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

VERY REV. F. W. FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S., DEAN OF CANTERBURY.
RIGHT REV. H. COTTERILL, D.D., F.R.S.E.
VERY REV. PRINCIPAL J. TULLOCH, D.D.
REV. CANON G. RAWLINSON, M.A.
REV. A. PLUMMER, M.A., D.D.

NEW EDITION.

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
LONDON AND NEW YORK
1907

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES.

(*The rights of translation and of reproduction are reserved.*)

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.

JEREMIAH.

Exposition

By REV. T. K. CHEYNE, M.A.,

RECTOR OF TENDRING, AND LATE FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD.

Homiletics

By REV. W. F. ADENEY, M.A.

Homilies by Various Authors:

REV. D. YOUNG, B.A.
REV. J. WAITE, B.A.
REV. S. CONWAY, B.A.
REV. A. F. MUIR, M.A.

VOL. I.

NEW EDITION.

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
LONDON AND NEW YORK
1907

THE

BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH.

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. The Life, Times, and Characteristics of Jeremiah.

1. The name of Jeremiah at once suggests the ideas of trouble and lamentation; and not without too much historical ground. Jeremiah was, in fact, not only "the evening star of the declining day of prophecy," but the herald of the dissolution of the Jewish commonwealth. The outward show of things, however, seemed to promise a calm and peaceful ministry to the youthful prophet. The last great political misfortune mentioned (in 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, not in Kings) before his time is the carrying captive of King Manasseh to Babylon, and this is also the last occasion on which a king of Assyria is recorded to have interfered in the affairs of Judah. Manasseh, however, we are told, was restored to his kingdom, and, apostate and persecutor as he was, found mercy from the Lord God of his fathers. Before he closed his eyes for ever a great and terrible event occurred—the sister kingdom of the ten tribes was finally destroyed, and one great burden of prophecy found its fulfilment. Judah was spared a little longer. Manasseh acquiesced in his dependent position, and continued to pay tribute to the "great King" of Nineveh. In B.C. 642 Manasseh died, and, after a brief interval of two years (it is the reign of Amon, a prince with an ill-omened Egyptian name), Josiah, the grandson of Manasseh, ascended the throne. This king was a man of a more spiritual religion than any of his predecessors except Hezekiah, of which he gave a solid proof by putting down the shrines and chapels in which the people delighted to worship the true God, Jehovah, and other supposed gods under idolatrous forms. This extremely popular form of religion could never be entirely eradicated; competent travellers agree that traces of it are still visible in the religious usages of the professedly Mohammedan peasantry of Palestine. "Not only have the fellahs preserved (Robinson had already a presentiment of this), by the erection of their Mussulman *kubbes*, and through their fetish-worship of certain great isolated trees, the situation and the memory of those sanctuaries which Deuteronomy gives up to the execration of the Israelites entering the promised land, and which it points out to them crowning the lofty summits, surmounting the hills, and sheltering themselves under the

green trees; but they pay them almost the same worship as the ancient devotees of the Elohim, those Canaanitish *kuffars* of whom they are the descendants. These *makoms*—so Deuteronomy calls them—which Manasseh went on constructing, and against which the prophets in vain exhaust their grandiose invectives, are word for word, thing for thing, the Arab *makams* of our modern *goyim*, covered by those little cupolas which dot with such picturesque white spots the mountainous horizons of the arid Judæa."

Such is the language of an accomplished explorer, M. Clermont-Ganneau,[1] and it helps us to understand the difficulties with which Hezekiah and Josiah had to contend. The former king had the support of Isaiah, and the latter had at his right hand the equally devoted prophet, Jeremiah, the year of whose call was apparently the one immediately following the commencement of the reformation (see ch. i. 2; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3). Jeremiah, however, had a more difficult task than Isaiah. The latter prophet must have had on his side nearly all the zealous worshippers of Jehovah. The state was more than once in great danger, and it was the burden of Isaiah's prophecies that, by simply trusting in Jehovah and obeying his commandments, the state would infallibly be delivered. But in Jeremiah's time there seems to have been a great revival of purely external religion. Men went to the temple and performed all the ceremonial laws which concerned them, but neglected those practical duties which make up so large a portion of true religion. There was a party of this kind in Isaiah's time, but it was not so powerful, because the misfortunes of the country seemed to show clearly that Jehovah was displeased with the state of the national religion. In Jeremiah's time, on the other hand, the continued peace and prosperity which at first prevailed was equally regarded as a proof that God looked favourably upon his people, in accordance with those repeated promises in the Book of Deuteronomy, that, if the people obeyed the Law of Jehovah, Jehovah would bless their basket and their store, and would keep them in peace and safety. And here it must be remarked (apart from the higher criticism, so much is as clear as the day) that the Book of Deuteronomy was a favourite reading-book of religious people at this time. Jeremiah himself (surely a representative of the most religious class) is full of allusions to it; its characteristic phrases recur continually in his pages. The discovery of the book in the temple[2] (2 Kings xxii.) was, we may venture to surmise, providentially permitted with a view to the religious needs of those times. No one can deny that Deuteronomy was peculiarly adapted to the age of Josiah and Jeremiah, partly because of the stress which it lays on the importance of religious centralization as opposed to the liberty of worshipping at local shrines, and partly because of its emphasis on the simple moral duties which the men of that age were in serious danger of forgetting. No wonder, then, that

[1] 'La Palestine Inconnue' (Paris, 1876), pp. 49, 50.

[2] The question, on which Old Testament critics are so much divided, as to the Mosaic or post-Mosaic origin of the Book of Deuteronomy receives a special treatment elsewhere.

Jeremiah himself should take up the study of the book with special earnestness, and that its phrascology should impress itself on his own style of writing. There is yet another circumstance which may help us to understand our prophet's strong interest in the Book of Deuteronomy. It is that his father was not improbably the high priest who found the Book of the Law in the temple. We know, at any rate, that Jeremiah was a member of a priestly family, and that his father was named Hilkiah (ch. i. 1); and that he had high connections is probable from the respect shown to him by successive rulers of Judah—by Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, no less than by Ahikam and Gedaliah, the viceroys of the King of Babylon. We may safely assume, then, that both Jeremiah and a large section of the Jewish people were deeply interested in the Book of Deuteronomy, and, though there was no Bible at that time in our sense of the word, that this impressive book to some extent supplied its place. There was, however, as has been indicated above, a danger connected with reading the Book of Deuteronomy, the exhortations of which so repeatedly connect the national prosperity with obedience to the commandments of God. Now, these commandments are obviously of two kinds—moral and ceremonial; not that any hard and fast line can be drawn between them, but, roughly speaking, the contents of some of the laws are more distinctly moral, and those of others more distinctly ceremonial. Some of the Jews had little or no conception of the moral or spiritual side of religion, and thought it enough to perform with the strictest punctuality the ceremonial part of God's Law. Having done this, they cried, "Peace, peace;" and applied the delightful promises of Deuteronomy to themselves. And it *seemed* as if Providence justified them, for, as was noticed just now, the kingdom of Judah was freer from external danger than it had been for a long time. Another consideration may be added. The prophet Nahum, as is well known, predicted the complete destruction of the tyrannical power of Assyria. In B.C. 626, *i.e.* in the fourteenth year of Josiah, a great step was taken towards the fulfilment of that prediction; a powerful rival kingdom to Assyria (though in nominal subordination to it) was established at Babylon, and the Medes, now a powerful and united kingdom, advanced upon Assyria from the east. This was just at the time when Josiah was beginning his reformation, and Jeremiah beginning to prophesy. Could there be a more manifest token (so many professedly religious people might urge) of the favour of God to his long humiliated people? Jeremiah, however, thought otherwise. Cassandra-like, he began his dirge when all were lulled in a deep sense of security. The spiritual state of his country seemed to him utterly rotten. He agreed, it is true, with those would-be religious persons that the local shrines and chapels ought to be abolished, and he could not object to their strict observance of the appointed rites and ceremonies; but he did from the bottom of his heart abhor and detest the supposition that a mere ceremonial worship could be pleasing to God (see those remarkable, though at the same time obscure, passages, ch. vii. 8—15, 21—23; xi. 15).

2. Jeremiah did not cease preaching, but with very little result. We need not wonder at this. The visible success of a faithful preacher is no test of his acceptableness before God. There are times when the Holy Spirit himself seems to work in vain, and the world seems given up to the powers of evil. True, even then there is a "silver lining" to the cloud, if we have only faith to see it. There is always a "remnant according to the election of grace;" and there is often a late harvest which the sower does not live to see. It was so with the labours of Jeremiah, who, like the hero Samson, slew more in his death than in his life; but on this interesting point we must not at present linger. Jeremiah went on preaching, but with small apparent success; when all at once a little cloud arose, no bigger than a man's hand, and soon the fair prospects of Judah were cruelly blighted. Josiah, the favourite, as it seemed, of God and man, was defeated and slain on the field of Megiddo, in B.C. 609. The immediate result was a tightening of the political yoke under which the kingdom of Judah laboured. The old Assyrian empire had long been declining; and just at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry there occurred, as we have seen, one of those great events which change the face of the world—the rise of the great Babylonian power. It need hardly be said that Babylon and the Chaldeans occupy a large place in the prophecies of Jeremiah; Babylon was to him what Nineveh had been to Isaiah.

But, before entering upon this subject of the relations of Jeremiah to the Babylonians, we have first to consider a question of some importance for the study of his writings, viz. whether his references to foreign invaders are covered entirely by the Babylonian aggression. Is it not possible that an earlier danger may have left its impress on his pages (and also on those of Zephaniah)? Herodotus tells us that the Scythians were masters of Asia for twenty-eight years (?), that they advanced to the borders of Egypt, and that, on their return, some of them plundered the temple of Ascalon (i. 106). The date of the Scythian invasion of Palestine can, it is true, only be fixed approximately. The Canons of Eusebius place it in Olympiad 36.2, equivalent to B.C. 635 (St. Jerome's Latin version), or Olympiad 37.1, equivalent to B.C. 632 (Armenian version). At any rate, it ranges between about B.C. 634 and 618, *i.e.* between the accession of Cyaxares and the death of Psamnutichus (see Herod., i. 103—105), or more precisely, perhaps, between B.C. 634 and 625 (accepting Abydenus's account of the fall of Nineveh). True, one could wish for better evidence than that of Herodotus (*loc. cit.*) and Justin (ii. 3). But the statements of these writers have not yet been disproved, and they suit the chronological conditions of the prophecies before us. A reference to the Babylonian invasion seems to be excluded in the case of Zephaniah, by the facts that in B.C. 635—625 Babylonia was still under the supremacy of Assyria, and that from neither country could any danger to Palestine then be apprehended. The case of Jeremiah is, no doubt, more complicated. It cannot be maintained that any discourses, in the form in which we now have them, relate to the Scythians; but it is

possible that passages originally spoken of the Scythians have been intermixed with later prophecies respecting the Chaldeans. The descriptions in ch. iv., v., viii., of the wild, northern nation, sweeping along and spreading devastation as it goes, seems more strikingly appropriate to the Scythians (see Professor Rawlinson's description, 'Ancient Monarchies,' ii. 122) than to the Babylonians. The difficulty felt by many in admitting this view is doubtless caused by the silence of Herodotus as to any mischief wrought by these nomad hordes in Judah; of course, by keeping the coast-road, the latter might have left Judah unharmed. But (1) we cannot be sure that they did keep entirely to the coast-road. If Scythopolis is equivalent to Beth-shan, and if "Scytho-" is correctly explained as "Scythian," they did not; and (2) the pictures of devastation may have been principally called forth by the later invasion. According to ch. xxxvi. 1—4, Jeremiah dictated all his former prophecies to Baruch, either from memory or from rough notes, as late as B.C. 606. Is it not possible that he may have heightened the colouring of warnings suggested by the Scythian invasion to adapt them to the later and more awful crisis? Nay, more, is not this expressly suggested by the statement (ch. xxxvi. 32) that "there were added besides unto them many like words"? When you once grant that prophecies were written down subsequently to their delivery, and afterwards combined with others in the form of a summary (a theory which does not admit of a doubt either in Isaiah or in Jeremiah), you therewith admit that features of different periods have in some cases most probably been combined by an unconscious anachronism.[1]

We may now return to that more pressing danger which has so deeply coloured the discourses of the prophet. One striking feature about the rise of the Babylonian power is its rapidity; this is vigorously expressed by a prophet contemporary with Jeremiah—

> "Behold ye among the nations, and look,
> Astonish yourselves, and be astonished;
> For, he doeth a deed in your days,
> Which ye will not believe, when related.
> For, behold, I raise up the Chaldeans,
> The passionate and impetuous nation,
> Who goeth through the breadth of the earth,
> To possess himself of dwelling-places which are not his."
>
> (Hab. i. 5, 6.)

In B.C. 609 Babylon had still two seemingly vigorous rivals—Assyria and Egypt; in B.C. 604 it had the undisputed mastery of the East. Between these two dates lie—to mention the events in Palestine first—the conquest of Syria by Egypt, and the reattachment of Judah, after the lapse of five centuries, to the empire of the Pharaohs. Another still more surprising

[1] On the whole Scythian question, see further Ewald, 'History of Israel,' iv. 255, 256; Duncker, 'History of Antiquity,' iii. 271—274; Payne Smith (whose expressions seem to the present writer too hasty and dogmatic), 'Speaker's Commentary,' v. 314.

event remains—the fall of Nineveh, which, so very short a time previously, had made such a show of warlike power under the brilliant Assurbanipal (B.C. 648—626). In vol. xi. of the 'Records of the Past,' Mr. Sayce has translated some striking though fragmentary texts relative to the collapse of this mighty colossus. "When Cyaxares the Mede, with the Cimmerians, the people of Minni, or Van, and the tribe of Saparda, or Sepharad (cf. Obad. 20), on the Black Sea, was threatening Nineveh, Esarhaddon II., the Saracos of the Greek writers, had proclaimed a solemn assembly to the gods, in the hope of warding off the danger. But the bad writing of the tablets shows that they are merely the first rough text of the royal proclamation, and we may perhaps infer that the capture of Nineveh and the overthrow of the empire prevented a fair copy from being taken" (p. 79).

Thus was the prediction of Nahum, uttered in the height of Assyrian power, fulfilled; the sword devoured her young lions, her prey was cut off from the earth, and the voice of her insolent messenger (like the Rabshakeh in Isa. xxxvi.) was no more heard (Nah. ii. 13). And now began a series of calamities only to be paralleled by the still more awful catastrophe in the Roman War. The Chaldeans became the waking thought and the nightly dream of king, prophets, and people. A reference was made just now to Habakkuk, who gives vent to the bitterness of his reflections in complaint to Jehovah. Jeremiah, however, fond as he is supposed to be of lamentation, does not give way to the language of complaint; his feelings were, perhaps, too deep for words. He records, however, the unfortunate moral effect produced by the danger of the state on his fellow-countrymen. It took the form of a religious reaction. The promises of Jehovah in the Book of Deuteronomy appeared to have been falsified, and Israel's God to be incapable of protecting his worshippers. Many Jews fell away into idolatry. Even those who did not become renegades kept aloof from prophets like Jeremiah, who boldly declared that God had hidden his face for the sins of the people. Those who have read the life of Savonarola will be struck by the parallel between the preaching of the great Italian and that of Jeremiah. Without venturing to claim for Savonarola an equality with Jeremiah, he can hardly be denied a kind of reflection of Old Testament prophecy. God's Spirit is not tied to countries or to centuries; and there is nothing wonderful if mountain-moving faith were blessed in Florence as it was in Jerusalem.

The prospects held out by Jeremiah were gloomy indeed. The Captivity was to be no brief interlude in Israel's history, but a full generation; in round numbers, seventy years. Such a message was, from its very nature, doomed to an unfavourable reception. The renegades (probably not a few) were, of course, disbelievers in "the word of Jehovah," and many even of the faithful still hoped against hope that the promises of Deuteronomy, according to their faulty interpretation of them, would somehow be fulfilled.

It cost Jeremiah much to be a prophet of ill; to be always threatening "sword, famine, pestilence," and the destruction of that temple which was

"the throne of Jehovah's glory" (ch. xvii. 12). But, as our own Milton says, "when God commands to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in man's will what he shall say."[1] There are several passages which show how nearly intolerable Jeremiah's position became to him, and how terribly bitter his feelings (sometimes at least) towards his own enemies and those of his country. Take, for instance, that thrilling passage in ch. xx. 7—13, beginning (if one may correct the version)—

> "Thou didst entice me, O Jehovah! and I let myself be enticed;
> Thou didst take hold on me, and didst prevail;
> I have become a derision all the day long,
> They all mock me."

The contrast between what he hoped for as a prophet of Jehovah, and what he actually experienced, takes form in his mind as the result of an enticement on the part of Jehovah. The passage draws to its end with the solemnly jubilant words—

> "But Jehovah is with me as a fierce warrior;
> Therefore shall mine enemies stumble and not prevail,
> They shall be greatly ashamed, because they have not prospered,
> With an everlasting reproach that shall never be forgotten.
> And thou, O Jehovah of hosts, that triest the righteous,
> That seest the reins and the heart,
> Let me see thy revenge upon them,
> For unto thee have I committed my cause.
> Sing ye unto Jehovah; praise ye Jehovah:
> For he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evil-doers."

But immediately after this chant of faith, the prophet relapses into melancholy with those terrible words, which recur almost word for word in the first discourse of the afflicted Job—

> "Cursed be the day wherein I was born:
> Let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed," etc.[2]

And even this is not the most bitter thing which Jeremiah has said. On one occasion, when his enemies had plotted against him, he utters the following solemn imprecation:—"Give heed to me, O Jehovah, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Should evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember how I stood before thee to speak good for them—to turn away thy wrath from them. Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and spill them into the hands of the sword; and let their wives become childless, and widows; and let their men be slain by the plague, their young men smitten of the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou bringest suddenly troops upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid

[1] 'Reason of Church Government,' bk. ii.

[2] Compare similar passages in ch. xiv., xv., xvii. 15—18.

snares for my feet. But thou, O Jehovah, knowest all their counsel against me to slay me: forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight, but let them be (counted as) fallen ones before thee; deal with them (accordingly) in the time of thine anger" (ch. xviii. 19—23). And now, how are we to account for this? Shall we ascribe it to a sudden ebullition of natural anger? Some will reply that this is inconceivable in one consecrated from his youth to the service of God. Let us remember, however, that even the perfect Exemplar of consecrated manhood gave utterance to feelings somewhat akin to those of Jeremiah.[1] When our Lord found (from the point of view of his humiliation, we may say "found") that all his preaching and all his wonderful works were thrown away on the scribes and Pharisees, he did not hesitate to pour out the full vials of his wrath on those "hypocrites." Doubtless "he felt pity as well as anger, but he thought the anger had a better right to be expressed. The impostors must be first unmasked; they might be forgiven afterwards, if they should abandon their conventionalties. The lover of men is angry to see harm done to men."[2] Jeremiah, too, like our Lord, felt pity as well as anger—pity for the nation misguided by its natural "shepherds," and was willing to extend forgiveness, in the name of his Lord, to those who were willing to return; the addresses in ch. vii., xxii. 2—9 are manifestly intended for those very "shepherds of the people" whom he afterwards so solemnly curses. Natural feeling, no doubt, there was in his communications, but a natural feeling purified and exalted by the inspiring Spirit. He feels himself charged with the thunders of an angry God; he is conscious that he is the representative of that Messiah-people of whom a still greater prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah—

> "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will get myself glory."
> (Isa. xlix. 3.)

This latter point is well worthy of consideration, as it suggests the most probable explanation of the imprecatory passages in the Psalms as well as in the Book of Jeremiah. Both psalmists and prophet felt themselves representatives of that "Son of God" (Hos. xi. 1), that Messiah-people, which existed to some slight extent in reality, but in its full dimensions in the Divine counsels. Jeremiah, in particular, was a type of the true Israelite, an Abdiel (a "servant of God") among the faithless, an adumbration of the perfect Israel and the perfect Israelite reserved by God for future ages. Feeling himself, however indistinctly, to be such a type and such a representative, and being at the same time "one of like affections (ὁμοιοπαθής) with ourselves," he could not but use language which, however justified, bears a superficial resemblance to vindictive enmity.

[1] It is best to speak guardedly. There was, doubtless, some human dross left in Jeremiah; and only the perfect "Servant of Jehovah" could appropriate the description in Isa. xlii. 2, 3.

[2] 'Ecce Homo,' p. 270 (ch. xxi.).

3. Jeremiah's warnings became more and more definite. He foresaw, at any rate in its main outlines, the course which events would shortly afterwards take, and refers expressly to the dishonoured burial of Jehoiakim, and the captivity of the youthful Jehoiachin.[1] In the presence of such misfortunes he becomes tender-hearted, and gives vent to his sympathetic emotion precisely as our Lord does in similar circumstances. How touching are the words!—

> "Weep not over one that is dead, neither lament for him;
> Weep (rather) for one that is gone away;
> For he will return no more,
> Nor see his native country."
>
> (Ch. xxii. 10.)

And in another passage (ch. xxiv.) he speaks both kindly and hopefully of those who have been carried away into exile, while those who are left at home are described, most expressively, as "bad figs, very bad, that cannot be eaten." "All that we hear of the later history helps us," Mr. Maurice remarks, "to understand the force and truth of this sign. The reign of Zedekiah presents us with the most vivid picture of a king and people sinking deeper and deeper into an abyss, ever and anon making wild and frantic efforts to rise out of it, imputing their evil to every one but themselves,—their struggles for a nominal freedom always proving them to be both slaves and tyrants at heart."[2]

The evil, however, was perhaps by nothing so much intensified as by the hearing which the people, and especially the rulers, accorded to the flattering prophets who announced a too speedy termination to the clearly impending captivity. One of these, named Hananiah, declared that in two years the yoke of the King of Babylon should be broken, and the Jewish exiles be restored, together with the vessels of the sanctuary (ch. xxviii.). "Not in two but in seventy years," was virtually Jeremiah's reply. If the Jews who remained did not submit quietly, they would be utterly destroyed. If, on the other hand, they were obedient, and "brought their necks under the yoke of the King of Babylon," they would be left undisturbed in their own land.

This seems to be the place to answer a question which has more than once been asked—Was Jeremiah a true patriot in so continually expressing his conviction of the futility of resistance to Babylon? It must be remembered, first of all, that the religious idea with which Jeremiah was inspired is higher and broader than the idea of patriotism. Israel had a divinely appropriated work; if it fell below its mission, what further right had it of existence? Perhaps it may be allowable to admit that such conduct as Jeremiah's would not in our day be regarded as patriotic. If the Govern-

[1] There is nothing inconceivable in this, even if we should grant that the prophecy, ch. xxi. 1—xxiii. 40, was modified in expression—in a word, edited—in the reign of Zedekiah, the uncle and successor of Jehoiachin.

[2] Maurice, 'Prophets and Kings,' p. 420.

ment had fully committed itself to a definite and irrevocable policy, it is probable that all parties would agree to enforce at any rate silent acquiescence. One eminent man may, however, be appealed to in favour of Jeremiah's patriotism. Niebuhr, quoted by Sir Edward Strachey, writes thus at the period of Germany's deepest humiliation under Napoleon: "I told you, as I told every one, how indignant I felt at the senseless prating of those who talked of desperate resolves as of a tragedy. . . . To bear our fate with dignity and wisdom, that the yoke might be lightened, was my doctrine, and I supported it with the advice of the prophet Jeremiah, who spoke and acted very wisely, living as he did under King Zedekiah, in the times of Nebuchadnezzar, though he would have given different counsel had he lived under Judas Maccabæus, in the times of Antiochus Epiphanes."[1]

This time, too, Jeremiah's warning voice was in vain. Zedekiah was mad enough to court an alliance with Pharaoh-Hophra (the Egyptians called him Uah-ab-ra, the Greeks Apries), who, by a naval victory, had "revived the prestige of the Egyptian arms which had received so severe a shock under Necho II."[2] The Babylonians would not pardon this insubordination, and a second siege of Jerusalem was the consequence. Undaunted by the hostility of the popular magnates ("princes"), Jeremiah urgently counsels immediate surrender. (At this point, it is expedient to be brief; Jeremiah himself is his best biographer. There is, perhaps, nothing in all literature which rivals the narrative chapters in his book for dispassionate truthfulness.) He is rewarded by close imprisonment, but his policy is justified by the event. Famine raged among the besieged inhabitants (ch. lii. 6; Lam. i. 19, 20, etc.), till at length a breach was effected in the walls; a vain attempt at flight was made by the king, who was captured, and with most of his people carried to Babylon, B.C. 588. Thus fell Jerusalem, nineteen years after the battle of Carchemish, and, with Jerusalem, the last bold opponent of Babylonian power in Syria. A few poor inhabitants, indeed, were left, but only to prevent the land from becoming utterly desolate (2 Kings xxv. 12). Their only consolation was that they were allowed a native governor, Gedaliah, who was also a hereditary friend of Jeremiah. But it was a short-lived consolation! Gedaliah fell by an assassin's hand, and the principal Jews, fearing the vengeance of their new lords, took refuge in Egypt, dragging the prophet with them (ch. xlii. 7—22; xliii. 7; xliv. 1). But Jeremiah had not come to the end of his message of woe. Did the Jews, he asked, expect to be secure from the Babylonians in Egpyt? Soon would their foes be after them; Egypt would be chastised, and the Jews would suffer for their treason. And now the unhappy consequences of the misreading of the Deuteronomic Scripture became fully visible. It was from their infidelity, not to Jehovah, but to the queen of heaven, that their calamities proceeded, said the Jewish exiles in Egypt

[1] Strachey, 'Jewish History and Politics in the Times of Sargon and Sennacherib,' p. 222, note.

[2] Dr. Birch, 'Egypt,' p. 180.

(ch. xliv. 17—19). What answer could Jeremiah make? His mission to that generation was closed. He could only console himself with that heroic faith which was one of his most striking qualities. During the siege of Jerusalem he had, with a Roman belief in his country's destinies, purchased a piece of ground at no great distance from the capital (ch. xxxii. 6—15); and it was after the fate of the city was sealed that he rose to the highest pitch of religious enthusiasm, when he uttered that memorable promise of a new and spiritual covenant in which the external helps of prophecy and a written Law should be dispensed with (ch. xxxi. 31—34). And in this heaven-born assurance of the immortality and spiritual regeneration of his people he persisted to the end.

4. It was impossible to avoid giving a brief abstract of Jeremiah's prophetic career, because his book is to such a large extent autobiographical. He cannot limit himself to reproducing "the word of the Lord;" his individual nature is too strong for him, and asserts its right of expression. His life was a constant alternation between the action of the "burning fire" of revelation (ch. xx. 9), and the reaction of human sensibilities. Truly has it been observed that "Jeremiah has a kind of feminine tenderness and susceptibility; strength was to be educed out of a spirit which was inclined to be timid and shrinking;" and again that "he was a loving, *priestly* spirit, who felt the unbelief and sin of his nation as a heavy, overwhelming burden." Who does not remember those touching words?—

> "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?
> Why then hath not healing appeared for the daughter of my people?
> Oh that my head were water, and mine eye a fountain of tears,
> That I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"
> (Ch. viii. 22; ix. 1.)

And again—

> "Let mine eyes run down with tears day and night,[1]
> And let them not cease:
> For the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach,
> With a very grievous blow."
> (Ch. xiv. 17.)

In this respect Jeremiah marks an epoch in the history of prophecy. Isaiah and the prophets of his generation are fully absorbed in their message, and allow no space to the exhibition of personal feeling. In Jeremiah, on the other hand, the element of human feeling is constantly overpowering the prophetic. But let not Jeremiah be disparaged, and let not those triumph over him who are gifted with greater power of self-repression. Self-repression does not always imply the absence of selfishness, whereas Jeremiah's demonstrativeness is not called forth by purely personal troubles, but by those of God's people. The words of Jesus, "Ye would

[1] This has been well brought out in Keble's verses on Jeremiah ('Lyra Apostolica').

not," and "But now they are hid from thine eyes," might, as Delitzsch remarks, be placed as mottoes to the Book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's rich individual consciousness extends its influence over his conception of religion, which, without being less practical, has become more inward and spiritual than Isaiah's. The main object of his preaching is to communicate this deeper conception (expressed, above all, in his doctrine of the covenant, see on ch. xxxi. 31—34) to his countrymen. And if they will not receive it in the peace and comfort of their Judæan home, then —welcome ruin, welcome captivity! By uttering this solemn truth (ch. xxxi.)—that a period of enforced seclusion was necessary before Israel could rise to the height of his grand mission—Jeremiah preserved the spiritual independence of his people, and prepared the way for a still higher and more spiritual and evangelical religion. The next generation instinctively recognized this. Not a few of those psalms which belong most probably to the Captivity (especially Ps. xxii., xxxi., xl., lv., lxix., lxxi.) are so pervaded with the spirit of Jeremiah that several writers have ascribed them to the pen of this prophet. The question is a complicated one, and the solution can hardly be so simple as these writers appear to suppose. We have to deal with the fact that there is a large body of Biblical literature impregnated with the spirit, and consequently filled with many of the expressions, of Jeremiah. The Books of Kings, the Book of Job, the second part of Isaiah, the Lamentations,[1] are, with the psalms mentioned above, the chief items of this literature; and while, on the one hand, no one would dream of assigning all these to Jeremiah, there seems, on the other, to be no sufficient reason for giving one of them to the great prophet rather than the other. With regard to the circumstantial parallels in the above-named psalms to passages in the life of Jeremiah, it may be observed (1) that other pious Israelites had a similar lot of persecution to Jeremiah (cf. Micah vii. 2; Isa. lvii. 1); (2) that figurative expressions like "sinking in the mire and in the deep water" (Ps. lxix. 2, 14) require no groundwork of literal biographical fact (not to remind realistic critics that there was no water in Jeremiah's prison, ch. xxxviii. 6); and (3) that none of the psalms ascribed to Jeremiah allude to his prophetic office, or to the conflict with the "false prophets," which must have occupied so much of his thoughts.

Still, the fact that some diligent students of the Scriptures have ascribed this group of psalms to Jeremiah is an index of the close affinities existing on either side. So, too, the Book of Job may be more than plausibly referred to as influenced by Jeremiah. The tendency of careful criticism is to hold that the author of Job selects a passionate utterance of Jeremiah's for the theme of his afflicted hero's first discourse (Job iii. 3; comp. ch. xx. 14); and it is difficult to evade the impression that a feature in the deepest prophecy of the second part of Isaiah is suggested by Jeremiah's pathetic comparison of himself to a lamb led to the slaughter (Isa. lii. 7; comp. ch. xi. 19). Later

[1] On the question whether Jeremiah really wrote the Lamentations, Old Testament scholars are divided.

on, an intensified interest in the details of the future contributed to heighten the estimation of Jeremiah's works (Dan. ix. 2; comp. 2 Chron. xxvi. 21); and several traces of the extraordinary respect in which this prophet was held appear in the Apocrypha (2 Macc. ii. 1—7; xv. 14; Epist. Jer.) and in the Gospel narrative (Matt. xvi. 14; John i. 21).

Another point in which Jeremiah marks an epoch in prophecy is his peculiar fondness for symbolic acts (*e.g.* ch. xiii. 1; xvi. 1; xviii. 1; xix. 1; xxiv. 1; xxv. 15; xxxv. 1). This is a subject fraught with difficulty, and the question may reasonably be asked whether his accounts of such transactions are to be taken literally, or whether they are simply visions translated into ordinary narrative, or even altogether imaginary—recognized rhetorical fictions. We must remember that the flourishing age of prophecy is over, the age when the public work of a prophet was still the chief part of his ministry, and the age of decline is come, in which the quiet work of laying up a store of testimony for the next generation has acquired greater importance. The chapter with Jeremiah's going to the Euphrates and hiding a girdle "in a hole of the rock" till it became good for nothing, and then taking another journey thither to fetch it again, is no doubt rendered more intelligible by reading "Ephrath" instead of *P'rāth*, i.e. "the Euphrates" (ch. xiii. 4—7); but the difficulty is, perhaps, not entirely removed. May not this narrative (and that in ch. xxxv.) be regarded as fictitious with fully as much ground as the equally positive statement in ch. xxv. 17, "Then took I the cup at Jehovah's hand, and made all the nations to drink"?

There is yet another important feature for the student to notice in Jeremiah—the diminishing emphasis on the advent of the Messiah, *i.e.* of the great ideal victorious King, through whom the whole world was to be brought into subjection to Jehovah. Though still found—at the end of a passage on the bad kings Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin (ch. xxiii. 5), and in the promises given shortly before the fall of Jerusalem (ch. xxx. 9, 21; xxxiii. 15)—the personal Messiah is no longer the centre of prophecy as in Isaiah and Micah. In Zephaniah he is not mentioned at all. It seems as if, in the decline of the state, royalty had ceased to be an adequate symbol for the great Personage to whom all prophecy points. Every one remembers that, in the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah, the great Deliverer is spoken of, not as a King, but as a persuasive Teacher, reviled by his own countrymen, and exposed to suffering and death, but in and through his sufferings atoning for and justifying all those who believed in him. Jeremiah does not allude to this great Servant of Jehovah in words, but his revelation of a new and spiritual covenant requires the prophecy of the Servant for its explanation. How is the Law of the Lord to be written in the hearts of a rebellious and depraved humanity? How, except by the atoning death of the humble, but after his death royally exalted, Saviour? Jeremiah prepared the way for the coming of Christ, partly by his putting out of sight the too dazzling regal conception which prevented men from realizing

the deeper evangelical truths summed up in the prophecy of the "Servant of the Lord." It ought to be added (and this is another respect in which Jeremiah is a remarkable waymark in the Old Testament dispensation) that he prepared the way of Christ by his own typical life. He stood alone, with few friends and no family joys to console him (ch. xvi. 2). His country was hastening to its ruin, at a crisis which strikingly reminds us of the times of the Saviour. He lifted up a warning voice, but the natural guides of the people drowned it by their blind opposition. In his utter self-abnegation, too, he reminds us of the Lord, in whose human nature a strong feminine element cannot be mistaken. Doubtless he had a less balanced mind; how should this not be the case, for we are speaking of him in relation to the unique, incomparable One? But there are moments in the life of Jesus when the lyrical note is as clearly marked as in the utterances of Jeremiah. The prophet weeping over Zion (ch. ix. 1; xiii. 17; xiv. 17) is an adumbration of the sacred tears in Luke xix. 41; and the suggestions of the life of Jeremiah in the great prophetic life of Christ (Isa. liii.) are so distinct as to have induced Saadyah the Jew (tenth century A.D.) and Bunsen the Christian to suppose that the original reference was simply and solely to the prophet.[1] It is strange that the most esteemed Christian writers should have dwelt so little on this typical character of Jeremiah; but it is one proof of the richness of the Old Testament that so striking a type should have been reserved for later and less conventional students.

5. The literary merits of Jeremiah have been frequently contested. He is accused of Aramaizing diction, of diffuseness, monotony, imitativeness,[2] proneness to repetition,[3] and to the use of stereotyped formulæ;[4] nor can these charges be denied. Jeremiah was not an artist in words, as to some extent was Isaiah. His poetic flights were restrained by his presentiments; his utterance was choked by tears. How could he exercise his imagination on depicting woes which he already so fully realized? or vary a theme of such unchanging importance? Even from a literary point of view, however, his unpretending simplicity is not to be despised; as Ewald has already remarked, it forms a pleasing contrast (be it said with all reverence to the Spirit common to all the prophets) to the artificial style of Habakkuk. But

[1] Grotius, with a true instinct, remarks, "Hæ notæ in Jeremiam quidem congruunt priùs, sed potius sublimiusque, sæpe et magis κατὰ λέξιν, in Christum."

[2] See the Commentary, *passim*.

[3] Kuenen ('Historisch-kritisch Onderzoek,' vol. ii. 248) gives a long list of almost identical passages, from which I take the commencement: ch. i. 18, 19 (xv. 20); ii. 15 (iv. 7); ii. 28 (xi. 13); iv. 5 (viii. 14); iv. 6 (vi. 1); v. 9 (29; ix. 8); vi. 13—15 (viii. 10—12); vi. 22—24 (l. 41—43); vii. 16 (xi. 14; xiv. 11); vii. 31—33 (xix. 5—7; xxxii. 35); vii. 33 (xix. 7; xvi. 4; xxxiv. 20).

[4] Such are—"sword, famine, and pestilence," or "sword and famine" (ch. xiv. 12—16; xv. 2; xvi. 4; xxi. 7, 9; xxiv. 16; xxvii. 8, 13; and twelve other passages); "the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness" (ch. vii. 34; xvi. 9; xxv. 10); "terror on every side" (ch. vi. 25; xx. 3, 10; xlvi. 5; xlix. 29); "feed with wormwood, and give water of gall to drink" (ch. viii. 14; ix. 15; xxiii. 15).

above and apart from his literary merits or demerits, Jeremiah deserves the highest honour for his almost unparalleled conscientiousness. Under the most trying circumstances, he never swerved from his fidelity to the truth, nor gave way to the "grief that saps the mind." In a quieter age he might (for his talent is chiefly lyrical) have developed into a great lyric poet. Even as it is, he may fairly claim to have written some of the most sympathetic pages of the Old Testament; and yet—his greatest poem is his life.

§ 2. Growth of the Book of Jeremiah.

The question naturally suggests itself—Do we possess the prophecies of Jeremiah in the form in which they were delivered by him from the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah onwards? In reply, let us first of all look to the analogy of the occasional prophecies of Isaiah. These, it can be reasonably well proved, have not come down to us in the form in which they were delivered, but have grown together out of several smaller books or prophetic collections. Analogy is in favour of a somewhat similar origin of the Book of Jeremiah, which was, at any rate once, much smaller. The collection which formed the nucleus of the present book may be conjectured to have been as follows:—Ch. i. 1, 2; i. 4—ix. 22; x. 17—xii. 6; xxv.; xlvi. 1—xlix. 33; xxvi.; xxxvi.; xlv. These were, perhaps, the contents of the roll referred to in ch. xxxvi.—if at least, with the great majority of commentators, we give a strict interpretation to ver. 2 of that chapter, in which the command is given to write in the roll "all the words that I have spoken unto thee . . . from the days of Josiah, even unto this day." On this view of the case, it was not till twenty-three years after Jeremiah's entrance upon his ministry that he caused his prophecies to be committed to writing by Baruch. This obviously excludes the possibility of an exact reproduction of the early discourses, even if the main outlines were, by God's blessing upon a tenacious memory, faithfully reported. But even if we adopt the alternative view mentioned in the introduction to ch. xxxvi., the analogy of other prophetic collections (especially of those embodied in the first part of Isaiah) forbids us to assume that we have Jeremiah's original utterances, unmodified by later thoughts and experiences.

That the Book of Jeremiah has been gradually enlarged can, indeed, be shown (1) by a simple inspection of the heading of the book, which, as we shall see, originally ran thus: "The word of Jehovah which came to Jeremiah in the days of Josiah, etc., in the thirteenth year of his reign." It is clear that this was not intended to refer to more than ch. i., or, more precisely, to ch. i. 4—ii. 37, which appears to represent the earliest discourse of our prophet. Two further chronological specifications, one relative to Jehoiakim, the other to Zedekiah, appear to have been successively added, and even the later of these will not cover ch. xl.—xliv. (2) The same result follows from the remark at the close of ch. li., "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah." This evidently proceeds from an editor, in whose time the book terminated at li. 64. Ch. lii. is, in fact, not an independent narrative, but the conclu-

sion of a history of the kings of Judah—the same historical work which was followed by the editor of our "Books of the Kings," except that vers. 28—30 (a notice of the number of the Jewish captives) appears from the chronology to be from another source; it is wanting, moreover, in the Septuagint Version.

Granting (1) that the Book of Jeremiah was edited and brought into its present form subsequently to the time of the prophet himself, and (2) that an important addition in the narrative style has been made to it by one of its editors, it is not *à priori* inconceivable that it should also contain passages in the prophetic style not by Jeremiah himself. The passages respecting which the greatest doubt exists are ch. x. 1—16 and ch. l., li. (the longest and one of the least original of all the prophecies). It is unnecessary to enter upon the question of their origin here; it is enough to refer the reader to the special introductions in the course of this work. The case, however, is sufficiently strong for the negative critics to make it desirable to caution the reader not to suppose that a negative position is necessarily inconsistent with the doctrine of inspiration. In words which the author asks permission to quote from a recent work of his own, "The editors of the Scriptures were inspired; there is no maintaining the authority of the Bible without this postulate. True, we must allow a distinction in degrees of inspiration, as the Jewish doctors themselves saw, though it was some time before they clearly formulated their view. I am glad to notice that one so free from the suspicion of rationalism or Romanism as Rudolf Stier adopts the Jewish distinction, remarking that even the lowest grade of inspiration (*b'rūakh hakkōdesh*) remains one of faith's mysteries" ('The Prophecies of Isaiah,' ii. 205).

§ 3. Relation of the Received Hebrew Text to that represented by the Septuagint.

The differences between the two recensions relate (1) to the arrangement of the prophecies, (2) to the reading of the text.

1. Variation in arrangement is only found in one instance, but that a very remarkable one. In the Hebrew, the prophecies concerning foreign nations occupy ch. xlvi.—li.; in the Septuagint they are inserted immediately after ch. xxv. 13. The following table will show the differences:—

Hebrew text.	*Text of Septuagint.*
Ch. xlix. 34—39	ch. xxv. 14—18.
Ch. xlvi. 2—12	ch. xxvi. 1—11.
Ch. xlvi. 13—28	ch. xxvi. 12—26.
Ch. xlvi. 40—51	ch. xxvi. 27, 28.
Ch. xlvii. 1—7	ch. xxix. 1—7.
Ch. xlix. 7—22	ch. xxix. 7—22.
Ch. xlix. 1—6	ch. xxx. 1—5.
Ch. xlix. 28—33	ch. xxx. 6—11.
Ch. xlix. 23—27	ch. xxx. 12—16.
Ch. xlviii.	ch. xxxi.
Ch. xxv. 15—38	ch. xxxii.

Thus not only is this group of prophecies differently placed as a whole, but the members of the group are differently arranged. In particular, Elam, which comes last but one (or even last, if the prophecy on Babylon be excluded from the group) in the Hebrew, opens the series of prophecies in the Septuagint.

Which of these arrangements has the stronger claims on our acceptance? No one, after reading ch. xxv., would expect to find the prophecies on foreign nations separated from it by so long an interval as in the received Hebrew text; and thus (the latter being notoriously of comparatively recent origin, and far from infallible) it would seem at first sight reasonable to follow the Septuagint. But there must be some error in the arrangement adopted by the latter. It is incredible that the passage, ch. xxv. 15—26 (in our Bibles), is rightly placed, as in the Septuagint, at the very end of the foreign prophecies (as part of ch. xxxii.); it seems, indeed, absolutely required as the introduction of the group. The error of the Septuagint appears to have arisen out of a previous error on the part of a transcriber. When this version was made, a gloss (viz. ch. xxv. 13) destructive of the connection had already made its way into the text, and the Greek translator seems to have been led by it to the striking dislocation which we now find in his version. On this subject the reader may be referred to an important essay by Professor Budde, of Bonn, in the 'Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie,' 1879 (see p. 533). That the whole of the verse (ch. xxv. 13) is a gloss had already been recognized by the old Dutch commentator Venema (1765), who will hardly be accused of rationalistic tendencies.

2. Variations of reading were of common occurrence in the Hebrew text employed by the Septuagint. It may be admitted (for it is self-evident) that the Greek translator was but ill prepared for his work. He not only often attaches wrong vowels to the consonants, but is sometimes so completely at a loss for the meaning that he introduces Hebrew words untranslated into the Greek text. It would also appear that the Hebrew manuscript which he employed was badly written, and disfigured by frequent confusions of similar letters. It may further be granted that the Greek translator is sometimes guilty of deliberately tampering with the text of his manuscript (striking instances of this may be found in ch. xxv. 25 and xliii. 13, and less conspicuous ones in ch. ii. 18, 25, 30; iv. 6; viii. 6; xviii. 2, 22; xxii. 14, 30; xxx. 5); that he sometimes abridges where Jeremiah (as often) repeats himself; and that either he or his transcribers have made various unauthorized additions to the original text (as, for instance, ch. i. 17; ii. 28; iii. 19; v. 2; xi. 16; xiii. 20; xxii. 18; xxvii. 3; xxx. 6). But a candid examination reveals the fact that both the consonants and the vocalization of them employed in the Septuagint are sometimes better than those of the received Hebrew text. Instances of this will be found in ch. iv. 28; xi. 15; xvi. 7; xxiii. 33; xli. 9; xlvi. 17. True, there are interpolations in the text of the Septuagint; but such are by no means wanting in the received Hebrew text. The Septuagint is sometimes nearer to the original simplicity than the

Hebrew (see, for instance, ch. x.; xxvii. 7, 8 *b*, 16, 17, 19—22; xxviii. 1, 14, 16; xxix. 1, 2, 16—20, 32).[1] And if the Greek translator takes offence at some of the repetitions of his original, so in all probability have the transcribers who have, without any evil intention, modified the received Hebrew text. On the whole, it is a favourable circumstance that we have, virtually, two recensions of the text of Jeremiah. If no prophet was more unpopular during his life, none was more popular after his death. A book which is known "by heart" is much less likely to be transcribed correctly, and much more exposed to glosses and interpolations, than one in whom no such special interest is felt.

§ 4. Exegetical and Critical Literature.

The Latin Commentary of St. Jerome only extends to the thirty-second chapter of Jeremiah. Aben Ezra, the most talented of the rabbis, did not write on our prophet; but the works of Rashi and David Kimchi are easily accessible. Modern philological exegesis begins with the Reformation. The following commentaries may be mentioned:—Calvin, 'Prælectiones in Jeremiam,' Geneva, 1563; Venema, 'Commentarius ad Librum Prophetiarum Jeremiæ,' Leuwarden, 1765; Blayney, 'Jeremiah and Lamentations, a New Translation with Notes,' etc., Oxford, 1784; Dahler, 'Jérémie traduit sur le Texte Original, accompagné de Notes,' Strasbourg, 1825; Ewald, 'The Prophets of the Old Testament,' English translation, vol. iii., London, 1878; Hitzig, 'Der Prophet Jeremia,' 2nd edit., Leipzig, 1866; Graf, 'Der Prophet Jeremia erklärt,' Leipzig, 1862; Naegelsbach, 'Jeremiah,' in Lange's Commentary, part xv.; Payne Smith, 'Jeremiah,' in the 'Speaker's Commentary,' vol. v.; König, 'Das Deuteronomium und der Prophet Jeremia,' Berlin, 1839; Wichelhaus, 'De Jeremiæ Versione Alexandrinâ,' Halle, 1847; Movers, 'De utriusque Recensionis Vaticiniorum Jeremiæ Indole et Origine,' Hamburg, 1837; Hengstenberg, 'The Christology of the Old Testament' (Clark's edit.).

§ 5. Chronology.

Any chronological arrangement of the reigns of the Jewish kings must be largely conjectural and open to criticism, and it is not perfectly clear that the writers of the narrative books in the Old Testament, or those who edited their works, intended to give a critically accurate chronology adequate for historical purposes. The most tedious problems relate to the times previous to Jeremiah. One difficulty, however, may be pointed out in the chronology of the concluding reigns (see Robertson Smith, 'The Prophets of Israel,' p. 415). According to 2 Kings xxiii. 36, Jehoiakim reigned eleven years. This agrees with ch. xxv. 1, which makes the fourth year of Jehoiakim synchronize with the first of Nebuchadnezzar (comp. ch. xxxii. 1). But, according to ch. xlvi. 2, the battle of Carchemish took place in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, which was the last year of Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar. This would make the first year of Nebuchadnezzar synchronize with the fifth year of Jehoiakim, and we

[1] Nearly all the references in this paragraph are from vol. ii. of Kuenen's 'Historisch-kritisch Onderzoek:' Leyden, 1861–65,—a book unsurpassed among introductions to the Old Testament for completeness, accuracy, and sobriety of judgment, and written on an entirely different plan from the author's equally able but (in the judgment of orthodox theologians) biassed work on 'The Religion of Israel.'

should have to conclude that the latter king reigned not eleven but twelve years.

The following table, which is at any rate based on a critical use of the sometimes discordant data, is taken from Professor H. Brandes' 'The Royal Successions of Judah and Israel according to the Biblical Narratives and the Cuneiform Inscriptions':—

B.C. 641 (spring)	First year of Josiah.
B.C. 611 (spring)	Thirty-first year of Josiah.
B.C. 610 (autumn)	Jehoahaz.
B.C. 609 (spring)	First year of Jehoiakim.
B.C. 599 (spring	Eleventh year of Jehoiakim.
B.C. 598-7 (winter)	Jehoiachin. Beginning of the Captivity.
B.C. 597 (summer)	Zedekiah appointed king.
B.C. 596 (spring)	First year of Zedekiah.
B.C. 586 (spring)	Eleventh year of Zedekiah. Fall of the kingdom of Judah.

THE

BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE CALL AND CONSECRATION OF JEREMIAH TO THE PROPHETIC OFFICE, FOLLOWED BY TWO EXPRESSIVE SYMBOLS OF THE MATTERS WHICH HE HAS TO ANNOUNCE.

Vers. 1—3.—There are some indications that the original form of the heading has been somewhat modified. Notice (1) that the words with which ver. 2 opens are identical with one of Jeremiah's characteristic formulæ for introducing a prophecy (comp. ch. xiv. 1; xlvi. 1; xlvii. 1; xlix. 34); and notice (2) the awkward connection of vers. 1 and 2, and 2 and 3 respectively. (The Septuagint has endeavoured to efface this awkwardness in part, and is so far unfaithful to the original record, but probably preserves an earlier form of the opening words, τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦ Θεοῦ). It is a reasonable conjecture that the passage originally ran thus: "The word of the LORD which came to Jeremiah in the days of Josiah," etc.; vers. 1 and 3 being added later, which involved a change in the construction.

Ver. 1.—**The words of Jeremiah.** This introductory formula only occurs here and in Amos i. 1. The editor of Jeremiah and of Amos deserts the usual phrase ("burden" or "utterance," "vision," "the word of the LORD which came," etc.) in order to give fuller information concerning the origin of the prophetic writers (but see on ver. 2). On the name Jeremiah, and on the position occupied by Hilkiah, see Introduction. **That were in Anathoth.** So Vulgate; Septuagint, however (followed by Payne Smith), makes the relative refer to Jeremiah (ὃς κατῴκει). But in this case would not the phrase have been "Jeremiah the priest," etc. (comp. Ezek. i. 1)? Anathoth was one of the priestly cities (Josh. xxi. 18); it lay on or near the great northern road (Isa. x. 30), and has been identified by Dr. Robinson (so also by Lieutenant Conder) with 'Anâta, situated on a ridge, an hour and a quarter north-north-east from Jerusalem.

Ver. 3.—**Unto the end of the eleventh year,** etc. The limit is accurate with regard to ch. i.—xxxix. The later prophecies have a superscription of their own (see ch. xl. 1). **In the fifth month** (comp. ch. lii. 12, 27).

Vers. 4—19.—*The call of Jeremiah.*

Ver. 4.—**Unto me.** For the change of person, comp. Ezek. i. 4.

Ver. 5.—**Knew thee;** *i.e.* took notice of thee; virtually equivalent to selected thee (comp. Gen. xxxix. 6; Amos iii. 2; Isa. lviii. 3; Ps. cxliv. 3). Observe, the predestination of individuals is a familiar idea in the Old Testament (comp. Isa. xlv. 4; xlix. 1; Ps. cxxxix. 16). It was also familiar to the Assyrians: King Assurbanipal declares at the opening of his 'Annals' that the gods "in the body of his mother have made (him) to rule Assyria." Familiar, too, to the great family of religious reformers. For, as Dean Milman has truly observed, "No Pelagian ever has or ever will work a religious revolution. He who is destined for such a work must have a full conviction that God is acting directly, immediately, consciously, and therefore with irresistible power, upon him and through him. . . . He who is not predestined, who does not declare, who does not believe himself predes-

tined as the author of a great religious movement, he in whom God is not manifestly, sensibly, avowedly working out his pre-established designs, will never be saint or reformer" ('Latin Christianity,' i. 111, 112). **Sanctified thee**; *i.e.* set thee apart for holy uses. **Ordained**; rather, *appointed*. **Unto the nations**. Jeremiah's prophecies, in fact, have reference not only to Israel, but to the peoples in relation to Israel (ver. 10; ch. xxv. 15, 16; xlvi.—xlix.; l. and li.?).

Ver. 6.—**Ah, Lord God!** rather, *Alas, O Lord Jehovah!* It is a cry of alarm and pain, and recurs in ch. iv. 10; xiv. 13; xxxii. 17. **I am a child**. I am too young to support such an office. The word rendered "child" is used elsewhere of youths nearly grown up (comp. Gen. xxxiv. 19; xli. 12; 1 Kings iii. 7).

Ver. 7.—**Thou shalt go**, etc. Thoughts of self are altogether out of place in one who has received a Divine commission. Jeremiah's duty is simple obedience. In pursuing this path he cannot but be safe (ver. 8).

Ver. 9.—**Touched my mouth**; literally, *caused (his hand) to touch my mouth*. Jeremiah had said that he was unskilled in oratory; the Divine answer is that the words which he has to speak are not his own, but those of Jehovah. Two things are obvious: 1. The touching of the lips is not purely metaphorical, as in Ps. li. 15 (comp. Ps. xl. 6); it represents a real experience. 2. This experience, however, can only have been a visionary one, analogous to that vouchsafed to Isaiah at the opening of his prophetic ministry. In the grand account given by Isaiah of his inaugural vision (which has evidently influenced the form of the vision of Jeremiah), we read of the same significant act on the part of one of the seraphim. It is the same act, certainly, but it symbolizes, not as here the communication of a prophetic message (comp. Matt. x. 19), but the purification of the lips. Does it not seem as if Isaiah had attained a deeper insight into the spiritual regeneration needed by the prophet than had been granted to Jeremiah? Another point in which Jeremiah's account seems inferior to that of Isaiah is plastic power. Notice how Jeremiah dwells upon the meaning of the words; this is a reflective element which diminishes the poetic power of the narrative. A word may be added to explain that "visionary" is not here used in opposition to "based on fact." That the two epithets are susceptible of combination is well shown in the vision described by Père Gratry, in his 'Souvenirs de ma Jeunesse' (pp. 102—105), the reality of which is not in the least impaired in the writer's mind by its thoroughly inward character: "Dans toutes ces scènes intérieures, je n'imaginais rien . . . c'étaient de saisissantes et très-énergiques réalités auxquelles je ne m'attendais nullement."

Ver. 10.—**I have set thee**; literally, *I have made thee an overseer, or vicegerent* (comp. Gen. xli. 34; Judg. ix. 28, where the Authorized Version renders the cognate noun "officer"). **To root out . . . to plant**, viz. by pronouncing that Divine judgment which fulfils itself (comp. ch. v. 14; Numb. xxiii. 25; Isa. ix. 8, 9; lv. 11). As there is so much more threatening than promise in Jeremiah's writings, the destructive side of his activity is expressed by four verbs, the constructive only by two.

Vers. 11—16.—Two trials or probations of Jeremiah's inner sight (2 Kings vi. 17). Two visions are granted him, which he is required to describe. The first expresses the certainty of his prophetic revelation; the second indicates its contents.

Ver. 11.—**A rod of an almond tree**. The name here adopted for the almond tree is peculiarly suitable in this connection. It means "wakeful;" the almond, blossoming in January, is the first to "wake" from the sleep of winter.

Ver. 12.—**I will hasten my word**; literally, *I am wakeful over my word*; alluding to the meaning of the Hebrew word for almond.

Ver. 13.—**A seething pot**. There is a variety of Hebrew words for "pot." The word here used suggests a vessel of large size, since pottage for a whole company of prophets could be cooked in such a pot or caldron (2 Kings iv. 38). From Ezek. xxiv. 11 we may infer that it was of metal. A "seething pot" in ancient Arabic poetry is a figure for war. The same symbol occurs in Ezek. xxiv. 3—12, but with a different application. **The face thereof is toward the north**; rather, *toward the south*; literally, *from the face of the north*. The "face" of the pot is the side turned to the prophet. We may suppose the contents to be on the point of boiling over.

Ver. 14.—**Out of the north**. Previously to the battle of Carchemish, the Babylonians are only mentioned vaguely as a northern people (see ch. iv. 6; vi. 1, 22; x. 22). Strictly speaking, they were an eastern people from the point of view of Palestine; but the caravan-road which the Chaldæan armies had to take entered Palestine at Dan (comp. ch. iv. 15; viii. 16), and then proceeded southward. (On the question whether a Scythian invasion is referred to, at least conjointly with the Babylonian, see Introduction.) **An evil**; rather, *the evil*; viz. the calamity which in deepening gloom

forms the burden of the prophet's discourses. **Shall break forth**; literally, *shall open*; i.e. let loose by opening (comp. the use of the same verb in Isa. xiv. 17, literally, "looseth not his prisoners homewards;" and Amos viii. 5, literally, "that we may open," *i.e.* "bring forth wheat"). There is, however, some difficulty in explaining the choice of this expression. We might indeed suppose that the caldron had a lid, and that the removal or falling off of this lid is the "opening" referred to by the phrase.

Ver. 15.—**I will call**; literally, *I am calling*; i.e. I am about to call. **The kingdoms of the north**; alluding possibly to the varied origin of the population of Assyria and Babylonia. But more probably it is simply a suggestive phrase for the wide extent of the hostile empire referred to (comp. ch. xxv. 9). **They shall set every one his throne**, etc. The kings or the generals, representing "all the families," etc., shall set up the high seat of power and judicial authority at the broad space within the gate of the city, which constituted the Oriental forum (comp. Gen. xxiii. 10; Josh. xx. 4; Job xxix. 7; xxxi. 21). Thither the besieged would have to come to surrender themselves (2 Kings xxiv. 12) and to hear their fate. A similar prediction is made with regard to Nebuchadnezzar (ch. xliii. 9, 10). It is true the seat of authority is there said to be placed at the entrance of the palace, but this was in fact another place where justice was wont to be administered (ch. xxii. 2, 3). Jerome's view, adopted by Rosenmüller and Nagelsbach, that "to set one's seat" means "to besiege" is against usage, and does not accord with the opening words of ver. 16. There is, however, an element of truth in it. The judgment executed ministerially by the northern kings or generals began with the siege of Jerusalem and the other cities, and hence the words with which the prophet continues. **And against all the walls**, etc. We should have expected something like "and shall set themselves in array against," etc. (comp. Isa. xxii. 7 *b*); see, however, last note.

Ver. 16.—**I will utter my judgments**; or, *I will hold a court of justice upon them*; literally, *I will speak judgments with them*. The expression is peculiar to Jeremiah (comp. ch. iv. 12; xii. 1; xxxix. 6; lii. 9), and includes both the examination of the accused, and the judicial sentence (see ch. xxxix. 5; lii. 9). **All their wickedness**, etc. Their "wickedness," *i.e.* their infidelity to Jehovah, showed itself in burning incense to "other gods," and bowing down to their images. "Burned incense" is, however, too narrow a sense. The root-meaning of the verb is to be fragrant, and the causative conjugations will strictly mean only "to make a sweet odour," whether by the offering of incense or by burnt offerings (comp. ch. xi. 12; 2 Kings xxiii. 8, where a causative conjugation is used in the same wide sense here postulated; also Ps. lxvi. 15 and Isa. i. 13, where the word usually rendered "incense" seems rather to mean "a sweet smoke"). The prophet says, "of other gods" (not "of false gods"), out of consideration for the ignorance of his hearers, to whom Baal and Moloch really were as gods; in fact, that expressive word (*'elîl*) which Isaiah uses ten times to express the unreality of the other so-called gods, occurs only once, and then not in quite the same sense (see ch. xiv. 14) in Jeremiah. But the prophet's own strict monotheism is proved by such passages as ch. ii. 27 *a*; viii. 19 *b*; xvi. 20.

Ver. 17.—**Gird up thy loins**, as an Oriental does before making any kind of physical exertion, whether walking (Exod. xii. 11; 2 Kings iv. 29), running (1 Kings xviii. 46), or fighting (Job xii. 21). **Be not dismayed.** A want of confidence on Jeremiah's part will issue in his utter discomfiture by his enemies. "Dismay" in Hebrew has a twofold reference, subjective ("dismay") and objective ("ruin," "discomfiture"). Both references can be illustrated from this verse. (Comp. the command and—ver. 18—promise to Jeremiah with the command and promise to Ezekiel—iii. 8, 9.)

Ver. 18.—**Brasen walls.** The plural is used instead of a collective term for the whole circle of fortifications. In the parallel passage (ch. xv. 20) the singular occurs; the same alternation of plural and singular as in 2 Kings xxv. 10; 1 Kings iii. 1. The combination of figures strikingly expresses the invincibility of one whose strength is in his God. **The kings of Judah.** Why the plural? Most reply, because Jeremiah would have to do with successive sovereigns. But this meaning would have been just as well conveyed by the singular: "the king of Judah," without any name being added—would mean the king who from time to time happened to be reigning. "Kings of Judah" in Jeremiah seems to have a special meaning, and to include all the members of the royal family, who formed a numerous and powerful class (see on ch. xvii. 20).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*On the external surroundings of the life of Jeremiah.* These words, which constitute the preface to the Book of Jeremiah, are evidently intended to furnish a historical setting for the writings of the prophet. But they also throw light on his character and work. For, though the true life of every man is his inner spiritual life, we cannot estimate the worth of this until we have taken account of the circumstances in which it is placed, the aids and the hindrances it receives from without. Let us consider, therefore, the spiritual significance of the main historical surroundings of the work of Jeremiah.

I. THE OFFICIAL RELATIONSHIP OF JEREMIAH. 1. Jeremiah *had the advantage of being the son of a priest.* He had probably received a religious education from his childhood. The religion of his fathers must have been familiar to him. Its solemn rites and suggestive symbols were often before his eyes. Possibly, like St. Paul, who was trained in Jewish theology before he became a Christian (Gal. i. 14), he may have found the Law a schoolmaster to bring him to a higher religion. The children of Christian ministers have peculiar privileges in the early knowledge of Scripture, Church life, etc., which they have opportunities of acquiring. 2. Yet *this official relationship of Jeremiah's had its disadvantages.* It was quite exceptional. Not more than three of the prophets were of sacerdotal origin. For the most part the priestly class regarded the prophetic with jealousy, if not with envy. (1) Officialism is *conservative*, and opposed to the free and revolutionary spirit of prophecy. (2) It is also *formal*, and tends to repress the inward and spiritual experiences of which prophecy is the highest outcome. It speaks well for Jeremiah that the spirit of prophecy was not crushed out of him by the dry traditionalism and the rigid ritualism of his priestly connections. 3. It is noteworthy that *the official relationship of Jeremiah was entirely overshadowed by his prophetic mission.* He is known to history not as the priest, but as the prophet. Official religious services are quite secondary to spiritual work.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE AGE OF JEREMIAH. 1. Jeremiah *entered on his mission in the midst of the reformation of Josiah.* Yet the prophet's work was entirely disconnected from that of the king. Political religious activity is very different from personal spiritual work. Ecclesiastical reforms will not effect spiritual regeneration. The king's overthrow of the idols does not dispense with the need of the prophet's call to repentance. 2. Jeremiah *continued his mission after the failure of Josiah's reformation and during an age of national decay.* The character of the age changed, but the prophet remained unchanged. Weak men may be content to echo the popular cries of the day. It is too often the mission of the servant of God to contradict these familiar voices. The true prophet is not the creature of his age, the mouthpiece of the *Zeit-geist;* he is called to resist this influence. 3. Jeremiah *closed his mission amidst scenes of national ruin.* It was given him to see the fulfilment of his warnings of doom, but not that of his promises of restoration. Hence he is the prophet of tears. Jesus also wept over Jerusalem, but he brought redemption. We should be thankful that we live in these latter times when we can see the realization of the promises of "the Book of consolation."

III. THE DURATION OF THE MISSION OF JEREMIAH. It lasted for at least forty years; how many more after the overthrow of Jerusalem we do not know. 1. This fact speaks much for the *prophetic power* of Jeremiah. Many men can only rouse themselves to one supreme effort. True greatness is as much seen in the continuance of powers as in supreme exhibitions of them. 2. This fact is a grand proof of the *faithfulness* of the prophet. Almost the whole of his work was done "in opposition." We admire the young martyr who summons up a momentary heroic courage to seal his testimony with his blood; but greater honour is due to the aged confessor who has persevered through a lifelong martyrdom, and, though spared to old age, is also "faithful unto death." 3. This fact sheds light on *God's ways with man.* Jeremiah commenced his stern prophetic denunciations forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem. This suggests to us (1) that God mercifully delays the execution of his threats to give man time for repentance; and (2) that the forbearance of God, which postpones the evil day, does not frustrate the justice which must ultimately bring it upon the impenitent.

Ver. 5.—*Predestination.* I. CONSIDER THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A DIVINE PREDESTINATION. 1. This implies (1) *foreknowledge*—God has his idea about a man and his mission before he forms the initial germ of his life; (2) a *sanctifying*, or *setting apart*, by which the man is considered by God in relation to his destined mission, and treated accordingly; and (3) a *preordination*, a Divine action in accordance with the Divine idea and purpose which tends to carry these into effect. Every life is prophesied in the mind of God by God's thought of it, and comes into the world girded with Divine purposes, wrapped up and drawn onwards by the unseen threads of the designs of God. 2. This predestination does not involve *fatalism*; it is consistent with human freedom of action and personal responsibility. On the one hand we must conclude, from its existence, that there are certain possibilities with which God endows a man, and certain limits with which God has hedged him about. But on the other hand, we must recognize that it depends on the man's own will and effort whether he use those possibilities, and attain to the end enclosed within those limits. He has a Divine vocation, but he may neglect it; he may fail in realizing God's idea of his life. There rests on him the responsibility of accomplishing his destiny.

II. CONSIDER THE GROUNDS FOR BELIEF IN A DIVINE PREDESTINATION. 1. It is revealed in *Scripture* (*e.g.* Acts ii. 23; Rom. viii. 29; 1 Pet. i. 2). 2. It is involved in the *idea of the providence* of a supreme God. God foresees all the future; in every act of his all other events and their relation to this must be present to the mind of God. With such knowledge a universal control of events, such as is implied by a providence not interfering from without now and again at critical moments, but immanent in the whole course of the world, must imply a Divine preordination. 3. It is proved to us by *experience*. (1) We are born with certain peculiarities, faculties, powers, tendencies. The prophet, like the poet, *nascitur, non fit*. (2) The external circumstances of life are largely beyond our control. The child cannot determine the sphere of life into which it is to enter at birth. All the opportunities and duties which result from these circumstances are made for us, not by us. They bring a mission and open up a career, by chance if there be no providence, but by preordination if there be a providence.

III. CONSIDER THE PURPOSE OF A DIVINE PREDESTINATION. 1. It must often be *mysterious*. Until we review life as a whole we shall not be able to interpret the meaning of its several parts. We cannot judge of the architect's design by examining the separate stones which lie scattered in the builder's yard. But: 2. It is not *arbitrary*. The very idea of destiny as determined by a Being of infinite thought implies purpose based on reason. God would not determine events simply to manifest his unfettered rights of sovereignty. Such aimless caprice could only emanate from a senseless despot. 3. It is turned to a *good purpose*. This must be so, for if God is good his designs must be good. The predestination is (1) for the good of the agent, who is blessed by being selected for Divine service; and (2) for the good of the world. The elect are chosen instruments for benefiting the whole world. Thus Jeremiah was destined to be "a prophet unto the nations." The Jew was an elect people that he might be the channel of blessing to all mankind (Gen. xii. 3; Rom. iii. 2). The Christian is a chosen vessel that he may carry grace to others, and serve as the salt of the earth, as the light of the world.

IV. CONSIDER THE PRACTICAL EFFECT OF THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION. It contains no excuse for indolence and no reason for despair, for God fits all of us for some service, the accomplishment of which depends on our own faithfulness. 1. It should lead us to *inquire what is God's will*, rather than to carve out a career for ourselves. 2. It should make us *humble, submissive, obedient*, and *diligent* in service, since there is a Divine idea of our life which God expects us to realize. 3. It should inspire *courage* in the midst of difficulties. Jeremiah was brave in the thought that he was fulfilling a Divine destiny. Such a thought inspires energy in face of enmity, contempt, isolation, and apparent failure.

Vers. 6—9.—*Diffidence overcome.* I. DIFFIDENCE IS A DIFFICULTY TO BE OVERCOME. 1. Jeremiah shrank from his mission, not through the cowardice that fears danger, nor through the indolence that dislikes effort, nor through the selfishness that declines responsibility, but through the *diffidence* of youth, sensitiveness, and humility. (1) Youth is naturally diffident. The world is all unknown; powers are not yet proved by experience.

(2) Sensitiveness inclines to diffidence. There is a confidence which depends simply on denseness and callousness. Acute feeling is a great hindrance to bold action. Jeremiah felt the miseries of his nation deeply, and it was peculiarly difficult for such a man to assume the position of a stern censor. (3) Humility leads to diffidence. If we think little of ourselves we are not likely to be forward in accepting posts of responsibility. 2. Now, this diffidence is an *evil thing*. It may not be sinful in its origin, but perfectly innocent, and even a mark of amiable characteristics. But it is injurious in its effects, and becomes positively guilty if indulged in when God has provided us means for overcoming it. The most gifted are often the most diffident. Hence if they yielded to their reluctance to fulfil their vocation, the greatest and best work of the world would be left undone. There is also a danger lest diffidence should become an excuse for indolence, selfishness, and cowardice. If unrestrained it will lead to these vices. People are often greatly to blame for shrinking from posts of responsibility, although they may even imagine they are earning the honours of modesty and humility.

II. GOD PROVIDES MEANS FOR OVERCOMING DIFFIDENCE. God never calls a man to any work without securing to him the means for performing it. Thus having called Jeremiah to his service, God sends help for overcoming the young man's diffidence. 1. *The consciousness of a Divine mission.* "Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee." It is well to feel that we are not doing our own work but God's. If we fail, what does that matter to us so long as we are doing his will? The thought of duty is itself an inspiration. We are not simply to attempt what we imagine to be a good thing; we are called for a purpose, sent on a mission, and the thought that we are about our Father's business should allay the hesitation of natural diffidence. The ambassador is armed with the authority of his master and backed by his master's power. The prophet is sent by God with God's authority. All who are working God's will are similarly supported by God's authority. 2. *The realization of the presence of God.* "I am with thee." We may be diffident while we look to self; but when we look away to God we see the Source of strength and victory. Indeed, our very diffidence may be a means of securing our true strength by making us seek the help of God. Self-distrust may lead to trust in God. Thus when weak in ourselves we may become strong in him (2 Cor. xii. 10). If we go in God's strength we have no more occasion to fear, since success no longer depends on our ability but on his assistance. 3. *The direct inspiration of the Spirit of God.* "Behold I have put my words in thy mouth." God is not only present by our side to assist and deliver us, but be is within the soul, infusing light and power. The prophet fears he cannot speak the needed words. The words he is to speak are not his own but God's. He is the messenger, God is the real speaker. If then he can but discern the voice of God within him, and interpret this to the people, all diffidence arising from his own incompetence should vanish. Every work which is done for God can only proceed from God, and when it does thus come from God we need not fear its failure. God can accomplish his own will in us as well as by his immediate actions in the world.

Ver. 10.—*The power of prophecy.* I. THERE IS A POWER IN PROPHECY. Prophecy is not simply a light, a revelation of truth; it is also a voice of authority, a means of active influence, a power. The Divine word in the prophet is like the Divine word in nature—an energizing word. God speaks, and it is done. The New Testament references to prophecy are made in obedience to this thought. The fulfilment of prophecy is there quoted not so much, as in modern evidential literature, as a proof of supernatural foresight, but rather as the effect of a Divine power which has realized the purpose of the ancient Word of God. This or that is said to be done "*that* it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet." God's Word is always a power (Heb. iv. 12). The Bible is not simply a revelation; it is a means of influence. The preacher should see that he is clothed with power. His mission is to influence as well as to teach.

II. THE SOURCES OF THE POWER OF PROPHECY ARE SPIRITUAL. The authority conferred on Jeremiah is not that of the secular arm. He is to exert his influence by no material force. His power is different in kind from that of a political government. The claim of the papal authority founded on this verse is unwarranted, since this does not confer the power of the sword but direct spiritual influence. Neither is the power of prophecy in the least allied to magic or sorcery. It is not a miraculous material force. 1. It is the *power of truth.* Truth is strong; knowledge is power. The prophet sees

the deep principles of God's government, and in the discernment of them lies the force of his utterances. 2. It is the *power of right*. The prophet takes his stand on the side of justice, purity, goodness. In the end the might must go with the right. 3. It is the *power of God*. The prophet is nothing in himself; he is God's servant; the authority he wields is God's. So the power of the preacher is not to be sought in reason, in eloquence, nor in official authority, but in the truth of his message, in the righteousness of his cause, and in his fidelity to the will of God.

III. THE RANGE OF THE POWER OF PROPHECY IS WORLDWIDE. Jeremiah was a Jew. Yet he was "set over the nations and over the kingdoms." 1. God is the King of kings and his authority concerns *kingdoms* as well as individuals. Political questions are amenable to the influence of Divine truth and righteousness. 2. God's truth does not only concern the Church. It is for the *world*—if the world will obey, for its blessedness; if it will not heed, for a judgment upon it.

IV. THE EFFECTS OF THE POWER OF PROPHECY ARE REVOLUTIONARY. It is no wild and transient influence, but a great stirring energy. Translated into modern language, this means that truth, right, and the will of God are powerful factors in history, disarranging human schemes and bringing higher designs into effect. 1. This power is *destructive*. Jeremiah is to "root out," etc. Evil is not a mere negation—simple darkness. It must be fought and cast out. Christ sent "a sword" (Matt. x. 34). The era of the Reformation was a destructive age. It is the duty of the preacher to protest against evil, to denounce it, to seek its overthrow, and not to shrink for fear of consequent disturbances. Warfare is better than guilty peace. 2. This power is ultimately *constructive*. Jeremiah is "to build and to plant." The destructive agencies of God are simply intended to clear off obstructions, and make the way for a new and better order. The disintegrating power of criticism should be regarded as only preparatory to the creative influence of living truth. The gospel is chiefly a constructive power, making men new creatures, building up the kingdom of God in our midst, bringing about a new heaven and a new earth.

Vers. 11, 12.—*The almond rod.* The early budding almond rod is symbolical of the wakeful attitude of God at a crisis in human events. God's manner of acting at this period of Jewish history may be regarded as typical of what we may expect again under similar circumstances.

I. THERE ARE OCCASIONS WHEN GOD'S WATCHFULNESS AND ENERGY ARE ESPECIALLY MANIFEST. God never sleeps (Ps. cxxi. 4). While we sleep he keeps watch. Though we do not mark his presence nor even think of it, he is still looking upon us and never ceasing from his activity. Yet he is said to awake as though from sleep (Ps. xliv. 23), because to us he appears to be more wakeful at one season than at another. 1. There are times when God watches unseen, and times when he makes his watchfulness manifest to us by his acts; then he is said to awake. 2. God generally acts in quiet ways unnoticed and not directly interfering with us; but now and again his ceaseless activity is more pronounced, and is specially felt by opposing our course; then God seems to have aroused himself. Such times are awful crises of existence. We should be prepared to expect them, and not presume on the present obscurity of the Divine actions. Some day it will be as though God awoke with the voice of a trumpet and the might of a host suddenly revealed.

II. GOD NEVER DELAYS HIS ACTION BEYOND ITS DUE TIME. When it is time for God to "awake," he does "awake." It seems as though he tarried; but he has a reason for waiting. 1. He does not come to deliverance at the moment we expect him (1) because it is well we should be tried by distresses, or (2) because high purposes beyond our own lives are to be attained through the things which are occasioning us trouble, or (3) because we have not sought his aid with true faith and submission, or (4) for causes beyond our comprehension. 2. He does not come to judgment (1) because he waits for sin to ripen, or (2) because he is long-suffering and gives time for repentance, or (3) because larger issues than those which touch us are involved in the act of judgment. Still, in both cases he comes at the right time. He is not a slothful God. He is wakeful, and his actions may be typified by the almond branch.

III. GOD'S JUDGMENTS SOMETIMES FALL SUDDENLY AND SWIFTLY. We may have but short warning of their approach. The execution of them may be rapid. The storm

which has long been brewing may burst quickly. The harvest which has ripened slowly may be gathered in with haste. The impending judgment may not be discerned till it is too late for escape. When the rain began to fall it was too late for man to seek refuge in the ark. When the Jews saw the hosts of Nebuchadnezzar approaching there were no means for saving their country from ruin. It is foolish and wrong to neglect the salvation of God until we discern his judgment looming over us. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Vers. 13, 14.—*The seething pot.* I. THE VISION OF THE SEETHING POT FORESHADOWS APPROACHING DOOM. God is about to "hold his session" upon Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. 1. They who are *most favoured* by God must expect the severest judgment if they prove unfaithful to him. The Jews were a favoured people. Their privileges were great; if they abused these their guilt and consequent punishment must be proportionately great. Therefore, instead of considering the past mercies of God as a ground for expecting to escape the penalties of our offences, we should see in them the measure of his future severities upon us if we sin in face of the special inducements to devotion afforded by those mercies. 2. The revelation of impending judgment is a great *motive for faithful preaching.* This vision of the seething pot is given to Jeremiah to rouse him to undertake his prophetic duties. A large part of his work consisted in gloomy predictions of coming doom. This was peculiar to the age. There are ages when similar preaching is especially appropriate. But as sin always makes for death the preacher is always called to raise a voice of warning.

II. THE VISION OF THE SEETHING POT ILLUSTRATES THE CHARACTER OF THE APPROACHING DOOM. 1. It is *gradually prepared.* The vessel is slowly heated to the boiling point. The guilt of sin accumulates and the evil consequences gather in force until they burst upon the victim with the energy of long pent-up wrath. 2. It breaks forth *suddenly.* Suddenly the vessel boils over. Judgment may be delayed and gradual in the preparation, and yet suddenly surprise us when at length it falls upon us. 3. It is *violent and overwhelming,* as the seething pot suggests fury, tumult, and, in its boiling over, a rushing forth of its scalding contents.

III. THE VISION OF THE SEETHING POT SUGGESTS THE SOURCE OF THE APPROACHING DOOM. The pot was turned towards the south and heated by fires in the north. 1. Punishment may come from the *most unlikely quarter.* The Jews had turned to Babylon for friendship, and from Babylon came their ruin. Our most trusted friends may become the instruments of our keenest suffering. 2. *Lawless violence may be overruled by providence* to work the ends of God's righteous laws. The doom is not to come from within the range of the theocracy and through the influence of those who consciously executed the Divine decree, but from far-off regions, wholly beyond the light of Israel's religion. Thus God makes the wrath of man to praise him. So storms and earthquakes, revolutions and invasions, tumults in nature and tumults in the human world, work ultimate good results in clearing and purifying the air, sweeping away pestilent corruption, and preparing for a new and wholesome order. 3. The more luxurious Southern races have frequently been visited by terrible invasions of hardier races from the North. The Scythians in the East, the Goths in the West, were scourges of God, and wholesome scourges, helping to reform the corrupt and indolent peoples who lived in dread of their invasions. We should see wise and good purposes of providence in these terrible events of general history, as we see them in the special history of Israel.

Vers. 17—19.—*Encouragements to fidelity.* It was no easy matter for Jeremiah, young, modest, and sensitive, to come boldly forward and threaten the judgment of God against his country. But if God calls a man to any task, he will help him through with it, and Jeremiah receives encouragements proportionate to his duty.

I. THE DUTY. Consider what the duty of faithful service laid upon the prophet included. 1. *Energy.* He is to gird up his loins, and arise. God is not satisfied with passive submission to his will. God cannot be faithfully served by the indolent. All our powers are required for his service, and they must be employed without distraction. 2. *Obedience.* Jeremiah is to speak just what God commands him. Fidelity is not simply devotion to God, it is devotion according to his will—the devotion of servants, not that of patrons. 3. *Thoroughness.* The prophet is to speak "all" that God com-

mands him. It is treason for the ambassador to suppress those elements of his commission which are displeasing to himself. The servant of God must not select from the revelation of Divine truth the words which suit his purpose and neglect the rest. He is not to shun to declare "the whole counsel of God"—threats as well as promises, difficult sayings and mysteries as well as plainly acceptable doctrines. 4. *Fearlessness.* "Be not dismayed." Fear is not only painful; it is injurious by paralyzing effort. Cowardice is sin.

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENTS. It is our duty to be faithful, though fidelity should bring our ruin; but such a result will not follow it. Consider the various inducements Jeremiah receives to a faithful discharge of his difficult task. 1. *A revelation of momentous truths.* God says, "Thou *therefore* gird up thy loins," etc. The word "therefore" carries us back to the visions of the almond rod and the seething pot. The truths revealed in these visions themselves furnish a motive for the prophet to declare them. The seer should become a prophet. Truth is not the private property of the few; it is the rightful heritage of all. It is the duty of him who knows to enlighten the ignorant. More especially is this the case in regard to spiritual truths, practical truths, and truths which concern the highest welfare of mankind. 2. *A warning of Divine displeasure.* "Be not dismayed at them, lest I make thee indeed dismayed." The fear of God is a safeguard against the fear of man. Cowardice provokes danger. The Christian has no armour provided for his back. 3. *An assurance of Divine protection.* This is given in a succession of strong images, that it may be felt in all its certainty and importance. For we need not only to know that God will protect us, but to realize this if we are to be brave and strong. Thus Jeremiah is made to feel that, in spite of his youth and sensitiveness, he will be strong as a fortress and firm as brazen walls. None are so independent before men as they who are wholly dependent on God. 4. *A promise of victory over opposition.* The young prophet is taught to expect opposition. (1) It is foolish to ignore the approach of trouble. A surprise sometimes leads to a defeat from very inferior foes. Danger foreseen is danger half overcome. The Bible never makes light of the difficulties and hardships of life (Luke x. 3). (2) No ground of confidence is more inspiring than the knowledge that the danger clearly, fully apprehended will yet be certainly overcome. This was the assurance given to Jeremiah. The same assurance is offered to every faithful servant of God (Isa. xliii. 1).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

On Jeremiah's ministry in general. "It is sufficient," said our Saviour, "that the disciple be as his Lord." Now, of all his servants few answered more closely to this description than did the prophet Jeremiah. In a very deep and real sense his life was a type of our Lord's. It is in the spiritual world as in the natural, a close resemblance exists between the separate parts and the entire organism to which they belong. The root, stem, bud, flower, fruit, and seed are each constructed on the same type as the tree itself. However widely diversified they may seem in form or function, their essential nature is the same. Hence every leaf is a miniature of the tree on which it grows; trunk, branches, foliage, are each patterned in it. And likewise every branch is but a reproduction on a smaller scale of the whole tree.[1] But this is only what we find constantly exemplified in the spiritual world. What miniature lives of Christ are those of men like Joseph, Moses, David, and many more! And amongst such as are illustrious in this respect stands Jeremiah. Like him, the consciousness of the Divine call was with him from childhood (cf. Luke ii. 49 and ch. i. 6). He too was persecuted with murderous hate by his own townsmen. As Christ was driven from Nazareth, so was Jeremiah from his native Anathoth (ch. xii. 6). His vehement denunciations of the corrupt priests and prophets of his day remind us of the reiterated woes pronounced by our Lord on the "scribes and pharisees, hypocrites," of his day. Like our Lord, Jeremiah also was the prophet who stood nearest to and told most plainly of the dread catastrophe which overwhelmed Jerusalem and her people.

[1] Macmillan.

Jeremiah was the prophet of Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar; our Lord of the like destruction by the Roman Titus. Both beheld the glories of the temple, and both told of the swiftly coming days when there should "not be left one stone upon another, which should not be thrown down." The footsteps of him who, beyond all others, was "despised and rejected of men," Jeremiah, in so far as it was possible to him, anticipated. The bitter tears shed by our Saviour over impenitent Jerusalem are shadowed forth in the prophet's prolonged and profound lament over his own idolatrous and disobedient countrymen. His well-known words, "Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by?" uttered concerning the sorrows of Jerusalem and her people, have come to be so universally appropriated to our Lord, that the prophet's own deep distress which they tell of, and the occasion of that distress, are alike almost if not entirely forgotten. "His sufferings come nearest of those of the whole army of martyrs to those of the Teacher against whom princes, and priests, and elders, and people were gathered together." To him, as to the great apostle, was it given to know "the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and to be made conformable unto his death." And we may venture to prolong the parallel, and to apply to Jeremiah the august words which, in their supreme meaning, can belong to but One alone. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." In that high recompense Jeremiah, so far as any servant of God may, shares. For the honour in which his name came to be held was very great. As time rolled on he was regarded as the chief representative of the whole prophetic order. By some he was placed at the head of all the prophets. At the time of the Christian era his return was daily expected. He was emphatically thought to be "the Prophet —'the Prophet like unto Moses,' who should close the whole dispensation." No wonder, then, that one devout student after another has been struck by the closeness of the resemblance here briefly pointed out, and has delighted to trace in the prophet's history foreshadowings of the "Man of Sorrows," who, more than any other, was acquainted with grief.—C.

Vers. 1—3.—*Introductory statements concerning Jeremiah's parentage and period of his ministry.* I. HIS PARENTAGE. He was the son of Hilkiah, not that Hilkiah who was high priest during the reign of Josiah, but of some similarly named priest. Even amid the terrible corruptions of that period, there appear to have been a few faithful souls who held fast to the fear of the Lord. We have their names, Huldah, Shallum, Baruch, etc. From amidst these Jeremiah sprang. The Lord can call and convert and consecrate to his work whom he will; but his more common way is to come to the habitations of his people, when he would find some whom he destines for special and honoured service. The homes of the godly are the hope of the Church. Amidst the children of the believing are to be found those whom God will generally employ to carry on his work. This is one way in which the promise is fulfilled, "Them that honour me I will honour."

II. HIS PROFESSION. He belonged to the priesthood. Terrible are the charges which are brought against the priests and prophets of that day. They had reached the limit of utmost degradation. They are said to "deal falsely," to be "profane;" and their conduct is described as "a wonderful and horrible thing." Yet Jeremiah belonged to this deeply fallen class. How difficult must have been his position! how constant his resistance to the contagion of their example and influence! When from amongst those who are of the same order, who have common interests, common duties, and who are thrown together in so many and close relationships, one stands aloof and turns upon his companions in severe and solemn rebuke as Jeremiah did, such a one needs to be strong as "a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls" (ver. 18) Jeremiah stands before us as a noble proof that the tide of evil, however strongly it may run, may yet be resisted; none are of necessity borne down by it but, by the same grace which was given to Jeremiah, they may stem the fierce current and defy its power. Ten thousand of the saints of God have done this; why should not we?

III. THE REASON OF ALL MEN COUNTING HIM AS A PROPHET. "The word of the Lord came unto him." He did not *say*, "I am a prophet;" but all men felt he was. For his words had power; they were mighty to the pulling down of the strong holds of

sin. It was not simply that he announced that there should be a "rooting out and pulling down" (cf. ver. 10), but the words which he spoke so wrought in men's minds that these results followed. Hence men, conscious of the power of his words, confessed that it was "the word of the Lord" which had come to him. This is the old prophetic word which, whenever spoken, constrains men to confess the presence of God (cf. 1 Cor. xiv. 25). And St. Peter (2 Epist. i. 19) says concerning it, "We have, surer still, the prophetic word." "More sure," he meant, than even the wondrous voice and vision of "the holy mount," for that was but a transient testimony given once and to the three favoured apostles of the Lord alone; but the prophetic word, that which woke up the response in men's hearts, and by which the secrets of each soul were disclosed—that was a more constant, more universal, more powerful, and therefore a more sure testimony than aught beside. And *the occasions* when this "word of the Lord" comes to any of his servants are well known. See how particular and definite the dates are here. "In the thirteenth year of the reign of King Josiah. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim," etc. The coming of the word of the Lord to any soul is a marked and memorable period. He through whom that word is spoken is conscious of an unusual power, he realizes the Divine presence in an altogether unusual manner. He is more passive than active. It is said of the holy men of old, that they "spake as they were moved [borne along] of the Holy Ghost," and this, St. Peter declares (2 Epist. i. 21), is ever a characteristic of the prophetic word. And those who hear the word know that the Lord is speaking through his servant. Listlessness and unconcern give way to serious concern. Some can tell the very day and hour when they first heard the "word of the Lord." They had listened to sermons and read the Scriptures again and again, but one day they felt that the Lord himself was speaking to them, and they could not but give heed. Like as the people of Judah and Jerusalem knew when the voice of God, though they despised it to their ruin, was speaking to them, so do men now. And if we have heard it for our salvation, the time, the place, the speaker, will often be vividly remembered in connection with it, like as those who heard Jeremiah knew the very year when the "word of the Lord came" to him. It is ill for both hearers and speakers alike if they be unable to point to periods when they were conscious that "the word of the Lord" came to them. For a preacher never to realize the sacred glow and the uplifting of soul which accompany the utterance of the prophetic word, or for a hearer to have so dulled his conscience, so destroyed his spiritual ear, that though the word of the Lord be spoken his heart never responds, his soul never realizes the presence of God;—from the sin and sorrow of either may God mercifully save us.

IV. THE DATE AND DURATION OF JEREMIAH'S MINISTRY. We are told when it began, and how long it lasted. It began when the evil days for Judah and Jerusalem were drawing very near. It was in vain that the devout King Josiah endeavoured to turn back the hearts of the people to the Lord God of their fathers. But though the long-suffering of God had been so tried and was now almost ceasing, yet, ere they were given up to the punishment which was their due, God raises up his servant Jeremiah and the band of faithful men who stood by him (cf. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15—21). For forty years—for that is the period covered by the reigns of the several kings spoken of—Jeremiah exhorted, warned, entreated, threatened, prayed, wept; but all in vain. Therefore God's wrath at length rose against them, and there was no remedy. "Behold the goodness and the severity of God!" How reluctantly will he abandon any to the results of their own ways! how slow is he to let come upon them that which they have long deserved! Yea, he is the long-suffering God. But whilst we fail not to remember and to rejoice in this, let us not fail either to remember and to dread the other equally sure fact, that "God is a consuming fire" to those who set at nought all his counsel, and will have none of his reproof (Prov. i. 24—33). Those to whom Jeremiah prophesied found it so, and so will all who sin in like manner now.—C.

Vers. 4—19.—*The dread commission.* I. WHAT WAS IT? (Cf. ver. 10.) It was to denounce the judgments of God against his people. At the end of the commission there is mention made of "building and planting;" but the chief charge is of an altogether opposite character. Jeremiah was set over the nations "to root out, and to pull down, to destroy, and to throw down." It was a terrible undertaking. He was to

spare no class, no rank, no order. Kings, princes, priests, and people were all to be alike solemnly warned of the sure judgments that were coming upon them. And the like work has to be done now. How prone we all are to speak with bated breath of the retribution of God! how ready, to ourselves and to others, to explain away or to soften down the awful words of God against sin and the doers thereof! Preachers and teachers of God's truth, beware lest the blood of those who perished because you warned them not be required at your hands (Ezek. xxxiii. 6)!

II. BUT IT IS A DREAD COMMISSION. The shrinking of Jeremiah from it is manifest all through this chapter. Before the heavy burden which he was to bear was fully disclosed to him, he exclaims (ver. 6), "Ah, Lord God! behold I cannot speak: for I am a child." And the assurances, aids, and encouragements which are given him all show how much needed to be done ere his reluctance and trembling fear could be overcome. The whole chapter tells of God's gracious preparation of his servant for the arduous work he had to do. And whosoever now undertakes like work, if he have no realization of its solemnity and burden, it is plain that God has not called him to speak in his Name. To hear a man tell of the awful doom of the impenitent in a manner that, if it be not flippant, yet seems to relish his task, and to hail it as an opportunity for rhetorical display, is horrible in the extreme, and will do more to harden men in sin than almost anything beside. The subject is so sad, so serious, so terrible, that he who believes in it at all will be sure to sympathize with the prophet's sensitive shrinking from the work to which he was ordained. If when sentencing criminals who have broken the laws of man to their due punishment, humane judges often break down in tears, though their punishment touch not the soul,—how can any contemplate the death that is eternal unmoved or without the most solemn compassion and tenderest pity? And to increase the fear and shrinking with which Jeremiah regarded the work before him, there was the *seeming presumption* of one so young—little more than "a child" in years, experience, or knowledge—undertaking such a work. *The hopelessness* of it also. As well might a sparrow think to fly full in the face of a hurricane, as for the young prophet to think to stay the torrent of sin which was now flooding and raging over the whole life of his people. Sin and transgression of the grossest kind had become their habit, their settled custom, their ordinary way. All that he had to tell them they had heard again and again, and had despised and forgotten it. What hope of success was there, then, for him? And *the fierceness of the opposition* he would arouse would also deter him from the work. It was not alone that the faces (ver. 17) of kings, princes, priests, and people would darken upon him, but they would (ver. 19) "fight against" him, as we know they did. Well, therefore, might he say, "Ah, Lord! I cannot." And to-day, how many are the plausible reasons which our reluctant hearts urge against that fidelity in such work as Jeremiah's which God requires at our hands! But God will not allow them. See—

III. HOW HE CONSTRAINED JEREMIAH TO UNDERTAKE THIS WORK. 1. Ver. 5: he gave him certainty as to his being called to the prophetic work. To know that we are indeed called of God to any work is an unfailing source of strength therein. 2. Ver. 7: he made him feel that necessity was laid upon him; "thou *shalt* go;" "thou *shalt* speak." (Cf. Paul's "Yea, woe is me," etc.) So Jeremiah himself afterwards says (ch. xx. 9) God's word was like "a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." What a help to the preacher of God's truth is such a conviction as this! 3. Ver. 8: he promised his presence and delivering grace. Consciousness of security and safety in God will give a dauntless courage in the face of any and of all opposition. 4. He gave him special qualifications for his work. Words and power of speech (ver. 9). Immovable and unflinching strength of will, a determination and resolve that would not waver (ver. 18). 5. He showed him that the rooting up and the destruction were not ends in themselves, but to lead on to planting and to building afresh (ver. 10). To know that we are working on to a good and blessed end is no small encouragement to us in working through all manner of difficulty to reach that end. 6. He made him vividly realize the nature and nearness of the judgments he foretold. This was the purpose of the visions of the rod of the almond tree and the seething pot (vers. 11—15; for explanation, see exegesis). The first vision told of God's judgment close at hand. The second, of the quarter whence these judgments come, and of the fierce, furious character of the foes who should come upon them.

Jeremiah was enabled to "see well" the visions, that is, to realize very forcibly what they meant. Oh, if we could but more vividly realize what the anger of God is against sin; if we could have a vision of the wrath of God; with how much more power and urgency should we plead with men to flee from the wrath to come! 7. Ver. 16: he reminds Jeremiah of the sins that called for these judgments. A deep sense of sin is indispensable to those who would earnestly warn of the doom of sin. 8. And (ver. 19) God again gives his servant the blessed assurance, "They shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee to deliver thee." Thus did God equip the prophet and prepare him for his work. His God supplied all his need. It was a stern warfare on which he was to go, but he went not at his own charges. If we be summoned to difficult duty, we shall be supplied with all-sufficient strength. Only let us be careful to avail ourselves of the help assured, lest (ver. 17) we be dismayed and God confound us before our enemies. Dread, therefore, no commission that God entrusts thee with, for along with it will ever be found the grace, all the grace, needed for its successful discharge.—C.

Ver. 10.—*The ministry for a corrupt age.* I. MUST BE RAISED UP BY GOD. Such an age will have its ministers, but they will be prophets who will prophesy only smooth things. But a true ministry for such an age will not be produced by it, but be given to it from God. "See, *I* have set thee," etc.

II. WILL BE ENDUED WITH DIVINE POWER. "I have set thee *over* the nations . . . to root out," etc. None who contemplate the marvellous effects of such a ministry and compare them with the natural powers of him who exercises it, but must see that the ascendancy he has gained and the spiritual power he wields are of God and not of man.

III. WILL MAKE NO COMPROMISE WITH SIN. See the number and force of the words used to indicate the ruthless antagonism which the prophet would manifest toward the wickedness of his day. Nothing less than its complete overthrow would fulfil the ministry entrusted to him.

IV. WILL DEMAND ON THE PART OF THE PROPHET, AND WILL GAIN FROM THE GRACE OF GOD, A FEARLESS AND AN UNCONQUERABLE COURAGE. (Vers. 17, 18.)

V. ITS END AND RESULT BLESSED. "To build and to plant" (ver. 10). The encumbered ground had first to be cleared and cleansed, but that done, the fabric of a true life should be upreared, and principles pure, holy, and blessed should have root in the hearts of all.—C.

Vers. 11—16.—*Jeremiah's visions.* I. WHAT WERE THEY? (Cf. vers. 12—14.)

II. WHEREFORE WERE THEY? In all probability, for the sake of vividly impressing the mind of the prophet with the message he was to deliver, and so ensuring that that message should be delivered with greater power. Hence the question, "What seest thou?" (ver. 11) was designed to arouse and arrest his attention, and for the same reason, when that attention had been awakened, the Divine commendation, "Thou hast well seen," is given. Cf. for similar questions and similar visions, ver. 13; ch. xxiv. 3; Amos vii. 8; viii. 2; Zech. iv. 2; v. 2, and in each case the motive seems to have been the same.

III. THEIR SUGGESTIONS FOR OURSELVES. 1. *Concerning God's punishment of sin.* (1) Its not being apparent to us is no reason for denying it. Certainly the vision of the stem, or branch, of the almond tree would not to an ordinary observer have suggested it. Nor either the second vision, that of the "seething pot," although that did undoubtedly present somewhat more of a troubled aspect. Yet both alike needed that their meaning and interpretation should be given. Their significance did not lie on the surface. Only a divinely illumined eye could see that the early-budding almond tree which, because of its outstripping other trees, being in advance of them all in yielding its fruit, was called the "wakeful" or "watchful" tree, meant that the Lord was "watchful over his word to perform it." Nor was the interpretation of the second vision much more evident than that of the first. And so continually, in connection with ungodly men, there are events occurring and signs of varied kind are given, which to those who are taught of God tell plainly how God is "watchful over his word to perform it;" but to others they tell nothing of the kind. They are like the prophet's almond tree and seething pot, which had no meaning until that meaning was pointed out. The people

of Judah and Jerusalem saw nothing in these circumstances, any more than in the prophet's visions, to alarm them very much. And so, still, ungodly men are at ease in the presence of facts and indications which fill those who believe God's Word with unspeakable alarm. How foolish, then, is it to take the unconcern, the powerlessness to understand God's signs, which characterize ungodly men, as any evidence of the unreality of that which God has declared! "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be," etc. Lot was as "one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." The Jews crucified our Lord because he saw so clearly and declared so plainly the character of their trusted leaders and the destruction that was coming—one even more terrible than that which Jeremiah foretold. But the Jews neither saw nor believed anything of the kind. (2) Its being by means of natural laws does not make it the less God's punishment of sin. The rapid growth and yield of the almond tree was a perfectly natural thing: there was no interference with the orderly course which such forms of plant life assume. And the war between the empires of Egypt and Babylon, in the vortex and whirlpool of which Jerusalem was dragged in and dragged down; all this which the prophet's second vision told of, was it not the inevitable though sad misfortune of any such diminutive power as was that of Judah and Jerusalem when placed in like circumstances? Her lot was cast just in the place where the two raging seas of Egypt and Babylon met. What wonder if her poor little barque went to pieces beneath the violence of those waves? It was sad enough, but yet perfectly natural; indeed, one may say, inevitable. And so it would be quite possible to explain all God's punishment away, and to regard it like the early blossoming of the almond tree, and like the seething troubles which must come upon little kingdoms placed as Judah was, when great empires on either side of her go to war, as only what was to be expected, what was in keeping with the natural order of things. Let any one read Gibbon, and from his account of the decline and fall of the Roman empire, you would gather no idea of a Divine righteousness arising to inflict merited punishment on an awfully corrupt and degraded people. Believers in God can and do see this, but the great historian has not felt himself bound to point out any such cause of the long series of disasters which he so eloquently relates. The inspired prophet and seer of Patmos has, however, done this; and in the Book of the Revelation, the woes coming upon that blood-stained empire are told of in symbolic but terrible form, and in connection with that God-defying wickedness which was the source and cause of them all. And so to-day, under cover of the fact that God works according to the natural order of things, men evade the teaching of the events that befall them. Because God punishes sin by the action of his natural laws, men deny that he punishes sin at all. His hand is not recognized in it, and therefore no repentance is awakened. They deem themselves unfortunate, and that is all. If we would be more faithful with ourselves, we should "hear the rod and who hath appointed it." No calamities or disasters come without meaning and intent; they are sent for moral and spiritual purposes, however much they may appear to be but natural and necessary events. Each of them will own, if interrogated, "I have a message from God unto thee." (3) It will increase in severity if there be need. The first vision is simply that of the almond tree; an emblem of gentleness rather than of severity. But the second vision, that of the boiling caldron, suggested a far other and more terrible visitation (cf. the plagues in Egypt, which increased in terribleness as they went on). And it is ever so even unto the "consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 29). (4) *It often comes from unexpected quarters.* The "seething pot" that the prophet saw had its face northward. Now, the reader of the history of the times of which our prophet tells—the times of King Josiah—will know that it was from the south, from Egypt, they expected that troubles would arise. And in the next chapter (ver. 16) mention is made of trouble that did arise from that quarter, though what particular event is referred to it is not easy to say. But the great trouble was to come from the north, from the last quarter from which they anticipated it. King Josiah lost his life in doing good service to that northern power, the great Assyrian kingdom, by fighting against Egypt. It was not, therefore, to be expected that *thence* calamity would come. But nevertheless it *was* thence that their great overthrow and destruction came. And little do the transgressors against God ever know or even dream whence his judgments against them will arise. It is not only "in such an hour," but from such a quarter "as they think not, that the Divine dis-

pleasure breaks upon them. A transgressor against God is safe nowhere: nothing may be visible to his eye, everything may be going on in orderly course, and he may have full confidence that all is well. But notwithstanding this, events soon to happen may prove that he has wrongly read the whole of God's providence, and that his security is least where he thought it was greatest and most certain. Happy, and happy alone, is he who hath made the Lord God his trust, and whose hope the Lord is. 2. *Concerning the Divine love.* We have seen wherefore these visions were given. They reveal to us that Divine love which would warn men from ways which bring upon them such sore judgments. The desire of God to save guilty men, to leave nothing undone by which they may be turned and kept back from evil, is manifest in all this. He would not have his message miss its mark by reason of any lack of deep impression and vivid realization of the truth on the part of the messenger.—C.

Vers. 4—9.—*Jehovah calls Jeremiah and gives him ample encouragements.* I. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH JEREMIAH WAS BROUGHT INTO EXISTENCE. This is stated in a very solemn and impressive way in ver. 5. Jehovah presents himself to Jeremiah as he who formed him in the belly, and even before then recognized him as one who was to do a special work. So with regard to Moses, Isaac, Samuel. The circumstances of their birth direct our thoughts to the special ends to be worked out by their earthly life. To each of them the same words might have been spoken as to Jeremiah. Moreover, if true of them, this word is true of all. Jehovah is the Fashioner of all mankind, and since he does nothing without some purpose, it follows that for every one of us, equally with Jeremiah, there is a recognition, a consecrating, an ordaining. In a few instances there may be a special publication of the purpose, but the purpose itself is real in every instance. Therefore our business clearly is to find out what God would have us be, our eyes open to his presence, our ears to his voice. Then if we have discovered what God would have us be, if there is a deepening impression on our minds that we are in the right way, this very thought, that God saw the proper work of our life or ever we entered upon it, will assure us that the work cannot fail. We shall feel that requisite strength in the doing of it, and full success at the end of it, are made certain. The failings of life come—and it is easy to see that they must come—from putting our own purposes athwart the settled purpose of God. We may rebel against the work which he calls upon us to undertake, but it is very certain that any work put in its place must end in disappointment and disaster. To Jonah as to Jeremiah, God might have said somewhat the same as is here recorded. It is an awful thought for sinners, in the collapse of their own plans, that they might have been successful and rejoicing, if only they had been from the heart obedient to the plans of God.

II. THE ANSWERING PLEA OF JEREMIAH. An *opposing* plea it can hardly be called, but it is the not astonishing statement of a difficulty that from the human point of view looks very great. When God makes his first approaches to men, asking them to do something special, what is more natural than that they should see huge difficulties in the way of obedience? How fertile was the self-distrusting Moses in suggesting difficulties when God came to him in Horeb (Exod. iii. 4)? Take special notice that the difficulties of such men as Moses and Jeremiah are not meant to be mere excuses, but are felt to be real reasons. Such is emphatically the position here. Jeremiah was but a lad; it is possible that he had not yet attained to what we should call a young man (Gen. xli. 12; 1 Kings iii. 7). At such an age one is valued for listening and learning rather than for talking. That the prophet made such an initial reply to Jehovah was a good sign rather than a bad one. Deep humility and a keen consciousness of natural weakness are welcome features in the man whom God would make his servant. It is tolerably certain that among the elders of Anathoth Jeremiah would have the reputation of being a quiet, unpretending lad. If a young man of another reputation had stood forward as a prophet, there would have been fair ground to charge him with presumption. But when one stands forward who ever looks doubtfully on his own abilities, is no self-asserter, and forms by preference a member in the background of every scene, such a standing forward at once suggests that there is some superhuman motive behind it. Jeremiah's plea is therefore a recommendation. Unconsciously he gives a valid certificate of fitness for his work. At the same time, this plea suggests all the difference which there is between the youthful Jeremiah and the youthful Jesus.

Jesus in the temple seems in his natural element, not too young even at twelve years of age to show an ardent interest in all that concerned Divine worship and service.

III. THE AMPLE ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH JEHOVAH GIVES TO JEREMIAH. In a few words, God puts before his servant all that is needed and all that can be supplied. 1. *There will be clear commands from God, and from the prophet there must be corresponding obedience.* Not with Jeremiah rests the deciding of whether he shall go here or there, or to what place first and to what last. He is always a sent man, and when he comes into the presence of his appointed audience, his message is a provided message. Thus it is ensured that he never finds himself in the wrong place or speaking at the wrong time. Well does God know how little we are able, of ourselves, to decide when to speak and when to be silent, what to say and what to leave unsaid. 2. One consequence of God's message faithfully delivered will be hostility and menace from the hearers, and therefore *there is an exhortation to courage, and an indication of the ground which makes that courage possible.* When Jeremiah gets into a certain presence and speaks a certain word he will be threatened. The threatening must be expected; it shows that the arrow of God's truth has found its home. All the powers of the human face will be called into malignant exercise against the prophet. The eye, the tongue, the muscles of the face will all be joined in strong combination to express the contempt and hatred filling the brain that lies behind. In no way can Jeremiah escape this experience; he must face the enemies, but in doing so he has the assurance that his Commander is near to deliver. 3. *God makes now an actual communication to the prophet.* The path is not yet taken, the audience is not yet in view, but by way of earnest inspiration the words of the Master are put into the servant's mouth. This of course was an indescribable experience. What it is to have the words of God in one's mouth can only be known by an actual enjoyment of the privilege. The only way in which we can discern how real and fruitful this experience was, is by observing its effect. There is no more hesitating, no turning from one answered plea to find another more cogent. Henceforth the prophet goes on steadily and faithfully in his mission, and his perfect service is best proved by this, that in due time he meets with the indicated opposition, and receives from God his promised protection.—Y.

VER. 10.—*The vast compass of the prophet's work.* I. THE WIDE EXTENT THE PROPHECIES COVER. Primarily they had to do with Jerusalem and Judah and all the families of the house of Israel. But this was only the beginning. They went on to affect in the most intimate way all the nations and the kingdoms. The principles of righteousness and truth and Divine authority concern all. They can no more be kept within certain geographical bounds than can the clouds and rains of heaven. On this day, when the Great I AM came to the youthful Jeremiah, *he* set him over the nations and over the kingdoms, and here is the reason why these prophecies, with their grand ethical deliverances, have still such a firm hold upon Christendom, upon the Gentile just as much as the Jew. Wherever there still remains the worshipper of stocks and stones, wherever the oppressor is found, and the man who confides in the arm of flesh, and the man who is utterly indifferent to the glory of God,—then in that same place there is occasion to insist most strenuously upon the continued application of Jeremiah's words. The prophets were more than indignant patriots; they were and are still witnesses to an ideal of humanity, nowhere regarded as it ought to be, and only too often neglected, if not contemptuously denied. He who came forth to condemn his own people for lapsing into idolatry did thereby equally condemn other nations for not departing from it. The gospel for every creature is preceded by a body of prophecy, which is shown also to concern every creature, not by laborious inference, but by such explicit words as we find in this verse.

II. THE DEPTH OF THE WORK TO WHICH THESE PROPHECIES POINT. The work is not only wide; it is deep as it is wide. The ultimate aim is set forth in two figures: 1. Building. 2. Planting. On these two figures Paul dwells very suggestively in writing to the Corinthians. The constructive work of God in the human soul needs more than one figure sufficiently to illustrate it. But all true building must be on a sufficient foundation; all Divine planting, if it is to come to anything, must be in a suitable soil. Hence there goes beforehand an unsparing work, to destroy things already in existence. Buildings already erected must be pulled down; plants already growing

must be uprooted and put beyond the chance of further growth. We have done things which ought to have been left undone; and the word to Jeremiah is that they must be undone, in order that the things which ought to be done may be fully done. The terms indicating destruction are multiplied to emphasize the need, and prevent escape into ruinous compromise. There must be no tacking on of a new building to certain humanly cherished parts of the old. Constructions after the will of God must not be liable to a description such as that of the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream; all must be strong, pure, and beautiful from basement to summit. In the garden of the Lord there can be no mixing of heavenly and earthly plants. A clean sweep—such is necessitated for the glory of God and the blessedness of man. Thus at the very first is given a hint of the hostility which Jeremiah would provoke. Pulling down means the expulsion of self from its fortress, and its bereavement of all that it valued. Every brick detached, every plant uprooted, intensified the enmity one degree more. "Destroy," "overthrow," are the only words that can be spoken as long as anything remains in which human pride and selfishness take delight. But at the same time, the prophet goes forth to build and to plant. He takes nothing away but what he leaves something infinitely better behind. When God sends a messenger to us, his great first word is "thorough;" and even though he has to make his way through human pains, tears, murmurings, and semi-rebellions, he keeps to the word. Remember, then, that he who pulls down also builds; he who uproots also plants; and he builds and plants for eternity.—Y.

Vers. 11—14.—*The almond tree and the seething pot.* He who put his word into the prophet's mouth also put a new power of vision into his eyes, and gave him to see signs such as tended to fix permanently in his mind deep convictions with regard to the power and purposes of God. Thus the prophet was assured of his ability to see more than others could see. Both through eye and ear he was fortified in the consciousness that his prophetic office was no empty boast.

I. THE ROD OF THE ALMOND TREE. Probably much such a rod as those which were laid up in the tabernacle overnight in order to certify beyond all question the divinely appointed office of Aaron (Numb. xvii.). This narrative, we may be pretty sure, would be transmitted with special care from generation to generation of the priesthood, and to it the mind of Jeremiah may at once have turned. That rod which once helped the priest is now found helping the prophet. It was the sign of how much living and fructifying energy might break forth where there was only the appearance of death. The auditors of Jeremiah's prophecies might say they saw no sign of impending calamities. In all self-confidence they might say, "Peace and prosperity will last out our time." And so Jeremiah goes forth with the remembrance of the almond rod, well assured that by God's power the most unexpected things may happen with the utmost suddenness. The words of prophecy may long lie dormant, and some may treat them as dead and obsolete; but none can tell at what moment the long quiescent may start into the most vigorous activity. Was it not all at once, after a long period of quietude, that Jesus came forth with a sudden outburst of miraculous energy and teaching wisdom? It is precisely those who have been long *dead* in trespasses and sins who sometimes startle the world by a sudden exuberance of the Divine life within them.

II. THE SEETHING POT. Here again is the exhibition of energy, and a sudden and irresistible change from quiet into furious and threatening movement. A pot boiling over with the vehemence of the fire under it, is an excellent emblem of how God can stir up his destroying wrath against the rebellious. What can be quieter than the water as it lies in the pot? what quieter than the fuel before it is kindled? and yet the light touch of a very small flame sends fuel and water into activity, and that activity soon rises into fury. The water that only a few minutes ago was still and cold is now turbulent and scalding. Just in the same way, God can take these "families of the kingdoms of the north," and make them the instruments of his wrath and chastisement, little conscious as they are of all the use to which they are being put. Everywhere in close proximity to us there are *latent* forces of destruction, and these with startling rapidity may become *patent*. Consider how soon the beautiful and cheering heavens may be filled with the elements of deadly storm.—Y.

Ver. 17.—*The consequence of unreasonable fear.* God has already exhorted Jeremiah to courage, and given him the strongest assurances of his own unfailing presence. But now he adds *warning*. Fear of the enemies of God will bring not only suffering but shame. The man who goes out to fight for his country, and turns in cowardice on the day of battle, only escapes the enemy to die a disgraceful death at the hands of his own people. To meet the threatenings of men, we must have in our hearts not only the strength of God but the *fear* of God. Those who turn from the weapons of God's enemies, whom in God's strength they should meet and conquer, find God himself in arms against them. He himself visibly and signally confounds the unfaithful, and thus even in the unfaithfulness of the messenger he who sends him is all the more honoured. As yet, of course, Jeremiah had not been tried, and all through his prophecies there is no sign that personal fear ever entered his mind. He had a very sensitive nature; he was often, almost continually one may say, the subject of depressing emotion, but the fear of no man, however dignified and powerful that man might be, deterred him from a plain exposure of his misdoings. And yet, although the prophet did not fall into unfaithfulness, it was well to warn him beforehand. Warning never comes unsuitably to any servant of God. He who stands should never take it amiss if he be exhorted to take heed lest he fall. And all the securing words with which God follows up the warning here do not make that warning one whit less needful. The prophet was to become like a fortress, as far as God could surround him with protection; but all the protection would avail him nothing, if he became careless as to his own believing connection with God. When faith fails, the whole spiritual man becomes vulnerable, and to become vulnerable soon leads to being actually wounded.—Y.

Vers. 1—3.—*A protracted ministry.* The ministry of Jeremiah attracts attention because of its length, the varied scenes amidst which it was carried on, and the external aspect of failure worn by it from first to last. May there not be in these and other respects a moral attaching to it for those who in distant ages can regard it as a whole, and in connection with the subsequent Divine evolution of events of which it spoke? Contrast it with that of John the Baptist.

I. ITS BACKGROUND OF CIRCUMSTANCE. Five reigns: for the most part brief; two of them ridiculously or tragically so. Beginning in a fitful flush of religious enthusiasm, and ending in a long and shameful captivity. Foreign politics were unusually interesting. The Medo-Babylonian overthrow of Syria was about to take place when he began; in the twenty-third year of his ministry Nebuchadnezzar laid the foundation of Babylonian empire in the victory of Carchemish, in which Israel was subdued, and universal rule passed into his hands; the invasion of Judæa followed in four years, and in the eleventh year of Zedekiah Jerusalem was taken. Personally his had been a chequered career. For twenty-two years comparatively obscure; for the most part probably at Anathoth. But towards the end of this period he came to Jerusalem. We find him in the temple (ch. vii. 2); in the gates of the city (ch. xvii. 19); in prison (ch. xxxii. 2); in the king's house (ch. xxii. 1; xxxvii. 17); and then at times in Egypt. There are two traditions as to his death—one that he was stoned by the Jews in their settlement at Tahapanes, in Egypt; the other that Nebuchadnezzar, having in the twenty-seventh year of his reign conquered Egypt, took him and Baruch with him to Babylon. In any case, he probably lived to an extreme age.

II. ITS MESSAGE. To warn against idolatry, by exposing its real nature and declaring its consequences. But through all and beyond all, to declare the indestructibleness of the kingdom of God, the certain advent of "The Lord our Righteousness," and the ultimate glory and happiness of a redeemed and purified people. Of scarce any other prophet can it be said that his predictions were so absolutely, and to present perception hopelessly future. Yet is his tone on this account none the less believing and confident.

III. ITS DIVINE SIGNIFICANCE. The "burden" of Jeremiah is identical from reign to reign, although the illustrative and occasioning circumstances vary. May we not say that: 1. *The personality of the prophet had a place in the Divine intention?* Certain we are that its influence was second only to that of his words, if even to that. His astonishment, sorrow, hope, etc., are all instructive and remarkable. 2. *The word of God has to deal with the continuity and development of error, and will outlast it.* The

lost antidote to error is the healthful development of truth. There is no phase of depravity, transgression, or unbelief for which the Word of God has not, in its historic evolution, some doctrine, reproof, correction, or instruction in righteousness. Revealed through human lips and lives by the operation of the Holy Spirit, it is a living, manifold growth, intimately associated with the vicissitudes of that human life it has to correct and redeem. There can never be a time when the gospel will have no word for the inquiring, wondering, suffering, sinning, unbelieving spirit of man. 3. *The ministry of the prophet was a visible sign of the Divine long-suffering.* "But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom. x. 21; Isa. lxv. 2). "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" (Matt. xvii. 17).—M.

Vers. 4—10.—*The call of the prophet.* As these are elements both ordinary and extraordinary in the prophetic office, so preparation, etc., for it must be of both kinds. Much that may be said of it will be applicable to all other service in God's Church; and there will be some conditions and circumstances that must necessarily be peculiar and abnormal. The behaviour, too, of one called to such a high office must ever be interesting to observers.

I. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH SUCH AN OFFICE SHOULD BE ASSUMED. Like Moses and others of whom we read, Jeremiah was of a backward and retiring disposition. It required insistance and remonstrance on the part of Jehovah to persuade him to undertake the task. His low thoughts of himself as contrasted with the mighty office to which he was called, held him back. There are some things that come most gracefully when they are spontaneous. The general duty, love, and service, owing by the creature to the Creator, etc., are of this kind. But for special work and appointment, requiring great qualifications and especial help of God, modesty and hesitation are a recommendation rather than otherwise. Our question, pointed first of all homewards, should be, "Who is sufficient for these things?" A feeling like this is helpful and preparative, as leading to the perception of the true strength and fitness that come from God, and to a constant dependence upon him. Many long idly for "some great thing to do," others hesitate because the thing is too great.

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD PREPARES MEN FOR EXTRAORDINARY SERVICE IN HIS CHURCH. Where direction and impulse are needed revelation is made. The spirit of the prophet is not left in doubt. A hesitating, vacillating prophet were a worthless messenger to the faithless. Revelation is therefore made to him of: 1. *His anticipative choice in the counsels of God.* This predestinating grace of God is a frequent assertion of the Old Testament. It is a mystery we cannot fathom; but is consistent with the free choice of the subject addressed. It has its effect in the voluntary acceptance of the appointment through persuasion and appeal. A discovery of this nature can only be for the few, who are called to especial responsibilities, etc., and has no reference to the general demands of duty, affection, zeal, which address themselves to all. 2. *Future Divine evidence, protection, and inspiration.* God will be with him, and will fit him for all he has to do. So Christ to his disciples, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20). This is to meet the exigencies of Divine service, and is not intended for personal aims and ends. Many a lowly worker in the Master's service is thereby endued with irresistible power. It is a conviction for which we are encouraged to seek grounds and assurances. 3. *Authority amongst the nations to destroy and to restore.* This is a moral investment. Just as God enforces truth and righteousness with accompanying mysterious sanctions, so he clothes his messenger with an authority the consciences of men will recognize even when their perversity of will inclines them to disobey.

How much of this spirit of certitude and conviction is needed for the ordinary life of the Christian? Have we the measure of it we require? or are we inefficient and useless because of our lack of it? There can be no question that such a spirit is inculcated by Christianity, and that reasonable grounds are afforded us all upon which to be thoroughly persuaded in our own mind. Let us act upon our deepest convictions and most unalterable certainties. This is the only way to attain to a sound apprehension of Divine things, and an efficient condition of service.—M.

Ver. 11.—"*What seest thou?*" (cf. Amos vii. 8; viii. 2; Zech. iv. 2; v. 2). The seer is encouraged and impelled to the exercise of his gifts. His first duty is plain, viz. to test his own powers of vision; and next, to ponder the significance of what he sees. So the spiritually endowed are summoned to the performance of the special work to which they have been called; and the newly discovered gift lifts them into a new sphere of responsibility and action.

I. GOD-GIVEN GIFTS ARE A STEWARDSHIP TO BE EXERCISED WITH THE UTMOST CAREFULNESS AND ENDEAVOUR.

II. WE CANNOT TELL HOW HIGHLY WE ARE ENDOWED UNTIL WE TRY OURSELVES TO THE UTMOST; AND THE BEST GIFTS MAY BE IMPROVED BY CULTIVATION.

III. THE WELFARE OF MULTITUDES MAY DEPEND UPON THE FAITHFULNESS OF ONE. Of many it might be asked, "Do they see at all?" Vision is a Divine gift to those who are to be leaders of men; and in lesser measure is given to all for their salvation if they will but open their eyes.—M.

Vers. 12—16.—*Hastening ills.* (For the first fig, cf. Matt. xxiv. 32.) The vision of the prophet is twofold, viz. a wakeful almond rod, and a boiling pot. They are symbols of quick accomplishment and violent invasion. As the almond rod is wakeful or ready to sprout when planted, and "first to wake from the sleep of winter," so the evils prepared by God will be quickly brought to pass. The boiling pot would seem to be the Chaldeans, who invaded Israel from the north. As swiftly and violently as the pot boils over, so will God make the wrath of men to praise him. The ills are swiftly approaching, but they are self-produced by Israel. When we compare this statement with the forgiving character of God, we must feel how great the sin and the provocation that could so move him. Yet on the very edge of his destroying vengeance he remembers mercy, and will have his people repent. Notice—

I. SINNERS MUST NOT CONCLUDE THAT THEY ARE SAFE BECAUSE OF PRESENT IMMUNITY. Jeremiah was as the eye of Israel just opened to the impending dangers. Many would even now reject his message; but the warning is given: 1. Through an intensely sensitive mind, that it may produce a vivid impression upon the imagination and heart of those who hear the prophet. 2. Seasonably, that although but a short time remains, there may be opportunity of repentance and reform.

II. GOD BEGINS THE CHASTISEMENT OF HIS PEOPLE GENTLY, BUT IF THEY REPENT NOT HE WILL INCREASE AND HASTEN HIS JUDGMENTS UNTIL THE EVIL IS WHOLLY AT AN END. The first emblem is one of rapid yet natural development; it is otherwise indefinite. The second is more suggestive of punishment and destruction. The first speaks only of such punishment as may be needed from time to time, and of the unceasing vigilance of the offended God; the second is sudden, overwhelming, and beyond all reckoning or measurement.

III. IDOLATRY IS THE SIN OF WHICH GOD IS MOST INTOLERANT. It is the transfer of affection and trust to an unworthy object, and an insult to God and degrading to themselves. They who indulge in it are warned that their punishment will be constant and rapidly successive; and that they are on the brink of signal, terrible manifestation of Divine wrath.—M.

Vers. 4—10.—*The prophet's call.* We see in the case of Jeremiah a striking instance of a man constrained by force of circumstance and by a Divine call to occupy a position and to do a kind of work for which he was not naturally either qualified or disposed. Of a highly sensitive and timid nature, a tender heart, a desponding spirit, he was inclined to mourn in secret over the abounding evils of the time rather than publicly to rebuke them. But as soon as the Divine summons comes to him, he "confers not with flesh and blood," he forgets his fears and infirmities, and for forty long years patiently withstands the tide of iniquity and adversity—a noble example of blended tenderness and strength. In this account of the prophet's call, note—

I. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN THE RAISING UP OF MEN TO DO HIS WORK. Jeremiah was "known" and "sanctified"—dedicated by God to his sacred office—before his birth. His "ordination," appointment, now is but the fulfilling of an antecedent Divine purpose and choice. Most of the illustrious men of old bear some conspicuous mark of such Divine election upon them, *e.g.* Moses, Gideon, Samson, Cyrus. St. Paul de-

voutly recognized it in himself, in spite of all his blind hostility to the name of Christ in former years (Gal. i. 15). We fail too often to take sufficient note of this mystery of God's foreknowledge and predetermination underlying the progress of the kingdom of truth and righteousness in the world. And yet we understand its history, we get at the heart and core of its meaning, only so far as we look through all surface appearances and, holding fast to the equally sure principles of human freedom and responsibility, discern the will that works out steadily, through chosen instruments, its own eternal purpose.

II. THE SHRINKING OF A LOWLY SPIRIT FROM A POSITION OF EXTRAORDINARY DIFFICULTY AND DANGER. "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child." This was the honest expression of conscious personal unfitness. 1. *The feeling was very honourable to him.* Who that knows himself would not tremble on being summoned to such a work? To take up a solemn responsibility with a light heart and easy self-confidence is the mark of a vain spirit that courts rebuke. He who has any true sense of the greatness of his mission from God will often

"Lie contemplating his own unworthiness."

2. *It was a sign of his real fitness for the work.* Humility is the basis of all that is great and good in human character and deed. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." The cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" is a symptom of inherent nobleness and slumbering power. Jeremiah's feeling that he was "but a child," prepared him the better to become the representative of the Divine majesty and the vehicle of Divine strength.

III. THE SPIRITUAL CONSTRAINT OF WHICH ALL TRUE SERVANTS OF GOD ARE CONSCIOUS. The prophetic inspiration came upon him and compelled him to deliver his message. "The word of the Lord was in his heart as a burning fire shut up in his bones,... and he could not stay" (ch. xx. 9). A Divine commission thus asserting itself in the inward consciousness of him who received it, might well be called the "burden of the Lord." Great reformers, preachers, missionaries, martyrs, have ever been moved by some such Divine afflatus. So felt Peter and John before the Jewish Council: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts iv. 20). So felt St. Paul: "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. ix. 16). "Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak." He must "speak" who is thus commanded; he must "go" who is thus sent.

IV. THE COURAGE AND STRENGTH WITH WHICH GOD ENDOWS ALL WHO THUS OBEY HIS BIDDING. The ministry of Jeremiah is a signal example of the way in which the grace of God may clothe the most timid spirit with dauntless energy and victorious power. He will never be "afraid of the faces of men," who knows that the Lord is with him. The fear of God casts out all other fear. Many a "little child" has thus become preternaturally brave; "out of weakness made strong." The history of the kingdom of God among men abounds with illustrations of the way in which he "chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty." And every patient, heroic Christian life bears witness to the sufficiency of his grace. You can glory even in infirmities, reproaches, necessities, and distresses, if the "power of Christ" does but rest upon you (2 Cor. xii. 9, 10).

V. THE MASTERY OF TRUTH OVER ALL THE HOSTILE POWERS OF THE WORLD. Jeremiah was "set over the nations and over the kingdoms," not as a prince, but as a prophet; not as wielding any form of mere brute force, but as the instrument of that silent energy of truth that casts down the strongholds of Satan in every land. His word was "like a fire and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces" (ch. xxiii. 29). Divine truth is the mightiest of all forces alike to "root out and to pull down,... to build and to plant." The sovereignty of the world is his of whom it is written, "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked" (Isa. xi. 4). The "many crowns" are on the head of him whose "Name is called The Word of God."—W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

The second chapter forms the introduction of a group of discourses (ch. ii.—vi.), which should be read together. It is called by Ewald (and the position of the prophecy favours this view) the first oracle which Jeremiah delivered in public ("oracle" is, in fact, the nearest English equivalent to those two remarkable Hebrew synonyms, *massā* and *nĕūm*—especially for the latter). This would bring it into the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (see ch. i. 3), though of course we cannot be sure that references to a later period may not have been inserted afterwards. It is, obviously, only a summary of the prophet's spoken words which we have in this most impressive discourse. In order to appreciate it, we must bear in mind the external political relations and the internal religious condition of the kingdom of Judah. These have been already touched upon in the general introduction. Suffice it to remind the reader that Josiah's reformation—in the strict sense of the word—did not begin till the eighteenth year of that king's reign; and that the state of things was at this time complicated by a dangerous alliance with that power against whose religion the teaching of the prophets of Jehovah was a continual protest (on the Egyptian alliance, comp. Ewald, 'History of Israel,' iv. 218). The first section of the prophecy is a general introduction, already full of serious charges against the people (vers. 1—9); in the second, the special occasion of the discourse is declared in the form of a question, and the sin referred to is rebuked (vers. 10—19); in the third, Judah's inveterate idolatry is denounced, and the disappointment and ruin to which it led candidly pointed out (vers. 20—28); and in the fourth, "half in earnest and half in ironical satire" (Ewald), the prophet points the moral of this foolish Egyptian fever which has seized upon rulers and people (vers. 29—37).

It is always interesting to notice how later inspired writers hasten to do honour to their predecessors. Originality is not an object with the prophets, but rather the developing and adapting the truths long ago "delivered." The whole group of prophecies to which ch. ii. belongs contains numerous points of contact, in ideas or phraseology, with the song of Moses (Deut. xxxii.). The following have been indicated:—Cf. ver. 5 with Deut. xxxii. 4; vers. 11, 12 with Deut. xxxii. 1, 21; ver. 20 with Deut. xxxii. 15; vers. 26—28 with Deut. xxxii. 6, 18, 37, 38; ver. 31 with Deut. xxxii. 5; ch. iii. 19 with Deut. xxxii. 6; ch. iv. 22 and v. 21 with Deut. xxxii. 6; ch. v. 7 with Deut. xxxii. 15; ch. v. 14 with Deut. xxxii. 22; ch. v. 28 with Deut. xxxii. 15; ch. vi. 11 with Deut. xxxii. 25; ch. vi. 15 with Deut. xxxii. 35; ch. vi. 19, 30 with Deut. xxxii. 18, 19.

Ver. 1.—**Moreover**; literally, *and*. The introductory formula agrees with ch. i. 4. We have as it were two parallel prophecies (ch. i. 4, etc., and ch. ii. 1, etc.); both branching out of the original chronological statement in ch. i. 2 (see Introduction).

Ver. 2.—**In the ears of Jerusalem.** Presumably Jeremiah had received his call at Anathoth (comp. ch. i. 1). **I remember thee,** etc.; rather, *I remember for thy good the kindness of thy youth.* It is an open question whether the "kindness" spoken of is that of God towards the people, or of the people towards God. The usage of the Hebrew (*khĕsĕd*) admits of either acceptation; comp. for the first, Ps. v. 7, xxxvi. 5, and many other passages; for the second, Hos. vi. 4, 6 (in ver. 6 rendering for "mercy," "goodness") and Isa. lvii. 1 (rendering "men of piety"). But the context, which dwells so strongly on the oblivion into which the Divine benefits had been allowed to pass, is decidedly in favour of the first view. How beautiful is this condescending language! Jehovah's past feelings come back to him; at least, so it appears to the believer, when God lets the light of his countenance shine forth again (comp. ch. xxxi. 20; Hos. ix. 10). He even condescends to overlook the weakness and inconsistency of the Israel of antiquity. He idealizes it (*i.e.* Jeremiah is permitted to do so). This is in harmony with other prophetic passages (see Isa. i. 26 ("as at the first"); Hos. xi. 1, 3, 4; Ezek. xvi. 6—14). The figure of the bride recurs constantly (see Hos. ii. 19, 20; Isa. liv. 4, 5; Ezek. xvi. 8). **Thine espousals**; rather, *thy bridal state.* **When thou wentest after me** (comp. Deut. viii. 2, "all the way which Jehovah thy

God led thee these forty years in the wilderness").

Ver. 3.—**Israel was holiness, etc.** Israel was a consecrated people (comp. Exod. xix. 5, 6; Deut. vii. 6; xiv. 2; xxvi. 19). Isaiah, fond as he is of the phrase "Israel's Holy One," does not expressly enforce the correlative truth, as Jeremiah does here. **The firstfruits of his increase**; rather, *his firstfruits of increase.* Israel is compared to the firstfruits (*rēshīth*) of the land, which were devoted to the house of the Lord (Exod. xxiii. 19; Numb. xviii. 12, 13). So in Amos vi. 1, the title given him is "the chief [margin, 'firstfruits'] of the nations" (in ch. xxxi. 7, a synonymous and cognate word, *rōsh*, takes the place of *reshīth* for "chief"). **All that devour him shall offend**; rather, *all that ate him incurred guilt*, or became guilty of a trespass. Foreigners were forbidden to eat of consecrated things; by breaking this law they became guilty of a "trespass," having invaded the rights of Jehovah (Lev. xxii. 10, 15, 16). The word for "trespass" is the same as that rendered "guilt."

Ver. 5.—**What iniquity, etc.**; rather, *what unrighteousness*, etc. (comp. Deut. xxxii. 4, "a God of faithfulness, and without unrighteousness," alluding to the "covenant" between Jehovah and Israel). God's condescending grace (his *'anāvāh*, Ps. xviii. 36). As if he were under an obligation to Israel (comp. Micah vi. 3, etc.; Isa. v. 3). **Vanity**; *i.e.* the idols; literally, *a breath* (so ch. x. 15; xiv. 22; xvi. 19). **Are become vain.** The whole being of man is affected by the want of solid basis to his religion (comp. ch. xxiii. 16; Ps. cxv. 8); and the evident allusion to our passage in Rom. i. 21 (St. Paul has ἐματαιώθησαν, as Septuagint here). The clause is verbally repeated in 2 Kings xvii. 15, with reference to the ten tribes.

Ver. 6.—**Neither said they, etc.**; as their children's children were forced by stress of trouble to say (Isa. lxiii. 11; see note). **A land of deserts and of pits.** The first phrase applied to the region through which the Israelites passed ("a wilderness") was vague, and might mean merely pasture-land. The remainder of the description, however, shows that "wilderness" is here meant, as often (*e.g.* Isa. xxxv. 1; l. 2), in the sense of "desert." Though recent travellers have shown that the Sinaitic peninsula is not by any means universally a "desert," and that in ancient times it was still less so, it is not unnatural that an agricultural people should regard it as a most inhospitable region, and should even idealize its terrors (comp. Deut. viii. 15). "Pits," *i.e.* rents and fissures in the soil, in which the unwary traveller might lose his life (ch. xviii. 20, 22).

Ver. 7.—**A plentiful country.** "A Carmel land," as it were (so Payne Smith). "Carmel" is strictly an appellative noun, meaning "garden-land," *i.e.* land planted with vines and other choice plants. So ch. iv. 26; Isa. xxix. 17; xxxvii. 24.

Ver. 8.—**The priests**, etc. The blame principally falls on the three leading classes (as in ver. 26; Micah iii. 11). First on the priests who "handle the Law," *i.e.* who have a traditional knowledge of the details of the Law, and teach the people accordingly (Deut. xvii. 9—11; xxxiii. 10; ch. xviii. 18; see also on ch. viii. 8); next on the "pastors," or "shepherds" (in the Homeric sense), the civil and not the spiritual authorities; so generally in the Old Testament (see ch. iii. 15; x. 21; xxii. 22; xxv. 34; Zech. x. 3; xi. 5, 8, 16; Isa. xliv. 28); and lastly on the prophets, who sought their inspiration, not from Jehovah (comp. note on ver. 30), but from Baal. To **prophesy by** (by means of) **Baal**, or rather, *the Baal*, implies that prophecy is due to an impulse from the supernatural world; that it is not an objectifying of the imaginations of the prophet himself. Even the Baal prophets yielded to an impulse from without, but how that impulse was produced the prophet does not tell us. We are told in 1 Kings xxii. 19—23, that even prophets of Jehovah could be led astray by a "lying spirit;" much more presumably could prophets of the Baal. *The Baal* is here used as a representative of the idol-gods, in antithesis to Jehovah; sometimes "Baalim," or the Baals, is used instead (*e.g.* ver. 23; ch. ix. 13), each town or city having its own Baal ("lord"). Things that do not profit. A synonym for idols (comp. ch. xvi. 19; Isa. xliv. 9; 1 Sam. xii. 21). An enlightened regard for self-interest is encouraged by the religion of the Bible, at any rate educationally. Contrast Comtism.

Ver. 9.—**I will yet plead, etc.** Repeated acts of rebellion call forth repeated objurgations and punishments. **With your children's children.** For God "visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" (Exod. xx. 5).

Ver. 10.—Justification of Jehovah's judicial action towards Judah. Consider the heinousness of the offence. **Pass over**—rather, *pass over to*—**the isles of Chittim**; *i.e.* the islands and maritime countries of the West, represented by Cyprus (see on Gen. x. 4). For the wide use of Chittim, comp. Numb. xxiv. 24; Dan. xi. 30). **Kedar**, in the narrower sense, is a large tribe of Arabian origin, whose haunts were between Arabia Petræa and Babylonia. Here, however, it is used in a wider sense for the Arab tribes in general (so ch. xlix. 28; Isa. xxi. 16, 17).

Ver. 11.—**Hath a nation changed** their **gods?** *Has any heathen nation ever changed its idol-god for another?* The prophet clearly

implies a negative answer; and yet it must be admitted that the adoption of a new religion, under the pressure of conquest or a higher foreign civilization is not an unknown phenomenon in the ancient world. **Glory**; *i.e.* source of all outward prosperity (comp. Ps. iii. 3, "my Glory, and the Lifter up of my head"). Religion was, in fact, the root of national life in antiquity; contrast our own division between the sacred and the secular! Jehovah elsewhere receives the title "the Pride of Israel"—Authorized Version, rather weakly, "the Excellency of Israel"—(Amos viii. 7; Hos. v. 5. Comp. the parallel passages, Ps. cvi. 20; Rom. i. 23).

Ver. 12.—**Be astonished.** "Be appalled" would more nearly express the force of the Hebrew (so ch. xviii. 16; xix. 8). **Be ye very desolate**; literally, *become dry*; i.e. not so much "shrivel and roll up" (on the analogy of Isa. xxxiv. 4), as "become stiff with horror."

Ver. 13.—**Two evils.** Israel has not merely offended, like the heathen, by idolatry, but by deserting the only God who can satisfy the needs of human nature. **The fountain of living waters.** So ch. xvii. 13 (comp. Ps. xxxvi. 9). *Fountain*; literally, *tank* or *reservoir*. Such reservoirs were "dug in the ground (see on ch. vi. 7), and chiefly intended for storing living waters, *i.e.* those of springs and rivulets" (Payne Smith). **Cisterns, broken cisterns.** A cistern, by its very nature, will only hold a limited amount, and the water "collected from clay roofs or from marly soil, has the colour of weak soapsuds, the taste of the earth or the stable." Who would prefer such an impure supply to the sweet, wholesome water of a fountain? But these cisterns cannot even be depended upon for this poor, turbid drink. They are "broken," like so many even of the best rock-hewn cisterns (Thomson, 'The Land and the Book,' p. 287). How fine a description of the combined attractiveness and disappointingness of heathen religions, qualities the more striking in proportion to the scale on which the religious problem is realized (*e.g.* in Hinduism)!

Vers. 14—19.—*Israel's punishment and its cause.*

Ver. 14.—**Is Israel a servant?** The speaker is evidently the prophet, who exclaims in surprise at the view which his prophetic insight opens to him: "quasi de re novâ et absurdâ sciscitatur" (Calvin). For Israel is a member of Jehovah's family; he is not a servant (except in the same high sense as in Isa. xl.—liii., where "servant" is virtually equivalent to "representative"), but rather in the highest degree a free man, for he is Jehovah's "firstborn son" (Exod. iv. 22). How is it, then, that he is dragged away into captivity like a slave who has never known freedom? The view of some, that "servant" means "servant of Jehovah" (comp. ch. xxx. 10), and that the question therefore is to be answered in the affirmative, is less natural. "Servant," by itself, never has this turning; and there is a precisely similar term in the discourse at ver. 31, where the negative answer of the question does not admit of a doubt.

Ver. 15.—**The young lions, etc.** A fresh figure, and a most natural one in Judæa (comp. 1 Sam. xvii. 34); already applied to the Assyrians by Isaiah (v. 29, 30). **Burned**; rather, *made ruinous* (comp. "ruinous heaps," 2 Kings xix. 25).

Ver. 16.—**Also the children of Noph, etc.** This is the climax of the calamity. *Noph*, called Moph in the Hebrew text of Hos. ix. 6, is generally identified with Memphis (after the Septuagint), which was called in the inscriptions Mennufr, or "the good abode," but may possibly be Napata, the Nap of the inscriptions, the residency of the Ethiopian dynasty (De Rougé). **Tahapanes.** The Hebrew form is *Takhpanes* or *Tahkpankhes*. This was a fortified frontier town on the Pelusiot arm of the Nile, called in Greek Daphnæ (Herod., ii. 20), or Taphnæ (Septuagint here). **Have broken, etc.**; rather, *shall break*, or (for the pointing in the Hebrew Bible requires this change) *shall feed off* (or *depasture*). From this verse onwards, Judah is personified as a woman, as appears from the suffixes in the Hebrew. Baldness was a great mark of disgrace (2 Kings ii. 23; ch. xlviii. 45). There is a striking parallel to this passage in Isa. vii. 18—20, where, in punishment of the negotiations of Ahaz with Assyria, the prophet threatens an invasion of Judah both by Assyria and by Egypt, and employs the very same figure (see ver. 20). So here, the devastation threatened by Jeremiah is the punishment of the unhallowed coquetting with the Egyptian power of which the Jewish rulers had been recently guilty. The fact which corresponds to this prediction is the defeat of Josiah at Megiddo, and the consequent subjugation of Judah (2 Kings xxiii. 29). The abruptness with which ver. 16 follows upon ver. 15 suggests that some words have fallen out of the text.

Ver. 17.—**Hast not thou procured this?** rather, *Is it not this that doth procure it unto thee* (*namely*) *that thou hast forsaken*, etc.? or, *Is it not thy forsaking Jehovah that procureth thee this?* **When he led thee by the way.** The prophet thinks, perhaps, of the rebellion of the forefathers of Israel, who too soon ceased to "go after" Jehovah (comp. ver. 2), and whose fickleness was imitated but too well by their descendants. This view is favoured by the phraseology of Deut. i. 33; viii. 2, 15. But we may, if we

prefer it, explain "by (or, rather, *in*) the way," on the analogy of the promise in ch. xxxi. 9, "I will lead them . . . in a straight way," *i.e.* I will grant them an uninterrupted course of prosperity. The omission of the adjective in the present passage may be paralleled by Ps. xxv. 8, "Therefore will he instruct sinners in the (right) way."

Ver. 18.—**What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt?** rather, *with the way to Egypt.* Isaiah (xxx. 2—5; xxxi. 1) and Hosea (vii. 11, 16) had already inveighed against an Egyptian alliance. The name given by Manasseh to his son and successor (Amon) suggests that at one period in his reign an Egyptian policy was in the ascendant, which coincides with the tradition preserved in 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, of an Assyrian captivity of Manasseh. Jehoiakim at a later period was a vassal of Egypt (2 Kings xxiii. 31, 35). **To drink the waters;** taking up the idea of the second clause of ver. 13. **Sihor,** or Shihor, occurs again in Isa. xxiii. 3, as a name of the Nile. It properly means, not so much "the black" as "the dark grey" (connected with *shakhar*, the morning grey), from the colour of the water. Rosenmüller's contrast between the muddy waters of foreign streams and the "fountain of living waters" is uncalled for; besides, the Nile water has always been held in high esteem. The Septuagint has Γηών, *i.e.* Gihon, also a name of the Nile according to Ecclus. xxiv. 27. **The way of**—rather, *to*—**Assyria.** It is true that Assyria was, to say the least, powerless to interfere for good or for evil, when these words were written. But in ver. 5 the prophet has already warned us that his complaints are partly retrospective. It would seem that the Assyrian party from time to time gained the upper hand over the Egyptian in the councils of the State. Or perhaps the prophet may refer to the Quixotic fidelity to Assyria of Josiah (see below on ver. 36). **The river;** *i.e.* the Euphrates, "the great river" (Gen. xv. 18). Babylonia it should be remembered, was in nominal subjection to Assyria; the Euphrates was the boundary between Syria and Palestine on the one hand, and Assyria—here the Assyrio-Babylonian region—on the other.

Ver. 19.—**Shall correct . . . shall reprove;** rather, *chastise . . . punish.* It is a constantly renewed punishment which follows the ever-repeated offence.

Ver. 20.—**Here a new section begins. I have broken . . . burst.** This is, grammatically, a possible rendering, but inconsistent with the second person in thou saidst, unless indeed (with Ewald) we suppose that something has fallen out of the text between the first and the second clauses of the verse. The best critics, except Ewald and Dr. Payne Smith, are agreed that we should follow the Septuagint and Vulgate in rendering "thou hast broken . . . (and) burst." This does not, strictly speaking, imply a new reading of the text, for *ti* was the old form of the suffix of the 2nd pers. fem. sing.; there is a precisely similar case in Micah iv. 13. It is a true description of the history of Israel before the exile. It would almost seem as if there was a fusion of two races among the Israelites, and that the smaller but nobler stock supplied all the great men in the sphere of religion; just as in Florence, most of the men who have illustrated her annals bear names of Teutonic origin. So we might argue, if we wished to explain the Biblical history from purely natural causes. But God (to apply the Caliph Omar's words) "knoweth his own." **Bands** (see on ch. v. 5). **I will not transgress.** This is the translation of the marginal reading in the Hebrew Bible, which, though implied also in the Targum, is probably a conjecture of the Jewish critics. The text reading (also that of the Septuagint and the Syriac) is, "I will not serve," (equivalent to "I will not be a slave any longer"). Obviously this does not harmonize with the rendering "I have broken," etc., in the first clause (unless, with Dr. Payne Smith, we explain "I will not serve" as virtually equivalent to "I will still serve my idol-gods"); hence the Jewish critics, by just adding a κέραια (Matt. v. 18), changed "serve" into "transgress." They did not venture to alter the next clause, which, quite as much as the first, presupposes the reading "serve" (see next note). **When**—rather, *for*—**upon every high hill,** etc. Bare, treeless heights were favourite spots for sacrifices, especially for Baal; groves, and leafy trees in general, for the lascivious rites of Asherah and Ashtoreth. The apparently extreme statement of the prophet is not to be minimized. Travellers still tell us of vestiges of ancient and doubtless pre-Christian idolatrous worship still visible on almost every attractive spot in the open country in Palestine. **Under every green tree.** We have no single word to convey the "fluid" meaning of this expressive word. It combines, in fact, the senses of pliant, sappy, leafy (comp. note on ch. xi. 16). **Thou wanderest;** rather, *thou wast stretching thyself out.*

Ver. 21.—**A noble vine.** Jeremiah means the choicest kind of Oriental vine, called *sorek* (from the dark-red colour of its grapes), and mentioned again in Isa. v. 2. The figure of the vine is one endeared to us by its association especially with our Lord; it was endeared to the Jews by the annual festivities of the vintage. The sacred writers are never afraid of its palling on the ear by repetition (comp. ch. v. 10; vi. 9; xii. 10; Isa. v. 1—7; xxvii. 2, 3; Ezek. xvii. 6; Ps. lxxx. 8—16). **A right seed;** *i.e.* a vine-shoot of the genuine

sort. "Seed" for "shoot," as in Isa. xvii. 11 (comp. ver. 10). **The degenerate plant**; rather, *degenerate shoots* (if at least the text is right).

Ver. 22.—**Nitre** does not mean the substance which now bears that name, but "natron," a mineral alkali, deposited on the shores and on the bed of certain lakes in Egypt, especially those in the Wâdy Natrûn (the ancient Nitria, whence came so large a store of precious Syriac manuscripts). In ancient times, this natron was collected to make lye from for washing purposes (comp. Prov. xxv. 20). **Sope**; rather, *potash*; the corresponding vegetable alkali (comp. Isa. i. 25). **Thine iniquity is marked.** So Kimchi and Gesenius (through a doubtful etymology); but the Aramaic use of the word favours the rendering *stained*, i.e. filthy. The word is in the participle, to indicate the permanence of the state (comp. "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood," etc.? 'Macbeth').

Ver. 23.—**How canst thou say, etc.?** This is not a mere rhetorical fiction equivalent to "or if thou shouldst perhaps say," but probably represents an objection really made by the inhabitants of the kingdom of Judah. Their fault was not in neglecting the public worship of Jehovah in his appointed temple, but in superadding to this, idolatrous rites inconsistent with the spiritual religion taught by Jeremiah. The people did not, it seems, regard this as tantamount to "following Baalim," just as some converts to Christianity in our own foreign missions might exclaim against being accused of apostacy, because they secretly carry on certain heathen practices. The prophet, however, applies a more rigorous test to their conduct. **Baalim**; the plural of Baal, used for "other gods" (ch. i. 16; comp. on ver. 8). **Thy way in the valley.** *The valley* in this context can only be that of Hinnom (see on ch. vii. 31), which from the time of Ahaz had been defiled with the rites of "Moloch, horrid king" (see 'Paradise Lost,' i. 392—396). **Thou art a swift dromedary.** Ewald would attach this half of the verse to ver. 24; and there is something to be said for this plan. *Swift dromedary* is, properly speaking, in the vocative. The ardour of the people for idolatry is expressed by the comparison of it to the uncontrollable instinct of brute beasts. The word rendered "dromedary" is in the feminine gender; it means strictly the young she-camel which has not yet had a foal. **Traversing her ways**; rather, *interlacing her ways*; i.e. running backwards and forwards at the impulse of passion.

Ver. 24.—**A wild ass, etc.** The type of wildness and independence (comp. Gen. xvi. 12; Job xxxix. 5—8). **That snuffeth up the wind**; to cool the heat of her passion. **In her occasion . . . in her month**; *i.e.* at the pairing-time.

Ver. 25.—**Withhold thy foot, etc.** Hitzig, with unnecessary ingenuity, explains this with reference to the fatiguing practices of the heathen cultus, comparing 1 Kings xviii. 26, where "vain repetitions" of "Baal, Baal," and (as he thinks) barefoot religious dances, are mentioned as parts of the worship of Baal. Umbreit's view, however, is far more natural. "God the true husband exhorts Israel not to run barefoot, and with parched throat, like a shameless adulteress, after strangers" (Payne Smith). **There is no hope**; *i.e.* the exhortation is in vain (so ch. xviii. 12).

Ver. 26.—**Is . . . ashamed.** It is the perfect of prophetic certitude.

Ver. 27.—**And to a stone, etc.** *Stone* (*'ebhen*) is feminine in Hebrew, and therefore addressed as the mother.

Ver. 28.—**According to the number of thy cities, etc.** A remarkable statement, and one that well illustrates the superficial character of Hezekiah's reformation. True, Manasseh's reactionary reign had intervened, but his counter-movement would not have been so successful had it not been attended by the good wishes of the people; and besides, the last years of Manasseh, according to the tradition in 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12—16 were devoted to undoing the mischief of his former life. The force of the prophet's words is strikingly brought out by M. Renan (he led an expedition to Phœnicia), who has shown that every district and every town had a cultus of its own, which often only differed from the neighbouring cultus by words and titles (*nomina, numina*); comp. Baal-Hamon, Baal-Hazor, etc. Dr. Payne Smith well expresses the argument of Jeremiah: "When every city has its special deity, surely among so many there might be found one able to help his worshippers."

Ver. 29.—**Wherefore will ye plead with me?** How can ye be so brazen-faced as to attempt to justify yourselves?

Ver. 30.—**Have I smitten your children.** The cities and towns of Judah are represented as so many mothers, and the populations as their children. It would, no doubt, be more natural to take "children" literally; but then we must read the verb in the next clause, "*Ye* have received," as the Septuagint actually renders. In the former case the "smiting" will refer to all God's "sore judgments"—sword, drought, famine, pestilence; in the latter, to the loss of life in battle. **Your own sword hath devoured your prophets** (comp. 2 Chron. xxiv. 21; 2 Kings xxi. 16). Manasseh's persecution (which extended, according to Josephus, especially to the prophets) may ac-

count for the preponderance of "false prophets" referred to in ver. 8 (cf. Matt. xxiii. 29).

Ver. 31.—**O generation, see ye.** It is doubtful whether *generation* here means "contemporaries" (equivalent to "men of this generation"), or, like γενεά sometimes in the New Testament, a class of men united by moral affinity (comp. Ps. xiv. 5; lxxviii. 8). In the latter case we should rather attach the pronoun in "see ye" to "O generation," and render "O (evil) generation that ye are!" So Hitzig, Keil, and Payne Smith; Ewald and Delitzsch adopt the first rendering. **Have I been a wilderness,** etc.? "Have I not been the source of light and happiness to my people, and of all temporal blessings?" (comp. ch. ii. 6). So the Divine speaker in Isa. xlv. 19, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain," or more literally, "in chaos" (same word as in Gen. i. 2); "chaos" and "the wilderness" are both images of that which is utterly unremunerative. **A land of darkness.** This is, of course, not literally accurate as a description of the Arabian desert. "Darkness" is here used as a synonym for "misery." Cloud and rain occupy precisely opposite places in the estimation of nomadic and agricultural peoples respectively. "The Bedouins," says an Arabic scholast, "always follow the rain and the places where raindrops fall;" whereas a townsman of Mecca calls himself "child of the sun." So Indra and Varuna, originally belonging to the cloudy and rainy sky, are in the Vedic hymns endowed with solar traits. It should be added here that it is an old problem, and too difficult a one for us to investigate, whether we should render "the darkness of Jah" (Jehovah) or (as Authorized Version) simply "darkness." The former rendering will mean very great darkness, such as Jehovah sends in judgment (*e.g.* to the Egyptians, Exod. x. 21—23). On this question, see Dr. Ginsburg on Cant. viii. 6 (where a similar doubt exists), Geiger's 'Urschrift und Uebersetzungen der Bibel,' p. 276; Ewald, 'Lehrbuch der Hebräischen Sprache,' § 270 c. **We are lords;** rather, *we have broken loose.* It is, however, a difficult word, which only occurs elsewhere in Gen. xxvi. 40; Hos. xii. 1; Ps. lv. 3.

Ver. 32.—**Or a bride her attire.** The prophet perhaps means the magnificently adorned girdle which the bride wore on her wedding day (comp. Isa. xlix. 18). But the word only occurs again in Isa. iii. 20, and its precise signification is uncertain.

Ver. 33.—**Why trimmest thou thy way?** rather, *How well thou contrivest thy way,* etc.? **Therefore hast thou also taught,** etc. The meaning which floated before our translators seems to be this: "so utterly immoral is thy course of life, that even the worst of women ['wicked ones' is in the feminine] have been able to learn something from thee" (so the great Dutch scholar, De Dieu, in 1548). But a more natural rendering is, "Therefore [*i.e.* to gain thine ends] thou hast accustomed thy ways to those evil things." *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus.* It required a deliberate "accustoming," or "training" (such is the literal meaning of *limmad*), to produce such a habit (ἕξις) as is here rebuked.

Ver. 34.—**Also in thy skirts,** etc.; or, *there is even found in thy skirts* (or, perhaps, *in thy sleeves*—the wide sleeves of an Eastern mantle). The fact which follows is adduced as the crowning evidence of wickedness. **Blood of the souls** is explained by the statement in Lev. xvii. 11, "The soul of the flesh [*i.e.* of the body] is in the blood;" hence the importance of the blood in the Mosaic sacrifices. The historical reference of this passage of Jeremiah may well be to the persecution of Manasseh, who is said to have "shed innocent blood very much" (2 Kings xxi. 16). It is Judah, no doubt, who is addressed, but the prophets mostly assume the "solidarity" of king and people (analogous to that of a forefather and his posterity); Manasseh, moreover, probably had the support of a large section of the population, at any rate in so far as he favoured the inveterate cultus of the high places or local sanctuaries. **I have not found it by secret search;** rather, *thou hast not found them breaking through (houses).* The phraseology agrees with that of Exod. xxii. 2, the law against "breaking through;" it suggests that the houses of all but the highest class in ancient as well as often in modern Palestine, were made of mere sun-dried brick, which could be easily "dug into" (comp. Ezek. xii. 5; Matt. vi. 19, 20, in the Greek). [Lieut. Conder states, it is true, that in hilly districts of Palestine the houses of the villages are built of stone, but he adds that the stone is simply taken from the ruins of the ancient towns.] Burglars caught in the act might be killed (Exod. xxii. 2), but the innocent victims of persecution could not be brought under this category, and hence those who slew them were really guilty of murder. **But upon all these;** rather, *but because of all these things;* i.e. not for any crime, but because of thine apostasy and zeal for the false gods ("these things," as in ch. iii. 7); so Hitzig, Keil, Payne Smith; less naturally De Dieu, "because of those false gods."

Ver. 35.—**Because.** This "because" is misleading; there is no argument, but the statement of a supposed fact. The particle so rendered merely serves to introduce the speech of the Jews (like ὅτι). **Shall turn;** rather, *hath turned.* Judah had so long

been undisturbed by any foreign power, that the people fancied the promises of Deuteronomy were being fulfilled, and that they, on their part, had pleased God by their formal obedience (comp. 2 Kings xxii. 17). **I will plead with thee.** Here, as in some other passages (*e.g.* Isa. lxvi. 16; Ezek. xxxviii. 22), the word includes the sense of punishing.

Ver. 36.—**Why gaddest thou about so much**—many render, *Why runnest thou so quickly;* but the verb simply means to "go," and it is enough to refer to foreign embassies, such as are alluded to in this very chapter (ver. 18)—**to change thy way?** The "way" or policy of Judah was "changed," according as the party in power favoured an Egyptian or an Assyrian alliance. **Thou also shalt be ashamed of;** rather, *thou shalt also be brought to shame through.* **As thou art ashamed of Assyria** (correct rendering as before). This is certainly difficult, for in the reign of Josiah it would appear that the political connection with Assyria still continued. Is it possible that Jeremiah, in these words, has in view rather the circumstances of Jehoiakim than those of Josiah? Does he not appear to look back upon Judah's final "putting to shame through Assyria" as a thing of the past? And to what event can this expression refer but to the overthrow of Josiah at Megiddo (so Graf)?

Ver. 37.—**From him;** *i.e.* from Egypt, personified as a man (so whenever a people is referred to; a land is represented as a woman). Egypt was, in fact, the only great power capable of assisting Judah at this time (see Introduction); yet even Egypt, the prophet says, shall disappoint her Jewish allies, for Jehovah has **rejected thy confidences** (*i.e.* the objects of thy confidence). As a matter of fact, "the King of Egypt came not again any more out of his land" after Necho's crushing defeat at Carchemish (2 Kings **xxiv. 7**; comp. **ch. xxxvii. 5**).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Recollections of the happy past.* It is pleasing to see how the prophet of judgment opens his first oracle with touching reminiscences of the early happy relations between God and his people. Thus the young man connects his new utterances with ancient experience and the old well-tried principles of spiritual religion. Thus, too, he leads the way from thoughts of God's goodness and memories of early devotion to a right condition of reflectiveness and tenderness of heart, in which the revelation of dark truths of the future will be less likely to harden his hearers in rebellion than if they had been spoken abruptly and harshly.

I. MANY OF US, LIKE THE JEWS, MAY BE REMINDED OF A HAPPY PAST. In years of deepening disappointment the sunny days of youth rise up to memory and rebuke the cynical mood which sorrow is too ready to engender. In years of lessening spirituality the holy seasons of early devotion may be recalled to mind to startle us out of our self-complacency. It is well to reflect upon such a past history as that of the Jews. 1. This was marked by *peculiar blessings on God's side.* (1) It was a time when God's love and kindness were felt with all the fresh receptiveness of youth; and (2) it was memorable for remarkable Divine protection and blessing. 2. This was characterized by *great fidelity on the side of Israel.* In spite of frequent murmurings and rebellions, the age of the Exodus had been the heroic age of Israel's national and religious history. (1) The people then followed God with affectionate devotion; they "went after him." (2) They consecrated themselves in purity and in service; "Israel was consecrated unto the Lord." (3) They were the earliest true servants of God—God's "firstfruits." Yet the first may become last (Matt. xx. 16). (4) This devotion was witnessed under trying circumstances. It was "in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." God's love is sometimes most manifest when outward circumstances are most distressing, and men are often more faithful to God in the wilderness than in the land flowing with milk and honey. What a strange irony of history is this, that though, while passing through the wilderness, the people looked forward to their happiness in the possession of the promised land, after they have had long possession of it they are led to look back on those early homeless wanderings as containing the most blessed age of their existence! But true happiness is ever found, not in external comfort, but in spiritual blessedness. Can we recollect early days when the battle of life was hard, and we longed for the ease which came with success, and now see that there, in that hard battle, our best days were lived, our true blessedness was realized? Such a memory must be full of pathetic suggestions.

II. THE RECOLLECTION OF A HAPPY PAST IS PROFITABLE. 1. *God remembers the past.* Not like the sour censor who remembers only our past faults, but rather like the kind parent who delights to call to mind the goodness of his children's early days, God makes no mention of the sins of the wilderness life, but dwells graciously on its happy features. God remembers our past for our good: (1) as a link of affection after subsequent sin has driven us from him; (2) as an ideal to which he would bring us back; and (3)—still for our good—as a standard by which to measure our present condition, and a just ground for wholesome chastisement. 2. *We are to recollect our happy past.* Israel is reminded of his early days. If we have "lost our first love," it is well that we should know this: (1) that we may see how far we have fallen, and repent (Rev. ii. 4, 5); (2) that the recollection of the blessedness of early devotion may revive the longing for its return; (3) that the consciousness that this was once attained may encourage us to believe that it is a possibility, and therefore may be attained again. *In conclusion*, note: 1. It is foolish simply to regret the happy past. The use of memory is not to give to us profitless melancholy, but to lead us actively to do better for the future. 2. It is a mistake for us to seek *simply* to regain the lost past, because (1) this is gone irrevocably, (2) the new age requires new forms of life, and (3) we should seek better things in the future. The second Adam is better than the first Adam before the fall. The kingdom of heaven is more glorious than the garden of Eden. The ripe Christian is higher in the spiritual life, though he may have fallen in the past, than the innocent child who has never known evil but has not experienced the discipline of life.

Vers. 5—7.—*The ingratitude of sin.* Of the many aspects under which sin may be viewed none is more sad than that of ingratitude to God. Every act of sin is a distinct act of ingratitude; for every such act is an offence against him who has shown to us nothing but love, and from whom we are taking innumerable favours in the very moment of our transgression.

I. THE INGRATITUDE OF SIN IS SEEN IN THE FORGETFULNESS OF GOD'S SAVING MERCY. So the Israelites forget the glorious deliverance from Egypt, and preservation amidst the horrors of the wilderness (ver. 6). God is resorted to in distress only to be ignored, forsaken, insulted, directly rebelled against, when he has effected a deliverance.

II. THE INGRATITUDE OF SIN IS SEEN IN THE IGNORING OF THE PRESENT GOODNESS OF GOD. (Ver. 7.) The Israelites were eating the fruit of the good land which God had given to them while they were rebelling against him. This is even worse than ingratitude for past blessings. Such ingratitude might attempt to plead the excuse of failure of memory; but ingratitude for present mercies can only arise from gross spiritual blindness or wilful disregard of all claims of justice and affection.

III. THE INGRATITUDE OF SIN IS SEEN IN THE FALSE CHARACTER WHICH IS ASCRIBED TO GOD. God asks, "What unrighteousness have your fathers found in me?" The conduct of the Jews was a direct indictment of the character of God. They deliberately insulted him, and rejected him for heathen deities. Such conduct could only be justified by the discovery that he was not what he claimed to be. After God has revealed himself to men in myriadfold evidences of goodness, there are some who hold, if they do not confess to, such evil conceptions of his character as amount to the basest calumnies of heartless ingratitude.

IV. THE INGRATITUDE OF SIN IS SEEN IN THE CHARACTER OF THE GODS WHO ARE PREFERRED TO JEHOVAH. These are "false" gods. Jews who knew that converted religious worship into an unreality, and thus became themselves hollow and unreal. For this miserable result did they forsake the God of heaven and earth, their Saviour and constant Benefactor! If they had found a rival with some pretensions to worth the insult would have been less. Herein is the grossness of the insult to God seen in all sin. What do men prefer to him? Transient pleasures, earthly dross. The pearl of great price is flung away, not for a smaller pearl, but for dust and ashes.

V. THE INGRATITUDE OF SIN IS SEEN IN THE ABUSE AND CORRUPTION OF GOD'S GIFTS. God gave the Israelites "garden-land," and they defiled it; they made *God's heritage* an abomination. When we sin we do so by employing the very powers which God has bestowed upon us. We insult him by turning his own gifts into weapons of rebellion. We blaspheme him with the tongue which he has made.

Ver. 8.—*Wickedness in leading men.* The great indictment of Israel reaches its climax in the accusation of the leaders of the people. Even they who should have been the guardians of truth and the vindicators of right have turned aside to evil ways. After this the defection of the whole nation appears utter and hopeless. We have here an instance of the terrible condition into which a country has fallen when its leaders, its teachers, its responsible civil and religious authorities, are unfaithful to their mission and set examples of wickedness.

I. CONSIDER THE SIGNS OF WICKEDNESS IN LEADING MEN. 1. These are often unrecognized until the evil has wrought disastrous effects. For there are circumstances which make them difficult to detect, viz: (1) *External propriety.* The priests still minister at the altar, the Law is still slavishly observed in ceremonial details, rulers still exercise authority, prophets still write and preach in orthodox language, and on the outside all things go on respectably, while there is rottenness hidden within. This was specially the case after the reformation of Josiah, when an outward respect for religious observances was established without any purification of heart or revival of spiritual life. (2) *Respect for authority.* Many people are too subservient to question the character of their leaders. They would rather unite with their rulers in crucifying Christ than recognize his claims against the authority of these men. They do not judge of the character of their leaders by any standard of morals, but found their standard of morals on that character. 2. The signs of wickedness in leading men may be detected in its bearing on the *special functions* of their respective offices. The priests are the temple servants of Jehovah, yet they never seek their Master. They who are familiar with the precepts of the Law know nothing of the person and will of the Lawmaker. The civil rulers who are ruling under a theocracy directly transgress the Law of God. The prophets lend themselves to a corrupt source of inspiration. So now again we may see men abusing the powers of office, and sinning in the very exercise of the responsibilities which are entrusted to them for the sake of the maintenance of right and truth. Therefore we must be on our guard, and not simply follow those who claim to lead because of their rank or office. Men of leading are not always men of light. We must "try the spirits" (1 John iv. 1), and judge of the character of those who claim to lead us by their actions, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. vii. 16).

II. CONSIDER THE PECULIAR GUILT OF WICKEDNESS IN LEADING MEN. 1. It is *contrary to knowledge.* The priests handle the Law. Men of influence are usually in a position to learn what is wise and good. Teachers of religion may be presumed to know more than the average of men. How great, then, is their guilt when their conduct is corrupt (Rom. ii. 21—23)! 2. It is *contrary to profession.* These leaders set themselves up as examples to others, and then even they go wrong. They who assume a high position should justify that position by manifesting a high character. More is expected of the professed Christian than of the confessed man of the world. 3. It is an *abuse of great responsibility.* If men wilfully employ positions of trust as means of violating the very objects of those trusts, their guilt is proportionate to the privileges they have received and the honours they have accepted. He who uses a Christian pulpit to propagate doctrines subversive of Christianity is guilty of base treason.

III. CONSIDER THE INJURIOUS EFFECTS OF WICKEDNESS IN LEADING MEN. These will be great in proportion to the influence of the men, and will partake of the special characteristics of that influence, viz.: 1. *Breadth.* Leading men have a wide influence, and the seeds of evil which they sow will be widespread. 2. *Depth.* Leading men have power at their disposal. Their example is weighty. 3. *Subtlety.* Dignity, prestige, authority, disguise the evil which would be recognized if it were stripped of the pomp of office. Therefore: (1) see that good men are chosen for posts of influence, and let the selection and education of civil and religious leaders be a matter of more prayer and thought on the part of the Church; and (2) be not too ready to follow with blind obedience those who may be in high positions. Be independent and watchful. Follow the one infallible Leader, "the Good Shepherd," Christ.

Ver. 13.—*Broken cisterns.* I. ALL MEN NEED SPIRITUAL REFRESHMENT. The soul has its thirst (Ps. lxiii. 1). 1. This is *natural.* We are born with instincts which reach out to the unseen, and the worldly habits which deaden these instincts cannot utterly eradicate them. If they could, we should cease to be men and become merely

rational brutes, for "man is a religious animal." 2. This is intensified by the *experience of life.* Thirst is increased by a heated atmosphere, hard work, disease, and special agents, *e.g.* salt water; so spiritual thirst is deepened by the heat and burden of life, by its toil and battle, by the fever of passion and the weariness of sorrow, by the poison of sin and the disappointment of delusive promises of satisfaction. How pathetic is this picture! If the living water is forsaken, cisterns—even poor, broken cisterns, with scant supply of foul water, are resorted to, for in some way the burning thirst of the soul must be quenched.

II. THEY WHO FORSAKE GOD INJURE THEIR OWN SOULS. Hitherto the prophet has spoken of the guilt of unfaithfulness. He now speaks of the loss this entails. It is right that *we* should first think of the simple sinfulness of our sin, for this is its most important feature. But it is profitable to consider also the folly of it, and the misery that it must bring upon us. This is not to be all relegated to the world of future punishments. It is to be felt now, and would be felt keenly if men were not blind to their own condition. As godliness has the promise of the life which now is as well as of that which is to come, so ungodliness brings present loss. This must not be looked for in the direction of material profit and loss, of bodily pain and pleasure, towards which the Jew was too much inclined to turn his attention. It is inward and spiritual, yet it is not the less real. For the spirit is the self. When the noise of the world is stilled, in silent watches of the night, in lonely hours of reflection, does not the poor homeless soul feel some sense of unrest, some vague thirst which no pleasure or possession has yet satisfied?

III. THE INJURY ARISING FROM FORSAKING GOD IS FOUND FIRST IN THE VERY LOSS OF GOD. God is more to us than all his gifts. The greatest loss of the prodigal son is not the food which he craves for in the land of famine, but the father whom he has forsaken. God is the chief source of the soul's refreshment. Men talk of the duty of religion. They should consider its blessings, and learn to seek God as they seek their bread and water—the first necessaries of life. God is a Fountain of living water. 1. His refreshing grace is *ever flowing*, and in great abundance, not limited in quantity as that of the largest cistern may be so that there is enough for all, and it may be had at all times. 2. It is *fresh*, like the mountain stream bubbling forth cool from the rock, not like the stale waters of the cistern. "He giveth more grace" (Jas. iv. 6), and "grace for grace" (John i. 16). The Christian does not have to go back to the grace of God in past ages. There is a fresh stream now flowing, and prayer opens to us fresh supplies of the love and help of God. 3. It is *wholesome and invigorating*, unlike the earthy waters of the cistern. How foolish, then, to turn aside from such a supply for anything! We need no better.

IV. THE INJURY ARISING FROM FORSAKING GOD IS INTENSIFIED BY THE UNSATISFACTORY NATURE OF THE SUBSTITUTES MEN TURN TO. 1. These are *self-made*. God makes the fresh spring, man makes the cistern. Can our work equal God's? 2. They are *limited in supply*—reservoirs, not flowing streams. 3. They are often *impure*; the cistern soon gets impregnated with unwholesome matter. 4. They are *imperfect of their kind.* The cisterns are broken; what little unwholesome water they have leaks away. All these characteristics apply to the waters men turn to in preference to God —*e.g.* human religion, philosophy, public occupation, social distraction, pleasure; these all fail to slake the soul's thirst. "Cor nostrum inquietum est donec requiescat in te."

Ver. 19.—*Sin self-corrected.* I. SIN BRINGS ITS OWN CHASTISEMENT. 1. Sin reveals its evil character as it comes into existence, and is no sooner completed than it is regarded by its parent with disgust. The wicked action which looks attractive in desire is repulsive to reflect upon. The very sight and thought and memory of sin are bitter. The burden of guilt, the shame of an evil memory, the sin itself is thus its own chastisement. 2. Sin naturally produces its punishment. The penalty of sin is not arbitrarily adjudicated nor is it inflicted *ab extrâ.* It is the natural fruit of sin. It is reaping what we have sown (Gal. vi. 7, 8). This fruit the guilty man must eat as his bread of sorrows (Prov. i. 31). Thus intemperance naturally breeds disease, mental degradation, poverty, and dishonour. Greedy selfishness brings upon a man dislike and provokes retaliation. Unfaithfulness to God deprives us of the communion of his

Spirit and the protection of his providence. We have to wait for no formal sentence, no executioner. The law within us carries its own sentence, and is its own executioner, and even as we do wrong we begin to bring upon ourselves the penalty of our conduct.

II. THE CHASTISEMENT OF SIN IS TO REPROVE AND CORRECT. The headache of the morning is a warning to the drunkard not to repeat the debauch of the night. 1. Chastisement corrects by bringing us to our right mind. It sobers a man, and thus helps him to look at his life in a true light. 2. Chastisement corrects by revealing the true character of sin. Its charms are all torn off, and the hideous monster is revealed in its naturally hateful shape. Then we see that all sin involves our forsaking God, and is due to the loss of respect for his will—the loss of the "fear of God" according to the Old Testament view, the loss of love to God according to the Christian view.

III. IT IS NOT WELL TO WAIT FOR THE CORRECTIVE INFLUENCE OF CHASTISEMENT BEFORE REPENTING OF SIN. 1. The chastisement may be a terrible experience from which we would fain shrink if we knew the nature of it. 2. Sin is evil in itself, and the sooner we stay our hand from it the better for ourselves, for the world, and for the honour of God. It is better not to fall than to fall and be restored. 3. God has provided a higher means than chastisement for delivering us from sin. This is an exercise of his goodness to lead us to repentance (Rom. ii. 4). The gospel shows us how Christ can save us from our sins by drawing us to himself and constraining us by his love to walk in his footsteps of holiness.

Ver. 22.—*The stains of sin.* I. SIN STAINS THE CHARACTER AND LIFE OF MEN. 1. Sin leaves *stains* behind it. No man can have clean hands after touching it. These stains are of two classes: (1) internal—the soiled imagination, the corrupted will, the vitiated habit which a single act of sin tends to produce; and (2) external, in the form of guilt before God, and lowered reputation in the sight of men. 2. The stains of sin are *not natural.* They are no part of the true colour of a man's character. They are all contracted by experience. 3. These stains are all *evil things.* They are not like marks of immature development or of the necessary imperfection of humanity. They are products of corruption.

II. NO MAN CAN WASH THE GUILT OF SIN FROM HIS CHARACTER. (Ch. xiii. 23.) The Jews were attempting this by denying the offences charged against them or excusing them. They would not admit their apostacy; but in vain. 1. Sin cannot be *undone.* We cannot recall the past. History is unchangeable. What we have done we have done. 2. Sin cannot be *hidden.* We can never hide it from God, who searches the heart (1 John iii. 20). We cannot long or perfectly hide it from man. It will colour our lives and reveal itself in action, in conversation, in countenance. 3. Sin cannot be *excused.* We may point to our training, our temptations, our natural weakness, our ignorance; and no doubt these facts are important as determining the degree of our guilt (Luke xxiii. 34). But the sin itself, greater or less as it may be, cannot be explained away. Our sins are our own or they would not be sins. 4. Sin cannot be *expiated* by us. Sacrifice is of no real avail. That was only acceptable as a symbol and type of God's method of cleansing sin. Penance could only act as discipline for the future; for the past it is no better than a fruitless sacrifice. Future goodness cannot atone for the past; for that is required on its own account, and if it were perfect it would be no more than it ought to be—we should still be "unprofitable servants."

III. NO MAN CAN WASH THE STAIN OF INDWELLING SIN FROM HIS LIFE. Men have tried all methods; but in vain. 1. *Simple determination* to conquer it. But he who commits sin is the slave of sin (John viii. 34), and a slave who cannot emancipate himself. The worst effect of sin is seen in the corruption of the will. Hence we have not the power to reform until our will is renewed, *i.e.* until, in New Testament language, we are "born again." 2. *Change of external circumstances.* This is a helpful accessory of more effectual means, but it is not sufficient in itself, because sin is internal, and no change of scene will effect a change of heart. A man may cross the Atlantic, but he will be the same being in America that he was in England. He may be lifted from the dunghill to a throne, but if he had a vicious nature in his low condition he will carry that with him to his new sphere. Base metal does not become gold by receiving the guinea's stamp. Sanitary arrangements, education, reforming influences, etc.,

are all helpful, but none are fundamental enough to effect the complete change. The stains are too ingrained for any such washing to remove them.

IV. IN THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST WE MAY SEE THE MEANS FOR CLEANSING BOTH THE GUILT OF CHARACTER AND THE STAIN OF INDWELLING SIN. 1. *Guilt* is shown to be removed by the free forgiveness of God in Christ, for no merits of our own, but for the sake of his work and sacrifice; by no effort of ours, but on condition of repentance and the faith which trusts him as our Saviour, and submits to him as our Lord (Acts x. 43). 2. The *stain of indwelling sin* is shown to be removed by the renewal of our nature, so that we are born "from above" and "of the Spirit" (John iii. 3—8), and become new creatures in Christ by means of the same faith of trust and submission (2 Cor. v. 17).

Vers. 35—37.—*False confidence.* I. THE GROUNDS OF FALSE CONFIDENCE. 1. *Assumed innocence.* Israel says, "I am innocent;" "I have not sinned." This assumption may result from (1) self-deception, or (2) hypocrisy. 2. *A claim to be favoured by God.* Israel says again, "His anger has turned from me." Present peace is taken as a warrant for expecting continued security, so that the very forbearance of God is converted into an excuse for presumption and indifference. Perhaps, too, pride comes in and aids the assumption that the guilty people are special favourites of Heaven and will be protected, whatever wrong they do. This was the mistake of the contemporaries of our Lord when they relied on the mere fact that they were Abraham's children (John viii. 39). 3. *Trust in human aid.* Judah turned first to Assyria, and then to Egypt. So men look to worldly associations for security in trouble. 4. *Reliance on diplomatic skill.* Israel turned from Assyria to Egypt when the former power failed and the latter was in the ascendancy. Men think to protect themselves by their own ingenuity.

II. THE FAILURE OF FALSE CONFIDENCE. The reasons of this may be noted: 1. *The reality of sin.* This is not the less real because it is denied. God still sees it. It still bears its necessary fruits. 2. *The rejection of God.* Israel turned from God to man. How then could he expect God's continued protection? 3. *Lack of principle.* Israel turned about from Egypt to Assyria. There was no settled policy. When expediency is the sole guide of conduct we are sure to be landed in ultimate failure. 4. *The character and fate of the human objects of confidence.* These were rejected by God. They who trust them must share their doom. It is always vain to "put confidence in princes" (Ps. cxviii. 9). But when these are bad men, godless men, rejected by God, the consequences of trust in them will be fatal. We are always involved in the fate of what we trust ourselves to. If we trust to the world, to human aid, to errors and falsehoods, to evil things, the certain overthrow of these must involve us in its ruin.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—14.—*A sweet remembrance embittered;* or Divine delight turned by his people's ingratitude into Divine distress.

I. GOD GREATLY DELIGHTS IN HIS PEOPLE'S LOVE. See the similitude he employs: "the love of thine espousals." It is difficult for us to recall any period in the history of Israel when such high praise as this was merited by them. For it is of their love to God rather than of his to them—though there was never any doubt about that—that the prophet is here speaking. But when was Israel's love at all of such devoted and intense order as to deserve to be thus spoken of? It is difficult to say. And he that knows his own heart will be slow to credit himself with any such ardent affection as is spoken of here. The explanation of such language is found in that joyous appreciation by God of all movements of our hearts towards him which leads him to speak of our poor offerings as if they were altogether worthy and good. Cf. "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst," etc.? (Matt. xxv. 44); also our Lord's estimate of the widow's two mites; the cup of cold water given in his Name, etc. Still, whilst the believer is compelled to confess that his Lord's loving estimate of his poor service and affection is an exaggerated one, it is one which is nevertheless founded upon a very blessed fact. There is such a thing as the child of God's "first love," when our delight

in God was intense, real, abiding; when prayer and service were prompt and frequent and delightful. Then we were content to leave the world, and to go out into the dreary wilderness if but our God led the way. Then there was not, as now there too often is, a wide separation between our religious and our common life; but, as ver. 3 tells, we ourselves and all we had were counted as holy unto the Lord. We sought that in whatsoever we did we might do all unto the glory of God. Now, such service is a delight to the heart of God. We are shown, therefore, that we can add to or diminish the joy of God. Such power have we. And the Divine appreciation of such service is shown by his anger towards those that in anywise hurt his servants. "All that devour him," etc. (ver. 3). The Book of the Revelation is one long and awful declaration of how the Lord God will avenge his saints.

II. BUT THIS DIVINE DELIGHT HAS BECOME DIVINE DISTRESS. The remembrance has become bitter. The cause of this change is by reason of his people having forsaken him. As is the joy of God at men's hearts yielding to him, so is his grief at their unfaithfulness. The heart of God is no figure of speech, but a reality. It rejoices in our love, it mourns over our sin. And this all the more because of the aggravation attending such forsaking him. For: 1. *It is in violation of solemn vows and pledges of fidelity which we have given him.* The yielding of the soul up to God is likened unto the espousal of the soul to God. At the time we made our surrender we joyfully confessed, "Thy vows are upon me, O God: O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord." Now, to go back from God is to violate all these sacred vows. 2. And whatever departures from God have taken place, *they have been without any provocation whatsoever.* Ver. 5, "What iniquity have your fathers found in me?" etc. Has he been hard with us, or impatient, or unready to answer prayer, or faithless to his promise? Can any who have forsaken God charge him so? 3. And such forsaking of God *has been an act of base and shameful ingratitude* (cf. ver. 6). God had brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, etc. And he had brought them into a plentiful country, but they had polluted it, etc. (ver. 7). All men are under a vast debt of gratitude to God, even the heathen—so St. Paul teaches us—who never heard his Name. But how much more vast is the debt of those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," and known his redeeming love, and who yet "turn back and walk no more with him"! 4. Such departures from God are characterized by *most unheard-of and monstrous foolishness.* The prophet in contemplating it (ver. 12) calls on the heavens to be astonished, etc. For such conduct *was unheard of* (cf. vers. 10, 11). Idolatrous nations remained true to their gods, though they were no gods; but Israel, etc. Too often is it that the professed people of God are put to shame by those who make no such profession at all. And it was as monstrous as it was unheard of (cf. ver. 13). It was as if any should abandon the waters of some bright, pure running fountain for the muddy mixture of a tank or cistern, which at the best is almost repulsive to one accustomed to the fountains of living water. And the folly of such exchange is even exceeded, for not only was it this foul cistern for which the living fountains had been forsaken, but even these very cisterns were flawed and fractured so that they could "hold no water." The force of folly could no further go. And men do the like of this still. As, *e.g.*, when they forsake the faith of the Father in heaven for the creed of the materialist, the agnostic, the atheist; when they choose rather the peace of mind which contemplation of their own correctness of conduct can afford instead of the joyful assurance of sin forgiven and acceptance with God, gained through Jesus Christ our Lord; when, in the controversy that is ever going on between God and the world, they decide for the world; when, reliance is placed on a religion of sacraments, professions and forms of worship, instead of that sincere surrender of the heart to God, that spiritual religion which alone is of worth in his sight; when the lot of the people of God is rejected in order that the pleasures of sin may be enjoyed for a season, and in many other such ways. 5. *And the sin is of such desperate character.* For see (ver. 8) how it has mounted up and overwhelmed those who from their profession and calling we should have thought would have been above it. The ministers of religion, the priests, pastors, teachers, have all been swept away by the torrent of sin. When those whose lives are given to prayer, to the study of God's holy Word, and to that sacred ministry which should be a bulwark and defence, not only for those for whom, but also for those by whom, it is exercised; when these

are seen to be involved in the common corruption, then the case of such a Church, community, or nation is hopeless indeed. See, too, *the insensibility* that such sin causes. In ver. 2 Jeremiah is bidden "*Go and cry in the ears* of Jerusalem." As you would bend down your face to the ear of one in whom the sense of hearing was all but dead, and would place your lips close to his ear, and by loud, clear utterance strive to make him hear, so had it become necessary by reason of the insensibility which their sin had caused, to deal with those to whom the prophet wrote. It is one of the awful judgments that overtake the hardened and impenitent, that whereas once they would not hear the voice of God, they at length find they cannot. Oh, then, let the prayer of us all be "From hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word and commandment, good Lord, deliver us."—C.

Vers. 14—19.—*The Divine ideal, how lost and regained.* The prophet has in his mind what was God's original thought for Israel, the Divine ideal concerning him; and along with that the mournful and utter contrast of his actual condition. An indignant "No" is the answer which rises to the prophet's lips as the questions, "Is Israel a slave? Is he a homeborn slave?" are asked. He thinks of God's words (Exod. iv. 22). But then there stares him in the face the most distressing but yet most unanswerable fact that Israel has become altogether such an one. "He *is* spoiled; the young lions roar over him," etc. (ver. 15). Applying the story of Israel to ourselves, we learn—

I. THE DIGNITY AND GLORY WHICH GOD DESIGNED FOR HIS REDEEMED. They were to be as *his sons* (cf. John i. 12, and parallels). Think of the ideas which we associate with the relationship of sons. Take the story of Abraham and Isaac as setting forth in human form what these relationships are. What affection, what confidence, what sympathy, what affluence, what honour, were Isaac's because he was Abraham's son! All that appertained to him no doubt manifested his happy consciousness of the place he held in his father's love. His looks, his tones, his dress, his demeanour, the respect paid to him, the freedom of his intercourse with Abraham, the influence he had with him,—all made manifest his honoured and his happy position. Now, all that which was Isaac's because he was Abraham's son, God purposes should be ours because we are his. Were the Divine ideal fulfilled, all that appertains to us would reveal the terms on which we stand towards God. Our look, our voice, our demeanour, our freedom from care, the general brightness of our life,—all would show our happy consciousness that we were the "sons" of our Father in heaven. The delight that Isaac had in Abraham, the delight that children have in their parents (Prov. xvii. 6), above all, as the supreme example of true sonship, the delight that Jesus had in God, we should increasingly realize. Such is God's ideal for his redeemed.

II. THE SAD CONTRAST WHICH ACTUAL FACTS TOO OFTEN PRESENT TO THIS IDEAL. This contrast Jeremiah presents in a series of vivid similitudes. 1. *Israel is "spoiled."* That is, he who had been a beloved son, happy, honoured, and free in his father's affluent home, is made a prey of, bound, beaten, abused, carried off as a slave. 2. Next he is likened to some unhappy traveller who, passing by a lion's lair, has fallen a victim. The beast's talons are fastened in his quivering flesh as he lies prostrate on the ground, and its fierce, exultant yells over him make the forest ring again. 3. The next is that of a wasted land, the desolated homesteads, the stripped fields, the torn-down vineyards, the flocks and herds all driven away. 4. The next, that of once goodly cities, their buildings now a heap of smouldering ruins. 5. And last, that of mocked and insulted captives in Egypt. Their captors have inflicted on them the indignity, so terrible in the eyes of a Hebrew, of shaving off their hair; the words "broken the crown of thy head" rather meaning "shorn the crown of thy head." Now, all these pictures which would call up vivid ideas of humiliation and suffering before the minds of Israel, the prophet suggests in these several sentences, in order to show the contrast between what God proposed for Israel at the first, and that to which he had now fallen. But that which was true of Israel is true now, once and again, of those who should have continued as God's sons. Does not that verse "Where is the happiness I knew?" etc., and the whole tone of that well-known hymn, describe a spiritual condition all too common? Our very familiarity with it shows how often there has been the sad experience of which it tells. One reason why we love the Psalms so much is that they clothe our own thoughts in the very words we need;

they say what our hearts have often said, and not least do they thus speak for us when, as they so often do, they confess the smart, the shame, the pain, and the manifold distress which our sin has brought upon us.

III. THE CAUSE OF THIS CONTRAST. (Ver. 17.) Did not thy forsaking of Jehovah thy God procure thee this? Let conscience confess if this be not the true explanation of ver. 19. Let us beware of explaining away the true cause, and sheltering our sin beneath some convenient excuse.

IV. THE REMEDY FOR THIS CONDITION OF THINGS. 1. There must be the clear perception of its true cause. Ver. 19, "*Know* therefore and *see* that," etc. To further this most salutary knowledge was the reason of so many distresses coming upon Israel, and for the same reason God will not suffer sin to be only pleasant, nor the cup of iniquity to be free from bitterness. To the riot and gaiety of the prodigal in the "far country," God added on the poverty, the swine-feeding, the rags and wretchedness, the husks for food, and the desertion by all his so-called friends,—all that misery that he might "come to himself," which whilst his riches and riot lasted he never would. And this is God's way still. He would have us know and see that it is an evil thing and bitter to forsake the Lord. 2. And when this has been thus known and seen, would we regain what we have lost, we must have done "with the way of Egypt and the waters of Sihor," that is, we must resolutely abandon those forbidden ways in which we have hitherto been walking. Ver. 18 is an earnest expostulation with such as have wandered from God. It seems to say to such, "What hast thou to do to be going after the world's sinful ways, or to be looking for help from her Sihor-like, her foul dark, waters? Oh, have not her ways harmed thee sufficiently already? will not the burnt child dread the fire? Wilt thou again belie thy name, and live rather as the devil's slave than as God's child? Was the one sorrow and shame which thy sin heaped upon thy Saviour not sufficient, that thou must crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him anew to open shame? Shall the dove vie with the vulture in greed for foul food, or the lamb find satisfaction in the trough of the swine? As soon shouldest thou, child of God, love sin and its evil ways." Let us remember for our great comfort, when well-nigh despairing of deliverance from the dread power of sin, that Christ has as certainly promised to deliver us from this, the power of sin, as he has from its guilt. The earnest look of trust to him, pleading his promise herein,—this repeated day by day, and especially when we know that "sin is nigh," will break its mastery, and win for us the freedom we need.—C.

Vers. 20—37.—*Jehovah's indictment against Israel.* Note—

I. ITS MANY COUNTS. 1. Their *sin of outrageous character.* It is spoken of as in ver. 20, because it so commonly involved the grossest fleshly sins, and because it involved shameful denial of God. Cf. ver. 27, "Saying to a stock, Thou art my father," etc. And it was chargeable with numerous and shameful murders (ver. 30). Killing the prophets of God; ver. 34, "In thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents," etc. 2. *Of long standing.* Ver. 20, "Of old time thou hast broken thy yoke" (see exegesis for true translation), "and saidst, I will not serve." 3. In *no wise chargeable to God.* Ver. 21, "Yet I had planted thee a noble vine," etc. 4. Was *ingrained into their very nature* (ver. 22). All manner of endeavour had been made to cleanse away the defilement, but its stain remained in them still. 5. Was *fiercely and determinately pursued after* (vers. 23, 24, 33; see exegesis). They "worked all uncleanness with greediness." 6. And this in spite of all that might have taught them better. (1) Warnings (ver. 25, where they are entreated to have done with such wickedness). (2) Miserable results of their idolatry in the past (vers. 26—28). (3) Divine chastisements (ver. 30). (4) God's great mercy in the past (ver. 31). God had not been to them as a wilderness. (5) The honour and glory God was ready to place upon them (ver. 32), like as a husband would adorn his bride with jewels. 7. And their sin is aggravated by (1) their shameless assertion of innocence (vers. 23, 35); (2) their persistence in sin (ver. 36), "gadding about to change their way," going from one idolatry to another, one heathen alliance to another.

II. THE MISERABLE DEFENCE OFFERED. It consisted simply in denial (vers. 23, 35). It augmented their guilt and condemnation (ver. 37).

III. THE INSTRUCTION FROM ALL THIS FOR OUR OWN DAY AND FOR OUR OWN LIVES.

1. It shews us the terrible nature of sin. (1) The lengths it will go. (2) The gracious barriers it will break through. (3) The condemnation it will surely meet. 2. It bids us not trust to any early advantages. Israel was planted "a noble vine, wholly a right seed." 3. The folly and guilt of denying our sin (cf. 1 John i. 8, "If we say that we have no sin," etc.). 4. The needs be there is for us all of the pardoning and preserving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.—C.

Ver. 22.—*The sinner's attempt to wash away his sin.* I. WHEREFORE HE MAKES THE ATTEMPT. Sometimes it is that (1) conscience is aroused; or (2) the Word of God is too plainly against him; or (3) Divine providence threatens ominously; or (4) like Felix, he trembles as some Paul preaches.

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH HE PROCEEDS. 1. He partially abandons known sin, as Pharaoh, Nineveh, Israel at time of Josiah's reformation, Herod. 2. Multiplies religious services. 3. Is ready with good resolves. 4. There is some stir of religious feeling. Tears are shed, the emotional nature is excited, and there is some temporary tenderness of conscience. Added to all this there may be: 5. Self-inflicted punishments, bodily mortifications. Such is the washing with nitre and the taking of much soap which the prophet describes.

III. ITS USELESSNESS. The stain of the iniquity is there still (ver. 22). How powerfully is this confessed in the great tragedy of 'Macbeth'! After his dread crime, the conscience-stricken wretch thus speaks—

> "How is't with me, when every noise appals me?
> What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes!
> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green—one red."

IV. THE TRUE CLEANSING WHICH IT SUGGESTS AND INVITES US TO. Isa. i. 18, "Come now, and let us reason together," etc.—C.

Ver. 25.—*A dread snare of the devil.* I. IN WHAT IT CONSISTS. The persuading the sinner that "there is no hope."

II. ITS TERRIBLE CHARACTER. It leads the sinner to excuse himself in his sin by the false belief that he is delivered to do all his abominations. It encourages him to go on in his sin (cf. ver. 25), instead of resolutely breaking away from it.

III. HOW MEN FALL INTO IT. By letting sin become the habit of their lives; the constant repetition of separate sinful acts forges the chain of habit, which it is hard indeed for any to break through.

IV. HOW MEN MAY GET OUT OF IT. 1. By prayerful pondering of the many proofs which show that this suggestion of Satan, that "there is no hope," is one of his own lies. These proofs are to be found in the plain statements, and in the many examples of the Word of God, which tell of God's grace to the very chief of sinners. They are to be found also in the recorded biographies and observed lives of many of the people of God. And also in our own experience of God in the past. 2. By then and there committing our souls into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ for pardon, for restoration, and for safe keeping for the future. 3. By renewing this self-surrender day by day, and especially when we are conscious that danger is near. So shall we be able to say, "My soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler."—C.

Vers. 36, 37.—*The restlessness of sin.* "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way?" etc.

I. THIS IS A COMMON COURSE OF CONDUCT IN SINFUL MEN.

II. THE REASONS FOR ADOPTING IT ARE OF VARIOUS KINDS. 1. Hope of larger gain. 2. Prospects of increased pleasure. 3. Disappointment with the way that has hitherto been tried. 4. Conscience will not be quiet in continuing the present way, etc.

III. BUT IT IS ALL OF NO AVAIL. The same wretched result is reached whichever way is taken (vers. 36, 37).

IV. GOD IN ALL THIS IS SAYING, "LET THE WICKED FORSAKE HIS WAY, AND THE UNRIGHTEOUS," ETC. (Isa. lv.).—C.

Ver. 2.—*God's estimation of his people's love.* A remarkable passage: to be taken in its evident meaning, and not to be explained away. What a loving use to make of the past faithfulness and attachment of his people! He would remind them of them, that they may repent and return.

I. IT IS FULL OF INTEREST TO HIM. To those who feel intense love for others, it is exceedingly grateful to find their love reciprocated. High, pure, disinterested love, like that of God for men, never receives equal return; but what it does elicit it prizes beyond all its intrinsic value. The parent thinks more of the child's love for him than the child of the parent's. 1. *It spoke of trust.* There is no fear or selfishness in love Divine love awakens. The wilderness could not daunt the simple hearts of faithful Israel. They were willing to take God at his word, and to look for the land of promise. So with respect to Christ. 2. *It spoke of gratitude.* He had saved them from Egypt's bondage, and made them his own freemen. No service was too arduous; no trial too severe. Jesus has saved us from sin and its consequences; we owe to him a deeper gratitude. 3. *It spoke of an affection that was its own reward.* There was delight in the presence and communion of God. Worship was rapture. The chief interest of life was spiritual and Divine. The life of Israel was separated and sanctified to God. Love that could manifest itself thus was a sign and guarantee that the love of God had not been in vain.

II. ITS FAILINGS ARE CONDONED BY ITS GENUINENESS. No mention is made of their murmurings, their disobedience, and unbelief. Where the true spirit of Divine love is exhibited God can forgive defects, etc. To him it is enough for the present that we do our best, and are true and earnest. So at the first signs of repentance he is willing to forget all our offences. What is good and real in men, is of infinitely more value to him than we can imagine, and for the sake of that he is willing to cover the guilty past. This is all the more precious a trait in the Divine character that it *does not spring from ignorance* of us. He knows us altogether, our secret thoughts, our down-sitting and our uprising. The readiness of God so to forgive and to overvalue past love and trust on the part of his people, ought to fill us with compunction and shame. We ought to ask, "Was *this* our love?" "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred," etc.?

III. THOUGH TRANSIENT, IT ELICITS AN ETERNAL ATTACHMENT AND LEAVES AN UNDYING MEMORY. "I remember." It ought to be a strong motive to the Christian to think that his little works of faith and labours of love are so highly prized, and so long remembered. "For thy works' sake." Who would not rather charge the memory of God with such gracious memories, that "heap up wrath against the day of wrath"?—M.

Vers. 2, 3.—*First love to God.* We have here a picture of the idyllic days of the soul's first love for God. The emphasis is on the sentiment—its depth, reality, and attractiveness. It is spoken of as something in which God delights; as in the odour of a rose, the beauty of a landscape, or the pleasant melody of a song.

I. IT IS ATTRACTIVE. For its spontaneity; its spirit of self-sacrifice; and its absoluteness.

II. IT IS IMMEDIATE IN ITS INFLUENCE UPON CHARACTER AND LIFE. Generous sacrifice. Dominance of spiritual aims and interests. Personal holiness.

III. IT IS FULL OF PROMISE. Not only what it is, but what it may become. In one sense the bud is more valuable than the leaf, or flower, or fruit. It has the interest of growth and the future about it. Israel's best gifts, then, were to God but "first-fruits." God only knows what capacity of spiritual progress and enlargement is ours; and he alone can tell the influence and importance of his people's faithfulness.—M.

Ver. 3.—*Guilty instruments of Divine judgment.* A great problem in morals. Pharaoh's "heart is hardened," and yet his guilt remains. Nations are raised up to punish Israel for unfaithfulness, yet they "offend" in doing this very thing.

I. WHEREIN THE GUILT OF INSTRUMENTS OF DIVINE VENGEANCE MAY CONSIST. At least two explanations of this are to be found: 1. *In the distinction between the formal and the material character of actions.* The essential evil or good of an action is in the

intention, the subjective conditions that originate and give character to it. It is subjective, not actualized; or its actualization in one of several forms or directions is indifferent. Towards any of these the Divine power may direct the impulse and tendency; or they may be shut up to them through the unconscious influence of providence, working in wider cycles. 2. *In the overdoing or aggravation of the appointed task.*

II. WHAT IT IS THAT AGGRAVATES THE GUILT OF THE WICKED INSTRUMENT OF DIVINE WRATH. It is the character of God's people, and the relation they bear to him. They have been "holiness unto the Lord." In so far as this character is interfered with or injured by the instruments of vengeance, the latter shall be the more guilty. In so far, too, as hatred for this character, either as past or present, in God's people has actuated the vengeance inflicted, the avengers "shall offend." (Cf. for a similar sentiment, Matt. xviii. 6.) The Divine Being declares his personal attachment to those he has chosen, and his identification with them. To injure them is to injure him. They also represent, even in their apostasy, the stock from which salvation is to come, and the world's spiritual future.—M.

Vers. 4—9.—*The indictment of Israel.* The chosen nation is arraigned in all its generations and in all its orders. It is a universal and continuous crime; and it ran parallel with a succession of unheard-of mercies, deliverances, and favours. In these respects it corresponds to the sin of God's people in every age—forgetfulness of past mercy, abuse of present blessings, the corruption and perverseness of those who were entrusted with Divine mysteries and sacred offices.

I. JEHOVAH APPEALS TO HIS CHARACTER AND DEALINGS IN THE PAST IN DISPROOF OF THERE BEING ANY EXCUSE IN THEM FOR THE SIN OF HIS PEOPLE. Inquiry is challenged. History is rehearsed. So it always has been. The reason for the sins, etc., of God's people is in themselves and not in God. God is just, and all the allegations and murmurs of unbelieving and disobedient Israel are lies. So the excuses Christians often give for their faults and offences are already answered in advance. We have received from him nothing but good. His help and protection were at our disposal; but we forsook him, and sinned against both him and ourselves.

II. THE ENORMITY OF THE OFFENCE IS THEN SET FORTH. The recital is marked by simplicity, symmetry, force, and point. It contains the undeniable commonplaces of history and experience, but the artist's power is shown in the grouping and perspective. 1. *It is ancient and hereditary.* The fathers, the children, and the children's children. Just as they could not go back to a time when God had not cared for them and blessed them, so they could not discover a time when they or their forefathers had not shown unbelief and ingratitude. It is pertinent to ask in such a case, "Must there not be some hereditary and original taint in the sinners themselves?" What will men do with the actual existence of depravity? How will they explain its miserable entail? Human history in every age is marked by persistent wickedness; Christianity suggests an explanation of this. It is for objectors to substitute a better. 2. *It consists in ingratitude, unbelief, and the service of false gods.* The Exodus with all its marvels and mercies, the blessings that surrounded them in the present, go for nought. They are forgotten or ignored. And idols, which are but vanity, are sought after to such an extent that their worshippers "are like unto them." This is the history of religious defection in every age. Forgetfulness of God, ingratitude, and the overwhelming influence of worldly interests and concerns, and the lusts of our own sinful nature, work the same ruin in us. How many idols does the modern world, the modern Church not set up? 3. *It is marked by the abuse of blessings and the breach of sacred trusts.* When men are rendered worthless by their sinful practices, they cannot appreciate the good things of God. Divine bounty is wasted, and blessings are abused. Sacred things are desecrated. Those who ought to be leaders and examples are worse than others. The priest who, if any one, ought to know the "secret place," "the holy of holies," of the Most High, is asking where he is. The lawyers are the greatest law-breakers. The pastors, who ought to guide and feed, are become "blind mouths." And the prophets are false. *Corruptio optimi pessima.* How hard is the heart that has once known God! "If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!" The backslider, the child of holy parents, etc., who shall estimate their wickedness?

III. FOR ALL THESE THINGS MEN WILL BE BROUGHT INTO JUDGMENT. The assurance is very terrible: "I will yet plead with" (*i.e.* reckon with or plead against) "you, . . . and with your children's children will I plead." This is the same Jehovah who "keepeth mercy for thousands," but "visiteth the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." There is a solidarity in Israel, Christendom, and the race, which will be brought to light in that day. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," and to bear our offences in the company of transgressors and the universal connection of the world's sin. "But as in Adam all have died, so in Christ shall all be made alive." Jesus is set forth as the Head and Representative of the humanity he redeems. Let us seek oneness with him through faith.—M.

Vers. 10—13.—*The marvel of unbelief.* A magnificent apostrophe. Yet this is no mere rhetoric. There is a terrible reality in the phenomenon to which attention is directed. Chittim, the general name of the islands and coast of the eastern Mediterranean, stands for the extreme west; and Kedar, the general name of the Arabs of the desert for the extreme east of the "world," with which the prophet and his hearers were familiar. Our "from China to Peru" would represent its meaning to us.

I. THE CONSIDERATIONS THAT MAKE IT MARVELLOUS. The people themselves were but dimly conscious of the strangeness of their apostasy. The prophet seeks to rouse their better nature by the most striking comparisons and illustrations. 1. *He compares it with the general fixedness of heathen systems.* A tendency to subdivide and stereotype life in the family, society, and the state is shown by idolatry. Idolatries reflect and pamper human desires and ideas, and enter into the whole constitution of the people. They undermine the moral life and spiritual strength, and flourish upon the decay they have made. Their victims are helpless because they are moribund or dead. The words of Isaiah are justified in such a case; "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it," etc. This is the reason of the perpetuation of error and superstition; but the fact is there all the same, and it is in striking contrast to the vacillation and apostasy of God's people. That which only appears to be good is clung to with reverence and tenacity from age to age. That which is acknowledged to be best, and in part realized to be so, is cast aside repeatedly. 2. *Look too at the character of him who is forsaken.* He has already told them a little of God's doings (vers. 5—7). Now it is sufficient to describe him as the "Glory" of Israel. The heavens, which look at everything all the world over, are to wonder and to be horror-struck at this unheard-of ingratitude and folly. 3. *Disadvantage and dissatisfaction must evidently result.* The action of the apostate is twofold—negative and positive. Describe the figure. How great the labour of worldliness; and its disappointment!

II. HOW SUCH CONDUCT CAN BE ACCOUNTED FOR. If it were the result of genuine and honest experience, it might be fatal to the claims of Jehovah. But it is explained by: 1. *The influence of the near and sensible.* The physical side of our nature is more developed than the spiritual. Our need appeals to us first and most strongly on that side. Abraham, who pleaded for Sodom, lied for Sarah. Jacob, the dreamer of Bethel, is the craven at Penuel. How unaccountable the yielding of the man of God to the false prophet (1 Kings xiii.)! After David's signal escapes and deliverances, he yet said in his heart, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." Elijah, after all his miracles and testimonies, sighs out, "Let me die." Peter, upon whose witness Christ was to found his Church, is addressed as he is ready to sink at the vessel's side, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Paul, who had withstood them "that seemed to be pillars," quails beneath the "thorn in the flesh." 2. *The demands made by true religion. Self has to be denied.* The whole carnal life is condemned. *Diligence* is insisted upon. We have to "pray without ceasing," to labour and not faint. We have to "press toward the mark for the prize." *Patience* is demanded, and the Christian profession commits us to *indefinite sacrifice.*—M.

Ver. 18.—*The unreasonableness of appealing to worldly assistance in spiritual enterprises.* This was the tendency of Israel when her faith grew weak. It is shown even now by those who trust to the arm of flesh, and who seek worldly alliances for the Church. We ought to be deterred from this when we consider—

I. THE OPPOSITION OF THE CHARACTER AND AIMS OF THE WORLD TO THOSE OF SPIRITUAL RELIGION.

II. THE UNRELIABLENESS OF THE WORLDLY.

III. THE DISHONOUR AND SPIRITUAL PERIL OF SUCH ALLIANCES.—M.

Ver. 19.—*God's method of punishing apostasy.* I. ITS OWN SIN IS TO FIND IT OUT.

II. THAT THE TRUE CHARACTER OF ITS ACTIONS AND THE BITTER FRUITS OF ITS SIN MAY APPEAR.—M.

Vers. 26—28.—*The shameless shame of idolatry.* I. ITS DEGRADING INFLUENCE. It violates all morality. Is repeatedly affronted by the discoveries which are made of its wickedness and folly. It affects the whole nation from the highest and the best. The reason is debased and set at nought.

II. CALAMITY IS THE TEST OF ITS PRETENSIONS. Whilst things go well with the idolater he forgets God or consciously dishonours him. But when he is overtaken with the consequences of his evil deeds he is not ashamed to call upon God. The unreasonableness and inconsistency of this conduct are no barrier to it. Beneath the unbelief and worldliness of men there is a tacit belief in the goodness and power of God. In prosperity they are idolaters, in adversity they find their way back to the God they had despised. This is the universal and permanent inconsistency of the world life.—M.

Ver. 28.—"*Lords many and gods many.*" The multiplicity of idols contrasts with the unity of the true God. It involves inconsistency, spiritual confusion, etc. But here the argument is—

I. THAT IDOLATRY IS A LOCAL, EXCLUSIVE, AND SEPARATIVE PRINCIPLE.

II. IT IS THUS THE CREATURE AND THE OCCASION OF IGNORANCE, PREJUDICE, AND DISCORD.

III. IT IS THEREFORE BOUND TO DISAPPEAR BEFORE THE LIGHT AND PROGRESS OF HUMANITY.—M.

Ver. 30.—*Rejecting the chastisements of God.* The spiritual benefits of pain, calamity, etc., are contingent for the most part upon their being received in a right way—as from God, and not by accident. They are intended to discover our sins to us, and to lead us to the love and righteousness of God. Where this result is not effected, "chastisement is not accepted."

I. THE POSSIBILITY OF REFUSING CHASTISEMENT.

II. MISERY AND PAIN ARE NOT OF THEMSELVES MINISTERS OF GRACE.

III. RIGHTLY RECEIVED, OUR GREATEST GRIEFS MAY BECOME OUR GREATEST MERCIES.—M.

Ver. 35.—*The plea of innocence a culminating sin.* We do not know to which particular charge this reply is given. Perhaps the key is contained in 2 Kings xxiii. 26. An external reformation was considered enough in the reign of Josiah, and it was assumed that the anger of God was thereby turned away. The prophet assures them that this was a mistake, and more than this, a sin in itself.

I. DEADLY SIN MAY EXIST IN THE MIND WHICH IS NOT SPECIALLY CONSCIOUS OF IT.

II. SUCH UNCONSCIOUSNESS EXHIBITS PERVERTED MORAL NATURE AND CALLOUSNESS OF HEART.

III. IT PROVOKES THE MORE SEVERE JUDGMENT FROM GOD.—M.

Vers. 1—8.—*Israel's desertion of Jehovah viewed in the light of the past.* Desertion rather than apostasy is the word by which to describe the offence charged against Israel in this chapter. Apostasy from principle is too abstract and unemotional a way of putting the thing. The spectacle presented to us is that of one person deserting another in the basest and most ungrateful way. It is a desertion without excuse, aggravated by every circumstance which can aggravate it. And now Jehovah sends his servant to bring the reality of this desertion distinctly before the nation. And suitably enough he sends him to "cry in the ears of Jerusalem." Whatever is sounded forth in the capital by a man who has had the words of God put in his mouth may be expected to go to the ends of the land.

I. THE WHOLE NATION IS SPOKEN TO. God has the power to look at human life in the light of a unity which the individual man is scarcely able to conceive. Here he looks not only at the living generation of those who had sprung from Jacob, but all backward through the past; each generation is, as it were, a year in the life of one who still lives, and is able to look back on things that happened centuries ago as events of his own youth. Thus not only is it true that one generation goes and another comes, while *God* abides for ever, but it is also true that while one generation goes and another comes, Israel abides for ever. Israel is spoken to as a full-grown man might be spoken to, exhorted in the midst of backsliding and unworthy habits to look back on the far different promise of his youth.

II. THE NATION IS SPOKEN TO AS SUSTAINING A MOST ENDEARING RELATION TO GOD. Even as a husband loves and cherishes his wife, so God has loved and cherished Israel. He looks back into the past, and he sees a great fall. The youth of Israel, according to his present view of it, was a time of love and devotion. No doubt there were murmurings and rebellions; and indeed, when we think of some of the things that Israel did during the leadership of Moses, the words of God seem exaggerated in speaking of the kindness of Israel's youth and the love of its espousals. But then we must bear in mind that we know only in a very imperfect way what is recorded, whereas God saw all, and to him the enthusiasm of the people on certain memorable occasions was very significant. He remembered all those events in which Israel rose to the height of its better self, and indicated the possibilities that might be expected from it. Such events now stand forth like sunny heights in memory. They are reasons why God should not allow his people quietly to depart, further and further, into the alienations of idolatry. This is what makes the present attempt at restoration so full of interest, that it is an attempt to bring back the erring spouse to her first love.

III. The nation is viewed in the light of A PAST IN WHICH JEHOVAH HAD MADE GREAT PROMISES AND ENTERTAINED GREAT EXPECTATIONS WITH REGARD TO ISRAEL'S FUTURE. They were reckoned a holy nation. They were as firstfruits of the whole earth, to which he attached an especial value. Levi he brought in sacred nearness to himself in lieu of the firstborn of Israel. It is one of Christ's distinctions that he has become the firstfruits of them that slept; and so here there was a nation which was the first to step out from long-accustomed idolatry. The glory of Abraham's faith in the unseen was still, as it were, resting on Israel in the wilderness. Jehovah told the people where to go; he gave them bread, water, and defence against enemies, in a land of peculiar desolation and danger. Promises for the future were given in the most effective way by distinguished services rendered in the present. When at last the Israelites settled down in Canaan, it might have been said to them, "May you not be sure that he who has freely, amply, and just at the right time, supplied your every need, will also, in all the generations to come, whatever their peculiar experiences, do the same thing?" God had taken his people into the deepest darkness, and put out every earth-enkindled light, just that he might manifest in greater glory and attractiveness that light which is the portion of all unwavering believers in himself. Thus the past of Israel glorified the God of Israel; and at the same time, it not only disgraced Israel itself, but had in it such elements of God's favour and assiduity as made the national desertion of him a great mystery.

IV. OBSERVE HOW COMPLETELY IT IS BROUGHT OUT THAT THE DESERTION IS A NATIONAL ACT. The *priests* appointed mediators in offering and atonement between Jehovah and his people; the *expounders of the Law*, whose business it was to keep ever manifest the difference between right and wrong; the *shepherds*, such, for instance, as every father at the head of his household, providing and guiding; the *prophets*, who should have been the messengers of Jehovah;—all these, far away from their right place, are found in the very forefront of iniquity. Jehovah is not only ignored; he is almost treated as if he were unknown. The people carelessly let their superiors think for them. When the priest in the parable went by on the other side, the inferior Levite would have thought it presumption to have acted differently.—Y.

Vers. 10, 11.—*Heathendom gives an unconscious rebuke to apostate Israel.* From a humiliating contrast of the present conduct of Israel with what might have been reasonably expected from the peculiar experiences of the past, God now turns to

make a contrast more humiliating still with heathen nations. The request to look *back* is succeeded by a request to look *round*. Search through every nation, inquire in every idol temple, watch the religious life of idolaters, and everywhere you will see a fidelity which puts the apostate children of Israel to shame. The heathen gods themselves Jehovah has indeed put to shame, notably the gods of Egypt and Philistia; but in spite of all, the heathen are still clinging to the falsehoods in which they have been taught to believe. Their fanatical devotion is, indeed, a pitiable thing, but even in the midst of all that is pitiable, God can find something to be used for good. This very fidelity to what is so false and degrading may be used to point a keen reproach to those who owe but do not pay allegiance to Jehovah.

There is thus suggested as a topic the UNCONSCIOUS REBUKES WHICH THE WORLD GIVES TO THE CHURCH. The heathendom on which Jehovah bade his people look has long passed away. In spite of the fidelity here indicated, the temples have fallen into ruin and the idols are utterly vanished. Nay, more; increasing signs come in from year to year, that all heathendom is gradually dissolving, so that, in one sense, Jehovah's words may be said no longer to apply. But we know that, in the spirit of the words, they continue to apply only too forcibly. It is but the *form* of the idol that passes away; the reality is the same. Thus he who calls himself and wishes to be thought a believer in Christ, does well to look out and see what he can gather by way of spiritual instruction and rebuke from the world. The world has much to teach us if we would only learn. Jesus himself gave the New Testament parallel when he spoke of the children of the world being wiser in their generation than the children of light. And though we should be very foolish to pay any attention to the world, when it puts on the air of a wiseacre and talks with the utmost self-conceit of things it does not understand, there is all the more reason why we should learn all we can by our own divinely directed observation. How the world rebukes us, for instance, every time we see *men of science searching after truth!* Think of the patient attention given day after day with the telescope, the microscope, and all the apparatus of the experimentalist in physics. Think of the perils and privations of the traveller in tropic and in arctic zones. Think of the unwearied hunting of facts, for possibly a whole lifetime, in order to turn some hypothesis into an established truth. And we also have truth to attain. Jesus and his apostles often spoke of truth which we have to make our own; understanding it, believing it, and making it part of our experience. But that truth assuredly is not to be won without effort. The question may well be asked if such differences would continue to exist among Christians as do exist, provided they only set themselves in reality and humility to discover all that may be known on the subject-matter of their convictions. A man of science, for instance, would not grudge the labour needed to learn another language, if he felt that an increase of knowledge would prove the result to be worth the labour. But how many Christians can be found who have any notion that it might be worth their while to learn the Greek Testament for themselves instead of depending upon even the best of translations? Again, the world rebukes us as we consider *the enthusiasm of terrestrial citizenship*. There is much for the Christian to learn as he contemplates the spirit breaking forth in many men at the thought of the land that gave them birth. How the feelings of such men glow to fever heat with the exhibition of a national flag, the singing of a national anthem, or the mention of great military and naval triumphs, with the names of the captains who achieved them! Then think of what is better still, the unwearied labours of social reformers, simply from love to their country, to lessen crime, vice, disease, and ignorance. In view of all this deep attachment to the land where the natural man has sprung into existence and is sustained, may not Christ well ask his people, if the heavenly πολιτεία into which they have been introduced by the second birth, is as dear to them? Then, what a rebuke comes to us as we look at *the efforts of commercial enterprise*. What toil there is here! what daring investments of capital! what quick combinations of the many to attain what cannot be done by the one! what formation of business habits so as to make easy and regular what would otherwise be difficult, perhaps impossible! And yet it is all done to get that wealth on which the Scriptures have so many warning words to speak. As these gods of the nations were no gods, so the wealth men think so much of is really no wealth at all. We are not to look towards the goal of their desires, nor follow in their steps. But as earnestly as they look towards the goal of an

earthly fortune, we should look towards that of a heavenly one. As we stand among men clinging to riches which they cannot keep, and clinging none the less firmly because the riches are hollow, let us bear in mind how easy it is for us who are but sinful mortals also to be deluded away into neglect of the true riches.—Y.

Ver. 13.—*Forsaking the fountain of living waters.* I. THERE IS SUGGESTED HERE AN INCONCEIVABLE ACT OF FOLLY. It is a thing which could be believed of no one in his sound senses that he would leave a fountain of living water, knowing it to be such, and enjoying the use of it; and be contented with a cistern such as is here described. A fountain is that from which he benefits without any trouble; it is a pure gift of grace, and all he has to do is to take up his habitation by it. Why, then, should he leave a fountain for a cistern, even if the cistern were ready-made? Still less credible is it that he should take the trouble to make a cistern. And the incredibility reaches its height when we are asked to suppose him doing all this with the end of possessing a broken cistern that can hold no water. Such broken cisterns the people of Israel seem to have known only too well. Dr. Thomson says there are thousands such in Upper Galilee, which, though dug in hard rock and apparently sound, are all dry in winter; at best they are an uncertain source of supply, and the water, when collected, is bad in colour and taste, and full of worms. The whole action, then, of the character here indicated is scarcely conceivable, unless as the expression of fear in a diseased mind. In somewhat of this way we have heard of men acting, who, after having made great fortunes, have become victims to the horrid delusion that they are paupers, and must make some sort of provision against utter destitution. So we might imagine the victim of delusion, with fountains all round him, still insisting upon having some sort of cistern provided. Note, moreover, that the aspect of folly becomes more decided when we consider that it is *water* which is treated in this way. The water which is offered so freely and continuously in the fountain is a thing which man *needs*, and yet it is for the supply of that which is a great and may be a painful need that he is represented as depending on broken cisterns which with great toil he has constructed for himself.

II. THERE IS MENTIONED AN INDISPUTABLE ACT OF DESERTION. Israelites, stung to wrath by a charge of folly, might reply that they had not left a living fountain for broken cisterns. This, however, was but denying the application of a figure; the historical fact which the prophet had connected with the figure they could not possibly deny. Assuredly they had forsaken God. Not simply that at this time they were without him, but, having once been with him, they had now left him. Had he not taken them up when they were in the weakness, dependence, and waywardness of national infancy? Had they not received all their supplies from him, and gathered strength and prestige under the shelter of his providence? They owed the land in which they lived, and the wealth they had heaped up, to the fulfilment of his promises, and yet they were now worshipping idols. Their worship was not a momentary outbreak like the worship of the golden calf, soon after leaving Egypt, and when they had so long been living in the midst of idolaters. It was a steady settling down into the worst excesses of an obscene and cruel worship, after long centuries during which the Mosaic institutions had been in a place of acknowledged authority. What extenuations there may have been for this apostasy are not to be considered here. The thing insisted upon is the simple undeniable fact of the apostasy itself.

III. THIS DESERTION OF JEHOVAH IS DIVINELY ASSERTED TO BE AN ACT OF THE GROSSEST FOLLY. We have noticed the figure under which this act is set forth; and if Israel meant to get clear of a humiliating charge, it was only by denying that God was indeed a fountain of living water. The figure, therefore, resolves itself into a sort of logical dilemma; and the fact is clearly shown that in spiritual affairs men are capable of a folly which, in natural affairs, they are as far from as possible. Man holds within him a strange duality of contradictions. In some directions he may show the greatest powers of comprehension, insight, foresight; may advance with all the resources of nature well in hand. But in other directions he may stumble like a blind man, while around him on every hand are piled up the gracious gifts of a loving and forgiving God. There is no special disgrace to any individual in admitting what a fool he may be in spiritual things. In this respect, at all events, he is not a fool above other fools. He

may see many of the wise, noble, and mighty of earth who have lived and died in apparent neglect as to the concerns of eternity and the relation of Christ to them. Men toil to make securities and satisfactions for themselves, but if they only clearly *saw* that they are doing no better than making broken cisterns, their toils would be relinquished the next moment. It is but too sadly plain how many neglect the revelations, offers, and promises of God; but who can doubt that if they could only really see him to be the true Fountain of living waters, the neglect would come to an end at once?—Y.

Ver. 26.—*A shame to be ashamed of.* There is, as Paul tells us (2 Cor. vii.), a godly sorrow and a sorrow of the world; a godly sorrow working out a repentance never to be regretted, and a sorrow of the world which works out death. So there is a shame and humiliation which is profitable in the right way and to the highest degree, when a man comes into all the horrors of self-discovery, and is ready to declare himself, feeling it no exaggeration, as the chief of sinners. Such a shame is indeed the highest of blessings, since it gives something like a complete understanding of what human nature owes to the cleansing blood of Christ, and to the renewing power of the Spirit. But there is also shame and humiliation such as the gaoler at Philippi felt when he suspected his prisoners were gone, and degradation was impending over him at the hand of his masters. It is to such a shame that our attention is directed here. The shame of a thief, not for the wrong he has done, but because he is detected in the doing of it. Israel, we see, is being dealt with in very plain language. Already the nation which God had so favoured, and from which he had expected so much, has been spoken of as lower than an idolater. And now it is likened to the thief in the moment when his knavery is discovered. Consider, then, as here suggested—

I. WHY THE SINNER SHOULD BE ASHAMED. The thief, of course, ought to be ashamed, and ashamed whether he is caught or not. He ought to come into such a state of mind as to acknowledge his offence and make restitution, even when otherwise his offence might remain undiscovered. He should be ashamed because he has done wrong; because he has broken a commandment of God; because he lives on what has been won by the industry and toil of his neighbours; because, in addition, he is robbing his neighbours of what benefit should have come to them from his own industry and toil. Some have enough to make them bow their heads in despair of ever being able to make restitution; and it is just when we thus begin to estimate the sense of shame that should fill the thoughts of the thief that we also come to have a clear idea of what a universal feeling amongst mankind shame should be. "The thief should be thoroughly ashamed of himself," you say, "in all possible ways." True, he ought. But now take to mind the home-pressing words of the apostle, "Wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (Rom. ii. 1). Nay, there may be more to be said for the thief than for thee. Only too often he has a bad start, and no real chance of getting out of bad associations. He may get so hemmed in with temptations as to find it very difficult to resist. And in any case, the thief has no more cause to be ashamed of his theft than any other sinner for his own particular mode of self-indulgence. God does not draw the distinctions which we are compelled to do, between wrongs that are crimes and wrongs that are not crimes. His distinctions are made on altogether different principles—principles which abide. If the thief has wronged his neighbour in one way, be sure of this, that you have wronged him in another. If the thief has sinned against God in one way, you have sinned against him in another. You may go through the world without the slightest fear of anything leaping to the light such as will bring the detective's tap upon your shoulder, and nevertheless you have yet to be bowed in unspeakable bitterness of shame because you have been defrauding God and missing the great end of life. What is wanted is that all of us should come to ourselves—being guided by that unerring Spirit which guides into all truth, and self being revealed by the light of the cross and of eternity.

II. WHY THE SINNER ACTUALLY IS ASHAMED. Discovery is what he dreads; discovery puts him in utter confusion. Discovery is disgrace and ruin, so far as his future relation to men is concerned. Henceforth he passes into a suspected and avoided class; he has lost the mark of respectability and confidence. The sad thing is that, in

the eyes of a large part of mankind, discovery seems to make all the difference. One may do a great deal of wrong with social impunity, if only there is cleverness enough to keep on the hither boundary of what is reckoned criminal. Those who are most serenely indifferent to the Law of God will fall into all sorts of sins, real and far-reaching evils, rather than transgress a certain social code. It is not so long ago since the duel ceased to be a part of the social code of England; and what a curious standard of honour was involved in such a practice! There are countries still where a man is disgraced if he refuses to fight; if he fights and kills his man it is reckoned no shame at all. The most immoral and debauched of men are yet curiously sensitive to what they choose to consider points of honour. People will plunge over head and ears into debt, and run into the wildest extravagance, that they may flourish a little longer in the social splendour which they know they have not the honest means to maintain. They feel it is a greater disgrace to sink in the world than to be unable to pay their debts. How needful it is for the Christian to take up all positions which he feels to be right—right according to the Divine will, no matter how much he may be exposed to the reproach of folly, Quixotism, and fanaticism! Let us pray that we may ever have a godly shame when the light of heaven is thrown on us, and we are contrasted with God in his holiness and Jesus in his perfect manhood. Let us equally pray that we may never be ashamed of Jesus. It is a harder thing than many seem to think, even though they are constantly acknowledging in hymn and prayer what they owe to Jesus in the way of gratitude and service.—Y.

Ver. 37.—*Why the confidences of men do not prosper.* The people of Israel are set forth, even within the limits of this one chapter, as having multiplied and extended their confidences; and yet it could not be said that they were prospering. Men with the religious element in their nature strongly clamouring for satisfaction, had turned to the gods of neighbouring nations, and multiplied these objects of worship until it could be said, "According to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah." God compares them to thirsty people who, with a copious fountain in their midst, work and toil to make cisterns, only to find that the end of their labour is in broken cisterns which can hold no water. And then, when their broken cisterns had proved quite unavailing, they fly to drink of Nile and of Euphrates. Evidently their confidence had not prospered, and a continuance and increase of adversity was threatened, the cause of it all being that their confidences were such as God, in his righteousness and majesty, must inevitably reject. Consider—

I. WHY THIS QUESTION AS TO THE SUFFICIENCY OF HUMAN CONFIDENCES IS SO IMPORTANT. The answer is that men cannot do without confidences. The events of a single day of life might be registered in such an aspect as to show what a confiding creature man is. Faith has become so much a habit with him as to be almost a second nature. Hence, even in the great concerns of life, we find many reposing trust with very little inquiry. Looking at others, we find their lives proving the need of confidence by the very frequency of doubt and irresolution in them. They are ever asking the question, yet never quite able to answer it, "What is the best thing for me to do?" And then, as so often happens, the end of hesitation and perplexity is, that they seem to have no choice at all, and go submissively towards the confidence that happens to be most inviting at the moment. Seeing, therefore, that we are compelled to have confidences, it is of the first importance to discover in what sort of confidences prosperity will alone be found.

II. MANY ACTUAL CONFIDENCES OF MEN PROVE FAILURES IN THE END. They approach men invitingly, they seem to stand well in the judgment of past generations, they may be the objects of very general approval, and yet, when they are searched into, when the truth concerning them is got from the bottom of the proverbial well, that truth is seen to be well expressed in the words which say men have not prospered in them. There is, for instance, a very plausible appearance of prosperity in worldly wealth. Many fail to acquire it, and when they acquire it, fail to keep it; but this is held to come in the majority of cases from some fault in the man, and not in the stability of his possessions. To say that a possession is as safe as the Bank of England is to utter the strongest conviction as to its stability and security; and yet such confidences fail because they are not enough for *the whole man*. It is just one of the perils of

wealth that man should let his whole heart rest upon it; should come to let the comforts, occupations, and hopes of life depend upon external possessions. There is failure also when men put confidence in self, confidence in present views of life, present feelings, present vigour of body and mind, in natural qualities, such as shrewdness, self-control, presence of mind, and in habits of attention, industry, and promptitude, that have been cultivated. What manifest failure also often comes from too much confidence in the judgment of man! The counsels of the wisest, most experienced, most successful of men, must be listened to with discretion.

III. THE REASON WHY SUCH CONFIDENCES DO NOT BRING PROSPERITY IS MADE PLAIN. They are not confidences after God's own heart. They are an ungodly waste of affections and energies given for higher purposes and more durable occupations. The practical lesson is that we should reject all confidences if we are not made quite certain that God approves them. Blessed is that man who has found his way, it may be through many losses and agonizing pains, to the truth that the unseen is more trustworthy than the seen, the eternal than the temporal. One who has thus risen into the sphere of Divine realities may have his confidences rejected and despised of men. What do these rejections matter? He who has firm hold of God himself need not to care for contemptuous words. The hard words of worldly men cannot destroy spiritual prosperity.—Y.

Ver. 13.—*The people's sin.* This is the sum and substance of the charge the prophet was called to bring against Israel. Idolatry was their destroying sin, the root of all their discords and miseries. It involved the renunciation of their allegiance to the God of their fathers, and in this their conduct was without a parallel. No instance of such apostasy could be found elsewhere. Those whom God had chosen to be witnesses for him before all the world were put to shame in this respect by the very heathen whom it was their mission to enlighten and bless. But we may regard this as the condemnation of the whole human race. "They have forsaken," etc. Note the view we get here—

I. OF THE BEING OF GOD AND THE RELATION HE SUSTAINS TOWARDS US. "The Fountain of living waters" (see also ch. xvii. 13; Ps. xxxvi. 9). 1. *He is emphatically the Living One.* The grand distinction of the Bible is that it reveals "the living God." The Name Jehovah, the mysterious and incommunicable Name, was expressive of this. "And God said to Moses, I AM THAT I AM," etc. (Exod. iii. 14). Absolute existence—essential, independent, necessary being—is the idea it conveys. The knowledge of such a spiritual Being, of a personality kindred with our own but absolutely exempt from its limitations, is our supreme need. David did but utter forth the insatiable longing of our nature for its true home, its only possible resting-place, when he cried, "My soul thirsteth for God, yea, for the living God." We want, not mere vague impressions of infinitude and eternity, but an Infinite and Eternal One in whom we may trust. Not mere abstract ideas of truth, and beauty, and righteousness, and love, but One of whom these are the unchanging attributes, and to whom, in the frailty of our nature, we can fly for refuge. "Our heart and our flesh cry out for the living God." 2. *He is the Giver and Sustainer of all other forms of spirit-life.* The "Fountain" of life; all other existences are dependent upon him. "The Father of spirits;" "we also are his offspring;" "in him we live and move and have our being." Whether our spirit-life once given can ever become extinct again may be a matter of doubt and controversy, but certainly it cannot be regarded as absolute and necessary existence. Though God may have endowed our nature with his own immortality, we do not possess immortality in the sense in which he does. "He only hath immortality." Ours is not self-existent being; it is dependent on him from whom it came—an outflow of the "Fountain" of life. 3. *He is the Source of all that nourishes, enriches, and gladdens this dependent creature-life*—"the Fountain of living waters." "Living waters" are the Divine satisfactions of the human soul. The Scriptures abound with similar figurative representations (Gen. ii. 10; Zech. xiv. 8; John iv. 14; Rev. xxii. 1, 17). Every age has had its witness to the truth that man's real satisfactions are only to be found in God. In Christ that witness is perfected, that truth verified. "This is the record," etc. (1 John v. 11, 12). Here are the conditions of infinite blessedness for every one of us. To be separated from God in Christ, to turn away from him, is to

perish, to doom yourself to the pangs of an insatiable hunger and a quenchless thirst. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee," etc. (John xvii. 3). This is death eternal—*not* to know him, to refuse the knowledge of him, to dream that you can live without him.

II. THE FOLLY AND EXCEEDING SINFULNESS OF SIN. The "two evils" here spoken of are but two forms, two sides, of one and the same thing. There is the self-willed departure from God, and there is the endeavour in that to lead a self-determined and self-sufficient life. 1. *They have forsaken me.* All sin is a forsaking of God. Adam turned his back on God when he listened to the voice of the tempter. The prophet rebukes here the shameful idolatries of the people. Think what idolatry means. It has, no doubt, its fairer side, in which it is seen to be the ignorant but still honest expression of the religious sentiment in men—the blind "feeling after God if haply they may find him." But think how it arose, and what its issues have been. St. Paul tells us how it was born of the corruption of man's nature, and has ever since been the Satanic means of deepening that corruption (see Rom. i. 20, *et seq.*). So is it with every sinful life. It begins with a more or less intentional and deliberate renunciation of God. The exact point of departure may not be very definitely marked; but as the life unfolds itself, the fact that this is its true meaning becomes more manifest. How marvellous a picture of this dread reality of moral life does our Lord's parable of the prodigal supply! Such is the history of prodigal souls. Happy are they who "come to themselves" before it is too late to return to the forsaken home of the Father. 2. *The dream of a self-determined and self-contained life.* "They have hewed them out cisterns" of their own, which shall render them, as they think, independent of the "Fountain of living waters." Here is the idea of a proud endeavour to find in one's self and one's own self-willed way all necessary good. But it is altogether vain. The cisterns are miserably shallow, and they are "broken." It is true of every man, indeed, that his satisfactions must spring from what he finds within rather than from his earthly surroundings; but then he is "satisfied from himself" only because he has learnt to link himself with the Divine Source of all blessedness—the living God.

"Here would we end our quest;
Alone are found in thee
The life of perfect love, the rest
Of immortality."

W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

That this chapter (to which the first four verses of ch. iv. ought to have been attached) belongs to the time of Josiah seems to be proved by ver. 6, and the years immediately following the reformation are not obscurely referred to in vers. 4, 10. Naegelsbach gives a striking distribution of its contents. The general subject is a call to "return." First, the prophet shows that, in spite of Deut. xxiv. 1, etc., a return is possible (vers. 1—5). Then he describes successively an invitation already uttered in the past, and its sad results (vers. 6—10), and the call which will, with a happier issue, be sounded in the future (vers. 11—25); this is followed by an earnest exhortation, addressed first to Israel and then to Judah (ch. iv. 1—4).

Ver. 1.—**They say,** etc.; as the margin of Authorized Version correctly states, the Hebrew simply has "saying." Various ingenious attempts have been made to explain this. Hitzig, for instance, followed by Dr. Payne Smith, thinks that "saying" may be an unusual equivalent for "that is to say," "for example," or the like; while the Vulgate and Rashi, followed by De Wette and Rosenmüller, assume an ellipsis, and render, "It is commonly said," or "I might say." But far the most natural way is to suppose that "saying" is a fragment of the superscription of the prophecy, the remainder of which has been accidentally placed in ver. 6, and that we should read, "And the word of the Lord came unto me in the days of Josiah the king, saying." So J. D. Michaelis, Ewald, Graf, Naegelsbach. **If a man put away his wife.** The argument is founded on the law of Deut. xxiv. 1—4, which forbade an Israelite who had divorced his wife to take her again, if in the interval

she had been married to another. The Jews had broken a still more sacred tie, not once only, but repeatedly; they worshipped "gods many and lords many;" so that they had no longer any claim on Jehovah in virtue of his "covenant" with his people. **Shall he return, etc.?** rather, *Ought he to return?* The force of the term is potential (comp. Authorized Version of Gen. xxxiv. 7, "which thing ought not to be done"). **Shall not** in the next clause is rather *would not.* **Yet return again to me.** So Peshito, Targum, Vulgate, and the view may seem to be confirmed by the invitations in vers. 12, 14, 22. But as it is obviously inconsistent with the argument of the verse, and as the verb may equally well be the infinitive or the imperative, most recent commentators render, "And thinkest thou to return to me?" (literally, *and returning to me!* implying that the very idea is inconceivable). Probably Jeremiah was aware that many of the Jews were dissatisfied with the religious condition of the nation (comp. ver. 4).

Ver. 2.—**Lift up thine eyes,** etc. No superficial reformation can be called "returning to Jehovah." The prophet, therefore, holds up the mirror to the sinful practices which a sincere repentance must extinguish. **The high places;** rather, *the bare hills* (comp. on ch. ii. 20). **In the ways hast thou sat for them.** By the roadside (comp. Gen. xxxviii. 14; Prov. vii. 12). **As the Arabian in the wilderness.** So early was the reputation of the Bedouin already won (comp. Judg. vi.). Jerome *ad loc.* remarks, "Quæ gens latrociniis dedita usque hodie iucursat terminos Palæstinæ."

Ver. 4.—**Wilt thou not, etc.?** rather, *Truly from this time thou callest unto me* (literally, *Dost thou not,* etc.? a common way of giving an energetic assurance). The prophet admits the apparent revival of faith in Jehovah which attended the compulsory reformation under Josiah, but denies that it was more than apparent (comp. ver. 10). **The guide of my youth;** rather, *the companion* (the familiar associate); so in Prov. ii. 17. Comp. ch. ii. 2, and especially Isa. liv. 6, "and a wife of youth" (*i.e.* married in youth), "that she should be rejected [how incredible a thing!]"

Ver. 5.—**Will he reserve?** rather, *Will he retain,* etc.? It is a continuation of the supposed address of Judah. **To the end?** rather, *everlastingly?* **Behold, thou hast spoken,** etc.; rather, *Behold, thou hast spoken it, but hast done these evil things, and hast prevailed* (i.e. *succeeded*). The substance of the two verses (4 and 5) is well given by Ewald: "Unhappily her power truly to return has been exhausted, as not long ago after fresh signs of the Divine displeasure she prayed in beautiful language to [Jehovah] for new favour and abatement of the old sufferings, [but] she immediately fell again into her sin, and carried it out with cool determination."

Ver. 6.—**The Lord said also unto me,** etc. It has been suggested (see on ver. 1) that this introductory clause belongs rather to ver. 1. Some sort of introduction, however, seems called for; Ewald supposes a shorter form, such as "And the Lord said further unto me." The view is not improbable, for although there is evidently a break between ver. 5 and ver. 6, there are points of contact enough between vers. 1—5 and the following discourse to prove that they represent the same prophetic period (comp. ver. 10 with ver. 3, vers. 8, 9 with ver. 1, ver. 12 with ver. 5, ver. 19 with ver. 4). **Backsliding Israel;** literally, *apostacy Israel.* Usually a change or modification of a name is a sign of honour; here, however, it marks the disgrace of the bearer. Israel is apostacy personified (comp. vers. 14, 22). **She is gone up;** rather, *her wont hath been to go up.*

Ver. 7.—**And I said after she had done,** etc.; rather, *and I said, After she hath done all these things, she will return unto me.* **And her treacherous sister.** Observe the distinction between the two sisters. Israel had openly broken the political and religious connection with Jehovah (Hos. viii. 4); Judah nominally retained both, but her heart was towards the false gods (comp. the allegory in Ezek. xxiii., which is evidently founded upon our passage).

Ver. 8.—**And I saw, when for all the causes,** etc.; rather, *and I saw that even because apostate Israel had,* etc. But this is exceedingly strange in this connection. The preceding words seem to compel us either (with the Vulgate) to omit "and I saw" altogether, or (with Ewald) to read the first letter of the verb differently, and render "and she saw," taking up the statement of ver. 7 ("saw; yea, she saw," etc.). The latter view is favoured by a phrase in ver. 10 (see note below). The same corruption of the text (which is palæographically an easy one) occurs probably in Ezek. xxiii. 13. The error must, however, be a very ancient one, for the Septuagint already has καὶ εἶδον.

Ver. 9.—**Through the lightness of her whoredom;** *i.e.* through the slight importance which she attached to her whoredom. So apparently the ancient versions. The only sense, however, which the word *kôl* over has in Hebrew is not "lightness," but "sound," "voice," and perhaps "rumour" (Gen. xlv. 16). Hence it is more strictly accurate to render "through the cry," etc. (comp. Gen. iv. 10; xix. 13), or "through the fame," etc. (as Authorized Version, margin). But neither of these seems quite

suitable to the context, and if, as King James's translators seem to have felt it necessary to do, we desert the faithful translation, and enter on the path of conjecture, why not emend *kōl* into *k'lōn* (there is no *vav*, and such fragments of true readings are not altogether uncommon in the Hebrew text), which at once yields a good meaning —"through the disgrace of her whoredom"? Ewald thinks that *kōl* may be taken in the sense of *k'lōn*; but this is really more arbitrary than emending the text. **With stones,** etc. (see ch. ii. 27).

Ver. 10.—**For all this**; *i.e.* though Judah had seen the punishment of apostate Israel (ch. iii. 7, 8). So Rashi, Naegelsbach, Payne Smith. Most commentators suppose the phrase to refer to Judah's obstinate wickedness (ver. 9), but this gives a weak sense. "Judah defiled the land, etc., and yet notwithstanding her repentance was insincere" —this is by no means a natural sequence of ideas. The right exposition increases the probability of the correction proposed at the beginning of ver. 8.

Ver. 11.—**It is very noteworthy that Jeremiah should have still so warm a feeling for the exiles of the northern kingdom (more than a hundred years after the great catastrophe). Hath justified herself.** "To justify" can mean "to show one's self righteous," as well as "to make one's self righteous," just as "to sanctify" can mean "to show one's self holy" (Isa. viii. 13), as well as "to make one's self holy." In spite of Israel's apostacy, she has shown herself less worthy of punishment than Judah, who has had before her the warning lesson of Israel's example, and who has been guilty of the most hateful of all sins, hypocrisy (comp. ver. 7).

Ver. 12.—Israel, therefore, shall be recalled from exile. Her sins are less than those of Judah, and how long and bitterly has she suffered for them! **Toward the north.** For Israel had been carried captive into the regions to the north of the Assyrian empire (2 Kings xvii. 6; xviii. 11). Comp. the promise in ch. xxxi. 8. **I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you**; rather, *my face to fall towards you* (i.e. upon your return).

Ver. 13.—*The condition of restoration to favour.* Israel is to acknowledge, or perceive, notice, recognize, her guilt. **And hast scattered thy ways**; alluding to that "gadding about" in quest of foreign alliances, reproved in the preceding chapter (ii. 36). Comp. "interlacing her ways," ch. ii. 23.

Ver. 14.—**Turn, O backsliding children.** There is a play upon words, or rather upon senses, in the original, "Turn, ye turned away ones" (comp. ver. 12). To whom is this addressed? To the Israelites in the narrower sense, for there is nothing to indicate a transition. Long as they have been removed from the paternal hearth, they are still "sons." **For I am married unto you.** The same Hebrew phrase occurs in ch. xxxi. 32. Its signification has been a subject of dispute. From the supposed necessities of exegesis in ch. xxxi. 32, some (*e.g.* Pococke and Gesenius) have translated, "for I have rejected you," but the connection requires not "for" but "though," which, however, is an inadmissible rendering; besides, the Hebrew verb in question nowhere has the sense of "reject" elsewhere (yet the Septuagint already has it, virtually at least, in ch. xxxi. 32, *q.v.*). The literal meaning is *for I have been a lord over you*, i.e. a husband. Israel is despondent, and fears to return. Jehovah repeats his invitation, assuring Israel that he does not regard the marriage bond as broken. He is still (in spite of ver. 8) the husband, and Israel the bride (comp. Hos. ii.; Isa. l. 1; liv. 6, etc.). **One of a city, and two of a family.** The promises of God are primarily to communities, but this does not prevent him from devoting the most special care to individuals. "One of a city, and two of a family," even though there should be but one faithful Lot in a city, and two such in a family (larger than a city, a single tribe containing only a few *mishpākhōth*, or clans), yet I will admit these few to the promised blessings." Calvin's remark is worth noticing: "Hic locus dignus est observatu, quia ostendit Deus non esse, cur alii alios expectent; deinde etiam si corpus ipsum populi putrescat in suis peccatis, tamen si pauci ad ipsum redeant, se illis etiam fore placabilem." The historical facts to which the prophecy corresponds are variously regarded. Theodoret, Grotius, etc., suppose it to have been fulfilled exclusively in the return from Babylon; St. Jerome and others think rather of the Messianic period. Hengstenberg finds a continuous fulfilment, beginning at the time of Cyrus, when many belonging to the ten tribes joined themselves to the returning Judahites. He finds a further continuation in the times of the Maccabees, and in fact a continually growing fulfilment in preparation for that complete one brought in by Christ, when the promised blessings were poured out upon the whole δωδεκάφυλον (Luke ii. 36). "Zion and the holy land were at that time the seat of the kingdom of God, so that the return to the latter was inseparable from the return to the former." Dr. Guthe, however, the latest critical commentator on Jeremiah, thinks that the passage can be explained otherwise, viz. "from each city one by one, and from each family two by two." This gives a more obvious explanation; but the ordinary rendering is more natural, and the explanation based

upon it is in the highest degree worthy of the Divine subject. The doubt, of course, is whether in the Old Testament a special providence is extended elsewhere so distinctly to the individual. But Jeremiah is pre-eminently an individualizing prophet; he feels the depth and reality of individual as opposed to corporate life as no one else among the prophets. (At any rate, one point is clear, that the prophet foresees that the number of the exiles who return will be but small compared with the increase to be divinely vouchsafed to them; see ver. 16.)

Ver. 15.—**Pastors.** In ch. xxiii. 4, the same word is rendered in the Authorized Version "shepherds," which would be less open to misunderstanding here than "pastors," civil and not spiritual authorities being intended (see on ch. ii. 8). The prophecy is, of course, not inconsistent with passages like ch. xxiii. 5, but as the national continuance of Israel was guaranteed, it was natural to refer to the subordinate civil authorities. **According to mine heart;** better, *according to my mind;* for here, as also in 1 Sam. xiii. 14, it is something very far from perfection which is ascribed to the chosen rulers. "Heart" is sometimes equivalent to "understanding."

Ver. 16.—**When ye be multiplied;** a common feature in pictures of the latter days (ch. xxiii. 3; Ezek. xxxvi. 11; Hos. ii. 1). **They shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord.** A definition of the Messianic period on its negative side—the ark shall be no longer the centre of religious worship. We must remember that the ark is represented in the Law as the throne of Jehovah, who was "enthroned upon the cherubim" on the lid of the ark. It is in virtue of this sacramental presence that the temple is called the "dwelling-places" of Jehovah (*e.g.* Ps. xlvi. 4; lxxxiv. 1, where Authorized Version has wrongly "tabernacles"). Now, in the Messianic period the consciousness of Jehovah's presence was to be so widely spread, at any rate in the centre of God's kingdom, the holy city, that the ark would no longer be thought of; it would be, if not destroyed (we know, as a matter of fact, that the ark was destroyed in some unrecorded way), yet at least become utterly unimportant. Jerusalem would then naturally succeed to the title "Jehovah's throne" (applied to the temple in ch. xiv. 12). **Neither shall it come to mind.** The same phrase is used of the old heaven and earth as compared with the new (Isa. lxv. 17). In the concluding clauses, "visit" should rather be "miss," and "that be done" should be "it [viz. the ark] be made." On the whole subject of the prophetic descriptions of the worship of the Messianic period—descriptions which often wear at any rate a superficial appearance of inconsistency, see the luminous remarks of Professor Riehm, 'Messianic Prophecy,' pp. 161—163. At the same time, we must be extremely cautious how far we admit that Old Testament prophecies of the latter days have received a complete fulfilment in the Christian Church, considering how far the latter is from the realizable ideal, and also the importance attached in the New Testament as well as in the Old to the continuance of Israel as a nation.

Ver. 17.—*Jerusalem's spiritual glory.* With Jeremiah's description, comp. that of Ezekiel, "The name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there" (xlviii. 35). This gives us the positive aspect of the Messianic period (comp. on ver. 16). Jerusalem shall be the spiritual centre of the universe, because it is pervaded by the presence of the Most High (comp. Isa. iv. 5). May we explain with Dr. Payne Smith, "Jerusalem, *i.e.* the Christian Church"? Only if the provisional character of the existing Church be kept well in view. **All the nations;** *i.e.* all except the chosen people. The word for "nations" (*goyim*) is that often rendered "heathen." **To the name;** or, *because of the name*, i.e. because Jehovah has revealed his name at Jerusalem. The phrase occurs again with a commentary in Josh. ix. 9, "Thy servants are come because of the name of Jehovah thy God, for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt." But we must not suppose that "name" is equivalent to "revelation;" rather, there is here an ellipsis—"because of the name" is equivalent to "because of the revelation of the name," or better still, ". . . of the Name." The "Name of Jehovah" is in fact a distinct hypostasis in the Divine Being; no mere personification of the Divine attributes (as the commentators are fond of saying), but (in the theological sense) a Person. The term, "Name of such and such a God," is common to Hebrew with Phœnician religion. In the famous inscription of Eshmunazar, King of Zidon, Ashtoreth is called "Name of Baal;" and to whichever proper name the religious term Name may be attached, it means a personal existence in the Divine nature, specially related to the world of humanity; or, to use the language of Hengstenberg, the bridge between the latter and the transcendent heights of God as he is in himself. In short, the Name of Jehovah is virtually identical with the Logos of St. John, or the second Person in the blessed Trinity. Hence the personal language now and again used of this Name in the Old Testament, *e.g.* Isa. xxx. 27, "The Name of Jehovah *cometh* from far . . . *his lips* are full of

indignation;" Isa. xxvi. 8, "The desire of our soul was to thy Name;" Isa. lix. 19, "So shall they fear the Name of Jehovah from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun." Comp. also Prov. xviii. 10; men do not run for safety to an abstract idea. Nor will all nations in the latter days resort either to a localized or to a spiritually diffused Jerusalem in the future, to gratify a refined intellectual curiosity. Neither shall they walk, etc.; *i.e.* the Israelites of the latter days; not the "nations" before mentioned (as Hengstenberg). The phrase occurs eight times in Jeremiah, and is always used of the Israelites. The word rendered "imagination" is peculiar (*shĕrirûth*). As Hengstenberg has pointed out, it occurs *independently* only in a single passage (Deut. xxix. 18); for in Ps. lxxxi. 13, it is plainly derived, not from the living language, from which it had disappeared, but from the written. (The close phraseological affinity between the Books of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah has been already indicated.) The rendering of the Authorized Version, which is supported by the Septuagint, Peshito, Targum, is certainly wrong; the Vulgate has *pravitatum;* the etymological meaning is "stubbornness." The error of the versions may perhaps have arisen out of a faulty inference from Ps. lxxxi. 13, where it stands in parallelism to "their counsels."

Ver. 18.—The reunion of the separated portions of the nation (comp. Ezek. xxxvii. 16, 17; Hos. i. 11; Isa. xi. 12, 13). Observe, Israel is converted first, then Judah. This detail in the prophecy is not to be pressed. Not that the force of any prophecy is to be evaded, but that in this case the form of the statement is so clearly conditioned by the abounding sympathy of the prophet for the ten tribes. These had been so long languishing in captivity that they needed a special promise. The form of the promise is imaginative; this seems clearly to follow from the fact that in no other passage (except, indeed, ch. xxxi. 9) is there a reference to the spiritual primacy of Ephraim in the restored nation. **Out of the land of the north**; *i.e.* Assyria and (ch. i. 14) Babylonia. The Septuagint inserts, "and from all the countries," agreeably to ch. xvi. 15; xxiii. 8; xxxii. 37. Of course, it would not be an accurate statement that the exiles from Judah were confined to "the land of the north." This is a fair specimen of the supplementing tendency of the Septuagint, though it is possible, and even probable, that the Hebrew text has suffered in a less degree from the same tendency on the part of later copyists.

Ver. 19.—The concluding words of the last verse have turned the current of the prophet's thoughts. "Unto your fathers." Yes; how bright the prospect when that ideal of Israel was framed in the Divine counsels! Condescending accommodation to human modes of thought. **But I said** fails to represent the relation of this verse to the preceding. Render, *I indeed had said*, and continue, *How will I*, etc. **Put thee among the children.** This is a very common rendering, but of doubtful correctness. It assumes that, from the point of view adopted (under Divine guidance) in the prophecies of Jeremiah, the various heathen nations were in the relation of sons to Jehovah. This is most improbable; indeed, even Exod. iv. 22 does not really favour the doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God in the fullest sense of the word. Moreover, the pronoun rendered "thee" is in the feminine, indicating that the prophet has still in his mind the picture of Israel as Jehovah's bride. It would surely be an absurd statement that Jehovah would put his bride among the children! Render, therefore, *How will I found thee with sons!* comparing, for the use of the Hebrew verb, 1 Sam. ii. 8, and for that of the preposition, Isa. liv. 11. It is, in fact, the familiar figure by which a family or a nation is likened to a building ("house of Abraham," "of Israel"). Jehovah's purpose had been to make Abraham's seed as the dust of the earth (Gen. xiii. 16). Instead of that, the restored exiles would be few, and weak in proportion, so that the Jewish Church of the early restoration period is represented as complaining, "We made not the land salvation, neither were inhabitants of the world produced" (Isa. xxvi. 18). A special Divine promise was needed to surmount this grave difficulty. **A goodly . . . nations**; rather, *a heritage the most glorious among the nations.* So in Ezekiel (xx. 6, 15) Palestine is described as "the glory of all lands." The want of irrigation, and the denudation of the land, have no doubt much diminished the natural beauty and fertility of Palestine; but wherever moderate care is bestowed on the soil, how well it rewards it! **Thou shalt call me . . . shalt not turn**; rather, *thou wilt call me . . . wilt not turn.* It is the continuation of Jehovah's ideal for Israel. In response to his loving gifts, Israel would surely recognize him as her Father, and devote to him all her energies in willing obedience. **Father** is here used, not in the spiritual and individualizing sense of the New Testament, but in such a sense as a member of a primitive Israelitish family, in which the *patria potestas* was fully carried out, could realize. The first instance of the individualizing use of the term is in Ecclus. xxiii. 1—4. (For the Old Testament use,

comp. Isa. i. 2; lxiii. 16; Exod. iv. 22; Hos. xi. 1.)

Ver. 20.—**Surely.** The word acquires an adversative sense from the context, as in Isa. liii. 4, and is virtually equivalent to "but surely." **From her husband**; literally, *from her friend* or *companion*. The choice of the word seems to indicate the inner hollowness of the married life. The woman only sees in her husband the companion, behind whose back she can follow her own inclinations.

Ver. 21.—Another of those rapid transitions so common in emotional writing like Jeremiah's. The prophet cannot bear to dwell upon the backsliding of his people. He knows the elements of good which still survive, and by faith sees them developed, through the teaching of God's good providence, into a fruitful repentance. How graphic is the description! On the very **high places** (or rather, *bare, treeless heights* or *downs*, as ver. 2) where a licentious idolatry **used to be** practised, **a sound is heard** (render so, not *was heard*)—the sound of the loud and audible weeping of an impulsive Eastern people (comp. ch. vii. 29). **For they have**; this evidently gives the reason of the bitter lamentation; render, *because they have*.

Ver. 22.—**Return, ye backsliding children,** etc.; more literally, *Turn, ye turned-away sons; I will heal your turnings* (as Hos. xiv. 4). It seems strange at first sight that this verse does not stand before ver. 21. But the truth is that ver. 21 describes not so much the "conversion" of the Jews as their willingness to "convert" (an archaism of King James's Bible, which we may well regret), or "turn" to God. Christ must touch, or at least make his presence felt, in order that the sick man may be healed; a special call of God must be heard, in order that the sinner may truly repent. **Behold, we come unto thee.** Efficacious, and not "irresistible" grace, is the doctrine of the Old Testament.

Ver. 23.—**Truly in vain,** etc. An obscure and (if corruption exists anywhere) corrupt passage, which, however, it is hopeless to attempt to emend, as the corruption consists partly in wrong letters, partly in omitted letters or words (or both); and, moreover, the text employed by the Septuagint appears to have presented the same difficulty. The latter point is especially noteworthy. It is far from proving that the traditional text is correct; what it does suggest is that the writings of the prophets were at first written down in a very insecure manner. The rendering of the Authorized Version is substantially that of Hitzig, who explains "the multitude of [the] mountains," as meaning "the multitude of gods worshipped on the mountains"—too forced an expression for so simple a context. It seems most natural to suppose (with Ewald, Graf, and Keil), a contrast between the wild, noisy cultus of idolatrous religions, and the quiet spiritual worship inculcated by the prophets. Compare by way of illustration, the loud and ostentatious demonstrations of Baal's ritual in 1 Kings xviii., with the sober, serious attitude of Elijah in the same chapter. The word rendered in the Authorized Version "multitude" has a still more obvious and original meaning, viz. "tumult;" and probably the Targum is not far from the true sense in rendering, "In vain have we worshipped upon the hills, and not for profit have we raised a tumult on the mountains."

Ver. 24.—**For shame**; rather, *and the Shame* (i.e. the Baal). The words *Bosheth* ("Shame") and *Baal* are frequently interchanged; so again in ch. xi. 13 (comp. Hos. ix. 10). So, too, Jerubbesheth stands for Jerubbaal (2 Sam. xi. 21; comp. Judg. vi. 32); Ishbosheth for Eshbaal (2 Sam. ii. 8; comp. 1 Chron. viii. 33). **Hath devoured the labour of our fathers,** etc.; a condensed way of saying that Baal-worship has brought the judgments of God upon us, our flocks and herds, and all the other "labour" (or rather "wealth," *i.e.* fruit of labour) of our fathers, being destroyed as the punishment of our sins (comp. Deut. xxviii. 30—32). Another view is that the "devouring" had to do with the sacrifices, but it is improbable that the sacrificial worship of Baal had developed to such a portentous extent, and the former explanation is in itself more suitable to the context.

Ver. 25.—**We lie down**; rather, *Let us lie down*; said in despair, just as Hezekiah says, "Let us enter the gates of Sheol" (Isa. xxxviii. 10). A prostrate position is the natural expression of deep sorrow (2 Sam. xii. 16; xiii. 31; 1 Kings xxi. 4). **Our confusion covereth us**; rather, *Let our confusion* (or *reproach*) *cover us* (*like a veil*) (comp. ch. li. 51; Ps. lxix. 7).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 4.—*Filial reminiscences of God.* We are here brought from the view of God as a Husband to that of him as a Father, for only when we consider his various relations

with us can we measure the depth of our sin or the motives we have for returning to him.

I. GOD'S PEOPLE CAN CALL TO MIND OLD MEMORIES OF HIS FATHERLY GOODNESS. 1. In our own experience of his grace he has revealed himself as a *Father*. He is the Source and Origin of life. In him we continue to exist (Acts xvii. 28). He is constantly protecting us and enriching us with his gifts. 2. God may be discerned as the *Companion of his people's early days*. (1) He was with his people—a Companion—not merely blessing them from a distance. (2) He was with his people as a *Friend*, holding kindly intercourse, condescending to intimate communion, accompanying them as a Stay and Solace through their pilgrimage. (3) He was with his people in their *youth*. None are too young to be honoured with the friendship of God. Happy are they who have been in communion with God from their youth up, instead of only coming to him at the eleventh hour! They enjoy the most of him, have longest time for his service, have most advantages for growing and ripening in religious experience. As we look back on our early days, we may often discern how God has been with us in dark scenes where his presence was unrecognized at the time, and has been sustaining and cheering us when we have not recognized the hand from which the comfort was coming.

II. OLD MEMORIES OF GOD'S FATHERLY GOODNESS MAY BE ABUSED. It would seem that the Jews often fell into this mistake. 1. *We may assume that the past blessing of God is all that we need.* Because we once enjoyed his presence we may be too ready to rest satisfied as though all must be well with us henceforth for ever. But we cannot live in the past. It is vain to waste our time in idle self-congratulations on our early devotion if later years have found us wandering far from God. We must not say that all is done that our souls need if we can point to an early time when we were introduced to filial relations with God. It is nothing to us that God was the Friend of our youth if he has been rejected in our later days. Indeed, this early memory will be our accuser for subsequent unfaithfulness. 2. *We may assume that if God was once our Father and Friend he will always stand in those relations to us.* But if we lose our first love we lose the blessings which are connected with it. The past is no security for the present. The momentous questions is, Do we now stand in a true filial relation with God? Is he still our Friend? If he was valued as a Companion in the freshness of youth, is he not wanted in the toils and battles of manhood? will he not be needed in the weariness of age? in the darkness and mystery of the lonely passage of death?

III. OLD MEMORIES OF GOD'S FATHERLY GOODNESS MAY BE CONSIDERED WITH PROFIT. 1. They may *reveal our subsequent unfaithfulness*. We compare ourselves with ourselves and see how we have fallen. 2. They may lead us to *see the blessedness of an earlier estate*, to be awakened to the loss we have suffered, and to be roused to the desire for a return to it. 3. They may *help us to trust God*. He was our Father and our Friend in early days. He is changeless. If, then, we repent and return to him, will he not permit us still to cry, "My Father;" and again to enter into the blessed influences of friendly fellowship with him? So the prodigal remembers his early days, and is induced by old memories to say, "I will arise and go to my father" (Luke xv. 18).

Ver. 10.—*Insincere repentance.* I. REPENTANCE IS INSINCERE WHEN IT DOES NOT POSSESS THE WHOLE HEART. Judah is accused of being "false," and of turning to Jehovah "feignedly," because she did not turn "with her whole heart." 1. True repentance must be found in the *heart*. Mere confession with the lip without a change of feeling is a mockery (Isa. xxix. 13). Simple amendment of external conduct is no repentance unless it is prompted by a sincere desire to do better, by a return to the love of goodness. 2. True repentance must possess the *whole* heart. It is not consistent with a lingering affection for sin. The penitent must not look back regretfully, like Lot's wife, on the pleasant things he is renouncing. Repentance must be for *sin*, not for certain sins selected from the rest for condemnation; it means the desire to abandon all wickedness. People sometimes repent insincerely by confessing and abandoning trifling faults, while they cling to greater evils. A right repentance searches the dark depths of the soul and brings forth old buried sins, forgotten but not yet forgiven, darling bosom sins which have grown into the very life and can only be torn out from a bleeding heart, common sins which are classed among a man's habits and which he

excuses to himself as being "his ways." Such repentance is no superficial emotion, no sentiment of the hour stirred in the church only to be forgotten as soon as a man re-enters his worldly associations. It must be thorough, profound, overwhelming. Yet it is not to be measured by the number of tears shed, but by its practical fruits, the solid proofs of a desire for a better life (Luke iii. 8—14).

II. INSINCERE REPENTANCE CANNOT BE ACCEPTED BY GOD. 1. Such repentance is *inexcusable.* Judah had failed to profit by the solemn lessons of her sister's sin and ruin. In face of such terrible warnings, how foolish to cling still to the old life even while pretending to turn from it! 2. Such repentance is only *self-deceiving.* The hypocrite would deceive God, but failing to do this he deceives himself. He is the dupe of his own design. For he imagines that his fraud will serve him some good purpose, whereas it is detected by God and frustrated from the first. 3. Such repentance is *useless.* Judah gains no deliverance by her feigned repentance. God is Spirit, and can only be approached in spirit (John iv. 24). Any other pretended return to him is no return. We do not come to God by simply entering a church, nor please him by the mechanical observance of an external service (Isa. i. 11—15). The insincere repentance is a double mistake, its trouble is all wasted, its tears all shed to no purpose, and the falsehood of it is a new offence increasing guilt before God. To turn to God only with the lip is thus not merely not to turn to him at all, it is to wander still further from him. Let us beware, therefore, of using the familiar language of confession if we are not really desiring to renounce sin and be reconciled to God. Let repentance, of all things, be true and whole-hearted.

Vers. 12, 13.—*God inviting the return of his sinful children.* This invitation is offered to "backsliding Israel" in preference to "false Judah" (ver. 11). There seemed to be more hope of the former. Openly wicked men are more easily led to repentance than hypocritical pretenders to goodness. Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Matt. ix. 12, 13), and his invitations were more readily accepted by publicans and reprobates than by Pharisees.

I. THE INVITATION IS FROM GOD. Before men return to God he seeks them. The Father calls to his children while they are yet in rebellion against him. In the quarrel between man and God all the wrong is on man's side, yet God is the first to bring about a reconciliation. 1. We have *not to reconcile God to us,* but to be reconciled to him (2 Cor. v. 20). Any difficulty on God's side has been removed by his own act in the sacrifice of his Son. Now it only remains for us to return. 2. We have *not to wait for God's willingness to receive us,* nor to persuade him. Already he has invited us, and he now waits to be gracious.

II. THE MOTIVE FOR THE INVITATION IS THE GOODNESS OF GOD. We must not imagine that there is in us any inherent attractiveness, any merit which in the eye of God outweighs our sin, any valuable qualities which make us necessary to him. The reason for God's anxiety to have his children return is simply his love for them, and this love is not derived from their worthiness, but from his nature. 1. It is because *God is "merciful,"* i.e. this is his peculiar characteristic; and mercy is exercised not according to desert, but according to need. Therefore the less man's desert is the greater will be the outgoing of God's mercy, because the deeper will be man's wretchedness. 2. It is because *God's anger is temporary,* while his mercy "endureth for ever." God says, "I will not keep mine anger for ever;" but he does keep his love for ever. We say "God is love," but we do not say "God is anger." He exercises anger when this is required, but to serve an end—to establish justice, to punish sin, etc., whereas he exercises love for its own sake. This latter is more fundamental, in the very heart of God, and outlives the wrath. Hence behind the passing anger that denounces and punishes, there is the eternal love that invites to reconciliation.

III. THE ONE CONDITION FOR ACCEPTING THE INVITATION IS THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GUILT. "Acknowledge thine iniquity." 1. This acknowledgment is *necessary.* We can only return to God by forsaking our sin, for it is just our sin which keeps us from him, and as long as this is retained must still keep us from him. Indeed, separation from God and sin are but two aspects of the same spiritual condition. We can only be forgiven when we admit our guilt, and only be welcomed by God when we humble ourselves before him. 2. This acknowledgment must be *complete.* It must

include a recognition of (1) positive disobedience—"thou hast transgressed," etc.; (2) the multitudinous variety of sins—"and hast scattered thy ways;" (3) the disregard of God's voice even when he has spoken in love and urged us to return. 3. This acknowledgment is *sufficient*. "*Only* acknowledge thine iniquity. No sacrifice, penance, or partial reformation is first required on our part. The new and better life must *begin* with our return to God.

Ver. 14 (second clause, "and I will take you," etc.).—*Religious individualism.* I. BY NATURE MEN LIVE SEPARATE, INDIVIDUAL LIVES. Man is social, yet he is personal. 1. Each soul has its own personality, separate from that of every other soul by immeasurable oceans. Sympathy unites souls, but does not destroy this individuality of being. Each soul has its own secret life, and the deeper the spiritual experience is the more lonely, hidden, and incommunicable will it be. There are dark recesses of consciousness in the shallowest heart which no stranger can fathom (Prov. xiv. 10). 2. Each soul has its own separate course to live, its peculiar privileges and privations, blessings and trials, its duties which no other soul can fulfil, its reserved heritage, its vast destiny. Starting from near points, our lives may branch out in all directions till they are utterly isolated in the lonely solitudes of the infinite possibilities of being. 3. Each soul has its own necessary variety of nature. No two are alike. The unity of mankind is a oneness, not of unison, but of harmony.

II. GOD DEALS WITH MEN SEPARATELY AND INDIVIDUALLY. 1. His love is towards men as individuals. The size of the human family is no impediment to this with an Infinite Being who possesses infinite capacities of thought and affection. Even among men the parent of a large family has as individual a love for each of his children as the parent of a small family. 2. God approaches man individually. The outward voice of invitation is general: "whosoever will" is invited. But the inward voice, in conscience and spiritual communion, is private. Yet this fact is not a restriction on our enjoyment of God's favours, for he speaks thus inwardly to all who will listen to him.

III. MEN MUST RETURN TO GOD SEPARATELY AND INDIVIDUALLY. Each must repent, trust, pray for himself. A nation can only return as the units return, "one of a city, and two of a family." We must enter the "wicket-gate" in single file. No association with Christendom, a Christian nation, a Church, a Christian family, will secure our personal redemption. Even families are divided here. Each must say for himself in the singular, "*I* will arise;" "*My* Father;" "*My* God." Still: (1) We may help one another, and owing to the influence of sympathy there may be "two of a family," while perhaps there is only "one of a city;" (2) after we return to God we may naturally unite in his service as his family, his Church, the one body of which Christ is the Head; and (3) though a few may return at first, it is to be the work of these few to increase their number till the whole apostate family is reconciled to God.

Vers. 16—18.—*The blessings of redemption.* The blessings which are here described as following the restoration of Israel are partly national and material in form, but they contain, in the heart of them, those deep spiritual elements of the Messianic ideas which constitute the blessings of redemption. Note the chief characteristics of these—.

I. THE NEGATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BLESSINGS OF REDEMPTION. 1. *Freedom from the old life of sin.* "Neither shall they walk any more after the stubbornness of their evil hearts." This implies (1) that the conquest of sin is itself a good to God's people, and not merely a painful and self-denying means for securing some other good; and (2) that this conquest is to be complete and final. Bad as were the subsequent failings of the Jews after the Captivity, they were cured for ever of their old sins of idolatry and of participation in the immoral and cruel rites of their neighbours' religions. Many as are the defects and falls of the Christian, these do not equal the evil of his old life. 2. *A change from the old habits of religion.* The Jews will no longer have the ark, the seat of a localized Divine presence, and they will not want this. We can never exactly recover the past. Paradise cannot be regained. The new Jerusalem will not be like the old garden of Eden. The restored Christian cannot return to the primitive innocence of childhood. But he need not altogether regret this impossibility. With the innocence of childhood there were associated its ignorance, its weakness, its restraints. With redemption there comes a new and larger life. The ark is lost; but

this need not be regretted since with it the limitations and material conditions of the Divine visitations are gone also.

II. THE POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BLESSINGS OF REDEMPTION. 1. *The enjoyment of God's full presence.* God's throne is to be no longer the mercy-seat at the ark: (1) confined to one small sanctuary; (2) separating the religious from the secular; (3) hidden from the common gaze of men. All Jerusalem will be God's throne. God will dwell in the midst of his people, revealed to all, consecrating the affairs of daily life (Zech. xiv. 20). 2. *The glorifying of God in the earth through the instrumentality of his people.* "All the nations shall be gathered," etc. God's people are honoured by being the means of attracting others to him. Thus they are "a city set on a hill" (Matt. v. 14). The blessings of the gospel in Christ are offered to the world. The glory of the Saviour and the joy of his people will be completed by the acceptance of them by all nations. 3. *Brotherly love.* The old enmity of Israel and Judah will cease (Isa. xi. 12, 13). Christ is the Prince of peace. His advent prepared the way for peace on earth. As his kingdom spreads, peace must also extend over the troubled world. Even now the individual Christian must find his joy in exercising the peaceful spirit and practising brotherly love (Heb. xiii. 1).

III. THE CONDITIONS FOR RECEIVING THE BLESSINGS OF REDEMPTION. 1. *Return to God in repentance.* This is implied in the previous verses. Repentance precedes restoration. 2. *Multiplication of numbers.* These blessings were to come after the people were "multiplied and increased." We cannot expect the full Christian blessings till the Church has grown largely in numbers. God has special blessings for his *Church.* The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, when the whole Church was gathered together (Acts ii. 1). These privileges of Christianity are of such a nature that they are not lessened by distribution, but the more they are scattered abroad, the more valuable do they become to every individual who enjoys them. 3. *A fitting time.* These blessings were not enjoyed at once. For some we still wait. "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed." Its growth is gradual; so is also the enjoyment of its blessings.

Ver. 22.—*Invitation and response.* I. THE INVITATION. 1. The *object* of the invitation. God calls on his people to return to him. Not simple reformation of morals, but the restoration of personal relations with God as the Father of his people is desired. 2. The *condition* of the invited. They are apostate children; *i.e.* (1) they are far from God, though (2) they were once near to him, and (3) they are still his children. As sinners, men have all lost a first estate of innocence, but have not lost, and can never lose, their filial relationship to God. Hence (1) the greatness of their guilt and (2) the hope of their restoration. 3. The accompanying *promise.* God invites and does not drive; he here exchanges threats for promises. God will heal, not simply receive his children. God alone can heal their apostacies. Man repents of sin, but God cures it. It is our part to turn from the evil, God's to destroy that evil. Sin is washed out, not by the tears of penitence, but by the blood of Christ. The healing is of the apostacies themselves, not simply of their painful effects. Christ saves from *sin.* This is what God most requires in us, and what we most need for our own blessedness (John i. 29).

II. THE RESPONSE. 1. An expression of *willing obedience.* "Behold, we come unto thee." This response must be *voluntary.* God waits for man's return, does not force it; since what he desires is not the abject submission of vanquished enemies, but the loving reconciliation of children. This response must also be *active.* "We come." The penitent does not simply "accept" the grace of God in a passive faith. He must "arise and go" (Luke xv. 18). This implies exertion of will, active obedience. 2. An indication of the *grounds* of that obedience. "For thou art the Lord our God." God invites by a promise of blessing to his people; they respond by turning from the thought of their own profit to that of the character and claim of God. The great motive to return is found in what God is rather than in what he does, because the return is to him and not merely to his blessings. Men will return to God when they see what there is in him to attract them to his feet. Hence the importance of knowing God (Job xxii. 21). Christ invites us by revealing the Father (John xiv. 6, 7). (1) We should think of the revealed *character* of God as a ground for returning to him. Israel returns by remembering the ancient Name "Jehovah," with its glorious significance and its sacred memories. (2) We should think of God's peculiar *relations* with

us. Israel thinks of "Jehovah *our* God." This relationship points to God's claim upon us, rising out of his recognized authority as "ours," and the special covenant bonds of those who have once yielded themselves to him, and also to the peculiar grace God bestows on his people, which both increases the obligation and facilitates the effort to return.

Ver. 23.—*From false to true salvation.* I. THE NEED OF SALVATION. This seems to be confessed before as much as after repentance. In both conditions Israel must turn somewhere for deliverance. 1. The need is *universal.* Israel was in national danger; but socially and privately men felt a vague sense of unrest and helplessness, and their heathen rites were a proof of this. The mystery of existence, the weariness of toil, the sorrow and disappointments of common experience, the terror of death, make men feel their helplessness. All religions witness to this fact. 2. The need is felt to be such that *only religion can meet it.* Men instinctively cry to their gods in the storm (Jonah i. 5). This element of religion is retained when every other vestige of it has vanished. This element is common to the most diverse forms of religion, the most degraded equally with the most elevated. Is not such a fundamental fact of human nature a ground for hope? Can we believe that such a deep, instinctive cry will meet with no response?

II. THE FALSE HOPE OF SALVATION. Israel had turned to the pagan worship on the hills for deliverance; but in vain. 1. Superficially regarded, there was *much to recommend this.* (1) It was conspicuous and imposing—on the hill-tops. (2) It was noisy; there was tumult on the mountains. The more noise and bustle there is in a thing the more important does it seem to those who forget that the real power is with "the still small voice" and the "gentleness" that makes great. (3) It was popular; in religious matters, as in all else, unthinking people go with the multitude. (4) It was multiform; not one temple service, but sacrifices on every hill. Unspiritual people put faith in the number of prayers, the amount of gifts, etc., rather than in the motive and spirit which prompt them. (5) It was easy to follow; it required no purity of life, no spiritual effort of faith. Men like a cheap religion. 2. *Experience proved the hope to be false.* The salvation was hoped for in vain. Heathen gods neither protected from external foes nor cured the internal wretchedness of Israel. This must have been the case, because (1) they were not gods at all, the ground of the hope did not exist; (2) the corruption which was permitted and encouraged in the rites with which these gods were served was the very source of the nation's ruin. The hope of salvation was the cause of destruction. So is it whenever men turn from God to lower grounds of confidence. The very apostacy thus committed is the source of the ruin which it is expected to avert. It is a great thing to have made the discovery of this fact. To see the mistake of the false hope is the first step towards deliverance.

III. THE TRUE HOPE OF SALVATION. "Truly in Jehovah our God is the salvation of Israel." 1. God only *can* deliver, since he only can control nations and subdue the hearts of individual men. 2. God *does* deliver by his providence in outward events and his spiritual help in the internal battle with sin. 3. God is *known* as the Deliverer by his actions in the past. Israel turns to "Jehovah *our* God," the God who had often shown himself as a Saviour. He who rightly reads the story of his own past life will see in it reasons for trusting God for the future. 4. God is *sought* as the Deliverer when all other refuges fail. After making the painful discovery mentioned in the earlier part of the verse, Israel comes to recognize the true salvation, but not till then. Trouble is good if it reveals the rottenness of our mistaken hope in time to set us free to seek the true hope. Yet how sad that men should need to have the veil thus forcibly torn from their eyes!

Vers. 24, 25.—*Shame.* I. SHAME IS THE NATURAL ACCOMPANIMENT OF GUILT. 1. *Distinguish shame from modesty.* Modesty is the fear of shame. Modesty shrinks from doing the thing which when done will result, or ought to result, in shame. Thus modesty pertains to innocence, shame to guilt. 2. *Distinguish natural shame from guilty shame.* Natural shame results from the exposure of what should be kept private but is pure in itself—this applies to spiritual as well as bodily delicacy; guilty shame is associated with that which, whether revealed or not, is morally bad. 3. *Distinguish*

false from true shame. The blush of innocence when falsely accused, the shrinking from the disapproval by others of conduct which we feel conscientiously bound to pursue, and similar feelings, are instances of the former. They simply result from weakness. Such shame is a needless pain, but it is only culpable when it leads to weak subserviency to what we know is not right—the fear of man which bringeth a snare. True shame is not simply the distressing consciousness of the disapproval of others, but the consciousness that this is well deserved.

II. REPENTANCE LEADS US TO REGARD SIN WITH SHAME. Israel then names Baal, the god of her former worship, "Shame." To the penitent "all things are new." The sins in which he gloried are now objects of the deepest shame. 1. Men must *see sin in a true light* to regard it with shame. The Israelites are here represented as confessing sin; they feel it is their own act: "We have sinned;" they feel that their fathers' sin does not extenuate the guilt of the new sin of the children, but, on the contrary, adds to the cumulative guilt of the nation. 2. When sin is thus regarded, the *shame is overpowering and overwhelming*: overpowering, for Israel says, "Let us lie down in our shame," there is no resisting the influence of it, it crushes to the dust in humiliation; and it is overwhelming, "let our confusion cover us;" such shame is no superficial and transient emotion. It is all-absorbing.

III. THE SHAME FOR SIN IS A WHOLESOME CORRECTIVE. Nothing is more painful. Self-love, self-conceit, and self-respect are all cruelly wounded. Yet the bitter medicine is a true antidote to the sweet poison of sin. 1. It opens our eyes to the *fatal consequences* of wickedness. In regarding Baal as "shame," the people seem to discover for the first time that he had "devoured the labour of their fathers from their youth." The passion of sin throws a false glamour about it and its effects which shame dissolves. 2. It serves as a *strong deterrent from future sin.* It makes our old ways look horrible, disgusting, contemptible. We wonder how we could have loved them, and so long as the shame lasts nothing could induce us to return to them. Unfortunately, shame soon dies away, and if disregarded leaves men harder than before. Therefore it should not be trusted in by itself, but used as a means to lead us to the enduring security against sin in Christ (Rom. viii. 1—5).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 4.—*A call to the young.* We need not hesitate so far to turn these words aside from their original meaning as to regard them as a Divine appeal to the young; especially if we understand that the prophet is here calling on Judah to return to the freshness of her "youth;" that "at this time," this hopeful reign of the good King Josiah, she should renew her covenant with Jehovah and the "love of her espousals" (ch. ii. 2). In the days of youth the heart is most freely open to Divine influences, and it may be expected to respond readily to such an appeal as this. Note—

I. THE DEEPEST TRUTH OF RELIGION IS THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD. That he is the Father of our spirits is the basis of his claims upon us. The quality of our religious thought, the drift of our religious opinions, the tone of our religious life, depend very greatly on our faith in this truth. Fatherhood is our highest conception of God, and includes within it all aspects of his being, and all the relations he sustains towards us. This crowns them all, embraces all. We cannot rise above and beyond it. Our ideas are essentially defective if we fall short of it. Not that the actual human fatherhood worthily represents it; that, at its best, is but a marred and broken copy—a feeble, distant reflection—of the Divine. And yet the essential elements remain in spite of accidental faults. Power, wisdom, love, judicial authority, kingly rule, protective tenderness,—these are the attributes of its ideal. And from the human, with all its imperfections and perversions, we rise to the Divine.

II. THE APPREHENSION OF THIS SACRED RELATIONSHIP IS SPECIALLY BEFITTING THE SEASON OF YOUTH. What more natural than that young people should think of God as their Father; that this idea of him should give shape and colouring to all their other religious ideas, and blend with all their views of life, and all their impressions of personal duty? Those who have grown old—old in the habit of frivolous thought, in the carnalizing ways of the world, in the debasing service of sin, are often dead to the im-

pression of it. Their hearts are too much estranged to feel its charm. But shall not they who still have the dew of their youth upon them, the bloom of its quick sensibility and pure affection, love to hear a *Father's* voice?

III. Nevertheless, THE FULL DISCOVERY OF THIS RELATION MARKS A CRISIS IN THE HISTORY OF ANY SOUL. It is generally connected with the painful discovery of sin and need. "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his Name's sake, . . . because ye have known the Father" (1 John ii. 12, 13). How suggestive is this of the hidden causes, the secret springs, the earliest realizations of Divine life in the soul! One of its first evidences is the recognition of the Father. The cry, "Abba, Father!" is the first that it breathes forth. But this comes with and through the recognition of Christ, the Son, the Saviour. "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son shall reveal him" (Matt. xi. 27). And it is a revelation that brings the assurance of "forgiveness for his Name's sake." The sense of dreary distance from God—guilt, shame, hunger, degradation,—this is the prelude to the sweet satisfactions of the life of sonship. It is the prodigal "coming to himself." When we are thus painfully feeling our way back to him, God comes forth in Christ to meet us, embracing us in the arms of his great love, breathing, weeping out upon us the infinite tenderness of his fatherly heart. Then we feel that we can dare to take that sacred name "Father" on our lips. It has a deep and blessed meaning in it never known before. And fear and shame and sorrow give place to the joy of eternal reconciliation.

IV. THE NATURAL RESULT OF THIS DISCOVERY WILL BE FULL PERSONAL SURRENDER TO THE FATHER'S GUIDANCE AND CONTROL. "Guide," literally, *Husband;* and the word "husband" is suggestive of all thoughtful and kindly guardianship, the wisdom that directs, and the strength that sustains. Youth needs such guardianship: 1. *Because of its special moral dangers*, worldly fascinations, Satanic temptations, acting on quick natural susceptibility. 2. *Because of its inexperience.* Experience is the growth of years. It is not of itself always the parent of the highest practical wisdom, but the want of it calls for the help of a superior power. 3. *Because of its weakness of moral principle.* There may be excellent natural dispositions, germs of Christian virtue in the soul, but they are not yet developed. They are but latent possibilities of good. When put to the test, they may be found wanting. God's grace alone can ripen them into mature and steadfast principles. 4. *Because beneath its fairest promise there may be hidden seeds of evil*, which only need the outward incentive to bring forth deadly fruit. 5. *Because the after-destiny depends so much on how the steps of youth are guided.* Let the young give heed to the Father's voice, and yield themselves to his loving control, if they would tread the path of honour and safety and blessedness.—W.

Ver. 22.—"*Backsliding Israel.*" "Backsliding" was the characteristic vice of the Jewish people throughout the whole course of their history. Their career was one of perpetual sinning and repenting, until the great apostacy, the final "falling away." And in this we see what is too often a truthful reflection of the individual life of men. The Jews were emphatically a representative people. Not merely does their recorded history represent the method of God's ways, but it illustrates the folly and treachery, the moral weakness and waywardness of our human nature. Dwell on the individual application of this passage. Consider—

I. THE EVIL INDICATED. "Backsliding" is suggestive of a turning away from God, a departure from the path of truth and righteousness, a fall from some higher state of spiritual consciousness or moral life. This evil may assume different forms. It may consist: 1. *In the loss of the simplicity and integrity of religious faith.* In an age of mental restlessness like the present, men too easily lose their hold of truth, which is the very hope and life of their souls. We may look with perfect composure upon the conflict between truth and error as regards its general and ultimate issues, but dare not forget how disastrous its bearings upon the individual life may be. There are revolutions in the history of religious thought, as in the history of nations, which it is as vain to think of arresting as it would be to attempt to turn back the ocean tide; but it is a mournful thing when, under such conditions, the mind that once had a firm grasp of the vital elements of Christian truth has slipped from its moorings and drifted out into the wild sea of doubt and uncertainty. To a really earnest spirit the recovery of a lost faith

is generally a painful process. How many have travelled back, as with wounded, bleeding feet, to positions of clearer vision and firmer standing which they once occupied, but in an evil hour had forsaken! As sometimes after a bright morning, which has been followed by a day of cloud and storm, there is again at sunset a glorious outbursting gleam of the radiance that had been obscured; so is it with their souls. They return to rest calmly in the truth that they had for a while lost sight of, and "at eventide," as in the morning, "it is light." 2. *In the decline of religious feeling*, the decay of those affections in which religious life consists. This is that secret spiritual "backsliding" that directly affects the soul's personal relation to God, and the consciousness of which sometimes extorts the bitter cry, "Oh that I were as in months past!" etc. (Job xxix. 2—4). It may arise from no change in religious belief. While a departure from the simplicity of the faith is generally connected with a lowering of the tone of religious feeling, the converse of this is not always true. But the faith has lost its life-giving force. The light it sheds has no warm, kindling glow. It is the light of the moon rather than the sun—clear and cold, having no power to quicken the frame of nature, to develop its beauty and fruitfulness, to awaken its music, and fill it with exulting joy. The carnalizing influences of the world, the wear and tear of daily life, inevitably lead to this internal spiritual decay, unless there is a perpetual renewal of the life "whose springs are hidden and Divine." 3. *In practical departure from the standard of religious duty.* The backsliding of the heart cannot long be concealed. It betrays itself in many ways—in a forsaking of the paths of Christian service, in some manifest lack of moral integrity, in a relapse into some form of vicious habit, perhaps in a complete loosening of the bonds of religious restraint, and utter abandonment to the pursuits of an ungodly life. It is of such a case that our Lord says, "If the salt have lost his savour," etc. (Matt. v. 13); and again, "No man, having put his hand to the plough," etc. (Luke ix. 62); and St. Peter afterwards affirms, "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness," etc. (2 Pet. ii. 21).

II. GOD'S METHOD OF HEALING. "I will heal your backslidings." This is the gracious persuasion by which he seeks to reclaim his children from their guilty wanderings. How may we expect him to fulfil the promise? 1. *By awakening in us a vivid sense and penitent acknowledgment of the wrong.* We can scarcely be delivered from it till we have seen all the sin and shame of it—its real meaning, the source from whence it springs, the end to which it leads. Until all this is deeply felt and freely confessed before God, the first step in the process of recovery has not been taken (see Ps. li. 3, 4; xxxii. 5; 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11). 2. *By moving us to trust simply in his forgiving and renewing mercy.* Our only refuge is in the Divine mercy, and there is no other way of mercy than that which the gospel reveals. The guilt of our backslidings can alone be cancelled by the blood of Christ, and the secret cause of them removed by the grace of his Spirit (1 John ii. 1, 2; iii. 5—9). "There is no prescription for the sickness of the heart but that which is written in the Redeemer's blood," for in this alone have we both the pledge and the channel of the saving love of God. 3. *By creating in us the energy of a nobler life.* "Return," etc. It is a question, after all, of moral resolution and self-determining spiritual power.

> "Full seldom does a man repent, or use
> Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch
> Of blood and custom wholly out of him,
> And make all clean, and plant himself afresh."

But God gives this gracious energy to those who seek it, and such "repentance unto life" is the true "healing."—W.

Ver. 1.—*The offer of a great forgiveness.* I. CONSIDER THE ILLUSTRATION BY WHICH IS SHOWN THE EXTENT OF JEHOVAH'S MERCY TO THE LOST. By an illustration drawn from the power allowed to the Israelite husband, Jehovah shows how great is his spirit of mercy and his desire that the deserting wife, so terribly described in the preceding chapter, should return. The reference is evidently to Deut. xxiv. 1—4. There the husband is invested with an authority which almost seems arbitrary, although from Numb. v. it also appears that an accused wife had a right of appeal to ordeal, which ordeal would infallibly certify either innocence or guilt. The essential point here,

however, lies in this, that there was an *ordained inability* for the wife to return to her first husband. The marriage tie, in spite of all the apparent facility of divorce, was not a thing to play fast and loose with. The way of departure might seem comparatively easy, but the way of return was altogether hedged up. We behold a curious mixture of indulgence and severity—*indulgence* for a time because of the hardness of the people's hearts; *severity*, in order that society might be kept together at all. For a husband to take back such a wife was ordained a ceremonial pollution, which needed to be cleansed away. But if such a return was impossible, still more evidently impossible was the return of one who had lived as a harlot. Yet thus did Israel, once the loving, devoted spouse (ch. ii. 1), now appear to Jehovah. Her life of desertion from Jehovah is described as one continuous, shameless exhibition of the harlot's lust. And it is just in the light of all this terrible impurity that the word comes to her, "Return again to me, saith the Lord."

II. CONSIDER HOW IT COMES THAT GOD CAN ADDRESS SUCH AN INVITATION. It is the old story of God's power to do things which man, however loving and merciful he may be in disposition, finds to be quite beyond his reach. Man, with the best intentions, with the most sympathetic heart, is limited in his resources to the outcast by the necessities of human society. To put one who has been an habitual thief in a position of serious trust, is a thing so hard as to be practically impossible. The victims of vicious inclinations may be deeply pitied, and yet the moment one tries to give them any large measure of help, the claims of others somehow come in to forbid. But God, as he rises far above man in his love and mercy and insight into the sinning human heart, so he rises—if one may thus put it—higher still in his power to give an amply sufficient help. God can bring back into the privileges and possibilities belonging to his Church, he can bring under all the penetrating potencies of his grace, the very worst apostate. What creature can be thought of more defiled than the harlot? Human reclaiming agencies can do nothing to serve her or save her, except as they put in their forefront the loving-kindness of God in Christ Jesus. It is well for us when we have to consider the impure, the degraded, the despairing slaves of vice, to consider also these encouraging words of God, "Return to me." Think much of him who spoke them, and then of the sort of people to whom they were spoken. Those who are most of all suffering in social outlawry may read all the horrible descriptions of abandonment to impurity found not only in this prophet but in others, and then say with the most joyful hope, "If Israel, being such, was *pressed* to return, I also may return." Hosea gives the appropriate words for such, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now" (Hos. ii. 7). And to keep up the figure, what will the end of such a Divine invitation and such a human resolution be? It is found in Rev. xxi., where we read the following request, "Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." The first Israel sank into an indescribable shame; the second Israel will rise into an indescribable glory.—Y.

Ver. 4.—*Israel's cry to the Father and the Friend.* I. OBSERVE THE SUDDEN CHANGE OF RELATION WHICH IS THUS BROUGHT BEFORE US. Hitherto we have had before us Jehovah's description of Israel under the guise of a wife departing from her husband into the most degrading and shameless conduct. And now our thoughts are suddenly turned, with nothing to prepare for the transition, to a new relation—that of father and child. Note that it is not God who directly presents himself in this relation. "Father" is a term put into the mouths of the people in the preceding chapter and also in this. In ch. ii. 27 they are represented as saying to a *stock*, "*Thou* art my father;" and now they say to *Jehovah*, "*Thou* art my Father, the Friend, the Companion of my youth." It may be that there was no depth of real sincerity in the cry, even though it is described as a cry, and not a mere perfunctory recognition—at all events, it sets forth a fact. Jehovah was a Father to the nation of Israel in this sense, that it was by his peculiar and necessary power that Israel was separated in all sorts of profoundly significant ways from the great mass of mankind. When Abram started forth, not knowing whither he went, this was to him a sort of being born again; an entirely new life lay before him, with expectations that he never could have cherished but that God planted them deep in his heart. And thus the name is a right and needful name to use. Israel is doing what it ought to do when it says, "Abba, Father!" The idea

evidently is that Israel has learned to speak to God much in the same way that an English child learns to say "papa" or "father" (Isa. viii. 4).

II. OBSERVE THE CONDUCT BY WHICH WHAT IS GOOD IN THIS RECOGNIZED RELATION OF FATHER IS MANIFESTED. It was true that Jehovah had been Father to Israel; it was moreover true that he had been Guide, Friend, and Companion to Israel's youth. It is not always the case that fatherhood means a loving and cherishing companionship. But here it is emphatically the case. Jehovah was a very close Companion to Israel in its youth; not really nearer, of course, than he had been since, but near in such a way that the people were compelled to note his proximity to them, and constant watchfulness over them. This, therefore, as Israel looked back upon its youth, was the right way for it to speak of Jehovah. Being Father, he had also been a true Companion and Support. "Guide of my youth" does very well for a rendering, if we bear in mind all that the guiding implies. There is a guiding which is a mere trade, a mere selling of the guide's knowledge. He takes up any stranger, shows him the way, gets his pay, and then the relation is at an end. But the practical guiding here comes from a deep love and solicitude. Further, it must be remembered that Jehovah's friendship and companionship were the friendship and companionship of one competent to guide. Friendship by itself is, of course, not sufficient to constitute guiding capacity. We see, then, that the expression of this verse is a very suggestive one by which to address God. *All fathers may learn from it the spirit of a right relation towards their children.* It is the name which they should desire their children to associate with their childhood. It should be a remembrance having a binding power when the child has become a man, and the father an old man. It should be possible to look back on a childhood where the father was a true companion, one whose companionship was full of true befriending and guiding. There is also indicated *the spirit in which youth should look beyond earthly dependencies to God himself.* He who was so much to a youthful nation of old will be of inestimable service to the ignorance, weakness, and abounding need of all youth. Especially should this consideration have force when one thinks of the significance in the doctrine of being born again. He who is born again has then a second youth, even though he be in the full strength of natural manhood. And what is wanted is that the man in his strength and his wide outlook on the possibilities of life should choose a truly humble position before God. The expression is also one that *may point back to a submissive, hopeful youth, wherein many Divine impressions were made,* and from which there has been a great backsliding. Then how beautifully would such an expression come from the lips of the returning prodigal, "My Father, thou wast the Guide of my youth, and now after a bitter experience of trying to make my own way, which has ended in a mere drifting before the strong currents of passion and self-indulgence, I come back to thee"! It is sad to have the friendship of father and child broken, sad at any time, but saddest of all when it is not through some meddling whisperer or repeater of a matter (Prov. xvi. 28; xvii. 9), but through the voluntary and obstinate departure of one of the friends.—Y.

Ver. 5.—*Actions speak louder than words.* Israel, we see, is represented as speaking with a very pathetic remembrance of God's great favours in the remote past. At present, indeed, there is a withholding of the rain that means fruitfulness and prosperity, but that Father who has been the Guide of Israel's youth, surely he will soon bring the rain, with all that follows it, in spite of any appearances to the contrary, such as his anger with Israel suggests. Such is the way that Israel *speaks;* but how does it *act?* Is there to be alteration in God without alteration in man? It is of no use for the sinning nation simply to wait as if God's righteous chastisements would be exhausted by lapse of time. There *might* have to be waiting, but assuredly there *would* have to be *repenting,* and the bringing forth of fruits meet for repentance. But instead of this God is confronted with persistent transgression. He who had been Friend, Companion, and Guide in youth could not have been so without a *docile acceptance* of the companionship. The guidance in youth meant that Jehovah had a right to expect a manhood of holy service. But so far from the people giving this, the expectation in their heart is that God will still provide for them and let them do as they like. They do not seem to understand that it is they who by their transgressions provide for the sustenance and continuance of the anger of Jehovah. That anger is not like a storm which

rises one knows not how, and presently subsides without man being able to do anything for its removal. God's anger was as a fire, and the wickedness of the people was like dry and highly combustible fuel before the flame. The one thing needful was to stop the fuel, and the fire would then very speedily burn out. To say with the lips, "My Father, thou wast the Guide of my youth," will only be of use when there is something like correspondence between what is spoken and what is done.—Y.

Ver. 15.—*God will provide pastors according to his own heart.* I. THE NEED SO EMPHATICALLY IMPLIED THAT SUCH PASTORS SHOULD BE GIVEN. The shepherd's occupation, it need hardly be said, is one that comes up again and again in the Scriptures, both in the literal sense of the word and the figurative one. And even in the literal occupation there was, doubtless, often need of men who could be described as shepherds after God's own heart. Every shepherd who was faithful, observant, courageous, and altogether superior to the hireling spirit, was to that extent a shepherd after God's own heart. Such a one might possibly not be after God's own heart in other respects. Many are very watchful over the brutes committed to their charge, and utterly thoughtless about the shepherding of their own souls and of the various human beings dependent on them and influenced by them. Then passing to the figurative flocks and shepherds, there are very pathetic representations in the Scriptures of the mischief consequent on the unfaithfulness of those rulers and providers who had been set over God's people. Take such a man as King Ahab. He was not a man after God's own heart, and what is the result? Going out against the King of Syria, Ahab, not very hopeful of a favouring word, consults Micaiah, the faithful prophet of God: "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd;" which was not only a warning of utter defeat, but a bitter charge against Ahab that he had been utterly faithless to his trust (1 Kings xxii. 17). There is so much of the sheep-nature in the human breast. How many have been troubled because there is no shepherd (Zech. x. 2)! Every time the confession is uttered, "All we like sheep have gone astray," there is a hint of pastoral unfaithfulness somewhere or other. The sheep-nature in the human breast has never been better set forth than in the anxiety of the departing Moses with respect to a competent successor (Numb. xxvii. 17). Food needs to be provided. There must be a guarding against self-willed wandering away from the supplies and comforts belonging to a constant member of the flock. There are the perils from wild beasts (1 Sam. xvii. 34). There is the work needed to bring back that which is lost. Look at Zech. xi. 16, where there is a hint of what the shepherd has to do—visiting those that are cut off, seeking the young ones, healing the broken, bearing that which standeth still (see also ch. l. 6; Ezek. xxxiv.; John x.).

II. THE FACT THAT SUCH PASTORS WILL ASSUREDLY BE PROVIDED. Great is the requirement, and there has often been a grievous disappointment in getting it met, but assuredly it can be met. The rulers in Israel had not all been as Ahab. That same Moses, who was so anxious concerning his successor, had been himself taken from faithful oversight of another man's sheep in order to deliver Israel from Pharaoh's clutch, and lead him towards the green pastures and still waters of the promised land (Exod. iii.). David, who had followed the ewes great with young, no doubt gently leading them when needful, gathering the lambs in his arm and carrying them in his bosom, who also had smitten the lion and the bear, was now taken to feed Jacob the people of God, and Israel his inheritance (Ps. lxxviii. 71; Isa. xl. 11). Not only had he been faithful as a shepherd, but he had also grown ever more conscious of the sheep-nature in himself, and the sheeplike requirements of his own life, and so, looking away from his flock upwards, he beautifully says, "Jehovah is my Shepherd." He had lions following his own soul (Ps. vii. 2; x. 9; xvii. 12; xxii. 13). Those are fitted to be shepherds after God's own heart who, feeling their own needs, make Jehovah *their* Shepherd. It is important to remember how David is declared as the man after God's own heart (1 Sam. xiii. 14; Acts vii. 46; xiii. 22). So God is here speaking through Jeremiah, with that confidence which comes from actual experience of the true and the brave among his own chosen. Then there is the great work of Jesus to be considered. It is very significant that in ch. xxiii., after a reference to the unfaithful shepherds, there is a promise of faithful ones, their work being set forth more explicitly even than here; and then God goes on to speak of the righteous Branch

which shall be raised to David, the King who shall reign and prosper and execute judgment and justice in the earth: he is the Governor who shall feed the Lord's people Israel (Matt. ii. 6); he is the Great Shepherd of the sheep brought again from the dead (Heb. xiii. 20); he who is also the Lamb in the midst of the throne, shall meet those who are gathered out of the great tribulation, and feed them, and lead them "unto living fountains of waters" (Rev. vii. 17); and thus being himself the Great Shepherd, he is competent to convey to all under-shepherds the resources whereby in all wisdom they may feed the hungry with knowledge and understanding. If Jesus makes us truly righteous, then with the lips of the righteous we shall be able to feed many. The duties of a pastor after God's own heart will appear in all their magnitude to one who is considering the pastoral work of Jesus himself. Such a one will take heed to himself, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made him overseer, feeding the Church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood. He will have his eye on the grievous wolves that enter in, not sparing the flock. He will carry out the spirit of the commandment which God gave to Moses at Sinai: "Neither let the flocks nor herds feed before the mount" (Exod. xxxiv. 3); by doing his best to keep all within his charge from thoughtless trifling with holy things. It is a great matter to be put in a position of spiritual pastoral responsibility; and all in such positions may joyfully remember that God will give them all needed strength. It is a sad thought for the careless pastor that it should so often be needful for the strangers to stand and feed the flocks he should feed—men that to a certain extent may be reckoned unauthorized. And yet what can be done? Flocks must not die of hunger; and as the real physician is he who cures the disease, whatever his professional standing may be, so the real shepherd is he who feeds the flock, and the brand of interloper is affixed to him in vain. And so God would invite all his people to do what they can to be true shepherds. In one sense the shepherds are as many as the sheep. It is better to be ministering to the deep, undying wants of men, than just to their passing pleasures. He who strives to make himself acceptable to men by an incessant watching of their whims and prejudices is very much like the prodigal who found nothing better to do than feed the *swine*. It is God's will that we should feed *sheep*.—Y.

Ver. 16.—*The superseding of the ark.* Along with the denunciations and painful descriptions which Jehovah has put into the mouth of the prophet, there now begins to be mingled a gracious, evangelical element. God's severest condemnations are meant to pave the way for return, repentance, reconciliation, and a reception of still more abundant gifts than before. Far and wide Israel has been scattered, but scattered only to be brought together again. Though there be but one in a city and two in a nation, God will find out the isolated ones and draw them back to him. Then, with pastors after God's own heart, what can there be but increase and multiplication of the flock of God? And then comes what is evidently meant to be considered as a great blessing, though at first it seems to point to another sad apostasy, and to forgetfulness of one of the holiest and most precious treasures of the past. The ark of the covenant, with the tables of the Law deposited within, was the very centre of religious associations to the nation. But now it is to be no more spoken of. God, indeed, trusts that the memory of it was to pass away. Reading such a verse as this, how one is made to feel the importance of time as an element necessary to the proper understanding of things! Such words as these spoken by Israel at an earlier date would have been a very bad sign, but spoken at the time when all was ripe for them, they become just as much a sign for good. The ark of the covenant—the literal ark with the literal tables of stone—could not be a permanent institution. For centuries it had been holy—holy not in word only, but also in deed. Consider how God honoured it, when for a time it was lodged in Philistia; consider the calamities that came upon the men of Bethshemesh and upon Uzzah, for their thoughtless handling of the ark. Much thus happened to make the Israelite very careful how he dealt with it. David and Solomon in particular were very solicitous to honour the ark to the utmost of their power. This is seen not only in the bringing of the ark up into the city of David, and the putting of it into the temple by Solomon, but perhaps even more in the conduct of Solomon to Abiathar, when Abiathar was implicated in the offence of Adonijah. Solomon spared the man he would otherwise have slain, because he had

borne the ark of the Lord God before David (1 Kings ii. 26). But there can be no doubt that as generation succeeded generation, the general feeling would become so mixed with superstition as to do more harm than good. The people had said, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord," but their saying had not amounted to much. The ark had been remembered, but the writing on the stones within had been forgotten. The longer it stood as the central object of a unique ritual, the more it became a symbol of separation from other nations. That which had been given so that one set of thoughts should be associated with it, thoughts to help in making pure, reverent, and watchful, had ended in having quite another set of thoughts associated with it. And so both the object itself seems to have vanished, and at the same time its dominion to have ceased. It is surely a very remarkable thing that all through the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah there is no reference to the ark. The vessels of God's house are mentioned, an altar was set up and offerings made, and in due time a temple built; but there is no word of the ark. Its work was done, and we are not so much as told what became of it. We know that the brazen serpent was declared Nehushtan, but the withdrawal of the ark God manages in complete silence. So true it is that—

"God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

Y.

Ver. 17.—*The gathering of the nations to Jehovah's throne.* I. THE NEW CHARACTER IN WHICH JERUSALEM APPEARS. It is no longer to be considered simply as the centre of Israelite affection and devotion, the city where was the palace of a human king, and the temple of Jehovah as the peculiar deity of Israel. It is no longer to be the place of a peculiar worship. Its character henceforth is to be far more glorious, one in which Israel shall lose nothing, yea, rather gain, in remembering what it has been able to contribute in attaining such an end. Jerusalem, that had been associated with all sorts of idolatrous abominations, is first of all to be desolated and humbled, whatever human pride and glory there was in it extinguished; and then the true glory will come. The city shall be Jehovah's throne, the throne of him who is God above all gods and King above all kings. And when men would recognize the authority of a king, his throne is the place they must come to. Hence to Jehovah, seated on his throne, all the nations are to be gathered; forsaking national idols and national ideals, all that is local and narrow and self-originated will vanish. The ark of the covenant passes away, and the tables of stone become unnecessary, for from his throne Jehovah will take means whereby he may write on the fleshy tables of every human heart the two great principles, "Love God and love thy fellow-man."

II. HOW THE GATHERING IS TO BE BROUGHT ABOUT. How clear it is that, the ark of the covenant passing away, mere local, terrestrial Jerusalem must also cease to have any peculiar value! The taking away of the ark of the covenant is really the taking away of all in the way of dependence that is merely visible and material. It is plain that the gathering together to Jerusalem cannot mean an actual travelling there from all parts of the earth's surface. Not that the mere local Jerusalem can become as a common spot of earth. After these northern desolators, of whom Jeremiah so often spoke, had done with it, it was rebuilt, and in due time became the scene of great spiritual redeeming acts profoundly affecting every child of man. The thought of the local scenes where Christ died, rose again, and ascended into glory, may well help every sinner in his believing approaches to his Saviour. Those who gather at Jerusalem gather there by virtue of the power which there is in every believing heart. Innumerable pilgrims, on piety intent, have gone on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, doing laborious penances by the way, only to discover in the end that they have been walking after the imaginations of their evil hearts. There may be great value in a journey to the Holy Land, if only those who go there have first of all had their minds opened to apprehend the work which he who died at Jerusalem did for them; otherwise their travels, whatever the human joy and interest of them, may only add to their subsequent condemnation. To go to Jerusalem spiritually is the great thing. The Jerusalem of our journey is situated in the pages of the New Testament rather than in Palestine. It is as we read the Gospels that we feel how Jerusalem is indeed the throne of Jehovah in this sense, that there, through his Son Jesus, he manifested righteousness, power, and

love, all the glorious attributes of his eternal reign. The transactions at Jerusalem are incomparable. No transactions in any one nation, however much they may affect the career of that nation, can rival the transactions at Jerusalem. The Englishman as an Englishman may feel his deep concern in Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights. The American as an American thinks of Philadelphia and the Declaration of Independence. The negro as a negro remembers Lincoln and the proclamation which gave freedom to the slaves. But underneath the natural, the peculiar, the merely terrestrial, there is another man, the man who has to think of sin within him, and death and eternity before him. Such a man, if he thinks rightly, will feel that it is towards Jerusalem that his most earnest considerations should gather. All who truly ponder the great questions of life must gather there, and thence in faith their thoughts will ascend to the true, the heavenly, the everlasting Jerusalem.—Y.

Ver. 21.—*A sincere repentance in an appropriate place.* How came this voice to be heard on the high places—this weeping and this supplication? The answer seems to lie in ver. 20, where there is interposed a suggestion that Israel, because of its past defections, would fail to prove capable and worthy of that glorious future which has been just depicted. How then can Israel reply except by an abundant outflow of the signs of penitence? There is weeping; there is deprecation of any such withdrawal of Jehovah's contemplated goodness; there is a most emphatic declaration that they had indeed been utterly perverse and had forgotten Jehovah. The submission to him, the acknowledgment of him, shall now be complete. The words put into the lips of the repentant people (vers. 22—25) are not extorted and grudging words, with a counter-resolution underneath to back out if any chance should offer. The eyes of the apostates have been opened; Israel has come to itself. What has been sought in vain on hills and mountains in the cruel service of heathen deities is to be got in full and abiding power from God. Observe now how—

THESE HIGH PLACES WERE MOST APPROPRIATE FOR THESE TEARFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND THESE ENTREATING APPROACHES TO GOD. 1. *The thing done had been a great public wrong.* Where men have sinned is the place for them to confess their sin. Now, this was not a sin in some secret place; it was not a sin confined to the thoughts of the heart, and known only to God; it was not some private, domestic wrong-doing. The whole nation shared in the sin of the high places. Even if some were not actually idolatrous, yet by their silence and inaction they condoned the idolatry. All surrounding nations must be cognizant of it. Sins in public cannot be got rid of without an equally public repentance and suffering. Who can tell what audacious and mocking words may have been spoken concerning Jehovah by the heathen around?—"Why, this Jehovah, whose temple and service are in Jerusalem, and who has no image, has really no power over the people! He has a name to live, but surely he is dead!" Elijah mocked the priests of Baal, and he had cause, for, unhappy men that they were, *they had believed in a lie.* But priests of Baal might also many times have mocked the people of Israel, for in one sense they had the truth, but *they did not believe in it.* Of course, in the end, such people were bound to make a very public acknowledgment of their folly and unbelief. 2. *By this weeping, etc., on the high places, there was a particularly impressive condemnation of idolatry.* He who forsakes a course of action necessarily condemns that action, and reproaches all who still continue in it, reproaches them none the less because reproach may not be at all intended. Such a return to Jehovah as is indicated in the concluding verses of this chapter is also, by the very act, a downright blow against idolatry. Let men who will persist in wrong courses know that they must be prepared for painful experiences when their companions, every now and then, desert them. There will always be some one discovering that the course is wrong, and going over to the other side. Take a very important instance of such exposure as we find it in the New Testament. Pharisaism and Jewish pride are there condemned from two great sources of judgment. One of these we find in Jesus, who spoke, we know how severely, against the Pharisees and their doings. From his words we feel how bad their spirit must have been and their inner life. But perhaps it is not too much to say that Saul's condemnation of them is still more striking; shown not in words so much, but oh, how clearly in deed! when he came out from them, showing he was no more of them. 3. There is thus a great warning *to all who are*

acting doubtfully in the blaze of public life. If such have occasion to turn, they must turn in public. Any one who stands well out before his fellows had need take care what he says and does, for he knows not what may be the force of circumstances, what revolutions there may be in his convictions. How much nations have had to suffer—perhaps will have to suffer to the end of time—just because they are not careful of the beginnings of evil in their midst! Look at what it cost America to get rid of negro slavery when once it had grown into a far-spreading and lucrative custom.—Y.

Vers. 1—5.—*Sin, Law, Grace.* We have here represented to us—

I. SIN IN ITS MOST AWFUL FORM. It was the sin of *idolatry.* This was especially grievous in the sight of God, since Israel was designed to give light to all other nations. They were raised up for the very purpose that through them the knowledge of God might flow forth to the whole world. The destinies of humanity depended on them. Hence if the light that was in *them* were darkness, "how great," etc.! Their corruption was the poisoning of the fountain, which would render deadly all its streams. Hence it is that this sin is so commonly represented in the prophetic writings under the images of harlotry and adultery—crimes which, when found in any belonging to him, the Israelite would most fiercely resent. By the nature and measure of their own hatred for such outrages on the purity of their home life, would God have them understand somewhat of the nature and measure of his hatred of that idolatry into which as a nation they had fallen, and against which God's prophets were for ever uttering their earnest protest. And to aggravate their wickedness, they had been guilty thereof again *and again* (ver. 1). They had become lost to all sense of shame in regard to it (vers. 2, 3). They had not waited to be tempted and persuaded, but had gone after their sin, greedily, seeking it rather than it them (ver. 2). They had persisted until the land was polluted by their sin (ver. 3). They had become so hardened that God's corrections failed to produce any result save to make them more brazen-faced in their wickedness than before (ver. 3). And they had gone on to this degree of criminality that they dared to mock God with mere lip service (vers. 4, 5). "Ay, and from this time forward thou criest to me, My Father, the Friend of my youth art thou. Will he always bear a grudge and keep it up for ever? Behold thou speakest thus and doest wickedness and carriest it out" (Keil's translation). *Corruptio optimi pessima est.* The sin of such as Israel—and *we* are such, raised up, qualified, designed to be the means of vast blessing to others, as is God's purpose with his Church,—is more aggravated and assumes forms more terrible than is possible to others.

II. LAW IN ITS MOST RIGHTEOUS UTTERANCE. (Ver. 1; cf. Deut. xxiv. 4.) "*They say;*" it was a well-known fact that the Law would not hear of the forgiveness and restoration of those who had sinned in the manner Israel had. Such leniency would open the door wide to the most glaring iniquity. "Plato, Plato," said Socrates, "I do not see how God can forgive sin." Sin once committed becomes a fact. Facts have their necessary, immutable and eternal consequences, which only by a miracle can be set aside or escaped. (See sermon by Rev. T. Binney, on 'The Law our Schoolmaster,' etc.; also J. Cook, of Boston, Monday Lectures: 'The Atonement.') There is no gospel for the sinner anywhere outside *the* gospel. The Law, as here, binds the wrong-doer to the inevitable issues of his own wrong-doing. Forgiveness and restoration are simply impossible. But note—

III. GRACE IN ITS MOST MARVELLOUS MANIFESTATION. Ver. 1, "Yet return again to me, saith the Lord." There is doubt as to the meaning of this; some read it (see exegesis) as a question to which a negative answer is required. But the whole tone and intent of the chapter (ver. 12) uphold the gracious meaning which belongs to the words as they stand and which we therefore accept. But if righteous Law forbids the sinner's return, how can grace invite such return? The elder son in the parable was much scandalized at the father's welcome of his prodigal younger brother. It did seem to be an improper thing to do. The practical reply to all such objections—and they have never ceased to be urged in all ages of the Church—is to point to actual facts. What has been the result of the belief of God's wondrous grace? Has a scriptural faith been proved to foster a sinful life? Are they who humbly rest on God's grace in Christ the licentious, the ungodly, the profane? The Evangelical Church can fearlessly press questions like these. And if it be asked what is the philosophy of this? how is it

that what seems likely to produce such ill, in fact does not? the answer is, that when the sinner comes in contrition and faith to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, the new life, the gift of regeneration, which is ever in connection with the cross, is given to him. He is started on a new career, on which he is certain to make progress, slow it may be, but sure nevertheless. And as day by day he repairs again to that same Saviour, the powers of the new life are replenished and renewed, and so, instead of the full free forgiveness which, when he returned to God, was bestowed upon him, causing him to take encouragement to live on in sin, it has wrought in him a holy hatred of it, and led him to turn from it more and more. No, the wondrous grace of God, which is told of in this word, "Yet return again to me," does not make void the Law, but it establishes the Law (cf. Rom. viii. 1).—C.

Vers. 6—10.—*An old and sad but very true story.* I. GOD LOOKING FOR FRUIT BUT NONE FORTHCOMING. 1. The fruit God looked for was Judah's repentance (cf. the history of the times to which Jeremiah refers). Idolatry was rampant in the northern kingdom. The southern also had been very far from free from it. But at this time God looked for a true repentance on Judah's part. 2. And such fruit was reasonably expected. There was the personal example and influence of King Josiah and the band of faithful men who were endeavouring to promote a true religious reformation. They had seen the degradation which followed Israel's sin (ver. 9); how Israel had fallen so low as to worship stocks and stones, the "most scoundrel idols," as Matthew Henry calls them. They had heard the gracious appeal of God to Israel (ver. 7). They had seen the judgments of God which had followed when his grace was rejected. How severe and terrible these had been! God "had put Israel away" (ver. 8). For nearly a century Israel had been in dread captivity by reason of their sins. And the sin which had brought down their judgments was the sin which Judah herself was guilty of. And the judgment had not happened to an alien nation or in a remote land. No, but to Judah's own sister, to members of the same family, of one blood and lineage; and close to her own door, hence under her own eye. What more arousing and alarming call to the unconverted could there have been than all this? And to lend further force to this call, there was in Judah the presence of the temple, the possession of all manner of religious privilege. How reasonable, then, was the expectation that Judah should turn away from her idolatry and unfeignedly repent! But the like of all such reasons for the expectation of a true turning to God exists in the case of many to-day. Every influence and argument for such turning to God as bore upon Judah then, bears upon many still. 3. But that which God desired was not forthcoming. It is the burden of the prophet's complaint that what Israel had done, and worse, was chargeable against Judah. And as now, all too often, those from whom real religion may reasonably be expected are found not only as evil, but outstripping others in ungodly ways. This is part of the story told us by these verses.

II. Another is that of MEN SEEKING TO PALM OFF ON GOD FICTITIOUS FRUIT INSTEAD OF GENUINE. (Ver. 10.) Cf. the history of the reformation in Josiah's day—how justly it is described in this verse! It was sudden, partial, external, shortlived. And such feigned reformations are common enough still. Cf. Luke xi. 21—26; and sermon No. 613 by Spurgeon: "And as the devil looks round and finds the place swept, he finds it garnished too. The man has bought some pictures: he has not real faith, but he has a fine picture of it over the fireplace. He has no love to the cross of Christ, but he has a very handsome crucifix hanging on the wall. He has no graces of the Spirit, but he has a fine vase of flowers on the table of other peoples' experiences and other peoples' graces, and they smell tolerably sweet. There is a fireplace without fire, but there is one of the handsomest ornaments for the fireplace that was ever bought for money. It is swept and garnished. Oh, the garnished people I have met with! garnished sometimes with almsgiving, at other times with long-winded prayers; garnished with the profession of zeal and the pretence of reverence. You will find a zealous Protestant—oh, so zealous!—who would go into fits at the sign of a cross, and yet will be guilty of nameless vice. You find persons shocked because another boiled a tea-kettle on a Sunday, or insured his life, or assisted at a bazaar, who will cheat and draw the eye-teeth out of an orphan child if they could get sixpence by it. They are swept and garnished. Walk in, ladies and gentlemen! Did you ever see a house so delightfully

furnished as this? How elegant! how tasteful! Just so: but men may be damned tastefully, and go to hell respectably, just as well as they can in a vulgar and debauched fashion." *Wherefore do men thus act?* Because conscience has been aroused by God's dealings with them, and it will not let them rest without doing something. The question now comes, how little can they do which will be sufficient to still the inconvenient and uncomfortable clamour of conscience? and such turning to God "feignedly," such reformations as that of Judah under King Josiah, such sweeping and garnishing of the house empty of any true love to God, is the device they resolve upon. Then next, in this sad story, we see—

III. GREATER CONDEMNATION THAN EVER COMING UPON MEN IN CONSEQUENCE. 1. They are branded with a worse name than others (cf. "treacherous Judah," vers. 7, 10). Under pretence of being faithful to God, guardians of the temple, the priesthood, the Law, making loud profession, they were idolatrous even as Israel. Hence the name of infamy, "treacherous." And Christ's most terrible words were for the "hypocrites" of his day. 2. A place less tolerable in the day of judgment will be assigned them, than that of those who sinned in like manner but without any such religious profession (ver. 11). Oh, then, what need for the prayer—

"Search me, O God, and try my heart,
For thou that heart canst see;
And turn each cursed idol out
That dares to rival thee."

O.

Ver. 11.—*The comparative advantages of Judah and Israel; professors and non-professors.* I. LET JUDAH AND ISRAEL BE TAKEN AS REPRESENTING RESPECTIVELY PROFESSORS OF RELIGION AND THOSE WHO MAKE NO SUCH PROFESSION. Judah did make such profession, but Israel stood aloof, neither worshipping at the temple nor joining in the appointed feasts.

II. OBSERVE THAT ISRAEL IS SAID TO HAVE "JUSTIFIED HERSELF MORE," ETC. (Ver. 11.) 1. This was true, for a sterner sentence went out against Judah than against Israel. (1) A more infamous name is given to her than to Israel; she is called "Treacherous." (2) And her punishment was more severe. Israel had long been prepared to mingle more or less readily with other nations. An assimilating process had been going on for many generations, religiously, socially, and politically. Hence they were looked upon much as the Pharisees of our Lord's day looked upon the publicans and sinners whom he so graciously welcomed. And we find that, as a fact, they soon became merged into the nations whither they had been carried away captive. They had no such memories, no such antipathies as the people of Judah, and hence their exile must have been more tolerable. The piteous psalms which bewail the hard lot of the captive came not from them, but from the exiles of Judah. It was they who "by the rivers of Babylon sat down and wept as they remembered Zion." The iron entered into their soul as it could hardly have done in the case of Israel. And the like facts—(1) and (2)—are seen in the case of unworthy professors of religion. See our Lord's holy hate, hear his scathing words of scorn and doom, in regard to the hypocrites of his day. And the world, too, looks on them with a contempt it keeps for none other. *And they suffer as none other can.* If the grace of God be still in them, who can describe the remorse, the self-abasement, the shame, with which they view the punishment that has come upon them? 2. And the *reasons* wherefore it was less tolerable for Judah than for Israel were: (1) Judah's privileges were so much greater. (2) Her warnings had been more numerous, more plain, more arousing, more prolonged (cf. the history and previous verses). (3) Her inducements to loyal obedience were stronger. Hence her sin brought the greater doom, "And the Lord said," etc. (ver. 11). And these are the reasons—greater privileges, louder warnings, more powerful inducements to obedience—which, when they are all disregarded and set at nought, compel, yea, create a scourge for the fallen Church, such as they who have never made any such profession can never feel. Therefore—

III. INQUIRE WHAT IS THE JUST CONCLUSION THAT SHOULD BE DRAWN FROM THE FACT NOW OBSERVED. 1. Is it this: that it is better to be Israel than Judah; to stand aloof from all profession of religion than to make such profession? (1) No; for it was

better to be Judah than Israel. There were possibilities, and these generally realized, of greater blessedness in Judah than could be attained in Israel. Compare the histories of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and see if the brightest and most numerous examples of sanctity, as well as the greatest displays of God's favour, to say naught of the joy of his appointed worship, were not in Judah rather than in Israel. And so in like manner we affirm that it is better to be the avowed disciple of Christ, notwithstanding the possibility of a more terrible fall, than to be numbered with the crowd of those who neither possess nor profess any regard for God. For larger blessing, in the form of increased moral resemblance to God, of joy in God, and of greater security from the power of sin, —these certainly belong to those who are as Judah rather than to those who are as Israel. All God's favour is open to them as it is not to those in whom God's fear does not dwell. (2) And again, No; for we do not reason in such manner in regard to other things. True, "He that is down need fear no fall;" but we do not, on the strength of that dismal proverb, begin immediately to prefer the lot of the fallen one to that of him who, by God's providence, is set on high and stands upright. The rich man does not hasten to make himself poor that he may be free from the fear of becoming so. Nor does the man who is blessed with vigorous health desire the condition of the invalid because in that condition there can be no fear of loss of health. Then why should the far less blessed lot of Israel, and of those outside the professed Church of God whom Israel represents, be preferred to the better and brighter lot of Judah and of God's Church, though a fall terrible and sad is possible here which could not be there? (3) And it would be right still to prefer the lot of Judah, even if Israel had been simply let alone by God. If God had sent no punishment to Israel, it would have been better to be Judah, with the possession of God's favour, although the possession involved the possibility of its loss, than to have been without that favour at all. But when we see that the judgment of God came upon Israel as well as upon Judah, then much more, notwithstanding the sad fact declared in this ver. 11, was it better to have been Judah than Israel. And so, were there no judgment on the world, and God's anger came only on a fallen Church, better even then to be of the Church than of the world. But when we know that there is a judgment of the world as well as of the Church, that sin has no immunity anywhere, then, though sin in the Church be worse than sin in the world, still let me be there where the favour, the joy, and the grace of God are, and not where they can never come. 2. But the true lesson of what we have been considering is, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Judah, and the Church of God whom Judah represents, need to remember that, notwithstanding their high position of privilege, corruption and sin *may* lay hold upon them, and should that happen, their sin and their doom will be the most terrible of all (cf. Epistle to Church at Laodicea). Therefore hearken to our Lord's words, "Watch and pray."—C.

Vers. 12—19.—*Confession of sin the indispensable prerequisite for its pardon.* That this is so is shown by the evident fact that if it could have been dispensed with it would have been. For the desire of God to pardon his guilty people is, as this section shows, intense. He will not cease to seek after them even when the punishment of their sin has actually come upon them. Hence (ver. 12) he addresses them in the lands of their exile, Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Media (2 Kings xvii. 6), and three times (vers. 12, 14, 22) implores them to "return." He "fills his mouth with arguments," and endeavours by every kind of assurance and promise to induce them to return. Ver. 12: they shall be completely forgiven. Ver. 14: they ought to return, for they are his by right, as the wife is the rightful possession of the husband. Ver. 14: they are the object of his constant regard, so that they cannot be concealed from his eye or hindered from his help. No, though in a whole city, or tribe, or nation, there should be but "two" or even "one," still his hand would reach them there, and bring them out and restore them to Zion. Ver. 15: and those who in days gone by had so grievously led them astray, should do so no more, for now, "pastors," *i.e.* rulers and guides, whether in the State or in religion, should be such as were "according to God's own heart," and these should feed them with knowledge. Ver. 16: and under this happy rule they should greatly multiply in the land. And, better still, they should so realize and rejoice in the spiritual presence of God that they should no longer need the

aid of the ancient symbols of that presence, such as the ark of the covenant of the old dispensation. Ver. 17: and Jerusalem should be so filled with the Lord's presence that they should call the city "the throne of the Lord." And the "nations" should be converted, and their wickedness be forsaken. Ver. 18: and Judah and Israel should be one, and in unity and affection possess the land. Such were the glorious hopes with which God sought to win back his people's hearts to himself, and they conclusively show how intensely the heart of God was set upon his people's return. But eagerly desirous as God was for this restoration of his lost children to his heart and home again, he is evidently held back from indulging such affectionate promptings by considerations that could not be overlooked. What they were, the demand that he makes for *confession of sin* plainly shows. They are—

I. The Law of righteousness. Sin is the violation of that Law, and until due atonement and acknowledgment have been made, sin ought not to be forgiven. I may, in accordance with our Saviour's commands, refrain from inflicting punishment on one who has wronged me, even though he have not repented of his wrong; and that refraining from inflicting punishment, or from demanding what is my right, is forgiveness in the sense our Lord meant; but he did not mean, for it would be a command impossible to obey—that I should receive such a one into the same confidence and love which I bear towards a dear friend who has never deserved anything else. Therefore my forgiveness of such an unrepentant offender, though granted in accordance with our Lord's command, and well-pleasing in his sight, and the best I am capable of, is nevertheless not complete, not perfect; for perfect forgiveness, that which God would bestow upon sinful men, means far more than the remission of penalty: it means restoration to the love, the fellowship, and the confidence of God. But this cannot be apart from due atonement made on the part of the wrong-doer. The Law of righteousness, the Law written upon our hearts as well as inherent in the nature of things, forbids such forgiveness apart from the essential condition of such forgiveness.

II. And the well-being of his household is that other consideration which restrains the prompting of affection to forgive sin unconditionally and from mere pity. Man is not the whole of God's household. He may be only the one sheep who has gone astray. The rest, the ninety and nine blessed ones who need no repentance. But to pardon sin without atonement would be to confound all moral distinctions, to discourage the good, and to teach the wrong-doer to regard his wrong as a very slight matter; it would be to carry the discords of earth into the presence of God, and to reproduce there the sins and sorrows of this world. Therefore let the love of God towards sinful man be inconceivably great, and it is so, still it is held back in its exercise by these considerations now named. But where sin is confessed as God demands it should be, then, as is promised here and in many other Scriptures beside, God's pardoning love can go forth and the sinner be restored to the favour, which he had lost. And the reason of this is not because the sinner's poor and inadequate confession of his sin is a sufficient atonement for the wrong he has done, but because, when he sincerely makes that confession, he is *invested with the acceptableness of Christ.* For Christ has made that atonement perfectly which man can only offer in the most imperfect way; "man's repentance needing too often to be repented of, and his very tears to be washed in the blood of Christ." But Christ looked upon sin as God looks upon it, hated it as God hates it, consented to God's judgment concerning it by bearing the penalty of it; "he bore our sins in his own body on the tree," and so made that true, that perfect confession and atonement which we can never make. And he did this in our nature, and as our Representative. So now, when we come in his Name, sincerely repenting of sin, though that repentance be inadequate in itself, yet because it is "the mind of Christ," and looks upon sin sorrowing over it as he did, our imperfect atonement is accepted in his perfect one, we have the fellowship of his sufferings, his atonement is in our measure reproduced in us, and we are made conformable to his death. Pardon thus bestowed neither violates the Law of righteousness nor is inconsistent with the well-being of the whole family of God. Hence it is that, as in ver. 13, the demand is made for confession of sin, and then of their iniquity in all its aggravated forms. Without such confession pardon cannot be bestowed. Not till the prodigal "came to himself," went to his father and said, "I have sinned," was he forgiven, notwithstanding all the yearning of the father's heart after his lost child. Now, to bring

men to this looking upon their sin as God looks upon it, as the Lord Jesus looks upon it, is the object of God's disciplines, of the pain and smart which so often accompany sin, and of so much of the teaching of the Bible and of God's providential government. And those who have trusted in Christ are continually to be "looking unto Jesus," for in that trustful look is the sure guarantee of the preservation of the "mind of Christ" in them in regard to sin, and so of their for ever abiding in the favour and love of God. This mind of holy hatred and sorrow on account of sin it is the especial work of God's Holy Spirit to produce in men; that Spirit who is given to them that ask his aid, more readily than even parents give to their children what those children they so much love need and ask for.—C.

Ver. 14.—*Married to God.* "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you."

I. THIS SEEMS AN INCREDIBLE STATEMENT. Had it been spoken of angels, or of unfallen man, or of eminent saints, it would have been more easy of belief. But it is of men desperately wicked, and to such, that God says, "I am married unto *you*." What infinite condescension and love!

II. BUT NEVERTHELESS IT IS TRUE. For: 1. We have the marriage lines, the record of the transaction, the very words of the covenant deed (cf. Ps. lxxxix. 3, 28; Heb. viii.; ch. xxxii. 38—40). In all these God declares that he has taken us to be his for ever: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God." 2. Our children are his. He bids them all call him by the blessed name of Father. 3. He repeatedly declares that we were the objects of his choice. Cf. Eph. i., "He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." And this because we "were partakers of flesh and blood, he himself also took part in the same;" "God *so* loved the world;" "He came to seek and to save that which was lost" (cf. also Eph. v. 25—27). 4. He has given us the sign and token of our being his in the sacrament of our baptism. That which the wedding ring is to the wife, baptism is to us: it declares the blessed fact that we are God's, and separates us for *his* Name, the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. 5. He has endowed us with his goods: "All things are yours, . . . the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours" (1 Cor. iii. 22). 6. He is always with us: "In him we live and move," etc. He is not far from any one of us: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." 7. He is jealous of our love: "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." What is the Bible but one long record of the disquiet of the heart of God when the love of those to whom he is "married" is turned from him? Hence the eternal law, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me;" "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." A man has a right to claim that she whom he has married should love him. He has no such claim on any other. And so because the Lord God condescends to hold this relationship towards us, he too claims our love: "Thou *shalt* love the Lord thy God." 8. We are on the way to dwell with him in his eternal home. We are not there yet, but we are on the way. "We are coming up from the wilderness," and if we faithfully recognize our relationship to God, we shall be "leaning upon our beloved" (Cant. viii. 5). 9. He has done for us, and does for us still, what only such a near and dear relationship can account for. Even the compassionate friend will not feel himself bound, though he will minister relief, to go and share the very same lot as that of those whom he compassionates. And the father of the prodigal did not make himself poor as that prodigal was. He lifted him up, but he did not himself stoop down. No; that which the Lord God has done is more than the love of friend, brother, father; it is the love of the husband alone. For the husband, if he be worthy of the name, will share the lot of the wife. And if she must suffer hardship, he will share it with her. If she dwell in mean abode, he will not be happy to dwell elsewhere. But does not all this describe what the Lord God hath done? "He, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor." The word "married" is not a mere metaphor, it is the alone explanation of the Incarnation and of the Atonement. The general benevolence of God, not even the fatherhood of God, will adequately tell wherefore he so humbled himself and lived here "as a poor meek man upon earth," and then died for us; but the *husbandhood* of God, the fact that he declares when he says, "I am married unto you," will account for it and explain all. We have to live here in this wilderness

world, to be tried, tempted, troubled, and at length to die, and we have also to resist even unto blood, striving against sin; and therefore he himself also took part in the same. Then if this statement of the text be true—

III. VAST CONSEQUENCES FOLLOW. 1. Forgetfulness or disregard of this relationship in which we stand to God must be utter misery. Perhaps hell is never so nearly brought up and made known in all its hideous wretchedness here on earth as by means of a marriage in which one side has lost all love for the other. Oh, the drag of the marriage bond then! What an iron chain; what a fetter it is! How it frets! How it galls! How simply horrible it has become! Penal servitude for life is but a mild description of it. From ever knowing it by experience, may God deliver us all! But such things, alas, are, and between men and women who have vowed to love and cherish each other "until death do them part." But we do not recognize so readily that well-nigh all the sorrow of this life of ours is because we have forgotten or disregarded our relationship to God. *That* marriage also is a bond which can never be severed. And if we have no love to God, no delight in him, no trust or confidence, oh, how that bond will gall, will irritate, will fret, and so become the very "strength of sin"! The unrest, the distress, the wild attempts to win happiness in lawless ways, the sting of conscience, the inward remorse, are all accounted for by the consciousness that men have of their obligation to God whilst that obligation is being grievously disregarded. On the other hand: 2. Due response rendered to the love of God towards us must be our deep, our indestructible, our ever-advancing joy. See the proofs of this in the return of the prodigal: "They began to be merry." Listen to David: "O God, thou art my God," etc. "I will go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy." Behold the martyrs. Rather than be severed from God by denial of him, let what shame, agony, loss, death, that might come upon them. Ask those who know what the love of God is, if it be not as we say. That pure joy which a true wife has in the husband she loves and reveres, that is the type of the joy in God which we may have and should have, and to which even the worst of us, the miserable backsliders, are by God himself entreated to return. How happy in his protection! How certain that he will be prompt to help in all peril and emergency! How free the outpouring of the heart in loving confidence! How sure of his love always! —no doubt ever clouding that certainty. And how sure, too, of his sympathy, his wise counsel, his constant support! And to all this God invites us, yea, he by this word of his bids us claim it as our right—a right he will at once recognize. It is wonderful; the condescension and the love of it are so marvellous that we are slow to comprehend, slower still to believe it, and slowest of all to realize and rejoice in it. But yet it is most assuredly true. Therefore, Lord, increase our faith; we believe, but help thou our unbelief.—C.

Ver. 19.—*The great difficulty overcome.* "How shall I," etc.? A different rendering has been proposed for this verse, but inasmuch as the general meaning and spirit of the prophecy are maintained in our common translation, we prefer to abide thereby. So read, the verse brings before us—

I. GOD'S GRACIOUS PURPOSE OF LOVE TOWARDS SINFUL MEN. He would put them "among the children," etc. Think what this involves. Picture to ourselves the lot of the children in the home of an affluent, affectionate, wise, and godly father. What condition fairer, more enviable, can be conceived? What freedom from all care! What unrestrained, confiding, loving intercourse between the children and their father! What healthful development and direction of character and disposition! How sheltered; how secure; how happy in the abiding consciousness of their father's love! How full of all good their position cannot but be! But the brightest, fairest lot that ever fell to any children in an earthly home fails fully to set forth what it must be to be set amongst God's children, and to be numbered amongst his sons and daughters. Blessed indeed are such; how blessed none but they who are thus "set among the children" can fully know. But such was the gracious purpose of God towards man, nothing less than this. He created us for this very purpose, with this very intent. And it is the reason and motive of the creation of every newly born child. For this every human soul is endowed with faculties which can find their complete exercise and enjoyment only amongst God's children: "God hath made us for himself, and our hearts have no rest until they find rest in him." But the verse, by its very form, indicates—

II. THE TERRIBLE THWARTING AND HINDERING OF THAT GRACIOUS PURPOSE WHICH HAS TAKEN PLACE. "*How* shall I put thee," etc.? plainly denoting that there is some giant obstacle in the way. In the case of Israel the previous portions of this prophecy show clearly what this was. But it is equally true of us all. And this dread hindrance to God's carrying out his purposes of grace towards us consists not so much in what we have done as in what we are. The *heart* of man is not right in the sight of God, and whilst that is so, God cannot set us amongst his children. Transgressions and offences are but the symptoms of the deadlier evil that lurks within, not the evil itself. That consists in the state of heart Godwards which, alas! characterizes us all, until the new heart and the right spirit be given. What should we say if towards ourselves as parents our children were to order themselves as we do towards God?—rarely thinking of us, placing no confidence in us; though we would delight to have them speak to us, yet maintaining a sullen silence always; in their hearts disliking us and resenting the expression of our will; disobeying us on the slightest pretext, and choosing for their friends those they well know to be our foes. If any parent was so unhappy as to have such a son or daughter, how could he set such a one amongst his other children who love him as children should? And that this is the case between the unrenewed man and God, let conscience and men's works, words, and ways witness. This being so, how can we "marvel" that our Lord hath said, "Ye *must* be born again"? But we are shown also—

III. THIS DIFFICULTY, VAST AS IT IS, TRIUMPHANTLY OVERCOME. In the latter part of the verse and in the confessions of the twenty-second and following verses it is clear that a great change has taken place. The rebel heart has gone, the child's heart has come in its place. The erewhile sinful godless soul is heard calling upon God as "My Father," and in daily conduct is found *not* turning away from him. What a change! No wonder that the Scripture emblems of it are all drawn from contrasts the most vivid and intense that experience furnishes or the mind can conceive: life and death, darkness and light, crimson red and snow whiteness, leprous and pure; as one possessed of the devil, and as one calm, sober, and in his right mind;—such are some of them. But the beholding of so great a change leads of necessity to the inquiry how it was brought about. Hence note—

IV. THE MEANS WHEREBY THIS WAS ACCOMPLISHED. These were as they ever are, the manifestation of the love of God. In Christ God came to seek and to save his self-lost children. But they, instead of welcoming the Christ of God, crucified and slew him. That rebel alienated heart which is common to us all wrought this awful crime. But it is when by the Holy Spirit men are led to see what they have done to him who so loved them as to come from heaven to save them, there is produced that conviction of sin, that deep and genuine repentance, that sense of his infinite love, and that consequent entire trust in him,—all which are the very elements of that heart of a dear child which calls God "My Father," and which will not turn away from him. I have read of one who was for ever reclaimed from the deadly sin of drunkenness by the deep anguish of heart which he experienced when he found that one day, when brutalized by drink, he had smitten to the ground his own dear child, and wounded her with a wound the scar of which she would never lose; and that he had done this whilst she was lovingly seeking to lead him away from the place and the people who were tempting him to his ruin. When he came to himself and knew what he had done, his horror and remorse had no bounds. "The drink! ay, it was all the drink!" he exclaimed when, years after, telling the story. "Could I ever touch it again? I kept my finger lightly on the little maid's forehead, and lifted my face to heaven, and vowed that I would never touch the murderous thing again as long as I lived, and with a broken heart I prayed the Lord to help me." That well-known story serves to illustrate how, in this great matter of man's restoration to God, he who once was a godless rebel becomes filled with another heart, and God can, as he desires to, place him amongst the children. For when I clearly see the wounds which I in my mad sin have inflicted on him who sought to save me, and who tenderly loves me still notwithstanding all I have done, the sight of his cross and of those wounds will fill my soul with such a hatred of sin and love of God that I am no longer what I was; I am born again, I have passed from death unto life. Yes, it is the sight of the love of God in Christ which turns the sinner into the child of God, and wins for him a place

amongst the children of God. With what fervour, then, may we pray the blessed Spirit to fulfil his work in and for us and for all men!—C.

Ver. 20—ch. iv. 2.—*God's way of restoration; or, the experiences of a young convert.* In ver. 19 we have given us the expression of the Divine perplexity in regard to lost Israel: "How shall I place thee among the children," etc.? But ere the verse closes we behold the problem solved, the seeming impossibility accomplished, for the lost is found, and he that was dead is alive again. The rebel Israel has become the loving obedient child. And now in these verses (20—ch. iv. 2) we seem to have a telling of the experience of the restored one, a setting forth of how God had dealt with him. It is given in the form of a dialogue between God and Israel, and is an accurate description of the Divine process of restoration.

I. THERE IS THE BRINGING HOME OF SIN TO THE CONSCIENCE. (Ver. 20.) God charges upon lost Israel great and grievous sin. He likens the wrong he has suffered at the hands of Israel to the most grievous wrong it is possible for a man to suffer, and which of all others a man resents the most. The accusation is terrible. Thus sharply and sternly does God deal with the soul he would save. He does not gloss over, or palliate, or in any way make little of our sin, as we are apt to do; but he shows it to us so clearly that the sight of it is almost more than the heart can bear.

II. THIS CONVICTION OF SIN IS FOLLOWED BY A DEEP REPENTANCE. (Ver. 21.) Israel is represented as seeing her sin, and then from the very high places which had witnessed her guilt is heard her weeping and supplication. The soul that has never known the smart and pain of the conviction of sin will never earnestly turn to the Great Physician for the healing that is needed.

III. THE PROCLAMATION OF MERCY FOLLOWS. Ver. 22, "Return, ye apostate children, I will heal your apostasies." Just as to the enraptured ears of the penitent who was weeping over the Saviour's feet there came the blessed sound of his pardoning word, assuring her her sins were forgiven and that she might go in peace, so here God is represented as declaring his mercy to the weeping, supplicating Israel. And the heart the Lord hath dealt with knows that thus it is. A voice not audible, but real, is heard in the soul, assuring the contrite one of the forgiveness he needs and craves.

IV. IN SUCH A HEART PROMPT BELIEF, INSTANT ACCEPTANCE OF THE OFFERED MERCY, FOLLOWS. Ver. 22, "Behold, we come unto thee; for," etc. As well might the steel filings refuse to be moved by the magnet that lies by them as the sin-convinced and contrite heart fail to lay hold on the promise set before it in the gospel. No sooner has God said, "Return, I will heal," than the answer is heard, "Behold, we come."

V. Then follows THE CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE OF FAITH. (Vers. 23—25.) There had been confession and repentance before the soul had heard and accepted the offer of pardon; but that which follows is more full, more deep than that which went before. We repent more deeply of sin after we have known God has pardoned us than before we had that blessed knowledge. See here: 1. Their confession of the utter vanity of all their idols (ver. 23). 2. Their confident assurance that God alone can be their salvation (ver. 23). 3. Their confession of the disgrace and infatuated folly which had characterized them as a people for so long a time (ver. 24). They call their idolatry "shame," and own how it has destroyed both their substance and themselves. 4. They acknowledge the complete righteousness of God's judgment against their sin, and their own just exposure to his wrath (ver. 25). "Let us lie in our shame and our disgrace cover us, that we have sinned," etc. (Lange's translation). And thus it ever is: the more we realize God's pardoning love, the more intense will be our perception of the baseness and utter evil of the sin that has been forgiven.

VI. This CONFESSION IS FOLLOWED BY FURTHER ASSURANCES OF GRACE. (Ch. iv. 1, 2.) Return to God shall be followed by return to their own land. "If thou returnest to me, thou shalt return (unto thy land), and if thou puttest away, etc., thou shalt not remove," *i.e.* into exile again. "And if thou shalt swear by Jehovah with sincere, righteous, and true heart," *i.e.* "if thou wilt truly give thyself up to God, then the heathen nations outside, seeing how thy God shall bless thee and shall heap his favours upon thee, shall come and bless themselves in him, and shall glory in him," *i.e.* they shall have done with their idolatries and be converted unto God. With such gracious promises would God encourage Israel in the new and better way in which

they are represented as walking; with such gentleness would he make them, as he in like manner makes all who truly turn to him, great.—C.

Ver. 16.—*Supercession of external religious ordinances and institutions.* This is because of the necessarily temporary nature of these, and the spirituality to which they are intended to minister, and which subsequently they may hinder.

I. THE TRUE WORSHIP OF GOD IS SPIRITUAL. It is not to bow before an altar or an ark that God calls us to his temple, but to see himself face to face, to discover our need of him, and to delight in his presence. Nor is this communion to be occasional or intermittent. The whole life is to be affected by spiritual influences. A true life may thereby become worship, and "daily toil temple service." This arises from the nature of God. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

II. THE MOST SACRED SYMBOLS ARE ONLY USEFUL AS THEY HELP TO THIS, AND WHEN IT IS ATTAINED ARE NO LONGER REQUIRED. This may be said not only of external church furniture, rites of worship, etc., but even of words and doctrines themselves, which are but imperfect representations of the Divine glory. When the building is finished the scaffolding is removed. The final end of education is not to load the mind with dead knowledge, but to culture and strengthen it. Ceremonial and doctrinal teaching are intended to lead men into personal experience of God and communion with him. When that is attained they fall into the background.

III. THAT RITUAL WORSHIP SHALL GIVE PLACE TO SPIRITUAL IS DISTINCTLY PROMISED. 1. *An incentive to the spiritual use of rites.* 2. *An assurance of Divine favour and love.* 3. *A promise of Christ and communion through him.*—M.

Ver. 19.—"*Put among the children.*" A promise deeply and tenderly evangelical. Israel and Judah had forfeited this position because they had broken the covenant. But the forgiving love of God is shown in his declaring that they should be reinstated. The force of the phrase is well explained as that of "bestowing a rich paternal benediction," or of restoring to the rights and privileges of inheritance.

I. THE SINNER HAS FORFEITED HIS POSITION IN THE FAMILY OF GOD. All through Scripture this relation is shown as depending upon mutual agreement and obligation. The covenant is the title-deed to the inheritance of God's children. The breaking of this on the part of the sinner destroys his claim and position. In the parable of the prodigal son we have the consciousness of this on the part of the transgressor beautifully described—"I am no more worthy to be called thy son." Moral harmony between the soul of man and God is of the essence of the filial relation. A lost position; a possibility that we have destroyed by our own act. Henceforth the sinner is a spiritual orphan, or a "child of Satan." There is no claim upon God save on condition of renewed obedience. He is subject to the wrath of God's wounded love and outraged honour.

II. READOPTION IS THE GUARANTEE OF ALL HIGHEST BLESSINGS. It is only children of God who are heirs of God; if, then, we would enjoy the privileges and blessings of his house, we must be reinstated in that which we have lost. But this is only possible on repentance and belief. We are assured here and elsewhere that the sinner can regain this title and relation without lessening of the dignity, privilege, and affection. When once this has taken place there is no bar to the bestowal of God's richest benediction. As his children, as those who are actuated by his love and governed by his Spirit, there is ample security that his blessings shall not be abused. A holy confidence and communion are established, and the true end of being is once more secured.

III. THIS IS AN ACT OF GOD'S FREE GRACE. The initiative is not the sinner's. Overtures of mercy come from him he has offended. There is nothing to compel God to do this. He is perfectly free, and any obligation into which he enters is sealed only by his voluntary promises. There is abundant evidence, too, of a Divine satisfaction and joy in the exercise of pardoning love. It is spoken of as a long hoped for and gladsome consummation. The "Abba, Father!" of the restored one is music in the heart of God. This is the only true joy—the joy of reconciliation. Who can doubt his welcome with such assurances as this? God wills not that any should perish, but that all should come to him and live.—M.

Vers. 21—25.—*Typical penitence.* It is difficult if not impossible to fix any historic date for the fulfilment of this prophecy. Not a few competent scholars maintain that it is yet unfulfilled. But in any case it is a picture of the future, and may be accepted as a description of the penitence that is well-pleasing in the sight of God. All through it is spiritual, and the national circumstances involved are put thoroughly into the background.

I. THE UPSPRINGING OF GODLY SORROW FOR SIN. (Ver. 21.) It is not the expression of annoyance and pain at the consequences of sin. A deeper sentiment inspires the host of weeping supplicants. Sin itself is the grief. The cry is from men who feel they have lost their way, that there is no satisfaction in the foul and inconsequent rites of idolatry. The religion and the life that flows from it are felt to be profoundly and utterly false. Memories of past spiritual privileges and endearing ties overpower their hearts. They do not wait, but pour forth their sorrow on the very scene of transgression. Their sin is before them. God is the Being they have offended, and to him therefore do they cry, in heartfelt and unrestrainable sorrow.

II. THE DIVINE RESPONSE. (Ver. 22.) The fatherly heart of God cannot resist the "voice heard upon the high places." He waits not, but forthwith addressing them already as "children," encourages their approach. Their offence is declared, but equally is the promise given, "I will heal your backslidings [apostasies]." This expresses the objective and subjective influence of Divine forgiveness. It not only removes the sin so that forthwith and henceforth it is as if it had never been, but it destroys the causes and tendencies of the evil. The source is cleansed, the disposition changed, and the way cleared for thorough reconciliation with God.

III. THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE DIVINE INVITATION. (Ver. 22.) God is taken at his word. No delay takes place. As the way of return has been shown, so they hasten to avail themselves of it. His authority and relation to them are acknowledged. They obey him.

IV. THE ACCEPTED SINNER'S CONFESSION. (Vers. 23, 24.) The "vanity," waste, and ruin attendant upon idolatry are declared. God is recognized as the only Saviour. Testimony like this has often proved more powerful in converting sinners than many sermons. It is due to God, and may be profitable to others.

V. THE ACCOMPANYING EMOTIONS. (Ver. 25.) Shame predominates. But it is not accompanied by despair. There is a false shame which prevents the sinner coming to God; there is a true shame which coexists with acceptance of proffered mercy, and earnest effort to retrieve the past. We ought not too readily to forget "the wormwood and the gall."—M.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Vers. 1, 2.—The form and structure of the translation require a change. Render, *If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith Jehovah, wilt return unto me; and if thou wilt put away*, etc., *and not wander; and wilt swear, As Jehovah liveth, with good faith, with justice, and with righteousness; then shall the nations bless themselves by him, and in him shall they glory.* The clause, "and not wander," seems too short; the Septuagint had a choicer reading, "and put away, etc., from his [thy] mouth, and not wander from before me." It is the close of the prophecy which we have here. The prophet subjoins a promise which he has heard from Jehovah. True, it does not appeal to Israel's self-love (as Isa. xlviii. 18, 19; Ps. lxxxi. 13—16), but to a nobler feeling of responsibility for the world's welfare. Israel has been entrusted with a mission, and on the due performance of this mission hangs the weal or woe of humanity. Hence Jehovah's longing for Israel's repentance. If Israel will but "return," and obey God's commandments, all nations will be attracted to the true religion. The form of expression used for the latter statement is borrowed probably from Gen. xxii. 18; xxvi. 4 (it is less closely parallel with Gen. xii. 3; xviii. 18). To "bless by" any one is to use his name in the benediction formula. Seeing Israel so blessed through his allegiance to Jehovah, all nations shall wish themselves a similar blessing (the reverse of the process in ch. xxix. 22; comp. Isa. lxv. 16). To "swear, As Jehovah liveth," means to call Jehovah to witness to the truth of a statement. This is to be done "with good faith," etc., *i.e.* the object of the oath must be consistent with honesty and probity. Abominations; *i.e.* idols, as often (see 2 Kings xxiii. 24),

Ver. 3.—**There is no occasion to separate** vers. 3, 4, from the preceding prophecy. We have other instances of as sudden a transition from the Israelites (in the narrower sense) to the men of Judah (see Isa. viii. 6—14; x. 1—4; xxviii. 1—6; in the writer's commentary). **For thus, etc.** "For" is here not causal, but explanatory: "I say this not only to the men of Israel, but to you, O men of Judah, who need the admonition to repentance, how deeply!" (see ch. v. 2). **Break up your fallow ground**; the same figure as in Hos. x. 12. To understand it, we must read the clause in connection with the following one. **Sow not among thorns.** The prophet means, though he does not say so, the roots which will spring up into thorns. "Do not plant your good resolutions in a heart filled up with the roots of thorns,' but first rake up the soil, and clear it of noxious germs, and then sow the seed which will grow up in a holy life" (comp. Matt. xiii. 7).

Ver. 4.—**Circumcise yourselves to the Lord.** A significant passage. All the Jews were circumcised, but not all were "circumcised to the Lord." There were but too many who were "circumcised in uncircumcision" (ch. ix. 25), and the prophet sternly reduces such circumcision to the level of the heathenish rite of cutting off the hair (ch. ix. 26; comp. Herod. iii. 8). Jeremiah seems to have been specially anxious to counteract a merely formal, ritualistic notion of circumcision, sharing in this, as in other points, the influence of the Book of Deuteronomy, so lately found in the temple (comp. Deut. x. 16). To him the venerable rite of circumcision (older, certainly, than Abraham) is a symbol of the devotion of the heart to its rightful Lord (comp. St. Paul in Rom. ii. 28, 29; Col. ii. 11; Phil. iii. 3).

Vers. 5—31.—A revelation of grievous purport has suddenly reached the prophet. See how the foe draws nearer and nearer, and how alarm drives the scattered population to seek for refuge in the fortified cities. Can such be the issue of the promises of peace with which Jehovah has encouraged his people? Such are the contents of the first paragraph (vers. 5—10). Next, in short, detached figures the prophet sets forth the sin of the people and its punishment. Like a scorching simoom is the former; like swift clouds, and like a whirlwind, is the onward march of the instruments of the latter. Swift, indeed, must repentance be, if it is to outrun punishment. For the northern peoples are already here (vers. 11—18). The impression is so strong on the mind of the prophet that he vents himself in language such as the last man might employ on the morrow of the final judgment day (vers. 19—26). And now, "lest what precedes might seem only poetry" (Payne Smith), the Divine decree is solemnly announced. The judgment is irrevocable; but there is a gleam of hope: "I will not make a full end." On the question whether the Scythians or the Babylonians are mainly alluded to, see Introduction.)

Ver. 5.—**Cry, gather together**; rather, *cry aloud.*

Ver. 6.—**Set up the standard.** The "standard" was a tall pole with a flag, pointing in the direction of Zion, for the guidance of fugitives. **Retire, stay not**; rather, *save your goods by flight; linger not.* The former verb occurs again in the same sense in Exod. ix. 19; Isa. x. 31. **From the north.** The expression suits either the Scythians or the Chaldeans (see on ch. i. 14).

Ver. 7.—**The lion**; the symbol of irresistible might and royalty (Gen. xlix. 7; Rev. v. 5). **Of the Gentiles**; rather, *of the nations.* There is no reference to the distinction between Jews and Gentiles; the Jews themselves are not allowed to escape. An ordinary lion attacks individual men; this lion destroys nations. **Is on his way**; literally, *has broken up his encampment*—a phrase perhaps suggested by the nomad Scythians.

Ver. 8.—**Is not turned back from us.** As we in our folly believed (ch. ii. 35).

Ver. 9.—**The heart . . . shall perish**; *i.e.* they shall lose their reason. The same verb in Ethiopic means "to be mad." The "heart" in Old Testament language is the centre of the intellectual as well as of the moral life (comp. Hos. iv. 11; Job xii. 24; Prov. xv. 28). So St. Ephrem the Syrian says ('Works,' in Syriac, ii. 316, quoted by Delitzsch), "The reason expatiates in the heart as in a palace."

Ver. 10.—**Ah, Lord God!** rather, *Alas! O Lord Jehovah* (see on ch. i. 6). **Thou hast greatly deceived this people, etc.** Much difficulty has been felt in interpreting this verse, partly because it seems directly to charge Jehovah with "deceit," and partly because the prophecy, **Ye shall have peace**, on which this charge is founded, accords exactly with the strain of the "false prophets" (see ch. vi. 14; xiv. 13; xxiii. 17). Hence some (*e.g.* Ewald) have altered the points of the verb at the beginning of the verse, so as to enable them to render, "And one shall say," the subject understood being either a "false prophet" or one of the people. This view is not in itself impossible (Keil's objection will not bear exa-

mination), but is not absolutely necessary, for the present is not the only passage in which Jeremiah, under the influence of strong emotion, charges Jehovah with "deceit" (see ch. xx. 7, a synonymous word is used; and comp. 1 Kings xxii. 23), and the words, "Ye shall have peace," may be meant to summarize the cheering promises in ch. iii. 14—18. Jeremiah may (it is not incorrect to conjecture) have supposed the fulfilment of his prophecy to be nearer than it really was (comp. 1 Pet. i. 11); hence his disappointment, and hence his strong language. So St. Jerome, "Quia supra dixerat, In illo tempore vocabunt Jerusalem solium Dei, etc., et nunc dicit, Peribit cor regis, turbatur propheta et in se Deum putat esse mentitum; nec intelligit, illud multa post tempora repromissum, hoc autem vicino futurum tempore." To suppose, with Keil, that Jeremiah refers the prophecies of the "false prophets" to God as their ultimate Author, seems inconsistent with Jeremiah's own statements in ch. xiv. 14 (comp. ch. v. 13). Moreover, we have parallels elsewhere in the prophets, as well as in the Book of Job, for the use of language with regard to Providence which a calmer judgment would condemn. A notable instance is Isa. lxiii. 17, where the Jewish Church, through its mouthpiece the prophet, throws the responsibility of its errors upon Jehovah. Depressed by melancholy, they give way for the moment to those human "thoughts" which are not as "My thoughts." They felt the "burden of the mystery." **Unto the soul**; *i.e.* unto the life.

Ver. 11.—**Shall it be said to this people**; *i.e.* words like these may be used *with reference to* this people. **A dry wind**, etc.; literally, *a clear wind* (but the notions of dryness and heat are closely connected with that of heat; comp. Isa. xviii. 4). The prophet doubtless means the east wind, which is very violent in Palestine, and, of course, quite unsuitable for the winnowing process. **High places** should rather be *bare hills*. **Toward**; or (is) *the way of*. So Hitzig, supposing the conduct of the Jews to be likened to a wind which brings no blessing, but only drought and desolation.

Ver. 12.—**Even a full wind from those places**. The passage is obscure, but this is a very possible rendering. "Full," equivalent to "violent;" "those (places)," equivalent to the bare hills spoken of in ver. 11. Keil and Payne Smith, however, render, "a fuller wind than those," *i.e.* a more violent wind than those which serve for winnowing the corn; while Hitzig (see on ver. 11) supposes "from those" to mean the persons described in ver. 11 as "the daughter of my people." **Unto me**; or perhaps *for me*, at my beck and call. **Now also will I**, etc. We must supply the other term of the antithesis from the context: "As they have sinned against me, so will I also now hold a court of justice upon them" (see on ch. i. 16).

Ver. 13.—**He shall come up as clouds**, etc. It is needless to name the subject; who can it be but the host of Jehovah's warlike instruments? (For the first figure, comp. Ezek. xxxviii. 16; for the second, Isa. v. 28; lxvi. 15; and for the third, Hab. i. 8; Deut. xxviii. 49.) **Woe unto us!** etc. The cry of lamentation of the Jews (comp. ver. 20; ch. ix. 18).

Ver. 14.—**Thy vain thoughts**. The phrase specially belongs to sins against one's neighbour—such sins as are described in ch. vii. 5—9 (Keil). "Vain" should rather be "wicked" (immoral); the root-meaning of the noun is "a breath" (the symbol of material or moral emptiness).

Ver. 15.—**For a voice declareth**, etc. There is no time to lose, for already news of the foe has arrived. He is now at Dan, the northern frontier-town, and is heard of almost as soon in the hill-country of Ephraim.

Ver. 16.—**Make ye mention**, etc. This verse contains a call to the neighbouring nations to take notice of an event which nearly concerns them all. True, it is only the investment of Jerusalem which can as yet be reported, but there can hardly be a doubt of the issue, and the capture of the principal fortress will at once be followed by that of the other fortified "cities of Judah." **Against** in the second clause should rather be *concerning*. (For the use of "behold" before an imperative, comp. Ps. cxxxiv. 1.) **Watchers**; *i.e.* besiegers (comp. ver. 17), who like the panther lie in wait for every one who comes out of the city, to kill him (ch. v. 6; comp. ch. vi. 25).

Ver. 17.—**As keepers of a field**. The prophet compares the tents, or perhaps the booths (1 Kings xx. 12, 16), of the besieging army to the booths of the guardians of the crops (Isa. i. 8; Job xxvii. 18).

Ver. 18.—**This is thy wickedness**; *i.e.* the effect of thy wickedness. (For the following words, comp. ch. ii. 19; iv. 10.) **Because**; rather, *truly*.

Ver. 19.—**My bowels**. It is doubted whether the speaker in vers. 19—21 is the prophet or the whole nation. Ver. 19 reminds us of Isa. xv. 5; xvi. 11 and xxi. 3, 4, and would be quite in harmony with the elegiac tone of our prophet elsewhere; the Targum too already regards the passage as an exclamation of the prophet. On the other hand, the phrase "my tents" (ver. 20) certainly implies that the people, or the pious section of the people, is the speaker. Both views may perhaps be united. The

prophet may be the speaker in ver. 19, but simply (as is the case with so many of the psalmists) as the representative of his fellow-believers, whom in ver. 20 he brings on the stage more directly. Ver. 19 is best rendered as a series of exclamations—

"My bowels! my bowels! I must writhe in pain!
The walls of my heart! My heart moaneth unto me!
I cannot hold my peace!
For thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, "
The alarm of war!"

Observe, the "soul" hears; the "heart" is pained. So generally the one is more active, the other more passive. The Hebrew margin gives, for "I must writhe," "I must wait" (comp. Micah vii. 7); but this rendering does not suit the context. **The walls of my heart.** A poetical way of saying, "My heart beats."

Ver. 20.—**My tents.** Jeremiah uses a similar phrase in ch. xxx. 18 (comp. also 2 Sam. xx. 1; 1 Kings viii. 66; xii. 16; Ps. cxxxii. 3; also Isa. xxix. 1, "city where David encamped, *i.e.* dwelt"). The expression is evidently a "survival" of the nomadic, tent-dwelling age. (Comp. the parallel phrase, "my curtains," *i.e.* my tent-curtains; comp. ch. x. 20; Isa. liv. 2; Cant. i. 5.)

Ver. 21.—**Shall I see the standard.** (See on ver. 6.)

Ver. 22.—**For my people is foolish.** The Lord gives no direct answer to the complaining question in ver. 21. He simply states the moral ground for Judah's calamity, and implies that this will last so long as the people continue to be "foolish," *i.e.* virtual deniers of the true God.

Ver. 23.—**I beheld.** The prophet is again the speaker, but in a calmer mood. God's judgment has been pronounced, and it is not for him to rebel. He has now simply to record the vision of woe which has been granted him. He foresees the utter desolation into which not only the land of Judah, but the earth in general, will be brought, and which reminds him of nothing so much as the "waste and wild" condition of the earth previous to the first creative word. But why is "the earth" mentioned in this connection? Because the judgment upon Judah is but one act in the great general judgment which, when completed, will issue in a fresh order of things (comp. Isa. iii. 14, 15, where side by side are mentioned Jehovah's judgment of "the peoples" and of "his people," and Isa. xxiv., where the judgment upon the enemies of Israel is interwoven with the judgment upon "the earth"). **Without form, and void**; rather, *waste and wild* (to represent in some degree the characteristic assonance of the original—*tōhū va-bōhū*); more literally, *immovable and lifeless.* It is the phrase used in Gen. i. 2 for primeval chaos. *Tōhū* and *bōhū* occur in parallel lines in Isa. xxxiv. 11, to express utter desolation; *tōhū* alone five times in the Book of Isaiah, and once in Job. **They had no light.** The heavens were in the same condition as on the third day, subsequently to the creation of the heavens, but prior to that of the luminaries.

Ver. 24.—**Moved lightly**; rather, *moved to and fro.*

Ver. 26.—**The fruitful place**; rather, *the garden-land* (see on ch. ii. 7). Not "the Carmel" (Keil, Payne Smith) for the context refers to the whole of the country, not to any single tract. The article before the two appellatives is the generic. **At the presence of**; rather, *by reason of.*

Ver. 27.—The vision breaks off, and the prophet emphasizes its truthfulness by the announcement of the Divine decree. "Desolation, and yet not a full end," is its burden. This is the same doctrine of the "remnant" which formed so important a part of the prophetic message of Isaiah and his contemporaries. However severe the punishment of Judah may be, there will be a "remnant" which shall escape, and become the seed of a holier nation (Amos ix. 8; Isa. iv. 2; vi. 13; x. 20; xi. 11; Hos. vi. 1, 2).

Ver. 28.—**For this**; *i.e.* because of the impending judgment. **Be black.** "To be black" is equivalent to "to put on mourning" (comp. ch. viii. 21; xiv. 2).

Ver. 29.—**The whole city.** The reading of which this is a version can hardly be the right one; for "the whole city" can only be Jerusalem, and in ver. 6 the people outside are bidden to take refuge in the capital. Hence Ewald, Hitzig, and Payne Smith (after Septuagint, Targum) would slightly amend the word rendered "city," so as to translate "the whole land" (of Judah). **Shall flee**; literally, *fleeth.* So afterwards render, "have gone," "is forsaken," "dwelleth." It is a vivid dramatic representation of the effects of the invasion. **Bowmen.** It is singular that Herodotus should say nothing about the use of the bow by the Chaldeans. But the monuments give ample evidence that they were a people of archers. So of course were the Scythians, as Herodotus testifies. **The rocks**; *i.e.* the limestone caverns which abound in Palestine, and which were frequently used as strongholds and hiding-places (see Judg. vi. 2; xv. 8; 1 Sam. xiii. 6; xiv. 11; xxiv. 3 (especially); 1 Kings xviii. 13).

Ver. 30.—**And when thou art spoiled, etc.** It is Jerusalem who is addressed—Jerusalem, personified as a woman, who decks herself out finely to please her admirers.

All these arts are in vain, for a violent repulsion has converted her lovers into her deadly enemies. And when Jerusalem is "spoiled," or taken by storm, what device will there be left to attempt? The "lovers" are the foreign powers to whom the Jews paid court (ch. ii. 18, 36, 37). **Though thou rentest thy face, etc**; alluding to the custom of Eastern women, who try to make their eyes seem larger by putting powdered antimony (the Arabic *kohl*) upon their eyelids. So, for instance, did Jezebel (see 2 Kings xi. 30); and one of Job's daughters received the name Keren-happuch, "box of antimony," *i.e.* one who sets off the company in which she is, as antimony does the eye. An old author, Dr. Shaw, writes thus: "None of these ladies take themselves to be completely dressed till they have tinged the hair and edges of their eyelids with the powder of lead ore. And as this operation is performed by dipping first into this powder a small wooden bodkin of the thickness of a quill, and then drawing it afterwards through the eyelids over the ball of the eye, we have a lively image of what the prophet (Jer. iv. 30) may be supposed to mean" (Shaw, 'Travels in Barbary and the Levant,' 2nd edit., p. 229).

Ver. 31.—**For I have heard a voice, etc.** This explains the preceding statement, "They will seek thy life." It is this murderous plot which calls forth the "cry as of a woman in pangs." **Bewaileth herself**; rather, *sigheth deeply*. **Her hands**; literally, *her palms*. **Is wearied because of murderers**; rather, *fainteth into the hands of* (literally, *is weary unto*) *the murderers*.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 3.—*Fallow ground.* Fallow ground is land that has fallen out of cultivation, or that has never been cultivated, and this has its counterpart in the broad fields of humanity, in the nations or individual men who are not under the influence of spiritual cultivation.

I. FALLOW GROUND IS COMPARATIVELY FRUITLESS. It may not be utterly fruitless. Even the bramble bears its wholesome fruit, and good thoughts and good deeds spring up in the midst of heathen nations and irreligious people. God's Spirit has not wholly deserted any. But such fruit is poor compared with the fruit of cultivation, and the crop of it is thin. The good which still pertains to a neglected soul is imperfect, and small in the extreme compared with the good which would spring up in that soul under proper spiritual influences. The highest thought, the purest morality, the noblest effort, the largest charity, are only to be found where the spiritual life is cultivated by worship, instruction, and discipline.

II. FALLOW GROUND BEARS WEEDS. If there are no flowers in a neglected garden, the soil will not be unoccupied. Dropped by birds in their flight, borne on the wings of the wind, in some way, myriads of seeds will find entrance into that garden and spring up in luxuriant growth. The neglected garden is not a barren desert; it is a wilderness. The neglected soul will not be merely deficient of good; it will bear a crop of evil. The heart cannot endure a void. If it is not filled with pure thoughts, it will indulge in unholy imaginations; if it has no object of worthy love, its affections will descend and twine about some debased object; if it is not active in doing good, it will be diligent in doing harm. In proportion to the gifts and powers of the soul will be the evil that will come out of it when neglected; the more fertile the soil, the more abundant the crop of weeds.

III. FALLOW GROUND IS SUSCEPTIBLE OF CULTIVATION. It is not rock, but good soil. The most brutalized man is not yet a brute. Conscience slumbers, is not killed. The Divine image in the soul is worn in the traffic of worldliness and fouled in the mire of sin, but it is not effaced. The disobedient son is still a son. Hence there is hope for the most neglected heathen, the worst sinner, the oldest enemy of Christ.

IV. FALLOW GROUND MUST BE BROKEN UP. Throw bushels of wheat among the thorns, and the thorns will only "choke" it (Matt. xiii. 7). Till the old evil is torn from the heart, the new truth cannot grow and bear fruit there. Men must repent of sin before they can receive the seed of eternal life to profit. John the Baptist must precede Christ. So long as we are cherishing any sin we are preventing the growth of fruitful graces. The mere hearing of the truth is not enough. If the heart is hard, it will not receive it (Isa. vi. 10). If the heart is preoccupied, the truth will be soon forgotten, or at best will be crushed out of all living energy. Hence the heart must

not only be cleared of weeds, it must be softened. The plough must break up the fallow ground.

V. IT IS OUR DUTY TO BREAK UP THE FALLOW GROUND. Men must be prepared for receiving the gospel of Christ. We are too eager to sow the seed. Hence the slight returns we have for so much effort and expenditure. People are called to "accept Christ" who do not know Christ, and would have no room in their hearts to receive him if they did know him. Much so-called "gospel preaching" thus meets with ridicule, or indifference, or bewildered surprise. If we were less hasty in seeking brilliant results we should see more true, fruitful returns for our work. Christ was not always and only crying, "Come unto me!" "Follow me!" Less pleasing, and in some eyes less important, words were often seen by him to be necessary. Men need instructing as well as inviting, rebuking as well as exhorting.

VI. THE DUTY OF BREAKING UP THE FALLOW GROUND IS GREAT AND PRESSING. How much fallow ground there is (1) in the *world!*—think of India, China, Africa, the godless of Europe; (2) in the *Church!*—how many enjoy its privileges! how few maintain its work! and (3) in *our own hearts!*—what faculties are wasted! what opportunities for good neglected!

Ver. 10.—*Divine illusions.* I. GOOD MEN MAY MISJUDGE GOD'S ACTIONS. The words of the text are not spoken with Divine authority; on the contrary, they are given in historical narrative as a record of the personal utterance of the prophet. He does not preface them with the august claim of authority, "Thus saith the Lord;" he distinctly says, "Then said I." Without needing to look for any other rendering of the text, we may consider it as throwing light on the condition of the prophet's mind, rather than as a difficult scriptural declaration of God's character and mode of acting. Thus we may see in it an expression of hasty judgment, misunderstanding, irritable impatience, complaint. If so, it warns us to beware of the prejudiced or impassioned utterances of the best and wisest men (Ps. cxvi. 11), and to be more cautious in forming judgments on difficult aspects of providence and religion, since even prophets err.

II. IT IS DIFFICULT TO JUDGE RIGHTLY OF GOD'S ACTIONS WHILE WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF THEM. We are too near to have the right perspective. The character of an action cannot be judged till its ultimate design is revealed. Many things look wrong because they are parts of a whole the remainder of which is unseen. Pride, passion, self-interest, and prejudice pervert our judgment. We must wait for time to clear up many dark passages in earthly providence (John xiii. 7). The inconsistency which seemed palpable to Jeremiah is less felt by us.

III. GOD'S ACTIONS ARE SOMETIMES ILLUSORY TO US. There was a measure of truth in the rash cry of the prophet. God never deceives. Yet his utterance may be misunderstood by us. God is said to harden the heart when his action results in this evil condition through the misconduct of men, and not at all through his wish to bring that evil about. So God might almost be said to deceive (though the expression is misleading) when his Word is such that we fall into a misconception in hearing it.

IV. THE ILLUSORY CHARACTER OF SOME OF GOD'S ACTIONS IS DETERMINED BY COMMON LIMITATIONS AND IMPERFECTIONS. Some truths are revealed, while qualifying truths are necessarily hidden because we could not understand them. No mention is made of the time of the fulfilment of a promise; hence we think it will be immediate, and are disappointed when we see delay and find unexpected troubles coming first. One part of God's Word may seem to contradict another when they refer to different conditions, but conditions not yet revealed to us.

V. TRUTH AND HUMAN WELFARE ARE BETTER SERVED BY THESE ILLUSIONS THAN BY REVELATIONS WHICH ADMIT OF NO MISCONSTRUCTION. If the child were never allowed to stumble, he would never learn to walk. We are educated by temporary illusions for higher truths than could be attained by plainer paths. Thus we know more of God and of heaven through the anthropomorphic and materialistic language of much of Scripture, which has resulted in gross misconceptions at times, than we should have learnt from language made bare enough to be unmistakable.

Ver. 14.—*The cleansing of the heart a necessary condition of salvation.* I. SALVATION IS PROMISED ON THE SIMPLEST POSSIBLE CONDITIONS. The very mention of con-

ditions suggests difficulties, delays, barriers. But the only conditions required are in our own power, are simply such as are necessary to make the reception of the salvation of God possible to us, and do not refer to the source of it. We are not to save ourselves, not to purchase nor to merit salvation, but only to be in a right condition to receive it.

II. SALVATION IS ONLY POSSIBLE WHERE THERE IS A CLEANSING FROM WICKEDNESS. The soul that clings to sin cannot also grasp the Saviour. If it would be right to deliver men from the painful consequences of wickedness while they remained under the power of it, it must have been wrong ever to have permitted those consequences. If it is not unjust to forgive the impenitent, it is unjust to punish them, which is absurd.

III. THE CLEANSING FROM WICKEDNESS MUST BE IN THE HEART. There all sin has its origin. Clean hands are vain without a pure heart. Reformation must not simply be moral, it must be spiritual—not a change of habits, but a purification of thought, affection, and desire.

IV. THE DUTY OF CLEANSING OUR HEARTS FROM WICKEDNESS RESTS UPON OURSELVES. The text is not a promise, but an exhortation. True, no one can purify himself by his own efforts alone (ch. ii. 22). God has provided the fountain for uncleanness, and only they who wash in this are clean. But men must plunge into the purifying flood, must make the effort of repentance, must seek the cleansing which is promised through Christ, must submit to the baptism of the Holy Ghost, must actively apply themselves to the execution of good deeds in the power given by God. Compare the words of Isaiah (i. 16).

V. THERE IS NO REASON TO DELAY THE CLEANSING OF OUR HEARTS. "How long shall thoughts of wickedness lodge within thee?" The longer repentance is postponed, the more difficult does it become; the more numerous are the stains of sin, the nearer is the approach of doom. Since it is for men to seek the cleansing of their souls, any delay must be attributed to their negligence, not to God's unwillingness to help them.

Ver. 22.—*The folly of misdirected wisdom.* I. WICKEDNESS IS FOLLY. The "fool," according to Scripture, is both morally corrupt and intellectually imbecile (*e.g.* Ps. cvii. 17). There is a truth underlying the saying of Socrates, that "Virtue is knowledge, and vice is ignorance." It is apparent, indeed, that men may have an intellectual conception of the right while they do wrong, as also that good men may fall into error. But, on the other hand: 1. We cannot progress in goodness till we *discern the way;* we must know God to love him, recognize the good to choose it. 2. Immorality *deadens the faculty of spiritual intuition;* purity purges the vision of the soul. 3. Wisdom is not mere intelligence, but *applied intelligence,* practical intelligence. It is not perfected till it is practised. He who knows the good is not wise until he does it; and he who does right from instinct, habit, or mere inclination is not really performing a moral action. An action is moral when it is performed with an intelligent regard to principle, *i.e.* when it is under the direction of spiritual wisdom.

II. THE FOLLY OF WICKEDNESS MAY BE ASSOCIATED WITH MISDIRECTED WISDOM. The "fool" in spiritual things may be a worldly wise man and clever in the execution of wickedness. Ironical as is the language of the text, it may often find a literal application. Shrewd business men may be spiritually blind. Men who are wakeful and eager in material concerns become dull and listless when they touch higher interests. This may be explained by two considerations. 1. *We develop most wisdom in regard to those things which interest us most.* Interest rouses attention, quickens perception, excites inquiry, stimulates intellectual activity; while lack of interest leaves the mind in a slumberous condition, working at half-power. If we feel no interest in goodness, we shall be dull and foolish in regard to it. 2. *Spiritual wisdom depends upon a spiritual tone of mind.* The greatest intelligence is not capable of detecting subtle harmonies and discords if it is not accompanied by "an ear for music." The cold intellect, which is but a huge calculating-machine, has not the fitting powers of perception for discerning spiritual truth. This requires a spiritual sympathy (1 Cor. ii. 14). Therefore (1) let the man of conscious intellectual power beware of the danger of assuming to judge spiritual questions before he has acquired the requisite

spiritual qualification; and (2) let us all beware of attaching too much weight to the religious motives of people who may be able business men, clever literary critics, and even profound students of science, and yet in moral regions "blind leaders of the blind."

III. MISDIRECTED WISDOM IS THE HEIGHT OF FOLLY. The very ability, misapplied, witnesses for the foolishness which permitted so gross a mistake. These people who are "wise to do evil" are on the whole "foolish," "sottish," and "have *no* understanding." The man who is prudent enough to exercise forethought for this life only enhances his folly in having none for the future life (Luke xii. 16—21). He who knows much of worldly things is convicted of grossest darkness in not knowing God. The born fool is excused by his misfortune of nature. But how foolish for the man who shows himself capable of wisdom to neglect the highest wisdom! Note, in conclusion, (1) the common mistake of honouring men for their intellectual ability rather than for their moral character; (2) the error of those who pride themselves in "knowing the world," while they are ignorant of God (Rom. xvi. 19); and (3) the need to turn from intellectual pride to childlike trust for the source of true wisdom (Matt. xi. 25).

Vers. 23—26.—*Chaos the result of sin.* I. SIN HAS A RETROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT. In his vision of the earth desolated by a Divine judgment on sin, Jeremiah sees a relapse to the primeval condition before the dawn of creation, and in his graphic description uses the very words of the narrative in Genesis. He describes the earth as "waste and wild." Every step in sin is a step downward, backward. It is backsliding. How rapid this is! One generation sees the fall back to the condition from which it had taken ages to build up the order of the world. One day's sin may undo the work of years in a soul's progress. One age of misrule may throw a nation back for centuries.

II. SIN HAS A DISINTEGRATING INFLUENCE. It breaks up the fair order of the world and tends to reduce it to chaos. Religion and morality are the chief securities for order, the strongest bands of social unity. Vice is a social solvent, destroying ties of trust and affection, undermining the foundations of industrial co-operation. It is corruption, and corruption means decomposition. This may be applied (1) politically, (2) socially, (3) personally.

III. SIN HAS A DESOLATING EFFECT. The earth is seen as not only wild; it is "waste," *i.e.* fruitless, solitary, desolate. The fruitful place becomes a wilderness, and the whole land desolate. The result of the retrogressive and disintegrating influences of sin is not to reduce the world to a state of elementary simplicity. It introduces confusion, turmoil, disaster, death. The loss of goodness involves the admission of evil passions, and the advent of these is followed by the irruption of misery with no prospect of peace but in death and destruction (Jas. i. 15).

Ver. 30.—*The abject helplessness which resorts to false pretensions and its failure.* I. ABJECT HELPLESSNESS. This follows the discovery or punishment of sin. It is when Israel "is spoiled." Israel is boastful and self-confident before the disaster comes; the prophet advises him to consider what he will do after it has fallen on him. What can be done in such a case? The sin cannot be undone; once revealed it cannot be hidden again; punishment from God cannot be successfully resisted by man. It is vain, then, to call on the mountains to fall and cover us (Luke xxiii. 30). How dreadful to be thus confounded! left without excuse, without refuge, without remedy! How much better to anticipate this conclusion and prevent it!

II. FALSE PRETENSIONS. There are the refuges now resorted to and trusted in for the future, but in vain. 1. Outward glory is a mockery when once internal wretchedness is discovered. What use are purple and fine linen to the leper? 2. When character is revealed, profession counts for nothing. 3. When true worth is destroyed, the most frantic attempts to recover it at the last moment will prove fruitless. The character once lost is hard to retrieve. Consider, then, the common mistake of living for appearances, making the outside of life respectable while the heart is corrupt, and, in the event of discovery, not repenting and amending, but simply excusing one's self, "making the best of the matter," trying still to put on a fair show. This is common at all times. So many people are more anxious to seem good than to be good. All the petty contrivances and miserable deceptions of such lives will be one day disclosed.

III. ULTIMATE FAILURE. "Thy lovers will despise thee, they will seek thy life." 1. Once discovered, the attempt to win favour by false appearances will not only defeat its own object; it will aggravate the evil it is intended to avoid. It aims at securing honour; but when detected it is the butt of ridicule, the deserved occasion of contempt. 2. The friends of sinful days become foes in the time of trouble. The *lovers* of the daughter of Zion are the first to despise her and seek her life. The ties of friendship in wickedness are brittle. This is based on selfishness. No high constancy can be expected from people of bad character. The only friend who will be a refuge in the shame and ruin which follow sin, is not the partner in guilt, but the very God against whom the sin is committed.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*The duty of reality in religious profession.* The reformations of Jehu and Josiah were superficial and short-lived. Something more thorough was required. A real, immediate return to Jehovah was demanded.

I. THE SIGNS OF UNREALITY. 1. *Retention of the memorials and symbols of the guilty past.* They may not be used, but they are there. There has not been strength of will to remove them, or the fear of man has produced vacillation. Externally the heathen temple stands side by side with the house of God, and may claim equal respect with it. 2. *An uncertain and wavering attitude.* Blowing hot and blowing cold. Compromising with existent evils. Postponing needed reforms. 3. *Unrighteousness of life.* This is one of the gravest evils. A creed which does not affect conduct must be either untrue or not heartily believed. An enigma of the anti-slavery times was the fact that amongst the pro-slavery advocates were many of the most orthodox clergy, whereas the leaders of the agitation for freedom were secularists, Unitarians, and men of vague or heterodox religious opinions.

II. EVILS ATTENDANT UPON UNREALITY. 1. *Confusion is created between the true and the false religions.* 2. *A constant temptation exists in the relics and practices of evil that are retained.* 3. *Moral influence upon unbelievers is lost, and unrighteousness encouraged.* 4. *Spiritual growth is seriously impeded.* It is a "sowing among thorns," or upon the exhausted and unfruitful soil of superficial emotion and fancy. As wild land can be cleansed from weeds only by deep and repeated ploughing, so the spiritual nature must be thoroughly moved by penitence and steadfast resolution.

III. GOD'S FEELING TOWARDS UNREAL WORSHIPPERS. He cannot accept their penitence. Their services are an abomination to him. His anger is represented as a smouldering fire ready to break forth in destruction.—M.

Ver. 10.—*Human uncertainty coexisting with Divine illumination.* The prophecy now uttered does not harmonize with that of ch. iii. 12—25. The *times* of fulfilment are unknown to the prophet. This element of uncertainty in all prophecies, even those of Christ ("for of the times and the seasons knoweth no man," etc.) is noteworthy. This outburst of annoyance and misconception illustrates—

I. THE TEMPTATION LATENT IN SUPERIOR DIVINE KNOWLEDGE. The moral balance and perspective are threatened with disturbance. Hence the impulse to expostulate with God—to speak as if from a superior standpoint of morality. Seeming contradictions are encountered which would have no existence to a simpler or less illuminated spirit. It is as if the moral nature of man were only practically sufficient for what is revealed to him by the ordinary faculties and means of knowledge.

II. THE SORROW ACCOMPANYING EXCEPTIONAL GIFTS. The prophet, no more than the poet or man of genius, is to be envied. How hard to be the custodian of a truth men will not receive! to be conscious of evils impending which one cannot avert! The *exceptional sensitiveness* of the prophetic temperament, and the *keener vision* of the seer, are the occasions of an incommunicable sadness, and even, at times, of overwhelming concern. Especially is this the case where patriotic feeling identifies the prophet on the one side with his people, and devout spirituality leads him nevertheless to acknowledge the righteousness of God. There was no more human or loving heart in Israel than

Jeremiah's, and if they would not heed his counsels, he was helpless. To be "before the age" in such a sense is not so enviable as we might imagine.

III. THE RESERVE THAT MARKS THE COMMUNICATION OF TRUTH. Partly necessitated by limitation of human nature; partly due to the subordination of the prophet, teacher, etc., to the special task before him. We should lose more than we should gain if, constituted as we are, we were to receive unlimited revelations of the future. The practical and immediate import of Divine revelation is therefore our first concern. To-day is a little space cleared for duty. Opportunities of well-doing occur in constant succession. "What is that to thee?" might well be asked of many a one that concerns himself with things beyond his ken: "follow thou me."—M.

Ver. 22.—*The wisdom of this world.* That there is such a thing we may well believe, for Christ himself noticed and commended it: "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." Within a certain range it is often seen to the disadvantage of the "wisdom that is from above."

I. IT IS GREAT IN QUESTIONS OF MEANS, METHODS, AND POLICY. Attention is directed to these continually. A certain pride is exhibited in skill and power of manipulation. There is something very attractive to a certain order of mind in the opportunities the world affords for manœuvre, dexterity, intrigue. The world prizes and encourages cleverness in practical, external matters. It can even appreciate the business qualities and the reliable character of Christians, when their inspiring principle is utterly ignored or intensely disliked. How much has the Church of to-day to learn of the world in merely practical concerns, knowledge of human nature, and adaptation of herself to her surroundings!

II. IT IS MARRED BY: 1. *Dislike to what is worthy and good.* Disillusion from worldly dreams may coexist with this. But men without lofty ideals cannot be happy or satisfied. 2. *Heedlessness as to the impending judgments of God and the eternal future.* 3. *Consciousness of worthlessness and uselessness of its own efforts.*—M.

Ver. 3.—*Fallow ground.* Such an analogy as this reminds us that the materials of the highest wisdom are always lying close within our reach, sometimes in very unlikely places. The world without is a mirror in which we see our own moral life and the laws that govern it reflected. Air, earth, and sea are full of teachers whom God has sent to rebuke in us all that is false and evil, and lead us into all that is true and good. The prophet, in the text, does but give an articulate voice to the silent eloquence of one of these. Apply personally some of the lessons taught.

I. THE LIFE OF EVERY MAN IS A PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL HUSBANDRY. There is a true analogy between the soul of a man and the field in which a farmer sows his seed. In each case there are latent productive elements, that may be turned either to good or evil according to the conditions of their development—capacities of indefinite improvement or of indefinite deterioration, of boundless fruitfulness or of boundless waste. The prolific virtue of the soil will nourish alike the germs of precious corn or of noisome weeds; and, whichever it be, the heavens above, by all the influences they shed down upon it, will promote the process. Thus will the faculties of our spiritual nature foster either the seeds of Divine excellence or of satanic corruption, and then all the laws to which our nature is subject, and all the associations of our life, will help to elaborate the issue, until we reap either a glad harvest of fruits that will endure for ever, or one of shame and sorrow—thorns and weeds and briars fit only for the flames. "He that soweth to his flesh," etc. (Gal. vi. 8). Hence the solemn necessity for some Divine power so to control and govern the secret dispositions and tendencies of our nature as that in our case the law shall be fulfilled in the nobler and better way. "Make the tree good," etc. (Matt. xii. 33).

II. In this husbandry of the soul, NEGLECT LEADS TO LOSS AND WASTE AND RUIN. "Fallow ground" is land untilled, uncultivated, which no plough turns up and into which no seed is cast. It may be purposely left to rest, that it may not exhaust itself, and that its internal resources may be all the richer afterwards. But the point of the analogy is this—that it naturally becomes encumbered with "thorns." In the spiritual husbandry, while fruitfulness is the result only of diligent labour, ruin follows from simple neglect. The land of the slothful husbandman will soon present the picture of

weedy, thorny desolation. To be ruined, to sink into a state of utter poverty and barrenness and destitution of all satisfying good, the souls of men only need to be left alone. "While men sleep the enemy sows tares." "What shall it profit a man," etc.? (Mark viii. 36). Our Lord speaks of the soul as being "lost" simply through being forgotten in the eager pursuit of a kind of good which can never of itself enrich and satisfy it. This implies that its native propensities are for the most part of a downward tendency. It bears within it the seeds of moral decay. The "fallow ground" spontaneously produces "thorns."

III. IT IS VAIN TO SOW SEEDS OF TRUTH AND GOODNESS IN HEARTS PREOCCUPIED WITH OTHER AND INCONGRUOUS THINGS. How many there are whose religious career may well be described as a "sowing among thorns"! They have religious susceptibilities; they are familiar with religious influences; but their secret hearts are the home of mean ambitions, tainted with the "lust of the eye and the pride of life," or they are entangled with a network of worldly associations or bound by the chains of some bad habit, from which they have not the courage or the strength to set themselves free. And so their spiritual condition is a strange medley of good and evil. Every better affection and impulse within them has some form of moral weakness by its side that nullifies it. Strong as their heavenward aspirations may sometimes be, there is nothing like whole-heartedness in their pursuit of the nobler good. No wonder they are "barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ." The ground must be cleared before a better result can be expected. How many a sower, going forth in the name of the Great Husbandman, is oppressed in spirit with the thought that much of the seed that he scatters falls "among thorns"! He has to contend with a thousand obstructive forces in men's hearts, and knows well that, unless some mightier force goes with his message to overbear all these, they will "choke the Word." Let the young especially watch and pray against the encroachment upon them of influences fatal to their higher life. It is a comparatively easy thing to overmaster the sins and follies of youth. Far otherwise when they have become the confirmed and cherished habits of the man. "Break up your fallow ground!" It is hard to do this. It involves much self-crucifixion. We all like to live at ease—to yield to the strongest influences of the passing hour, as the sluggard does, who allows himself to be overcome by the spell of sleep, and to dream away the hours and moments that ought to be spent in the wakeful activities of life. But this is not the way to reach the heights of heavenly glory and blessedness. It is the certain road to poverty and ruin, to despair and death. Not on grounds of self-interest alone is the appeal of the text to be urged. Consider what a loss to the world is involved in every barren, undeveloped human soul and life. It is a great calamity to a country to have large tracts of its territory lying waste and desolate, while many of its people, perhaps, are perishing for lack of bread, or compelled to flee to other lands to find a field and reward for their labour. How sad that, in a world of such overwhelming spiritual need and destitution as this, the powers of any human soul, that might exercise a redeeming influence upon it, should be left idle or allowed to run to waste!—W.

Ver. 14.—*Vain thoughts.* I. THE LIFE OF EVERY MAN IS GOVERNED BY HIS THOUGHTS. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. xxiii. 7). True as it is that the essential moral quality of the man will always determine the order of his thinking, the converse also is equally true. Thought is the formative principle of all personal life—kindles feeling, touches the springs of purpose, guides the course of moral action. What are character and conduct but the definite expression of secret thought?

> "That subtle husbandman,
> That sows its little seed of good or ill
> In the moist, unsunned surface of the heart.
> And what it there in secrecy doth plant,
> Stands with its ripe fruit at the judgment day."

II. EVERY MAN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TENOR OF HIS THOUGHTS. If not, there could be no room in this matter for remonstrance or appeal. The law of the association of ideas may be such that it is as impossible to prevent some particular thought from recurring to the mind as to stay the tide of the ocean; but it is certainly possible

for us to regulate our *habitual mental conditions*. It is given to us by watchful, prayerful self-discipline, especially by occupying the mind with higher and nobler things, to secure that the main drift of our thinking shall be in the right direction. We can choose our own fields of daily contemplation. Those thoughts will "lodge" in us which we most encourage and cherish, and for this we are accountable.

III. THE CHERISHING OF VAIN THOUGHTS IS NECESSARILY DEGRADING IN ITS EFFECT. "Vain thoughts" are iniquitous thoughts, sinful thoughts. "The thought of foolishness is sin" (Prov. xxiv. 9). It is impossible to measure the corrupting power of such thoughts. No evil imagination or purpose can enter the mind, and be allowed for a moment to dwell there, without leaving some moral stain behind it. Accustom yourself to any extent to the play of such influences, your whole being becomes contaminated by them, and—

"The baseness of their nature
Shall have power to drag you down."

Our minds cannot be in frequent contact with mean or grovelling objects of contemplation without finding that they poison all the streams of moral life within us. "To be carnally minded is death" (Rom. viii. 6).

IV. THE ONLY CURE FOR THIS EVIL TENDENCY IS THE DIVINE RENEWAL OF OUR SPIRITUAL NATURE. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts" (Matt. xv. 19). Let that be sanctified, and their power over us shall cease. Superficial expedients, mere external restraints and corrections, are of little use. We need something that shall go to the root of the disease. The fountain of life within must be cleansed if the streams that flow from it are to be pure. The temple at Jerusalem was externally beautiful, its roof so bright with burnished gold that nothing less pure than the glorious sunbeams could rest upon it; but that did not prevent it from being internally the haunt of many a form of hollow hypocrisy, and the scene of a base, worldly traffic—"a den of thieves." Let the Spirit of God make our souls his temple, and that holy Presence shall effectually scatter all vain and corrupt imaginations. They cannot "lodge" where the heavenly glory dwells. Every thought of our hearts shall then be "brought into captivity to Christ."—W.

Vers. 3, 4.—*The peril of profession without possession of real religion.* This will be shown if we consider—

I. THE SCENE HERE PRESENTED TO US. 1. The fallow ground; that is, ground unoccupied, free. Not hardened, as the wayside (cf. Matt. xiii.); not shallow-soiled, as the stony ground; not poor and barren, but capable of yielding rich return. 2. Sowers about to cast in seed—good seed. 3. A stern prohibition of their work. They are commanded to "sow not." A reason is given—the fallow ground that looks so fair is full of thorns. They are bidden "break up," *i.e.* purge, cleanse, this ground. And all this on penalty of God's sore displeasure (ver. 4, etc.).

II. ITS SIGNIFICANCE. 1. *For those to whom Jeremiah wrote.* (1) *They* were as the fallow ground, at this time free from open visible idolatry which had been their disgrace and ruin. All *that* King Josiah had put a stop to. So now they were free to begin afresh, to take a new departure, to turn over a new leaf, as fallow ground is ready for a new sowing (cf. the history of the times). (2) And they were about to sow the seed; *i.e.* they were about to adopt the outward forms of the divinely appointed Jewish worship. Externally they would conform to the ancient faith, and in large measure they did so. (3) But now there comes the strange, stern prohibition of the text, and in so much that follows. They are bidden to refrain from this external religion, these outward rites. And the reason is given—their hearts were yet unchanged, full of the seeds of all their former wickedness, and until these "thorns" were purged out no good, but only evil, could come of any mere external conformity. It had no value in the eyes of God, it only aroused his sore wrath. But let them "*break up the fallow ground*" (cf. vers. 4, 14). Let there be a true inward repentance before they approach God with the visible signs and forms of his worship. Let them not think that by any such mere formal service they could turn aside the anger of God. Such the significance of this scene in regard to Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah. But note: 2. *Its significance for ourselves.* (1) There are many whose character corresponds to the "fallow ground."

Free from gross external fault, morally fair, decent, and reputable. Not thoughtless and trifling, as the wayside hearers (cf. Matt. xiii.). Not obstinately self-willed, as the stony-ground hearers, who are represented by the emblem of a superficial soil having stretched beneath it a hard, pavement-like rock, through which the rootlets of the sown seed cannot thrust themselves to reach the nourishment of the soil beneath. Nor are they incapable of yielding good service to God; on the contrary, they have, like the fallow ground, all capacities for yielding a rich return. (2) And such persons often sow the seed of religious profession and observance, and assume the varied external signs of true religion. It is not necessary to inquire their motives, but they do this. And when we see them we are all well pleased. We hope very much from them, as no doubt Josiah hoped much from the external religiousness of the people with whom he had to do. But God sees not as man seeth. His eye penetrates beneath the surface. And the fallow ground may be full of thorns; that is, the heart of him who makes all this external profession—comes to the Lord's table, teaches in a Sunday school, leads in prayer, perhaps enters the ministry of the Church,—his heart may all the while be unrenewed, impure, filled with the seeds of thorns, which wait only their opportunity to bear their baneful harvest. (3) Hence God forbids such sowing amongst thorns. How stern his denunciations, how awful his threatenings, to those who are guilty of this sin! Do any inquire, Wherefore this severity? The reply is: (*a*) Hypocrisy is hateful to him. See our Saviour's denunciations of hypocrisy (cf. Matt. xxiii.). He who was gentle and full of grace to all others, had no words too scathing for this sin. No doubt his stern words were designed also to open the eyes of the people who were deceived by the false professions of those to whom our Lord spoke so severely. And we can hardly doubt, either, that there was a gracious purpose in regard to the men themselves, to awaken and alarm them, if by any means it might be possible. But still, he who to us is the Manifestation of God, makes evident how hateful in his sight is all religious profession that rests on no reality within. (*b*) A further reason for the severity which is so marked here is the extreme peril of such sowing amongst thorns to the sowers themselves. Few things are more deceiving to a man's soul than to be professing religion, and to be accounted by others as truly religious, when he is not so. It is bad to be an unregenerate man; it is worse to be such and not to know it; but the worst condition of all is to be such, and to be believing all the while that you are the reverse, and that for you salvation is sure. But this dread self-deception is fearfully fostered by this sin, which God here so severely condemns. (*c*) And yet another reason for this Divine condemnation is that by this sin the Name of God is blasphemed. The world is keen-eyed, and soon detects the mere outside religion of those whom this word contemplates. And because of the base coin the genuine is suspected, and the way of godliness despised. Therefore note—

III. THE SOLEMN SUGGESTIONS OF THIS SUBJECT TO OURSELVES. 1. To those who have been guilty of this sin. You have been, you are now, it may be, making loud religious profession, and yet your heart is not right in the sight of God. We do not say, "Throw up your profession, abandon all religious ways;" but we do say, "Have done with insincerity." Resolve that the fallow ground *shall* be broken up, the heart truly yielded to God. Implore him to give you the *reality*, that your profession may be a lie no more. 2. Let all remember that this purging of our hearts, this cleansing of our souls, needs to be *continually* done. The thorn seeds float continually over the fallow ground, and, if it be not continually cleansed, they will take root, and the good seed will be choked. 3. The Divine condemnation of sowing amongst thorns is not designed to deter our sowing where the grace of God has cleansed us from such thorns. Many read these terrible threatenings, and fear to take upon them a religious profession, lest they should be found unworthy and untrue. But if God has given you to repent of sin, to long after holiness, to look daily to your Lord for grace and help, then he *has* washed your heart from wickedness (ver. 14), and you may, you ought, openly to avow his name, observe his appointed ordinances, and engage in any way his providence may invite you in his direct and recognized service. 4. And let not those who neither possess nor profess religion deem themselves better off because those who profess without possessing are so severely dealt with. Let them remember that if the righteous—and to the outward eye these *are* righteous—scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?—C.

Vers. 5—31.—*The proclamation of woe.* Such is the character of this entire section, and we observe upon this proclamation—

I. THAT, LIKE ALL SUCH, IT IS PROMPTED BY DIVINE LOVE. The most fearful judgments contained in the whole Bible are those denounced by our Lord Jesus Christ. The most awful words ever spoken are those which proceeded out of the mouth of him at whose graciousness all men wondered. It is evident, therefore, that they were the utterances, as is this one here, of Divine love. They are beacon-lights set up as a warning, that men may not suffer their vessels to run on those rocks against which they warn, and of whose peril they are the evidence and sign. There was time for those to whom Jeremiah spoke to turn unto the Lord and find salvation, though indeed it was the eleventh hour. And that they might be driven to this, morally compelled to come in to the mercy of God, is the object of these terrible threatenings, these blasts of the alarm-trumpet of God's love. And in keeping with this intent, this proclamation—

II. SETS FORTH IN A VIVID, STRIKING FORM THE JUDGMENTS THAT IT DENOUNCES. 1. Under the emblem of a lion bursting forth from its thicket upon its defenceless prey (vers. 7, 8). 2. Under that of a terrible tempest (vers. 11—13). 3. Under that of a cordon of "watchers," who guard every corner and the entire circumference of a field in which the game they are hunting for has taken refuge. So should Judah and Jerusalem be beleaguered and hemmed in until captured and destroyed (vers. 16, 17). They who would lead men away from sin to God must not shun to set forth in the most impressive way possible to them the dread evil of that which they would have them forsake. Hence the lurid pictures of the unquenchable flame and the undying worm which our Saviour presents to us, and hence these vivid representations of the prophet Jeremiah.

III. IS INTERMINGLED, AS IT HAS BEEN PRECEDED, WITH EXHORTATIONS TO THAT REPENTANCE BY WHICH THE THREATENED JUDGMENTS WOULD BE TURNED ASIDE. (Vers. 8, 14.) So in declaring the judgments of God against sin, we should never let it be forgotten how God hath said, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but rather," etc. This section is a model of the method in which the more awful portions of our message to men should be declared. Hence note how it—

IV. IS A BURDEN OF THE LORD ON THOSE WHO ARE CHARGED WITH IT. (Vers. 19—31.) Jeremiah could not refrain from delivering his message, and could not but know that to many it would be delivered in vain; but it was with grief and pain of heart he foretold what he knew must come. See our Saviour's tears over Jerusalem. Listen to St. Paul, "Of whom I tell you even weeping." Would that we all knew how to combine this faithfulness and this yearning tenderness in the delivery of this message! Then would men be aroused, as too often they are not now, to "flee from the wrath to come."

V. IS CERTAIN TO BE FULFILLED IF THE SIN WHICH IS THE CAUSE OF IT BE NOT FORSAKEN. Few things are more solemnizing to the careless soul than to have plainly brought before him the sure fact that God has never gone from his word, awful though that word might have been. He did not here. All that Jeremiah foretold came to pass. The anguish of his heart was not caused, any more than were the Redeemer's tears, by a merely fancied calamity. We are not able to tell what will be all the characteristics and elements of the Divine retribution on sin, but of its *reality* none who read the book of God's written records, or the book of his providence as seen in historic facts, can for one moment doubt. Oh for a far deeper conviction of these soul-subduing truths on the part of all who preach and all who hear God's holy Word!—C.

Ver. 10.—"Ah, Lord God! surely thou," etc. *Inflicted infatuation, or the deceived of God.* I. THERE ARE SUCH. How else can they be described who, in spite of the plainest declarations of God against their wickedness, persist therein, persuading themselves that they have no cause to fear? Such was the way of these to whom Jeremiah spoke. They and their false prophets were continually saying, "We shall have peace" (cf. ch. v. 12, 31). And there have been other instances (cf. Pharaoh, hardening his heart against God). And there are many now. The Bible speaks, providence speaks, conscience speaks, Christ's ministers speak, the Holy Spirit speaks pleading with them; but they heed not, they turn a deaf ear to every voice. What can this be called but infatuation? And it can only be explained as Jeremiah here explains it, as a Divine judgment. "Ah, Lord God! surely *thou* hast deceived them." The evidence that their course was one that must bring punishment was so glaring, so strong, so irresistible,

that none but the infatuated could possibly disregard it. Now, it is the testimony of the Word of God that such blindness is judicial, is from God. God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Our Lord refers more often than to any other Old Testament Scripture, to that word of Isaiah's which tells of the Divine will, that "seeing, they [his enemies] may see and *not* perceive, and hearing, they may hear and *not* understand." Men who will not hear come at length to find they cannot. So with Judah and Jerusalem; they were at this time "given up to a strong delusion, that they should believe the lie"—that peace could be their lot in spite of what they were. We speak of gospel-hardened men, and, alas! we too often see such. And this is in keeping with God's law of habit—a law most beneficent to those who obey him, but terrible in its effects on the disobedient. For separate actions crystallize into habits, whereby such actions, no matter what their character, become easy to us, and at last can be performed without any effort of our will. So that separate acts of obedience to God will at length become a blessed and holy habit of obedience, and separate acts of sin repeated again and again will become a direful habit of sin, from which we cannot break away. And because all this is in accordance with a Divine law, therefore God is said to harden men's hearts, to hinder their understanding of his Word, to give them over to strong delusions and, as here, to "deceive the people."

II. THE CAUSE IS CLEAR. Ver. 18, "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee." It is from no decree of reprobation, from no predestination to sin, but from the inevitable action of the law of God which ordains that "ways" and "doings" such as Judah's were shall at length so utterly deceive those who are guilty of them that the most glaring falsehood is not too glaring for them to believe.

III. ITS DOOM IS JUST. Is it unjust that a man shall be filled with the fruit of his own ways? that what a man soweth that he shall also reap? Holiness must become impossible if its opposite be not possible too. The same law necessitates both. It is no arbitrary infliction, but the natural outcome of what a man has been and of what he has persistently done. It is as natural as that the harvest should follow the sowing of its own seed. The most dreadful element in the sinner's doom—the worm that dieth not—will be the ever-present reflection that he has brought it all upon himself. He himself made the bed on which he has to lie. And if still the doom of these wicked men be objected to, as it is, we reply, remembering how it is ever the necessity of any moral condition to be seeking to assimilate its surroundings to itself, so that goodness seeks to make others good, and evil seeks to make others evil—remembering this we say, with the late Dr. Arnold, "It is better that the wicked should be destroyed a hundred times over than that they should tempt those who are yet innocent to join their company." And this is what they would be sure, from the very necessity which arises from what they are, to be ever seeking to accomplish. Therefore we say their doom is just.

IV. THE AWAKENING AWFUL. (Ver. 9.) See the picture of dismay and despair which the prophet draws (cf. Rev. vi. 17). Self-deception, however hardened into habit by long years' use, cannot endure for ever. There will be an awakening.

V. THE LESSON PLAIN. Break away at once from sin lest it coil round thee like a serpent, lest repeated transgression become links, and the links a chain which will bind thee so fast that thou canst not escape. Therefore break away now, turn to the Lord Jesus, invoke his aid, day by day look to him, and thou art saved.—C.

Ver. 14.—"O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved." *The loving charge of the Great Searcher of hearts.* The text shows us—

I. GOD INTENSELY DESIRING MAN'S SALVATION. This is evident from the pleading tone of the text. It is like the pathetic cry of the Saviour over the same Jerusalem, when her people rejected him. And this Divine distress over the sinner's rejection of salvation, or in any wise missing of it, is attested not by any one Scripture alone, but by many, and by a multitude of other witnesses beside. How many Divine utterances there are which breathe the like loving concern to that well-known one which says, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. xxxiii. 11)! And the Divine words of love are confirmed by the supreme deed of love. "God so loved the world." Surely the remembrance of this Divine yearning for our eternal salvation should touch and subdue our

hearts. If we knew of one who, when we were prostrate with disease, out of love came to us, despising all risk of contagion, and watched over us night and day, on the alert at every turn and stage of the dread foe that was threatening our life, who in every way showed himself heedless of his own comfort or safety, so only as he might win us back to health; how in after years should we regard such a one? Would not even the most selfish cherish a warm regard, a grateful recollection? And most men would take care to let it be known what was their estimate of such self-sacrificing love. "But," saith God, "Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider."

II. GOD DECLARING THAT MAN MUST DO HIS PART IF THAT SALVATION IS TO BE WON. If the whole matter rested with God, such language as our text, in which man is charged, importuned to bestir *himself*, would have no meaning, would be what we will not even suggest. And our text but embodies the same truth as to the need of man's co-operation with God which lies upon the surface of every "Come unto me" uttered by our Lord or by his apostles and ministers in his Name. Our salvation is not a case in which God but speaks and all is done, and commands and all stands fast. The work of grace is not accomplished as one tree is made an oak, the other an elm. We look with delight and wonder at the manifold triumphs of mind over matter which the varied discoveries of science have in this century achieved. But the salvation of a soul has the higher glory of the triumph of mind over *mind*—that in strict harmony with the laws and liberties of mind, and in spite of inherent and inveterate opposition, the love of God shall conquer and subdue, and the "unruly wills of sinful men" shall cheerfully own and yield to the Divine sway. But in such a salvation man must do his part; he is not left out in the scheme, and here, as in so many other Scriptures, he is called upon to be a worker together with God that he "may be saved." How this truth shatters the delusion and the fatal self-deception of those who comfort themselves in their disregard of God by a wresting of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's work, as if it were one which absolved them from all endeavour, instead of prompting them thereto and aiding them therein. And some Christian workers need also to be reminded of this same truth; for they are tempted at times to excuse and account for their want of success on the ground of the sovereignty of the Divine working—the Spirit, like the wind, blowing where it listeth—rather than on the ground of their own laggard following of the Divine leading and their failure to co-operate with God. *Man must do his part*—this is the law writ large over all God's Word and works and ways.

III. GOD SHOWING TO MAN WHAT HIS PART IS. "Wash thine heart," etc. Then: 1. Wickedness is a *defiling* thing. It is to the soul what the mud and mire of the street, what all material foulness, are to the body. Sometimes this is made manifest even now. On a man's face may be read the moral defilement of his soul. But generally men are too cautious for that, and in this world men take care not to let the inward defilement appear. We are formed to love what is fair-looking and pure and wholesome, and we turn away from its opposite. And wicked men know this, and are careful to maintain appearances. But if *hereafter*, as now, God "gives to every seed its own body," he shall then, as is plainly taught, give to every soul its own body—a body that will take its nature, shape, and form from the moral characteristics of the soul. Oh, what transformations there may be then! The character of the soul determining what the body shall be. Some then, who here have had no form nor comeliness, shall be seen then as the angels of God; and others who here have lacked no natural beauty, shall be shunned as were those who in our Lord's days on earth were possessed with an unclean spirit. Oh for the purged vision, that we might see our souls as God always sees them! Then surely we, seeing how wickedness ever pollutes and defiles, should turn from it with loathing, as now we too seldom do. 2. And the defilement is such as *cleaves* to the soul. "*Wash* thine heart," etc. The abode from which the evil spirit went forth for a while, but then in his lordly manner declared he would return to it, as he did—that abode was only "swept," not washed; that defilement which lay loose and light about the house could be thus got rid of, but that which cleaved to it continued there still. He who would be saved must deal thoroughly with his soul. No light, easy, partial amendment will do. This God teaches us by this earnest word, "*Wash* thine heart," etc. 3. And this cleansing must be of the heart. The whole chapter is a protest against the mere external purifying which the sinful people were seeking to palm off upon God instead of the true inward cleansing which

he demanded, and with which alone he would or ever will be content. 4. And this *we* must do. Had we been told that the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ can alone do this, or had we been bidden pray like David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin;"—such declarations and counsels we could readily have understood, but for us to be told to do ourselves what so many Scriptures repeatedly declare God alone can do—how is this? Well, let the story of the blind man whom our Lord bade go and wash in the pool of Siloam, and who because he obeyed won back his sight,—let his story answer the question. It was the grace of the Lord Jesus restored him, but yet this much that he could do he had to do. But never, never on the ground of that washing in Siloam would the restored man claim for himself the credit of his own restoration, and so, although we be bidden wash our hearts from wickedness, yet who does not know that there lies behind these words the promise of the cleansing fountain, in which alone we can wash and be clean? And every one who seeks to obey this word will soon find his own utter powerlessness to rid himself of the clinging, cleaving wickedness of his heart, and the necessity he is under to answer back to this word of the Lord's, "Lead me, then, Lord, to that cleansing stream, where only it is of any avail that I seek to wash my heart from wickedness."

IV. GOD ENCOURAGING MAN TO DO HIS PART BY THE PROMISE OF SALVATION. "Wash thine heart, . . . *that thou mayest be saved.*" The promise is contained in the command. We can appeal to experience to verify this implied promise. In the hour when sin would assert its mastery, let the soul turn in instant trust and prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ, and he shall find that he is saved. Sin will slink away, like Satan did at the word of the Lord, and in such experience of Christ's saving power we have the pledge and earnest of the full salvation which shall be ours when he who has begun the work in us has perfected it according to his word.—C.

Ver. 14.—*Vain thoughts.* "How long shall," etc.?

I. THEY ARE THE PROLIFIC SOURCE AND CAUSE OF ALL WICKEDNESS. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." St. Paul, desiring all things lovely and of good report, all that has praise and virtue, to abound in the disciples of Christ, bids them "*think* on these things" (Phil. iv.). Therefore vain thoughts must lead to and produce wickedness. "They are the spawn of the evil heart, from which all other wickedness is produced." They are not to be here understood as merely trifling, foolish, empty thoughts, but thoughts that are evil, impious, sinful, wicked. They are the thoughts which bring forth sin, which in its turn brings forth death. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it," etc.

II. THEY RENDER SALVATION IMPOSSIBLE. The cleansing of the heart from them, their dislodgement therefrom, is set forth as indispensable to Jerusalem being saved—a condition that must be fulfilled. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." The converse of this is true also and equally, "Without holiness," that is, without this pureness of heart, "no man shall see the Lord." How manifestly true this is! What would a man whose heart is full of these thoughts do in the "Father's house"? It would be hell to him. He would be anywhere rather than there.

III. THEY ARE VOLUNTARILY ENTERTAINED. They have come to the door and have sought and obtained entrance. They have been bidden "come in," and the heart has consented to "lodge" them. The protest that the prophet utters against them, were they not voluntarily admitted and retained, would be unmeaning. There would be occasion for profound pity, but none for blame. But conscience owns the truth that the prophet's word implies.

IV. THEY CAN BE GOT RID OF. Men are called upon to "wash their hearts" from them and to expel them. It is, therefore, plainly within men's power to do this. The words of these exhortations suggest the method. 1. Turn to Christ, in trust and prayer, especially to him as your crucified Lord. Behold the fountain of his blood. Such turning to Christ for pardon and for purity will "wash thine heart from wickedness." 2. By a vigorous act of the will, like as when our blessed Lord found the evil one lodging wrong thoughts in his mind, he gave him no place, but sternly bade him and his begone. And this was ever his way. It must be ours. 3. But leave not the heart empty. Bring in at once other thoughts, holy, Christ-like, that demand prompt,

vigorous, and continuous work for Christ; so shall vain thoughts quit their hold and home in thy heart, and lodge there no more.

V. THEY ARE GRIEVOUS IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. Note the pathos and pleading of the appeal. "O Jerusalem, . . . How long?" Men take cognizance only of words and deeds, and are content if these be in keeping with the laws society has laid down. But God notes the thoughts of the heart, and grieves when they are "vain." What fervour this fact should lend to our prayers for purity of heart, that its thoughts may be cleansed by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit!

VI. THEY ARE RUINOUS IN THEIR EFFECTS. (Cf. vers. 15—17.) They lead to sin and that to death. Are we conscious that such thoughts have lodged or are lodging within us? Listen to the Divine appeal, and implore his grace that you may respond thereto as he would desire.—C.

Ver. 27.—"Yet will I not make a *full* end." *God's reserve of mercy.* This Divine resolve regarding the reserved remnant of the people of Judah and Jerusalem, who should be excepted from the desolation that was coming, is declared several times. Here in the text, then again in ch. v. 10; xxx. 11, and once again in ch. xlvi. 28. And these are but the echo of what God said to Israel long ages before in the desert of Sinai, as we read in Lev. xxvi. 44. And in other parts of Jeremiah's prophecies, and in the writings of all the prophets, this Divine resolve to mercifully reserve from destruction a portion of Israel is more or less plainly declared. Thus, then, God does not conceal that the end he makes will not be a full end. And there were many reasons why this fact should be declared. 1. It would show that God was mindful of his covenant with their fathers; that their "unfaithfulness could not make the faithfulness of God of none effect." The scoff of the unbeliever, the dismay of the true-hearted, would be alike prevented, for, by God's not making a full end, the way was yet plain for the accomplishment of all that he had spoken. 2. Moreover, such declaration would sustain the faith of the faithful. They would see how they were not forgotten, that God's watchful care was over them, and that amid the coming desolations he would find means to deliver those who put their trust in him. 3. And the keeping open of this door of hope was calculated to persuade some to enter through that door and so be saved. This is why, even when a man has sinned away well-nigh all his life, when he has made an end of nearly every opportunity of return to God, we go and stand by his bedside, dying sinner as he is, and tell him that "a full end" is not yet made; even now Christ waits to be gracious, and will in no wise cast out. We tell of this hope in the trust that now, even at the last, the guilty one may turn to Christ and live. But we know that an "end" was indeed made to the national life of Israel. The terrific judgments which came upon them, and which the prophet in this chapter so vividly describes and so bitterly bewails, did make an end to all their national glory. Their land became desolate, their cities were destroyed, the holy and beautiful house of God was burnt with fire, their kings were slain, the throne overturned, the whole people carried into captivity; their cup of national sorrow was full to overflowing. But God did not suffer the agents of his righteous judgment to make a *full* end. Accordingly, in the days of Cyrus and his successors there came a restoration, although partial, poor, and incomplete, and under Ezra and Nehemiah Jerusalem and the house of the Lord were raised from their ruins and rebuilt. A remnant of the people was saved, the full end was not allowed to come, has never been allowed to come, though Israel's national glory, yea, their very existence as a nation, has long since passed away. But whilst the oft-repeated words of the text refer mainly to Judah and Jerusalem, they really declare *a principle of the Divine procedure*, a continual law of his government and rule. God's way is, when making an end, not to make a full end. He has ever a reserve of mercy. Now, concerning this principle, we observe—

I. IT IS IN PERPETUAL OPERATION. 1. It finds illustration, yea, may be said to be ever ruthlessly at work, *in the kingdom of nature.* Look at the story of *creation.* Whatever may have been the material condition of our globe prior to the period told of in the sacred record, we cannot conceive of it as having been eternally "without form and void." The researches of science seem to give a very different account from that. But whatever may have been its condition, and we can hardly doubt that it had an order and beauty of its own, an end was made to all that ere the last creation

era dawned. But yet not a full end. The material for the new creation was there, and it took new form and order according to the creative word. All had become desolate, but out of that God brought forth a new condition of things, which he himself declared to be "very good." And what is this *doctrine of evolution*, concerning which in these days we hear so much—what is it but a further illustration in the kingdom of nature of the law of the text? "The survival of the fittest"—what does that imply but that there has been an end made of all the unfit and the less fit. But the whole order has not perished; there has been an end, but not a full end, and the fittest have been reserved. 2. And how frequent in the pages of *history* are the illustrations and examples of this principle of the Divine procedure! The destruction of the world by the Flood,—that was an end, but not a full end, for Noah and his house were saved. Earlier still, when God drove out from Eden the parents of our race,—what an end was then made of all that was bright and blessed in their lives! but still not a full end. For, as St. Paul tells us, "the creature was made subject to vanity, *in hope*." Hope, *the* hope, of redemption and restoration through the promised Seed of the woman, was God's illustration of this law then. The destruction of the generation of Israel that came up out of Egypt with Moses, and whose carcases fell in the wilderness; but their children were God's reserve of mercy in their case. And outside the pages of the Bible, thoughtful students of history, who love to trace the hand of God therein, are able to point to many an illustration of this law. Take the story of one man—Alfred the Great: he and the little Saxon band that clave to him were God's reserve of mercy for our land in those dark days, and saved us from coming to a full end, though we had come so near to it. And there are many, many more to which we cannot now allude. And in the history of *the Church* also how often has this been seen! Take the call of Abraham, for example. The religion of the ancient patriarchs had all but died out, an end had nearly come. But by the Divine call of Abraham it was prevented from being a full end; a new era was introduced when he became "the father of the faithful and the friend of God." And to pass over all intermediate illustrations of this same law, though they be many, and some of them most notable, we may refer to the revival of evangelical religion in the last century. An end had come to well-nigh all earnest religion; the land was desolate with more than a material desolation. There was "a famine, not of bread, but of the hearing of the Word of the Lord." But God suffered it not to be a full end. Wesley and his trusty band, Whitefield and those who laboured with him, became, under God, the means of a new departure, the introducers of a better order of things which has continued to this day. And it has been the same *in families*. Take the prophetic family in the days of Samuel. But for him it would have come to a full end. Take the most illustrious instance of all,—the house and lineage of David. To what nearness to extinction it had come when the Saviour, the predicted Stem who should grow out of the root of Jesse, was born at Bethlehem, and that course of events began which have made the name of David, great before, yet infinitely and eternally great now by means of him of whom it was foretold by the angel to his mother, that he should "sit upon the throne of his father David," and of whose kingdom David himself sang that it "should have no end." 3. And what are many of God's *providential dealings* with men, his afflictive dispensations especially, but further illustrations of this same law? "Ye have heard of the patience of Job." The lives of Joseph, of David, of Elijah, of Daniel, of Paul, and, above all, of our Lord,—what are they but instances in which "it pleased the Lord to bruise them, and to put them to grief"? He saw fit to make an end to much of that which naturally they loved, and for a weary while to cloud over and conceal well-nigh all the brightness of their lives. But in no case was there a full end made, nor ever will there be. To many of us the Lord God comes and makes an end of what we would so much like to guard and keep—health, wealth, friends, prosperity, our inward joys, our outward gladness; God sends his angel of discipline and bids him make an end—though not a full end—of these things. Yes, it is oftentimes God's way. 4. And what are *his spiritual disciplines* but the carrying out of the same principle? Do we not read, "Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God"? of the prodigal, that "he came to himself," and said, "I will arise and go to my father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned?" of Peter, that "he went out and wept bitterly"? Yes, often does he bring down our hearts so that we cry out, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?"

But he never makes a full end. False hope and trust have to go, but trust that is true, hope that is of God, come under the law of his reserve of mercy—they are the spared remnant, and whilst an end is made of all the rest, these survive. 5. And what will *death itself be* but our last experience of this law? Heart and flesh shall fail, the outward man shall perish, there shall be an end made of all that belongs to this world so far as we are concerned, and the place that has known us here shall know us no more for ever. But whilst it will be an end, so much so that our bodies shall return, "earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes," still it will not be "a full end." We—the true self—shall still remain; though the body go back to its earth, "the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Yes, the law of the text is seen everywhere. It is a principle of the Divine procedure that is in perpetual operation; it was brought to bear upon Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah, and it bears upon nations, Churches, families, individuals, men, whenever God sees that the time has come for its application. But—

II. IT IS A PRINCIPLE THAT PROMPTS INQUIRY AS TO ITS REASON AND INTENT. This making an end, even though it be not a full end, has much about it that may well, if not perplex, yet give rise to earnest, thoughtful inquiry on the part of him who observes it. Without question, it is often a severe law, a principle prolific in pain. It was so in the case of those to whom Jeremiah wrote. "The righteous scarcely were saved," but "the ungodly and the sinners," who formed the vast majority, were not saved at all. Yes, though God made not a full end, the end he did make was terrible indeed. Now, we know it is not possible for us so to understand all the ways of God that we may fully rise to—

> "The height of this high argument,
> And justify the ways of God to men."

But this much we may say: the surgeon's knife that cuts away the poisoned flesh in order to save life is a severe operation, yet one that even he who writhes beneath it will consent to and be thankful for. The burning houses that cannot be saved are allowed to burn on, and men's efforts are all turned towards the saving of those that are yet untouched. If Israel was to be preserved faithful as the keeper of the oracles of God—and, humanly speaking, the welfare of the whole world depended upon her fidelity in this matter—then the cankered portion of her people must be cut off, that the rest, yet in health, might continue so. "Our God is a consuming fire." His judgments will, must, burn on until all that is rotten and unsound has perished from the way. The dread doom of the world to come is described by a word that tells of the action of the surgeon's knife, or of the vine-dresser's pruning implements, which are used to cut away that which is evil or worthless, that that which is healthful may be preserved, strengthened, and developed according to the will of God. Yes, it is dreadful when God comes forth to make an end of wickedness and the wicked; but it would be more dreadful still—the whole history of mankind attests it—if he did not. But it is a work from which he shrinks. "As I live, saith the Lord"—and can we dare, or would we wish, to disbelieve him?—"I have *no* pleasure in the death of the wicked; but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." "Why will ye die, O ye house of Israel?" And we may say more than this. In the repetition of our text, which we have in the tenth verse of the next chapter, we see another purpose designed by these terrible dealings of God with his people. They were getting behind "battlements," trusting in defences and safeguards which were of no avail; withdrawing their confidence from God, who had never failed them, to place it in those professed protectors who would always fail them, even as they had ever done. Hence one purpose of the stern process through which Judah and Jerusalem had to pass was the taking away of those "battlements" which were "not the Lord's." Their looking to the rulers of other nations, the gods of other nations, or to such poor material resources as they could themselves supply, was fatal to that reliance on the Lord God which had been their distinguishing feature in their happiest and most glorious days. But it was essential to the fulfilment of God's purposes in regard to them that this reliance upon God should by any means be restored. Therefore it was necessary that God should make an end of and destroy these "battlements," taking them utterly away. And in pursuance of this same main design, God would set the faithful amongst them free to live a new, a happier,

holier, and every way better life. For they were hampered, entangled, ensnared, thwarted, and hindered at every turn by the hideous mass of moral wreckage by which they were surrounded. They could hardly move for it. There must, therefore, be a clearance made if God's people were to enter upon, as he was determined that they should, that new, that better life, to which he recommended them, and after which they yearned. "Now, all these things happened unto them for an ensample," and we may see in them, if we will, the motive and intent of the like dealings of God with men in our day. Thou troubled child of God, afflicted very much, of whose earthly comforts, enjoyments, and possessions God has been pleased to make so large an end, thou seest the reason why. And thou whose soul he has brought very low, taking from thee all thy trust and confidence, so that now he has made "thy very spirit poor," canst thou not understand wherefore he hath so dealt with thee? And our death, which makes an end of all that in this world we have called our own, it too finds its explanation in what was the evident purpose of God's dealing with his ancient people. It was and it is, either for the putting away—if even by a terrible process—of the evil and wrong that are yet in men; or for the destruction of every false confidence, or for the setting the soul free—as his disciplines do, and as at last his messenger, Death, will do—to serve him in newness of life to his honour and glory, and to our own eternal joy. But in what has now been advanced we have only spoken of the reason wherefore God makes an end of so much, why he comes in these often terrible ways. We have yet to ask, "*Why are we spared? Why is there this reserve of mercy?* Why is not a full end made?" And looking at the history of God's ancient people, answers to these questions also may readily be found. To have made a full end would have given occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme. We remember how Moses pleaded this argument when sore wrath had gone out against Israel, and it seemed as if a full end was to be made. And the promise of God to Abraham would have been set aside, the covenant which he made with their fathers in the days of old. And the language which we find in the Scriptures, the language of intense tenderness and love towards his people, proves that to have made a full end would have broken the heart of God. "How shall I give thee up?" "I have written thee on the palms of my hands." "Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget; yet will not I forget thee." In view of such love, how could there be a full end? And the Lord Jesus Christ has rendered such condemnation needless. For they who are spared when God judges the world, are spared not for any inherent intrinsic excellency in themselves, but they are they who have believed on the Name of God's dear Son. Hence they have the righteousness of faith, the germ, the guarantee, the generator of all righteousness; and they have the indwelling of the Holy Ghost by whom they shall be strengthened to live in newness of life. All the possibilities to secure which God makes an end of so much in those who have not come to faith, they already have, and hence God is able, even as he is willing, to except them from the destruction that comes on all beside. And to mention but one other reason for this reserve of mercy—for God not making a full end; he sees in these spared ones those by whom his "way shall be made known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations." They are to be the instruments of his grace, his channel of untold blessing to all mankind. Therefore doth God care for and guard them, and amid all destruction no evil is suffered to befall them, nor any plague to come nigh their dwelling.

III. And now, lastly, we note that this principle of the Divine procedure which we have been considering IS ONE WHICH WE MUST ALL OF US BE PREPARED TO HAVE APPLIED TO OURSELVES. Yes, God will look down upon us all, as Churches, families, individuals, and will mark what in us and who of us will be found worthy to stand in the great day when he separates the chaff from the wheat. Ah! this is the great question which concerns us. "Where, then, shall I myself be? Shall it be amongst those whom God must put away, or amongst those whom he shall delightedly spare?" What question can compare with this? But the material for its answer may be found by asking—*Where are we now?* The destroying powers of the world, the flesh, and the devil are abroad; they are slaying their thousands and their tens of thousands. But are they destroying us? Or are we—as God grant it may be—amongst his "reserve of mercy"? Are we living unto God? Can we look up to our Lord and Saviour and appeal to him who knoweth all things, to attest the love and trust towards him that abide in our

heart? Oh, if it be so, and the life of prayer, of obedience, of self-surrender, be ours now, then we can, with humble but strong confidence, predict that when the last destroyer comes, even Death, whilst he will be permitted to make an end of much that here we rejoice in, yet he shall by no means make "a full end" of us. No, his coming, which is so terrible to the unbeliever, shall for us be but a setting us free, a delivering us from the bondage of corruption "into the glorious liberty of the children of God," so that our soul shall escape as a bird from out the snare of the fowler, and we henceforth shall "live unto God."

"Then shall the day, dear Lord, appear
That we shall mount and dwell above,
And stand and bow amongst them there,
And see thy face and sing thy love."

An end, a full end, will have been made of all that is corruptible, all that distresses, all that defiles, all that death can in any way touch; but it shall not be a full end of *us*, rather shall it be the beginning of a life so holy, so blessed, that all the past shall seem to have been no life at all. Look, then, at the two companies which have been brought before us. There are those whom God's judgments are making an end of, and there are those whom those judgments cannot touch—God's reserve of mercy. Look at these latter again; they are clothed in white robes, and they have palms in their hands. For they have come "out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. . . . They hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither doth the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Therefore, O Lord, make *us* to be numbered with thy saints now and in glory everlasting.—C.

Vers. 20, 30.—"Suddenly are my tents spoiled." "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" *A surely coming confession compelling a present serious question.* Note the historic reference of the words to the people to whom the prophet spoke. Applying them in more general sense, let us observe—

I. THE CONFESSION. "Suddenly," etc. This confession. 1. *Not that of the child of God*, for his tents cannot be spoiled. (1) The peace of mind which he enjoys. That rests on the sure basis of what Christ has done for him. The varied disturbing powers of this world cannot touch that. Nothing can separate him from the love of God (Rom. viii. at end). (2) The righteousness which God has given him. That springs from a source, and is sustained by a power, that is supernatural and therefore beyond the power of this world to give or take away. (3) His most cherished possessions. True, the child of God is subject, like other men, and at times it seems more than other men, to sudden reverses of fortune, to loss, bereavement, and the other manifold sorrows of this life. But though he cannot but lose his earthly treasures, and deeply feel their loss, yet all the while his true treasure remains intact, for it is not here, but yonder. And even when with one hand God takes away his earthly treasures, with the other he so graciously ministers support and consolation that, in the might of a Divine faith and love, he is able to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord." (4) His life. That is not capable of being spoiled. If he is called upon suddenly to lay it down, or to give it up amid much pain and distress, he is able to say, as dear old Richard Baxter did when he lay a-dying, and when asked by a friend how he was, "Almost well." Yes, the nearer death, the nearer life to the child of God. It is a blessed exchange for him, come how, come when, come where it will. Therefore this confession cannot be his. But, as it was in the days of Jeremiah, it is: 2. *The confession of the worldling and all those who are living without God.* For their tents *are* suddenly spoiled. (1) The peace of mind in which they often seem so established. To our eyes they appear not to be troubled, neither to be plagued as other men are (cf. Ps. xxxvii.). How easy and unconcerned they are! but the text comes true to them. *Remorse* may suddenly spoil their tents. Like "Esau, who found no place of repentance, though," etc. *The events of God's providence* may be the spoiler; carrying off their riches, striking down their wealth, turning away their friends. Every-

thing may seem to be slipping away from them. And then, oh how true our text is of them then! And the approach of death, with the "fearful looking for of judgment." And should none of these have succeeded in this life to shatter their false trust, how will the *dread solemnities of God's judgment day* certainly do this! See the consternation of those on the left-hand side of the Judge, who asked, "When saw we thee," etc.? (2) The moral rectitude, the credit for righteous character, on which they have stayed their souls. This too may be, will be, suddenly spoiled. Sometimes sudden temptation will do this. Unguarded by any Divine power, the man's weak resolves give way under unusual pressure, and character is blasted and the good name gone, as in a moment. Transient visions of the Divine holiness, the claims and requirements of God's Law flashing upon him as did the lightnings from Mount Sinai,—such manifestations will reveal the man to himself, and "spoil" his self-complacency for ever. The light of eternity *must* do this. Tried by the standard God has given, self-righteousness must give way. (3) His external prosperity on which his heart was fixed. To have nothing but what this world can give, and to have *that* suddenly taken away, as it often is, as at death it all must be,—whose should this confession be if not his of whom we are speaking? (4) His life itself, to which he clung so tenaciously, oh, what a wrench that will be when the man to whom this life was all is by the hand of death ruthlessly torn away from it! And oftentimes this is sudden, unlooked for, at such an hour as he thinks not, as he has made up his mind that it will not come. Like him to whom God said, "Thou fool!" These, then, are they from whom this confession—bitter lamentation and wail of woe rather should it be called—is heard. What agony of heart can be conceived more awful than that of the worldling and the godless, when "suddenly their tents are spoiled"? God grant it may not be ours. Note—

II. THE QUESTION, "What wilt thou do," etc.? Who can tell what the delirium of dismay and despair will drive a man to under such circumstances? See Judas the traitor. Suddenly his tent—the hope of his gains—was "spoiled," and we know what, in the remorse and despair which fastened upon him, he did. But some will harden themselves still more. Others will plunge into business, pleasure, sin, and there seek to drown the tortures of the mind. It is impossible to forecast what one and another will do, and least of all can they tell themselves. But it is *God* who asks this question, and that with the gracious intent that we should turn to him for the answer. Let us do so. Perhaps your tents *are* spoiled already. Before, therefore, you say what you will do, ask of God what thou shouldest do. 1. Is it thy inward peace, the calm and unconcern of thy life, that is spoiled? Then "acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace." 2. Is it thine estimate of thine own righteousness? Do not seek to mend or patch it up in any way (cf. Phil. iii.). Seek from Christ the righteousness that is of faith. 3. Is it thine earthly prosperity that is shattered? "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth." Have your treasure for the future in heaven. There, "where neither moth nor rust," etc. 4. Is it thy very life that is being taken from thee? Oh, wait not until this tent is actually spoiled.

> "To Jesus do thou fly,
> Swift as the morning light,
> Lest life's young golden beams should die,
> In sudden endless night."

III. THE ORDER IN WHICH THIS CONFESSION AND QUESTION ARE PLACED. The question is asked *before* the spoiling takes place. Like as it is asked, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" The intent is that we should, by turning to God and coming within his sure defence, escape that spoiling of our tents which must come on all not within that defence. And so in the other question, which is like unto it, the intent manifestly is that we should *not* neglect so great salvation. Then let this good will of the Lord be done. Come over amongst those whose tents cannot be spoiled, and away from those upon whom the spoilers shall fall certainly, suddenly, and soon.—C.

Vers. 19—30.—*"The fellowship of Christ's sufferings."* The extreme anguish of the prophet which is revealed in these verses justifies the affirmation that, like St. Paul, Jeremiah also knew "the fellowship of Christ's sufferings." Consider—

I. THEIR NATURE. 1. The sight of the constant dishonour done to God. This was part of our Lord's suffering. Living amongst men at all involved it. It has been said truly that, if the Son of God became incarnate, he must be a "man of sorrows." But if it be a pain and outrage to an affectionate son to hear his father, whom he knows to be worthy of all honour, yet nevertheless insulted, and to see him daily dishonoured, what must have been the sufferings of our Lord at what he daily had to see and hear! And to Jeremiah this was one chief part of his sorrow. To him the Name of God was dear; his honour and glory precious; but let these chapters tell what scenes continually came before him. "Rivers of water run down mine eyes because men keep not thy Law." Dishonour done to God has ever been distress and pain to his servants. 2. The endurance of the scorn and hate of men. To some men this is nothing. They answer scorn by scorn and hate by hate. They choose war rather than peace. But in proportion as a man is of a loving disposition, and has lavished his love upon any, he will desire, yea, yearn for, a response. Do not parents desire it in their children? Would they not be distressed indeed if they did not receive it? And so with our Lord. He had no armour of indifference, or contempt, or hate against men. But he opened his heart to them. There was no stint in the love he lavished upon them. Hence he could not but long to receive a response to that love. The cross itself was wreathed with attractiveness for him, because it, though nothing else would, would draw all men unto him. And in the fellowship of this suffering Jeremiah shared. He, though deeply loving his people and faithfully serving them, yet was denied the response of trust and love which he would fain have gained. He, too, "was despised and rejected of men." 3. The realizing, by the power of affectionate sympathy, the awful consequences of his countrymen's sin. It is the effect of such sympathy to cause the sufferings of those we love to come before us in such terrible vividness that they fill the soul with an anguish that is almost intolerable. Hence our Lord's deep distress (cf. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" etc. and his lament over the doomed city and people). But in this suffering of our Lord Jeremiah had indeed fellowship (cf. vers. 23—30.) He saw the destruction that was coming on Judah and Jerusalem in its *entireness*. "The whole land is spoiled;" "The whole land shall be desolate." In its *suddenness*. "Suddenly are," etc. (ver. 20). In its *duration*. Ver. 21, "How long shall I see the standard?" etc. It could not be a passing storm, but an abiding wrath. And more still, he sees *how deserved* it all was (vers. 18, 22). And then how *awful!* It was as if original chaos had come again (ver. 23; cf. Gen. i.). It was as the dread and never-to-be-forgotten manifestation of God at Sinai, when the mountains trembled and all who beheld were stricken with fear (ver. 24). For the devastation caused by the "spoilers" had been so thorough, they had done their work in such fearful fashion, that districts heretofore teeming with population were now solitary and lone as the desert; and so stripped were they of all that could minister to life, that the very birds had fled away (vers. 25, 26). The awful spectacle was clearly visible to the prophet's eye, and, as he looked upon it all and knew how certain was its advent, he cries out as in the agony of dread bodily pain (ver. 19). 4. The witnessing day by day the decay of all goodness and the firmer hold of sin. Our blessed Lord's tears over Jerusalem, his oft "sighing," his agony, his long lament over the guilty people, were not caused only, nor chiefly, by the mere fact of their sufferings, but it was because of the increasing alienation from God, the ever-hardening heart, the mighty power of sin upon them, that his bitterest tears were shed and his deepest agony endured. And so with Jeremiah. Pain and distress were evils undoubtedly, but they were as nought compared with the moral degradation, the spiritual wickedness, which he saw around him and increasing every day. 5. The being compelled to utter the "amen" of his soul to the judgment of God as "true and righteous altogether." With what agony would a father witness the accumulation of proof upon proof that his son whom he loved had been guilty of crime that deserved and must receive condign punishment! To be obliged to own to himself that his beloved son is righteously condemned—what sorrow that! And this confession our Lord made. His death meant this—his assent to the judgment of God against sin that that judgment was just. Death was the penalty, and he submitted to it. And never has death been, nor can it be to any child of God, what it was to our Lord. The realization of sin, the consciousness that on him was the iniquity of us all, and how awful but how just was the wrath of God against it,—this explains that

exceeding bitter cry from out the darkness, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And, in his measure and degree, Jeremiah had the fellowship of this suffering also. It is the sorrow of sorrows to him that there was no alternative; God *must* punish sin like that of his countrymen. How glad would he have been could he have seen any—however little—light in the darkness! But it was all dark; there was not a solitary redeeming ray. The condemnation was awful, but God was just who judged so.

II. THE UNIVERSALITY OF THIS FELLOWSHIP. Like as in every leaf of the tree the whole fabric of the tree is pourtrayed, root and trunk, branch and foliage, so in the experience of every member of Christ's mystical body, however humble that member may be, there is shown the resemblance of Christ himself. See Abraham interceding for Sodom, Moses for Israel, Samuel mourning for Saul; Elijah's ministry and that of all the prophets, Paul's and that of all the apostles, and where there are any who have "the mind that was in Christ Jesus," who are filled with love to God and love to man, to whom sin is hateful and holiness dear. It will be a measure and a test of our own possession of the mind of Christ if those sad facts, which were the source to him and to all his true-hearted servants of such great sorrow, are likewise sources of sorrow to us and make us know the fellowship of his sufferings.

III. ITS EXCEEDING BLESSEDNESS. It may seem an anomaly and contradiction to speak of "blessedness" as appertaining to "suffering," but it is nevertheless true that exceeding blessedness does belong to the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. For: 1. It wins for us the ministries that sustained our Lord. These were such as the full enjoyment of the love of God, uninterrupted communion and intercourse with him, the open vision of the "joy set before him" in the winning back of the world to God,—such were the supports of Christ's ministry, and the like has been given to all who have entered into his sufferings. See the bright onlook of Jeremiah (cf. ch. iii. 15—18 and 11) and of all the prophets; of St. Paul and all the apostles. And see, too, their joy in God, the rest of their hearts in his love. Such have been and such will be the supports of such souls. 2. It fortifies us impregnably against all the power of the wicked one. Satan will not waste his time and energy on those who are within the sure defence of this holy fellowship. His darts cannot reach where they stand, or, if they reach and strike, they cannot penetrate the "armour of God" in which they are clad. Sin has no charm, but repels: holiness attracts with a magnetic might. "They are born of God, and the wicked one toucheth them not." 3. It gives tremendous power over the hearts of men. What is the great need of our day but this, a ministry that has entered into this fellowship? one penetrated with the love of God and the love of men, to whom the favour of God is life, and the judgments of God the ununspeakable woe of the soul? How would such men speak and pray and plead? It was the secret of St. Paul's power, and of the great ministers for Christ in all ages. It won all the triumphs of the early Church, it was manifest in Bernard, Francis, Wesley, Whitefield, and many more. Men cannot resist the power with which such speak. It constitutes those who have entered into it God's true priests. They have power when they plead with God for men, and when they plead with men for God. Such is another element of the exceeding blessedness of this fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

IV. ITS ALONE ENTRANCE. This entrance is by fellowship with Christ in our daily life. Let us look much upon him as he is shown to us in his gospel and in the Scriptures generally, and as we see his likeness reproduced in the lives of the truest of his people. Let there be much looking to him in the exercise of daily trust, committing and commending our whole interests to his care. Let there be much converse with him in devout meditation, worship, and prayer. Let there be much service done for him in all such ways as he points out for us, and the result will be that we shall come so to see, hear, touch him, so to realize his living presence, and then so to love him, that all that affects him will affect us. We shall have fellowship in it all, and, therefore, in this fellowship of his sufferings in which all his chosen have shared.—C.

Vers. 30, 31.—*Broken reeds*, concerning which note—

1. WHAT THEY ARE. They are the friends that are kept simply by either: 1

Wealth. "Though thou clothest thyself with crimson" (ver. 30). The garb of the rich, telling how Jerusalem had won some of her professed friends. 2. *Splendour.* "Deckest thee with ornaments of gold." Jerusalem could make a grand show, put on much pomp by which the eyes of men were dazzled and deceived. And outward show will deceive many men. But those thus attracted know how, when the splendour pales and the outward show can no more be kept up, to fall away and show what "broken reeds" they are. 3. *External beauty.* The "painting" spoken of was an Oriental device to increase the beauty of the countenance. But weak indeed is the hold which mere outward beauty can have on any who have been attracted by it. It fades, and they along with it.

II. THEIR APPARENT TRUSTWORTHINESS. Had there never been anything at all like helpfulness in them, no reliance could have been placed upon them. But the lures which drew them had power enough to make them profess much and then to practise somewhat. Hence they seemed to be *real* friends.

III. THEIR TRUE CHARACTER. When they can no longer gain aught by her who believed in them, they turn round upon her and "seek her life" (ver. 30). It was so with Jerusalem, it will be so with such as are like her. And yet men go on seeking after these outward things which can win for them only friends of this wretched sort, whilst those inward qualities which have no charm for such, but have all charm for the worthy and the good, are little valued and therefore little cultivated.

IV. THE DREAD INCREASE OF SORROW THEY ARE THE CAUSE OF. A more appalling picture of utter agony and distress of soul cannot be imagined than that given in ver. 31. It is said that when Cæsar saw Brutus amid his assassins, he covered his face with his mantle and let his murderers do their worst. No stab could be so deadly as the discovery that his trusted friend had become his murderer. "Et tu, Brute!" And part of the deep sorrow of our Lord was that Judas, "his own familiar friend," should betray him. If, then, to the stainless soul the discovery of such treachery can cause such sorrow, how must the sorrow of those who, in addition to this, have the memory of their own sin, be deeper and more dreadful still?

V. THE WAY OF WISDOM, WHICH KNOWLEDGE OF THEM POINTS TO. Surely it is this—to turn from all such "broken reeds" to "the rod and the staff" which Christ furnishes for all his pilgrims.

"One there is above all others,
Well deserves the name of Friend," etc.

C.

Ver. 31.—"*There shall be weeping.*" The text is a solemn and awful declaration of the retribution of God upon impenitent men.

I. NO TRUTH MORE DOUBTED OR DENIED THAN THIS. Lot was "to his sons in law as one that mocked." And so it is still; this truth scarce gains any hearing and yet less belief. Reasons of this are: the prevalent scepticism as to all religious belief; the special dislike to such a subject as this; false views as to the love of God; the busy energy of the evil one, who will not suffer men to consider and ponder this truth.

II. BUT IT IS NEVERTHELESS THE TRUTH OF GOD. Scripture is full, plain, and earnest in the matter. The premonitions of conscience endorse the Word of God. The course of observed events lends its strong testimony. The common consent of the wisest and best of men confirms it. The analogy of all human government supports it.

III. AND DEMANDS THEREFORE TO BE MADE KNOWN. Compassion would prompt to its proclamation. The severe displeasure of God against the watchman who neglects to warn the people urges this. The example of our Lord, who ever insisted on it. Its manifest fitness to arouse and arrest the sinner. Beware, therefore, of yielding to the temptation to be silent on this theme.

IV. BUT TO BE PREACHED ONLY BY SUCH AS BELIEVE AND FEEL ITS TRUTH. Unbelieving or unfeeling setting forth of these awful verities will but steel the heart of the ungodly against them. But in the spirit of Jeremiah, and yet more in the spirit of our Lord, let men be warned that for the impenitent there remaineth the dread retribution of God.

Ver. 1.—*The kind of return which Jehovah requires.* In ch. iii. there has been much spoken concerning return. There is the impossibility pointed out of a divorced wife returning to her husband; yet Jehovah's own people, whose conduct has been even worse, he presses to return. The fact is mentioned that Israel had been told to turn, yet had not turned. There is also the fact that Judah had made a feigned turning. A true return is seen to be the prime condition of all the glorious future which God had shadowed forth, first for Israel, and then for all nations. And then the chapter concludes with a touching outburst of penitential emotion. From all which it will be clearly seen how timely and needful is the exhortation which introduces ch. iv. Return of *a certain kind* is, after all, not so difficult, if only there be certain conspiring circumstances. The most undemonstrative and unlikely man may have his feelings roused up, and then comes decided utterance. Right words are spoken, right purposes declared. But what of the carrying of them out? What about the difficulties in the future—the fightings without and the fears within? The return which God desires is a permanent return, just as when, after a long frost, there comes a complete thaw, and, with genial warmth following, renewed life, growth, and fruitfulness.

I. OBSERVE HOW GOD RECOGNIZES THE INSTABILITY OF THE APOSTATE PEOPLE. It is not simply that he apprehends instability in their resolutions towards himself. Their very apostasy is itself an unstable thing. With all the hold which idolatry seems to have upon them, they are not thoroughly fixed in it. Evidently there are ways of appealing to them which draw forth a resolve to make some sort of turning. Never should we forget that sinners, even the most persistent of them, are unstable in their ways. Instability there of course is from the common fluctuations of life; but, more than that, the very purposes of the sinner are more unstable than he thinks. A thick-skinned conscience is often more in appearance than in reality; the penetrable point has not been discovered—that is all. Even when to all outward appearance a man seems quite contented with the life which others condemn, he may have very trying διαλογισμοί within him. Hence the strange anomaly sometimes presented of wicked men doing deeds of helpfulness to others. Gamblers, out of their unrighteous gains, are known to indulge in most eccentric acts of beneficence. After all, the powers of evil have a most uncertain tenure over those who may seem most their slaves.

II. THE ONLY TURNING FROM EVIL WHICH CAN BE COMPLETE AND PROFITABLE IS THE TURNING TOWARDS GOD. Not only from sin, but towards God. That is the only way of keeping clear both of Scylla and Charybdis. To turn from a life that is self-condemned, by trying to make another path of one's own, may seem to be successful for a while, but in truth it is only travelling in a circle. The man whose springs of knowledge and strength are in himself, or in the counsels of men, will come back to where he started. Think, for instance, of those drunkards who have taken pledges of total abstinence, and set their feet towards a manlier and purer life, only to find very soon that appetite and habit are not so easily mastered. At last, after many failures, a permanent keeping comes. There is a struggle, crowned with victory, because the soul, having lost all its self-confidence, has really turned to God. The departure into sin is *from God*, and to him must be the only satisfactory return.

III. THE FORSAKING OF SIN MUST BE A COMPLETE FORSAKING. Into this demand for completeness there must be put the utmost significance of the word. God's people might visit all the high places in turn, and laboriously erase every outward vestige of idolatry. On everything like an approach to idolatry the most rigorous penalties might be imposed. There might be a domiciliary visitation, and a ransacking of every house from garret to basement, lest there should be anything hidden away, such as Laban's teraphim which Rachel stole. But what of all such exertions? They could only end in the taking of abominations out of *the sight of man*. The essential thing was to take them out of *the sight of God*. The high places and groves in every *heart* must be purged of their idolatries. Here the edicts of a king and the vigilance of reforming enthusiasts were of no avail. By the very necessity of the case, the putting away must be an individual act. Forth from the heart proceed the outward visible abominations, and the only way of stopping the procession was by a thorough cleansing of the source whence it came. Such prayers are wanted as for the creating of a clean heart, and the setting of one's secret sins in the light of God's countenance. The heart, deceitful and desperately wicked, only God can know, and only God can

cleanse. He himself must be besought to direct affections, purposes, imaginations, towards things pure, holy, and Divine. Remember, then, that a thing may be out of man's sight and yet right over against the eyes of God. Even that which may not at present disturb your conscience may yet be very offensive to him. Thus it will be seen that a real turning to God is very difficult, and needs much submission and humility. One has to walk very circumspectly. Wavering is one of the greatest perils, and may very soon be fatal. He who wavers, vacillates, and turns to look round to the things that are left, loses the direction; and that direction, once lost, who knows how much else may be lost before it can be recovered?—Y.

Ver. 2.—*Jehovah's requirement with respect to the oath.* Jehovah has just told his people that, with unwavering resolve, they must put their abominations out of his sight. This exhortation, general as it is, is very emphatic; but it chiefly serves to lead on to something more explicit. Jehovah singles out one peculiar abomination, and fixes the attention of his people on that. The truth is, if they sweep this abomination away, all is done that needs to be done. These abominations, so odious to the pure eyes of Jehovah, were bound together in a kind of organic unity. The infliction of a fatal blow on any one of them inevitably brought death and withering on the others. Just as he who stops the action of one of the vital organs of the body stops the action of them all. Look, then—

I. AT WHAT JEHOVAH REQUIRES WITH REGARD TO THE OATH. There were many solemn appeals that had in them the nature of an oath. God at once directs attention to the most solemn of all, the appeal to himself by his own peculiar Name and his own enduring existence. The passages are too numerous to mention in which there is record of people saying, "As Jehovah liveth." Now and then, no doubt, the words were spoken with solemnity and sincerity, and also with a steady remembrance afterwards of the holy Name which had thus come to the lips. But in the great bulk of instances it was only an idle word. A man gets excited, and then the most solemn words rush from his mouth, with no thought of the meaning they express. Or, worse still, there may be the deliberate attempt to consecrate a falsity, and get it received for undoubted truth, so that others may act from it and rest upon it with the utmost confidence. Now, to the removal of all this false swearing, God would have his people earnestly to apply themselves. Note that God does not say here what Jesus afterwards said, "Swear not at all." The time was not ripe for such an exhortation. The words of Jesus aim directly at that ideal state when every man shall speak truth as naturally as he breathes pure air; when it shall be as impossible for him to speak or even think the false as to live amid carbonic acid gas. One may say that even here, in this word through Jeremiah, there is nothing to bind the hearer to an oath. The injunction has a permissive element. A man needs not to say, "Jehovah liveth;" but if he does say so, let him bear in mind all that the expression involves. It is the most solemn way of securing that all speaking and acting shall be true and sincere; that all judgments shall be according to proven facts and Jehovah's declared principles of justice; and that all life, in short, should be pervaded and filled with energy by a spirit of righteousness. To begin with, what an abomination it was to say, "As Jehovah liveth," when the practice showed that whatever true recognition of Deity obtained among these people was on the high places and towards the heathen idols! Then from this it was only too easy to bring forward Jehovah's Name in connection with all sorts of falsehood, cruelty, and oppression. The change is to come by bringing truth into the oath. There must ever live in the mind of the oath-taker a distinct apprehension and conviction as to Jehovah's real, enduring existence. It must be remembered how he said to Moses, "I am that I am." And, following the history of Israel onward, there must be an ever clearer perception of his character, of his power, of his constant observation of individual life, and his fiery, consuming anger against all iniquity. Then, if all this truth, justice, and righteousness appear where before there was such a loathsome sink of deception and corruption, what will be the result?

II. THE NATIONS WILL ENTER INTO AN INEXPRESSIBLY SATISFACTORY RELATION TOWARDS JEHOVAH. His aspect, in their eyes, altogether alters. A step is taken—a great step, and one that makes all others easy—towards that gathering of the nations to Jehovah's throne which is mentioned in ch. iii. 17. There is now something to awe

and to attract the hitherto worshippers of idols. They say that a man is known by his friends. If the man be one not yet seen, living at a distance, he can only be judged of by those professing to be his friends, with whom we come into actual intercourse. If those whom we see be upright, generous, magnanimous, loving, we shall have no difficulty in crediting that the unseen one is the same. Israel having been what it had been, it was little wonder if the heathen came to have a very poor opinion of Jehovah. But Israel is now called to a very different life, and, in particular, to make such a use of the oath as that the nations shall not merely have their opinion of Jehovah altered, but shall find in him a source of blessing to themselves and one in whom, without risk of shame and confusion, they can continually glory. Jehovah, God of Israel, whom Israel at last has truly honoured, obtains then more than a bare acknowledgment. He is exulted in as Lord and Benefactor to all the nations of the earth. "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev. xix. 6). This is the consummation of creation's choral song, and it comes from practising truth, justice, and righteousness in such a way as will fully please Jehovah.—Y.

Ver. 3.—*Thoroughness in spiritual culture.* There is put before us here an agricultural figure, which our observation of fallow ground in England, at present, fails to give us the power of understanding. When we look at an English ploughman turning a piece of meadow-land into arable, there does not seem anything very difficult about his work. Why, then, should breaking up the fallow ground be so hard? Why should this be reckoned an appropriate figure for something evidently difficult, something, it would seem, habitually shirked and the necessity of attending to which the men of Judah and Jerusalem did not sufficiently recognize? The answer is to be found in a state of things which, after all our efforts, will probably present itself imperfectly to the mind. By many of the Hebrew husbandmen the cultivation of their land seems to have been managed in a very imperfect, careless, happy-go-lucky sort of way. In the moveless East, what things are to-day tell us pretty well what they were two thousand years ago. Dr. Thomson, speaking of the plain of Gennesaret—a district which Josephus describes as extremely fruitful—says, "Gennesaret is now pre-eminently fruitful in thorns. They grow up among the grain, or the grain among them." And again on the same page, "These farmers all need the exhortation of Jeremiah, 'Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.' *They are too apt to neglect this;* and the thorns, springing up, choke the seed, so that it cannot come to maturity" ('Land and the Book,' p. 348). The truth, then, was that the land was but half reclaimed from the wilderness. To have properly reclaimed it, and then kept it in a satisfactory state, would have required a great deal of trouble. And since from such fertile land the husbandman, with but little effort, could get enough to serve the passing day, he did not concern himself *to make the land do its best.*

Hence we see that this admonition, whatever its first aspect of obscurity, is really a most important one for all of us. The exhortation is to nothing less than *thoroughness in spiritual culture.* Thoroughness in the cultivation of the heart, as a soil wherein the seeds of Divine truth are sown, pays in the highest sense of the word. Look at what science, skill, and the bold investment of capital for the enrichment of the soil and for machinery to save labour, have done for modern farming. The full productiveness of God's earth seems to be apprehended by comparatively few. And if this is so in things natural, there is no wonder at all that we should be so little conscious of the thoroughness required in cultivating our spiritual nature. There are many human hearts where subsoil ploughing is as yet unknown. There is a soil that grows an abundant crop from plants of human origin, but the seed that God sows either falls dead or dies after a brief struggle to find hold and sustenance in the heart. The word through Jeremiah here is but the germ from which our Lord expounded his parable of the four kinds of soil. There is laid on each one of us a heavy burden—the stewardship of a human heart. And yet it is a precious and honourable burden. Far beyond the ripest, sweetest, and most copious fruits of the soil beneath our feet, is the fruit that may come from within us. But the culture must be thorough. True, that means toil, patience, watchfulness, discrimination; but what great work was ever done without them?—Y.

Ver. 9.—*Despair among the leaders in Israel.* Let us consider how Jehovah leads the prophet up to the emphatic, and what we may call consummating, announcement of this verse. One severe sentence comes on another, until at last the prophet himself, crushed and overwhelmed, gives utterance to the sense he feels of contradiction to former gracious words. This cheerless outlook to Israel, he says, is as a sword piercing to the soul. Looking back, then, through the previous eight verses, we find a spirit of *thoroughness* running through the whole. Jehovah has asked for thoroughness, and seems to intimate that the demand will be practically neglected. Thoroughness in turning to him; thoroughness in the putting away of all abominations; thoroughness in observing the sanctity and obligation of the oath; thoroughness in the culture of spiritual life; thoroughness in circumcision of heart; thoroughness everywhere, is the order of the day. Then on the other hand—because, in spite of all remonstrances, there is a clinging to the superficial modes in which all merely human reformations are managed—we are confronted with the thoroughness of God's work. *If men will not be thorough, at all events God will be so.* His fury will come forth like the unquenchable flame; his agents, in the shape of invincible armies, will bear down resistlessly on his unfaithful people; and, as a sort of climax, the very heads and guides will acknowledge themselves utterly overcome. Such is the scene presented in ver. 9. Consider—

I. How the consternation and humiliation of these men now is in contrast to their previous conduct. We do not stay here to make discriminations among the four classes of prominent men here indicated. The general truth underlying the conduct of all of them is that the leading persons in the State would assuredly lose their self-confidence. Brazen and complacent as that self-confidence is, Jehovah is undermining it in secret, and it will come down with a crash. These men were associated in deception; each one deceived, first of all, himself; and then by a continuous mutual action and reaction, the power both of deceiving and of being deceived became very great indeed. The king, upon giving the slightest encouragement, would become a centre for all sorts of flatteries and arrogant assurances; and indeed, as long as it was a matter of keeping their own people in subjection, these leaders might have comparatively little difficulty. They knew what they were dealing with, and could keep it in bounds by virtue of long practice and cleverly transmitted tricks of management. There was a certain ground of experience which they went upon in all their contemptuous refusals to listen to God's prophet. But now there comes up, all at once, a danger outside their experience, and not only defying their resources, but coming down on those resources like a deluge, and utterly sweeping them away. When the downtrodden and aggrieved in their own borders begin to mutter sedition and meditate conspiracy, they may, perhaps, stop this peril in its beginning; but when the majestic destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way, how shall he be met? The lion out of the thicket is manageable enough if the man against whom he advances happens to have a loaded rifle in his hand, and the power of using it with unerring aim; but what if he has nothing more than a cudgel? Kings and princes, priests and prophets, might successfully join in counsel to mislead and keep down their own people; but a strong and proud army, that has come forth like a mighty wild beast intent on prey, is not to be turned back by mere counsels. In the last resort *strength* must be opposed to strength. The sole virtue of skill lies in this, that it can make the most of strength. But where the strength is lacking, *skill can do nothing.* No amount of skill can make a walking-stick do the work of a rifle, and the great peril of most human lives lies just in this, that they go on in the contented use of ordinary resources for ordinary needs. Practically speaking, extraordinary needs are not thought of till they come. There are voices to us, even as to these kings, princes, priests, and prophets of old; but we do not heed them, and meanwhile the lion out of the thicket, all unsuspected, is coming nearer and nearer to us.

II. Note the forcible expression with regard to the kings and princes Their hearts are to perish. Not but what priests and prophets may have the same experience. Hebrew parallelism is to be borne in mind. The description of king and princes applies also to priest and prophet, and *vice versâ.* They were overwhelmed in a common catastrophe. It is the heart-perishing itself we would call attention to, whoever the subject of it might be. One is reminded of the similar expression, tolerably frequent in the Old Testament, of the heart *melting.* With regard to the king, the

would be an utter collapse of all kingly dignity and pretension. It is not the mere conquest of territory and the desolation of it that can turn the supreme master into a complete slave. Complete subjection is only achieved when body and mind are alike in bondage. Many a captive has shown himself nobler than his captor; his heart being swelled out with even an increase of vitality, courage, and resource in the very hour when the ungodly seem to have triumphed. Discrowned kings have sometimes been more regal than on the coronation-day itself. The thing to be marked here is that these leaders being *cast down outwardly* were equally cast down *inwardly*. The whole nature crashes down in ruins. The dispossessed leader becomes as dejected in soul as he is in station. What a warning *for us*, then, is this melancholy prediction! It is very certain that to us the outward casting down, at all events, must come. Natural resources, limited and temporary at the best, are always showing weak points, always needing patching up, and the most that can be done is to postpone the evil day. And then what is the end to be? Are our hearts also to perish? Is there to come on us utter despair and brokenness of spirit? It need not be so. Look on the courage of genuine Christians in captivity, in martyrdom, in poverty, amid the attacks of slander, in the midst of spiritual non-success. If the heart perish, it will be for want of believing resort to the succours which come down from the heavenly places. God can so unite, inspire, instruct, and gladden the heart of every believer, as effectually to deliver it from perishing. And remember, we are every one called to be, if not kings, at all events viceroys in our own life. There must be no yielding to presumptuous and audacious dictation of men. He who leans upon the mere assertions of others, because he is himself indisposed to make the necessary effort for finding out truth, must be prepared at last to get into that state which is described as one in which the heart perishes.—Y.

Vers. 11—13.—*The uses of the wind.* Not all the uses of the wind are set forth here, but enough is mentioned to remind us how God can turn a *beneficial* agent into a *destructive* one very rapidly and decisively. The force of the unquenchable fire has already been spoken of (ver. 4); and it is a sufficiently dreadful thought that fire, so genial, so useful, with such a place in the house, and—so far as Israel was concerned—such a place in the service of God, should thus have become, in the thoughts to be associated with it, dreadful as sword, famine, or pestilence. The man who has had his house burned down, to the utter loss of all his goods, will henceforth be apt to make grim comments in his own heart when he hears men extolling the benefactor fire. And now God comes to another great force in the material world, and shows how it can be the symbol of the workings out of his holy wrath. 1. *Observe how he calls attention to the beneficial working of the wind.* Frequently the force of the wind is of such a moderated, yet effectual kind, that it is used to fan and to cleanse. These invading hosts, it was to be remembered, were not essentially destructive. They were made up of human individuals, each of whom had measureless capabilities of benefiting his fellow-men. Possibly from these very northern lands there had come buyers and sellers, bringing commercial prosperity to Israel. Is it not plain that we should always consider, when one approaches us in a hostile and threatening way, that it may be possible by a certain course of conduct to have him come in a very different way? Many enemies have been friends, and after their enmity has come to a head and done much damage, it is possible for them to become friends again. This destroying wind, fierce and dreadful as it was for a time, would yet subside, and fanning and cleansing work be done again. 2. *It is worth noticing that the Spirit of God which has such large power to bless has also power to destroy.* The Spirit of God is, on the highest authority, compared to the wind. Indeed, that is what the name signifies—the breath or wind from God. Working through Peter in the glorious apostolic days, we see that Spirit healing the lame man; we hear him speaking mighty, convincing, renewing words to thousands hitherto indifferent; bringing men into correct and firm apprehensions of truth that had been misunderstood or not understood at all; and filling their minds with such a light of promise as gave reality and indescribable charm to the future. But that same Spirit struck down Ananias and Sapphira with an appalling and fatal blow, and made Elymas the sorcerer suddenly blind. Only a turn is needed, and the open hand which God extends, the hollow of it filled with the gifts of his

grace, can be closed so as to smite in wrath. God does not need to go far afield for the instruments of his chastisement. The energy of his Holy Spirit can destroy as well as make alive; and Jesus, who is Saviour, is also appointed to judge and condemn.—Y.

Ver. 14.—*The unwashed heart and the vain purposes cherished in it.* There are here an *exhortation* and a *question* which, taken together, pierce very deep, and suggest once more the true cause of all the terrible calamities which are to befall Israel; for though Jerusalem is addressed, the repentance and remedy for all the evils in question must come from the action of a united people. Jeremiah's words in ver. 10 are in a measure representative words; they indicate the way in which the nation would conclude that Jehovah had *promised* one thing; whereas quite another thing had *happened*, and that evidently by his disposition. And so Jehovah meets Jeremiah with this word, so that he shall not persist in a mistaken attempt to harmonize Jehovah's predictions. Further, he is to declare the same thing to Jerusalem, that being the great centre where kings and princes, priests and prophets are gathered together. Instead of looking outward and ignorantly complaining of God, let them look inward, with practical intent, and see what they can do by way of heart-reformation. These stupendous perils can all be removed, but Jehovah by himself cannot remove them. In one sense, of course, he could do so. The wind might be made to subside, the lion be driven back to his thicket, the destroyer of the Gentiles annihilated. But there would be no permanent putting right in this if Israel remained the same. Israel indeed might think that, if only the enemies vanished, then the sword would indeed be withdrawn from the soul. The hearts of the king and princes did not perish simply because of the hosts that were gathered against them. This was a reason so far; but in another sense no reason at all, seeing it did not go to the root of the matter. But now Jehovah does go to the root of the matter; his Word is indeed a sword reaching deeper than the superficial thoughts of the people.

I. THE EXHORTATION. 1. *The heart is to be cleansed.* The heart. Persistently does God drag these people to look within. Either they were not willing to do so, or not able to do so, or, what is perhaps a more correct way of putting it, they lacked both willingness and ability. They would look anywhere but to the true cause of all their ills and to the true sphere where redemption and security were to be worked out. If they would only attend to their hearts and see in their hearts what God saw in them, all the seeds of peril, corruption, and everlasting shame, then they would get on to the right way, and being delivered from fundamental errors in their thoughts, they would come to the apprehension and practice of fundamental truths. They had already been told of the mockery of a mere outward circumcision, and enjoined to *circumcise* their hearts. Now the figure is varied, and they are told to cleanse their hearts. It is because the heart of the king and the prince is so polluted that it perishes. If it were a clean heart it would be a strong heart, invincible against panic and despair. 2. *The filth that is to be taken out of the heart is wickedness.* It takes a long time to work the conviction into the minds of many people that wickedness is as filth. These very people loathe the waifs and strays who think nothing of being constantly begrimed with dirt. To such the impurity of the great unwashed is a loathsome thing; it nauseates them to come within sight or scent of it. But let such recollect that even if, as far as their bodies are concerned, they have daily changes of fine linen, white and clean, that is a mere trifle if the consciousness within be habitually defiled by inhuman and degrading thoughts. There is, of course, a very practical truth in the common saying that "Cleanliness is next to godliness;" but cleanliness of the conscience, removal of every slimy stain of self, is but one of the aspects of perfect godliness. If only we are labouring to cleanse our hearts from wickedness, all other cleanliness will assuredly follow. In proportion as wickedness is cleansed out, there will follow all outward decencies, courtesy of manner and refinement of tastes. The right inwardly grows to the comely outwardly; but if that inward right be lacked, then all apparent comeliness is but the whited sepulchre. 3. *The mode of cleansing.* The word chosen to indicate this is a very significant one. The mere general term for cleansing is not sufficient; nor even the more restricted but still general term for cleansing with water. The washing to be done is that sort which in the literal instance is to be done by a vigorous trampling of the feet. The Hebrew word is the same one in which the

profoundly penitent David prays that God would wash him from his iniquity, and again to wash him so that he should be whiter than snow (Ps. li.). And so here we have another instance of the unremitting thoroughness which marks this chapter. It is *the heart* that is to be cleansed, and that by the most vigorous kind of washing. The accumulated filth of years has entered into the very texture of the fabric. The truth is that the only way of carrying out the exhortation is to submit the heart to him in exactly the same spirit as David did. God is *the Cleanser*, and only when our nature has passed through all his purifying agencies shall we *really* know what perfect human nature is. We do indeed see that perfection in Jesus, but with such distorted vision that the seeing cannot be called seeing as we ought to see.

II. THE QUESTION. The thoughts with respect to which the question is asked are really purposes. This will come out more clearly on considering some of the expressions in which the same Hebrew word is used; *e.g.* when the woman of Tekoah spoke to David of God *devising means* to bring back his banished (2 Sam. xiv. 14); so Eliphaz tells Job that God disappoints the *devices* of the crafty (Job v. 12). Several of the Proverbs contain the word. The *thoughts*, i.e. *counsels*, of the righteous are just (Prov. xii. 5). Where there is no deliberation, *purposes* are disappointed (Prov. xv. 22). There are many *devices* in a man's heart, but the counsel of God shall stand (Prov. xix. 21). Purposes are established by counsel, *i.e.* there must be wisdom in forming them, and prudence in carrying them out. A comparison of these selected passages will amply suffice to show what God means by vain thoughts, and what sort of practical thoughts he would wish us to put in their place. Man is meant to live with definite ends in view, on which he may expend his strength and faculties. But when these ends are his own—self-originated and self-gratifying—then they are emphatically vain. They can only continue by deceiving the mind that proposes them and holds to them. The question therefore is as to when our eyes shall be opened to perceive the right purposes of life, the solid and attainable ones, the purposes that are not vain, because they are God's purposes and because he provides all resources needed for carrying them out. Jerusalem wished these terrible troubles from outside to be at an end, just that it might resume its own projects. On the other hand, God wished it from the very heart to adopt his projects in order that then he might take all obstacles and enemies completely out of the way.—Y.

Ver. 22.—*Those who are wise to do evil.* This description of "my people" has a curious resemblance to the exhortation of our Lord when he told his friends to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. These people, according to Jeremiah's observation, had all the wisdom of the serpent, but it was for serpentine purposes. And the worst of it was that they hurt themselves the most. Note—

I. THE REFERENCE TO MAN'S GREAT POWERS. Even in his headlong, infatuated descent to ruin, the great powers are manifest. It is the very perversion and ruin of what is so noble in its original constitution that helps to give one an insight, deep even though melancholy, into all that makes up the nobility. A *temple* in ruins fills one with thoughts which could never be excited by looking at a dilapidated shed. Jeremiah looks upon Jerusalem and the men who are leaders there (ver. 9), and their great human faculties cannot be concealed from him. When man sinks into sin, this does not destroy the great human powers; it simply distorts their operation. We look at men as they are, and whatever the sad reflections coming into our minds, we still see the supremacy in terrestrial creation, the power to adapt means to ends, and all that strength and suppleness of intellect which are so much more than the greatest strength of a brute.

II. THESE GREAT POWERS MUST BE USED. The human intellect cannot be left to lie like a dead sword in the scabbard. In one sense the intellect is but an instrument, having in itself no character either for good or evil, any more than a piece of machinery. Everything depends on the disposition and intents of the man using it. But then the intellect, instrumental as it is, is NOT a mere instrument, but has a living connection with the rest of human nature. It must act, with more or less energy, according to the individuality of its possessor. These faculties must be used, if not for good, then for evil. History abounds in instances of wicked and selfish men who have achieved their mischievous ends by that very intellectual force which was given for something very

different. Hence the importance of early training and direction, so far as one will can alter the course of another. Every individual whose faculties are diverted from good purposes is so much gain to the powers of evil. There is no neutral ground to which to retire. To go out of the one path is to go into the other. This was the sad thought that, even while Jerusalem was going down, lower, lower, towards the hour of its capture and desolation, there were yet in it many men who had the power, if only their hearts had been right, to do much towards saving and blessing their country. But all their thoughts, their utmost acuteness of mind, were given to build and enrich self.—Y.

Vers. 23—27.—*A threatened return from cosmos to chaos.* It is impossible to read this passage without having the first chapter of Genesis brought to mind. Moreover, it was intended that it should be brought to mind. In Gen. i. we have the brief, sublime description, impossible to forget, of the advance from *chaos* to *cosmos*. Here in Jeremiah we have a very sad and suggestive indication of possible return from *cosmos* to *chaos*. These two words, it will be admitted, are often used very loosely. Particularly is this true of the latter. We talk of things having got into a chaotic condition, when if such really were so, it would be a very terrible condition indeed. *For what is chaos?* It is the state indicated at the very beginning of the Scriptures, the state out of which God fashioned what we call the *cosmos* or the world. Bear in mind that the creation described in Genesis is not the making of something out of nothing, but the fashioning of formless, empty matter into an orderly collection of appropriate parts and beyond that an innumerable array of living, active organisms. "The earth was without form and void." Strictly speaking, the earth spoken of in Genesis was as yet an ideal thing. "And darkness was on the face of the abyss." As the writer of the narrative conceived it, there stretched out from the formless, empty earth an impenetrable, rayless depth of space. *This is chaos*, where there is no ray of light, not even the slightest beginning of order, not even the smallest seed of life. But with the moving of God's breath upon the face of the water *cosmos begins*. Light comes; and then day and night are defined, and heaven and earth, and so on through the familiar procession of God's wonderful works, till cosmos gets its terrestrial crown in the fashioning of man. It is worth while for all who would rejoice in the works and ways of God to get a clear notion of the difference *between chaos and cosmos*.

Then bearing this difference in mind, WHAT A TERRIBLE PROSPECT JEREMIAH HINTS AT IN THIS PASSAGE! Just by the profit and glory of the *ascent* from chaos to cosmos in Genesis do we measure the loss and shame of the *descent* from cosmos to chaos in Jeremiah. It is earth we see, with the men and women, the domestic and social bonds, city and country, all occupations of mankind, all that is highest in human attainments; and this aggregation, which comes from man's toiling development of the cosmical elements presented to him, is seen sliding back to chaos again. There can be no mistake about it. Mark, it is not what the prophet *hears*, but what he *sees*. "I beheld" is repeated. And looking out he sees not the accustomed scene of life and activity, but the earth without form and void. He looks for the heavens where dwell the sun by day and moon and stars by night, but there is no light of any sort. The mountains and hills, which always were so significant of strength and grandeur to the Hebrew imagination, show signs of being moved away. No man could be seen. There are several words in Hebrew all rendered by the English word "man," but Jeremiah's word here is the same with that in Gen. i. 26. Then, moreover, all the birds of the heaven fly away. Other inhabited and cultivated places have become as the wilderness, but not as an uninhabited wilderness. Note Isa. xiv. 23: Babylon is there described as being made a possession for the bittern. Thus it is indeed desolated, but evidently the birds do not fly away from it. Here, however, even the birds, which so easily flit from place to place, disappear as if they had no hope of making in this place their nests and finding in it their sustenance. Thus every detail points to the chance, the possibility, of Chaos resuming his ancient reign. But now observe—

THERE IS AN ARREST BEFORE SUCH A DEPLORABLE CONSUMMATION. "I will not make a full end." Man the individual and men the social community may slide a long way towards destruction, may be as it were on the brink, without a remedy; and yet God can so act as to arrest, restore, and consolidate anew, with such internal purity and coherency as will defy further lapse. Note the full significance of the use of the word

κόσμος in the Greek Testament. It was into the κόσμος that the true Light came. John's great directing word to his disciples as he saw Jesus coming to him was, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the κόσμος." Where all should be perfect order, vigorous life, and exuberant fruitfulness, there is discord, contradiction; everything jars, and there is a never-intermitting groan of pain. All this Jesus can take away, and must take away. It is through him that whatever promises and hopes lie in ver. 27 are to be carried into effect. This whole passage, therefore, suggests an aspect in which the need of Christ's work and the reality of it may be very profitably considered.—Y.

Ver. 30.—*Departed charms that cannot be restored.* The figure here is of a woman, once beautiful and attractive. There is thus a return to the theme of ch. ii., where the idolatrous land is set forth as a wife departing from her husband. In the days of her beauty she has fascinated many lovers; but now the beauty is gone, and she makes desperate attempts to compensate for vanished charms by external adornments; only to find her efforts cause for deeper humiliation. Consider—

I. THE CHARM OF NATURAL ATTRACTIONS. There is a time when youth and beauty are comparatively independent of external aids. So there was a time in Israel when no special devices were needed to keep the admiration and envy of the world. David and Solomon made the kingdom great, not by a dexterous concealment of poverty and hollowness under external magnificence, but by a simple and scarcely avoidable exhibition of the greatness of *real* resources. The kingdom was one of strong men, valiant warriors, and overflowing material wealth. So it is with individuals still. They attract and influence, not by vain pretensions, but by what they really are. The attractive element in them may be overvalued, but at all events it is not a mere appearance. Nothing is gained by refusing to admit the success and charm of natural resources. Confidence in them is justified by the way in which the world receives and encourages those who possess them.

II. THE FOLLY OF FORGETTING THAT NATURAL ATTRACTIONS MUST FADE AND DISAPPEAR. Probably they are but comparatively few—those vain men and women who use dyes, cosmetics, and paints, under the notion that thereby they conceal the ravages of time. Nevertheless, ludicrous as such devices are, there are only too many who do the same thing, so *far as the essential principle is concerned.* They cannot be got to admit the failure of power and faculty. Habit is too strong to enable them rightly to apprehend their diminished resources. Hosea said of Ephraim, "Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not" (vii. 9). There may even be a nobler side to such a spirit, viz. the resolution not to give way before difficulties. But we must take care that an admirable element in conduct does not blind us to what may be disadvantageous or even perilous in it; *e.g.* one hears sometimes of judges afflicted with deafness—a most dangerous infirmity in the administration of justice, and at least a most discommoding one to all who have to address the judge. What is needed is that, even in the days of youth and strength, of unimpaired faculties of sense and intellect, one should remember that far other days are coming. Consider in connection with this the last eighteen verses of Ecclesiastes. The spectacles and the speaking-trumpet are all very well in their way, so far as they make an easier, smoother slope to the grave; but what folly it is to be assiduous about these things, and utterly careless about that new, Divine, and eternal life which shows itself in all the grandeur of its peculiar principle and strength, precisely amid the decays of the natural man! What sadder sight can there be than an old man, clinging to the worn, torn, weather-beaten, age-marked sides of his earthly tabernacle, and doing his best to resist every incursion from the forerunners of death; simply because he knows of no better mansion, because he is utterly ignorant of the "house of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"!—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

Is the punishment thought too severe? Then let the moral condition of Jerusalem be inquired into. Must not such transgressions precipitate its people into ruin? There are four well-marked sections or strophes.

Vers. 1—9.—Gladly would Jehovah pardon, if his people showed but a gleam of sound morality. But they are all deaf to the warning voice—the Law of God is flagrantly violated. In particular the marriage tie, as well the typical one between man and woman as the anti-typical between the people and its God, is openly disregarded (comp. Hos. iv. 1; Micah vii. 2; Isa. lxiv. 6, 7; Ps. xiv. 3).

Ver. 1.—**If ye can find a man.** "A man" is explained by the following clauses. It is a man whose practice and whose aims are right, of whom Jeremiah, like Diogenes with his lantern, is in search. (It is evident that the prophet speaks rhetorically, for himself and his disciples, however few, were doubtless "men" in the prophetic sense of the word.) **Judgment . . . the truth**; rather, *justice . . . good faith*, the primary virtues of civil society.

Ver. 2.—**And though they say, The Lord liveth.** Though they asseverate by the most solemn of all oaths (contrast ch. iv. 1, 2). **Surely.** So the Syriac. This rendering, however, involves an emendation of one letter in the text. The ordinary reading is literally *therefore*, but may etymologically be taken to mean "for all this," "nevertheless."

Ver. 3.—**Are not thine eyes upon the truth?** rather, *surely thine eyes are upon* (equivalent to *thou lookest for and demandest*) *good faith*, alluding to ver. 1.

Ver. 4.—**Therefore I said**; rather, *and as for me, I said.* **They are foolish**; rather, *they act foolishly* (as Numb. xii. 11). **For**; rather, *because.* Their want of religious instruction is the cause of their faulty conduct. In fact, it was only after the return from Babylon that any popular schools were founded in Judæa, and not till shortly before the destruction of the temple that the elementary instruction attained the regularity of a system (Edersheim, 'Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Time of Christ,' pp. 134, 135). **The judgment of their God.** A similar phrase occurs in ch. viii. 7. "Judgment (*mishpat*) here (as in some other passages) has acquired a technical sense. This may be illustrated by the corresponding word in Arabic (*din*), which means (1) obedience, (2) a religion, (3) a statute or ordinance, (4) a system of usages, rites, and ceremonies" (Lane's 'Lexicon,' *s.v.*). "Judgment" is, therefore, here equivalent to "religious law," and "law" is a preferable rendering.

Ver. 5.—**The bonds** are the thongs by which the yoke was secured to the neck (comp. Isa. lviii. 6). In ch. ii. 20 the word is rendered "bands."

Ver. 6.—This verse reminds us of a famous passage in the first canto of Dante's 'Commedia,' in which Dante the pilgrim is successively opposed by three wild beasts—a panther, a lion, and a she-wolf. That the poet had Jeremiah in his mind cannot be doubted. The deep knowledge of the Scriptures possessed by mediæval theologians (and such was Dante) may put many Protestants to shame. Curiously enough, whereas the early commentators on Dante interpret these wild beasts of vices, the moderns find historical references to nations. On the other hand, while modern expositors explain Jeremiah's wild beasts as symbols of calamities, Rashi and St. Jerome understand them of the Chaldeans, Persians, and Greeks. **A lion out of the forest.** The first of a series of figures for the cruel invaders of Judah (comp. ch. iv. 7). The frequent references (see also ch. xii. 8; xxv. 38; xlix. 19; l. 4) show how common the lion was in the hills and valleys of the land of Israel. **A wolf of the evenings**; *i.e.* a wolf which goes out to seek for prey in the evening. So the Peshito, Targum, Vulgate (comp. "wolves of the evening," Hab. i. 8; Zeph. iii. 3). But there is no evidence that *'erebh*, evening, has for its plural *'arābhōth*, which is, in fact, the regular plural of *'arābāh*, desert. Render, therefore, *a wolf of the deserts*, i.e. one which has its den in the deserts, and falls upon the cultivated parts when it is hungry. Luther, "the wolf out of the desert." **A leopard**; rather, *a panther.* The Chaldeans are compared to this animal, on account of its swiftness, in Hab. i. 8.

Ver. 7.—**How . . . for this?** rather, *Why should I pardon thee?* **Thy children**; *i.e.* (since "the daughter of Zion" is equivalent to Zion regarded as an ideal entity) the members of the Jewish people (comp. Lev. xix. 18, "the children of thy people"). **When I had fed them to the full.** So Ewald, following the versions and many manuscripts (there is no marginal reading in the Hebrew Bible). This gives a good sense, and may be supported by ver. 28; Deut. xxxii. 15; Hos. xiii. 6. But the reading of the received

Hebrew text, though somewhat more difficult, is yet perfectly capable of explanation; and, slight as the difference is in the reading adopted by Ewald (it involves a mere shade of pronunciation), it is not to be preferred to the received reading. Read, therefore, *though I made them to swear (allegiance), yet they committed adultery*. The oath may be that of Sinai (Exod. xxiv.), or such an oath as had been recently taken by Josiah and the people (1 Kings xxiii. 3; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 31, 32). The "adultery" may be taken both in a literal and in a figurative sense, and so also the "harlots' houses" in the next clause. It is also well worthy of consideration whether the prophet may not be referring to certain matrimonial customs handed down from remote antiquity and arising from the ancient system of kinship through women (comp Ezek. xxii. 11).

Ver. 8.—**As fed horses in the morning.** The rendering *fed horses* has considerable authority. "Lustful horses" is also possible; this represents the reading of the Hebrew margin. The following word in the Hebrew is extremely difficult. "In the morning" cannot be right, as it is against grammar; but it is not easy to furnish a substitute. Most moderns render "roving about;" Fürst prefers "stallions."

Vers. 10—18.—Provoked by the open unbelief of the men of Judah, Jehovah repeats his warning of a sore judgment.

Ver. 10.—**Her walls.** There is a doubt about "walls," which should, as some think, rather be *vine-rows* (a change of points is involved; also of *shin* into *sin*—the slightest of all changes), or *shoots*, or *branches* (comparing the Syriac). The figure would thus gain somewhat in symmetry. However, all the ancient interpreters (whose authority, overrated by some, still counts for something) explain the word as in the Authorized Version, and, as Graf remarks, in order to destroy the vines, it would be necessary to climb up upon the walls of the vineyard. (For the figure of the vine or the vineyard, comp. on ch. ii. 21.) **Take away . . . not the Lord's.** The Septuagint and Peshito read differently, translating "leave her foundations, for they are the Lord's" (supposing the figure be taken from a building). As the text stands, it is better to change **battlements** into *tendrils*. Judah's degenerate members are to be removed, but the vine-stock, *i.e.*, the believing kernel of the nation, is to be left. It is the key-note of the "remnant" which Jeremiah again strikes (see ch. iv. 27).

Ver. 12.—**It is not he.** Understand "who speaks by the prophets" (Payne Smith). It is hardly conceivable that any of the Jews absolutely denied the existence of Jehovah. They were practical, not speculative unbelievers, like men of the world in general.

Ver. 13.—**And the prophets,** etc. A continuation of the speech of the unbelieving Jews. **The word is not in them.** The Authorized Version gives a good meaning, but it involves an interference with the points. The pointed text must be rendered, *he who speaketh (through the prophets*, viz. Jehovah) *is not in them.* Thus the Jews hurl against prophets like Jeremiah the very charge which Jeremiah himself brings against the "false prophets" in ch. xxiii. 25—32. **Thus shall it be done;** rather, *so be it done;* i.e. may the sword and famine, with which they threaten us, fall upon them.

Ver. 14.—**My words in thy mouth fire.** (See on ch. i. 9, 10.)

Ver. 15.—**O house of Israel.** After the captivity of the ten tribes, Judah became the sole representative of the people of Israel (comp. ch. ii. 26). **A mighty nation.** The Authorized Version certainly gives a part of the meaning. The Hebrew word rendered "mighty" (*'ĕthān*), rather, "perennial," is the epithet of rocks and mountains (Numb. xxiv. 21; Micah vi. 2); of a pasture (ch. xlix. 19); of rivers (Deut. xxi. 4; Ps. lxxiv. 15). As applied in the present instance, it seems to describe the inexhaustible resources of a young nation. Render here, *ever replenished;* i.e. ever drawing anew from its central fountain of strength. Does not this aptly convey the impression which a long-civilized nation (and the Jews, who have been called "rude," were only so by comparison with the Egyptians and Assyrians) must derive from the tumultuous incursions of nomad hosts? The description will therefore fit the Scythians; but it is not inappropriate to the Chaldeans, if we take into account the composite nature of their armies. **An ancient nation;** *i.e.* one which still occupies its primeval seat in the north (ch. vi. 22), undisturbed by invaders. **Whose language thou knowest not.** So Isaiah of the Assyrians, "(a people) of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand." The Jews were no philologists, and were as unlikely to notice the fundamental affinity of Hebrew and Assyrian as an ancient Greek to observe the connection between his own language and the Persian. When the combatants were to each other *βάρβαροι*, mercy could hardly be expected. The sequence of vers. 49 *b* and 50 in Deut. xxviii. speaks volumes.

Ver. 16.—**Their quiver.** (See on ch. iv. 29.) **As an open sepulchre;** *i.e.* furnished with deadly arrows, "fiery darts." So the psalmist, of the "throat" of deceitful persecutors (Ps. v. 9).

Ver. 17.—**Which thy sons and thy daughters,** etc.; rather, *they shall eat thy sons and*

thy daughters. In the other clauses of the verse the verb is in the singular, the subject being the hostile nation. **They shall impoverish,** etc.; rather, *it shall batter . . . with weapons of war* (so rightly Payne Smith); *khérebh,* commonly rendered "sword," is applied to any cutting instrument, such as a razor (Ezek. v. 1), a mason's tool (Exod. xx. 25), and, as here and Ezek. xxvi. 9, weapons of war in general.

Vers. 19—29.—Judah's own obstinacy and flagrant disobedience are the causes of this sore judgment.

Ver. 19.—**Like as ye have forsaken me,** etc. The law of correspondence between sin and punishment pervades Old Testament prophecy (comp. Isa. v.). As the Jews served foreign gods in Jehovah's land, they shall become the slaves of foreigners in a land which is not theirs.

Ver. 21.—**Without understanding;** literally, *without heart.* This seems at first sight inconsistent with ver. 23, where the people is described as having indeed a "heart," but one hostile to Jehovah. The explanation is that a course of deliberate sin perverts a man's moral perceptions. The prophet first of all states the result, and then the cause. So in Ezek. xii. 2, "Which have eyes and see not," etc.; "for they are a rebellious house."

Ver. 22.—**Fear ye not me?** The Hebrew places "me" emphatically at the beginning of the sentence. **By a perpetual decree.** This is one of the evidences, few but sufficient, of the recognition of natural laws by the Biblical writers; of laws, however, which are but the description of the Divine mode of working, "covenants" (ch. xxxiii. 20; comp. Gen. ix. 18) made for man's good, but capable of being annulled (Isa. liv. 10). Comp. Prov. viii. 29; Job xxxviii. 8—12.

Ver. 23.—**A revolting and a rebellious heart.** The heart is the centre of the moral life virtually equivalent to "the will;" it is "revolting" when it "turns back" (so literally here) from God's Law and service, and "rebellious" when it actively defies and opposes him.

Ver. 24.—**That giveth rain,** etc. The second appeal is to the regularity of the rains. Dr. Robinson remarks that there are not at the present day in Palestine "any particular periods of rain, or succession of showers, which might be regarded as distinct rainy seasons," and that, unless there has been some change in the climate of Palestine, the former and the latter rains seem to correspond to "the first showers of autumn, which revived the parched and thirsty earth and prepared it for the seed, and the later showers of spring, which continued to refresh and forward both the ripening crops and the vernal products of the fields" ('Biblical Researches,' iii. 93). He reserveth unto us, etc.; literally, *he keepeth for us the weeks—the statutes of harvest;* i.e. the weeks which are the appointed conditions of harvest. The prophet means the seven weeks which elapsed from the second day of the Passover to the "Feast of Harvest," or "Feast of Weeks" (Pentecost) (Exod. xxiii. 16; xxxiv. 22; Deut. xvi. 9, 10).

Ver. 25.—**Have turned away these things.** "These things" are the benefits mentioned in the preceding verse (comp. ch. iii. 3; xii. 4). Thus the judgment is not entirely future; a foretaste of it has already been given (comp. 1 Kings xvii.; Amos iv.).

Ver. 26.—**They lay wait,** etc.; rather, *they spy* (literally, *one spieth*), *as fowlers lie in wait.* **A trap;** literally, *a destroyer;* i.e. an instrument of destruction (comp. Isa. liv. 16, where "the waster" (or destroyer) probably means the weapon referred to previously).

Ver. 27.—**A cage.** The Hebrew word *k'lūb* is used in Amos viii. 1 for a basket such as was used for fruit; it seems to be the parent of the Greek word κλωβός, used in the 'Anthology' for a bird-cage. The root means to plait or braid; hence some sort of basket-work seems to be meant. Connecting this with the preceding verse, Hitzig seems right in inferring that the "cage" was at the same time a trap (comp. Ecclus. xi. 30, "Like as a partridge *taken in a cage* [ἐν καρτάλλῳ, a peculiar kind of basket], so is the heart of the proud"). Canon Tristram suggests that there is an allusion to decoy-birds, which are still much employed in Syria, and are carefully trained for their office ('Natural History of the Bible,' p. 163). But this seems to go beyond the text. **Deceit;** *i.e.* the goods obtained by deceit.

Ver. 28.—**They overpass the deeds of the wicked;** rather, *they overpass the common measure of wickedness* (literally, the *cases of wickedness*); or, as others, *they exceed in deeds of wickedness.* **Yet they prosper;** rather, *so that they* (*the fatherless*) *might prosper;* or, *that they* (*the rich*) *might make it to prosper.*

Ver. 29.—A repetition of ver. 9 in the manner of a refrain.

Vers. 30, 31.—The result of the prophet's examination of the moral condition of the people.

Ver. 30.—**A wonderful and horrible thing,** etc.; rather, *an appalling and horrible thing hath happened in the land.* The word rendered "appalling" (or stupefying) has a peculiar force. It only occurs again in ch. xxiii. 14, though a cognate adjective is found in ch. xviii. 13 (comp. on ch. ii. 11).

Ver. 31.—**The prophets . . . the priests.**

(See on ch. ii. 26.) **Bear rule by their means**; rather, *rule at their beck* (literally, *at their hands*, comp. ch. xxxiii. 13; 1 Chron. xxv. 2, 3; 2 Chron. xxiii. 18). An example of this interference of the false prophets with the priestly office is given by Jeremiah himself (ch. xxix. 24–26). **My people love to have it so.** Sometimes the prophets speak as if the governing classes alone were responsible for the sins and consequent calamities of their country. But Jeremiah here expressly declares that the governed were as much to blame as their governors.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*Forgiveness for many through the righteousness of one.* I. GOD IS GREATLY DESIROUS TO PARDON HIS CHILDREN. The command is given to "run to and fro" and search for the one righteous man. God thus expresses his anxiety to forgive. "He *waiteth* to be gracious." The first movement towards exercising pardon comes from God even before men desire it. He will lay hold of the smallest ground for forgiveness. If the one righteous man can but be found, God will forgive the city.

II. SOME RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NECESSARY AS A GROUND FOR FORGIVENESS. If the righteous man cannot be found, the condition of the city is hopeless. There is a propitiatory power in righteousness. Good men are priests, and their lives sacrifices of value for the advantage of others. The righteousness of Christ is an essential element in the atonement (Heb. x. 9, 10). It was not possible for the sin of man to be forgiven except on condition of this. Pardon is offered to men only through this (Acts xiii. 38).

III. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH AVAILS WITH GOD MUST BE SOLID AND PRACTICAL. A vain, religious boast counts for nothing (ver. 2). 1. The goodness to be sought for is not devoutness of demeanour, but the exercise of justice and the effort to keep good faith. 2. This is to be looked for, not in the temple, but in the streets and lanes and places of public concourse, *i.e.* in daily life. The best evidences of character are to be seen in home life and conduct in business. When the domestic and commercial morality of a city is corrupt, the condition of that city is ruinous, whatever may be the assiduity and decorum with which religious observances are maintained.

IV. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF ONE MAY BE EFFICACIOUS FOR THE SECURITY OF MANY. Sodom and Gomorrah would have been spared for the sake of ten righteous men (Gen. xviii. 32). Lot was the providential means of saving Zoar (Gen. xix. 21). The one man Christ secures salvation for the whole world (Heb. vii. 24, 25). There is much that is mysterious in the principle of Divine grace which is here revealed—much that we cannot explain. Still, there are truths entering into it which may be discerned, *e.g.* injustice cannot be done by God in the smallest respect; the righteous are "the salt of the earth," they preserve by preventing complete corruption; there is hope for the city in which but one righteous man lives, since he may be the means of leading others back to righteousness—this principle is one on which God acts in forgiving, not in distributing bare rights; all that he requires is a safe and justifiable ground on which to exercise pardon, not a fund of merit such as could constitute a claim on his grace.

Ver. 3.—*Fruitless chastisement.* I. THE PURPOSE OF CHASTISEMENT IS CORRECTION. 1. It is to lead men by outward suffering to *inward grief* ("they have not grieved"). No more hopeless condition can be found than pleasure or indifference in sin. The tears of penitence are the first preparations for reformation. 2. It is to lead men, through outward suffering and inward grief, to a genuine conversion of character (God looks for a restoration of "good faith"), and to bring them *back to God* ("they have refused to return"). It is no end in itself, no good except as leading to a further good. It is not given in vindictive rage nor to satisfy the claims of abstract justice. Though it springs directly from the wrath of God, that wrath is based on his eternal love. Because God loves his children he must be angry when they sin. Because he desires their good he must not spare his rod (Prov. iii. 11, 12). The purpose of chastisement is not so mysterious as is commonly supposed. People often exclaim vaguely, "These troubles must be sent for *some* good purpose." The purpose is not all hidden. It is mainly that we may be brought nearer to God.

II. THE CORRECTION AIMED AT IN CHASTISEMENT IS NOT ALWAYS ATTAINED. A

terrible delusion possesses multitudes of suffering people. They have faith enough to believe that trouble is sent for their good, but not spirituality enough to see how to use it for that end. Such people assume that it must benefit them, however they behave under it. Some suppose that if they suffer in this world they will certainly receive compensation in the next. Such ideas imply that chastisement cannot be deserved, or that the mere endurance of it is meritorious, or that, if not exactly punishment for sin, it must be a necessity to be borne now or hereafter for its own sake or to satisfy some strange will of God. But chastisement is a "means of grace," and, like other "means of grace," may be frustrated. We may receive this grace in vain (2 Cor. vi. 1). Consider the causes of the fruitlessness of chastisement. 1. *Stoical hardness.* We may be stricken, but not grieve. 2. *Thoughtlessness.* We may feel inward grief, but not reflect on our condition and need. 3. *Pride,* which suffers pangs of grief but no contrition for sin. 4. *Impenitence.* We may "refuse to receive correction," harden our wills against submission, and rebel in impatience and complaining against God, instead of returning to him.

III. FRUITLESS CHASTISEMENT IS WHOLLY AN EVIL THING. Like every other grace, if abused it works injury. Sent to bless, it is converted into a curse. 1. It is *wasted suffering.* As such it must be reckoned as an evil. Pain in itself is not a good thing. If it works no good, natural instinct is right in regarding it as bad. 2. It leads to an *aggravation of wickedness.* The very abuse of it is a sin. The wrong temper in which it is received is so much more wickedness added to the long catalogue of unrepented sin. One more call from the Father is spurned by his children. 3. It *leaves the heart harder* than it finds it. Sorrow, if it does not soften the sufferer, will harden him, as friction, which abrades the tender skin, renders the tough skin more thick and horny.

Vers. 12, 13.—*Culpable unbelief.* The Jews are accused of unbelief as a sin. It is therefore sometimes to be regarded in this light (*e.g.* Heb. iv.). Let us consider the characteristics of a culpable unbelief and its origin.

I. UNBELIEF IS MORALLY CULPABLE WHEN IT ARISES FROM AN EVIL HEART. 1. This unbelief must be distinguished (1) from that of *ignorance;* (2) from that of *prejudice,* bad education, etc.; (3) from that of *honest doubt.* 2. It is recognized (1) as residing in the *will* rather than in the intellect—a result of wishing a thing not to be true; and (2) as coloured by *custom,* worldly proclivities, base passions, ill feeling against all that the highest truth is concerned with. It is practically equivalent to the wilful rejection of truth. He who is blamed for this is not blamed for his opinions, but for the moral determining causes of them. We are not responsible for our beliefs, in so far as they are purely intellectual, but we are responsible for them in so far as they are formed under moral influences.

II. THE EVIL TENDENCIES TOWARDS A CULPABLE UNBELIEF ARE ABUNDANT AND POWERFUL. These are not to be found in a simple proneness to err, a natural weakness of faith, nor in the dangers accompanying daring speculation. They are to be traced in conduct and practical affairs. 1. *Untruthful habits.* Israel had dealt treacherously with God (ver. 11). We must be true to discern truth. If the eye is evil, the whole body is full of darkness. There is a close connection between those two evil things which go under the name of infidelity—treachery and unbelief, lack of faithfulness and lack of faith. 2. *Resistance to the will of God.* The language of the people betrays an animus, a spirit of enmity to God. "They have belied the Lord." Nothing blinds like hatred. 3. *Love of ease.* The words of Jeremiah were not pleasant; he threatened terrible things. Therefore his hearers refused to accept his message. Their conduct was most illogical, since truth is not affected by our liking for it—are there not many unpleasant truths?—and most injurious to themselves, since it was for their own interest to give heed to the warning of approaching calamity, that foresight might mitigate the force, if it could not now prevent the falling, of the blow. Yet this conduct was most natural. It is constantly to be observed that people listen to the teachers whom they like rather than to those whom they believe to be speaking the most important truths, and accept the opinions which suit their inclinations rather than those possibly less agreeable ideas which stand on the surest foundation of fact. 4. *Spiritual deadness.* The Jews deny the inspiration of the prophets. To them weighty words such as those of Jeremiah are mere "wind." So there were those who derided him who spake with

the weightiest authority and "as never man spake." Sin deadens the soul to the perception of God's voice in nature, in the Bible, in Christ, in conscience.

Ver. 19.—*Suitable retribution.* In anticipation of their astonishment at the character of the retribution that is to fall upon them the Jews are to be shown that this is fitting and rightly corresponds to their conduct.

I. THEY WHO FORSAKE GOD IN PROSPERITY WILL FEEL THE LOSS OF GOD IN ADVERSITY. According to the religious conduct in sunny days will be the condition of rest or ruin in dark days.

II. THE FALSE GODS OF PROSPERITY PROVE WORTHLESS IN ADVERSITY. Israel served heathen gods in their own land. In their captivity they are to be slaves to strange men. The gods are then nowhere. Men make gods of wealth, pleasure, fame, etc., and find that, though these may be worshipped, they can do nothing to deliver their devotees.

III. THEY WHO THROW OFF THE SERVICE OF GOD MUST SUBMIT TO HARDER SERVICE. They think to be free, but they really are the slaves of sin (John viii. 34). They reject the easy yoke and light burden of Christ only to find themselves bound in the galling fetters of Satan.

IV. THE ABUSE OF BLESSINGS IS NATURALLY PUNISHED BY THE LOSS OF THEM. In their own land the Jews had proved unfaithful to the God who had given it them. They are rightly punished by exile to a strange land, where they must miss his gracious government.

Vers. 22—24.—*Man rebuked by nature.* Man considers himself to be "the lord of creation." He alone of all creatures is made in the image of God. Yet there are things in nature which should put him to shame. Jeremiah indicates two of these.

I. THE DIVINE ORDER OF NATURE REBUKES THE WILFUL DISOBEDIENCE OF MAN. 1. *Nature is ever obedient to the law of God.* (1) The greatest powers of nature submit to Divine ordinances. The sea, vast and mighty, is bound by his decree (Job xxxviii. 8—11). (2) The wildest convulsions of nature do not transgress these ordinances. The waves may toss and roar, but they cannot pass the bounds that God has set them. Hurricanes, thunder-storms, earthquakes, are as subservient to law as the silent sunshine and the peaceful growth of spring. (3) The simplest means in accordance with Divine laws are sufficient to restrain the fiercest forces of nature. God has placed the *sand* as a bound of the sea, and the storms are driven back from the sandy beach as surely as from the coast of iron crags. (4) The obedience of nature to these Divine ordinances is everlasting and without exception. The sea is bound by perpetual decrees. 2. *Man alone is disobedient to the Law of God.* He is the great exception to the order of the universe. The wild sea never transgresses God's decrees; man is the sole transgressor. The possibility of this strange, solitary rebellion among all the orders of God's kingdoms of nature is explained by the constitution of man and the character of the obedience which is required by this. Nature is under necessity; man is free. Nature's obedience is unconscious, material; man's is deliberate, moral. He is to fear, to tremble, *i.e.* to obey under the influence of thoughts and feelings of reverence. Lacking these, he can be bound to the throne of God by no chains of compulsion. But how terrible to use the high endowment of liberty only to set at defiance the august decrees before which all other creatures bow unceasingly!

II. THE DIVINE BENEFICENCE OF NATURE REBUKES THE UNGRATEFUL REBELLION OF MAN. 1. *The order of nature is beneficent.* God gives the rain "in its season." He keeps for men "the appointed weeks of the harvest." The regularity and harmony of the physical world are beneficial to men. The sun never fails to rise. If it once failed, what disasters would follow! If the motion of the earth were irregular no life could continue to exist. The order of the seasons is a distinct blessing (Gen. viii. 22). Instead of shrinking from "the reign of law" as from a cruel tyranny, we should welcome it when we remember that the laws of nature are but the material expression of the will of God, and that will the outcome of his goodness. 2. *This beneficence of nature shows all sin to be a mark of ingratitude.* God smiles on us in nature (Matt. v. 45). How then can we, while blessed by the very sunshine of that smile, rise up in revolt against him? If the grandeur and splendid harmony of nature do not awe us,

shall not its gentleness and kindliness attract us to loyal obedience to him who is at once the Fountain of law and the Father of mercies?

Vers. 30, 31.—*The most appalling condition to which a nation can sink.* After enumerating the sins of his people in ever-darkening series, the prophet at length reaches a form of evil worse than all others, at the sight of which he starts back with an exclamation of horror; this is corruption at the very fountain of instruction and worship, and the willing acquiescence in it by the nation.

I. CONSIDER THE FEARFUL NATURE OF THIS EVIL. 1 *False prophecy.* The prophet should be the highest oracle of truth. If *he* utters lies, knowledge is corrupted at its source. The guilt of such conduct is exceptionally great, because (1) it is a sin against light; (2) it is a prostitution of the highest powers to the basest ends; and (3) it is a cause of widespread ruin to those who follow these "blind leaders of the blind." 2. *Subservient priesthood.* The priests were at the beck of the false prophets. These men had not the excuse of the prophets. The prophets represented a progressive religion—a religion of inward lights, a religion in which new departures were expected, and therefore one in which the excuse of honest though mistaken enthusiasm might be urged in defence of a lapse into error. But the priests were the custodians of a rigid ritual defined by a written Law. They were put in trust, and their apostasy was a deliberate act of unfaithfulness. The Christian teacher, though free from the letter of the Law, and gifted with the spiritual freedom of prophecy, is put in trust with the gospel (1 Tim. i. 11). If he, while retaining the influence and emoluments of his office, consciously forsakes the guidance of the New Testament for the fascinations of groundless speculation, he too is guilty of unfaithfulness; and if he knows the speculation to be false, but accepts it out of deference to its popularity, he is guilty of base treason like that of the commander of a fortress who surrenders to the enemy from sheer cowardice. 3. *Popular acquiescence* in these evils. "My people love to have it so." This is pleasing, since (1) the false prophets flatter and prophesy smooth things, while the true prophets like Jeremiah must often rebuke and denounce judgments; and (2) the priests are satisfied with an unspiritual religion, ritual without morality, perhaps even immorality in religion. But this fact completes the terrible depravity of the nation. The people cannot plead ignorance nor compulsory obedience. The willing followers of corrupt religious leaders must share their guilt; nay, they are responsible for the aggravation of it by fostering with applause that which would die out if neglected.

II. CONSIDER THE FINAL RESULT OF THIS EVIL. "And what will ye do in the end thereof?" It was characteristic of the false prophets that they aimed only at immediate popularity, and thought only of the present, while the true prophets were concerned with the future. But the future will some day be the present. Is it not best to inquire what this is becoming while yet there is time to modify it? 1. Consider the *moral* results of this depravity, the corruption of conscience, the falsifying of the nature of those who live in falsehood, the destruction of all spiritual life in those who lower spiritual functions before the claims of worldly convenience. 2. Consider the *penal* results of this depravity. Can *this* of all evils go unpunished? (See ver. 29.)

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*A wicked city spared for the sake of one saint.* The challenge is very bold and striking. It proves how thoroughly the prophet, as taught by the Spirit, had read the national corruption. At the same time it furnishes a gauge of the long-suffering mercy of God, and the influence for good of one true man. Jerusalem, the chief city, is chosen as representing what is best and most influential in the nation; and its streets and lanes as the haunts of the multitude, the merchants, the artisans, and common people, who would represent the general public morality. It is as if he had said, "In practical life, amid the miscellaneous throng, seek for the just and honourable man." What light this throws upon—

I. THE EXTENT OF CORRUPTION POSSIBLE IN HUMAN NATURE! The Jewish metropolis had been highly favoured. The priesthood had its head-quarters there. The chief

messages of the prophets had been delivered in its precincts. It was the centre of influence, national spirit, and intelligence. Yet the effect of all this was morally and spiritually *nil*. Worse even than Sodom and Gomorrah in actual spiritual condition, as certainly it would be far less tolerable for it than for them in the day of judgment. *Ideally* it was the city of the saints and of heavenly peace and order; *actually* its temple was a den of thieves, and its streets the scenes of universal dishonesty, godlessness, and corruption. As has been said of a certain metropolis of Christendom, it would appear to have been the case that "the more churches the less religion." Allowing it to be a rhetorical exaggeration, it was nevertheless a terrible statement to be able to make. But the great cities of the modern world have filled with a like despair the minds of the wisest thinkers. The measure of man's possible degeneration and depravity who can fix?

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCE IN SPIRITUAL THINGS! The spectacle of Abraham praying for the cities of the plain is most impressive. But may it not be paralleled by the unconscious influence of good men? Even accepting the statement as a challenge, was it not a great thing to say that one man by his holiness could have saved the city? Suppose there had been such a man. One can imagine what would have been his sorrow at the universal evil, and his feeling of helplessness and uselessness amid the prevalent irreligion. Yet would his presence there be no light matter, no vain thing. Though he knew it not, he would have been the saviour of the people—immediately from the judgment of God, possibly in the future from the sin that was destroying it. The value, therefore, of individual influence in spiritual matters is incalculable; and no Christian can say that he is of no use. *Godward* the prayer of the faithful may soar in constant intercession and mediation; *manward* his character and works are a constant testimony to the unbeliever.

III. THE INFINITENESS OF GOD'S LONG-SUFFERING LOVE. The presence of one good man in the wicked city would have been *an appeal to God's justice* that could not be despised. He could not "destroy the righteous with the wicked." But far more would it have been *an appeal to his love*. The hope of the future would have been wrapped up in that solitary saint. In him grace would find a secret sanctuary, and the forces of salvation a vantage-point from which to sally forth to the rescue of perishing souls and the work of national, yea, of world-wide, regeneration. The judgments of God are not inflicted arbitrarily or in haste. He has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Any reasonable excuse for merciful intervention or delay is welcome. Countless acts of mercy and forgiveness, countless opportunities for repentance, have occurred ere the uplifted axe has dealt its terrible stroke. Learn, then, from this that: 1. *The life as the prayer of a righteous man availeth much with God.* 2. *That God will save us if we will only let him*; and 3. *He will begin his work of salvation from the least, and carry it on even to the greatest.*

IV. THE REASONABLENESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS OF VICARIOUS SUFFERING THROUGH CHRIST.—M.

Ver. 3.—*What God requires of man.* "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth?" This is better rendered, "O Lord, look not thine eyes for fidelity?" *Faith* is the grand requirement. It is the condition of communion between man and God, and man and man. Scripture lays stress on this. Faith cannot be a mere logical abstraction or a condition beyond the reach of man. It must be practical—within the power of the will, and such as may be reasonably looked for in all. "Fidelity," the Old Testament equivalent for the New Testament "faith," has its expression in reality, honesty, thoroughness. These are the marks of the man God delights to honour, and they are the obligation of all (cf. Micah vi. 8).

I. THE SIMPLICITY, REASONABLENESS, AND NECESSITY OF IT. God could not ask for less than man demands of his fellow, and society requires for its stability and advancement. It is obviously independent of the accidents of culture, fortune, or position; and for any solid understanding between God and man, absolutely indispensable. We are God's stewards, servants, representatives, etc. Having this, we have all; wanting this, all our other acquirements are vain.

II. THE SCARCITY OF IT. A little while ago we read that not a just man could be found in all Jerusalem. Here it is said that even in the most sacred oath there is false

swearing. The want of this quality, rather than its presence, strikes the inquirer. This it is that gives rise to wars, jealousies, selfishness, sin in all its forms.

III. THE REASON FOR ITS ABSENCE IN MOST MEN. Because men are sinners, alienated from the life of God and unconscious of his claims. The carnal nature is unable of itself even to be real, to be truly honest, or to discharge faithfully and completely the most ordinary duties. A supernatural aid is required. A Saviour must die. Through him the soul must be united with God in a true love and holy understanding. The better nature thus awakened, the trust and confidence and love thus created must be reinforced by the Spirit. How terrible the thoughts, "Thou God seest me"! "Be not deceived: God is not mocked"! "His eyes are as a flame of fire"! "The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword," etc.! Who shall deceive that all-seeing One? The eyes of Jehovah, reading the secrets of the soul, look for *fidelity*, for *faith*.—M.

Ver. 18.—*Sparing mercy.* The judgments described as about to be inflicted are very fearful, but they were amply deserved. The wickedness of the people was such as to justify their complete destruction. Yet they were spared ere they were totally extinct! Why this unlooked-for restraint?

I. IT HAS CHARACTERIZED ALL GOD'S JUDGMENTS OF MANKIND ON EARTH. The Fall, the Flood, the Exodus, etc., the sparing of the remnant of Benjamin, etc.

II. THERE IS BUT ONE EXPLANATION FOR IT. It is the possibility of *some* turning to him truly in the first instance; and, secondly, through them, of the race being saved in the future. God has never utterly cut off even the most sinful. *Love*, and not mere vengeance, behaves in this way. 1. *Has he not spared us?* 2. *He has never abandoned his purpose of saving "the whole world."*—M.

Ver. 22.—*God's power in restraining the forces of nature.* An old, yet ever new, illustration of his power. The tiny grains of sand, the "Portland Beach" of shingle or pebbles, is enough to hold back the mighty ocean. It is but one of many impressive illustrations of his restraining power and goodness.

I. IT IS CALCULATED TO INSPIRE REVERENCE AND LOVE.

II. OUR HELPLESS DEPENDENCE UPON HIM IS THUS SHOWN.

III. THE POWER OF GOD IN THE SPHERE OF MORAL INFLUENCE AND SAVING GRACE AS thereby suggested.

> "'Thus far and no further,' when addressed
> To the wild waves, or wilder human breast,
> Implies authority that never can
> And never ought to be the lot of man."

It is God's prerogative. Let us not defy him or arrogate to ourselves that which is his. Let us rather yield ourselves to his gracious dealings and fatherly purpose.—M.

Ver. 1.—*Can a righteous man be found in Jerusalem?* God's warnings still go on concerning the same thing—the deeply seated, the deeply destructive wickedness of the people. But though the same subject has to be spoken of, there is no monotony in the treatment of it. It can be looked at from fresh points of view, and put into fresh lights. A careful reading of ch. iv. will show how many different things can be said concerning wickedness; and now, with ch. v. 1, the reproaches and appeals still continue. Note—

I. THE INDIVIDUALIZING ASPECT OF THE APPEAL. The nation and Jerusalem and the leaders in it have all been referred to; but as long as there are generalities and nothing more individuals will think they can get away from blame under cover of them. Here, then, is a bold challenge which fastens up in a corner every dweller in Jerusalem. The challenge, of course, is not to be taken literally. The true state of things may be known, and known very distinctly, without any running to and fro at all. Let every one take a glance at those whom he knows, and then come home to a candid inquiry concerning the life within his own breast. It is an easy thing to blame others, to throw the fault of disaster upon those who occupy prominent positions. Followers are to blame as well as leaders. The iniquity of Jerusalem, deep, turbid, incessant as the stream of it is, is made of many contributions which, individually considered, may seem very slight. A few men in every age are called to toil for the removal of evils

of which, personally, they are not guilty; but every one has the opportunity of improving the world, by doing his best to keep his own heart right. Others are to blame, and there are times when they must be faced, blamed, and resisted; but there is given a *daily* need, duty, and opportunity to do in our own hearts what no one else can do for us.

II. HOW COMPREHENSIVE AND CONFIDENT THE CHALLENGE IS. It amounts to this, that there cannot be found in all Jerusalem one man who is just in all his dealings, and a seeker after truth. *Not one.* Must we, then, take this literally? The answer is, *No*, and *Yes*. It would have been strange if Jerusalem had become so utterly bad a place that every soul within it was perverted from the ways of right and truth. There must have been some men desiring and striving to live a right life. We bear in mind what God said to Elijah when Elijah said, in the despair and bitterness of his heart, that only *he* was left to serve God. Not so by any means; the searching God, who counts hearts where fallible men can only count heads, told his prophet there were still seven thousand with knees unbowed to Baal. And did not Jeremiah discover from his own experience that there were some on Jehovah's side (ch. xxvi. 24; xxxix. 15—18)? But they were not enough to exert a leavening and recovering influence. And yet the very men whom we may call good and just and true, seeing something of the right, and trying to do it as far as they saw, would have drawn back in confusion and self-distrust if they had been asked, in a direct way and so that the question could not be evaded, "Do you answer this description?" "Are you doers of justice and seekers after truth?" In trying to answer such a question, would not the moments of unfaithfulness and hesitation come to mind—the occasions when they were tempted to escape from loss and pain by some convenient compromise? It will never do for us to congratulate ourselves on being a great deal better than others so long as we come short of what God wants us to be.

III. The thing to be specially considered is, how THIS ACCUSATION APPLIES TO THE GREAT MASS OF THE PEOPLE. Many would have said, cynically enough, "Justice and truth are no concern of ours." These are words that sound very well in general statements; but directly the attempt is made to bring them close to the individual, it is alleged that they do not apply, or else there is the name and not the thing. Things are called just which are not just, and true which are utterly false. Let men of noble minds talk of justice and truth, and only too many are found to allege that such speaking is but cant and hyprocrisy. When Jesus said to Pilate that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth, Pilate answered him with the question, "What has truth got to do with the matter?" Men want to get on, to get rich, to get known, to live easily, to satisfy the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life; and the claims of justice and truth would make sad havoc with such purposes. Those who have learned from Christ that justice and truth are great necessities of life, necessities in a far higher sense than food and clothing, have often to notice, with great pain and concern, the number of those who do not seem to have any conception of what it is really to do justice and seek after truth. They do not comprehend the objects which God and Christ set before them any more than a blind man comprehends colours. Why, then, blame them? it may be asked. The blame is that they will not come to Christ that they may have sight. To Christians the power and disposition are given to do justice. The spirit is put in them to seek for truth as those who seek for hid treasures, and those who seek with such a zeal and impulse can never seek in vain.—Y.

Vers. 3—6.—*Chastisement thwarted by universal stubbornness.* I. THE FACT THAT GOD'S CHASTISEMENTS ARE THWARTED. The chastisements are evidently indicated as severe, and the reason of the severity is hinted in the preliminary question. God is looking for truth, looking for it in the midst of oaths broken and despised. He looks for faithfulness in all the ways in which it can be shown. There must be correspondence between promises and performances; there must be stability of character; the character must be such that men will be the same out of sight as in sight, working as ever in the Great Taskmaster's eye. Moreover, God cannot be put off by the most plausible appearance of fidelity; he knows always whether the heart is steadfast in its affection and zeal. And thus seeing all this insincerity among his

people, this carelessness about truth, he chastises them to make them feel *their wrong*, attend to *his will*, and alter *their deceiving ways* so as to correspond with it. They are told beforehand what is coming, and the very instrument of chastisement is displayed before them. They had no ground for saying, "Suffering came upon us, and we knew not why it came." We know that Jeremiah's words must have been very pungent and irritating, and the irritating element was just this, that he persistently spoke of conquest, desolation, and exile as lying in the immediate future for his fellow-countrymen. And here Jeremiah, with the prophet's melancholy privilege, sets forth the future as present. The stroke has fallen; the suffering, the loss, the humiliation, are keen; but there is no understanding in the mind, and no sign of repentance and return. Their faces are harder than the rock. If some sculptor could put into a marble face all that outwardly marks the stubborn mind, that would be the expression of Israel now towards Jehovah. No subdued look in the eye; no irrepressible quivering of the lips preliminary to saying, "Father, I have sinned . . . and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (ch. iii. 4).

II. THE REASON WHICH THE PROPHET ADVANCES FOR THIS STUBBORNNESS. Remember what we have said already—and let it be said again, for it is essential to a right understanding of the passage—that the purpose of the chastisement was distinctly set forth beforehand. The people had not to grope in the dark as to the reason of their suffering. There was no room for disputing, if only Jeremiah were accepted as indeed a prophet of Jehovah. And to Jeremiah himself the intention of the chastisement was, of course, plain by the very clearest light. And, since it is natural for us to suspect that what is plain to us should be plain to others, Jeremiah could see only one reason for this distressing want of recipiency. Those who are so stubborn he thinks can be but a part of Israel, the poor and foolish, the degraded, brutalized residuum of the nation. Thus Jeremiah illustrates, by this interposed conjecture of his, a very common and perilous tendency among *thinking* men. We may not be unwilling—indeed, we may only be too eager—to admit the degradation of a large part of mankind, and their stolid indifference to all that is noble, refined, and truly humane. But then, on the other hand, there is an excessive exaltation of the natural man. Genius, intellect, success in research and discovery, such as that of a Newton and a Faraday—these are glorified beyond their due. It is forgotten that while men have natural powers whereby they can *climb* very high, they must come to God in humility and ask for wings of faith if they are to discover the highest kind of truth, the truth to which man must *soar* rather than *climb*. Jeremiah reckons that what he certainly cannot find in some he will assuredly find in others. He will turn away from the ignorant rabble, and go to the men of substance, the men with responsibility, such, doubtless, as the king and the princes, the priests and the prophets. But he goes only to fail, only to discover that the wise men of this world are as little disposed to attend to the preaching of the *prophet* as Paul afterwards discovered them to be to the preaching of the *apostle*.

III. And so we come to THE REAL REASON OF THE STUBBORNNESS. It is something which lies in universal sinful human nature, apart from any special defects or special excellences. The stubbornness may sometimes suddenly vanish where we should expect it to continue, and where we should expect it to vanish it may not only continue but become to all appearance invincible. The heart of unbelief is found in every rank. The experience of Jesus would seem to have been that the poor and the foolish, as Jeremiah would have classified them, were more ready to turn to him than the great. An excellent commentary on the passage we have been considering is to be found in the first and second chapters of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians.—Y.

Ver. 10.—*The vineyard spoiled because of the degenerate branches.* I. LOOK AT THE FIGURE WHICH UNDERLIES THIS EXHORTATION. We find in other parts of Scripture passages curiously rich in illustration of the emphatic exhortation here. Turn to Isa. v. 1—7: here is presented to us the picture of a vineyard protected by a fence against marauders and wild beasts, planted with the choicest vine, and tilled in the most complete and careful manner. But when the vineyard, in spite of all care, only yields wild grapes, then the hedge and the wall are taken away and the cultivated land lapses into wilderness. Ps. lxxx. contains a very similar passage, save that it is the language of appeal from a suffering people instead of a warning

from a disappointed God. God is described as having cast out the heathen to make room for the vine which he had brought from Egypt. And in the land where he planted it it grew downwards and upwards and outwards, spreading far and wide. "Why then," say the people, "hast thou broken down her hedges, so that all which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it." Once again, there is a very striking passage in Prov. xxiv. 30, 31. The wise man passes the vineyard of the man void of understanding, and finds it full of thorns and nettles, and *the stone wall thereof broken down.* Hence the vineyard, with its need of a strong wall kept in good repair, comes before us almost as distinctly as if it were a familiar sight.

II. CONSIDER NOW THE EXHORTATION ITSELF. *The wall* round this vineyard of God, even this vineyard which he so plainly set apart and has cared for so much, is to be broken down. We have not far to seek for the reason. The branches of the vine are not Jehovah's. "I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?" (ch. ii. 21). The wall is not yet in such case as that round the vineyard of the man void of understanding. It has not dropped to pieces through sloth. Its fate, it may be said, is even worse, for it has to come down by an act of judgment. Protection is a mockery and reproach when the thing protected fails to reward the care that has been lavished upon it. God breaks down the fence that he may make a clear way for the removing of the branches. The branches, one may say, are fixed in a true vine and draw nourishment from good soil; yet wild, sour, deluding, discreditable grapes are all the result. The branches, therefore, are to go, but only the branches. A full end is not to be made. The trunk, the roots, still stay. For indeed a word has, by-and-by, to be spoken by Jesus, concerning the vine and the branches, and the branches which are to *abide* in the vine that they may bring forth fruit. God will destroy all profitless connection with himself. If men avail themselves of the strength and opportunity which he gives to bring forth fruit, not such as will glorify him, but such as suits the perverted taste of men, then all the branches on which such fruit comes must be unsparingly cut away. And what a thought that fruit which men so much value is after all in God's sight, which gives the true estimation, a sour and worthless thing!—Y.

Ver. 14.—*Those who call the word of Jehovah a lie.* It has been a common folly, in connection with all the revelations which God has made at sundry times and in divers manners, to despise the authority of the messengers. Noah, Moses, David, and many others up to Jesus himself, could tell, along with Jeremiah, the same essential experience of contempt, rejection, and persecution. It is not for God to use those outward pomps and recommendations on which men count so much. A message unwelcome in itself is easily made of no repute when the messenger is devoid of outward state. Outward show, as every age can tell, counts for a great deal. Perhaps the visit of the Queen of Sheba would have been made far less of if she had not been a queen, or had come without the barbaric treasures which she spread forth in such great abundance. Simple lovers of truth, when their station happens to be obscure, are not much remarked. Here then was Jeremiah, asserting that he had come with a message from the Lord of the utmost moment, and he is rejected with the brusque intimation that his message is a lie and he himself an impostor. And this rejection is all the more noticeable because *the words of the prophet must surely have had a strange impressiveness.* None of the prophets could have spoken in the routine fashion of a herald announcing the proclamation which many times, perhaps, he has announced before. They must all, at least in the judgment of a few, have spoken with authority and not as the scribes. And Jeremiah at all events must have stood before the people, having every channel of outward expression filled from the sad experiences and emotions of his own inward life. The sorrows of which he spoke were as sorrows that he saw rising before his mind's eye in all the horrors of their reality. The words, as he says in ch. xx. 9, were often words that he tried to keep back, but that which was as a burning fire shut up in his bones must break out at last. And therefore, when the words did come, they were charged with a force of personal conviction and brotherly entreaty which in itself ought to have been enough to arrest attention. Moreover, sword and famine, future calamities with all their aggravations, were not the only things of which the

prophet spoke. He had to deal *with an actual present* as well as a foreshadowed future. The present in which he and his audience lived teemed with idolatry, perjury, fraud, and oppression. These things were not lies. It was no lie to point to the manifest seed that Israel was sowing, and surely there was nothing more really reasonable than that there should be a reaping according to the sowing. At this height of rejection, then, God steps in *to vindicate and honour his faithful servant.* It is a melancholy kind of distinction, but a distinction nevertheless. His words were not only true words, but most terribly near to their fulfilment. It was not that Jeremiah himself was an agent in destroying, but his words became so immediately true, there was such a rapid production and concentration of the agents of destruction, as to make it quite proper to say that these words of the prophet were as consuming fire. But a few years, and many of these despisers found that the alleged lies were only too painfully true. It is not over lapsing centuries that we have to look for the fulfilment of Jeremiah's gloomy prediction. Isaiah long before had sounded the note of warning, and now the peril is close at hand. It was inevitable that Jeremiah should speak with an urgency and excitement absent from the messages of his great predecessor. As the time of chastisement drew nearer, the warnings had to be louder, more disturbing, possibly more continuous. The mariner setting out on his voyage may be warned of some special danger lying in his track; but the adviser, while he may speak very earnestly, will not speak as does the man who, when the helmsman is close upon the danger, shouts to him, with utmost excitement and agitation, at once to change his course. God gave to Jeremiah this melancholy satisfaction, that while he had been, to his heart's deepest sorrow, a messenger of woe, he had yet been approved, on the surest evidence, as a messenger of truth.—Y.

Ver. 22.—*A lesson from the raging sea.* I. WE OBSERVE GOD FIXING LIMITS WITHIN WHICH HIS CREATURES EXERCISE THEIR POWER. Jehovah speaks here of the sea in particular, but just because it happens to be an excellent representative, for the purpose in view, of the rest of his creation. We may notice God's boundaries in many places and at different seasons, and surely it must often strike thoughtful minds, as they walk by the mighty deep, that there is, in the arrangement of sea and land, an exquisite illustration of the unfailing wisdom of God. Here is this vast mass of water, covering the surface of the globe, ever in motion and yet ever keeping its place. The true state of the case is even more wonderful than that which was presented to Jeremiah. To him the earth was a flat expanse, and the beach would have the aspect of an embankment which really kept the water back. We, aided by the discoveries of science, know that the real limiting forces of the sea work in a much more mysterious manner. But, of course, the fundamental truth is the same. There must be a great and loving intelligence at work, keeping the waters within their appointed bounds.

II. OBSERVE THE COMPARISON WHICH IS MADE BETWEEN DISOBEDIENT MAN AND THE SEA IN A STATE OF STORM. The sea easily gets a kind of personality, and the sea in a storm is very like a proud man chafing against the barriers which confine him, and trying to break them down. More than that, when God looks down into human society, underneath the (to us) often calm surface, he must see little else than stormy agitation, one human billow dashing against another, each individual in his self-assertion contributing to make a general disturbance, and a disturbance which apparently will not soon have an end. And yet the sea, with all its fury and roar and threatening, with all the destruction it may work out in its own sphere, is powerless to overwhelm the solid land. In the strength of their confidence, men would build large cities close to the ocean-brink and inhabit them without fear. They will go down and look at the tempest in its utmost fury, sure that they are safe. A few yards make all the difference between the agony of deadly peril and perfect ease of mind. The more furious the storm is, the grander it makes the sight without in any wise diminishing the feeling of safety.

III. HENCE THERE IS INDICATED THE FOLLY OF ALL HUMAN OPPOSITION TO GOD. The storm rises; it may destroy many ships and lives; but in due time the calm returns and the great features of the scene appear the same. The land is still there. And so men may chafe against the commandments and purposes of God, and may go on without intervals of calm, even exceeding the sea in the continuity of their violence.

But what does all the strife avail? The boundaries are fixed. If in that which is natural God has taken so much care in the line between sea and land, is it not certain that he will take equal care in that which is spiritual? God's work continues on the solid land, away from all disturbance of his foes. Nay, more, looking at the figure here from the Christian point of view, we see that even within what seems its own sphere, the raging of the sea can soon be stopped. Let us think of Jesus quelling the waves, and we shall feel that the greatest storms of opposition and persecution are entirely in the hands of God. How long these storms may rage and what they may do entirely depend on the purpose which he wishes them to subserve.—Y.

Vers. 26—29.—*The worst kind of wickedness found among the people of Jehovah.* God's people are well acquainted with the voice of those scorners who speak as if hypocrisy was the invariable accompaniment of a religious profession. They do discover, it must be admitted, far more frequently than they ought to discover, that religious profession is a mere pretence; and thereupon they never forget the few well-established instances which are a ground, in season and out of season, for a sweeping charge of hypocrisy. But such people, unfortunately for themselves, are not readers of the Scriptures; else they would discover that God does not wait for outside malevolent critics to make the most of the hypocrisies to be found amongst his people. God not only sees and laments this peculiarly odious form of wickedness, but is exceedingly plain in his description and terribly severe in his denunciation. In this matter outsiders cannot tell God's people anything they do not know already. Note—

I. That which ought to be found amongst God's people. This is just the thing which makes the whole discovery so inexpressibly sad—that this wickedness is found where there should have been found a character diametrically opposite. It is the scene of the wickedness that indescribably aggravates the wickedness itself. That a good man, a really good man, should be found in a den of thieves is impossible. Vain would it be for him to continue there and yet plead his uprightness. A den of thieves does actually give character to every one who willingly inhabits it, and so, passing from the bad to the good, a certain high reputation must attach to every one who openly ranks himself among the people of God. It was not because these Israelites dwelt in a certain territory or were descendants from certain ancestors that they were reckoned the people of God. There was a covenant, the terms of which were to be taught to every generation and diligently observed by it. And this covenant emphatically required that these people should live among themselves an upright, brotherly, loving life. Without this, worship was vain; indeed, without this, worship, in the true sense, was impossible. In the home, union was to be preserved by subordination and purity; and in society, by the safety of life and property to the individual. God's people are "the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand," and it is manifest that, in the right order of things, a sheep's clothing should cover a sheep and not a wolf.

II. That which actually is found. Wicked men are found where none but the devout, the upright, and the gentle ought to be. Further, this wickedness is so marked off by bold and indignant expressions that every one guilty of it may know Jehovah's eye to be upon him. For such a man there lies no way of escape among vague generalities. He cannot get off by alleging, with apparent seriousness, that, while there are undoubtedly deceivers among the people of God, he at all events is not to be numbered amongst them. If a man is behaving himself after the fashion here described, he certainly must know it. With regard to certain actions, the nature of them may come out so openly that it is easy to effect the consequent exclusion and separation of the offender from the people of God. But there yet remain many wickednesses, the worst of wickednesses, which a man may go on committing and yet keep his name written in the human record of those who profess service to God. He may even make his very position a vantage-ground for the laying of his snares and the perfecting of his wiles. He may be able so to conceal his hand and his purpose as to deceive even his victims, who, instead of arguing that because there is great wickedness the doer of it must be a bad man, begin at the other end and say that a maker of long prayers cannot possibly be bad; he may be driven to the infliction of a painful blow, but, that must be reckoned his calamity rather than his fault. Now, the descriptions in this passage make it evident that God sees into all the doings of such men. And at

this particular time these men had become very successful, and we must infer very influential. Wherever money is heaped up it makes influence. And even though such oppressors were not numerous, their very position gave them power. But over against them, with all their power, all their wealth, all their pretensions, there is that God who marks every tear and groan and writhing of the oppressed. This passage is but one out of many in which God shows his hatred to all injustice. Some of the so-called friends of humanity, who are never tired of asserting their friendship and pressing their claims, make one of their great claims to be in this, that they oppose all acknowledgment of God. Depend upon it, God is the true Friend of humanity; he first, and afterwards are those whom he inspires with his own indignation against wrong, and endows with the strength, patience, resolution, and all Divine resources needed to destroy it. What wonder is it that God should speak of vengeance against such a nation as permits and extenuates the monstrous evils denounced in this passage?—Y.

Vers. 30, 31.—*Mutual helpers in wrong-doing.* I. THE TEMPTATIONS HERE SET FORTH. Three classes are mentioned—the prophet, the priest, and the people in general. Each class plays only too well its iniquitous and deplorable part, just because of the strong assistance which it gains from the attitude of the others. Each class acts as tempter in its turn, and that none the less effectually because it may do it unconsciously. Each one also tempts because he is tempted, and one hardly knows where the malign influence begins save by remembering the words of James, "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." The prophet, however, is here put first, and this can hardly be without reason. On him there did indeed lie a peculiar burden of responsibility. The prophets here mentioned, we may take it, were not false prophets, although they spoke falsely. The false prophet was he who pretended to be a prophet, although God never sent him; and of such there were doubtless some in the land at this very time. But the horrible thing here was that men whom God had set apart to speak the truth used the prophetic office to tell convenient lies, such as seemed to afford security and profit. Jonah, in his cowardice fleeing from duty, is an illustration of what many other prophets must have done, only they went further and never came back to truth and peace. We know how men in all ages have sold the heritage of faculty which God has given them to the service of lying and darkness. Instead of fighting where their hearts ought to have been, among the soldiers for truth and liberty, they have become mercenaries under despots. These prophets on whom Jehovah had put his hand had allowed themselves to be filled with fear and greed and schemes for worldly success, instead of with the Spirit of Jehovah. They went not with what was true, but with what was acceptable. How much higher the faithful prophets should stand in our esteem when we consider the temptations they resisted, the pains they suffered, the pious heroism which marked their sometimes long career! Imagine what the consequences would have been if the apostles had altered and trimmed the gospel. Then there were *the priests.* "The priests bear rule by their means." The allusion may be to the hands of the prophets, but perhaps a better meaning is to take it that the prophet sinned in *his* way, and the priest again in *his* way. The prophet's great instrument of service was his *mouth*, and with this he *prophesied falsely.* The priest's great instrument of service was *his hand*, and this he used to get *superstitious deference to his privileges*, instead of for the purpose of presenting, with his whole heart, offering and atonement for the people. In addition to this, there may have been, and very likely was, a corrupt understanding between priest and prophet. Then both priest and prophet had in their eyes *the great* mass of the people. God himself looked down on this unfaithfulness of the great officials with a warmth of indignation that would soon burst into flame, but the people regarded it all with a very different feeling. They "loved to have it so." When a true prophet came, speaking truth, his message was so hateful and humiliating that they denied his office. "Surely the man who speaks such things cannot be a prophet; a madman he may be, or a fanatic, or a disloyal man whose Israelite form hides a foreign heart; anything you like, but *not a prophet.*" But when the prophet comes speaking lies, looking into the faces of his audience for all that he has to put into their ears, then his office will be approved. And so with the priest. If he

makes it clear that burnt offerings and all sacrifices are nothing without repentance and reform, he will be thought very little of. He must let the people sin and sin as much as they like. They will cram the temple area with multitudes of flocks and herds to take the effect of sin away, if only they may go on sinning. What God had given to teach the dreadful malignity of sin, these priests had turned into an agency for making it seem a mere trifle.

II. THERE WAS ALSO AN OPPORTUNITY OF REBUKE AND REMONSTRANCE. The people were not obliged to accept these priests and prophets on their own *ipse dixit*. It was not because a man came forth with his "Thus saith the Lord" that he was to be followed. Anybody can say, "Thus saith the Lord." The devil attempted persuasions of this sort when he came to Jesus in the wilderness. There must be a strict searching into what is said. One purpose for which God used prophets and priests was as a test of those whom they had to do with. God wishes to know the extent of our regard for the truth, and he has not left us helpless in discovering that truth with the almost certainty. There is always something to appeal to. Every true prophet with his "Thus saith the Lord" had behind him a Law and testimony, already written and indisputably valid, to which he could point. Each prophet as he came along was more firmly tied to the truth, because he had behind him so many who had already spoken, and whom he must not contradict. So the apostles could be checked in speaking lies or inventions, because an appeal was possible to what Jesus had said in the flesh. There were twelve men with one message, and only as long as the message was one were people bound to receive it. And happily, if a difference had arisen, there was always the means of testing which speaker was right. "No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed." As things stand to-day, it is perfectly clear that we can test every one professing to be a messenger of Divine truth; we can test him effectually. We are not left unprovided amid modern imposture, knavery, and delusion.—Y.

VER. 1.—*True manhood.* Without any introduction, let us plunge at once into our subject, which is *True manhood.* It opens broadly before us in the suggestions which both this verse and the chapter from which it is taken contain. And first of all we will note—

I. THE DIVINE DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF IT. It consists in executing judgment and seeking the truth. The Lord asks importunately that "*a man*" may be found, and then he defines and describes what he means by "a man," in the words, "one that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth." Such is his description of true manhood. So, then, the true man is he to whom truth—that which is right, that which is in accordance with the will of God—is the all-important thing. The habit of his mind, the purpose of his life, is to discover this truth—to know what is right. And when what professes to be truth comes before him, he weighs it in the balance of conscience, tests how it tallies with the mind and will of God; and according to its agreement thereto he approves or disapproves, he gives his judgment. And then, when his judgment is formed, his mind made up, as we say, he does not linger in the outer courts of mere approbation, but he presses on into the very sanctuary, the holy of holies, of corresponding action—he "*executeth* judgment." Having sought, seen, approved the right, he does it; not once now and then, but habitually. Such is the *man* after God's own heart, such the Divine description of what manhood really is. And now observe: 1. How *complete* a definition this is! For what form of goodness or excellence is there that this does not include? Whatever is right for a man to do or be comes under this description. Our well-known word, "virtue," will help us here; for what is virtue but simply that which becomes, which properly belongs to the idea of, the *vir*, the grand old Roman name for man regarded in his higher nature, as contrasted with the lower idea of man in regard to those qualities which he possesses in common with the brutes around him? Man spoken of as merely the human creature was designated by another word; but man as intelligent and moral, man in his nobler being, they designated by that word *vir*, from which our word "virtue" comes. Therefore "this word 'virtue' corresponds as closely as possible with our word 'manliness.' They are equivalent terms. Then, if we know what virtue is, we know what true manhood is. It includes all moral excellence

whatsoever. It is the fruit, the certain fruit, of a man's seeking the truth, and then, when he has found it and conscience tells him that he has found it, of his straightway practically putting it into action, embodying it in word and deed. It is the product of the three highest faculties God has given to man—intellect, conscience, will. It therefore must embrace all that belongs and is becoming to the *vir*, the man, and must exclude all that is contrary thereto." 2. And how *catholic* a description it is! In it "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, male nor female, bond nor free;" there is neither—that is, neither exclusively—Buddhist, Mahommedan, Christian, Jew; neither Romanist, Eastern, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, nor any other sect nor creed whatsoever. For "God is no respecter of persons," but, as St. Peter said to Cornelius, "In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him." Thus catholic, thus all-embracing, is this Divine description of a true man. God's chosen ones consist of all the good. 3. But how *condemnatory* of the world's standards! Before what tinsel imitations of the true manhood does the world bow down! How many glorify physical strength—the Samsonian type of man! And indeed the possession of a physical frame capable of much toil, much endurance, that shrinks not from hardships, and laughs at bold and daring enterprises before which other men quail; a body well organized, its varied functions all working powerfully and smoothly like the several parts of a perfectly adjusted machine;—that *is* a great gift of God. But to make a man's physical qualities the measure of his manhood, that cannot be worthily thought of for one moment. And so, too, if we take *intellectual* distinction—that, though far nobler than the physical, will fall before the high claim of the Divine ideal. And as for *secular* distinction—that greatness which consists in what a man has, wealth, rank, power, rather than what he is,—that claim will not stand for one moment. The world may, does, fall down before these things, and before the last it absolutely grovels; but in the high courts of God's judgment they go for nothing at all. And at that bar not a little that has the world's free licence as consistent with manhood is frowned upon and utterly condemned. No; right, truth, virtue, all that is in harmony with God's will,—this is what the man after God's mind seeks, finds, and habitually does. 4. And how *commendatory* to the conscience is this Divine definition of manhood! Put it before any thoughtful man, and at once he confesses it worthy of God to set forth and blessed for man to seek after. Here the excellent of the earth in all ages and in all lands have found a common meeting-place, and, when unbiassed conscience has spoken, have come to a cordial embrace. 5. But how *Christ-compelling* is this Divine description of true manhood! For he who sets himself to embody it, and really enters on the glorious endeavour, will speedily find that he wants a model, a motive, and a might which assuredly he cannot find in the world around him. A *model;* for mere abstract descriptions help but little. What can the most brilliant word-painting do to enable you to realize what a lovely landscape is like? It can do something, but not very much. But let the gifted artist draw the scene, let him in beautiful picture portray it, and how much more vividly we realize it then! The mechanician must have his model to work from if he is to do successful work. And so, would we realize the description God has given us of a true man, we also must have our model. But there is only One who is flawless and altogether perfect—the Lord Jesus Christ. Patriarchs, prophets, psalmists, apostles, saints, even the most worthy, are none of them perfect; for we have to modify here, correct there, and absolutely reject elsewhere. It is, therefore, to the life of our blessed Lord and Master that this Divine description of manhood forces me would I find the one example I may safely, always, and everywhere copy. But I want a *motive* also; for when I begin my great endeavour I find it no holiday task. It brings no worldly gain, it wins no human applause. My natural bent and bias are utterly against it. Ease and comfort are ever crying, "Spare thyself." Companions on the road are few, and not all of them to my liking, and the way is narrow and rough and steep. What, then, can alone spur me on and constrain me by a compulsion I cannot resist? What but a sense of Christ's great love, and the supreme solicitude to "be accepted of him," which flows therefrom? There is absolutely no other motive which will serve for the *whole* way. Some will take me a part of the way, and others a further part, but all will fail long ere the true end is reached. Therefore am I again driven to Christ, that, as he is my Model, so he may be my Motive

too. But he must also be my *Might*. The power to endure, the strength to toil, the daily grace for daily need,—whence can it come but from him who has said, "Because I live, ye shall live also?" True manhood, real virtue, is therefore an impossible thing apart from Christ. More or less stunted and distorted forms of it there may be, but the Divine ideal, never. May he help us to remember this. Thus, then, complete, catholic, condemnatory of the world's standards, commendatory to the conscience, compelling resort to Christ, is this Divine manhood of which our text tells. But note—

II. THE DIVINE DISAPPOINTMENT AND DISMAY AT NOT FINDING IT WHERE IT MAY SO JUSTLY HAVE BEEN EXPECTED. Observe the words of our text, how they challenge the most thorough search everywhere, implying that the Lord himself had made such search—he whose eyes (ver. 3) "are upon the truth," who is keen-visioned to discover his own in the densest crowd or in the most obscure abode. But now he challenges any to make a like search. Let them run to and fro in the by-streets, in the broad ways, in market-places, in all parts where men congregate; let them in every such place see, know, seek, if they can find even one true man. And the challenge is made not in scorn nor in anger, but in disappointment and dismay. For where, if not amongst God's own professed people, and in the centre of their worship, Jerusalem; where, if not there, could such as God sought be found? But not even there were they; there were "none righteous; no, not one." But what was found this whole chapter plainly declares. There was horrible wickedness—wickedness which only such appalling images as the seventh and eighth verses of this chapter could fitly describe. And this not amongst the ignorant poor only, but amongst the great, the well instructed also (vers. 4, 5). And where there was a form of religion the power was wanting, as the second verse tells. They might use devout words, but the Lord, whose eyes were on the truth (ver. 3), knew how hollow that profession was. So that there was not one man such as God desired. And, though willing to spare, God was forced to punish (ver. 9). This and much more of a like sort prevails all through the chapter. But the contemplation of it fills the Divine mind with disappointment and dismay. It is deep distress to him that he cannot find what he so much desires to find. Are we quite sure that the like question might not be asked in our day? Is the Divine ideal of manhood so constantly realized? Is there not very much to make a devout heart fear lest a like search might lead to a too much like result? Let us remember what it is God looks for in us. Not that which the world thinks so much of, but this manhood; and he mourns when he finds it not. And let it be our prayer that more and more *we* may be men according to his mind. Note next—

III. THE DIVINE DEMONSTRATION OF THE DELIGHT AND JOY HE HAS IN IT. He says if there be but one such man, he will spare Jerusalem for his sake. Such is the meaning of the last clause of this verse. What higher proof (save one which we will note anon) could he give of his estimate of this manhood? He gave large proof when he told Abraham that if there were ten righteous in Sodom he would spare the city for their sakes. And he is continually doing the like of what he here said he would do. He is continually blessing the bad for the sake of the good. "Ye are the salt of the earth," said our Lord to his disciples, implying thereby that, but for his people, the world would go to corruption. "For the elect's sake those days shall be shortened"—the days, he meant, of Jerusalem's destruction, which were then, as in Jeremiah's time, swiftly drawing on. And how often we read of bad and wicked descendants and successors on the throne of David, who for his sake were dealt with far other than they deserved! And to-day, how many godless children of pious parents are for like reason dealt with in like manner! The Church might well, did she choose, challenge the world to say where it would be without the Church. The impious sneer at, persecute, and despise the godly; but were it not for those they so shamefully use, theirs would be a short shrift and a quick going down into hell. And let all who are living godly in Christ Jesus be cheered by knowing that, though persecuted by the world, they are yet most precious in the Lord's sight. Now finally note—

IV. THE SUPREME DEMONSTRATION GOD HAS GIVEN OF HIS DELIGHT AND JOY IN IT. We turn to the gospel for this, and it enables us to reply to the Divine challenge to "find a man;" for we have found *him* "of whom Moses and the prophets did write"—the man Christ Jesus. He has answered to the Divine description, and for his sake not a city

alone, but a world, is to be pardoned. "For he is the Propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but," etc. And our pardon will be not as Sodom's or Jerusalem's would have been—leaving the people still the slaves of sin; but the beginning of a new life, in which we shall grow more and more into the fulness of the stature of the perfect man, the Divine ideal embodied in Christ Jesus. But such is the Divine delight in this Man that, for his sake, he pardons *whosoever* believeth on him. God hath laid help for us "on One who is mighty" to save. Let us, then, go and put in our claim, confessing our deep need of pardon, but pleading God's own promise, that for the sake of this Man—his own "beloved Son in whom he is well pleased"—he should pardon us. And the answer will come back, "Go in peace; be of good cheer: thy sins be forgiven thee."—C.

Ver. 3.—*An unfailing appeal.* "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth?" Text uttered in protest against the pretence and hypocrisy everywhere prevailing in the prophet's day. But the appeal is vindicated whatever we understand by "the truth." Consider it in regard—

I. To THE TRUTH AS SPOKEN BY GOD, IN HIS WORKS AND IN HIS WORD. See this in the constancy and invariability of the order of nature. The reign of law is because "the eyes of the Lord are ever," etc. See it in the fulfilment of ancient prophecies, especially those which concern our Lord Jesus Christ; and we are to believe it in regard to those many promises of God, the fulfilment of which yet waits.

II. To THE TRUTH WRITTEN—to try and test thereby all our teachings and beliefs. See our Lord, in the temptation, how *his* eyes were ever on the truth. Hence his "It is written" foiled the tempter again and again. "To the Law and to the testimony," etc. The Bereans—and their example is held up as noble—searched the Scriptures daily, to see if the teachings they heard "were so;" so, that is, as the apostles affirmed.

III. To THE TRUTH IMPLANTED—to encourage and avenge it. His grace implants truth in the character, and leads to its being acted out in the life. Now, the eyes of the Lord are ever upon such men. As he *hates* the hypocrites, so he loves the sincere, the "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile." His eyes rest on them ever with delight. His Spirit cheers and encourages them amid all outward distress and persecution. His hand will verily avenge them as "his own elect," in his own good time.

IV. To THE TRUTH INCARNATE—to behold and bless all those who are in him. "I am the Truth," said the Lord Jesus. How we love to attract the attention and to enjoy the smile of recognition and approval on the part of those who are greater than ourselves in this world! Would we come under the notice and smile of the Lord God, we must come to him upon whom his eyes are ever resting with delight, even to his well-beloved Son, the Truth incarnate. Until we are "in him" we are in the cold shade, and without hope or help. In him the eyes of the Lord are on us as they are on him, and "he makes his face to shine upon us."—C.

Ver. 3.—*The sorrow of sorrows.* "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved," etc.

I. To BE STRICKEN OF GOD AND AFFLICTED IS IN ITSELF VERY PAINFUL TO CONTEMPLATE. When such sorrow comes it is: 1. To teach the servant of God how to sympathize with and succour other troubled ones. 2. To loosen them from the clinging bands of this world. 3. Because such sorrow is the inevitable pain and distress attendant upon that glorious contest for "the prize of our high calling," for which contest our Father, out of love to us and because of his joy in us, and knowing that we shall win it, has entered us. Still, notwithstanding these facts and others like them, the afflictions of the righteous are painful indeed.

II. BUT SORROW IS YET MORE SORROWFUL WHEN IT IS SELF-CAUSED. Such was the sorrow of many of those whose tears and lamentations we read of in Scripture—David, Peter, Esau. "It was my own fault:" this is the reflection which calls into dread life and activity "the worm that dieth not." But still, when, as with the contrite hearts, Manasseh, David, Peter, etc., of whom Scripture tells, their sorrow is of a godly sort, then, sad as it is, its result makes it blessed.

III. BUT THERE IS A SORROW OF SORROWS, AND IT IS TOLD OF HERE. It is when, as

this verse tells, God sends his corrections and sore afflictions upon men, and yet they are none the better for them, but even worse. Pharaoh is the great illustration of this deepest sorrow. It is not all who can say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy Word." But of too many that word is true which says, "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar . . . yet will not his foolishness depart from him" (cf. Rev. xvi. 10; Acts xxvi. 14). 1. *But what is the cause of these failures on the part of God's chastisements?* They are such as these: (1) Sentence against an evil work is not executed *speedily*. (2) The fearful force of the desire after the evil object overwhelms and bears down all thought of the punishment that must follow. (3) The assigning of the affliction that comes to other causes than the true one. To this day the Jews do not see that their rejection of the Lord Jesus was the reason of God's rejection of them, nor that it is *his* blood which is upon them and their children. 2. But without question *such sorrows are the most lamentable of all;* for: (1) they reveal the virulence, the deep-seated character, and the dread hold which sin has gained; (2) they necessitate and forctell yet more severe judgments from God; (3) they cast most sad doubt on the question whether such persons will ever be saved at all.

CONCLUSION. Is sorrow resting upon us? Then: 1. Rest not until you have found out its cause. "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me" should be our appeal. 2. Let the possibility that your sorrows may leave you unblessed, that God's purpose and intent may be lost upon you, send you to the throne of grace with importunate prayer that so it may not be with you.—C.

Vers. 3—5.—*The rich and the poor meet together.* They do so—

I. IN MOST MOURNFUL WAYS. 1. *In their common exposure to sorrow and death.* 2. *In their yet more mournful subjection to the bondage of moral evil,* both alike leagued together in rebellion against God (cf. text). From which learn: (1) No circumstances alone will shut out sin. (2) If one condition of life has its moral disadvantages, so has another. (3) That this does not affirm that all are on one level in this respect. They are not so; they who have knowledge and have been taught God's truth may and will justly be expected to compare favourably in conduct and character with those not so privileged. (4) That the terribleness of the might of sin is seen in the fact that it leaps over the fences and safeguards of happy circumstances and abundant knowledge, as easily as it finds entrance where there are no such fences at all. But the mournfulness of this meeting of the rich and poor leads us to look out for and rejoice in other and more happy ones. And there are such. Note, therefore—

II. THE BLESSED MEETINGS OF THE RICH AND THE POOR. 1. *In their common possession of a moral and spiritual nature.* Those great capacities whereby "a man is so much better than a sheep" are the property of rich and poor alike—to love and be loved; to search out knowledge, to worship, trust, and delight in God. Man is God's jewel, whether it be set in all fit and beautiful surroundings or whether by some malign cause it have fallen into the mud. By its nature, not its surroundings, are we to judge of it. 2. *In Christ.* "He was rich, . . . he for our sakes became poor"—thus for ever uniting the two together. He was, whilst on earth, at the same time both rich and poor, having at his command more than the vastest resources of the rich, and yet day by day sharing the lot of the poor. He was the Son of man, the Head and Representative of all men—of humanity at large. 3. *At the cross.* The common malady craves and finds the common medicine. The sorrows of the contrite heart are those of no class at all, but are the experience of rich and poor alike; and the cross alone can soothe them, and thither therefore they alike come. These all are clothed in the robe made white in the blood of the Lamb. 4. *In the everlasting kingdom of our God.* There the barriers of caste and class, which here seem so fixed that they can never be moved, will be broken down, and character alone will determine whether we shall stand high up or low down on the steps of the eternal throne. The love of God in Christ will be the great uniting bond, and, as that rules and governs us, so will our companionship and our condition be ordered. There the rich shall be rid of the many hindrances of their lot which make it so "hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God;" and there the poor shall have said farewell for ever to all the privation and painful toil of earth. The tears of all shall flow no more. *Then let us learn:* (1) To

cherish sympathy with all our brethren. The poor with the rich, and they with the poor. It is equally difficult but equally obligatory on each. (2) To be eager in telling to the poor of this gospel of the meeting of the rich and the poor. (3) To come to Christ and to his cross, and to abide there, that the Spirit of him who was the Friend and Saviour of all may dwell in us more and more.—C.

Ver. 4.—*The moral disadvantages of the poor.* Jeremiah recognizes and refers to these disadvantages as a well-known fact, and he tells how he expected to find in them an explanation of the deplorable wickedness with which Jerusalem was filled. "Therefore I said, Surely these are poor," etc. We note—

I. THAT THESE ARE THE REAL EVILS OF THE LOT OF THE POOR. At once all manner of other distresses which attend poverty arise to our minds, and therefore we would observe: 1. *That we do not deny that their physical and social disadvantages are also evils.* To be ill fed, ill housed, ill clothed, as so many of the poor are,—who can make light of a lot like theirs? Therefore: 2. *Still less do we deny our duty to relieve their physical evils to the utmost of our power.* 3. *But we do deny that these are their chief evils.* For: (1) Many of these are more than counterbalanced by what is so commonly found amongst the rich. Dr. Channing says, "When I compare together different classes as existing at this moment in the civilized world, I cannot think the difference between the rich and the poor in regard to mere physical suffering so great as is sometimes imagined. That some of the indigent among us die of scanty food is undoubtedly true, but vastly more in this community die from eating too much than from eating too little, vastly more from excess than starvation. So as to clothing: many shiver from want of defences against the cold; but there is vastly more suffering among the rich from absurd and criminal modes of dress, which fashion has sanctioned, than among the poor from deficiency of raiment. Our daughters are oftener brought to their grave by their rich attire than our beggars by their nakedness. So the poor are often overworked; but they suffer less than many among the rich, who have no work to do, no interesting object to fill up life, to satisfy the infinite cravings of man for action. According to our present modes of education, how many of our daughters are victims of *ennui*—a misery unknown to the poor, and more intolerable than the weariness of excessive toil! The idle young man, spending the day in exhibiting his person in the street, ought not to excite the envy of the overtasked poor; and this cumberer of the ground is found exclusively among the rich." (2) And their intellectual disadvantages are nearly as great an evil as those that belong to their outward lot. "Knowledge is power," but to be without knowledge is to lack the power to lighten, to elevate, to refine, to cheer, and in ways manifold to ameliorate our lot in life. Therefore to lack knowledge and education deserves to be looked upon with even more compassion than the lack of physical comforts. But still, the chief evil of poverty is its moral disadvantage. Now—

II. THESE MORAL DISADVANTAGES OF THE POOR ARE SUCH AS ARISE FROM: 1. *The difficulty of maintaining self-respect.* All the world seems agreed to regard the poor as the "lower orders," and to confine the term "respectable" to those who have enough and to spare. And when poverty necessitates the receiving, and yet more the asking, of charity, how hard it is then to maintain that erect moral bearing, that spirit of independence, which is so essential to the formation of all true, worthy moral character! 2. *The almost impossibility of mental culture.* How can the man who has to continue at prolonged and laborious bodily toil from morn to night, day after day all his life long, and only then can earn scarce sufficient to provide for his actual bodily necessities, be expected to be other than rough, rude, illiterate, and contented to be so? What mockery it seems to talk of mental cultivation to a man like that! But shut off from such cultivation, how utterly is the door closed upon him which leads to so much that would cheer and brighten his whole life, and would lift him up in the scale of moral being! 3. *The risk to all moral delicacy and refinement which their crowded and wretched habitations involve.* If men are obliged to herd like cattle, only less comfortably than they, how can "a man be better than a sheep" in such case? 4. *The temptation to envy and sullen discontent at their beholding what seems to them the so much brighter lot of the well-to-do.* The patience of the poor beneath the awful injustices and hardships which arise from the unequal distribution of wealth is a

marvel. Especially, too, when they have daily to endure the supercilious and half-scornful treatment which the possesssion of wealth almost invariably begets towards those who have it not. 5. *The hard struggle which faith in God and his goodness cannot but have amid the hardships of poverty.* It is true that men would be far happier if they were better men, but it is also true that vast numbers of men would be better if they were only happier. When our children are happy they are good; it is unhappiness makes them cross and wrong. There is no more heartbreaking fact to a thoughtful and compassionate mind than this, that the blessing of faith in God and the love of God, which the poor most of all need, is for them the hardest of all to win and keep. 6. *The dread temptation to sensual indulgence which the hardships of their lot expose them to.* Can we wonder that these men rush to the gin-shop, the tavern, and there in strong drink forget for a while the miseries of their common life? It is a piteous fact that it is the most wretched of the poor who drink most desperately. (Let the reader turn to Dr. Channing's sermon on 'Ministry for the Poor,' to see many of these points worked out.) Such are the real evils of the lot of the poor, beside which their outward hardships are small in comparison.

III. FROM ALL THIS WE LEARN WHY WE SHOULD COMPASSIONATE THEIR LOT, AND WHAT IN IT WE SHOULD CHIEFLY ENDEAVOUR TO RELIEVE. When their moral disadvantages move our compassion, as they should and as they did our Lord's, we shall strive most of all to counteract and remove them. How shall we do this? We reply, *After the manner of our Lord.* Chiefly by ministering to their souls. He went about everywhere *preaching and teaching.* The very greatest kindness that can be done to a poor man is to bring him to Christ, to get him by God's grace thoroughly converted. That will lift him up and bless him every way. It will not despise secondary means. Our Lord fed the poor, healed them, ministered to their temporal relief frequently. But he did not do this indiscriminately. They were by no means his chief works. That chief work was a ministry to their souls. And so those who copy his example will not despise secondary means—charity, wise sanitary laws, education. But all these will be put in the second place, not in point of time and attention, but in esteem and worth. They will be counted only as *aids* to what is far better than themselves. It may be that the Church has not availed herself of these aids as she should, but has left them to the care of the State more than she should. Still, it is ever those who are most intent on the moral well-being of the poor who are found to the front in all schemes for their physical and social well-being. So that the excellence of our Lord's method is that, whilst it aims at the highest good, it more than any other seeks to promote and indeed secures as a help to that highest, the lower and temporal good of those to whom it ministers. *And it has a rich reward.* "Blessed are ye poor," said our Lord, "rich in faith and heirs," etc. Not a few of the greatest saints, the martyrs, the heroes of the faith, have been drawn from the ranks of the poor. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ has come to them, and straightway they have been as it were transformed. They have risen up above the low levels of their old life—so mean, sordid, foul, godless oftentimes—and have come to be like the Lord himself. And to-day, how perpetually may we see amid the godly poor all the disadvantages of their lot which we have enumerated above, completely overcome! They reverence conscience; they envy not the rich; they cultivate and rejoice in the purest and tenderest home affections; though ignorant of most of human learning, they have the fear of God and the knowledge of his Word, and so are wise with a wisdom before which mere human wisdom dwindles into insignificance. They keep themselves from all vice, they love and trust God with a simplicity of utter trust and calm confidence, beautiful and blessed even to contemplate—how much more to possess! "Blessed are ye poor!" Thus, then, after the manner of our Lord, would we strive to meet and overcome the moral disadvantages of the poor.—C.

Ver. 7.—*How men curse their blessings.* "When I had fed them to the full," etc.

I. GOD DOES THIS AT TIMES. Cf. Gen. iii. 17, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake," etc.; Hag. i. 11, etc. And whenever he makes our good and pleasant things the means of our punishment. Hezekiah's riches and prosperity were the lure which drew upon him the oppressing Assyrians. And so the body which, when possessed of all its faculties and in health, ministers so much good to man, God, in judgment upon the

man's sin, may for the sake of the sinful soul cause that disease, pain, impotence, may curse it. And the mind also—that may become a den of malignant, impure, profane thoughts.

II. BUT MEN DO THIS FAR MORE FREQUENTLY. The noblest physical gifts may be shattered, wrecked, by sins against the body. The mind—capable of such high service and a channel of such vast blessing—men may, do, pollute, corrupt, and pervert and so curse their blessings. The moral nature—this a great gift of God, the power to judge, choose, resolve; but see how soon man cursed that and turned his blessing into a curse. The gifts of providence are also abused in the same way (cf. text). The home. Oh, what joy comes to men through the blessings that were designed to be for ever associated with that word! But how often men, by self-indulgence, neglect, evil example, utter failure in parental duty, turn the blessing of home into a curse! And even the gospel of Christ itself—God's unspeakable gift—men may make the knowledge of it to be "a savour of death unto death" for themselves. "This Child is set for the *fall* of many in Israel," said Simeon of our Lord.

III. BUT IT IS A CRIME WHICH GOD CANNOT AWAY WITH. "How shall I pardon thee for this?" etc. "Shall I not visit," etc.? (ver. 9). Cf. parable of fruitless fig tree—"Cut it down," etc.; the talents—"Take from him the talent," etc. And the human conscience everywhere assents to this judgment of God. We judge in like manner ourselves. We feel that such are without excuse. Let us, then, consider our blessings, and ask ourselves, "What are we doing with them? how are we using them?" Let it be our daily prayer and endeavour that we fall not into this great sin.

IV. GOD'S WAY IS TO TURN OUR CURSES INTO BLESSINGS. (Cf. Neh. xiii. 2.) 1. *He has done so even with sin.* What curse could be greater? Yet, by the redemption there is in Christ, even that is so made subject that now

> "We may rise on stepping-stones
> Of our dead selves to higher things."

2. *And he has done so with sorrow.* Grief had been for ages going about the world, a sad-robed, sombre, and ever-tearful guest in whatever house she took up her temporary abode: and there was no house she did not visit. But since the Lord Jesus became the "Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," she, in virtue of that acquaintance, has changed her very nature, and the curse is turned into a blessing. She ministers help to the soul, in releasing it from the bonds of this evil world and in uplifting it towards its true Father and home in heaven. 3. *And so with death.* Its sting is taken away. To them who are in Christ he is rather a friend than a foe, for he it is who opens the door of our prison-house and lets the soul go fro nd rise to that place—

> "Where loyal hearts and true
> Stand ever in the light,
> All rapture through and through,
> In God's most holy sight."

C.

Ver. 10.—*Battlements not the Lord's.* Jeremiah is telling of the defer es of Judah and Jerusalem. In the approaching invasion they should fall and rove utterly worthless; for, by reason of the people's sin, that blessing of the Lord which had made their battlements impregnable hitherto was withdrawn, and so, the people being no longer the Lord's, their defences were not either, and so were no defences at all. But often those who are not under the Divine displeasure—nations, Churches, individuals—are found relying on defences that are not Divine, thinking to find shelter and safety within battlements that are not the Lord's; and when such is the case the Lord would ever have such battlements taken away. The course of his providence not seldom makes plain his displeasure in these things; for they get torn down and destroyed hopelessly if they who trust in them are not wise in time, and themselves take them away. There are many references in Scripture to such battlements. They are spoken of either as "walls daubed with untempered mortar," or as "broken cisterns which hold no water," or, more plainly, as "refuges of lies," or as "a house built upon the

sand," or as the building upon the foundation of "wood, hay, stubble." Such are some of the parallels to the truth taught in the text. But take some illustrations of this erecting of and trusting in battlements *not* the Lord's.

I. IT HAS BEEN SEEN IN THE DEFENCE OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. Nothing in the world is so precious, so essential to the world, as the Church of Christ, and he has promised to preserve it unto the end. But men have often tried to plant, maintain, and spread it in anything but Divine ways; *e.g.* when: 1. *They have relied on the secular arm.* They have done so, and with what consequences let the present state of Christendom tell. When will men trust the glorious inherent power of the faith of Christ, and throw to the winds those carnal weapons which she wields only to her own wounding? When will she hear the voice of God saying, concerning such battlements, "Take them away; they are not the Lord's"? 2. *Organization* is another of these very questionable defences. That it has its use, and is capable of much and valued service, he would be a fool who should deny. But the peril is lest the artificial and merely human supports which organization supplies should be allowed to serve instead of that Divine *life* which alone is the true defence of any Church. Church arrangements which necessitate that when that life is wanting everything shall collapse about such a Church, that it shall cease to be and not present the mere *simulacrum* of what it is not,—it is a question if this be not a better order than one which, by means of its elaborate organization, keeps up the show of Church life when the reality is not there. 3. And the same may be said of *all those adventitious aids to the Church of Christ upon which men are apt so much to rely.* Wealth, social position, learning, eloquence, numbers, gifts, and other such advantages,—let a Church place her trust in any of these, and the command of the text will go forth at once. But the true defence of a Church is the life that is in her, the manifest godliness of her members; *that* is a battlement which is the Lord's, and which none can take away.

II. IT HAS BEEN SEEN IN THE DEFENCE OF THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH. The faith of the Church is, without doubt, most precious; and it is our duty to contend earnestly for it. But men have sought to guard and defend it in wrong ways. 1. *Persecution* has been tried. 2. *Demanding subscription* to fixed creeds. There may be and are good reasons for demanding such subscription, but it cannot be said that such subscription has kept the faith one and entire in all the members of the Church. Probably there is more unity of belief in those Churches which demand no such subscription than in those who do. 3. *Relying mostly on the intellectual defences of the faith.* There are such, many, varied, cogent, clear, invaluable, but they may be all read and mastered, and the citadel of the heart be not won. But the true battlement of the faith is in the fact that it commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Let conscience be awakened and then the faith presented, and the fitness of the faith to the needs and teachings of conscience are visible at once.

III. IT IS CONTINUALLY SEEN IN MEN'S CONDUCT IN REGARD TO THEIR OWN PERSONAL SALVATION. What else is: 1. *Trust in sacraments?* They are, without doubt, means of grace to the believer in Christ—the experience of myriads of saints attests that; but he who looks to them as a *viaticum* that will open a way to heaven for the vilest, surely that is a refuge of lies. 2. *Reliance on human priests?* This reliance is by no means confined to the Church of Rome. Deep seated in men's mind is the idea that ministers of religion can really help the soul in its great needs. Much of sending for ministers in cases where death is anticipated is based on this false belief. 3. *Trust in such poor righteousness* as we can offer to God; what can it do? 4. *Resting on an imagined leniency* in God, which will prevent his carrying out the threatenings of his holy Law as he has said he would? How many soothe and still all disquiet of conscience by such false confidence as this!—a confidence which the facts of life, apart from the Word of God, utterly shatter and show to be false. But the true defence of the soul is Christ; *that* battlement is the Lord's, yea, is the Lord himself, and he will keep that which is committed to him even unto the great day.—C.

Ver. 24.—*The silken fetter.* In ver. 22 the prophet has spoken of the soft, unstable sand holding in and beating back the mighty surgings of the sea; but here he tells of what would seem a still more unlikely thing, that the goodness of God should lead men to fear him. He selects that prominent proof of God's goodness, the giving of

the rains and the harvest, as a type of all, and he takes for granted that men *ought* to have found in this goodness of God an argument for his fear. Now we remark—

I. THAT THIS IS AN UNUSUAL ARGUMENT. We could understand other attributes of God being appealed to as grounds for fearing him—his majesty, his power, his justice, his wrath—but his *goodness* seems to call for almost every other feeling than that of fear. Joy, gratitude, benevolence, praise, but not fear. We delight ourselves in his goodness, we bask in it as in the blessed warmth of the sun, but we never *fear* it, or see in it a reason for such regard of God. And it is certain that this expectation of the prophet, that God's goodness should lead us to his fear, was not based on any supposition or belief that there was aught of fearfulness about the goodness of God. Of the devil's goodness when he turns himself into an angel of light, when he quotes Scripture, as he did at our Lord's temptation, and when he pours honey into our cup,—of his goodness we may be afraid. It is but a mask. And of some *men's* goodness we may be afraid—men who are "false as the smooth, deceitful sea," "adders' poison under their lips;" they betray with a kiss. And men were wont to fear the goodness of the gods they worshipped. They imagined they would be jealous if they saw a man prospering overmuch. Hence to appease them men would inflict loss and injury on themselves. See the story of Polycrates. Nor either because there is aught of fatality attached to the goodness of God. It is not as the beautiful flush on the countenance, which, lovely as it may appear, is a mark of doom clearly discernible to the experienced eye. For no such reasons as these are we to *fear* God and his goodness. Nevertheless—

II. GOD'S GOODNESS IS A PROPER REASON FOR A HOLY FEAR. 1. For it reveals a Being so far removed above all our conceptions of human goodness, One who stands on so infinitely higher a level of moral excellency, that a sacred awe fills our soul as we contemplate what God is and what his love is, especially his love to us in Christ. "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

"Oh, how I fear thee, living God,
With deepest, tenderest fears,
And worship thee with humble hope
And penitential tears!"

2. And because God's goodness reveals the intensity and depth of his love, and therefore reveals a corresponding wrath against all who outrage that love. The gentlest mother yearning with affection for her children,—let those little ones be wronged, what a fury will she become towards the wrong-doer, and all because her love is so great! And so, "according to God's love, so is his wrath." There is no wrath like that "of the Lamb." 3. And because God's goodness in its temporal manifestations is but granted for a while. He reserves his right to recall it when he will. Hence if riches, or any other form of earthly good and present earthly joy,—if these increase, set not your heart upon them. It is terrible to have all our peace of heart and mind, all the joy of our life, identified with and dependent upon what one day God may recall. Every channel of God's goodness thus becomes a possible channel of deep suffering and distress. If, then, your delight in the gift have not led you to the love and trust of the Giver, what comfort will you have when the gift is withdrawn? What an argument this for the comment of our text! 4. Remember, again, the depraved nature which we carry about with us, which ever seeks to pervert to evil what God gives us for our good. "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked." Prosperity is a sore temptation, before which many a man falls. God's gifts are the material out of which many build a screen, a wall which shuts them off from God. 5. And because God's goodness heightens our responsibility. How stern the word, "*Cut* it down; why cumbereth?" etc.! Goodness and love and care had been thrown away upon it. If God, then, have pleaded with us by his love, as we know he has, what if our hearts be still estranged from him? "He that from God's mercy gathers no argument for his fear, may conclude thus much—that there is indeed forgiveness with God, but no forgiveness for him" (South). Then let us ask—

"Lord, let thy fear within us dwell,
Thy love our footsteps guide;
That love shall all vain love expel,
That fear all fear beside."

C.

Ver. 24.—*God's gifts of the rains and the harvest.* "The Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us," etc. To a country so liable to drought as Palestine, the regular, periodic rainfall was of the utmost importance. If they had not the former rain—that which came first after seed-time—the seed would not germinate in the soil; and if, when near the harvest, the rain did not come again, there would be no full corn in the ear: it would not swell out and mature in any way to the husbandman's content. "Hence the people of those lands speak of the weather and the crops with a more immediate reference to God than is usual with us. It is said that the common expressions of the peasantry are such as much impress travellers with their apparently devout recognition of the Almighty's agency." A lady and her party were one day traversing, under the conduct of their Arab guide, the fertile plains west of the Carmel range. "Rain began to fall in torrents. Mohammed, our groom," so the lady tells, "threw a large Arab cloak over me, saying, 'May Allah preserve you, O lady, while he is blessing the fields!'" "Blessing the fields,"—what a beautiful synonym for the rain! But it indicates the constant dependence of those lands on these rains, and the people's sense of the high value of this gift of God. The husbandman relies entirely upon the early and the latter rain, and if these do not fall copiously in their season famine will ensue. Therefore, when wishing to point out some signal mark of the Lord's favour to his people, the prophet selects this, that he "giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season," etc. The prophet knew that every heart would assent and own the goodness of the Lord herein. Probably he was more sure of it there and then than he would be here and now. We have got so mystified with the modern doctrines of "the order of nature" and "the uniformity of natural law," that we have come to regard the universe almost as a great machine, the regular working of which excites no surprise, and demands and obtains still less gratitude. But all this is very sad. Happy they who, in the coming round of the seasons, the fall of the rain and the blessed harvest, are both able and glad to confess, "It is the Lord, who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever." But let this verse not so much suggest the literal facts here commemorated by the prophet, as those other and higher spiritual facts which they resemble and suggest. The three blessed gifts of God in the natural world here spoken of, tell of gifts like to them in the spiritual world. And first they remind us of—

I. THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE SO HAPPY AS TO REALIZE ALL THE THREE: the two rains—both the former and the latter—and the harvest. Now, there are many such, God be praised for them! In their own religious life they know what God's blessing of the former rain is. There was such vivid realization of the love of Christ, such hatred of sin, such sweet sensitiveness of conscience, such free intercourse with God in prayer, such bright onlooks into the glory to be revealed, such ready delight in worship and in work, such prompt siding with the will of God—in a word, such enjoyment of him, that it is still, and will ever be, a delightful retrospect.

> "What peaceful hours we then enjoyed!
> How sweet their memory still!"

"That was the early rain. The seed had just been sown, and the Master, to make it take deeper root, and to make it spring up faster into the green blade, gave them the sacred shower of his loving presence." And then there came afterwards *the latter rain.* For such is needed even in the holiest Christian's life. The early excitement, the power of novelty, which is a power in the religious life as in all other, wore off, as it is its nature to do. Many weary leagues of life's pilgrimage had to be traversed, many disappointments to be met with, many trials to be endured, many temptations—subtle, strange, strong—had to be met and overcome, and they left the soul weary and exhausted. And, but for the blessed latter rain, the strength and vigour of the Divine life in the soul would have died down. But then there came, brought about in one way and another, the second baptism of the Holy Ghost. And, by means of that, separate acts of obedience crystallized into blessed habits, which made their discharge prompt, easy, and effective. The power of prayer became more marked, the knowledge and experience of the truth of God's Word deepened. The unseen and eternal came out of the mist and vagueness of former years into clear, well-defined reality, so that the seeing him who is invisible came to be a daily vision; and the walk with God

grow to be constant, delightful, and more intimate each day. And so the harvest of peace with God, of holy calm, of settled obedience, and of loyal, happy service, was daily reaped. And in the case of those who have passed into the skies, the harvest of glory has been reaped also, or rather is being reaped, the joy of which is ever-during with the eternal life of the soul. So again and again has it been in the experience of the Christian life. And likewise has it been also in *the work and service* rendered to Christ. That, too, in many an instance, has had its former rain of blessing. It was begun in Christ and for Christ. Tokens of the Lord's presence were not wanting even at the very outset. Sinners were converted, believers were edified, souls were saved, as the result of the early toil in the Master's vineyard. The sermons may have been juvenile, unskilled in mere sermonic art, but they had the Divine power with them. The teaching given to the scholars in the class may have been sadly unscientific, and wanting in symmetry and system; but Jesus was commended to the children, and his love so spoken of that they listened, were touched, were persuaded, were saved. And then years after *the latter rain came.* For a long while the work went on in a quiet, almost monotonous way. There appeared no stir, no great impression made. But he who gave the early rain now sent the latter also. And a new outpouring of the Spirit's influence was given. And again and increasingly the Word was spoken with power; the influence of Christ's servant told with all the added strength that life-long consecration to that work gave to it, and many a soul confessed the might of that ministry which Christ enabled him to discharge. And a blessed harvest was reaped, day after day, week by week; the sickle of the Word seemed never so keen, the hand that wielded it never so vigorous, the sheaves never so large, until the reaper was called away to join in the glad festivities of the eternal harvest-home. Yes, so it has been again and again. And, would we have it so with ourselves,—and would we not?—let it not be forgotten that the realization of these blessings—the early and the latter rain, and the harvest—*in our work* depends upon our personal realization of them in *our own souls.* The soul not alive in and for God can never accomplish much in his work and service. We must "take heed to ourselves" would we successfully take heed to our work, and be the means of salvation to others. Yes, let us remember this. But be encouraged by remembering also that *it is God's way and wont to send this threefold blessing.* This verse speaks of his giving these great gifts as his customary habit. It is not an exceptional or strange thing with him, but that which we may, and even should, look for. May he help us so to do, and then give us our heart's desire! But next consider—

II. THOSE LESS HAPPY ONES WHO REALIZE ONLY TWO OUT OF THESE THREE GIFTS OF GOD. They have had the early and the latter rains, but the harvest they have not yet rejoiced in. There are such experiences, both in the Christian life and in Christian work. The men were truly converted to God at the first, and they have in after years felt the power of his Spirit again and again; but that harvest of settled peace and joy, that power habitually to walk with God in the comfort of his love, and in prompt, joyful obedience to his will, has not come to them. And they grieve over it much. And yet more is this delay of the harvest often known in the *sphere of Christian work.* The *whole Christian Church* mourns to-day over this delay of harvest. The early rain of the Pentecostal day fell refreshingly upon them; and since then there have been spring-tides of Divine influence, copious outpourings of the Spirit of God, latter rains in deed and in truth. But the harvest—where is that? Where is the world, or even one entire nation, won for God? The boundaries of the kingdom of Satan do not seem much diminished, nor those of the kingdom of God much enlarged. And so, too, *individual Churches* have, in like manner, been blessed with early and latter rains, but the harvest of their work has not come. They can tell you of times in their history when there seemed a general movement Godwards; when the people met for prayer in unwonted numbers and with unwonted fervour. Their early history may have been one of difficulty and struggle, but these were overborne by a glorious awakening, a girding of them with power, by the Spirit of the Lord manifestly setting up his standard in their midst. "And the Lord added to them daily such as should be saved." And in more recent years they have had like and even larger experiences of his glorious presence. But yet the harvest is not reaped. Not only is the neighbourhood around them still for the most part as it was, untouched, unimpressed by the power of the

gospel, but many who gather with them Sunday by Sunday, and in their week-day assemblies, are yet unconverted and unsaved. Where is the harvest? Why does it not come? "How long, O Lord, how long?" these servants of God continually cry to him. And so, too, with the *individual worker* for Christ. He, too, can look back on a time when he began his holy labour, whether in more prominent or more obscure place it matters not; but there was given to him the early, and since then there has been the latter, rain. But he looks round his class, his family, his school, his congregation, and oh, what a scant portion of the field is as yet even begun to be garnered for Christ! How powerless his words seem to fall on many of them! How unanswered his prayers on their behalf still seem to be! *Now, what are we to say to all this?* Well, these three things we may surely say: First, that God *reserves* the weeks of harvest. He has appointed them, but the day of their coming he has reserved in his own power. The husbandman must have long patience; the growth and development of the holy seed is an orderly, and is generally a slow, process. All God's greatest works are slow. Science is ever teaching us this. What ages upon ages do the geologist and the astronomer demand for the processes of which they tell! How our little chronologies dwindle into insignificance besides those vast periods which they have conclusively shown to have been occupied by the Creator in perfecting those phenomena of which their several sciences take account! And, in the far greater and more difficult work of the moral and spiritual regeneration of human souls, shall we be impatient if God do not begin, continue, and end it all in the short space of *our* little lives? Surely this is to be unreasonable, is improper, is wrong. But remember, too, that the harvest itself *is a long process.* They are "*weeks* of harvest." The ingathering has begun when only one sheaf in a field has been reaped. The Lord Jesus said, "The fields are white already unto harvest," when he held in his hand only one solitary ripe ear of corn, the conversion of the woman of Samaria. Hence we may possibly be mourning that the harvest has not come, when in fact it has actually begun. Why, my brother, it began in you from the first hour that you were converted to God. He was cutting the bonds that bound you to this world when he first called you to himself; and all the varied means by which he is separating you from the world is but the reaping continually going on; and when the sickle of death comes and cuts down this bodily life of yours, it will be but the last stroke of the reaper that tells that the harvest for you is finished at last. And so with *your work.* The harvest is begun. That child's heart you won for Christ here, that soul that was brought to Jesus through the Word preached by you there, those others gathered to the Redeemer's feet elsewhere,—what were these blessed facts but the beginning of the harvest, a beginning that is to go on? You are not strong enough to reap all the Lord's field; be content that he lets you reap a part. Other workmen are to enter in where you may not, and to their arm shall fall the sheaves that you may not gather. So say not any more, "The harvest is delayed." Why, you are actually engaged in it now. You are not a mere sower, but you are a reaper too. And remember the full harvest shall be reaped. He is the Lord of it, and will not let it waste; by one means or another it shall all be gathered in. This is what we have to say to you who mourn at the harvest's delay.

III. But there are others less happy still. THOSE WHO CAN CLAIM TO HAVE REALIZED ONLY ONE OF THESE THREE GIFTS OF GOD. The harvest is not theirs, nor both the former and the latter rains, but only one of them. Now, this one may be only the former rain. In their religious life they were blessed with this; the wonted happy results followed; but since then there has been a standstill, and those observing them are, as St. Paul was in reference to the Galatians, "in doubt" about them, and sorrowfully ask the question, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you?" Their goodness has been "like the morning cloud and the early dew"—it has gone away. And so also in *much of religious work.* At the beginning there was a zeal and fervour and force which promised great things, but it all soon died down. They had no staying power, and because all was not accomplished in one vigorous rush and charge, and because the difficulties that had to be overcome presented a more stubborn and obstinate front than was anticipated, those who went forth to do battle with them became discouraged and soon turned back. In these cases, both in the life and the work, though there was the former rain, the latter has not as yet fallen. Now where, as is often the case, this has

been owing to neglect of those Divine aids which God has placed within our power—the blessed aids of prayer, watchfulness, and the diligent use of grace already given—then not pity but censure must be awarded to those of whom we speak. "They have not because they asked not;" or if they asked they "asked amiss." Ah, what a sad amount of such asking amiss there ever is!—asking as a substitute for working, instead of as an aid and encouragement thereto; asking, but with motives marred by selfishness, strife, and many forms of that "regarding iniquity in the heart," which ever bars the coming of the needed answer. And so there have been decline and decay, and a fresh fall of the heavenly rain is indeed wanted. Oh, do these words apply to any of us, either in regard to our stunted life or our ineffectual work? It may be so. But, thank God, such sad facts are not always the cause. God may be pleased, notwithstanding that his servants wait upon him for the outpouring of his Spirit they so much desire, to delay his answer. The rains of God have their season, and he best knows what and when that season is. His purpose is to stir you up to yet more earnest prayer, to greater energy of spiritual endeavour. All the night through did Jacob wrestle with the angel, ere he won the glorious name of Israel. Not till after so long and so arduous a struggle that his physical strength gave way, the sinew of his thigh shrank, and he seemed reduced to utter powerlessness;—not till then was the victory won. If, therefore, any of us, in our own religious life or work, are still waiting in prayer and watching thereunto, but yet the desired answer has not come, regard it not as denial, but only as a delay sent to test and try your faith—that faith more precious in the sight of God than gold and silver, and which when tested shall come forth triumphant, to the praise and glory of his grace. But there are those who have the *latter* rain only. Is it not so with all those instances of late repentance, of eleventh-hour turning to God? Such coming to God at the last does now and then occur, and the promise of our Lord, "Whosoever cometh unto me I will," etc., is made good. Such have the latter rain, but they can hardly be said ever to have known the former. And so, too, with those who all their lifetime have been subject to bondage, have walked in darkness and have seen no light,—to these tried children of God light often comes at eventide; they have the latter rain, but not the former. And it is so also in many departments of Christian work. Take the long and painful history of many of our missions. For how many years, amid how many discouragements, from deaths, desertions, disease, and the like, have the pioneers of those missions toiled on as the missionaries in Central Africa, so repeatedly deprived by death of one and another of their little band, are yet doing! The early rain has never come, but the latter we are sure they and all such shall have. Oh, how they deserve and demand our sympathy and our earnest prayers! Shame will it be on the Church at home if these be withheld. But we believe they are not and will not be. These are, however, a third class less blessed than those who have both the former and latter rain, and still less than those who have added on the crown and consummation of all their toil—the joyous harvest. But far, far more blessed are they than that other and last class of whom also we are reminded—

IV. THOSE WHO HAVE NEITHER OF THESE BLESSINGS—NEITHER FORMER NOR LATTER RAIN, NOR HARVEST. The profession of the Christian life may be made, and one or other form of Christian work may be undertaken, but all manner of motives, all manner of reasons, save the alone right and true one, may account for such facts. The religion and the work may alike be hollow, formal, insincere; a life and a work on which neither the former nor the latter rains of God's Spirit will ever come, and the only harvest which shall be reaped will be one of "shame and everlasting contempt." There is no *Divine* life in the man's soul, and therefore none in his work either. No more pitiful spectacle can any contemplate than this, and from being examples of it may God in his mercy deliver us all. But there is no need of this. The Lord our God is wont to give "rain, both the former and the latter, in his season," and to reserve unto us the appointed weeks of harvest. This is his declared will. Why, then, should we be without his blessing? Oh, let every one resolve that if importunity of prayer can for Christ's sake win it, we will know the joy of both the former and the latter rain, and will anticipate and look out for the appointed weeks of harvest! You who have had both the former and the latter rain, be ready for the reaper's work. You who have had but the former rain, plead mightily for the latter too; and you who have had neither, whether in your own life or in your work, remember the fault is your own, but resolve

in the strength of God's grace that it shall be so no more. Turn to him your Lord and Saviour, who came that you might have life, and might have it more abundantly, and beseech him to give you what you must have or die. And so for you and for us all we would pray—

"Diffuse, O God, those copious showers,
That earth its fruit may yield,
And change this barren wilderness
To Carmel's flowery field."

C.

Vers. 27, 28.—*The devil's lure.* "Their houses are full of deceit, *therefore* they are become great," etc.

I. SEVERAL OF THESE LURES ARE NAMED HERE. 1. *Wealth:* "They are waxen rich." 2. *Luxury:* "They are waxen fat, they shine." 3. *Impunity:* "They overpass, . . . they judge not, . . . yet they prosper." 4. *Success:* "They prosper."

II. AND THE LIKE LURES ARE HELD OUT STILL. Satan is ever seeking, and with sad success, to seduce men by such and similar snares.

III. IT IS WHAT WE MIGHT EXPECT. For that Satan should in this manner tempt men is in keeping with his constant method of parodying and travestying all the good works of God. What virtue, what Christian grace, is there that he does not caricature—modesty by servility, prudence by meanness, generosity by careless waste, etc.? And so here, "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich," and hence Satan sets to work to devise a blessing of his which also shall make rich—and this is his great lure.

IV. AND THIS LURE IS MADE THE MORE ATTRACTIVE BY THE FACT THAT GOD OFTEN SUFFERS HIS SERVANTS TO FALL INTO GREAT DISTRESS. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous;" "In the world ye shall have tribulation." For God desires that we shall love him for himself, yea, when our earthly interests even plead against him. Such trial of our faith is exceeding precious in his sight.

V. OUR DUTY AND DEFENCE, THEREFORE, IS: 1. To look right on beyond the present reward, even to "the end." 2. To expose to others the treachery of these apparent rewards. 3. To pray for and cherish the spirit of Nehemiah, who said, "So did not I, because of the fear of God." 4. To yield our heart and soul up to the better attraction of Christ and his cross, until we come to say of him, "*Thou* art 'mine exceeding joy.'"—C.

Ver. 31.—*A wonderful and horrible thing indeed.* Consider—

I. IN WHAT IT CONSISTED. 1. "The *prophets prophesy falsely.*" The prophets were not mere predicters of future events, but the utterers of God's will—those who *spoke forth*, as the very word "prophet" denotes, the hitherto undeclared mind of God. For this purpose they were specially selected, trained, privileged, commissioned. Hence every inducement that could possibly bear on them to lead them to be faithful to their high charge and trust was theirs: love of their country; approval of their own conscience; the fear of God; the sure, if not present, reward of their fidelity which they would receive from God. But yet they prophesied falsely. We could have understood: (1) *Their hesitation* in the discharge of their duty. See how Jeremiah himself shrank from it, so stern and arduous was it. It was no light matter to be a prophet in those days. (2) *Their silence even.* Fear may have rendered them dumb, or hopelessness of doing any good may have silenced them. But that they should prophesy falsely—they from whom fidelity at all costs might have been looked for—that was "a wonderful and horrible," etc. The fountains of truth were poisoned, the helm of the ship was in the hands of those who would steer her on to the rocks. The light that was in Israel was darkened, therefore how great was their darkness! What force such a fact as this lends to the urgency with which: (*a*) *God's prophets*—his ministers to-day are such—should take heed to themselves and to their doctrine; and (*b*) *God's people* should remember in fervent prayer those on whom so high and solemn a charge is laid. 2. "*The priests bear rule by their means.*" The priests were the more familiar ministers of religion. They were a permanent order, not raised up for special occasions, and they came into contact with men continually. They were supposed "to keep knowledge." They had all the traditions of their order, all the memories of their history and of God's

favour to them. They were independent of the prophets, but were much bound to the people for their sympathy and support. But whilst independent of the prophets, they were greatly assisted by them in furthering the service of God. And they also had means of knowing the truth. They were able to try the spirits, whether they were of God. Hence they might have known the falsity of the false prophets. And they ought to have exposed it. But instead they combined with them, accepted the aid of their falsehood, and bore rule by their means. For, corrupt as the people were, they would speedily have discovered the wickedness of the priests had not the prophets sided with them. Now the poison spreads. The priests, coming into contact with all the people, propagate the falsehood of the prophets, shelter themselves behind their authority, and deceive those who trusted in them. Yes, it is "a wonderful and horrible," etc. It is in the power of some to originate falsehood: this the prophets did. It is in the power of others to spread that falsehood abroad: this the priests did. Leagued together, the people who trusted them were in evil case indeed. But there was a further element of sorrow to be yet added. 3. *The people loved to have it so.* (1) This showed that: (*a*) conscience was dead or drugged; (*b*) all perception of their true wisdom was gone; (*c*) there was no remedy but the fire of the judgment of God. (2) It is explained by probable facts that: (*a*) the poison was disguised; (*b*) large licence was allowed. (3) It reveals the awfully contagious nature of moral evil. The dread possibilities of national corruption, against which we are bound to watch and pray.

II. THE QUESTION IT GIVES RISE TO: "What will ye do in the end thereof?" That is, to what lengths will they go when their wickedness has full hold upon them? to what depths of degradation will they fall? to what resources will they turn when God's judgments come? The sadness of the question lies in the impossibility of satisfactorily answering it. It leads us to the brink of an abyss, at which we can only shudder and pray that none of us may fall therein.

CONCLUSION. 1. Thank God that such prophets and priests are the exception to the rule. 2. That when such exceptions are met with, God has provided a remedy against them—in his infallible Word; in his Spirit, leading us into all truth. 3. Try all that human ministers say by these tests. 4. Seeing how much depends upon them, and what power for good or ill they cannot but have, pray with all importunity that God send only faithful men into his ministry, and preserve in their fidelity those who are there already.—C.

Vers. 20—24.—*Nature's witness against blind eyes and rebellious hearts.* Three forms of evil are rebuked here.

I. THE DULNESS OF SPIRITUAL SENSIBILITY THAT FAILS TO DISCERN THE DIVINE MEANING OF NATURE. Israel and Judah are addressed as a "foolish people, without understanding," etc. Their crimes and sorrows sprang in great part out of their blindness and thoughtlessness (Isa. i. 3; v. 12, 13). They would not use even the powers of spiritual discernment they possessed. They perceived not the Divine presence in natural things—the sounding shore, the revolving seasons—so as to bow with adoring reverence before it. Few things are stranger or sadder than the insensibility of the spirits of men to the Divine in nature. "They have eyes, but do not see" the "invisible things" of the Great Creator "through the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." They must be startled into the recognition of the present God. When some event out of the ordinary course occurs, they stand in awe before it, but in the familiar round of nature they find nothing Divine. We are all more or less open to this charge. The earthquake, the lightning flash, the hurricane, set us thinking of the majesty of him who wields such mighty forces at his will; but we forget the still more marvellous exercise of power that maintains the silent harmony of the spheres, holds the due balance of earth and sea, chases away the darkness of the night by the gently spreading dawn of every new morning, brings the grass blades and the flowers up out of the cold sod, ripens the fruit upon the trees, and changes the green carpet of the springing corn into the golden glory of the harvest. Of course it cannot be expected that any incident in the familiar daily round of nature should produce precisely the same effect on us as some new and startling phenomenon. The glory of the setting sun, that we have gazed upon a thousand times before, must needs be less to us in this respect than that of some flaming meteor that bursts suddenly upon the

darkness and is gone. But it is deeply significant of the dulness of our spiritual sensibility that we can gaze so often on the world of wonders around us without being solemnly impressed with the presence of the living God.

II. THE SELF-WILL THAT SPURNS THE DIVINE CONTROL. A contrast is here drawn between the subjection of the great sea to the laws God's will has imposed on it, and the bounds his hand has drawn around it, and the insubordination of the rebellious spirit of man. It is a grand expression of Divine power in the material realm that the sea-shore presents. We are impressed with the majestic force of the rolling tide, but, after all, there is something still more wonderful in the solid strength of the belt of sand that resists and restrains it. (Even as the moral strength of a man is seen not so much in the ungoverned fury of his passions, as in the calm resolution that controls them.) The sea is subject to restraint; not so the wayward spirit of man. The sea, in its wildest raging, obeys the laws that are imposed on it, and "its own appointed limits keeps;" but the rebellious heart of man defies all authority other than its own impulses. How deep the mystery of this difference between material and spiritual forces! How awful the prerogative of a being on whom God has conferred a moral freedom like his own! He will never violate that freedom in any of his dealings with us; that were to destroy the very nature he has given. But in proportion to the dignity of the self-determining power, so dreadful must be the penalty of abusing it.

III. THE INGRATITUDE THAT YIELDS NO RETURN OF LOVE FOR THE DIVINE BENEFICENCE. It was an aggravation of the guilt of Israel that they were as unmoved by the perpetual manifestation of the goodness of God as they were by the revelations of his power. Even that did not lead them to repentance or teach them to fear him. Few evidences of the thoughtful goodness of God have been more conspicuous through all the ages than the beneficent round of the seasons. In spite of all the wickedness of man's ways, "he left not himself without witness, in that he did good," etc. (Acts xiv. 17). The appeal this great fact makes to the consciences and hearts of men is specially forcible as bearing on those whose calling is to be fellow-workers with God in developing the harvests of the earth. "Labour is a sublime necessity," not as a mere "necessity," but because of its moral meaning and moral uses. And of all physical labour, the husbandry of the earth is most rich in moral associations, as educating men to lowly dependence on God, and grateful devotion to him in response to his fatherly providence and long-suffering grace.

Learn—As all Divine manifestations speak to us alike of infinite power and infinite beneficence, so the result in us should be the blended affections of fear and love.—W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VI.

A prophecy, in five stanzas or strophes, vividly describing the judgment and its causes, and enforcing the necessity of repentance.

Vers. 1—8.—Arrival of a hostile army from the north, and summons to flee from the doomed city.

Ver. 1.—**O ye children of Benjamin.** The political rank of Jerusalem, as the capital of the kingdom of Judah, makes it difficult to realize that Jerusalem was not locally a city of Judah at all. It belonged, strictly speaking, to the tribe of Benjamin, a tribe whose insignificance, in comparison with Judah, seems to have led to the adoption of a form of expression not literally accurate (see Ps. lxxviii. 68). The true state of the case is evident from an examination of the two parallel passages, Josh. xv. 7, 8, and xviii. 16, 17. As Mr. Fergusson points out, "The boundary between Judah and Benjamin . . . ran at the foot of the hill on which the city stands, so that the city itself was actually in Benjamin, while, by crossing the narrow ravine of Hinnom, you set foot on the territory of Judah" (Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' i. 983). It is merely a specimen of the unnatural method of early harmonists when Jewish writers tell us that the altars and the sanctuary were in Benjamin, and the courts of the temple in Judah. The words of "the blessing of Moses" are clear (Deut. xxxiii. 12): "The beloved of the Lord! he shall dwell in safety by him, sheltering him continually, and between his shoulders he dwelleth;" *i.e.* Benjamin is specially protected, the sanctuary being on Benjamite soil. And yet these highly favoured "children of Benjamin" are divinely warned to flee from their sacred homes (see ch. vii. 4—7). **Gather yourselves to flee**; more strictly,

save your goods by flight. In ch. iv. 6 the same advice was given to the inhabitants of the country districts. There, Jerusalem was represented as the only safe refuge; here, the capital being no longer tenable, the wild pasture-land to the south (the foe being expected from the north) becomes the goal of the fugitives of Jerusalem. **In Tekoa.** Tekoa was a town in the wild hill-country to the south of Judah, the birthplace of the prophet Amos. It is partly mentioned because its name seems to connect it with the verb rendered **blow the trumpet.** Such paronomasiæ are favourite oratorical instruments of the prophets, and especially in connections like the present (comp. Isa. x. 30; Micah i. 10—15). **A sign of fire in Beth-haccerem;** rather, *a signal on Beth-hakkérem.* The rendering of Authorized Version was suggested by Judg. xx. 38, 40; but there is nothing in the present context (as there is in that passage) to favour the view that a fiery beacon is intended. Beth-hakkérem lay, according to St. Jerome, on an eminence between Jerusalem and Tekoa; *i.e.* probably the hill known as the Frank Mountain, the Arabic name of which (*Djebel el-Furaidis*, Little Paradise Mountain) is a not unsuitable equivalent for the Hebrew (Vineyard-house). The "district of Beth-hakkérem" is mentioned in Neh. iii. 14. The choice of the locality for the signal was a perfect one. "There is no other tell," remarks Dr. Thomson, "of equal height and size in Palestine." **Appeareth;** rather, *bendeth forward*, as if it were ready to fall.

Ver. 2.—**I have likened . . . a comely and delicate woman.** This passage is one of the most difficult in the book, and if there is corruption of the text anywhere, it is here. The most generally adopted rendering is, "The comely and delicate one will I destroy, even the daughter of Zion," giving the verb the same sense as in Hos. iv. 5 (literally it is, *I have brought to silence*, or perfect of prophetic certitude). The context, however, seems to favour the rendering "pasturage" (including the idea of a nomad settlement), instead of "comely;" but how to make this fit in with the remainder of the existing text is far from clear. The true and original reading probably only survives in fragments.

Ver. 3.—**The shepherds with their flocks,** etc.; rather, *To her came shepherds with their flocks; they have pitched their tents round about her; they have pastured each at his side.* The best commentary on the last clause is furnished by Numb. xxii. 4, "Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field."

Ver. 4.—**Prepare ye war;** literally, *sanctify* (or, *consecrate*) *war.* The foes are dramatically described as urging each other on at the different stages of the campaign. The war is to be opened with sacrifices (comp. Isa. xiii. 3 with 1 Sam. xiii. 9); next there is a forced march, so as to take the city by storm, when the vigilance of its defenders is relaxed in the fierce noontide heat (comp. ch. xv. 8); evening surprises the foe still on the way, but they press steadily on, to do their work of destruction by night. The rapidity of the marches of the Chaldeans impressed another prophet of the reign of Josiah —Habakkuk (see Hab. i. 6, 8). **Woe unto us! for the day goeth away;** rather, *Alas for us! for the day hath turned.*

Ver. 5.—**Let us go;** rather, *let us go up.* "To go up" is the technical term for the movements of armies, whether advancing (as here and Isa. vii. 1) or retreating (as ch. xxi. 2; xxxiv. 21; xxxvii. 5, 11).

Ver. 6.—**Hew ye down trees;** rather, *her trees.* Hewing down trees was an ordinary feature of Assyrian and Babylonian expeditions. Thus, Assurnaçirpal "caused the forests of all (his enemies) to fall" ('Records of the Past,' iii. 40, 77), and Shalmaneser calls himself "the trampler on the heads of mountains and all forests" (Ibid., p. 83; comp. p. 90). The timber was partly required for their palaces and fleets, but also, as the context here suggests, for warlike operations. "Trees," as Professor Rawlinson remarks, "were sometimes cut down and built into the mound" (see next note); they would also be used for the "bulwarks" or siege instruments spoken of in Deut. xx. 20. **Cast a mount;** literally, *pour a mount* (or "bank," as it is elsewhere rendered), with reference to the emptying of the baskets of earth required for building up the "mount" (mound). Habakkuk (i. 10) says of the Chaldeans, "He laugheth at every stronghold, and *heapeth up earth*, and taketh it" (comp. also 2 Sam. xx. 15; Isa. xxxvii. 33). The intention of the mound was not so much to bring the besiegers on a level with the top of the walls as to enable them to work the battering-rams to better advantage (Rawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' i. 472). **She is wholly oppression,** etc.; rather, *she is the city that is punished; wholly oppression is in the midst of her.*

Ver. 7.—**As a fountain casteth out;** rather, *as a cistern keepeth fresh* (literally, *cool*). The wickedness of Jerusalem is so thoroughly ingrained that it seems to pass into act by a law of nature, just as a cistern cannot help always yielding a supply of cool, fresh water. **Violence and spoil;** rather, *injustice and violence* (so ch. xx. 8; Amos iii. 10; Hab. i. 3). **Before me,** etc.; rather, *before my face continually is sickness and wounding.* The ear is constantly dinned with the sounds of oppression, and the eye pained with the sight of the bodily sufferings of the victims. The word for "sickness" is applicable to any kind

of infirmity (see Isa. liii. 3, 4), but the context clearly limits it here to bodily trouble.

Ver. 8.—**Be thou instructed**; rather, *Let thyself be corrected* (Authorized Version misses the sense, a very important one, of the conjugation, which is *Nifal tolerativum* (comp. Ps. ii. 10; Isa. liii. 12). The phrase is equivalent to "receive correction" (ch. ii. 30; v. 3), and means to accept the warning conveyed in the Divine chastisement. **Lest my soul, etc.**; rather, *lest my soul be rent from thee* (Authorized Version renders the same verb in Ezek. xxiii. 17, "be alienated").

Vers. 9—15.—It is an all but complete judgment which Jehovah foreshows. Unwilling as the people are to hear it, the disclosure must be made.

Ver. 9.—**They shall throughly glean, etc.** "Israel" has already been reduced to a "remnant;" the ten tribes have lost their independence, and Judah alone remains (ch. v. 15). Even Judah shall undergo a severe sifting process, which is likened to a gleaning (comp. Isa. xxiv. 13; Obad. 5; ch. xlix. 9). The prospect is dark, but believers in God's promises would remember that a few grapes were always left after the gathering (comp. Isa. xvii. 6). **Turn back thine hand.** If the text is correct, the speaker here addresses the leader of the gleaners. Keil thinks this change of construction is to emphasize the certainty of the predicted destruction. But it is much more natural (and in perfect harmony with many other similar phenomena of the received text) to suppose, with Hitzig, that the letter represented in the Authorized Version by "thine" has arisen by a mistaken repetition of the first letter of the following word, and (the verbal form being the same for the infinitive and the imperative) to render *turning again the hand.* In this case the clause will be dependent on the preceding statement as to the "gleaning" of Judah. **Into the baskets**; rather, *unto the shoots.* The gleaners will do their work with a stern thoroughness, laying the hand of destruction again and again upon the vine-shoots.

Ver. 10.—**Their ear is uncircumcised**; covered as it were with a foreskin, which prevents the prophetic message from finding admittance. Elsewhere it is the heart (Lev. xxvi. 41; Ezek. xliv. 7), or the lips (Exod. vi. 12) which are said to be "circumcised;" a passage in Stephen's speech applies the epithet both to the heart and to the ears (Acts vii. 51).

Ver. 11.—**Therefore I am full**; rather, *But I am full.* **I will pour it out.** The text has "pour it out." The sudden transition to the imperative is certainly harsh, and excuses the *conjectural emendation* which underlies the rendering of the Authorized Version. If we retain the imperative, we must explain it with reference to Jeremiah's inner experience. There are, we must remember, two selves in the prophet (comp. Isa. xxi. 6), and the higher prophetic self here addresses the lower or human self, and calls upon it no longer to withhold the divinely communicated burden. **All classes, as the sequel announces, are to share in the dread calamity. Upon the children abroad**; literally, *upon the child in the street* (comp. Zech. viii. 5). **The assembly of young men.** It is a social assembly which is meant (comp. ch. xv. 17, "the assembly of the laughers").

Ver. 12.—**Shall be turned**; *i.e.* transferred. **Their fields and wives.** Wives are regarded as a property, as in Exod. xx. 17 (comp. Deut. v. 21).

Ver. 13.—**Given to covetousness**; literally, *gaineth gain*; but the word here rendered "gain" implies that it is unrighteous gain (the root means "to tear"). Unjust gain and murder are repeatedly singled out in the Old Testament as representative sins (comp. Ezek. xxxiii. 31; Ps. cxix. 36; Isa. i. 15; ch. ii. 34; and see my note on Isa. lvii. 17). There is a special reason for the selection of "covetousness" here. Land was the object of a high-born Jew's ambition, and expulsion from his land was his appropriate punishment (comp. Isa. v. 8, 9).

Ver. 14.—**They have healed**, etc. The full force of the verb is, "they have busied themselves about healing" (so ch. viii. 11; li. 9). *Of the daughter.* Our translators evidently had before them a text which omitted these words, in accordance with many Hebrew manuscripts and the Septuagint; Van der Hooght's text, however, contains them, as also does the parallel passage (ch. viii. 11). **Slightly**; or, *lightly*; Septuagint, ἐξουθενοῦντες. **Saying, Peace, peace.** Always the burden of the mere professional prophets, who, as one of a higher order—the bold, uncompromising Micah—fittingly characterizes them, "bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace;" *i.e.* draw flattering pictures of the state and prospects of their country, in order to "line their own pockets" (Micah iii. 5).

Ver. 15.—**Were they ashamed?** The Authorized Version certainly meets the requirements of the context; there seems to be an implied interrogation. Most, however, render, "They are brought to shame;" in which case it seems best to take the verb as a perfect of prophetic certitude, equivalent to "they shall surely be brought to shame." **When**; rather, *because.* **Nay, they were not at all ashamed**; rather, *nevertheless they feel no shame* (i.e. at present). **They shall be cast down**; rather, *they shall stumble.*

Vers. 16—21.—Without hearty repentance, there is no hope of escape. But hitherto Judah has rejected all admonitions. What availeth mere ceremonial punctuality?

Ver. 16.—**Stand ye in the ways**; literally, *station yourselves on* (or, *by*) *roads*, i.e. at the meeting-point of different roads. There (as the following words state) the Jews are to make inquiry as to the old paths. Antiquity gives a presumption of rightness; the ancients were nearer to the days when God spoke with man; they had the guidance of God's two mighty "shepherds" (Isa. lxiii. 11); they knew, far better than we, who "are but of yesterday, and know nothing" (Job viii. 9), the way of happiness. For though there are many pretended "ways," there is but "one way" (ch. xxxii. 39) which has Jehovah's blessing (Ps. xxv. 8, 9).

Ver. 17.—**Also I set**; rather, *and I kept raising up* (the frequentative perfect). **Watchmen**; *i.e.* prophets (Ezek. iii. 17, and part of Isa. lii. 8; lvi. 10). **Hearken**, etc. Probably the words of Jehovah. Standing on their high watch-tower (Hab. ii. 1), the prophets scrutinize the horizon for the first appearance of danger, and give warning of it by (metaphorically) blowing a trumpet (so Amos iii. 6).

Ver. 18.—**Therefore hear**, etc. Remonstrance being useless, the sentence upon Israel can no longer be delayed, and Jehovah summons the nations of the earth as witnesses (comp. Micah i. 2; Isa. xviii. 3; Ps. xlix. 1). **O congregation, what is among them.** The passage is obscure. "Congregation" can only refer to the foreign nations mentioned in the first clause; for Israel could not be called upon to hear the judgment "upon this people" (ver. 19). There is, however, no other passage in which the word has this reference. The words rendered "what is among them," or "what (shall happen) in them," seem unnaturally laconic, and not as weighty as one would expect after the solemn introduction. If correct, they must of course refer to the Israelites. But Graf's conjecture that the text is corrupt lies near at hand. The least alteration which will remove the difficulties of the passage is that presupposed by the rendering of Aquila (not Symmachus, as St. Jerome says; see Field's 'Hexapla') and J. D. Michaelis, "the testimony which is against them."

Ver. 19.—**The fruit of their thoughts.** That punishment is the ripe fruit of sin, is the doctrine of the Old (Isa. iii. 10; Ps. lviii. 11, margin) as well as of the New Testament (Jas. i. 15).

Ver. 20.—**To what purpose . . . incense from Sheba?** This is the answer to an implied objection on the part of the Jews, that they have faithfully fulfilled their ceremonial obligations. "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. xv. 22); "And 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; comp. Isa. i. 11; Amos v. 21—24; Hos. vi. 6; Micah vi. 6—8). All these passages must be read in the light of the prophets' circumstances. A purely formal, petrified religion compelled them to attack the existing priesthood, and a holy indignation cannot stop to measure its language. *Incense from Sheba;* frankincense from south-west Arabia. This was required for the holy incense (Exod. xxx. 34), and as an addition to the *minkhah*, or "meal offering." **Sweet cane.** The "sweet calamus" of Exod. xxx. 23, which was imported from India. It was an ingredient in the holy anointing oil (Exod., *loc. cit.*). Not to be confounded with the sugar-cane.

Ver. 21.—**I will lay stumbling-blocks**, etc. Of the regenerate Israel of the future it is prophesied (Isa. liv. 15) that his enemies shall "fall upon him [or, 'by reason of him']." Of the unregenerate Israel of the present, that he shall "fall" (*i.e.* come to ruin) upon the "stumbling-blocks" presented, not without God's appointment, by the terrible northern invader.

Vers. 22—30.—The enemy described; the terror consequent on his arrival; a rumoured declaration of the moral cause of the judgment.

Ver. 22.—**From the north country** (so ch. i. 14 (see note); iv. 6). **Shall be raised**; rather, *shall be aroused.* **The sides of the earth**; rather, "the recesses (*i.e.* furthest parts) of the earth" (so ch. xxxv. 32; Isa. xiv. 13).

Ver. 23.—**Spear**; rather, *javelin* (or, *lance*). **They are cruel.** The cruelty of the Assyrians and Babylonians seems to have spread general dismay. Nahum calls Nineveh "the city of bloodshed" (iii. 1); Habakkuk styles the Chaldeans "bitter and vehement, terrible and dreadful" (i. 6, 7). The customs brought out into view in the monuments justify this most amply, though Professor Rawlinson thinks we cannot call the Assyrians (with whom the Babylonians may of course be coupled) naturally hard-hearted. "The Assyrian listens to the enemy who asks for quarter; he prefers making prisoners to slaying; he is very terrible in the battle and the assault, but afterwards he forgives and spares" ('Ancient Monarchies,' i. 243). **Their voice roareth.** The horrid roar of the advancing hosts seems to have greatly struck the Jews (comp. Isa. v. 30; xvii. 12, 13).

Ver. 24.—**We have heard the fame thereof.** The prophet identifies himself (comp., for the same phenomenon, ch. iv. 19—21; x. 19, 20) with his people, and expresses the general feeling of anxiety and pain. The phraseology of the closing lines reminds us of Isa. xiii. 7, 8.

Ver. 25.—**Go not forth into the field.** The "daughter of Zion" (*i.e.* the personific po-

pulation of Jerusalem) is cautioned against venturing outside the walls. **The sword of the enemy**; rather, *the enemy hath a sword.* **Fear is on every side**; Hebrew, *māgōr missābīb*; one of Jeremiah's favourite expressions (see ch. xx. 3, 10; xlvi. 5; xlix. 29; and comp. l's. xxxi. 13 [14].). Naturally of a timid, retiring character, the prophet cannot help feeling the anxious and alarming situation into which at the Divine command he has ventured.

Ver. 26.—**Wallow thyself in ashes**; rather, *sprinkle thyself with ashes*, a sign of mourning (2 Sam. xiii. 19; so Micah i. 10). **Mourning, as for an only son.** The Septuagint renders πένθος ἀγαπητοῦ (comp. Gen. xxii. 2, where in like manner the Septuagint renders, not "thine only son," but "thy beloved son"). Possibly this was to avoid a supposition which might have occurred to some readers (it has, in fact, occurred to several modern critics) that the "only son" was Adonis, who was certainly "mourned for" by some of the Israelites under the name of Thammuz (Ezek. viii. 14), and whose Phœnician name is given by Philo of Byblus as Ἰευώδ (*i.e.* probably *Yakhidh*, only begotten, the word used by Jeremiah; comp. Βηρούθ, equivalent to Berith). M. Renan found a vestige of the ancient festival of Adonis at Djebeil (the Phœnician Gebal) even at the present day. There would be nothing singular in the adoption of a common popular phrase by the prophet, in spite of its reference to a heathen custom (comp. Job iii. 8), and the view in question gives additional force to the passage. But the ordinary explanation is perfectly tenable and more obvious. The phrase, "mourning [or, 'lamentation'] for an only begotten one," occurs again in Amos viii. 10; Zech. xii. 10. In the last-mentioned passage it is parallel with "bitter weeping for a firstborn."

Ver. 27.—**I have set thee, etc.**; literally, *as an assayer have I set thee among my people, a fortress.* Various attempts have been made to avoid giving the last word its natural rendering, "a fortress." Ewald, for instance, would alter the points, and render "a separater [of metals]," thus making the word synonymous with that translated "an assayer;" but this is against Hebrew usage. Hitzig, assuming a doubtful interpretation of Job xxii. 24, renders ". . . among my people without gold," *i.e.* "without there being any gold there for thee to assay" (a very awkward form of expression). These are the two most plausible views, and yet neither of them is satisfactory. Nothing remains but the very simple conjecture, supported by not a few similar phonomena, that *mibhçar*, a fortress, has been inserted by mistake from the margin, where an early glossator had written the word, to remind of the parallel passage (ch. i. 18, "I have made thee this day a fortress-city," *'ir mibhçar*). In this and the following verses metallurgic phraseology is employed with a moral application (comp. Isa. i. 22, 25).

Ver. 28.—**Grievous revolters**; literally, *rebels of rebels.* **Walking**; rather, *going about*, as a pedlar with his wares (so Prov. xi. 13; xx. 19; Lev. xix. 16). Jeremiah had good reason to specify this characteristic of his enemies (see ch. xviii. 18). **Brass and Iron**; rather, *copper and iron*, in short, base metal.

Ver. 29.—**The bellows are burned.** The objection to this rendering is that the burning of the bellows would involve the interruption of the process of assaying. We might, indeed, translate "are scorched" (on the authority of Ezek. xv. 4), and attach the word rendered "of the fire" to the first clause; the half-verse would then run: "The bellows are scorched through the fire; the lead is consumed," *i.e.* the bellows are even scorched through the heat of the furnace, and the lead has become entirely oxydized. But this requires us to alter the verb from the masculine to the feminine form of third sing. perf. (reading *tammāh*). It is better, therefore, to give the verb (which will be Kal, if the *nūn* be radical) the sense of "snorting," which it has in Aramaic and in Arabic, and which the corresponding noun has in Hebrew (ch. viii. 16; Job xxxix. 20; xli. 12). The masculine form of the verb rendered "is consumed" is still a difficulty; but we have a better right to suppose that the first letter of *tittōm* was dropped, owing to its identity with the second letter, than to append (as the first view would require us) an entirely different letter at the end. This being done, the whole passage becomes clear: "The bellows puff, (that) the lead may be consumed of the fire." In any case, the general meaning is obvious. The assayer has spared no trouble, all the rules of his art have been obeyed, but no silver appears as the result of the process. Lead is mentioned, because, before quicksilver was known, it was employed as a flux in the operation of smelting. **Plucked away**; rather, *separated*, like the dross from the silver.

Ver. 30.—**Reprobate silver . . . rejected them**; rather, *refuse silver* (as the margin) . . . *refused them.* The verbal root is the same.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 7.—*Wells of wickedness.* I. IF WICKEDNESS IS ABUNDANT AND PERSISTENT, IT MUST COME FROM A DEEP SOURCE. The wickedness of Israel is constantly renewed—ever fresh and abundant, like water in a well. Such water must flow out of deep fountains. The continuity of a course of sin proves that its origin is deep-seated. The sin of hasty temper is less than that of deliberate calculation, the fall before sudden temptation more excusable than the wilful choice of evil, the occasional slip less culpable than the continuous habit of wickedness. This habitual sin must be rooted in a man's nature. Springing out under all circumstances, it is seen to be, not an outside defect, but a fruit of his own inner life. Constantly flowing in spite of all restraints of law, social influence, and conscience, it shows how thoroughly corrupt the heart must be (Matt. xv. 18).

II. IF WICKEDNESS IS DEEP-SEATED IN THE HEART, IT MUST FLOW OUT IN FREQUENT ACTS. The spring cannot restrain its waters; the heart cannot repress its imaginations. These must come forth and express themselves in deeds. Men may aim at living two lives—an inner life of sin and an outer life of propriety; but the attempt must ultimately fail. The greater the evil of the heart, the more completely must this colour the life.

III. DEEP-SEATED AND EVER-FLOWING WICKEDNESS PROVOKES THE SEVEREST JUDGMENT FROM GOD. Jeremiah points to this as the terrible justification for the approaching desolation of the land. 1. In itself it is most heinous, and carries the greatest guilt. 2. It is so radically evil that it impregnates the whole nature of the people in whom it dwells, so that they cannot be regarded as doers of wickedness only, but as wicked; not as those who have committed acts of dishonesty, untruth, violence, etc., but as thieves, liars, murderers, etc. 3. Ever-flowing, it promises no better things for the future. If left to itself, it will but repeat the sickening tale of the past with aggravated depravity. 4. It is the source of evil to others. The sin flows out. It must be checked for the protection of all who come under its influence.

Vers. 10, 11.—*The indifference of men and the burden of truth.* We have here revealed to us a conflict in the mind of the prophet. At first it seems vain for him to speak, for none heed his warnings (ver. 10); but then he feels the awful burden of his message compelling utterance. While he looks at his audience he loses heart and sees little good in attempting to influence them; but when he looks within at his trust he finds that this has claims and powers before which he must bow obediently. Thus the teacher of high truth is often discouraged when he considers the unfitness of men to receive it, until he realizes more fully the majesty of the truth itself which possesses him and is not simply a treasure to be regarded as his property, but a Lord demanding his faithful service.

I. THE INDIFFERENCE OF MEN. Here was the source of Jeremiah's discouragement, and we can sympathize with him. What is the use of uttering truths that men are not fit to receive—only to waste our powers, create misunderstandings, and provoke opposition? 1. *The reception of truth depends on the condition of the receiving mind.* Language requires ears as well as tongues. Outward ears are useless without the inward ears of an understanding mind. An ass has no lack of ears, but what are a prophet's words to him? There are people to whom the solemn utterance of the most awful truths is but so much noise. Therefore (1) it behoves men to beware of mocking at the supposed folly of any teaching till they have ascertained whether the fault lies with the teacher or with the taught. And (2) it is not enough to utter truth; we should seek for men the right preparation for receiving it—the ploughing of the hard soil in readiness for the sowing of the seed. 2. *When the mind is in a wrong condition for the reception of truth this may meet with ridicule and dislike.* Truth may meet with ridicule. The word of Jehovah was "a mockery to the Jews." Ridicule may be both a result of misunderstanding the truth and a cause of further mistakes. Truth may also meet with dislike. The Jews had "no delight" in the Divine Word. This was a proof of their not understanding it; for to know it is to love it (Ps. cxix.

16). It was also a cause of their not rightly receiving it; for dislike to truth blinds the eye to the nature of it.

II. THE BURDEN OF TRUTH. In spite of all these grounds for discouragement, Jeremiah feels that he must utter his message when once he considers its origin and character. 1. *Truth is a trust from God.* It is "the fury of the Lord" that possesses the prophet, not the mere passion of his own thoughts. He who holds a Divine truth is a steward of an oracle of God. Woe to him if he consult his own convenience and rely only on his own judgment when, as a steward, he is called to be faithful to his Master's will. His duty is to speak; the consequences may be left to God. 2. *Truth is an inspiration from God.* Jeremiah is "full of the fury of Jehovah." The Spirit of God has possessed him; he is brought into sympathy with the thought and feeling of God: he must needs utter this. If men feel the inspiration of truth they will be carried away by it and poor considerations of worldly expediency will be swept on one side by the flood of a Divine passion. 3. *Truth is a burden on the soul which cries for utterance.* Jeremiah exclaims, "I am weary with holding in!" "Woe is me!" cries St. Paul, as he thinks of the suggestion to restrain his preaching the gospel. Under great passions men do not speak measured words, chosen in strict consideration for their hearers; they speak to give vent to their own souls. The grandest utterances of humanity, in prophecy and in poetry, are free from all calculations as to the reception of them by an audience. They are unrestrainable expressions of the soul; like the songs of birds flowing from the very fulness of the heart. 4. *Truth is for the good of mankind.* Jeremiah must speak, for what he utters concerns others than himself. No one has a right to the monopoly of any great truth. It is common property, and he who hides it steals it. If his excuse is that men cannot understand it, let him remember (1) that he is not an infallible judge of the capacities of other men; and (2) that his duty is to bear his testimony, whether men will hear or no, and to leave all further responsibility with them.

Ver. 14.—*False peace.* I. THE CRAVING FOR PEACE IS NATURAL. These false prophets gained their influence by professing to satisfy a natural instinct. The Jews dreaded war with their great neighbours. 1. All wicked men are at heart in a *state of unrest.* The soul that sins is at war with God, with the law and order of the universe, with its own nature. 2. This condition is *distressing.* The outward warfare begets inward unrest. Then, above all things, peace is the great want of the soul. Wealth, success, happiness, can be spared if but this jewel is still preserved. All great philosophies and all earnest religions set themselves to the task of discovering or creating it.

II. THE PRETENSIONS OF FALSE PEACE ARE PLAUSIBLE. The prophets dissuaded their hearers from attending to the warning words of Jeremiah, and endeavoured to make them believe that they were in no danger. There is much that is very popular in arguments such as theirs. 1. They agree with the *wishes* of the hearers. Men are always inclined to believe what they wish. 2. They flatter the *pride* of the populace. The people are told that they are too great and too favoured of Heaven to suffer any serious calamity, and they are only too ready to believe it. 3. They claim the merits of *charity.* They promise pleasant things. This looks more charitable than the threatening language of stern censors. Hence the prophets win favour for their apparent geniality and liberal sentiments. 4. They require *no sacrifices* from those who accept them. The doctrine is popular because the practice flowing from it is easy. The flattering prophets called to no reformation of character. 5. They have *appearances* in their favour. At present all looks fair. Is not this a presumption that the future will be happy? The sun is rising in gold and crimson; why, then, prophesy the approach of a storm?

III. THE PRETENSIONS OF FALSE PEACE ARE RUINOUS. 1. These pretensions do *nothing to secure* the peace. They simply lead men to believe that they are to enjoy it. Such a belief cannot alter facts. If there is no peace we do not make peace by crying, "Peace, peace!" This is the language of folly and indolence. 2. These delusions only *aggravate the danger.* They prevent men from preparing for the calamity by blinding them to the near advent of it.

IV. THERE IS A WAY BY WHICH THE NATURAL CRAVING FOR PEACE MAY BE SATISFIED.

The deceiving prophets do not make peace; they only talk of it. But in the teaching of true prophets and apostles the way to secure solid peace is revealed. 1. This is shown to be *not immediate.* Jeremiah was right in saying that the people must suffer before they enjoyed peace. Christ, the Prince of peace, came to "send a sword" (Matt. x. 34). The gospel does not preach "peace at any price," but peace after victory in warfare, rest after patient endurance of tribulation. 2. This is shown to be through *repentance and renewal of life.* The deceiving prophets promise peace to the people as they are. While we are in sin we cannot have true peace (Isa. xlviii. 22). Peace follows the advent of the Spirit of Christ (John xiv. 26, 27).

Ver. 16.—*The old paths.* I. CONSIDER THE RECOMMENDATION TO FOLLOW THE OLD PATHS. 1. The course of life should be determined after *thoughtful deliberation.* Jeremiah is to "stand in the ways and see." It is foolish to go with the multitude without individual convictions of what is right, or to follow our own private impulses blindly and aimlessly. 2. The choice should fall on a *good way.* Other ways may be smooth, pleasant, flowery at the starting, only to lose themselves in the pathless wilderness, while this may look more rugged and steep at first; but it should not be the present attractiveness, but the direction, the whole course and the end of a way, which should determine our choice of it. 3. There are *old paths* of right. Religion has not to be made anew. It is not left for the latest saint to discover the way of holiness. 4. Having found the right way, we should forthwith "*walk therein.*" Knowledge is useless without practice; nay, guilt is aggravated if, knowing the right, we follow the wrong. 5. In the right way is *rest* for the soul. Even while on the earthly pilgrimage many quiet resting-places may be found (Ps. xxiii. 2), through all the course an inward peace may be enjoyed (Prov. iii. 17), and at the end will be found the perfect rest of the home of God (Heb. iv. 9).

II. CONSIDER THE GROUNDS ON WHICH THIS RECOMMENDATION IS BASED. 1. Old ways have been *tested by experience.* We choose for a guide one who has already traversed the country. In an unknown land we naturally turn to beaten tracks in preference to following stray footprints across the wild, or striking out for ourselves a pathless way. If others have done rough pioneer work, why should not we avail ourselves of it? If they have reached the goal, they have proved that it is attainable by their way. This is fact; that a new way will be easier or shorter is conjecture. There is, therefore, a presumption in favour of the old. 2. Old ways in religion are *nearer to the original fountains of inspiration.* Israel was referred back to the old ways marked out by Moses, the great founder of the Jewish faith. Christians are referred back to primitive Christianity, to the teaching of the apostles, to the life and example of Christ. Christianity is not a speculation, a creation of the spirit of the age. It is a tradition, a following of those Divine counsels which are indicated in the New Testament.

III. CONSIDER THE LIMITATIONS TO THE APPLICATION OF THIS RECOMMENDATION. 1. The old ways are to be followed only in so far as they are *good.* Still we must judge by our own conscience. Antiquity must not be taken as a despotic master. There are bad old ways. The first-born man struck out an evil way; it was left to Abel, the second-born, to show the better course. 2. In considering the character of an old way, we must take note of the *character and light* of those who founded it. There have been dark ages in the past. Corruption soon crept in. Things are not good just in proportion to their age. Christians must look, not to the Puritans, the Reformers, the mediæval Church, the Fathers, but, passing numerous errors and corruptions, reach back to Christ himself for the true old way. He is *the* Way (John xiv. 6). 3. We must ever *progress* beyond the attainments of the past. We are to follow those old ways that are good; we are to build on the one foundation. But we are not to be content with having the foundation. The fabric must rise higher and higher (1 Cor. iii. 11—15). Christianity is a religion of progress. It is not to be subject to revolutions. Progress must follow the lines laid down by Christ and his apostles. Christianity is not strengthened nor adorned, but only burdened and hidden, by a mere accretion of human ideas and institutions; yet it is a seed which grows, developing larger, fuller life out of its own essential principles (Matt. xiii. 31). Jeremiah himself took a great stride forward beyond the limits attained by antiquity, though in the direction of the

old path, *i.e.* in the spirit of the religion of his fathers (ch. xxxi. 31—34). "These times are the ancient times, when the world is ancient, and not those which we count ancient, *ordine retrogrado*, by a computation backwards from ourselves" (Francis Bacon).

Ver. 17.—*Watchmen.* I. THE MISSION OF THE WATCHMEN. 1. They are *appointed by God.* God raises up prophets, preachers, teachers of righteousness. Unless they have a Divine call they are usurping a position to which they have no right (Gal. i. 1, 15). Hence see (1) the authority of the watchmen; (2) the merciful kindness of God in providing warning and instruction. 2. They are to *observe what goes on around them.* The prophets are seers of spiritual truths, observers of events of history in the light of those truths, and thus, as watchmen, able to discern approaching dangers. The Christian teachers must not be wrapt up in abstract truth. They must see the application of this, note the condition and needs of men, discern the "signs of the times." The prophets were political leaders. They discoursed on subjects which in our day would be discussed in the newspaper. 3. They are to *blow the trumpet.* The seer is to be a prophet. He who knows truth must make it known to others. The watchman must not simply "*let* his light shine;" he must blow a trumpet, demand attention, compel men to hear. The enemy is at the gate. This is no time for mild disquisitions on military tactics; it is a moment when men must be awaked from their sleep and summoned to arms. The Christian preacher speaks to men who are asleep and in great danger. His duty is not simply to let the truth be known. He must arouse, urge, "compel" men to hear his message.

II. THE RECEPTION OF THE MISSION OF THE WATCHMEN. The watchman has done his duty in sounding the trumpet. If none will hear, he is free. 1. Men must *hearken* to the Divine message before they can profit by it. To be warned is not to be saved. If men refuse to accept the truths of Christianity these can do them no good, and they are left free to follow or to neglect them. 2. Men must *obey* the Divine message before they can profit by it. It is nothing to tremble at the warning of judgment unless we are moved to actions of precaution. Felix trembled, and was none the better for this proof of the powerful effect of the preaching of St. Paul (Acts xxiv. 25). 3. If the Divine message is heard and disregarded, the folly, guilt, and ruin will only be aggravated. The plea of ignorance is gone. Indifference is converted into obstinate rebellion (ver. 19).

Ver. 20.—*Worthless sacrifices.* I. SACRIFICES ARE WORTHLESS WHEN THEY ARE NOT OFFERED IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT. The mere gifts are of no use to God (Ps. l. 8—13). They are only valuable as expressing the thoughts and feelings of the giver. Religious services are simply good as the outward expression of worship. 1. Sacrifices are worthless when they are not prompted by *spiritual devotion;* religious services are unacceptable when they are only external performances. The true sacrifice must be of the *will, i.e.* self-dedication. 2. Sacrifices are worthless when they are accompanied by *immorality of conduct.* Worship at church is a mockery if daily conduct in the world is corrupt (Isa. i. 15).

II. WORTHLESS SACRIFICES MAY HAVE ALL THE EXTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICES. 1. They may be offered *to God.* There may be a real intention to approach God, yet this is vain if the heart is wrong. 2. They may be according to *prescribed order.* The formally obedient Jews were rigidly subservient to the ordinance of the authorized ritual. 3. They may be *costly*—incense from Sheba, sweet cane from India. But men cannot buy acceptance with God by signing heavy cheques.

III. THE OFFERING OF WORTHLESS SACRIFICES IS A SERIOUS FAULT. 1. It is an *insult to God.* Better offer nothing than the worthless gift when all he really asks for, the heart, is withheld. 2. It is a source of *self-delusion.* The offering being given, the conscience feels relieved, false pride is stimulated, and the real spiritual condition is hidden. People have a vague feeling that they have done a good thing in attending church, in sitting out a service, in mechanically following the forms of worship. Yet, as this is really utterly worthless, the impression of self-complacency it produces is highly injurious.

Vers. 27—30.—*Testing fires.* Under the image of an assayer and his fire, Jeremiah

is led to regard his mission, and the troubles of Israel, with which this is so much concerned, as means for testing the character of the Jews.

I. THE STANDARD OF MEASUREMENT IS DIVINE TRUTH. The prophet is to be an assayer. Men are to be judged by the truths of righteousness which he is inspired to see and to declare. God has revealed standards of judgment. We are not free to shape our lives according to fancy, taste, or unaided private judgment. The truths of Scripture constitute the standard by which we shall be measured. This will be applied according as it is known. Jeremiah was the watchman before he was the assayer. He blew the trumpet, preached the truth he saw. They who have not received the fuller revelation will be judged by what light they possess (Rom. i. 18—20; ii. 12).

II. THE TEST IS APPLIED IN THE FIRES OF AFFLICTION. Trouble is not only sent for discipline and chastisement; it is a test, a revealer of character. It reveals a man to himself and to others. If he has any true spiritual life, any precious metal, it must come out when, one after another, the worthless ideas and feelings fail before the searching flames of the baptism of fire. Trouble shows: 1. Whether religion is real and heartfelt, or formal and superficial. 2. How far faith is a practical trust, and how far it is a barren conviction. 3. Whether love and devotion to God are deep enough to stand against the temptation to rebel or despair.

III. THEY ARE UTTERLY WORTHLESS WHO DISPLAY NO GOOD QUALITIES AFTER THE SEARCHING TRIAL OF AFFLICTION. This follows from the preceding statements. It was terribly applicable to Israel. We should ask how far it applies to ourselves, and beware of two delusions, viz.: 1. The delusion that merit may be still hidden after God has applied his most thorough test. A religion which is completely secret, never discoverable, must be a poor and worthless thing. The heart cannot be right if it never gives proof of good qualities when tested in all ways. 2. The delusion that trial can destroy spiritual worth. The silver is not burnt if it is not forthcoming. True religion will survive the hardest test that may be applied to it. It is only the superficial, unreal sentiment of religion that is scorched up by persecution and affliction; the growth on the barren rock, not that in the good soil (Matt. xiii. 5, 20, 21).

IV. GOD WILL REJECT NONE WITHOUT FULL TRIAL. Character is to be assayed. God judges before he condemns. The reprobate silver has been well tried. No soul is reprobated by God till every means has been used to search for some good in it. See, then, the merciful intention of trial. The fires are fierce because the intention is to discover some small good thing hidden from every milder test, if only this exists. God is not anxious to find the evil, but to find the good, in men, as the assayer is searching for silver. He will gladly welcome the faintest indication of the least good. No genuine silver can miss the Assayer after his most searching tests. God will abandon no soul till he has sought for all that can be brought in its favour. He is loth to give his children up (Hos. xi. 8).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 4—8.—*The apostate city that cannot be let alone.* Godlessness is condemned by its impracticableness as a universal and thorough-going principle of human life. It is also an evil that defies ordinary restraints, and constantly becomes worse. "This is the strongest and most dangerous mining-powder of cities and fortresses when sin, shame, vice, and wantonness get the upper hand" (Cramer). The city that has forsaken God is—

I. A SOURCE OF MISCHIEF AND UNCLEANNESS. It is likened to a fountain casting forth wickedness. It is an originative agent of evil. Its private, social, and public life multiplies occasions and causes of sin. There is no power within itself sufficient to restrain or purify. Its very laws and regulations tend to foster vice. As of the natural heart our Saviour said that out of it "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, etc.," so, where there are multitudes of such, there will be an exaggeration of the individual tendency and influence. As the leader of fashion, and dominant authority in new customs and ideas, there is an *éclat* transferred from it to what is evil. Its existence becomes, therefore—

II. AN OCCASION OF INJURY AND DANGER TO ALL WHO HAVE TO DO WITH IT. It

is as a fire that has broken out amidst combustible material. By-and-by "the wicked city" is felt to be an intolerable evil. It is a menace to the peace and good government of its neighbours. They cannot afford to ignore it. No time must be lost in bringing it to reason. Its excitements and dissipations wax madder and more widespread. No time can be lost. Hence the avengers come from all quarters in haste and eagerly. "Sanctify war against her! Arise, let us go up at noon!"—the heat being no barrier to their setting out; "Arise, and let us go up in the night!"—the darkness and weariness being forgotten in their hatred and vengeance. For the same reason no terms can be made with it. The Mosaic regulations in warfare are set aside (Deut. xx. 19, 20). There is no chivalrous respect inspired by it, and as it shows no mercy, none is accorded to it.

III. IT IS A CONTINUAL OFFENCE TO GOD. God's love for it had been great, and he had purposed to make it a centre of redeeming love. This aim had been thwarted. So it has been with the city life of man everywhere. As a natural development, and a providential result in human history, the city is intended to enlarge the powers of doing good and to bless the world. But how seldom has this been the case! The centralization of life has but intensified its corruption. Is there any place where the salvation of society seems more hopeless than in our great cities? And God's patience threatens to give out. He cannot bear the noisomeness of its evil. He is about to turn from it in utter loathing and final abandonment. But not yet. Warning is given; a prophet is sent. Nay, the Son himself, if haply they will hear him, in whom alone a sufficient antidote is found. In him is salvation, for of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, the scene of regenerated society, he is Centre and Lord. He is the "Fountain opened for sin and for all uncleanness."—M.

Ver. 13.—*The ministry of deceit.* The extent to which corruption prevailed is suggested when even the prophets and priests share the general apostasy: "Every one dealeth falsely."

I. THE DUTY IT HAD TO FULFIL. The priest dealt with ritual, the prophet with moral and doctrinal questions in religion. They had to act as the spiritual guides and overseers of the people of God. Here they are represented as behaving like quack doctors in cases of grave injury or disease. They were appointed for the spiritual health and well-being of men. Circumstances in the condition of their flocks would determine the manner in which they should exercise their functions, and the special direction in which their attention should be directed. Israel had fallen into serious wickedness. It was no isolated acts of transgression of which she was guilty; her whole spiritual state was one of alienation from God. In such a case the utmost faithfulness and severity were required; as the surgeon has to probe the wound, and use sharp instruments for excising the part that is diseased; or the physician has to make a thorough diagnosis of a patient, and in desperate sickness to use desperate remedies. Here an opposite course had been pursued. The gravity of the "hurt" was overlooked or ignored, and merely outward signs of amendment were regarded as complete reconciliation with God. 1. *That which separates men from God is no slight matter.* It is a deadly thing. If it continues, it must inevitably destroy. The observances of religion will be nullified until it is put right. Men must be told of their sin, not merely in a round and general manner, but judiciously, and according to the specialities of individual or class peculiarities. The unbelief of the natural man is the parent of his misdeeds and sin, and keeps him from any real communion with God. 2. *The minister of religion is bound to be discerning and faithful.* 3. *It is only through a real and spiritual repentance that reconciliation can be effected.* At such a juncture spiritual religion ought to have been insisted on, and the enormity of the offence exposed. Preliminary acts of contrition; experiences and discoveries of the heart such as conviction of sin, etc.; the necessity of love, obedience, and faith ought not to be slurred over.

II. FAILURE IN THIS DUTY AND ITS CAUSES. The root-cause is undoubtedly the share which the religious teachers had in the general depravity. There was also a consequent lack of spiritual discernment. The greatness of the fall from the former position occupied by Israel was not appreciated, and the nature of true religion was not understood. A ministry under court patronage and a merely popular ministry are alike subject to the temptations to please rather than to deal honestly with the evils of

individuals, society, and the state, and to rectify them. "They who live to please must please to live." There is such a thing always as a making of religion too easy either in its moral conditions or its doctrinal realizations. It is fearfully wrong to say a man is a Christian when he is not a Christian; or so to deal with him in pastoral relations that he fancies himself in possession of salvation and spiritually secure when he is in heart and life far from God. Flattery has a thousand forms, and there is no falsehood to which it contributes that is more insidious or wide-reaching than this.

III. THE RESULTS. These are terrible in the extreme. From the authority of office they are credited in their declarations, and national and individual offences are condoned and perpetuated. Possible for a man to be deceived on this most vital question; to think himself a child of God when he is in reality a child of Satan. Death-bed repentances. 1. *The divorce of morality from religion.* 2. *The intensified wrath of God at hypocrisy and sham religion.* 3. *Eternal death and irretrievable loss.*—M.

Ver. 16.—*The old paths.* Men are surrounded from their earliest years with various religious systems, the claims of which conflict. To a conscientious mind, intellectual disquietude is the first result of this; in those less in earnest it produces and justifies indifference. All religions tend, under these circumstances, to assume the aspect of speculative questions, and the moral life is increasingly detached from religious sanctions. Morality must thereby be impaired, if it do not ultimately disappear. The prophet, therefore, recalls the people to the consideration of religion as a practical question. It is with him a question not of pure theory, but of conduct and experience. He urges the settlement of the conflict upon these grounds, and furnishes certain criteria by which to determine it.

I. ANTIQUITY IS A TEST OF TRUE RELIGION. Man is a religious being by nature, and God has never left himself without a witness in the world. There has been no generation in which some have not sought and found him. From the very first, therefore, there must have been religious conditions observed, which from their nature must be, as they were intended to be, permanent. The argument for the existence of God, for instance, is greatly strengthened by the evidence of the recognition of him by primitive and ancient peoples. Even in their errors and mistakes, when their views and observances are collated and compared, witness is given to fundamental truths. But the argument is stronger still when the people appealed to are those who, like Israel, have an historical faith. Ages of faith were behind them, illustrated by mighty heroes and saintly men of God. For ages a certain communion had been observed between the nation and its theocratic Head. What was the secular character of those ages? Were they marked by political strength, social order and purity, and commercial prosperity? Were the leaders of the people men whose ideal of life and actual behaviour commended themselves to the general conscience of the world? Was it to be supposed that any essential truth for the spiritual guidance of men had to be discovered thus late in the day? Were men to be always on tiptoe to learn what the last finding of research might be? There were paths that had been tried by holy men. When the nation was at its best, it acknowledged God in these ways. The vast majority of those who were holiest and best had tried them and found them satisfactory.

II. BUT DISCRIMINATION IS REQUIRED. The children of Israel were to "stand in the ways," *i.e.* to examine the different systems of religion and morals that laid claim to their attention. Critical and historical judgment had to be exercised. It is *not simply the oldest religion that is to be retained and followed*, but that in the religious history of the past which has most evidently conduced to noble action, spiritual health, and well-being. The heathenisms of the world are self-condemned; immorality has ever tended to destruction. The Englishman, therefore, is not to look to the Druids for infallible teaching; nor Christians to the saints of the Old Testament times. The dictum of Ignatius is sound: *Nobis vera antiquitas est Jesus Christus.* But the teaching and personality of Jesus were commended by their essential agreement with Mosaicism in its most ancient form; as that in turn was but a confirmation and elaboration of patriarchal convictions, experiences, and revelations. The truth that has been held in all ages is retained in each new development of revelation and history, but it is spiritualized and grounded upon deeper and wider sanctions.

III. THE NATURAL HUMAN DESIRE FOR MERE NOVELTY HAS TO BE OVERCOME. True religion is not to be despised because it is old. The truth, when carefully studied and spiritually realized, is ever new and fresh. And the "new truths" to which advancing time introduces us are justified only as we can organically and spiritually evolve them from their archaic predecessors. Obligations which are merely relative will change or disappear with the relations upon which they are founded, but the cardinal truths of heart and life must ever retain their authority, and new experience will but tend to deepen and strengthen their hold upon the religious nature. If, on the other hand, the teachings of experience and the warnings of prophets are despised, new heinousness will be added to the wickedness of the wicked. It will be wilful disobedience, and as such will be more severely punished.

IV. OBEDIENCE TO THESE DOCTRINES OF EXPERIENCE WILL CONFIRM AND SATISFY THE SOUL. If, in spite of these corroborations, the doctrines were productive of misery and spiritual unrest, then they would go for nothing. But this is the final and absolute criterion—Do they tend to the welfare and increase of spiritual life, and to the satisfaction of the deepest longings of the soul?—M.

Vers. 18—20.—*The reasonableness of the Divine judgments.* The language employed suggests publicity. The world is called into solemn council—a "congregation" for judgment. 1. *Not that upon questions of this nature the carnal mind is any authority of and by itself.* "Who art thou that judgest?" might well be asked of any who assumed such an office. It is only as confirming and justifying the action taken by God. Thus understood, the testimony of the world is most valuable, being different from what might be expected. It is a great mystery, this judgment of God's apostate people by the heathen nations. 2. *And yet we must not understand it as a mere figure of speech.* There is a real endorsement of the righteous judgments of God in the mind of the world—one of those revealing circumstances which show "the Law of God written upon their heart." When the question is a broad, simple, and evident one, even the most perverted soul will affirm the sentence of Heaven. Unbelief is only superficial. Beneath the crust of hardened consciences there still remains a primitive sense of justice; and to this will the final sentence of condemnation appeal, when we shall give account of the deeds done in the body. The sinner will not only hear the decision from the great white throne, but he will stand self-condemned; and the universal assembly will confirm the verdict. 3. *How fearful, too, must have been the guilt of God's people that on this occasion such umpires could have been so confidently appealed to!* The features of their criminality that are emphasized are these: *obstinacy* and *hypocrisy.* The latter is but the abettor of the former. The unreality of Israel's repentance was especially abhorrent to Jehovah. It vitiates all the costly articles and enhancements of their worship, and is but the cloak of a real continuance in sin. If, then, they do in heart refuse to obey God, what more reasonable than that he should suffer the laws of his universe to deal with them, and punish them with "the fruit of their thoughts"? The angels of vengeance that wait upon sin, licentiousness, luxury, and waste, will be suffered to do their work; and they shall learn by experience that "the way of transgressors is hard." But the instant that the spirit of reality and sincerity revisits their hearts, his ear will be open to their cry, and his mercy will redeem.—M.

Vers. 27—30.—*The prophet a spiritual assayer.* Of interest as a description of process of refining precious metals among ancient peoples. The grinding and washing of the ore to discover and separate the precious metals, the fusing of the silver with lead in order to its further purification, and the repetition of this under severer heat, are processes which are used to illustrate the influence of the words of revelation upon the human heart. These words—

I. REVEAL CHARACTER. "Some believed, and some believed not," is the consequence always following upon the faithful preaching of the truth. "It is a hard saying; who can hear it?" How instantaneous were the results in this way attendant on the proclamations of Biblical prophets and preachers! They addressed the conscience, the affection, and the will, and pressed for a verdict and practical following up of opinion in action. Much more is this the case with the gospel, because of its deeper and more

spiritual force. It is by hearing the Word, and looking into the mirror it affords, that a man is discovered to himself.

II. DETERMINE DESTINY. Sometimes in a good, sometimes in a bad sense. In the case before us it is wholly the latter. As there was no reality or earnestness in Israel, so there was no point at which a commencement could be made towards reformation. They are all concluded guilty and worthless. It was a severe judgment, but was meant in mercy to the people themselves. They were thereby warned of the need of radical change, and the supernatural, saving grace of God. It is by the determinations and effects produced by the hearing of the Word that the future is influenced. There is a distinct moral responsibility incurred each time the truth is proclaimed in our hearing. Nothing else so searches into and potently affects the moral nature, because the conscience is most vividly aroused and reality in all its naked force bursts upon the soul. The furthest developments of personal character, interest, and occupation may be thus conditioned: "See, then, how ye hear!"

III. ARE CAREFULLY ADAPTED, BY INCREASINGLY SEVERE PROCESSES, TO EFFECT THEIR END. They result in rejection, and this is rendered inevitable by the utter worthlessness of character and work exhibited. If there is any good in a man, the truth will discover it, and sympathetically develop and reinforce it; if not, it will only the more utterly and unquestionably condemn him. The ear does not try words more delicately or decisively than words of God try the heart. According to their spiritual state will men be condemned, approved; received or rejected by the hearing of the gospel. Some men have been tried and condemned by it already; to others it opens more and more widely the door of hope.—M.

Vers. 1—8.—*A dreadful onlook.* Such was the vision of Jeremiah which he saw concerning the coming wrath upon Judah and Jerusalem. It was the sad sight which the sinners in Jerusalem never, but the seer ever, saw clearly, vividly, heart-brokenly. The vision of Jeremiah for Jerusalem was the forerunner of our Lord's in substance, spirit, and result. Now, with regard to this awful onlook of the prophet which is here related, note—

I. How SOLITARY IT WAS. The people of Judah and Jerusalem were in no fear, and for forty years and more this vision was not realized. Other eyes saw nothing to be troubled about, and men generally were at ease in Zion. It was only the purged vision of the prophet that pierced the future and portrayed the dread realities of that fast-coming day. *He* saw clearly what others saw not at all. And so it is always. But why is this? Why do sinners *not* see? Take an answer from those senseless exhibitions in which the performers place themselves in positions of frightful peril, so that a moment's unsteadiness of nerve, the slightest slipping of hand or foot, would lead to their immediate inevitable and dreadful death; running all this risk to amuse the gaping, shameless crowds, who stare, stamp, and shout their applause at what never ought to be done. But let these performers provide us a reply to the question we have asked. They will tell you that at first they approached those dangerous places with great fear; how it was long ere they could walk with ease along that slender cord, or stand fearless on that dizzy height. But they got at length so used to these things that now they go through their perilous performances without the slightest fear. And so is it with grievous sinners against God. They have got so used to the threatening of his anger that they think nothing of it after a while, and go on unconcernedly until almost the moment of his vengeance bursts upon them. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore," etc. Their heart wishes that there may be nought to fear. The long-suffering and forbearance of God are perverted, by the deceitfulness of sin, to foster that belief, and so they at length persuade themselves that what God's servants see so clearly and warn them of so faithfully has no real existence, and "as it was in the days of Noah, so is it also in the days when the Son of man cometh." Oh, what need for the prayer, "From all the *deceits* of the world, the flesh, and the devil, good Lord, deliver us"!

II. How VIVIDLY SEEN. Jeremiah sees the hurried flocking of the Benjamites (see Exposition), the terrified inhabitants of Jerusalem, to some common centre in the city, and then their hasting away out of the southern gates towards Tekoa, one of the southernmost cities of the land, and furthest off from the dread invaders, who were

speeding from the north. The alarm-trumpet sounding its shrill notes amid the quiet streets of Tekoa; he sees the signal-fires blazing from the height of Beth-haccerem, and answered by other like fires, all telling of distress; and then, from hill-summits yet further away, he sees the never-ending train of fierce and victory-flushed soldiers marching ruthlessly on in all the pride and pomp of war, streaming along the great northern roads, the open highway whereby they entered the holy land. He sees the various encampments, the spoliation of the whole district round, the eager haste of the foe to attack the great fortress of Jerusalem, the goal of all their hopes and the prize of their arduous campaign; he sees the varied preparations for war, the building of the engines of attack, the burning of her palaces; in short, the whole dread details of a city doomed to destruction at the hands of a besieging army. Thus vivid was the vision. And such clearness of onlook is given to God's seers that they may thereby more deeply impress and more surely move the minds of those they are sent to. It is well to muse over things unseen and eternal until they become real to us, until our faith becomes the evidence of the things not seen, and gives substance, shape, and body to the things hoped for. Then as those who have tasted and handled and felt the powers of the world to come, we shall speak with unwonted power, and men through us will also see what they have never seen before. But—

III. How WELL FOUNDED THIS VISION WAS. For the prophet came to the conviction of the coming wrath upon his country, not on any light grounds, but on such as in all ages may lead to a like conviction. 1. *There was the extreme importance of Jerusalem*, as an almost impregnable mountain fortress. In the frequent wars between Egypt and Assyria this fortress was the object of much solicitude to either side. And besides her strength there was her wealth and her fame, so that Jerusalem became a coveted possession to one great monarchy after another. Jeremiah (ver. 2) compares her to a beautiful and luxuriant pasturage (cf. Exposition). And as shepherds would covet such pasturage for their flocks, so the enemies of Jerusalem would covet her. So attractive, so desirable was she in their esteem. This fact, then, of the worth of Jerusalem to Assyria was one reason wherefore Jeremiah knew that that lawless and rapacious nation would certainly attack her. 2. *The "delight in war" which characterized Assyria.* Vers. 4, 5 represent the language of their soldiers, their eagerness to be led to the attack, their impatience at every hindrance, their disregard both of the heat of noon or darkness of night. They were a people ever on the look out for plunder and aggrandizement, and seized on the very first pretext that offered for invasion and capture. 3. *The prophet's clear perception that God was on the side of Israel's foes.* Ver. 6, "Thus hath the Lord of hosts said." It was, therefore, his will. It had been borne in upon his mind that God's wrath was ready to be poured out. He had been told so by the Spirit of God; he "spiritually discerned" the dark facts of the future, so that they stood out vivid and clear before the eye of his soul. 4. *And his conviction that such was God's will could not but be deepened by the constant presence before him of the atrocious wickedness of the doomed city.* Ver. 7, "As a fountain," perpetually, copiously freely, irresistibly, "casts out her waters, so did Jerusalem cast out," etc. The moral corruption of the people made him certain that the holy God of Israel would not suffer it to go on unpunished. And it is ever so. Let a nation, a family, a Church, an individual, give themselves up to wickedness and gross violation of the commands of God, it is certain that sentence of death is on them. Execution may be deferred, but unless there be repentance it will certainly be carried out. There were special features about the vision that was given to Jeremiah, but every believer in God sees in substance the very same. The deep-felt conviction of the godly is the expression of the will of God. What such a one binds on earth is bound in heaven, and whose sins such retain they are retained. It is a terrible fact, then, when any come under the grave moral condemnation of the people of God, for their condemnation is but the echo of those thunders they have heard reverberating around the throne of God.

IV. How MERCIFULLY SENT. Their purpose was obvious. Many years God would yet wait. Thus he gave this call to repentance, and waited long to see if it would be needed. The most loving words of Jesus are those which make our hearts tremble and our spirits quake with fear; those which tell of the everlasting fire and the never-dying worm. For these awful declarations are the expedients of love to drive, to terrify, to force away from the edge of the precipice of ruin those whom no other means will with-

draw therefrom. And that this is the intent of these awful representations of God's wrath is seen in ver. 8, where God pathetically pleads with Jerusalem to be "instructed" by his words, "lest his soul depart from" her. Remember, then: 1. *It is only the eye, purged by the Spirit of truth, that can see the truth as to ourselves or others.* Until thus cleansed, we may be going down to our graves with a lie in our right hand. 2. *Praise and bless God for his loving warnings to the wicked.* Pray that they may be heeded, and be careful not to disguise or diminish them by prophesyings of peace when there is no peace. 3. *Hasten to be yourself and to bring others to be safe within the shelter of the love of God, where no evil can befall and no plague ever come nigh.*—C.

Ver. 1.—*Signal-fires.* "Set up a sign of fire in Beth-haccerem." Introduction—Illustrate from Homer's description of such signal-fires, or from Macaulay's poem, 'Defeat of the Spanish Armada.' Take them as illustrative of the warnings of God against sin.

I. REVIEW SOME OF THESE SIGNAL-FIRES. 1. The Bible. 2. The ministers of God's truth. 3. Conscience. 4. Present judgments upon men's sin.

II. NOTE WHEREFORE THEY SHOULD BE SET UP. 1. Men are living in grievous sin. 2. God's judgments are near at hand. 3. Men are in a state of false security. 4. They will rally the good to increased exertion. 5. They will arouse and arrest the wicked. 6. That like fires may be enkindled by the faithful, who have seen them and taken the warning, and will therefore send it on. 7. God's sore judgment will come upon those who do not set them up.

III. HOW THIS MAY BE DONE. 1. By faithful preaching. 2. By living in the fear of God. 3. By separation from the ungodly. 4. By seeking to save all over whom you have influence from the wrath to come.

IV. WHEN DONE, LET THESE WARNINGS BE AS SIGNAL-FIRES. 1. Such as all must observe. 2. Such as all will understand. 3. Set up from sense of the reality both of the threatened danger and the people's need. 4. Kept burning steadily in spite of all that would quench them.

V. THE SIGNAL-FIRES THAT GOD SETS UP HAVE THESE CHARACTERISTICS. 1. The Bible. 2. Conscience. 3. Present judgments.

VI. LET OURS HAVE THE SAME.—C.

Vers. 2, 3.—*The Lord's pasture.* Patterns of things spiritual and eternal are scattered broadcast over God's universe. Nothing is more pleasant than to trace these resemblances out. Our Lord was ever "likening" things in the kingdom of heaven to things he saw around him in the world. His own word, "parables," tells of things "placed by the side" of others for comparison of their likenesses or contrasts. The prophet in these verses "likens" Jerusalem—the daughter of Zion—to a beautiful and luxuriant pasturage (cf. Exposition). He was speaking of the material city. But *that* daughter of Zion leads our thoughts to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, the Church, "which he has purchased with his own blood." Now, that may be fitly likened to such a pasture; it is the Lord's pasture. For—

I. THERE THE SHEEP OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD FIND REST AND REFRESHMENT AFTER THE OFTEN WEARY JOURNEY OVER THE WAYS OF THE WORLD. (Cf. Ps. xxiii., lxxxiv.) See the many testimonies to the spiritually refreshing and restful influence of the worship of the Church. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures," etc.

II. THERE HIS SHEEP FIND PASTURE. "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will feed her poor with bread." By the ministry of God's truth, by the application, through the Holy Spirit's grace, of the things of Christ. Christ's people are fed as with the Bread of life.

III. THE COMELINESS AND BEAUTY OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST JUSTIFY THIS COMPARISON. True, the Church has not yet put on her "beautiful garments." The prophetic visions of her glory and majesty still wait to be realized. "The bride" has not yet "made herself ready." But even as she is, in her garments of humiliation, treading her painful way as a weary pilgrim, who is like unto her? Where are moral beauty and grace to be found such as she possesses, and has shown—yea, is showing still—in spite of all imperfections? Even now—oh, how much more by-and-by!—the Church of Christ,

the Lord's pasture, is the fairest, loveliest scene this poor sin and sorrow stricken earth presents. Even now she is Christ's bride, and all spiritual beauty and comeliness are summed up in that.

IV. FOR ATTRACTIVENESS. Cf. ver. 3, which tells how other shepherds were irresistibly drawn to this pasturage, and how eagerly they led their flocks there. As concerned the earthly Jerusalem this had no happy meaning, but as concerns Christ's Church its meaning is happy and blessed indeed. It is good that the fowls of the air should lodge in the branches of the great tree, which has sprung from the tiny seed planted by the Lord. And it is good that "nations, and peoples, and tribes, and tongues" should, as many already have been, and as all others will be, drawn by the attractiveness of the rich and luxuriant pasturage which the Lord's pasture offers. It is a weary world; self and sin are cruel taskmasters; they have no green pastures into which they lead their sheep. The opened ear of those whose hearts are touched with Christ's sympathy perpetually hears the cry for help, the longing to be led into the pasture of the Lord. It is a reproach to every professed disciple of Christ if he do not, by what he is and by the spirit of his life, attract others to the Lord's pasture, and lead them to say, "We will go with you, for we see that the Lord is with you."

V. IT IS THERE WHERE THE LORD LEADS HIS SHEEP. Many think they can be Christ's without uniting themselves to his people, keeping amid the world's ways and standing aloof from the Lord's pasture. But this is wrong. There is a sense in which the old saying, "Nulla salus extra ecclesiam," is true, and nothing casts graver doubt on the reality of our discipleship than absence of sympathy with other disciples, and no liking for their companionship. Love for "the brethren" is given as one note of having "passed from death unto life." It is the Lord's will that his people should be banded together in their several folds, and the instinct of the renewed heart almost certainly leads it to desire this pasturage. Hence, as a fact, there are scarce any, if any, of the disciples of Christ who are not found in one or other of the folds into which the one flock of the Good Shepherd is divided.

CONCLUSION. Ask two questions: 1. *Of those who are not Christ's.* Do you find that the ways of the world are really better than the Lord's pasture? is it better to serve sin and self than Christ? We are sure that there can be but one answer. Why, then, do you not hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and "follow" him? 2. *Of those who are his.* Are you careful not to blotch and blur that likeness? Many do this, so that the likeness cannot be traced, and the world turns away from it, not drawn by what it sees. Strive to let men see in you somewhat—much—of that spiritual grace and beauty which will lead men greatly to desire to enter the Lord's pasture for themselves.—C.

Ver. 4.—*Sorrow because of eventide.* "Woe unto us! for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out." It is not thus that we are wont to welcome the going away of the day, the quiet peaceful hours of eventide. How *beautiful*, even in its outward aspect, is oftentimes the evening hour, the gradual subsidence of the varied sounds of the busy day, the glorious sunsets, the rich radiance of the evening sky, the exquisite tints and colourings of the hills as the mellow light of evening falls upon them, the ruby glow which adorns, glorifies, and almost transfigures the sun-clad peaks of mountainous lands! Yes, eventide is an hour of beauty, in which Nature puts on her almost loveliest garb now that the "garish day" has gone. It is a scene on which the eye delightedly rests. And it is the hour of *reunion* also. From the scattered districts where one and another have pursued their daily toil, the members of the family, the household, the village, come home, and in pleasant converse talk over the events of the day, and forecast the events of to-morrow. The hearts of the children turn to the fathers, and the heart of the fathers to the children, in the happy intercourse which is only possible on the blessed Sunday or at the evening hour. And it is the hour of *rest*. The plough stands still in the furrow, for the ploughman has gone home; the toil-worn horse roams in his pasture or feeds peacefully in his stable. The man of business has shut up his ledger, and left the city and the office, and rests quietly amid his family at home. The night has come, in which no man can work. And if we take the symbolic meaning of the day and regard it as telling of *the day of life*, even then the ideas of calm, rest, and serene quiet gather around it. What a

beautiful old age is that described in the seventy-first psalm—beautiful for its confidence in God, for its humility and meekness, for the vigour of its desire for God's glory, and for its bright onlook into the future! And such beauty often belongs to old age, so that "at eventide there is light." We probably all of us know of some on whom the shadows of evening are falling fast, because the day of their life "goeth away;" but how calm, how serene, how peaceful, how bright, is their old age! They do not say, nor do others say concerning them, "Woe unto us! for the day," etc. But in the text we have a precisely *opposite feeling*, one of dismay and sore grief because of the day's departure. And this lamentation is one uttered, not alone by those of whom the prophet wrote, but by many others also. Therefore let us—

I. LISTEN TO THOSE WHO MAKE THIS LAMENTATION. And: 1. There were *those of whom Jeremiah wrote.* The Chaldeans, who were about to invade Judæa and Jerusalem. The text occurs in a vivid description of the troubles they would bring upon his people. He is representing their eagerness, their furious haste to assail and capture the doomed city. Hence the interruption of nightfall is fiercely resented by them. They would lengthen out the day if but they could. Like as Joshua bade the sun stand still (Josh. x.), that he might complete the overthrow of his enemies, so would these Chaldeans like that the sun should stand still, that they might complete the overthrow of theirs. And because that cannot be, therefore they exclaim, "Woe unto us!" etc. What a lesson these Chaldean soldiers give to the professed soldiers of Christ! Would that we had the like zeal in our endeavour to win the kingdom of heaven! But it is only the violent, those who are in real earnest and put forth all their "force," who shall take it. 2. But if we take the day as referring to the day of life, we shall often hear *in Holy Scripture* the like lamentation. The saints of the Old Testament, how they shrank from death: "Oh, spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more;" "The dead praise not thee, neither any that go down into silence;" "The living, the living, shall praise thee, as I do this day." The overflowing gratitude of the hundred and sixteenth psalm is because of deliverance from the dreaded death. How Hezekiah (Isa. xxxviii.) piteously wept and prayed that he might not die! They knew not that to depart was far better; death was to them only gloomy, silent, dark, and where fellowship with God was not. Hence this "Woe unto us!" etc., expresses the common feeling of Old Testament times at the going away of the day of life. 3. But there are *those who still make like lamentation.* Let us listen to them. (1) Those from whom *the day of opportunity* is going away. We none of us like to miss opportunities. Even to miss a train vexes us. How much more when we see slipping fast from us the power of gaining and doing great good! The scholar who has let slip the opportunities of winning the knowledge which would fit him for his life's work, but now must go forth all ill equipped, and so must with shame take a lower place. The youth or man who has failed to win the confidence of those about him, and now has to leave them without the great advantage which their confidence would have given him. The professed disciple of Christ who has some child, some companion, some one over whom he had influence, leaving him for a distance, or, more grievous still, by death, and he has never used his opportunity of speaking to him on behalf of Christ. This is a woe indeed, a reflection bitter to have resting upon one's conscience. The brother or sister, the husband or wife, the companion or friend, who have let go opportunities of showing kindness, of comforting and helping those who looked to them for such comfort and help, and now it is too late. Ah! that is a dreadful thought, to think of what you might have done for them and ought to have done but did not, and now can never do. All these are instances in which those from whom the day of opportunity is going away will often lament, "Woe unto us!" It is with a bitter pang that we see "the shadows" of *that* "evening stretched out." (2) Those from whom *the day of prosperity* is going away. Listen to the patriarch Job (xxix. 3): "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me!" And all through the chapter he continues his sad lament over happy days gone by. And so now to see the like befall ourselves—health, wealth, friends, dear children, or those even dearer still, all going from us, what wonder that such say, "Woe is us!" etc.? But sometimes it is on account of the going away of the day of *spiritual* prosperity. The mournful retrospect of days of purity, peace, strength, enjoyment of God, delight in his worship, usefulness in his service; but these now all gone or fast disappearing. Ah! the backslider, the

man who suffers himself to lose his religion, has many bitter moments of regret and remorse. How he curses the sinful folly which led him to lend an ear to the deceitful suggestions of the wicked one, and which have brought him to this wretched pass! Yes, it is a terrible thing to see the day of spiritual prosperity going away and the shadows of its evening stretched out. (3) Those from whom *the day of a life lived without God* is going away. This must be dreadful indeed. They have drunk up all that the cup of this world has to give them; there is not a drop left, and there is no provision made for the eternity to which they are hastening. With what intensity of bitterness will the "Woe unto us!" of such be uttered! For though such perceive that eternity is near, and God's awful judgment bar, yet how difficult, how all but impossible do they find it to hurry on their preparations as they would fain do! The lips unused to pray cannot pray. The habits of unbelief and worldliness won't be broken. Faith will not come. They have so long turned away from Christ that now they cannot turn to him. Pride holds back the confession which their repentance would make, that all their past life has been one melancholy mistake. Such are some of the great difficulties which stand in the way of him who, at the close of a long life lived without God, would then turn to God. And as he sees that now this world is lost to him, and the next not won and all but impossible to be won, how inevitable the exceeding bitter cry, "Woe unto us!" etc.! But now—

II. LET US ENDEAVOUR TO LIGHTEN THIS LAMENTATION, AND TO COMFORT THOSE WHO SAY, "WOE UNTO US!" 1. Those who lament the going away of *the day of opportunity*. Remember that *all* opportunity is not gone. "Why should a living man complain?" "A live dog is better than a dead lion." (Illustrate from Foster's essay on 'Decision of Character.' Story of a spendthrift who had lost a vast estate suddenly resolving that he would regain it, and at once setting about to earn money, though ever so little, and at length, by dint of prolonged, hard, and often degrading toil and of rigid economy, accomplishing his resolve. Such victories have been won in spite of temporal loss.) Remember *all* is not gone. And where spiritual opportunities have been let go, sad as such loss is, others yet remain. "Sleep on now, and take your rest;" that was our Saviour's way of telling his unwatchful disciples that they had lost the opportunity of ministering to him as he had asked them. But in the next breath he says, "Rise, let us be going: behold, he that betrayeth," etc.; that was his way of telling them that there were opportunities for other service yet awaiting them. Peter, when he went out after his denial of his Lord, and wept bitterly, thought that nevermore would he have opportunity of doing aught for that dear, dear Lord whom he had so shamefully denied. But 'twas after that the Lord said to him, "Feed my lambs," "Feed my sheep." Therefore waste not time in mere brooding over lost opportunities. Confess your faithlessness, and seek forgiveness, and then ask the Lord to show you what yet remains that you may do for him. And be sure that he will graciously deal with you as he did with his apostle of old. 2. Those who lament the going away of *the day of prosperity*. If you are not a believer in Christ—one born again of the Holy Ghost unto him, then I know not how to comfort you or how to lighten your lamentation. I can only counsel you to kneel and pray that this loss of temporal good may lead you to him who waits to give you eternal good, in the gain of which all earthly loss will be forgotten. God grant you may follow this counsel. But if you are a child of God, then remember *Christ will be with you in your trial*. Was there not another with the three Hebrew youths in the furnace of fire, so that its fierce flames burned them not, and they walked up and down as if beneath the cool shade of the trees of Paradise? Manifold and great good to you and through you is undoubtedly designed by letting such trial come to you. To give you holy skill and blessed tenderness in ministering to other troubled souls; to impart to you deeper knowledge of yourself; to make you the means of making known to others what Divine grace can do. This was why God suffered Job to be so tried, and why the Lord put the faith of the Syrophœnician woman to so severe a strain. Did not our Lord himself become the "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"? What do we not all owe to that? And so through his people becoming more or less men of sorrows and acquainted with grief, large blessing shall flow down to others. Then do not think it all "woe" if the day of your earthly prosperity does seem to be "going away," and the shadows of its evening be stretched out. 3. Those who lament the going away of the day of a life

lived without God. To such we would say that it is a rare mercy that they are distressed at all. For many die as they have lived, indifferent and unconcerned about God and things eternal. But if alarm and fear have been awakened, that is a token of mercy. The dying robber on the cross beside our Lord, at that last hour turned to him, and was *not* refused the mercy he craved. Christ "saves *to the uttermost* all that come unto God by him." Give glory to him by even now turning to him, as he bids you do. But let none presume on the possibilities of such repentance at the very last. "The Gospels tell of one such, that none may despair; but of only one, that none may presume." "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

"To Jesus may we fly
Swift as the morning light,
Lest life's young golden beams should die
In sudden endless night."

If we be found in *him*, then the exceeding bitter cry of our text will never be heard from us. The day of opportunity will not leave us. If the day of earthly prosperity do leave us, then it will be because the Lord hath provided some better thing for us. And when the day of life goeth away and we with it, it will be but "to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."—C.

Vers. 4, 5.—*How the kingdom of heaven is to be taken.* "Prepare ye war," etc. It is lawful to learn from the children of this generation, who are wiser in their affairs than the children of light. Therefore, from the way in which the enemies of Judah should assail her, we may learn how the kingdom of heaven is to be won. There is—

I. THE RECOGNITION OF THE REALITY OF THE STRUGGLE. "Prepare ye war," etc.

II. CASTING ASIDE OF ALL SUGGESTIONS OF EASE. "Let us go up at noon;" the burning heat did not matter.

III. IMPATIENCE OF HINDRANCES. "Woe unto us! for the day," etc.

IV. RESOLVE TO ENCOUNTER ANY AND EVERY PERIL RATHER THAN BE PUT BACK FROM THEIR ENTERPRISE. "Let us go up by night."

V. DETERMINATION NOT TO REST TILL THE POWER OF THE FOE BE UTTERLY DESTROYED. "Let us destroy her palaces," etc.—C.

Ver. 6.—*The real director of human affairs.* "For thus hath the Lord of hosts said, Hew ye down trees," etc. Nothing could seem a more purely human affair than the invasion of Judah and Jerusalem by the armies of Babylon. Its motives, methods, means, results, were all just such as were perfectly comprehensible and according to the manners of that age and the peoples concerned. One event followed another in natural sequence, and was fully explained, so men would say, by what went before. And so in reference to a still more notable event—the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. To the eye of an ordinary historian, that supreme event was brought about in altogether a common and ordinary way. But as concerning that event, so concerning this of which Jeremiah tells, it is distinctly declared that *God* was overruling and directing all that took place. Not that God was the author of the wickedness which seemed triumphant in these events—especially in the "wicked hands" by which our Lord was "crucified and slain." No, but just as, when a fire has broken forth and is threatening to devour and destroy on all hands, wise and skilful firemen, when they cannot quench it, will contrive to lead it in a given direction, will order the path it shall take as seems to them best, *so* God, when he sees the raging fire of wickedness has broken forth, guides and orders the path it shall take, the work it shall do. Wickedness is never attributable to God, but the development and form it shall assume are so. Hence in the text, the Lord of hosts is represented as the real Commander of the armies that were to invade Judah and Jerusalem; it was *his* orders they were in fact obeying, though nothing was further from their thoughts than this. And so we are taught that *God* is behind all human affairs, ordering and directing them according to his will.

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

And now we ask—

I. WHY SHOULD NOT THIS BE SO? Many reply that if you find an adequate cause for any given effect, there is no need to look for any other. But, in answer, see, I let this book fall; what causes it to fall? The law of gravity will adequately explain it. But was that the real cause? Was not *my will to let it fall* that real cause? And so in human affairs, we may see the immediate antecedent, but we have a right to ask, "What lies behind that?" You say, "Sufficiently plain motives led to such and such conduct;" but we ask, "Who brought these motives into action? who or what set them at work so that these results have come about?" Further—

II. GOD IS A PERFECTLY HOLY BEING, AND THEREFORE MUST DESIRE TO HAVE ALL MORAL NATURES MADE LIKE UNTO HIMSELF. "Good and upright is the Lord, *therefore* will he teach sinners in the way." "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness;" hence we are bidden, "Give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness." Hence it is certain that he will employ all means consistent with the nature he has given us to bring our wills into harmony with his own. Therefore when we see a whole system of things, an entire course of events, tending to and actually producing this result—for the Captivity did cure Israel of their idolatry, they went no more after false gods, nor have they done so ever since—we at once put it down to him whose nature and whose will we know.

III. AND OUR INDIVIDUAL CONSTITUTION SUPPORTS THIS VIEW. There are Divine laws for the body, the mind, the affections. And to bring us into harmony with his laws, which are the expression of his will, he has "begirt us round" with safeguards and guides which, if we heed, happy are we, but if we neglect, we suffer. It is certain that the health of our whole nature follows obedience to these laws; and, on the other hand, the misery which results from disobedience declares plainly his will, and shows that he is behind all those facts which we call the causes of these results, and is himself *the* Cause of them all. Now, this is true in the case of each single person. May it not, therefore, be true in the case of the world at large, and in regard to what we call "causes and effects"? Then note further—

IV. THE UNITY OF PURPOSE WHICH IS SEEN THROUGHOUT THE ORDERING OF THE UNIVERSE, SO FAR AS WE CAN TRACE, SEEMS TO INDICATE ONE MIND GOVERNING ALL. Read history, or such a book as Creasy's 'Decisive Battles of the World,' and note how each great struggle has helped forward the advance of humanity, has bettered the condition of mankind, so that it is terrible to think what, in many instances, would have been the consequences had the events fallen out in an opposite way. The hand of God in history is clearly discernible by all who believe heartily in the living, all-holy, all-loving God.

V. And, of course, THE WHOLE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE SUPPORTS THIS DOCTRINE. (Cf. the story of Joseph, and his answer to his brethren, "It was not you that sent me hither, but God.")

VI. Learn in CONCLUSION: 1. To cast out from your minds every idea or thought of chance, fate, or any mere haphazard coming about of events. 2. How seriously we ought to look at the events of our own lives, and inquire God's meaning in regard to his dealings with us. We are not to be drawn off from this by the imagination that our little lives are far too insignificant for God to care for or direct. Does not God paint the roadside flower, the wing of the moth? Is there anything minute or insignificant in his esteem? 3. Rejoice and be exceeding glad. "Our Father's at the helm." "What we know not now we shall know hereafter." Therefore "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him."—C.

Ver. 7.—*Sin compared to a "fountain."* I. THE COMPARISON JUST. For: 1. *Naturalness.* A fountain or spring bursting out on the hillside excites no surprise as if it were an unheard-of, an extraordinary thing. Nor does the outflow of sin from the human heart. 2. *Continuance.* The streams of each may sing—

> "But men may come and men may go,
> But we flow on for ever."

3. *Having their source "from within."* Out of the depths both alike come. 4. *Unchangeableness in character.* What they were once they are always. 5. *Spon-*

taneousness. No force is needed to draw forth their streams. 6. *Copiousness.* 7. *Effectiveness.* The course of a stream is ever discernible by its effects. It tells on all that it touches, it leaves nothing as it was before it came. 8. *Force.* The fountain *will* have way given to it. It will break all barriers that block its way.

II. THE LESSON IS OBVIOUS. Shall we *divert* its streams, and compel them to run only in quiet safe places where they will cause us no worldly harm? This is what most men try to do, and very often succeed in doing. But this is not God's plan. His charge is, "*Make the fountain good.*" And this he can do; he can create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us. "He that believeth in me," said our Saviour, "from within him shall flow rivers of living water;" not, as now, rivers of death. O Christ—

> "Thou of life the Fountain art,
> Freely let me take of thee:
> Spring thou up within my heart,
> Rise to all eternity."

C.

Ver. 8.—*The worst woe of the wicked.* "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee."

I. THERE ARE MANY WOES WHICH ACCOMPANY SIN. "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked." All observation attests the truth of this word.

II. BUT THERE IS ONE WHICH MAY FITLY BE SPOKEN OF AS THE WORST OF ALL. It is this—God's soul departing from the sinner. This indeed is terrible. It is so amongst men. We hear at times of those who have worn out the love even of those who loved them most tenderly. They have made the soul of those who loved them to depart from them. Sons have done this for fathers and mothers, friends for friends, husbands for wives and wives for husbands; and to have thus driven away a deep and earnest love is a depth of ruin than which none in this world can be more terrible. But to have worn out the love of God—to have made *his* soul to depart from us, what woe can compare to that? His providential favour may depart from us, and that is sad. Our realization of his love in our hearts may depart from us, and that is sadder still. But for his love itself to depart, that is the worst of all.

III. WHAT, THEN, CAN CAUSE SO GREAT A CALAMITY TO COME UPON A MAN? It is his *refusing instruction* (cf. Prov. i., "Seeing thou hatest knowledge," etc.). This Judah and Jerusalem were doing; this all too many are doing now.

IV. BUT THIS GOD DEPRECATES GREATLY, AND IMPLORES US NOT TO BE GUILTY OF. "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem," (cf. our Saviour's tears over Jerusalem). Appeal.—C.

Ver. 9.—"*Turn back thine hand.*" The text, no doubt, tells of the utter and complete desolation which would result from the Chaldean invasion of Judah and Jerusalem. In vivid dramatic form Jehovah is represented as bidding the invading armies go over their ruthless work again, and make the desolation yet more awful. Like as the grape-gatherer, after he had to all appearances stripped the vine of its clusters, would "turn back his hand" amongst the tendrils, and search once more over the whole branch to see that no solitary cluster had escaped him ("tendrils," rather than "baskets," are what is meant; see Exposition); so, if there were a solitary village or homestead which had escaped the fury of the foe, they are bidden go back on their work, that none whatever might escape. Such the meaning, and it was ruthlessly fulfilled. But the form of expression may be applied, not merely to the ministers of God's vengeance, as in the text, but to those who serve him in ways far more acceptable and ordinary. We, therefore, take the charge, "Turn back thine hand as a grape-gatherer," and address it—

I. TO THOSE WHO ARE AT WORK FOR GOD. The *self-satisfied*, who look at their work with too much content, as if it could not be bettered,—these need this charge. And the *discouraged*, who are for throwing up their work, abandoning it in sorrow and despair, believing they can do nothing more,—to them God would say, "Turn back thine hand." To *those who desire to do their work thoroughly.* Go over it again. See how Paul was constantly in the habit of "turning back his hand," *i.e.* going over the Churches that he had established, revisiting them, in order that he might "confirm" them in the

faith (cf. Acts, *passim*). "Line upon line, line upon line," is God's counsel to us in this matter.

II. To THE STUDENTS OF HIS WORD. To none more than to these is this charge necessary, if they are to keep a living interest in God's Word. We come to be so familiar with the main themes, and the forms in which they are expressed, that reading of the Bible comes to be a work in which no thought is aroused, or attention arrested, and we weary of it terribly. Now, it is to the diligent searcher, who will "turn back his hand," go over his work again, and not be content with the truths which lie only on the surface and which every eye can see,—to him shall there be revealed clusters of precious truths which he had never seen before, and the Word of God shall yield to him what it yields only to searchers like himself.

III. To THOSE ANXIOUS FOR THE FRUITS OF GOD'S GRACE IN THEMSELVES. To true-hearted believers it is often a cause of regret that their fruits seem so few and so poor. How often the confession is made of this spiritual fruitlessness! But we need not, ought not, to stay in complaints and confessions. "Turn back thine hand," and search if there may not be more fruit found, and of a better kind. "In *me* is thy fruit found," says God, and it may be we have been looking in the wrong places and to wrong sources for that which we so earnestly desire to see. We may "go on unto perfection," for so bids us the Word of God. Our "whole body, soul, and spirit may be preserved blameless," and we may be "the sons of God without rebuke;" for Christ "is able [has power] to save to the uttermost," and therefore we may be "filled with all the fulness of God." So, Christian brother, "turn back thine hand as a grape-gatherer," and think not thou hast gathered all the fruits of the Spirit that may be borne by thee. Thou hast not.

In conclusion, note how the subject tells of: 1. The *worth* of those objects which we search after. The action of the grape-gatherer, in carefully going over the branch again, testifies to his sense of the value of that for which he searches. And so here in I., II., III. 2. And what is yet left to be gathered *will be more readily found* because of the others that have been gathered. The solitary remaining clusters are seen more easily now that the others which hid them are cleared away. And he who desires to do more work for God, to know more of the truth of God, to bear more fruit unto God, shall find that his former work has been for his help, and on account thereof he is more sure of success. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit;" therefore "turn back thine hand."—C.

Vers. 9—17.—*The preacher's bitter cry.* Profound distress marks the prophet's utterances in this section. The lament over the incorrigible wickedness of men and his own baffled work is loud and long and bitter exceedingly (cf. Christ's tears over Jerusalem; Paul's sorrow over his countrymen).

I. WHAT CAUSED THIS BITTER CRY? His perception of the judgment of God drawing nigh (vers. 9, 12, 15). The obstinacy of the people (vers. 10, 16, 17). The hopelessness of reformation (ver. 13). *All* were corrupt, and the prophets and priests were even leaders in sin (ver. 14). Even the Lord's voice had been despised (ver. 16). Now, when facts like these occur, the judgment of God threatening but those exposed to them obstinately refusing warning; and when those who should have warned them and been their guides in the ways of God are themselves godless, and the voice of God has been heard and deliberately despised, then, as the faithful servant of God sees this awful guilt and its sure, inevitable, and swift-approaching judgment,—then it is that a sense of despair, a deep grief fills the soul, as well it may.

II. WHAT IS A PREACHER TO DO UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES? The first thought is to turn away from the doomed people and to speak no more to them in God's Name. But it is better to take example from the prophet, who was verily as one of those servants who, when those called to the prepared feast would not come, but "made light" of the gracious invitation, each saying, "I pray thee have me excused," went out, at his lord's bidding, into the highways and the hedges and compelled them to come in. So did Jeremiah now (ver. 11). It grieved him to the heart that God's Word should be despised, and he became "full of the fury of the Lord" (cf. ch. xx. 9). Hence he poured out his full heart upon young and old, men, women, and children, wherever he found opportunity of unburdening his soul on this great theme. He was inspired by God to do this, and the fact teaches us that preaching, which may seem to be of no use for the

accomplishment of one result, may yet be of much use in regard to another. Jeremiah's testimony, though it did not save the people from captivity, was of great service to them there, and to the whole Jewish people ever after. His words, which seemed as idle tales when he spoke them, became mighty through God in after days. The neglect, therefore, of our message now should not lead us to cease delivering it, but should rouse us to more zeal, and make us "weary with holding in" (ver. 11). We may be sure that whenever God moves us to speak earnestly his Word, he intends to make our message a means of blessing *some*when and *some*where.

III. WHAT THE PREACHER'S GRIEF REVEALS. It tells much: 1. *Of God.* (1) Of *his love;* for it is ever he who inspires his servants with deep solicitude for men's salvation: it is he who through them is saying, "How can I give thee up?" (2) Of *his righteousness;* for the vivid realization of the coming judgment which his servants have is given them that they may impress upon the impenitent and the ungodly the sure issue of their sins. The prophets who see and declare God's love are they who declare his righteousness also. 2. *Of the preacher himself.* How truly he is sent of God! It is the Spirit of God speaks through him, the love of God leading him to deep love for his fellow-men. If our hearts are greatly filled with a yearning for men's souls, if "rivers of water run down our eyes because men keep not God's law,"—such solicitude is a sure sign of the presence of God with us, and a pledge of his help in delivering our message. 3. *Of men.* How desperately set they are against God! how absolute their need of the renewing power of the Holy Ghost! See what the prophet says (ver. 10): "Their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken." The habit of sin has caused their ear to be overgrown, and its power of hearing stopped, "so that," etc. How should the preacher ever remember this, and supplicate the mighty aid of the Divine Spirit if his message is to do any good!

IV. QUESTIONS IT SUGGESTS. 1. *For preachers and teachers.* Do we know anything of the prophet's grief? Facts all too plentiful and too closely resembling those which filled Jeremiah with the fury of the Lord (ver. 11) abound in our day. Do they excite any similar feeling in ourselves? What need we have to pray and watch against becoming used to sin! and for sympathy with the prophets of God and yet more with Christ, their Lord and ours! 2. *For those who hear the Word of God.* Are you becoming the cause of such grief to any of God's servants? Remember theirs is but the foreshadowing of your own, which will be far greater if you heed not their word. Rather heed that Word, and so become not their bitter grief but their joy now, and their cause of rejoicing in the day of the Lord.—C.

Ver. 10.—*The uncircumcised ear.* I. WHAT IS THIS? Not a *physical* defect, although the figure employed seems to tell of some fleshly growth which has formed over the cavity of the ear, and so destroyed the power of hearing. Nor a *mental* defect. They were acute enough; they readily understood the prophet's meaning when he spoke to them. Their minds were at that very time busy about all sorts of plots and schemes, which they hoped to carry out. Nor was it a *moral* defect. They knew the right, the true, the good. Conscience was still at work and goading them with her reproaches. Hence they devise means (ver. 14) to lull and quiet it. And they had the power of choice, and deliberately chose ways of their own rather than those of God. True, it is said in the text, "And they cannot hearken." But that tells only of what is the perpetual result of refusing continuously to hear God's Word. Let a man tie his arm to his side for six months, and see what power of using it he has left after that. It will have become *atrophied.* And so in like manner do the functions of the soul, the limbs of our spiritual nature. The "will not" in regard to their use darkens down into the dreadful "cannot" of the judgment of God. There is no more awful fact for the faithless servant of God, nor more blessed one for the faithful, than this law of habit. The utterance of it concerning the wicked is, as here, "They cannot hearken;" but concerning the good, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." But it is a *spiritual defect.* It is the result of "the alienated *will*," that which the Bible calls "the unrenewed heart," "the carnal mind," "the unregenerate nature." All such expressions tell of the *will* of man turned away from God, and having no higher motive than to please and gratify self. *That* is the radical defect of us all, and it is that which the prophet here terms "the uncircumcised ear." It by no means

always involves the outrageous wickedness which is told of in their prophecies; it can exist and yet never "commit abomination," as did these to whom Jeremiah spoke. It is found in company with much outward religiousness, much moral propriety, much amiability of character; but wherever it is, Christ's word concerning all such is, "Ye *must* be born again." It is in its nature fierce, savage, unsubdued still. It often seems to be tamed, and moves about soft-footed and gently as if it never could do harm; but let some lure be held out to it, some provocation be given, and then its ferocity and all its hideous evil will reveal itself at once. Accustomed as we are to see this evil nature held in check by the usages of society, the habits of civilized life and a refined selfishness, we are often blind to its true character, and "marvel" much at our Saviour's reiterated word, "Ye must be born again."

II. ITS EFFECTS. 1. Disregard of and dislike to the Word of God. "To whom shall I speak?" said the prophet. He could get no one to listen to him. And this is the too frequent experience of our own day. How deserted the churches are, and where they are better attended, what kind of listening is it that prevails? Granted the intolerable dulness of many preachers, but the evil is not probed when this is said. The true cause is "the uncircumcised ear" that Jeremiah tells of. But not only have men "no delight in" the Word of God, they count it "a reproach." They come to be ashamed of its being thought that they should regard it with interest or have any real care for it. The tone adopted regarding those who do delight in God's Word is one of scorn and contempt. 2. Men go on unchecked in sin (cf. vers. 13, 15, and *passim*). Surely it is a question not merely for the Church, but for thoughtful men of the world, whether it be well for any community or people to be throwing aside all the restraints of God's Word, as so many are doing. The history of Israel of old is a beacon-light, warning the people of our day of what comes from despising the Word of the Lord. 3. God's judgments come upon such people (ver. 12). 4. Men become shameless and hardened (ver. 15). 5. The heart of God's faithful servants is sorely troubled (cf. ver. 10). Here the prophet mourns over their "uncircumcised ears."

III. ABETTORS AND MINISTERS TO THIS EVIL. 1. Unfaithful priests and prophets (ver. 13). 2. The hardening effects of the people's own sin.

IV. THE REMEDY. Yet more impassioned and earnest ministry of the Word. There must be no giving up of work or abandoning it in despair. But—as ver. 11—more intense devotedness in the endeavour, futile as it may appear, to save men from death. 2. The fiery disciplines of God. He is "a consuming fire;" and the fire of his love will burn fiercely on until the evil on which it fastens is burnt out of the soul, the Church, the nation, he loves. Oh, the awfulness of the love of God! If God were *not* love, there might be a possibility of a soul being allowed to perish in its sins and to go its own way to death unchecked; but as the fondest mother will subject her child to terrible suffering for the saving of its life, so, too, will God.

CONCLUSION. What a summons comes to us from these truths: (1) to seek the renewing grace of the Spirit of God; (2) to take heed how we hear!—C.

Ver. 14.—*The vampires of the soul.* There is a hideous creature called the vampire bat, that is said to destroy its victims by sucking their life-blood. Whilst thus destroying them, it gently fans them with its wings, and so keeps them in a profound slumber, from which the probabilities are that they will never wake. And what other are they who lull the souls of sinful men to the sleep of death by "saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace"? No greater crime can be imagined than this of which our text tells. The physician who should pamper a man in his disease, who should feed his cancer or inject continual poison into the system, whilst at the same time he promised sound health and a long life,—such a physician would not be one-half so criminal as the professed religious teacher who should knowingly bid those entrusted to his charge to be at ease and to take comfort, when he ought to be crying, "Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion!" The pilot who should pretend to steer a ship toward its proper haven, but all the while was of intent driving her upon unseen rocks, would not be a worse traitor than the man into whose hands the helm of human souls is entrusted, and whose professed duty it is to steer them towards Christ, but who, instead of so doing, was guiding them to utter ruin, by flattering them that all was well when all was ill. In the great day, when all shall render up their account to God, what awfulness of doom

will not be reserved for him who has been chargeable with blood-guiltiness like this? We observe—

I. THAT IT IS AN ALL TOO FREQUENT SIN. 1. The prophets of Judah and Jerusalem were guilty of it, notwithstanding that (1) they knew the truth; (2) they professed the truth; (3) they were ordained to teach the truth. Still, out of all manner of evil motive they were guilty of this sin. Oh, let all who teach, whether in the pulpit, the home circle, or in the school, remember that their sacred charge and duty may not merely be imperfectly fulfilled—that it ever is; nor even neglected merely, sad as that is; but it may be utterly perverted, and that which was designed to be for our own and others' great good may become the means of our and their more terrible condemnation. From this may God save teachers and taught alike! 2. And there are now those who are bidding men be at peace when there is no peace. (1) They who bid men be at peace on the ground of their moral integrity, their respectability of character, and of the righteousness with which they are credited amongst their fellow-men. God forbid that we should decry or depreciate the value of character, reputation, and integrity amongst men. No, indeed; but all the same we feel that it is a plea all too feeble, and one that cannot avail such as we are before the bar of the all-holy God. (2) They who teach men to trust in sacraments or Church ordinances of any kind. These, too, are precious in their proper place, but regarded as a valid claim to eternal life, apart from the disposition of the heart Godwards, they will save no man, and he who trusts them or teaches others to trust them, is guilty of saying, "Peace, peace," etc. (3) They who rely on a faith which is fruitless in love to God and man. This is the characteristic of all forms of Antinomianism, and though that be "a way which seemeth right unto many men, the end thereof is death." 3. But let us remember that *we* may practically be preaching this fatal peace. Christian men and women, who do nothing for the salvation of those around you; who are eager about amusements, business, worldly position, and all such things, but who are unmoved or but very little moved at the ungodliness in the midst of which you live; what is the conclusion that others draw from this unconcern? Why, that you don't believe what you profess, and that therefore they need not either. And so you encourage them to say, "Peace, peace," etc. Whose conscience is there that does not smite him here? and who of us is there that has no need of the prayer, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation"? And all who are unconcerned about their own eternal welfare. Fathers and mothers who have not sought the Lord, you will die in your sins if you repent not; but you will die not to yourselves merely; you will drag your children down with you, for you are teaching them to be unconcerned and indifferent, when neither you nor they possess any true peace at all. 4. But after all, those who are the most guilty of saying, "Peace, peace," etc., are *sinful men to themselves*. The devil taught men the way very early in the history of our race. "Ye shall not surely die;" so he lyingly declared to our first mother, and she, all too willing to believe that there would be peace though she did disobey God, ruined herself, her husband, and all her children by that one deed. And ever since men who love to disobey have encouraged themselves in their sin by this fatal flattery of their souls of which our text tells. They did so in the days of Noah, "until the flood came and took them all away." See also Belshazzar's feast at the height of merriment, when the handwriting appeared on the wall, and that night Babylon was taken and her king slain. So has it been with the Jewish people—in Jeremiah's time, and so in our Lord's. The Captivity shattered that first false peace, and the utter destruction of Jerusalem the second. And we are told it will be so at the last, in that "day when the Son of man cometh." Observe, then, some of the deceits whereby men beguile themselves into saying, "Peace, peace," etc. They are such as these: (1) The infinite mercy of God. (2) "I am no worse than those who make a religious profession. If they are saved, I shall be too." (3) "Yes, I am going to repent and turn to God; I certainly mean to one day." (4) Religious profession: "I am baptized and take the sacrament." (5) Denying the truth of the Bible: "I have no proof that there is a God, a heaven, or indeed that I have a soul. It is all a 'perhaps;'" so men say. And there are many other such deceits. But now—

II. NOTE HOW THE LIE THAT IS IN ALL SUCH SAYING OF "PEACE, PEACE," ETC., MAY BE DETECTED. A man may hold up a phial of liquid that is colourless, clear, spar-

kling, that seems in all respects like pure, wholesome water. But the skilled chemist drops into it the fitting test, and at once the poisonous substance is precipitated, and thus is made evident to all. Now, with all these deceits of which we have been telling, their true nature may be made manifest if we apply those tests which only the true peace of God will endure. For, if the peace in which we are trusting be a true one and not a deception, it will: 1. Always tend to the making of us holier, purer, more Christ-like. God's peace always does this. It "keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus," it "rules" in our hearts. 2. Stand under the hardest blows of misfortune and earthly sorrow. Listen to its voice: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;" "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord." Now, will peace such as springs from such sources as those told of help a man in straits like those of Job? 3. Be with him in death. 4. Have Christ at the heart of it as its Alpha and its Omega, its beginning and its end.

III. BUT OUR SUREST SAFEGUARD IS NOT IN OUR BEING ABLE TO DETECT THE FALSE PEACE, BUT IN POSSESSING THE TRUE. That is ours when we surrender our souls to Christ. Then we shall have peace indeed. (1) Peace from fear of God's condemnation; (2) peace from dread of guilt; (3) peace from the tyranny and oppression of "the evil one;" (4) peace from the crushing power of earthly sorrow; (5) peace from the terror of the grave and the judgment day; (6) peace in the conscious possession of the love of God. Such is the true "peace of God." Oh, how foolish, then, to barter *that* for the false and fatal pretences of peace which are for ever beguiling the hearts of sinful men! May he who is "our Peace," even Christ, cause us to give heed to his own loving call, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"!—C.

Ver. 15.—*The sin against the Holy Ghost.* I. THIS SIN IS SET FORTH HERE. For the sin is no one definite act, but a condition of mind which renders repentance hopeless and persistence in sin certain (cf. Revised Version, Mark iii. 29, where the true reading is as there given, "is guilty of an eternal *sin*"). But is not this the condition described in the text, described vividly, accurately? They had hardened themselves till repentance, yea, even shame, on account of "abomination" was utterly absent from them. "'They were not at all ashamed,' no tinge of it, not the least 'blush' was visible. Was it not certain that such people who would go on, as they did, in sin, were in danger of eternal sin?" Hence they had never forgiveness, and the prophet was forbidden (see ch. vii. 16) even to pray for them (cf. 1 John v. 16).

II. OTHER INSTANCES OF IT OR APPROXIMATIONS TO IT. 1. Those who with unblushing effrontery ascribed Christ's holy ministry and his deeds of merciful might to Satanic power. They cried out, "Show us a sign from *heaven*," implying that thus far he had only shown them signs from hell. 2. Those who were responsible for the cry, "His blood be on us, and on our children!" And there are instances now. The condition of shamelessness in sin and of helplessness as to repentance may be, and we fear at times is, reached. Therefore note—

III. THE STEPS BY WHICH MEN REACH THIS CONDITION. 1. By disregard of the rebukes of conscience, stifling them, instead of going, as they would prompt, to the mercy-seat, and there confessing the sin. 2. By persistence in sin. 3. By the commission of great sins. 4. By loss of self-respect. 5. By forfeiture of character and the esteem of men.

IV. ITS DOOM. "It hath never forgiveness." "They shall fall among them that fall; they shall be cast down, saith the Lord." Wherefore this? 1. Because sin and sorrow are linked together by a chain that cannot be broken. Therefore where there is eternal sin there must be eternal punishment. The latter keeps pace with the former, and dogs its footsteps for ever. It cannot but be so. 2. Because such men are murderers of other men's souls. They are centres of rebellion against God, of deadly spiritual contagion. Blood-guiltiness is upon them, yea, they are steeped therein. 3. Because God could not be God and not abhor such condition of soul as this sin betrays.

V. ITS SOLEMN LESSONS. 1. Cherish a holy hatred of sin, for its tendency is ever to reproduce itself, and so to become eternal. 2. Beware of disregarding the monitor within—conscience, God's voice in our souls. To do so is to drive away the trusty

sentinel who guards the approaches of the soul against its deadly foes; to pierce and undermine those blessed walls which keep back the inrush of the ocean upon the whole land. Let us not do aught like this. But pray—

"Quick as the apple of the eye,
O God, my conscience make,
Swift to discern when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake."

3. Is sin upon your conscience now? At once confess it, and so find from your Lord forgiveness for it, and more—deliverance from it and from all possibility of that dread sin which the text describes and which hath never forgiveness.—C.

Ver. 16.—*The good old paths.* It is noticeable in the order of nature how God has secured the true adjustment and hence the highest well-being of his universe by means of *the action of contrasted and opposite forces.* By means of that power which the mighty mass of the sun has to draw everything to itself—if this were left alone to operate, the whole of those innumerable orbs that now circle round the sun as their centre would be drawn in upon it and perish. But this is prevented by the action of an opposite force, called the centrifugal, as the first-mentioned is called the centripetal. This opposite force tends, by the velocity with which the planets revolve around the sun, to drive them off and away from it: thus, by the effect of these opposite forces, that perfect harmony and unerring order of the whole stellar universe, which has been the admiration of all observers in all ages, are preserved. *Chemistry* also can furnish illustrations not a few of the beneficent action of opposite forces, where either left alone would work only harm. In the *great law of sex*, the constitution of all life, plant life as well as animal, as male and female, this in all its aspects is another marked instance of the same Divine method. In *political life*, the two great tendencies, monarchial and democratic, or the rule of the one *versus* the rule of the many—the mutual strugglings of these two—keep the world in such equilibrium as we see. In *religion*, the Catholic principle which makes self nothing, and the Protestant principle which makes self all-important, each man having to give an account of himself to God,—these are both designed to contend the one against the other, and whilst Catholicism is to check the selfish individualism into which Protestantism is apt to lapse, Protestantism is in its turn to struggle against that servility of mind into which the principle of self-abnegation, the essential principle of Catholicism, is prone to degenerate. It is in the resultant of these two forces that the purest form of religious life is found. And in regard to *the life of obedience to God*, the life which he would have us live here on earth, that, too, is governed by the action of opposed laws. There is the law which works through our bodily nature, and which if left alone would make us, not in body only but in soul, of the earth earthy, for ever "grovelling here below." But there is the opposed law which works through our spiritual nature; but, blessed as it is, it needs to be disciplined and made perfectly healthful to us by means of the salutary necessity of giving heed in due measure to the lesser law just spoken of. The first preserves us from being mere enthusiasts, the second from the far greater peril of enslavement to the world, the flesh, and the devil acting through them. And in those two tendencies, one of which is plainly referred to in this sixteenth verse and the other implied, the love of the old is contrasted with the love of the new. Here, again, we have et before us two great forces in humanity, which by their mutual contentions preserve it tolerable health and comfort, and ensure its steady, onward progress. Conservatism and liberalism are not the products of any one national revolution, like our own in 1688, but they are two God-implanted tendencies of the human mind, each of which has its appropriate and most useful function, and neither of which can be dispensed with without harm to the whole body politic in every nation under the sun. To lie like a log on the ocean of human life, useless and despised amid the nationalities of the world, is the doom of those who will blindly close their eyes to the fresh light and truth which are for ever breaking forth upon the world; to run upon the rocks and make shipwreck of everything is the doom of those who despise the teachings of experience, and care only to be for ever finding out some new way and to follow some new guide. But let these two act and react each on the other—the love of the old

upon the love of the new, the tendency to be always looking back upon the tendency to be always looking forward, and then the result is that men will come generally to practically act upon that prudent, though to many minds most prosaic, maxim which counsels—

"Be not the first by whom the new is tried,
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

But in regard to the way in which God would have us go, our text teaches—

I. THAT THERE ARE NO NEW WAYS. From the beginning that which the Lord God hath required of man has been, even as it yet is, that we should "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God." The gospel of the Lord Jesus is not to supersede or make void this eternal law, but to establish it as it never had been or could have been before. "What the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh," did, "that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us." For this end, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the burden of guilt is taken off from us, and a new heart and a right spirit given. But the law of life is ever the same. It is the old and good way.

II. NEVERTHELESS, MEN ARE CONTINUALLY DEVISING NEW WAYS. It was so in Jeremiah's time; it is so in our own. By denials of truths most surely believed amongst us for many generations, or by additions thereto, or by substitutions of other forms of faith, men have done to-day as in the days of old. Every magazine and newspaper, besides innumerable volumes ever issuing from the press,—all alike are popular as they throw over old ideas and propound "some new thing." Science and secularism and superstition between them would, long ere this, have destroyed the good old way, had it not been so firmly constructed that all these powers combined are not adequate for such a task.

III. IN THESE NEW WAYS WHAT IS TRUE WILL BE FOUND TO BE OLD, AND WHAT IS NOT OLD WILL BE FOUND TO BE NOT TRUE. For there are *tests* by which new teachings may be tried, and ought to be tried, and by which the prophets of God tried the new teachings of their day. 1. *The test of conscience.* The human conscience confesses God. It is borne in upon the human heart that God is. Nothing can permanently stifle or destroy that confession, which Conscience, left to herself, would ever make. The very word "conscience" implies the recognition of some other being as with us, in us, around and about us. It confesses God. All teachings, therefore, that deny God, or explain him away as a blind force or law, or identify him with his universe, the pantheist's God,—these teachings by this sure test are tried, and found wanting. 2. *The test of result.* Note what is the result of any professed truth upon *personal happiness.* God, who has given us so many things richly to enjoy, must from his very nature purpose the blessedness of his children. But if a system be offered us, the inevitable result of which is to blot out hope, to shut us up to this often most miserable life, as all they would do who would take from us the Christian hope—then its drear and dread effect upon the heart of man proclaims it false. See, too, how any teaching tells upon *character.* Here is a surer test still. Whatever else is dark and obscure, goodness and truth must ever be right. But if any new doctrines tend to deteriorate character, as many of them do, to make sin easier and virtue more difficult; if they throw the reins upon our lower nature; if they take away the great motives to nobleness of life;—then again they are demonstrated false. And note their effect upon *society generally.* Can the denial of God's existence, of the religious basis of morality, as Mr. Herbert Spencer denies it, of the authority of Holy Scripture, of the sanctity of the sabbath, of the Divine mission of the Son of God, of the resurrection of the dead, the judgment and future blessedness or woe depending upon our lives here;—can the denial of any of these things, which, alas! is common enough now, tend to the good of society? Must not the general well-being of mankind be greatly threatened if such doctrines be generally accepted? But doctrines that would thus destroy good are *ipso facto* declared to have no part nor lot in the kingdom of truth. By these tests of conscience and result let the new ways be tried, and it will be seen that what in them is true is old, and what is not old is not true.

IV. WHEREFORE, THEN, DO MEN DEVISE THESE NEW WAYS? The causes are sometimes: 1. *Intellectual.* Mental restlessness on the part of some will lead men, even in the most perilous matters, to be doubting the old and devising what is new. And God

often suffers them to wander in the far and drear country of mental unrest, and to feed upon its husks, and so come to themselves, and arise and go back to their Father's heart and home, from whence it had been better had they never strayed. 2. Sometimes, and more often, *moral*. Religion is that which binds. It is a ligature, a restraining cord upon the evil propensities of our nature. If, therefore, doctrines be offered which will relax that little-loved bond, they will be eagerly welcomed. A faith that will give not true liberty, but "licence," men will ever love. 3. And always *spiritual*. Where the heart is surrendered to Christ the mind will not be ensnared by these subtleties of the evil one. If the Holy Spirit of God have wrought in us the great regenerating change, we shall have liberty and deliverance from all these. Safety from the wanderings of the intellect, as well as from the worse wanderings of our sinful nature, are alike ensured to him who has given himself up unreservedly to God.

V. BUT THOSE WHO WOULD WALK IN THE WAY GOD WOULD HAVE THEM GO MAY KNOW THE WAY BY ITS BEING "OLD" AND GOOD. All old ways are not good, but the way of God is both. It is old, therefore familiar to many; has been often described, is well marked out; its different stages are well known. "The wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein." And it is good. It leads to him who is the supreme Good —God. It has been the chosen way of all the good. It makes those good who walk therein. He who alone on this earth of ours was perfectly good—our Lord Jesus—walked in it, and lives to enable us to walk therein also. It is the will of God that we should walk therein. "Its ways are all ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace." "Ye shall find rest to your souls." For all these reasons it is the good way as well as the old; therefore let us "stand," "see," and "ask" for this way, and this way alone.—C.

Ver. 16.—*At the meeting of the ways.* "Stand ye in the ways," etc.

I. THIS IS WHERE VERY MANY ARE. The young especially. Paths stretch out on either hand, some of them inviting, some repelling. But for the young, and for many others beside who have not yet fully chosen their path, the present is a time when a decided choice must be made. If the matter were to be settled according to the inviting or other aspect of the *beginning* of the ways, the one we should choose would soon be fixed upon. But we have to take into consideration the progress of the way, and, above all, the end of the way. Here the text gives—

II. GOOD COUNSELS FOR ALL WHO HAVE COME TO THIS MEETING OF THE WAYS. We are bidden: 1. *Pause a while.* "*Stand* ye in the ways." Oh, if we could but secure this thoughtful pause! if we could but induce those we are now contemplating to "ponder" a while the paths before them! if it were but realized that the way we take is a matter for consideration, and that only a fool would rush heedlessly on! 2. *Investigate.* As one at the meeting of the ways, but not certain which was the right one for him, would look along each way in turn, and "see" which appeared to be the most likely to bring him to his desired destination. Therefore we are bidden, not only "stand," but "see." 3. *Inquire.* Other travellers come along—men who are familiar with the district, who have traversed one or other of these roads themselves. Then let us avail ourselves of their knowledge and experience, and "ask" as to these ways. 4. *And let your mind be made up as to the character of the way you desire to walk in.* Let there be no mere vague, listless looking over all the paths without much concern which of them you take; but we are bidden, "Ask for the *old* paths . . . the *good* way."

> "The way the holy prophets went,
> The way that leads from banishment,
> The King's highway of holiness."

All the "old" paths are not also "good ways;" far from it. But there is an old, and therefore well-known, well-trodden, and hence unmistakable way, which also is the *good* way. One purpose of the lives of God's faithful people is that, by the observation in the record of them, men may be led to ask for the paths in which these walked, feeling sure the way they took must be a good, *the* good way. Happy they who have been led to resolve they will find out the secret of such men's lives and make it their own. These will ask, not for any way, but for the old paths, the good way.

III. GREAT ENCOURAGEMENTS TO FOLLOW THIS COUNSEL. 1. It is implied that if such guidance be asked it will be given. For, if that guidance were not given, how could any walk in these paths? That it is open to them to do so proves that the guidance asked has been given. And so it ever will be. 2. It is promised that, if we walk in the old and good way, we shall find "rest" to our souls. After all, this is everything. If a man has inward rest and peace, heaven for him has begun below. What matters it what we have if this rest be not? What matters what we have not if this rest be ours? And it is a *true* rest—not a mere lethargy of the soul or sleep of conscience, but that "rest which remaineth for the people of God," the rest of faith, the rest promised by the Lord Jesus when he said, "Come unto me, . . . and I will," etc.

IV. CHRIST HIMSELF IS THAT WAY—THE OLD, THE GOOD WAY. Let the will be utterly surrendered to him; let our faith daily look to him; then "he shall be made to us of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." This is what he meant when he said, "*I* am the Way."

> "This is the way I long had sought,
> And mourned because I found it not;
> Till late I heard my Saviour say,
> 'Come hither, soul, *I* am the Way.'"

And *so* we shall find rest to our souls.—C.

Vers. 18—30.—*God's appeal for vindication of his vengeance.* Note—

I. THE CHALLENGE. (Ver. 18.) God summons the nations, the congregations, the earth, to serve as on a grand jury, and to vindicate by their verdict the righteousness of his procedure. Now, from this challenge we learn: 1. *The universality of conscience.* There is a moral sense, a knowledge of right and wrong, implanted in all men by God. It is "the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." 2. That God desires to have this universal conscience approving what he has done. (1) He takes for granted that his procedure will be scanned and judged by men. (2) But this he desires and approves. (3) He asks only for a true deliverance upon the case before them. 3. God desires us to regard his actions, not as right because they are his, but as his because they are right. It is a perilous thing to defend the rectitude of Divine actions—as they have been defended, *e.g.* the massacres of the Canaanites—on the ground that his will makes them right. *That* is not the method whereby we are to "vindicate the ways of God to man." Abraham did not so, but asked, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Not *make* right, but *do* it. But what condescension on the part of God, thus to submit himself to our judgment! But he does this because he so yearns for our love, and because love cannot be apart from moral approval.

II. THE STATEMENT OF THE MATTER ON THE PART OF GOD. 1. God declares what he will do (vers. 19—21). 2. How he will accomplish his purpose (vers. 22, 23). 3. How terrible its accomplishment will be (vers. 24—26). And then he gives: 4. The grounds of his procedure (vers. 19, 28, 29).

III. THE CALLING OF THE WITNESS. (Ver. 27; cf. Exposition.) Jeremiah was to observe and declare the guilt of those whom God condemned.

IV. THE VERDICT ANTICIPATED. (Ver. 30.) Men shall call them "reprobate silver."

CONCLUSION. Let us tremble at that righteousness of God which the whole earth will confess when he condemns the sinner. Let us lay hold on that righteousness of God which is for us in Christ.—C.

Ver. 19.—*The fruit of thought.* I. THOUGHT HAS FRUIT. In all departments of life its fruit is seen—scientific, political, social, moral, religious. Thoughts are *born* in some one mind. *Sown* by words spoken or written, and by the influence of the lives of those in whom they are born; they *germinate* by contact with other minds; they *appear above ground* in the tendencies of any given age; they *bear fruit* in the achievements of the age.

II. THOUGHT BEARS GOOD FRUIT OR EVIL, ACCORDING AS THE LAW OF GOD IS HEEDED OR REJECTED. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto *according to thy Word*."

III. THE CHIEF PARTAKER OF THE FRUIT OF THOUGHT WILL BE THE THINKER. (Cf. text.) And it is true both of good thoughts and ill. As a man thinketh so is he.

CONCLUSION. Let it be our prayer that we may come into full sympathy with him who said, "How precious are *thy* thoughts unto me, O God!" So shall the fruit of our thoughts be precious likewise.—C.

Ver. 20.—*Abhorred sacrifices.* I. THERE ARE SUCH. (Cf. text; Ps. l.; etc.)

II. THEY MAY HAVE MANY OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICES. 1. Costly: "Incense from Sheba." 2. Regular. 3. Correct.

III. BUT YET THEY ARE ABHORRED OF GOD. "To what purpose," etc.? (Cf. our Lord's denunciations of hypocrites.) This because: 1. They lack sincerity. 2. They yield no fruit in holy obedience. 3. They cause the Name and worship of God to be hated of men. 4. They render more hopeless the true repentance of the offerer.

IV. WHEREFORE ARE THEY OFFERED? 1. Conscience will not allow men to throw off all regard for religion. 2. Custom demands it. 3. Worldly interests are served by it. 4. There is a secret reliance upon them as furthering their good before God.

V. WHAT DO SUCH FACTS TEACH US? Not to throw aside outward forms of worship: many do this on the ground of insincerity often associated with them. But to see that whilst we worship outwardly we worship also in spirit and in truth. To measure the worth of our worship by its power over our conduct. To join on all our poor, marred offerings, which is all that at the best they are, with the perfect sacrifice which Christ has offered for us all.—C.

Ver. 29.—"*The bellows are burned.*" The text is a homely and unusual one, but its graphic force may help all the more to impress the truth taught by it. "The prophet likens the people of Israel to a mass of metal. This mass of metal claimed to be precious ore, such as gold or silver. It was put into the furnace, the object being to fuse it, so that the pure metal should be extracted from the dross. Lead was put in with the ore to act as a flux (that being relied upon by the ancient smelters as quicksilver now is in these more instructed days). A fire was kindled, and then the bellows were used to create an intense heat, the bellows being the prophet himself. He complains that he spoke with much pathos, much energy, much force of heart, that he exhausted himself, without being able to melt the people's hearts; so hard was the ore that the bellows were burned before the metal was melted—the prophet was exhausted before the people were impressed; he had worn out his lungs, his powers of utterance; he had exhausted his mind, his powers of thought; he had broken his heart, his powers of emotion; but he could not divide his people from their sins, and separate the precious from the vile" (C. H. Spurgeon). Now, from the text learn—

I. IT IS THE PURPOSE OF GOD SO TO MELT AND SUBDUE THE HEART OF MAN THAT HE MAY MOULD IT AFRESH, AND ACCORDING TO HIS OWN GRACIOUS WILL. Now to this end there are needed: 1. *A Divine fire* which shall bear upon the heart of man. But the Holy Spirit is such a fire, which, if it be quenched, woe is unto us! 2. That that fire *shall glow with fervent heat.*

II. TO SECURE THIS HE MAKES USE OF MANY AND VARIED APPLIANCES WHICH THE PROPHET HERE LIKENS TO "BELLOWS." 1. *The prophets own ministry* in the case of Judah and Jerusalem at that time. 2. The faithful ministry of his truth *by his prophets now.* 3. *His Law, his Word, the varied means of grace.* 4. *His mercies, especially the mercy of God in Christ.* 5. *His chastisements and judgments.* These more especially referred to here. Such are some of these appliances.

III. NOW, IT IS POSSIBLE FOR ALL THESE TO BECOME UTTERLY INEFFECTUAL. This is what is here meant. God's *messengers, Law, mercies, chastisements,*—all in vain. And such things *happen now.* There are those whom nought can move. *What is the cause?* Not that the Divine heat did not bear upon the heart that was to be melted. Not that those appliances were left unused whereby the understanding, the conscience, the affections, and the will might be rendered more susceptible of the Divine influences. But *the obduracy of the heart.* The perversity and evil of that baffled all the earnest endeavours of God's grace in regard to that heart.

IV. NOW, WHEN "THE BELLOWS ARE BURNED," WHEN ALL MEANS HAVE BEEN

TRIED AND FAILED TO WIN THE HEART FOR GOD, NO CONDITION CAN BE MORE AWFUL OR DEPLORABLE. 1. It is sad *for God's ministers.* Jeremiah, Paul, Christ, and thousands of his ministers since have prayed and wept over obdurate hearts. 2. *But it is far more sad for these hard-hearted ones themselves.* (1) They are without excuse. (2) There is no hope of their repentance. (3) They are in danger of eternal sin.

CONCLUSION. 1. Christ's ministers must expect that, *so far as they can see,* they will, at times, labour in vain in regard to the salvation of souls. The bellows will be burned, and the ore remain unmelted still. 2. They are to be sustained by the thought that God will deal with them, not according to the results of their work, but according to its fidelity. 3. Let the impenitent be warned.—C.

Ver. 16.—*The good way.* The prophet here employs the memory of the past as a motive to repentance. He would fain persuade the people to return to the better ways in which their fathers walked. The calamities that were falling so heavily upon them were the result of their having forsaken those good old ways. Let them consider how they have fallen, search out the real causes of the trouble and sorrow they endure, retrace their wandering steps, and the old prosperity shall come back to them again. Note here—

I. THE DIVERSE WAYS MEN TAKE, diverse as regards their moral quality and issues. "Stand ye in the ways." Think of the various kinds of moral life that men are leading. Amid the social conditions and relations of this world we are as travellers with many paths branching out in different directions before them, who must choose their own. We may know little of the internal experiences of our associates in the pilgrimage of life, but the broad types of character, the general tendencies of moral habit, are open enough to our view. The "ways" are many, but there is only one path of eternal rectitude and blessedness. There is the way of reckless transgression, of thoughtless indifference, of base avarice, of exclusive devotion to earthly ambitions, of mere virtuous respectability, of religious indecision, etc.; and there is the way of faith and piety, "the path of the just which is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Men cannot help to some extent revealing outwardly the tenor of the life within them. Every one of us bears more or less clearly upon him the stamp of a certain distinctive character. Whatever the bent of his spirit may be, it will always betray itself, in look, manner, speech, conduct, by the books he reads, the friendships he forms, the places he frequents, the gratifications in which he delights, through a thousand channels of self-revelation. We are all "living epistles" of something—some type of character, some order of moral life—"known and read of men."

II. THE THOUGHTFUL OBSERVATION THESE CONDITIONS DEMAND. "Stand in the ways, and see." It is a great thing to know how to "see." There are those who "seeing, see not." One of the first lessons in the moral science of life, as in physical science, is observation—to know how to note facts and trace laws and draw conclusions, to know how to learn and to turn what is learnt to good account. The characters and lives of others are not to be to us mere matters of amusement or philosophic speculation, much less ill-natured criticism; but sources of instruction, teachers of practical truth. They all have their admonitory and exemplary use. The higher advantages of social life have never been reaped, the very rudiments of our duty as social beings have not been mastered, till we thoroughly apprehend this. Let the young specially lay the lesson to heart. Their position is favourable—the plain of life before them, not yet entangled in a network of circumstantial difficulties, nothing to undo that ought never to have been done, no false steps to retrace that were rashly taken. But how soon may they be drawn into forbidden and dangerous paths if they do not consider! As the ship glides imperceptibly from the open sea into the broad mouth of the river, whose distant banks are hidden, so easily are they led captive to the power of evil if they allow themselves to drift with the tide of outward influence and inward impulse, and will not *think.* At the same time, enlarged experience of life may be expected to give added force to its moral lessons. Beset as a man may be with associations that seem to determine his course for him in spite of himself, it is always possible for him to pause and consider his way. The darkness and confusion of the storm may be too great to allow the sailor to take his observations and find out his real place on

the pathless ocean; not so with any man as concerns his relation to the heavenly powers and the eternal realities. He has always light enough to "discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not" (Mal. iii. 18). The true way of life is clearly revealed to those who are willing to "see." "The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein" (Isa. xxxv. 8).

III. THE PRACTICAL RESULT TO WHICH SUCH OBSERVATION MUST LEAD. "Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein." Asking and acting, inquiry after the right way, and a resolute determination to follow it; when these conditions are supplied there can be little doubt as to the issue. A life of practical godliness, based on faith in revealed truth, springing from the inspiration of the spirit of truth and purity in the secret soul,—this is the way. It is the "old way." New as regards the light Christianity has shed upon it, new as regards the revelation of him in whose redeeming work its deep foundations have been laid, it is "old" as regards its essential principles of faith and righteousness. The martyrs, prophets, and holy men of every age have left their glowing footprints upon it. Elijah ascended from it in his chariot of fire. David made the statutes of the Lord his delight as he pursued his pilgrimage along it. Abraham trod the same path, led on by the star of promise. Upon it Enoch walked in lowly fellowship with God. It is stained with the blood of righteous Abel.

"Our glorious Leader claims our praise
For his own pattern given;
While the long cloud of witnesses
Show the same path to heaven."

The way is as plain as Divine teaching and human experience can make it; let us gird up the loins of our minds to "walk in it."

IV. THE REWARD OF PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE. "Ye shall find rest unto your souls." "Rest," for beings such as we are, is the repose of the mind in discovered truth, the pacification of the conscience in the assurance of Divine forgiveness, the satisfaction of the heart in the embrace of real good, the balance of all our powers in a holy service. In the life of faith and godliness, the life Christ gives to all who come to him, can such rest alone be found. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. xi. 29).—W.

Ver. 7.—*Jerusalem like a fountain casting forth evil.* A fountain, as mentioned in Scripture, is generally suggestive of a most gracious and abundant supply of the highest good; even as in ch. ii. 13 and John iv. 14. How very noteworthy, then, to find that the fountain, which naturally suggests all that is bright, beautiful, and refreshing, should be so turned away from its common place in poetic use as to become the most impressive illustration of Jerusalem's polluted heart! Indeed, an imaginative writer would probably get severely criticized if he used the figure of a fountain for such a purpose; and yet, when one thinks it over, this very unexpectedness makes the figure more instructive. The poetry of a prophet must, above all things, have arresting power in it. Think, then, of the fountain. Think of it, first of all, in its usual aspect, pouring forth a bright, pleasant-sounding stream, as inspiring to the mind as it is refreshing to the thirsty mouth. But all this view must be instantly and decidedly put away. Instead of the clear, sparkling water there must come into the mind the thought of a feculent, poisonous flood, and of the force that lies behind it, some deep inward energy hidden in the secret places of the earth. A continuity of most pestiferous evil comes from these secret places, and even by such an image as this is the actual wickedness of Jerusalem set forth. The hearts of its people are gathering-places for a destructive stream, always flowing forth and always replenished. They never get tired of their wickedness and never repent of it. Then one remembers that the hearts of men were destined for a very different purpose. Just as the devout heart perceives that God meant these crevices and great caverns in the earth to gather and pour forth the refreshing streams of water, so he meant the hearts of the children of men to gather and pour forth all manner of loving, hopeful, patiently pursued projects for the good of others and for the glory of God. The woman of Samaria evidently came to Jesus with a heart that was indeed a fountain casting out wickedness, but she heard the delightful news that Jesus could give her water which should be in her "a well of water

springing up into eternal life." There is another Jerusalem besides this earthly and polluted one. Jeremiah was not the only one who told people to fly out of it because of impending destruction. Jesus, in his prophetic words, spoke with even greater emphasis—a thing to be expected. The earthly Jerusalem, great and glorious as it once was, is now called spiritually Sodom and Egypt, for it is the place *where our Lord was crucified* (Rev. xi. 8). The Jerusalem to be thought of henceforth is the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. It has many glories, many beauties, many surpassing gifts of grace for needy men, and not the least is this, that there is "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." And may we not say that this river is constituted by the numberless fountains that flow out of every renewed heart? The glory of the river is God's, but the service and dedication which bring that river into existence are the privilege of God's people. We are to let our thoughts dwell on the deplorable fountain Jeremiah speaks of here, only that we may see more clearly and gratefully the spring of true and abiding goodness which he can put in its place.—Y.

Ver. 13.—*Covetousness a universal sin.* It is not so much of covetousness in itself that the prophet is here speaking, as of the universality of it. From the least even to the greatest the spirit of the spoiler is in the hearts of the people. The words, of course, are not to be taken literally as to individuals; but there is this universality about them, that they apply to every class. That a man is rich, and increased with goods, and that he has, indeed, a great deal more than he can ever enjoy in his own person, is far from being a general ground for supposing that he will be contented with his possessions. The more he has and the higher he stands, the more he may want to have and the higher he may want to get. And so all the way up the ladder from the lowest round, men are continually struggling with one another. It is a ladder, the lowest round of which will hold a great multitude, but it ever narrows as it ascends; and the covetous who happen to be also strong and consequently victorious over their feebler competitors, go clambering on as long as one's eye rests upon them. No one ever seems to reach the top of the ladder; and it may be said moreover that, though there seem many who are free from the spoiling spirit, it simply arises from this, that there has been nothing to bring the dormant germ into life and activity. No one can tell what possibilities of evil lie within him. And may not the essential element in covetousness be a strong motive force even when it is hidden away under the appearance of something else? One thing is very certain, that covetousness prevailed from the least even to the greatest in Jerusalem; it will also do so in every other human society. It is in human nature to have strong desires of the heart, strong and imperative even as hunger and thirst; and these desires will go out after things that can be seen and felt, enjoyed with the senses. To whom these things may of right belong is, alas! a secondary consideration with many men. They simply do not reflect upon it at all. Life resolves itself into a struggle between him who wants and him who has, and, if the truth must be spoken, the victor in such a struggle is practically a robber. There may be no physical violence, no shedding of blood; but if there is the enriching of one's self at the expense of another, then the essential wrong is present. Let us allow the covetous man whatever credit there may be in this, that he does not form his covetous designs for any pleasure that he has in rapacity, but rather that he is rapacious in order to carry out his covetous designs. He wants to be rich and strong, and the only way he can do it is by crushing others into poverty. Hence this is reckoned an unavoidable accompaniment. It never strikes men of this sort that there is a more excellent way to satisfy and exhilarate the heart. *God's eye is upon this universal desire for large possessions*, and he can make a Divine and truly wise use of the desire. He turns our thoughts to the heavenly, the unseen, the eternal. Man does well in having the largest views as to possessions; he does well in looking to an immense increase of goods. It is a grand thing when he can pull down his barns and build greater, if it is only spiritual wealth that he is heaping up. In this gathering of goods there is no spoiling of the brethren, leaving them hungry, naked, and unsheltered. The spiritual wealth of the godly man makes poverty to none. Nay, rather—beautiful contrast—the richer he becomes, the richer he makes all with whom he comes in *living* contact.—Y.

Ver. 14.—*Healing the hurt slightly.* There is here an illustration of the false dealing referred to in the previous verse—an illustration from the prophets in particular, and, as might be expected, the specimen given shows how seriously this false dealing affected the prospects of the nation. There is, it will be observed, a plain statement of the matter wherein the prophets were deceivers; and there is also a figure setting forth the practical result of the deception.

I. CONSIDER THE PLAIN STATEMENT OF THAT WHEREIN THE PROPHETS ARE FOUND LIARS. They say, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace." The plain statement comes later than the figure, but it is needful to consider it first. War, invasion, humiliating conquest,—these had been threatened by the true prophet, but the false prophets come in and declare that there shall be peace. The word "peace" was probably one of the ordinary mutual salutations of the people; and these prophets, going out into the public places when war had been threatened, may have thrown into the salutation a special emphasis, as much as to say, "This Jeremiah speaks a lie when he prophesies war." And this word of the prophets showed that they did not comprehend where the hostility really lay. The hostile relations between the invading human hosts and Israel amounted to the merest trifle compared with the hostility between Jehovah and those who had been named as *his people.* The essence of the struggle lay, not in its being a struggle between invader and invaded, but between rightful Master and rebellious servants. The invader indeed may not have been conscious of any particular enmity against Israel. The chief passion in his heart may have been nothing more than savage lust for the exercise of force and the acquirement of spoil. But between God and his people there was a deep breach in all right relations. God wars against them, and therefore they were not to suppose that peace was secured, even if they kept on amicable terms with foreign nations. But, in truth, no amount of finessing, parading, and boasting could keep them permanently right with foreign nations. To suppose this was to suppose that they could pluck the weapons of God's chastening anger from his firm grasp. When God takes the wicked to become his sword, his sword they are, to be wielded with no uncertain efficacy. Men make the blunder of thinking there is peace, when they have only conciliated what enemies they can see and hear into invisibility and silence.

II. CONSIDER THE FIGURE WHICH ADDS TO THE FORCE OF THE PLAIN STATEMENT. It is a figure which does much to bring to the individual Israelite the serious consequences of this false dealing on the part of the prophets. War, while always a national disaster and anxiety, may leave individuals unscathed; nay, there are always a few who manage to build up some sort of prosperity and renown by successful war. But here is a figure which speaks of healing and of hurt, and of those who have to heal the hurt. The prophet is set forth as the surgeon, whose business it is to enter the home and put right again the malady that may be afflicting some member of it. This figure, too, it will be observed, tells us something of the feeling of the people, and thereby goes beyond the plain statement as to the false dealing of the prophets. 1. *There is a consciousness that all is not right.* There is a hurt. There is something to be healed. There is a sense of uneasiness, a sense which somehow must be taken away. The words of Jeremiah inflict superficial wounds and bruises at the least. There is a pain in the inward consciousness which is like the slashing of a whip upon the tender skin. Such messages as those which God put into the prophet's mouth were sure to hurt the pride of a nation, and rouse its patriotism into egotistic fury. Then we may be sure that some of the people would feel that the prophet might be speaking the truth. Some things he said were undeniable. The idol-worship was plain; so were the trickery and oppression which abounded in the common life of the people. And all this sense of uneasiness, which is really the sign that conscience is not utterly dead, only needs to be treated rightly in order to be roused into a vigorous life. 2. *The nature of the hurt is misunderstood.* This is the least that can be said. It may have been understood by some of the prophets, and yet, for their own base purposes, misrepresented. Jeremiah describes the hurt by its true name. The word in the Hebrew is a very strong word, meaning something very serious, something which demands great skill and effort, if it is to be put right. Who can exaggerate the seriousness of the crisis, when some malady going to the very heart of a man seems to awaken no corresponding alarm, either in his own mind or in the mind of his physician? And

what a serious charge to bring against a physician if he seeks to lull alarm by making out the trouble to be a mere trifle! Yet this is just what many do. When the sense of unrest gets into the life, it is counted but as a physical illness. Change of air and scene are prescribed for symptoms which can only be permanently removed by change of heart. The more worldly and unspiritual a man is, the more dogmatism, recklessness, and overbearing arrogance he will show in lecturing those who have become disturbed in their consciences. 3. There is thus declared to be healing, when *there is not the slightest possibility of it.* Assurances are given which have no real foundation in anything the assurer knows or has done. He has been giving great attention to the visible cuts and bruises, and the deep, internal, organic injury is more firmly fixed than ever. Men will thus play the physician, try to get credit for their skill, and do untold harm, when they ought rather, in all humility and modesty, to confess their ignorance.—Y.

Ver. 16.—*The ancient paths to be sought and walked in.* I. THE ADDRESS IS TO THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY WALKING IN A CERTAIN WAY. There is activity of the whole life, a conscious and chosen activity. We are sometimes spoken of as being asleep and needing to be awakened out of sleep, and even as being dead and needing to be renewed to life; but here there is rather an approach to the other extreme in the aspect of sinful man that is presented. One kind of movement in human life lies beyond choice. Man must move on, from birth, through time, into eternity. This is a movement which, as he does not produce it, so neither can he in the least retard it. But now we are called to notice another kind of movement, that which man chooses—emphatically chooses—and into which he throws oftentimes his whole energy. Thus there is no man but what is in a path which he has chosen. However much he may seem to be the sport of circumstances, yet it will be found, in the complete inspection of his heart, that he loves to have circumstances moving him rather than that he should do what he can towards controlling circumstances. Moreover, the address is to those who are walking in a *wrong* way. Evidently they are *persisting* in it. And it is not only wrong, but *seriously,* even *fatally,* wrong. Yet, though the address is to those in the wrong way, there is every reason why those who happily are *in the right way* should also consider the appeal. If it is very difficult to turn from the wrong way into the right, it is very easy to make some divergence, at first imperceptible, from the right way, and so become most dangerously entangled in the wrong one.

II. THERE IS AN APPEAL TO THOSE ADDRESSED, TO GIVE THE MATTER IN QUESTION MOST EARNEST CONSIDERATION. There is surely a great deal in these two words, *see* and *ask.* The difference between right and wrong is also the difference between the soul's highest bliss and deepest misery; but it is a difference only to be comprehended when the soul is thoroughly in earnest to get to the bottom of all that is involved in the difference. Hence we are told to look; and we must be sure that we see as we ought to see. It is quite possible to have eyes and to look towards a thing, and yet to be practically blind, not discerning the real nature of it. A man's ways may be right in his own eyes; he may think the warnings of others, or the differing course that they take, to be mere scrupulosity, ending in nothing. Wherefore a man is to distrust his eyes, and add to what they may tell him the information to be gotten by the hearing of the ear. It is interesting to notice how sometimes the eye confirms the ear, and sometimes the ear the eye. Here the man is to make the tongue follow the eye, asking to follow upon seeing; so that he may get information on a matter of the utmost moment from authorities on whom he may depend with the utmost confidence. We must not dare to blame any one but ourselves if we make some gross error in the conduct of our life. God knows how easily the children of men wander; and so he expects them to do all they can by way of making sure that they are in the right road. Consider how alert some people are, in travelling by rail, lest perchance an omitted inquiry may send them in a wrong direction. A prudent man will never miss his way for want of asking. Yet these very people, who are reckoned prudent in such a small matter as finding their way from one place to another on the surface of the earth, are indifferent to an event which it is awful to contemplate, when they are told to see and ask if they be in the right way for eternity.

III. OBSERVE THE DEFINITENESS WHICH IS GIVEN TO THE LOOKING AND THE ASKING.

Man is not sent out on a vague quest, with nothing to guide and to limit him. If he will look where God points, and ask the questions which God puts into his mouth, his quest will soon be at an end. The right path is indicated by infallible signs. It is *the ancient one;* the way which began to be trodden, not one or two generations back, but as far back as the record of human relations extends. The right way is older than the wrong. The way appointed for the first progenitors of mankind, when they stepped out where none had been before them, is the way for us. As to *essentials*, Christ points out no different way from that which Adam was set to travel. Adam's path was to be the path of strict *attention*, so that he might understand God's will; of strict *obedience* in doing the will when understood; and of perfect *trust* in God, feeling that his commandments for his dependent and finite creatures were the best, even though reasons for them might not be given. The most ancient of all paths prescribed for men is that of a willing handing over of one's life to the will of that wise, loving, and holy One who is supreme. All that Christ has told us, all he has done for us, is for the purpose of leading us into an effectual compliance with the requirement. Does not the experience of Enoch show that the right path is an ancient one? What more can be said of the most devoted Christian, rich in all the resources of grace, than that he has walked with God? What else can there be but true good and rest undisturbed when one is under the immediate influence of that God whose own peace knows not the slightest invasion amid all the commotion of the universe? Real rest, a rest to the heart, was wanted by these people of Israel, and all that was so much wanted would surely come if only the ancient paths were found and once more frequented.—Y.

Ver. 20.—*Sweet and fragrant things made abominable to God.* I. OBSERVE THE TROUBLE WHICH MEN WHO ARE REALLY UNGODLY MAY TAKE IN CONNECTION WITH RELIGION. *Real religion* means, of course, a great deal of trouble and self-denial, watchfulness and prayer. But when there is *only the appearance* of religion, there may also be much trouble, considerable time may be appropriated, and there may be considerable expenditure of money. So it was here. Materials for holy service were brought from a far country, and, being probably expensive in themselves, they would become more expensive still by the distance they had to be brought. The expense would also look greater because it was on articles which were not manifestly a necessity of life. Men must spend money for food and raiment and a roof to shelter them, and out of the money so spent they plainly get something; but here, in return for all the trouble and cost of getting the incense, etc., to Jerusalem, there is a very plain intimation that the offering of it does not effect the slightest good, does not in the least improve the position of those who offer. And this very rejection by Jehovah makes us see more clearly the trouble these people took. For we may be sure that the word through Jeremiah would not stop them in their offerings, useless as they were. The less there is of intelligent and pure devotion in religion, the more there is of superstitious, terrified clinging to habitual outward forms; and the same kind of action continues still, in many ways and in all communions. People without any real love to God in their hearts, or real submission to him, go through a great deal in the way of forms and ceremonies, and delude themselves with the notion that somehow they will be the better for it all.

II. OBSERVE THE CERTAINTY THAT THIS TROUBLE IS ALL IN VAIN. Those who bring the offerings are not left in even the slightest doubt. They have not the excuse of being able to say that in some way or other, which they do not understand, there will come a benefit out of their offerings. There is a refusal in the most decided and solemn way. Although these gifts may find their way into the house of God, and the altar itself be used in connection with them, they are not therefore accepted. They are just as much refused as a gift would be if the bringer of it had the door of the house where he brought it slammed in his face.

III. THE REASON OF THE REFUSAL. Though not here expressed, the reason, from what is said elsewhere, is perfectly plain. These gifts, sweet and fragrant as they are in themselves, become an insult because of the men who bring them. Growing in their natural place, they play their part in adding to the beauty and perfume of God's world; but now the fragrant has become as it were stinking, because of the defiled hands through which it has passed. What men bring to God they must bring with clean

hands and a pure heart. The great use of these gifts with their pleasant qualities was to signify what was sweet and fragrant and devoted in the hearts of the people. But when God knew that the gifts were bestowed through superstition or formality, or through the fear lest neglect might bring disaster on some cherished scheme, how could he accept these gifts? Consider further how, in many instances at least, the money was got that procured these gifts. They were the fruits of robbery, fraud, and oppression. When we read how some of the spoils of conquest in ancient times not unfrequently went to enrich an idol temple, how thankful we should be that in God's Word there is such plain dealing with those who think that some great gift to religious uses can condone their wickedness. Then, of course, in such cases the greater the expense of a man's religion the greater also was the amount that had to be gotten in wrongful ways. The Pharisee extortioner had to give several extra turns to the screw in order that he might get just that special sum which was needed to keep up his reputation as a religious man.—Y.

Ver. 30.—"*Reprobate silver.*" Two important things are to be remembered with regard to the meaning of the words in this verse. 1. That Jeremiah uses the same Hebrew verb where we have the two different words, "reprobate" and "rejected." What Jeremiah really says is that the silver bears the name "rejected silver," because Jehovah has rejected it. 2. The verb employed is commonly used to signify the action which is opposed to choosing; *e.g.* in Isa. vii. 15 the time is spoken of when a child becomes able to *reject* the evil and to *choose* the good, and in Isa. xli. 8, 9 there is a still more striking instance, because of its bearing on the words now under consideration. These are the words: "Thou, *Israel*, art my servant, *Jacob*, whom I have chosen, the seed of *Abraham my friend*. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, *Thou art my servant*; I have *chosen* thee, and not *rejected* thee." Thus it will be seen that we are not simply to think of *rejection* over against *approval*. Silver ore, being put through the most searching test possible, may respond to the test by coming out approved silver. But he who is thus *able to approve* is not necessarily in the position which *requires him to choose*. He may only have the duty of an assay agent, which stops with reporting the result of his test; he who has employed is the man to make the choice. Now, God tries in order that he may decide for himself whether to choose or reject; *e.g.* he rejected Saul from reigning over Israel, which of course means that, from the hour of rejection, Saul's throne was considered vacant. We can now proceed to point out the truths implied in this verse. 1. *There can be no adequate discernment of the merit or demerit of any man unless by God himself.* Only when God rejects can the stamp "rejected" be put on any one. Men may set up their canons of approval; they may apply their tests, philosophical, or political, or literary, or even theological. They may reject and excommunicate, pursuing with fiercest hatred all who are not approved according to their tests. Thus there will be a partial and temporary rejection, but since it comes from no adequate inquiry, the rejection itself will be rejected by a higher authority. Of this we have a conspicuous, we may even say the supreme, instance in Ps. cxviii. 22, "The stone which the builders *rejected* [the same Hebrew word as Jeremiah uses, be it observed] is become the head of the corner." It may be, indeed, that he whom some men reject may in the end be rejected by God also, but it will be for very different reasons. 2. *The reasons for rejection we must try to discover.* The Lord rejects those who claim to be accepted. He will reject the claim when it is that of mere national descent, as when Jesus said to the proud Jews who opposed him, that out of the stones he could make children to Abraham. God rejects all mere formal acknowledgment of him; it is not enough to say, "Lord, Lord." He rejects all that is the mere exercise and effort of intellectual faculties. In short, he rejects all that does not begin with a complete acceptance of Christ, and hence go on in the spirit of entire submission to him. Illustrations of what prompts to rejection are furnished both before and after this verse, *e.g.* in ver. 20, where the incense, etc., is rejected, *i.e.* of course, the men who offer the incense, and in ch. vii. 14, where the admired temple is threatened with overthrow. A mere building is shown to be nothing in God's sight unless it is frequented by such as are themselves acceptable to him. Observe also, in ascertaining the reason for rejection, how the word "silver" is kept. The thing tested

is rejected, not because it is counterfeit, but because it is persistently impure. It will not yield up those baser elements which are so intimately blended with it, and effectually destroy the value and hide the lustre of the pure silver. And yet remember how high rejected man rises above rejected silver. Man in his freedom may relent from his stubbornness and submit to those renewing and purifying processes which will result in the silver being approved and chosen. 3. *There is no chance of establishing and commending what the Lord rejects.* Saul did his best to struggle against the Divine decision, but there is no more pitiable sight in all the records of kingship than that which he presents in the struggle. We also must reject those whom God rejects; and there can be no mistake about it that we must reject those who reject God—such as are spoken of in 2 Kings xvii. 15, those who rejected the statutes of God and the covenant that he had made with their fathers, and the testimonies which he testified against them.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VII.

Ch. vii.—x.—Severe rebukes of idolatry alternating with announcements of the impending judgment. The circumstances connected with this discourse, or part thereof, appear to be detailed in ch. xxvi. Among the parallelisms between the two sections, notice especially the reference to the fate of the temple of Shiloh (comp. ver. 14 with ch. xxvi. 6). The date of the original utterance of the prophecy is thus fixed for one of the early years of the reign of Jehoiakim. Ch. x. 1—16, however, requires separate consideration.

Vers. 1—7.—The Divine requirements and the corresponding promise.

Ver. 2.—**Stand in the gate**; *i.e.* not an outer gate (for the outer court would be filled with the people whom Jeremiah was to address), but one of the three gates which led from the inner court to the outer. Probably it was the gate where Baruch recited the prophecies of Jeremiah at a later period, and which is designated "the new gate of the Lord's house," and said to have been situated in the "upper" *i.e.* inner court (ch. xxxvi. 10; comp. ch. xxvi. 10). We may conjecture that either one of the three great festivals or some extraordinary fast had brought a large number of people together at the temple.

Ver. 4.—**The temple of the Lord.** Notice the iteration of the phrase, as if its very sound were a charm against evil. It reminds us of the performances of the howling dervishes at Cairo, who "sometimes remain for hours, incessantly shouting the Muslim confession of faith (*lâ ilâha*, etc.)" (Dr. Ebers, in Bädeker's 'Egypt,' p. 150). The phrase is repeated three times to express the earnestness of the speakers (comp. ch. xxii. 29, "O earth, earth, earth"). These false prophets evidently retained a large amount of the old materialistic faith of the Semitic nations (to whom the Israelites belonged by race), which localized the presence and the power of the divinity. The temple was, in fact, their palladium, and as long as it stood, the national independence appeared to them to be secured. They faithfully handed on the teaching of those prophets of the last generation, who, as Micah tells us (iii. 11), were wont to "lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us." How Isaiah met this error we may collect from Isa. xxviii. 16 (see my Commentary). **Are these**; *i.e.* these buildings (comp. 2 Chron. viii. 11, where for "the places" the Hebrew has "these").

Ver. 5.—**If ye throughly amend**, etc.; a development of the idea of ver. 3. The true palladium of Judah would be the faithful performance of Jehovah's moral laws, especially those referring to the conduct of the rulers. Observe the stress which all the prophets lay on the virtues of civil life.

Ver. 6.—**The stranger, the fatherless, and the widow**; specially commended to the care of the Israelites (Exod. xxii. 21, 22—a passage belonging to one of the most evidently primitive portions of the Pentateuch; Deut. xxiv. 17, 19, 21; xxvii. 19; comp. Isa. i. 17, 23; x. 2; Ezek. xxii. 7). **In this place**; *i.e.* specially in Jerusalem, but not altogether excluding the rest of the kingdom (see vers. 3, 7).

Ver. 7.—**For ever and ever.** It is doubtful, both here and in ch. xxv. 5, whether these words should be joined to "gave" or "cause you to dwell." Still, the latter connection is both in itself the more probable one, and that suggested first of all by the accentuation (this, however, is not here decisive). It was not the extent of the original promise, but that of the enjoyment of the gift, which was in question. A more exact rendering of the prophet's

formula is that of the Septuagint, ἐξ αἰῶνος καὶ ἕως αἰῶνος: *i.e.* from the most remote antiquity to the most distant future.

Vers. 8—15.—The formalism of Jewish religion exposed. The lesson of Shiloh.

Ver. 8.—**Lying words**; such as those quoted in ver. 4.

Ver. 9.—**Will ye steal, etc.?** rather, *What! stealing, murdering*, etc.? The construction is formed by a series of infinitives, preceded by an interrogative expressing extreme surprise, equivalent to "Is this your way of life—a course of theft, and so forth?"

Ver. 10.—**And come**, etc.; rather, *and then ye come*, etc. **We are delivered to do**, etc.; rather, *we have escaped, in order to do*, etc. To make the concluding words of the verse a part of the speech seems hardly fair to the Jews, who would certainly not proclaim that they had made their escape from the threatened judgment with the object of prosecuting abominable acts. Such a view, moreover, greatly weakens the force of the emphatic "We have escaped." "In order to do," etc., are the words of the prophet, who thus lays bare the secret intentions of these formal worshippers.

Ver. 11.—**Even I have seen it**; understand, "and I will therefore destroy the house which gives shelter to evil-doers."

Ver. 12.—**But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh.** Jeremiah attacks this false confidence in the temple of Jerusalem, by pointing to the destruction of an earlier sanctuary, of which very little is known, indeed only so much as to give an edge to our desire for more. It is certain, from Josh. xviii. 1 and 1 Sam. iv. 3, that the tabernacle and the ark found a resting-place at Shiloh (an Ephraimitish town to the north of Bethel), nearly the whole of the period of the judges, or more exactly between the latter days of Joshua (Josh. xviii. 1) and the death of Eli (1 Sam. iv. 3). Manifestly, then, there must have been some sort of "house," *i.e.* temple, at Shiloh; a mere tent would not have been sufficient for so long a period. This presumption is confirmed by the language of Jeremiah, and by the expressions of the narrative books. The fate which the prophet is bidden to announce for the existing temple is analogous to that which fell upon "Jehovah's place in Shiloh." The latter was, therefore, not merely a deportation of the ark, such as is referred to in 1 Sam. v. And when the narrator of the times of Samuel speaks of Eli as "sitting by the door-post of the temple of Jehovah" (1 Sam. i. 9), is it more natural to suppose that the word "temple" is here applied to the tabernacle, or that there was really a house, however rude, as sacred in the eyes of the faithful as was afterwards the splendid temple at Jerusalem? The latter view is strongly confirmed by Judg. xviii. 31, "All the time that the house of God in Shiloh existed" (Authorized Version is misleading), and Judg. xix. 18, where the Levite travelling to Mount Ephraim says, "I am going to the house of Jehovah." It is no doubt strange at first sight that so little information is given us as to this central sanctuary of the true religion; but are there not other omissions (especially in the history of the judges), which are equally strange as long as we look upon the Old Testament as primarily an historical document? We do know something, however, and more than is generally suspected; for when the right translation is restored in Judg. xviii. 31, it follows, from a comparison of this and the preceding verse, that the temple of Shiloh was destroyed simultaneously with the captivity of the northern tribes. The impression produced by this emphatic announcement of Jeremiah is revealed to us by a later passage in his book (see ch. xxvi.).

Ver. 13.—**Rising up early and speaking**; *i.e.* speaking zealously and continually (so ver. 25; ch. xxv. 4; xxvi. 5; xxix. 19). It is an expression peculiar to Jeremiah.

Ver. 14.—**To Shiloh.** Shiloh and the temple of Shiloh are interchanged, precisely as Jerusalem and the temple of Jerusalem (ch. xxvi. 9; Micah iii. 12).

Ver. 15.—**I will cast you out of my sight**; viz. into a foreign land (see Deut. xxix. 28). The land of Israel was in a special sense "Jehovah's land" (Hos. ix. 3; Lev. xxv. 23). **Ephraim**; here used for the northern tribes collectively, as Isa. vii. 2; Hos. iv. 17; v. 9; xii. 1.

Vers. 16—20.—The hypocrisy of the worship of Jehovah proved; its punishment.

Ver. 16.—**Pray not thou for this people.** Abraham prayed for Sodom (Gen. xviii. 23—32); Moses and Samuel for Israel (Exod. xxxii. 11—14; xvii. 11; Numb. xiv. 13—20; Ps. cvi. 23; 1 Sam. vii. 9, 10; xii. 17, 18, 23); and Jeremiah would fain perform the same pious duty to his people. We have a specimen of his intercession in ch. xiv. 19—22 (comp. ch. xviii. 20), followed immediately by a rejection of his prayer, parallel in thought to the present passage. Verbal parallels are ch. xi. 14; xiv. 11. **Cry**; *i.e. cry for help* (see on ch. xiv. 12); parallel with "prayer," as ch. xi. 14; Ps. xvii. 1; lxi. 1.

Ver. 17.—**In the streets.** A climax. There is no sense of shame left.

Ver. 18.—**The children . . . the fathers . . . the women.** All ages were represented in this idolatrous act, thus justifying the sweeping character of the judgment as

described in ch. vi. 11. **Cakes** (comp. ch. xliv. 19). The word is peculiar (*kavvânim*), and perhaps entered Palestine together with the foreign rite to which the cakes belonged. Various conjectures have been offered as to their nature, but without any demonstrable ground. Sacrificial cakes were not uncommon. Hosea refers to the luscious raisin-cakes used by idolaters (Hos. iii. 1). **To the queen of heaven.** This title of a divinity only occurs in Jeremiah (here and in ch. xliv. 17—19, 25). It reminds us, first, of titles (such as "queen of the gods") of the Babylonio-Assyrian goddesses, Bilat (Beltis) and Istar, who, though divided in later times, were "originally but two forms of the same goddess" (Sayce, *Transactions of Society of Biblical Archæology*, iii. 169). It is, however, perhaps an objection to the view that Bilat or Istar is intended, that neither here nor in ch. xliv. is there any allusion to that characteristic lascivious custom which was connected in Babylonia with the worship of Istar (Herod., i. 199). The phrase has, however, another association. It reminds us, in the second place, of the Egyptian goddess Neith, "the mother of the gods." The first mention of "the queen of heaven" in Jeremiah occurs in the reign of Jehoiakim, who was placed on the throne by Pharaoh-Necho, one of the Saïte dynasty (Saïs was the seat of the worship of Neith). If the "queen of heaven" were a Babylonio-Assyrian goddess, we should have looked for the introduction of her cultus at an earlier period (*e.g.* under Ahaz). But it was in accordance with the principles of polytheism (and the mass of the Jews had an irresistible tendency to polytheism) to adopt the patron-deity of the suzerain. Subsequently Judah became the subject of Nebuchadnezzar; thus it was equally natural to give up the worship of an Egyptian deity. Jewish colonists in Migdol would as naturally revert to the cultus of the Egyptian "mother of the gods" (see Grätz, 'Monatsschrift,' Breslau, 1874, pp. 349—351). The form of the word rendered "queen" being very uncommon, another reading, pronounced in the same way, obtained currency. This should be rendered, not "frame," or "workmanship" (as Authorized Version, margin), but "service." The context, however, evidently requires a person.

Ver. 19.—**Do they provoke me, etc.?** literally, *Is it me that they provoke* (or, *vex*)*? Is it not themselves?*

Ver. 20.—**Upon man, and upon beast.** That all creation shares in the curse of man is repeatedly affirmed in the Old Testament as well as the New. Inferentially, this doctrine appears from the narrative of the Fall, and still more clearly from Isaiah's description of Paradise regained (xi.). Hosea speaks of sufferings of the animals arising out of the guilt of Israel (iv. 3), and a consciousness of the "solidarity" of all living creatures is ascribed to a Ninevite king in the Book of Jonah (iii. 7, 8). In general, the origin of this community of suffering is left mysterious, but in Gen. vi. 12 it is expressly stated as the cause of the Deluge, that "all flesh [*i.e.* both man and beast] had corrupted its way upon the earth;" *i.e.* apparently, that contact with man had led to a corruption of the original innocence of the lower animals. It is a common experience that intercourse between Christianized (not to say civilized) man and the domestic animals produces a sometimes pathetic change in the psychic phenomena of the latter. Is the reverse process utterly inconceivable?

Vers. 21—28.—Jeremiah dispels the illusion that God's claims are satisfied by a merely formal service.

Ver. 21.—**Put your burnt offerings, etc.** Throw all your sacrifices into a mass, and eat them at your pleasure. Ye have my perfect permission, for they are of no religious value. According to the Law, the burnt offerings were to be entirely consumed by fire, while the other sacrifices were mostly eaten by the offerers and by their friends. There is a touch of contempt in the phrase, **eat flesh**; they are merely pieces of flesh, and ye may eat them.

Ver. 22.—**I spake not unto your fathers, etc.** An important and much-disputed passage, from which Graf, Colenso, and Kuenen derive one of their chief subsidiary arguments for the post-Exile date of the Levitical legislation. The prophet here appears to deny *in toto* that Jehovah at Mount Sinai had given any injunctions on the subject of sacrifice. But the prophet must at any rate be consistent with himself; he cannot utter anything by Divine command which is fundamentally at variance with other equally authoritative declarations. Do the statements of Jeremiah elsewhere justify us in accepting the words in their literal, superficial meaning? There are three other passages which have a claim to be considered. In ch. xvii. 26 the prophet draws a picture of the happy condition in which the Jews might be, were they only obedient. One of the features of this picture is that the Jews would still bring all the various kinds of sacrifices to the house of Jehovah. In ch. xxxi. 14 a similar description is closed with the promise to "satiate the soul of the priests with fatness," implying that there would be a great abundance of thank offerings in regenerate Israel. In ch. xxxiii. 11, among other blessings of the future, the prophet mentions

the praiseful exclamations of those who would bring the sacrifice of thanksgiving. These passages do not contain any statement respecting the origin of the sacrificial system; but they do expressly assert that Jehovah contemplates that system with pleasure, and apparently that he designs it to be permanent among his people Israel. Let us now turn to ch. xxxiii. 17—24. Here the prophet, in the Name of Jehovah, declares that there is a Divine covenant "with the Levites, the priests," who shall never "want a man before me . . . to do sacrifice continually." A covenant with the priests implies a covenant with the people, the priests being the representatives of the people. This passage, therefore, is more distinct than those previously quoted; it does appear to maintain that the range of the Sinaitic covenant included the duties of the priesthood, *i.e.* sacrifices. On the other hand, it should be observed that the genuineness of this latter passage is not beyond dispute, the whole section in which it occurs (ch. xxxiii. 14—26) being omitted in the Septuagint. We have now to inquire, Is there a real discrepancy between the words of Jeremiah (strictly speaking, of Jehovah) in the verse now before us, interpreted literally, and the passages adduced above? Are they more inconsistent than such an utterance as ch. vi. 20 (first half of verse), which appears to deny the utility of sacrifices altogether? If the latter may be explained as a forcible oratorical exaggeration, why not also the present passage? Jeremiah sees the people attaching a pernicious importance to the *opus operatum* of sacrifice. On one occasion he tells them that Jehovah cares not for sacrifices; he means, as the context shows, the sacrifices of men without spiritual sensibilities. On another, that Jehovah never commanded their fathers to sacrifice; he means (may we not presume?) the mere outward forms of the ritual, divorced from the sentiment and practice of piety, which, as Hosea tells us (vi. 6), Jehovah "delights in and not [equivalent to 'more than'] sacrifice." There is, therefore, no fundamental inconsistency between the passage before us and the three passages first quoted, and if so there can be no real discrepancy with the last-mentioned passage, for the priests (as was remarked) perform their functions on behalf of the people, and the permanence of Jehovah's covenant with the priests depended on the spiritual life of the people they represented (read ch. xxxiii. as a whole). This view seems less arbitrary than that of Ewald, who thinks that the sacrifices spoken of in our passage are merely the free-will offerings of the rich; and than that of Dahler, who interprets, "My chief care was not to prescribe rules for holocausts and sacrifices, but this is what I commanded thee above all," viz. moral obedience. According to it, the prophet's denial is not absolute, but relative—relative, that is, to the notion of sacrifices entertained by the Jews whom he addresses. Of course, Graf's view, that the denial is absolute, will equally well suit the context. The people were surprised at Jeremiah's objurgations, because they thought they had fulfilled the claims of the covenant. Jeremiah's purpose is equally well fulfilled whether his denial is qualified or unqualified, absolute or relative. Our object has been to separate the exegesis of our passage from a still doubtful controversy, and to offer a tenable view of it, based upon grounds purely internal to Jeremiah. It may be suggested, however, to the student of Leviticus, that even if the Levitical legislation in its present form were proved to be of a post-Exile date, it would still be doubtful whether any believing temple-worshipper could help assuming that Jehovah had, from the first existence of the nation, given his direct sanction to the offering of sacrifices. If so, it is comparatively unimportant (except with regard to the progressive revelation of the strictness of the law of truth) whether the Levitical code was given to Moses at Mount Sinai in its present form or not.

Ver. 23.—**But this thing . . . Obey my voice, etc.** Comp. Deut. vi. 3, "Hear [the verb rendered here 'obey'] therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee," etc. The words, **I will be your God**; rather, *to you a God*, etc., occur in Lev. xxvi. 12 (comp. Exod. vi. 7; Deut. xxix. 13). **Walk ye in all the ways**, etc., is not a citation, but reminds us of passages like Deut. ix. 12, 16; xi. 28; xxxi. 29. **That it may be well unto you** is a characteristic phrase of Jeremiah (ch. xlii. 6; xxxviii. 20; xl. 9); but is also frequent in Deuteronomy (comp., besides the passage quoted above, Deut. iv. 40; v. 16; vi. 18; xii. 25).

Ver. 24.—**Imagination**; rather, *stubbornness* (see on ch. iii. 17). **Went backward, and not forward**; rather, *turned their back, and not their face* (literally, *became backwards, and not forwards*).

Ver. 27.—**Therefore thou shalt speak**, etc. rather, *and though thou speak . . . yet will they not*, etc.; *and though thou call unto them, yet will they not answer thee.*

Ver. 28.—**But thou shalt say**; rather, *thou shalt therefore say.* **A nation**; rather, *the nation.* "What one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself?" (2 Sam. vii. 23). And yet "this is

the nation that have not hearkened," etc. Truth; rather, *good faith* (as ch. v. 1). Is cut off from their mouth; *i.e.* their oaths to Jehovah are false oaths (ch. v. 2).

Vers. 29—34.—Tophet, the greatest of all abominations; the beginning of the Divine retribution.

Ver. 29.—**Cut off thine hair.** The "daughter of Zion," *i.e.* the community of Jerusalem, is addressed; this appears from the verb being in the feminine. It is a choice expression which the prophet employs—literally, *shear off thy crown* (*i.e.* thy chief ornament). The act was to be a sign of mourning (see Job i. 20; Micah i. 16). Some think there is also a reference to the vow of the Nazarite (the word for "crown" being here *nézer*, which is also the word rendered in Authorized Version, "separation," *i.e.* "consecration," in the law of the Nazarite (Numb. vi.). But neither in this context nor anywhere else have we any support for the application of the term "Nazarite" to the people of Israel. **On high places**; rather, *on (the) bare hills* (see on ch. iii. 21). **The generation of his wrath**; *i.e.* on which his wrath is to be poured out (comp. Isa. x. 6).

Ver. 30.—**They have set their abominations**, etc.; alluding, doubtless, to the altars which Manasseh built "for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of Jehovah," and especially to the image of the Canaanitish goddess Asherah, which he set up in the temple itself (2 Kings xxi. 5, 7).

Ver. 31.—**The high places of Tophet**; rather, *the high places of the Topheth*—(on the "high places" (Hebrew *bamoth*)—here probably artificial mounds to erect the altars upon, and on "the Topheth," see Commentary on 1 Kings). **In the valley** of the son of **Hinnom**. Hitzig and others would take Hinnom as a noun meaning "groaning" (Rashi, the great Jewish commentator, had already proposed this view), which is at first sight very plausible. But this name of the valley is already found in the description of the boundaries of Judah and Benjamin in Josh. xv. 8; xviii. 16. **To burn their sons**, etc. (On the worship of Moloch (Saturn), see on Lev. xviii. 21, and comp. Ezek. xvi. 20, 21, from which it appears that the children were first slain before being "caused to pass through the fire.")

Ver. 32.—**The valley of slaughter**; with reference to the great slaughter reserved for the unbelieving Jews. The scene of their sin shall be that of their punishment. **Till there be no place**; rather, *for want of room* (elsewhere).

Ver. 33.—**And the carcases**, etc.; almost verbally identical with Deut. xxviii. 26.

Ver. 34.—**The land shall be desolate**; rather, *shall become a waste*. The curse denounced upon the disobedient people in Lev. xxvi. 31, 33 (for another parallel between this chapter and Lev. xxvi., see ver. 23). In both passages the word for "waste" is *khorbah*, which, as Dr. Payne Smith remarks, is "used only of places which, having once been inhabited, have then fallen into ruin." Hebrew is rich in synonyms for the idea of "desolation."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Preaching repentance.* I. THE OCCASION. It was in the gate of the temple, where the crowd of worshippers would pass, and at the time of their going up to worship. 1. In a *public place*, (1) that men might not have to seek the preacher, but rather be sought by him; and (2) that all might hear, for truth, warnings of judgment, and gospels of deliverance are for all. 2. At the *entrance to the place of worship*, because (1) worship should be associated with instruction; (2) many people who observe religious ordinances need to be convinced of their sin and urged to repentance as much as the "publicans and sinners;" and (3) we must repent of sin before we can be accepted by God; so Jeremiah was to preach to the people as they went in to the temple, not as they came out.

II. THE ACCUSATION. The Jews are not accused of *Church* sins, neglecting religious ordinances, etc. Their sins were against common morality. 1. Though men may be very observant of *religious ordinances* they may yet be guilty of the *grossest wickedness* (ver. 6). 2. God is most concerned with our *conduct in daily life*. Here is the true life, the life which occupies the larger part of our time, engages most of our energies, gives freest scope for good or evil.

III. THE EXHORTATION. Practical amendment is sought. 1. There must be an *amending*. Repentance is not merely sorrow for the past; it is a change of desire and effort for the future. 2. This must be *practical*. The Jews are to amend their "ways." True repentance is more a matter of conduct than of emotion. It must bring forth fruits (Matt. iii. 8). 3. This must be *definite*. Particular sins are specified as to be

abandoned (ver. 6). Men must repent of their own sins, their characteristic sins, their habitual sins. We are too ready to renounce the sins which do not belong to us, and to pass over our most familiar sins unnoticed. 4. This must be *thorough*. The Jews are to "throughly amend" their ways. A half-hearted repentance is a mockery. As well not flee from the City of Destruction at all as linger regretfully about its vicinity like Lot's wife, only to suffer a similar fate to hers.

IV. THE ADMONITION. The Jews are warned of the danger of a false ground of confidence (ver. 4), and threatened with approaching judgment. 1. If we believe that men are in danger, that is a *false charity which hides the danger* out of consideration for feelings of mere temporary comfort. 2. There is an *advantage in using the minatory* language of Scripture, though (1) with deep solemnity, (2) with sadness and kindliness of purpose, (3) without the amplification of imaginative sensationalism, (4) accompanied by clear indications of the way of escape and encouragements for hope in following it.

V. THE PROMISE. (Ver. 7.) Repentance is to be followed by forgiveness and the restoration of favour. God charges us with our sins, and threatens judgments, all in love that he may thus lead us to safety and blessedness. The most wicked men may find forgiveness and ultimate salvation if they will but repent and turn to God (ver. 6).

Ver. 4.—*The confidence of superstition.* I. CONFIDENT LANGUAGE IS NO GUARANTEE FOR A SECURE FOUNDATION OF TRUST. The Jews are vehement in exclamation; but their words are boastful without ground. Frequent repetition is no evidence of the truth of a saying. Yet, though against all reason, and by mere force of urgency, how many convictions have been thus forced on the belief of mankind! Trite sayings are commonly accepted for true sayings. We do not think to test the genuineness of the old worn coin so much as that of the new coin. We naturally believe that with which we are familiar. Indeed, we may persuade ourselves to believe almost anything by simply dwelling upon the idea of it till this becomes inseparable from our consciousness. And all this without the slightest reason!

II. THE SUPERSTITION OF RELIGION MAY BE FOUND IN MEN WHO HAVE LOST THE SPIRITUALITY OF IT. The Jews neglected the spiritual worship, which was all that was really valuable in the temple service, but they clung to the idea that there must be a sanctity about the very walls of the temple which would make it a place of safety for those who took shelter within them. Superstition is the disease of religion. When spiritual holiness is gone, a sanctity is ascribed to material things. They who have no faith in God may have strange faith in charms and spells, like the Jews who, perhaps, thought to work a charm by the threefold iteration of their cry, "The temple of the Lord," etc.

III. NO REAL SECURITY CAN BE FOUND IN EXTERNAL THINGS. The temple building was no palladium to the bad men who sought refuge in it. It is vain to be near the Church if we are far from God. Religious ordinances, membership in a Church, official association with religion as priest, prophet, or minister, and the like outside affairs, contain no promise whatever of protection, and the man who shelters himself beneath the whole of them and does not seek spiritual shelter is as much exposed to the tempest of judgment as if he stood out in the open plain of bare infidelity.

IV. THE TRUE TEMPLE OF THE LORD IS THE HEART OF A GOOD MAN. God does not dwell in temples made with hands. Earthly temples of stone may represent his dwelling, but they cannot bring him nearer to men nor confine his presence within limits. But the soul of a good man is a real temple wherein God's Spirit truly abides and effectively operates (1 Cor. vi. 19). Such a temple is safe from all harm. Thus we must seek safety, not by entering a temple, but by becoming a temple—not by securing the external protection of holy things while the heart and life are unholy, but by receiving God within the heart and sanctifying the life to him.

Ver. 13.—*The voice unheeded.* I. GOD IS EVER SPEAKING TO HIS CHILDREN. There is a Divine voice speaking, not to favoured prophets in rare moments of spiritual elevation, but to all men, that all who will may hear. This voice comes to us in many forms. 1. The voice of *nature*—the proclamation of the power and wisdom of God in the awful, silent speech of the stars (Ps. xix. 3), and the gentler language which tells

of his tenderness and beneficence in the cheery songs of spring and the glad shout of the harvest. 2. The voice of *history*. God is in history, and speaks to us through the events of the past, warning by judgments (ver. 12), inviting by acts of deliverance and gifts of mercy (see Ps. cv.). 3. The voice of *providence* in daily life. Has not God been speaking to us through our own experience—using various prophetic agencies—the advent of a new joy, the cloud of a great sorrow, a visitation of the angel of death to the home? has he not repeatedly roused, invited, pleaded, and consoled us with voices from out eternity? 4. The voice of *prophecy*. God had often so spoken to the Jews before the days of Jeremiah, and reference is plainly made to this fact in the text. That voice still lives, because truth is eternal. Thus God speaks to us through the inspired thoughts of the Bible. 5. The voice of *Christ*. He is the "Word" of God made articulate in the dialect of men (John i. 1—14). He who sees Christ hears the voice of God. 6. The voice of *conscience*. This is God speaking within the soul. Every time we feel compunction at doing wrong, or an inward urging to do the right, God is pleading in our heart by direct communion, spirit with spirit.

II. THE VOICE OF GOD IS URGENT. God speaks with urgency—"rising up early and speaking." 1. The urgency of God's voice is a proof of his *great love to his children*. He speaks with frequency, repeating the same unheeded lesson, and even when none attend to his voice. God speaks to his children before they pray to him. The first impulse to spiritual communion comes from God, not from us (Ps. xxvii. 8). Christ stands at the door and knocks (Rev. iii. 20). We may see in this an evidence of the long-suffering mercy of God—a mercy which "endureth for ever," and we may see an encouragement to listen and turn to him. Still he "waiteth to be gracious." 2. The urgency of God's voice is a proof of *the great importance* of what he says. God is urgent. What tremendous destinies must turn on a question which even he must rouse and bestir himself about! We might expect that any voice from the awful majesty of God would be full of deep and vast meaning. What must be the significance of his words when even he speaks with earnest insistance, with pressing urgency? How can such an utterance be passed unheeded?

III. GOD'S VOICE IS OFTEN NOT HEEDED. He speaks with the authority of the majesty of heaven, with the yearning love of a Father, with the urgency which betokens matters of profound interest, and with a direct reference to the most fearful woe and the most glorious blessedness of his children. Yet men turn aside with indifference. What are the causes of this appalling wonder? 1. *Spiritual deafness*. There are men who have no ears for the voice of God. Yet God can open our ears if we are willing to hear. 2. *Hatred to the highest truth*. Men stop their ears against the sound of honest words which are hateful to sinful hearts. 3. *Consciousness of guilt*. Fearing words of doom, men refuse to hear any words from God; but (1) the doom will not be the less because the warning is unheeded, and (2) God warns to save. 4. *Unbelief*. Doubt as to whether a voice is Divine is often natural, and if the doubt grows into widespread scepticism the cause may be intellectual rather than moral. But when once a voice is recognized as Divine, unbelief is distrust in God; it is "making him a liar."

IV. THE REFUSAL TO GIVE HEED TO GOD'S VOICE IS A FATAL EVIL. 1. It aggravates guilt by adding to it (1) fresh rebellion against our great King, (2) ingratitude to the pleading love of our merciful Father, (3) wilful sin against light. 2. It leaves the purpose of God's voice uneffected. He urges and pleads with his children, but he does not force them to return to him. If they will not heed his voice that voice is lost upon them, and the ruin from which it would call them unaverted.

Ver. 16.—*Forbidden prayers*. Certain prayers must be regarded as unlawful.

I. PRAYERS OF POSITIVE DEMAND. Many men pray as though they were dictating to God. Prayer is petition, not command. The suppliant should assume the attitude of a mendicant.

II. PRAYERS WHICH AIM AT TURNING THE WILL OF GOD. We may believe that God will do in answer to prayer what he would not do apart from prayer, because the very prayer may be the one essential condition which makes that fitting which would not be fitting without it. But this must be in accordance with God's will, which is always perfect, while ours is often evil.

III. PRAYERS FOR WHAT IS WRONG IN ITSELF. God cannot grant such prayers. We may pray for all men, but we may not pray for every imaginable favour to be given to all men. Thus it is wrong to pray that the impenitent wicked should not be punished. The purpose of the text seems to be just to forbid this prayer. Jeremiah is not to pray that the calamities he sees approaching may not fall on the guilty people. It would be bad for them and an outrage on justice that, while they refused to hear the Divine voice warning them of their danger and inviting them to the way of safety, God should hear the voice of any intercessor pleading that the threat should not be accomplished, and that the wicked people should be saved from just punishment.

Vers. 21—28.—*Declension.* Jeremiah endeavours to rouse a sense of guilt in his hearers by pointing to the sad downward course of their history when this is regarded in the light of Divine requirements and inducements to follow them.

I. THE DIVINE REQUIREMENTS. These were not for the offering of mere formal sacrifices, but for obedience to God in heart and conduct (1 Sam. xv. 22). Men need to be repeatedly reminded of this fact, because there is a common tendency to separate religion from morality, to believe that God is pleased with the performance of Church services by those whose lives are spent in sin and selfishness, and that the devotions of the sanctuary atone for the wickedness of daily life. Jeremiah and the prophets generally teach (1) that religious services are worthless except as expressions of inward devotion, and (2) that no religious service is acceptable while obedience in common life is neglected.

II. THE INDUCEMENTS TO FULFIL THESE REQUIREMENTS. 1. *A clear statement* of them. Jeremiah was not the first to reveal them. They were well known and easily understood. 2. *Rewards promised for obedience.* It would be "well with" the people if they walked in all the ways that God commanded them. Disobedience led to the Captivity. Obedience is the only condition on which we can enjoy liberty. 3. *Repeated warnings.* (Ver. 25.) By all forms in which the Divine voice reaches us God is continually reminding us of his will and urging us to obedience.

III. THE CAUSES OF DECLENSION. 1. *Inattention.* "They hearkened not." People are too preoccupied by worldly concerns to give the requisite thought to higher interests. 2. *Self-will.* "They walked in the counsels and stubbornness of their evil heart." Men disobey through the conceit of superior knowledge and through the obstinacy of selfish aims.

IV. THE CHARACTER OF DECLENSION. 1. *Departure from God.* Israel turned "the back and not the face" to God. In disobeying the will of God we necessarily cease to walk with God, lose the light of his presence, become godless. 2. *A constant deterioration of morals.* The contemporaries of Jeremiah "did worse than their fathers." Progress is the natural order. But, left to itself, the leaven of wickedness will spread as surely as the seed of goodness would grow if that were allowed free development.

V. THE CONSEQUENCES OF DECLENSION. 1. *Hardening against the reception of truth.* (Ver. 27.) The people have reduced themselves to such a condition that they cannot receive the prophet's message. 2. *Inability to profit by correction.* "This is a nation that . . . receiveth not correction" (ver. 28). 3. *Destruction of the value of religious services.* The burnt offering should express the dedication of the worshipper. But as it does nothing of the kind, it is worthless, and may as well serve as flesh for a common meal (ver. 21). Religion, which should be the inspiration of morality, is dead and powerless in the hands of people of corrupt lives. The noblest exercise of humanity is thus reduced to a nullity.

Ver. 32—ch. viii. 3.—*Horrors of retribution.* I. THERE IS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT HORRORS OF SIN WILL BE FOLLOWED BY HORRORS OF RETRIBUTION. 1. *Justice* requires a proportionate relation of punishment to sin. The Jews had sinned greatly. It was right that they should be punished with severity. Mild views of the requirements of punishment may be the result of a dulness of conscience which does not recognize the depth of guilt. When men are most deeply convinced of sin, they are also most apprehensive of the merited wrath of God. 2. Punishment, to be *effective*, must be proportionate to guilt. In its three functions as deterrent when threatened, chastisement for correction when received, and warning to others when witnessed, it can only

be effectual if a due proportion be observed. 3. The *nature of God* leads us to suppose that he may exact horrible retribution for horrible sin. He is almighty, and if his anger, which is slow to rise, is at length roused, this must be terrible indeed. God is long-suffering, merciful, ready to forgive; but he is not weak and indifferent to the great evils of sin. It is not reasonable to suppose that the Divine anger will be the less in its outpouring because it is long withheld.

II. THERE ARE INDICATIONS OF THE HORRORS OF RETRIBUTION IN THE SCRIPTURAL REVELATIONS CONCERNING IT. Jeremiah is speaking chiefly of physical horrors which are to accompany the overthrow of Jerusalem. But he suggests that these contain certain necessary elements of retribution. 1. *Death.* Tophet shall be a valley of slaughter. The great and ultimate punishment is always regarded, not as pain, but as death (Rom. vi. 23). 2. *Shame.* The corpses are to be unburied and exposed to the ravages of unclean animals—for the Jew a fearful degradation. Sin exposed, confounded, defeated, will reflect burning shame on the sinner. 3. *Anguish.* "The voice of mirth," etc., will cease; men will prefer death to life (ch. viii. 3). 4. *A peculiar relation of penalty to offence.* Tophet, the scene of horrible wickedness, shall be the spot for retributive slaughter. Where wretched men immolated their children their own dead bodies shall be cast. The sun and moon and stars which they worshipped shall look down on their bones bleaching out in the open.

III. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN IT IS NECESSARY TO MAKE MEN THINK OF THE HORRORS OF RETRIBUTION. The language of Jeremiah is explicit and graphic. 1. Details of future retribution should not take the chief place in instruction. They lose their effect by too frequent repetition. By themselves they are not able to produce a better life, but may result in hardness, unbelief, and disgust. The love of God in Christ is *the* great power to lead to holiness. 2. Nevertheless we must not shun to declare "the whole counsel of God." Thoughts of retribution may be powerful means for rousing convictions of sin, if they are accompanied by appeals to conscience which make men feel the due proportion of guilt to punishment.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Keeping the temple gate.* It was probably not the outer gate, but one of the gates which led from the outer to the inner or upper court (cf. ch. xix. 14; xxvi. 10; xxxvi. 10). "From this point the prophet could view the whole assembly of the people in the outer court, as well as the gates leading from without into it" (Lange). Christ seems to have stood thus at times.

I. THE PREACHER OF TRUTH DOES WELL TO CHOOSE THE MOST IMPRESSIVE POSITIONS, OCCASIONS, AND CIRCUMSTANCES FOR THE DELIVERY OF HIS MESSAGE. The great aim of the preacher is to get a hearing for what he has to say. Tact (to a certain degree), artistic juxtaposition and arrangement, sympathy with the spirit of the times, etc., are indispensable qualities to him who would give the Word of God bold and effective expression. Public occasions may, therefore, frequently be utilized for special services, etc. Passing movement and contemporary events may give fresh interest to permanent truth. A curious ingenuity is sometimes exhibited in making the preacher inconspicuous and reducing his office to a matter of routine. He ought always to feel that his message is an extraordinary one, requiring all the earnestness and effort of which he is capable to convey it with due effect. And even then it must have suffered at his hands, and in much he will be an unprofitable servant.

II. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE MAY BE VERY FASHIONABLE, AND ALL BUT UNIVERSAL, WHERE THERE IS LITTLE REAL RELIGION. One has to distinguish between the outward and the inward, the religion of rite and ceremony and that of the heart. Here apparently the representatives of "all Judah" were assembled, and yet it was no sign of national piety, but rather the contrary. Instead of the carnal nature being checked and corrected, it was directly fostered by such worship. *Public worship* is a phrase which often includes elements that have nothing to do with the worship of God. That the services of God's house should be chaste and attractive will be generally admitted. But architectural adornments, musical accessories of an ornate or merely artistic nature, displays of rhetoric, and similar additions to the essential character of the worship, may

prove popular and entertaining, and yet be spiritually pernicious. In the case of Judah the whole worship was on a low intellectual and spiritual key. The gods of heathenism and Jehovah were worshipped alike, and the licentious rites of idolatry mingled with the sacrifices of the Law. This had resulted in the temple being polluted and becoming a "den of thieves." Our aims in worship, the purity and concentration of our hearts, the moral relation between our every-day life and our temple service, have all very intimately to do with the question of the value of public religious observances.

III. RIGHTEOUSNESS OUGHT TO BE PRELIMINARY TO WORSHIP. "Amend your ways and your doings" is the demand the prophet makes in proof of the genuineness of their worship. Religion is a matter of life, and not of showy observances and empty protestations. The best proof that we intend serving God is that we have already begun to do so in business and morals. This duty, although difficult, is the best preparation for exalted spiritual experiences and sincere adoration. Men are not fit to appear before God when their misdeeds are still being repeated and their moral habits are not under the influence of his Spirit.

IV. UNREAL WORSHIP OF GOD IS CERTAIN TO BE DETECTED AND EXPOSED. We can imagine the shame of the nobility and people whom the prophet from his unlooked-for vantage-point so sharply rebuked.—M.

Vers. 4—7.—*Who shall dwell in the house of the Lord?* I. AN UNWARRANTABLE ASSUMPTION. They arrogate to themselves, not only the exclusive possession of a meeting-place between God and man, but they speak of themselves as in a special and peculiar sense the temple of God. 1. There is an argument latent here. The temple is looked upon as a permanent and immovable building—a place of intercourse between Jehovah and his people. It is the only place of the kind, and it will stand for aye. But the Jews are so related to the temple, so bound up with its existence and maintenance, that they esteem themselves identified with it, and therefore partaking of its attributes. By an easy transition, to which language affords many parallels, they come to say, "The temple of the Lord is this [*i.e.* are we]." 2. And yet this very pretension, when spiritually interpreted, expresses a gracious and mysterious truth. That is the intention and aim of man's creation. Every man, as man, is made to be a temple of the Holy Ghost. This is his purpose and obligation; but, instead of this, how opposite is the actual condition of most men! Not, therefore, as a matter of course, independently of moral resolve and Divine inspiration, but as something to be striven after and earnestly realized in holiness of life, is man the "temple of the Lord." 3. And as is often the case, the illegitimate narrowing and monopoly of this Divine indwelling is the very sign of its absence. They who rest upon other than moral grounds for the claim to the presence of God within them are usurpers. It is the universal privilege of those who serve God acceptably in spirit and in life. That which has a moral condition cannot be confined to local or sectarian limits.

II. A COMMANDMENT WITH PROMISE. A rehearsal of common duties enjoined by the Law of Moses. It is terse, prosaic, detailed, and altogether opposed to the absurd pretension it is meant to correct. Just those duties, too, are mentioned which the prophet was well aware had been neglected by Judah. There is nothing brilliant or magnificent about the catalogue of deeds. They are just such actions as are obligatory upon all men. It was not even necessary for a man to be a Jew to do them; for when the Gentiles do these things it shows that there must be a law written upon their hearts by nature or grace. And yet the greatest in Jerusalem could not, any more than the heathen, do the least of them perfectly. How gracious that to them, therefore, is attached this promise of temple consecration! So the grand human duties and merciful dispositions, without which life would be so hard, are recommended and enforced by that comprehensive promise, to be immediately realized in personal blessing and consecration, to be completely fulfilled when "the tabernacle of God shall be with men."—M.

Vers. 13, 25.—"*Rising up early.*" A striking expression concerning Jehovah. In ver. 25 it is strengthened: "Daily rising up early." It speaks to us—

I. OF THE ANXIETY OF JEHOVAH FOR HIS PEOPLE. He who has important business on hand, or dear ones in trying circumstances, or great results dependent upon imme-

diate and strenuous exertion, will show diligence in some such way. He will be unable to rest. So it is with God and his Church. Not that he can be said to *fear* or be uncertain as to the issues. But the interest he has in the fortunes and spiritual state of his people is of this description. It is no impassive God who is presented to us in Scripture. A profound concern for the interests of our race ever fills the mind of God. His deepest affections are engaged. He mourns the sin and rejoices in the salvation of men.

II. OF HIS DILIGENCE IN PROVIDING FOR THE WANTS OF HIS PEOPLE. It is no aimless, helpless anxiety that fills his breast. The most practical measures of help and direction are devised and carried into execution. Prophets, the plenipotentiaries of Divine grace, are sent in immediate response to the needs and demands of men. No age of the world or the Church but has its thick succession. Heaven is in continual activity on behalf of sinners. The choicest spiritual gifts are ceaselessly rained upon the earth. The most devoted servants of God are raised up and sent. Truth in quick evolution anticipates the spiritual necessities of those who would seek God. There is no flagging, no cessation, from Adam's fall to the uplifting of the second Adam. And onward from that Divine spectacle, in which was displayed the "fulness of the Godhead bodily," events hurry to the culminating glories of Pentecost and the marriage supper of the Lamb.

III. IF THIS BE THE CASE, HOW OUGHT WE TO STUDY AND LAY HOLD OF THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION? Is there not a contrast between the affectionate concern and sacrifice of God and the languid indifference or stubborn refusals of men? How shall we escape if we neglect this infinite mercy? How shall we excuse the manner in which we listen to the Word of God?—M.

Vers. 17—20.—*Idolatry a detailed insult to Jehovah.* This is frequently stated in the Bible. It must be the case from the very nature of the worship of false gods. It is a denial and robbery of the true God. But the description here given helps us to realize more completely the intense sinfulness of the worship of idols, because of the circumstances attending it.

I. AGGRAVATING CIRCUMSTANCES. 1. *It was done publicly in the streets of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah.* God was displaced from the land he had given. The place that was consecrated by the faith and worship of the saints and the ceaseless mercies of Jehovah is desecrated by the orgies and profanities of heathenism. The worship of the "queen of heaven" (the female representative—Astarte—of the nature principle, of which Baal is the male principle) could not but be public. As the Baal worshippers poured forth their libatious to the sun-god in broad day, so the worshippers of the moon made no secret of their devotions. It was done literally and perforce "in the face of heaven." And celebrations of the most obscene description mingled with their sacrifices. Yet was there no shame. 2. *It absorbed the attention and energies of the people.* Here is a picture of a whole family, from the eldest to the least, occupied in tasks connected with the worship of Astarte. How different from the perfunctory or imperfect service rendered to Jehovah! No time was left for the true worship. And is it not just so to-day under new forms and conditions? The idolatry of pleasure, gain, ambition, personal and social ideals,—does it not absorb the minds and bodies of its devotees? How little time is left for Christian duty and sacrifice! How weary and useless are those faculties which are professedly placed at the service of God! Our life-work is too often in the market-place, in the forum of personal display and self-seeking, etc., instead of the service of Jesus and the house of God. 3. *It involved the waste of the natural products of the land.*

II. THE DELIBERATE INTENTION. There was not wanting this expressed defiance. The idea is that they would annoy and exasperate Jehovah with impunity to themselves, as mean natures delight in awakening the jealousy, etc., of others. In this way they showed how completely they misunderstood the relations of Jehovah with his world and his people, his command over the forces of nature, and his power of retaliation through the ordinary laws of nature.

III. ITS RECOMPENSE. 1. *According to natural laws.* Affecting, therefore, the objects they required for their sacrifices to Astarte, and cutting off the supplies requisite for man and beast. 2. *To their own confusion.* God will be unaffected; they them-

selves will be put to shame. The idolater and atheist are their own worst enemies. 3. *Not to be escaped or ended.* They are playing with fire. It will soon find its proper objects in themselves and their profaned offerings. Nor will they be able to quench that which they have kindled. So helpless will transgressors ever be. In the least of the calamities that they provoke upon themselves there is a beginning of penal fires and eternal miseries.—M.

Vers. 31—33.—*The desecration of Tophet.* This valley was the scene of Solomon's Moloch-worship, of the child-sacrifices of Ahaz and Manasseh, and of the varying idolatrous rites of succeeding times. If the temple still maintained externally its consecration to Jehovah and its position as the centre of the theocracy, the valley of Ben-Hinnom was the acknowledged centre and high place of Moloch. Its vicinity to Jerusalem brought it into prominent opposition to the temple. Some signal exhibition of the Divine wrath is, therefore, called for. This is furnished by the iconoclastic zeal of Josiah, the great slaughter of Israel in war, and the gradual use of it as a receptacle for filth, sewage, unburied dead, etc. The prophecy, repeated in ch. xix. 11, is speedily translated into history. We have here an instance of the Divine laws—

I. THAT THAT WHICH IS MORALLY CORRUPT SHALL ENTAIL DESTRUCTION. Where there is filth in God's universe there will be fire. Corruption *is* the beginning of death, in this world and that which is to come.

II. THE INWARD, MORAL CHARACTER OF THINGS AND PERSONS SHALL HAVE EXTERNAL PHYSICAL EXPRESSION. It will not always be concealed. That which is whispered in the ear shall be spoken from the house-top. The trap will be labelled and the pitfall plainly shown. The externalizing processes of history and development in nations, individuals, etc., tend to declare by outward and unmistakable signs the real character. Of this Tophet is an illustration. The judgment its revolting practices bring upon its votaries is the occasion of its permanent defilement. It gradually is transformed into a scene of physical abomination, and, to the spiritual imagination, the type and symbol of eternal perdition. Gehenna fires—how different their first and last senses, and yet how related! The same law will operate in holy and spiritual men. The inward nature will cast the slough of corruption, and shall be clothed upon with a "body," which shall express, further, and fulfil it. When that which is really and spiritually filthy is sentenced to be "filthy still," the saints shall find embodiment and circumstances corresponding to their inward condition, and constituting the elements of their reward.—M.

Vers. 1—34.—*The relations of righteousness and religion.* This chapter, as indeed so much other of Jeremiah's prophecies, teaches not a little concerning this great theme. In this chapter we note how it shows—

I. THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE PRINCIPAL THING. 1. It is God's *solemn* demand (ver. 2). (1) Jeremiah is charged to proclaim it in the Name of the Lord and as *his* word. (2) He is to go where there will be a vast congregation of the people: "In the gate of the Lord's house." (3) Probably at a time of national gathering, at one of the feasts, so as to secure a yet larger audience. (4) At a moment when the word of the Lord might be expected to win most attention from them—as they were "entering in at the gates to worship the Lord." 2. It is God's *perpetual* demand. See the whole chapter, the whole prophecy. "Amend your ways and your doings" (ver. 3) is its constant appeal. 3. At first it was *his only* command, and it is ever *his first* command (ver. 22). Our first parents were commanded to obey before sacrifice or any rites of religion were appointed. And so with Israel (ver. 22). The moral Law was given before the ceremonial. And it was given in a far more imperative form. The moral Law begins "Thou *shalt*;" the Levitical (Lev. i. 2—ii. 1), "If any man will." Hence from all the foregoing it is evident that righteousness stands before all else in the Divine esteem.

II. RELIGION WAS GIVEN FOR THE SAKE OF AND AS AN AID TO RIGHTEOUSNESS. Righteousness is not for the sake of religion, but *vice versâ*. No doubt they render mutual help, but the proper relation of the two is as aforesaid. And religion can be a help to righteousness and ought ever to be, even as it has often been and is. 1. *By supplying fresh motives.* Apart from religion, righteous conduct becomes simply morality, and bases itself upon laws of expediency, or at best draws its force from motives that rise no

higher than earth and man and the present life. But religion gives *the love of God in Christ* as its all-constraining force. Under the influence of this, what have not men done and borne; and what will they not do and bear? 2. *By lending intensity to those already in action.* How puny the power of *hope*, when it has none other recompense than that which this life and this world can furnish, contrasted with its invincible force when the recompenses of eternity, made known to us by religion, are set before it and held out to it! And so with the motive of *fear*. What an immense addition is made to the deterrent force of fear when the idea of God and *his* awful displeasure are present before the mind!

"His love will all vain love expel,
His fear all fear beside."

3. *By furnishing a perfect example.* In our blessed Lord's life, short as it was in duration, and far removed from us as it is in time, place, and circumstance, nevertheless in it there is to be found a standard and model of righteous conduct for all ages and all lands, such as can be found nowhere else. His life has been the compass by which many a saint has steered across the difficult ocean of life, and by its aid arrived safely at the desired haven. 4. *By winning for us, in response to our fervent prayers, the ever-present and potent help of the Divine and transforming Spirit.* By his aid the very "body of sin" within us is crucified, and we become new creatures in Christ. 5. *By its ordinances of worship:* its continual teaching, its Church fellowship, and its varied sacred observances, keeping alive within us those beliefs and sentiments which are ever the most powerful prompters to all righteousness of life. Thus the Israelite of old found the Law of God (cf. Ps. cxix.) his perpetual aid, and the worship of God's house a constant solace and strength. And it is so still. By the truths and the ordinances of religion, the weak, wavering will is steadied, the feet are kept from falling, and the soul is preserved from death. Such ought ever to be the case, ever is so, where religion is the worship of God in spirit and in truth; and this was the Divine design and intent in giving it to us.

III. BUT THEY ARE AT TIMES FOUND ASUNDER. Religion may flourish, but righteousness be only conspicuous by its absence. It was so in the time of the prophet. We see a whole apparatus of religion—temple, altar, priests, sacrifices, services; nothing omitted in external observances. And there was a national profession of it; large sums of money were lavished on it, and there was a universal outward regard for it. But, on the other hand, all this went on whilst the most gross unrighteousness characterized the very people who outwardly were so religious (cf. vers. 5, 6, 9, 18). This was an appalling fact. Nor, alas! is it one that now has no existence; the same sad separation of religion from righteousness may be too often seen in our days as of old. The murderous banditti of Southern Europe are diligent at Mass, and pay all honour to the Virgin and saints. The midnight assassins of Ireland are all good Catholics. And many a chapel and church in our own land has amongst its seemingly most religious worshippers, men who are cruel, hard, fraudulent, impure—"saints at the prayer-meeting and sacrament, but very devils at home."

IV. THEY MAY BE EVEN OPPOSED TO ONE ANOTHER. Not merely separate, but antagonistic. Yes, religion, which was designed to minister to righteousness, may not only be severed from it, but be actually found undermining it, sapping its very life and strength. Thus: 1. *By begetting false confidence.* (Cf. ver. 4.) The Jews thought that all this religion must guarantee them immunity from the Divine displeasure, must ensure them his safeguard and protection. He, so they thought, could never suffer harm to come to his own temple—"the temple of the Lord." And still it is hard to persuade our hearts that all our religion goes for nothing, and worse than nothing, when it brings forth no fruit of righteousness. So many prayers, such liberal gifts, such good desires, such correctness of creed and of outward demeanour, such devotional fervour,—surely these things must propitiate Heaven, must ward off the Divine displeasure! (Cf. G. Eliot's character, Bulstrode, the fraudulent but very religious banker, in 'Middlemarch.') 2. *By teaching men truths which they can readily wrest to evil.* (Cf. ver. 10.) The meaning (see Exposition) is not "We cannot help ourselves; God has given us over to sin;" but "We are delivered by our religious observances—sacrifices and the like; the score is cleared off; we are secured against harm; we may go and live as we list." Thus they "turned the grace of God into lasciviousness," and "continued in sin that," etc. And is not this

done still? It is to be feared that not a few suck a poisonous pleasure from the blessed doctrine of the forgiving love of God. Thus the gospel itself may become a "savour of death unto death" to those who thus "make Christ the Minister of sin." And because religion has been seen so often severed from righteousness, and sometimes even ministering to unrighteousness, many have been and are eager to sweep it away altogether as a hindrance rather than a help to moral well-being. A highly educated German gentleman, whom the writer met abroad, expressed it as his strong and deliberate conviction that the religiousness and the decay of a people stand related as cause and effect. He argued that England must sink because her leading statesman was an eminently religious man. And were religion necessarily or generally severed from righteousness, still more if it were necessarily or generally *opposed* to righteousness, then it would deserve the denunciation of all right-minded men, and the sooner it were swept utterly out of the way the better. But all we can say is that if righteousness be not found in company with religion, it is to be found nowhere else; and if the Church of God, the great company of those who profess to be actuated by religious motives and aims, do not furnish and nurture God-like and righteous souls, then there is no other company on the face of the earth that does so. Bad as the Church may be, the world is far worse.

V. WHAT, THEN, IS OUR DUTY? Not to inveigh against religion, still less to seek its destruction, but to do all we can to restore the original and God-designed relationship between it and righteousness. "What God hath joined together, let," etc. And it is on this restoration of right relationship between the two that God so strenuously and sternly insists here and throughout his Word. If (ver. 3) they *will* amend their ways, then his blessing; but if not, he will have no mercy. He cites the instance of Shiloh as a solemn warning to them (ver. 14). He forbids Jeremiah even to pray for them whilst they continue as they are (ver. 16). He pours his contempt upon all their religion, their burnt offerings, and sacrifices (ver. 21), whilst severed from righteousness. He tells them that all along in their history, from the first until now, he had asked for, though he had never received it from them, not religion merely, but *righteousness*—obedience to his Word (vers. 21—28). Instead of that they had committed all abomination, and therefore they should miserably perish (vers. 29—34). How dreadful, then, must be the separation, and yet more the antagonism, between these whom God united! As he gave Eve to be a help-meet to Adam, so did he give religion to be the help-meet of righteousness. Let us tremble with a holy fear if we find ourselves able to go on contentedly in religious observances, whilst conscience becomes less and less sensitive, and our love and loyalty to righteousness grow feebler day by day. Our subject shows us that such a disastrous condition is possible. But that we may escape it, let us resolve that, inasmuch as God has given us religion for our help—a help which our blessed Lord himself ever made use of—

> "Cold mountains and the midnight air
> Witnessed the fervour of his prayer;"

—we will know the possibilities of help towards holiness which undoubtedly it contains. Let us set ourselves to seek the "baptism of the Holy Ghost" and "the enduements of power" which come therefrom. If we do thus set ourselves to seek these, they shall be ours, for they are most certainly promised; so shall religion and righteousness abide in that most intimate and hallowed union which God from the first designed for them, and our righteousness, ministered to by its God-given help-meet religion, shall far exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, yea, shall advance ever nearer to that most glorious attainment, in which we shall be as our Saviour bid us be—"perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect."—C.

Ver. 3.—*The indispensable condition of all grace.* "Amend your ways," etc. See how this demand for amendment is reiterated in this chapter and throughout this prophecy. And we observe—

I. IT IS EVER SO. 1. *See the Word of God.* The prodigal had to come away from the far country first. John the Baptist, our Lord, and his apostles all preached repentance before pardon. The Law comes before the gospel. 2. *Conscience confirms the justice of this demand.* We feel it to be a monstrous thing that, without any turning from sin even in purpose, there should be an expectation of God's grace. 3. Men make

this same demand of those who rebel against their laws. 4. God's providence upholds this demand. The constitution of things is for the obedient and against the transgressor (cf. Butler's 'Analogy').

II. AND THE REASONS ARE BECAUSE SIN: 1. *Outrages God.* What order or happiness can there be in that household where the authority of the head is openly set at naught? 2. *Is dogged by sorrow and death.* The avenging deities were said to be shod with wool, so that their footsteps, ever following the transgressor, were not heard. It was the vision of sin and its awful issues that caused Jesus to sigh, to be troubled in spirit, and to weep; it was his agony. Now, God would save us, but cannot until we have done with wickedness. 3. *Binds the soul to enmity against God.* Deeds of wrong are the devil's sacraments, whereby he seals on the soul his own impress and pledges the soul to serve him. Every solitary act of sin deepens that impress and makes that pledge more irrevocable. Therefore, if the soul is to be saved, that bond *must* be broken. 4. *Amendment in conduct is the first step towards the restoration of the soul.* A man may break off ill-doing, and yet his heart be very far from right with God. Still, because every victory over sin strengthens the conscience and weakens the power of sin, its hold is thus loosened upon the soul, and the work of restoration is so far advanced.

III. BUT COMPLIANCE WITH THIS MOST RIGHTEOUS DEMAND IS: 1. *Often very difficult.* Ask the drunkard, the impure, the worldling, the gambler, if they find it easy to break away from their besetting sins. How like a set of fiends they clamour for their wonted indulgence! "Hoc opus hic labor est." 2. *But never impossible.* No; for along with every Divine command goes forth the strength needed for obedience. How absurd, on mere human principles, for our Lord to bid the man with the withered hand to stretch it forth; the palsied to rise, take up his bed, and walk; and Lazarus to come forth from his tomb! But all these facts are recorded to encourage those who would turn to the Lord, but yet "are sore let and hindered." We often ask—

> "Oh, how shall feeble flesh and blood
> Burst through the bonds of sin?
> The holy kingdom of our God,
> What soul shall enter in?"

And there could be but one sad answer were it not that he who gives the command gives also the needed help. Yes—

> "There is a way for man to rise
> To that sublime abode;
> An offering and a sacrifice,
> A Holy Spirit's energies,
> An Advocate with God."

3. *And ever blessed.* (Cf. vers. 3, 7.) All those precious sentences with which the sermon on the mount opens, and which we call the Beatitudes, were addressed to those who had resolved, by God's grace, to amend their ways. Christ has no other word for them than that they are blessed, and what his Word affirms all they who have followed his leading do with grateful heart confirm. Yes, "blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." 4. *But if refused, is awfully avenged.* Too often it is refused. It was so here. All manner of excuse attempted, and though these "lying words" (ver. 4) were and are exposed again, the refusal is persisted in, and then "the wrath of God arises, and there is no remedy." "From all such hardness of heart and contempt of thy holy Word and commandment, good Lord, deliver us."—C.

Ver. 4.—*How men deceive themselves.* "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord," etc. The people of Jerusalem were flattering themselves that no harm would come to them because of the presence in their midst of the temple of the Lord. And men flatter themselves in like manner still. Now let us—

I. CONSIDER THEIR ARGUMENT. God had said, "In this house will I dwell." They knew that, and hence it seemed impossible that it should be devastated by the heathen. It was the place of which he had said, "There 'mine honour dwelleth.'" The cloud of

glory had filled it, the Shechinah brightness rested on the mercy-seat. Was it to be imagined that he who of old had smitten with death those who presumed even to look into or to touch the ark of God, who had smitten monarchs with leprosy for lack of due respect to it, would now suffer the bands of the idolaters to lay waste his sanctuary, in which it was enshrined? Moreover, once and again salvation for Israel had gone forth from the temple of God, deliverance and victory had there been won. The prophetic prayer of Solomon who had built it told of mercy and help that should surely come to Israel through that temple. Thus ancient teachings, glorious events, the manifested presence of God, many promises in connection with the temple of the Lord, all combined to lead men to look upon it with an undue trust, and to believe that, so long as it reared its sacred front in their midst, it would prove as a palladium, a shield and defence for them all. Therefore they met all Jeremiah's warnings, and all misgivings of their own consciences, by the oft-repeated cry, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these!" And that which answers in our day to the Jewish trust in these "lying words," as Jeremiah terms them, is the confidence that is placed in the Church, her sacraments and ministers; or in past religious experiences, or in present moods of feeling; and yet more in the endorsement of our religious profession by our acceptance into the Church's fellowship and our admission to her ordinances. Such answer now to the "lying words" Jeremiah denounced then. But note—

II. WHAT OF WORTH THERE IS IN THIS ARGUMENT. There can be no doubt that the tares owe a great deal, owe everything in fact, to the wheat amongst which they have been sown. But for the wheat, they would have been plucked up long ago. And God's dealings with men had so often confirmed what our Lord's parable teaches, that the tares had come to congratulate themselves that they had no cause for fear. For ten righteous men Sodom would have been spared. For Moses' sake all Israel had been borne with, when but for his intercession God's righteous anger would have swept them away. The descendants of David had cause many times to bless themselves that, though so unlike their great ancestor in obedience to God, they were yet of his house and lineage. "For the elect's sake," said our Lord, "those days"—days of Jerusalem's final doom—"shall be shortened." And so here in the text, the people of Jerusalem could not but know that they were wicked in the extreme; but because they, though tares, were blessed with the presence of what they thought God counted as wheat—the temple and all its hallowed associations—they laughed at the idea of any great calamity coming upon them. And in the present-day parallels to that old trust in "lying words," what of worth there was in those words then, there is in the like of them now. The Church, with all its hallowed associations, *is* God's wheat, or rather, does assuredly contain all there is of it. For what manner of definition of the Church of God will any one presume to lay down other than this, that it consists of *all* the good? Broader it is not; but *so* broad it is. The presence, therefore, of the godly in any community is a guarantee of good to that community. "Ye are the salt of the earth," said our Lord. But for his Church the world would rot. Let any who sneer and persecute Christ's servants, whether in school, work-room, office, shop, or where else—and such persecution is common enough—let them remember that, but for such as those on whom they are pleased to pour their contempt, their own career would be cut very short indeed. If, then, the temple of the Lord, to which the Jews were trusting, was as the wheat, then the wicked people who were looking to it for safety were in the right, and their words were not lying words.

III. ITS WORTHLESSNESS NOTWITHSTANDING. In all those instances in which the tares had been spared for the sake of the wheat, there had been two conditions fulfilled. It had been really wheat which sheltered the tares, and there had been sufficiency of it. There was not enough of it when the Deluge came, nor when Sodom was destroyed; and so, in like manner, should ever the wheat fall short, it will go ill with the tares then. But did the temple and its ritual and its associations fulfil either of these conditions? No doubt the mere structure, her very stones, had worth in God's sight. Just as, for the sake of the dearly beloved soul that once has dwelt within that now lifeless corpse, we hang over it with tenderest fondness, and would not put it away from us were we not compelled; so, because of the true worship that had gone up from that temple, and because of the many saintly men who there had

drawn near to God, that material shrine had a certain value and would not lightly be allowed to perish. But if there were preciousness in the temple, there was not sufficiency of it to outweigh or to cover over the iniquities which surged around it, yea, invaded its very courts, and of which it was made the unwilling occasion. Instead of being a palladium, or any sort of guarantee of safety to that godless nation, its towers and courts, its altars and ever-ascending sacrifices, were ever calling down vengeance upon those who so shamefully used them. And, indeed, it could hardly be said to be as God's wheat at all. The temple had often been the vehicle of that "worship in spirit and in truth" which alone God desires, and for the sake of such worship it had a relative preciousness. But let that worship cease—as it had long ceased—then the temple became as a mere corpse, beautiful, tenderly loved indeed, but still corruptible, corrupting and spreading corruption, and therefore demanding to be put out of the way. Now apply all this to the false truths of our own day. Will the Church, her sacraments, her ordinances, your membership with her, your frequent moods of religious feeling, your current creed, your loud profession of attachment to her, your manifold religious privileges,—will any or all of these things, precious though they every one of them be, compensate for that surrender of your true self to God which is his perpetual desire and demand? Will they not rather, as did the presence of the temple and their innumerable privileges for the Jews, heighten your guilt, and make more glaring your sin, because they show that you have been amongst those "to whom much has been given," and of whom, therefore, "much will be required"? No worship, however magnificent, costly, constant; however hallowed by association, or authorized by venerable usage, or sanctioned by the holiest of the Church of God, or even owned by God as the means of uplifting many hearts heavenward and Godward; if such worship be wanting, as, alas! it may be, in the all-essential element, the "worship in spirit and in truth;" if there be no outgoings of the *heart* in it all, as too often there is not,—then it will prove no shield from but a provocative to that holy wrath of God which sooner or later awaits every godless soul.

IV. THE VERY SERIOUS SUGGESTIONS IT OFFERS. 1. *The utter hatefulness of sin.* (1) It turned the very temple of the Lord and its sacrifices, which had been designed to be "a savour of life unto life" to those who by means of them drew nigh to God, into "a savour of death unto death." And so still, even Christ the Rock, the sure Foundation, becomes by this wresting power of sin a crushing stone which, falling on the head of the sinner, grinds him to powder. (2) It drags down the innocent with the guilty. That temple of the Lord, the holy and beautiful house, what had that done? Had it not deserved all honour and love from those amid whom it stood? And now the sin of the people was to overwhelm her in utter and irretrievable ruin. The man whose wickedness pulls down innocent and loving wife and children, and drags *them* in the mire which he has chosen to wallow in, as we see their misery, how odious his sin appears! And this is ever one of sin's works. It drags in and down the innocent, the pure, the beloved. Behold those blackened ruins, those polluted altars, those blood-stained courts, and see a parable of sin. 2. *The testimony that these refuges of lies, such as that in which the Jews trusted, do surely give of our need of a real refuge, a true defence.* Men who deny *the* Saviour most are yet ever confessing that they and all men do need *a* Saviour. They who would not trust in God trusted in the mere material temple. 3. To what are *we* trusting? In "lying words"—which God forbid!—or—which may God grant!—in those words of the Lord Jesus, which are able to make us wise unto salvation?—C.

Vers. 5—16.—*Strange church-goers.* I. LOOK AT THEM AS JEREMIAH SAW THEM. Thieves (vers. 6, 9), most cruel oppressors, murderers, adulterers, etc. Yet they were all going into the temple to worship the Lord. Strange church-goers indeed.

II. ASK IF THERE BE ANY SUCH NOW? What if some angel of God, unseen by us, were to mark on the foreheads of all who enter our churches now their true characters in the sight of God: would there be no fraudulent, no oppressors of the poor, none whose hearts, though not their hands, are chargeable with having shed innocent blood? Let us each one ask, "What name would be put upon *me*?"

III. INQUIRE WHAT POSSIBLE MOTIVES CAN ACTUATE THEM. 1. With some, no doubt, it is a cloke to cover up their real character. 2. Or a tribute paid to the demands of

fashion, custom, society. What would be thought of them if they did not go to church? 3. Or a method of quieting conscience. They come away and think they have wiped off the score that was against them. They say (ver. 10), "We are delivered [see Exposition] to do," etc. 4. Or to set an example to those they are pleased to call "the lower orders;" like the philosophers of old, who, whilst they held all religions to be equally false, yet regarded them all as indispensably useful. 5. Or as a means —for so many regarded such things—of propitiating the Divine favour and securing a title to heaven by-and-by. But there is no end to the motives which lead such men to do that which, to more honest-hearted people, appears a mockery, an absurdity, and yet worse.

IV. LISTEN TO THE LORD'S WORD TO SUCH. He tells them: 1. They were getting no good whatsoever from such worship (ver. 3). 2. They were completely deceiving themselves (ver. 4). 3. They were neglecting that amendment of their ways which would save them (ver. 5). 4. They were grossly insulting God (vers. 10, 11). 5. They were blind to notorious facts: *e.g.* Shiloh (ver. 12); Ephraim (ver. 15). 6. Thorough reformation was alone the way of life for them (vers. 3, 7). "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."—C.

Vers. 9—11.—*Sacrilege.* I. WHAT DO WE GENERALLY UNDERSTAND BY THIS WORD? 1. Some use it of disregard of ritual. 2. Others of secular employment of sacred places or things. 3. Others of those persons whom they regard as unauthorized presuming to minister in holy things. 4. Others of robbing churches, etc. But without discussing these, let us note—

II. WHAT GOD COUNTS AS SACRILEGE. It is declared here (ver. 11). It is when men turn the Church of God into a den of robbers. Our Lord charged this upon the religionists of his day. Jeremiah charges it, in God's Name, upon those to whom he was sent. Costly, splendid, correct, continual worship was duly carried on. Irreverence—and how much less sacrilege!—would seem to be a charge utterly unfit for those who worshipped in such manner. And yet, though the word be not here used, the thing itself is emphatically told of as the very crime which these people were flagrantly guilty of. Turning God's house, which was called by his Name, into a den of robbers,—if that be not sacrilege, what else is? They robbed one another (vers. 5, 6). They robbed God. And the temple was their haunt, as their den is the robbers' haunt; and there they found rest, and prepared themselves for further crime (ver. 10), as does the robber in his den. It is an awful indictment. But under one or other of the counts of such indictment they are assuredly chargeable who frequent the house of God, not for the high and holy purposes for which the worship of God was designed, but that, as in ver. 10, they may get peace of mind in regard to their past sins and so be free to go and sin again. "With such usage the temple is not a place of salvation, but a refuge for robbers, where they purify themselves from the blood of their evil deeds, so as to be the readier for new ones." Therefore all they who "make Christ a Minister of sin," who, instead of deliverance from sin, get comfort in it by their religious observances, who shelter themselves from all fear of God's anger and silence the warnings of conscience by "coming and standing before God in his house which is called by his Name," though their object be only "to be delivered to do all these abominations," and not at all to be saved from them,—these are the sacrilegious, and their profanation of holy things is the worst of all.

III. THINK OF THE RESULTS OF SUCH SACRILEGE. 1. How God is dishonoured! 2. How his service is made hateful in the eyes of men! What a stumbling-block it is to those who would turn to God! 3. How it hardens the man's own soul! 4. How it necessitates the judgment of God!

IV. WHAT SHOULD SUCH A SUBJECT TEACH US? Surely, when in the house of God, to pray that if any have come there in sacrilegious manner, God's Spirit, the Lord of the temple, may meet with them and turn them from their evil way. Should we not also search and see if there be *any* such evil way in ourselves? And let our prayer be unto him who when on earth drove forth with scourges the "robbers" whom he found in the temple, that he would be pleased, by the scourge of his Spirit and his Word, to

drive forth from all in his house now all in them that would rob him of his glory and their souls of eternal life.—C.

Vers. 12—16.—*Warning voices.* I. SUCH VOICES ARE PERPETUALLY HEARD. The prophet speaks of three such here. 1. Shiloh (ver. 12). 2. The Lord himself (ver. 13). 3. Ephraim (ver. 15).

II. And THEY TELL EVER THE SAME TRUTHS. 1. The Divine anger against sin (ver. 12). 2. The utter uselessness of their "trust in lying words" to escape that anger (ver. 14). 3. The absolute need of repentance.

III. And MEET, ALL TOO OFTEN, WITH THE SAME RECEPTION. They were rejected. "Ye heard not; and I called you," etc. (ver. 13).

IV. But are VINDICATED IN LIKE AWFUL MANNER. 1. By their sin becoming ineradicable, so that they are given over to a reprobate mind, and are "guilty of an eternal sin" (cf. Mark iii. 29). Hence (ver. 16) the prophet is forbidden to pray for them (cf. 1 John v. 16). 2. By the judgment of God falling upon them (ver. 15).

CONCLUSION. 1. Watch and pray against unbelief in these warnings. 2. Take heed to them yourselves. 3. Hold them up to others. 4. Bless God for them.—C.

Vers. 12—14.—*Shiloh, or the God-forsaken shrine.* It is to many minds impossible to avoid a feeling of deep sadness when we look upon the ruins, noble even in their desolation, of some former beautiful and august sanctuary of God. There are many such scattered over this and other lands: Tintern, Furness, Melrose, etc. Our imagination pictures them when in the zenith of their glory, with their many stately towers and tapering spires, their long-drawn aisles and lofty roofs, the glorious vista of high-arched nave and choir and glittering sanctuaries stretching away further still in the dim distance, the gleaming altars, the magnificent service, the vast throng of kneeling worshippers, the soul-enchanting music, and the murmur of myriad prayers. The memories of saintly men and women who have worshipped and are buried there crowd upon the mind, and we wistfully wonder where and why that consecrated genius has flown which had power to rear for God shrines so glorious as those whose ruins we are beholding must once have been. It is sad to think of such glory and beauty as these forsaken shrines once had gone for ever. The Jews who came back from the Captivity wept when they thought of the glory of the ancient temple, which they never more might see. But if the departure of *material* glory may cause sadness to the mind, how much more the departure of that which is *spiritual!* If we mourn that we shall no more have the presence of some fair temple of the Lord, how much more when we lose the Lord of the temple! And it is such sadder loss that Shiloh, the God-forsaken shrine, has to tell of. And we observe upon it that—

I. THERE ARE FEW MORE MOURNFUL HISTORIES THAN THAT OF SHILOH. Shiloh was one of the earliest and most sacred of the Hebrew sanctuaries. There for full three hundred years the ark of God remained and the priests of the Lord ministered. As soon as the promised land was mainly subdued, Joshua brought the ark of God from Gilgal, near the Jordan, to Shiloh. The place was probably chosen for its seclusion and hence its safety, it being off the great highways of the land. Bethel, which otherwise might have been chosen as especially sacred, was yet in the hands of the Canaanites. Hence Shiloh, in the territory of the powerful tribe of Ephraim, and of their great ancestor Joseph, a tribe which more and more had been coming to the front amongst their brethren, was chosen for the sanctuary of the ark of God. There, as afterwards at Jerusalem, "the tribes went up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the Name of the Lord." What glad festivals; what gracious deliverances; what Divine responses to their inquiring of the Lord; what holy memories of thronging worshippers, of accepted sacrifices, of saintly priests and prophets who had dwelt there, were all associated with that shrine at Shiloh! There Eli ministered, and Hannah came to present her offerings, to pour out her prayers and to pay her vows. There she brought Samuel, and there the Lord called him to his high service as he ministered before him. All their truest and noblest life drew its inspiration from the God who had placed his Name there, and whom there they went to worship. But at length, under the rule of Eli, that well-meaning but weak-willed high priest, priesthood and people alike sank down into a state of moral and religious degra-

dation from which Eli was powerless to deliver them. His own sons led the way in abominable wickedness, and became sons of Belial even beyond others. So low had they fallen, that they had come to regard the ark of God as a kind of fetish, and hence they carried it down to battle against the Philistines, thinking thereby to certainly win the day. But the ark of God was taken, its besotted priests slain, and Eli, hearing the dreadful tidings suddenly, died, a worn-out and broken-hearted old man. From that hour, as the seventy-eighth psalm tells, God "forsook Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; . . . he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim." And it was all because, as the same psalm tells, Israel "tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies: but turned back, and dealt deceitfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images." Wherefore "he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel." And now, ages after, Jeremiah bids the people of his day go to Shiloh, and see what God did to it for the wickedness of the people. They might trace out, perhaps, the foundations of her ancient walls, and discover the vestiges of the former sanctuary; but now no altar bore the sacred fire, the smoke of no sacrifice ascended, no priest ministered, no God gave answer, no song of the Lord went up; the whole place was probably ravaged and overthrown by the enemies of Israel, who had carried off their great treasure, the ark of God. Well might the wife of Phinehas, in the hour of her agony, call her new-born, but now fatherless, and soon to be altogether her orphan, child, I-chabod, for indeed the glory had departed, the ark of God was taken, and the Lord had forsaken Shiloh. Oh, the sorrow, the shame, the unavailing remorse which would overwhelm the faithless priesthood and the godless people, when they beheld that God-abandoned shrine, and remembered wherefore this calamity had come upon them! Yes, this story is a sad one; but it is most salutary also, and therefore we may well heed the word of the Lord which says to us, "Go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my Name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." But we observe—

II. THAT SHILOH HAS MANY PARALLELS. Shiloh is not the only God-forsaken shrine of which the Bible tells or of which we have had knowledge. No; there are all too many like it. There was the temple of the Lord in Jeremiah's time. All its splendour, its solemn ritual, its lavish sacrifices, its ever-burning altar fire, could not save it. The stern sentence went forth against it, and it was burnt with fire and laid in ashes on the ground. There was the temple which was afterwards built on the return from Captivity, and which was so beautiful and adorned in the time of our Lord; concerning that, too, Jesus said, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!" And it was the same with many Churches, those "spiritual houses" which, after our Lord's time and in his Name, were reared "for a habitation of God through the Spirit." The Christian Church at Jerusalem. The honour of being the mother Church of Christendom was taken from her and transferred to Antioch, and ultimately it was overwhelmed altogether in the destruction that came on the city in which it was gathered. And there were the Churches of Asia; their "candlestick was removed out of its place," as the Lord warned them would be the case, and now secular historians bear their testimony to the truth of that warning word. Gibbon tells how "in the loss of Ephesus the Christians deplored the fall of the first angel, the extinction of the first candlestick of the Revelation; the desolation is complete; and the Temple of Diana or the Church of Mary will equally elude the search of the curious traveller. The circus and the three stately theatres of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes. Sardis is reduced to a miserable village; the god of Mahomet, without a rival or a son, is invoked in the mosques of Thyatira and Pergamos; and the populousness of Smyrna is supported by the foreign trade of Franks and Armenians. Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy or courage. At a distance from the sea, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens defended their religion and freedom above four score years; and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and Churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect; a column in a scene of ruins." They have thus all disappeared, as Christian Churches almost utterly; they are as Shiloh and Jerusalem—their houses in which they worshipped God left unto them desolate. And there have been many other Churches since, and some nearer our own time and in

our own land. And many still, perhaps, need sorely the admonitory counsel to go to Shiloh, and see what the Lord has done there. But not in material edifices alone, nor even in those gathered communities to which more properly the name of Churches belongs, need we go to find instances of God-forsaken shrines. For inasmuch as we all are "temples of the Holy Ghost," so St. Paul tells us, and our own experience confirms his word, it is possible to find only too many illustrations of this same mournful fact. Take the ever-memorable example and warning of the fallen apostle Judas. What a shrine of the Holy Ghost he once was! How richly gifted! how gloriously endowed! He came with the rest, saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy Name." He with the rest "ate and drank in Christ's presence, and in his Name did many wonderful works." He enjoyed the fellowship of Christ, and by him was sent forth in his Name. But behold him giving place to the devil, yielding his soul up to the demon of covetousness and worldly ambition, and then acting as the guide to them who arrested the Lord, betraying the Son of man with a kiss, and then, when too late he awoke to see the madness and horror of what he had done, rushing forth to seek and find a suicide's grave in the Aceldama, "the field of blood," purchased by the price of his traitorous gain. And Ananias and Sapphira and Demas and yet others, what are they all but deplorable instances and names of these God-forsaken shrines? And have we not known such? Men who prayed, and worshipped, and taught, and preached, and then, having denied the Lord who bought them, fell away, and found henceforth nothing but "a fearful looking for of judgment" and of the "fiery indignation" of God destined to be poured out on all such as they. Ah! it is a sight which might well make angels weep, and which drew forth the bitter tears of the Son of God himself.

III. AND IN EVERY CASE THE CAUSE OF THIS FORSAKING OF THEM BY GOD WAS ONE AND THE SAME. It was always "wickedness." Not any outward circumstance, not any of those secondary causes which we are so apt to regard as the real cause. But this which these verses so plainly declare. It was so even in those ruined edifices to which we referred at the beginning of this homily. History will tell you how gross immorality and horrible corruption found a too-ready home in those fair fabrics which had been reared for far other purposes and with far other design. But "wickedness" having made them its haunt and home, the people, roused to fierce wrath, rose up and tore them down, and their grey, ivy-clad stones utter forth to this day such message as that in our text. And in all those other instances to which we have pointed, whether temples made with hands, whether Churches or individual men, it has ever been sin, sin, which has wrought all this evil. And in that every-day fact of bodily death we have the standing type of this terrible truth, "The wages of sin is death." That body once so bright, so full of energy, so lit up with intelligence and love, so possessed too, it may have been, with the Spirit of God, so fair, so lovely to look upon when life dwelt in it, now in death,—what is it but a God-forsaken shrine, and hence doomed to return, "earth to earth, dust to dust, and ashes to ashes"? We are so accustomed to death that this its solemn lesson we are ever forgetting or putting out of sight.

IV. BUT ALL THESE SHILOHS HAVE A MESSAGE FROM GOD UNTO US, ACCORDING TO WHAT WE ARE. We every one of us are either examples of these forsaken ones, or becoming so, or, blessed be God, still habitations for him through the Spirit. Now, if we be already forsaken of God, then if this fact be—as surely it should be, and as we trust it is—a matter of sore distress to us, then there is a gracious word to us if we be willing to hear it. All of us were once "temples of God." We can look back to the time when none of the unclean spirits that now haunt and harm us so terribly had any home in our souls; when thoughts were pure, hands undefiled, and our lips unpolluted with evil. Our fathers and mothers brought us to be baptized, or in other ways recognized the blessed truth that we belonged to the Father, the Son, and the *Spirit*. And in our childhood days we, as all children are, were members of the kingdom of heaven. But what are we now? O God, it is dreadful to think of what some are now! The desolate ruins of once glorious Churches; the lifeless bodies that we carry to the grave are but faint types of what some of these God-forsaken ones have become. And can it be that any are willing to continue so, and thus make it inevitable that God should sweep you away into the hell of all corruption? Oh no; you cannot be willing that that should be. Well, then, if you tremble at such doom, as well you may, listen: *God will re-enter his shrine, and make you once again his temples.* Yes, he will do that. He will

"restore your souls and lead you in," etc. But first, as when Hezekiah cleansed the temple, you must cast out the manifold uncleanness that is there. There must be a thorough purging, a real repentance. God will not come back to a sin-inhabited and evil-loving soul. You must "throughly amend your ways." This is indispensable. See how in this chapter and throughout his Word God insists upon this. And then, as the high priest was wont to do, come bearing the blood of atonement into the presence of God; come, that is, pleading the Name of Jesus for acceptance and pardon and restoration,—and you shall behold, in the shrine of your soul, the cloud of glory once again shining there and the presence of God again manifested there. Thus come day by day, and you shall find how Christ saves "to the uttermost all that," etc. But are you of those whom God is now forsaking? Is the dread process of crowding out God by the bringing into the shrine of your heart those many things God hates and with which he will not abide, going on in you? Ah! that may be so. As others, so you were once the temple of the Holy Ghost, and perhaps there came a day when more than ever you welcomed him as your Ruler, because he had taken of the things of Christ and had shown them unto you. You made your open confession and avowal of your desire to be ruled and governed by him; you pledged yourself by his help to be Christ's faithful servant always. And for a time you were so: you were careful, conscientious; you remembered your Lord's word, "Watch and pray;" you readily abandoned all that stood between you and the doing of his will; you walked with God. But a change has come over you. One by one you received into your heart likings, and desires, and beliefs, and dispositions which were contrary to the Spirit of Christ. These suggestions you listened to, their counsels you obeyed. And so the love of the world fastened on you, propensities and habits which war against the soul took hold of you, and now you, whose heart was once a shrine of God, will, if the sad process I have spoken of goes on much longer, be forsaken of him altogether. Oh that the consideration of the doom of Shiloh may fill us with a holy fear, and lead us to such prayer as that which the well-known verse expresses!—

"Search me, O Lord, and try my heart,
For thou that heart canst see,
And turn each cursed idol out
That dares to rival thee."

But some of you are to be congratulated that you are still temples of God, still shrines of the Holy Ghost. Well, then, cherish his presence as the greatest joy of your life. For "he is your life." You would not invite to meet and abide with a dear and honoured earthly friend those with whom you well knew he had no sympathy nor they with him, who were distasteful and hostile to him. You would not treat an earthly friend so. Be careful, then, not so to treat the Spirit of God, who now dwells within you. Be full of solicitude not to grieve him, yet more to do nought that would drive him from you. "Walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." So shall God dwell in you and you in God, and that more and more to your ever-increasing strength and purity and joy. Thus though, as we have now done, you may go in devout thought to Shiloh, and behold what God has done there, yet you shall be able with thankful joy to know that never, never shall you be as that God-forsaken shrine.—C.

Vers. 13—16.—*The Divine long-suffering worn out.* The above section brings before us, as do many other Scriptures, this very certain and very serious truth of God's patience being not only exhaustible, but exhausted. We observe—

I. THE DIVINE LONG-SUFFERING IS A VERY PRECIOUS FACT. Nations, Churches, individuals—have not we ourselves?—have been examples of it. What have not all of us owed to the fact that the Lord is long-suffering, and "willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn," etc.? But—

II. THIS TRUTH HAS VERY OFTEN BEEN MUCH ABUSED. 1. In men's *thoughts;* for they have allowed themselves to pervert the truth of the "eternal hope," and to think that in no way can the finite will of man exhaust the infinitude of mercy which there is in God. 2. And in their *words* also they have so set forth the long-suffering of God as to leave on men's minds the impression that it was practically infinite. We love to sing such verses as those which tell how

"None can measure out thy patience
By the span of human thought,
None can bound the tender mercies
Which thy holy Son hath wrought."

And there is a sense in which these words are most blessedly true, but it is undeniable that such words are often pressed to a meaning which practically encourages the sinner to go on in sin. 3. And yet more is this truth abused in *deed*. Those to whom the prophet was writing had abused the long-suffering of God (cf. the closing verses of the Second Book of Chronicles). And how fearfully frequent is this abuse in the present day! How many reckon securely on making their peace with God, and having all the great affairs of their souls fully settled for eternity, although they go on, day by day and year by year, living in total disregard both of God and of his will. Therefore it is necessary to insist with all urgency—

III. THAT THE LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD CAN BE WORN OUT. The above section of this prophecy plainly declares this fact. And the fate of Jerusalem stands not alone in evidence of this (cf. the story of the Deluge, and how long then the long-suffering of God waited). Those who perished in the wilderness—how often were they warned! And, indeed, it may be said that God never brings ruin upon nation, Church, or individual soul without warning, repeated, plain, and urgent. But the fact that he does send such ruin proves that men may tempt God too far.

IV. AND THAT WHICH WILL EXHAUST THE LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD IS CLEARLY SHOWN US. It is not the fact of sin, great sin, repeated sin, but it is when, as in the case before us, *sin has been persisted in in spite of every kind and degree of plainest warning*. "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck," etc. (Prov. xxix. 1). Now, such was the conduct of those told of here. God had not merely let them know of the peril of their conduct, but his loving solicitude for them had shown itself in the most marked ways. Note expressions in ver. 13: God not only spoke to them, but like as "those who watch for the morning" rise up early, so God himself awoke early, *i.e.* he chose the most favourable hours, the most probable means for gaining attention to the truths which he, by his prophets, spoke to them. But it was all of no avail. "Ye heard not; . . . ye answered not" (cf. ch. vi. 16, 17). Now, it is sin persisted in, in spite of all such Divine solicitude so repeatedly manifested, that God will not pardon (vers. 14, 15). It is an unpardonable sin, and like such sin its forgiveness is not even to be prayed for (ver. 16, and cf. 1 John iv. 16).

V. CONSIDER THE REASON OF THIS REFUSAL TO FORGIVE. It is not because there is not love sufficient in God to pardon, but because his love is so great, because he *is* love. For God's love is not as that of too many earthly parents—a partial and unjust thing, loving one child at the expense of the others—but his love is for *the children*. His *whole* family are the subjects of his incessant and tenderest solicitude. Now, if a rebellious child come away from its rebellion, and have done with it, coming and confessing, "Father, I have sinned," with what joy the Father welcomes such returning one back! And so do the angels of God. No harm, but only good, results. But if there be no repentance, and the spirit of rebellion burns on in the heart of the child, how, consistently with true regard for the welfare of the other and obedient children, can the Father deal with that one as he does with these? It would turn heaven into hell, and make the Father's house, now the home of blessedness and the blessed, a scene of eternal discord. It could not be. Now, it is because such despising of the long-suffering of God destroys the hope of repentance, renders impossible the sighing of the contrite heart, and renders certain the going on in rebellion, that therefore this sin wears out the long-suffering of God and hath never forgiveness. The very love of God necessitates that he who is separate and alien in heart from the children of his love should be separate and alien from them in every other respect as well. And therefore, because it would be praying against the well-being of God's children, the prophet is forbidden to pray for the forgiveness of this sin. It is the unpardonable sin, the sin unto death, the sin against the Holy Ghost.

CONCLUSION. *We learn what alone bars the mercy of God.* Not this or that sin, however great. Still less the circumstance of death. But this "despising the forbearance of God." What need, then, for us all to pray, "Keep back thy servant also

from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: . . . I shall be innocent from the *great* transgression"!—C.

Ver. 16.—*Prohibited prayers.* The text a distinct instance. We remark—

I. SUCH PROHIBITION OF PRAYER SEEMS VERY STRANGE. Are we not bidden "pray without ceasing," "in all things by prayer and supplication . . . make our requests known unto God"? Are we not promised, "Ask, and ye shall receive"? Did not the Lord say, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint"? And, in a case more nearly resembling the one before us in the text, did not Samuel say to the rebellious people of his day, "But God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you"?

II. IT IS NEVERTHELESS A FACT. And this prohibition is repeated (ch. xi. 14; xiv. 11; cf. also Exod. xxxii. 10).

III. AND WE HAVE WHAT IS SIMILAR NOW. There is no express command not to pray for the reversal of the laws of nature. But yet we never do pray for such things. David's servants wondered that when his child was dead he should altogether cease from fasting and prayer; but he answered, "Wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again?" (2 Sam. xii. 23). And even before death has actually taken place, when there is no hope of life, we find it all but impossible to pray for such life. And so in regard to what we know would be derogatory to the honour of God and his righteousness; we should never think of praying for aught like that. Or for what cannot be in the nature of things. Now, in all these things it is as if we had been prohibited to pray for them, seeing that we never do so pray. As children give over praying their parents to do this or that when they see by the expression of their countenance that it cannot be, and, on the contrary, when they see the faintest look of "yes," they urge their request with a renewed importunity of clamour; so is it in our prayers before God. We must see the look of "yes" on the face of God in more or less degree, or our prayers die down. But if it *be* seen, then they rise up, press on and forward with a vigour unknown before. This is a law of all prayer. And in regard to prayer for such as are told of in the text, it may be that Jeremiah was not expressly told in so many words that he was not to pray for them, but it was borne in upon his mind that he could not. And it is sadly possible that such conviction may be borne in upon the minds of God's people now concerning some reprobate ones. There comes over the soul the deep feeling that such and such a one "is joined to his idols," and that you can only "let him alone." The disciples of the Lord were bidden, when their message was spurned, to cast off the dust of their feet as a testimony against them. Paul did so with the hardened Jews. And such solemn conviction as to the utter godlessness of any on the part of a company of God's people is that "binding on earth" which will be ratified by, because it is but the result of, the "binding in heaven." They of whom the Church feels deeply that "their sins are retained," those sins are retained. And so through this solemn conviction, this despair of the soul's turning to God, prayer for such soul may become impossible. God has practically said concerning such to his people, "Pray not thou for this people, neither," etc.

IV. THIS IS A FACT OF MOST MOMENTOUS IMPORT TO THOSE WHOM IT CONCERNS. To be given up by God's servants may be the token that you are given up by God. Their feeling about you may be—we do not say necessarily is, but may be—but the reflection of God's. Happy are they who put joy and gladness into the hearts of God's servants, and for whom they with earnestness and strong faith can pray. But sad is the outlook of those for whom those same servants of God feel they cannot pray. Oh, pray that prayers for you may never be counted by God or by his people as amongst prohibited prayers!—C.

Ver. 18.—*Idolatrous worship both a warning and a model.* The text vividly portrays the worship rendered to the heathen goddess, whose sumptuous and licentious worship had so fascinated those to whom the prophet wrote.

I. IT IS A WARNING. For it shows the deadly contagion of sin. Now, when the head of the household goes after evil, he speedily draws in and down wife and children, until the whole family is corrupted, and they become a household of wickedness. The text reveals whole families engaged in the worship of idolatry, each member taking an

active and eager part. They become so many societies for the propagation of ungodliness. In the sanctity or the sin of the parent the children are sure to share. In the first, by the grace of God; in the second, by the fatal force of a father's example. A father can lift his children up to heaven or he can drag them down to hell, and some do. See the text.

II. BUT IT IS A MODEL ALSO. In what we are here told, the heathen shame the Church. Idolatrous worship may well put to the blush much of the worship of God. For in the worship told of in the text, false and horrible as it was, nevertheless we see much that we might well copy. 1. *It was a worship that made all work.* What a busy hive of workers each household is seen to be! But where is the counterpart of this in the Church of Christ? A whole family eager and active for Christ—the father, the mother, and all the children—would be a unique fact. How lazy, how indolent, is the greater part of our religion! 2. *The children were interested in it.* We are heart-broken that the great masses of our countrymen stand aloof from the worship of God. Did we interest them in it when they were children? We had them all in our hands, as we have their children now. Are our modes of worship, our representations of God's truth, our methods of instruction, such as shall make them love God's worship when they grow up? What would we not give to see our children so eager in God's worship as were the children told of in the text in idol-worship? 3. *Both sides of the house were agreed on this great question.* Husband and wife were of one mind, and each did what they could to further it. It was the general rule. Is it so now in regard to God and his service? Does the husband never hinder the wife? does the wife always help the husband on the heavenward road? 4. *There was fit work for each, and each did it.* The children could gather sticks, the men kindle the fires, and the women, etc. When will there arise in the Church some who will point out some fresh and wise methods of enlisting *all* in her work? We have now two or three regular plans in operation; but if any be unfit or unwilling for them, as many are, there is nothing else for them. What we need is what these idolaters in their sad worship seem to have found—a work for *every* one, and every one at his work. But meanwhile let each one who is standing in the vineyard idle, not because unwilling to work, but because no one has hired him, no one has pointed him to the work for which he is really fit—and there are many such—let him take his case to the Lord, and ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and he may rest assured, no matter whether he be little child or grown-up man, an answer will come to him soon.—C.

Ver. 19.—*The recoil of sin.* I. THE RESULTS OF SIN ON OTHERS ARE TERRIBLE. 1. What may not be their deadly influence *upon those with whom the sinner comes in contact?* How hereditary, how contagious, how virulent, the poison of sin! As no man liveth unto himself, so also "no man dieth unto himself." If he die by reason of his sin, he ever drags down others into the same doom. 2. *And their results Godward.* It is said they "provoke him to anger;" "God is angry with the wicked every day;" "God is slow to anger, and of great mercy." But still sin is "the abominable thing that he hates." He will not tolerate it in his children, and hence, however severe the measures necessary to separate it and them, those measures will be taken. "Our God is a consuming fire." But—

II. THE RECOIL OF SIN ON THE SINNER HIMSELF IS TERRIBLE ALSO. It is described in the text. 1. *It provokes him to anger.* It is not alone the Lord whose anger is aroused, but the sinner's anger also is provoked. As he looks back on the folly, the utter madness, of what he has done, how completely he has been deceived, what rage of remorse fills his soul! How he flogs himself with the lashings of his own self-upbraiding! What epithets of anger and contempt does he heap upon his own head! He is filled with the fruit of his own ways. And another of these bitter fruits is: 2. *Confusion of face.* He is ashamed, abashed, confounded, because of his sin. He is so (1) *before his own conscience.* He cannot bear to think of himself. From the companionship of his own thoughts he flees as from a haunting ghost. Like a sheeted spectre conscience seems to be pointing at him with its dread finger, its stony eyes ever glaring upon him, so that, turn which way he will, he cannot escape their gaze. He is ashamed of himself, covered with confusion of face before his own conscience. Oh, miserable, miserable wretch that he is! (2) *Before God.* He cannot pray. He shuns the throne

of grace. His iniquities have so "taken hold of him" that he cannot "look up." All joy, all confidence, all hope in God, have fled. He feels himself an outcast from the Divine presence; he would feel the eye of God upon him if he knelt down to pray, and that he cannot bear. (3) *Before man.* He cannot for ever conceal his sin and folly, and even when it is as yet undiscovered, he is conscious of this "confusion of face" in the presence of others. And when at length the sin is discovered, oh, what agony of shame and remorse then! Death is chosen rather than life, and men rush to the suicide's grave as to a positive relief. "Anywhere, anywhere out of the world," which has become aware of their sin! Oh, this awful recoil of sin! "I believe that if the mental sufferings of such backsliders could be written and faithfully published, they would astound you, and be a more horrible story to read than all the torments of the Inquisition. What racks a man is stretched upon who has been unfaithful to his covenant with God! What fires have burned within the souls of those men who have been untrue to Christ and his cause! What dungeons, what grim and dark prisons underground, have saints of God lain in who have gone aside into by-path meadows instead of keeping to the King's highway! He who sins must smart, especially if he be a child of God, for the Lord hath said of his people, 'You only have I known of all the people of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities.' Whoever may go unchastised, a child of God never shall" (Spurgeon).

III. THE ALONE CURE FOR THIS CONFUSION OF FACE IS THE CONTRITE CONFESSION OF THAT WHICH HAS CAUSED IT. God's word is passed that such confession shall avail; but let not him who has gone back from God think that the return will be as easy as the departure. It will not. David was never the same after his sin as he was before. Oh, it is dreadful to think of this recoil of sin, and how it staggers and wounds and weakens the soul for the whole life long. We *slide* back, gliding easily as over smooth ice. Not so do we return. Still, let the return be ever so difficult, the Lord bids us return, and he will heal all our backslidings. Oh, let us all go straight away to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for fear we should be backsliders; for there is the surest standing-ground, there our footsteps never slip! And if we have thus sinned, and sin's recoil is now terribly felt by us, then still go to the same cross; for our only hope of healing is there, and there alone.

"Come, let us to the Lord our God
With contrite hearts return;
Our God is gracious, nor will leave
The penitent to mourn."

C.

Ver. 20.—*The innocent victims of sin.* I. THERE ARE MANY SUCH. All forms of life are mentioned here—human, animal, plant from the stateliest trees down to the lowliest herb—and all shall suffer because of the sin of but a portion of them. How many, even of men, were innocent! and the young children—what had they done? Yet none were to escape, though it was but a portion of the men of the day who had done such wrong.

II. HENCE SOME SAY, "THE WAY OF THE LORD IS NOT EQUAL." But: 1. The summing up of all life in one head, constituting it a corporate unity, giving a *solidarité* to all life, especially to all human life, is the Divine order. 2. And though sin and sorrow come by means of it, yet a far larger balance of good is produced by it. What do we not owe to our all being members one of another? True, evil comes, but good yet more. Were we all isolated, separated, independent, there would be no guarantee for our good even then, but there would be certainty of infinite loss. If the sins of the fathers are visited on the children unto the third and fourth generation, the mercy of the Lord is unto *thousands* of generations "of them that love him and keep his commandments" (Exod. xx. 6). 3. And though because of it "in Adam all died," yet because of it also "in Christ shall all be made alive." This interlinking of one with all and all with one is, therefore, a matter for great thankfulness, and, though attended with present evils, not at all of complaint.

III. AND THE THOUGHT OF THESE INNOCENT VICTIMS OF SIN IS MOST SALUTARY. 1. *It often holds back from sin.* This is one way in which God "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings has ordained strength." How often fathers and mothers will for

the sake of their children, that they might not be harmed, keep back from sin, to which but for such motive they might have yielded! 2. *It deepens repentance for sin.* (Cf. 2 Sam. XXIV. 17.) 3. *It makes sin more hateful to us.* What must that be which destroys not us only, but our children, innocent of all sin? And it may be that the thus furnishing of additional safeguards against sin, and of additional motives to obedience, was one reason in the Divine mind for constituting us all "members one of another."

IV. AND THE THOUGHT OF THE INNOCENT VICTIM OF SIN, OUR LORD JESUS, IS THE MOST SALUTARY OF ALL. For he transforms us from victims into victors—victors over the condemning, the attractive, the defiling, the enslaving power of sin. And it is as we "look unto" him, as our souls habitually trust him to do all this for us, that we cease to be victims of sin, and become victors over it. Let us give glory to him by accepting his offered grace.—C.

Vers. 21—28.—*The indispensable condition of well-being.* This is laid down in ver. 23—obedience to God. It is the teaching of the entire Bible, of our Lord, the prophets, his apostles. The gospel is for this—to secure it more perfectly; and the sacrifices of the ancient Law were for the same reason. But men have ever rebelled against this. They were doing so in Jeremiah's time. They sought to make their sacrifices and burnt offerings a substitute for the obedience God commanded. Hence, as Hezekiah was compelled to destroy the venerable relic, the brazen serpent, which, intended as an aid to faith, had become the object of faith, so now Jeremiah was compelled to speak slightingly of the appointed sacrifices and worship of the temple for the very same reason. Ver. 21: he mocks at their repeated sacrifices, and (ver. 22) declares that at first God never desired or commanded any such things—only that they should obey his voice. He implies that they were afterwards given but as safeguards and helps to their obedience, which, without them, could not be secured. That obedience (ver. 23) he emphasizes as the one thing needful—the only thing for which God cared, but which they had persistently and, what was worse (ver. 26), increasingly refused. So that now (ver. 27) they were fixed in their disobedience, and no words, however divinely authorized, however earnestly urged, would have effect, and there was nothing left but to declare (ver. 28) their utterly abandoned character and condition. And the like conduct is seen still. Men still are ever attempting to evade the Divine rule of life. By reliance on sacraments, profession of religion, adherence to orthodox creeds, resting in feelings and periods of religious excitement when their emotional nature has been deeply stirred,—in almost anything rather than in that God faith in whom is shown only by obedience to his will. And the habit of this grows, and its results, as of old, become worse and worse, and all exhortation and warning fall on deaf ears and hardened hearts, and men still become as those who "obey not the voice," etc. (ver. 28). Let us remember that this is the subtle temptation of all ages, all Churches, and all people; and let us pray that God would write upon our hearts the sure truth that the one only evidence of our having so "named the name of Christ" as to be "in him" is our "departing from iniquity."—C.

Ver. 29—ch. viii. 3.—*The harvest of sin.* I. WE READ IN OTHER SCRIPTURES OF "THE JOY OF HARVEST." Such shall be the joy of God's redeemed people when his purposes of grace are fulfilled in and for them. It will be a joy unspeakably glorious.

II. BUT HERE WE HAVE PORTRAYED ANOTHER HARVEST—that of sin. Here there is no joy, but bitter lamentation and weeping and woe (ver. 29). We are shown: 1. The *seed* from which this harvest springs (ver. 30)—the doing evil in the sight of the Lord; setting their abominations in his house (ver. 30). 2. We see its *growth*—in open and unblushing idolatry; in the debasement of their nature. They had come to sacrifice their own children to their idol-god, to such horrible cruelty had they sunk down. 3. We see its *harvest*, (1) in death, widespread and terrible (vers. 32, 33); (2) in the flight of all joy and gladness (ver. 34); (3) in public and deep degradation (ch. viii. 1, 2); (4) in utter despair (ch. viii. 3).

III. AND THOUGH DIFFERING IN OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCE, YET IN SUBSTANCE AND REALITY THE SAME HARVEST WILL EVER SPRING FROM THE SAME SEED. 1. *All evil-doing is such seed.* And sheltering this under the cloak of religion,—this is the same

seed. 2. And its *growth* will be in like manner. Progressive daring in sin; the debasement of our nature. 3. And its *harvest* will be seen, (1) in widespread spiritual death, and often in terrible death-beds; (2) in the loss of all joy and gladness; (3) in degradation before men; (4) in awful despair.

CONCLUSION. Remember, "God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth," etc.—C.

Ver. 4.—"*Lying words.*" These were "lying words," as being used by false men for a false purpose. Literally true, for it *was* "the temple of the Lord" that stood in the midst of the land, and in the gate of which this message was delivered,—they were false in spirit, for the deceitful prophets thought thus to make the sanctity of the material structure a cover for the iniquities of the people—a charm to ward off their threatened punishment. The cry was indicative of a hollow and rotten condition of things throughout the entire system of social life. "The prophets prophesied falsely, and the priests bore rule by their means, and the people loved to have it so" (ch. v. 31). We may take these words in three different lights, as reflecting—

I. THE SPIRITUAL PRIDE THAT LEADS MEN TO THINK THEMSELVES THE SPECIAL OBJECTS OF THE DIVINE FAVOUR. This was the characteristic vice of the Jewish people. The distinctions God conferred on them—that they were separate among the nations as "Abraham's seed" and the chosen covenant people, that they had the temple of the Lord among them—were made occasions for national vain-glory, instead of incentives to holy character and noble deed. The same principle is illustrated whenever superior enlightenment, knowledge of truth, spiritual gifts, personal sanctity, ecclesiastical advantage, etc., lead in any way to self-exaltation. Nothing more unseemly than this. If in any such sense "the temple of the Lord" is with us, it may be expected that the shadow of it will produce in us a solemn sense of responsibility. Special privilege brings with it corresponding obligations. Whatever tokens of his favour God bestows on us, their due effect is to lead us to walk with the greater self-forgetfulness and reverential fear before him.

II. THE HYPOCRISY THAT MAKES THE "FORM OF GODLINESS" A SUBSTITUTE FOR ITS "POWER." What availed it that the temple of the Lord stood among them, if the spirit of devotion had departed? The sacred shrine in which they boasted was but a mockery of their internal falseness. The essence of Pharisaism lies in this resting in the outward and apparent, to the neglect of the inward, the spiritual, the real. None so far from God as they who imagine that a mere round of external observances will please him apart from the sincere homage of the soul. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips," etc. (Matt. xv. 8).

III. THE SELF-DECEPTION THAT PUTS ON THE GARB OF A RELIGIOUS PROFESSION AS A CLOKE FOR SIN AND A SHIELD FROM ITS PENALTY. The people did wickedly, and then went and stood before the Lord in the house called by his Name, and said, "We are delivered" (ver. 10)—a striking illustration of the folly of those who dream that, so long as they pay public homage to the sovereignty of God's claims, they may violate his laws with impunity. It is a delusive dream that must have, sooner or later, a dread awakening. The mere material temple, glorious as it may be, is no sanctuary for a guilty conscience and a corrupt life. Simply to "lay hold on the horns of the altar" will not save us from the Divine retributions, the Nemesis that tracks the footsteps of the transgressor. Merely to cry, "Lord, Lord!" will never avert from men the sentence, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity" (Luke xiii. 25—27).—W.

Vers. 1—14.—*The doom of the temple.* I. THE MESSAGE TO THOSE CONCERNED CANNOT BE ESCAPED. The message is to men who make their boast and confidence in the temple. To be within temple reach seems to place them in a kind of fortress. Such must evidently be met on their own ground. And thus the prophet is sent to the temple gate. There, assuredly, all who took any deep interest in the temple would be found. Jeremiah himself belonged to the priests, and there is no saying but what, prophet as he was, he had to take an allotted share in the temple service. Possibly the message may have been repeated on several occasions, and likeliest of all on those occasions when the temple precincts were crowded with visitors. And when the temple was destroyed, would there not be many to remember that the threatening of destruction was uttered in the very gates of it? Thus we see that there is no want of

directness and closeness in dealing with the unfaithful; and no want of courage and candour on the part of the man who was chosen to warn.

II. THE MESSAGE IS TO MISTAKEN WORSHIPPERS. To look round with pride and say these buildings are the temple of God, was as the utterance of some first principle. These worshippers, precise enough in outward forms, had a superstitious feeling that whatever vicissitudes might come elsewhere, Jehovah would keep the place of worship secure. The mistake lay in thinking that God valued the temple for itself. Yet it had not been *made* by his command, in the same sense as the tabernacle had been; rather, it was accepted as a sign of David's deep religious feeling and Solomon's pious regard for his father's wishes. There is nothing to show that out of his own will God would ever have commanded the erection of a temple. It was unseemly in the eyes of David that he should be dwelling in a house of cedar, when the ark of God was behind curtains. But this feeling had in it a certain barbaric element, a fondness for outward pomp and display. It was the best that was in the king's heart, and so it was accepted. He did what he could. But there was no inherent sacredness in the temple, that it should be kept inviolate amid the wreck and defilement of everything else. The people needed to be taught this truth in very plain language. The feeling towards the building is made manifest in such a passage as Ezra iii. 11—13. In fact, the more the people became alienated in heart from the God of the temple, the more enthusiastic, fanatical even, they seem to have become with regard to the mere building.

III. THE WAY IN WHICH THE MISTAKE IS SOUGHT TO BE REMOVED. There is no heaping of scorn on the feeling of the people. Their feeling is rather made the occasion of strengthening the hold of God's truth upon them. If they *really* value the temple, they are shown the way by which they may keep it and dwell within it. Jehovah shows very distinctly that in his eyes the true glory of Jerusalem is not the temple, but the sort of people who dwell in the city. It is better to have a community of the pious, the upright, the truly brotherly, dwelling in cottages, than to have whole streets of splendid palaces, inhabited by luxurious, self-indulgent oppressors. *Men* hold in high esteem buildings, pictures, books, statues, great fruits of human intellect. *God* looks at good actions; little but significant kindnesses—the giving of the cup of cold water, the visiting of the sick, and the feeding of the hungry. A community of men, selfish to the core, will not be preserved for the sake of a splendid building; but that building may be preserved if a community of good men will be really pleased by its preservation. The truth, however, is that a community, living such a life as God here indicates should be chosen, would care very little about the pomps of a building. They would prefer to spend their substance in satisfying pressing needs of men. Many of the ecclesiastical buildings of to-day are inexcusably sumptuous. They are put up to gratify the lust of the eye, and meanwhile the spiritual glories of the upper room at Jerusalem and the Pentecostal miracle are quite forgotten. The publican, the penitent after God's own heart; went up to the temple; but what were its material splendours to him, as he stood, smiting his breast, and saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner"?

IV. THE MESSAGE IS CLINCHED BY A CLOSELY FITTING EXAMPLE FROM HISTORY. One instance is enough to prove a negative. The feeling in the hearts of the people is that God will fence the temple site around, for the sake of the temple. But Shiloh is at once brought forward as a capital instance to the contrary. Evidently it still remained in a ruined, neglected state, for any one to go and see it. Israel knew what Shiloh had been at the first, and they could see how different it was now. In reading history, we are bound to profit by all of Divine warning that may appear in what we read.—Y.

Ver. 18.—*The family joined in idolatry.* I. REMEMBER GOD'S IDEAL OF AN ISRAELITE FAMILY. This is not set before us in any particular passage, but we can gather it from different institutions and commandments. Religion not only concerned the individual in his relation to the priest, the altar, and the holy of holies, and in his general relations to his fellow-men; but there was a very special mention of institutions and regulations which made the individual remember his position in the family. These institutions and regulations were as vital bonds, making the family into a true organic

unity. There were the dedication of the firstborn, and the institution concerning the meaning of the Passover feast (Exod. xiii.). There was the command to honour father and mother. So connected with the passage now under consideration, there was the setting apart of the dough (Numb. xv.). A continual instruction and training in Divine things was to be provided for. A mother could have no greater honour than that her children should rise up and call her blessed. Thus gathering together many passages that might be cited, we see that God meant the family to be a great agent for the advancement of his people in all that was good; and the same family ideal comes out with equal prominence and beauty in the New Testament. The natural family may, so far as Christ is concerned, count for much, if only each individual in the family will live up to his opportunities. Still, Christ insists upon the natural family being subordinate to the spiritual family. It is one of the illustrations of the great disintegrating and reconstituting power of the gospel of Christ, that it breaks up the family which is held by nothing stronger than natural bonds. The ideal family of the children of God, those who are the spiritual and abiding Israel, must be gained at any cost. The notion of a family gives one of the aspects in which Christians may be perfectly associated together.

II. LOOK AT THE DEGRADED POSITION IN WHICH THE ISRAELITE FAMILY ACTUALLY WAS. The parents are confirmed idolaters, and are dragging down their children to their own level. The children are sent out to gather fuel towards an idolatrous offering, when they should be learning of the nature, the will, and the promises of Jehovah. A desecrated temple has been spoken of, turned into a den of robbers; but what is that compared with a desecrated family? How insidiously, how gradually, how irresistibly, these children are drawn into idolatry! Gathering wood might be an interesting, amusing occupation, more like play than work. What idea could the children have of the awful insult to which this gathering would contribute? They would grow up, as by a second nature, to kindle fires and knead dough themselves. And it was so easy to treat the child in its way, to tell it to go out and gather wood; far easier than to bear patiently with its waywardness and inattention, and thus lead it on to some understanding of Israel's glorious past. For such treatment meant that the parent should be a learner also, he and his children moving onward together into an enjoyment of the fulness of the Divine promises. And yet God had done much for these parents to make the teaching of his truth as easy as it could be made. He had given things to be set before the children's eyes at periodic intervals. But here, in this deep and pleasing infection of idolatry, is an influence which seems to work successfully against all that God can do. What could be hoped from rising up early and sending the prophets, when there was all this counter-working in the Israelite home?

III. CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF STILL ACHIEVING THE IDEAL. Much may be done towards making even the natural family a holier and more edifying institution than in most cases it is. The humiliating description here shows how much depends upon the parents. How much there is still, even among families nominally Christian, which is just as horrible in this way as this family idolatry among the Israelites of old? Children are sedulously schooled into the worship of Mammon. Selfish and heedless parents are eager to send them to work, when as yet they should know only the home, the school, and the playground. Too often is the maxim reversed that the parents should provide for the children. Christian parents, at all events, should hold themselves bound by the most solemn obligations to do all they can for the training of their children in godliness. There is an ideal of parental duty, and that ideal is seen in action when we look towards the great Father in heaven. Assuredly there would be more God-fearing children if there were more really God-fearing parents. But what cannot be gained by looking up to human guidance and example, can be gained by looking to God. He gathers his children out of many human households, and gives them his own Word to be an impulse and a guide. He puts into their hearts a love of the spiritual brotherhood, which is a deeper feeling than any that nature knows. And the end of it all will be that his children will be perfectly joined together in one mind, in the praise and service of him who alone is worthy to be praised and served by all.—Y.

Ver. 28.—*The inveterate disobedience of Israel.* All along, from ver. 21, this is the theme, viz. the *disobedience* of Israel. Now, to give full force to a charge of disobedience

there must be the means of furnishing ample proofs that *directions* have first been given—plain, earnest, and authoritative. And this is just what we find here. God refers his people back over the long years in which, by divers agencies, he had laid before them his righteous and beneficent will. What he commended was for his glory; for his glory because for his people's good; for his people's good because for his glory. The present state and prospects of the people are very humiliating, but assuredly no part of their humiliation can be laid to the charge of their God. The cloudy and the fiery pillar was but a symbol of most distinct guidance for the whole heart. The people were not suffered to wander for lack of expostulation and warning. When a lad turns out badly, criticizing speech is often directed against the parents, as if somehow *they must* be at fault. They *may* be at fault indeed, but there is no *must* in the matter. Hasty criticism at such a time, from the very injustice of it, adds a cruel intensity to the pain and disappointment already existing. But hasty criticism cannot be silenced by merely deprecating it, and parents at such moments would do well to remember that they stand in relations to their disobedient children not unlike those in which, as is represented here, Jehovah stood towards Israel of old. The most loving and watchful and patient of parents never did for his children near so much as Jehovah did for Israel. There was the instruction of their wonderful career, in which God had moved so sublimely among them. There were the ten commandments, formulated so distinctly, and set in such a grand historical frame. There were all the rites and ceremonies filled with instructing power to those who would seek to understand them. And there was also, accumulating generation after generation, the great mass of prophetic truth. Man is what he is, not for want of light, but for want of disposition to use and obey the light when it appears. There is an indisposition to attend to truth and to fidelity in all duty, until at last the very feeling of what faithfulness and righteousness are vanishes from the breast. But still the excuse is attempted, and persisted in with shameless impudence, that the word which professes to come from God must have in it something defective, something that effectually prevents it from being received. But it is only from the unrenewed mind that talk of this kind comes. Those who have had their eyes opened to the truth of God soon begin to discern that in that truth there is no lack of guidance, or inspiration, or comfort, or any good thing which can uplift and satisfy the heart. And we may be sure that God, who has given this immense and fruitful body of truth, has brought it nearer to the individual conscience than the individual in his perversity will always acknowledge. Men are indulged too much in the complaint that nobody has spoken to them about their souls. A miserable egotism often lies at the bottom of such complaining. If they know by any means whatever—and it matters not how slight the hint may be—that there is something written for the obedience of all mankind and for their consequent advantage, then these complainers are bound to attend to it. Men are not so foolish in the quest of worldly gains. Then they will go upon the slightest hint, and follow it up discreetly and warily. Why, then, should they be so foolish in the matter of spiritual gain? Because "truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth."—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VIII.

Vers. 1—3.—Punishment will even overtake the sinners who have long since been deceased.

Ver. 1.—They shall bring out the bones. Not only shall many of the dead bodies remain unburied, but the sepulchres of those who have till now "lain in honour, each one in his house" (Isa. xiv. 18), shall be violated. **The inhabitants of Jerusalem** meant are evidently those of the upper class, for the others were buried, with but little regard to the security of the corpses, in the valley of **Kedron** (2 Kings xxiii. 6). According to some, the motive of this invasion of the chambers of the dead is avarice (comp. Herod., i. 187, Darius at the tomb of Nitocris); but the context, without excluding this view, rather suggests malice and contempt. Thus "the wrath of man" was to "praise" Jehovah (Ps. lxxvi. 10).

Ver. 2.—And they shall spread them, etc. Not as an act of solemn mockery, for the agents are idolaters themselves, but God so overrules the passions of his unconscious instruments that no more effective ceremonial could have been devised. Whom

they have loved, etc. The prophet is designedly diffuse in his description. With all their misspent zeal, these unhappy idolaters cannot even find tombs.

Ver. 3.—**Which remain.** The words are certainly to be omitted in the second place where they occur. In the Hebrew they stand after **in all the places**, and the word for "places" is feminine, whereas the participle, "the remaining," is masculine. The Septuagint and Peshito have nothing corresponding. There is a clerical error in the Hebrew.

Ver. 4—ch. ix. 1.—The incorrigible wickedness of the people, and the awfulness of the judgment.

Ver. 4.—**Moreover thou shalt say, etc.**; literally, *and thou shalt say*. The section is introduced by a formula which connects it with ch. vii. 2, 28. **Shall they fall, etc.?** rather, *Do men fall . . . doth a man turn away?* One of those appeals to common sense in which the prophets delight. Who ever sees a fallen man stay quietly on the ground without attempting to rise? or a man who has wandered out of the path persist in going in the wrong direction?

Ver. 5.—**Slidden back . . . backsliding.** The verb is the same verb (in another conjugation) as in ver. 4, and the noun is a derivative from it. The Authorized Version, therefore, has slightly weakened the force of the argument. **They hold fast deceit.** They cling to a false view of their relation to their God (comp. ch. iv. 2; v. 2).

Ver. 6.—**I hearkened and heard.** The Divine Judge condescends to speak after the manner of men. He will be his own witness; for it is his own people, Jeshurun, which is on its trial. **Not aright.** It is a compound expression, equivalent to "insincerely," "untruly" (comp. Isa. xvi. 6). **Repented . . . turned**; rather, *repenteth . . . turneth* (or, *returneth*). **To his course.** The Hebrew text, sometimes represented as having a different reading ("courses," in the plural) from the margin, really gives the same reading with one letter misplaced. The singular stands in the parallel passage, ch. xxiii. 19, and offers no difficulty. **As the horse rusheth**; literally, *overfloweth*. Both the Authorized Version and the Vulgate (*impetu vadens*) efface the second metaphor. The uncontrollable passion of both people and war-horse is compared to the all-subduing course of a winter stream or torrent.

Ver. 7.—The appeal to the regularity of animal instincts reminds us of Isa. i. 3. **Yea, the stork, etc.** The migratory birds obey their instinct with the most unfailing regularity. Those referred to are: (1) the stork, whose "regular and sudden return is one of the most interesting natural sights of Palestine. **The expression 'stork in the heavens' refers to the immense height at which they fly during migration" (Tristram); (2) the turtle, or turtle-dove, whose return is the sure sign of spring (Cant. ii. 11); (3 and 4) the crane and the swallow, or rather, "the swift and the crane." These birds are again mentioned together in Isa. xxxviii. 14 (the psalm of Hezekiah), where special reference is made to the penetrating quality of their note. "The whooping or trumpeting of the crane rings through the night air in spring, and the vast flocks which we noticed passing north near Beersheba were a wonderful sight." The introduction of the swallow in the Authorized Version is misleading, as that bird is not a regular migrant in Palestine. The note of the swift is a shrill scream. "No bird is more conspicuous by the suddenness of its return than the swift," is the remark of Canon Tristram, who saw large flocks passing northwards over Jerusalem, on the 12th of February ('Nat. Hist. of Bible,' p. 208). It is an interesting fact that the swift bears the same name (*sūs*) in the vernacular Arabic as in the Hebrew of Jeremiah. **The judgment**; better, *the law* (see on ch. v. 4).

Ver. 8.—**How do ye say, We are wise?** Jeremiah is evidently addressing the priests and the prophets, whom he so constantly described as among the chief causes of Judah's ruin (comp. ver. 10; ch. ii. 8, 26; iv. 9; v. 31), and who, in Isaiah's day, regarded it as an unwarrantable assumption on the part of that prophet to pretend to instruct them in their duty (Isa. xxviii. 9). **The law of the Lord is with us.** "With us;" *i.e.* in our hands and mouths (comp. Ps. l. 16). The word *tōrāh*, commonly rendered "Law," is ambiguous, and a difference of opinion as to the meaning of this verse is inevitable. Some think these self-styled "wise" men reject Jeremiah's counsels on the ground that they already have the divinely given Law in a written form (comp. Rom. ii. 17—20), and that the Divine revelation is complete. Others that *tōrāh* here, as often elsewhere in the prophets (*e.g.* Isa. i. 10; viii. 16; xlii. 4), simply means "instruction," or "direction," and describes the authoritative counsel given orally by the priests (Deut. xvii. 11) and prophets to those who consulted them on points of ritual and practice respectively. The usage of Jeremiah himself favours the latter view (see ch. ii. 8; xviii. 18; and especially xxvi. 4, 5, where "to walk in my *Tōrāh*" is parallel to "to hearken to the words of my servants the prophets." The context equally points in this direction. The most natural interpretation, then, is this: The opponents of Jeremiah bade him keep his exhortations to himself, seeing that they themselves were

wise and the divinely appointed teachers of the people. To this Jeremiah replies, not (as the Authorized Version renders) Lo, certainly in vain made he it, etc.; but, *Yea, behold! for a lie hath it wrought—the lying pen of the scribes* (so Authorized Version, margin). *Sōfĕrim* (scribes) is the term proper to all those who practised the art of writing (*sēfer*); it included, therefore, presumably at least, most, if not all, of the priests and prophets of whom Jeremiah speaks. There are indications enough that the Hebrew literature was not entirely confined to those whom we look up to as the inspired writers, and it is perfectly credible that the formalist priests and false prophets should have availed themselves of the pen as a means of giving greater currency to their teaching. Jeremiah warns his hearers to distrust a literature which is in the service of false religious principles—a warning which prophets in the wider sense of the term ('The Liberty of Prophesyings') still have but too much occasion to repeat. [It is right, however, to mention another grammatically possible rendering, which is adopted by those who suppose *tōrāh* in the preceding clause to mean the Mosaic Law: "Yea, behold, the lying pen of the scribes hath made (it) into a lie;" *i.e.* the professional interpreters of the Scriptures called scribes have, by their groundless comments and inferences, made the Scriptures (especially the noblest part, the Law) into a lie, so that it has ceased to represent the Divine will and teaching. The objections to this are: (1) the necessity of supplying an object to the verb—the object would hardly have been omitted where its omission renders the meaning of the clause so doubtful; (2) that this view attributes to the word *sōfĕrim* a meaning which only became prevalent in the time of Ezra (comp. Ezra vii. 6, 11).]

Ver. 9.—**The wise men are ashamed.** It is the perfect of prophetic certitude, equivalent to "the wise men shall certainly be ashamed." And why? Evidently because they have not foreseen the calamities impending over their nation. They have preached, "Peace, peace; when there was no peace" (ver. 11); and hence they find themselves "taken" in the grip of a relentless power from which there is no escape. **What wisdom**; literally, *wisdom of what?* i.e. in respect of what?

Vers. 10—12.—These verses are almost the same as ch. vi. 12—15; the differences are in ver. 10. They are omitted in the Septuagint, and Hitzig regards them as an interpolation, at any rate from the point where the present passage coincides verbally with its parallel. His grounds are: (1) that ver. 13 follows more naturally on ver. 10 *a* ("... them that shall inherit them") than on ver. 12; (2) that ver. 10 is deficient in symmetry; and (3) that the deviations from ch. vi. 13—15 sometimes loosen the connection of the clauses, sometimes sink into the colloquial stylo. The arguments seem to be inconclusive. Jeremiah is apt to repeat himself (Graf refers to ver. 14 = ch. iv. 5; ver. 15 = ch. xiv. 19; ch. v. 9 = v. 29, ix. 8; ch. vii. 16 = xi. 14; ch. l. 41—43 = vi. 22—24; ch. l. 44—46 = xlix. 19—21); and the element which is common to this paragraph and to ch. vi. 12—15 seems equally appropriate in both connections. It should be added, however, that the cautious and reverent Bleek has come to the same conclusion as Hitzig. To them that shall inherit them; rather, *to them that shall take possession of them*, i.e. by violence.

Ver. 13—ch. ix. 1.—Further description of the judgment; grief of Jeremiah.

Ver. 13.—There shall be no grapes, etc.; rather, *there are no grapes ... and the leaf is faded.* It is the actual condition of things which the prophet describes. Elsewhere Judah is compared to a vine with bad grapes (ch. ii. 21); here the vine does not even pretend to bear fruit. Another figure is that of a barren fig tree (comp. Matt. xxi. 19). And the things that I have given them, etc.; rather, *and I gave them that which they transgress* (viz. *laws*). The construction, however, which this rendering implies is not perfectly natural, though supported by most of the ancient versions (except the Septuagint, which omits the words), and it is better to alter a single vowel-point, and render, "And I will give them to those who shall pass over them." The phrase to pass away is constantly used of an invading host; *e.g.* Isa. viii. 7; Dan. xi. 10, 40.

Ver. 14.—**Why do we sit still?** The prophet transports us by a stroke of his pen into the midst of the fulfilment of his prophecy. The people of the country districts are represented as urging each other to flight. True, it is the resource of despair. No defenced cities can defend them against the judgment of Jehovah. **Let us be silent**; rather, *let us perish*; literally, *let us be put to silence.* Hath put us to silence; rather, *hath caused us to perish*; i.e. hath decreed our destruction. **Water of gall**; a phrase characteristic of our prophet (see ch. ix. 14; xxiii. 15). It is a little difficult to find a rendering which shall suit all the passages in which *rosh* (gall) is mentioned. In Deut. xxxii. 33 (and so Job xx. 16) it is clearly used for "venom" in general; and yet in ver. 32 of the same chapter it obviously means a plant. Another general application of the term seems to have been to bitterness in

general, the ideas of bitterness and poisonousness being taken as interchangeable. The Authorized Version may therefore stand.

Ver. 15.—**Health**; rather, *healing*. Another rendering is *tranquillity* (same sense as in Eccles. x. 4). **Trouble**; rather, *terror*.

Ver. 16.—The invader is introduced with the same mysterious indefiniteness as in ch. iv. 13. **From Dan**; *i.e.* from the northern frontier (see on ch iv. 15). **Trembled**; rather, *quaked* (so ch. xlix. 21). **His strong ones.** The phrase "strong ones" generally denotes oxen, but here (as in ch. xlvii. 3; l. 11) horses.

Ver. 17.—A new image to intensify the impression of dreadfulness. **Serpents, cockatrices**; rather, *serpents* (*even*) *basilisks*. The second noun is in apposition to the more general "serpents." "Basilisks" (*Serpentes regulos*) are the renderings of Aquila and the Vulgate. Some species of highly venomous serpent is clearly intended; more than this we cannot say. The root probably means "to hiss." Canon Tristram thinks of "a very beautifully marked yellow serpent, and the largest of the vipers found in the Holy Land," called the *Daboia xantheina*. He adds that it is one of the most dangerous ('Nat. Hist. of Palestine,' p. 275).

Ver. 18—ch. ix. 1.—The captivity of Judah and the deep sorrow of Jeremiah.

Ver. 18.—**When I would comfort myself,** etc. The text is here extremely difficult, and if there is corruption anywhere it is in the opening of this verse. Ewald and Graf suppose an ellipsis, and render, "(Oh for) my enlivening [*i.e.* an enlivening for me] in trouble!" Hitzig more naturally renders in the vocative, "My enlivener in trouble," which he supposes to be in apposition to **my heart.** De Dieu (1648) wavers between this and the view that it is an address to his wife, "Quæ marito solatio est." (See, however, ch. xvi. 2.)

Ver. 19.—**Because of them that dwell in,** etc. The Hebrew simply has "from them," etc. The prophet is transported in imagination to the time of the fulfilment of his prophecies. He hears the lamentation of his countrymen, who are languishing in captivity. **Is not the Lord in Zion,** etc.? is the burden of their sad complaints; "king" is a familiar synonym for "God" (comp. Isa. viii. 21; xxxiii. 22; but *not* Ps. lxxxix. 18, which is certainly mistranslated in Authorized Version). But why "in Zion"? "Zion" was properly the name of the eastward hill at Jerusalem, where lay the oldest part of the city (called "the city of David"), and the highest portion of which was crowned by the temple. **Why have they provoked me to anger,** etc.? is the reply of Jehovah, pointing out that their sufferings were but an exact retribution for their infidelity (comp. ch. v. 19).

Ver. 20.—**The harvest is past,** etc. For "summer," read *fruit-gathering* (the vintage began in September). The people again becomes the speaker. The form of the speech reminds one of a proverb. When the harvest was over and the fruit-gathering ended, the husbandmen looked for a quiet time of refreshment. Judah had had its "harvest-time" and then its "fruit-gathering;" its needs had been gradually increasing, and, on the analogy of previous deliverances (comp. Isa. xviii. 4; xxxiii. 10), it might have been expected that God would have interposed, his help being only delayed in order to be the more signally supernatural. But **we are not saved** (or rather, *delivered*).

Ver. 21.—**For the hurt,** etc.; literally, *because of the breaking*, etc., *I am broken;* comp. ch. xxiii. 9, and the phrase "broken in heart" (Isa. lxi. 1, etc.). The prophet feels crushed by the sense of the utter ruin of his people. **I am black**; rather, *I go in mourning* (so Ps. xxxviii. 6; xlii. 9). The root means rather "foulness" or "squalor" than "blackness" (comp. Job vi. 16, where "blackish," an epithet of streams, should rather be "turbid").

Ver. 22.—No hope or remedy is left; again a proverbial expression. **No balm in Gilead.** Gilead appears to have been celebrated in early times for its balsam, which was exported by Ishmaelites to Egypt (Gen. xxxvii. 25) and by Jewish merchants to Tyre (Ezek. xxvii. 17). It was one of the most costly products of Palestine (Gen. xliii. 11), and was prized for its medicinal properties in cases of wounds (comp. ch. xlvi. 11; li. 8). Josephus mentions this balsam several times, but states that it only grew at Jericho ('Antiq.,' xv. 4, 2). Tristram searched for balsam in its ancient haunts, but in vain; he thinks Jeremiah means the *Balsamodendron gileadense* or *opobalsamum*, which in Arabia is used as a medicine both internally and externally. But if Pliny ('Hist. Nat.,' xxiv. 22) may be followed in his wide use of the term "balsam" so as to include the exudations of the "lentiscus" or mastick tree, then "balm of Gilead" is still to be found; for the mastick tree "grows commonly all over the country, excepting in the plains and the Jordan valley" ('Nat. Hist. of Bible,' p. 336). **Is there no physician there?** We hear but little of physicians in the Old Testament. They are only mentioned again in Gen. l. 2 (but with reference to Egypt, where medicine was much cultivated), and in 2 Chron. xvi. 12; Job xiii. 4. From the two latter passages we may, perhaps, infer

that physicians were rarely successful; and this is certainly the impression produced by Ecclus. xxxviii. 15, "He that sinneth before his Maker, let him fall into the hand of the physician." The remedies employed in the Talmudic period quite bear out this strong saying (see Lightfoot, 'Horæ Hebraicæ,' on Mark v. 26). The physicians of Gilead, however, probably confined themselves to their one famous simple, the balsam Is not the health . . . recovered? Gesenius renders, less probably, "hath no bandage been applied to the daughter of my people?"

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 4—6.—*Persistent depravity.* I. PERSISTENT DEPRAVITY MUST BE DISTINGUISHED FROM A CASUAL LAPSE INTO SIN. 1. This is marked by a *constant habit* of sin, a falling without rising again. The best man is often guilty of mistakes, but he soon seeks to recover himself (Ps. xxxvii. 24). His habit is upright, the direction he follows on the whole, though now and then he may lose ground for a short time, is right. But the man who is persistently depraved makes the wrong way his main course, and if he ever deviates from it does so accidentally or only under some temporary impulse, soon returning as by instinct to wallow in the mire, where only he feels at home (2 Pet. ii. 22). 2. This is characterized by *absence of repentance* after sinning. No man is heard to repent (ver. 6). After a good man has fallen into sin he is overwhelmed with shame, plunged into dark depths of grief, tortured with bitter pangs of contrition, like Peter when he "went out and wept bitterly." But the persistently depraved man feels no such distresses. The sun shines as brightly after he has contracted a new crime as before. His serene self-complacency is not ruffled by one spasm of inward revulsion. 3. This is characterized by an *impetuous impulse* to sin. A good man may fall into sin. One who is persistently depraved rushes into it. To the former sin comes as defeat after a battle in which his better nature has fought and failed; to the latter it comes unresisted, welcomed: he "returneth to his course" with eagerness, "as the horse rusheth into the battle."

II. PERSISTENT DEPRAVITY IS FAR MORE CULPABLE THAN A CASUAL LAPSE INTO SIN. All sin is culpable. Sin cannot be entirely accidental in any case, or it would cease to be sin. But persistent sin is by far the most evil form of sin. 1. A casual fall may be induced by powerful external temptation; persistent depravity must rise from an *internal appetite.* 2. A casual fall may come as a sudden surprise when a man is off his guard; persistent depravity must be *clearly perceived and consciously cherished.* 3. A casual fall may be the result of a sudden outburst of passion which results in something approaching temporary insanity; persistent depravity must be *calm and cold-blooded,* standing the test of reflection. This is altogether beyond what could be anticipated. You are not surprised that a man should stumble occasionally in the darkness of this world, amidst the snares and pitfalls of temptation, with the natural weakness of humanity, or that he should sometimes miss his way or be lured aside from the right road to pleasanter paths; but that he should not care to rise after falling, not think of returning when he sees the error of his way, but should keep to it with a consistency which would be heroic in a better course,—such depravity is unnatural and monstrous.

Ver. 7.—*A lesson from the birds.* It is interesting to observe that the Scripture references to natural history are not directed so much to theological arguments as to moral lessons. While questions concerning the being and nature of God absorb almost the exclusive attention of the natural theologian, the prophet, who assumes the belief of his hearers in the immanence of God in Nature, is more concerned to show how she rebukes man for his own shortcomings and incites to goodness by her mute example. The scriptural treatment is, therefore, more nearly followed by the regard for the human and moral aspects of nature in the spirit of Wordsworth and Ruskin, which is characteristic of the better thought of our own age, than by the cold, prosaic examination of the physical world, as simply affording one section of the evidences of religion, which was pursued in the days of Paley.

I. THE BIRDS REMIND US THAT WE ARE SURROUNDED BY DIVINE ORDINANCES. Migratory birds have their appointed times. Every creature has its special vocation.

To the lower animals this comes as a necessary law, as a course determined by unconscious instinct. To man it comes as a mandate of duty, an impulse in the conscience, a way to be clearly perceived and freely chosen. But, though the same method for exacting the performance of the Divine ordinances which obtains in nature is not enforced on man, those ordinances extend to him; to him also they come with Divine sanction. Though man is physically free to rebel, morally he is no more his own master than are the birds who are bound by the laws of their instincts. Freedom from compulsion is not freedom from obligation.

II. THE BIRDS REMIND US THAT IT IS AS WELL TO OBEY THE DIVINE ORDINANCES. In their migrations they find their welfare secured. Driven by the inward impulse of Divine law written on their instincts, they speed them over vast tracts of unknown lands, and at length find themselves in the clime and at the season which is best suited for them. What an image of implicit faith! We are called to go forth, like Abraham, we know not whither, but like him to find a possession in the unknown land (Heb. xi. 8). The future is unseen, the way is wild and pathless, dark clouds as of brooding storms gather on the horizon; but if we take as our compass the known will of God, we too shall find sunny climes beyond the seas of trouble, a home at the end of our pilgrimage.

III. THE BIRDS, BY THEIR EXAMPLE, REBUKE OUR DISOBEDIENCE TO THE DIVINE ORDINANCES. Free to roam through illimitable regions of air, the high-flying stork, the turtle-dove, the swift, and the crane all keep to their true course, not dropping down, tempted by the attractions of leafy vales or fruitful gardens, not turned aside terrified by the horrors of high mountains, lonely deserts, or stormy seas, till they reach their destination in punctual obedience to the mysterious law of their nature. These migratory birds are representative of external liberty restrained by inward law. We are not under any outward compulsion nor any inward law of instinct like that of the birds. But we are capable of following a higher law. We have light which is denied to them, and high motives of fear and love to prompt to obedience. If we disobey, the obedience of the birds is an ever-recurring rebuke.

Vers. 8, 9.—*Untrustworthy literature.* I. LITERATURE MAY HAVE MANY ATTRACTIONS AND YET BE UNTRUSTWORTHY. 1. *Authority.* They were official prophets and teachers whom Jeremiah opposed. Errors gain power when they are pronounced *ex cathedrâ*. The belief in papal infallibility is but one instance of a common human weakness. 2. *Pretentiousness.* The self-styled wise men of Jeremiah's age were confident and boastful. The world is too ready to take a man at his own estimate of himself. Vehement assertion is often accepted instead of solid proof. 3. *Numerical force.* Jeremiah stood as one against many. No mistake is greater than the assumption of so-called common sense, that truth may be presumed to reside with the majority. How often from the days of Noah downwards has it been found with the few! 4. *Popular style.* These "wise" men knew how to suit the taste of the multitude; they could prophesy smooth things. There is a fearful fascination in literary style. The great danger to the cultivated is that they should select for their guides those writers whose language is most pleasing in place of those whose arguments are most sound. Lies may be commended by brilliant epigrams, and unwholesome passions fostered by splendid poetry. The ease and fluency of Hume and the wit of Voltaire were effective with many persons who would not have been moved by bare arguments.

II. IF LITERATURE IS UNTRUE IT SHOULD BE TREATED AS WORTHLESS. 1. Style is but the vesture of thought, and thought is but idle fancy if it *does not correspond to fact.* The first question to be asked about a writer is not, "Are his ideas novel, original, striking? are they beautiful, grand, imposing? are they pleasing, popular, acceptable?" but simply, "Are they true?" If this question in answered in the negative, all other recommendations may be considered as worse than worthless. The sweeter the bait, the more dangerous the trap. 2. The test of truth in religious literature is *conformity to the Word of God.* The Scripture is a guide and authority to the Christian. God's word in nature, providence, and conscience must be heard and interpreted if men would speak truly on these subjects. The profession to be speaking Divine words founded either on a pretended revelation or a boast of superior intelligence, is vain unless the private words of the individual harmonize with the general truth of God's

world-wide revelations. 3. *Experience* will test the truth of literature. If literature concerns itself with serious subjects, it cannot be regarded as a trifle of idle hours. It will be brought into judgment. Experience will try it. No lie can be eternal. The self-styled "wise" men will "have to be ashamed," "dismayed and taken," when events contradict their untrue language.

Ver. 11.—(See on ch. vi. 14.)

Vers. 14, 15.—*Despair.* I. DESPAIR WILL ARISE ON THE PERCEPTION THAT THERE IS NO WAY OF ESCAPE FROM RUIN. The miserable Jews are pictured as first sitting still helplessly, and then rousing themselves to enter the fenced cities, only to find that death awaits them there as surely as in the open plain. People are too ready to believe that "something will turn up," and so hold on, in confidence and indifference, till their eyes are suddenly opened, and they see room for nothing but despair.

II. DESPAIR WILL ARISE ON THE RECOGNITION OF THE WRATH OF GOD. The Jews are to see that their God has put them to silence. Philistines, Egyptians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, might all be resisted; but who shall resist God? Men can only fight against God with confidence until they perceive him fighting against them. Then hope is madness.

III. DESPAIR WILL BE HEIGHTENED BY THE SENSE OF GUILT. The Jews are to see that their calamity is the punishment of sin. It is deserved. It is justly given. Men hope on while they refuse to admit their sin; but conviction of sin is fatal to hope.

IV. DESPAIR MAY FOLLOW A CONFIDENT HOPE. The Jews had looked for peace and for a time of health. Yet none came. Hope may be very bright and yet very delusive. The splendour of the sunrise contains little promise that the day will close without storms. Subjective confidence is no guarantee of objective truth. Things are not the more true because we believe them very firmly. We may feel safe and be in danger. A peaceful death is no security for a joyful resurrection. It is little that a man has overcome the fear of death; the important question is whether he has removed the ground for that fear. The faith that saves is not confidence in our own security, but submissive and obedient trust in Christ.

V. THE POSSIBILITY OF DESPAIR IS REVEALED, NOT TO PRODUCE IT, BUT TO WARN US FROM IT. If it were inevitable, or, being experienced, invincible, it would be cruel to prepare any for it. Why not let the poor doomed wretch enjoy his brief hour of sunshine before he is sent "to dwell in solemn shades of endless night"? But the revelations of a possibly dark future are given in mercy to warn us from sowing the seeds of despair and to point to the way of escape. No soul need despair since there is One who "is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb. vii. 25).

Ver. 20.—*Harvest contrasts.* The seasons have their lessons for all of us, teaching both by analogy and by contrast; for the warnings suggested by the opposition of our own condition to that of the natural world may be as instructive as the encouragements arising out of the harmony between the two. To Jeremiah the harvest came in its brightness only to show the condition of the Jews in the deeper shadow. A similar experience may occur to those of us who have no harvest-song in the soul to respond to the harvest-gladness of the world without.

I. THE MOST HOPEFUL EXTERNAL EVENT IS NO SECURITY FOR DELIVERANCE FROM THE GREATEST TROUBLES OF LIFE. Even harvest did not bring deliverance. People are too ready to rest their confidence on various indications of God in the outside world. 1. *Time.* The harvest is a new waymark in the course of time. Many trust blindly to time to bring them some help, while they do not stir a finger to secure it. 2. *Change.* The harvest indicates a new season. The sanguine are too ready to believe that any change must be for the better. 3. *Material prosperity.* The harvest brings bread for the body. Must it not, therefore, lay the foundation of perfect and lasting good? To those men whose "god is their belly" the harvest would seem to promise complete satisfaction. 4. Indications of the *merciful kindness of God.* He sends the harvest. Then, it is reasoned, he wishes to bless, and therefore will permit no harm. But experience proves the error of these anticipations, and reflection should

soon detect the fallacy which underlies them. Outward events do not always correspond to inward experiences; the latter have their own separate conditions. God may deal mercifully with us now and in earthly things, but his present forbearance is no proof that we shall never suffer from his righteous wrath in the season of judgment.

II. THE MOST HOPEFUL EXTERNAL EVENT DEEPENS THE SENSE OF THE INTERNAL DISTRESS WITH WHICH IT IS CONTRASTED. The harvest past, and yet undelivered! 1. *A new stage of time* has gone, and the deliverance is still delayed. 2. *Outside events* change, but the essential condition remains unchanged. 3. *Material good* is enjoyed while real good is still unattained, and this makes the minor blessing seem but a mockery. 4. *God is merciful*, and yet we are not delivered! Some fearful evil must be at the foundation of such a strange condition. 5. *A time of rest* is looked for but comes not. After harvest should come rest. Distress is heightened by the disappointment of expected deliverance. 6. *Approaching troubles* increase the gloom of present distress. The harvest is *past*. Now we look forward to chill autumn, to stormy winter. Not saved in harvest! What are we to expect in less propitious times?

Ver. 22.—"*Balm in Gilead.*" I. THE WORLD NEEDS REMEDIES FOR MORAL AND SOCIAL HEALING. Jeremiah regarded the Jews as wounded by the cruel calamities which were to overwhelm them; but beneath the wounds he detected an unhealthy national condition which equally needed healing. Men suffer thus from the external wounds of adversity and from the internal disease of sin. How small a part of mankind can be considered in a thoroughly healthy condition! Men are not only imperfectly developed; they are suffering from positive disorders. The world needs medicine as well as food—the physician as well as the farmer. Nations need healing for political disorganization within and wrongs of subjection to a foreign yoke without. Society sadly requires to be purified, even regenerated. Individual men suffer from the smart of sorrow and the disease of sin—both signs of an imperfect, disorganized condition, needing cure. The one disease which is at the root of all the chief maladies of mankind is moral evil. The forgiveness of sins must come as a healing of sickness (Mark ii. 9).

II. MANY PROFESSED REMEDIES ARE FORTHCOMING. Gilead has her balm. Every new physician has his patent nostrum. The world does not suffer from the small number of remedies which have been proposed to cure all the ills that flesh is heir to. It is rather in danger of being poisoned by a superabundance of most incongruous drugs. Every religion brings its own remedy. Philosophy, in its highest ambition, aims at a practical cure of society. Political innovations, social reforms, education, sanitary improvements,—all seek this result.

III. NO EARTHLY REMEDIES SUFFICE FOR THE NEEDED CURE. The balm of Gilead is found in abundance, but, alas! it will not heal the smart of Israel. Physicians advise, but their advice is futile. Nothing could effect the deliverance of the Jews in the days of Jeremiah, though lying prophets and astute politicians did their best. No earthly remedy can heal the widespread evil of the world (Isa. i. 6). 1. Earthly remedies are *external*. They may change the social order; they cannot cure the false ideas, irregulated passions, and vitiated conscience of which the habits of society are but symptoms. Spiritual disease must be treated with spiritual medicine. The physician for the body can do little in ministering to "the mind diseased." You cannot make men moral by the strictest puritanical legislation. (1) The disease of *sin* is in the heart, and the remedy must reach the heart. (2) So the deepest *distress* of mankind cannot be cured by the amelioration of physical comforts. A princely legacy is no consolation to a mother for the loss of her child. 2. Earthly remedies *partake of the character of the disease*. Human religions bear on their faces the marks of that very moral corruption which they aim at destroying. Sin can only be cured by something outside the sinful world; sorrow, by something above the scene of human distresses. We must go further than Gilead for the true balm, for Gilead will share with Israel the trouble for which we seek a remedy.

IV. GOD HAS PROVIDED HIS OWN REMEDY FOR THE MORAL AND SOCIAL HEALING OF THE WORLD. Christ is "the good Physician." The miracles of healing which he wrought on the bodies of men were signs of the work he came to effect for their souls.

1. Christ's remedy comes from *higher than human sources.* The healing of the sinless One is not tainted with the corruption which marks all simply human attempts at cure. 2. Christ's remedy goes to the *root of the evil* of mankind. His great work is not to effect an external revolution of society, but to cleanse the conscience (Heb. ix. 14) and heal the heart. 3. Individually, healing is brought to *all*, and the worst cases are just those for which Christ chiefly came (Matt. ix. 12). When all other remedies fail, his is most effectual, because it is (1) most needed, and (2) most glorified by the result. 4. *Society* must be healed by the application of Christian principles to politics, to commerce, to literature, to recreation, to domestic life.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 4—7.—*Apostasy an anomalous and incalculable thing.* I. THE ANALOGIES OF COMMON SENSE AND INSTINCT ARE FALSIFIED. (Vers. 4—6.) If a man fall, he will rise again to his feet; if he has made a mistake or gone in a wrong direction, and discovers it, he will turn again, unless he be absolutely bereft of his senses. One might expect similar behaviour in spiritual matters. But in the wickedness and defection of Israel it was not so; their apostasy seemed perpetual. The migratory birds are taught by instinct when to return. The season of their coming again is almost as calculable as that of their going. But the departure of the sinner is incomprehensible, and his return cannot with certainty be expected. Nay, the likelihood is he will continue in his sin, and pursue his own destruction to the bitter end. In this, as in many other instances, the career of the sinner can only be explained on the score of infatuation. His moral sense is perverted or destroyed. In place of that quick response which conscience ought to make to the voice of duty, there comes over his spirit an insensibility to moral considerations, and a growing ignorance of things Divine gradually deepening into outer darkness.

II. IT IS UNMOVED BY THE CONSIDERATIONS THAT OUGHT TO AFFECT IT. (Ver. 5.) The growing misery and unhappiness which it occasions are not strong enough to check the tendency to sin, if indeed their connection with it is clearly perceived or acknowledged. The cravings of the spiritual nature have to give place to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." By-and-by they are stilled, not by being satisfied, but by being stifled; and a curious heedlessness, which is deaf to all the voices of prophetic warning and entreaty, increasingly characterizes it. Under such circumstances it is difficult to discover any common point of contact or argument that shall be valid to both parties. When reason is left behind, it is not to higher, but to lower, susceptibilities that appeal has to be made.

III. THE CONCERN, THE CLAIMS, AND THE GRACIOUS PROVISION OF GOD ARE AS NOTHING. (Ver. 6.) The saint in the times of his calamity calls upon God to incline his ear. In the fearful condition and moral insensibility of his people to their wickedness and danger God is represented as of himself inclining his ear and listening attentively for the lightest sigh of repentance. He calls, but no notice is taken. The means of salvation he has provided are neglected or abused. The form of godliness is cultivated when the spirit has fled and the exercises of religion are the chief foes to its reality. What can be the conclusion to all this? They are spiritually dead. There is neither power nor inclination to seek for better things. Nothing but supernatural grace and long-suffering love can avail to save them.—M.

Vers. 8—12.—"*Peace, peace; when there is no peace.*" The present condition of the country, the evils that lowered upon the horizon,—these alike bore their message even to the natural conscience. If Israel was in the right way, and really understood the will of the Lord to do it, why these scandals, miseries, and impending evils? Again, the better to reach the perception of those who were thus unable to draw the inference for themselves, the condemnation was to be in kind—a sort of elementary lesson in the "correspondences" that marked the Divine government of the world was to be read to them. The scribe who had prophesied "smooth things" would be confronted with his own writings and compelled to eat his own words.

I. DIVINE ILLUMINATION ALONE CAN GIVE TRUE UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WORD

The priests and scribes, because of familiarity with holy things, claimed to be wise. They were satisfied with the spiritual state of Israel. Had they been wise, they would have anticipated what took place. The Holy Spirit alone bestows Divine insight and foresight.

II. THE DESPISERS OF DIVINE TRUTH, AND THOSE WHO FALSELY PRETEND TO ITS CUSTODY, WILL BE PUT TO SHAME. "Refuges of lies" will be swept away. The judgment, when it comes, will find them wholly unprepared and helpless. "Take heed that the light that is in thee be not darkness." "Blind leaders of the blind," the *sorrowing* comes to them in vain for comfort, or is deceived to his own hurt; at last the victim of a misplaced confidence, to find himself "of all men most miserable." The *sinner* meets with no true correction or instruction; and in his desperation he receives from them no help. Their judgment is that they will share the fate of their victims and dupes.—M.

Vers. 13—15.—*False hopes ministering despair.* The lessons of life are not readily learned by most men. They require to be frequently repeated ere they produce an impression. God, therefore, deals severely with his people, whose delusion is the more unpardonable because of the piety of their fathers and the light of revelation which had been given. He will, therefore, make to "pass away from them" one by one the things that he had given: the fruits of the earth shall be cut off; the comforts of life shall be at an end; trouble and sorrow shall seize upon them.

I. HOW HARD IT IS FOR MEN TO REALIZE THAT THE OUTWARD BLESSINGS OF LIFE DO NOT OF THEMSELVES SATISFY, AND CANNOT BE RELIED UPON! Each of us can remember how, one by one, the things of life had to be taken from him ere he learnt their real littleness and insufficiency. This is often the way God seeks to bless us. He takes away the object whose possession is misunderstood and whose properties are abused, that he may remove the temptation from the heart and leave it free for heavenly affections. "We can do without happiness, and instead thereof find blessedness." But to only a few is it given to know this. The multitude are as foolish scholars, "ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth."

II. HOPE WHICH HAS BEEN SO MISPLACED AND BETRAYED TOO FREQUENTLY INTRODUCES TO DESPAIR. As the lesson has not been learned, there is no perception of the real mistake. The old blunders are repeated until, in the sweeping away of all that we had held dear, we feel that life itself is not worth living, because we can see no real good within our reach. "Who will show us any good?" We are convicted, too, of unpardonable folly. The dissatisfaction with the things of life is gradually equalled, if not surpassed, by dissatisfaction with ourselves. We are conscious of needs that are not met and yearnings that refuse to be stilled. And beneath all these is the miserable consciousness that, in pursuits so trifling and tastes so mean, our true nature is being degraded. We grieve over our shattered idols and our vanished comforts, and yet more, are angry with ourselves that we should so grieve. The question will at last come, "If these things be our chief good, what security is left of ultimate happiness? If the real end of life has not been sought, we are not only unfortunate—we must be culpable." For to seek the truth, etc., of life is not only a possible enjoyment we have missed, but a duty we have neglected. And yet of our own selves we feel unable to retrace our steps. Having the desires we have, which have been strengthened by years of indulgence, we cannot all at once or of our own motion replace them with better ones. A feeling of helplessness, convicted folly and sin, and indefinite degradation gradually dawns upon our affrighted conscience. How shall we escape from the consequences of our own actions? Whither shall we flee who, in seeking our good always in material things, have been living in practical atheism? We can do nothing else but, like the smitten Israelites, betake ourselves to our closets and sit still.

III. BUT THE JUDGMENTS OF HEAVEN UPON THE SINNER, HOWEVER TERRIBLE IN THEMSELVES, ARE NOT MEANT TO PRODUCE THIS DESPAIR. The false trust is removed, that we may find the true one. The worst calamities of life, and its grievous disappointments, will be more than compensated for if they lead us to the Saviour. The prophet, speaking representatively for Israel, says, "Let us submit to God's judgment, and confess our sin as its cause." "Silence before the Lord" is the sure way to his restored favour and help.—M.

Ver. 20.—*Occasions of hoped-for salvation that have not availed.* Probably a proverbial expression. It is not admissible for us to understand the words of help expected from Egypt, which would be to make them an anachronism. They well describe the result of hoping against hope, and in this sense might be spoken by those who have been reduced to extremity by worldliness of spirit and unholiness of life. "It is plain that a great part of Israel imagined, like their heathen neighbours, that Jehovah had need of them as much as they had need of him; that their worship and service could not be indifferent to him; that he must, by a natural necessity, exert his power against their enemies, and save his sanctuaries from profanation. This, indeed, was the constant contention of the prophets who opposed Micah and Jeremiah (Micah iii. 11; ch. vii. 4, *seq.*; xxvii. 1, *seq.*); and from their point of view the captivity of Judah was the final and hopeless collapse of the religion of Jehovah" (W. Robertson Smith).

I. HOW MANY OCCASIONS HAVE THERE BEEN ON WHICH WE HAD EXPECTED AN IMAGINARY GOOD, OR LOOKED FOR A DELIVERANCE WHICH NEVER CAME! The man who has sought for wealth becomes rich only to find that his possessions fail to yield him the satisfaction he expected. False expectations have been entertained by the victims of misfortune that God would deliver them. True, they have no claim upon him, and they know that, if they were to be requited as they deserved, they would be left alone. The victim of unhallowed desires, hurried and driven as by an inward demon, fancies that, in his own nature or the course of life, he will come to a turning-point. He will "sow his wild oats" now; by-and-by he will settle down and marry and be respectable and virtuous. The events of life to which he looks forward take place, but there is no deliverance wrought by them. So many seek the Divine favour in formal religious observances, and do not find it. When many around us are being awakened from their indifference and converted to God, we are alarmed at our own spiritual deadness. The time of grace has slipped past unimproved. God has been gathering in his children, and we are left out.

II. TO WHAT CONCLUSION OUGHT THIS TO LEAD US? That we ought to be anxious and in earnest there can be no question. Our chances appear desperate. Our power of moral recovery is greatly lessened as compared with the freshness of childhood's days. But whilst there is life there is hope. We have reason to congratulate ourselves that we have not been cut off in the midst of our sins. The door is still open. Let us, as those "born out of due time," awake to righteousness, and seek with tears an offended but loving Father. "Now is the accepted time; . . . now is the day of salvation."—M.

Ver. 22.—"*Physician, heal thyself.*" Gilead, an outlying district of Palestine, was celebrated for its aromatic balsam, of great virtue for wounds, sores, etc. The natives of the place doubtless became expert in the application of their famous herb. By virtue of its possession, Israel might be said to be the healer of the surrounding nations. Even more so in a spiritual sense it was the physician of men's souls, holding for others and for all time the saving truth of God. But the evils which came upon itself—social, political, spiritual—had now increased to such a degree that it might well be asked, were the sources of saving health exhausted, or were the possessors of spiritual wisdom wholly extinct?

I. WHAT FOUNDATION WAS THERE FOR THE PRETENSION OF ISRAEL TO BE THE SAVIOUR OF THE NATIONS? Its own internal condition was deplorable. Materially and spiritually it was more in need of healing than those it regarded as barbarians and heathen. So of the Church which has become corrupt a similar question may be asked. If those who profess the faith of Christ do not exhibit its fruits or possess its peace, they belie their profession and discredit the cause of their Master. When professed believers are as troubled with earthly cares and as downcast amid earthly trials as others, men of the world will doubt the efficacy of their religion, belief, and life. This is the burning question of Christendom through all time. Has it any means of curing the evils of humanity, the miseries of life, the wickedness inherent in human nature?

II. HAD THE UTMOST USE BEEN MADE OF THE RESOURCES AT COMMAND? Was there any one who knew the nature of the evil, and how to cure it? Why did they not seek Jehovah? Christians are frequently at a loss, not so much for lack of an orthodox creed as of a realizing faith. They have not been in the habit of going to Christ

with their cares and sorrows. Earthly things have been allowed to divert their attention from truth and righteousness as the principles of life. But sometimes great mischief is done by wrong expectations of what Christ will do for his people. Men sow to the flesh and expect to reap a spiritual harvest, or their faith in Christ is but another avenue to an earthly end. Under such circumstances they cannot fail to be disappointed. We must look to religion for its proper functions; to Christ for what he has promised to give. Have we any grief which we do not, cannot take to Christ? Are we consciously resting on him for moral guidance and support and spiritual fellowship? They who always and in all things rest their souls upon a living Saviour will know that there is "balm in Gilead," etc.—M.

Ver. 2.—*Befooled indeed.* This is what we say when we see men giving heed to the plausible statements of gross impostors, and, in consequence, lavishing their time, energy, and wealth in the hope of large recompense; but who, when the time comes that the hoped-for gain should be theirs, find themselves deceived, defrauded, helpless, and utterly ruined men. These are they who are the prey of bubble companies, lying advertisements, and the other ten thousand frauds into which unwary persons are beguiled. But is not this what we may say when we read of those told of in our text? Was there ever more flagrant, piteous, and awful instance of men being made fools of indeed? For—

I. LOOK AT THESE UTTERLY DECEIVED ONES. 1. *They were worshippers of the gods of the heathen.* The sun, the moon, and all the host of heaven: these were the objects of their worship. Reference is continually made to them and to their worship (2 Kings xxiii. 5; xxi. 3, etc.). 2. *And they were most earnest worshippers.* Note the piling up of expressions to indicate this. (1) They "*have loved*" them. Here is the root of all real worship. The object must be loved, and these people were drawn to and attracted by these false gods. (2) They "*served*" them. This follows as a sure consequence. It is not said they believed in them; but that matters not: if there be that in the object of our worship which makes us like it—love is almost too sacred a word as applied to false gods—we shall serve it readily enough. (3) And then they "*walked after*" them. That which lured them at the first drew them more and more, and so it became the habit of their lives. (4) And they "*sought*" them. When they found the worship of some of these gods was pleasant, they sought out more of them; or it may mean that they got at last to have a real faith in them, and hence "consulted them as oracles, appealed to them as judges, implored their favour, and prayed to them as benefactors." (5) And they "*worshipped*" them. See them at their worship on Mount Carmel, on the day when Elijah challenged their priests to put to the test his God and theirs. None could doubt the sincerity of their worship or the earnestness with which they cried all that morning long, "O Baal, hear us!" And those to whom Jeremiah wrote were such thorough worshippers of these gods. They withheld no proof of their devotedness. 3. *But yet they were utterly deceived and disappointed.* See in text and in immediate context how these gods dealt with them. Ardent votaries as they had been, those whom they worshipped let all the hideous woes come upon them which are told of here: death, desolation, degradation, and despair. That was what their gods did for them. They had spent their all on these pretended physicians, and were nothing bettered, but made worse indeed.

II. ENDEAVOUR TO EXPLAIN BOTH THEIR INFATUATION AND THEIR DISAPPOINTMENT. 1. *As to their infatuation.* It can hardly be possible for any reader of the history of these people to avoid asking the question, "Wherefore was it that they were so given to idolatry?" Their whole national history showed that nothing but sorrow and shame had come from idolatry, and yet here they were for ever, not merely falling into it, but deliberately and persistently going after it. What could be the reason? (1) Partly, no doubt, the example of the great and mighty nations around them. We must remember what an infinitesimally small kingdom that of Judah was—about the size of an ordinary English county, and how insignificant they were; how the influence, therefore, of the great empires which pressed them on either side could not but be felt. And this was all on the side of idolatry. Idolatry had done *them* no harm; the gods they worshipped had, so it would seem, lifted them up to greatness and power surpassed by none. All seemed to say to the poor, weak, little kingdom of Judah, "You had far

better do as we do and trust our gods rather than your own." (2) The spirituality of the worship God required, and the absence of all such demand on the part of idolatry, was another argument for idolatry and against the worship of God. No graven image, no representation of God, nothing that would help the senses to conceive of God as like to themselves, was granted to the Jews; God was a Spirit, and he was to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. No statue, no image, no painting, no symbol even, was to represent him. It was not allowed that the Jew should be able to place in his house or carry about with him, as other nations did, any material emblem of his God (cf. Deut. iv. 15; Isa. xl. 18). But spiritual worship of this kind has ever been found far more difficult to maintain: it demands a condition of heart and mind so purified that to the gross and sensual such worship is impossible, and to the ordinary mind it is far from easy. The anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament, and the Incarnation itself, are condescensions of God to the confessed feebleness and incapacity of man for such pure worship. But, on the other hand, idolatry, abounding with "chambers of imagery," lending itself to all the clamour of the senses,—what wonder that it was preferred? (3) Add on to this the fact that strict obedience to the Levitical Law involved such isolation from all other people, such scrupulous care, such heavy sacrifices of time, wealth, ease, and the good will of men; in short, was altogether, as St. Peter afterwards said (Acts xv. 10), "a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear;" whilst idolatry wooed them with its sensuous, brilliant, luxurious, and easy rites; and again we ask, what wonder that idolatry was preferred? (4) And present earthly good seemed to be associated with it, and absent from the worship of God (cf. ch. xliv. 15—19, "For then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off, . . . we have wanted all things"). And (5) lastly, the licence allowed by the lax moral code of idolatry, and its positive sanction of gross licentiousness; this, contrasted with the stern frown of the true Jewish faith upon all such sin, was more than sufficient to attract in crowds a people so debased as the Jews had now become. Then, as still, the most powerful and the most depraved passions of human nature were not only permitted free indulgence by idolatry, but actually patronized, protected, and prescribed. All ancient history attests this, and the result on the heathen world, not only history but God's providence and his Word alike (Rom. i.) have plainly declared. 2. *As to their disappointment.* Idolatry, however for the moment it may seem to have brought good along with it (cf. *supra*), resulted at last in such unparalleled woe as the prophets, one and all, continually declared must come from it. But whilst no idolatrous nation has ever stood permanently in its greatness—let the decayed and perished empires of antiquity witness—there can be little question that sentence against the evil work was executed more speedily, more sternly, and more notoriously against the Jews than against any other idolatrous nation whatsoever. It cost them more than any other people, and they have not paid "the uttermost farthing" even yet. The rabbis say that in every one of the innumerable cups of affliction which Israel in the course of the long ages has had to drink, there has been mingled some of the dust of that golden idol-calf which Moses ground to powder beneath Mount Sinai. We are told how, when he had done this, he cast the powder into the stream from whence the camp drew its water, and made all the people drink of it. Now, wherefore was sorer judgment meted out to Israel than to others because of their idolatry? (1) Because they were the beloved of the Lord. A man may see a strange child doing a disgraceful action and may take comparatively little notice; but if it be his own son, whom he loves, will he not feel and resent it then as otherwise he never would? (2) And "chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." They were to be the channel along which the truth of revelation was to flow to mankind at large, and if that channel were not kept free from pollution, neither could the living waters which flowed along it. Hence the prompt and stern measures which were ever taken to preserve Israel in the faith of God, or to restore them if they had wandered. It could not be, therefore, that Israel should permanently and entirely lapse into idolatry. The well-being of the world hinged on their handing down pure and uncorrupt the oracles of God and the faith of their forefathers, and because "God so loved the world," the cup of idolatry was ever made bitter and nauseous to his people, so that they might hate to drink of it.

III. TRY TO TURN THIS WHOLE SUBJECT TO GOOD ACCOUNT. 1. *The votaries of the world may in these verses behold their own portraiture and read their sure reward.*

For (1) they do after this manner give themselves to the world. They "love," "serve," "walk after," "seek," and "worship" it. (2) And their infatuation is explained by like reasons. (3) And their reward will be to be utterly deceived and disappointed. God will say to each one of them, "Thou fool!" (Luke xii. 20). 2. *The worshippers of God may profitably contemplate a model which too many of them too seldom follow, of earnest devotedness in their worship.* "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." Would that the devotedness of the world to its god were equalled by the devotedness of the Church to theirs! 3. Every one may behold, in the tremendous and deadly attraction of the world, fresh, urgent, and constant need of being "kept by the power of God" in the love of God. Well may each day begin with this prayer—

"Lord, I my vows to thee renew;
Scatter my sins like morning dew,
Guard my first springs of thought and will,
And with *thyself* my spirit fill."

C.

Vers. 4—11.—*Backsliding in its worst forms.* All departures from God are evil, but some are only temporary, and are quickly followed by repentance, return, and restoration. There are others, however, of a far more serious kind, and we have in these verses a great deal told us concerning them. We are told of some of—

I. THEIR CHARACTERISTICS. 1. *So contrary to men's wonted ways.* For when men find that they have brought evil on themselves, they will at once seek to undo such evil (ver. 4). If a man fall, he will not lie still in the mire or in the road, but will get up again as speedily as may be. If he have mistaken his path and got on a wrong track, will he not, as soon as he discovers his mistake, quickly retrace his steps that he may get into the right way? That is how men act in the common affairs of life. But, though Judah and Jerusalem knew well that they had fallen, yet they showed no desire to rise, and though they could not but know they were altogether out of the right way, they showed no willingness to return. 2. *Resists the strivings of God's Spirit* and all his drawings of them to himself. Ver. 7 implies such God-implanted instincts in men's souls, but declares that, unlike the ever-obedient birds, man resists and refuses the call of God. 3. *Becomes shameless.* (Vers. 6, 12.) This feature we have had noticed before (cf. ch. vi. 15); it arrested the prophet's attention as being evil exceedingly. 4. *Determined and defiant.* (Ver. 6.) 5. *Is at last perpetual.* (Ver. 5.) They have gone into an evil way, and they abide in that way, no power of Divine grace being able to draw them therefrom. So terrible is this worst form of backsliding, it is perpetual.

II. THEIR CONSEQUENCES. The evil fruit such sin bears is shown here. 1. *Deep sorrow to the heart of God.* How pathetic is this lament! How it echoes the anguish of those words, "How shall I give thee up!" "How often would I have gathered thee!" etc.! Such is the tone of these (vers. 4—8). The Divine grief is audible through every part. 2. *Shame to the backsliders themselves.* (Ver. 9.) It is ever so. These chapters have been giving illustration upon illustration of this result. And our own observation and the experience of all who have turned from God to sin—all alike confirm what God's Word has said. 3. *Utter and absolute ruin.* (Ver. 10.) The dreadful sorrows of the vanquished in beholding their most beloved ones torn from them to a fate worse than death, and their lands which they had inherited from their fathers taken possession of by their conquerors,—these common incidents of war are cited as illustrative of the utter ruin which would come upon these ungodly ones. And evermore will men find it an exceeding bitter thing to depart from the living God. We are also shown some of—

III. THEIR CAUSES. 1. *Deception.* Ver. 5, "They hold fast deceit." How many are the falsities by which men are deceived, and to which they hold fast as if they were sure facts on which their souls might rest (cf. vers. 8, 11; vii. 4, 8)! 2. *Dislike of God's ways.* "They refuse to return." They had no desire to detect the falsity of their trust; they were glad to have any excuse for refusal. 3. *Strong preference for the world's ways.* Ver. 10, "Every one . . . given to covetousness." The ways of God suffered not such worldliness, but the ways they had chosen gave free permission. Here is ever the secret of departure from God. But can nothing be done? "Is there no balm in Gilead?" (ver. 22). Note, then—

IV. THEIR CURE. How shall this evil spirit be cast out and the right spirit be restored? In ver. 6 the process is shown to us. There is: 1. *Realization of the results of our sin.* The backslider is represented as contemplating with dismay the awful consequences of his sin, and asking, "What have I done?" It is "the conviction of sin" which is the beginning work of God's Spirit in the sinner's heart. See the prodigal contemplating the ruin he had brought upon himself. This was the first step in his "coming to himself." 2. *Repentance of our wickedness.* (Ver. 6.) Not general repentance, but each man seeing *his own* wickedness and repenting of that. The man has come to look on it as God looks on it. Formerly he loved his sin, now he hates it. One element of our Saviour's atonement was this, that he in our nature and as our representative, looked upon our sin as God looked on it, and so offered to God for us a true repentance. We, however contrite in heart, could offer none such, for as it has been truly said, "Our very repentance needs to be repented of, and our tears washed in the blood of Christ." But this element of all true atonement—that he who makes such atonement looks on the wrong done as he who has been wronged looks on it—was present in Christ's atonement, and is one reason wherefore "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin." 3. *Confession.* This is the "speaking aright" which is told of in ver. 6. They had been denying, excusing, maintaining their sin heretofore, anything but speaking aright about it; but now there is heard the right language of confession: "I have sinned." 4. *Practical turning from the evil way.* As before each had turned determinedly to his own self-chosen course (ver. 6), now they would turn from it. Such is the way of the backslider's return and restoration, a way up which there is no smooth easy sliding as there was down, but in which every step has to be firmly made and resolutely kept to—a way difficult indeed, but, blessed be God, not impossible.

V. THEIR COUNSEL. Let each wanderer from God ask himself the question, "What have I done?" 1. Such inquiry can do no harm; and: 2. Is likely to be of great advantage. 3. The time for such inquiry is lessening day by day. 4. "It is a fearful thing" for an unforgiven man "to fall into the hands of the living God."—C.

Ver. 6.—*The way home.* The text suggests much concerning this way from the far country of sin to the home of our Father and God. The Lord is here lamenting that none of the people of Jerusalem were walking in it. Note—

I. THE STAGES OF THE WAY. 1. *Realization of the ruin wrought by our sin.* The soul is represented as contemplating this ruin, and asking, "What have I done?" This is the first stage. 2. *Repentance.* Each one is to repent of "his wickedness." We are not to lose ourselves in a general confession of sin, as too many do, but to think of our own sin apart from that of other people, and to think of what is especially *our* sin. Thus personal and particular, our repentance is the more likely to be genuine and godly. 3. *Confession.* "These that have sinned, these and these only speak aright when they speak of repenting, and it is sad when they who have so much work for repentance do not say a word of repenting." But confession is this "speaking aright" which God desires to hear from us. Now, this confession is so acceptable to God because it glorifies his holiness and his love. His *holiness;* for the sinner has come to see sin as God sees it, and hence to hate and abhor it. He is of one mind with God about it as he never was before. And his *love;* for confession casts itself in faith upon a love that is deeper than its sin. Deep as is God's abhorrence of sin, the sinner in confession appeals to and lays hold on a love that is deeper still. Hence, when the sinner makes his sincere confession before God, he is at once right out of "the far country," and home in the heart of God. The robe, the ring, the shoes, are put upon him; the feast is prepared, and the merry-making, the joy in the presence of the angels of God, at once begins.

II. THE ATTENTIVE OBSERVER OF THOSE WHO TRAVEL BY THIS WAY. It is God who is represented as bending down his ear, hearkening to what is said, listening for any words of confession, and ready to hear them if spoken. The text is the language of gracious expectation and desire on the part of God. It calls to mind the father's waiting for the prodigal's return. How often had he looked with longing, loving gaze down the road along which his returning son must come, if ever indeed he would come! He had looked so often that a speck in the far distance would at once be discerned by him. Hence, "when a great way off," the father saw him. And so here God is represented as thus waiting for his guilty people's return. And how much there is to

confirm our faith in this Divine solicitude for the sinner's salvation! Look at the very *constitution of our nature*. That, as Bishop Butler has shown, is evidently on the side of virtue, that is, of obedience to God, and against the disobedient. "Who will harm you, if ye be doers of that which is good?"—thus the apostle appeals to the universally recognized fact, that the constitution of man's nature is such as to favour the good. And, on the other hand, the declaration that "the way of transgressors is hard," is based on another like fact of universal experience. Such is one evidence of "the care" with which, as George Herbert sings, "Lord, with what care thou hast begirt us round!" Then *the revelation of his truth* is yet further in evidence. That truth, as ministered to us by the written Word or by the lips of prophets, apostles, pastors, teachers—it matters not—is a perpetual proof of the Divine solicitude for our eternal good. And *his providence*, making it to be well with the righteous and ill with the unrighteous. Well and ill with each respectively in mind, body, and estate. And *his Spirit*. That Spirit speaking to us in conscience and in the powerful pleadings of his grace in our hearts, of which we are all so often conscious. And, last of all, God has shown us this loving care of his for us in *his Son*. He has shown himself in a manner adapted to touch and move all hearts, and to draw all men unto him. Now, all this mass of evidence is in keeping with that solicitude which this verse and so many other portions of God's Word reveal as felt by him towards sinful men. And if it be asked "What moves this solicitude?" the character of God furnishes the answer. The *holiness* of God. "Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners in the way." And we are bidden "Give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness." It is the nature of holiness to be distressed at all that contradicts it and is unlike itself. It rests not until it has assimilated all around it to itself. Here, then, is one reason of God's perpetual appeals to sinful men. His *wisdom* also. It is the characteristic of God's wisdom to adjust means to ends. How wonderfully and beautifully this is seen in all departments of nature! But for the fulfilling of the high purposes of his grace, what instrument can he find more fit than the regenerated, redeemed soul? Even now and here we see this. A soul aglow with love and faith towards God, what will not that soul do for God? Hence to the principalities and powers in heaven shall be made known by the one Church—the company of the redeemed shall evidence it—the manifold wisdom of God. His *love* also. If the beholding of scenes of distress touch our hearts and make us eager to render help, can we imagine that he who made us is less willing than ourselves to show pity and render help? Our Lord's argument is, "If ye, evil though ye be, know how"—and we do know how—"to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give," etc.? Humanity, as it has been well said, is the heavenly Father's sick child. Will not the Father's love, therefore, be all the more called forth to that child? And his *compassion* also. For this life is the critical period of that child's malady. It is the time when the great question of its life or death is being determined. Terrible forces are against it, and the struggle is now at its most momentous hour. This fact would cause the Father's love to go forth, as it has gone and is going forth, in active compassion, in open manifestation of its solicitude. Such are some of the considerations which lead to our Father's attentive observance of all those who travel by this homeward way.

III. THE END OF THE WAY. They who come there will find restoration to the Father's love, the implantation of a new nature, the complete pardon of the past, power to live as God's dear child for the future, and ultimately the everlasting dwelling in the very presence and home of God.

IV. BROOKS BY THE WAY. It is said, "He shall drink of the brook by the way, therefore shall he lift up the head." We may apply these words to the travellers in the way we are speaking of; for they need, in the weary and often most difficult journey, the refreshments which God alone can supply. Such aids are given in the promises of God, the fellowship of God, the communion of fellow-travellers on the way, and in the service and worship of God.

V. THE SOLITARINESS OF THE WAY. It is but "here and there a traveller" that is found. The way is not thronged. This verse is God's lament that scarce any are found willing to go along this road; for it is not the way of worldly advantage. They who "are given to covetousness" (ver. 10) will never choose this way. They have persuaded themselves that they are as well off and better where they are. They are

deceived, and, what is worse, are willing to be deceived: "They hold fast deceit, and so refuse to return." We should have thought that surely it would be otherwise. 1. *Reason* bids them return (ver. 4). If a man have fallen, he will not lie content on the earth, but will arise. If in an ordinary journey he have missed his way, he will at once retrace his steps. Reason rules in such cases, but not here. 2. *Conscience* bids them return. They could not but know that their sin had done them sore harm; but none of them asked, "What have I done?" however loudly conscience might summon them to such repentance. 3. *God's Word* bade then return (ver. 8), but lo! certainly in vain he made it. 4. *Providence* bade them. The events that had taken place were all admonitions of God; but though the birds of the air marked and obeyed the providence of God, sinful man "knew not the judgment of the Lord" (ver. 7). Hence the way is solitary.

CONCLUSION. But the question for us is, "Are *we* in this way?" Let us bless God if we are, and press on therein. Let us note how short the day is in which we can travel, how its few fleeting hours are lessening, lest when we would start on the way we have to exclaim (ch. vi. 4), "Woe unto us! for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out."—C.

Ver. 18—ch. ix. 1.—*The prophet's grievous lament.* I. ITS GRIEVOUSNESS. (Vers. 18, 21, ch. ix. 1.) Ver. 18, "When I would comfort myself," etc. All hope dies down, is crushed beneath the overwhelming evidence of the hopelessness of his people's condition. Ver. 21: he is as if wounded, his heart is clad in the garb of deepest woe, the black raiment of the mourner. Ch. ix. 1: he has exhausted his power of telling forth his deep grief, his eyes refuse to weep more, though his heart be sore pierced, and the troubles of his people are unrelieved. Therefore he desires that he might weep continually.

II. ITS GROUNDS. 1. *They were still trusting in lying words* (ver. 19), reckoning that, because the temple of Jehovah and the throne of David belonged to them, therefore they should have been secure. Though in distant lands, in actual captivity—for there the prophet contemplates them—they were still imagining that the possession of the temple and David's throne should have been their sure safeguard. It is terrible to see God's judgments coming upon guilty men, but when these judgments themselves seem to fail in teaching the needed lesson, that is a greater sorrow still. 2. *The time of redemption was over.* (Ver. 20.) The long harvest days, the bright summer weather—symbols of all days of opportunity—these were gone. The days when they might have turned to God and found deliverance, "the wrath of God had arisen against them, and there was no remedy." But what a retrospect is his who has to say as did lost Israel, "The harvest is past," etc.! For: (1) Such seasons remind us of our privileges and obligations. (*a*) It is a time of fruitfulness, of great privilege, grace, and goodness. God makes man's cup to overflow. Youth and days of gospel privilege. Sundays, sacred services, etc. (*b*) It should be a time of great activity. The natural harvest and summer-time is so. For: (*c*) It is a season of such limited duration. (2) But men often let these times pass away unimproved. (*a*) The world hinders them. (*b*) Perversion of Scripture truths. (*c*) Belief that they are well enough as they are. (*d*) Procrastination. (3) But once gone, the fruits of that summer and that harvest can never be saved. Such facts as these open the floodgates of grief in hearts like that of Jeremiah. 3. He could see no means of restoration or recovery whatsoever (ver. 22), no balm and no physician anywhere.

III. ITS WORD TO ALL WHO SHOULD KNOW OR ARE THE CAUSES OF SUCH GRIEF NOW. 1. Christ's servants should be in sympathy with the prophet's lament. It is because *we* are so indifferent the world is so. "Si vis me flere flendum est," it is ever saying, but in vain, to the professing Church. Oh for the compassion of Jeremiah and yet more of Christ! If we sowed in tears we should reap in joy. If so we went forth "bearing precious seed, we shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing," etc. 2. But you who cause such grief, think you not that if such be the result of anticipating God's judgments upon sin, the enduring of them must be far worse? And that is your part in them. Christ himself assured the weeping women who followed him to Calvary that the woes of them who crucified him would be worse than his own. "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

CONCLUSION. Then, instead of causing sorrow to the faithful servants of God by resisting their appeals, yield to them, and so gladden these servants, and the angels of God, and the heart of God, and the Son of God. So you yourself shall "enter into the joy of your Lord."—C.

Ver. 22.—*Christ and the Holy Ghost realities after all.* "Is there no balm in Gilead?" etc. One of the commonest taunts of ungodly men—and it has been so in all ages—against the believer in God and in his redeeming grace, has been their apparent utter absence amongst such vast multitudes of people for so many centuries, and this though the conditions were such as needed, and that in most distressing manner, both their presence and their power. And one of the subtlest and saddest temptations to which the human mind is subject is that of doubting the grace of God. "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is now thy God?" The taunt of the psalmist's enemies had roused up the demon of doubt concerning God and his love, and no wonder, then, that the psalmist's tears flowed fast both day and night. Now, the text is one of those sad questionings to which the force of distressing facts will now and again give rise. It contains three questions, and we will note concerning them these three things—their meaning, their occasions, their answers.

I. THEIR MEANING. And take: 1. The *literal meaning* of the balm and the physician about which the prophet so mournfully inquires. Balm was a resinous gum which flowed from the side of a tree or shrub found on the sunny slopes of Mount Gilead, and counted very precious. When Jacob would counsel his sons how they might propitiate Joseph, who held their brother in captivity, he told them to take him a present of "a little balm" (Gen. xliii. 11). It was an article of merchandise (Gen. xxxvii. 25), regarded as of invaluable efficacy in medicine (cf. ch. xlvi. 11; li. 8). Its name was derived from a word which told of the manner in which it was procured from the tree that bore it. The side of the tree was pierced, and the precious balm then flowed forth. The physicians of the day constantly made use of it, and had studied the best means of applying it. But it is evident that the prophet is speaking under a figure. Note, then: 2. The *metaphorical meaning.* He speaks of the lost "health of the daughter of my people," and means by that the national ruin which was so fast coming on Judah and Jerusalem—ruin of all kinds, spiritual, moral, temporal. By the "balm" he means some method of recovery for his people, and by the "physician" some skilled, sagacious, powerful deliverer, who should be able to employ these methods and so save the land. The prophet was in despair about this; he saw no hope nor help anywhere, and hence the piteous cry, the mournful question of our text. To every one who professed to have found the balm and the physician the ruined land so needed, he addressed the unanswerable question, "Why then is not the health," etc.? 3. *Their evangelic import.* It has all along been seen that the terms used here were capable of such application. The "balm" is a beautiful symbol of Christ. The Mount Gilead, the tree, the pierced side, the stream thence issuing, and its mighty healing power,—these severally send our thoughts to Mount Calvary, the cross, the pierced side of the Saviour, the precious blood, and the unquestionable spiritual healing might there is therein. And Scripture is ever speaking of sin as a disease; of man as one whose health needs recovery. The analogies are obvious. And the "physician," who is he but that Divine Spirit whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto men? He so shows to us the meaning and intent of our Saviour's sacrificial death, that "by his stripes we are healed." Yes; whilst we all are the stricken with mortal disease, Christ is the Balm that surely heals, and the blessed Spirit is he who reveals Christ to the soul. "For no man can say that Jesus is Lord"—that is, in all the full meaning of those words, and with sincere intent—"but by the Holy Ghost."

II. THEIR OCCASIONS. What led to these questions being asked by the prophet? and what tends to their being asked still? 1. By *the prophet.* The ruin of his land and people. The awful calamities that were at that moment overhanging the doomed nation. But: 2. By *men still.* It is the contemplation of the threefold fact of sin, sorrow, and death. (1) *Of sin.* Think of the myriads of mankind who have lived and died on this earth of ours, and all of them unblessed by the light of the gospel. Think of the rampant wickedness, the hideous vice, the festering corruption, the indescribable moral

pollution that characterizes vast masses of mankind, indeed *the* mass of mankind. And think of the corruption of Christianity: what a veneer of religion! what a counterfeit of godliness! what a hollow mockery so great part of it is! And coming closer home, the saddened contemplator of the ravages of sin may turn his gaze inward into his own heart, and as he reflects on the slender hold which Divine and holy principles have upon him—

> "What scanty triumphs grace has won,
> The broken vow, the frequent fall;"

and as he cries out at times almost in despair at seeing the strength of the chains by which his soul is bound, "O wretched man that I am!" etc.,—the words of our text fit in with his mournful mood. It seemed to him as if there were "no balm in Gilead, no," etc. (2) *Of sorrow.* To St. Paul, as he penned the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the whole creation seemed to "groan and travail together in pain." What is the progress of mankind but one long procession of mourners! Oh, the tears and sorrows of the broken-hearted, the helpless, the desolate and afflicted of all ages and of all lands! What a catalogue do they fill! The mind reels as it contemplates the dark mass of human woe. Its faith in the Divine Fatherhood staggers as if smitten with a deadly blow, and is half forced to the conclusion, which to a sad and an increasing number seems self-evident, that there is *no* balm in Gilead, *no* physician there. (3) And the *reign of death* produces similar feelings. As men see how the king of terrors stalks triumphantly through the land, how ruthless is his tyranny, how crushing his power, how dark the grave into which we so soon descend, and how helpless we all are against his might, it does seem at times as if there were no deliverer and no deliverance. But note—

III. THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS. 1. *To those which inquire, "Is there no balm . . . physician there?"* some answer "No." Sin, they say, is a mistake which education will rectify, and the operations of the great law of evolution will gradually eliminate. In fact, there is no such thing as "sin" in the sense religious people think. Therefore, whilst for the race there is hope, for the present and past generations there is none. Sorrow, also, they teach, is the result of ignorance of natural laws or of disregard of them. The progress of knowledge will gradually lessen it; that is all that can be said. And as to death, that, of course, is the inevitable, and ends all. The only immortality is in the influence which a man exerts in those who come after him. As to "the Resurrection and the life"—*credat Judæus.* Such is the dismal gospel of this nineteenth century. But the Christian reply to these questions is unhesitatingly, "Yes; there is a Balm and a Physician for the sin-stricken soul, whether of the individual or of the whole human race. And for the heart riven with sorrow, broken with grief. And for all those, too, over whom Death has reigned with such cruel power. Because we believe in Christ and in the Holy Ghost, we believe in the 'Balm' and in the 'Physician' humanity needs." But then comes: 2. *The last and seemingly unanswerable question.* "Why then is not," etc.? What are we to reply to this? (1) For one large part of those whom it concerns, the sin, sorrow, and death ridden multitudes, *we deny* that which the question assumes. For the Balm and the Physician have done or are doing their blessed work on them. We appeal to the throng of the redeemed, the blessed dead, myriads of whom are now with God.

> "White-robed saints in glory,
> Cleansed from every stain."

With the eye of faith we behold them, and we believe in their existence as we believe in our own, and the yearning of our hearts is to be with them. And *they* are a great cloud of witnesses to the Balm and to the Physician both. But—as unbelievers will demand clamorously that we should do—we come down to this world and this life that now is. Well, then, we appeal to the fact that there *are* regenerated, renewed, saintly souls living here on earth to-day, walking in purity, integrity, and in the light and love of God. *They* are God's witnesses to what the unbeliever denies. Furthermore, there are a vast number in whom this process of healing *is going on.* Slowly, it may be, and with sad retrogressions at times, but really, notwithstanding. The tide is

a long, long time coming in, but it does come in. Healing is always a gradual work. "Nemo repente fuit 'sanctissimus,'" any more than "turpissimus." A man cannot leap into heaven, as, thank God, he cannot leap into hell. But because healing is only gradual, do we deny its existence? But we know there are vast multitudes more to be accounted for than those we have as yet told of. (2) Therefore for this part we say concerning them, *wait*. St. Paul had evidently pondered this problem, and he has taught us that there are due times and seasons appointed in the wisdom of God for the manifestation of Christ to men (cf. 1 Tim. ii. 6; Eph. i. 8—10; Phil. ii. 9; Col. i. 20), but that in the "dispensation of the fulness of times" it is God's "good pleasure" to "gather together all things in Christ," all the living and all the dead. And it is impossible not to see how the heart of the holy apostle exults in the beatific vision, the "breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of the glorious completed living temple of the Lord God. Therefore, in view of revelations like these, we say that before the reality of the work of Christ and the Holy Ghost are denied, we are bound to *wait*. And if it be objected that the waiting has been and may be for so long, we reply that it is because men *will* not come unto Christ that they might have life. The remedy of redemption is not forced upon any soul. A man's soul is not saved by his will being crushed, by his ceasing to be a man and becoming a machine. We cannot but believe and know—the individual conversion of every true child of God demonstrates it—that God has ways and means to bring "the unruly wills of sinful men" into accord with his own, and this in perfect harmony with the moral freedom he has given man. How long and how dreadfully far the human will may go in resisting God we cannot tell, but we may not believe that it is greater than God himself and can exhaust all the Divine resources. The hunger and misery of the prodigal brought him "to himself," the consuming fire of the dread captivity which Jeremiah is foretelling burnt out for ever the love of idolatry amongst Israel; and there are other like fires of God's holy love which may have like results. Therefore, we say, that until—if we may so speak—God has thrown up the case of sin and sorrow stricken humanity, we have no right to affirm that there is "no balm in Gilead," etc. In regard to *sorrow*, that has a ministry of spiritual healing of its own, which has gone on ever since "the Man of sorrows" became "acquainted with grief." As his messenger, Grief has gone about from house to house, from heart to heart, a veritable sister of mercy, though clad in coarse and unlovely garb. Up and down the streets of this weary world, and in and out every one of its homes, she perpetually goes; but no one ever meets her in the new Jerusalem, in the city of our God, for her ministry is not needed there. Then as to *death*, we say that in all the drear, dark, hopeless power of it "Christ *has* abolished death." We can, and by every graveside we do—challenge death as to its sting, and the grave as to its victory. Therefore we say, and with glad hearts, that the health of the daughter of the people is recovered, or is recovering, for that there is both Balm in Gilead and a Physician there.

CONCLUSION. But whilst we bid the unbeliever wait ere he pronounce with certainty that there is neither Balm nor Physician, we would earnestly and affectionately beseech him not to wait ere he has recourse to them. Disease does not become easier to cure by being allowed to go on unchecked. It only gives the physician far more trouble, and the patient far more pain. And the analogy holds good in regard to the disease of sin. Come, then, to Christ now.—C.

Ver. 22.—*The balm of Gilead.* There were those who treated the crimes and miseries of the nation as a trifling matter; they sought to "heal the hurt slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there was no peace" (ver. 11). Not so the prophet. He is keenly alive to the dreadful evils of the time. He takes the sins and sorrows of the people on himself, makes them his own. Tender human sympathy, as well as Divine compassion, breathes in the words, "For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt." And it is not sorrow alone but "astonishment" of which he is conscious. "Why is not her health recovered?" Can it be that there is no remedy? The "balm of Gilead" is taken as the symbol of a healing moral power. Is it so, then, that the very nation that was called to diffuse a redeeming influence over all the world is unable to cure herself—has no medicine for her own diseases, or none to apply it? Such is the wonder with which a thoughtful, earnest spirit will often contemplate the

moral condition of the world, in view of the fact that God's "saving health" in the gospel has so long been made known to it. Consider—

I. THE DIVINE REMEDY FOR THE MORAL MALADIES OF THE HUMAN RACE. This remedy is the spontaneous fruit of the love of God. On the ground of that love we may justly expect such a remedy. It is not likely that a God of infinite benevolence would leave the human race to perish. Though redemption is "of grace," yet there is everything to make it antecedently probable. Though nature contains no revelation of it, yet to the eye on which the light of the gospel has once fallen, the whole constitution of the universe is full of dim prophecies and promises of some such triumphant grace. The spirit of boundless beneficence that pervades and governs it—the fact that for every want there is a supply, for every appetite that which gratifies it, for every danger a safeguard, for every poison its antidote; above all, the silent witness in favour of mercy that is graven more or less deep on every human heart;—all this is so much in harmony with the great redemption as in a sense to anticipate it. But it is facts, not probabilities, with which we have to deal. The gospel is God's actual answer to our human necessities, the sovereign remedy his love has provided for the sins and sorrows of the world. He heals them by *taking them upon himself* in the person of Jesus Christ his Son. "He was wounded for our transgressions," etc. (Isa. liii. 5); "Who his own self bare our sins," etc. (1 Pet. ii. 24); "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," etc. (Rom. v. 20, 21). Note respecting this Divine remedy: 1. *It goes to the root of the disease.* It does not effect a mere superficial reformation, as human methods for the most part do; does not flatter with the appearance of health while leaving the malady to strike its roots down deeper and deeper into the soul. It reaches at once the secret springs of all mischief, destroys the germs of evil in human nature, changes the outward aspects of the world's life by giving it a "new heart." 2. *It is universal in its application.* All national diversities, all varieties of social condition, of age, of culture, of intellectual development and moral life, etc., are alike open to its application, and it is the same for all. 3. *It is complete in its efficacy.* Every element of human nature, every department and phase of human life, bears witness to its healing power. A perfect manhood and a perfect social order are the issue it works out. 4. *It stands alone*, not one among many, but absolutely the only remedy. It enters into no kind of competition with other methods of healing. It has the solitary and supreme authority of that which is Divine. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name," etc. (Acts iv. 12).

II. THE HINDRANCES TO ITS UNIVERSAL EFFICIENCY. "Why then is not," etc.? The reason lies, not in any want of fitness in the remedy, or in any lack of power or willingness in him who provides it, but in certain human conditions that nullify its action and thwart his purpose. 1. *In the self-delusion that leads men to think that they have no need of cure.* "They that are whole need not a physician," etc. (Matt. ix. 12). The sense of moral sickness is the first step to healing. 2. *In the vain self-trust by virtue of which men dream that they can cure themselves.* How many and how plausible are the expedients by which the world seeks to rid itself of its own maladies! How slow is human nature to confess its helplessness! 3. *In the obstinacy of spirit that refuses the Divine method.* "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" etc. (2 Kings v. 12). Anything rather than God's way of healing by the blood of atonement and the regenerating grace of the Spirit! 4. *In the lethargy and neglect of those whom God has called to minister the healing power.* Who shall say how much of the continued sin and misery of the world lies at the Church's door? If all who have themselves known the virtue of this sovereign balm were but more thoroughly in earnest in their efforts to commend it and to persuade men to apply it, how much more rapidly would the health of human society everywhere be recovered!—W.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The bones of the dead idolaters cast out before their cities.* I. ASK HOW THIS SPOLIATION COMES TO PASS. One cannot suppose that it came by the *intention* of Jehovah. Rather would it arise as a necessary part of wholesale pillage. Considerable treasures might be lying in the tombs of these grandees of Israel, and much might also have been hidden in them for purposes of safety, and therefore, seeing that this hideous devastation had to happen, it was fitting to call attention to it beforehand. It was

another indication of how completely, for its sins, Jerusalem had been handed over to the foreign destroyer. It makes all the difference to mention such a terrible circumstance beforehand, as an illustration of the severity of God's dealings. Thus it is seen that the spoliation cannot be laid to his charge. And though it must be taken as a sign how barbarous the ancient civilization was at bottom, this is but a consideration by the way. The real cause of this hideous spectacle was in the idolatry of those who had covenanted to love and serve Jehovah, to walk after him and seek him and worship him. These dead ones had forsaken God and taught their posterity to forsake him also; and now there was none among the living able to protect the bones of the dead from such horrible insult.

II. OBSERVE THAT THE HUMILIATION HAS A PECULIAR CONNECTION WITH THE IDOLATRY OF THE PEOPLE. Not only are the tombs emptied, but the bones are scattered before the host of heaven. The enemy was not thinking of this exhibition, but it happened so very opportunely. Sun, moon, and stars looked down upon the scene thus strewn with the bones of the illustrious, as if in rebuke for the use which Israel had tried to make of them. They had worshipped and served the creature in opposition to the Creator, and this was what had come of it. These bones had strengthened the living body to worship the sun, and now the sun shone steadily down on them, as if in public rejection of what was not only a mistaken honour to the creature but a shameful insult to the Creator. The very things we misuse become the instruments of our humiliation.

III. THE GENERAL QUESTION OF THE TREATMENT OF DEAD BODIES IS SUGGESTED FOR CONSIDERATION. Various are the customs of men with respect to the treatment of the dead, but many of them have one common element, in that they try to preserve the visible, tangible relics of life as long as possible. There is something very touching in the hopes and beliefs which are represented by an Egyptian mummy, as if the survivors felt that life had receded into some deep, inscrutable chamber, again to come forth in due time and reanimate its old tenement. We think of how Joseph must have been under the influence of a feeling of this kind, when he gave such strict commandment concerning his bones. Still, it is part of the salvation wherewith Christ saves his people, that we are lifted above these haunting considerations as to the corporeal frame. It is according to the Spirit of Christ that we should labour, by exercise and self-denial, to make the living body an efficient agent of his will; but when the life has gone, no sentimental treatment of ours can alter the fact that the body is mere matter, fast under the chemical laws which will soon resolve it into its constituent elements. Have not the bodies of God's saints been shamefully maltreated, both during life and after death? Think out of what a mangled and bleeding form the spirit of Stephen took its flight to everlasting bliss. If there be force in the injunction of Jesus not to fear what men can do to the sentient body, how much more may it be urged not to fear what they can do to the senseless corpse. The enemies of the noble and fearless witnesses of truth have shown more than once their contemptible spirit by the way in which they have treated the dead. They could not get at them when living, and they thought it was something of a triumph to insult their remains when gone; *e.g.* Wycliffe and Cromwell. The scattering of these bones before sun, moon, and stars would have been a thing to glory in, if the men to whom they belonged had been soldiers in the noble army of martyrs.—Y.

Ver. 3.—*A pitiable condition: death preferable to life.* I. REMEMBER MAN'S NATURAL DREAD OF DEATH. The very force of the prophet's expression here lies in this, that it contradicts the habitual feelings of the human breast. The natural preference is to choose life rather than death; nay, it can hardly be called preference at all. There is an instinctive prompting to ward off everything that may be fatal. Whatever the drawbacks and pains of life may be, life is chosen rather than death. In most instances the suicide is held not responsible for the state of his mind at the time. We must all die indeed; yet death is so alien to every predominating feeling of the mind when in health and prosperous circumstances, that even when death comes near others, it is viewed as if it had little or nothing to do with us. And so when Jeremiah's word came to these people in Jerusalem, they, at least the young and the strong among them, would receive it very incredulously. That things should ever become

so bad as to make death desirable would seem to them to show that the threatener of such a doom was overdoing his warnings.

II. LIFE MAY BECOME SO FULL OF PAIN AND MISERY THAT THIS NATURAL DREAD MAY BE REVERSED. When the blow was struck and Jerusalem fell into the hands of the hosts from Babylon, thousands would be thankful that, amid so much destruction, their lives were spared. To lose possessions and go into exile would seem a light price to pay for the preservation of life. But with the increased experience of exile itself its dreadfulness became manifest. How could it be otherwise? The captivity and exile were not of an ordinary nation, but of one whose God was Jehovah. These people had been in the enjoyment of peculiar privileges and satisfactions, which they had come to accept as a matter of course; and when they lost them, they would then discern, if never before, something of their true value. It was out of a land of promise, a land reserved for the people of God, that they had been cast, and no lapse of time could content them to be as other nations. It is just because man has within him such capabilities for enjoying life that he can be driven to the other extreme of desiring death. Life could not be so blessed as Christ holds out the hope of its being, unless there were also the possibility of its being correspondingly wretched.

III. It is thus suggested that we should aim at reaching a state of mind such that EITHER LIFE OR DEATH SHOULD BE EQUALLY ACCEPTABLE. To *prefer* life to death is a natural feeling, but certainly not the feeling which a believer in God and Jesus should have. And to prefer death to life is the feeling which comes after a time of struggling, weariness, pain, and disappointment; but what darkness of the mind does this not prove! what inability to profit by the light which shines in Christ! The Christian medium lies between the two extremes. Not to wish to live, nor to wish to die, but to be in Christ's hands, so that as long as we are living there may be an availing of every opportunity of service, and when we die a fresh proof that faith in the Saviour who also died, but rose again, is no deluding vanity. It is one of the glorious aspects of Christ's salvation that he can save men from crying out for death rather than life, just because he can lift them into an experience of joy and peace which overbear the sense of temporal pain and loss.—Y.

Vers. 4—7.—*The unnatural conduct of Jerusalem.* Still more humiliation for the proud, self-satisfied city. The prophet comes with a heavenly light, revealing the very foundations of her glory, and showing how unsubstantial they are, how easily exposed as contradicting truth and the highest propriety. What is aimed at here is to set before man, by the force of contrast, what he ought to be, in the sum of all his faculties made one by a will which acts according to the commandment of God. And so we see—

I. A LESSON FROM THE SUBORDINATE PART OF MAN'S NATURE. If a man falls, he instantly attempts to rise again. Even if there is some serious injury, it is commonly discovered by the failure of the man's attempt to rise; and so from the subordinate part of our nature there is a rebuke to the higher and governing part. A very striking instance of such a rebuke would be given in the falling of a drunken man to the ground. He staggers to his feet again if he can. If he remains on the ground it is a sign, to use the common expression, that "he is very far gone indeed;" and in such an instance may we not truly say that the body is rebuking the will for its imbecility and its base slavery to appetite? So if a man is going anywhere, and turns unwittingly from the straight path; such a turning may be made very easily, and the wrong path be kept in for a while, but presently there will be some sign to show the error, and with more or less delay there will be a return to the right path. Here, then, are two instances, level with the experience of everybody, of what is natural for man to do, viz. come back from a wrong state as soon as ever he can; and if the position be only looked at truly, it will be seen that it is as unnatural for a man to remain in spiritual degradation as to continue lying on the ground.

II. A LESSON FROM THAT PART OF THE CREATION WHICH IS SUBJECTED TO MAN. There is the horse. He can be so trained as to become a potent force in the battle-field, and if he becomes uncontrollable and rushes hither and thither, as dangerous to friend as to foe, it is not because of any rebellious purpose, but a brief madness has seized on him. Let a few hours pass, and he may be submissive and serviceable as before. "We put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body."

"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." The very birds of the air, seemingly so free from all restraint, come and go according to certain laws. If the beasts which man has tamed to his use, and on which he daily depends, were to treat *him* as *he* treats *God*, what an awkward, nay more, what a perilous scene this world would become! The whole visible universe, ground beneath, air around, and far away into the immensities of space, are crowded with admonitions to perversely disobedient man. These birds mentioned here, by certain wondrous intimations to which they are ever heedful—exceptions only going to prove the rule—help to carry on the government of God. They are faithful to their nature, and their faithfulness is again but a sign of God's own faithfulness in the orderliness of the seasons. Then go beyond the ordinary subjection of God's creation to his will. Look at what we call "miracles." Think of the passage of the Red Sea, the speaking of Balaam's ass, the obedience of the fish in the Sea of Galilee to the will of Jesus, the storm becoming a calm, the venomous serpent dropping innocuous from the hand of Paul. What rebukes these are to man, who persists in walking in his own way! Man himself proceeds with all confidence in the training of brute beasts. He takes the colt and the puppy, and makes them abundantly useful. He is pretty sure how they will turn out. The trouble he takes with them is rewarded in the end. But with regard to his own child, though he has watched over it far more carefully than any of his beasts, he may be bitterly disappointed. His training may be mocked, as it were, and put to shame—and so, rising from the human parent to the thought of God in heaven, we see Israel similarly perverse, negligent of all that has been done to make right ways for it and keep it in them.—Y.

Vers. 8—12.—*The exposure of pseudo-wisdom.* I. THE CLAIM MADE. Those on whom Jeremiah presses his appeals for a change of purpose reply, if not by plain words, at all events by equally plain actions, that they are so wise in their own conceits as to need no guidance from an outsider. A profound belief in one's own insight and skill may of course be justified by results; such a belief has been a very important factor in many great achievements. But it is also to be noticed that to have this belief without any corresponding reality is an evil which may afflict a man at every age of his life. It belongs to the young in their ignorance, and the old, with all their experience, may not be free from it. That experience, even though long, may have been a narrow one, and yet, with all its narrowness, full of blunders. But the recollection of all that should make such old men humble avails nothing to diminish the dogmatism of their advice to others. A certain official and social position is also a grand vantage-ground to air a reputation for wisdom. Nothing is then needed but an abundance of self-assertion to gain acknowledgment from the weak and the ignorant. These great men of Jerusalem would point scornfully at Jeremiah, the lonely prophet. Their city polish would perhaps be in strong contrast to the rustic airs of the man from Anathoth, and, as if to make their claim of wisdom more definite, they fell back on what seemed an unanswerable challenge. "Is not the Law of Jehovah with us?" The meaning of this seemed to be that they could boast of a certain outward conformity with Mosaic institutions. They certainly did attend to the incense and the sweet cane, the burnt offerings and the sacrifices (ch. vi. 20). Moreover, what they asserted for themselves implied a correspondingly humiliating opinion of Jeremiah. They were wise, and of course he was a fool. They had the Law of Jehovah, and Jeremiah, in pretending to utter Jehovah's words, was of course nothing better than an impostor.

II. THE DIVINE WAY OF EXPOSING THIS CLAIM. These self-constituted wise men meet the prophet with a declaration as to what they think themselves to be. "We are wise men," they say, nor does the prophet throw back the shortest, directest answer that was possible. It would have been of no use to say, "You are fools." But it was of use to project himself into the future, and indicate what would happen to these boasters. When the homes of these pseudo-wise are broken up, and their wives and fields become the spoil of the conqueror, then it will be clear beyond a doubt where the wisdom is and where the folly. Folly will be condemned of her children, even as wisdom is justified of hers. Where now are the writings of these wise men? Jeremiah said at the time that they were full of lies, and we may be sure that, like all reflections of popular fashion and prejudice, they passed very quickly out of vogue. "The Law of

Jehovah is with us," said these wise men; but it was a valueless connection, whereas the prophet had that Law written in his heart. Being in full sympathy with all that was right, and loving, and generous, and pure, he was a fit subject for the solemn impulses that came to him from on high, and thus he went forth to speak on themes immeasurably deeper than the passing phenomena of an age. And so it is that his words, despised and rejected at the time, nevertheless abide, and are felt to be very precious by all who lack wisdom. As we notice the arrogance of spurious wisdom here and also in such passages as John vii. 48 and 1 Cor. i. 22, we turn away to welcome that heavenly light which in the very shining of it proclaims its source to be entirely different from any earth-enkindled light. Our true wisdom in presence of the Law and the prophets, the Christ and the apostles, is to feel very deeply how ignorant, benighted, and astray we are without them. And there is true wisdom also in that power of the heart which enables us to discern between the false prophet and the true, the false Christ and the true. Such wisdom may be found in the heart of a little child or of a man on the common level of humanity, when it is utterly lacking among many who lead the world in temporal affairs. Full of darkness and duplicity must the minds of these leaders in Jerusalem have been when they lacked the power of seeing that Jeremiah, unpromising as his outward appearance might be, was indeed a prophet of God.—Y.

Ver. 17.—*The serpents which cannot be charmed.* I. THERE ARE SERPENTS WHICH CAN BE CHARMED. Serpent-charming must have been a not unfamiliar sight to the Israelites (see 'The Land and the Book,' pp. 154, 155). This means, taking the figure away, that there were many great and pressing evils which lay within human resources to mitigate, perhaps to remove. Thus when sore famine fell upon Canaan, Jacob found corn, though he had to send as far as Egypt. The resources thus employed are, no doubt, exceptional, and need peculiar skill and aptitude to discover and use them; but still—and this is the thing of importance here to remember—they are within the reach of the natural man. To say that necessity is the mother of invention is only another way of saying that there are serpents which can be charmed. Man stands upon the known and the achieved, that he may reach forward and win something more from the unknown. Not everybody can charm a serpent, but some can. So there are a few physicians, one here and another there, who have wonderful skill in the cure of special diseases. Part of the ills of human life can be swept away by wise and timely legislation. Epidemics may be restrained and made comparatively mild by cleanliness and attention to sanitary rules. Ills which in one age have been thought beyond remedy, in the next age are perfectly understood as to their causes and their cure.

II. THERE ARE SERPENTS WHICH CANNOT BE CHARMED. We may assume that it was so literally; that there were certain serpents which proved obdurate against every wile. And the danger of the serpent's bite would in such an instance become most dreadful, just from this very insensibility to everything in the shape of a charm. An enemy was to be brought on Israel whom no bribe, no promise, no art of persuasion whatever, could turn back. If he was to be turned back, it must be by main force or by Divine interposition. So we have to consider that, whatever ills we may succeed in neutralizing, there are others still left behind, unabated in their deadly efficiency by any resources we have in ourselves. It matters little that we can charm some serpents, if we cannot charm all. If there be left only one superior to our skill, that one is enough to ruin all. The most successful charmer among us will discover his match at last. He may charm poverty away, only to find, in a little while, *ennui* and possession without enjoyment. He may have the experience indicated in Prov. xxiii. 32: he may charm away, as he thinks, the peril of the wine-cup, and exult in assured mastery, only to discover at last that the foe with whom he has been trifling "bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder." So a man may achieve most of his purposes, charming away, as it were, obstacles on every side, only to find in the end that he cannot charm his conscience, that it will not be silent and sleep before the memory of much wrong-doing.

III. THERE ARE SERPENTS WHICH CAN BE MORE THAN CHARMED. There is much in the conjecture that the reference to the serpent here is suggested by the mention of Dan in the previous verse. Jacob's word for his son Dan was, "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backwards" (Gen. xlix. 17). But we shall do wisely in considering the

reference as having a deeper connection with the work of him who is the serpent from the beginning (Rev. xx. 2). All the painful serpent-bites of life, all the deadly ills, proceed from the brood which in some way or other originate with him. And thus thinking of him, the great dragon, the devil, the adversary, we must needs think of the correspondingly profound work of Jesus over against his work. *Jesus was a serpent-charmer;* and his efficacy as a charmer is most graciously manifested in the miracles which he wrought to remove physical defect, disease, and death. These miracles had in them something of the nature of a charm. They did not destroy the maleficent power, but they curbed it, made it for the time dormant and inoperative. But after having done all these miracles, Jesus is seen proceeding to a work which is more than that of the charmer. He who was lifted up to draw all men to him makes the victim of the serpent-bite impervious, for all future existence, to any further danger. The bite may come, in the sense of inflicting pain, but the peril is past. The serpent-poison becomes neutralized by the vigour and purity of that eternal life which is in Christ Jesus the Lord.—Y.

Ver. 20.—"*The life is more than the meat.*" After the subsidence of the Deluge, there was a promise given to Noah that, "while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, . . . summer and winter, . . . shall not cease." Scanning the surface of the Scripture narrative, it appears as if this promise had not been kept, seeing there is a record of several notable and protracted famines; and moreover, we have only too good reason to suppose that millions in the successive ages of the world have perished from famine. We must hold, however, to God's promise having been kept in the spirit of it; its non-fulfilment, so far as human experience is concerned, must arise from some other cause than the unfaithfulness of God. An inquiry into these painful experiences is suggested by the utterance of this verse. The meaning seems to be that harvest and summer, the annual gathering of the corn and the wine and the oil, have nevertheless, in some way or other, left the people who should have profited by them, unprovided for. The words may be applied in two ways. 1. *When there is an actual gathering of harvest.* There may be an abundance, even a superabundance, of the fruits of the earth, and yet those who sowed and planted, watched and watered, may not get the slightest benefit. Now, not to get the expected benefit from these things means, if not destruction of life, at least a considerable impairment of it; for natural life depends upon them. And ch. v. 15—24 casts no small light on this state of things. There the mighty men from the north are spoken of, and Israel is addressed as follows:—"They shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: . . . they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees." Strangers pluck the rich fruit of the husbandman's toil, and he himself is trampled into privation, reduced to the bare subsistence of a slave taken in war. Thus we see how God may lay before a man that which through the sin and folly of the recipient he may not be able to use. Think of the prosperous man in the parable, who had such abundant crops that he must needs build bigger barns, and yet in the very day of his pride was taken away. What is wealth unless God, in the prosecution of his own wise purposes, chooses to give security in the possession of that wealth? 2. *When the harvest itself fails.* The harvest season may pass and the summer close, only to leave men with empty garners, in hunger and despair. Whither shall they turn, when drought, blasting, and mildew, palmerworm and locust, cankerworm and caterpillar, have done their work? Then it is that "those who are slain with the sword are better than those who are slain with hunger, for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field" (Lam. iv. 9). Thus, whether the harvest be given or withheld, the practical result is the same. The people are not saved. God may bring the harvest to a complete and beautiful maturity, may, so to speak, save the harvest—and "save the harvest" is not an unfamiliar expression to those who are engaged in the vicissitudes of agriculture—only to teach thereby a more impressive lesson to the people who live so that they cannot be kept safe. What force there is in the expression of this verse if we take it to mean, "The corn is saved; the vintage is saved; the olives are saved; all the pleasant fruits of the land are saved; but *we are* not saved"! The life is more than the bodily nourishment, and when men will not take heed to *the higher things* which belong to *the life*, it is just what might be expected that they should have disappointments in *the lower things* which belong to *the nourish-*

ment. The true material wealth of every land, when we get at the substance of it, lies in what its soil produces; and when men boast, as they are apt to do, that their own land has gotten them their wealth, it is needful that Jehovah should show them how completely he controls the roots and fruits of everything that he has made to grow for human food. No wonder evil comes to those who do not say in their hearts, "Let us now fear Jehovah our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest" (ch. v. 24). Malachi puts into striking words the fundamental reason for the sore complaint we have been considering, and the way in which it may be brought to cease (ch. iii. 9—11).—Y.

Vers. 21, 22.—*Why the hurt of Israel is not healed.* I. IT IS NOT FOR WANT OF EARNESTLY CALLING ATTENTION TO THE HURT. Jeremiah had wearied and vexed his fellow-countrymen by his persistent warnings. In ver. 21 he insists on how the hurt of Israel had become his hurt. In one sense he was not hurt, for he had kept clear of all idolatrous and unjust ways; he was in a different service and different kind of occupation. But though separated thus, he was also united even as a member to the rest of the body, and had to suffer where he had not sinned. His fellow-countrymen, perhaps, said to him, in substance if not in so many words, "Leave us to go our way, and go you yours; if we sin, we sin, and if we suffer, we suffer, and it is no concern to any but ourselves." The sinner in his suffering and his heart-corruption must be a cause of great trouble to those who are trying to serve God. They cannot go by on the other side and leave him. No matter how self-occupied one may have been before he came under the control of the Divine will, afterwards he must occupy himself with such things as concern the spiritual health and blessedness of all mankind. Jeremiah sets us a great example in thus speaking of himself as being individually wounded. If sinners continue careless, impenitent, incredulous as to the wrath of God and their pitiable state of alienation from him, there is all the more need that God's people should feel instead of them. These Israelites could not say they were left without warning and urgent remonstrance, for the man upon whom the business of warning had been laid cried and mourned over the troubles of others, because in a very deep sense they were his own. Vain, therefore, was it for the people, in after years, amid the gloom of exile and bereavement, to say they had not been properly warned.

II. IT WAS NOT FOR WANT OF A MEDICAMENT. In wounds of the body, Israel knew where to go. They found balm in Gilead, and Gilead was not far off, even supposing they had always to go there to get the balm. Balm of Gilead might be made to grow nearer than Gilead. Thus we see the medicament *was easily procured*—a very important consideration. The incense for the altar they brought all the way from Sheba, but the balm for healing grew much nearer. Easiness of procurement, however, would have been little without efficiency. A *certain* remedy brought from the ends of the earth is better than a *doubtful* one near to home; only, of course, there must be foresight to lay in a stock, so that it will be at hand when wanted. Evidently this balm of Gilead which grew within Israelite territory was a famous and trusted balm. Only some popular and widely known agent of healing would have served the purpose of the prophet for quoting here. And is it not plain that the God who thus provided for bodily wounds a balm so easily obtained and so efficient in its action, might also be trusted to provide an available and thorough cure for the worst of spiritual ills? Assuredly the prophet means that an affirmative and encouraging answer is to be given to his question. There is balm in Gilead. There is peace for the guilty conscience, purity for the turbid and defiled imagination, strength for the weakened will. The springs of all our pollution and pain can be dried up, and their place know them no more for ever.

III. IT WAS NOT FOR WANT OF A PHYSICIAN. The medicament is good, but it may require to be applied by a skilful and experienced hand. The physician can do nothing without his medicaments, and the medicaments are oftentimes nothing without the physician. A physician is needed to prepare the way for saving truth, to apply it in its most efficacious order, and to press it home in close and vigorous contact with that which has to be healed. The balm of Gilead is not given that it may be trifled with, that it may film over deep evils with a deceptive appearance of removal. In applying that balm there may have to be pain, intense pain for a time, in order that a worse

pain may be for ever taken away. The pain coming from self-indulgence must be succeeded by the pain coming from self-denial. Men have to discover that the pains of sin are the smitings of God, and when they have made this discovery they will be in a fair way to learn that only he who smites can also heal. Do not let us unjustly complain of incurable ills; let us rather confess that we are much in the condition of the poor woman who, after spending much on many physicians, found, by a simple faith touching the true Source of healing, what she had long vainly sought.

IV. THE REASON PLAINLY LAY WITH THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES. They would listen to no warning. Balm was offered, and the physician's skill to apply it, but they would not come to be healed. They preferred the pleasures of sin along with its risks and pains. That their state was bad they knew, but they believed it was not near so bad as the prophet made it out to be. Only physicians can tell how many cases of bodily disease might be cured if the sick were willing to go to the root of the matter, and mend their habits as to eating and drinking, working and playing. Ignorance, indifference, prejudice, and unblushing lust of the flesh lie at the bottom of much bodily disease, explaining both how it originates and how it continues. And similar causes operate with regard to such ills as afflict the consciousness of the entire man. Sinners must have a will to go to Jesus if they expect healing and life, and then life more abundantly.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1.—The Hebrew more correctly attaches this verse to ch. viii. **Oh that my head were waters**, etc.! A quaint conceit, it may be said. But "if we have been going on pace for pace with the passion before, this sudden conversion of a strong-felt metaphor into something to be actually realized in nature, is strictly and strikingly natural." So Bishop Doane, quoting, by way of illustration, Shakespeare's 'Richard II.,' "meditating on his own utter annihilation as to royalty:"

"Oh that I were a mockery king of snow,
To melt before the sun of Bolingbroke!"

The tone of complaint continues in the following verse, though the subject is different.

Vers. 2—22.—Complaint of the treachery and folly of the people; lamentation over their consequences.

Ver. 2.—**A lodging place of wayfaring men**; a "khan" or "caravanserai," to use the terms now so familiar from Eastern travel, where "wayfaring men" could at least find shelter, and the means of preparing their provisions. Comp., besides the parallel passage in Ps. lv. 6, 7, our own Cowper's fine reminiscence of Jeremiah: "Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness!" etc. **Adulterers, . . . treacherous men (see ch. ii. 20; iii. 8, 9; iii. 20; v. 11).**

Ver. 3.—**And they bend their tongues**, etc.; rather, *and they bend their tongue as their bow of falsehood, and they use not their valour in* (literally, *according to*) *good faith.* There is a sad, stern irony in these words, which remind us of Isaiah's (v. 22) "valiant men—for drinking wine," and of our own prophet's repetition of himself in ch. xxiii. 10, "Their valour is—untruth." A less pointed form of the same figurative statement is that of the psalmist in Ps. lxiv. 3. **Upon the earth**; rather, *in the land.* The Authorized Version pays very little regard to the context in its rendering of the ambiguous word *ereṣ.*

Ver. 4.—**Take ye heed every one of his neighbour.** Such was the result of clinging to an unprogressive religion—one which refused to be spiritualized by the prophets. Certainly, if the established religion was so inefficacious, it was self-condemned. Here we find the prophet depicting a state of society in which the elementary bonds are already dissolved, and suspicion becomes the natural attitude even of a good man. We find a very similar picture in the last chapter of Micah—a chapter, it is true, which stands apart from the rest of the book, as it implies a greater development of wickedness than the rest of Micah and the contemporary prophecies of Isaiah would lead us to expect. Are these prophetic descriptions just and accurate? We may allow something, no doubt, for the warmth of feeling natural to every human preacher, even under the influence of inspiration; but we must not allow ourselves to explain away the obvious meaning of the prophets. The latter and their disciples were "the salt" of their country; and in proportion as their influence declined, the natural effects of a non-moral, purely ritualistic religion showed themselves on a larger scale. **Every brother**; *i.e.* every fellow-tribesman or fellow-citizen. **Will utterly supplant.** There is nothing in the context to suggest an allusion to Gen. xxvii. 36 (Jacob). The verb has its common sense of deceiving. **The tense should be the**

present, not the future, both here and in the next verse. **Will walk**; rather, *goeth about* (see ch. vi. 28).

Ver. 5.—**They have taught their tongue**, etc.; again an intimation of the unnaturalness (in the higher sense) of vice (comp. on ch. ii. 33).

Ver. 6.—**Thine habitation**, etc. According to St. Jerome, this is addressed to the prophet; but it is better to follow the Targum, which makes the clause refer to the Jewish people. The connection is (as Dr. Payne Smith points out), "Trust no one; for thou dwellest surrounded by deceit on every side."

Ver. 7.—**I will melt them.** It is the same word as that used in Mal. iii. 3 of the "refiner and purifier of silver." Purification, not destruction, is the object of the judgment which is threatened! Strange that mercy should find place, after the offence of the criminal has been found so grievous! But, lest we should expect too favourable an issue, the prophet adds, in the name of Jehovah, **For how shall I do?** or rather, *How should I act? How otherwise should I act?* The continuation is a little doubtful. The Hebrew has, "by reason of the daughter of my people;" but this can hardly be right. We naturally expect something to justify the preceding statement. The reading of the Septuagiut answers to our anticipations by rendering ἀπὸ προσώπου πονηρίας θυγατρὸς λαοῦ μου, and this is confirmed by the parallel passage ch. vii. 12 (comp. ch. xi. 17; xxxii. 32).

Ver. 8.—(Comp. Ps. lv. 21.) **As an arrow shot out**; rather, *as a sharpened arrow;* but this is based on the marginal reading, and is itself a slightly forced rendering. The Hebrew text (*i.e.* the consonants), and also the Septuagint and Vulgate, have "as a murderous arrow."

Ver. 10.—This and the next six verses contain a description of the sad fate of the sinful land and people. At first the prophet speaks as if he saw it all spread out before him. Then, in the character of a surprised spectator, he inquires how this came to pass, and receives the Divine answer, that it is the doom of self-willed rebellion. **The habitations** should rather be *pastures.* The country, once covered with grazing flocks and herds, is now so utterly waste that even the birds cannot find subsistence.

Ver. 11.—**I will make**, etc. Notice how the utterances of the prophets stand side by side with those of Jehovah. A true prophet has no personal views; so that whether his revelations are expressed in the one form or the other makes no difference. **Dragons**; rather, *jackals.*

Ver. 12.—**For what the land perisheth.** A closer rendering would be more forcible: *Wherefore hath the land perished, is it burned up like the wilderness with none that passeth through?*

Ver. 13.—There is no answer, for the wise men are ashamed (ch. viii. 9); so Jehovah himself takes up his speech. **My law which I set before them**; not in reference to the publication of the Law on Sinai, but, as Keil rightly points out, to the oral exhibition of the *Tôrâh* by the prophets. **Neither walked therein**; viz. in the Law. (On the precise contents of the term here rendered "Law," see note on ch. viii. 8.)

Ver. 14.—**Imagination**; rather, *stubbornness* (see on ch. iii. 17). **Baalim.** The Hebrew has "the Baalim;" practically equivalent to "the idol-gods" (see on ch. ii. 8). **Which their fathers taught them.** "Which" refers to both clauses, *i.e.* to the obstinacy and the Baal-worship.

Ver. 15.—**I will feed them, . . . with wormwood.** A figure for the bitter privations of captivity (comp. Lam. iii. 15, "He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood"). Wormwood and gall—*i.e.* the poppy (Tristram)—are combined again in Deut. xxix. 17.

Ver. 16.—**I will scatter them also**, etc. (comp. Deut. xxviii. 64; Lev. xxvi. 33). **I will send a [the] sword after them.** Even in the land of their captivity they shall have no rest. A special prophecy to the same effect was addressed to the Jewish fugitives in Egypt (ch. xliv. 27). In both cases it is the unbelievers who are referred to; the nation as such was, through its Divine calling, indestructible.

Vers. 17—22.—A new scene is introduced. To give an idea of the greatness of the impending blow, all the skilled mourners are sent for to raise the cry of lamentation. But no, this is not enough. So large will be the number of the dead that all the women must take their part in the doleful office. The description of the mourning women is as true to modern as to ancient life in the East. "And, indeed," says Dr. Shaw, a thoughtful traveller and an ornament of Oxford in the dark eighteenth century, "they perform their parts with such proper sounds, gestures, and commotions, that they rarely fail to work up the assembly into some extraordinary pitch of thoughtfulness and sorrow" ('Travels in Barbary and the Levant,' 2nd edit., p. 242; comp. Amos v. 16; Eccles. xii. 5).

Ver. 18.—**That our eyes may run down**, etc.; a justification of this artificial system. The piercing notes of the hired mourners are to relieve the sorrow of the afflicted by forcing for it a vent.

Ver. 19.—**Forsaken**; rather, *left.* **Our dwellings have cast us out**; rather, *they have cast down our dwellings.*

Ver. 20.—**Yet hear**; rather, *for hear*.

Ver. 21.—**Death is come up**, etc. "Death," equivalent to "pestilence" (as ch. xv. 2), the most dreaded foe of a besieged population. (For the figure, comp. Joel ii. 9.) **The children from without.** The ideal of Zechariah is that "the streets of the city should be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (viii. 5). But the pitiless reaper, Death, shall cut off even "the playful child from the street" (so we might render more literally). **Streets**, in the parallel clause, means the "broad places" where men congregate to tell the news.

Ver. 22.—**Speak, Thus saith the Lord.** These words are in three important respects contrary to the style of Jeremiah: (1) such a prefix as "speak" is unique; (2) such a phrase as "כה נאם" is also unique in Jeremiah; (3) when our prophet does use the formula "נאם" it is not at the beginning of a verse. They are omitted by the Septuagint translator, who presumably did not find them in his copy of the Hebrew, and the text gains greatly by their removal. The following words are mistranslated in the Authorized Version, and should run, not **even**, but *and*, **the carcases of men shall fall**, etc. It is most improbable, however, that a fresh Divine revelation should begin with "and." With other points, the word rendered "speak" would mean "pestilence." Possibly the word fell out of ver. 21, where it would find an excellent place in the second clause (as an explanatory parallel to "death," as in Ps. lxxviii. 50), which would thus obtain greater roundness and symmetry. **As the handful**; *i.e.* as thickly as one heap of corn succeeds another under the deft hand of the reaper.

Vers. 23, 24.—These two verses were hardly composed for their present position, though a connection may, of course, be thought out for them. Perhaps a comparison of Hab. iii. 17, 18, may help us. There the prophet looks forward to a complete desolation resulting from the Chaldean invasion, and yet declares that he can even exult in his God. So here. All subjects of boasting have been proved untrustworthy; but one remains—not wisdom, not valour, not riches, but the knowledge of the revealed God.

Ver. 24.—The knowledge of God relates to three leading attributes, the combination of which is very instructive. First, **loving-kindness**. This is not to be understood in a vague and general sense of the love of God to all mankind; the term has a special connotation with regard to the Israelitish people. God shows loving-kindness to those with whom he is in covenant; hence the combination "loving-kindness and faithfulness" (Ps. lxxxv. 10, corrected version), and as here (comp. Ps. v. 7, 8; xxxvi. 5, 6), "mercy and righteousness." Israel is weak and erring, and needs mercies of all sorts, which Jehovah, in his "loving-kindness," vouchsafes. Next, **judgment**, or justice. Jehovah is a King, helps the poor and weak to their right, and punishes the wrong-doer (comp. ch. xxi. 12). Then, **righteousness**—a similar but wider term. This is the quality which leads its subject to adhere to a fixed rule of conduct. God's rule is his covenant; hence "righteousness" shows itself in all such acts as tend to the full realizing of the covenant with Israel, including the "plan of salvation." It is by no means to be confined to exacting penalties and conferring rewards.

Vers. 25, 26.—A further enforcement of the doctrine that no outward privileges, if dissociated from inward moral vitality, will avail.

Ver. 25.—**All them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised**; rather, *all the circumcised in uncircumcision*, or, as Ewald turns it, "all the uncircumcised-circumcised." But what does this enigmatical expression signify? Hitzig, Graf, and apparently Dr. Payne Smith, think that it has a twofold meaning: that, as applied to the Jews, it means circumcised in the flesh, but not in heart, and, as applied to the heathen, simply uncircumcised (the one-half of the phrase neutralizing the other, like "a knife without the blade," "angels with horns and hoofs," etc.). The latter meaning, however, is surely very improbable, and it would only become necessary if it were proved that circumcision was practised by none of the nations mentioned but the Jews. This is not the case. There is no doubt that the Egyptians were circumcised in very early times (see the drawing of a bas-relief in the Temple of Chunsu at Karnak, given by Dr. Ebers in his 'Egypten und die Bücher Mosis'). The assertion that only the priests underwent the operation has no older evidence than that of Origen (edit. Lommatzsch, iv. 138), "in whose time it is quite possible that the Egyptians, like the later Jews, sought to evade a peculiarity which exposed them to ridicule and contempt." As to the Ammonites and Moabites, we have, unfortunately, no information. With regard to the Edomites, it is true that, according to Josephus ('Antiq.,' xiii. 9, 1), they were compelled to accept circumcision by John Hyrcanus. But it is still quite possible that, at an earlier period, the rite was practised, just as it was among the ancient Arabs, the evidence for which is beyond question (see the writer's article, "Circumcision," in 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' 9th

edit.). (On the statement that "all these [the] nations are uncircumcised," see below.)

Ver. 26.—**All that are in the utmost corners**; rather, *all that are corner-clipped*; i.e. that have the hair cut off about the ears and temples. Herodotus tells us, speaking of the Arabs, "Their practice is to cut the hair in a ring, away from the temples" (iii. 8); and among the representatives of various nations, coloured figures of whom are given in the tomb of Rameses III., we find some with a square place shaved just above the temples. The hair below this shaven place was allowed to grow long, and then plaited into a lock. It is to such customs that Jeremiah alludes here and in ch. xxv. 23; xlix. 32. A prohibition is directed against them in the Levitical Law (Lev. xix. 27; xxi. 5). **For all these nations are uncircumcised**; rather, *all the nations*, etc. Another obscure expression. Does it mean (taken together with the following clause), "The Gentile peoples are uncircumcised in the flesh, and the people of Israel is equally so in heart"? But this does not agree with facts (see above, on ver. 25). It is safer, therefore, to assume that "uncircumcised" is equivalent to "circumcised in uncircumcision" (ver. 25). The next clause will then simply give the most conspicuous instance of this unspiritual obedience to a mere form.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*Grief for others.* I. THE RIGHT SPIRIT IN WHICH TO REGARD THE MISERIES OF OTHER MEN IS ONE OF GRIEF. A less worthy spirit is too common. 1. *Self-congratulation.* The evil condition of others is simply used as a dark background on which to throw out in relief our own superiority. 2. *Indifference*—the spirit of Cain, which cries, "Am I my brother's keeper?" 3. *Vindictiveness.* Jeremiah denounced the sins of Israel, and threatened punishment. Yet he regarded these sins with no Pharisaical sternness, and he could not contemplate the punishment of them with indignant satisfaction. Even if men are deserving punishment, that punishment is still pitiable. Sin inclines a good man to sorrow as much as to anger.

II. GRIEF FOR THE MISERIES OF OTHERS WILL BE INDUCED BY A TRUE APPRECIATION OF THOSE MISERIES IN A SPIRIT OF SYMPATHY. 1. *A spirit of sympathy.* Jeremiah felt the distresses of his nation as private sorrows. He was a true patriot. We must feel one with men before we can rightly regard their troubles. 2. *A true appreciation* of the miseries of men. Sympathy implies knowledge. We do not feel aright because we do not take the trouble to inquire into the condition of others. Much apparent hard-heartedness arises simply from ignorance—but culpable ignorance. True sympathy will feel distress for the real evil of others, not only for their transient moods. It may need to weep over those who foolishly rejoice, and rejoice for those who weep wholesome tears of penitence.

III. GRIEF FOR THE MISERIES OF OTHERS MAY BE OUR BEST MEANS FOR HELPING THEM. Barren pity is a mockery when active aid is called for. 1. But genuine sympathy is the strongest *motive* to help. 2. We can *intercede* in prayer most effectually when we make the sorrows of others our own. Christ's sorrow for men was an important element in his intercession. 3. *Sorrow* for others may move them to view their condition in a true light. Tears may avail where warnings are lost. We have no greater motive to repentance than can be furnished by a right feeling of what Christ has suffered through our sin.

IV. GRIEF FOR THE MISERIES OF OTHERS IS NOT ALONE SUFFICIENT FOR THEIR DELIVERANCE. Jeremiah wept over his nation, yet the threatened desolation was not averted. Christ wept over Jerusalem, but Jerusalem was destroyed. Though God is "grieved" at our sin, we may fall into ruin. His grief is a strong inducement to repentance, but every man must repent and seek deliverance for himself.

Vers. 4—8.—*Falsehood.* I. SIN CULMINATES IN UNIVERSAL FALSEHOOD. The intellectual aspect of sin is untruth. Every sin is a lie. The triumph of sin is the overthrow of all truth and trust.

II. FALSE RELATIONS WITH GOD LEAD TO FALSE RELATIONS WITH MEN. Religion and morality mutually influence each other. The worship of a god known to be false develops a life of falseness. The hypocritical service of God is likely to be accompanied by dishonest dealings with men.

III. HABITS OF FALSEHOOD ARE FATAL TO HUMAN WELFARE. Society reposes on trust. Commerce is impossible without good faith. Universal distrust must involve social disintegration. The state, the family, all mutual organization, must then fall to pieces. Falsehood only succeeds by abusing trust; but by so doing it tends to destroy trust; and when it has accomplished this end it will be ineffectual. Universal lying would be useless to everybody.

IV. FALSEHOOD IS REGARDED BY GOD AS A PECULIARLY WICKED SIN. For this especially the people must be punished (ver. 9). Deceit amongst men is a sin against God, who is the Truth eternal. It is a spiritual sin, a sin most near to the diabolical (John viii. 34). It is a sin which is peculiarly injurious to the spiritual nature of the sinner, tending to destroy conscience (Matt. vi. 23). It involves both injustice and cruelty towards men.

Ver. 9.—*A visitation of God.* I. CHASTISEMENT IS A VISITATION OF GOD. The phrase "a visitation of God" has been too much confined to calamitous events. God visits us every hour in gentleness and mercy. Still, it is important to recognize that he also comes in chastisement. He *comes*, does not simply order, but himself executes chastisement. 1. We should *recognize* the Divine visitation. Outwardly the trouble may have a human origin. The calamities of the Jews arose out of a Chaldean invasion, but the prophets saw above and behind that invasion a Divine purpose. God was in those armies from Babylon. God is in our troubles. 2. This fact should make us *dread to incur* chastisement. We cannot resist it, for if God is in it, all his might and majesty are there. 3. This fact should make us submit to the chastisement when it comes as *just and good.* Its origin is not Satanic, but Divine. If God is in it he must ever be true to his character; his fiercest anger can never break the bounds of what is just and fair; he must always be ready to show mercy when this is possible (Hab. iii. 2).

II. CHASTISEMENT IS DETERMINED BY THE PERSONAL RELATIONS BETWEEN GOD AND MEN. It is God's soul being avenged. God's vengeance is quite unlike ours; it is never cruel or intemperate; it is always governed by justice and consistent with unchanging love. It is, however, more than judicial punishment. It is an action arising out of personal feeling and determined by our personal offences against God. Sin is more than transgression of Law,—it is ungrateful rebellion against God; and punishment is more than the cold vindication of Law,—it is the result of the provoked anger of God. Such anger is right, for it is not kindness but weakness that allows a father to receive insult from a child unmoved. The greater the love, the greater will be the righteous anger when this is wronged.

III. CHASTISEMENT IS NECESSITATED BY THE CONDUCT OF MEN. It is "for *such* things" and "on *such* a nation." God does not love vengeance. He does not send punishment as an arbitrary exercise of sovereignty. Therefore our chastisement is virtually in our own hands. Even after meriting it, we alone are to blame if the full force of the blow falls upon us. For God has provided a way of escape, and offers forgiveness to all who repent and submit. Therefore it is foolish for men to complain of their hard lot in falling under the storm of a visitation of God in wrath.

IV. THE NECESSITY FOR CHASTISEMENT MAY BE RECOGNIZED BY OUR COMMON INTELLIGENCE. The text is an appeal to reason, a question which unbiassed minds could answer only in one way. If chastisement is not seen to be reasonable, it must be either (1) because the depth of guilt is not felt, or (2) distorted views of chastisement have been entertained. This will be such as befits the offence.

V. THE PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CHASTISEMENT INVOLVE PERSONAL ELEMENTS IN REDEMPTION. Hence the necessity for a "propitiation." Thus Christ redeems us by becoming a Propitiation for our sins (1 John ii. 2).

Vers. 12—16.—*The causes of national disaster.* I. IT IS PROFITABLE TO INQUIRE INTO THE CAUSES OF NATIONAL DISASTER. 1. *Intellectually*, this is a subject of profound interest, dealing with fundamental principles and the vast issues to which they lead when working on the largest scale. 2. *Morally*, it is of great practical importance for the warning it supplies to all nations. The sight of terrible ruin rushing down upon a people is appalling, but the awe with which it strikes us will not have much whole-

some effect till we have an intelligent appreciation of the sources from which it comes, and are thus enabled to watch them and guard against them.

II. SPIRITUAL WISDOM IS REQUISITE FOR THE DISCERNMENT OF THE CAUSES OF NATIONAL DISASTER. They do not lie on the surface. No study is more difficult than that of the philosophy of history. Unless the mind is awake to spiritual facts, the inquiry will not go beyond secondary causes, or attempting more will commit injustice. The prophets needed inspiration for this as much as for the prediction of future events. No mere literary historian is fit for the work. Only a prophet can be fully equal to it, and other men can only pursue it with safety when they walk in his footsteps. Hence the immense value of the historical elements of the Old Testament to the statesman.

III. THE CHIEF CAUSES OF NATIONAL DISASTER ARE MORAL. Material causes are visible on the surface, such as famine, plague, invasion, revolution. Political causes lying deeper may be easily discerned, such as diplomatic complications, class divisions, violent changes in popular sentiment. But beneath all such influences there are great moral causes. 1. These act through *providence*. God takes note of the conduct of nations, judges, ministers. 2. They also act *directly*. Luxury is enervating; injustice destroys the confidence of a people in its government, etc.

IV. ONCE REVEALED, THE MORAL CAUSES OF NATIONAL DISASTER ARE SIMPLE AND INTELLIGIBLE. The prophets make these clear to us in the case of their own nation. 1. Negatively, the causes were traced to *disobedience* to the will of God, culpable because this was well understood—"set before them." 2. Positively, they were found in *wilful stubbornness and demoralizing idolatry*. God was the shield of his people. When he was forsaken they were defenceless. Nations are only secure while they are governed by the will of God, by justice and humanity. Godlessness, bearing fruit in falsehood, cruelty, and vicious lawlessness of passion, is a sure source of national ruin. The state of the public conscience is more important to a nation than that of its army.

Vers. 23, 24.—*False boasting and true confidence.* I. FALSE BOASTING. 1. We are inclined to overvalue our *own possessions*. The wise man thinks wisdom the one source of security, the strong man strength, the rich man riches. That bulks most largely which lies most near to us. 2. The very *good* that is in a thing may deceive us by tempting us to overvalue it. Wisdom, strength, and riches are all good in their way. Trust in them is very different from trust in fraud and violence. Not regarding them as enemies, we are in danger of confiding in them as saviours instead of simply employing them as servants. 3. The *number* of earthly resources leads us to assume that security must be found in some of them at least; for when one fails we can fall back on another. But if the best do not protect in the extremity of danger, will inferior aids suffice? Wisdom is greater than strength, and strength than riches. If wisdom fails, what can the rest do for us? 4. The *variety* of advantages contained in earthly resources deceives us as to their value. Wisdom promises to outwit the enemy or devise some means of evading ruin. Yet the wisdom of the wisest Jews was defeated by those who came from the land of "the wise;" and how can it avail against the supreme wisdom? Strength as physical prowess and national power may be imposing and yet not almighty. Samson was weak under a woman's wiles. Goliath fell before the sling of the stripling David. Riches may buy much. They could not prevent the Chaldean invasion. They cannot buy off sickness, disappointment, death, the punishment of sin. Nebuchadnezzar found the possession of the world no security against the most humiliating affliction (Dan. iv. 28—33). The rich fool was mocked by his own prudence (Luke xii. 16—21).

II. TRUE CONFIDENCE. 1. This is to be sought in the *knowledge of God*. Wisdom, the best of earthly resources, is not sufficient for protection, but it is the type of a higher wisdom, wherein is the secret of safety. This is a wisdom which concerns itself, not with petty devices, subtle schemes, cunning, and cleverness, but with the highest knowledge, bearing fruit in "the fear of God" (Ps. cxi. 10). We must know God to trust him. 2. The knowledge of God will reveal to us the *special grounds* for confidence in him, viz. (1) loving-kindness, disposing him to help the needy; (2) justice, making it apparent that he will concern himself in human affairs as the King ruling all into order; and (3) righteousness, showing that in the broadest way he will

maintain the right. Hence it will be apparent that God can and will help us only in accordance with these principles of his character; and we must know them, not only to learn thereby to confide in him, but also to bring ourselves into that spirit which will justify us in expecting his mercy, *i.e.* reconciliation to his love, submission to his government, and obedience to his righteous will.

Vers. 25, 26.—*Impartial justice.* I. SPECIAL PRIVILEGES DO NOT INTERFERE WITH THE IMPARTIAL EXERCISE OF DIVINE JUSTICE. Judah is specially privileged, and prizes circumcision as a seal of the peculiar favour of Heaven (Gen. xvii. 9—14). Yet Judah must take its place in the indiscriminate catalogue of corrupt nations. If privileges are noted in God's exercise of justice, this can only be as an aggravation of guilt. The citizens of favoured nations, the heirs of rank and wealth, persons whose lives have been peculiarly successful and unvisited with the usual amount of trouble, all stand in this position. Their present happy condition is no guarantee for favour in the day of Divine judgment, but, on the contrary, a reason for regarding the ingratitude of sin as, in their case, the more culpable.

II. THE OBSERVANCE OF EXTERNAL ORDINANCES HAS NO INFLUENCE ON THE IMPARTIAL EXERCISE OF DIVINE JUSTICE. Their utility is solely as regards their effect on men. They are profitable only in so far as they assist the corresponding spiritual acts, which are all that God takes note of (Col. ii. 11). The circumcised in body who are not circumcised in heart will suffer just as if they had never been circumcised at all. The ordinance without the spirituality is an offence rather than a pleasing thing. It shows knowledge; it is a mockery to God. This must be so, (1) because God is spirit, and can only be served spiritually; and (2) because the highest justice is concerned with thoughts, motives, deeds of the soul, rather than with the ambiguous actions of the outer life.

III. NO EXCEPTIONS WILL BE MADE TO THE IMPARTIAL EXERCISE OF DIVINE JUSTICE. All kinds of nations are classed together. Cultivated Egyptians and wild Arabs, scrupulous Jews and idolatrous Ammonites, all come before the same judgment-bar, all have the same fair trial and righteous sentence. 1. The *heathen* are not excluded from God's judgment; for (1) he is the God of all the earth, and of those who ignore him as well as of those who recognize him; (2) the heathen have a light of nature and a conscience by which to guide their conduct; (3) God's judgment is reasonable, and can adapt requirement to opportunity, so that the heathen will have as just treatment as those who are more privileged. 2. The *Jews and professedly religious* are not excluded. Many people make an utterly unwarrantable assumption that their respectability, position in the Church, etc., are such that the stern ordeal of the judgment is not for them. In his vision of judgment Christ made no such exceptions (Matt. xxv. 31—46).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Vicarious grief.* It is a common occurrence in the history of God's Church that when general indifference to religious truth, to impending judgments, or depraved spiritual condition, etc., is exhibited by the multitude, one or at most a few are sensible of the nature and extent of the evil. Knowledge in such a case is nearly always sorrow. This is intensified when remonstrances are unheeded, and efforts of reform are defeated. It is the righteous man, the reformer, who is most affected by the situation, and who feels most keenly the disgrace and danger.

I. IN THE HIGHEST THINGS IT IS THE FEW THAT MUST FEEL FOR THE MANY. This has been the law from the beginning. It is a necessity of nature. It is a Divine appointment. Pure feeling, even when painful, appears as a stewardship in one or two hearts, perhaps in one alone. Joseph is moved to tears at the heartlessness of his brethren. Jonathan is ashamed for his father Saul. Elijah laments in loneliness and despair the apostasy of Israel. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem; painfully wonders at the slowness of heart to believe exhibited by his own disciples; is "sore amazed" at the cup of iniquity he has to drink. Jeremiah is here evidently in the same succession of vicarious suffering. We see the same principle working in our own circle of acquaintance. Men, women, sorrowing and suffering for others, who are themselves unconscious or are partially so.

II. WHAT ARE THE COUNTERVAILING ADVANTAGES WHICH LIGHT UP THIS MYSTERY? It cannot be wholly to the detriment of those in whom it is illustrated. The justice of God is involved in the question. 1. *The keenest joys spring from or coincide with the deepest, purest sorrows.* 2. *By-and-by the sorrow will transfer itself to its objects, in the grace of repentance.* 3. *In at least one illustrious instance, it exerts an atoning, mediatorial influence for sinners with God.*—M.

Vers. 2, 3.—*The man of God's longing for seclusion.* I. IT IS THE NATURAL RECOIL OF A PURE HEART FROM WICKEDNESS. When the knowledge and love of God are in the heart, sin appears more loathsome. The love of goodness will show itself in a hatred of evil, and a desire to be separated from its workers. In some this love of God and goodness overpowers even the natural attachments and ties of life. And it may be carried to such an excess as to become a spiritual disease, in its way as sinful as the causes that give rise to it. Monasticism has its root in a good and proper feeling carried to excess, and without the restraining and modifying considerations that ought to accompany it. In the instance before us (and like instances)—

II. IT SPRINGS FROM NO SELFISH MOTIVE. Jeremiah did not seek for the "luxury" of grief; sufficient the wanderer's tent, or the comfortless caravanserai of the desert. Nor has he any desire to attitudinize. It is a loneliness that shall not be conspicuous; a losing of himself amongst strangers who care not for him and notice him not. Nor did he seek to evade the duties of life. If he separated himself, it was not to escape from the impending dangers he had announced; nor to intermit his spiritual activities. "He wished there to *weep* for them" (Zinzendorf); to study the problem in fresh and more hopeful aspects; to recover his mental and spiritual calm; to recruit his spiritual energies for a new and more successful effort. So in our own day, the underlying motive must ever determine the lawfulness, the character, and the continuance of our spiritual retirements.

III. GOD DID NOT REBUKE IT, BUT HE DID NOT SEE FIT TO GRATIFY IT. Here the longing, if it ever grew into a prayer, was not answered, at least at once, or in the way conceived of. Whilst the day of grace lasted, and God's people were open to repent and to be influenced by his words, he is detained amongst them. When all possibilities were exhausted, then the dungeon of the king's prison or the shame of the Egyptian exile might serve the purpose. *But even then the essential craving was satisfied.* There is a longing that is its own answer. To some it is given to experience solitude and spiritual detachment in the midst of the busy throng of transgressors for whom they yet ceaselessly work. This centrifugal tendency may be productive of greater concentration, real compassion, and capacity for usefulness, when it is controlled and overcome by a sense of overmastering responsibility, and a "heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel, that they may be saved."—M.

Vers. 2—6.—*The self-opposition and futility of the sinner's life.* A strong argument against the practice of a thing may often be found in the supposition that it should become universal. This is valid in the case of the practices and desires of wicked men. The idea of Hobbes concerning the original state of human society is ingenious and conceivable from this very reason, were it not contradicted by the world's history.

I. ONE SIN ENTAILS ANOTHER, AND CRIME LEADS TO CRIME. (Ver. 3.)

II. UNIVERSAL WICKEDNESS PRODUCES UNIVERSAL DISTRUST AND MISERY. (Ver. 5.)

III. EVIL-DOING IS A WEARY AND FRUITLESS TOIL.

IV. ITS FUTILITY CULMINATES WHEN IT ROBS A MAN OF THE KNOWLEDGE AND FELLOWSHIP OF GOD, AND EVEN OF THE DESIRE FOR THEM. (Ver. 6.)—M.

Vers. 12—16.—*The affliction of God's professed people an enigma to be explained.* I. THE MYSTERY. This consists partly in the particular subjects of it, and partly in the degree to which it has gone. It is spoken of here prophetically as a future thing that has already taken place; and the problem is stated accordingly as a realization, and not a thing only conceived of. From time to time the history of Israel and Judah presents such scenes. It is by no means one of uninterrupted progress. There are backward movements, standings still, interruptions, sharp and humiliating national disasters, and long epochs of civil war, political nonentity, or foreign captivity. 1. *Yet*

have there not been many gracious promises to the contrary? 2. *On the whole, the past reverses of Israel have been retrieved, and a measure of continuous progress attained.* 3. *The special affliction referred to is unprecedented, and its result would almost appear to be final.* The history of the Christian Church and of individual believers presents features analogous to this. The slow progress of the world's evangelization. The comparative absence of spiritual blessing in the midst of God's children. Their divisions, scientific scepticism, or unscientific superstition, like parasites, strangling the tree of the Church and draining away its life. Or the mystery appears in the individual Christian. His creed is orthodox, his behaviour outwardly presenting little that is blameworthy; and yet worldly business is a constant series of reverses and dishonourable compromises; his influence is lost; afflictions come upon him, and he cannot bear up under them; the peace of Christ is not his; etc.

II. THE POINT OF VIEW FROM WHICH IT IS TO BE REGARDED. This very important to be determined. *The apostate people* of God fail to realize the extent to which they have fallen, and confound the formal rites of religion with its spirit and reality. They at first attribute it to natural causes, or treat it as a temporary thing that will right itself, etc. *The heathen*, looking on *ab extrâ*, imagine that the Jehovah of Israel is no longer able to deliver, or that he has ceased to care for her. *Here* it is declared to be a judgment upon apostasy—utter departure from truth and righteousness, and the sterner because of that fact. And when we look at all the circumstances of the case, this interpretation seems more probable—to carry, as it were, its evidence with it *The key, therefore, is for the most part an inward one;* at first, at any rate, wholly so. This it is which constitutes the main element of difficulty in the troubles of God's people. Hence the room there must be for mistakes, and the ease with which a wholly erroneous view may be taken with superficial probability. And this suggests *how large a part of the Church's function is fulfilled in merely being a problem and a mystery to the carnal mind.* When judgment begins at the house of God, it is time for all attentively to look on and inquire why it is so. Greater perils lie on the side of unfaithfulness than of mere unbelief. And in the last resort conscience must be appealed to in explanation of mysteries of reverse and trouble. Thereby God is knocking at the door of the heart both of the world and the Church. It is of the utmost importance that we settle the question between us and him.

III. AN INTERPRETER WANTED. (Ver. 12.) When men are at a loss, or there is radical difference of opinion, it is evident that some authority is required to decide the question. The world and its canons are by the nature of the problem ruled out of court. And the apostate is too blinded with his own sin and too callous through repeated acts and prolonged habits of wrong-doing to be trusted in the matter. At this juncture the advantage of revelation and of the prophetic office appears. So far as God is concerned, the seer speaks with the authority of direct inspiration; so far as the culprit is concerned, he occupies a representative position, and as one of those implicated, yet himself innocent, acts as general conscience. This is God's way—to raise a testimony and extract a confession from the heart of the transgressor himself, or from the midst of those upon whom his judgments fall. And the same end is accomplished now through the Spirit and the Word. The saint becomes the mouthpiece of the Saviour, and the world is convinced of "sin, of righteousness, and of judgment."—M.

Ver. 21.—*The death of the wicked contrary to nature.* Various respects in which this is so: it is sudden; it defies all the resources of comfort and protection; it is untimely, and cuts off the young in their bloom—the children for the fathers' sin, the hope of the nation and the family. "Death will not, as an enemy lurking without, attack those only who venture out to him, but will assault the people, penetrating into all their houses, to fetch his sacrifices" (Naegelsbach, in Lange). Why so?

I. IT IS BECAUSE THE LAWS OF GOD AND OF NATURE HAVE BEEN SHAMEFULLY VIOLATED.

II. THE TRIAL AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CONFIRMED SINNER ARE SWIFTLY REMOVED TO ANOTHER JUDGMENT-SEAT.

III. IT IS INTENDED AS A DEMONSTRATION AGAINST EVIL AND A TERROR TO EVIL-DOERS.—M.

Vers. 22—24.—*The knowledge of God the only real "glory" of man.* Comparison of the earthly acquisitions and properties of the natural man with those which are spiritual and Divine frequent in Scripture. In history and in life they are seen in competition. It is not that the one class of gifts is to be wholly despised and the other alone sought. A correct perspective must be established. It is *the* "glory" of a man that requires in the first place to be determined. After that is settled, all other things will take their due place and precedency.

I. THE "GLORY" OF MAN MUST DEPEND UPON THE END FOR WHICH HE HAS BEEN BROUGHT INTO EXISTENCE. This is written in his nature, confirmed by providence, and made clear by revelation. In the words of the Westminster Catechism, "*The chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.*" Everything else must be subordinated to this; but if pursued in its place, will show itself to be a perversion of his nature, and will end in calamity and misery. How very few care to satisfy themselves upon this momentous question! Hence the necessity for the teachings and warnings of experience. 1. *The "glory" of man will be declared by the manner in which the circumstances of his earthly lot affect it in the working out of that end.* Each of the qualities and properties upon which men usually pride themselves has been tried in this way and found deficient. The *wisdom* of the world has a thousand times been shown to be foolishness before God. There are a myriad problems for which it has no key. "Might" has been reduced to nothingness by the least of the duties and experiences of the spiritual life. Disease and death can bring down the mighty from their seats, and stay the greatest worker at his task. Many a time has the cherished object after which one has laboured with apparent success been snatched away just when about to be attained. And "wealth" is similarly discredited. The moth and the rust can corrupt the treasures of earth, and the thief breaks through and steals them from their most guarded security. The accident of fortune may give or take away the greatest fortune. And when death comes, all these earthly possessions have to be left behind. They cannot avail for what lies beyond. How seldom are these gifts used for the highest end! And how unavailing of themselves would they be to secure it! 2. *The "glory" of man must depend upon the success with which it contributes to secure that end.*

II. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS INDICATED UNMISTAKABLY BY THESE TESTS AS THE ONLY TRUE "GLORY" OF MAN. God is identified with the ultimate aim of our being. He made us, and it is for him we live. Consequently, the better we know him, the better shall we be able to serve him. 1. *Imitation of God will spring from the knowledge of him.* The more we know of him the more we must love him, and admiration will lead to resemblance in spirit and in life. "We love him, because he first loved us." 2. *Knowledge depends on and leads to obedience.* (John vii. 17.) The knowledge of God sheds light upon the universe and life, and directs the soul and body into the channels of health, happiness, and usefulness. 3. *It is connected with and culminates in Divine fellowship.* In this way the character and presence of God are brought into closest contact with the spirit of man, his character is moulded into the image of the Divine original, and the joys of communion deepen and enlarge into the blessedness of heaven. "This is life eternal, [even now] to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."—M.

Ver. 1.—*The testimony of tears.* Tears are an unusual, a strange sad sight in a strong man. But here Jeremiah appears utterly broken down. He abandons himself to a very agony of sorrow. His tears remind us of those of our Lord and of St. Paul. But they are also a relief to the overburdened heart. Like the cry of the sufferer in sore pain. We are glad when we behold one enduring some crushing sorrow enabled to pour forth his grief in tears. The heart-broken prophet has evidently felt them to be such a relief. His thoughts of his country's sorrows, when they lie too deep for tears, are greater than he can bear. He would, therefore, that he might be able continually to weep. But tears are admonitory. They bear a very powerful testimony, which we shall do well to give heed to. For they bear witness—

I. TO HIS PROFOUND CONVICTIONS. 1. *In regard to the truth of the message he has delivered.* When we behold God's servants, such as Jeremiah and St. Paul and others, labouring with all energy of soul, with infinite self-sacrifice, exposed to every form of

ill, and "with many tears," we are constrained to inquire the motive of such a life. But only one of three suppositions is possible. (1) Either he who labours is a deceiver. He is consciously acting a part. But this supposition in regard to prophets and apostles of God's Word has long been given up. "The world has renounced almost to a man this hypothesis. It refuses to believe in the possibility of a hypocrite whose writings inculcate and whose conduct exemplifies the highest order of moral excellence; it refuses to believe in a benevolent, modest, self-denying, high-minded, humble, magnanimous liar, in whom falsehood speaks with the very tongue, looks through the very eyes, and personates the very gestures and tones of truth; it refuses to believe that a man with no earthly motive for it, and every earthly motive against it, should spend the best part of a lifetime in cheating men into truth and virtue which he had himself utterly renounced" (H. Rogers). But if this hypothesis be rejected, then there is another. (2) He has deceived himself. He is the victim of enthusiasm, the unconscious agent of a bewildered and disordered brain. But this hypothesis also will not bear investigation. For such enthusiasms are generally short-lived, they are soon detected, and the common sense of mankind refuses to participate in them. No instance can be found of a mere enthusiast persuading whole nations and convincing the purest, the most sober, and the most thoughtful of whole communities, and in such manner that the falsehood thus originated shall live on and acquire power over men's minds increasingly. And there are other tests whereby enthusiasm may be discriminated from the deliberate convictions of the sober mind, and every one of such tests, when applied to the history of faithful witnesses for God's truth, fail to show that these witnesses were, though not dishonest, yet merely mistaken enthusiasts. There remains, therefore, (3) only the other alternative, that the message which they delivered with so much earnestness was true. And the tears of the prophet and apostle do alike bear this testimony, and its force men have everywhere felt. And would we convince an unbelieving world of the truths we profess to hold, we must manifest more of a like conviction. If some wan, worn, emaciated preacher, bearing on him evidently the marks of the Lord Jesus, whose whole life had been, like that of Jeremiah or St. Paul, one long sacrifice for the truth,—if such a one could appear amongst us, then would the world believe, as it now altogether refuses to whilst those who profess belief show such few tokens of the reality of their belief. 2. *In regard to the dread peril of those who disobey God.* We know with what impassioned earnestness Jeremiah had pleaded with his infatuated countrymen; how he had exhorted, implored, and wept in his endeavour to win them from their wicked ways. And now, when it seemed all in vain, we behold him sunk in sorrow, dissolved in tears. Wherefore this? Were the theory of the universalist true, that there is no "fearful looking for of judgment," that all will be made blessed in the coming hereafter, irrespective of what they have been or what their conduct in this life,—then such tears as we are contemplating now would be unmeaning. Had the prophet held such views, had our Lord, had St. Paul, their deep distress would have been inexplicable, because altogether uncalled for. Or even if the theory of those who hold that "death ends all" been that of God's servants, still such distress would be far more than could be accounted for. Or even if it were that only the blessedness of the righteous were missed, and all others would simply perish, then too the future of the ungodly would call for no such sorrow. Or that by such devices as those of the Romish Church—Masses, indulgences, and the like—the guilty soul, though indeed its doom were terrible, yet it might by these devices be rescued from such doom,—then too there could have been no tears such as these. But contemplating the overwhelming sorrow of men like Jeremiah when beholding the judgment of the ungodly, we are shut up to the conviction, which evidently possessed him so profoundly, that it is a fearful thing for an unforgiven man to fall into the hands of the living God. 3. *In regard to the exhaustion of all present resources of help.* Could Jeremiah have *done* anything to turn aside that judgment which he so vividly and with such distress anticipated, he would not have given himself up to tears. They are the evidence that all resources are exhausted, that nothing more can be done, that as he says (ch. vi. 29), "The bellows are burned." The language of such tears is the voice of God saying, concerning the hardened and impenitent, "He is joined to his idols: let him alone." God save us all from having to shed, and still more from causing, such tears as these. But they bear witness also—

II. To PROFOUND COMPASSION. He who has known the compassion of God for his own soul will, in proportion to the depth of that knowledge, feel compassion for the souls of others. Indifference and unconcern are no longer possible to him who knows the love of God when he sees men perishing in sin. "The love of Christ constraineth" him. And the same compassion, thus begotten, leads him to mourn when the offer of God's mercy is refused. Such tears, being interpreted, tell of his passionate but useless desire that the sinner's doom *had been averted*. Cf. David's exceeding bitter cry, "O Absalom, my son, my son!" etc. And they are made to flow the more freely by the remembrance that that lost condition *might have been* so altogether different. There was no necessity for it. That which could not have been avoided, which we feel to have been inevitable, we bear with more calmness. But when there is the consciousness, such as David had concerning Absalom, that he might have come to an end so different, to an end as honourable and blessed as this was disgraceful and miserable, that reflection made his tears flow faster than before. And when it is not mere folly *but grievous sin* which has brought God's judgment upon men, then the compassionate heart grieves yet more; a further drop of bitterness is infused into the cup, and such tears as we are contemplating have this sorrow in them as well as the others we have spoken of. And that now there *is no hope, no remedy*,—this is the last and worst reflection which wrings the compassionate heart with uttermost grief. Jeremiah beholds the house of Judah "left unto them desolate;" the daughter of his people not merely "hurt," but slain. How is it that, with like reasons for such compassion as that of Jeremiah, we know so little of it? "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy Law"—so spoke God's servant in the hundred and nineteenth psalm. But who can say that now? Compassionate Saviour, give us of *thy* mind.

III. To THE BEHOLDERS OF SUCH GRIEF. 1. *Are you workers for God?* Then remember that disappointment and present failure have been the lot of many of the noblest of the servants of God. There is a goodly fellowship of such. 2. *Are you believers in God?* Then remember his sure promise as to what shall follow this "sowing in tears," this "going forth weeping, bearing precious seed." We are not to think that we have seen the last result of our toil because that which we do see is so distressing. 3. *Are you rejecters of God?* Then remember that God puts such tears "in his bottle," and they are treasured by him; and their testimony, whilst it will be for the salvation of those who have shed them, will be far more terrible judgment against those who have caused them. "Weep not for me," said our Lord on his way to the cross, "but weep for yourselves, and for your children. . . . If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Yes, these tears tell of the sorrows of God's people, but they predict a worse sorrow still for his hardened foes. Look, then, O thou who hardenest thyself against God, and ask thyself, "If this be the sorrow I have caused, what shall that be which I shall have to bear?" Remember that it is not only here that there are tears, but in the future abode of the impenitent it is distinctly declared, "*There* shall be weeping." Then cease to cause such tears here, that you may never have to shed tears far more bitter there.—C.

Ver. 1.—*The moral degradation of women.* The expression, "the slain of the daughter of my people," suggests this subject. Therefore we may thus apply the prophet's words. Note—

I. THE MORAL DEGRADATION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF A PEOPLE IS A JUST CAUSE FOR THE DEEPEST SORROW. For think of what and how much is slain in these slain ones. The ruin of health, and the early and often dreadful death, are the least that is slain. Happiness is slain—that of the victim, and of those to whom she was once precious. The joyous hopes once cherished. The influence which might have been so pure and purifying, now corrupt and corrupting. The character once honoured, now dragged in the mire. The *soul*, in all its moral worth and spiritual energies and desires, that too is slain. Therefore, when contemplating such cruelly slain ones, the prophet's piteous cry of anguish is no more than such utter woe constrains.

II. BUT SUCH SORROW SHOULD TURN INTO SCORN AND WRATH FOR THE SLAYERS OF THESE SLAIN. Beware of the hideous complacency with which the world regards such murderers. Pray to be kept from the paths of such "bloody men."

III. BUT SUCH SORROW SHOULD NOT FORGET THAT THERE IS A DIVINE SPIRIT THAT

CAN "BREATHE UPON THESE SLAIN, THAT THEY MAY LIVE." The Spirit of Christ did so breathe upon one such, and she lived. He said to her, "Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke vii. 36—50).—C.

Ver. 2.—*Sighings after the wilderness.* The text reminds us of Ps. lv. 5, "Oh that I had wings," etc.! of Elijah's longing that he might die; of the similar dejection of Moses. Even our Lord said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" But such desire as that of the text is in itself—

I. UNNATURAL. We are formed to mingle with our fellow-men, to live with them, not away from them. 1. It is in intercourse with them *life becomes interesting to us.* We are taken out of ourselves, fresh sources of pleasure and advantage are continually opened up to us. 2. *Sympathy* also is in fellowship. Our joys are more than doubled and our sorrows more than halved by the power of that sympathy which solitude can never know. 3. *Opportunities of doing good* are not to be had "in the wilderness," and when we "leave" our people. 4. Nor are the *benefits they can confer on us* to be found there. Heart and mind and soul are blessed by companionship and injured by solitude and isolation. Hence such wish as that of the text is, apart from the motive given, unnatural.

II. AND IT MAY BE WRONG. 1. It is so when it is the child of *impatience.* Doubtless there is much often to try our patience, and to make us wish that we could have done with it all. But we should not think much of the labourer who, because the toil was arduous, threw up his work ere the day was done; or of the soldier who left in the midst of the campaign. 2. Yet more culpable is it when it springs from *indolence.* There are many who dislike real work in any form. Exertion and effort are shrunk from everywhere. And in their religious life it is the same. And from such poor motive such wish as that of the text sometimes springs. 3. Still worse is it when it comes of *unbelief.* When all faith is gone, and the dark, dread falsehood begins to get hold of a man, that rest is only to be gained by breaking out of this life altogether.

III. BUT IT MAY PROCEED FROM CAUSES WHICH CAN ONLY EXCITE OUR COMPASSION. 1. Extremity of suffering: Job, Paul. 2. Experience of human infidelity, as in Ps. lv. 3. When all the purposes for which God ordained us to live in fellowship with one another are unattainable. Such was the case with Jeremiah. Pleasurable interest in such fellowship as was his could not be for him, but only daily vexation of his righteous soul (cf. Lot). Sympathy he could neither give nor find. Ever so desirous of doing them good, they spurned and despised all his efforts. And as to gaining good from them, it was but a continual contact with pollution. What wonder, then, that Jeremiah longed to be away from such a scene? "The hermits of the East, the anchorites of the desert, are more closely linked with ourselves in feeling than some at first may think. Our impulses are often identical with theirs; and if our actions vary it is because our standard of right, not our nature, is changed. In the life of each man there are hours when he sighs for the desert; hours when, bowed down by the sense of sin in himself and the sight of it in others, wearied out by striving to teach a stiff-necked generation, disheartened at seeing the 'good cause' advance so slowly, he can scarcely refrain from following, in his small way, the example of that emperor who exchanged the palace for the cloister, and the crown for the cowl." These are moments such as came to Jeremiah now. "The Emperor Charles uttered in deeds what we have all breathed in sighs. We do and we must long to flee away and be at rest; but then it must remain a longing, and nothing more" (G. Dawson).

IV. AND GOD HAS MADE PROVISION FOR ITS SATISFACTION. Not by giving us permission to retire to desert solitudes, except, as with Elijah and Paul, it may be for a while to prepare for future and higher service. But in the manner that the psalmist suggests where he says, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then," etc. Yes, *wings like a dove will bear us into the present rest of God.* The dove is the emblem of *meekness.* Like the lamb amongst the beasts, so the dove amongst the birds is the symbol of lowly meekness and gentleness. But lowly meekness is the way to rest, the rest God gives, the peace of God. Listen to our Saviour: "Come unto me, all ye that labour . . . Take my yoke. . . . For I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. xi.). The dove is the emblem of *purity.* It was not only amongst those birds that were counted clean, but was especially selected for presentation to God

in sacrifice, as that which was pure alone could be. The doves were allowed to fly about the temple and to rest on its roofs and pillars (see H. Hunt's picture of the 'Finding in the Temple'). But purity opens the door of heaven, and enraptures the beholder with the beatific vision there. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Wings are these, therefore, well likened to those of a dove, "covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." Yes, "keep thyself unspotted from the world," and God shall so manifest himself to thee that thy soul shall be at rest, let the wicked rage around thee as they may. And the dove was the selected symbol *of the Holy Spirit.* "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove," said John the Baptist. But his wings will bear thee where thou mayest see the fatherly love of God, his wisdom guiding all, and his gracious purpose being more and more accomplished. "He will take of the things of Christ and show them unto thee." And in them thou *shalt* have peace. The psalmist's passionate longing may then be fulfilled for us. We may have "wings like a dove." These, of meekness, purity, and the blessed Spirit of God. And so, without quitting the station assigned us or departing to any wilderness, we may have even now the rest of God.—C.

Ver. 7.—*The doings and doom of deceit.* The verses from ver. 2 to the text set forth its doings, and the text and remainder of the chapter foretell its doom. Note—

I. DECEIT. It is a terrible indictment that the prophet brings. He affirms that deceit is: 1. *Universal.* Ver. 2, "They be *all*," etc. Ver. 6, "Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit;" *i.e.* it is everywhere, all around you. That: 2. It has broken up the most sacred relationships: "They be all adulterers" (ver. 2). 3. It has turned their solemn assemblies into a conclave of liars (ver. 2). 4. It is practised deliberately. Ver. 3: as a man deliberately bends and takes aim with his bow. 5. It has mounted the judge's seat (ver. 3; cf. true translation of phrase, "They are not valiant for the truth"). 6. It has smoothed the way for all evil. "They proceed from evil to evil" (ver. 3). 7. It has destroyed all confidence (1) between neighbours, (2) between brethren (ver. 4). 8. It is diligently studied. Ver. 5, "They have taught," etc. "They take the utmost pains to go crookedly." 9. It is cruel and deadly in its aims (ver. 8). In view of a condition of things so horrible, how unanswerable is the demand of ver. 9, "Shall I not visit them for these things?" etc.! It will be found in all the judgments of God upon nations that those judgments have never come until there was no other way of dealing with such nations, if the moral life of the world was to be maintained.

II. ITS DOINGS. 1. *It had made dwelling amongst them intolerable to the righteous.* (Cf. ver. 2.) Jeremiah longs to get away from them. The most desolate solitude would be preferable to living amid such a people as this. It is an ominous sign for a community when the godly, however compassionate, however long-suffering, can no longer endure to dwell in their midst. 2. *It had made the thought of God intolerable to themselves.* Vers. 3, 6, "They know not me, saith the Lord." Just as a man may meet one whom he desires to have nothing to do with, but when he meets him will pass him as if he did not know him; so deceit had made these people, as it makes all such, desirous of having nothing to do with God. Therefore they will not recognize or acknowledge him in any way. 3. *And at last it had made them intolerable to God.* Ver. 7: God asks, "What else can I do for the daughter of my people?" (cf. Exposition). There was nothing now but for the judgment of God to go forth against them. Therefore note—

III. ITS DOOM. Ver. 7, "Therefore thus saith," etc. And down to ver. 22 these awful judgments of God are set forth. Inquire, therefore, what there is about deceit which renders it so hateful in the sight of God. 1. *There can be no doubt that it is so.* "Lying lips are an abomination unto the Lord" (cf. Ps. xv.; Acts v.). "All liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth," etc. 2. And some of the reasons are: (1) Deceit cometh from Satan, who was "a liar from the beginning," and "the father of lies." It was by his lies that our first parents were deceived and sin was brought into the world. (2) It is the source of infinite misery and distress. It is "the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil" which still work well-nigh all our sorrow and our shame. (3) It tends to the destruction of human society. All our well-being and comfort depend upon good faith being maintained between man and man. "But now,

where fraud and falsehood, like a plague or cancer, comes over to invade society, the band which held together the parts compounding it presently breaks, and men are thereby put to a loss where to league and to fasten their dependencies, and so are forced to scatter and shift every one for himself. Upon which account every notoriously false person ought to be looked upon and detested as a public enemy, and to be pursued as a wolf or a mad dog, and a disturber of the common peace and welfare of mankind; there being no particular person whatsoever but has his private interest concerned and endangered in the mischief that such a wretch does to the public" (South). A sin, therefore, so destructive of the well-being of his children cannot but be abominable in the eyes of the Father of us all. 3. It shuts God out of the heart altogether. God has made us for himself, but deceit bars fast the door of man's heart against him. God can only be worshipped in spirit and in truth; but deceit renders this primary condition of such worship unattainable. 4. But God in his anger remembers mercy. Ver. 7, "Behold, I will melt them, and try them," that is to say, he will, as the smelter casts the metal into the fire not to destroy but to refine it, to purge away its dross, and then, that being done, tests and tries it to see that the process has been effectual; so God will send his judgments upon his people, not to destroy, but to purify them, and he will afterwards test them again, give them another opportunity of serving him. He might have destroyed, but this he will not do. He "will melt them, and try them." But less than this he cannot do. "What else," etc.? he asks. It is a dread process; Judah and Jerusalem found it so, and all who compel God to cast them into such a crucible find it to be a dread process. Our blessed Saviour wept over Jerusalem, although he told them that when next they saw him they should say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord." It was the thought of that furnace for fire through which they must be passed ere they would come to this better mind that drew forth those tears. Let none, therefore, deem the judgment of God a subject for trifling with, because, as here, God says its purpose is to "melt and try," rather than to destroy.

CONCLUSION. Let this consideration of the doings and doom of deceit lead us to listen to the Lord's appeal, "Oh, do not this thing that I hate!"—C.

Vers. 10—22.—*The terrible threatenings of love.* There are few more awful passages of Scripture than this. The doom denounced on the guilty people is indeed dreadful. Nevertheless that doom had not yet descended. There was a merciful pause, during which space was given for repentance. Meanwhile the prophet was bidden to utter these threatenings. Notice—

I. HOW TERRIBLE THEY ARE. 1. *In themselves.* The fertile hills and pastures of their country shall be laid waste, so that no living creature can find food (ver. 10). Jerusalem is to be utterly destroyed and desolate (ver. 11). The deep anguish of the people—their very meat to be as "wormwood," and their drink as "water of gall" (ver. 15). They shall be carried captive and scattered among the heathen, and even then shall not escape the sword (ver. 16). They shall be overwhelmed with sorrow, their eyes shall gush out with tears (vers. 17—19). Death shall reign everywhere (ver. 21); and shall be accompanied with deepest degradation (ver. 22). It is not possible to conceive of more hopeless misery than is portrayed in these vivid descriptions of the wrath that was to come. 2. *Because of their righteousness. Unrighteous* suffering can be borne, and those who bear it are bidden by the Lord to count themselves as "blessed" because of it (Matt. v. 11, 12). And sorrows that come to us in the course of God's providence, and the reason of which we do not know, these we can bear sustained by the faith of the Father's love. But when sore suffering is sent to us as the direct punishment of sin, and the righteous because so deserved anger of God is evident, then those consolations which are open to us under other sufferings are closed to us under these. The bitter reflection, "It was all our own fault; it might, it ought to have been avoided," makes the pain we endure, and the calamities that overtake us, more terrible than otherwise they could possibly be. We take refuge from man's anger and from ordinary sorrows in God's love, but sin that has brought down God's righteous judgment has also closed against us that most blessed shelter and every shelter, and we are left without defence. And another element in their terribleness is: 3. *The certainty of their fulfilment.* "God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that *shall*

he also reap." The threatenings of God are not, as are many of the threatenings of men, mere empty vapourings, great swelling words, never designed to be fulfilled. Let the records of all human history, of all human lives, whether told of within or without the pages of the Bible, attest the absolute certainty of fulfilment which evermore characterizes the threatenings of God. When and where has he ever threatened and failed to fulfil his threat? Let the Fall, the Flood, the destruction of Sodom, the plagues on Egypt, the deaths of the generation of unbelievers in the wilderness, and ten thousand instances more, all prove the steadfastness of God to his word. And it is this fact of the absolute certainty of his threatenings being fulfilled that adds to them a yet further terribleness. There is no chance of escape, no hope of God's relenting; as certain as the fixed laws of nature are these awful denunciations of God to him who persists in bringing them upon himself.

II. BUT THEY ARE THE THREATENINGS OF LOVE. 1. He who utters them is the God who in his very nature and essence is love. How manifold are the proofs of this in creation, in providence, in grace! He, therefore, has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; judgment is his "strange work." 2. Those against whom they are uttered are the objects of his love. His love for them is deeper than his anger against them. Hence it is that the contrite sinner never fails to gain the pardon he seeks. "Fathers of our flesh" may "chasten after their own pleasure, but he for our profit" (cf. ver. 7). 3. His purpose in these threatenings is a loving purpose. He would compel by the scourge of fear his rebellious children to abandon their evil ways. 4. And if at length he is compelled to execute his threatenings, it is out of love that he does so. For the love of God is towards his *children*, not to any one particular child, and the welfare of the family is the chief consideration. *Salus populi suprema lex.* If consistently with that the transgressor can be restored, he will be, but not else. Hence, as an earthly father would not permit one of his children, ill with terrible and contagious disease, to mingle with the other children; or, as in the far more sad case of utter moral wickedness, intercourse with the rest would be forbidden; so, for the sake of the rest of his children, God will separate them from the wicked and the wicked from them. But it is love which constrains to this, and hence it is that the seeming contradiction is true, that he who is the God of love is also "a consuming fire." The very fatherhood of God is the most fearful fact of all others against the persistently rebellious and ungodly soul. Hence—

III. SUCH THREATENINGS ARE EVER THE MOST TERRIBLE OF ALL. Cf. the threatenings of our Saviour. The most awful utterances to be found in the whole Bible proceeded from his lips—the lips whose words were wont to be so "gracious" that the people "wondered" at them. It is his sayings which have lit up the lurid glare of the fires unquenchable of hell, and it is he who has made our souls shudder at the sight of "the worm that dieth not," and of the "outer darkness" where there is "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." See, too, the Revelation of St. John. That apostle, whose great theme is the love of God, whose soul was more attuned to the music of love than that of any other, wrote that awful book, which is full throughout of "mourning, lamentation, and woe," and which almost reeks with the blood and fire and smoke of torments of which it tells. These facts can only be accounted for—and there are more like them—on the ground that the threatenings of love are ever the most terrible of all. And they are so, for such reasons as these: 1. Love so hates what tends to the harm of those it loves. Hence it brands with its deepest curse that sin which harms God's children most of all. One chief argument with many minds for the retention of capital punishments is that only so can a government or nation mark its sense of the supreme wickedness of the crime it so punishes. Punish it as other crimes are punished, and it will come to be regarded as no worse than they. And in like manner God would inspire us with a holy abhorrence of sin by the awful condemnation that he has pronounced against it. 2. Love so yearns to rescue those it loves. The rope may cut and wound the hands of the drowning sailor to whom we have thrown it, but we do not mind that if thereby he be drawn safe to shore. The knife of the surgeon may cut deep and cause fearful pain, but if it saves the imperilled life we are thankful notwithstanding. So God sends forth these stern, rough, and terrible threatenings, that souls under the spell of sin may be awakened, alarmed, made to tremble, and to "seek the Lord while he may be found." No gentler means will

avail; therefore these, so love resolves, shall not be left untried. It will shrink from nothing to accomplish its compassionate purpose of rescuing from the murderous sin the soul it loves. 3. And there is no wickedness so deep as that of outraging love. Men will never see sin in all its hatefulness until they see it as outrage done to love. Whilst they are taught only that it is disobedience to sovereign rule rather than despite and shameful wrong done to a Father's heart, they will not look upon it as they should, nor repent of it as they must. Even in human esteem, outrage done to a loving heart adds intensity to the condemnation with which we view and sentence disobedience done to law. We all recognize that such wickedness is the worst of all. We cannot wonder, then, that the threatenings against wrong persistently done to the love of God are terrible as they are, and the most terrible of all.

CONCLUSION. 1. Beware of bringing upon yourselves such threatenings as these. Those which are fulminated forth by hatred, or by pride, or by sovereignty, or by law,—these, though they may be terrible, are not to be compared with those that we have been considering. "The wrath of the Lamb" is the most awful of all. 2. Beware of despising them. So far from believing what has now been shown, men argue in directly opposite way, and, because the threatenings are those of love, they conclude that they may safely be disregarded, they will never be carried out. But what has now been shown proves that this is the very last thing we can venture to do. 3. Beware of concealing them. It is to be feared that, in these soft, easy days on which we have fallen, the Lord's watchmen do very often fail to "blow the trumpet and give warning." From blood-guiltiness such as that let us pray to be delivered. For are there not many now whom nothing but the startling peal of the trumpet of God's threatened judgments will ever arouse or alarm? Assuredly there are. Therefore, in view of the doom of the ungodly, as well as by the love of Christ, let us "*beseech* men to be reconciled to God."—C.

Vers. 12—15.—*The inquest on the slain of Judah and Jerusalem.* I. GOD DEMANDS IT. 1. For his righteousness is impugned. Men had not failed, could not fail, to notice the terrible judgments which God had sent upon Judah and Jerusalem, and, as is implied by his own declaration of their causes (ver. 12), they had either not seen or had denied the righteousness of what had been done. This questioning of the Divine righteousness and equity is a procedure all too common still. 2. And thus the Divine hold on the loyalty of men's hearts is threatened. For unless men regard God as righteous, just, and good, no power in the universe can make them yield him the homage of their hearts. How much of the alienation of heart in the present day may be attributed to the representations of God which a false theology has set forth! Men will not, for they cannot, love such a being as too many preachers represent God to be. They may be threatened with everlasting perdition, but it will make no difference. For God himself has given us a nature which renders impossible our yielding our hearts' homage to any one—be he whom he may—that our hearts do not regard as worthy of that homage. 3. But God's supreme solicitude is for this homage of our hearts. Hence what threatens it must be intolerable to him. Therefore he seeks for vindication before the hearts of men, and demands this inquiry.

II. AN UNIMPEACHABLE JURY IS IMPANELLED. It is not just any one who can be trusted to make this inquiry. The frivolous, the unthoughtful, would fail to grasp the problem involved, and the ungodly who suffered these judgments would be sure to assign them to any and every cause rather than the true one. Therefore those who are summoned to this inquest are (1) the wise—those who will intelligently consider all the facts of the case; and (2) those "to whom the Lord hath spoken"—those, that is, who have been divinely enlightened, who are in sympathy with truth and righteousness. God summons such, and fearlessly demands, now as of old, the most thorough investigation into the righteousness of all his ways.

III. THEY ARE BIDDEN WELL AND TRULY TRY THE CASE BEFORE THEM. He would have them so consider it that they may "understand" it in all its bearings, reasons, and ends. He tells them what he has done and what he yet will do, and what are his reasons for his conduct. He does not conceal that his judgments are tremendous, notorious, certain to excite inquiry, to be challenged, and by many to be condemned. But he appeals to the "wise," and to those "to whom the Lord hath spoken," to con-

sider and understand what he has done. God calls not for mere credulity from any of us; he asks for no mere blind faith; but it is to a "reasonable service" he summons us, and this reasonableness he would have us consider and "understand." "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say:" such is his appeal.

IV. AND WHEN THEY HAVE "UNDERSTOOD" THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD THEY ARE TO "DECLARE" IT. There is no greater service that can be rendered than "to vindicate the ways of God to man;" to "commend the truth to every man's conscience in the sight of God." The believer is established, the waverer brought to decision, the sinner —like as Felix, when Paul "reasoned of righteousness and judgment"—is made to tremble, the scorner and the atheist are silenced.

V. THE EFFECTS OF THAT VERDICT WILL BE VARIED. 1. It will strike terror to the hearts of the enemies of God; for it will rob them of the comfort they had in regarding God's judgments as unjust. Even this "drop of cold water" they may not have. 2. It will give great peace of mind to all beholders of God's strong rule; for it will show that his rule is not strong and supreme alone, but absolutely righteous. 3. It will make God's people "sing unto the Lord a new song," because "he cometh to judge the earth" (Ps. xcvi.). It will assure them of the triumph of righteousness, and the utter impotency and impermanency of wrong. But let each one ask himself, "How will that verdict affect *me*?"—C.

Ver. 14.—*Hereditary sin real sin.* God here declares that he will punish those who have walked "after Baalim, which their fathers taught them." Therefore the fact of their having been trained in this sin by their fathers is not held to acquit them of guilt in what they do. Their sin, though hereditary, is real.

I. THIS SEEMS UNJUST. It has often been objected to that because the fathers ate sour grapes the children's teeth should be set on edge (Ezek. xviii. 2). Why should I be punished for another's man's sin?

II. BUT IT IS THE DIVINE LAW. The sins of the fathers *are* visited on the children. "By the offence of one all men were made sinners" (Rom. v.). And in daily life how perpetually we see this law in ruthless operation!—children punished in health, fortune, character, reputation, in mind, body, and soul, all through their fathers' sin. They walk in the ways of Baalim because their fathers taught them. And yet, unjust though their punishment *may* appear—

III. CONSCIENCE ENDORSES IT. Who knows how much of that strong passionate nature which led David into such dreadful sin may have been inherited? Indeed, he says, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity," etc. (Ps. li.). But this does not hinder him from taking all the blame of his sin upon himself. All the way through we hear his confession—"my sin," "my transgression," "mine iniquity." And never does the conscience awakened to a sense of sin think of palliating such sin by the plea of its being the result of inheritance. Thus conscience witnesses to the righteousness of the Divine Law.

IV. AND SO DOES HUMAN LAW. What judge ever pardoned a criminal because he had a bad father? We execrate "bloody Queen Mary" notwithstanding she had a bloodthirsty father.

V. THE EXPLANATION IS: 1. That hereditary sin does not destroy *conscience*. *That* speaks in all; it is "the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world," the inward monitor which ever condemns crime and approves righteousness (cf. Rom. ii. 14, 15). 2. Nor does it destroy *understanding*. Teachers of righteousness are on every hand, from whom all may learn. 3. Nor does it destroy the *power of will*. It may weaken, but it does not destroy. Therefore, in spite of hereditary sin, every man knows, and can choose if he will, that which is right; and therefore he is held accountable before every tribunal—that of God, of conscience, and of man. 4. But there is yet another reason given by St. Paul: "*God hath concluded all in unbelief, that he may have mercy upon all*" (Rom. xi. 32; Gal. iii. 22). A cruel Roman emperor wished that all Rome had but one neck, that he might kill it with one blow. God hath in his infinite grace gathered up all our humanity into one, even in Christ, so that, as sin had destroyed all by one stroke (Rom. v.), the grace of God in Christ might save all by the one righteousness of the One; so that "where sin did abound, grace," etc. That gathering up of humanity into one in Adam, which seems at first sight to have worked such injustice,

is altogether met, and far more than met, by the again gathering up of all in One, even in Christ, which works such grace. But that ultimate redemption which is in Christ does not hinder, but that meanwhile, and for a weary while, hereditary sin may work woeful sorrow and harm. Therefore—

VI. THIS FACT APPEALS: 1. *To all parents.* Seek to cut off the entail. We may have received such sad inheritance, but let us, as we may, reject it for ourselves, and in so doing refuse to hand it on to others. Again and again has God given grace to some one member of a godless house—as to Josiah, son of that Amon of whom it is said, "But Amon sinned more and more"—who has for himself and those who come after him broken the bad succession and begun a new and blessed departure. When we have done our best, our children will have a sufficiently heavy burden to bear; let us not make that burden heavier, life more terrible, and holiness and heaven far less attainable for them, by handing down to them a legacy of evil example and of unhallowed habits and propensities inherited from ourselves. Do not let us sin so against our children. Yet many do. 2. *To all children.* Your fathers' sin will not excuse yours. God has turned judgment away from many an evil son because he had a godly father, but never because he had an ungodly one. Therefore if yours be the sad and too frequent lot of those who inherit evil from their parents, reject that inheritance, and seek and gain from your heavenly Father, though you may not be helped herein by your earthly one, the better, the most blessed inheritance of the children of God.—C.

Vers. 21, 22.—*Death's doings.* Behold—

I. DEATH'S CARNIVAL. In many an ancient continental city you may see portrayed in still vivid colours, on the roofs of their covered bridges,—as on that of the old bridge at Lucerne,—on the walls of their churches, and elsewhere, the grim 'Dance of Death.' These verses remind of those paintings, and tell in yet more fearful form of Death's dread carnival. With what diabolic zest he is represented at his work here! He is shown to us, not as coming in in ordinary manner to the sick-chamber, where his coming has long been expected and may even be welcomed; but as breaking in roughly, unexpectedly, cruelly, like a thief coming in at the windows. Nor as drawing near to the poor, the defenceless, the miserable; but entering into our palaces, the abode of the great, the rich, the strong. Nor as calling home those whose day's work is done, who have lived their life, and to whom eventide has long ago arrived; but as cutting ruthlessly down the dear young children in the very blossom of their days. Nor as ridding the earth of the cruel and vile; but tearing from us the innocent, the children. Nor are vigour, strength, and promise any more a defence against him than decrepit old age; for "the young men" are his victims even as others. And no multitude of slain will satiate him. Ver. 22 represents the numbers of the dead as so great that they have to be left unburied and uncared for to rot upon the open field. It is true that this frightful picture is taken from the awful experiences of a besieged city, but with slight modifications it is true everywhere and always. This life is the carnival of Death. What are men but a long succession of mourners? As the poet says—

> "Our hearts like muffled drums are beating
> Funeral marches to the grave."

And when we contemplate the cruel consequences of this carnival of Death, which is going on still, the mind and heart reel, and faith in the fatherhood of God would fade utterly out of men's souls were it not that in brighter colours still the Word of God portrays—

II. DEATH'S CONQUEROR. *Christ* has abolished death. The broken pillar, the turned-down torch, the "Vale, vale, in æternum vale," of the old pagan world, have now no appropriateness because no truth. Death is sorrow still, even to those who believe in him who is "the Resurrection and the Life;" but it is not and cannot be that hopeless, unutterable, unfathomable woe which it was till he came who hath abolished death. No doubt this terrible verse (ver. 21), which tells of Death's dread doings, is yet far more true than we would like it to be, and often and often, in the blank desolation and shattered hopes which earth's bereavements bring to us, we fail to derive all the consolation and help which Death's glorious Conqueror has given to us. But, never-

theless, he has given them, and it is true that "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." Let us see to it that we are, by a living abiding trust, "in the Lord," and then, though we sorrow, and sorrow bitterly still, yet it will not be, it is not, "as those that have no hope."—C.

Vers. 23—26.—"*Whereof to glory.*" Introduction. Cannot understand these prophecies without a knowledge of the history of the times. This is true of all prophecies, and especially of these. Therefore we will glance at such history as we proceed. Note—

I. THE GLORYING THAT IS CONDEMNED. 1. That of the wise man in his *wisdom.* The statesmen of Jeremiah's days had been thus glorying. They had prided themselves in their political sagacity. For many years they had formed alliances, now with one power and now with another. And they seemed to have managed well, for, for nearly a whole century, Judah had been, though so weak a power and so valuable a prize, left unattacked. Therefore no wonder that the wise men gloried in their wisdom. But now political trouble was beginning again. Egypt had become a great power, and was warring against Assyria. In this war the king Josiah sided with Assyria, and was slain in the battle of Megiddo. Thus they were without their king, and compelled to ally themselves with Egypt and to share in her fortunes, which to the eye of the prophet were the reverse of bright. Great troubles were drawing near, and it is in view of them that Jeremiah says, "Let not the wise man," etc. 2. The strong in their *strength.* The army of Judah was large, their fortress of Jerusalem was all but impregnable, but Jeremiah saw that all this would not avail. Their utter overthrow was fast hastening on. The great Babylonian power which had absorbed the Assyrian should accomplish this. Hence the word, "Let not the strong man," etc. 3. The rich in their *riches.* The long continuance of peace had enabled the nation to accumulate vast wealth. But this only made them yet more an object of desire to their approaching invaders. Their wealth was their woe. 4. The children of Abraham *in the covenant, of which circumcision was the sign* (vers. 25, 26). From the time of Hezekiah's reformation until the time when Jeremiah wrote, Judah and Jerusalem had professed the ancient faith. The temple service had gone on, the sacrifices offered, etc. There had been a short, sad interval during Manasseh's reign. But so far as profession went they had been worshippers of God. And of late years Josiah's reformation had led to still louder profession. And in this profession we know they trusted very implicitly (cf. ch. vii.). But it had not preserved them from the Divine displeasure in days gone by, nor in the present, nor would it in days to come. For beneath all this profession the moral and spiritual condition of the nation was most evil. Even in Hezekiah's day Isaiah had told the people that, in spite of all their profession, "the whole head was sick," etc. (cf. Isa. i.). And that this was so was shown by the readiness with which they followed Manasseh in his idolatries, and joined in the persecution of the faithful servants of God. And when Manasseh repented, and there was again an external profession, it was scarcely any better. But the monstrous conduct of Amon, who "sinned more and more," made the people desire the old ways. Hence, when Josiah came to the throne, they were prepared for his reforms. But again it was only a change of custom, not of character; outward, but not inward. Jeremiah sought to help forward a true reformation, for it was indeed needed (see his description of the moral condition of the people, vers. 2—8 in this chapter). Hence it was that he told them their circumcision was no better than uncircumcision. *Apply all this* to ourselves: (1) *As a nation.* We have all these several advantages above named: wise statesmen, great strength, vast wealth, universal religious profession; but all these, apart from moral and spiritual worth, will go for nothing. It is "righteousness," and that alone, that "exalteth a nation." (2) *As individuals.* We are not to despise any of these things. They are God's good gifts; but they will not save us. We may not glory in them as a sure safeguard.

II. WHEREOF WE MAY AND SHOULD GLORY. (Cf. ver. 24.) This means that there should be: 1. *Intellectual apprehension* of the truth in regard to God. His character is shown: (1) In his exercise of loving-kindness. It is well to be open-eyed to the many and varied proofs of this—in creation, providence, redemption, grace. And it is well to be able to trace these proofs and to show that God is good. (2) In his exercising judgment. He has given proofs of this also, and that is but a partial and therefore

most misleading theology that shuts out of view the sterner aspects of the Divine Father. As in Christ we see most of all how God exercises loving-kindness, so too in him we may see the sure warnings of his judgment. "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where," etc.? (3) In his exercise of righteousness. How full the proofs of this also! How manifest in Christ, his teachings, life, death, his Spirit's work now, etc.! Now, it is most desirable to understand all this, for the mind to grasp these sure truths. Too much of the religiousness of the day is weak, flaccid, unstable, because there is wanting knowledge and understanding in the truth. We are apt to be satisfied with an emotional religion, with the play of feeling and the outgoing of the affections. But for all this to be reliable we must *understand* as well as feel. 2. In that he "knoweth" as well as understandeth. This is more than to understand. For "to know" continually means, in Bible language, to approve, to be in sympathy with, to delight in, etc. (cf. "I will not know a wicked person;" "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous;" "This is life eternal, to know thee the only," etc.). And so here to know God is to have moral sympathy, personal experience, inward approval and delight in regard to God. Now, he who thus understandeth and knoweth God hath "whereof to glory." The prophet desired that his people might have this glorying, for this would save them, whilst all the other things in which they gloried but left them to perish. Appeal to all who profess religion and who instruct others. Can you thus glory? Do you understand? Better still, Do you *know* God in his loving-kindness, judgment, righteousness?—C.

Vers. 23, 24.—*The chief good.* The people had little reason to glory in their wisdom, or power, or wealth. These natural resources had utterly failed them as a safeguard against the avenger and destroyer. The prophet directs them to an infinitely surer ground of trust, a higher cause of rejoicing. These words are a striking appeal to faith, all the more remarkable because of the desperate circumstances of the time. In spite of all the desolation of the land, the wreck and ruin of all their pride as a nation, let them hold fast to their faith in the living God, and especially in those attributes of his being and principles of his government—loving-kindness, judgment, righteousness—which such circumstances tend to obscure and seem even to disprove. We fix our minds now simply on this thought—*the knowledge of God and personal fellowship with him are immeasurably more worth our seeking and rejoicing in than all those endowments which to the carnal eye are so full of charm.* There is a natural tendency in men to rejoice unduly in the good that they derive by birth, or education, or the favour of providence, forgetting that the *chief good* is something of a different kind, something that must come to them in a different way. Nothing that tends to enrich and adorn and gladden our life in this world is to be despised; but if we measure things by a true standard, and esteem them according to their real and relative value, we shall place everything else that men call good or great beneath that which connects us directly with God and heaven and immortality. Note respecting this higher good—

I. IT IS MORE TRULY OUR OWN THAN ANYTHING ELSE CAN EVER BE. This is seen if we consider: 1. *The way in which it becomes ours.* The surface acquirements and adornments of life—wealth, social position, favourable circumstances, etc., cannot be called "ours" in the sense in which that which is an inherent element of our individuality is ours. And even as regards personal qualities, there are important differences. Whatever natural gifts belong to us, our own will has had nothing to do with our possession of them. Their development may be dependent on it, but in their origin they are not so. Whereas the affections that connect us with God tell how the deepest depths of our being were stirred at their birth within us. Nothing so truly ours as that which has thus become ours. 2. *The absolute satisfaction it brings.* All the "springs of our being" are in God. He is the true Home and blissful Centre of rest for every human spirit. "The good man is satisfied from himself" (Prov. xiv. 14), not because of anything in the resources of his own finite being, but because he has learnt by the utter renunciation of all trust in these to find his true "self" in God. 3. *Its perpetuity.* We may soon be bereft of all other endowments; this we can never lose. There is no possession over which a man can rejoice in this world which is not precarious and uncertain. And though the sense of this need not check our free use

and hearty enjoyment of it, it will always cast some slight shadow over the sunshine of our delight. But there is no shadow here, no sense of insecurity, no fear of disappointment. Have your soul in conscious fellowship with God, and you may rest in the thought that "nothing shall ever be able to separate you from his love" (Rom. viii. 38, 39). "This is life eternal," etc. (John xvii. 3). "The water that I shall give him shall be in him," etc. (John iv. 14).

II. UNLIKE OTHER FORMS OF GOOD, IT IS INCAPABLE OF ABUSE. What natural gift is there that men may not turn, and have not actually turned, to some purpose contrary to that for which it was given? The false use grows, not so much out of any quality or tendency in the thing itself, as out of the innate perversity of our human nature. And there is nothing in the thing itself, or in the fact of our possessing it, that necessarily acts as a cure for that perversity. Intellectual capacity, genius, literary culture, rank, wealth, etc.,—how often have these been allied with moral corruption, and given their possessors the ability to inflict incalculable mischief on the human race? The graces of holy character which spring from fellowship with God cannot, in the nature of things, be thus abused. You cannot conceive of their being prostituted to evil ends. They bear within them the pledge of their Divine use and issue.

III. IT ENABLES US, AS NOTHING ELSE CAN, TO APPRECIATE ALL THAT IS TRUE AND GOOD IN THIS PRESENT WORLD. You must know God before you can rightly understand and realize the highest profit of the world in which he has placed you. There are two popular errors in this direction—one is the error of supposing that the apprehension of the truth of nature depends solely on mental capacity and scientific investigation. Does not the inability of some of the most illustrious thinkers of every age to find out the Divine in nature, rather show that it is more a question of spiritual sympathy than of intellectual power? The other error is that of supposing that the power to procure the good of this life is the same thing as the power to enjoy it. And yet how many pampered children of wealth and fashion are there who bear upon their faces the marks of weariness and discontent! Their souls are withered by excessive physical indulgence and artificial culture. They have lost the capacity of pure and simple enjoyment, and childlike wonder and delight are things to them unknown. Let your spirit be in fellowship with God, let your "heart be set to hallow all you find," and the deepest treasures of truth and the sweetest satisfactions of life are within your reach. God has made purity of heart the condition, not only of knowing himself, but of knowing the best of his gifts. It both creates and verifies—

> "The cheerful faith that all which we behold
> Is full of blessing."

"Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. vi. 6). "Blessed are the meek," etc. (Matt. v. 5). "All things are yours," etc. (1 Cor. iii. 21—23).

IV. IT GIVES US THE POWER TO CONFER HIGHEST BENEFIT ON OUR FELLOW-CREATURES. We are disposed sometimes to envy the talents, the range of influence, the means of usefulness, that others possess. It seems a grand thing to us to be in certain commanding positions, and have resources that may be used at pleasure for the working out of certain desired ends. Remember, however, that what can alone give worth to these things are precisely those personal, moral qualities that are within the reach of all. The influence of godly character is deeper, more radical, more productive of enduring fruits of blessedness than any other kind of influence. Who would not rejoice in the power to confer this highest good upon the world?—W.

Ver. 1.—*Incessant weeping over the calamities of Israel.* We have here *still another measure* of how great, in the estimation of the prophet, the calamity was which had fallen upon his people. Other measures have already been given, in the despoiling of the tombs (ch. viii. 1, 2), in the exile worse than death (ch. viii. 3), in the visitation of serpents which were beyond the charmer's power (ch. viii. 17), and in the suffering through the sin of his people, which even a true servant of God could not escape (ch. viii. 21). And now this extraordinary desire of the prophet comes in to make plain from yet another direction how great he reckoned the impending calamity to be. We may well imagine that as he set before Jerusalem these gloomy prospects, the people in their light-heartedness replied, "Why make all this ado? Why try thus to alarm

us by these threatenings and cries and tears?" The exclamation of ver. 1 guides us to what the prophet's answer would be. "My tears, which you count so causeless, rather fall short—short beyond all expressing—of the occasion for them." The fact is that the deepest, tenderest human pity and sorrow, when compared with the actual needs of fallen man, are but as a slight thaw that vainly struggles with the penetrating frost of the heart. Not that human beings lack the power of deep emotion. Whole peoples will be responsive enough to certain touches. But who is to bring before the hearts of all men a sufficient perception of what it is that underlies and perpetuates the misery of the whole world? The thing wanted is an abiding pity for men lying in the suffering of sin. It is perfectly true that there is not pity enough for men because of their poverty, their bodily defects and infirmities, and all miseries that are visible to the natural man. But the real reason why even this pity falls so lamentably short is that there is no searching consideration of what lies deeper than any visible miseries. *Nothing effectual* can be done with the *seen* unless the *unseen* is put right. Then we may be sure of it that the seen will come right with wonderful quickness and stability. We must make our hearts to dwell with the utmost pity on those who are not yet born again, not yet living the life of faith, not yet in living union with the great Source of eternal life, not yet rejoicing with the joy of the Holy Ghost. If we ourselves are really in process of salvation, and with our increased knowledge of truth comprehending more and more what salvation will bring with it for ourselves, then it will not appear to us extravagant and rhapsodical rhetoric that a prophet should wish his head to be waters, and his eyes a fountain of tears. It is unmanly and utterly despicable to weep for trifles, to weep over some spoiled gratification of self; but what sort of a heart must that man have who can watch, free from the deepest agitation, his brethren going on heedlessly into perdition? Jeremiah would have been unworthy of his call and his visions as a prophet if he had fallen short of his exclamation here. Not, of course, that we are to make too much of *the mere shedding of tears*. In the case of the prophet copious tears were the index of a heart within right in its thoughts, steady in its purposes. But there are many instances where copious tears have no such value. They come and go like a thunder-shower, lasting us briefly and leaving as little trace behind. Men of few tears may be men of a large, wise, far-seeing kindness. He who never gives to beggars in the street may yet be doing much to make beggary cease altogether. Jeremiah's wish, then, was the wish of a man who saw deeply into the confusions of his time; and yet he did not see as deep as Jesus. Those few tears that Jesus dropped amid the bereaving agonies of Bethany, had in them more of a pure and profound pity over men than all the tears that sinners themselves have shed. No sinful man can imagine that ideal of human life which was ever before the eyes of the Son of God. He alone knows how far man has fallen; he alone knows how high fallen man can be raised. He sees what men miss who do not repent and believe in him. He sees what possibilities of remorse and shame and self-condemnation may be opening up in eternity to the negligent and the impenitent. What wonder, then, that he spoke of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched! What tears must not be shed over those who choose to sow the wind, seemingly forgetting that they must reap the whirlwind!—Y.

Ver. 2.—*The lodging-place in the wilderness.* I. WHAT IT IS THE PROPHET WISHES FOR. The occurrence of the word "wilderness" may easily mislead us into thinking that the prophet's wish was for solitude, and thus we may be disposed to reproach him, as if, Timon-like, he wanted to get away from his fellow-men altogether. But it is not on the word "wilderness" that we must fix our attention to discover the prophet's feeling. The reference to a traveller's lodging-place is the main thing to be considered. It is not between some hermit's humble, solitary shelter and the well-built house, which is but one out of many making up the stately city, that the contrast is made, but rather between the inn of the traveller and the abode of the man who, day after day, has to mingle busily in the society of which he forms a part. If you are staying at an inn for the night, it matters very little, so far as acquaintance is concerned, who your fellow-guests may be. You scarcely meet them; you are in their company for a few hours, and on the morrow each takes his several way. Jeremiah prefers to live in an inn, where he would see a succession of strange faces, to living even amongst his own people.

Then that the inn should be in a wilderness was a sort of necessity, to round his wish off and make it perfectly express the state of his mind. Travellers had often wide stretches of wilderness-land to cross, where, just because it was wilderness, some sort of shelter needed to be provided for the night. But it might not be an inn in anything like our understanding of the word—perhaps nothing more than a rough enclosure, where only that was provided which the bare necessities of the moment demanded.

II. WHY THE PROPHET WISHES FOR THIS. The settled society in which the prophet has been living has become rotten in all its important relations. Jeremiah has a people whom he must describe as "my people." He is connected with them by a tie of nature which no repugnance of his can destroy. But, though they are his people, that cannot make him to overlook, excuse, or tolerate their iniquities. Nay, the very fact that they are his people helps to make the iniquity more burdensome to him; for with one's own people one has so much to do. A righteous son of Sodom, if such a character were imaginable, sickened with all the abominations around him, might well have left his kinsfolk, if they would not listen to his warning or profit by his refusal to join in their wrong-doing. And Jeremiah may be looked on here pretty much as if he had been a dweller in Sodom, for Jerusalem was spiritually Sodom. Adultery, knavery, habitual lying and wrong-doing,—these were sad elements to be charged as going to the substance of the social life of the people. And the prophet wished to be free from all entanglement with such. Of course we are not to take his wish literally. It is but an emphatic way of indicating how separated he was in the spirit of his mind from such considerations as ruled in only too many hearts of Israel. Though among his people, he was not of them. United according to the flesh, there was a great gulf between them according to the spirit. His people though they were, he yet was compelled to look upon them as travellers whom he casually met just for a little time. And so must God's people ever learn to look upon many of those whom they are continually meeting on earth. *For enduring society* there must be something more than natural ties, frequent intercourse, or community of intellectual tastes and pursuits. It is a small thing to be brought together in the concerns of time if we are not also brought together in the concerns of eternity. Sad it is to think that there may be a closer bond between those who have never met on earth than between those who, on earth, have lived for years together! Those who are travelling to the same place may never meet by the way, but when they do meet it is not in the traveller's mere lodging-place, but where there are many *mansions*, and whence they "go out no more for ever." A mansion is itself a place that *abides*, and those who dwell in it are meant to *abide* also.—Y.

Ver. 3.—*Wickedness prevailing, and why it prevails.* "These wicked people," says the prophet, "prevail, but their prevailing does not come by truth and good faith."

I. WE HAVE HERE AN ADMISSION THAT WICKEDNESS PREVAILS. It is, indeed, one great consideration in the prophet's unutterable grief that wickedness is so strong and successful. Man, weak and puny as he is in some respects, is in others strong to achieve very impressive results. In mere physical strength there are many brutes that far excel him, but he has faculties which so multiply his strength as to put the rest of creation under his feet. That man, with his peculiar nature, should be strong to do good, means that if his choice so falls he may also be strong to do evil. The prophet looks out, then, upon wicked men who prevail in their plots and schemes. He has no wish to minimize their success. He uses a strong word to indicate it. The word used to indicate the prevailing of the waters at the Deluge is the word also used to indicate the prevailing of the wicked here. The wickedness is not only extensively present, but manifestly successful. There must be no shirking of this fact. It is another matter, indeed, what the success may be worth, and how long it may last; but there it is, such as it is. The wicked prevail by putting the good into prison, and even to the taking away of their lives. They prevail by seducing the weak and self-indulgent into temptation. They prevail by deceiving the simple. They go upon the maxim that everything is fair, and has in it the highest necessity if it helps toward the attainment of their ends. And their ends they do attain, making a boast of their success, and sneering at the scrupulosity of those who will not follow in their steps.

II. THE INSTABILITY OF THIS PREVAILING IS HINTED AT. Integrity, truth, good

faith, are thrown to the winds. The prophet does not need to have extorted from him an admission that the wicked prevail; but along with the admission he makes an assertion which, even in the midst of his melancholy, gives him confidence and a measure of satisfaction. This prevailing, great and proud as it is, cannot last, for it lacks the essential constituents of endurance. The man who gains his ends by deceit and perfidy must of necessity deceive himself as much as he does others. He persuades himself that he will never grow weary of what he so much enjoys. He forgets, too, that every one whom he deceives may be thereby learning a lesson which some day may come back in unexpected and terrible treachery to himself. There is not a single instance of wicked prosperity that need alarm or perplex us. The more wickedness raises its head in boasting, the more sudden may be the final overthrow.

III. THOSE WHO CLEAVE TO TRUTH ALWAYS PREVAIL IN THE END. They do it by the best kind of prevailing—that of vanquishing the evil in their own hearts; and, so far as their overcoming is also an overcoming of others, they do it in such a way as provokes no retaliation. He who has a settled regard for what is real and true and abiding, keeps out of his future those very things which bring confusion to the wicked. The prevailing of the righteous may not, indeed, be exhibited so as to impress the eyes of the world; but that is a small matter. He who overcometh looks forward to God's rewards, which are such that the world cannot appreciate them. The great thing is to be calmly conscious in our own breasts that we are winning the victory God would have us win.—Y.

Vers. 4—8.—*The social bond a rope of sand.* This is very strong language for a man to use concerning the society in which he lives, but it harmonizes with the strength of the language which the prophet has been using with respect to himself in vers. 1, 2. A very bad state of things cannot be described by mild words. Such descriptions as that in this passage make plain how just and necessary the impending desolation of Jerusalem was. He who has just expressed such wishes for himself must speak with words that startle when he comes to counsel all who, in the midst of many perils, would wish to act prudently.

I. THERE IS AN IMPLICATION HERE AS TO WHAT SOCIETY IN ISRAEL MIGHT HAVE BEEN. Without looking for perfection, it was reasonable to expect something a great deal better than what the prophet saw. *There is the strength and help coming from real friendship.* The more men are brought together the more chances they have of making most precious friendships. Modern facilities of intercourse have probably done much to enlarge such relations. Men meet oftener and communicate more easily than they were once able to do. But it ought to be especially true of those living near one another that neighbourhood and acquaintance, other things being equal, should lead on to friendship. The claim of friendship is recognized as something special—beyond the claim of kindred, humanity, and common country. In time of trouble we look to friends as those to whom we have a right to look, and we must be ready for similar claims upon ourselves. The prophet indicates also *the claim of brotherhood.* Brother should help brother. Not, of course, that mere natural nearness can compensate for deeper differences of disposition and temperament; but the remembrance of a common parentage should have at least the negative effect of destroying all temptation to injure. Then there is *general integrity in all dealings between man and man.* It is one of the most reasonable of all expectations that we shall so live and act that our word shall be as good as our bond. That which is fair and just towards every one should be wished and provided for. The good name of each should be the care of all.

II. THERE IS A VERY BOLD STATEMENT AS TO WHAT THE SOCIETY IN ISRAEL ACTUALLY WAS. The man who could speak thus must have been a man of great courage—a man into whom God had put a spirit of resolution agreeing with the words he had to speak. Stern, unsparing words are only belied and made to look ridiculous when uttered by a faltering lip. If the prophet's words here were true, this was a society only in name. Some may say that such words could not be true—that things could not possibly be so bad. But, remember, these are the words of a prophet of God, and God is he who searches the heart and can tell exactly how far advanced in corruption a society is at any particular time. Note how a skilled physician will assert the existence of mortal mischief in a patient when as yet there is no sign of it to others, and also

predict with tolerable correctness how long it will take the mischief to run its course. And shall not God be much more discerning? All doleful statements as to the rottenness of society have come to be called jeremiads, as if they were really in the same class as the statement of Jeremiah here. But very often such doleful statements are only the result of ignorance and partial views, coming from a defect in him who sees and not in the thing seen. Jeremiah stated the simple truth here. If there had been hopeful signs they would have been mentioned, for God never lacks in an encouraging recognition of the preservative elements in society. To one who notes the warnings of Isaiah it will be nothing wonderful that the evils perceptible in his time should have strengthened into the deplorable universality indicated here. And even now, in places where the outward signs of Christianity abound, there are proofs that society might, in no very long time, approach the description of Jeremiah. The same evils are continually present, though kept in check. No one trusts a stranger. He must first of all take the lowest place, and do such things as need the least amount of trust, and so gradually work himself into the highest place of esteem. No one complains that he cannot win confidence at the first. Family jars and disputings are proverbial. Jesus, we know, divides brother against brother; but it is nothing new that he thus brings into society, for Jacob is the supplanter of Esau, and brother complains against brother to this very Jesus, because he thinks himself defrauded of his rights in the inheritance. There were two couples of natural brethren in the company of the apostles, and in their carnal days they were found hotly embroiled in the dispute as to who should stand greatest in the kingdom. There are abundant seeds of evil in society which are mercifully prevented from having free scope, else the result might soon show us that Jeremiah was in no wise going beyond the essential truth in what is said here.—Y.

Vers. 23, 24.—*Exultation of heart and life according to the will of God.* I. MAN IS SET BEFORE US HERE AS BEING IN A STATE OF VERY LIVELY EMOTION. He is spoken of as glorying; and the Hebrew word used is such as suggests the idea of a man, not only intensely pleased within his own breast, but whose pleasure, like heat bursting into flame, finds vent in words and songs of exultation. The glory and exultation felt by the mind within may appear in many ways—in the face, in the gestures, in the speech; but the prophet indicates here the highest kind of expression, that of poetic and musical utterance. Genius comes in to render permanent certain experiences of exultation, the record of which would otherwise speedily pass away. There is thus set before us a certain state of mind and a certain expression of it. And be it observed that this state of mind is not condemned in itself; nay, it is rather invited and encouraged. It is only condemned when it is produced by a wrong consideration of the objects exciting it, and there is a plain direction how to produce it in the right way. Hence we see how God intends man to be raised into great activity of emotion. It is a wicked thing to repress and starve the feelings. Some there are who act as if the expression of emotion were a thing to be ashamed of; they seem to think they are doing a good work in trying to kill everything like living feeling within them. Now, it is perfectly certain that God would encourage everything which gives the emotions a large part to play in human life, and particularly the joyful emotions. Notice, for it is an interesting thing to notice, how it is Jeremiah, the weeping prophet as he is called, who here points out to his erring brethren the way to the best sort of exultation. The truth is that Jeremiah was a rejoicing believer as well as a weeping prophet. He wept over Jerusalem, as did the greater One who came long after; but it is plain that he must also have had deep joys in his own soul, even as Jesus had. God wishes us to cultivate the singing, exultant heart; for that we all may have, even when we lack the singing lip. We are to have much grief and pity, continual sorrow of heart, because of the world's sins, but it argues a great lack and a great loss if we have not much joy because of God's salvation. The exultation which comes from a selfish use of the world and a selfish success must be put away; but only that another and purer kind of exultation may take its place.

II. THE WARNING LEST THIS EXULTATION, WITH THE CONSEQUENT EXPRESSION OF IT, SHOULD BE PRODUCED IN A WRONG WAY. Three classes are spoken of—the wise, the strong, the rich. Wise and strong by natural endowments; rich by the acquirement of visible, tangible possessions. And wise, strong, and rich men may rejoice and boast

and sing when, perhaps, their feelings should rather tend to the other extreme, of mourning and humiliation. A word on the warning to each of these classes. 1. *The wise.* The existence of the wise man is recognized. A wise man is not of necessity to be always contrasted with the foolish. He has a right to the name of wise if his practical faculties of mind rise above the common level. When such a one has shown himself foreseeing and cautious, patient to wait when action would be hurtful, yet prompt to decide when decision is necessary—when, in short, he has obtained a general reputation for wisdom—it is then only mock-modesty for him to pretend that his gifts are not beyond those of common men. Wisdom is the strength of the mind, and the man who has it cannot be unconscious of it, any more than the man strong in body can be unconscious of his strength. But this wisdom, while it is to be used, disciplined, made the most of, is not a thing to glory in. The more it is looked at, the more its limits will be seen. See how easily it can be misused. It was said of Burke that he gave up to party what was meant for mankind, although he would strenuously have maintained that, through party, he got his best means for serving mankind. But of many it is only too true that their great faculties of intellect, meant for the good of men and the glory of God, have been deliberately given up to that which hurts men. Wisdom, as wisdom, is not to be gloried in. It must be an instrument in a higher hand before it can work out such a result as will fill the contemplating mind with exultation and praise. 2. *The strong.* How much men admire strength—strength of body, or strength to maintain and carry out some settled purpose! The young men who contended in the Grecian games gloried in their strength, and so did their kinsfolk and all the people who took pride in the land that produced such. And yet glorying of this sort would not bear reflection. Assuredly it could not endure in a renewed mind to think that the prize of victory had been gotten by the defeat and humiliation of a brother man. Glorying in strength means looking back on victories of brute violence, such victories as Goliath was wont to rejoice in. Glorying in strength means sitting down at the banquet with the blood-stained conqueror, and singing of his achievements amid the flush and insolence of wine. And it means also the encouragement and the formation of similar hopes and purposes for the future. Such feelings of glorying in mere strength the beast of prey may have as he goes up and down in the forest, but they are not the feelings of a man considering the possible range of his thoughts and aspirations. A strong man must employ his strength usefully, recollecting that it was given so that, with a devout and obedient mind in a strong body, he might serve God in his day and generation. 3. *The rich.* Rich men glory in their wealth, and not without plausibility. They find that it stands excellently well in the place of wisdom and strength. They can buy the wisdom and the strength of others; and the more freely they expend, the more also, in certain ways, they obtain. He who professes to despise wealth never gets credit for sincerity; and yet it is perfectly certain that those who profess to glory in this same wealth are preparing for themselves, in one way or another, a terrible humiliation. Let them lose their wealth, and they will waken to the discovery that they have also lost their attractions. There is more to be said for glorying in one's wisdom and strength than in one's external possessions; for the wisdom and strength, whatever their shortcomings, are really a part of the man, while the external possessions are little better than an accident.

III. MAN IS DIRECTED TO A CAUSE OF EXULTATION WHICH, WITH THE UTMOST CONFIDENCE, HE MAY ALLOW TO OPERATE FREELY ON HIS MIND. There is a song for man to sing worthy of his highest powers—a song in which he may glory with respect to himself, because he has become somewhat of that which he ought to be. We are not allowed to sing exultingly and proudly of our own natural powers, even if they were the powers of a Plato, a Shakespeare, or a Newton; but there is a sure standing-place for us to exult lawfully in *what we have become.* The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than the greatest born of women. We may always magnify humanity when we see one of ourselves coming to a true knowledge of God. The peculiar possibility of glory to man is that he is able to know his Maker. *Understand* and *know.* Surely these words mean a great deal; one can hardly put too much of meaning and encouragement into them. Through Isaiah, Jehovah said, "The *ox* knoweth his owner, and the *ass* his master's crib: but *Israel* doth not know, my people doth not consider." And yet, if Israel will only consider and turn, it is capable

of knowing God as no brute, however docile, attentive, and faithful it be, can ever come to know its master. The brute gives to its master a brute's recognition; it does the utmost its faculties enable it to do; but in coming to man we come to one who can be so altered as to know God even as a child knows its father. The true glory of the worst of men is that *he can be regenerated.* The glory of the best of men is that *he has been regenerated.* The great end to be aimed at is that every man should exult in his having been made *a partaker of the Divine nature.* The more he thinks of his Saviour, the more he will glory in this—that he, in spite of all his spiritual ignorance and blindness, has had in him a power to be so renewed and uplifted; that he has become one of the exceeding great multitude, who owe eternal blessedness to the work of Christ. To speak of the possibility of such glorying as comes from the knowledge of God was a great matter in relation to these children of Israel. They had fallen into the most appalling errors as to the character and disposition of deity. They had come to have gods many—gods who were the patrons of cruelty, rapacity, tyranny, injustice, lust, and covetousness. They had to practise, as a matter of religion, things opposed to those very things in which Jehovah here represents himself as delighting. What was required from them, therefore, was to listen humbly and attentively to those prophetic expostulations which pointed towards light, truth, redemption, and a new song to be put in their mouths by Jehovah himself. And a similar way is to be ours if we would be sure of glorying in the Lord. The way of God in this matter is by the truth as it is in Jesus, and into that way God's Spirit must lead us, and keep us in it even to the end, amid all the difficulties arising from the natural pride of human hearts.—**Y.**

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER X.

Whoever wrote the prophecy in vers. 1—16 of this chapter, it was not Jeremiah; but of course, as the passage forms part of a canonical book, its claims to the character of a Scripture remain the same as if it were the work of our prophet. It is obvious at the very outset that it interrupts the connection; vers. 17—25 stand in no relation to vers. 1—16, but attach themselves most naturally (see below) to the concluding verses of ch. ix. The author tells us himself, as clearly as he can, that the people whom he addresses are free as yet (or at any rate have freed themselves) from the guilt of idolatry, and consequently cannot be the same as those who are so severely chastised for their polytheism in ch. vii. 17, 18, 30, 31. The style too is, on the whole, very different from that of the writer of the preceding chapters (see the details in the introduction to this passage in the Commentary of Naegelsbach). But how can we account for such an insertion? Only by the view already mentioned (supported by a large number of facts throughout the prophetic literature), that the prophecies were edited, and here and there supplemented by the "sons of the prophets" (if the term may be applied in a new sense), *i.e.* by persons providentially raised up for this purpose, and endowed with at least a younger son's portion of the prophetic Spirit. In the times of the editor of Jeremiah, to whom we owe the first sixteen verses of this chapter, the Jews must have been in danger of falling into idolatry, and our prophet, guided by the Divine Spirit, took up the pen to counteract this danger. His name has not come down to us; indeed, self-abnegation is the characteristic of inspired writers. How uncertain is the authorship of at any rate not a few of the psalms, and of all the historical books! And have we a right to be surprised that the prophets too, absorbed in their glorious mission, have sometimes forgotten to hand on their names to posterity? It is of course possible, in the abstract, that some fragments of the passage are really due to Jeremiah; but how are we to distinguish them from the rest? Hitzig thinks that vers. 6—8 and ver. 10 are the great prophet's work; but these are the very verses the origin of which is the most doubtful, since they are entirely omitted in the Septuagint. One thing is certain—that the passage vers. 1—16 stands in close relation to the latter part of the Book of Isaiah. The prophetic writer, whoever he

was, had his mind saturated with the ideas and phrascology of that magnificent work. The similarity, however, is hardly so close as to justify the view that Isa. xl.—lxvi. and ch. x. 1—16 are productions of the same inspired writer. [It is no objection to the theory here advocated that the passage is found in the Septuagint; for no one has ever supposed that the process of editing the Scriptures was not already long since finished when the Alexandrine Version, or rather collection of versions, was made.] It is a singular fact that ver. 11 is written in Chaldee (see note below).

Ver. 2.—**The way of the heathen.** "Way" equivalent to "religion" (comp. ὁδός, Acts ix. 2, etc.). **Be not dismayed at the signs of heaven**; alluding to the astrological calculations based upon extraordinary appearances in the sky. Diodorus Siculus remarks (ii. 30)—and his statement is fully confirmed by the Babylonian cuneiform tablets—that "the appearance of comets, eclipses of the sun and moon, earthquakes, and in fact every kind of change occasioned by the atmosphere, whether good or bad, both to nations and to kings and private individuals [were omens of future events]." A catalogue of the seventy standard astrological tablets is to be found in the third volume of the British Museum collection of inscriptions. Among the items we read, "A collection of twenty-five tablets of the signs of heaven and earth, according to their good presage and their bad;" and again, "Tablets [regarding] the signs of the heaven, along with the star (comet) which has a corona in front and a tail behind; the appearance of the sky," etc. There can hardly be a doubt that the prophetic writer had such pseudo-science as this in his eye (see Professor Sayce, 'The Astronomy and Astrology of the Babylonians, with translations of the tablets,' etc., in the *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archæology*, iii. 145—339).

Ver. 3.—**The customs of the people.** "People" should, as usual, be corrected into *peoples*—the heathen nations are referred to. The Hebrew has "the statutes;" but the Authorized Version is substantially right, customs having a force as of iron in Eastern countries. It seems to be implied that the "customs" are of religious origin (comp. 2 Kings xvii. 8, where "the statutes of the heathen" are obviously the rites and customs of polytheism. **For one cutteth a tree**, etc. This is intended to prove the foregoing statement of the "vanity," or groundlessness, of idolatry. The order of the Hebrew, however, is more forcible, *for as wood out of the forest one cutteth it*, viz. the idol.

Ver. 4.—**They deck it . . . that it move not.** The close resemblance of this verse to Isa. xl. 19, 20; xli. 7, will strike every reader. "Move" should rather be *totter*.

Ver. 5.—**They are upright as the palm tree**; rather, *they are like a pillar* (i.e. *a scarecrow*) *in a field of cucumbers*. This is the interpretation given to our passage in ver. 70 of the apocryphal Epistle of Jeremiah (written in the Maccabean period, evidently with reference to our prophecy), and is much more striking than the rival translation, "like a palm tree of turned work," *i.e.* stiff, immovable (comp. Virgil, 'Georg.,' iv. 110, 111; Horace, 'Sat.,' i. 8, 1—4). **They must needs be borne . . . they cannot do evil**; a reminiscence, apparently, of Isa. xlvi. 7; xli. 23.

Ver. 6.—**Forasmuch as there is none**; rather, *so that*, etc. But practically it is merely a strengthened negative. There is **none like unto thee**; none, that is, among those who claim to have Divine power (comp. the phrase, "God of gods," Deut. x. 17; Ps. cxxxvi. 2). It would appear from some passages, however, as if the heathen did not worship mere nonentities (though idols are sometimes called "things of nought," *e.g.* ten times by Isaiah) by comparison with Jehovah, but that there was a dark background of awful personal or quasi-personal reality (*e.g.* Deut. iv. 7; 2 Chron. xxviii. 23).

Ver. 7.—**O King of nations.** As time went on, the sacred writers became more and more distinct in their assertions of the truth that Jehovah, the Self-revealing God, is not Israel's King only, but also of the world (comp. Ps. xxii. 28; xlvii. 7, 8; xcvi. 10). **To thee doth it appertain**; viz. that men should fear thee. **Forasmuch as**, etc. (see above, on ver. 6). **Among all the wise men.** "Men" is supplied, but doubtless rightly. It is a contest—how unequal a one!—between Jehovah and the sages of the heathen (comp. "Yet he also is wise," Isa. xxxi. 2).

Ver. 8.—**Brutish and foolish.** In fact, the original meaning of the idolatrous religions had begun, probably, to fade, and the worship of Bel and Nebo had become (as the worship of the Egyptian gods became at a later period) increasingly formal and ritualistic. **The stock is a doctrine of vanities**; rather, *an instruction of vanities*; i.e. all that the idols can teach is vanities. Against this is the plural ("vanities," not "vanity"); it is more natural (and also more in accordance with usage; comp. Gen. xli. 26, Hebrew) to render, *the instruction of the vanities is wooden* ("vanities" has the constant technical sense of "idols;" see ch. viii. 19; xiv. 22; Deut. xxxii. 21; Ps. xxxi. 6). The clause then furnishes a reason for the

folly of the heathen; how should they attain to more than a "wooden" knowledge, when the idols themselves are but wood? A bitter truth in an ironical form.

Ver. 9.—This verse apparently once followed ver. 5. Like vers. 7 and 8, it is omitted in the Septuagint. **Silver spread into plates**, etc. The silver and gold were meant for the coating of the wooden image (comp. Isa. xxx. 22; xl. 19). **Tarshish**; *i.e.* Tartessus, in south-west Spain, between the two mouths of the Bætis, or Guadalquivir. **Gold from Uphaz.** A place bearing this name, or anything like it, is not known from other sources than the Old Testament writings; and hence a corruption of the text has naturally been suspected (Ophir into Uphaz). As, however, *r* and *z* are not easily confounded, either in the earlier or the later Hebrew characters, this view must be abandoned, though it has the authority of several ancient versions of this passage (including the Peshito and the Targum). The name occurs again in Dan. x. 5. The Peshito, moreover, curiously enough, translates *zāhāb mūfāz* in 1 Kings x. 18 (Authorized Version, "the best gold") by "gold from Ophir." **Blue and purple.** The Hebrew has no word, strictly speaking, for either "blue" or "purple." Both these words here used probably express colouring matter rather than colours (this is certain of the latter word, which properly designates a kind of mussel, the shell of which yielded dye). The first produced a violet purple, the second a reddish purple.

Ver. 10.—**The true God**; literally, *a God in truth*, the accusative of apposition being chosen instead of the usual genitive construction, to emphasize the idea of "truth."

Ver. 11.—**Thus shall ye say**, etc. This verse is, unlike the rest of the chapter, written in Chaldee, and greatly interrupts the connection. Whether it is a fragment of a Targum (or Chaldee paraphrase) representing a Hebrew verse really written by Jeremiah, or whether it is a marginal note by some scribe or reader which has found its way by accident into the text, cannot be positively determined. What is certain is that it is not in its right place, though it already stood here when the Septuagint Version of Jeremiah was made. To argue, with the 'Speaker's Commentary,' that the latter circumstance is decisive of the correctness of the passage in its present position, implies a view of the unchangeableness of the text in the early centuries which few leading scholars will admit.

Vers. 12—16.—Repeated with a slight variation in ch. li. 15—19.

Ver. 12.—**He hath made the earth**, etc. (comp. the frequent references to the Divine creatorship in the latter part of Isaiah (xl. 22; xlii. 5; xliv. 24; xlv. 12, 18; li. 13). **By his discretion**; rather, *by his understanding.*

Ver. 13.—**When he uttereth his voice**, etc. The phrase is difficult, but the Authorized Version probably gives the right sense. God's "voice" is the thunder (Ps. xxix. 3), which is accompanied by the gathering of heavy clouds ("His pavilion round about him," Ps. xviii. 11). **He causeth the vapours to ascend**, etc.; the storm-clouds coming up more and more thickly from the horizon. From this point the verse agrees with Ps. cxxxv. 7 (the psalm is full of such reminiscences, and is obviously very late). **Lightnings with rain**; rather, *for the rain.* The lightnings are, as it were, the heralds or attendants of the rain. **The wind out of his treasures**; a noble figure, used elsewhere of the snow and hail (Job xxxviii. 22), and of the waters of the sea (Ps. xxxiii. 7).

Ver. 14.—Before these natural miracles, all men, except those who have been enlightened by revelation, are *without knowledge* (so, and not in his knowledge, we ought to render); *i.e.* without insight into their origin and meaning (compare the overwhelming series of questions in the sublime theophany in Job, ch. xxxviii., xxxix.). **Every founder is confounded by**, etc.; rather, *every goldsmith is brought to shame by the graven image*; for how can the work which has needed all the resources of his skill deliver him?

Ver. 15.—The very essence of idols is **vanity**; they are unreal as "a breath;" they are, not so much **the work of errors** as a *work of mockery*, *i.e.* not *opus risu dignum*, but a work which rewards the efforts bestowed upon its production by disappointment.

Ver. 16.—**The portion of Jacob**; *i.e.* Jehovah. The phrase appears to have been coined at a lower level of religion, when every nation was supposed to have its own patron deity; just as the prophet says, ironically, to the fetish-worshippers of Israel, "Among the smooth stones of the stream is thy portion" (Isa. lvii. 5), and Moses, in Deuteronomy (iv. 19), speaks of the host of heaven as having been "divided [*i.e.* assigned] unto all nations under the whole heaven." But, of course, the phrase is susceptible of a high, spiritual application (comp. Ps. xvi. 5; cxlii. 5). God's people are, by their very conception, an ἐκλογή, chosen out by God, and choosing him, and not the world, for their portion. "Making the best of both worlds" is an object implicitly condemned by this consecrated phrase. **The former of all things.** How much more forcible is the original phrase: "... of the whole," *i.e.* the universe! "To form" is a phrase constantly used of God in the second part of Isaiah. **The rod of his**

inheritance. "Rod" should rather be *tribe*. The twelve tribes had an inner unity, as contrasted with other peoples; comp. Ps. lxxiv. 2 and Isa. lxiii. 17 ("tribes").

Vers. 17—22.—This passage connects itself immediately with ch. ix., where the invasion of Judah and the dispersion of its inhabitants have been foretold. Here, after describing dramatically the departure of the latter into exile, the prophet reports a distinct revelation of the same fact, so that this can no longer be assumed to be mere imaginative rhetoric. The Jewish people is then introduced, lamenting her sad fate, but expressing resignation.

Ver. 17.—**Gather up thy wares.** "Wares" should rather be *bundle*. There is no allusion to trafficking. **O inhabitant of the fortress**; rather, *thou that dwellest besieged*.

Ver. 18.—**I will sling out**; a forcible image, to express the violence of the expulsion; comp. Isa. xxii. 17, 18 (ver. 17 needs correcting). **At this once**; rather, *at this time* (comp. ch. xvi. 21). Invasion was no novelty to the Jews, but had hitherto merely produced loss of goods rather than of personal liberty. **That they may find it so**; better, *that they may feel it*. Others supply as the subject "Jehovah," comparing Ps. xxxii. 6, "In a time of finding" (Authorized Version, "When thou mayest be found"). Jeremiah himself says, "Ye shall seek me, and shall find, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (ch. xxix. 13 = Deut. iv. 29). Still, these passages are hardly quite parallel, as the object of the verb can be easily supplied from the connection. The Vulgate apparently reads the text with different vowels, for it renders *ut inveniantur*; the Septuagint has "that thy stroke may be found."

Ver. 19.—It is rather doubtful (as in the parallel passage, ch. iv. 19—21) whether the speaker here is the prophet, or "the daughter of my people," who, in ch. vi. 26, is called upon to "make most bitter lamentation." Of course, the prophet cannot dissociate himself from his people; and we may therefore, perhaps, consider both references united. **Hurt**; literally, *breach*; a term so used for political calamities. **A grief**; rather, *my grief*; but "grief" is meant to include both physical and mental sufferings (literally, *my sickness*).

Ver. 20.—**My tabernacle**; rather, *my tent*. It is very striking how present to the minds of the Israelites was the consciousness of their pastoral origin. Hence the cry, "To your tents, O Israel" (1 Kings xii. 16); comp. also, "And the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as aforetime" (2 Kings xiii. 5). **My cords . . . my curtains.** The "cords" are those which, by being fastened to poles and stakes, keep the tent steady; the "curtains," of course, are the covering of the tent (comp. Isa. liv. 2).

Ver. 21.—**The pastors**; *i.e.* the civil authorities (see on ch. ii. 8). **They shall not prosper**; rather, *they have not prospered*; or, better still, *they have not acted wisely*, the notion of prospering being rather suggested than expressed (the same word is used in Isa. lii. 13).

Ver. 22.—**Behold, . . . is come**; rather, *Hark! tidings! Behold, it cometh!* The tidings are that the foe is at hand, advancing with a great commotion, with clashing spears, prancing horses, and all the hubbub of a great army. **A den of dragons**; rather, *of jackals* (as ch. ix. 11).

Vers. 23—25.—These verses confirm the view taken above, of the speaker of this whole section. Jeremiah and the people, each is, in a sense, the speaker; but here the prophetic faith seems to run rather in advance of that of his fellow-countrymen. They form, however, a fitting sequel to the charges brought against the people in ch. ix. The speaker admits that he (either the people of Judah personified, or Jeremiah as a representative of its best portion) fully deserves chastisement for having attempted to go his own way (comp. Isa. lvii. 17). He has now attained an insight into the truth that man's duty is simply to walk in the path which God has marked out for him. He only asks that Jehovah would chastise him **with judgment**, or, more clearly, *according to what is just*. "The contrast is between punishment inflicted in anger, the object of which is to cause pain to the criminal, and that inflicted as a duty of justice, and of which the object is the criminal's reformation" (Payne Smith). The fear expressed, however, is not exactly **lest thou bring me to nothing**, which is too strong for the Hebrew, but *lest thou make me small*. Israel was secured against annihilation by the promise of Jehovah, but feared he might possibly survive only as the shadow of his former self.

Ver. 25.—This verse is repeated, with slight differences, in Ps. lxxix. 6, 7. The fault of the heathen is that they exceeded their commission (Isa. x. 6, 7; xlvii. 6; Zech. i. 15), and aimed at destroying, instead of merely punishing, Jehovah's erring people. **His habitation**; rather, *his pasture* (comp. ch. xii. 10).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The folly of paganism.* I. THE FOLLY OF PAGANISM PROVES THE WEAKNESS OF SUPERSTITIOUS FEARS. The Jews were tempted to fear astrological portents (ver. 2) and idol-powers (ver. 5). Yet a little reflection was enough to show that these things were impotent for harm. The lowest religion is a product of fear. Superstition finds converts where rational faith fails. The trouble thus resulting from the weakness of men can only be dissipated by boldly confronting the source of terror and thoroughly examining it.

II. THE FOLLY OF PAGANISM BEVEALS THE MISTAKE OF YIELDING TO ITS FASCINATIONS. For this miserable inanity the Jews were abandoning the God of heaven and earth! Religion should be accepted, not for its attractiveness, but for its truth. It must be a reality or it will be a snare. Yet how many are led to adopt systems of religion without any regard to the truth of the ideas they contain, but simply out of liking for their ritual, emotional sympathy for their poetry, or even mere love of the musical accompaniments of the worship connected with them!

III. THE FOLLY OF PAGANISM IS AN EVIDENCE IN FAVOUR OF THE TRUTH OF THE RELIGION OF THE BIBLE. The reason and imagination of men in all ages, in all climes, in all degrees of civilization, have been set to the task of inventing religions (consciously sometimes, but for the most part unconsciously and therefore the more genuinely), and the result in all cases is far inferior to Christianity. A mere comparison of religions should lead us to prefer this, and a simple conclusion from such a comparison is that this must be of Divine origin.

Vers. 6, 7.—*The incomparable greatness of God.* I. GOD IS GREAT. This simple item of the Mohammedan's creed must be accepted with equal reverence by the Christian, though it forms but one part of his conception of the Divine nature. There is danger lest we should regard the goodness of God in such a way as to detract from his majesty. Truly considered, it enhances the supreme glory of God's greatness. God is great in power, in wisdom, in resources, in essential being. God is also great in character, in purpose, in the just and good principles of his actions. The worship of a God of mere power is the cringing of a slave, and has no spiritual value, but rather degrades the devotee by destroying independence of conscience and moral courage. It would be our duty to resist a being of infinite power if that power were not used righteously, for such a being would not be God, but an infinite demon; and though resistance were hopeless, it would be better to be a martyr to conscience than the degraded minion of an unrighteous despotism. But God is worthy of all worship because his greatness of power reposes on greatness of character.

II. THE GREATNESS OF GOD IS INCOMPARABLE. The Jews were led to see that their God was not one among many deities, not even the supreme God, the Zeus of a pantheon of lesser divinities, but the only God, and out of all comparison with all other beings. God is infinite. You cannot compare the infinite with anything finite. The greatest existence which has any limit is as far from the infinite as the smallest. This is as much larger than a world as it is larger than a grain of sand. The being of God is entirely distinct from all other orders of being—vastly greater than the universe of them—in its fulness incomparable to any. Yet: 1. God, being infinite, contains in himself all possibilities of being, and therefore all may see their ideal perfection in him though he transcends all (Heb. ii. 10). 2. God has made man in his own image, and in his power of thought, freedom of will, and moral conscience, man has characteristics like the Divine in kind, though incomparable with that in degree (Gen. i. 26). Christ is the "express Image of his substance" (Heb. i. 3), "but only so because in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. ii. 9).

III. THE INCOMPARABLE GREATNESS OF GOD SHOULD MOVE ALL MEN TO FEAR BEFORE HIM. All should fear because: 1. He is too great to be concerned with a few; all nations, all mankind, are equally under his sway. 2. He is infinitely above the greatest, so that kings and wise men, persons of the highest rank and of the most profound genius, are as much below him as if they were beggars and fools. 3. He is so vast in being, power, and character, that it is no mark of noble independence to resist

him, but only a sign of foolish pride which will certainly be humiliated. The fear of God thus engendered is an awe, a reverence, not mere terror. The gospel tempers this with the confident love of children, but does not destroy it, since perfect love, while casting out terror, infuses feelings of reverence.

Vers. 10, 12, 13.—*The nature of God.* The true nature of God is seen in contrast with the objects of heathen worship. Error is sometimes serviceable in furnishing an occasion for a clearer definition of truth. Christian theology has grown up through controversies with heresy and unbelief.

I. THE NATURE OF GOD. 1. God is *real.* Jehovah is the true God. He is not only superior to heathen deities. They are non-existent. He alone is. Religion is based on facts. Its first affirmation is this—"God is." It is not a growth of the poetic imagination, a fabric of baseless speculation, nor merely "morality touched with emotion," without any object for that emotion to rest upon. It is the worship of a God who exists. Otherwise no poetic charm nor practical expediency can make it anything but a delusion, which all who venerate truth should abjure. 2. God is *living.* The word "God" is not a name for the totality of being, for the unconscious forces of the universe, for a blind "Not ourselves that makes for righteousness.' All faith affirms more. No worship is justified without the belief that God is spirit, thinking, willing, living. God is, indeed, the one self-existent life, the life in which all other life is contained (Acts xvii. 28). 3. God is an *everlasting King.* He is eternal and changeless—not a God of the past alone, but equally active in the present. He is not only the Creator who formed the world ages ago, but the King who now rules it. Our worship is not merely veneration for what he has done, but a constant appreciation of what he is doing, and prayer touching his future action—a real and effectual communion with a living and acting God. 4. These thoughts of the nature of God should induce *submission and reverence.* None can compare with him. All are in his power. His eternal presence demands constant attention, and his ceaseless activity requires a correspondence in all our activity.

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE NATURE OF GOD. 1. It is seen in *creation.* Power is revealed in the original formation of all things, wisdom in their orderly establishment (ver. 12). A real world can only come from a real God. A living world must derive its vitality from an original source of life. The less cannot produce the greater. All that we see in the universe must have been originally in the thought and power of God. 2. It is seen in the *present activities* of the world. The tumult of waters flows in obedience to God's voice. Clouds, and wind, and lightning, and rain, follow his directions (ver. 13). The great energy of the physical world testifies to an energizing power behind it. The universe is not a beautiful crystal, nor a fossil relic of past life. It is replete with force, undergoing perpetual change, and constantly developing fresh forms of vitality. Such a condition of things implies that the real and living Creator must be also an ever-present Ruler, "an everlasting King."

Ver. 16.—*God the Portion of Israel.* I. GOD IS PECULIARLY RELATED TO HIS OWN PEOPLE. The previous verses describe the universal supremacy of God and the claims he has over all his creatures. He is not one among many gods, but the only God; he is the Creator of all things, in him all things consist, all men live only through him. He is gracious to all his human family, he is willing to give his richest blessings to all mankind. Still, there are other and special relations which God holds only with those who trust and love and obey him. They who seek God will find him as the negligent will never do. They who choose God for their Portion will be chosen by him for peculiar favours. This is quite consistent with the universality of the being and activity of God.

II. GOD'S PECULIAR RELATION WITH HIS PEOPLE ADMITS OF NO RIVALRY. God must be *the* Portion of his people or in no sense peculiarly theirs. Israel cannot retain the special privileges of the covenant with Jehovah while breaking the conditions of that covenant which require unwavering fidelity (Deut. xxviii. 14). He who would find his portion in God must not also seek it in the world. He may have many worldly advantages while pursuing higher aims, because these may be "added unto him;" but he must "seek *first* the kingdom of God" (Matt. vi. 33).

III. GOD'S PECULIAR RELATION WITH HIS PEOPLE IS AN UNSPEAKABLE BLESSING TO THEM. 1. He makes them *his inheritance*, i.e. prizes them as property, values them "as the apple of his eye" (Deut. xxxii. 10), as his "peculiar treasure" (Mal. iii. 17). If God showers down upon all his creatures mercies countless as the stars of heaven, what must be the wonder and the glory of their state whom God thus prizes and marks for special favour! 2. They find in him *their Portion*. (1) The Portion is God, not the gifts of God, for the Giver is better than his gifts. God is more to his people than all he bestows upon them. (2) This portion is independent of all earthly circumstances; it may be enjoyed in sickness, in poverty, in human contempt. (3) It is the highest blessedness of the soul—enjoying God, living in the light of his love, receiving the essential blessedness of Heaven.

IV. THE BLESSING OF THIS PECULIAR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS OPEN TO ALL MEN. The Jews too often rested their claim on inherent national rights—their birthrights. But the New Testament declares the spiritual Israel to be the true Israel (Gal. vi. 15, 16), and this Israel is composed of all who walk "according to the rule" of faith in Christ. Therefore the broad invitation for all to follow Christ opens the door for all to the closest relationship with God. If all are invited to Christ who is the Way, all may become God's peculiar inheritance, and find their Portion in him (1 Pet. ii. 9).

Vers. 23, 24.—*Confession and correction.* I. GENUINE CONFESSION INVOLVES A CLEAR RECOGNITION OF DUTY AND A WILLINGNESS TO RECEIVE NECESSARY CORRECTION. 1. There must be a *recognition of duty*. We cannot confess the wrong till we know the right. Conscience awakes only when a standard of right outside ourselves is perceived. 2. There must be a *willingness to receive necessary correction*. If we make honest confession of sin, we imply that we desire to be free from it. But a right understanding of our own condition in the light of God's requirements makes the necessity of correction apparent.

II. A CLEAR RECOGNITION OF DUTY WILL SHOW THAT THIS CONSISTS IN SELF-ABNEGATION TO A HIGHER WILL. The essence of sin is self-will. The first sin was an act of disobedience. All wickedness is a rebellion against a supreme authority. Man is not free to live to himself, swayed only by his own lawless caprice. He has a vocation to fulfil. 1. He has no *right* to go his own way. He is a servant. He is lawfully subject to a righteous Lord, before whom duty requires him to say, "Not my will, but thine, be done." 2. He has not *light* enough to direct his own steps. Future accidents cannot be anticipated. The ultimate effects of the simplest action are not to be traced beforehand. Hence the need of a higher direction. 3. He has not *power* to succeed in his own way. If he starts by himself, making the awful experiment of a self-sustained pilgrimage through the toils and storms of life, he will assuredly make shipwreck. Our duty is not to live for self, nor even for God in our own way or by our own unaided strength, but to do his will, in his way, by his aid. Thus the Christian, looking for authority, guidance, and strength in Christ, is taught to say, "To me to live is Christ."

III. A WILLINGNESS TO RECEIVE CORRECTION ARISES FROM A PERCEPTION OF ITS JUSTICE AND UTILITY WHEN VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF DUTY. 1. It must be recognized as *just*, not only merited, but coming in a fair degree. We could not willingly accept a correcting chastisement which was disproportionate to guilt. 2. It must be recognized as given on *principles of righteousness*, not out of vindictive wrath. 3. It must be recognized as sent for a *merciful purpose*. It is correction, not simply retribution. This is wholesome, and given, not in anger, which would be fatal (Ps. ii. 12), but in love (Prov. iii. 12). Such correction we should not murmur under, but welcome, accept as a blessing, and even pray for. But we shall only do this when we are impressed with a right sense of duty, which makes us acknowledge that we are not to live for ourselves, and must be subdued and trained by all necessary means to submission and obedience and a true feeling of our own helplessness, requiring the help of Divine discipline. *Because* man's way is not in himself he may naturally ask for wholesome correction.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 2—5.—*The helplessness of heathen gods a conclusive argument against them.* How is the superstitious worship of nature and inanimate objects to be corrected? It is obvious that the attributes attached by the worshippers to the idols they worship are wholly foreign to them. It is ignorance, association, and the tendency to transfer subjective ideas to objects of sense, that have largely to do with this. The correction, therefore, must be furnished by a real analysis of the idol—a taking of it to pieces, and examining how it came into existence. But—

I. LET US INQUIRE WHAT WORSHIP INVOLVES. It is evident that an impression must exist of the power of the object worshipped to help or to hurt. In some way men have associated it with the production of evil or good in human destiny. A sense of dependence is generated. Fear arises, to degenerate into vulgar terror or to refine itself into the sentiments of reverence and respect. A being greater than ourselves is needed to constitute a veritable God to the human heart.

II. TESTED BY THIS, IDOLS AND CELESTIAL SIGNS CANNOT BE GODS. 1. *Careful observation will show that, whilst there may be agreement between certain changes of the heavenly bodies and the changes of weather, physical condition, etc., these are not producible as by a responsible will but according to the fixed laws of nature.* 2. *The stars of heaven and the idols of earth are alike constituted of inanimate matter.* 3. *In addition to this, the latter are wholly the creatures of man.* 4. *Neither the heavenly bodies nor the idols can help themselves.*—M.

Vers. 6, 7.—*The uniqueness of Jehovah.* When other gods have been proved to be false, it is very important that this unlikeness of God to anything else should be established. His claim to attention and reverence is thereby held in judgment.

I. IN WHAT RESPECTS JEHOVAH IS UNIQUE. 1. *In idea.* It is a wondrous conception—a being so great, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. As a conception it stands alone, commands respect, and invites reverent investigation. Such goodness with such power and wisdom! 2. *In pretensions.* (1) He claims our sole worship; (2) our highest and holiest service is his by right, and is unworthy of him; (3) our welfare and destiny are in his hands. 3. *In works.* There is nothing he has claimed to be which he has not made good in his works—creation, providence, grace.

II. THIS CONCEPTION OF GOD AS UNIQUE HARMONIZES WITH THE INSTINCTS OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT, AND THE TEACHINGS OF HISTORY AND NATURE. It has cast its spell over the mightiest intellects, and commanded the homage of the purest and best of men. In the worship of him whom it represents the highest longings are satisfied, and the most characteristically human sympathies and principles encouraged. The unity of nature; the mental principle that traces everything to a great First Cause; the manner in which the system of religion of which he is centre and dominating principle explains this, and harmonizes the life of man with his surroundings;—are all indications that point to the same conclusion.—M.

Ver. 19.—*Grief borne that cannot be cured.* I. AN INSTANCE OF THE POWER OF TRUE RELIGION. His sorrow was intense. No one could understand or sympathize with it. Yet he is able to put it under and, although not removing it wholly, to bear it. This is alike removed from self-indulgence and stoicism.

II. THE CONSIDERATIONS THAT AFFECTED HIM IN THIS WAY. He had to finish his task. It was practical, and could admit of no interruption. The sense of duty is, therefore, supreme—patience, submission. His grief is recognized as a personal stewardship. He is responsible for its expression and repression. It has a special relation to his own character and life. He regards it, therefore, as sent from God, and not, therefore, to be hastily dismissed. How it enriched his nature, increased his personal usefulness, and enhanced the value of his writings to generations then unborn!

III. CHRISTIANITY IS TESTED BY THE MANNER IN WHICH IT ENABLES MEN TO BEAR AFFLICTION. The relation of our sorrows to our personal and spiritual salvation. The ministry of sorrow. The hopes of the future alleviating and directing into profitable

reflection and effort. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh," etc.—M.

Vers. 1—17.—*Idolatry.* This section of Jeremiah's prophecy is one of the notable passages in the Scriptures concerning idolatry. It is like that in Ps. cxv., and in Isa. xl., xliv. It states or suggests much of great interest on this subject, and which deserves to be well considered by us. There is—

I. THE TREMENDOUS FACT OF IDOLATRY. See: 1. The *multitudes* of mankind who have avowed such worship. 2. The *wide extent* of the world's inhabited countries over which it prevails. 3. Its *permanence.* It has lasted on from age to age, and has been handed down unchanged from generation to generation, so that the prophet could challenge his countrymen to tell of any nation which had ever changed their gods (cf. ch. ii. 11). And though vast portions of mankind have professedly thrown aside their idols, yet there are still more who have not even at the present day. Idolatry is the dominant religion of the world to-day, if numbers are considered, even as it was in the days of Jeremiah, and this notwithstanding—

II. ITS MANIFEST ABSURDITY. How scathing is the ridicule which the prophet pours out upon such monstrous worship! With what sarcasm he dwells upon the fact of their being mere wooden dolls, hideous as a scarecrow in a garden of cucumbers (cf. Exposition, ver. 5), chipped into such shape as they have by the hands of the men who worship them, decked with tawdry finery, must be nailed up lest they should tumble down, and "must needs be borne because they cannot go" (ver. 5), and are, of course, powerless either for evil or for good. And the prophet points out (ver. 8) that the absurdity is none lessened when the idols are of a more costly sort. They may be plated with silver and adorned with gold (ver. 9), and the workmanship may be of a much more elaborate and artistic kind. But it is all the same; the idol is nothing but a piece of wood, and that which is taught about them is "a doctrine of vanities," *i.e.* utterly false and absurd. But though idolatry be thus manifestly absurd, yet we are forced to admit the fact of—

III. ITS NEVERTHELESS STRANGE BUT STRONG ATTRACTIVENESS. How else can not only the multitude of its votaries be accounted for, and their fidelity to it, but also *the high rank and leading position of those nations who adhered to it?* They were not mere barbarous savages who worshipped idols, but the foremost peoples of the world. The empires of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Greece, Rome, were all sworn upholders of idolatry (cf. Acts xvii.). And to-day it is not the mere fetish-worshippers of the South Seas and Africa who are idolaters, but people such as the Chinese and Hindoos—to say nothing of those who in Christian Churches bow down before tinsel-decked images or pictures of virgins, apostles, and saints, and, if they do not worship them, render them homage which can hardly be distinguished from worship. And a yet further proof of this attraction is that *the well-instructed people of God,* the seed of Israel, the possessors of the oracles of God, were for ever falling into this sin. This entire chapter is one appeal and protest against their so doing. And we know how often in the past they had bowed down to idols. The command which stands at the head of the Decalogue, by its position there, by its fulness of expression, and by the severity of its sanctions, shows that the attraction of the idolatry which it denounced was indeed terrible, and therefore needed to be thus solemnly forbidden. And age after age the same command had to be repeated, and its violation sternly punished, notwithstanding that (ver. 16) "the Portion of Jacob" was "not like" these wretched idols—no indeed, but was the alone true God, the living God, the everlasting King (ver. 10). And yet there were needed this command and appeal; yes, and the consuming fire of God's wrath which fell upon Israel in their captivity, before the taint of idolatry could be burnt out of them. Now, how was this? Note, therefore—

IV. ITS PROBABLE REASON AND CAUSE. We cannot observe the tremendous fact of idolatry without being led to inquire into its origin. It is not sufficient to refer to the licence it gave to the sensual nature of man; if such licence were all that was desired, why couple it with some form of worship? The explanation must lie deeper than this. And that missionary would get on very poorly with any tolerably educated heathen if he were to assume that the idolater worshipped the hideous idol before which he bows himself down. He would tell you that he did nothing of the kind,

but that which he worshipped was the unseen powers of which that idol was the symbol. No doubt idolatry degenerates into actual idol-worship. That with which something Divine has been so long associated comes to be regarded as itself Divine, and worshipped accordingly. And then idolatry has sunk down into fetishism. And it may be often seen where you would least expect it. But originally idolatry was not the worship of images. That worship may probably be thus explained. 1. Man cannot do without a deity of whom, in some form or other, he must be conscious, and whose presence he can realize so as to be able to look to him in time of need. Man cannot be a thorough atheist. His instinctive religiousness and tendency to worship cannot be ever kept under. For a while it may, but let heavy sorrow come, or let fear and dread fill his mind, and he will, he must, then call upon God. 2. But God will not reveal himself to us except to our spirits. He can be only spiritually discerned. Not through any of our senses, or through our intellect, but through the Spirit alone. "They that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." 3. But such coming to God involves purity of heart and life. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." And not only purity, but great spiritual effort. How difficult we find it to realize the presence of God, to hold down our minds, and to summon the energies of the will when we pray! "We know not how to pray as we ought." And permitted sin, defiling the conscience and destroying our confidence, will ever hinder spiritual worship. 4. But these imperative conditions of worship —that it should be in spirit, and that it should be pure—men like not. Still, they must worship. What, then, is to be done? The idol is the solution. To avoid the strain and effort of the spirit, men have taken as a symbol some material thing—as the Israelites at Sinai took the golden calf—and so have sought to represent God to their minds. The idolater persuades himself he cannot know the Deity directly, and therefore will avail himself of the aid some sensuous object will afford. And such symbol he can carry about with him, and there is no need of purity of heart for such worship—it can be done without. What wonder, then, that man, averse to spiritual exercises and sensual-hearted, should have everywhere fled to idolatry, as in fact he has done? It is an endeavour to have the favour of God on cheaper terms than he demands; on conditions easier and more agreeable to our fallen nature. But in regard to the idolatries into which Judah and Jerusalem so often fell, there must be remembered not only the force of those universal causes of idolatry now considered, but *the further force of powerful example all around them.* Who were the mighty nations with whom they had most to do? Egypt, Assyria, Babylon. Tyre also, in her wealth and might, stood on their northern border, and yet others, whose fame reached them from afar, flourished and grew strong. But all these worshipped idols. Happiness, success, strength, and power seemed to be with these nations and not with the worshippers of Jehovah. And all this Judah saw and deeply observed, and at length came to believe that it was better for them to serve idols than to serve God (cf. for proof of this, ch. xliv. 17—19). For Israel to keep from idolatry was to swim against wind and tide, and to do so when wind and tide promised to bear them on to a condition of prosperity greater than they had ever known. And Jeremiah knew that in Babylon, where they were going, they would be exposed to the full force of this temptation. The devil of idolatry would come to them, and, pointing to the glory of Babylon, would say, "All these things will I give thee, if," etc. And to fortify them against this temptation was the object of the prophet's earnest appeal. The tempter would suggest to them, "You have lost everything by worshipping God. Your conquerors, who hold you now in their power, and have destroyed your city, your temple, your land, have gained all their glory by worshipping their gods. Do you the same; learn their ways."

V. ITS CONSEQUENCES. These have been very terrible. With Israel God dealt very sternly. His *direct vengeance* came upon them again and again. It was hanging over them at this time as a dark thunder-cloud. But besides this, there were *the natural results* of such worship—results which were conspicuous in Judah and Jerusalem, and have ever been so in all idolatrous nations (cf. ver. 8). They became "brutish," "given over to vile affections" (cf. Rom. i. 20—32).

VI. ITS SURE BUT ONLY ANTIDOTE. *Living faith in the living God*—this alone, but this surely, would enable them to resist, not only the clamour and cravings of their

lower nature, but also the seductive force of the seeming success which idolatry had won and they had lost. Only such faith would serve them, and hence, in vers. 6, 7, 10—13, 16, the prophet bids them remember the incomparable glory, majesty, and power of the Lord, the true God, the living God (ver. 10), and the terribleness of his wrath. He reminds them that God is Creator (ver. 12) and Preserver (ver. 13). He who formed the earth governs it still, and he is *their* God, and they are his people. He is their "Portion," and "Israel is the rod of his inheritance" (ver. 16). And this which would be Israel's safeguard must be ours still. Let that living faith in the living God be lost, and at once resort will be had to symbols and substitutes for God, which, though in form they may be far different from the idols of the heathen, yet in substance and effect are the same.

VII. ITS PRESENT-DAY LESSONS. There are such, for the peril of Israel is our own. 1. For we also may—and many do—substitute reverence for those things which are associated with the worship of God for that worship in spirit and in truth which he alone cares for. Symbols, sacraments, creeds, Churches, religious observances,—any one of these may become an idol, that is, a substitute for God. They demand no strain and energy of our spiritual nature; the senses or the intellect can grasp them; and they make no such strenuous demand upon the surrender of the will, the yielding of the heart to God; they will let us do as we like, if not entirely yet far more than true spiritual worship ever will. And thus, though we be called Christians, we may be idolaters after all. 2. And let us guard against being deceived by the sanction which worldly success and present good so often lend to ways which God forbids. There was very much around Israel whose desirableness said to them, "Come with us, and we will do you good." Idolatry did seem to answer, whilst their religion did not. And the way of the wicked will often seem to prosper, whilst "waters of a full cup" of sorrow "are wrung out" to the people of God. The mighty bribe which Satan pressed upon our blessed Lord, if he would but renounce the way of the cross appointed for him by his Father, and take "all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them"—that same bribe is pressed upon myriad souls still. 3. By constant and earnest worship of God let us cherish and keep alive in our hearts that living faith in the living God made known to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, which alone can, but surely will, meet and overcome all those temptations to idolatry, which now, as of old, beset every human soul.—C.

Ver. 16.—"*The Portion of Jacob.*" By this expression, "the Portion of Jacob," is meant the Lord God. Once again it is met with in Jeremiah's prophecy (ch. li.), where several of the verses of this chapter, our text amongst the rest, are repeated word for word. It is interesting to inquire the probable reason for this beautiful but unusual name being given to God. That God is the Portion of his people is a precious truth often declared. But this form of that precious truth is unusual, and may well lead us to ask why God is so called. And there can be little doubt, I think, that the motive of the prophet was to touch the hearts of those whom he addressed, and, if so it might be, to waken up again a longing after this "Portion of Jacob," which they were so fast letting go. There was an appealing power in this name, and for that reason it was probably chosen. The devout Jew loved to think and tell of God as the God of Jacob. You meet with the two names thus linked together perpetually in the psalms and often elsewhere. "The God of Jacob is our Refuge," "The Name of the God of Jacob defend thee," etc. Sometimes we read of God as the God of Abraham, and as the God of Isaac, but more commonly as the God of Jacob. Now, why is this? Is it not because that Jacob was more thoroughly the representative and father of the Jewish people than any other patriarch? Abraham was a great hero of the faith; Isaac's career was too still and serene to be at all a pattern of their own; but Jacob, he was the typical Jew, both in the mingled good and evil of his character, and in the manifold trials and vicissitudes of his life. A sorrowful, struggling, and often sinful man was he, sore chastened of the Lord again and again, but never given over unto death; like the bush burning in the fire but never burnt, and coming out of God's disciplines the better for having passed through them. In him the Jews saw their own character and career vividly portrayed, and they loved to feel that God was the God of Jacob; the God, therefore, whom they needed, and in whom he who was the

truest representative of all their race found strength and solace and salvation. Thus this appellation here given to God, "the Portion of Jacob," was calculated to waken up many very tender and holy memories, and might lead, as was sorely needed, to a better mind towards God amongst those to whom the prophet spoke, and to a turning away from those idolatries by which now and for so long they had been sinning against God and destroying themselves. And the Portion of Jacob waits to be ours as well as his. Jacob was not only a representative Jew, but also *a representative man.* For men are but rarely cast in the heroic mould of Abraham, nor is their career quiet and uncheckered like that of Isaac. But in the sins and sorrows, the struggles and falls, the temptations and trials of Jacob they behold themselves. God by this name declares himself to be the God of, the Portion of, all sinful, sorrowing, struggling, and much-tried men everywhere and at all times; the God, therefore, that *we* need, the Helper *we* want. He is the God who is revealed to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom there is neither Greek nor Jew, no distinction of any kind, but who is "the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe." If, then, this Portion of Jacob may be our Portion too, we shall consider with more interest what that Portion consists of, what it was that Jacob possessed in God. And to see this let us recall to our minds the records that are given of the patriarch's career. As we study them we shall readily see what portion Jacob had in God, and how precious a possession it was. And—

I. IN GOD HE FOUND UNSPEAKABLE GRACE. Was there ever a more wretched, guilty sinner than Jacob, when he fled away from his home in just fear of his outraged brother's wrath? He had entrapped him once and again, inflicting on him grievous wrong; he had deceived his aged father; he had lied again and again in the basest and most hypocritical way. Altogether the man was odious in the sight of all; all our sympathies go over in a rush towards the frank if foolish Esau. Jacob's character was at this time nothing less than repulsive. His mother was probably the only living soul who had either faith in or affection for him. He had deserved the reprobation of all. And we cannot but believe that he must have felt very much of this, and that it was with a sense of deepest sin and shame he fled away to Padan-aram, from his father's and mother's home. Man had cast him off; would not God do the like? For his sin had not been that of one who had never known God. God had been about him all his days; he had learnt to know, to fear, and desire God. He had been, as all knew, an avowedly religious man. His sin was therefore all the more unpardonable, as his guilt was all the greater. He is shown to us out on the wide stony track over the mountains which form the backbone of Palestine. The day has ended, the sun gone down; he is all alone, the night is gathering round him. The ground is strewn with huge fragments of the bare, barren rock of which the mass of those mountains is composed. On the cold hard ground he lays himself down to rest, helpless, hopeless, forsaken, he might well think, both of God and man. But it was not so, for God came to him there. "In the visions of the night the rough stones formed themselves into a vast staircase reaching into the depth of the wide and open sky, which without any interruption of tent or tree was stretched over the sleeper's head. On the steps of that staircase were seen ascending and descending the messengers of God; and from above there came the Divine voice, which told the houseless wanderer that, little as he thought it, he had a Protector there and everywhere; that even in this bare and open thoroughfare, in no consecrated grove or cave, 'the Lord was in this place, though he knew it not.' This was Bethel, the house of God, the gate of heaven." What the effect of this glorious vision must have been upon him we can hardly ever estimate. The nearest Scripture parallel probably would be the effect of the father's gracious reception upon the returning prodigal. Somewhat akin to his feelings must have been those of Jacob at this time. For what he had seen and heard had shown him beyond doubt that God had not cast him off, had not dealt with him after his sins nor rewarded him according to his iniquities. It was like the kiss of the Divine forgiveness, the joy of conscious realization of God's redeeming love. Yes; Jacob found *this* Portion in God, the fulness of forgiving love. But is not this the Portion we want, the God we need to know? Not one who will cast us away from his presence and throw us over when we have done wrong. If God were strict to mark iniquities, who of us could stand? But the God, the Portion of Jacob, meets our need; for as Jacob was sinful and often falling into sin, so are we.

II. Another element of this portion which Jacob possessed in God was the CONTINUAL AND MOST COMFORTING MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD which he was privileged to enjoy. How continually in his career are we met with instances of God's appearing to him! And besides the distinctly recorded instances, the impression is left upon the mind that it was the constant privilege of Jacob to hold intercourse with God, to talk with him as a man talketh with his friend. Yes; the God of Jacob was One who was graciously willing to come near to his servant, and to be known by him as his God—a God near at hand, and not afar off. But who can estimate what these Divine communications did for Jacob?—how unspeakably valuable an element in his portion this was? What courage, what confidence, what bright hope, what strength of faith, it must have imparted to the patriarch's mind! And such blessedness is assured to all believers. "I will come unto them, and will manifest myself unto them," said our Saviour. "I have set the Lord alway before me; because *he is at my right hand*, I shall not be moved." "God is our Refuge and Strength, a *very present* Help in trouble." It is because we cannot realize God's presence, can in no way feel him near to us, that therefore our hearts fail us for fear and our souls are cast down within us. But he to whom God reveals himself as he did to Jacob has in that fact a safeguard and protection from fear such as nought else can afford.

III. But another element in the portion which Jacob had in God was that of PURIFYING DISCIPLINE. Assuredly he was not left without chastisement; yea, it was a very scourging that was dealt out to him on account of his sins. Men are apt, both in reading the Bible and in observing the too frequent failures of godly men now, to look steadily at the sins of men like Jacob and David and others, and to wonder how such men can be regarded as God's people at all; but they do not look on and observe how sorely they are punished for their faults, and how they in this world find, beyond well-nigh all others, that "the way of transgressors is hard." Whoever else may seem to sin with impunity, the children of God may not and do not. No doubt Rebekah and Jacob thought they had done a very wise and clever thing when, by deceiving Isaac, they fraudulently obtained the blessing which belonged to Esau as the firstborn. But Rebekah, in the long years of melancholy bereavement of her favourite son—for she never saw him again after that day he fled from his home—had abundant leisure to see and repent of her folly and her sin. And Jacob, as he ate the bread of servitude and dwelt a stranger in a strange land, haunted with dread of Esau, was made to know that his trickery and fraud had borne him but a wretched harvest. The consuming fire of God's holy love burnt fiercely on until this dross which was so mingled with the pure ore of Jacob's faith was purged out of him. And this is ever an indispensable and a never-absent part of the portion of Jacob. The purging, purifying disciplines of God's holy love we shall all have to submit to according to our need of them. And this should render the Portion of Jacob not less but more precious in our esteem. If we willingly submit to much pain and distress in order that the health of the body, which at best can last only for a few short years, may be secured, may we not much rather submit ourselves to whatever of painful discipline God may appoint in order to secure the health of our souls, which shall live for ever? How dreadful would it be if God were not thus to purge and cleanse us; if he were to allow the cancerous growth of our sins to spread and grow until it had obtained such hold on us that death, eternal death, must follow! But this, out of fatherly love to us, he will never allow; and therefore Jacob was, and so we must be, held down to the suffering which his disciplines cause until their perfect work is done, and we are presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. Oh, let us be more anxious that God's will should be done in us than that his hand should be taken off from us. Never, never may he say concerning any one of us as he did concerning Ephraim, "He is joined to his idols: let him alone."

IV. GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL GUARDIANSHIP AND CARE was a further element in the portion of Jacob. How God watched over him! how truly Jacob could say, "He knoweth the way that I take"! Never was there any man to whom these words were more appropriate than they were to him. With what constant interest did God appear to mark all the way by which Jacob had to go! His eye was never off him, his hand never withdrawn, his help never wanting when needed. Even when Jacob did not dream that God was near him, he was so in fact. So that he had to confess as at

Bethel, "Surely God is in this place, though I knew it not." Hearken how he speaks of God when blessing the sons of Joseph. He tells of him as "the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil." Such was his confession of that never-failing care, that incessant interest with which the Lord God had watched over every stage of his life's journey. How all his very steps had been ordered by the Lord! This is another characteristic of the portion which Jacob had in God. And must not that man be blessed who consciously realizes that he has this God for his Help? To have our lives made God's care, our interests his concern, to have his angels evermore keeping watch and ward over us, encamping round about us to deliver us,—this is another blessed element in the portion of Jacob and of all like him.

V. MEETNESS FOR "THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS IN LIGHT." Gradually, step by step, sometimes with seeming retrogression, but ever advancing on the whole, Jacob was lifted up from the low level of his former spiritual life, and ceased to be any longer Jacob, and became Israel. Such elevation, such meetness for "the inheritance of the saints," was and ever is part of the portion of Jacob, and a most blessed part it is.

And now, IN CONCLUSION, let us ask, *Is there such a Portion anywhere else?* Our text affirms, "The Portion of Jacob is not like them." The prophet is speaking of the wretched idols before whom his countrymen were so prone to bow down. It seems wonderful that any should have ever thought that the God of Jacob was like them. Like them! when even to think of them was to despise them with utter contempt. What a contrast to him, whom mind, and heart, and will, body, soul, and spirit could never sufficiently adore! It seemed monstrous that any should substitute for him those wretched idols, upon whom the prophet, in the preceding part of this chapter, pours forth his bitter scorn. But he means by the assertion we have been considering to declare that the Portion of Jacob is *an incomparable Portion.* None can be put beside, still less put in the place of him. And this is a truth for to-day. We ask again the question, "Is there such a Portion anywhere else?" Oh that they whom the psalmist calls "men of the world," and of whom he says, "they have their portion in this life," would compare the two—Jacob's and their own! Ah! you who have not the Portion of Jacob, we allow that you may have very much that is bright and fair. God may fill your veins with health, your coffers with gold, your houses with all luxury, your gardens with flowers, your fields with fruits, and your life with comfort and outward peace; but you are like those trees which in the winter-time are called Christmas-trees. "One feels a kind of pang at the first sight of such trees. No doubt it is beautiful in its way, with the little lights twinkling among the branches, and the sweet gifts of affection hanging from every twig. But the tree itself, are you not sorry for it?—rooted no longer, growing no more, no more circulation of the living sap, no sweet discoursing by its means between air and soil, between soil and air. The last waves of its life are sinking, and the more you hang upon it and the more you gather round it the faster it will die" (Dr. Raleigh). And if we have not the Portion of Jacob, we are like one of these trees. Loaded it may be with all manner of pleasant things, and surrounded with affection, but dying all the while. But "the Portion of Jacob is not like them"—one that will abandon you at the close of your life, or maybe long before, and leave you helpless and forlorn. Oh no; but then, when "heart and flesh fail," God will be "the Strength of your heart," and your "Portion for evermore." *That* is the portion of Jacob, and oh may God grant that it may be yours and mine, and that of all we love! Amen.—C.

Vers. 17, 18.—*Wherefore God doth judge the world.* It is not of the world at large, but of Judah and Jerusalem, that the prophet is here speaking. But nevertheless the judgments of God and the design wherewith they were sent, though having reference only to one people, are true examples of all like judgments, whenever, wherever, and however they come. Therefore note—

I. THE JUDGMENTS FORETOLD. The people are to be driven forth into exile and captivity. The whole book tells of their sorrows. Jeremiah's prophecy is one long denunciation of the wrath of God about to come on the guilty land. He was sent to declare this in the hope that those to whom he spoke might yet turn to the Lord and live; like Noah, that "preacher of righteousness" who warned the godless of his day of the judgment that was coming upon them. More particularly in these verses Jeremiah declares (ver. 17) *that not even the meanest and poorest will escape.* The "wares"

spoken of tell rather of the few mean possessions, the small trifling properties, of a poor man, which in his haste he would gather together in a bundle and so endeavour to save (cf. Exposition). In former judgments it was mainly the high and lofty, those of wealth and station, who had suffered; but now all, from the highest to the lowest, should be included in the overwhelming desolations about to be poured forth. And so the prophet represents the poor and wretched hastily gathering up their little effects, and making off with them as best they may. And ver. 18 adds yet other terrible features to this delineation of the judgment that is coming: "Behold, I will sling out," etc. This, therefore, shows how ready they must have been for such treatment. David selected smooth stones from the brook, such as were fit and apt for his sling, and with them he went forth to meet Goliath. Not any missile, not any stone, would serve. And so if it were possible, as it was, for a people to be "slung out" of a land, they must have made themselves fit for such judgment, or else they would not have been subjected to it. And this they had been doing for many a long year. "When the husbandman seeth that the harvest is come, he putteth in the sickle." This is true of the visitation of judgment as well as of grace. *The violence* of the people's expulsion from their land is also indicated: as a stone is hurled forth from the sling. And the *completeness* of the judgment: "at this once," *i.e.* completely, thoroughly, at one blow. Former judgments had been partial, temporary, long drawn out. This was to be complete, perpetual, and "at once," as a stone is in a moment driven forth from the sling. And their *far-distant destination* is suggested. God intended that they should be carried far off into the land of their exile (cf. Isa. xxii. 18). But note—

II. THE FACT THAT THESE JUDGMENTS ARE DECLARED TO HAVE A PURPOSE BEYOND THEMSELVES. All was to be done "*that they may find.*" It is plain, therefore, however we supply what must come after the word "find," that there was a definite Divine purpose in all these calamities. They were not to be an end in themselves, but to lead on to one beyond. And surely this must be the purpose of all God's judgments; he can have no satisfaction in them simply as punishment. His heart is set on what is to come forth out of them, and the result has regard to them. "That *they* may find;" they who have sinned so terribly, they shall learn by these judgments that he sends.

III. WHAT THAT PURPOSE IS. What is it that they may find? Our translators have simply added the words "it so," thus leaving undetermined what the finding is to be. But surely that which God would have them find is all that which hitherto they could not be persuaded to believe in, *e.g.* the bitterness of disobedience, the vanity of idols, the sure truth of God's word, the uselessness of all religion that is not from the heart, etc. But all this to the intent that they may find, as at last many of them did, the way of repentance and return to God. God had made them for himself, as he has made us all for himself. It is blasphemy to think of him as creating human souls, endued as they all are with such vast capacities, with any other design. And hence it is that the heart of man is unquiet, has no rest, until it find rest in God. God will not suffer it to be otherwise, blessed be his Name. And since for Judah and Jerusalem nothing else would do, they should go into bitter exile, and suffer as in the very fire, "that they might find" God; that they might come to themselves, and say, "I will arise and go to my father," etc. "God *will* have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;" and for the persistently impenitent a most awful will it is. As the late Duke of Wellington was wont to say, "There is only one thing worse than a great victory, and that is a great defeat;" so we may say there is only one thing worse for the ungodly than this set will of God for their salvation, and that is that his will should not be as it is.

IV. WHAT, THEREFORE, WE ARE TO LEARN FROM THIS. 1. Give thanks and praise to the Lord God for his most gracious purpose concerning men, that they should find him (cf. Ps. c., "Oh be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands, . . . for it is *he* that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are *his* people, and the sheep of his pasture"). 2. Compel him not, as Judah did, to resort to sore judgments ere we will seek and "find" him. 3. At once take Christ's yoke and learn of him, and so find rest in our souls by finding him.—C.

Ver. 19.—*Submission.* I. THE GRIEF CONTEMPLATED. It is told of in ver. 17, etc. And it was indeed great; the "wound was grievous;" for: 1. It was so *universal.* It

affected all classes and in all ways, in mind, body, and estate. 2. So *severe*. It was not a "light affliction," but "the iron entered into their souls." 3. And it was *self-caused*. The fangs of remorse were fastened in them by the consciousness they could not escape, that they had brought all their sorrows upon themselves. 4. And they *drew down so many others*, and innocent ones, in their own doom. This is ever one of the most fearful torments to the soul of the guilty. "I have ruined, not myself only, but my wife, children, parents, friends." The dart, if it be plunged first into the heart of those we love, will rankle in our own all the more terribly when it pierces us. 5. And the *light of God's countenance was gone*. With that we can bear anything. Paul and Silas sang praises in the dungeon at Philippi. But withdrawn, driven away by our sin, then is the soul sad indeed. 6. And it was *irreparable*. The wrath of God had arisen, and there "was no remedy" (cf. ver. 20). But note—

II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH IT WAS BORNE. "But I said, Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it." Now, these words might be used to express a spirit of sullen hardihood. Some have so understood them. But we rather regard them as the language of pious submission. It is the true Israelite who speaks; not the godless, idol-loving multitude, but the chosen of God who were mingled among them. And that this is so is shown: 1. By the check the speaker puts upon his lament. He was about seemingly to launch out in great complainings when he arrests his speech by recollections of a different kind: "But I said," etc. He would not allow himself in any more complaint; he replies to all such thoughts by the considerations he now brings forward. 2. He recognizes the cause of all these sorrows (ver. 21). It was their failure to "seek the Lord," the pastors becoming "brutish"—their grievous sin. Mere sullenness would never make such a confession as this. 3. And the spirit of vers. 23—25, so lowly, devout, and filled with sacred desire,—all these show that we are to understand ver. 19 as the utterance, not of defiant hardihood or any other evil spirit, but as that of submission. Parallels, therefore, are to be found in the submission of Aaron at the death of his sons (cf. also Lam. iii. 18—21, 39, 40; Micah vii. 9; Ps. lxxvii. 10; xxxix. 9, etc.).

III. THIS SPIRIT GREATLY TO BE COMMENDED. 1. *For its nature*. It is not the spirit of *a stoic*, of one who sets his teeth firm, and resolves to endure, come what may; but it is tender, gentle, and keenly susceptible of pain. Nor is it *silent*. Its voice is heard in prayers, confessions, praises, and it is ever desiring more of God's presence and grace. Nor is it *slothful*. It will be open-eyed to see and alert to act if aught can be done to minister relief or gain deliverance. Thus it does not violate any good instinct or dictate either of nature or conscience, as it would do were it characterized by either of the undesirable qualities named. They each have some sort of semblance of submission, but are far away removed from being identical with it or necessary to it. But submission consists in that calm composure of our whole nature, that meek acquiescence in the will of God, however painful that will may be. And therefore this spirit is commendable: 2. *For its comeliness*. How morally beautiful and lovely it is! We never tire of it, never do anything but in our hearts admire and praise it, and long to make it our own. How our hearts go out towards those that have eminently manifested it! As Aaron (cf. *supra*); Job saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away," etc.; Moses; and above all, our Saviour. Notwithstanding all his present and most deserved glory as our risen Lord, it is to him on the cross, crowned with thorns, in all the glory of his meek submission—to him the heart of humanity ever turns with adoring love and trust. 3. *For its self-conquest*. Under the smart and distress of great loss and disaster, how ready the understanding is to think hard thoughts and to utterly resent what God has done! And the will, how sullenly it frowns upon God, and with lowering brow refuses to submit! And the passions, how they rage in torrents of tears and wild wailing cries of angry agony! And the lips, what hard speeches they are prompt to utter (cf. "I said in my haste, All men are liars")! And the hands, how eager to take revenge upon any who have been the means and instruments of our affliction! But the spirit of submission holds all these hot, eager forces in, as with bit and bridle, and bids them all be still. They are, as were the lions before Daniel, awed and subdued by his calm, hallowed presence. Blessed is he who can thus conquer himself. None else shall conquer him, and least of all any of the mere circumstances of life (cf. Prov. xvi. 32). 4. *For its wisdom*. "There are few things in the world so totally and entirely bad but some advantage may be made of

them by a dexterous management; and it is certainly a man's wisdom to make the best of a bad condition, there being a certain kind of pious and prudential husbandry by which a man may so improve a calamity as to make the endurance of it the performance of a duty, and by his behaviour under it to procure a release from it. We should, with Isaac, take the wood upon our shoulders, though we ourselves are designed for the sacrifice; and who knows but, as in his case, so in ours also, a patient resignation of ourselves to the knife may be the sure and direct way to rescue us from it?" (South).

"He always wins who sides with thee;
To him no chance is lost;
Thy will is sweetest to him when
It triumphs at his cost.

"Ill that thou blessest turns to good,
And unblest good to ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be thy sweet will."

5. *For its acceptableness to God.* The Lord Jesus Christ was the "my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," because of it; because his meat and his drink was ever to do the will of the Father who sent him. "Blessed are the meek." "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that," etc.

IV. NOT EASY, BUT NEVERTHELESS FULLY POSSIBLE, OF ATTAINMENT. Not easy, because all our instincts under the smart of pain and loss (cf. *supra*) protest against it. Because also the maxims of the world are directly contrary to it. But attainable by *practice.* "Let him train himself whilst young to lesser self-denials and mortifications; let him learn to put up with and pass by a slight undervaluing word, and in time he shall find himself strong enough to conquer and digest an injurious action; let him learn to overlook his neighbour's incivility, and in time he shall be able with patience and firmness of mind to endure his insolence and cruelty, and that without being discomposed by any instigations to revenge; and let him accustom himself to do this often, and at length he shall be able to do it always" (South). And yet more by *communion and intercourse with the Lord Jesus Christ.* We catch the tones and habits and thoughts of those with whom we most associate. Live in close companionship with Christ, and the spirit of him who "when he was reviled, reviled not again," shall be formed in us, and more and more shall we know how "blessed are the meek," and how surely God "will exalt us in due time" (cf. Phil. ii. 5—11).—C.

Vers. 20, 21.—*The ruin wrought by the prayerless pastor.* I. CONSIDER THE SCENE PORTRAYED BY THE PROPHET. Consider it both before and after that dread invasion of which he was ever warning his countrymen. 1. *Before that invasion,* whilst Judah was at peace, there might often have been witnessed over the wide downs and pasture-lands of Palestine the shepherds' encampment; for Palestine was an eminently pastoral country, as the psalms of David and the teachings of our Lord plainly show. And hence up and down the land might have been seen the shepherds' tents, whole camps of them, dotting the plains or valleys with their slender poles, their broad curtains and strong cords holding them erect and securing them firmly to the ground on which they stood. The swarthy children would be running in and out, and at even-time the greater portion of the whole inhabitants of these tabernacles would be gathered around or within them. And in the immediate neighbourhood, carefully watched by their shepherds, would be the flocks quietly grazing, in which consisted their whole wealth. It was a pastoral scene the peacefulness and beauty of which were as manifest as the commonness of it in the happier days of Palestine and her people. 2. *But after the invasion,* in the unhappy days which, when Jeremiah spoke, were drawing so terribly near, when the land should be overrun by the armies of Babylon, there would be as often seen the actual circumstances portrayed in our text. The tent thrown down, its cords cut, its curtains a shapeless heap upon the ground, left to decay and rot by those who had wrought its ruin. And all would be silent and still; no merry prattle of children heard, or the coming and going of the men and women who once had made that tent their home. A few blackened ashes alone telling where the camp-fire had been. The

flocks all scattered; those that the foe had not destroyed driven off and wandering in the wilderness, none knew where. It is a picture of utter and most mournful desolation.

II. ITS MEANING. Its intent is to represent what was about to happen in regard to the Church and people of Judah. The temple should be overthrown and burnt with fire; her holy places profaned, her altars broken down, her sacred services all brought to an end, the solemn feast-day no more observed. Her children—they who ministered at her altars and sang the high praises of the Lord—should have gone forth from her and be as though they were not, and all the congregation of the people, the flock of the Lord, should be scattered. And all this came to pass, as we well know, violently and as in a moment, like as a stone is suddenly hurled forth from the sling (ver. 18). But the prophet's picture has a yet wider application; for it tells of the terrible desolation which may come upon any Church, whether in a nation, or a community, or in any given district. Under the vivid imagery which Jeremiah employs we may see represented the deplorable disaster of a Church's desolation, and whence and how it comes. Therefore let us look at: 1. *The overthrown tent.* By it we may see represented the destruction of the whole organization of the Church. How beautiful is the spectacle presented to the outward eye by a Church that enjoys the blessing of God! Behold her *sanctuaries.* Look upon them, from the stately cathedral down to the humblest house of God in the land. Here, with dome and towers and spires piercing the sky, pointing upwards, heavenwards, and breaking the dull level of men's common habitations, and of the buildings which they have reared for their dwellings, their labour, their trade. And out in the country, on the hillside, scattered over the wide plains and along many a quiet valley, in hamlet, village, and town, we behold the sanctuaries built for God, and the stream, larger or smaller, of worshippers that continually go up to them to worship. Each one of these sanctuaries a centre of light and warmth, of energy and holy toil, blessing and being blessed. And think of *the sabbaths* of the Church—those blessed days of rest, when the weary round of toil is made to hush its noise, and for the time to cease. The plough stands still in the furrow, the horses roam in the meadow or gladly rest in the stall; but the ploughman is gone home, that he may, if he will, give heed to the husbandry of the soul and to the preparation for the harvest of heaven. Nor, in this survey, may we pass by *the Church's worship.* What myriads of jubilant anthems and glad psalms and triumphant hymns go up heavenwards, with a merry noise! What help for all who desire it is won by those who give heed to the holy truth that is at such times proclaimed! Ah! if spiritual thought and feeling could, by some Divine chemistry, be made visible, what a glorious scene would be witnessed! Like unto the rainbow which was round about the throne, beautiful to behold, would the worship of the Church be seen, even as it is seen by him to whom and for whom and by whom it is all rendered. Think, too, of *the work of the Church.* The ships that bear her messengers, charged to proclaim the glad tidings of the gospel to all mankind, speed their way through all seas, across all oceans, and enter every harbour. Ah! yes; Christ's Church on earth, faulty, imperfect, unfaithful, as she so often and so largely is,—where would the world be without her? and where would the wretched and the lost find their truest friends, if not in her? But all this outward organization, this visible tabernacle of the Church, is contemplated, *not* as in her happy ideal, but in the very reverse. The prophet's picture portrays the tabernacle thrown down, and desolation everywhere. Hence her sanctuaries forsaken, profaned, or left to decay and ruin; her services abandoned or turned into mere performances of worn-out ceremonies; her sabbaths no longer days of guarded rest, but like all other days; her work paralyzed and dropped more and more, and all her external framework and organization overthrown. Try and realize what that would be. And this is not all. 2. *Her children are represented as having gone forth from her.* When all is well with a Church, it is our joy to see the children taking the fathers' place, coming forward to uphold the standard which the aged hands of the seniors are compelled to let go. How delightful such a scene is we need hardly say. But there is nothing of this kind contemplated here, but, on the contrary, those to whom the Church would naturally look to carry on her work are seen borne away captive by the foes of the Church, and as slaves to the world. 3. And the last feature in this sad picture is *the scattering of the flock.* The people at large, for whose interests the Church was

bidden to care, turning from her with disgust, scouting her claims, running riot in sin, unchecked, unhindered, unwarned; sinking down into awful depths of wickedness and spiritual ignorance, living "without God and without hope in the world." Such is the scattering of the flock, the alienation of her children, and the spoiling of her tabernacle, from all which may God evermore keep and defend us. But that we may be thus defended, let us—

III. INQUIRE THE CAUSE OF SUCH DISASTER. It is clearly stated in ver. 21, "The pastors have become brutish, and have not sought the Lord." 1. Who are these pastors? It would be a mistake to suppose that only ministers are meant. Jeremiah did not mean these only, but all to whom the flock of God were entrusted—kings, rulers, judges, parents, and teachers, heads of families, and all to whom, by virtue of their position, the charge and responsibility of watching over the souls of others was given. 2. Now, these pastors had "become brutish." By which is meant, first of all, unintelligent, stupid, blind to the meaning of facts, and incapable of perceiving what needed to be done; with no quick apprehension, if any at all, of their responsibility, their duty, or the peril that threatened both their flock and themselves; settled down into the stolid apathy and indifference of ignorance, of dulled perception, and of blindness of heart. Brutish, too, because unspiritual, materialized, worldly, earth-bound; having little or no regard for anything beyond what this life can give or take away; caring more for the fleece of the flock than for its faith and fidelity. And brutish, it may be, in a yet lower sense, because sensual; like those of whom Paul tells with bitter tears. "Whose god," he says, "is their belly, who glory in their shame, who mind earthly things." 3. "The pastors have become brutish." What an awful association of ideas! Can any condition be conceived of more horrible than this? No wonder such disastrous results followed. Think how dreadful such a fact must be for *the honour of Christ*. How his Name must be blasphemed! How such must crucify the Son of God afresh, and once more put him to open shame! How again the Lord Jesus, pointing to the wounds in his sacred hands and feet and side, must declare, "These are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends"! Blessed Saviour, keep us from such sin as this. And how dreadful for *the Church of Christ*, which he has purchased with his own blood! How such men discourage the Church! how they chill its ardour! how they stagger its faith! how they weaken its strength! how they imperil its very life! And how dreadful for *the world!* "Woe unto the world," said our Saviour, "because of offences!" This he said in pity for the world, hindered, made to stumble and fall by those who should only have helped it on its way to God. How many will be hardened in wickedness, encouraged to despise all religion, furnished with fresh subject for impious mockery and new arguments for sin, by such as they of whom our text tells! And how dreadful for *these brutish ones themselves!* "But woe," said Jesus, "unto them by whom that offence cometh!" "Who shall abide the day of the Lord's coming" to execute his wrath on them? Who, indeed! God, in his infinite mercy, save us from ever knowing what that wrath is. 4. *But how came this awful fall?* What brought down these pastors to this dreadful condition? And the answer to this question is plainly given. *They did not seek the Lord; they were prayerless pastors:* and that explains all. Now, this did not mean that there was no worship, no praise, no prayer, ever offered. We know there was. The temple service went on and the sacrifices were presented as usual. But there was no true, heartfelt prayer. They did not really *seek* the Lord. And so with ourselves, there may be, and there probably will be, the keeping up of pious customs, the daily prayers, the ordinary worship; but for such seeking of the Lord as is here told of, and the neglect of which worked such ruin, there must be far more than this. There must be that full application of the heart and mind, that lifting up of the soul to God, that drawing out of the affections after him, that cleaving of the desires to him, that ardour and yet that patience, that humility and yet that boldness which time cannot measure, which make long prayers seem short to him who offers them, and short prayers, if of necessity they must be short, count as long prayers with him who, for Christ's sake, mercifully receives the soul who follows hard after him. This is the kind of prayer which can alone be our safeguard from the abyss into which the pastors here told of fell. Would we escape it, we must seek the Lord *so;* all else is as seeking him not at all. It is no holiday task, but one demanding all the energies of the soul. How many,

how mighty, how manifold, how subtle, are the difficulties in the way! There is the earth-bound heart, that ever clogs our souls with its clinging clay; that makes them like the bird with the lime of the bird-snarer on its feathers, unable either to fly or go: when it would soar aloft it is powerless to spread its wings, and so is as if chained to the ground. And incessant occupations clamour for attention, and are ever telling us we have no time. And indolence and sloth keep suggesting thoughts of ease and self-sparing. And want of practice in this, as in everything else, makes real prayer very difficult. And Satan, when he sees the soul threatening to escape him by means of such prayer—as by such means it ever will escape him—bends all his energies to thwart and hinder, to baffle and beat down, such prayer. All this is so, but yet we *must* thus pray. And let us not be disheartened. All these difficulties have been overcome by ten thousand of the saints of God, and shall be by us. And, for our help, remember our Lord's intercession. Join all our prayers—poor, weak things as at their best they are—on to his almighty, all-prevailing intercession, and in this also we shall come off "more than conquerors through Christ who hath loved us." So shall we be kept from being one of those wretched pastors who have become brutish, and have, therefore, only scattered the Lord's flock; yea, we shall be made and be confessed, now and hereafter in our Lord's presence, as one of the pastors after his own heart.—C.

Vers. 23—25.—*Fruits of a chastened spirit.* From what foul soil do the fairest flowers spring! Beautiful as they are, they are rooted in that which is altogether unbeautiful. The sweet perfume of many woods, seeds, flowers, will not be given forth until they are gashed with the axe, or bruised, or crushed, or otherwise seemingly maltreated. We could not have the many-hued arch of the exquisitely tinted rainbow were it not for the drear, dark clouds and the descending rain. The most precious of the psalms were wrung out of the heart of David when that heart was well-nigh borne down with grief. And here, in these verses, it is the chastened spirit of Judah, personified in the prophet who speaks, that utters itself in the lowly confession of the twenty-third verse, the holy submission of the prayer of the twenty-fourth verse, and the settled hatred of them who hate God which burns in the twenty-fifth. Consider, then, these fruits, and may God make them to abound in ourselves.

I. THE CONFESSION. Ver. 23, "O Lord, I know," etc. Now, this is a confession: 1. *Of humble dependence upon God.* It is an acknowledgment that, however much man may propose, God will dispose; that man's goings are of the Lord. The life of each is, as God told Cyrus (Isa. xliv.), guided, governed by him. Illustrations are everywhere: the cruelty of Joseph's brethren; the oppression of Israel in Egypt; the crucifixion of our Lord (cf. Acts ii. 23); the persecution of the Church (Acts viii. 3); Paul's early life; etc. All these are instances in which, whilst men did exactly as they liked, acting with choice as unfettered as it was evil, they were nevertheless made to subserve the Divine plans, and their evil was compelled to work out good. Man may have power to "walk," but whither his steps will lead he cannot "direct." "The way of man is not in himself." He is free to choose his way, and for his choice he is responsible; but he is not allowed to determine all that shall come of that choice or what its issues and results shall be. Every time that men find their plans turn out altogether differently from what they expected or designed, proves the truth of the prophet's word. God has planned the life of each one of us. He intends certain results to be secured by our lives.

> "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will."

And our wisdom is to see and confess and conform ourselves to the Divine plan—happy they who do so!—and not to thwart or hinder it, as so many are bent upon doing, and hence, in the manifold sorrows of their lives, find it "hard to kick against the pricks." Our wisdom is daily to pray, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; make plain my path before my face." 2. *Of their own folly and sin.* There are many teachers who will instruct us in this truth of our own incompetence to order our ways; all that is needed is that we be willing to learn. Such teachers are: (1) *Reason.* It is reasonable that, as we are the creatures of God, he should have

the control of our lives. (2) *Scripture.* We have cited some instances already. (3) *Observation.* The world is strewn with the wrecks of men who have disregarded the chart given them of God, and have run upon the rocks in consequence. (4) But the most strenuous and resistless teacher of all is *Experience.* He will make a man learn, almost whether the man will or no. And it was this teacher who had been instructing, in his emphatic manner, Judah and her people. By the miserable mess they had made of their lives, and the frightful calamities which now were close at their doors (ver. 22), they had at length come to see and confess their own wretched ordering of their way. Hence now the confession, "O Lord, I know that," etc. It is a blessed fruit for folly and fault to bear. It is not the natural fruit, but one of God's gracious grafts. Peter's folly of boasting bore such fruit when "he went out and wept bitterly." Let our prayer be that the faults and follies, the sins and sorrows, with which our lives are scattered over may make us see and own, "O Lord, I *know* that," etc. 3. *Of their trust, nevertheless, in God's infinite love.* For not improbably this confession has not only an upward look to God as the Director of men's ways, and an inward look upon their own sin, but also an outward look upon those dread foes who were hastening to destroy them. And this was their comfort that, after all, these enemies of theirs were in God's hands. No doubt they designed fearful things against God's people (cf. ver. 25). But then, "the way of man is not," etc. Hence even these fierce, relentless foes might be held in and turned about by the bit and bridle of God. Had not God, in the days of the good King Hezekiah, proved this in regard to the King of Assyria and his army? Had he not, as Isaiah said, "put a hook in his nose . . . and turned him back by the way by which he came"? And this confession breathes this hope and trust that God would do the like by their enemies now about to fall upon them. It is a real comfort to know that all our enemies, whether human or spiritual, are under the control of God. Even the apparently omnipotent prince of evil has but a limited power. *He,* too, cannot direct his own way. "The Lord, he is the true God, the living God, the everlasting King" (ver. 10).

II. THE PRAYER. Ver. 24, "O Lord, correct me, but," etc. 1. *This is a model prayer.* For: (1) It confesses wrong. It owns the need of correction. The man is no longer right in his own eyes. He is seen, like the publican, "standing afar off," etc. (2) It desires to be put right (cf. Ps. li.). As there, so here, there is the longing for renewal, the clean heart, the right spirit. (3) It deprecates, not the correction, but the wrath of God. The man has a clear view of that wrath—its crushing, destroying power. It is good to have this. Without it there is the danger of our looking lightly upon our sin. 2. *It is a most instructive prayer.* It teaches us: (1) That all the corrections we have received have been fatherly ones—"in judgment," not "in anger." For had they been in anger we had not been here at all. (2) That we are alive and in God's presence proves that the love of God, and not his anger, is ours still. For his anger would have "brought us to nothing." (3) That there are corrections in anger. There have been such. Where are Egypt, Nineveh, Babylon, Rome? God brought them "to nothing." And there will be for all who harden themselves against God. (4) That, seeing all need correction and will therefore receive it, either "in judgment" or "in anger," our wisdom is to make this prayer our own. One or other of these corrections we must have. Which shall it be? This prayer was answered for Israel. They have *not* been brought to nothing, and they *were* corrected. That sin of idolatry which brought on them God's correction they have, ever since that correction, utterly abandoned. Then let us make this prayer our own.

III. HOLY ANGER AGAINST THE ENEMIES OF GOD. We can readily see that vers. 23 and 24 are the fruits of a chastened spirit, but this fierce utterance of ver. 25 seems of another kind. But it is not. No doubt it has somewhat of the fierceness which belonged to that stern age, but it is none the less a real fruit of a right spirit. We ought to be very doubtful of our own spirit, however meek and contrite it is, if it be not accompanied with an intense detestation of evil. "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?" Such sentiment is a true note of the Spirit of God, and a religious life that lacks it is sure to be lacking in vigour, strength, and reliability. It is not personal hatred that finds utterance here, so much as a deep sense of the wrong done to God and the hindrance that is placed in the way of his will. The seventy-ninth psalm is an expression of this petition. Our

age, and the temperament that so soft an age induces, are apt to make us be too easy with sin and sinners. We are so bred up in the idea of the "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," that we forget how anything but gentle and mild he was to the hopelessly bad who were, in regard to the spiritual well-being of his people, doing as is here said, "eating up Jacob, devouring him," etc. What awful words poured forth from the Saviour's lips towards such! Let us suspect a meekness that makes us mild towards such. A man may make the confession of ver. 23, and offer the prayer of ver. 24, and fall and fall again; but if he have the stern spirit of ver. 25, that deep, intense hatred of evil, sin is far less likely to have dominion over him for the future; he will be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Therefore, whilst we crave that fruit of the Spirit which is seen in vers. 23, 24, let us crave that also which we have here in ver. 25. It is the result of our being "strengthened with might by the Spirit of God in the inner man," and leads on, in blessed, successive steps, to our being "filled with all the fulness of God."—C.

Ver. 23.—"*The way of man.*" The prophet probably speaks here not merely for himself, but in the name of the whole nation. He gives articulate utterance to the better elements of thought and feeling existing among them, their conscious short-sightedness as regards the meaning and issue of their own national experiences, their helpless dependence on the unseen Divine power that is working out through the terrible events of the time its own all-wise purposes. An important view of human life is here presented before us. Consider (1) *the fact asserted*; (2) *the influence it may be expected to have over us.*

I. THE FACT ASSERTED. "The way of man is not in himself," etc. All human life is a "way," a journey, a pilgrimage, through various scenes and circumstances, to the "bourn from whence no traveller returns." And, free as we may be and accountable for our own actions, there is a sense in which it is equally true that it is given to none of us to determine what that way shall be. We are called on to recognize a governing power external to ourselves, above and beyond ourselves. Look at this fact in two lights as indicative of: 1. *Moral inability.* A man's own judgment and impulse are not in themselves a safe rule for the conduct of his life. He cannot always trace the mutual relation of interests and events, is liable to be deceived by appearances, blinded by the glamour of his own feelings, misled by the force of his own self-will. The very complexity of the circumstances among which he "walks" is often a source of danger. He is as one surrounded by the diverse interlacing paths of a forest; he needs both external guidance and internal influence to direct his choice. The right way is not "in himself." 2. *Practical restraint.* No man has the actual power to determine altogether the course of his own life. Free as he may think himself to be to take what "steps" he pleases, he is, after all, often ruled by circumstances over which he has no control. He is not always master of his own movements, cannot do the thing that he would, constrained perhaps to do something totally different from what he intended. Who has not found himself to have been drifted, by the silent, unobserved current of events, into a position entirely other than he would have chosen for himself? Who has not had to accept, as the issue of his own doings, something strangely unlike what he looked for? "Man proposes; God disposes."

> "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will."

Human history—national, social, individual—is full of illustrations of the governing and restraining effect of some mysterious force that underlies all the phenomena of life. Faith penetrates the heart of this mystery, and discerns in it a personal Divine providence, the energy of a will that is "holy and just and good."

II. THE INFLUENCE THIS FACT MAY BE EXPECTED TO HAVE OVER US. Such a truth, even in the purely negative form in which this passage presents it, may well have a marked effect on the whole habit of our daily thought and action. It teaches several important lessons. 1. *Distrust of self.* If our judgment is thus fallible, our impulse misleading, our power limited, shall we think to make our own will the sole rule of life? "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding," etc. (Prov. iii. 5, 6); "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will

go into such a city," etc. (Jas. iv. 13—16). 2. *Thoughtful observation of the course of events*, with a view to trace the path of the providence that is over us. Hidden as the power that governs our life may be, the teachable mind discerns ever more and more clearly the method of its working. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him," etc. (Ps. xxv. 14); "The meek will he guide in judgment," etc. (Ps. xxv. 9). 3. *Practical obedience to the call of present duty.* Dark as our way may be, we cannot go far wrong if we follow the dictates of conscience. Be true in everything to your own sense of right and to the clear lines of Divine Law, and you may safely leave all issues with God. 4. *The calm repose of faith.* In the confused conflict of adverse circumstances, in the deep night of our sorrow and our fear, we hear a voice that whispers to us, "All is well." It must be so if we believe that almighty Love is Lord of all.—W.

Vers. 1—12.—*What men fear and what they ought to fear.* I. WHAT MEN FEAR. *They fear mere images of their own manufacture.* Note the connection between vers. 2 and 3. In ver. 2 the heathen are spoken of as being dismayed at the signs of heaven. Probably these signs, considered in their more particular and direct connection with the dismay, were really images on earth, representing the supposed Divine dignity of the bodies in the heavens. The heavenly bodies were signs to the believer in Jehovah—signs of the power and wisdom of Jehovah. But what signs could they be to the heathen? In their eyes they were themselves Divine realities, and the signs were on earth in the shape of images. If this view be correct, it makes dismay at the signs of heaven look more than ever absurd; for these signs were of man's own making. He goes out to the wood and cuts down one tree, and it supplies material for common use, beams and flooring and furniture for his dwelling-place. He takes another tree, neighbour and of the very same kind, and of this he makes an image, to be an object of dread, to be approached with trembling solicitude and doubt. The very chips and shavings that come off as it is being shaped may be burnt, but it itself is sacred, decked with silver and gold, perfected by the most cunning art of the time, surrounded probably with the choicest treasures of the land where it is worshipped. And yet in itself it is nothing. When it grew in the wood it bore leaves and fruit, and had vital movement in it. By its life it spoke to those who had ears to understand. Other trees cut down, even when they become dead wood, are useful; but here is dead wood not only useless but so treated that it becomes full of the worst peril to all associated with it, a centre of abominations, delusions, and cruelties. And *it must be felt as a very extraordinary thing* that what men thus make with their own hands should be regarded with such perpetual dread and circumspection. Partly it may be accounted for by the force of education. Those who had been brought up having their minds sedulously filled with certain associations in respect to these images, would either fail to see any absurdity in fearing them or, in spite of the absurdity, would be unable to get over the fear. It is very absurd to be afraid of walking through some secluded churchyard at midnight, but many people could only do so with the utmost trepidation—even those who show plenty of good sense in their ordinary affairs. The mystery lies not so much in the continuance of image-worship as in the origin of it; and this is a mystery we have no power to penetrate. A more practical thing is to take heed to the counsel here given. *These* works of your own hands cannot hurt you. Neglect them, they cannot resent the negligence. Pile up before them all you can in the way of gift and honour, and yet you get not the least good in return. You may be hurt by other works of your hands, but assuredly not by them; and if you are hurt—as it seems by the instrumentality of these images—yet be sure of this, that the hurt comes from Jehovah's anger because you are honouring and worshipping the creature in opposition to the Creator. And if it be said, "How does all this dissuasion against *image-worship* concern *us*?" the answer is plain that, although we do not make images of wood, we may have conceptions in our own minds which are as truly the cause of empty terror as any visible image that man ever made. The ultimate meaning of the counsel here is that it is vain to fear anything or any one save the omnipotent God.

II. WHAT MEN OUGHT TO FEAR. Images are presented in this passage, first, in themselves, in all their emptiness, as pure fabrications of human superstitions; and then they are brought into the presence of the exceeding glory of Jehovah, and thus the exhibition of their nothingness is completed. Moreover, the glory of Jehovah

shines more brightly still by contrast with the darkness and shame that are over against it. He is the great and strong One, the living One, and the everlasting King. The ever-living God over against dead and degraded matter!—can there be a greater contrast? And to bring out God's strength, his strength to make his wrath felt as real suffering in the lives of those who displease him, the contrast is made, not between the living God and dead idols, but between the omnipotent Ruler and the kings of the nations. Take the kings of the nations; take him who rules the widest territory, controls the largest resources, shows in himself the greatest resolution and force of character, achieves the most splendid reign that history can record—take such a one, and yet what is he over against Jehovah? Jehovah is the King of the nations. It is his power that moulds them and gives them their destiny, their place in his economy of the ages. And as Jeremiah contemplates all this, he says, "Who would not fear thee?" Certainly there are none but what would fear, and with a properly befitting fear, if only they could properly regard the object presented to them. But while men are fearing that which need not be feared, they depart further and further from a sense of him who holds in his self-sufficing being complete power over all their best interests. When they suffer, being deceived by lying lips, they attribute their suffering to the wrath of a God whom they themselves imagine; and so, fixing their minds by a kind of fascination on the wrong cause, they fail to have even the least suspicion of the right one. If, when a blow falls upon us, we could trace that blow back, and see how much of it comes from God, and with what purpose it comes, then how much useless suffering would be spared! But blows come on men in the dark, and they prefer to remain in the dark with their evil deeds rather than be freed from their misconceptions by coming to the light.—Y.

Ver. 2.—*The dismay of the heathen at the signs of heaven.* By the signs of heaven here are doubtless meant those heavenly bodies given for signs and seasons, days and years (Gen. i. 14); this view still further helping to explain the reference in ch. viii. 2 to sun and moon and all the host of heaven. Why *these* should terrify it is not very easy for us to comprehend, surrounded as we are by quite different associations. Often, indeed, there is cause of terror in the heavens above us, as when the depths of the celestial spaces are hidden from us by the thunder-cloud, and when the stormy blasts go forth on their errand of destruction over land and sea. But such terrors, we know, come from things nearer the earth. Sun and moon and all the host of heaven have quite a different effect on our minds. And we know, too, from the references to them in the Scriptures, that they did not terrify those who knew God. The Book of Psalms shows nothing of dismay at the signs of heaven; rather it sets them forth as helping to produce cheerfulness, enjoyment, and elevating adoration towards him who made them. Such feelings have never been absent from the minds of those who have really comprehended whose handiwork the heavenly bodies are, and why he brought them into existence. How is it, then, *that by such a strong expression they are here represented as being objects of terror?* The answer is, that the maker of them being unknown, and the purpose of them being undiscernible, to those whose minds were darkened by wicked works, they had to make their own conjectures. And thus they filled the darkness of their ignorance with horrid, stupefying errors. To sun and moon and all the host of heaven they came to attribute a kind of personality. And then to the personality thus conceived there would be attached the two contrasted states of mind of complacency and wrath. *Complacency* appeared in the warmth, brightness, and clearness of day, and the cloudless skies of night, when moon and stars were revealed in all their milder splendour. *Wrath*, on the other hand, would seem to be shown by the eclipse, the waning of the moon, by rolling clouds, destructive storms, thunder and lightning, long droughts, meteors, comets, etc. And once having got into their heads that sun, moon, and stars had Divine dignity about them, it was nothing very wonderful that these heathen should be thus terrified by everything in the way of celestial commotion. In every such commotion the frowning faces of the celestial gods would be visible, and every injury thus coming would be reckoned as a blow from them. The words of the messenger to Job, telling him how the lightning had destroyed his flocks, may be adduced as a very striking illustration of dismay at the signs of heaven. What does the messenger tell Job? That *the fire of*

God had fallen from heaven. But the messenger did not know that; all he knew was that some extraordinary flame had destroyed the sheep. He went beyond the actual fact of his experience, and from it made such an inference as his superstitious mind naturally led him to make. Thus, then, we may take it this dismay at the signs of heaven was produced; and once it became thoroughly fixed in the mind that every eclipse, comet, storm, death by lightning, was an expression of Divine wrath, the next thing would be an instant attempt to make propitiation and avert further mischief. And it is easy to see that, as priestcraft grew in power, all would be done that could be done to make the people believe that the signs of heaven needed constant remembrance in order to keep them acting favourably towards the inhabitants of earth. Such, then, was the way of the heathen; but the way of Jehovah's people was to be quite different. These signs of heaven were no sufficient cause of terror, and indeed were to be quite differently regarded. God says to his people, "Be not dismayed;" but the command cannot directly produce obedience. There must be a showing, a clear showing, that there is no cause for terror. Terror because of the signs of heaven can only come from ignorance. The moment the mind takes in the great general drift of Gen. i., that same moment dismay will yield to an intelligent veneration towards God. A savage, seeing the express train rush past him, with its thunder and mystery, at the rate of fifty miles an hour, is as a matter of course utterly terrified and bewildered. But there would be no terror and bewilderment if he only really knew all the wisdom, patience, and controlling power which have made that express what it is. Furthermore, who would think of denying the immense utility of railways to the world because every now and then there is some hideous disaster to a train? And, similarly, through all the mysterious destructions which from time to time come in the natural world, we must look at something beyond and above them. Jesus Christ, who came into the world to make manifest and explicit the love of God as a great reality, is higher than any of these causes of temporal pain and loss. We are not permitted to get any satisfactory view of suffering as a whole, and we do well to refrain from putting any speculation of our own in the place of such a view. Our wisdom is to get more and more of a practical knowledge of God. Only so can it become possible for us to say that "we shall not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."—Y.

Ver. 23.—*The way of man not in himself.* I. MAN IS NOT TO BE THE CHOOSER OF HIS WAY. "I know that the way of man is not in himself." It is surely not without significance that אָדָם is here used for "man." To the Hebrew there must always have been the opportunity of peculiar suggestions upon the occurrence of this word. Adam would rise to mind, the first man, with God's purposes for him, and his speedy calamitous departure from those purposes. God made Adam that he might go in God's way. When the two accounts of the creation of man are taken together, it will be seen how abundant is the evidence that the way of Adam was not in himself. His only condition of safety, peace, and happiness was in strict compliance with the Divine injunctions. And with regard to the descendant of Adam, he who can read the account of Adam and see the essential correspondence between ancestor and posterity, is there not everything to teach him that his way also is not in himself? Why, he is some little distance advanced in the way before he is conscious that it is a way at all. The preservation of his life and the direction of it have been at the disposition of others. And when life—as far as individual responsibility is concerned—really begins, how wise he proves to be who looks for the pointing of God's finger, and feels that he must follow it! The man who insists that he can make his own way only finds it perish at last. Because no way can be considered just as a way; whether it is pleasant or painful, easy or difficult, is not the great matter, but whither it leads, what lies at the end of it. As it would be foolish for a man to take charge of a ship, ignorant of his destination and how to reach it, so it is equally foolish for a man to suppose that any way will do so long as it is as comfortable and easy as he can make it. Man's right way must be according to God's clear will; and it is the way of trust in Jesus who is the Son and Christ of God. Note, further, the strong expression of individual assurance here given. "I know," says Jeremiah. He knew it indeed from his own experience. The way in which he now was, of prophet and witness for Jehovah, was

not of his choosing. He did not think himself fit for it. And yet so far was he from being right in his own impressions as a young man, that it appears God had chosen him for a special purpose or ever his existence had begun. It is a great blessing to a man when, either from experience of his own wanderings or prudent observation of the wanderings of others, he can say in this matter, "I know." He spares himself much anxiety and shame who is humble enough to put himself under Divine guidance.

II. GOD MUST ESTABLISH MAN WHEN HE IS IN THE RIGHT WAY. "It is not in man that walketh to make sure of his steps." In other words, though he may have begun the journey rightly, that is no proof that he will go on without hindrance or disaster to the end. In days when the journeys of most people, even long journeys, would have to be undertaken on foot, this expression with regard to the walking man would be very significant. The perils of such a journey were well known—perils from robbers, perils of losing one's way in the dark and sometimes probably in the daylight, perils through trusting to strangers who may deceive or insufficiently inform him, perils through sickness far from home and friends. And so in the great spiritual way there is needed humility all through. The way is made up of little steps, and a false step may not be possible to retrieve. Divine knowledge and Divine intimations must stand in the place of our experience. Faith in God's wisdom which cannot fail, and in God's Word which cannot lie, must be our resource in all perplexity. There are times when common sense and right feeling are enough to guide our conduct, yet even these are more the gift of God than may at first appear. We cannot, then, be too minutely observant as to our need of Divine light and truth and assurance. Thus, being found in the right way and enduring to the end, we shall be safe.—Y.

Ver. 24.—*God's correction of his people.* A preliminary difficulty is felt here, in that this earnest deprecation seems to apply to the position of an individual. Ver. 23 is easily taken as being the utterance of Jeremiah himself, but ver. 24 can only apply with propriety to the nation. Such an utterance as that of this chapter must evidently be taken as a combination made up by several speakers. Jehovah speaks; Jeremiah speaks; the nation speaks; and in such an outburst as that of ver. 24 the nation speaks fitly, not as a multitude, but as with the voice of one man. It will be noticed that there is a correspondence with ch. iii. 4, where Israel is represented as possibly addressing Jehovah, and saying, "My Father, thou art the Guide of my youth." And here is an ample confession that the filial, dependent, submissive spirit is needed still.

I. OBSERVE THE ADMISSION OF WRONG-DOING. "Correct me," uttered at all, is an admission that correction is deserved. The whole of the supplication of course implies a reference to the relation of father and child, as if Israel said, "My Father, I have done wrong, and I know that all wrong-doing children, when the wrong is discovered, must expect to be corrected." The correction of children by their parents must have been very familiar to all Israelites; the Book of Proverbs, in many of its pithy sentences, being in part a consequence of this familiarity and in part a cause of it. A most important part in the benefit of correction came from its very certainty, from the child's knowledge that the correction could not be escaped. Though the *extent* of it might be an open question, the certainty was to be no question at all. The position might be put thus: If an earthly father, being evil, yet has firmness enough not to overlook the least departure from his commandments, then the pure Jehovah above, who is regarded as the Father of Israel, cannot be less strict to mark iniquity. Israel has done wrong, and to make an ample admission of the wrong, to welcome the needful chastisement, is nothing more than what is right. There is no merit in such an admission; the suppliant who makes it is only doing what he ought to do. To continue insensible of the wrong adds to the wrong, and makes correction as correction altogether in vain.

II. A FEAR LEST THE CORRECTION MAY BECOME EXCESSIVE AND INJURIOUS. Israel has before its mind, the conception of a father in his relations, powers, and duties. But since the measurements are made from the earthly father with all his imperfections, it follows that not only are the encouraging aspects of the relation seen, but also dreadful possibilities as to how far the chastising force may go. Israel argues too closely from the father on earth to the Father in heaven. The earthly father is seen boiling over with rage, beating his child in the wildness of his fury, not because it

has done wrong, but because it has thwarted him. It is important to notice this very partial way of conceiving the fatherhood of God; this exaggeration of mere might. There is thus given an index to the insufficiency of the knowledge which the Israelites had of God, and a proof how much Jesus was needed to come in and *reveal* the Father, bringing the serenity and composed action of his attributes into full view. God, of course, never acts with fury and frenzy as we apply these words to man. God produces results through man, and there may be fury in the human agents, but in the God behind them there is none. The narrow notion of Jehovah expressed in vers. 24 and 25 itself needed to be corrected. His favour towards Israel was not an arbitrary thing, nor could it be right that his imagined wild fury might justly expend itself on heathens. If Israel was to be corrected with judgment, the same judgment was surely needed to correct the heathen. If there is fury with them, there can be no true dealing in judgment with Israel. Severity with the heathen as typical enemies of the typical people of God is another matter; but severity must never be confounded with fury.

III. THE KIND OF CORRECTION DESIRED. "Correct me, but with judgment." Correction, to have any proper effect, must be deliberate, and proportioned to the offence that has been committed. While it comes from a fatherly purpose, it must come also with the calmness and impartiality of a judicial procedure. A charge is made; evidence is adduced and examined; defence, denial, extenuation, are listened to; everything must be weighed; and so he who is corrected will feel in his conscience that the correction is just. The severity is not blind and measureless force. If it cannot fall short of a certain standard of pain, neither will it exceed it. Any other sort of dealing has no right to the name of correction at all. Foolish Rehoboam, threatening to chastise the people with scorpions, is an illustration of what must ever be avoided by those who are in power. Be it a child or be it a man who is smitten, no good can be done unless there is the sense that the smiting is just.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XI.

The superscription in ver. 1 evidently belongs to the three chapters xi.—xiii., though ch. xi. and xii. are more closely connected with each other than with ch. xiii. To which period the group of prophecies belongs—whether to the reign of Josiah, or of Jehoiakim, or of Jehoiachin, or to various periods, is a matter of dispute. It contains at any rate one passage (ch. xii. 7—17) which was almost certainly put in by a later editor. It is doubtless Jeremiah's work, but seems out of place here (see below, on this passage). Naegelsbach's analysis of ch. xi., xii., is striking. The fundamental idea of the entire discourse he assumes to be the antithesis of covenant and conspiracy, and proceeds thus: 1. A reminder of the renewal of the covenant between Jehovah and the people lately made under Josiah (ch. xi. 1—8). 2. First stage of the conspiracy; all Israel, instead of keeping the covenant with Jehovah, conspires against him (ch. xi. 9—13). 3. The punishment of the conspiracy is an irreversible, severe judgment (ch. xi. 14—17). 4. Second stage of the conspiracy; the plot of the men of Anathoth (ch. xi. 18—23). 5. Third stage; the plot in the prophet's own family (ch. xi. 1—6). Naegelsbach, however, with violence to exegesis, continues thus (assuming the homogeneousness of ch. xii. 1—6 and 7—17): 6. Israel's conspiracy punished by a conspiracy of the neighbouring peoples against Israel (ch. xii. 7—13). 7. Removal of all antitheses by the final union of all in the Lord (ch. xii. 14—17).

The opening verses of this chapter give us (as we have seen already in the general Introduction) a most vivid idea of the activity of Jeremiah in propagating a knowledge of the Deuteronomic *Tōrāh* (*i.e.* the Divine "directions" with regard to the regulation of life). It may even be inferred from ver. 6 that he made a missionary circuit in Judah, with the view of influencing the masses. It was, in fact, only the "elders" of the different towns who had taken part in the solemn ceremony described in 2 Kings xxiii. "The words of this covenant" had been ratified by the national representatives; but it required a prophetic enthu-

siasm to carry them home to the hearts of the people. Hence it was that "the word came to Jeremiah from Jehovah, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and speak unto the men of Judah," etc.

Ver. 2.—**Hear ye . . . and speak.** To whom is this addressed? To Jeremiah and his disciples. The Septuagint, indeed, followed by Hitzig and Graf, read (instead of "speak ye"), "Thou shalt speak unto them," adopting one different vowel-point. But this involves an inconsistency with the first verb, and is not at all necessary, for why should we suppose Jeremiah to have been completely isolated? If the prophet had well-wishers even among the princes, it stands to reason that he must have had more pronounced adherents in the classes less influenced by the prejudices of society.

Ver. 3.—Here begins a series of direct references to Deuteronomy, determining the date of the discourse. **Cursed be the man,** etc.; alluding to Deut. xxvii. 26 (which has, however, not "obeyeth," but "confirmeth," *i.e.* ratifieth as his own personal rule of conduct. **The words of this covenant**; rather, *the words of this ordinance.* The rendering "covenant," however, is not so much erroneous as unsuitable in this context; it is a secondary meaning of the Hebrew *b'rîth*, the original sense being rather "authoritative appointment" (from *bārāh*, to cut, hence to decide). Nothing, perhaps, is so injurious to a correct understanding of the Scriptures as persistently rendering a Hebrew or Greek word by the same supposed equivalent. "Covenant" is no doubt appropriate in some passages (*e.g.* Josh. ix. 6; 1 Sam. xviii. 3), because an "appointment" between men, if equals, involves "giving and taking;" but is inadequate when the parties are not equals, and most of all when the superior party is the Divine Being. In these cases we must clearly recur to the original meaning of "appointment" or "ordinance;" and we have one such case here (see also Hos. vi. 7; 2 Kings xi. 4; Job xxxi. i.; Ps. cv. 10; but *not* Gen. xvii. 9). Διαθήκη (1, an arrangement; 2, a will or testament; 3, a covenant) is to some extent parallel (see Cremer's 'Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek,' *s.v.*).

Ver. 4.—**From the iron furnace**; rather, *out of the iron furnace.* It is Egypt which is thus described (comp. Deut. iv. 20; 1 Kings viii. 51). The oppression in Egypt was like the furnace in which iron is rendered malleable by heat (so Isa. xlviii. 10, "I have tested thee in the furnace of affliction").

Ver. 5.—**The oath which I have sworn** (so Deut. vii. 8; comp. viii. 18). **As it is this day**; a Deuteronomic formula (see *e.g.* Deut. ii. 30; iv. 20), appealing to the test of experience. **So be it, O Lord.** The Hebrew has "Amen, Jehovah." "Amen" equivalent to "true, faithful, trustworthy;" or used in this way as a formula of asseveration, "may it be verified by facts" (the Septuagint has γένοιτο); comp. ch. xxviii. 6.

Ver. 6.—**Proclaim all these words,** etc. This command probably points to a missionary circuit of Jeremiah, as suggested above. Others render, "read aloud" (comp. 2 Kings xxii. 8, Hebrew); but Jeremiah receives the direction to "proclaim" or "cry" elsewhere (ch. ii. 2; iii. 12, etc.). So Gabriel, in the Koran, directs Mohammed to "cry," *i.e.* to proclaim or preach (Sura xcvi. 1).

Vers. 7, 8.—A condensation of ch. vii. 23—26. **Imagination**; rather, *stubbornness* (see on ch. iii. 17). **I will bring**; rather, *I brought.* **All the words.** "Word" sometimes means "thing spoken of;" here, for instance, the curses specified in Deut. xxviii.

Ver. 9.—**A conspiracy.** The language is figurative. Jehovah is the King of Israel; to commit sin is "to rebel against" him (Authorized Version sometimes weakens this into "transgress"); and to encourage one another in wickedness is "to conspire against" God. We need not suppose any open combination against spiritual religion; it is enough if "the spirit of the time" was directly contrary to it.

Ver. 10.—**Their forefathers.** The Hebrew has "their fathers, the former ones." The allusion is to the sins of the Israelites in the wilderness, and in Canaan under the judges. The prophets are constantly pointing their hearers back to those early times, either for warning (as here) or for encouragement (ch. ii. 1; Hos. ii. 15; Isa. i. 26; lxiii. 11, 13). **And they went after**; rather *and they* (*themselves*) *have gone after.* The pronoun is expressed in the Hebrew, to indicate that the prophet's contemporaries are now the subject.

Vers. 11—13.—A summary of Jeremiah's usual prophecies (comp. ch. iv. 6; vi. 19; xix. 3; and especially ii. 28; vii. 17).

Ver. 13.—**That shameful thing**; rather, *the shame.* The name Baal is changed, to mark the abhorrence of the speaker, into Bosheth (see ch. iii. 24). Manasseh, we are told, "raised up altars for Baal" (2 Kings xxi. 3).

Ver. 14.—**Therefore pray not thou,** etc. First Jehovah declares that even the intercession of the prophet will be of no avail (see on ch. vii. 16), and then that the belated supplications of the people themselves will be ineffectual to avert the calamity. **For their trouble.** The four most ancient versions, and some of the extant Hebrew manuscripts, read "in the time of their trouble" (as in ver. 12). The confusion between the

two readings is easy, and the reading of the versions is to be preferred.

Ver. 15.—**What hath my beloved to do in mine house?** "My beloved" is evidently the Jewish people, who in ch. xii. 7 is called "the dearly beloved of my soul." The Divine Speaker expresses surprise that one who has now so poor a claim to the title of "my beloved" should appear in his holy house. It is spoken in the spirit of that earlier revelation of Isaiah, "When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts?" (Isa. i. 12). The Jews, it would seem, came to the temple to pray, but their prayer is not accepted, because it is associated with unholy practices. They thought by formal prayers and sacrifices to pay off their debt to the Deity, and so be free to go on with their old devices (as in ch. vii. 15). This seems the best view of the difficult words which follow, but it implies a correction of the certainly ungrammatical rendering of the Authorized Version—seeing **she hath wrought lewdness** —into *to work the wicked device.* But here begins the most obscure part of the verse. **With many** cannot be right; for "with" has nothing corresponding to it in the Hebrew; the word in the original simply means "the many," and as it is immediately followed by a noun in the singular with "and," and a verb in the plural, it is plain that it must (if correctly read) be part of the subject of the latter. The Septuagint, however, has a different reading, which may very well be correct, and out of which the received Hebrew reading may easily have grown—"Can vows and holy [*i.e.* hallowed] flesh remove from thee thy wickedness [or perhaps, 'thy calamity']?" The connection thus becomes easy. "Vows and holy flesh" (*i.e.* the flesh of sacrifices, Hag. ii. 12), naturally go together; the only other possible way of taking the passage (assuming the correctness of the received text)—"the great ones and the holy flesh shall pass away from thee"— is obviously inadmissible. "Vows and sacrifices," however, precisely express the true association of ideas. A man made a vow, and he generally paid it in the form of a sacrifice. But, inquires Jehovah, "Can such vows and such victims please God, and expiate thy wickedness [or, 'avert thy calamity']? *Then thou mightest rejoice.*" The latter words are not, indeed, more exact than those of the Authorized Version, but are in accordance with grammar, and suit the preceding question. It is not certain, however, that the text is right here; the Septuagint has ἢ τούτοις διαφεύξῃ. (Notice that Keil, conservative to a fault in matters affecting the received text, agrees with the above correction, which is also adopted by Ewald, Hitzig, and Graf.)

Ver. 16.—**A green olive tree.** The olive tree is "one of the most thriving, hardy, and productive trees in the East" (it was the first tree elected king in the parable, Judg. ix. 8), and with its "foliage of a deep, perennial green," furnishes a striking symbol of healthful beauty. A psalmist, speaking in the character of the typical righteous man, compares himself to a "green olive tree in the house of God" (Ps. lii. 8). The word rendered "green" is one of those which are the despair of translators (see on ch. ii. 20). It gives a picture in itself. We seem to see a flourishing, sappy tree, with abundance of pliant, gracefully moving, perennially green branches. **With the noise of a great tumult.** Either the tumult of the *mêlée* of battle is meant (the same uncommon word is used with such a reference in Ezek. i. 24) or the crashing of thunder. "With a rushing mighty sound" would be a more forcible rendering. (For the concluding figure, comp. Ezek. xxxi. 12.) **He hath kindled fire,** etc. There is no occasion to explain this as merely the perfect of prophetic certitude. It was literally true that the fire of war had already devastated the fairest portion of the Holy Land. Israel (expressly referred to in ver. 17) had already been carried into captivity, and Judah was, to the prophetic eye, as good as destroyed. Here, no doubt, that wonderful perfect of faith does come in.

Ver. 17.—**The Lord of hosts, that planted thee.** He who "planted" Israel (comp. ch. ii. 21) could also uproot it; and though, for the sake of his covenant with Abraham, he would not destroy it utterly, yet he could not but interpose as Judge to punish its manifold transgressions. Israel and Judah are mentioned together; for the prophets, so far as we know them from their works, did not recognize the separation of the two kingdoms. **Against themselves**; rather, *for themselves*; i.e. to please themselves.

Ver. 18.—Here, as Naegelsbach puts it, begins the second stage of the "conspiracy." **Hath given me knowledge,** etc.; rather, *gave me knowledge, and I knew it.* **Then**; *i.e.* when I was in utter unconsciousness. Jeremiah had no presentiment of the murderous purpose of his townsmen, till by some "special providence" it came to his knowledge.

Ver. 19.—**Like a lamb or an ox**; rather, *as a mild lamb* (as one of the old translations has it), equivalent to *quasi agnus mansuetus* (Vulgate). Jeremiah says that he was as unsuspicious as a tame lamb which has grown up with its master's family (2 Sam. xii. 3). The Arabs use the very same adjective in a slightly different form as an epithet of such tame lambs (Bochart, 'Hierozoïcon,' i. 520—522, edit. 1663). It

is impossible to help thinking of that "Servant of Jehovah," of whom Jeremiah was a type, who is said, in prophetic vision, to have been "brought as a lamb to the slaughter," and "not to have opened his mouth" (Isa. liii. 7). **The tree with the fruit thereof**; apparently a proverbial expression. Giving the words their ordinary meaning, the rendering would be, *the tree with its bread* (*b'lakhmō*). Our translators appear to have thought that the transition from "bread" to "fruit" was as justifiable in Hebrew as it is in Arabic (in which *'ukla* means properly "food" in general, but also "date fruit"). Fruit, however, was not such an important article of food with the Israelites as with the Arabs; and we must either, with Hitzig, suppose a letter to have intruded into the text, and render (from a corrected reading *b'lēkhō*), *with its sap* (comp. Deut. xxxiv. 7, Hebrew), or else appeal to the etymology of *lekhem* (commonly "bread"), which is "firm, consistent," and render, *the tree with its pith* (Hence *laḥmu* in Arabic means "flesh," and *luḥmatu*, "a woof"). It is no credit to St. Jerome that he followed the absurd version of the Septuagint, "Let us put wood into his bread."

Ver. 20.—(Parallel passage, ch. xx. 12.) **Unto thee have I revealed my cause.** This is the literal rendering, but a comparison of Ps. xxii. 8 and Prov. xvi. 3, suggests that the meaning is "Upon thee have I rolled my cause." This expression is certainly not only more forcible, but more appropriate than the other. Jeremiah's cause was not a secret which needed to be "revealed" to Jehovah, but a burden too heavy for so finely strung a nature to bear alone. Grammatically, the preferred meaning is quite justifiable, though less obvious, as there are other instances of an interchange of meanings between two classes of verbs (see on ch. xxxiii. 6).

Ver. 21.—**Prophesy not, etc.** The men of Anathoth tried first of all to effect their object by threatening. **In the name of the Lord** should be rather, *by the name*, etc. The phrase is exactly parallel to Ps. lv. 1, "Save me, O God, by thy Name, and judge me by thy strength." The Name of God is equivalent to his revealed presence or personality. Baal's prophets prophesied "by Baal" (ch. ii. 8), *i.e.* by an impulse thought to proceed from Baal; Jehovah's by the consciousness of his revealed presence.

Ver. 22.—**Their sons and their daughters, etc.** The lot of the weaker sex and of the male children under the military age is contrasted with that of the young warriors.

Ver. 23.—**Even the year,** etc.; better, *in the year of their visitation* (or, *punishment*), taking the accusative as that of time.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The ancient covenant.* I. THE OBJECT OF THE COVENANT. This was to secure obedience. No covenant was required on God's side, since he is ever willing to bless and changeless in his beneficence. But for the sake of men's faith and to secure their allegiance God graciously condescended to enter into covenant bonds. It is therefore foolish to claim the fulfilment of God's promises irrespective of our conduct. They are "covenant" promises—*i.e.* conditional and assured on certain terms. If we break the terms we can no longer expect the fulfilment of the promises.

II. THE SANCTIONS OF THE COVENANT. 1. *The obligations of gratitude.* The past mercies of God are recited; *e.g.* deliverance from Egypt. 2. *Promises of future good.* If faithful, Israel was to take possession of the "land flowing with milk and honey." 3. *Threats in case of disobedience.* If they proved unfaithful, the people were to find the land of promise full of troubles, and ultimately to be expelled from it (Deut. xxviii. 15). 4. *Constant Divine pleading.* The covenant could not lapse through forgetfulness. Prophets were sent again and again to urge its claims on the people (ver. 7).

III. THE OBLIGATION OF THE COVENANT. This was an ancient covenant; yet it was still binding. God was still fulfilling his part in blessing his people. The obligation was not such as time could affect. What is inherently right once is right eternally. Truth does not lose force with age. The Bible contains covenants which age has made venerable, but not feeble. Its commands and promises are eternally fresh and living, and when the merely local and personal exterior is laid aside, the essence of them applies as much to us as to the Jews. The appetite for mere novelty which characterizes much intellectual inquiry in the present day, as it did that of the Athenians of St. Paul's age (Acts xvii. 21), ignores the fact that the most important question is "What is true?" not "What is new?" Old familiar truths must be noticed that they may be remem-

bored and practised, though of course not to the exclusion of new truths. The New Testament does not abolish but perfects the spiritual truth of the old. It contains that and more.

IV. THE BREACH OF THE COVENANT. The people are accused of disobeying the precepts of the covenant (ver. 8). Disobedience involved both the loss of the promised blessings and the execution of the threatened curses. They who accept special privileges incur special obligations. They who enter into a Divine covenant will be judged by the terms of that covenant. Christians will be judged, not simply by the common law of righteousness in conscience and nature, but by the special requirements of the New *Testament*, i.e. of the *covenant* of Christianity.

Vers. 11—13.—*Idolatry confounded.* I. TROUBLE IS A TOUCHSTONE FOR RELIGIOUS TRUTH. The idolatry that is played with in prosperity is found to be useless in adversity. The Jews had regarded mere stocks and stones as their gods. But in the season of real distress they turn from these and cry to the true God to arise and save them. 1. *The ground of confidence which gives way in the hour of need is worse than useless;* it is treacherous and ruinous, and the discovery of its true character confounds those who have relied on it. A religion which will not stand the test of trouble is a mockery. 2. *Trouble reveals the vanity of an insincere faith.* In trouble we need the true, the real; all false religiousness, all playing at devotion, breaks down then. If our religion has been vain and ill founded, we are then discovered and made to be ashamed, "like a thief when he is found" (ch. ii. 26). 3. *There is a deep instinct which cries out for the true God in the hour of distress.* Old memories then revive, scouted faiths reassert themselves, the first cry of the child to his Parent breaks out again involuntarily, and the godless man in his agony groans, "O my God!"

II. IF WE HAVE FORSAKEN GOD IN PROSPERITY WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO EXPECT HIM TO SAVE US IN ADVERSITY. The religion which we accept in our general life is that to which we should justly look in our hours of need. Here is the natural irony of religion. A man is punished by being left to the protection of the creed of his own choice. It must always be remembered, indeed, that whenever we truly repent and seek God spiritually he will receive and save us (Hos. vi. 1). But the mere cry for God's help in distress is not repentance, nor is it a spiritual return to God. It is a selfish utterance, and may be made while the heart is still far from God, and the sins which drove us from him still unrepented of. It would be neither just nor good for us that God should respond to so degraded and unspiritual a prayer.

III. ALL GROUNDS OF RELIGIOUS CONFIDENCE EXCEPT FAITH IN THE TRUE GOD PROVE FALSE AT THE TEST OF TROUBLE. This is the result of applying the touchstone of trouble; this is the lesson of bitter experience when men are left to cry to their false gods in the hour of need. 1. If there were any worth in these grounds of confidence it *would* be seen then. (1) They should answer to men's requirements, for men have made them to suit their own wishes. (2) They should be sufficient in number for help. "According to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah." How many religious refuges have men made for themselves! Shall *all* these human inventions fail? (3) They should be sufficiently various to afford the required help. Every city had its peculiar cult. The human notions of religion are infinitely various. Cannot a man find one to meet his need out of the whole catalogue of creeds? 2. Experience furnishes the answer to these questions, and shows the certain failure of all the creeds of human invention. They must fail: (1) Because they are human. How can the god whom a man has made save him? (2) Because they are commonly materialistic—the stock and stone of the Hebrew idolatry find their counterparts in the materialistic philosophy and schemes of merely physical amelioration of modern men. (3) Because they are numerous, and therefore none of infinite value, but all limited in range. (4) Because they are reflections of our own thought, not higher influences to lead that thought. Every city had its god embodying the ideas of the city. Men have their separate creeds corresponding to their inclinations and prejudices. Such creeds afford no refuge when deeper questions open up in the dark night of distress.

Vers. 16, 17.—*The olive struck by lightning.* Under the image of an olive tree consumed by lightning fires the prophet portrays the devastation which will come upon

Israel in spite of former prosperity. This is a type of the similar doom which may overtake the happy and prosperous.

I. THE HAPPY PROSPERITY. 1. The olive tree was *green*—perennially green. Prosperity may be constant and unbroken before the descent of judgment. 2. It was *fair*. Prosperity may come with much honour and gladness. 3. It was *fruitful*. The life may abound in good to others. 4. It was *planted by God*. (Ver. 17.) All good comes from him, and it is a great good to be established in our way of life by God's will and help. Yet none of these good things sufficed to avert a terrible doom. Present prosperity is no security against future adversity. The goodness of the past will be no safeguard against the punishment of sins of later years. The long-tried, honoured, useful man who falls into sin at the end of his life must not delude himself into supposing that his earlier career will shield him from all troublesome consequences.

II. THE FEARFUL DEVASTATION. The green and fair and fruitful tree was struck in the thunderstorm, and its branches consumed with fire. 1. The devastation was *from above*—by fire from heaven. God who planted also destroyed. Punishment is sent by God. 2. It was *sudden*. The lightning flash is instantaneous. The terrible ruin of sin may fall in a moment. 3. It was *irresistible*. The tree is passive and helpless in the storm. Its very magnitude only invites the blow which will destroy it. 4. It was *destructive*. Fire consumed the branches. The fires of judgment are consuming fires—they burn to destroy (Matt. iii. 12).

Vers. 18—23.—*The conspiracy of Anathoth.* This incident may afford us some lessons on the subject of persecution, in its occasion and character, the behaviour of the persecuted and the righteous action of God in dealing with it.

I. THE OCCASION OF THE CONSPIRACY ILLUSTRATES A COMMON CAUSE OF PERSECUTION. Jeremiah had been proclaiming unwelcome truths. He had exposed sin and threatened judgment. Such preaching was unpopular, and the men of Anathoth sought to stay it by force (ver. 21). 1. *The faithful preacher must expect to meet with opposition.* Unpopularity is no proof of incompetence (*i.e.* if it arises from the subject-matter of the teaching, not from the style of the teacher). Christ, who began his mission with public favour, ended it amidst universal contumely. 2. *The most needful truth is the most unwelcome.* The smooth words of false prophets of "peace" are acceptable. But they are narcotics given to men who should be roused to flee for their lives. The only hope for those who are spending wicked lives is in their being awakened to a sense of guilt and danger. The effort to awaken them, however, stirs their resentment.

II. THE CONDUCT OF THE CONSPIRATORS REVEALS THE TRUE CHARACTER OF PERSECUTORS. 1. It is *foolish*. Truth cannot be destroyed by suppressing the voice that utters it. Some day it will declare itself in spite of all hindrance. 2. It is *unfair*. Words are met by force. To silence a voice is not to reply to it. Violent opposition to the spread of ideas is a tacit confession of inability to meet them on their own ground of reason, a virtual confession of their force of truth. 3. It is *destructive of social order*. Jeremiah's fellow-townsmen conspire against him. The persecuting spirit divides nearest neighbours. It is the greatest enemy to brotherly charity (Matt. x. 36). 4. It is *treacherous*. While Jeremiah was ignorant of their enmity—led like a lamb to the slaughter—the men of Anathoth were plotting against his life. 5. It is *murderous*. The tree is to be destroyed with its fruit. Professing a good purpose, persecution is invariably possessed by a cruel spirit. 6. It covers *enmity to God* in opposition to his servants. Jeremiah was bidden no longer to prophesy in the Name of Jehovah. It could not be denied that he spoke with Divine authority. Therefore to silence him was to refuse to receive the message of God.

III. THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE VICTIM EXEMPLIFIES THE RIGHT COURSE TO BE PURSUED UNDER PERSECUTION. 1. Not to *desist* from the duty which provoked the persecution. Jeremiah met with little but opposition throughout his long life; yet he remained faithful to the last. 2. Not to *rashly embrace danger*. Jeremiah sought deliverance. It is childish to court persecution. 3. To *seek help from God*. Jeremiah at once committed his cause to God. God alone (1) can help; (2) has the authority to execute vengeance (Rom. xii. 19); (3) judges righteously, impartially, without the bias of passion; and (4) discerns the motive of men and the degrees of guilt trying "the reins and the heart."

IV. THE ACTION OF GOD TYPIFIES THE ULTIMATE EXECUTION OF DIVINE JUDGMENT. 1. *Punishment* must follow such wickedness. Though it is delayed, the vengeance must come. 2. This punishment will be *severe.* "The young men shall die by the sword," the children by famine. Fearful sin must bring fearful penalties. 3. This punishment will be *without exception.* No remnant of the men of Anathoth will be spared. All are guilty; all must suffer. There is a popular impression to the effect that the number of sinful persons lessens the blame attaching to each individual. It is a mistake. If all sin, each will be punished individually as much as if one only were guilty. No conspiracy of men, however widespread, however subtle in schemes, however violent in action, can defeat the ends of Divine justice (Prov. xi. 21).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 5.—*The response of the spiritual conscience to the words of God.* "And I said, Amen, Jehovah." This expression, uttered by Jeremiah with apparent originality, is really an echo of Deut. xxvii. 15. There it expresses the agreement of the whole congregation of Israel: here it is the word of one mouth. The adoption by the prophet, at this juncture, of words so solemnly significant is very impressive. One stands sponsor for many; a righteous and earnest man for a nation of callous transgressors. And is it not often so? What, indeed, would our poor, erring, depraved humanity do with itself were it not for these individual, mediatorial spirits, whom God raises up from time to time through the ages to interpret his will and to keep it in reverent obedience and spiritual trust for them who as yet are ignorant and alienated from his life? The service such men render is of vast importance and but imperfectly understood.

I. ONLY THOSE WHO ARE IN COMMUNION WITH GOD CAN TRULY UNDERSTAND AND APPROVE HIS JUDGMENTS. The commandment is intelligently alluded to, and its penalty stated. The correspondence of Judah's condition with that anticipated in the original passage is pregnantly suggested. All the more so that the transgressors did not feel or admit the correspondence. The prophet alone could say, "Amen;" but he said it emphatically and representatively. How many of God's people find a similar difficulty in acquiescing in his dispensations? They do not examine themselves, or their conscience is not sufficiently awakened, and consequently they fail to recognize his judgments and to profit by them as was intended.

II. GOD RAISES UP THOSE WHO SHALL RESPOND TO HIS VOICE AND MAINTAIN PROVISIONALLY HIS COVENANT RELATIONS WITH THE WORLD. The prophets were not only mouthpieces of Divine truth; they were saints whose consecration was essential to their spiritual discernment and the due exercise of their functions. The people were for the most part spiritually asleep or dead. In their spiritual and moral constitution a medium was provided sensitive enough for the perception and transmission of Divine communications. It was no exaggeration to speak of these messengers as "prepared, ordained, and sent." They were specially raised up for this duty of sustaining the conscious relations of God with his people. This was a dim foreshadowing of the Messiah-consciousness. In a certain sense the prophet repented, believed, obeyed, for the whole people, even as the high priest made solemn offering once a year for the sins of the whole people. Not that this spiritual condition of the inspired seer and saint could be effectual for individual salvation of others; but that it exercised a certain representative and general influence. The prophet held the truth as it were in trust for others, continually and energetically sought to mediate between Jehovah and Israel, and urged the people to acts of repentance and obedience. With each prophet it might be said that a new opportunity was given, a new day of grace afforded, for the return of the apostate nation to its primitive covenant relations with God. And in the succession of the prophets a guarantee was given of the enduring character of those relations, even when the covenant itself was flagrantly broken and practically set aside by those whom it chiefly concerned. The essential point was that there should be no age without some person or persons who should sustain a conscious spiritual connection with Jehovah for themselves and their race.

III. THAT WHICH THE FEW HAVE UNDERSTOOD AND ACCEPTED SHALL BECOME THE COMMON INHERITANCE OF ALL. The prophet was for the most part a solitary and

a lonely man. This isolation of his lot was his grief, but the persistence of the succession of the prophets proved the unswerving purpose of God ultimately to save, not only Israel, but the world. There might be from time to time but one or two who could say "Amen" to his judgments, but some day the people as a whole would themselves endorse and approve them. And soon in the "fulness of the time" Christ would come, who is the faithful and true Witness, the "Amen" of all the Divine Law and promise. In his world-wide reign as our Representative, Prophet, Priest, and King, through faith in him, the race will be constituted into a new Israel, to keep the word of God. In this transfer of influence the law is that the communication shall proceed from the higher consciousness and consecration to the lower; the travail for souls, etc., being but a detailed sponsorship, one day to be done away with, when "all should know him, from the least even to the greatest."—M.

Ver. 10.—*Spiritual atavism; or, the sins of the fathers.* There are punishments and consequences of ancestral sin which reach even to descendants of remote generations. This seems to imply a descent of responsibility—a subject full of difficulty and mystery. The unity of the race in its sin and misery is, with St. Paul, an argument for the probability and even certainty of its unity in the grace of salvation. The doctrine of original sin is treated in Scripture as antecedent to the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ. In connection with this subject, notice—

I. THE INFLUENCE OF HEREDITY. In modern times the laws of heredity have been scientifically investigated, and startling results brought to light. Tendency can be traced from parent to child in gradually deepening lines and more confirmed manifestations. Spirit as well as body acknowledges this law, and, whether in health or disease, its operation is now placed beyond all dispute. But another law or modification of this law is perceived working alongside of it, namely, the law of atavism, in which not the general tendency towards improvement or degeneration is observed, but an apparently arbitrary and capricious recurrence of ancestral peculiarities that had long disappeared from the race. Of this nature seems to have been the present sin of Israel. It was not in the line of continuous succession, but a recurrent phase after intervals of normal and religious life. Thus it showed that the power of evil had only been "scotched," not killed; and that it was ready on the slightest provocation to assert itself in the rankest forms. How much that is mysterious in the conduct of individuals can be traced to the influence of such a principle! The two selves of every man represent influences that have been at work in his progenitors from remotest time.

II. HOW SOLEMN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS. No care can be too great in relation to those we bring into the world. Our own nature and character should be diligently cultivated, and the utmost attention paid to parental example, family influence, and educative circumstance in their upbringing. It will not do to ignore the fact that, from generation to generation, there are transmitted both physical and spiritual tendencies which have largely to do with the formation of character and the determining of destiny. For good or for evil, the parent exercises a despotic influence upon all whom he brings into the world.

III. YET THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE CHILDREN REMAINS. In the sad entail of evil there are many bright instances of bold and pronounced departure from ancestral sin. The individual is not wholly subject to predetermining influences. If so, moral freedom would be but an illusion. A power is required to break the tyranny of inherited sin, and this is provided in the grace of God. The gospel is the development of this grace as an effectual and adequate means of salvation.—M.

Ver. 14.—*The staying of intercession.* The desperate condition of Israel is shown in this prohibition. How great must have been the sin of God's people, ere prayer on their behalf could have been forbidden! What could have been the reason of this?

I. WHILST SIN IS PERSISTED IN THERE CAN BE NO REMOVAL OF DIVINE JUDGMENTS. The righteousness of God has, after long-suffering mercy, brought these upon his people. The wisdom of their imposition is infallible; and they spring from the depths of an inscrutable, infinite love. Whilst, therefore, the condition which involved their imposition is unchanged, it would be presumption to suggest their removal. It is rather for the righteous conscience of saints sorrowfully to approve the action of the Supreme

Magistrate, as he draws his cordon round the transgressor and compels him to capitulate. The real calamity in connection with these judgments is the spiritual wrongness which necessitates them, and not the physical conditions through which they are executed. Most men suppose that if the pain or inconvenience is removed the evil is at an end, and the question between them and God settled. They still go on to sin. Impunity confirms and hardens them in their transgression. We have not learned the real lesson of calamity until we have detected its moral sources or occasions, and sought to rectify them before God.

II. DIVINE JUDGMENTS MAY IN CERTAIN INSTANCES BE GREATER MERCIES THAN THE REMOVAL OF THEM WOULD BE. When judgment continues to rest upon the transgressor, it is not mere vengeance which is represented, but mercy working on the lines of severity. It is God's emphasis upon his commandment which must be heeded. The blessing that is latent in it waits the appearance of a repentance not to be repented of. Like pent-up waters, it will flow in an overwhelming stream when once the barriers of law have been removed by the sinner's return to God.—M.

Vers. 18—23.—*Perils of prophesying.* The conspiracy of which these verses speak seems to have been sudden as it was secret. It affected the mind of the prophet in a peculiarly painful way, as it was the men of his own district who were concerned in it—his friends, probably even kinsfolk, who looked upon him as their worst enemy. The crime was all the more heinous that the means taken to execute it were underhand. It is possible that they greeted him with expressions of kindness and hospitality, and that everything was done to prevent his suspecting his real danger. Upon his discovering the plot, it is possible that they ceased to conceal their intentions, and, thinking him in their power, urged him "prophesy not in the Name of the Lord."

I. THE PERILS OF THE PROPHET arose from: 1. *A hatred of the truth in his hearers.* There was something unpalatable in the continual denunciations of their wickedness. Their spiritual and patriotic pride was wounded. The demands made upon them by the righteousness of Jehovah they did not care to yield to; and the dislike of the prophet arose from his association with his message. No vengeance, therefore, could be too great. It is not imprisonment they seek to inflict, but death itself, and death in such an obscure and ignominious way that "his name may be no more remembered." 2. *Their fear of the consequences of his prophecies.* The future which he described as inevitable was not pleasant to contemplate. The words he spoke threatened to overturn their most cherished designs and to rob them of their precious things. 3. *Ignorance as to how these might be averted.* By an easy process of association they came to look upon Jeremiah as not simply declaring, but in a sense causing, the evils of which he prophesied. They reasoned, therefore, to the foolish conclusion that if they could destroy him they would free themselves from the dangers which he threatened. The preacher has often to incur dislike of this sort from his hearers. It is of the nature of the carnal mind so to misapprehend the things of God and the things that make for peace. At certain times stern denunciation and declaring of the true consequences of evil action are not to be regarded as enmity, but friendship. The word spoken by an inspired mind is to be distinguished from the expression of mere bitterness and dislike. Paul had to entreat his converts not to count him their enemy when he sharply reproved them.

II. THESE PERILS ARE WARDED OFF by: 1. *Direct revelation.* This is an advantage which the ordinary servants of God may not count upon. It was vouchsafed occasionally to prophets and apostles, but there is something in the spiritual mind which enables it to detect more quickly than others the symptoms of hatred to the truth. Promptings and suggestions to certain action in the midst of circumstances to ordinarily human eyes unsuspicious, have been too frequent in the history of the Church to be doubted. And even where no direct information may be given as to the reason of certain courses of action, which God's saints may be moved to observe, the results clearly prove the presence of a careful and ever-watchful Providence. 2. *Faith in God.* Jeremiah said, "Unto thee have I revealed my cause" (better, "Upon thee have I devolved my cause"). He evidently felt that his duty was to commit the whole matter into the hands of God. And this is ever the safest way. The judgment, the prevision of man, are to be distrusted. The soul should cast itself by faith upon God, who is able to save.

3. *Greater boldness in the course of action assumed.* This was a distinct moral advantage. The men whose action was inspired by fear were certain to be influenced by it. Superstitious dread of the effects of his words would produce a reaction from their cowardly plans. And they would feel themselves more and more helpless as they saw how they aggravated their own punishment. So the preachers of the gospel and the servants of Christ generally must not consult with flesh and blood, but be bold in proclaiming the whole will of God, in preaching the Word, being "instant in season and out of season." There are allies and reinforcements latent in the constitution even of the worst enemies of the cross of Christ.—M.

Ver. 3.—*The doom of disobedience.* This new discourse, which begins with ch. xi., is a continuation of the same sad monotone of denunciation and doom which goes on throughout well-nigh the whole of Jeremiah's prophecies. The curse pronounced here on the disobedient—

I. IS VERY TERRIBLE. The words, "Cursed," etc., are fearful words to come from the lips of the God of grace and mercy. And that which they threatened was terrible also. What a catalogue of woes, which were denounced against the guilty people, might be compiled from these chapters! And how exactly the event answered to the prediction! Read the history of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the sufferings of the people, which is given in the records of the times, for proof of this. It is a dismal story, heart-sickening, and one from which we should at once turn away were it possible for us to do so. But all this, which was written aforetime, was written for our learning, and therefore we cannot but give heed. For not only is the curse terrible—

II. IT IS ALTOGETHER JUST. What makes a sentence, such as is pronounced here, just? Is it not such considerations as these?—1. *That the Law which has been violated should have been altogether righteous.* None can read over the moral Law given by God to his people without confessing its righteousness. "The Law was holy, just, and good." Those who disobeyed it and were punished by it could not dispute its righteousness. 2. *That it should have been fully known.* If ignorance could have been pleaded the equity of the sentence might have been questioned. But amid all possible publicity and solemnity the Law was given at the first; and at a time (ver. 4) when their hearts, by reason of God's exceeding goodness to them, were peculiarly susceptible to impression. And ever since then, by repeated, prolonged, and earnest appeal (ver. 7) that obedience should be rendered. 3. *When conscience consents to the Law that it is good.* (Ver. 5.) They said "Amen" to it. The prophet is not giving his personal account only, but referring to the fact that all the people said "Amen" when the curse upon disobedience was pronounced from Mount Ebal; cf. also a more recent "standing to the covenant" to which probably Jeremiah alludes (2 Kings xxiii. 3). 4. *When the transgression has been notorious.* (Ver. 8.) It was not simply that they would not obey, but they would not even listen, and they went on in their own way, utterly disregarding the covenant to which they had promised obedience (cf. also vers. 9, 10). 5. *When ingratitude has been added to disobedience.* (Ver. 4.) What had not God done for them? How deep was the obligation to obey! 6. *When forbearance has been exercised.* For a thousand years and more they had been suffered to occupy the land of promise (ver. 5, "As it is this day"). Wherever, then, was there or could there be a righteous doom if this were not?

III. AND AS NECESSARY AS RIGHTEOUS. Remember the purpose for which God had chosen Israel—that they might be the channels of his truth and righteousness to all other people. God was merciful to them and blessed them, "that his way," etc. (Ps. lxvii.). "In thee and in thy seed," said God to Abraham, "shall all the nations," etc. But if the men of the nation had rendered themselves incapable of this service, it was essential for the well-being of the world that they should make room for more faithful men. And this they had to do.

IV. AND CERTAIN OF ACCOMPLISHMENT IF THE DISOBEDIENCE BE NOT FORSAKEN. The judgment that came upon Judah and Jerusalem was not at all a solitary isolated fact. The like of it had happened before, has since, happens now, and will again whenever like provocation is given, as it all too often is. God's way of dealing with Israel is God's way of dealing with *man* everywhere and in all ages; therefore his way of dealing with *us*. God's Law, his demand for obedience, man's disobedience, and the

consequent doom, are all facts with which we are familiar. The history of Israel is but an example of what is ever taking place. Even the gospel of the Lord Jesus, however much it may avert the eternal results of our transgressions, will not save us from the present temporal consequences in this world. "These all died in faith," so we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, of those "whose carcases," nevertheless, "fell in the wilderness." "The way of transgressors is," has been, must, and ever will be, "hard."—C.

Ver. 4.—*The precious recompenses of obedience.* "Obey my voice, . . . according to all which I command you: so shall ye be," etc. The earlier verses of this chapter form part of that earnest reminder which Jeremiah was commanded by God to address to the men of Judah and Jerusalem concerning a transaction with which they had all had very much to do. That transaction was their solemnly pledging themselves, as they had done during King Josiah's recent reign, to observe the ancient covenant which the Lord God had made with their fathers. The sixty or seventy years before King Josiah's time had been years dreary and degraded in the national life of the people. Even Hezekiah, the last pious King of Judah before Josiah, had secured only a very partial reformation, and in the days of his godless son Manasseh, and in those of his even worse grandson Amon, who "sinned more and more," the religious life of the people all but died out. The sacred Scriptures in which this covenant was contained had, during these miserable years, been neglected and put out of sight as writings for which they had no longer love nor use; as a book which we do not want is either got rid of or put away on some high shelf, to make room for others which we more highly prize. "The nation did not want to hear the Law which testified against their multiplied transgressions, nor to listen to a condemnation of the idols they had chosen." But in King Josiah's reign, in some out-of-the-way corner, buried beneath no one knows what worthless rubbish, a copy of the despised Word of God was discovered. It produced on the pious monarch a profound impression. He was overwhelmed with shame and dismay when he compared the commands of the covenant of God with the actual conduct of the people. He shuddered to think of the judgments which must come upon them—and which had already come upon the neighbouring nation of Israel—unless they repented and turned to God. But he did not waste time in unavailing regrets. He at once took practical measures to bring about that religious reformation which he saw to be so much needed. He therefore summoned all the people of Judah to Jerusalem, and caused the book of the Law to be publicly read to them; then he made all the people renew the covenant which they had so long forgotten. For a time it seemed as if the reformation and repentance were real; but the old idolatries began to make their appearance again after a while, and when Jeremiah was sent from God to remind them of their violated vows they had fallen back into a condition as evil as, if not worse than, that of former days. Therefore the prophet opens his commission by the awful denunciation of Jehovah's curse upon the disobedient. He would startle and arouse them, if it might but be possible, so that they might awake to righteousness and to God ere wrath arose against them and there should be no remedy. And here he tells of the precious recompenses of obedience, "So shall ye . . . God." Consider, then—

I. THESE PROMISES. 1. "*Ye shall be my people.*" Now, by this is meant, amongst other blessings, that they shall be *the object of his care.* How many are the proofs that this is a constituent part of the heritage of his people! Were not Israel so? Did he not watch over them continuously? "He suffered no man to do them harm; yea, he reproved kings for their sakes." "He gave his angels charge over them to keep them in all their ways." The rage of Pharaoh, the cruel thirst of the hot, waterless sands, the threatened famine of the breadless desert, the marauding Amalekite, the pestilence that walked in darkness, and the destruction that wasted at noonday,—not one of these was suffered to harm them. How full are the Law, the prophets, and the psalms with sweet assurances of the tender care of God over his people! Nor does the New Testament come behind the Old in like gracious declarations. And the experience of all God's people swells the volume of testimony to his loving solicitude and watchfulness over us. "And such honour have all his saints." And to be of his people means also *to be the abode of his Spirit.* That Spirit should dwell in them, rule and mould them after the Divine will. True, God's ancient people do once and again seem to have been utterly

abandoned of that Holy Spirit. But there was ever a faithful remnant, ever a godly few, of whom the Lord was wont to say, "They shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels." And we must remember that there were long periods in Israel's history when, as a nation, they lived under the blessed guidance of that Spirit. These more happy periods are passed over in silence, as all such in the records of nations are, so that the saying has passed into a proverb, "Happy the nation that has no history." It is of the sad, troubled times that history tells, not of the long, eventless, peaceful times. When at rest, they walk in the fear of the Lord, and possess the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and are multiplied. Oh the joy of this possession of his Spirit! The thought of losing it made the contrite psalmist cry out in his agony, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." "I will put my Spirit within you" was ever one of the choicest promises of God to his people, and one of the surest tokens that they were his people. And it is so still. To be his is to be guided and governed of that good Spirit, to have our understandings purified, our affections wisely controlled, our hearts, our wills, under his direction always, so that we turn away from what is evil and cleave to that which is good. And it includes, furthermore, the *being made the channels of his grace*. Others shall be blessed through us, as it was said to Abraham, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." God's people are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. How unspeakably great and blessed is the influence of the true people of God! In their presence impurity, profanity, selfishness, sin in all its forms, hide their shameful heads and slink away, whilst all things lovely and of good report flock around them and attend upon them continually. And finally they become *the inmates of the home of God*. The heavenly inheritance, of which the earthly Canaan, the land promised to the fathers of Israel, was the type and symbol, becomes theirs. They enter it through the gates of death, and these gates once passed, they are in his presence, where "there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there is," etc. Such are some of the elements of this great joy of God taking us for his people, a joy which, of his infinite mercy, may he make us all to know. 2*d* "*I will be your God*." This cannot mean less than that *he will be known to them as their God*. They shall be able to realize his existence, his presence, his constant nearness to them. True, the God of Israel, whose promise this is, was not known by any organ of sense; he was no material God that their hands could handle; he spake with no human voice that their ears could hear; he appeared to them in no visible form that their eyes could see; he was manifested then, as now, only to their spirits. But when they worshipped him in spirit they felt that he was at their right hand, so that they could not be moved. Hence they went about their daily work and engaged in all the occupations of their lives, consciously realizing the presence of God; so that they constantly spoke of him as "their God," "our God," "my God,"—so near, so real, so present was he to them. They could not if they would, and they would not if they could, escape from his presence or withdraw from the observation of his eye, or from the guidance and guardianship of his hand. In such manifestation of himself to them did he fulfil his word, "I will be your God." Nor was this all. Not only was he realized by them but *rejoiced* in. "I will go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy," was the delighted declaration of the saints of old and is so of the saints to-day. Such joy had they in him that, when all earthly affairs were disastrous for them, when the fig tree did not blossom, and when there was no fruit in the vine, and the labour of the olive failed, and the fields yielded no meat, when the flock was cut off from the fold and there were no herds in the stall,—when, that is, ruin stared them in the face and met them on every side, nevertheless they could rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of their salvation. "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord," was their perpetual song; and it is the song still of all those to whom God has said, "I will be your God." And his word came true yet further by *their coming to resemble him*. It is ever the result of worship to conform the worshipper to the deity he worships. Hence it was said of the worshippers of idols, "They that make them are like unto them, so is every one that trusteth in them." Accordingly it has ever been found that they who bowed down to gods impure, cruel, and treacherous, became themselves impure, cruel, and treacherous. But, on the other hand, they who have worshipped the God of Israel have become like him—righteous, just, and true, merciful, and pure, and good. "I will be your God" meant, therefore, "I will make you like myself,"

and this promise God ever fulfils. And it means also, "*I will be your rest.*" The soul whose God the Lord is, reposes on him. The storms of life may rage, its tempests beat, but "firm and unmoved are they who rest their souls on God." Everything may appear to be slipping away from a man, and he may seem to be like one gliding down a steep, smooth slope, ever faster and faster to the precipice over which he will be hurled into destruction, unable to grasp any friendly rock or branch, or to find foothold anywhere—and men's circumstances are like that sometimes; but they to whom this word, "I will be your God," is fulfilled, do find foothold in God and can stay themselves upon him. Hence, when heart and flesh fail, God is the Strength of their heart and their Portion for evermore.

II. THE CONDITION OF THEIR FULFILMENT. They were faithfully to do the commandments which he had made known to them: "Obey my voice, so," etc. And this condition is not abrogated; it is in as full force to-day as it was in the days of old. But when it is complied with, then, not merely by the gracious appointment of God, but also in the way of natural result, there follows the enjoyment of the promised blessings. For: 1. Obedience tends to such enjoyment of God, inasmuch as *it prevents the rising of those mists whereby the sight of God is shut out from the soul.* Travellers along the Rhine or over the mountains of Switzerland know to their cost how often the most glorious scenery the world contains is completely hidden from their view by the uprising of some wretched mist, wrapping in cold, dark, impenetrable fog all that upon which their eyes would have so delightedly rested. They want to gaze upon all that loveliness; they have come for that very purpose; but they cannot for those thick clouds. And oh, what a beautiful vision is the face of God! How good it is to gaze upon him, and to behold the shining of his countenance! And this we should do were it not for those mists with which disobedience to God's will ever blots out all that otherwise we should so delightedly see. "If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God;" but when they do condemn us, confidence vanishes, and, as by a veil of impenetrable cloud, the face of God is hidden from our view. We have lost him; we cannot realize him · he is as if he were not, and the soul is forlorn and wretched and exposed to all manner of ill. Now, this sad experience, which is as common as it is sad, shows how the obeying of the voice of God must tend to the enjoyment of him, inasmuch as it prevents all that which hides God from our souls. 2. And before obedience that *wall of the rebellious will,* which more than aught else displeases and dishonours God and keeps him out from the soul, "falls down flat," as did the walls of Jericho before the obedient tribes of Israel. That will must be subdued, that stronghold of evil must be pulled down, and obedience is the strong hand that accomplishes this much-needed work. That strong fortress cast down, the soul becomes the possession of God, and the hitherto rebellious forces of the soul own him as their God. Or, to take another similitude, obedience unbars that fastened door before which the Lord Jesus has stood so long and knocked, but in vain, for admission. He desires to enter and to make us the glad partakers of his grace. But till that door be unbarred all this cannot be. 3. Obedience, furthermore, *keeps us in those paths along which alone God is to be met.* Full well we know that there are paths innumerable along which men go, along which we have gone ourselves; but God is never to be met with in them. But along the path by which obedience leads us, there we do meet with him, and are blessed by him. 4. And without this obedience God *cannot carry out* his purposes of grace. This is what we are told in the verse that follows our text. God asks for obedience, "that I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto," etc. Therefore without this he is held back from what he earnestly desires, and he cannot do the things that he would. God cannot admit the ungodly and the disobedient into the blessed land of promise. To do that would be to perpetuate for ever the sins and sorrows of time. Therefore—

> "Those holy gates for ever bar
> Pollution, sin, and shame."

But "blessed are they that do his commandments, that they," etc. (Rev. xxii. 14). Now, the first step of this obedience—that which introduces to all these recompenses—is to surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ (John vi. 28, 29).—C.

Vers. 16, 17.—*The first last.* Many, indeed, are the instances in which those who

were placed first in opportunity have been found last in attainment. Privilege, favour, education, help of all kinds, have been at their disposal, and yet the results which had been designed for them, and which so surely should have been theirs, they have missed (cf. Matt. xi., "Woe unto thee, Bethsaida!" etc.). And in ordinary life, as well as in the records of the Bible, may we learn how frequently, not the strong and mighty, but "the lame take the prey." The first are last and the last first. Now, of such sad and shameful failures these verses supply a notable instance. Under the imagery of a green olive tree, fair and of goodly fruit, the prophet pictures the condition and prospects of the people of God when he first planted them. No similitude could more strikingly convey to the mind of the inhabitant of Judah and Jerusalem the idea of happy and sure prosperity. But, next, the prophet portrays a far different scene—that same tree, but black and charred, its trunk riven, its fruit and foliage all gone, and its branches broken down; for the thunderbolt and the scathing lightning, the wild tempest and the fierce wind, have all done their deadly work upon it, and now it stands a mere blackened stump, instead of the beauteous and fruitful tree it once was. From that height of favour to that depth of disaster were Judah and Jerusalem to fall. They who had been first should be last.

I. THEY WERE FIRST. The imagery employed by the prophet tells in what respects. 1. *In the favour of God.* The olive was a favourite tree, held in highest esteem by the people of the lands where it grew; hence it is used here and elsewhere as an emblem of those whom God favours and has pleasure in (cf. "I am like a green olive tree in the house of my God," Ps. lii. 8). The Bible seems to love the tree. It is the first named of any known tree (Gen. viii. 11), and is the subject of the first parable (Judg. ix. 8). It is everywhere spoken of as precious; hence, when Judah and Jerusalem are thus named, we regard it as a name of endearment, telling how precious they were in God's sight. This is borne out by direct statements and by the recorded deeds of God, which show the esteem in which he held them. 2. *In beauty.* No doubt the beauty of the olive tree exists partly in the eyes of the beholder, who looks upon it with affection for all the service it renders him. But to others also there is unquestionable beauty in the olive which, with its "noble groves, covered with foliage the whole year round, spreading like a silver sea along the base of the hills and climbing their ascending terraces, speaks loudly of peace and plenty, food and gladness" (see Ruskin, 'Stones of Venice,' vol. iii. pp. 175—177). And without doubt it was beautiful in the eyes of those to whom the prophet wrote. But there is a moral beauty as well as that which is material, and of which the material is a fit symbol. And, compared with the disorder, the violence, the foulness, the wickedness of all kinds, in which the rest of the world was sunk, Israel was as a garden of the Lord—a green olive tree, "fair" and comely to look upon. In them that which was lovely and of good report, that which had virtue and praise, were found as nowhere else. Love to God and love to man, justice, truth, and piety were held in esteem amongst them as amongst none others. 3. *In usefulness.* The olive tree was not merely fair, but "of goodly fruit." From that fruit came one of the commonest and most essential articles of the Eastern's food. Its oil was employed in connection with almost everything that they ate. Its berries gave flavour to the peasant's bread. The evening lamp was kindled with the oil pressed from it. And that same oil was used to anoint their priests and kings, for the lamp in the holy place, and to mingle with many of their sacrifices. To "anoint the head with oil" was deemed most delightful and refreshing (Ps. xxiii.). Wounds were dressed with it (Luke x. 34), and the sick were anointed with it (Mark vi. 13; Jas. v. 4). The wood of the tree was employed in the sacred furniture of the temple, and there seemed to be no part of the tree which did not in some way render service to man. Now, such was the purpose of God in regard to his people, that in them "should all the nations of the earth be blest." They were to be the channel of blessing to all people. Through them God's "saving health" should be known "amongst all nations." 4. And *in permanence.* Their blessedness was to abide. The "greenness" of the tree spoken of here refers to its perpetuity and strength. The olive is known to live to a great age. It is not improbable (see Kitto) that some of the olive trees now on the Mount of Olives are contemporaneous with our Lord. The tax paid on them is that which was assigned to such trees when first the Turks became masters of Palestine. All trees planted since are taxed far more heavily. But of the great age to which the

olive tree attains there can be no doubt. It brings forth fruit in old age, and its leaf doth not wither (Ps. i.). It was, therefore, a fit emblem of permanent prosperity and strength. Such was the Divine intent in regard to his people. Their blessedness was to abide. Thus in all these and yet other ways were they first. But—

II. THEY BECAME LAST. See the terrible similitude employed—the charred and shattered tree. But not more terrible than true. The smouldering ruins, the devastated city, the desolate land, which a few years afterwards the prophet looked upon, showed how true his word had been. They had become last indeed. Exalted to heaven, they had been thrust down to hell. None can avoid inquiring—

III. THE CAUSE OF ALL THIS. It is declared to be threefold. 1. *The evil of the people themselves.* (Ver. 17.) Their persistence in idolatry in spite of all remonstrance, warning, and every inducement which should have withdrawn them from their sin. "Do not the abominable thing which I hate" had in every variety of manner been said to them by God, but in vain. He hated it because it was the root of so many other sins, and the destroyer of all the good he had purposed both for and through them. 2. *Their evil returning upon themselves.* Ver. 17, "The evil . . . which they have done against themselves." This is ever the way of sin (Prov. viii. 36). It wrongs our entire nature. What a man sows he reaps. The reason is debased, conscience trampled on, the power of will prostrated, the soul imprisoned, the affections perverted, the imagination defiled, the body often diseased, character ruined, substance wasted, all the true springs of happiness poisoned or stopped. He has sown to the flesh, and of the flesh he has reaped corruption. Yes, sin is ever done *against ourselves.* 3. *The woe which comes from the provoked anger of God.* Besides these natural results of sin—the reaping which is according to the sowing, and which are terrible enough in themselves—there come the punitive inflictions of the wrath of God. History as well as the Bible is full of proofs of this on a large scale, and so are the experiences of individual transgressors, though in more limited form. And wherever sin, the primary cause, is found, there sooner or later will come these other causes which together work so dread a doom.

CONCLUSION. What effect should the contemplation of facts like these—and they are written and wrought for our learning—have upon us? Should they not cause us to reject at once and for ever all those suggestions which Satan is ever plying us with—that sin will not be punished, and the transgressor may, after all, go free? In view of facts like these, how can that be believed? And should they not lead us to offer as our daily prayer the petition, "Give us a heart to love and dread thee, and diligently to live after thy commandments"? And not only to dread and deprecate the wrath which sin provokes, but to desire and seek after that preoccupation of the heart with the love of God which will bar out sin.

> "Guard my first springs of thought and will,
> And with *thyself* my spirit fill."

C.

Ver. 17.—*The limits of long-suffering love.* I. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS ANCIENT PEOPLE WERE THOSE OF LOVE. That he should have chosen them and brought them into covenant with himself; that he should have taken such precautions to preserve them in that covenant. See the time selected for its establishment (cf. ver. 4)—when their hearts were susceptible and softened by his great goodness to them, and therefore the more ready to receive and keep the impression of his will. And how forbearing he had been! For more than a thousand years they had been in possession of the land, though they had so often sinned. See, too, the mighty motives to which he appeals—fear of the curse pronounced on the disobedient, hope of the precious recompenses promised to such as should obey. And he enlists conscience on his side. They all said "Amen" to the covenant of God (ver. 5). And perpetually he had been reminding them of his covenant (ver. 7). All this—and it is paralleled by God's dealings with men now—proves the loving solicitude with which God regarded his people.

II. AND THAT LOVE WAS LONG-SUFFERING. It was not alone that he had allowed them so long possession of the land promised to their fathers, though they had often

forfeited it; but now, not till his forbearance had (vers. 8—10) manifestly failed in its purpose and was being even perverted into an occasion for fresh sin, did he "change his way" toward them. And even then, many years' respite was given in which repentance and so forgiveness and restoration were possible. And to further this end Jeremiah was sent to them. And all this is like God's dealings still. Take the history of ancient and of all nations that have fallen, and the several steps of Israel's career will be found to have been trodden by them also: a time of great favour; disobedience; warning, repeated, earnest, continued; respite even at the last; sin persisted in notwithstanding all; then the long-threatened destruction. And it is true of families, Churches, individuals, to-day as of old.

III. BUT THAT LOVE HAD ITS LIMITS. The ruin that came upon Israel, upon Judah, and has so often come upon those like them, proves this.

IV. WHEN THESE LIMITS WERE REACHED, NOTHING COULD THEN AVERT THE THREATENED PUNISHMENT. (Cf. vers. 11—17.) Not: 1. *The piteous "cry"* of distress (ver. 11). 2. Still less (ver. 12) any *appeal to their idol-gods.* "They shall not save them *at all*," no, although (ver. 13) throughout the whole land, "in every city," and in every street of every city these idol-gods had their altars, their incense, and their worship. 3. Nor even the *acceptable prayer of the righteous.* (Ver. 14 and ch. vii. 16.) How dreadful this! 4. *Multiplied sacrifices.* (Ver. 15; cf. Exposition.) The prophet's meaning, which is quite obscured in our translation, seems to be to protest against their flocking to the house of God, seeing how guilty they had been—it could do them no good; and also against their thinking that "the holy flesh" of sacrifices would turn away wrath from a people who "rejoiced when they did evil." 5. Nor the fact of *past privilege and favour.* (Ver. 16.) No, although God had made them as a green olive tree (ver. 16). Himself "planted thee," yet he will himself kindle the fire that shall rage and devour it.

V. FROM ALL WHICH MEN EVERYWHERE ARE TO LEARN: 1. *To dread every sin.* For we cannot tell when and where those limits of God's long-suffering are reached. That sin to which a man is tempted may be the overstepping of them so far as he is concerned. If he do that, the word may go forth, "Let him alone" (cf. Rev. xxii. 11). We are apt to think that any time will do to turn to God. It will not. It is not universally nor commonly true

> "That while the lamp holds out to burn,
> The vilest sinner may return."

It is untrue; for the probability of a man then, at the very last, turning his heart to God, when up till then he has ever turned his heart away from God, is small indeed. The limit was passed when the Spirit of God left him, and that may be long before death comes. Probably death has nothing whatever to do with it either way. We should then say to ourselves, when drawn to any sin against which God's Holy Spirit is protesting and pleading, "If I disobey him now he may leave me altogether." 2. *To desire God.* The clearing of the heart of sin is not sufficient, the heart must be occupied. The house to which the evil spirit came back bringing others worse than himself, was swept and garnished, but it was "empty." So if men's hearts be "swept" from ill deeds, yet if they be not occupied, evil will come back. It is when the love of God possesses our heart that there is no fear of our even approaching, still less of overstepping, the limits of his long-suffering love. This is our sure, our only safeguard.—C.

Vers. 18—23.—*The baffled plot.* These verses are an episode. Like as the miracle of the healing of her who touched the hem of our Lord's garment was an episode in connection with the healing of the daughter of Jairus (Mark v. 21, etc.), so this account of the plot against Jeremiah's life comes in here, breaking the thread of his discourse, which is not renewed again till ch. xii. 7. Scripture has many instances of similar plots contrived against the servants of the Lord; they are found in the histories of Joseph, David, Nehemiah, Elisha, Paul, of our Lord, and of others. In this one, note—

I. ITS CIRCUMSTANCES. Jeremiah had given dire offence to the men of Anathoth, his own city, men who, like himself probably, were associated with the priestly office,

"Between the priesthood and the prophets there had hitherto been more or less of conflict, but now that conflict was exchanged for a fatal union. 'A wonderful and horrible thing was committed in the land; the prophets prophesied falsely, and the priests bore rule by their means;' and he who by each of his callings was naturally led to sympathize with both, was the doomed antagonist of both—victim of one of the strongest passions, the hatred of priests against a priest who attacks his own order, the hatred of prophets against a prophet who ventures to have a voice and will of his own. His own village, occupied by members of the sacred tribe, was for him a nest of conspirators against his life. Of him first in the sacred history was the saying literally fulfilled, 'A prophet hath no honour in his own birthplace' (Ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ, Luke iv. 24)" (Stanley). They objected not so much to his prophesying, for there were plenty of them who did this, but to his strenuous assertion—an assertion that their own consciences assented to, that he spoke in the Name of the Lord (ver. 21). Warnings so faithful but yet so terrible were little liked, as they ever are by those who so much needed them. And since they could not silence him in any other way, they determined to take away his life. Secretly and craftily they laid their plot. Jeremiah had not the least suspicion of it. "I was," says he (ver. 19), "like a lamb," that is, a pet or house lamb, such as the Orientals often keep (see Exposition). He went in and out amongst his brethren, trusting them, and thinking no ill, whilst all the time this dark and deadly plot was being devised against him. And it would have been successful, we can hardly doubt, had he not been "warned of the Lord" (ver. 18). The shock, the dread revulsion of feeling, which the tidings caused him is evident in the almost unmeasured grief and indignation which the following verses express. His first utterance is a cry for vengeance (ver. 20) on them, an appeal to the righteous God to uphold his cause. Then comes a denunciation of the Divine doom upon them, then an aggrieved remonstrance (ch. xii. 1) and complaint addressed to God himself in view of the prosperity of these ungodly and wicked men, followed by a fierce demand for revenge (ch. xii. 3); all which is replied to (ch. xii. 5) by a sharp but loving rebuke, a revelation of yet further treachery, and that on the part, not of mere acquaintances and neighbours, but of his own brethren, the inmates of the same home, children of the same father; and finally (ch. xii. 6) God, who had already baffled their first plottings against him, now puts him on his guard against all that they should afterwards devise, bidding him "believe them not, though," etc. (ch. xii. 6). Of the manner in which they purposed to carry out their deadly scheme, or how God revealed to his servant what was going on, we are not told; only the above noted facts are stated. But these are full of interest and instruction. Note, therefore, some of—

II. THE SUGGESTED LESSONS. They are such as these. 1. "Having the form of godliness but denying the power thereof, means subjection to the power of all ungodliness though denying the form thereof." See these would-be murderers of the prophet; they were consecrated priests. 2. "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." The plotters against the prophet's life were discovered and declared by him to whom "the darkness and the light are both alike," and so his servant was forewarned and saved. Therefore, "They that trust in the Lord shall be," etc. 3. "The servant will often have to be as his Master, and the disciple as his Lord." Like the Lord Jesus, Jeremiah was hated of his countrymen and brethren (cf. Homily on ch. i. 1—3, p. 10, for more of these resemblances). Several of them are recorded in these verses. The hatred felt towards him by his countrymen and in his father's house. The cause of that hatred. The deadly plots which were devised against him. The innocence and gentleness—"like a lamb," etc.—which characterized the hated one. And such fellowship with Christ is the law of his service. 4. "Resemblance between the Master and his servant may be often close but is never complete." However natural Jeremiah's outburst of rage and indignation, we cannot help noticing how far short in moral elevation he falls of him who prayed, "Father, forgive them," etc., and of the first Christian martyr, who was taught of Christ to pray, "Lord, lay not this sin," etc. The *perfect* Example is Christ; we can "call none good but One," that is, him. 5. "Wrongs that God will suffer against himself he will not suffer against his people." Jeremiah was avenged within a very little time and in ample manner, but the wrongs God had suffered from the same people he had borne for centuries, and even then there was a reserve of mercy—he made not "a full end." 6. "Let our eyes be ever toward

the Lord, for he will pluck our feet out of *every* net"—Satan's, Sin's, Sorrow's, Doubt's, Death's.—C.

Vers. 1—12.—*The covenant with the fathers binding on the children.* Here it is necessary to go back over all the history of Israel, and consider the great covenant transactions between God and his people. Such transactions we find to have been filled with great solemnity, so that they might make a deep mark in history. We trace the beginnings of the great covenant in God's dealings with Abraham. Indeed, the covenant with Israel as a nation was the necessary consequence of the covenant with Abraham as an individual. Then, as Jeremiah says here, there was a definite interchange of promise in the day when Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt. He could then ask them for an undertaking of obedience and separation from the idolatrous and impure heathens. While they were in servitude to Egypt and manifestly crushed in spirit, it was not possible to ask anything from them. But when Jehovah had abundantly proved his power, his grace, and his nearness, when he took his stand amid the freshness of glorious Divine achievements, then the covenant appeared, to the generation to which he proposed it, in all its fitness, as an instrument for the attainment of further ends. The gracious purposes of this covenant are made strikingly apparent in the continuance of it even after the people had lapsed into their riotous gathering around the golden calf (Exod. xxxiv. 10). But this covenant in all its amplitude, and with all the difficulties surrounding the observance of it, is nowhere set forth with greater solemnity and particularity than in Deut. xxvii.—xxx. There we find the curses and the blessings detailed and illustrated, and the provision made that between Ebal and Gerizim, in the very midst as it were of the land of promise, the covenant should receive a great national acceptance. "*But*," an Israelite might have said to Jeremiah, "*these things happened so long ago.*" Men think they can easily set aside claims that rise out of the distant past. In the case of this particular claim, however, no such rejoinder was possible. In 2 Kings xxii. we read of the discovery of the Book of the Law in the reign of Josiah, and in ch. xxiii. we read of the decisive and comprehensive action which Josiah took upon making the discovery. The description in ver. 2 of how he gathered in the house of the Lord all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, priests and prophets, and small and great, reminds us of the gathering long before, between Ebal and Gerizim (Josh. viii. 35). All the people, we are further told, "stood to the covenant." Josiah was enabled to make a general overthrow of all the external visible instruments of idolatry, and what is of particular moment to be observed is the keeping of the Passover as arising out of this renewed covenant (2 Chron. xxxv. 1—19). It was like coming face to face with that great event in the early history of the people, their deliverance from the iron furnace. Thus when we bring into one view all these great transactions in relation to the covenant, we see how weighty and urgent is the message Jehovah here sends Jeremiah to deliver. His covenant was with a nation in the whole duration of its existence. Each generation as it died handed on its *land*, its possessions, its national customs, but in the midst of all it had to hand on this covenant. The land was Israel's only upon a certain condition. The owner of a piece of land may covenant with some one that he and his heirs and assigns shall have the use of the land in perpetuity, on the observance of certain conditions. If these conditions are willingly, perhaps eagerly, accepted, there is no just right to complain of forfeiture if the conditions are completely and carelessly set at nought. God's works, we are made to observe, go on to their completion through the service of many generations of his creatures. How many generations of insects have died in making the beautiful coral islands! We amid our spiritual light and advantages are the inheritors of many privileges. We have the use of an estate, which has been enriched by the toils and sufferings, the prayers and tears, of many ancestors. But we can inherit no privilege, no joy, no promise, no hope, without inheriting the responsibilities of a covenant. We may, indeed, neglect the covenant, but surely it requires great audacity to assert that we have even the faintest pretence of right to do it.—Y.

Ver. 14.—*Intercession unavailing.* God here forbids Jeremiah to intercede for the people in their sore trouble. Similar expressions are found in ch. vii. 16; xiv. 11;

xv. 1. It was evidently meant that the prophet should feel how unavailing all intercession was.

I. WE HAVE HERE A VERY PAINFUL EXCEPTION TO A VERY IMPORTANT RULE. The rule is to pray, to pray continually, and to pray with not the least fervency and devotion when our prayers are intercessions. God delights in the dependent and confiding approaches of his people; and intercession must be specially a joy to him because it looks away from individual good, and exemplifies most effectively the loving of one's neighbour as one's self. Moses, Job, Samuel, Daniel, are all found interceding for transgressors. Hence the very forbidding here makes continual remembrance of the needs of others all the more a duty. We have to pray for those who lack the faith or the disposition to pray for themselves. And especially we have to bear in mind him "who ever liveth to make intercession" for the spiritually needy. It is worth noting that, while God here forbids Jeremiah to intercede for the people, he is represented in Rom. xi. 2—4 as reproving and enlightening Elijah when he interceded *against* the people. We must give special pains to say for sinners all that we can. And in order to do this, we must be observant and pitiful; for as a general rule we have a quick eye for faults, and become censorious by a kind of second nature. It wonderfully suits the inclinations of fallen man to be an accuser of his brethren.

II. WHY THE EXCEPTION IS HERE MADE. There are two considerations here. 1. *The petition, as to its literal aim, could not be granted.* It was evidently a petition for the delivery of Judah and Jerusalem from the special calamity now so near. That calamity had become necessary. There was no choice for the people but to drink the waters of the full cup now wrung out for them. God, in refusing to hear Jeremiah, had really the same end in view as the prophet himself; but the prophet, in his keen sensitiveness, wished the end to come by some less painful way than through desolated Jerusalem. But God knew that this was the right way—just because it was the way of humiliation and loss, and thus, in refusing *the special supplication* of the prophet, God was really taking *the best way of answering it*—paradox though it may seem to say so. 2. *Jeremiah's own position had to be considered.* We may conclude that it was reckoned one of the distinctions of a prophet that he could act as intercessor. Jeremiah, we know, was asked to pray to God for the people (ch. xxxvii. 3; xlii. 2); and just at the times when the refusal was most emphatic, the appeal for intercession may have been most urgent. Well, then, was it that Jehovah should, as it were, stop the mouth of his servant in his supplication, so that no one could take up a reproach and say, "If thou wert indeed a prophet, thy petition for us would immediately avail." The honour of Jeremiah as a faithful servant was dear to his Divine Master. This is brought out very clearly by the reference to Moses and Samuel in ch. xv. 1. It was no shame to him to fail where Moses and Samuel could not have succeeded.

III. OBSERVE WHAT LAY BEYOND THE PRESENT REFUSAL. Though all is so stern and forbidding here, we look further on in the book, and there is brightness again. Ch. xxix. 1—14 is a beautiful contrast to the word we have been considering. Desolation and exile were a cheap price to pay for such a restoration into favour as God there provides. He has shut the gates of mercy for a while; but only for a little while—seventy years, two generations of men! The permanent command, only to be set aside by a special interference, is that which says, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee" (Ps. cxxii. 6).—Y.

Vers. 16, 17.—*The fated olive tree.* I. GOD'S COMPARISON OF HIS PEOPLE TO THE OLIVE TREE. There would have been force in the comparison if applied to any flourishing and fruitful tree, but there was peculiar propriety in directing the thoughts of the people to the olive. The olive was already associated in sacred history with the return of hope after the Flood, and doubtless, in the times of Jeremiah, it was one of the most valuable of trees, as it still is, for the richness of its produce, and the variety of ways in which that produce meets the common wants of men. The extensive olive groves, composed of trees that reach no great height, and unattractive to a mere casual glance, were yet more to the people than all the cedars of Lebanon. And as the people were led to consider these olive trees, full of vigour, abounding in blossoms, many of which never came to fruit, and yet, after all, left abundance of fruit behind; as they recollected all the use of the olive, for food, for light, for anointing, for soap-

making;—the thoughtful among them would feel that God could have employed no better figure to suggest how full Israel was of productivity of the most practical sort. Mention is made in Hosea (xiv. 6), as well as here, of the beauty of the olive tree. In one sense the olive was not beautiful. As far as the picturesque was concerned, many trees excelled it. But, after all, the deepest beauty, the only beauty that will bear inspection, is that which comes from pleasant experiences and associations; and those who were rich in profits from the labour of the olive would see in it a beauty absent from many trees otherwise more attractive. The olive, to one seeing it for the first time, might seem a tree of small practical use. But experience proved that its performance was great, and so it became more and more a name of honour. And this tree, having in it such capabilities, *God had planted*. The olive tree needs a special soil to bring out all its capabilities. Dr. Thomson says, speaking of a certain plain full of olive-orchards, "The substratum of these plains is chalky marl, abounding in flint. . . . In such soil the tree flourishes best, both in the plains and upon the mountains. It delights to insinuate its roots into the clefts of the rocks and crevices of this flinty marl; and from thence it draws its richest stores of oil. If the overlying mould is so deep that its roots cannot reach the rock beneath, I am told that the tree languishes, and its berries are small and sapless." And so God planted his people, being such as they were in his eye, in a land promised and duly prepared. Nay, in a certain sense, they were planted even before they reached the land of promise. They were planted and became fruitful as soon as ever God took them in hand, fruitful even amid the pains of Egypt and the desolations of the wilderness.

II. THE DESTRUCTION OF THIS OLIVE TREE. All the wealth that came from this olive tree was being used for bad purposes. The fatness of the soil went into the olive, but the fatness of the olive did not come back to God in grateful and proportionate service. Nay, rather, it was used against him; and the harm it did was to some extent measurable by the good it might have done. The axe is laid, not only at the root of the tree that brings forth no fruit, but also at the root of the tree that brings forth its fruit to be used in hostility against him who planted the tree. Israel might say, "Is it not plain that God favours us, for are we not as the green, fair, fruitful olive? Why, then, should we believe threatenings that seem contradicted by these signs of favour?" These were signs of favour indeed, but they were also grounds of expectation. And when the expectation was utterly disappointed, and when the fruit of Jehovah's gracious dealings was used to prop up the abominations of idolatry, it was time for him to work in all the severity of righteous judgment.—Y.

Vers. 18—23.—*The prophet in his own country.* This passage describes a peculiar peril to Jeremiah, and a peculiar peril to those who conspired against him.

I. A PECULIAR PERIL TO JEREMIAH. His life was full of perils—"perils from his own countrymen" in many ways, perils from the palace with its great men, from priests and false prophets, from every devotee of idolatry, from every one, in short, whose vices and iniquities he lashed with the scourge of his Heaven-inspired tongue. He would expect to make enemies in these directions. But here is peril from *an unexpected source*. He was not at all prepared for it, and when the knowledge of it in all its hideous reality came upon him, he was correspondingly excited. Yet, though the peril was unexpected, it was by no means *to be marvelled at*. As soon as we look at the position of Jeremiah and the consequent feeling of his kindred, we cease to wonder. Much may be said, and justly, of the strength of natural affection; but the selfishness so deeply settled in every human breast, and so potent, is stronger than any tie of nature. Perhaps a mother's love may be trusted to stand out against it, but Scripture shows, in more than one instance, to what lengths a brother's jealousy will go. Think of Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brethren, Moses and Miriam, and David and his elder brethren. Christ said that "a man's foes should be they of his own household;" but this was not a new thing. It was but the continuing of an old and sad difficulty in the way of regenerating the world. If things had gone as they ought to have gone, it was in the comparative retirement of Anathoth that Jeremiah should have found some slight opportunities of rest in the midst of his arduous public labours. That he had some quiet place of rest and of converse with like-minded spirits is very probable, but he would find it as Jesus did. Jesus, we know, found his nearest approaches to home

life in Capernaum and Bethany, and not at all in Nazareth. We may surmise that he never had as much as one quiet day there after his public ministry began. The relatives of Jesus said that he was beside himself, and probably they feared that the strange things he did and the ever-increasing hostility he provoked would bring suspicion on themselves. And so it was very awkward for these kinsfolk of Jeremiah in Anathoth. Every one ran the risk of being pointed at as brother, or uncle, or cousin of that madman the prophet. Further, this peril, being from an unsuspected source, *went on to its height without suspicion.* The prophet puts his position very touchingly and forcibly by the figure of the tame lamb. As the lamb goes along with those to whose company it has been accustomed, all unconscious of their slaughtering designs, so the prophet meets his brethren, those with whom he played as a child, those whose faces were among the first he could remember. Why should he suspect them? True, he knows that far too often brother has been the sworn and relentless enemy of brother; but let this be the experience of others. He cannot believe it till by actual taste he finds the bitterness in his own cup. Jeremiah's experience stands here to teach us, not to be suspicious, not to let caution and wariness degenerate into a cynical putting on of armour against everybody, but to let both our safety and our peace of mind lie in our nearness to God. The nearest of brother men is too weak, too uncertain, to be made an object of trust.

II. THERE WAS A PECULIAR PERIL TO THE CONSPIRATORS. Though there was a danger where Jeremiah never thought of looking, it was precisely upon that danger that Jehovah had his observant eye (ch. xvii. 9, 10). What the conspirators would reckon one of their greatest helps, namely, that the proposed victim did not in the least suspect their designs, doubtless proved in the end a very material help to the faith and endurance of the prophet. Had not God made a sure provision for him where he did not even suspect that there was anything needing to be provided? Let the wicked know this, that whatever they reckon to be their peculiar advantage will assuredly turn out to be their peculiar weakness, difficulty, and, indeed, weapon of decisive overthrow. The prophet's kinsfolk made the not uncommon blunder of thinking that they would get rid of difficulties in getting rid of one peculiarly awkward and irritating difficulty that lay close to them. There is one great difficulty we never can get rid of, and that is the omniscience of God. Let there be a warning, then, to all those who belong to the πατριά of a prophet. Let them be careful how they set themselves against anything strange and peculiar in any one belonging to them. Self-delusion, of course, is possible, and a man may mistake some "Will-o'-the-wisp" for the steady prophetic illumination. But he is not likely to be converted by threatening and repression. It is only by Gamaliel's policy that either impostors or victims of delusion can be truly exposed. The men of Anathoth, kinsfolk and neighbours alike, were not required to believe in Jeremiah on his first appearance, but they were required to wait and see whereto this thing might grow. What a pity they had not some shrewd and commanding Gamaliel to keep them in the path of prudence!—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XII.

VER. 1.—Painfully exercised by the mysteries of the Divine government, the prophet opens his grief to Jehovah. **Righteous** art **thou**, etc.; rather, *Righteous wouldest thou be, O Jehovah, if I should plead with thee;* i.e. if I were to bring a charge against thee, I should be unable to convict thee of injustice (comp. Ps. li. 4; Job ix. 2). The prophet, however, cannot refrain from laying before Jehovah a point which seems to him irreconcilable with the Divine righteousness. The rendering, indeed, must be modified. **Yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments** should rather be, *yet will I debate questions of right with thee.* The questions remind us of those of Job in Job xxi., xxiv. Thus to have been the recipient of special Divine revelations, and to be in close communion with God, gives no security against the occasional ingress of doubting thoughts and spiritual distress. Wherefore **are all they happy**, etc.? rather, *secure.* The statement must be qualified by what follows. In the general calamity the wicked still fare the best.

VER. 2.—**Far from their reins**; *i.e.* from their heart (the seat of strong impulses and desires); comp. Ps. xvi. 7; xxvi. 2.

Ver. 3.—**Hast seen me, and tried**; rather, *seest me, and triest.* **Pull them out.** Perhaps this is correct, and there is an allusion to the figure of the plant in ver. 2. But the verb need mean no more than "separate" (comp. ch. vi. 29). **Prepare them**; literally, *consecrate them*, as victims for the sacrifice.

Ver. 4.—**How long**, etc.? The verse is decided rather differently by the Hebrew accents. The question should end at **wither**, and the following words run on. **Every field** should be *the whole field* (i.e. open country). The connection has caused some difficulty. But drought is constantly described as a judgment (ch. iii. 3; v. 24, 25; xiv. 2—7; xxiii. 10), and it is a prophetic doctrine that the lower animals suffer for the fault of man. **Because they said**; rather, *because they say.* The speakers are the ungodly. The subject of the following verb is uncertain. Some think it is God; but when God is said to "see" (*i.e.* take notice of) anything, it is always something actually existing. The subject must, therefore, be the prophet, of whom the ungodly scoffingly declare, **He shall not see our last end**, because his predictions are mere delusions.

Ver. 5.—Jeremiah's impatience corrected. The expressions are evidently proverbial. The opposition to the prophet will reach a still higher pitch; and if he is so soon discouraged, how will he bear his impending trials? **And if in the land of peace**, etc.? a second figure, the translation of which needs amending. *If (only) in a land of peace thou art confident, how wilt thou do in the pride of Jordan?* The "pride of Jordan" means the thickets on its banks, which were notorious as the haunts of lions (ch. xlix. 19; l. 44; Zech. xi. 3). "Lions' bones have been found by Dr. Roth in the gravel of the Jordan. Lions are seldom or never found now west of the Euphrates, although they occasionally cross the river" (Rev. W. Houghton, 'Bible Educator,' i. 22).

Ver. 6.—An example of the "treachery" referred to in ver. 1; a conspiracy against Jeremiah in his own family. **Have called a multitude after thee**; rather, *have called aloud after thee*, as one raises a hue and cry after a thief.

Vers. 7—17.—A separate prophecy. The key to it is in 2 Kings xxiv. 1, 2, where it is related that, after Jehoiakim's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, "Jehovah sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it." The prophecy falls into two strophes or sections, vers. 7—13 and vers. 14—17. In the first we have a complaint of the desolation produced by the guerilla warfare; in the second, a prediction of the captivity of the hostile peoples, not, however, without a prospect of their return home and conversion to Jehovah. It is evident enough that this passage stands in no connection with what precedes. The whole tone is that of a description of present scenes and not of the future. Sometimes, no doubt, a prophet, in the confidence of faith, represents the future as though it were already past; but there is always something in the context to determine the reference and prevent ambiguity. Here, however, there is nothing to indicate that the description relates to the future; and it is followed by a prediction which presupposes that the preceding passage refers to the literal past.

Ver. 7.—**I have forsaken mine house.** The "house" is here not the temple, but the people of Israel, as the parallel clause shows (see Hos. viii. 1, and comp. Heb. iii. 6; 1 Tim. iii. 15). Jehovah, not the prophet, is evidently the speaker. **I have left**; rather, *I have cast away.* **Into the hand of her enemies.** The Hebrew is more expressive: "Into the palm of the hand." Bonomi ('Nineveh and her Palaces,' p. 191) has an engraving from the monuments of guests at a banquet, holding their drinking-vessels in the deeply hollowed palm of their hand. So here the people of Israel, in her weak, fainting state, needs only to be held in the quiet pressure of the palm of the hand. The remark and the illustration are due to Dr. Payne Smith.

Ver. 8.—The reason why Jehovah has given up his people. Israel (or, more strictly, Judah) has proceeded to open hostility against his God. **He is unto me**—or rather, *has become unto me*—**as a lion in the forest**; a familiar circumstance (comp. on ver. 5 and ch. iv. 7). **Therefore have I hated it.** "To hate" is a strong expression for the withdrawal of love, shown by the giving up of Israel into the power of his enemies, as Mal. i. 3 (Keil).

Ver. 9.—The first part of this verse is mistranslated. Instead of **Mine heritage is unto me**, etc., it should be, *Is mine heritage unto me* (i.e. to my sorrow, a *dativus ethicus*) *a coloured bird of prey? Are birds of prey round about her?* The passage is difficult, but the following seems the most plausible explanation:—Jehovah is represented as surprised to see his chosen people a prey to the heathen (a strongly anthropomorphic description, as if Jehovah had not anticipated that his "giving up" his people would have such sad results). It seems to him (adopting human modes of speech) as if Israel were "a coloured bird of prey," the bright plumage of which excites the animosity of its less brilliant comrades, who gather round it and pull it to pieces. It is an allusion to the phenomenon, well-known

to the ancients ('Tacit.,' 'Ann.,' vi. 28; Suet., 'Cæs.,' 81; Plin., 'Hist. Nat.,' x. 19), of birds gathering round and attacking a strange-looking bird appearing in their midst. The prophet might have simply said "a bird;" why does he say "a bird of prey (*'ayit*)"? Probably because he has just described the hostile attitude of Israel towards Jehovah under the figure of a lion. Some particular, rare kind of vulture seems to be intended. Sennacherib apparently uses a cognate word (*'it*) for the vulture ('Taylor Cylinder,' iii. 68). Bochart and Gesenius, following the Septuagint, think "hyena," and not "bird of prey," is the right rendering in the first clause; but Gesenius does not offer any other passage for the meaning *bestia rapax*. **Come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field.** There is a parallel passage in Isa. lvi. 9, where, as here, the "beasts of the field" (*i.e.* the wild beasts of the open country) are the heathen powers employed as God's instruments for chastising Israel (comp. also Ezek. xxxiv. 5, where the same figure occurs). "The prophet adopts the strongest way of expressing that Israel, utterly bereft of his natural defenders, lies at the mercy of the great heathen empire" (note on Isa. lvi. 9). **Come to devour;** rather, *bring them to devour.*

Ver. 10.—Another simpler and more natural image, expressing the same idea, as those in ver. 9. The favourite way of representing Jehovah's relation to his people is that of a vine-proprietor to his vineyard (see on ch. ii. 21). How would a vineyard be ruined if a band of shepherds were to drive their flocks among the tender vine-shoots! **The many pastors** (or, *shepherds*) are clearly Nebuchadnezzar and his generals (comp. ch. vi. 3). **My pleasant portion.** Jehovah is the "portion" of his people; his people and its land are the "portion" of Jehovah (see on ch. x. 16). The epithet "pleasant" expresses the emotion of the surprised speaker.

Ver. 11.—**Layeth it to heart;** rather, *laid it to heart.* Inconsiderateness is repeatedly spoken of as an aggravation of the moral sickness of Israel (Isa. xlii. 25; lvii. 1, 11).

Ver. 12.—**Upon all high places through the wilderness;** rather, *upon all bare heights in the wilderness* (see on ch. iii. 2). Hardly with a reference to their pollution by idolatry; the mention of "the wilderness" (or pasture-country) suggests that it is merely a feature in the impoverishment of the country (a contrast to Isa. xlix. 9). **The sword of the Lord shall devour;** rather, *the Lord hath a sword which devoureth.* It is the heavenly sword (Isa. xxxiv. 5), the symbol of Divine vengeance (see below on ch. xlvi. 5).

Ver. 13.—A description in proverbial language of the absence of "peace" (literally, *soundness*, i.e. prosperity, security), from which "all flesh" in Judah at this time shall suffer. The trouble of sowing has been in vain, for *they have reaped thorns* (so we must render grammatically, and not shall reap, and in the next clause **shall not profit** ought to be *have not profited*). **And they shall be ashamed of your revenues;** rather, *be ashamed then of your produce;* but it is more natural to emend the pronominal suffix, and render, *and are ashamed of their produce* (the Authorized Version seems to have very nearly taken this easy step). It is, of course, the produce of husbandry which is referred to.

Ver. 14.—Here occurs a transition. The prophet comes forward with a denunciation in the name of Jehovah. **All mine evil neighbours;** the hostile peoples mentioned in 2 Kings xxiv. "My neighbours," because Jehovah "dwelleth in Zion." **Pluck them out of their land;** viz. by deportation into a foreign land. Judah and the neighbouring nations shall share the same fate. This is indicated by the use of the same verb "to pluck out" in the next clause with reference to Judah (comp. 1 Kings xiv. 15, Hebrew). In the case of Judah, however, to be "plucked out" is a mercy as well as a judgment, considering who they are "out of" whose "midst" the Jews are "plucked."

Ver. 15.—**I will return, and have compassion.** The rendering is too Hebraistic; the sense is simply, *I will again have compassion.* The prophets offer no partial or "nationalistic" view; of the mercy of God (comp. on ch. xlviii. 47).

Ver. 16.—Israel has been converted and restored, and if the other nations follow his example and **swear by my name,** *i.e.* adopt the religion of Jehovah (comp. Isa. xix. 18), they shall be rewarded by being suffered to dwell safely in Israel's midst. Observe the contrast with ver. 14. Before, Israel had dwelt amidst them to his own detriment; now they shall dwell amidst Israel to their profit.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The prosperity of the wicked.* I. THE DIFFICULTY. The prosperity of the wicked was a difficulty of peculiar force to the Jews, since it seemed to contradict an item of their peculiar faith—the doctrine of temporal rewards and punishments. The difficulty is less to us Christians; but it is idle to deny its existence. It is threefold. 1. *The success of wickedness.* The treacherous plans of the wicked often succeed.

Their violent actions are often unchecked and produce fatal results. How is it that these evil things are not frustrated before they ripen to perfection? That wicked men should plot evil, should attempt evil, we can imagine; but that they should be allowed to carry it out—often only because many accidents are favourable—this is hard to understand. "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" 2. *The security of the wicked.* After they had succeeded we should expect that they would discover the vanity of their most prosperous efforts. But they not only attain their objects. They find these to be satisfactory, and are able to enjoy them with calm self-complacency. Here is the greater mystery: after completing their bad deeds the wicked are left in undisturbed enjoyment of the fruits of them. "Wherefore are all they secure that deal very treacherously?" 3. *The Divine blessing apparently enjoyed by the wicked.* Not only does their own work succeed, but Providence bestows favours upon them. Outside events of life over which they have no control minister to their prosperity. Here is the greatest element of the difficulty. God has planted them, and they enjoy fruitfulness through his help.

II. THE WAY TO TREAT THE DIFFICULTY. 1. *Face it.* Jeremiah boldly confronted his troublesome thoughts. People often try to hush up their doubts. The result is that a subtle spirit of scepticism spreads unconsciously through all their ideas, and its disintegrating influence undermines all solid faith. Suppressed doubt is fatal to sincerity. It begets indifference to truth. We cannot hold firmly the truths we know till we distinctly separate these from those we doubt. The suppression of doubt is cowardly. Doubt can only be conquered by being boldly confronted. 2. *Do not charge God foolishly.* Jeremiah did not accuse the justice of God. We are dim-sighted and weak in our judgment. Much of this great world must be a mystery to us. We must not assume that, because we cannot justify the ways of God, they admit of no justification. It is foolish as well as rebellious to presume to be the judge of God. 3. *Bring the difficulty to God.* Doubt should drive us to prayer. God only can enlighten our darkness. God graciously permits his children to plead and debate with him (Isa. i. 18). Doubt is not necessarily a result of any misconduct. But, however it arises, it is best to confess it to God.

III. THE DIRECTIONS IN WHICH TO LOOK FOR A SOLUTION OF THE DIFFICULTY. 1. *The righteousness of God.* Jeremiah sees the difficulty, but it does not drive him from faith in the justice of God. Religion makes constant demands on faith—the personal faith of trust in the character of God where appearances are against what we believe that character to be. Confidence in the unwavering righteousness of God will help us to look for certain indications of a solution of the difficulty occasioned by the prosperity of the wicked. Right must and will be done, and if it is not yet accomplished it will be ultimately. From the character of God we may thus reason to his certain action (Gen. xviii. 25). 2. Hence we have an argument in favour of *future rectification.* Jeremiah expects it to come even in this life, though it is long deferred (ver. 3). The Christian looks for it in the great judgment, and the fruits of this in the life to come. 3. The difficulty may be lessened even for the present by the reflection that *material prosperity is not real prosperity.* It may be well for a good man to suffer. Prosperity may be an evil. True welfare consists not in success, not in security from calamity, but in inward peace, in progress in the Divine life.

Ver. 2 (last clause).—*God near to the mouth but far from the life.* I. IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE THE NAME OF GOD ON OUR LIPS WHILE THE THOUGHT OF GOD IS ABSENT FROM OUR MINDS. This is the case with mere formal worshippers, who use the language of devotion without realizing to themselves its meaning. The danger of it besets us all. Words come to be handled like coins, without any distinct recognition of what they represent. This applies especially to words which refer to God, since it requires a high act of abstraction to keep constantly before us the ideas of the unseen Object of such language. Understand that these empty words are worse than wasted breath; they are a mockery to God, a deception to men, and a source of self-delusion to the speaker of them.

II. IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE THE NAME OF GOD ON OUR LIPS WHILE THE LOVE OF GOD IS ABSENT FROM OUR HEARTS. We may not fall into the first mistake. The language may not be empty words. The thought of God may be present. Yet this may be a

mere thought—a cold and barren idea, having no influence on our affections. This religion of words and notions is a vain thing. Indeed, it is not a religion at all; it is only a theology. Religion does not begin till the heart opens to receive God. It consists not in the intellectual recognition of God, but in the love of God (Deut. x. 12).

III. IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE THE NAME OF GOD ON OUR LIPS WHILE THE POWER OF GOD IS ABSENT FROM OUR CONSCIENCES. God may be spoken of, thought of, approached with a certain affection, though not the true love of our hearts, and yet be practically disregarded. His will may still be of no account to us. We may still not make our lives subservient to his Law. There is then no evidence of God in our conduct. Though our thought may be religious, our life is godless.

IV. IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE THE NAME OF GOD ON OUR LIPS WHILE THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS ABSENT FROM OUR SPIRITS. The deepest fact of religion is the indwelling of the Spirit of God—the real presence of God. God inhabits the soul as a temple. We may have much religiousness without this. The Name of God may be inscribed on the portals of the temple while the shrine is empty of his presence.

V. IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE THE NAME OF GOD UPON OUR LIPS AND TO BE VERY WICKED. If the Name be only on our lips, this is no sign of moral and spiritual goodness. The wicked contemporaries of Jeremiah were many of them religious precisionists; yet their moral guilt was none the less for all their language of devotion.

VI. IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE THE NAME OF GOD ON OUR LIPS AND TO SUFFER ULTIMATE RUIN. Formalism and hypocrisy may prosper for a time. Those men who had the Name of God on their lips were the wicked who *prospered* (ver. 1). Yet they were doomed to ultimate punishment. It is important to remember this constantly, since we are too ready to be deceived by professions and appearances.

Ver. 5.—*A dark prospect.* If Jeremiah was ready to despair when he discovered the conspiracy of the men of Anathoth, how would he bear the news of the treachery of his own brethren? His condition under the lesser trouble made the prospect of greater trouble most alarming. The Divine admonition which such a situation showed him to need may be of value to others who may be repeating the experience of the prophet.

I. DESPAIR UNDER LESSER TROUBLE MAKES THE ANTICIPATION OF GREATER TROUBLE A DARK PROSPECT. 1. Greater trouble may *reasonably be expected.* God usually prepares us for the endurance of trials by sending them by degrees, and reserving the more severe till we have been trained to the endurance of milder ones. Few men can say that they have drunk the cup of sorrow to the dregs, and none can know what bitter drops may yet be in store for them. 2. The advent of greater trouble is *not itself an alarming fact.* Trouble is fearful only in proportion as it strikes fear into us. If we are prepared to meet it we need have no terror. God can give strength equal to our requirement, and for the sterner trial the more abundant support. The man's trouble is greater than the child's, but so is the man's strength. 3. The one cause of alarm is in *our weakness.* If this is revealed before slight tests, it must be much worse when the strain is harder. The important point is not that after enduring the foot-race we shall fail in contending with the chariots, but that, failing in the one trial, we may expect only failure in the other.

II. THE PROSPECT OF GREATER TROUBLE SHOULD HELP US TO BEAR THE LESSER. Some of us are too ready to "give way" at once. But there is more power of endurance in all of us than we are ready to acknowledge to ourselves. After the latest wrench of the rack we cry out that we can bear no more; yet another and still another turn is given, and we do bear it. The prospect of this possibility should make us husband our strength. The very sight of danger may be a stimulus to courage by inspiring a heroic spirit. Life is generally pitched in too low a key, and thus men whine under slight smarts and shrink before mean difficulties. If the same men saw more imperative calls to energy and endurance, they would rouse themselves and call up latent powers which as yet lie slumbering unheeded.

III. FAILURE BEFORE LESSER TROUBLE SHOULD LEAD US TO SEEK BETTER MEANS FOR THE ENDURANCE OF THE GREATER. 1. It is *more important* that we should be able to bear the greater trouble. This is a more serious matter, and defeat under it involves a more overwhelming disaster. Therefore it is exceedingly needful to learn the lesson of our weakness before this has brought us into a more terrible condition of distress.

2. It is also *more difficult to endure* the severer strain. The strength which is barely sufficient for the cares and toils of a quiet home life will fail utterly if a man has to contend with lions in the wild thickets of the lonely Jordan valley. If health breaks down before the soft breezes of summer, how will it stand before the frost and fog of winter? If the young man falls into vicious habits while under the protection of his father's home, what will become of him when he goes out into the world? If the prospect of sickness and earthly sorrow fill one with hopeless distress, how will he pass through the valley of the shadow of death? how will he endure death itself? 3. These questions should not make us despondent, but should drive us through self-diffidence to *seek the help of God*. Failure in small things will be good for us if it teaches us a wholesome lesson on our own weakness, and so inclines us to turn to a higher source of safety. Then we shall find that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. xii. 9).

Ver. 7.—*The forsaken heritage.* I. GOD REGARDS HIS PEOPLE AS HIS HERITAGE. The temple was God's house, the Jews were God's heritage. The Church is now the habitation of the Spirit of God, and her members are God's possession. This fact implies: 1. That God dwells with his people. 2. That he takes delight in them. 3. That he may be expected to protect them from harm. 4. That he has rights over them and claims their submission to himself. 5. That his honour is concerned with his people's conduct, so that their wickedness is not a matter of indifference to him, but is an insult to his Name.

II. GOD MAY FORSAKE HIS HERITAGE. God's people have no such "vested interests" that nothing can destroy their claims upon him. The present enjoyment of God's favour is no guarantee that this will be perpetual. 1. History shows that God *has* forsaken his heritage in the past; *e.g.* the Jews, ancient Christian Churches of Asia and Africa, individual Christians who have fallen from the faith. 2. It is reasonable to expect that he *will* do this when honour and righteousness require it. Let us, therefore, not presume on the favour of God.

III. GOD ONLY FORSAKES HIS HERITAGE WHEN THAT HAS BECOME CORRUPT. God never leaves his people till they leave him. He is not changeable, capricious, arbitrary in his favours. His love never wanes, his grace never fails, his help and blessings are never limited. The change begins on man's side. It is found in rebellion against God. 1. In *self-will*. The heritage becomes like a lion of the forest—*i.e.* no longer tame, but swayed by its own wild passions. 2. In *evil-doing*. The lion is fierce and destructive—a beast of prey. 3. In *direct opposition to God*. The lion "cries out against" God.

IV. GOD'S HERITAGE IS IN A TERRIBLE CONDITION WHEN IT IS FORSAKEN BY HIM. Birds and beasts of prey come up to devour the heritage. 1. It needs *no positive act of God's* to bring desolation on his sinful people. If he but withdraw his protection, the natural evils of the world and the special evils which they have provoked will be enough to bring ruin on their heads. 2. God's people will *suffer in an especial way* by the withdrawal of the Divine presence. The heritage is "like a speckled bird." It is strange, and so it draws upon itself opposition. The Jews were a mark for the enmity of the heathen through the singularity of their national customs. Christians are often singled out for opposition from the world for similar reasons. If they have lost their peculiar protection, their peculiar position and nature will invoke a peculiar ruin.

Ver. 13.—*Profitless labour.* I. PUNISHMENT WILL CONSIST IN PART IN THE PROFITLESSNESS OF LABOUR. This will perhaps be the special punishment of industrious bad people. To them it will be peculiarly painful, for in proportion to the zest and earnestness with which any work is carried on will be the bitterness of disappointment when this is seen to fail. Thus the victorious general is punished by being robbed of his conquests, the statesman by having his political schemes frustrated, the inventor by finding his invention superseded or rendered futile, the literary man by seeing his productions treated with neglect.

II. LABOUR MAY BE GOOD IN ITSELF AND YET PROFITLESS. It need not be mistaken in direction nor incompetent in execution. 1. It may be *real sowing*. "They have sown"—have not simply run uncertainly nor beaten the air with indefinite

energy. 2. It may be the sowing of *good seed.* "They have sown wheat." 3. It may be *assiduous and arduous.* "They have put themselves to pain."

III. LABOUR WILL BE PROFITLESS IF IT BE CURSED BY GOD. "They are ashamed of their increase because of the fierce anger of Jehovah." 1. *We cannot succeed in our work without the blessing of God.* This is necessary, not only for those things in which we can do nothing and are wholly dependent on him, but also in regard to our own efforts. Man sows, but God must give the increase. We cannot order the seasons, command the weather, determine the germinating power of nature. The farmer is but the attendant of nature. The real work of the farm is done by nature, and nature is a name we give to the action of God. If, therefore, God did not follow with his work, the farmer might as well scatter sand of the desert over his fields as sow good wheat. So also all our labour depends on God's blessing for its fruitfulness. 2. *The curse of God will destroy the fruits of labour.* Tremendous destructive agencies are in his hands. He can send frost to nip the tender buds, drought to wither the growing plant, blight to destroy the filling ears, storms to beat down the ripe corn. Sickness, commercial disaster, wars, etc., may frustrate the wisest, ablest, most industrious efforts of men. Therefore let us learn (1) to live so that we dare ask for God's favour; (2) to labour at such work as God will approve; and (3) to seek the blessing of God upon our efforts (Ps. xc. 17).

Vers. 14—17.—*General punishment and general restoration.* I. PUNISHMENT IS GENERAL. It is not selective, it is impartially administered. 1. *The people of God do not escape.* If the Christian falls into sin, the Law of God must be vindicated on him at least as rigorously as on the worldly man. Judah had shared the sins of her neighbours; she must also share their punishment. If sin is general, so must be its penalties. No religious position which does not secure us against wickedness will protect us against its consequences. 2. *The godless do not escape.* The heathen nations are to suffer with Judah. Though they were sometimes the instruments in the hands of God for the chastisement of Judah, they were not on that account exonerated from blame for the bad motives of their conduct. The sin of others is no excuse for us in wronging them. The executioner of the law is himself subject to the law. They who do not admit the authority of God are not the less subject to his authority. Men who refuse to submit to the Law of God will be judged by that Law as certainly as those who have freely gone under its yoke. It is not for us to choose our government in spiritual things, but to submit to the one righteous government which God has set over all men. In the execution of this it will be found that all men have sufficient light to render them accountable for their actions, though the degree of their responsibility will vary with the degree of their knowledge.

II. RESTORATION IS GENERAL. This is offered to the heathen nations as well as to Judah. As general punishment must follow general sin, so general restoration will follow general repentance. Here, too, God is impartial. 1. This restoration is not the less perfect for each individual by being general. "Every man" is to come and each to his "own land" and his "own heritage." There are men who seem to fear the broadening of the mercies of God, lest they should become less valuable to each recipient, and so they would jealously narrow them to protect their full privileges for a few. Such ideas are not only basely selfish—since the holders of them quietly assume that they are among the few—they are dishonouring to the grace of God, which is exceeding abundant, with enough for all who need it. 2. The general character of the restoration is its most happy feature. It will mean the abolition of war, rivalry, jealousy, separation, and the enjoyment of peace and brotherhood, the realization of the glory of the unity of the race through harmony in the unity of faith. "Then shall they be built in the midst of my people." Thus through the great restoration, *i.e.* through the perfected redemption in Christ, we may look for the fulfilment of the great ideal human brotherhood. 3. The conditions of this restoration are the same for all, viz. (1) the compassion of God, and (2) repentance and amendment. They who taught Judah to serve Baal must learn with Judah to follow the true religion. But if this condition is not fulfilled, the restoration can never be enjoyed.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Moral difficulties with the providence of God.* The tone of this address to Jehovah is strikingly contrasted with that to the men of Anathoth. To them he is as a lion or a brazen wall. To Jehovah he is as a fretful child, ignorant, wilful, perverse, and requiring to be corrected.

I. THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED A STUMBLING-BLOCK TO FAITH. (Vers. 1, 2.) David even is envious over this, and many a saint has felt its bitterness in his soul. That there are instances enough to make the idea plausible that wickedness is the best policy, we all know. The difficulties that beset the honest trader or the conscientious courtier and statesman are proverbial. And often just those measures which are most clearly condemned by Scripture and conscience appear to be the means most justified by the circumstances of the case. This view, however, is corrected by larger experience. It does not take all the facts within its scope, or it does not rightly interpret them. It is impossible for a mere outsider to judge of any one's actual happiness, or the private conditions which most powerfully affect the possession and enjoyment of wealth or high position. The teachings of history and of individual experience will in the end lead to the conclusion, "Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith" (Prov. xv. 16).

II. THE IMPULSE TO FORCE JEHOVAH'S HAND. (Ver. 3). This is the meaning of Jeremiah's imprecation. To one who sees by supernatural aid the tendencies of things, it must be very hard to refrain from this. Judgments that are justified to the moral nature sometimes appear to be mysteriously delayed. What would be well done had better be done quickly. But this is the presumption of the creature, the promptings of ignorance and not of faith. God can afford to wait. It is his character to have long patience, and the results more than justify this in the end. He will work out his purposes in his own way and in his own time, notwithstanding the impatience of his servants inquiring, "What or what manner of time?" There is a species of tempting Providence closely connected with this in many spiritual men. They have the clearest conviction that certain things are right and proper for them to do, and, without consulting as to seasonableness or the best means for their accomplishment, they hasten to do them, and then expect that God will recoup them for the loss they incur or extricate them from the difficulties in which they have entangled themselves. This certainly is not waiting upon the Lord, but an arrogant assumption of his prerogatives. It was the principle that lay at the root of Moses' great transgression; and even the disciples had to be rebuked because they knew not what spirit they were of.

III. THE TONE OF THE PROPHET'S PRAYER. Superficially it appears reasonable, considering the character and position of those to whom he refers. And there is at any rate a formal recognition of the righteousness of God to begin with. It is evident, too, that the conscience of the prophet is without offence in the sight of God, and yet there can be no doubt that the language he adopts is not to be justified. He is carried away by excess of zeal, but it is zeal without knowledge, and he himself will be the first bitterly to regret his presumption. It is a perilous thing for any man to attempt to judge his fellows by infallible standards. One thing in the behaviour of the prophet was to be commended. He did not conceal these thoughts within himself. He says, "Let me talk with thee," conscious that in this openness of soul lay his moral safety. A few minutes' honest communion with God will tap many a festering sore and correct many a subtle error of spirit and life. The last lesson of Divine revelation is not severity but love.—M.

Vers. 5, 6.—*A prophet's foes they of his own household.* These two verses are related, and must be read together in order to get at their proper sense. The prophet had complained of the treachery and prosperous circumstances of the enemies of Jehovah; whereupon he was told that worse things were in store for him—that his own family would be his fiercest opponents. This was in a degree the lot of Christ; it is experienced by many of the true servants of God.

I. THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF THE FLESH, AND THERE-

FORE MAY BE EXPECTED TO EXCITE HATRED AND OPPOSITION WHERE THAT ASSERTS ITSELF.

II. THE SERVANT OF GOD WILL OFTEN BE TRIED BY THE FAILURE AND DEFECTION OF HIS MOST CHERISHED FRIENDS.

III. IT BEHOVES ALL WHO ARE ENTRUSTED WITH DIVINE TRUTH TO ASK THEMSELVES WHAT IS THE GROUND OF THEIR CONFIDENCE.—M.

Vers. 7, 8.—*Leaving all for God.* (Naegelsbach is of opinion that the words of vers. 7—13 "are to be understood as having a double reference," *i.e.* both to the prophet's own feelings and to Jehovah's judgment. Zwingli and Bugenhagen consider that Jehovah begins to speak at "Go" or "Come," in ver. 9. There is evidently an intimate blending of the prophetic with the Divine consciousness throughout the whole passage.) A hard duty, but one often devolving upon faithful servants of Jehovah. Indeed, spiritually, it is the first condition of discipleship imposed by Christ. Only thus can the soul preserve its equipoise and integrity in what may be required of it. The Master will brook no rival.

I. THE REASONS FOR SUCH A SACRIFICE. It is possible that for one with the keen, affectionate nature of Jeremiah, much intercourse with his family and friends would have interfered with the performance of his duty. He was appointed to discharge an anomalous function, for which the greatest concentration of energy and spirit was required. Even though he had to weep as he spoke the words that God had commanded him, he must speak. His duty to the nation overshadowed or pushed into the background the claims of friends. So the follower of Christ may be subjected to discipline in providence, or to voluntary self-deprivation of a like kind by the demands of spiritual work. And it behoves all who labour in the cause of truth to hold themselves spiritually detached from those things and relations which might impede true usefulness.

II. KEEN PERSONAL SORROW IS FREQUENTLY OCCASIONED BY IT. That it was a real trial to Jeremiah there can be no doubt; and probably the special discovery made to him (ch. xi. 18 *seq.*,) was intended to facilitate the transfer of attachment to Jehovah. The endearing terms—"mine house," "mine heritage," "the dearly beloved of my soul," and the manner in which he repeats the history of his estrangement, prove how deeply the trial had affected him.

III. THEREBY IS TESTED THE LOYALTY OF THE SAINT TO GOD. In a question between one's friends and Jehovah, the settlement ought not to be doubtful to the mind of the saint. The reasons for withdrawal from entangling relations may not immediately appear, but the believer can with confidence leave them in the hands of God, by whom they will in due time be revealed. There is a danger in the midst of ordinary human relations that Jehovah shall be considered simply as an addition to our obligations, instead of being the supreme and all-modifying influence of our life. In proportion to the severity of the experience will be the consolations to be received.—M.

Vers. 14—17.—*Mercy and judgment.* In these verses we have one of the "larger words" which make the whole world's testament of salvation and life. The threatenings are stern and will be executed to the letter; but the promises seem to transcend the immediate occasion. A gate of hope and redemption was herein opened to multitudes who at that date were not included in the covenant of Israel. The conditions upon which their possible comprehension within the future Israel is based are moral and spiritual, and therefore truly universal.

I. THE GREATEST JUDGMENTS OF GOD UPON THE NEIGHBOURS OF ISRAEL BUT CORRESPONDED WITH THEIR CRIMES. That grave evils were inflicted upon the enemies of Israel cannot be denied. Multitudes were put to a painful death. Nations were uprooted, and human life appeared to be looked upon as an insignificant thing. In judging of this, however, it must be remembered that they had done and were ready to do similar things to Israel and Judah. The moral platform, too, upon which they lived has to be considered. Ages of depravity and barbarism, upon which higher appeals would have been utterly lost, had to be imaginatively impressed and overawed. And there were not wanting testimonies of conscience amongst the enemies of Israel themselves to justify this course. But—

II. EVEN IN BEING PUNISHED FOR THE SAKE OF ISRAEL, THEIR DESTINY WAS LINKED WITH HERS. If at first their lot would appear to be hard and inconceivably hopeless, yet in the end there can be no question that they were gainers by the association. In common life, with those whom they subdued they received manifold advantages, especially of a spiritual kind, and the choice was set before them of good as well as evil. On the principle, therefore, that it is better for one to suffer even severely at first if afterwards he may retrieve his position and attain to a higher and more desirable one through the initial discipline, it was better for these nations to be brought to book in this way for Israel's sake. Enemies to begin with, they might, and in many cases did, become friends and fellow-heirs of the promise.

III. APPARENT LENIENCY TOWARDS ISRAEL IS JUSTIFIED BY ULTERIOR PURPOSES OF UNIVERSAL BLESSING. As compared with her neighbours, it might appear as if one measure were meted out to her and another to them. But this is only contemporary and relative. The punishment inflicted has to be estimated by the spiritual deprivations which accompanied it. The deferring of Israel's hope must have been a keener sorrow than any mere temporal reverse. It must be remembered that through Israel, the seed of Abraham, all nations were to be blessed. To avert from her utter extinction was indirectly to ensure the greater benefit to the future. But that to be made to cease as a nation from the face of the earth would have been relatively less painful than many of the dispensations through which she had to pass, cannot but be allowed.

IV. IN THE MIDST OF DESERVED JUDGMENT THE FREE MERCY OF GOD IS THE MORE CONSPICUOUS. How unlooked for this promise concerning the future of Israel's enemies! The silver thread of hope traverses the dark labyrinth of judgment. It is only the wisdom of infinite Love that could so disentangle spiritual possibilities from such stupendous and widespread ruin. How glorious the mercy which can so assert itself! The only phrase that can describe the phenomenon is "*grace has reigned.*" The individual sinner, in the midst of his deserved miseries, may take comfort from this. However great the wretchedness and ruin which he has brought upon himself, and however long continued his alienation from God, if he but turn now from his wickedness, a way of escape will be opened up for him through the sacrifice of Christ.—M.

Ver. 1.—*Perplexing questions.* "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" etc. Unquestionably they very often do. Some of the reasons are—

I. THEY ARE MORE SHREWD. "The children of this generation are wiser than the children of light." They give more heed to the laws of success, are more alert to seize opportunities and to guard against those men and things which would work them harm. No amount of piety will compensate for inattention to the laws of success.

II. THEY ARE LESS SCRUPULOUS. Where success is thus won by some seemingly short cut which a godly man hesitates to take, it will not seldom be found, after a while, that the apparently long way round of the righteous was yet the nearest because the truest road. But meanwhile the ungodly appear to have the best of it.

III. THEIR ATTENTION IS MORE CONCENTRATED AND UNDIVIDED. The godly man cannot say in regard to the pursuit of this world's goods, "This one thing I do;" but the ungodly can. Whilst "not slothful in business," the Christian has also to "serve the Lord." Whilst a citizen of this world, he is also a citizen of another country, even a heavenly one, and by his faith he has avowed that he seeks that country. His attention must therefore be divided, as his who sows only to the flesh is not.

IV. THE LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD. The ungodly are his children, though ungrateful ones, and the heavenly Father would woo and win them back. Therefore in all gentleness he deals with them, making his sun to shine and his rain to descend on them as on his faithful children. The long-suffering of God is to lead to repentance.

V. TO TEST, IMPROVE, AND DECLARE THE FAITH OF THE GODLY. If righteousness were a royal road to riches, and faith infallibly led to fortune, where would be the room for trust in God? how would such trust be tested and deepened, and how would it ever be made manifest? The devil would have had reason for his taunt concerning Job, "Doth Job serve God for nought?" But that there may be such men as Job, heroes of the faith, pure, noble, God-fearing souls, saints indeed, God does at times let such men serve him for nought so far as this world is concerned, and hands over this world's wages to the devil, that he may with them bribe, as he in vain sought to bribe our

Lord, those who will "fall down and worship him." But that these questions may not perplex us, let us live day by day in view of the unseen and eternal, walking with God, holding communion with him; so shall our estimates of this world's prosperity be corrected, and we shall be able to behold with calmness the allotment of that prosperity to the ungodly rather than to ourselves.—C.

Ver. 3.—*Imprecatory prayers.* "Pull them out like sheep," etc. There are many of these. Some of them, like this one, are very terrible (cf. Ps. cix.; cxxxvii. 9, etc.). How are they to be understood? how justified? Of what use are they to us now? Questions like these cannot but be started in reading such prayers. The difficulty of them has been felt by almost every Christian and even humane reader. To get rid of such difficulty—

I. SOME HAVE SPIRITUALIZED THEM. The slaughter work which they call for is to be done, not on human bodies, but on human wickednesses, those inward and deadly foes which are so many and which hate us with cruel hatred. But whilst it is quite lawful to so make use of these petitions, it cannot be said that this is what they who first prayed them meant.

II. OTHERS HAVE TRIED TO TURN THEM SIMPLY INTO PROPHETIC PREDICTIONS—mere announcements of what God would do. But such alteration would never have been thought of but for the moral difficulty of letting them stand as they are. And the alteration is not permissible.

III. OTHERS, VERY MANY, HAVE EXPLAINED THEM ON THE GROUND OF THE IMPERFECT SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF GOD'S ANCIENT PEOPLE. "They knew," it is said, "no better. True, their prayers are wrong, unchristian, cruel, but they are to be excused because of the dim light, the very partial knowledge, of those days." But, in reply, it is clear that they were *not* ignorant; they had plain laws against revenge (cf. Lev. xix. 8; Exod. xxiii. 4, 5). And hence St. Paul, when arguing against revenge, cites the Old Testament, as in Rom. xii. 19, 20, quoting from Deut. xxxii. 35 and Prov. xxv. 21 (cf. also Prov. xx. 22; xxiv. 17). And Job (xxxi.) emphatically disavows both the act and thought of revenge; and so David (Ps. vii. 4, 5). And see David's conduct in regard to Saul twice. See, too, his gratitude to Abigail for holding him back from revenge (1 Sam. xxv.). And they had numerous laws enjoining mercy (cf. also Balaam's speech, given in Micah, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to *love mercy*," etc.?).

IV OTHERS HAVE SAID THAT SUCH REVENGEFUL UTTERANCES ARE BUT THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WRITERS—that they were not inspired when they thus speak. But David claims inspiration (2 Sam. xxiii. 1, 2). And the apostles claim it for him; and with especial reference to the hundred and ninth psalm, one of the most notable of these utterances (Acts i. 16). And they were composed for the temple service as acts of worship. Hengstenberg says of them, "They were from the first destined for use in the sanctuary. The sacred authors come forth under the full consciousness of being interpreters of the spiritual feelings of the community, organs of God for the ennobling of their feelings. They give back what in the holiest and purest hours of their life had been given to them." Hence we are compelled to regard these utterances as being only—

V. THAT WHICH IT WOULD BE RIGHT FOR A GOOD MAN, PLACED IN THE LIKE CIRCUMSTANCES, BOTH TO FEEL AND UTTER. Let it be remembered: 1. They knew nothing or but little of the great day of future judgment as we do. 2. The judgments implicated are all *temporal.* It can never be right to pray for the eternal damnation of any soul, and this they never do. 3. Many of the expressions are poetical. 4. These desires for the overthrow of their enemies were: (1) *Natural.* Resentment against wrong, anger on account of it, and desire that it may be punished, are implanted in us. Let us but place ourselves in their position. How did we feel in the time, *e.g.*, of the Indian Mutiny? (2) *Necessary.* In those fierce days a stern and fierce spirit was needed if any people were to hold their own at all (cf. Isaac Taylor, on 'Spirit of the Hebrew Poetry'). (3) *Based on the eternal truth of God's retributive justice.* God had declared by word and deed this attribute of his. Could it, then, be wrong that they should call on him to show himself what he had declared himself to be? (4) *Left to God to carry out.* "Unto God," says Jeremiah, "have I revealed [or, 'committed'] my cause. (5) *And in*

the New Testament we have some similar utterances. (Cf. Matt. xxiii. 11.) (6) *And we ourselves in war*—which we all allow to be at times lawful—*act on these very principles*, and do for ourselves what the Old Testament saints only besought God to do. Hence conclude that, in like circumstances and for similar reasons, such prayers as these are not evil. What the New Testament condemns is revenge for private personal injuries, for persecution when suffered for the gospel's sake; but not war for defensive purposes, and therefore not the stern spirit which is essential to war. And one practical lesson from all such utterances is that they reflect what exists in God—a determined and fierce hatred against wickedness—and therefore they awaken a salutary fear of that vengeance and an earnest desire to "flee from the wrath to come."—C.

Ver. 5.—*Failure in little things.* "If thou hast run with the footmen," etc.? The prophet of God was weary hearted. Like Job, like the writer of the thirty-seventh psalm, like John the Baptist, he was sore perplexed at God's dealings. The wicked prospered, the righteous were cast down. Hence he sadly asks, "Wherefore doth," etc.? (ver. 1). Now, God answers such questionings as these in different ways. Sometimes by showing his servant the true state of the ungodly, making him "to understand their end." Sometimes by revealing to the righteous the vast superiority of their portion over that of the ungodly. Sometimes by gently soothing the ruffled spirit. At other times, as here, by rousing rebuke and sharp remonstrance, bidding him bethink himself, if he broke down under these comparatively small trials, how would he bear up when much more terrible ones had to be endured? If running with "footmen" was too much for him, then how would he "contend" with the swift "horses"? If he could feel secure only in a quiet land (see Exposition), how would he do in a region full of peril like that of the jungle-land, the lair of the lion and other fierce beasts of prey, which stretched along the banks of the Jordan? Greater trials were to come to him than he had as yet known; how would he meet them if he failed in the presence of these lesser ones? Now, in applying the principle here laid down, note—

I. GOD PUTS UPON US FIRST THAT WHICH IS LESS, AND AFTERWARDS THAT WHICH IS GREATER. In all departments of life. 1. Our *physical powers* are taxed first lightly, afterwards more heavily. 2. So our *mental powers;* the easy lessons first, then those that are more difficult. 3. So with our *moral life;* temptation comes "as we are able to bear it." 4. So in *business life;* the lesser responsibilities and duties first. 5. And so in the *spiritual life;* God does not expect from the young beginner that which the veteran in his service can alone render.

II. AND THE LESS IS TO PREPARE US FOR THE GREATER. Childhood is to prepare for youth, that for manhood, and all our life here for our everlasting life yonder. But—

III. FAILURE IN THAT WHICH IS LESS CARRIES WITH IT FAILURE IN THAT WHICH IS GREATER ALSO. This is the law implied by the question of ver. 5. And it is a universal law. Therefore we may ask this question, "If thou hast run," etc.? 1. Of such as are *unable to bear the lesser trials of life.* What unmanly complaining we often hear, though in the presence of sorrows compared with which their own are as nothing! If they fail here and now, what will they do there and then? 2. *Of such as find a little prosperity do them harm.* This is the reason why many are kept poor. God sees that they would be puffed up, spiritually injured in many ways, if worldly prosperity were granted them; and hence he keeps it away. A little was given, as if to test them, but they could not bear it; and hence in God's love they were not tried again. 3. *Of such as fall before slight temptation.* If conscience is set aside and trampled on in lesser matters, it will be served no better in such as are greater. 4. *Of such as are looking for a more convenient season than now to yield themselves to God.* Will the opposition of your own heart, of the world around you, of the power which habit has over you, become less? But if you yield thereto now, how will it be when all these have become, as they will, more powerful still?

IV. BUT THE REVERSE OF THIS LAW IS TRUE ALSO. Victory over the less will lead to victory over the greater. By the successful running with the footmen we shall be prepared for the severer contest with horses. Hence little trials borne well prophesy our bearing well such as may be greater, should God please to send them. And if, when entrusted with but a few things, we are found faithful in them, the Lord whom we serve is likely to make us "ruler over many things." The lesser temptation resolutely

withstood prepares for withstanding the greater when it comes; and the overleaping of the frail barriers that now may oppose our self-surrender to Christ ensures that nothing at any future time shall be able to keep us back from him, nothing shall "separate us from the love of Christ."—C.

Vers. 7—13.—*The hiding of God's face.* Here is a most terrible condition of things set forth. It may be taken as telling of the calamities which ensue when God hides his face from his people. It is terrible every way. Because—

I. OF HIM BY WHOM HIS FACE IS HIDDEN. It is God. We feel such conduct from our fellow-men according to our estimate of the person who manifests it. Now, all these facts which make the hiding of his face grievous to us meet in God—righteousness, goodness, wisdom, power. Were he devoid of these, could we question the existence of any of them in him, we could bear with more equanimity his hiding his face from us.

II. OF THOSE FROM WHOM HIS FACE IS HIDDEN. Had they been enemies all along, it would have been taken as a matter of course; that he should have regarded them with favour would never have been expected. Or had they been strangers and aliens to him, then, too, his favour would not have been looked for. Or had that favour never been known or enjoyed, then its absence would not have been felt, nothing that they had been accustomed to would have been missed. But the reverse of all this is the truth. They had been counted by him as friends, as dear children, as precious in his sight; and he had been wont to cause his face to shine upon them. See the endearing epithets by which he describes them. He had counted them as "the dearly beloved of his soul" (ver. 7), "his portion," "his pleasant portion," etc. (vers. 8—10). How dark, therefore, must be the frown of God to such! how intolerable to them his displeasure!

III. OF THAT WHICH ACCOMPANIED THE HIDING OF HIS FACE. There is withdrawal: 1. *From the sanctuary.* "I have forsaken mine house." The customary services went on, but the glow, the unction, the power of them had departed. The place where his honour dwelt, the dearly beloved of his soul, was forsaken by him. 2. *From the people.* His heritage was no longer pleasant to him; he delighted not to dwell amongst them. All that joy, strength, prosperity, which belonged to them when God was amongst them had departed. 3. *From the land.* "The whole land is made desolate." In the outward circumstances and surroundings of the people the effect of God's hiding his face from them became terribly manifest. And there has come a terrible revulsion of feeling on the part of God towards them (see vers. 8, 9). And not only his mind, but his hand, his providence, is awfully changed towards them. He calls on their enemies to come (ver. 9). And they come (ver. 12). And the ruin is complete: "The sword of the Lord shall devour from the one end of the land even to the other" (ver. 12). All their own plans—their sowing of wheat (ver. 13)—for their own good are miserably defeated, they "reap thorns." Thus the inward displeasure of God manifests itself oftentimes in the outward circumstances of a man or nation.

IV. OF THAT ON ACCOUNT OF WHICH GOD'S FACE IS HIDDEN. It was "because no man layeth it to heart" (ver. 11). The lesser judgments of God, his repeated warnings, had been disregarded—hearing they heard not, seeing they saw not; and hence all this. Had the cause of their woe been their misfortune, the result of mistake, or ignorance, or lack of timely counsel, then there would have been some element of consolation amid all they had to suffer. But to add to their distress was the ever-present reflection, "It was all our own fault; we brought it all on ourselves." With what intense hatred, therefore, should we look upon all that grieves the Spirit of God! and with what earnest haste should we endeavour to return unto God, if we have wandered from him! These miseries which beset those from whom God hides his face are his loving scourgings whereby we may be led to say, "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned," etc.—C.

Ver. 9.—*The speckled bird.* A great preacher relates the following incident:—He says, "I had during my early ministry to preach one evening at a neighbouring village, to which I had to walk. After reading and meditating all day, I could not meet with the right text. Do what I would, no response came from the sacred oracle, no light flashed from the Urim and Thummim. I prayed, I meditated, I turned from one verse

to another; but the mind would not take hold, or I was, as John Bunyan would say, 'much tumbled up and down in my thoughts.' Just then I walked to the window and looked out. On the other side of the narrow street in which I lived I saw a poor, solitary canary bird upon the slates, surrounded by a crowd of sparrows, who were all pecking at it as if they would tear it to pieces. At that moment the verse came into my mind, 'Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird; the birds round about are against her.' I walked off with the greatest possible composure, considered the passage during my long and lonely walk, and preached upon the peculiar people and the persecutions of their enemies, with freedom and ease to myself, and I believe with comfort to my rustic audience. The text was sent to me, and if the ravens did not bring it, certainly the sparrows did." But while the use here made of the text is a legitimate one, it certainly is not its meaning. That, therefore, as in all cases, has the priority of claim to be considered, and we note how it tells—

I. OF WHAT MAY BE THE RELATION OF GOD'S HERITAGE TO HIMSELF. He who had once so loved them as to call them by all endearing names, "the dearly beloved of my soul" (ver. 7), "mine heritage" (ver. 8), "my portion," "my pleasant portion" (ver. 10), and whose hand had been wont to follow the dictates of his heart, had now completely changed towards them. His love had departed, and in place thereof had come aversion and anger (cf. Homily on vers. 7—13). Sad as it is, this similitude shows what may come to be the relation between God and his people. "Therefore have I hated it" (ver. 8), saith God. We cannot but inquire *the cause* of so terrible a change. It was because "no man layeth it to heart" (ver. 11); no man, *i.e.* would give heed to God's words and signs of warning, but went on in sin just the same. They would not repent, but persisted in their evil ways. But we may take the words also as suggesting—

II. WHAT WILL BE THE RELATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE TO THE WORLD. The world *will* hate the Church. "The birds around" *will* come "against her." Sometimes it seems as if it were not so. For unquestionably there are many portions of God's heritage that the world does not persecute. The age of martyrdom is over. God has shut the lions' mouths. He puts his fear upon the world; they see that God is with his people; or they are partly in sympathy with them. But at other times it is true as it was with that poor bird amongst the sparrows. "Well may we pity a godly wife bound to an ungodly husband; alas! full often a drunkard, whose opposition amounts to brutality. A tender, loving spirit, that ought to have been cherished like a tender flower, is bruised and trodden underfoot, and made to suffer till the heart cries out in grief. We little know what lifelong martyrdoms many pious women endure. Children also have to bear the same when they are singled out by Divine grace from depraved and wicked families. Only the other day there came under my notice one who loves the Lord. I thought if she had been a daughter of mine I should have rejoiced beyond all things in her sweet and gentle piety; but the parent said, 'You must leave our house if you attend such and such a place of worship. We do not believe in such things, and we cannot have you about us if you do.' And nobody knows what godly working men often have to put up with from those among whom they labour. Frequently the working men are great tyrants in matters of religion. If a man will drink with them and swear with them, they will make him their companion; but when a man comes out to fear God, they make it very hard for him." Yes; God's heritage is in the eyes of the world "as a speckled bird," etc. But let God's servants remember, when they are thus tried, that they have fellowship with Christ. They were forewarned of it; Christ did not conceal the cross from them. "Behold," he said, "I send you forth as sheep amongst wolves." But they cannot do you much harm (cf. Matt. 10). The day is soon coming when their power will be for ever destroyed. Meanwhile, keep away from them as much as you lawfully may. Do not needlessly provoke them; whilst harmless as doves, be wise as serpents also. Do not be like them, and do not be afraid of them. Go not alone with them; have the Lord Jesus ever with you, and you will be able to meet them in all holy and courageous wisdom and meekness. If the persecution be very great, ask the Lord to place you somewhere else, if so it may be. And till he does, and always, pray for them—Sauls may become Pauls.

III. IT IS A RELATION IN WHICH GOD'S HERITAGE MUST STAND EITHER TO GOD OR TO THE WORLD. There cannot be compromise. "No man can serve two masters." "If

any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "The friendship of the world is enmity against God." "Ye *cannot* serve God and mammon." Whose aversion, then, will you have, since that of God or of the world you must have? Your peril is not that you should deliberately choose to have the aversion of God rather than that of the world, but that you should seek to compromise. But that also is impossible. In coming to a decision be sure you take eternity into view, and may God who compels you to make this great choice help you—as he will if you seek his grace—to choose, like Moses, "rather to suffer affliction with," etc.—C.

Vers. 14—17.—*The tide that has no ebb, but ever flows.* Such is the grace of God.

I. IT HAS NO EBB. It seemed to be going back in regard to those to whom the prophet wrote. What terrible calamities were threatened and also came! How dark the face of God seemed towards them! But they were to be restored Ver. 14, "I will pluck out the house of Judah from among them." And even yet God's mercies to his ancient people are not done. Another restoration is to be theirs. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (cf. Rom. xi.). And Israel is but a type of humanity at large. God has not created all men in vain. Man, as such, is precious in his sight; "the dearly beloved of his soul." And notwithstanding the dark records of human history—man's sins and sorrows—God's love is upon him still. He "so loved the world," and that love has not ceased. The tide of his grace has not ceased to flow. But there may be barriers in the way of its onward progress. Human sin is such. It is so in nations and in individuals, and not only do men by their sin bar for themselves the inflow of God's grace, but for those who come after them. And to break through and break down these barriers is a work of time. Ages and generations may elapse. In mountainous regions you may often see a river flowing through what was manifestly once the bed of a vast lake. But after the lapse of long ages the waters rose and burst through the barriers that held them back from the valleys and plains beneath, and from that moment the river has flowed on in the channel in which we now see it. So will it be with God's grace to mankind at large. Its waters shall rise, and by-and-by the rocky barriers of man's sins, and all that man's sin has built up, shall be broken through and broken down, and then "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the seas." The tide has never gone back; it has been but delayed. Wise and holy fatherly love is at the root of all things, and is the key which unlocks, as none else will, all the problems of life. That love held his people down to the sufferings they had to endure until the evil mind departed from them, and so it holds humanity down and individual souls down to what they have to endure until they be changed in the spirit of their minds. But all this while the tide of his gracious purpose is rising, and soon that which hinders shall be taken out of the way. Judah was to go into captivity, but Judah was to be "plucked out" from thence, and that is but a pattern of God's dealings with us all.

II. But not only has this tide no ebb, IT FLOWS ON EVERMORE. Not only was Judah to be restored, but forgiveness and salvation are offered to her "evil neighbours" (ver. 14), who had done her harm. God's purpose in the election of some is not the reprobation of the rest, but the salvation of all. "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." The "evil neighbours" had corrupted Judah (ver. 16), and they had persecuted her (ver. 14); but now the set time to favour them also had come, and salvation is offered to them (ver. 16). Thus the tide of God's grace flows on evermore, and where it seemed as if it would never come. From all which we may learn: The redemption of the world is the purpose of God. But every nation and people in their own order. The elect are the firstfruits; those nearest to them come next. If any refuse, their national life is lost (ver. 17). But the unfaithfulness of man shall not make the faith of God of none effect. Let us take this tide at its flood; it will lead us on to life eternal. It is *the* "tide in the affairs of men" which calls us to launch forth upon it, that it may bear us to never-ending bliss.—C.

Vers. 1—5.—*The prophet's complaint.* The writings of the prophets are often as much historic as they are prophetic; historic of personal as well as national experiences, of inward thoughts and emotions as of outward incidents. In tracing the current of events, the writers disclose the workings of their own spirits, and in expounding and

vindicating God's ways with Israel or with other nations, they indicate the method of his dealings with themselves. This was singularly true of Jeremiah, and we have here a striking illustration of it. This passage probably marks the time when the people of his own native city of Anathoth, and even his kindred, his "brethren of the house of his father," could no longer bear his faithful rebukes, and he was compelled to take refuge in Jerusalem (ch. xi. 21; xii. 6). Consider (1) *the prophet's state of mind* as here made manifest; (2) the meaning and force of *God's remonstrance.*

I. THE PROPHET'S STATE OF MIND. It contains a singular mixture of good and evil, thoughts and emotions both noble and base. So conflicting and even contradictory sometimes are the voices of the truest human heart. This outburst of hostility from the men of Anathoth has plunged his spirit in confusion. Like a ship checked in its course, with its sails taken aback by a sudden squall, its guiding principles and powers are for a while disturbed, and its balance lost. Note different elements of feeling. 1. *Deep perplexity.* He cannot reconcile the events that are taking place and the seeming prosperity of the wicked with the known rectitude of the Divine character. "Righteous art thou, O Lord; . . . yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments," etc. Why this "yet"? If he is thus convinced of God's righteousness, why this wish to reason with him? There is a conflict between unbelief and faith, between the disposition to judge by sensible appearances and the desire to judge by eternal principles. And the difficulty is aggravated by the fact that the designs of the wicked seem to succeed because God smiles on them. "Thou hast planted them," etc. This fact of successful wickedness under the wing of a Divine Providence is the deep and awful mystery that has been a source of perplexity and trouble to thoughtful men in every age. David felt the full force of it (Ps. lxxiii.). His "feet had well-nigh slipped" because of it, "until he went into the sanctuary of God," and then the problem was solved. It is when we get away from our carnal reasonings into the sanctuary of spiritual contemplation and the realm of faith that we can alone hope to understand these things. When God's ways most perplex and confound us we must keep fast hold of right thoughts about himself. His judgments are a mighty deep. But as beneath the heaving, storm-tossed ocean there lie great mountains of the solid world, so does God's righteousness underlie all the agitations and conflicting phases of human history. Faith in that will give us rest and peace. 2. *The sense of his own rectitude.* "But thou, O Lord, knowest me," etc. This is not the utterance of vain self-righteousness. A "conscience void of offence," the persuasion that our purpose is pure and our hearts right with God, is never to be confounded with spiritual pride. Without a shadow of vain-glory you may know well that you are better than many around you, and could not do as they do. There are times in a man's history when nothing but the sense of personal rectitude can sustain him. When calamity comes upon him, when he falls, perhaps, from some high position and is cast forth upon the world homeless and friendless, what a bitter ingredient in his cup is an accusing conscience! On the other hand, he may defy everything to rob him of his peace, and, like Job, may preserve his soul in serenity in spite of blighted hopes and withered joys, a taunting world and scornful friends, if he can say, "My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high" (Job xvi. 19). 3. *The spirit of revenge.* "Pull them out," etc. He would fain antedate the day of slaughter. This may have been an unguarded, momentary outburst of impatient resentment. But it was none the less evil and irreligious. Why was he rebuked for it if it were not wrong? (Similar examples in Moses, Elijah, Jonah, the disciples James and John.) Let us beware how we take God's judgments into our own hands. "Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord" (Rom. xii. 19). Never let us speak as if the punishment of the wicked, which is the Lord's "strange work," were regarded by us with complacency. 4. *Human sympathy.* "How long shall the land mourn," etc.? The prophet is true to himself here. He grieves for the misery inflicted on the innocent by the wrong-doing of others. The humane heart groans with the "groaning creation," and sighs for the time when all shall be renewed. He who "endured the contradiction of sinners against himself" teaches us to take upon ourselves, as he did, the sins and sorrows of the world.

II. THE DIVINE REMONSTRANCE. "If thou hast run with the footmen," etc. (For explanation of these references, see Exposition.) There is extreme gentleness in this rebuke. It is interesting to note how uniformly gentle the reproofs God administered

to the prophets were. Two things are noticeable in this remonstrance. 1. *It refers to Jeremiah's want of courage*, and says nothing about his mental perplexity. We are reminded that the best cure for our morbid conditions of thought and feeling is that we should brace up the energies of our soul to bear whatever Providence may see fit to lay upon us, and valiantly to contend for the cause of truth and goodness in the face of all opposition. 2. *It speaks of severer trials that are in store for him in the future.* Life is for us all a course of Divine discipline, in which all lesser tests of faith and fortitude are intended to prepare us for sterner conflicts and nobler victories.—W.

Vers. 1—4.—*The prophet puzzled by the prosperity of the wicked.* I. HOW THIS PUZZLE ARISES. It arises from the presence of a number of facts together, the coexistence of which the prophet finds it impossible to explain. 1. *There is his assurance as to the character of Jehovah.* He speaks confidently as to the Divine righteousness. Observe how it is the thing that he starts with. All our doubts will get cleared up in the end, however long the process may be, if only we start with the sure practical conviction that Jehovah is, and that he is righteous. "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains." And as one would not doubt the existence of them, so neither must one doubt the righteousness of God. Jeremiah could not but become acquainted with the character of one who was so constantly manifesting himself to him. Besides, there was the history of Jehovah's consistent and glorious dealings in the past to fall back upon, and it was presumed that Jeremiah was well acquainted with that history. If it had not been so, there would have been little use in referring him to Moses and Samuel (ch. xv. 1). It was no earthly governor swayed about by all sorts of motives with whom Jeremiah had to deal. 2. *From the manifest wickedness of the wicked and their equally manifest prosperity.* Jeremiah has no more doubt about the character and deserts of his enemies than he has about the character of his God. He speaks as if there were some close connection between the wickedness and the prosperity, and as if the unscrupulous man could boast himself without contradiction being possible as to the results of his audacity. It seems to the prophet as if there should be an instant and complete stoppage of all this pride and deceit. 3. *From some special advantages they have had not of their own procuring.* "Thou hast planted them." This is a way of indicating that all outward circumstances favoured men when they started on their knavery. They were well placed for the attainment of prosperity, and the same kind of outward circumstances had continued. They had grown and brought forth fruit. It seemed that if they had been planted at random, planted anywhere else, these wicked purposes would have been comparatively fruitless. Probably Jeremiah's notion was that *God* located every man in his starting-place, and if so, it is easy to see how such a consideration would increase his perplexity. 4. *From the hypocrisy of the wicked.* While Jeremiah sees only too plainly their wickedness, they pretend to be righteous and devout and God-honouring. The name of Jehovah is, perhaps, oftener on their lips than on the lips of the prophet himself. They may be full of zeal for the temple, for incense, for offering; they may even make capital by reproaching Jeremiah for his utterances on these subjects (ch. vi. 20; vii.). 5. *From the suffering they inflict on the land.* The wicked may prosper, and yet in their very prosperity suck away the life-blood of a nation. That is no true prosperity where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The words of the prophet suggest that there was grinding and rapacity, and thus no encouragement to the tiller of the soil to do his best. Truly have the fruits of the earth been called "kindly," for they are kindly to one who will diligently cultivate. But no one will diligently cultivate if the fruits of his toil are to come to one who reaps where he has not sown, and gathers where he has not strawed. 6. *From the scorn these wicked heap on the prophet himself.* "They said, He shall not see our last end." Of course we are not to suppose that the prophet was influenced here by considerations of personal resentment. Doubtless what chiefly moved him was to maintain his sacred work. These wicked men were like the scoffers of whom Peter speaks, walking after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?"

II. HOW THE PUZZLE WAS TO BE DIMINISHED. By the time we reach the end of the Book of Jeremiah, God's judgments on all the prosperous wicked are amply manifested. When Jeremiah came to close the roll of his prophecies, and reflect on all that God had

said in them and done even in Jeremiah's own time and under his own eyes, and when further he recollected his own hasty complaints, he would surely feel that a trustful and patient waiting for the full event would have been much wiser. Perhaps no prophet ever saw more of the accomplishment of his own prophecies than Jeremiah did. He did see the end of those who, in their pride and fatness, had reviled him. Let us be true and faithful to what the Spirit of truth has made known to us as the will of God, and everything in the way of vindication will come if we only wait. We must not mistake precipitation and impetuosity for zeal. God's people have to wait for their own perfection and their own reward; they have also to wait for the execution of God's judgment against his enemies. Through all the centuries that have passed since Jeremiah's complaint here, oppression and robbery have continued, and they continue still. And as we think of such things, it will be well for us if we can end our thoughts where Jeremiah began: "Righteous art thou, O Lord."—Y.

Vers. 7—11.—*The inheritance that has lost its charms.* I. WE HAVE HERE REGRETFUL THOUGHTS OF THE PAST. We can see what the prophet once hoped and desired. Not only what he had hoped and desired in those dreams of youth before God had touched his heart and claimed the service of his lips, but also what he had hoped and desired since becoming a prophet. Dear as Anathoth with its inhabitants may have been before, it would become dearer still when he thought of impending calamities to the whole land. There are cherished objects indicated by the words "house," "inheritance," and "desire of the soul." What is precisely indicated by these words it is of course impossible for us to say; but any of us, thinking for a little of the objects that lie nearest to our hearts, will comprehend that the prophet is here speaking of separations he had found it very hard to achieve. He did not pretend that alienation from house and heritage and kindred was an easy thing. Then we must bear in mind that the references here have a deeper meaning than to Jeremiah's purely human relations. It is pretty well agreed that the full truth of these words is only reached when we think of Jeremiah as representative of Jehovah. God's separation from his people was the thing of most serious moment. God had a house; God had an inheritance; God had a beloved object, an object of desire (Deut. xxxii. 9). God had been with these people now for many centuries, and there was much to make them precious in his sight. They were the seed of Abraham, the descendants of those whom he had delivered from Egypt and guided through the wilderness into the land where they now dwelt. Things might have been so different, if only the people had been of a different spirit. There was no necessity in the nature of things that Israel should have become so idolatrous, so hostile to Jehovah, any more than there was necessity that Anathoth should become a place of mortal snares and perils to the prophet. What a fall there was from the triumphal march across Jordan, under Joshua, to the march at the heels of a conqueror all the way from Jerusalem to Babylon! Again we say things might have been so different. That which God had cherished might have become a rich earthly manifestation of his glory. The vineyard on a fruitful hill might have become what it was intended to be—a fruitful vineyard.

II. PRUDENT AND DECISIVE ACTION IN PRESENT NECESSITIES. Natural affection must yield to spiritual duty. Jeremiah might doubtless have kept the good will of his kinsfolk, such as it was worth, if only he had been able and disposed to remain silent as a prophet. Happily there is no hesitation, there is no sign of its even being possible. Let us seize on every record that illustrates how strong, how immovable, those become who put their trust in God. The path that Jeremiah had to tread was trodden afterwards by Jesus himself. His kinsfolk would have interfered with main force to stop what they reckoned the vagaries of one who was beside himself; and so as far as Jesus could be said to have had any abiding-places, they were in Capernaum and Bethany, not in Nazareth. So with Jeremiah. He had to give up all that on earth he had any natural claim to, and throw himself on God, and those who perchance might help him for the sake of God. Nor was he disappointed. There is certainly no indication here of the compensations that came to the prophet for his fidelity and self-denial. It is hardly the place to mention them. But we do see this clearly, that when once the lower is relinquished, decisively relinquished, and a higher station taken up, the lower is seen to be lower. Temporal and natural relations, that count for so much when one is in the

midst of them, are seen then in their comparative unimportance. Let it not be supposed that, after cutting off the right hand, one must of necessity wait for the fulness of life eternal to get anything like compensation. The compensation begins in the very act of self-sacrifice. Does not the prophet here say that what had once been so loved had come to put on such a threatening, maleficent aspect that he also had come to hate it? What has had to be relinquished for Christ only leaves so much the more of opportunity to grasp and to use the spiritual wealth which is in him.—Y.

Ver. 10.—*Shepherds where they ought not to be.* The words of this verse suggest a degradation of the vineyard, which may have been accomplished in one of two ways. The prophet may have been indicating the miseries of his country by a scene from real life, a literal spoiling of a vineyard by the literal flocks of careless or unscrupulous shepherds. Either a vineyard becomes neglected by its owner, and so lays itself open to the inroads of a roaming flock, or the shepherd comes, and, regardless of all right, breaks his way in by sheer force. In a land where there were both vineyards and flocks, nothing was more likely than that the oppression of the weak by the strong should be illustrated in some such way. And when we pass to the figure, recollecting that Israel was reckoned as a flock and its rulers as shepherds, then we begin to discern how these rulers are once more to be blamed. Neglect is the least thing to be laid at their door; they are chargeable with even more than neglect, even with high-handedness and utter lack of regard for neighbourly rights. These rulers are charged in other places for their want of fidelity in making due provision for the flock; here, while they make a sort of provision, they do it in a way which indicates how little they think of the real interests of their sheep. 1. *There is presented to us here a picture of two occupations, two possessions, both right in themselves.* It is not the robber who desolates this vineyard, the man to whom violence is an ordinary element. It is the shepherd, the man whose work is every whit as useful and commendable in its way as that of the vinedresser. God made the surface of his earth for his creatures, animate and inanimate, and there is an appointed and sufficient place for all. There are pasture-grounds where the sheep may grow and by its wool provide clothing for men, and there are the tillage-grounds whence come the corn, the oil, the wine, which are equally for the sustenance and pleasure of men. 2. *The mischief which may be done by a selfish occupation with one's own interests.* In one sense the shepherd could not be too careful about his own interest. He had food to search for, his flock to keep together, wanderers to restore, wild beasts to drive away. This was all very difficult, but the difficulty should have taught him to look sympathetically at the interests of others. The vinedresser would have in his own way as hard and anxious a life as the shepherd. There are difficulties enough in human existence from things which cannot be helped. Why should they be added to by the thoughtlessness of those who can be thoughtful if only they care to be, unselfish if only they care to be? A shepherd with the heart of a brother in him would be doubly careful when he came near a vineyard. It was easy for his heedless sheep to do a damage which, once done, no amount of regret could undo. 3. *Heedlessness of the interests of others works to our own serious damage in the end.* The position of these kings of Israel and Judah had to be set forth by more than one image. Their people had to be looked at in the aspect of a flock and of a vineyard, and so indeed each one of us has to look at his own life in more aspects than one. A narrow, one-sided view is ruinous; it may have temporary advantages, but they are soon gone, and then the full folly of short-sightedness will appear. These kings lived a self-indulgent life, and gathered round them a favoured few, whom they enriched and pampered in like manner. Meanwhile the land was suffering from oppression and injustice, and these great ones advancing to an overthrow, the completeness of which would be intensified by the remembrance of past follies. That is the truly prudent man who is always looking beneath the surface and beyond the present. To find an easy, ready-to-hand way out of present difficulties may be the surest way of making future difficulties altogether unmanageable.—Y.

Ver. 13.—*Sowing wheat and reaping thorns.* It is true that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." It is also true that "men cannot gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles." And at the same time it is emphatically true that men may

sow wheat and yet reap thorns. The contradiction is only on the surface; it suggests inquiry, and the further the inquiry is continued, the more it is seen what serious truth is contained in the prophet's statement. Consider, then, the statement in two aspects

I. AS SHOWING THAT MEN DO NOT REAP WHAT THEY HAVE SOWN. They sow wheat. It is surely not to a *mere semblance* of wheat-sowing that the prophet here refers. It is true that men sow unconsciously the seeds of misery, of a bitter and shameful harvest, the gathering of which they cannot escape. It is true that the men who consult present pleasure and the present appearances of things are every day sowing evil seed, without having the least suspicion that they are sowing at all. It is even true that men may be so led away by errors of education, or habits received by mere tradition, as to go on all life through in what they suppose to be right, but which nevertheless is utterly wrong. All this, however, is rather to be classed under the sowing of tares which are like wheat. The prophet is here dealing with the sowing of something really good, and something capable of truly satisfactory results. The truth he would indicate is more fully set forth in our Lord's parable of the four different kinds of seed. The seed which the sower went forth to sow was *all good seed*. The seed which fell in the good ground was not one whit better than what fell by the wayside. We see, therefore, that a large part of good seed is not reaped. Just according to the area comprised by the terms "trodden ground," "stony ground," and "thorny ground," is there force in the statement that wheat has been sown, and yet wheat not reaped. The prophet's reference is to the great, unquestionable, and peculiar privileges of Israel. The Lord had not dealt with any nation as he had dealt with Israel. Other nations had found rising up amongst them men of genius and worldly wisdom and originating power; but no other nation of antiquity shows in its history any man like a Moses, a Samuel, or a David, or even the very least of the prophets. We look upon Israel, therefore, as representative of all who have enjoyed abundance of religious privileges, of those whose early days have been in the midst of religious instructions and associations. Yet out of this very class the worldliest of the worldly have come. For all the truth that has been bountifully sown not one stalk of result is to be seen. Mark that what is to be first noticed is the negation of good results. Is it not a sad thing that one should have to read first of all of so much Divine truth coming down from heaven, so many glorious revelations, so many angelic visits, so many inspired prophets and witnesses, and then, on the other hand, of so little manifest result in regenerated and purified human lives?

II. AS SHOWING THAT MEN REAP WHAT THEY HAVE NOT SOWN. Thorns, of course, could not be reaped unless thorns were planted, but no one would deliberately plant thorns. That would be to say, at the very beginning of one's possibilities of choice, "Evil, be thou my good." But the heart of man, rich, deep, inexhaustible ground as it is, has come under a curse of which Gen. iii. 18 is but a shadowy suggestion. The vicious willingness of the ground to bring forth thorns and thistles every husbandman knows full well. Ch. iv. 3 needs to be borne in mind: "Sow not among thorns." Men shrink from the toil and suffering needful to uproot the false and the injurious, and still more difficult do they find the watchfulness and determination which would prevent thorns from getting hold at all; and yet it is perfectly certain that thorns, allowed to continue, will in time destroy anything like abiding fruit from the good seed. Note the important difference between the tares and the thorns. The wheat and the tares grow together till the harvest; then the tares are easily separated and burnt. The *perfected* wheat is as easily separated and *garnered*. But the thorns choke the wheat, and there is never any real gathering at all. Wheat that does not reach maturity is worth nothing *as wheat*. It cannot be put into the garner. Hence the *keeping down* of the thorns is every whit as important as the *pushing forward* of the wheat. If the negative conditions are neglected, the positive conditions are nullified. Israel was now, as we see, sunk in the filthiest abominations of idolatry. But it had come to this through a long neglect of the most earnest warnings. Note in particular Numb. xxxiii. 55, "If ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides." The idolatry of Israel was a far worse thing than the idolatry of the heathen; just as a neglected garden overrun with weeds and briars is worse than a weedy and briery corner of the wilderness (Lev. xxvi. 16; Deut. xxviii. 38—40; Micah vi. 15; Hag. i. 6).—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIII.

The chapter falls into two parts—the one describing a divinely commanded action of the prophet, symbolical of the approaching rejection of the Jewish people, the other announcing in literal language the ruin especially of the king and the queen-mother, and emphasizing the inveterate corruption which rendered such a blow necessary. The mention of the queen-mother (see ver. 18) renders it probable that Jehoiachin is the king under whom the prophecy was composed. It is true that other kings besides Jehoiachin ascended the throne in the lifetime of their mother; but the express and repeated mention of the queen-mother in the account of Jehoiachin (2 Kings xxiv. 12, 15; comp. ch. xxix. 2; xxii. 26) warrants the inference that Nehushta, Jehoiachin's mother, was a more powerful personage than other queen-mothers. This will be confirmed if, with Hitzig and Bertheau, we accept the statement of the text of the Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxvi. 9), that Jehoiachin was eight (not eighteen) years old on his accession (see on ch. xxii. 28).

Vers. 1—11.—The entire people of the Jews is like a good-for-nothing apron.

Ver. 1.—**A linen girdle**; rather, *a linen apron*. "Girdle" is one of the meanings of the Hebrew (*'ēzōr*), but is here unsuitable. As ver. 11 shows, it is an inner garment that is meant, one that "cleaveth to the loins of a man" (in fact, the *περίζωμα* of the Septuagint, the *lumbare* of the Vulgate). The corresponding Arabic word, *'izār*, has, according to Lane, the meaning of "waist-wrapper." Israel was to Jehovah in as close a relation spiritually as that in which the inner garment referred to is to him who wears it materially. There is an Arabic proverb which well illustrates this: "He is to me in place of an *'izār*" (Freytag, 'Studium der Arab. Sprache,' p. 298). "A *linen* apron" may perhaps be specified, because linen was the material of the priestly dress (Lev. xvi. 4), and Israel was to be spiritually "a kingdom of priests." But this is not absolutely necessary. The common man used linen in his dress as well as the priest; the only difference between them was that the priest was confined to linen garments. But an "apron" would in any case naturally be made of linen. **Linen**; literally, *flax* (a product of Judah, Hos. ii. 5). **Put it not in water.** The object of the prohibition is well stated by St. Jerome. It was at once to symbolize the character of the people of Israel, stiff and impure, like unwashed linen, and to suggest the fate in store for it (ver. 9).

Vers. 4—6.—After Jeremiah has worn the apron for some time, he is directed to take it to *P'rath*, and hide it there in a cleft (not "hole") of the rock. A long interval elapses, and he is commanded to make a second journey to the same place, and fetch away the apron. What does this *P'rath* mean? It is by no means easy to decide. Hardly "the Euphrates," (1) because the common prefix, "the river," is wanting, though in so extraordinary a narrative it was peculiarly needed; (2) because of the length of the journey to Babylonia, which has *ex hyp.* to be made twice; and (3) because the Euphrates is not a rocky river. Ewald suggested that "some wet place near Jerusalem" probably had the name of *P'rath*, and indicates a valley and spring called Forah, about six English miles north-east of Jerusalem. Mr. Birch appears to have hit independently on the same spot, which he identifies with the Parah of Josh. xviii. 23, about three miles north-east of Anathoth, and describes as a picturesque gorge between savage rocks, with a copious stream (*Quarterly Statement of the Palestine Exploration Fund*, October, 1880, p. 236). This combination, however, involves an emendation of the text (*P'rath* into *Pārāh*)—logically it involves this, as Mr. Birch has seen; Ewald's comparison of the Arabic *furât*, sweet water, seems inconsistent with his reference to Parah—for which there does not seem to be sufficient necessity; and it is better to adopt the view of the great old French Protestant scholar, Bochart, that *P'rath* is a shortened form of Ephrath, *i.e.* at once Bethlehem and the district in which Bethlehem lay (see 1 Chron. ii. 50; iv. 4; and perhaps Ps. cxxxii. 6). It need hardly be said that the limestone hills of this region afforded abundance of secluded rocks. There may, of course, be at the same time an allusion to the ordinary meaning of *P'rath*, viz. Euphrates, on the analogy of the allusion in Isa. xxvii. 12. Those who hold the view here rejected, that *P'rath* is equivalent to the Euphrates, sometimes suppose that the narrative is a parable or symbolical fiction, such as Luther, Calvin, and others find in Hos. i., iii., the thing signified being in this case the carrying captive of the people to Babylon; and this seems the

best way of making this interpretation plausible.

Ver. 6.—**After many days.** To allow time for the apron to become rotten.

Ver. 7.—**I went . . . and digged.** The apron, then, had been covered with a thick layer of earth.

Vers. 8—11.—Explanation of the symbol. Could there be a greater humiliation for Judah and Jerusalem than to be compared to a rotting linen apron? The hard things said of **this evil people** in ver. 10 must of course be understood with the limitations indicated in the note on ch. ix. 15, 16. **Imagination** should (as usual) be *stubbornness*. The explanation in ver. 11 is a strong argument for the rendering "apron" (see above, on ver. 1).

Vers. 12—14.—Here another symbol is introduced—a symbolic phrase rather than a symbolic action. The first symbol referred to the people as a whole; the second represents the fate of the individual members of the people. The words, **Thus saith the Lord God of Israel**, are omitted in the Septuagint, and certainly the form of the following phrase seems hardly worthy of so solemn an introduction. **Every bottle.** It is an earthenware bottle, or pitcher, which seems from ver. 13 to be meant (comp. Isa. xxx. 14), though the Septuagint renders here ἀσκός. **The kings that sit upon David's throne**; rather, *that sit for David upon his throne*; i.e. as David's heirs and successors. The plural "kings" is to include all the kings who reigned during the final period of impending ruin. **With drunkenness.** The effect of the "wine-cup of [the Divine] fury" (ch. xxv. 15). **Dash them one against another.** This is merely the development of the figure of the pitchers; not a prediction of civil war. The pitchers, when cast down, must of course fall together into pieces.

Vers. 15—19.—An admonition to seize upon the only means of escape.

Ver. 16.—**Give glory**, etc. Let your tribute to your King be that of humble submission to his will. The precise application of the phrase must be derived from the context (comp. Josh. vii. 19; Mal. ii. 2). **Upon the dark mountains**; rather, *upon mountains of twilight*. A "mountain" is an image of a great obstacle (Zech. iv. 7; Matt. xxi. 21). As Judah is walking along, the hitherto even tenor of his way gives place to huge mountains wrapt in an impenetrable dusk, over which he will stumble and fall if he does not repent in time.

Ver. 17.—Should all admonitions be in vain, Jeremiah will return (like Samuel, 1 Sam. xv. 35) and give vent to his sorrowful emotion. **The Lord's flock.** Jehovah is likened to a shepherd (comp. Zech. x. 3).

Ver. 18.—The extent of the calamity shown in individual instances. For the fulfilment, see 2 Kings xxiv. 15. After a reign of three months, the young prince and his mother were carried to Babylon. **And to the queen**; rather, *and to the queen-mother* (literally, *the mistress*). It will be noticed that, except in two cases, the names of the mothers of the reigning kings of Judah are scrupulously mentioned in the Books of Kings. This and the title of "mistress" are indications of the high rank they enjoyed in the social system. In the case of Asa, we are told that he removed his mother, Maachah, from her position as "mistress," or queen-mother, on account of her idolatry (1 Kings xv. 13). The political value of the station is strikingly shown by the ease with which Athaliah, as queen-mother, usurped the supreme authority (2 Kings xi.). From an historical point of view, the "queen-mother" of the Jews is a most interesting personage; she is a relic of the primitive age in which relationship was reckoned with regard to the mother (so with the Accadians, Etruscans, Finns, etc.). It should be added, however, that once (viz. 1 Kings xi. 19) the same title, "mistress," is applied to the queen-consort. **Humble yourselves, sit down**; rather, *sit down in abasement*; i.e. take the station suitable for your abased circumstances (comp. Isa. xlvii. 1). **Your principalities**; rather, *your head-ornaments*.

Ver. 19.—**The rendering of the Authorized Version is substantially right**, as the events referred to are obviously future. The tense, however, in the Hebrew, is the perfect—viz. that of prophetic certitude. Jeremiah sees it all in prophetic vision, as if it were actually taking place. **The cities of the south**; *i.e.* of the dry, southern country of Judah, called the Negeb—**shall be [are] shut up**—*i.e.* blocked up with ruins (as Isa. xxiv. 10)—**and none shall open them** (openeth them), because all Judah will have been carried captive. (For fulfilment, see ch. xxxiv. 7.)

Vers. 20, 21.—The captivity being still (in spite of the perfect tense) a thing of the future, the prophet can seek to awaken the conscience of the careless under-shepherd by showing how self-caused is his (or rather her) punishment.

Ver. 20.—**Lift up your eyes.** The verb is fem. sing., the pronoun (in suffix form) masc. plu.,—a clear indication that the person addressed is a collective. Probably the "daughter of Zion" is intended, which, in a certain sense, might be called the "shepherd" or leader of the rest of the nation. **From the north.** Again this horror of the north as the source of calamity (see on ch. i. 14).

Ver. 21.—**What wilt thou say**, etc.? The rendering of the verse is uncertain, though

the Authorized Version undoubtedly requires correction. The alternatives are, *What wilt thou say when he shall appoint over thee (but thou thyself hast trained them against thee) familiar friends as thy head?* and, *What wilt thou say when he shall appoint over thee those whom thou hast taught to be thy familiar friends as thy head?* The rendering "familiar friends" is justified by Ps. lv. 13; Prov. xvi. 28; xvii. 9; Micah vii. 5. The "captains" of Authorized Version, or rather "tribal chiefs," is unsuitable.

Ver. 22.—**Thy heels made bare**; rather, *treated with violence.* The fate held out to the daughter of Zion (trained to walk about with "tinkling ornaments," Isa. ii. 18) is to plod wearily along with bare feet (comp. Isa. xlvii. 1).

Ver. 24.—**As the stubble.** "The word means not what we call stubble, but the broken straw which had to be separated from the wheat after the corn had been trampled out by the oxen. Sometimes it was burnt as useless; at other times left to be blown away by the wind coming from the desert, on which see ch. iv. 11; Job i. 19" (Payne Smith).

Ver. 25.—**The portion of thy measures**; *i.e.* thy measured portion. But it is probably safer to render, *the portion of thy garment*, the upper garment being used instead of a bag to hold anything (comp. Ruth iii. 15; 2 Kings iv. 39). **In falsehood**; *i.e.* in false gods (ch. xvi. 19).

Ver. 26.—**Therefore will I, etc.** But the Hebrew is much more forcible, "And I also," etc., implying, as Calvin remarks (comp. Prov. i. 26), a certain retaliation. **Upon thy face**; an allusion to Nah. iii. 5.

Ver. 27.—**I have seen, etc.** The Hebrew is again more forcible than the English. It runs, "Thine adulteries and thy neighings," etc.! (this is an exclamation as it were; then more reflectively), "I have seen thine abominations." **Neighings**; *i.e.* passionate craving for illegitimate objects of worship (comp. ch. ii. 24, 25; v. 8). **In the fields.** The Hebrew has the singular. The "field," as usual, means the open country. **Wilt thou not, etc.?** rather, *How long yet ere thou be made clean?* In ver. 23 the prophet had vehemently declared his people to be incorrigible. But, like the tender Hosea, he cannot continue to hold such gloomy thoughts; surely Israel, God's people, must eventually be "made clean"! But this can only be as the result of judicial affliction, and these afflictions will be no slight or transient ones.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—11.—*The spoiled girdle.* I. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE LIKE A GIRDLE TO GOD. 1. They are his *peculiar property.* The girdle is a private personal possession. It belongs solely to the wearer. When all ordinary property is taken from him he retains the clothes on his body. Even the bankrupt has a right to these. 2. They are *near to God.* This girdle—really an under-garment—is close to the person of the wearer. God does not simply hold his people as an absentee landlord holds his property. He draws them near to himself. He cherishes them with affection, sustains the burden of them, carries them with him in his glorious out-going to works of wonder and mercy and in his blessed in-coming to Divine peace and sabbatic repose. 3. They are *a glory to God.* (Ver. 11.) Garments are worn, not only for clothing, but to add grace and beauty. God's people are more than safe with him; they are glorious. It is true that they have no inherent grace which they can add to the splendour of God, but they can adorn that splendour by reflecting it, as the clouds which gird about the rising sun seem to increase its beauty by reflecting its own rich rays. 4. They are required to *cleave to God.* God graciously takes his people near to himself; yet they must voluntarily bind themselves to him in love, in devotion, in submission, in obedience.

II. GOD'S PEOPLE, IN THEIR SIN, ARE LIKE A GIRDLE DEFILED AND UNWASHED. 1. Jeremiah was forbidden to put the girdle in water (ver. 1). Whilst living in this world the best men daily contract stains of sin; but God has provided a fountain for cleansing, and by daily penitence and faith in his purifying grace the soul may be made and preserved pure (Zech. xiii. 1). As all have sinned and do sin, all need this constant cleansing. To neglect it is to become increasingly foul and unfit for the honour that God bestows upon his people. 2. This corruption is manifest (1) in *neglect* of the will of God—"they refuse to hear my words;" (2) in wilful *obstinacy*—they "walk in the stubbornness of their heart;" (3) in positive *disobedience and impurity*—they "they walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them;" (4) in inveterate *impenitence*—they "would not hear."

III. THE PUNISHMENT OF GOD'S SINFUL PEOPLE IS LIKE THE SPOILING OF THE GIRDLE.

1. They are *cast off*. The unwashed girdle can be worn no longer. In their holiness God's people were his glory; in their defilement they are his dishonour. God can endure the presence of nothing impure (Heb. xii. 14). 2. They are left to their own *increasing defilement*. The unwashed garment is buried, and becomes only worse. The most terrible punishment of sin is to be left to sin unchecked. Vice then becomes ingrained—a second nature. 3. They are *dishonoured*. The girdle is visibly marred with the earth in which it is buried. Internal impurity is punished with external shame. Punishment is appropriate to guilt. Pride is chastised by humiliation. 4. Though their sin may be hidden for a time, it will be *revealed at last*. The girdle is buried only to be exhumed. The longer it was buried the worse must have been its condition when it was again exposed to view. The corruption of the heart cannot be ultimately concealed; it must reveal itself in the life. In the resurrection-life, wherein the body is spiritual and fits truly and expresses clearly the soul that inhabits it, the foul soul will be compelled to inhabit a foul body. 5. They are rendered *worthless*. The girdle is utterly spoiled—profitable for nothing. Sin not only dishonours, it destroys. The girdle becomes rotten. As dirt rots a garment, so sin rots a soul. It not only makes it foul and hideous, but it destroys its faculties and energies, degrades its essential nature, and introduces the corruption of death (Jas. i. 15).

Vers. 12—14.—*The parable of the wine-flagons.* I. THE PROUD ARE LIKE WINE-FLAGONS. Jeremiah is thinking chiefly of the aristocracy of his nation (ver. 13) and their pride (ver. 17). The metaphor, therefore, specially designates the proud. These are swelled-out and pretentious, but not solid, and do not contain anything good of their own. They are brittle. Pride is itself a source of danger (Prov. xvi. 18).

II. THE WRATH OF GOD IS LIKE FERMENTING WINE. It is a disturbing influence, breaking in upon the quiet of self-complacency. The more its natural tendency to reduce us to repentance is suppressed by pride, the more terribly will its presence agitate us. The larger the flagon, the more wine will it contain; the greater the rank, the greater the trouble when universal retribution comes. The more empty the flagon, the more wine will it contain; so the less of real solid worth there is in a man's life, the more room will there be for the exercise of Divine wrath against his wretched condition.

III. THE EFFECT OF THE WRATH OF GOD ON THE PROUD IS LIKE THE ROLLING OF WINE-FLAGONS FILLED WITH FERMENTING WINE. The flagons are imagined to be drunken, and to behave as drunken men would behave. In this condition they exemplify the state of those into whom God has poured the vials of his wrath. This does not simply work in them, leaving their exterior undisturbed. Spiritual though it is, it affects the whole life. We cannot escape the effect of God's anger by ignoring spiritual facts and living in the outside, worldly life alone. This and all our experience will be disturbed. The flagons strike one another. Companions in the pleasures of sin become mutual enemies in the punishment of it. Moral corruption leads to social discord. Civil war is one of the greatest calamities which can overtake a nation, and when this arises, not from any contention for right or liberty, but from the outburst of wild passions, selfish greed, etc., it is doubly destructive. In such an event wickedness becomes its own executioner.

Ver. 16.—*Darkness.* I. SIN PLUNGES THE SOUL INTO DARKNESS. "Light is sown for the *righteous*" (Ps. xcvii. 11). The darkness of evil thoughts and an evil will throws its shadow out on the world, and ultimately brings gloom over the whole of life. 1. This darkness is *distressing*. The benighted feel a horror of great darkness falling upon them amid the wild and lonely mountains. When God withdraws the sunshine of his grace this mournful condition must be the experience of the godless. 2. It is *confusing*. They "stumble upon the twilight mountains." Without God we have no true guide in life. There are mountains of difficulty to be overcome in our earthly pilgrimage, steep and toilsome and dangerous. How dreadful to venture unenlightened and unguided through such pathless wilds! If the life were to be spent in a paradise, it would be sad to dwell amidst its beauties in perpetual gloom; but, seeing that it is a pilgrimage over the mountains, it is fearful to be left in darkness. 3. It will *grow into deeper darkness*. At first it is a twilight. Some hope that this is the

herald of the dawn; but they are mistaken—it is the portend of the night. The mingled lights and shadows will melt into the blackness of midnight. The mixed joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, of this life, which some sanguine souls suppose to be the worst condition they will be in, and likely to give place to rest and joy hereafter, will end to the sinner in the terrible darkness of a much worse future retribution. 4. The *present light* is no guarantee that the darkness is not approaching. The brightest day may be followed by the blackest night.

II. THE PROSPECT OF THIS DARKNESS SHOULD WARN MEN TO AVERT IT. 1. It is *not inevitable.* It has not yet come. There is still time to escape. If there were no remedy, all warnings would be useless. The very utterance of warnings implies that the terrors to which they refer may be avoided. 2. The contemplation of its approaching advent should urge men to *seek an escape.* The prospect is gloomy, and many will not face a gloomy prospect. They dislike allusions to unpleasant subjects. But it is necessary to contemplate such sad truths, that men may be roused by selfish fear when they will not be moved by the love of God. 3. The *way of escape* is to be found in "giving glory to God." It is returning from rebellion to the service of God, humbling ourselves, rejecting the pride which clings to the old sin, and regarding God alone as worthy of honour, and so submitting to his will and obeying his commands as to glorify him by our acts. To the Christian all this is implied in faith in Christ which involves the humbling of ourselves before him, and our trust in his grace which glorifies his love, and loyalty to his will which honours his rights of royalty.

Ver. 18.—*Royalty humbled.* I. GOD IS THE JUDGE OF KINGS. They are as far beneath God as are the meanest beggars. Their rank is no protection against the execution of Divine justice; their power no security against the consequences of the wrath of God. No earthly honour or power will serve men when they stand before the great throne of judgment.

II. WICKED KINGS WILL MEET WITH SEVERE PUNISHMENT. The greater the privileges they have had, the more have they been able to abuse them, and therefore the greater their guilt. The larger their influence has been, the more harm have they done in using that influence for evil purposes. All who are entrusted with exceptional power should remember that this incurs exceptional responsibility.

III. THE PRIDE OF KINGS WILL BE PUNISHED WITH HUMILIATION. Every sin will have its appropriate retribution. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," not only in the main characteristics, but in particular features. Pride thus naturally sows the seed of shame (Prov. xxix. 23).

IV. THE GREATNESS OF THE PRESENT PROSPERITY OF WICKED KINGS WILL ENHANCE THE SUFFERING OF THEIR FUTURE RETRIBUTION. They who stand highest can fall lowest. Poverty is felt more keenly by people who were once in affluence than by the children of the poor. The memory of his former luxuries must have added keenness to the sufferings of Dives in Hades. We are not to infer from this that future retribution is only a compensation for the inequality of the joys and sorrows of this life, that kings will suffer for their very greatness (for the wicked poor will be wretched hereafter, while the good and great will be blessed in the future with heavenly treasures), but that if we are *unfaithful*, the measure of future distress will necessarily be partly determined by that of present enjoyment. We need not, therefore, be envious of the prosperity of the wicked. Rather it should fill us with horror, grief, and pity as we consider what a fool's paradise they live in—what anguish will grow out of the contrast of it with the certain retribution of all sin!

Ver. 23.—*The Ethiopian's skin and the leopard's spots.* I. SIN BECOMES INHERENT IN THE NATURE OF MEN. The black of the Ethiopian's skin and the spots of the leopard are natural. Sin is, of course, originally unnatural. Yet it is so ingrafted into the very life of men that it becomes part of their nature. 1. Men *inherit* tendencies to evil; *e.g.* the child of the drunkard is likely to feel strong temptation to intemperance, etc. We are not to blame for what we inherit; but we do suffer through it. The degraded moral nature is a fact, and one for which the possessor of it suffers, although he will not be responsible for it, nor punished simply for having it, but only for the

way in which, with his free-will, he yields to it, and, on his own account, makes it still more corrupt. 2. Men *habituate* themselves to sin. Habit is second nature. The sin which is wilfully chosen becomes a tyrannous habit. We are colouring our very being by the tone of our thoughts and actions. What we do to-day, that we will be to-morrow. We are the result of our own past deeds. He who speaks or acts a lie becomes a liar; he who indulges in impurity becomes an unclean being; he who follows selfish impulses becomes a creature of selfishness. Thus every man is building up a habitation for his soul by his own deeds. What shall this house be? A temple of divinity? a palace of pure delights? a charnel-house of corruption? or a prison of gloom?

II. THIS INHERENT CONDITION OF SIN MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANY MAN TO IRRADICATE IT. 1. *Self-reformation is impossible.* Sin is not a mere defilement to be washed off. It is ingrained. It is in the blood, in the life, in the nature. Action is according to character. If the character is corrupt, so must be the action. It is true we are free to do as we will, but so long as our nature is corrupt we shall will to do evil, because the will is part of the nature. But apart from the vexed question of the freedom of the will, every man is conscious of the difficulty of overcoming opposing habits, even when his will is roused against them. When he would do good evil is present with him, and this evil is so strong that it can only be regarded as a law of (corrupted) nature (Rom. vii. 21—23). 2. *Perfect reformation must be sought from God.* This must be regeneration (John iii. 3). Man can do much with himself, but only God can "create" in him "a clean heart" and make him "a new creature." Therefore, to be born again, we must be born "from above." Regeneration must be the work of the Spirit, which is the brooding source of all life. But this is possible for all (Matt. xix. 26). The impossibility for self-reformation should not leave us in sullen indifference, but should rouse us to seek the one sure means of renewal in crucifixion of the old life and spiritual resurrection to a new life, through yielding ourselves up to the influence of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11.—*The marred girdle.* This and the following emblem are intended to symbolize the characters and punishment of pride in spiritual and carnal men respectively. The "girdle" of linen cloth worn by the priest represents the close relation of Judah and Jerusalem to Jehovah. He had chosen them, and taken them into closest fellowship. They were as his cincture to declare his character and glory to men. But they had abused his confidence. For them, therefore, the fate was reserved which is described in connection with the girdle. Where the cleft of the rock was, in Ephrath or Euphrates, is not quite plain; but the probability is that the last-mentioned is really meant, and that a journey to it was indeed made by the prophet.

I. THE DIGNITY AND IDEAL CHARACTER OF GOD'S PEOPLE THUS SET FORTH. The linen girdle worn by the priests was a portion of their appointed and consecrated garments. It represented, therefore, the idea of consecration arising from nearness and closeness. They were highly favoured amongst the nations as being brought into immediate relation with Jehovah. "As the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord" (ver. 11). And as the girdle, by bracing the body, becomes a means of strength, so Israel was to be the power of God amongst the nations of the world. They were to be as kings and priests before God, to show forth his righteousness and to execute his will.

II. THE CONDITION UPON WHICH THESE HAVE TO BE MAINTAINED. Simply because they had been so designed in the eternal purpose. They had no security for this position being retained. It would not do for them to rely upon prestige. With spiritual strength relaxed and moral purity lost, they were no longer fit for the honourable service to which they had been called. It was only as their spiritual life rose to the height of their calling, and maintained itself from age to age by means of Divine truth and continual exercise of faith, that they could expect to retain their privileges. But this Israel was far from seeing. She required, therefore, to be taught the truth of it by

experience, and nothing would do this better than that which the symbol suggested. Their outward circumstances and position would be made to correspond with their inward character, so that all men, and even they themselves, would cease to be deceived. This is ever the order of the Divine government. He will set our secret sins in the light of his countenance.

III. THE MESSENGER OF GOD SHOULD SPARE NO EFFORT TO EMBODY AND ENFORCE THE TRUTH HE HAS TO DECLARE. Whether Ephrath in Israel or Euphrates was meant, a journey of considerable length had to be taken, and much trouble was involved. But the prophet did not grudge this if thereby he might appeal through the imagination the more forcibly to the heart of his people. So sometimes ancient prophets had to submit to themselves being made signs that were spoken against. There can be no question that the manner adopted by the prophet of illustrating his message was most effective and striking. And it was clear even to the simplest understanding. An illustrative style of discourse is carefully to be distinguished from a florid one; and anything which conveys more vivid impressions to one's self is more likely to add impressiveness and vivid force to what one has to say to others. This going to Euphrates on the part of the prophet was quite an important business, but it was justified by its result. And so preachers should spare no pains to link the truth of God with the actions, the experiences, and the interests of men.—M.

Vers. 12, 15.—*Broken pitchers; or, worldly sufficiency and its punishment.* I. THE SIGNS OF THIS DISPOSITION. The threatenings of God are interpreted as if they had been truisms of blessing justified by the unbelievers' own experience. The prophet is therefore despised, and his message wrested from its original meaning. The people were so oblivious to their own guilt that they looked forward without fear to the future, or they professed to do so. They had clothed themselves in triple armour of self-sufficiency against Divine warnings. So the worldly mind continually prophecies good for itself instead of evil, and inverts the messages of Divine grace. The sharpest experiences and most signal reverses are not enough to rid it of this folly, and thereby it condemns itself.

II. HOW IT IS DEALT WITH BY GOD. That this is provoking to the Divine mind is evident. It is a fresh element added to the guilt already denounced. The insult to the messenger of God must be avenged, and this is accomplished: 1. *By removing all ambiguity from his words.* Their real meaning is explained so that no one can mistake it. In this pointed disillusion there is the greater emphasis imparted to the original message. God will not suffer any one to remain in ignorance of his final destiny, whether it be good or evil. 2. *The doom already predicted is repeated with expressions of Divine determination and anger.* Civil discord and national destruction are plainly set forth, and whilst these take place the ear of an offended God is turned away. He will "not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them."

III. IT IS WELL, THEREFORE, FOR MEN TO GIVE REVERENT HEED TO DIVINE WARNINGS AND INSTRUCTIONS. Sometimes in the history of the Church omens, dreams, and visions have been given whose meaning was not clear, but on prayerful solicitation it has been revealed. Wilful blindness cannot escape punishment, because it provokes the just anger of God. But to those who ask in humble inquiry what the will of the Lord may be, he will return a gracious answer, and declare how the evil may be averted.—M.

Ver. 16.—*Days of grace and how they should be spent.* The mind of the prophet was full of the doom which he had predicted, and he was apprehensive of the spiritual results of exile and confusion with heathen nations. The people themselves, however, did not exhibit any such anxiety. They treated his words as idle tales, or as the expression of ill nature and enmity. The relation of these two is a typical one. From age to age the preacher of righteousness urges his pleas and presses for immediate attention to reformation of life. As constantly those addressed put off the needed repentance and waste the time which is afforded them for working out their salvation.

I. THE PRESENT IS TO BE REGARDED AS A GRACIOUS OPPORTUNITY FOR REPENTANCE AND SPIRITUAL SERVICE. The element of time in these, as in other prophecies, is left for the most part indefinite. Exact dates would defeat the purpose the message of the

prophet has in view. It was sufficient for him to impress upon them that there would be but a short time between the present and the fate he had described. It was a sign of God's grace that he had been sent to warn them. They were to listen to his voice as to the voice of Jehovah. And in the event of repentance, that which was near at hand might be indefinitely postponed or altogether averted. But in any case the really essential work of repentance ought to be done whilst they had clear views of the nature of their sin and the requirements of God's Law. From Josh. vii. 19 it is evident that the phrase, "Give glory to the Lord," meant nothing else than to repent. It suggests the honour of God, which is acknowledged and felt by the humbled sinner as he bows before the footstool of grace and tells out the dark history of his sin. The lower he is in his own estimation the higher is that throne of glory before which he lies prostrate. And at such a time the grandest conceptions are given of the greatness, the power, and the love of God. His forgiveness shines forth in new, unspeakable splendour. And the restored sinner is eager to declare to others the grace which he himself has received. But all this is necessarily a work of time, and demands for its adequate fulfilment the full possession of our faculties and the clearest perceptions of truth.

II. THE RISKS INCURRED BY DELAY IN THESE DUTIES ARE THEN DESCRIBED. The figure is that of a traveller in a mountainous region who loses his way amongst the dark rocks until eventually the deepening gloom leaves him in despair and death. The picture is very vivid, and appeals to the deepest human feeling. It suggested the mental and spiritual confusion which were likely to arise from unlooked-for reverses, from captivity in a heathen land, and from forgetfulness of the traditions of Israel. But it is even more truly correspondent with the condition of those who have delayed making their peace with God until they have suffered mental eclipse, or been overtaken by the terror, the weakness, etc., of a death-bed. The worth of "a death-bed repentance" has been rightly discounted by every preacher and writer of the Church. There is but one instance of such a thing in Scripture. It is but seldom that resolutions formed under such circumstances, in the event of restoration to health, avail against the temptations and lifelong habits of the sinner.—M.

Ver. 17.—(See on ch. x. 19.)—M.

Ver. 23.—*Moral helplessness: how induced.* I. THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT MAY GO. The metaphors employed are intended to illustrate the difficulty of getting rid of that which has become a part of one's self, or which has become natural to one. It is evident that superficial means would never produce the effect supposed, because that which seems to be superficial has really its root in the nature, and would be reproduced similarly in place of that which was removed. The doctrine is that there are certain evils into which men fall which may appear to be external, matters of custom and observance, but which have really their origin in the depravity of the heart. Any merely external reform, like that of Josiah, would fail to effect a permanent change, because the source of the errors and transgressions which were corrected was deeper than the remedy could reach. And this is the case with the sins of men. To cease to do evil we have not only to stay the hand but to purify the heart. To cease to do evil we must cease to think it, to feel it, and to conceive it. So helpless is the sinner when he stands face to face with the problem of reformation. Effort after effort is made and fails. It is bound to fail because the source of the wrong-doing has not been rectified. *To change himself*—who is capable of this feat?

II. CAUSES OF IT, REAL AND UNREAL. Excuses readily suggest themselves to the sinner who would avoid the humiliation of repentance. He may ask the question, as if it were a mystery, "Wherefore come these things upon me?" Or, ignoring the witness of conscience, he may attribute his weakness to circumstances and external influences. This is the error which the prophet refutes. With great skill he shows the terrible power of habit: how men continue to do that which they have been doing simply because they have been doing it. The feet acquire a fatal facility in transgression, and the hands a skill in working evil. They almost act automatically when things forbidden are suggested. But when the commandments of God are concerned they are unfamiliar with the duties enjoined, and the will is not resolute enough to persevere in them.

III. ITS GREAT REMEDY. Seeing that in himself the sinner is without strength, it would appear at first as if he could only despair. But this is not the teaching of the prophet. He has already counselled vigorous effort, and implied that a commencement and continuance in well-doing were possible. But the change could only begin at a spiritual point, viz. repentance. And this, as Scripture abundantly shows, though within the power of every one, is a supernatural grace. A true sorrow for sin may be induced in answer to prayer, by the study of Scripture, and the contemplation of Christ; but it is always the work of the Holy Spirit. When that grace, however, has once been attained, it is open to the sinner to reverse the process by which he has been enslaved. After conversion evil habit will assert itself, and can only be met by constant dependence upon Divine grace and constant effort after holiness. The good habit formed by repeated and regular actions according to the Law of God is the best antidote to the evil one.—M.

Vers. 1—12.—*The ruined girdle; or, it may be too late to mend.* The much-needed lesson of this section was taught by means of one of those acted parables of which we have so many instances both in the Old Testament and in the New: *e.g.* Zedekiah's horns of iron (1 Kings xxii. 11); the strange marriages of Isa. viii. 1, Hos. i. 2; the two yokes (ch. xxvii. 2); and in the New Testament, our Lord's standing the little child in the midst of the disciples; the washing the disciples' feet; the withering of the fig tree; the taking of Paul's girdle (Acts xxi. 11), etc. The present instance seems very strange, and to us it would have appeared unmeaning, uncouth, and simply grotesque. But to Orientals, and especially to Jews, the dramatic action of the prophet—for we regard what is here said as having been literally done—would be very impressive. It was a strange garb for the prophet to be arrayed in. It would attract attention, be the subject of much comment, and, when the prophet continued to wear it, though soiled and in much need of washing, this would cause more comment still, and would indicate to the people that the strange garb and conduct of the prophet had meaning and intent which it would be well for them to give heed to. Then the taking of the girdle to Euphrates—whatever place be meant—burying it there, leaving it; and then finding it and fetching it back, and no doubt exhibiting it, ruined, worthless, good for nothing;—all this would rivet the people's attention, and deeply impress their minds. Now, one evident, if not the chief, lesson designed to be taught by this to us curious procedure, was the irreparable ruin that would come upon the people through the exile and captivity which they were by their sin bringing upon themselves. Many, no doubt, had comforted themselves with the idea—as is the manner of all transgressors—that if trouble did come to them it would not be so bad as the prophet made out. They would get over it, and be but little the worse. This dramatic parable was designed to shatter all such notions, and to show that Judah, like the much-marred girdle, would be, after and in consequence of their exile, "good for nothing." Note, then—

I. THE FIRST PART OF THE PARABLE—THE GIRDLE WORN. This would encourage their delusion. For the likening of them to a girdle, especially to a linen girdle—a priestly and therefore a sacred vestment—and to a chosen and purchased girdle, would vividly declare to them how precious they were in God's sight. 1. For as the girdle (ver. 11) was worn close to the person of the wearer, it denoted how *very near to the heart of God they were* who by this similitude were set forth. The known favour of God led them, as it had led others, to presume that they could never try God too much. He would be sure to bear with them and forgive them, do what they might. 2. Then the girdle was a portion of the dress most necessary to the wearer, and so denoted how *necessary his people were to God.* Had not God said, over and over again, in every variety of way, "How can I give thee up? how can I make thee as Sodom?" (Hos. xi. 8; ch. ix. 7)? As the girdle was indispensable to the comfort, the decorousness, the strength of the wearer, so God taught by this figure that he could not do without his people. 3. Moreover, as the girdle was adorned and ornamented, and thus was a most valuable portion of the dress, so it showed that his people were to God a *cherished ornament and praise.* They were to be to him "for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory" (ver. 11). And as such God had worn this girdle and put it on him. And his people knew all this, and *presumed upon it.*

II. THE SECOND PART—THE GIRDLE UNCLEANSED. This would show wherefore their ideas must be a delusion. "Put it not in water" (ver. 1). The prophet was bidden to wear it in this soiled and foul condition, and no doubt he did so. It would provoke the contempt, which adornments associated with uncleanliness ever excite. But its intent in thus being worn unwashed was to depict the moral state of those to whom the prophet was sent. As they would put away from them a soiled and unclean girdle, so they were to learn that God, though he might bear long with a morally unclean people, would not always do so. And—

III. THE THIRD PART OF THE PARABLE—THE GIRDLE PUT AWAY. This would show that their presumptuous ideas were actually a delusion. The girdle was so spoiled by its burial by the Euphrates that it was henceforth "good for nothing." And all this came true. It was but a miserable remnant of the people that came back from Babylon, and as an independent nation they have never since regained the position that they then lost. All their national glory came to an end; the lesson of the marred girdle was literally fulfilled.

IV. THE WHOLE A PARABLE THAT HAS MANY APPLICATIONS. To Churches, to individuals, to all the gifted of God's grace in time, talents, opportunities, and, above all, in the presence and help of the Holy Spirit. They will be tempted to presume, to think they can never forfeit these things, that God will be ever gracious to them as he has been in the past. This parable is a word for all such, and should prompt the earnest and constant putting up of the psalmist's prayer, "Keep back thy servant . . . from presumptuous sins," etc.—C.

Vers. 12—14.—*Vessels of wrath.* This is another similitude having the same general purpose as the former one. "Every earthen flagon (cf. ch. xlviii. 12)—the inhabitants of Jerusalem, her king, her priests, and prophets—will be filled with the wine of the intoxicating beverage of God's wrath (cf. ch. xxv. 15; Isa. xxviii. 7; li. 17; Ezek. xxiii. 31; Ps. lx. 3; lxxv. 8) given them as a punishment for the pride and cruelty and impiety which they drank greedily as wine; cf. Rev. xiv. 8; xviii. 3, where the harlot drinks the wine of her own fornication and gives it to others, and intoxicates herself and them with it (Rev. xvii. 2; xviii. 6), and therefore God gives her the cup of his wrath, and she reels under it" (Wordsworth). The awful threatenings of these verses teach us much concerning the characteristics of those whom the Lord "will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy" (ver. 14).

I. THEY GRADUALLY BECOME VESSELS OF WRATH. Not till they are filled with their intoxicating sin are they certainly to be so called. But this goes on day by day.

II. THEY COME TO JEER AND MOCK AT BOTH THE MESSAGE AND THE MESSENGERS GOD SENDS TO WARN THEM. Ver. 12, "Do we not certainly know," etc., as if they would say, "Tell us something we do not know." It is an utterance of unbelieving and mocking contempt.

III. THEY ARE AS DRUNKEN MEN: bereft of reason, unable to help themselves or their brethren, the sport of fools, and at the mercy of the most contemptible foe. Either torpid and insensible to all that concerns them, or else filled with fury and lost to all natural affection, hurting and destroying those nearest and dearest to them (ver. 14).

IV. ALL VESSELS, LARGE AND SMALL, ARE FILLED ALIKE. (Ver. 13.) Not alone the common people were to be thus filled, but the magnates of the land—king, priests, etc.

V. THEY ARE MUTUALLY DESTRUCTIVE. (Ver. 14.) Such is the doom of sin.

CONCLUSION. We all are vessels. We all shall be filled. But what with? Pray that it may not be with the wine of the wrath of God, but "with the fulness of God" (Eph. iii.).—C.

Vers. 12—14.—*The last results of sin.* I. GOD AND HIS MESSAGE MOCKED.
II. OUR ENTIRE NATURE UNDER ITS CONTROL.
III. ALL RANKS AND ORDERS POSSESSED BY IT.
IV. EVERY MAN'S HAND AGAINST HIS FELLOW.
V. GOD KNOWN ONLY AS THE GOD OF WRATH.—C.

Ver. 15.—"*Be not proud.*" It is difficult to see what those whom the prophet was addressing had to proud of; but it is certain that they were proud, and that thereby

they were, more than by aught else, hindered from receiving the word of God. The inflated shape, the mean material, and the easily destroyed nature of those "bottles" to which he had likened them, as well as the arrogant boastful talk of the drunkard, whose doings theirs he predicted should resemble; both these comparisons show how vividly the prophet discerned in them this besetting sin of pride, and the ruin it would be sure to work them. Let us, therefore, note—

I. SOME OF THE REASONS FOR THIS EXHORTATION, "Be not proud." 1. The main reason which the prophet here urges is *its antagonism to the Word of God.* Now, such antagonism cannot but be, for: (1) *The Word of God despises what men most esteem.* (*a*) Their own moral worth. How high men's estimate of this! how low that of the Word of God! (*b*) Their own capacities. Man deems himself capable of self-support, self-deliverance, and self-salvation. The Word of God tells him he is utterly dependent on God for all things, be he who he may. (*c*) The world—its maxims, honours, wealth, etc. (2) *It esteems what men most despise.* (*a*) Such qualities of mind as meekness, forgiveness of injuries, humility, indifference to the world, great regard to the unseen and the spiritual. (*b*) Persons who have nothing but moral excellence to recommend them, be they poor, obscure, and despicable in the world's esteem. (*c*) Courses of life which may involve "the loss of all things," so only as we "may be accepted of him." 2. Its other terrible fruits. Some of these are given in the verses following. It will not suffer men to give glory to God; it leads men into deadly peril (ver. 16). It causes deep distress to those who care for their souls; it will end in their utter ruin (ver. 17).

II. HOW OBEDIENCE MAY BE RENDERED TO IT. Probably there is nothing but that threefold work of the Holy Spirit of which our Lord speaks which will ensure such obedience. Pride is too deeply rooted in the hearts of men to yield to any lesser force but: 1. *The conviction of sin*—destroying all man's self-complacency. 2. *Of righteousness*—filling him at the same time with admiration of the righteousness of Christ, with despair of attainment of it, but with joy that, though he cannot have it in himself, he yet has it by virtue of his faith in Christ. 3. *Of judgment*—destroying the supremacy of the world over his mind, and so delivering him from the temptation to its pride. This work of the Holy Spirit lays the axe at the root of the tree, and ere long hews it down. Let, then, this Holy Spirit be sought in all sincerity, and let his guidance be ever followed; so shall "the mind of Christ" be increasingly formed in us, and we shall learn of him who was "meek and lowly in heart," and so find rest in our souls.—C.

Vers. 16, 17.—*Lost upon the dark mountains.* "Give glory to the Lord," etc.

I. THE SCENE PORTRAYED. It is that of unhappy travellers overtaken by night, when crossing some of the perilous mountain tracks of Palestine. A traveller overtaken as these seem to have been by a night storm, is in imminent danger of falling over precipices and perishing miserably. Even by day the way is perilous: the paths are easily lost, or are strewn with rocks, or they lead along steep and slippery slopes, or by overhanging cliffs, where a single footslip may plunge the heedless passenger headlong to a frightful death in the far depths below. But how much more dangerous such journey must be when night overtakes the travellers, is evident. The fading light has gone, but the journey has still to be pursued. And now comes that stumbling upon the dark mountains, which is so terrible and inevitable. There is the anxious looking for the fitful light of moon or stars, and occasionally hope arises that the clouds will break and some glimmer appear. But this hope has been speedily quenched by the clouds gathering over again, and with the added darkness of the rain-storm, so that the darkness is "gross," like unto that of the shadow of death. Every step, therefore, is fraught with frightful peril, and not a few thus benighted amid such mountain passes perish miserably ere the morning dawn. Such is the scene portrayed.

II. THAT WHICH IT REPRESENTS. 1. *The temporal calamities which God sends—as to the Jews—in punishment for their sins.* All earthly distress has the sad tendency to unhinge the mind, to fill with foreboding fear, and greatly to perplex and overwhelm; but when to the natural effects of such earthly distress there is added the consciousness of guilt and of having deserved what God has sent, then the dismay, distress, and despair which are suggested by the prophetic picture are miserably increased. 2. *The hardened sinner's despair of God's mercy.* The vision of judgment and wrath

has come upon him, but the remembrance of his sins crushes hope of mercy (cf. Judas "going out and hanging himself"). 3. *The entanglements of sin.* It is a great mistake to imagine that those who are enslaved by any sin are happy in it. Not a few of them endure a very hell in their frantic but futile endeavours to break the chain which long indulgence has forged and fastened around them. The bitter repentance, the unavailing remorse, every gleam of hope of deliverance so soon quenched, the recklessness of despair, the groaning as of the prisoner appointed to death,—all these are realities known to the slaves of sin, and should make every soul shudder lest the like should come upon him. 4. *The procrastinator's death-bed.* He who has been convinced over and over again that he ought to seek the Lord, but has ever put it off,—his feet are likely to "stumble upon the dark mountains" when the night of the shadow of death draws upon him.

III. HOW SUCH MISERY MAY BE AVOIDED. It was very near: the prophet's words imply that the oft-threatened doom was at their very doors. And so the like doom may be near to many now. *But yet it may be avoided.* Giving heed to God's Word (ver. 15). We have much hope when we see an earnest heeding of that Word, a really serious attention paid to it. But that by itself is not enough. There must be the actual "giving glory to God;" by confession of sin, acknowledging the wrong done; by casting the soul on God for forgiveness in lowly trust; by forsaking the evil that has roused the just anger of God. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man," etc.

IV. THE GREAT REASON FOR FEAR THAT THIS MISERY WILL NOT BE AVOIDED AFTER ALL. It was and it ever is the accursed *pride* (vers. 15, 17) that will not allow of such giving heed to the Divine Word and such giving glory to him. All the instincts of the unrenewed heart are up in arms against such self-abasement. Any sacrifice will be brought rather than that of the broken and contrite heart.

V. THE UTTERLY HOPELESS CONDITION OF THOSE THUS LOST. (Ver. 17.) See the prophet's piteous tears. He can do nothing—every resource has been tried and failed, and he can but "weep sore in secret places" for the "pride" that has ruined those he would fain have saved. Oh then, sinful heart, down, down before thy God, and "give glory to him," as he would have thee do, as it is so right and reasonable and good for thee to do, as the ministers of God entreat thee to do.—C.

Ver. 20.—*The neglected trust demanded.* "Where is the flock that was given thee," etc.? This word is addressed to the rulers of Judah and Jerusalem. Their people, the nation over whom they ruled, were God's flock, his "beautiful flock." That flock had been entrusted to the rulers' care. The influence of those in power was very great. As were the leaders of the people—especially the king—so were the people themselves. They could be led like a flock, and were so. Tremendous, therefore, was the responsibility of those in power, to whom was entrusted this flock of the Lord. But they had used their great authority and power badly. Ruin had come or was about to come upon the flock (cf. vers. 18, 19); they were to be scattered, scattered wholly, and the greater portion of them lost. To these careless and guilty shepherds the Lord now comes, and asks for the flock he had placed in their hands. "Give an account of thy stewardship," was said to those who were to be no longer stewards because of their faithlessness. Now, this question, "Where is the flock," etc.? is one which should be often heard sounding in the ears of many others besides those to whom it was first addressed, *e.g.*—

I. TO THE PASTORS OF THE CHURCH. The Church of God is his flock, his "beautiful flock." Its members are very dear to him, "purchased with his own blood." The Church is given, entrusted, to pastors. When Christ ascended up on high he gave some "pastors." This method of ordering his Church is the one he has willed. His blessing has evidently rested on it. What does not the Church of God owe to her faithful pastors? But whatever their character they cannot but have great influence. They are trusted by the people. They have received special gifts for their work in the form of mental and moral endowments. They are much prayed for. They are specially set apart for the charge of the Church of God. They have every inducement to fidelity. Faithful, the love of their charge will gather round them; the fear of God will dwell within them; the crown of life awaits them. And these mighty

motives, acting upon hearts already prepared by God's grace and devoted to this high office, have for the most part secured a great degree of fidelity in it. Hence a character and reputation have become associated with the office, which cannot but invest with much influence, as it does with much responsibility, all those who occupy it. But in spite of all this there may be, as there has been at times, great unfaithfulness. Hence the flock has been scattered. The Church has suffered in numbers, in purity of doctrine, in consistency of life, in spirituality of character. Its enjoyment in all holy service goes; its power for good in the neighbourhood where it dwells goes; its regard for all that marks vigorous life in a Church all goes; and ere long its "candlestick is removed out of its place." Perhaps its numbers may not greatly diminish. There shall be the observance of the sabbath, its services, its sermons, its sacraments—orderly, regular, frequent. Many things may conduce to this. Its name may live, but it is dead. Oh, the awfulness of this! And if it have been through the negligence and unfaithfulness of the pastor, who shall deliver him from the charge of blood-guiltiness which will lie at his door? What will he answer when the question is addressed to him, as one day it surely will be, "Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?" Let every pastor of Christ's Church consider this and pray—

"Chief Shepherd of thy chosen sheep,
From death and sin set free,
Let every under-shepherd keep
His eye intent on thee."

II. To ALL PARENTS. Our children are the Lord's flock, his "beautiful flock." They are very dear to him. He puts his arm round every one of them; he takes them all up in his arms and blesses them. He declares by his Word and by their baptism that they are of his kingdom, and he both promises vast reward to those that receive them in his Name, and threatens with dreadful doom all those who "offend" them. But parents have unspeakable influence over them. They mould and fashion them, not in outward form and habits alone, but in inward character. For a long time they are as God to their children, who know no higher authority, no higher help. Hence they trust their parents utterly. And to guard against the abuse of this tremendous trust, God has implanted the instincts of parental love, and given every motive to parents to guard and keep well those he has entrusted to their care. Now, if through parental unfaithfulness those children become renegades from God, he will surely ask this question, "Where is the flock," etc.? Let remembrance of this lead to earnest prayer and diligent heed, so that each parent at last may have the unspeakable joy—as he may have—of standing at last before God, and saying, with glad thankfulness, "Behold, here am I, and the children, thou hast given me."

III. To EVERY INDIVIDUAL SOUL. For the sum of all the faculties, opportunities, talents, the whole of the varied gifts and capacities which together form our spiritual nature—judgment, affection, conscience, intellect, will,—all these are the flock of God which is entrusted to every individual man; and by due care and cultivation of them he can preserve and develop them into an offering of worship and consecration which God will ever accept and bless. Every man has the making of his own life by the help of God. There is scarce any degree of honour and joy which he may not win by faithfulness in the use of that which God has entrusted to him. Concerning them all God says, "Occupy till I come." And how vast and varied is the help God gives to us in this great work! What means of grace are provided! What recompense even here and now is given! Victory over self; a mind at peace; blessed influence over others; the love and esteem of the good; free communion and intercourse with God himself; the consciousness of the Divine love; the bright and blessed hope of the eternal life hereafter. So that even now "in keeping of God's commandments there is great reward." But if we be unfaithful here and "waste" all our "goods"—these high gifts, faculties, and opportunities—sowing to the flesh when we should be sowing to the Spirit, then this question will be heard concerning all these things, "Where is the flock," etc.? And then we search in vain for any answer to the next question (ver. 21), "What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee?" Therefore let us each keep continually before our minds such truths as those that are taught in the well-known hymn—

"A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save
And fit it for the sky.

"Help me to watch and pray,
And on thyself rely;
Assured if I my trust betray
I shall for ever die."

C.

Vers. 21, 22.—*Sin its own scourge.* I. THERE ARE OTHER SCOURGES FOR SIN. The direct and positive inflictions of the Divine wrath. Not alone the Bible but the great books of history and experience must all be denied if we deny such positive punishment of sin. Never has there been yet any system of laws for moral beings which has been left to be simply self-acting, and which therefore have had no positive sanctions of penalty for transgression added. And God's Law is not such. As the Jews and other nations and individuals have found, and as the unrepentant will find hereafter, if not now, God's Word upon this matter is most assuredly true.

II. BUT SIN IS ITS OWN SCOURGE. That scourge is woven and knotted with many cords. 1. *Conscience*, ever passing sentence of judgment. 2. *Habits of wrong-doing*, hateful but fast clinging to the soul, and by which it is "tied and bound." 3. *The manifold difficulty of repentance.* The man would heartily turn from his evil way, but he has got into the current just above the falls, and it is bearing him on and down, resist as he will. 4. *The sight of children, companions, etc., corrupted and perhaps ruined by our evil example.* Oh, what a horror is this: seeing those whom, for every reason human and Divine we were bound to cherish and guard from evil, cursed by *our* sin! 5. *The moral disapprobation of the good around us.* Their sentence of condemnation is felt to have a binding power. What they "bind on earth is bound in heaven." 6. *The "fearful looking for of judgment."* Such are some of the cords which, woven together, make up the dreadful scourge wherewith sin scourges itself.

III. AND THIS SELF-MADE SCOURGE IS THE MOST TERRIBLE OF ANY. Deep and unfathomable as were the sufferings of our Lord, he distinctly declared that those coming on his enemies were worse. "Weep not for me," he said, "but weep for yourselves, and for your children.... If they do these things in a green tree," etc. It is evident, therefore, that suffering in which the consciousness of sin enters must be worst of all. Those "stripes by which we are healed," though they "ploughed deep furrows" on the body of our blessed Lord, yea, upon his inmost soul, still there are stripes more terrible even than they. The quenchless fire of God's positive inflictions would be more tolerable were it not for the gnawing of that undying worm—the sinner's own remorse. Are not they, then, "fools" indeed who "make a mock at sin"?—C.

Ver. 23.—*An awful condition indeed.* "Can the Ethiopian change his skin," etc.? This verse tells of one who has brought himself to such a pass that he cannot cease from sin. It is an awful condition indeed. Note—

I. SOME OF THE ELEMENTS WHICH MAKE IT SO. They are: 1. *The memories of a better past.* There was a time when his soul was unsullied, his hands clean, his heart pure, his life unstained; when he could hold up his head in conscious integrity by the grace of God. But that is all gone. 2. *The prostration of his will.* He is continually making resolves, but they are frail as cobwebs, they are broken through by the slightest temptation now. The power to firmly and steadfastly resolve seems gone from him. He has resolved so often, but in vain, that his will now refuses to rise to the endeavour. 3. *The powerlessness of all means of deliverance.* He attends God's house, he reads the Scriptures, he kneels in prayer, he goes to the Lord's table still it may be, but they have lost their power to hold him back from his sin. They seem to be of no use at all. 4. *The fearful onlook to God's judgment.* He sees it coming swiftly upon him. He is ever terrified at the near approach of the day when he will be utterly lost. "Lost! lost!" he is ever saying to himself. He fears exposure, he fears the final doom, and knows not how to escape. 5. *Shame in the presence of the good.* He is haunted by the feeling, "If they but knew me as I am!" and he knows the day is coming when

they will know, and he will be cast out as vile. 6. *The thought of the misery and shame he will bring upon others.* Perhaps he has wife, children, father, mother, a number of friends and relations, whom he knows he will drag down with him in his own ruin. 7. *The temptation to recklessness born of despair.* Satan is ever suggesting to him that, as he cannot regain what he has lost, he had better take his fill of such pleasure as he has. And too often he yields. 8. *The perversion of his understanding.* It is his interest to believe there is no God, and hence his intellect is busy in gathering together materials for this belief and for doubting and denying all religious truth. And so he sinks down into atheism and all ungodliness. Yes; his is an awful condition indeed. But consider—

II. SOME COUNSELS TO THOSE WHOM THESE TERRIBLE TRUTHS CONCERN. 1. Remember you cannot be certain that you have come to this condition. Satan will endeavour to persuade you that there is no hope. But believe him not. You are lost if you believe him. Steadfastly refuse to believe. 2. If the thought that such should be your condition distresses you, take it as a token for good that God has not given you up. 3. Remember that others have been saved who were as near being lost as you. 4. Rouse yourself to use all means of help which God has given you. (1) Let there be special seasons of prayer. (2) Avoid the occasions of your sin. (3) Put every hindrance you can in the way of your sin; such as altering your manner of life, avoiding being alone, reading such Scriptures and such books as will tend to deepen your sense of the sin and show you how to escape from it. (4) Avail yourself of the counsels of some wise and godly friend. (5) Fill up your time, hands, and thoughts with useful and absorbing work. (6) Do not despise small victories; they lead on to greater ones. (7) "Pray without ceasing." Remember that God is able and has promised to "save to the *uttermost* all that come unto God by Christ." Thus doing, even *thou* shalt be saved.—C.

Ver. 27.—*The one thing needful.* "Wilt thou not be made clean? When," etc.?

I. MEN ARE SPIRITUALLY UNCLEAN. Like as the Lord looked down upon the occupants of the porches at Bethesda, and saw but a multitude of impotent folk (John v.); so now, as "his eyes behold the children of men," he sees a similar though a far more terrible sight—the mass of mankind spiritually diseased. This is manifestly true of the heathen world. The abominations and the cruelties that are practised there show the virulence of the soul's malady amongst them. And if we look at the mass of those who profess and call themselves Christians, in how many of these is the profession profession only, a veneer of religious customs covering a corrupt and sin-loving heart. And if it be so with the professing Church, what must it be with those who reject all the means of grace which the Christian Church enjoys?

II. BUT GOD GREATLY DESIRES THAT MEN SHOULD BE DELIVERED FROM THIS UNCLEANNESS. "He will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." He desires this: 1. *From his very nature.* He himself is the most holy God. But all moral qualities ever strive to reproduce themselves in those around them. Let a man be characterized by orderliness, truthfulness, sobriety, purity, and in proportion as he is so the contact of those of opposite character will be painful to him, and he will endeavour to make them like himself. And so, because "good and upright is the Lord, *therefore* will he teach sinners in the way." 2. *His righteousness* also. The sense of outrage and wrong which sin must produce in the heart of God makes him angry with the wicked every day. 3. *His compassion.* Sin is sorrow. We wonder at the priests of Baal persisting in cutting and wounding themselves. But is not every sinner just such a one? And with this added sorrow—that their wounds are for eternity, and not for the short life here alone. On the other hand, to be "made whole" spiritually is to be made blessed for ever.

III. YET MEN WILL NOT. The tone of the question, the woe which precedes it, the comparison of the sinner with the Ethiopian and the leopard, etc. (ver. 23), the half-despairing cry, "When shall it once be?" (ver. 27),—all this shows the prophet's conviction of man's persistent clinging to his sin. Were the question concerning bodily disease, it would be unnecessary. Who would not be delivered from that? But when it is spiritual healing, men will not. From the *consequences* of their sin they are willing to be delivered—the punishment, the remorse, the shame, etc.—but not from the sin itself. True, at times, in the first keen pangs of remorse, and under the vivid sense of

shame, they would be willing *then* to be rid of the sin itself. But their return to their sin shows how momentary and superficial this feeling was. And men would be willing, perhaps, *if by some one act* the whole cure could be effected; if the being made whole was not so slow, so difficult, so self-denying a process. And, in fact, they do hope that by some one act—a death-bed repentance—the whole process will be accomplished.

IV. BUT WITHOUT MAN'S OWN CONSENT HE CANNOT BE MADE WHOLE. God does not by a mere act of power make a man spiritually whole, as he makes one tree an oak, another an elm. The will must consent. We have this awful power of compelling Christ to "stand at the door and knock;" for the door of our hearts is opened from the inside. *We* must undo the bolts and remove the bars. No view of the Holy Spirit's influence which contradicts this can be a true view. We can, and alas! do, say "No" to God. But also we can, and he is ever pleading with us to, say "Yes" to his call.

V. BUT ONE DAY IT SHALL BE GIVEN. "My people shall be willing in the day of my power." Christ wept over Jerusalem, but yet he told them that when next he came they should say, "Blessed be he that cometh in the Name of the Lord; cf. also the predicted repentance of the Jews, "They also which pierced him," etc. (Zech. xiv.). But oh, what "everlasting burnings," what awful scourgings, has Jerusalem had to go through before, like the prodigal, she came to herself! Let none abuse this doctrine. If we will say "Yes" to God now, and come to Christ in loving self-surrender, we shall find his yoke easy and his burden light; but if we will say "No," then we shall have to come to ourselves; and what may not that involve? Truly, "now is the accepted time," etc.—C.

Ver. 16.—*A solemn warning.* This is an appeal to the fears of the people; one of the many instances in which the prophet seeks to win them to the way of righteousness by the presage of impending woe. Utter destruction is before them (ver. 14), the twilight is fast deepening into "gross darkness." But even now it is not too late for them to avert the calamity by their repentance. It is not mainly through their fears that Christianity exerts its influence over men. But, as many of the discourses of Christ show, men may sometimes sink into conditions of moral insensibility from which only an alarming voice will awaken them. And the gospel has its side of terror. Even the gracious Saviour and his apostles spoke of "wrath to come." Consider (1) *the duty*, (2) *the motive.*

I. THE DUTY. "Give glory to your God." Several distinct elements of thought and life are involved in this. 1. *A recognition of the sacred and indissoluble relation in which we stand towards God.* However we may have forsaken him, he is still "the Lord our God." We are still his dependent creatures, his needy children. To please him, to serve his purposes, to show forth his glory, must, in the very nature of things, be the end of our existence. All religious life begins with the devout acknowledgment of this supreme personal relationship. 2. *A due sense of the claims God has, on the ground of what he is in himself, on our regard.* The true glory of the Divine Being is his infinite moral perfections. When Moses said, "I beseech thee show me thy glory," God answered, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the Name of the Lord before thee." We "give glory to God" when, gazing upon the beauty and majesty of his intrinsic moral excellences, we yield back to him a due response of reverence, and admiration, and trust, and love. 3. *Practical surrender to his service.* "Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. vi. 20). The actual homage of a godly life is indicated here—the consecration of all the powers of our nature as a "living sacrifice" upon the altar of the Lord. If the Name of the Lord our God is hallowed in our hearts, we shall thus give ourselves and our all to him. Practical goodness akin to his own is the best and most acceptable tribute we can pay. We honour him most when we most strive to be like him in all holy character and Godlike deed.

II. THE MOTIVE. "Before he cause darkness," etc. Here is a prospect that may well awaken fear. Something more than mere external calamity is suggested. There is internal distress, mental perplexity and bewilderment; a condition in which the spirits of the people become a prey to all kinds of misleading and deluding influences, wildly groping after a good that is lost and gone from them for ever. Few pictures of imagination could be sadder than that of men looking and longing for the light, only to

find the darkness growing more and more deep and dense around them. It is often something like this when men are unfaithful to their real convictions and negligent of the acknowledged claims of God. Trifle with truth and conscience, and you cannot wonder that truth should become to you a mere mocking shadow, and conscience a perpetual foe to your peace. Despise the sacred privileges and obligations of life, and you make them to be sources of heavy condemnation. Let the light be scorned or abused, and it turns into "the shadow of death." "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth" (John xii. 35).—W.

Ver. 23.—*A moral impossibility.* This passage expresses the hopelessness of the prophet as regards the success of any human effort to persuade the people to forsake their evil ways, or by any efforts of their own to save themselves. It suggests—

I. THE INVETERACY OF SIN. 1. Arising from *the depravity of nature.* The dark spots and the ebon skin have a hidden cause. Sins are the natural outcome of sin. All forms of wrong-doing are but symptoms on the surface of a secret moral disease. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts," etc. (Matt. xv. 19). 2. *The force of habit.* "Use is second nature." Custom has a power over men that rivals that of native propensity. As good habit is a most effective educator of every form of virtue, so, on the other hand, when habit has been allowed to foster the evil tendencies of a man's nature, he becomes hopelessly "tied and bound with the chain of his sins."

II. THE MORAL IMPOTENCE IT ENGENDERS. Sin not only corrupts the springs of a man's moral life, but paralyzes all his nobler powers, robs him of the ability to act out the better instincts of his nature. The voice of natural conscience may not be wholly silenced, the natural heart may not be utterly destitute of good impulses; but there is no redeeming power in these. As well expect the darkness to give birth to light, and life to spring spontaneously out of death, as suppose that a sin-loving, sin-hardened man will of himself forsake his evil ways. He will never be able by his own hand "to pluck the vicious quitch of blood and custom wholly out of him." The complete moral helplessness of humanity was made abundantly evident before the full revelation of gospel grace. It was when we were "without strength" that Christ "died for the ungodly."

III. THE WONDROUS EFFICACY OF THE REGENERATING POWER OF GOD. The most defiled and degraded nature may be transformed by the touch of him who made it. Even the skin of the Ethiopian and the leopard's spots must yield to the sovereignty of the Divine energy. Deep-rooted and habitual as the evil in a man's heart and life may be, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth him from it, and when the Spirit of Christ moulds the substance of his being he becomes "a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. v. 17).—W.

Vers. 1—11.—*The marred girdle.* I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GIRDLE. This is set before us clearly in ver. 11. God chose something which should illustrate the close connection between Israel and himself, and yet which should illustrate at the same time how easily that connection could be severed. The girdle was, of course, a familiar part of an Israelite's apparel. Not exactly a necessity, for a man could perhaps do without it; and yet a necessity in this sense, that habit had made it so. The very function of the girdle was to bind; otherwise it was, as a girdle, of no use. Thus, by likening the people to a girdle, God indicated that, in a certain sense, he had made them necessary to himself. He had placed them in a conspicuous position, where the service they could render was very important. He meant that he and his people should be viewed together; he always in relation to them, they always in relation to him. Hence the variety of terms in which he indicates his purpose in making the children of Israel to be as his girdle. "That they might be unto me for *a people.*" Jehovah was to look on them with a feeling of ownership and mastery which he was not able to feel with regard to other nations; and they, in turn, were to look up to Jehovah, feeling that all their purposes and actions were to be determined by his will. Jehovah meant that one of the most suggestive and comforting names by which he could be known should be that of the God of his people Israel, and that in turn Israel should be known as the people of Jehovah. In them Jehovah was to be praised; in them he was to be glorified.

Other nations might play the part of girdle to their deities, but there was really nothing of substance to gird. But when Jehovah drew Israel to himself, there was the opportunity of a real, glorious, and ever-extending service before them. Other nations chose and fabricated their gods; Jehovah chose and separated Israel, and in doing so intended the connection to be a very close one, and provided all the means by which it might become such.

II. THE INSTABILITY OF THE GIRDLE. The very Israelite who was to be taught lessons by this girdle, when he chose a girdle for himself, was generally able to make it serve his purpose. He would get it of some durable substance, to wear long. Elijah and John the Baptist were girt with leathern girdles. The Israelite, in the girdle with which he was familiar, dealt with that which was altogether under his control. The longer he wore it, the easier he found it, and the more amenable to his touch. If it began to tear and slip, and to slacken and hinder just when it should have been tightest and most helpful, its owner would very soon get rid of it as a deceiving girdle. But while Jehovah could bring his people very close, and compel them in a certain sense to remain with him, he could not make them cleave to him. Cleaving could only be done with purpose of heart, and must be a voluntary action. These people were not as a piece of linen or leather, to be folded exactly as the wearer might choose. If they had been they could not have rendered the service Jehovah wished from them, and in the result they showed that they did not wish to cleave to God. He could not trust them. Again and again he tried them, only to find that they cared nothing for their relation to him, nothing for the golden opportunity of setting forth his praise and glory.

III. THE HUMILIATION OF THE GIRDLE. Jeremiah was told to take this linen girdle and bind it round his loins. Linen was the material of the priests' garments; and was not Israel a consecrated people? Jeremiah, belonging to a priestly family, would easily be able to get hold of a linen girdle; although the directions given to him here would seem to show that this particular girdle was, in some way, to excite special attention. Notice how the instructions were given to the prophet bit by bit. At first he is simply told to put on the girdle. It was there to teach its own lesson to all who had eyes to observe and a disposition towards timely repentance. Then with his girdle he was to take a journey to Euphrates. That such a journey was long, difficult, and dangerous, is true as men count length, difficulty, and danger, but to a prophet the greatest difficulties and dangers come from refusing to take the way of God, however long it may be. Jonah had to go to Nineveh; what is there unreasonable in supposing that Jeremiah had to go to the neighbourhood of Babylon? It may have been just as profitable a use of time to take long journeys there as to go on giving testimony against those who resolutely closed their ears. Besides, it was by Euphrates that the girdle Israel was to be marred. It was to be shown to them that, if they would not act as a girdle, they could easily be made useless for any other purpose. If they would not be God's people, they should achieve no position for themselves. If they would not honour the name which he had given them, there was no other name by which they could get distinction. If they would not be to his praise and glory, as the girdle cleaving firmly and serviceably to him, then they should be to his praise and glory as the marred girdle. If we will not do what God wishes us to do, then he takes care that we shall not do what we ourselves wish to do. The girdle brought back from Euphrates was found profitable for nothing. That which is meant for salt of the earth and loses its savour, is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden underfoot of men.—Y.

Vers. 15, 16.—*A demand for the timely giving of what is due to Jehovah.* It will be observed that the previous verses of this chapter set forth the doom of Jehovah's apostate people by two very expressive figures. There is the figure of the girdle, marred and become good for nothing by lying so long in the damp recess of the rock. There is also the figure of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, from those high in station down to the common people, every one of them become as it were a living wine-skin, filled with drunken fury, destroying one another and being destroyed. This figure, bordering on the grotesque, presents as impending a very terrible scene. But with the verses now to be considered there returns what we may call an evangelical interval. Though in these prophecies of Jeremiah gloom of necessity predominates, yet there are equally necessary

intervals of light, intervals where the mercy of Jehovah is clearly revealed, and his never-failing desire that his people should return to him. There is, of course, practically, no hope for these people so far as their present social state is concerned. They will go on their own way; but to the last God will also make his appeal. Notice now the things which God asks for here.

I. ATTENTION. "Hear ye, and give ear." These people have never really attended to the import of the prophetic messages. Either they have been totally indifferent or they have been irritated by some word they did not like, and so the complete message has fallen uncomprehended upon their ears. For instance, the why and wherefore of the prophet's extraordinary journey to the Euphrates, they did not trouble themselves to consider. And it is plain from ver. 12 how entirely they missed the meaning of the prophet's saying respecting the bottles being filled with wine. The parabolic sentence was to them nothing more than mere commonplace. And of course, so long as attention was lacking, truth was of no use. There is an analogy between the receiving of truth and the receiving of bodily food. As food must be properly introduced into the physical system, so truth must be properly introduced into the mind, brought before the understanding of the individual, firmly grasped by him in its reality, so that it may become a real and beneficial element in the life.

II. HUMILITY. There must be submission to the prophet as a proved messenger from God. Pride is going to be the ruin of these people. The prophet himself was humbly obedient to all commandments of God; why, then, should his audience be proud? The grandees of Jerusalem do not like to be talked to by the comparative rustic from Anathoth. The elders resent remonstrances from a man comparatively young. Those whose boast it perhaps was that they had never been in bondage to any man, do not like to hear of conquest and captivity. There is no getting at truth and right without humility. Because truth means, not only the reception of that which is true, but the casting out of the old and the loved and the often boasted of. It is very hard for a man to cut himself off from the past and show by a very different future how he feels the errors and follies of which he has been guilty. It is hard for the διδάσκαλος like Nicodemus to go down from his chair and become a μαθητής, stumbling among the rudimentary principles of the kingdom of heaven.

III. THE GIVING OF GLORY TO JEHOVAH. "Give glory to Jehovah your God." These people had been giving elsewhere what *they reckoned* to be glory, but which, so far from being glory, was indeed their own deepest shame. Glory of a certain sort they had plenty of, but they came short of the glory of God. They did not, in the conduct of their life, show a proper response to the wisdom by which God had created them as men and separated them as a people. By their present doings they were exposing the Name of Jehovah to insult and scorn from all round about. This asking for glory to be given was a request reasonable in itself. If a master is a good master, it is not right that his servant should act so as to make the master's reputation suffer. If a father is a good father, it is not right for his child to act as if he had been deprived of all beneficial influences in the way of teaching and training. What is thought of a man who basely forgets his nationality and laughs at the feelings that gather around the idea of fatherland? And hence the Name of Jehovah was a name to be magnified in word and deed and every outcome of life on the part of his people. We ourselves must labour to praise God with our whole hearts. And more than that, we must live as those who show the power of *God*, saving us and lifting us into an altogether higher life.

IV. THE GIVING OF THIS GLORY PROMPTLY ON ACCOUNT OF PERIL TO THOSE WHO REFUSE TO GIVE. The figure employed is that of a traveller on a journey. He gets into the wrong road, gets indeed altogether out of any proper road; but he persists in mere wandering, refuses to be warned, will not accept guidance back to the proper path. He sees dangers, many dangers, but because it is daylight he manages to escape them. And now, as the darkness momentarily increases, the warnings also increase in urgency. When the darkness is fully come, where will he be? On the mountains, not able to take one confident step in any direction, lest it be over the precipice. Furthermore, in the case of a traveller, he has always this resort, that if darkness comes amid such dangers he can stand still till the return of the dawn. But here is the contrast in that the expected dawn will never come. This rebellious, God-dishonouring generation is virtually walking into captivity of its own accord. As far as it is concerned, it will look

in vain for restoration. The restoration will belong, not to it, nor even to its children, but rather to its children's children. Those who wander from God wander into a state where they are self-destroyed, because the resources of which they boasted themselves have come to nothing. Glorify God, willingly, in the light, or you will end by glorifying him unwillingly, in the darkness. Think of what came to Herod because he did not give the glory to God.—Y.

Ver. 20.—*A searching question to the shepherd.* The position of a king towards his people was illustrated by the position of a shepherd towards his flock. Hence the question here was doubtless meant for the special attention of the king. The nation was largely in the hands of the king for the time being. Formal authority belonged to him, and it was generally joined with corresponding power; hence the responsibility by which he was justly held for the exercise of his authority, and yet it is plain that such a question as this could only have a partial application to the responsibilities of any particular king. Whoever the king may have been at the time this prophecy was uttered, it was no "beautiful flock" that had been handed to him. He had received it after the neglect and abuse of many predecessors. The nation itself, considered in its collective capacity and through all its past growth, is here impersonated and addressed. Consider—

I. To WHAT CLASSES OF PERSONS SUCH A QUESTION AS THIS MAY BE CONSIDERED AS STILL ADDRESSED. Evidently it bears on all who have to do with the *government* of any people. Just, firm government has much to do—though how much cannot be exactly expressed—with the welfare of every community. The personal conduct and example of governors is also a very important matter. Better kings in Israel might have helped to make a better people, and this influence of government becomes ever a more important thing to recollect, because the people are becoming more and more their own governors. Each individual has only an infinitesimal part, but it is a real part, and therefore the conduct of each most surely affects the aggregate. It is plain how this question bears on the *parental relation.* It did so bear on Israel of old, and it bears equally on all who have offspring put in their charge, to train as far as they can, for the service of Christ, in their day and generation. *Teachers* may be said to have a "beautiful flock" in their charge. The deep influence of Dr. Arnold on his pupils shows how a teacher may bring out all the beauty of his flock. The application to spiritual teachers and pastors under Christ, the great Teacher and Pastor, is obvious. And, generally, every one must consider those around him, on whom, by daily companionship or any way of sufficient contact, he exercises influence. Every one is responsible, not only for that which is formally handed to him, but just as much for all that he can in any way keep. Let no one suppose that he himself has nothing to do but be cared for. Just as we are every one of us sheep in one sense, so we are shepherds in another.

II. WHAT IS REQUIRED IN ORDER TO GIVE THE RIGHT ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION. Nothing but this, that we can truthfully assert ourselves to have been *faithful.* It cannot be required that we should lose none of the sheep. Not even the most faithful shepherd that trod the pastures of Palestine could manage that. He could only do his best to be provident, watchful, and courageous, so as to be himself free from blame if a sheep was lost or fell a prey to the wild beast. And not one of the kings of Israel or Judah could have said quite so much as this. Some of them, indeed, showed not the slightest notion that sheep had been put into their hands at all. Depend upon it, if there were more of this faithfulness there would be more success in gathering and preserving a flock for God. Faithfulness is the least that can be shown in our relations to others. Of course, meddlesomeness, censoriousness, bigotry, must not be mistaken for it. No good can be done if individual liberty is not respected, but nothing must prevail on us to deviate in the slightest from the line Christ has marked out. Those of Christ's sheep who, being most conscious of their own incapacity to make a way, keep their eyes fixed on the way their Master makes for them, are really doing something of the shepherd's work. Every one living and acting by the rule Christ has given is more of a shepherd than he thinks. Then, for comfort, let it be kept in mind that no faithfulness of ours will prevent the waywardness and wilfulness of others. Jesus warned Judas, but Judas went obstinately off into his own way. Paul, faithful as none of us can ever hope to be, had to bewail many who, professing faith, yet walked contrary to

the will of Christ. The great thing to be aimed at is that we should be clear from the blood of all men (Acts xx. 26—30).

III. It will be seen that this was a question FOR FLOCKS AS WELL AS FOR SHEPHERDS. Rulers are responsible for right leading, but subjects and followers are not altogether as sheep, that they should blindly follow those in formal authority. Truth has not been put within the formal shepherd's exclusive protection. We must take care whom we follow. It is a delusion to suppose that we can hand ourselves over spiritually to the guidance of any one less than Christ. Others may help and suggest; only he can command. Paul came to his hearers with arguments and persuasions, laying before them the truth, which they were able to receive because it was the truth, not because the authority of the speaker made it true. All New Testament preaching goes on the assumption that every one can be fully persuaded in his own mind. The same Scriptures are open to reader as to preacher. None can have their eternal interests perilled except by their own negligence.—Y.

Ver. 23.—*A natural impossibility.* I. THE NATURAL IMPOSSIBILITY HERE PRESENTED. It is a profound and momentous truth, God himself being the witness—the heart-searching God—that man who is accustomed to do evil cannot turn to good. This truth is not baldly stated here, but is illustrated in such a way that there can be no possible doubt as to God's meaning. Observe that the impossibility referred to is a *natural* one. It is not said that under no circumstances whatever can a man accustomed to do evil be enabled to do good. The thing affirmed is that the power of habit and custom is so strong that he cannot turn himself. If we are inclined to doubt this, and indulge in that glorification of human nature which is at once so easy and so perilous, we have only to think of the illustrations here employed. It is vain to discuss with a man who is determined to magnify the power of the natural man towards that which is right and good. The better plan is to assure one's own heart of the truth which God would make plain by these illustrations of his own giving. If any one asserted that an Ethiopian could change his skin or a leopard his spots, he would be reckoned a fool past arguing with. But there are multitudes who think it is very good advice to tell the poor slave of worldliness and passion to be a man and exert the strength of his will and turn away from evil. Now, what God says here by his prophet is that every such attempt must end in disappointment. No doubt there are certain times and stages in life when it is hard to accept such a view. It is a humbling and limiting view, one which exhibits in such an uncompromising way our weakness. But the sooner we come to take such a view—to take it practically and not in a mere speculative manner—to feel that the way of self-recovery and self-perfecting is closed against us, the better it will be for us.

II. THE CONSEQUENT NEED OF A GRACIOUS INTERVENTION. This is not stated here, but we know that it is meant to be remembered. In all such emphatic assertions of human inability there lies the suggestion that we may look confidently and ought to look promptly for abundance of Divine help. God puts his hand on our mouths to stop all proud words, but at the same time he would lead us to lay hold of his promises and be filled with his strength. A clear vision of our own inability means a clear vision of the need of Divine intervention, and a clear vision of the *need* of Divine intervention may be expected to prepare for an equally clear vision of the *reality* of that intervention. That which measures the impossibilities in the corrupted natural man helps to measure the reasonable purposes and expectations of the man who is renewed by the Spirit of God. When we have got the life that is hid with Christ in God, we have something within us which defies the corruptions so powerful before. The Christian, full of the Divine Spirit, is found able to utter all sorts of paradoxes. Though he cannot, of himself, make one hair white or black, he can be "suffering, yet alway rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich." There is a way, then, by which those accustomed to do evil can be brought to do good. There are resources which more than make up for the greatest lack of natural strength. If we only seek for those resources in the right place, we cannot fail to find them.

III. THE TEACHING TO BE DERIVED FROM THE EMPLOYMENT OF THESE PECULIAR ILLUSTRATIONS. Thousands of images were available to show natural impossibilities, but *these two* are employed. It will be observed that they relate to the alteration of

external appearance. God could change the skin of the Ethiopian, could change the spots of the leopard; but he leaves them as they are, because no good purpose could be served by the alteration. Where an alteration is really wanted, he can make it, with results that are profitable now and promise a far greater profit in eternity. So far as the merely agreeable is concerned, it would certainly have been pleasanter for the negro if those features which make him an object of ridicule to the ignorant, the proud, and the fastidious, were taken away. But it is God's principle to interfere with nature only where sin has made the interference necessary. Many negroes—God be thanked—have found the better part, the one thing needful; and, compared with this, what is the most disturbing of surface discomforts? Continual comfort at the heart, a comfort which cannot be taken from him, makes him forget all these. There would be no object in changing the spots of the leopard; let us rather rejoice that God takes away from men the leopard-ferocity which makes them as dangerous as any beast of prey. How often we seek vain and useless things, making ourselves miserable over physical defects and peculiarities, and continuing quite indifferent to the washing of the heart from wickedness. Instead of being anxious after things we cannot change and need not change, let us pray and strive after that possible, fundamental, radical change which will bring in due time perfection of the whole man. God, working from the heart, will cause that in due time we shall be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIV.

This chapter must be read in connection with the following one. They describe chiefly Jeremiah's twofold attempt at intercession (see vers. 7—9 and 19—22)—a tender and appealing attempt indeed. The terrible sufferings of the people during a drought went to the prophet's heart. He even ventured, when repelled the first time, to intercede anew, on the ground of the covenant, but in vain. On receiving (ch. xv. 2—9) a revelation of the bitter fate in store for his people, he bursts out into a heart-rending complaint that his own destiny should throw him into such a whirlpool of strife. His Lord at once corrects and consoles him (ch. xv. 10—21). There are doubts, however, about the connection of these latter verses.—The date of the drought is not stated; but as the punishment of Judah is described as future, and no reference is made to the captivity of Jehoiachin, we shall probably be right in setting it during the reign of Jehoiakim.

Ver. 1.—**The dearth**; rather, *the drought*, or, more literally, *the droughts*, the plural being used to indicate the length of time the drought lasted.

Ver. 2.—The tenses in the following description should be perfects and presents; the Authorized Version, by its inconsistency, destroys the unity of the picture. **The gates thereof**; *i.e.* the people assembled there. **They are black unto the ground.** "To be black," in Hebrew, is "to be dressed in mourning" (so *e.g.* Ps. xxxv. 14, "I bowed down in black"). Here we must understand the same verb which is expressed in the psalm, "They bowed down in mourning attire to the ground." "Black," however, is not to be taken literally; it means rather "squalid, unwashed" (of garments).

Ver. 3.—**Their nobles**—*i.e.* the upper classes of Judah and Jerusalem—**have sent their little ones**; rather, *their mean ones*; i.e. their servants, or perhaps (as Naegelsbach and Payne Smith) simply, "the common people;" it was not a matter concerning the rich alone. **To the pits**; *i.e.* to the cisterns. **Covered their heads**; a sign of the deepest mourning (2 Sam. xv. 30; xix. 4; Esth. vi. 12).

Ver. 4.—**The ground is chapt.** Perhaps; but it is more obvious to render, *is dismayed*, according to the usual meaning of the word. Words which properly belong to human beings are often, by a "poetic fallacy," applied to inanimate objects (as in ver. 2). **In the earth**; rather, *in the land*.

Ver. 5.—Even the animals starve. **Yea, the hind also.** The hind, contrary to that intense natural affection for which she was famous among the ancients, abandons her young.

Ver. 6.—**The wild asses . . . in the high places**; rather, *on the bare heights*. "The wild asses," says a traveller cited by Rosenmüller, "are especially fond of treeless mountains." **Like dragons**; render rather, *like jackals* (as ch. ix. 11; x. 22). The allusion is to the way jackals hold their head as they howl. We are told that even the keen eyes

of the wild asses fail, **because there was [is] no grass**; rather, *herbage*. They grow dim first with seeking it so long in vain, and then from lack of nourishment.

Ver. 7.—The intercession of Jeremiah begins. **Do thou it**; a pregnant expression, equivalent to "act gloriously" (as Ps. xxii. 31; Isa. xliv. 23). **For thy name's sake.** Jehovah's "Name" pledges him to be merciful to his people, and not to make a full end of them, even when they have offended (comp. "Our Redeemer was thy name from of old" Isa. lxiii. 16).

Ver. 8.—How pathetic a supplication! Jehovah will surely not be as a stranger in the land—the strangers, or "sojourners," like the *μέτοικοι*, enjoyed no civic rights, and consequently had no interest in the highest concerns of the state—and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside—or perhaps, *pitcheth his tent*; for the traveller in Palestine doubtless carried his tent with him then as now—to tarry for a night. With the latter figure compare the beautiful comparison of the hope of the ungodly to "the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day" (Wisd. v. 14).

Ver. 9.—As a man astonied; rather (comparing the Arabic *dahama*), *as one struck dumb*. But Dr. Payne Smith, with much reason, is more than half inclined to follow the Septuagint reading, equivalent to "as one in a deep sleep." Leave us not; literally, *lay us not down*; as if a burden of which the bearer is tired.

Vers. 10—16.—The answer of Jehovah.

Ver. 10.—Thus have they loved to wander, . . . therefore the Lord doth not accept them; *i.e.* with such pertinacity have they been set upon "wandering" (roving lawlessly about), that the Lord hath no more pleasure in them. "Therefore," is, literally, *and*. "Thus," or "so," is used in the same sense as in 1 Kings x. 12, which runs literally, ". . . there came not so [abundantly] almug timber." The particle of comparison has given much occupation to the commentators (see Payne Smith's note), but the above view is at once simple and suitable to the context; for Jeremiah has already admitted that "our backslidings are multiplied" (ver. 7). *The Lord doth not*, etc. (to the end of the verse), is quoted *verbatim* from Hos. viii. 13. Jeremiah puts conspicuous honour on the older inspired writers; he has no craving for originality. Nearly all has been said already; what he has to do is chiefly to adapt and to apply, He will now remember, etc. The emphasis is on "now." Nothing is more remarkable in the prophets than the stress laid on the unerring justness of the time chosen for Divine interpositions. When the iniquity is fully ripe, it as it were attracts the punishment, which till then is laid up in store (comp. Gen. xv. 16; Isa. xviii. 5; xxxiii. 10).

Ver. 11.—Pray not for this people. So in ch. vii. 16 (on which see note); ch. xi. 14.

Ver. 12.—Their cry. The word is very forcible; it is the shriek in which an unsophisticated man gives vent to his pain and grief. An oblation. It is the vegetable offering (Authorized Version, "meat offering;" Luther, "speisopfer") which is referred to in the so-called *minkhah* (literally, *gift*). Though sometimes offered separately, it regularly accompanied a burnt offering. I will not accept them. Dr. Payne Smith tries to soften the rejection of these worshippers by the remark that "there is a time when the most genuine repentance avails nothing to avert the temporal consequences of sin." But the analogy of other similar passages (*e.g.* Isa. i. 15) warrants the view of Keil that the ground of the rejection of the worship is its heartless formalism and insincerity, which was equally a bar to Jehovah's favour and the prophet's intercession.

Ver. 13.—"Pleading with Providence, the good prophet lays the blame on ill teaching, but the stern answer (ver. 14), admitting the plea as true, rejects it as inadequate (ver. 14), and denounces sorrows which (vers. 17—22) the prophet passionately deprecates" (Rowland Williams). Ah, Lord God! rather, *Alas! O Lord Jehovah* (see on ch. i. 6). The prophets say unto them. The greater part of the prophetic order had not kept pace with its more spiritual members (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.). They still traded on those natural gifts of divination (Micah iii. 6) which were, no doubt, where genuine, of Divine origin, but which, even then, needed to be supplemented and controlled by a special impulse from the Spirit of holiness. Jeremiah, however, declares, on the authority of a revelation, that these prophets did not divine by any God-given faculty, but "the deceit of their own heart" (ver. 14). The Deuteronomic *Tōrāh*, discovered after a period of concealment at the outset of Jeremiah's ministry, energetically forbids the practice of the art of divination (Deut. xviii. 10).

Ver. 14.—A thing of nought. The word, however, is collective, and means all the various futile means adopted for prying into the future.

Ver. 16.—I will pour their wickedness; *i.e.* the fruits of their wickedness (comp. ch. ii. 19, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee").

Vers. 17—21.—The prophet's grief, and second intercession.

Ver. 17.—Therefore thou shalt say, etc. There is something strange and contrary to verisimilitude in the prefixing of this formula, not to a Divine revelation, but to a

more expression of the pained human feelings of the prophet. It is possible that the editor of Jeremiah's prophecies thought the paragraph which begins here needed something to link it with the preceding passage, and selected his formula rather unsuitably. **Let mine eyes run down**, etc. (comp. ch. xiii. 27). Jeremiah's tender compassion shows itself in his choice of the expression, **the virgin daughter of my people**, just as we feel an added bitterness in the premature death of a cherished maiden.

Ver. 18.—A picture of the state of things after the capture of Jerusalem: the slain without, the famine-stricken within. The latter are described allusively as "sicknesses of famine" (so literally). As a peculiarly striking evidence of the downfall of greatness, it is added that even prophet and priest have to **go about into a land that they know not**. The verb used here can obviously not have its ordinary sense of going about for purposes of traffic. Aramaic usage suggests, however, a suitable meaning; what the prophet sketches before us is a company of these ex-grandees "begging their way" into an unknown land.

Ver. 19.—**We looked for peace**, etc.; a repetition of ch. viii. 15.

Ver. 20.—**Our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers.** There is a mysterious connection between the sin of the past and of the present. So in another prophet we read, "Your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together [will I requite]."

Ver 21.—**The throne of thy glory**; *i.e.* the temple (ch. xvii. 12; Ezek. xliii. 7), or Jerusalem (ch. iii. 17). It is the same conception where Jehovah is said to "dwell between" [or, 'sit upon'] "the cherubim" (Isa. xxxvii. 16; Ps. lxxx. 1; xcix. 1).

Ver. 22.—None of the **vanities**, or false gods (ch. iii. 17), of the heathen can deliver us in this our strait (want of rain). "Rain-makers" is still a common name of soothsayers among savage nations. *Thou alone art God, and our God*; or, in Jeremiah's phrase (not, Art not thou he, etc.? but) *Art thou not Jehovah our God?* and the ground of the appeal follows, Jehovah is the Maker of all these things; *i.e.* all the heavenly phenomena, especially the clouds and the rain.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*A plague of drought.* I. A PLAGUE OF DROUGHT IS AN INSTANCE OF A NATURAL CALAMITY OCCASIONING GREAT DISTRESS. Jeremiah gives a vivid picture of the trouble such a plague causes. Men of all classes, from the noble to the ploughman, suffer under it; the animal world is driven from its natural instincts; universal desolation and agony prevail. Yet this is all *natural.* It is not the result of war nor of any human interference; it is a natural calamity. Nature is not always placid and pleasing. She has her frowns, her storms, her droughts. The world is not a waste, howling wilderness; but neither is it a garden of Eden. Thorns spring up among the wheat. Even away from the perpetual deserts fertile fields are occasionally parched and withered. We must expect a mixed experience in human life, as we meet with it in nature. Showers of blessing are not always falling. There come also periods of dearth, seasons of natural distress.

II. A PLAGUE OF DROUGHT IS AN EXAMPLE OF ONE FORM OF THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN. Though the drought is natural, it is not, therefore, to be separated from all relation to human and moral affairs. God rules Nature through her laws when he does not supersede them. In his government of men God may overrule natural events to the execution of his decrees. When such a calamity as a plague of drought falls upon a land, it is well to ask whether there are no national sins for which it is sent as chastisement. Sometimes the calamities of nature are the direct result of human conduct. Thus Palestine now suffers from lack of water, partly because the felling of trees has diminished the rainfall, and partly because what rain there is is quickly drained off for want of proper irrigation arrangements. Still, we must not assume that every natural calamity is sent for the punishment of sin. This is but one among many Divine purposes. Wholesome discipline, ulterior advantages, the avoiding of worse though unseen calamities, etc., may enter into the Divine reasons for permitting the trouble. Such calamities should make us *examine* ourselves, not humiliate ourselves without thought and clear conviction of conscience.

III. A PLAGUE OF DROUGHT IN NATURE SHOULD SUGGEST THE POSSIBILITY OF SPIRITUAL DROUGHT. Outward things are symbolical of inward experiences. There is a drought of the soul—when the soul is not partaking of the "water of life," and it is the

most fearful kind of drought. Yet, while the physical calamity excites all attention and occasions universal distress, this calamity is often unheeded. But the effects of it are not the less destructive. The soil becomes barren, unfruitful; the heavenly graces within, the instincts of Christian charity, are lost; the spiritual vision fails. It is unnatural not to feel thirst in a season of drought. The soul that is in this condition will first come to itself with a feeling of deep distress, a pain of inward longing, a panting and thirsting after God (Ps. lxiii. 1).

IV. A PLAGUE OF DROUGHT SHOULD MAKE US MORE THANKFUL FOR THE COMMON BLESSINGS OF DAILY LIFE. The commonest blessings are the most valuable. The first necessary of life is air, and air is the most abundant thing in nature. The next most important requirement is water, and water is usually exceedingly plentiful. Gold and diamonds are rare, but these can easily be spared. This very fact, which is a result of God's providential care, induces an ungrateful neglect. We take without thought that which we are always receiving. We must lose it to appreciate it. In sickness we prize health; in thirst we value water. It would be more wise and grateful to acknowledge God's blessings while we have them, instead of requiring him to take them from us to teach us their worth.

Ver. 7.—*A plea for mercy in spite of guilt.* I. WE CAN ONLY PLEAD FOR GOD'S MERCY AFTER A FRANK ADMISSION OF OUR OWN GUILT. The common habit of people is to take the opposite course—to excuse themselves, extenuate their faults, or ignore, or even deny them. But this is vain before God, and while persisted in it shuts the door against forgiveness. God can only forgive sin that is confessed, can only have mercy on the humble and penitent. This confession must be frank and full. Such a confession is contained in the prayer of Jeremiah. 1. *Personal* guilt is admitted—"our iniquities." 2. The shame of *increasing* guilt is admitted—"our backslidings." If we feel we are better than we once were, we excuse our present imperfection on the ground that it is at least an improvement on the past. It requires a genuine penitence to admit that we have been growing worse. 3. Sin is seen to be an offence *against God*—"We have sinned against thee." It is not a mere fault in ourselves; it is a direct act of warfare with Heaven. David said this (Ps. li. 4); so did the prodigal son (Luke xv. 18). 4. Sin is recognized as *abundant*—"Our backslidings are many." It is vain to confess some sins whilst denying others, or to attempt to represent them as less numerous than they really are. This keeping back of part of the confession mars the whole of it. 5. Guilt is acknowledged to be *open* before God—"Our sins *testify*." 6. It is seen to be a bar to our claim of simple right—they testify "against us." Condemnation, therefore, may justly follow the plain evidence of guilt. Our own sins are witnesses to oppose any plea we may found on our personal deserts.

II. OUR OWN GUILT, WHEN FRANKLY ADMITTED, IS NO HINDRANCE TO THE MERCY OF GOD. The only hindrance is impenitence. The ground of God's mercy is not our desert, but his goodness. If there is anything in us which predisposes him to be gracious, this is not our worth, but our want. The more wretched the condition to which our sin has brought us, the more urgent the call to his pity. The one plea is "for his Name's sake." 1. For the sake of God's *character*. His Name expresses what he is. His highest name is "Love." By this name we plead for mercy. Because of what he is, because of his inherent goodness, love, and pity, we implore his help. 2. For the sake of God's *honour*. He has promised to have mercy on the penitent (*e.g.* Deut. xxx. 1—10). Thus he has pledged his Name, bound himself by his own certain faithfulness. 3. For the sake of God's *glory*. His highest glory is his goodness. When he delivers his children his own Name is glorified. Redemption honours God more than creation. The song of the redeemed at the end of the world will be more sweet and more noble than the song of the sons of the morning at the dawn of creation. As Christians we see these truths more clearly revealed in Christ. He is the "Word" incarnate, the "Name," the highest manifestation of the character of God, the fulfilment of his greatest promises, the expression of his brightest glory. For us to pray "for Christ's sake" is the same as praying "for God's Name's sake."

Vers. 8, 9.—*The Hope of Israel a stranger in the land.* I. GOD IS THE HOPE AND SAVIOUR OF HIS PEOPLE. 1. God is the *Hope*. (1) He inspires hope; (2) in him is

the ground for the realization of hope; (3) our highest hope is for the possession and enjoyment of God himself; (4) this hope is justifiable in the people of God. He is the Hope of Israel, truly the Hope of the spiritual Israel. 2. God is the *Saviour* in trouble. He is remembered in trouble if he is forgotten in prosperity. In our greatest need he is found nearest to us. Though he does not always prevent us from falling into trouble, he is always ready to help us when we are in. There is to us no more important character of God than that of the Saviour, since, as "man is born to trouble," we all need a Saviour, and he alone can deliver from the great sorrows and sins of life.

II. GOD MAY BE WITH US AS A STRANGER. 1. He may be with us and *unknown*—like the stranger who passes through a country unrecognized. He was received by Abraham as a stranger (Gen. xviii. 2). Hagar and Jacob failed at first to discern his presence. Christ was treated as an unknown stranger by the two disciples journeying to Emmaus. 2. He may be with us but for a *season*—like the traveller who sojourns for a night and is gone the next morning. We may receive temporary visitations of God without enjoying his abiding presence, casual glimpses of the Divine instead of a constant walking with God, the light of Heaven falling now and again on our path while earthly clouds fling long stretches of dreary shadow over the most of it. 3. He may be with us without having *communion* with us—as a stranger, not as a companion—as the traveller who pitches his tent in our land, not as the guest whom we welcome to our hearth. Thus God may be near to us without our receiving him into our hearts as our great Friend. 4. He may be with us without *acting* for our good—like a mighty man slumbering. So he may see our need and yet we may not be saved.

III. IT IS MOST SAD THAT GOD SHOULD BE WITH US AS A STRANGER. 1. It is sad because the *blessings of his presence are then not received.* (1) He must be known if we are to benefit by his aid. (2) We need his constant presence for constant distresses. (3) God helps by inward grace, which must come through close personal communion. (4) We need the active aid of God, not the mere fact of his presence. 2. It is sad because it is a *violation of our natural relations with God.* God is our Father. Shall our Father be but as a stranger passing through our midst? He is changeless in his eternal love to us. We are bound to him by close and perpetual obligations, and we are in great and constant need of him. How, then, do we ever find ourselves in this unnatural condition? The cause is in us (ver. 10). Great sin cherished in impenitence severs us from God, and makes it necessary that he should depart from us. God is a stranger when with us, (1) because we are too earthly minded to discern his presence, and too occupied with worldly things to think of it; (2) because we do not open our hearts to receive him in inward companionship; and (3) because we do not seek and trust his help in our need (Rom. x. 21).

Vers. 13—16.—*False prophets.* I. OFFICIAL TEACHERS MAY BE FALSE TEACHERS. The false prophets belonged to the recognized order of prophets. No rank in the Church confers infallibility. Popes have been heretics. The authority of a teacher must be sought in his message, not in his office. It is our duty to try the spirits by their correspondence with *known revelation* (1 John iv. 2), by the *fruits* of their lives and doctrines (Matt. vii. 16), and by the standard of our own *conscience* (2 Cor. iv. 2).

II. PREACHING WHICH IS NOT INSPIRED BY THE DIVINE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS IS LIKELY TO BE FALSE. The prophet may have a piercing intellect and a towering imagination. Yet he will err if he be blinded by unholiness and excluded from the revelations of spiritual communion. He speaks only out of his own heart; but the heart is "deceitful above all things." Attempts are constantly made to evolve religious truth out of the inner consciousness of the thinker. No idle dreams are more delusive, since (1) men have not the *materials* out of which to build a theology of their own; (2) they have not the *faculties* capable of using those materials—sin perverts the spiritual vision, prejudice and self-interest distort views of truth.

III. CONSCIOUSLY TEACHING FALSE IDEAS OF RELIGION IS A HEINOUS CRIME. It is using the Name of God in vain (ver. 14). It is abusing the trust of a high office for low purposes. It is likely to involve many in the toils of a fatal deception. It is easy to prophesy smooth things—easy thus to gain a vulgar popularity. But if this is done at the expense of truth, it is an awful sin. All Christian teachers should beware of the

temptation to degrade their mission by aiming at pleasing their hearers instead of faithfully proclaiming the will of God.

IV. FALSE TEACHING IN RELIGION WILL BE PUNISHED BY FATAL RESULTS. It ought to be clear to everybody that the first question concerning any teaching is whether it is true. Yet this question is often ignored. The prophet is eloquent; the doctrine is pleasing; the prediction is inviting. But what of all that if it is false? The prophecy will be punished when truth is revealed by facts. Then the false prophet will suffer by the fulfilment in himself of the prophecy he denied, and the people by the coming of the evil day they were too ready to hear discredited.

Ver. 20—ch. xv. 1.—*Prayer for mercy rejected.* I. THE PRAYER IS BASED ON URGENT PLEAS. 1. *A complete confession of sin.* (Ver. 20.) It is acknowledged as hereditary, but as also personal. Therefore all claims must rest on Divine considerations, since no ground for prayer can be found in anything human. 2. *The plea of the Name of God.* This is a plea all men can urge. The character, the honour, and the glory of God are suggested by his Name. For the sake of what he is, and the glory that his mercy will reflect, we may plead for pardon. By his love we beg for his forgiveness. 3. *The plea of disgrace to the throne of God's glory.* This is a more special plea. The temple was the house of God, wherein his glory was manifested. To destroy it was to put an end to the manifestation of Divine glory associated with it. God's glory is reflected on his Church. If the Church is humiliated, disgrace falls on the throne of God's glory. Yet, note, it is only the throne that is directly disgraced, not the glory itself. The tarnished mirror can no longer reflect the radiance of the sun; this is a discredit to the mirror, but not directly to the sun, since there is no diminution of the sun's brightness. Still, indirectly, dishonour is done to the original source of glory. The sun is less admired if its light is less reflected. God is less honoured if his glory is less manifested. 4. *The plea of the Divine covenant.* This is the most special plea. God has made promises. To the fulfilment of these his faithfulness is bound. He has made a covenant with his own people. They who have accepted the covenant plead its special claims. The Christian has not only the universal mercy of God to trust in; he has the special promises of the gospel, the assurance of the privileges of God's restored children.

II. NEVERTHELESS THE PRAYER IS REJECTED. 1. *Intercession is useless for those who will not repent and seek mercy for themselves.* The prayer was that of the prophet on behalf of his impenitent countrymen. The intercession of good men is recognized as powerful. Their character adds weight to their intercession (Jas. v. 16). But not only must Jeremiah's prayer be rejected, even Moses the founder of the nation and Samuel the father of the prophets could not prevail in the present case. The intercession of one greater than Moses, of Christ himself, will not save those who are obstinately hardened against returning to God. 2. *The Name of God includes reference to his justice as well as his mercy.* For his Name's sake he must vindicate the right. The one-sided view of God which excludes all reference to his wrath is dishonouring. Even a man who can never feel righteous indignation is weak and imperfect. For a judge to acquit all criminals would be fatal to justice. 3. *The throne of God's glory is more dishonoured by sin than by external disaster.* The Jews feared discredit to the temple in its desecration by the heathen. It was more desecrated by their corrupt practices in it. To make the temple a den of thieves is more dishonouring than to overthrow it so as not to leave one stone upon another. The sins of Christ's Church are more dishonouring to his Name than her sufferings, her willing subservience to the spirit of the world more humiliating than her apparent lowly condition when trampled under the feet of persecutors. The pure martyred Church is a glory to Christ, the corrupt prosperous Church a shame to his Name. 4. *God's covenant has human conditions.* He condescends to bind himself to bless us so long as we fulfil our obligations to submit to him. Disobedience breaks the covenant. The faithless Christian cannot urge the pleas of the privileges of the gospel.

Ver. 22.—*Prayer for rain.* I. OBJECTIONS TO PRAYER FOR RAIN. 1. *The universality of law.* It seems to have been vaguely imagined till recently that the weather was not subject to laws of nature in the same strict form in which most material things are thus bound. But this surmise was simply based on ignorance. Recently more

indications of law have been discovered, and we see the dawn of a meteorological science. How, then, can we expect God to change the weather in response to our prayers? 2. *The limitations of knowledge.* We really do not know what weather is best. What is good for one place is bad for another. The effects of rain and of drought are so far-reaching that it seems vain for us to judge what is best regarding them. But God knows all and is infinitely wise. Why should we not trust to his unerring discretion? 3. *The goodness of God.* If God is well disposed to his creatures, will he not give them what is for their good? Why, then, even if it were possible for the weather to be affected by our prayer, and if we were wise enough to know what was best for the world, should it be necessary for us to pray about the weather, as if God needed to be urged to govern the world for our benefit?

II. REASONS IN FAVOUR OF PRAYER FOR RAIN. 1. *The control of God over the laws of nature.* God is not the slave of his own legislation. Without changing his laws, he can act through them, as men who cannot alter the laws of nature can still alter the facts of nature by their use of those laws. Moreover, are there no spiritual laws? Yet, without violating the principles of the constitution of the spiritual universe, we believe that God can answer prayer for spiritual blessings. 2. *The conditional character of prayer.* The limitation to our knowledge makes it necessary for us to pray on the condition that God will only answer our requests so far as they agree with his wise and righteous will. Prayer for rain, of all prayers, must not be an absolute demand, but a submissive and humble request, accompanied by the desire that not our will but God's be done. We have no right to dictate to God in prayer, and wisdom would not desire such a right. But there need be no limit to the greatness of the objects of prayer when the right condition of trust in God's higher will is observed. 3. *The fact that prayer alters our condition before God.* It may be wise and right for God to do after our prayer what it would not be well for him to do without it. The very prayer may be a link in a chain of causation. Drought may be sent to us, as it was to Judah, with a Divine purpose concerning our conduct. A change in our conduct will then modify the action of that purpose. Prayer may be the best indication of such a change. We have distinct promises that we may receive, when we seek them in prayer, blessings which are withheld so long as we abstain from asking for them (Matt. vii. 7, 8).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 7, 9.—*A prayer for God's people in time of his judgments.* The prophet's words, as he intuitively places himself in the position of those who are about to be afflicted. Not, therefore, to be regarded as an ideal prayer, but a true representation of the spiritual state of those who are conscious of their sin and their need of salvation. They explain the lack of apparent answer to prayer, and truthfully interpret the spiritual condition of the awakened sinner.

I. PRAYER IS AN INDEX OF THE SPIRITUAL STATE. Here we have the oscillation between fear and hope, doubt and faith, vividly portrayed. There is a flitting to and fro of the soul between the extremes of dejection and of confidence. All real prayer ought thus faithfully to represent the mind of the petitioner. It is a laying bare of secret thoughts and moral convictions; an unconscious as well as a conscious confession. Whilst it may be said that a man's inner being is revealed in his prayer, he is not to be judged by it by his fellow-men. It is only God who can truly understand the indications which it affords, and only he who has a right to interpret them. There is a rising, a falling, and a rising again in the course of the prayer. It is the Name of God which serves as a reminder and spiritual confirmation.

II. PRAYER IS A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE AND A MEANS OF GRACE. There is evident in this utterance a wrestling with unbelief. Memories of evil crowd upon the soul and seem to darken the horizon. The sinful nation confesses that in itself there is no hope, but as that conviction is arrived at, another asserts itself, namely, that God is the Hope of Israel, and that in his name or character there is the promise and potency of restoration. It is in spiritual transitions like these that the soul is lost and found again. Temptation is anticipated and overcome, sin is cast away, and God is throned in the heart. It is better to make such honest discovery of ourselves to God, even in our

weakness and lack of faith, than that we should carry these into the conduct of life. It is in these transitions of despair and hope reaching to and resting in restored faith and settled purpose of righteousness, that the overcoming of the world is already accomplished.

III. THE PRAYER THAT SEEMS TO BE REJECTED NOW MAY YET PROVE A CONDITION OF ACCEPTANCE. Had Israel herself really adopted the words of this her representative mediator, she would have escaped the awful abyss that yawned before her, but she knew not the day of her opportunity. By slow stages of recovery, marked by many relapses, was she to climb to the great truth from which she had fallen, that the Name of God was her salvation and hope. So it is that many a prayer uttered without apparent answer supplies in itself a spiritual condition of ultimate blessing. Its answer is really begun in the change of attitude assumed, and the spiritual truth laid hold of. By-and-by irresolution and uncertainty will give place to faith, and the windows of heaven will be opened.—M.

Vers. 19, 22.—*Prayer a fruit of chastisement.* There is a deeper and more spiritual tone in this utterance. The heart of Israel is conceived of as having been searched and revealed. Repentance is felt, and confession made. The true source of peace and help is sought after; and the false ones which have been tested are rejected.

I. IN THE DISCIPLINE AND JUDGMENTS OF LIFE GOD TEACHES MEN HOW TO PRAY. Thereby they learn in a stern school their own sinfulness; the misery and desolation of the soul that is alienated from the life of God and exposed to his wrath and curse; the incapacity of earthly things to deliver or console, and the power of God to forgive and to save. It is in this estimate of themselves and their resources that the foundation is laid for real spiritual desire. When sin has been felt and acknowledged, a relation is established between the soul and God which is immediately recognized in its claims.

II. THE SPIRIT WHICH IS THUS PRODUCED IS ALONE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD. There are many prayers which evidently ought not to be, and with due regard to the needs of the sinner and the honour of his heavenly Father could not be, answered. The chief end of prayer is not gained in the obtaining of the objects that are asked for, but in the gradual assumption of a right relation to God and acknowledgment of his character and authority. Thus it is that some prayers sound like wails of despair, whilst others are full of the breathings of resignation, obedience, faith, and love. It is with this filial tone that true prayer begins. And it is only when we have learned that "whom he loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth," that we are able to adopt it. "Thy will be done" is the burden of every Christ-taught prayer, as it is the outcome of all true spiritual discipline.—M.

Ver. 21.—*Invoking the honour of God.* Not along ago this phrase, "Do not disgrace the throne of thy glory," was employed in prayer by a convert in a certain religious meeting. Shortly after a letter was sent to the papers, inveighing against the "profanity" of the idea; in apparently complete ignorance of its scriptural origin and warrant. Often the language of humility may conceal a conception of real arrogance, and so, on the other hand, the most daring appeals to the promises, the character, and the honour of God may have their root in the profoundest reverence and faith. It is high ground to take, simply because no other ground is available.

I. AS SINNERS HAVE NO REASON FOR MERCY IN THEMSELVES, THEY MUST APPEAL TO GOD. Mere pity would be inadmissible as a motive to which to appeal. There is no ground of acceptance in the sinner himself, and consequently there remains only that course of action which will illustrate and glorify the character of God. That God had chosen Israel as his servant, and Jerusalem as the seat and centre of the theocracy, are the only reasons that are valid in approaching him for mercy. Any course of action which would fail to give due respect to the attributes of his character or the purposes of his grace in the world is already forbidden when it is stated. God has been at pains to pledge himself to the ultimate salvation of men. His Name is itself a promise that no compromise shall be entered into or ineffectual means of salvation adopted. Therefore the necessity of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. In him the justice of God is honoured, and his Name revealed in the hearts of men. It is only as the gospel is per-

ceived as the offspring of the purest, highest motives on the part of God that it can call into existence corresponding motives in the sinner himself.

II. TO THE SAINT THE HONOUR OF GOD SHOULD EVER BE OF MORE ACCOUNT THAN HIS OWN WELFARE. "For Christ's sake" is a formula in which much of this feeling is implicitly expressed. The exigencies of God's kingdom, the furtherance of his purposes of love and grace, the recognition of the principles of righteousness, are essential to a true Christian life as to true prayer. And the keenest susceptibility should be felt to any conduct on the part of God's servants which would seem to injure his cause in the world or to misrepresent his character.

III. GOD'S NAME IS PLEDGED TO AND BOUND UP WITH THE SALVATION OF MEN. It seems a daring and wondrous plea to urge in the presence of him with whom we have to do; but it is the only one which we can truly offer, and it is of infinite avail. If we accept Christ as representing the honour and righteousness of God, are we not assured that every prayer truly offered in his name shall be answered? The welfare and usefulness of God's servants are guaranteed by such a consideration, and we cannot offer it too often or insist upon it with too great earnestness.—M.

Vers. 1—9.—*Thankfulness through contrast: a harvest sermon.* These verses are a terrible picture of drought and famine. Our thankfulness for what God has done for us in the bounteous harvest he has given may be called forth the more by considering the contrast with our happy lot which these verses present. Contrast is a great teacher. It is the black board on which the teacher's white markings are more clearly seen, the dark background of the sky on the face of which the stars shine out the more. Now, this chapter is all concerning, not a bountiful harvest, but a dread famine. We cannot determine the date of this famine, but it appears to have been one of those premonitory judgments of God sent to teach his sinful people wisdom, so that the more terrible judgments of the future years might not be needed. "A terrible drought had fallen upon the land, and the prophet's picture of it is like some of Dante's in its realism, its pathos, and in its terror. In the presence of a common calamity all distinctions of class have vanished, and the nobles send their little ones to the wells, and they come back with empty vessels and drooping heads, instead of with the gladness that used to be heard in the places of drawing water. Far afield the ploughmen are standing among the cracked furrows, gazing with despair at the brown chapped earth, and out in the field the very dumb creatures are sharing in the common sorrow. And the imperious law of self-preservation overpowers and crushes the maternal instincts. 'Yea, the hind also calved in the field, and forsook it, because there was no grass.' And on every hill-top, where cooler air might be found, the once untameable wild asses are standing with open nostrils, panting for air, their filmy eyes failing them, gazing for the rain that will not come. It is a true description—so they say who know what drought in Eastern lands is and does. How it distressed the earth, the beasts, and man, is all vividly portrayed." The pits, some of them natural hollows in the hard rock and in caves, where evaporation was less speedy; others of them dykes and cisterns, the works of man;—but all alike were empty. The ground was split by reason of the long drought into wide and deep fissures; earth's wounds for man's sin, mute mouths crying to Heaven for pity, the lips of earth suffering, waiting for a drop of water to relieve the torment of its awful thirst. And not the land only, but the dumb brutes were involved in the common woe. The hind, driven down from her high places into the fields in search of the grass that has disappeared from the lofty heights, meets with disappointment here also, and in her agony of hunger and thirst forgot and forsook her young, whom she, above most other of the beasts of the field, was wont to care for and cherish tenderly; and the hardy wild asses (ver. 6) found their hunger even greater than they could bear, and panted in terror and distress. And man—all ranks and ages were smitten, the people generally were languishing. The gates of the cities and other chief places of concourse were "black unto the ground," with the sad, coloured garments of the mourners who bent prostrate there; and one long, loud, bitter cry went up from the whole city of God. *But what a contrast is our condition to theirs!* See it in the aspects of the fields ere harvest was gathered in. In the gifts of all nurturing powers from heaven—rain, dew, and fountains of water. In the abundance provided for man and beast, and in the contentment and peace of the herds of the field. In the glad congratulations of all classes

in the land, from the labourer to the noble, because of what God has given. The whole nation rejoices, a cry not of sorrow but of gladness goes up from the home of the rich and poor, high and low alike. And this contrast is seen also in the thoughts of God prompted by the two events. "The dearth" made the people think that God was as a stranger in the land, one who knew nothing of them or their need. If we felt concerning our distresses that God was as a stranger to us, they would be much harder to bear. But so Judah and Jerusalem thought. Nor was this the worst thought; for if God knew how they were suffering, and yet no help came, did not a yet darker surmise seem warranted? Was it not as if he were "as a wayfaring man that but turned aside to tarry for the night," and who therefore, having no interest in the place or the people, would care but little for them? This was a terrible thought indeed. If our mind be haunted with the dread thought that God looks on unmoved at our affliction, and cares not for our distress—what, then, can we do? But so they thought. The sun rose and set, the stars looked down upon them just as they had done at other times; but there was no heart of love in their calm, unmoved gaze; and so it seemed there was no heart in God, and that he, unmoved by their appeal, left them to perish. Or could it be that, after all their boasting in him as mighty to save, One mightier than he had arisen and overpowered him; that he was "as one astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save"? Was there some cruel fate which, after all, was ruling over their destinies, and so preventing the mighty One, of whom their fathers told, from coming to their help as in the days of old? Such dark and terrible thoughts float about the minds of men in the hour of dire distress such as this dearth had brought upon them. And so all hope was quenched, the voice of prayer was stifled, their hearts died down in complete despair. The dearth in itself was bad enough, causing bodily agony beyond all description, but its horrors were heightened and awfully intensified by the dark thoughts about God to which the distress gave rise. But in all this, what a contrast does our happier lot present? The thoughts of God which the harvest he has given prompt are the very opposite of those which, as we have seen, haunted the minds of those who suffered under the dearth. Not as a stranger ignorant of us and our wants does God appear, but as One who "knoweth that we have need of all these things," and who openeth his hand and filleth us with good. And still less as a wayfaring man, and who therefore has no concern nor care for land or people. Every golden ear of corn has been a tongue as well, and has told eloquently though silently of our Father's care. The wide-stretching fields of corn have been filled with these myriad witnesses to his love, and have stood up in their serried ranks, to give the lie to the unbelieving heart, that would harbour hard thoughts of God. As all with one consent yield to the summer breeze, so with like oneness of consent, do they attest his unfailing goodness and his never-ceasing care. And they proclaim him, too, as the Hope of his people, and their Saviour indeed. He is no "mighty man that cannot save." For all the treasures of the field, created, preserved, and ripened for our use, in spite of all adverse influences which threatened them, all show that he is mighty to save. His hand held in check every hostile power, every destructive storm, every killing frost, every blighting mildew, every creeping caterpillar, and all else that would have robbed us of the corn he has given. Oh, what a gospel do the fields preach! And how differently God might have dealt with us! For whilst there is so vast a contrast between our harvest and that dearth of which these verses tell, there has been no such contrast between our conduct and that which brought upon Judah the calamity from which they suffered. Have we not reason to make the same confession which was made concerning them?—"O Lord, . . . our iniquities testify against us," etc. (ver. 7). What, gratitude then, does such long-suffering love call for from us! Let, then, our harvest lead us to do that which Judah's dearth led the prophet to do—to turn to God, and confess him as our Hope and our Saviour in time of trouble. In this way he is again standing at our doors and knocking for admission. The "miracle of the loaves" is done over again for our comfort and help. We have "the joy of harvest," let him have it also in gathering us into the garner of his faithful souls for time and for eternity.—C.

Vers. 7—9.—*An absent God deplored.* The dearth told of in foregoing verses and the misery caused thereby led to the conviction that God had abandoned his people. In these verses and throughout this section down to ch. xv. 9 we find the prophet pleading with God to return. In these verses we are shown—

I. THE CAUSES WHICH HAD BROUGHT ABOUT THE DIVINE WITHDRAWAL FROM THEM. Their "iniquities," "backslidings," "sins" (ver. 7). Nothing else has such power; sin only can shut out God, but it always will and does.

II. THE HAPPY MEMORIES WHICH MADE IT SO BITTER. God had revealed himself to them in such endearing manner. He had been ever "*the Hope of Israel.*" He had inspired, maintained, and justified that hope again and again. And he had become the Hope of Israel through having shown himself so perpetually "the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble." The memory of God's servants was stored with recollections of such deliverances, national and individual, from troubles temporal and spiritual; vouchsafed, too, not because of Israel's deserving, but out of God's pure bounty. Now, it was these happy memories which made God's present dealings with them so terrible to bear.

III. THE SAD CONTRAST BETWEEN THE DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS NOW AND OF OLD. We have seen what he had been to Israel, but now, the prophet complains, he is to them very far from what he was then. He is "as a stranger," "a wayfaring man," as one "taken by surprise," as one strong but yet unable to help. Their enemies would taunt them with the reproach that either God was as a stranger, and therefore did not care for them; or, if they denied that, then it must be that there was a stronger than he, who had taken him by surprise and prevented his rendering help to his afflicted people. Either he would not or he could not—on one of the horns of this dilemma they by the force of their present circumstances were thrown. And there can be no doubt that the great mystery of life, its sins and sorrows, do often force perplexed and troubled minds perilously near to one or other of these conclusions, which nevertheless faith affirms to be alike false, and will never admit for one moment.

IV. THE SOURCES OF HOPE UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES LIKE THESE. They are: 1. *The Name of God.* This the prophet pleads (ver. 7). He confesses that all their own conduct is altogether against them. They can have no hope in themselves. But the Name of God remains to be urged in his pleading, and therefore it is this Name that he does urge. "Do thou it for thy Name's sake." Here is a fact which cannot change. When driven out of all hope in ourselves by reason of our sins, we may yet hope in God, and plead the grace and goodness that are evermore in him. 2. *The presence of his appointed ordinances and his chosen dwelling-place in their midst.* This is the meaning of ver. 9, "Yet thou art in the midst of us." The temple, the altar, the sacrifice, the priests, the ark, were all there; the appointed channels of communication between God and his people. And so long as we may go unto his footstool, and the throne of grace is open to us, there is hope in that. God will come to us again in the way of his holy and appointed ordinances, if we will go along that way to seek him. 3. *They were the objects of his love.* "We are called by thy Name." Israel was so. God had chosen them at the first. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him." And it is because of that undying love of God, they who for their sins have lost his presence may yet win it back again.

V. THE PRESENT DUTY. Prayer. The prophet betook himself hereto. "Leave us not," he cries (ver. 9). And nothing barred the success of this prayer but that the people for whom he prayed had no heart in it. God stood ready to forgive and restore. The prophet's prayer was fully answered on the part of God. But those for whom he prayed were not ready, and so their judgment went on. But for ourselves, if we deplore an absent God, let us betake ourselves to these potent arms of all-prevailing prayer, and God shall ere long be again known to us as of old as our Hope and our Saviour in time of trouble.—C.

Vers. 13—16.—*False teachers no adequate excuse for evil conduct.* No doubt the people to whom Jeremiah was sent had been encouraged in their ungodliness by the faithlessness and sin of their prophets. Blind guides were leading the blind, and with the inevitable result. And here Jeremiah pleads, as an excuse for his people's sin, that they had been thus misled. But God refuses to admit the plea. Now, on this, note—

I. FALSE TEACHING IS SOME EXCUSE FOR EVIL CONDUCT. The deepest instincts of our hearts affirm this. Our Lord himself does so, when he says, "He that knew not his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with few stripes." But this word of his, whilst it allows that lack of teaching is some excuse, denies that it is sufficient (cf.

John xix. 11). St. Paul also says, concerning the heathen nations, "The time of this ignorance God winked at."

II. BUT IT IS NOT AN ADEQUATE EXCUSE. For: 1. *The taught are the creators almost as much as the creatures of their teachers.* The people who clamour for smooth things to be prophesied to them will find such prophets forthcoming. Ahab's prophets—all of them but Micaiah—were such. It is true, "like priest, like people;" but it is also true, "like people, like priest." The demand creates the supply. The pastors of the Church are the product of the Church, almost as much as the Church is the product of the pastors. What a worldly Church wants it will have, for the woe both of itself and its pastors alike. 2. *They have a sure test by which to try all their teachers.* "To the Law and to the testimony," etc. Conscience also is ever on the side of God, and is prompt to condemn all teaching that leads to sin. The Holy Spirit likewise pleads in men's hearts for God. And the faithful words of those in whom God's Spirit dwells. None, therefore, are shut up to any human teachers. 3. And where evil teachers have been followed, *it has been in spite of the protest which these other higher and surer guides have uttered,* or would have uttered had they been suffered so to do.

III. BUT IF IT BE ILL FOR THE TAUGHT, IT IS YET MORE ILL FOR THE TEACHERS. "His blood will I require at the watchman's hands." The most awful of our Lord's denunciations were addressed to such evil teachers (cf. the oft-repeated, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" cf. ver. 14, etc.).

CONCLUSION. 1. Let those who are taught by any human teachers test what they receive by the Word of God. Be as the Bereans (Acts xvii. 11). 2. Let those who teach watch anxiously and prayerfully against the temptation to conform their teachings to the likings of their hearers rather than to their needs. Let them remember that the causes of error and false teaching are much more moral than they are intellectual. 3. Let teachers and taught alike sit daily at his feet who said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."—C.

Vers. 17—22.—*The distracting power of great distress.* The prophet seems blinded by his tears. The distress portrayed here is terrible indeed, and the prophet so realized it that his mind appears to have reeled beneath his apprehensions of the coming calamities. Hence he falls into utterances which can only be regarded, however pardonable and comprehensible under his piteous circumstances (cf. ver. 18), as exaggerated, and in many respects, as all such utterances are, incorrect. Every sentence in ver. 19, etc., is open to grave question. It would be dreadful if they were not. Note—

I. THE PROPHET'S EXPOSTULATIONS. (Ver. 19.) Now, God did not "utterly reject Judah," nor did "his soul loathe Zion." It was his love for his people that determined him at all costs to purge them from their evil.

II. HIS COMPLAINTS. (Ver. 19.) He complains that they had been disappointed and implies that God was the cause why their expectations had failed. They had no right to look for peace, being what they were.

III. HIS CONFESSIONS. Nothing could be more appropriate or more sure to gain the mercy of God than such confession as this, if it were indeed sincere and general on the part of those who had sinned. But this it was not; it was because they would not repent, would not return unto the Lord, that therefore his wrath arose against them until there was no remedy.

IV. HIS ENTREATIES. (Ver. 21.) God never "abhorred" his people, but only their sins; and that God should be thought to "disgrace" the throne of his glory can only be explained on the grounds we have stated. Nor either is it God's way to "break his covenant."

V. HIS PLEAS. (Ver. 22.) Here the prophet pleads truly. There was no hope in any heathen deity, but in God alone. And had the people indeed "waited" upon God, matters had gone more happily with them. But this was just what they did not do. Now, concerning all such utterances as these: 1. *Bear with them.* God did so. He rebuked not his servant, though that servant had spoken unadvisedly concerning him. 2. *Be very slow to believe them.* Cf. Naomi, and her false forebodings of fear. How ill she thought God would deal with her! How gracious, in fact, that dealing was! And St.

Paul assures us that "God hath not cast off his people." "All Israel shall be saved." Let us wait on and wait for God. 3. *Be ashamed if by our sin we have caused such distress.* Jeremiah had not sinned, but he mourns as if the sin were his own. Beholding the sorrow our sin causes to those who love us will, if we be not utterly hardened, arouse shame, sorrow, and contrition in our own hearts. 4. If those who know most of the mind of God tremble for us, have we not reason to tremble for ourselves?—C.

Ver. 21.—*A dreadful apprehension.* That God should "abhor" us. Such apprehension filled the prophet's mind, as it has other minds.

I. BUT THIS GOD NEVER DOES. He is our Father; he *so* loved us as to give Christ for us. It is impossible, therefore, let our apprehensions be what they may, that he can abhor us.

II. BUT HE MAY SEEM TO. 1. No one will think thus of God by reason only of *temporal calamities.* These have again and again come and do come to God's servants, but produce no such distressing thought as this (cf. Ps. xxii., "He hath not despised nor abhorred," etc.). 2. Nor will *spiritual distress* alone cause it. There may be loss of comfort in God; no enjoyment in prayer or worship. Sin may again reassert its mastery, and fill the soul with sorrow. Doubts may insinuate themselves into the soul. But none of these will of themselves lead to the thought that God abhors us. 3. They may do so, however, if *the presence of sorrow, temporal or spiritual, be so severe as to throw the mind off its balance.* (Cf. former homily.) Despair has for a while under such circumstances wrought this harm, and that in the holiest minds. Even our blessed Lord knew somewhat of this awful experience (cf. the agony in the garden, and the cry on the cross, "My God, my God," etc.). Elijah, John the Baptist, Jeremiah here, and others have been instances. Cowper the poet also, and the not unfrequent cases of religious melancholy leading either to settled gloom or even suicide. The tenderest pity and compassion are to be felt for such. 4. *Persistent disobedience and repeated backsliding* are the chief causes of this apprehension. When the world, the flesh, and the devil fill the heart, especially the heart which has once been cleansed, then "the last state of that man is worse than the first" (cf. Saul, Judas, Ahithophel). Yes; such sin has power to turn the sun into darkness and the moon into blood, and to make the very stars fall from heaven. God becomes the horror of the soul, and men will "make their bed in hell" if but they may flee from his dreadful presence.

III. THE GREAT DESTROYER OF THIS DREAD. It is suggested by the prophet's own words: "Abhor us not, *for thy Name's sake.*" This is the antidote of all such fearful dread. The Name of God, *i.e.* that by which he has made himself known. And what has been the verdict of all the witness concerning God, which his words and works and ways have borne, but this, that he is plenteous in mercy to all that call upon him—to all that call upon him in truth? He is the "God of all grace." And if Israel of old had proof of this, how much more have we in Christ! Behold God in him; he is the Name of God to us men. Then, where this dread apprehension exists, let Christ be preached, meditated upon, sought in prayer, confessed with the lip, served and followed in the life, waited on continually, and soon this dread shall pass away.—C.

Ver. 14.—*Lying prophets.* Every divinely inspired prophet of the olden times was emphatically a "seer," gifted with the power of looking, as other men could not, into the inmost heart of things—passing events, natural laws, Divine providences—so as to discern their deeper meaning. The past, the present, and the future all came under his survey, inasmuch as he had to do mainly with those absolute and universal truths which are in no way subject to the conditions of time. As the prophet is called a seer, so the subject of his prophecy is often called a "vision." It is remarkable how large a proportion of the prophetic revelations of the Old Testament were of a pictorial, symbolic character (see Numb. xxiv. 4; 1 Kings xxii. 17; Isa. vi. 1; Ezek. xxxvii. i. 10; Hab. ii. 1), and even when they were otherwise, similar phraseology is often used to indicate the prophet's extraordinary power of moral and spiritual insight. But this passage speaks of *false* prophets—men who assumed the prophetic function when not divinely called to it, mere pretenders to the prophetic gift. Ezekiel calls them the "foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing" (Ezek xiii. 3). Every age has had some such misleading witnesses. Christ warned the people against them in his

day (Matt. vii. 15; xxiv. 24). St. John spoke of their uprising as a characteristic of the "last time" (1 John ii. 18; iv. 1). Our own age is certainly no exception. Men may not claim Divine inspiration in the old prophetic sense, but never were there bolder claims to deep spiritual insight, never such adventurous flights into the realms of mystery, never so many dogmatic remedies for the intellectual restlessness or the moral diseases of human nature. Note, here—

I. THAT FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND OF SPEECH WHICH WOULD SEEM TO BE A FIXED PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE GOVERNMENT. There was nothing to prevent the false prophets from speaking; the people were only forbidden to listen to them. Though it be nothing but a vision of their own diseased fancy, a conceit of their own distempered brain, that men have to deliver, they are allowed to deliver it. Better so, that the false should come out to the light of day, confronting the truth, rather than that it should be suppressed by an external force that may at another time be enlisted on its side. The truth has nothing to fear from public conflict with error and all its forces. A marvellous change, as regards the openness of the conflict, has taken place since the days when Milton wrote his 'Areopagitica' and Jeremy Taylor his 'Liberty of Prophesying.' No doubt it is full of danger to the weak and wavering, to those whose mental eagerness is not tempered by humility and whose hearts are not "established with grace." But this is God's way of leading the world on to fuller, clearer light. And is it not in harmony with his whole moral administration of human affairs? He puts awful, destructive powers into men's hands, and he holds each one responsible for the way in which he wields them. There are boundless possibilities of evil around us all, moral as well as physical, and our case would be sad indeed if there were not equal and still greater possibilities of good. It is well that the false prophets should tell out their "dreams," if only that the light of God may expose their emptiness and the breath of God may scatter them.

II. THE NEED OF A SURE CRITERION OF JUDGMENT. How shall we discern between the false and the true? These supposed prophetic utterances of old were subjected to certain tests. 1. *Their verity.* If they were falsified by the facts of history or the inner consciousness of the people, they could not be of God. 2. *Harmony with Divine Law.* They must be favourable to the cause of virtue and morality; could not promise prosperity apart from repentance, or cry, "Peace, peace," when there was "no peace." 3. *The personal character of the teacher.* The messengers of a holy God must needs be themselves holy. The quality of their message would be reflected in their own life. The same principles hold good now. Such an essential connection exists between truth in thought and truth of feeling, character, life, that every form of doctrine must be judged by its moral influence, both on the teacher and the taught. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Moreover, Christianity refers us to a testing principle of still higher quality and completer efficacy—*the presence of the Spirit of truth and grace in our own souls.* "He that is spiritual," etc. (1 Cor. ii. 15). "Ye have an unction from the Holy One," etc. (1 John ii. 20, 21). There is no safeguard against error but this Divine faculty. As regards an external standard, the Scriptures of eternal truth are the touchstone. "To the Law and to the testimony," etc. (Isa. viii. 20). The voice, the Law, the life of God in your own soul, is a touchstone of still more delicate quality and ready application. If what you read or hear will not bear this test, it is but the "dream" of a false prophet, "the deceit of his own heart," and no true "burden of the Lord."

III. GOD'S SURE VINDICATION OF THE CAUSE OF HIS OWN TRUTH, WHATEVER FORCES MAY ASSAIL IT. (See vers. 15, 16.) The ministry of the true prophets was a marvellous revelation of the Divine power that sustained them and verified their words. They were seldom called to do battle with the false prophets on their own ground, directly to assail their errors by argument and disproof. They were simply called to proclaim the truth, leaving it with God to make it victorious. The apostles of Christ dealt with the abounding theoretical and practical evils of their day on very much the same principle. The thing that is false gains its influence over men's minds by reason of its resemblance to the true. The counterfeit circulates because it seems like the real coin. There is no way in which we can so effectually rebuke it as by setting forth the glory of that of which it is the perversion or the mocking shadow. In the full, clear light and the spreading power of the truth error must, sooner or later, wither and die.

Let us have faith in the triumphant force of God's own Word. "What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord," etc. (ch. xxiii. 28, 29). We may well trust in the ultimate victory of that which is the product of infinite wisdom, and is backed by all the resources of omnipotence.—W.

Vers. 1—6.—*The miseries produced by lack of water.* I. THE BITTER CONSCIOUSNESS THAT AN IMPERATIVE NEED CANNOT BE SATISFIED. Well might there be mourning, languishing, and crying. When we are speaking of need, one of the first questions to be asked is whether the need is natural or artificial. An artificial need, by continued self-indulgence, may come to be very keenly felt; and yet, when circumstances arise which prevent the satisfying of the need, the artificiality of it is clearly seen. But a natural need, when the supplies are stopped, soon shows how clamorous it can become, how productive of unendurable pain. These Israelites had been multiplying artificial needs. They thought they needed visible images, to be richly adorned and constantly worshipped. They thought they needed large external possessions, and so the land became full of covetousness. Rich men tried to increase their riches, and poor men wanted, *above all things*, to get out of their poverty. But all the while the difference between natural aud artificial need was forgotten. The natural needs went on being satisfied, because God, who gives rain from heaven, was long-suffering; and the supply came so habitually that the people did not reckon how there was a hand upon the fountain of the waters which could seal them up in a moment. But now, no sooner is the supply stopped than there is deep and inconceivable misery. The idolater will go on living, even if you take his images away; a rich man need not die because he is stripped of his possessions; but what shall one do who cannot get water to drink? The unendurable pain of Dives in Hades came not from the lost wealth and splendour of earth, but because he could not get the least drop of water to cool his tongue.

II. THE VANITY OF HUMAN RESOURCES. Jerusalem now abounds in pools and cisterns, and the probability is that in the time of Jeremiah there was a similar abundance, both within and without the city. Great cities have always had to see to the providing of water, according to their judgment of what was necessary. A due supply of water is one of the most important charges that can be entrusted to any municipality. The authorities of Jerusalem may have done their best according to their lights; but they had forgotten that the most they could do was to provide receptacles for the Divine bounty. They had hewn cisterns without considering that a time might come when there would be no water to put into the cisterns. That time has come, and where is now the wisdom of the wise and the strength of the mighty? Men may flatter themselves that they rule on earth; but it is very plain that the spaces above, where the clouds gather and whence the rains descend, are beyond their control.

III. THE NULLIFYING OF HUMAN INDUSTRY. The work of the ploughman is in vain. God requires man to work and study in order to get the fruits of the earth; but it is only too easy for him in all his work and study to forget God. He who expects a harvest will not omit ploughing, sowing, irrigating—without these works expectation would be idiotic—but he may very easily omit faith in God. He may neglect the bestowment of the firstfruits, and all that service of God which the fruits of the earth give us strength to render. Well may such a one be ashamed when the ground is chapped and there is no rain in the earth. This is the sign of his own folly in attending to certain secondary requisites and forgetting the one requisite most important of all. When it is so required, God can feed thousands without any sowing and reaping at all; but no man is allowed to reckon that his sowing will assuredly be followed by reaping. He may sow wheat bountifully, only to reap thorns bountifully, because he has forgotten God (ch. xii. 13). If the sowing is in prayer and humility, in gratitude for the past and reasonable expectation for the future, then the sower will have no need to be ashamed. Whatever other things God's servants may lack, God will put the true, abiding glory upon them.

IV. THE LINKING OF MAN WITH THE BRUTE CREATION IN A COMMON SUFFERING. The hinds and the wild asses suffer, and doubtless they were prominent representatives of many other classes of the brute creation ('The Land and the Book,' p. 172). A common thirst not only brings down the noble to the level of the mean man, but man in general to the level of the brute. It is well that we should have plain reminders, such

as cannot be escaped, of the links that bind us to the lower creation. We cannot, at present at all events, get above some of the wants of the brute, although certainly it cannot rise to some of ours; but it is just the wants of the brute that seem to be the only wants many feel. They have enough if they can eat, drink, and be merry.—Y.

Vers. 7—9.—*An appeal out of the depths of separation from God.* I. THE APPEAL OF THOSE WHO ADMIT THAT IN THEMSELVES THEY HAVE NO CLAIM UPON GOD. They have no record of faithful service to present; no array of good deeds goes before them to plead for acceptance and approval. It is all the other way. Their iniquities testify against them; they have backslidden; they have sinned against Jehovah; *at least, so they say.* There is the appearance of having come to themselves. It might seem as if the prodigal nation, so long spending its substance in riotous living, had been brought to a full stop and a place for repentance amid the privations of a waterless land. Why, indeed, should there be any suspicion as to a genuine confession of great iniquities, a genuine and swift submission to Jehovah? Notice that the confession is correct enough as far as the mere words are concerned. But after all, these words were not unlike the statements extorted by the pains of the Inquisition. Confessions and professions have been made by tortured men in their agonies which had no value as genuine utterances of the heart. It is needless to say that, as far as *purpose* is concerned, no resemblance is to be found between Jehovah depriving Judah of its water and Rome torturing heretics to make them recant. There may be *different purposes* where there are *similar results.* This cry of the people showed the *severity* with which they had been smitten; it did not of necessity show the state of their hearts. All that they said was true; their iniquities did testify against them; they were apostates; they had sinned against Jehovah. Only when we look at past confessions of the like sort, we see how little they meant (Numb. xiv. 40; xxi. 7; Judg. x. 10; 1 Sam. vii. 6). It was the parched tongue and not the broken heart that made them speak. And therefore it is that their appeal has to be met with a refusal. Earnestly as they cried, the cessation of chastisement would not have been followed by the renewal of a true obedience.

II. THE APPEAL OF THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME CONSCIOUS OF THEIR OWN HELPLESSNESS APART FROM JEHOVAH. They want water, and there is no way of getting it apart from the mercy of an all-powerful God. The very way in which they speak shows how vain they feel all resources to be save one. But if other resources had been possible, assuredly they would have tried them. They come to God's door, not because it is the right one, but because it is the only one left to try. So passengers begin to think of God and eternity when the captain says the tempest-beaten ship cannot be saved. So sick people send for a minister of religion when the doctor says the disease is mortal. So the doomed criminal makes a fashion of giving all his attention to the chaplain when the plea for mitigation is rejected. What a humiliating position men take in making an appearance of coming to God only when they can get nowhere else! What wonder is it that, under such circumstances, they fail to get a right relation established between God and themselves! Prayers in such circumstances, whatever the language employed, may prove no more than the incoherent shriek of despair, a cry without any real turning to God, without any real trust in him.

III. THE APPEAL OF THOSE WHO CAN CALL TO MIND GOD'S CHARACTER AS ALREADY REVEALED. The description of God in his deeds and disposition had ample warrant from the history of his past dealings. He had been in the midst of his people, "the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble," as a mighty man showing himself able to save in the greatest danger. He who now fastened up the clouds and the springs had given waters in the wilderness. He who now made the earth fruitless had given manna which needed neither sowing nor reaping. Jehovah had been behind all the visible agents towards deliverance, victory, and possession of the promised inheritance. His tabernacle had been in the midst of his people, and his glory in the midst of his tabernacle. How easy it is to remember, when necessary, that which, when convenient, it seems just as easy to forget! The clouds of heaven and the mountains in whose secret depths he had wrought at the water-springs had been suffered to hide God; but now that his gracious works are vanished for a while, men suddenly and painfully miss the worker. They can flatter him whom they have not even despised, but rather

simply ignored. When the cisterns are empty, when the land is chapped, when there is no water anywhere for man and beast, then they can talk effusively concerning "the Hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof in time of trouble." What self-accusation is implied in this appeal! It was not in ignorance of Jehovah's claims that they had sinned against him. His past dealings were known and could be recollected under stress of need. If God could speak to Jeremiah as one familiar with the deeds of Moses and Samuel (ch. xv. 1), then we may be sure the God connected with those deeds was also known in his historical manifestations—known to some extent at least to the great bulk of the people.

IV. THE APPEAL OF THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME KEENLY SENSITIVE TO GOD'S SEPARATION FROM THEM. This is set forth by two figures. He has become as a stranger in the land, as a wayfarer pitching his tent for the night. The people profess to wonder why it is so, and yet they need not wonder. He who has been in their midst because, first of all, he has gathered them around him as the recipients of measureless privileges, finds rivals raised on every high place and in every grove. His special commands are shut out from influence on the conduct of daily life. His messenger is scorned by rulers and conspired against by his own kinsfolk. What is all this but to become even worse than a stranger? A stranger may advance through successive grades of acquaintanceship into bosom affection and trust; but if he who is and ought to remain the centre gets pushed out little by little, even beyond the circumference, what force is there potent and exact enough to bring the former relation back? God had told these people how to treat the stranger, but instead of attending to his commands they had ended by making God himself a stranger. Needless, then, was it to ask the question, "Why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land?" As well might the ebbing sea ask the rock round which it rolled at flood, why it had forsaken it. Jehovah had remained the same in truth, in love, and in purpose. It was the people who had failed, and flowed further and further away from him. They talked of him as a mere wanderer among them, whereas they were the real wanderers, wandering in heart, drifting about from one temporary satisfaction to another (Exod. xxii. 21; Lev. xix. 9, 10, 33; Matt. xxv. 35; Heb. xiii. 2).—Y.

Vers. 10—12.—*The severities of Jehovah—sword, famine, and pestilence.* I. THE OCCASION OF THESE SEVERITIES. This occasion is stated in ver. 10. The people have spoken of Jehovah as a stranger and traveller, which way of speaking gives opportunity for asserting that it is they who are the real wanderers, straying from Jehovah's highway of righteousness and appointed service; and not only have they strayed, but they have loved to stray. The making of a straight path for Jehovah has been very hard and exacting, and the first voice of temptation to turn into an easier road has been listened to. And even now, out of the midst of their agonies, their cry has no repentance in it. They wish God to come into their midst and protect and comfort them, forgetting that if he is to be really in their midst they must turn from their iniquities. They must show clear signs of forsaking their sins before he can relax his severities. Dreadful as this experience of a waterless land is, they must look for the exciting cause of it in themselves. A disobedient child, suffering punishment at the hands of his parent, while he knows that one cause of his pain is the chastising instrument, knows also that it is a cause which only operates because of the wrong that he himself has done. If we would only give due attention, it is within our own power to keep the worst pains out of life.

II. VAIN DEFENCES AGAINST THE SEVERITIES. 1. *The intercession of good men.* Jehovah says once again to his prophet, "Pray not for this people for their good." Jeremiah himself, naturally and commendably enough, is prompted to cry on their behalf. But doubtless they themselves also urge the prophet's intercession. 2. *Fasting.* Outward and visible humiliation; such attire and such attitudes assumed as were congruous with the cry of vers. 7—9. All this was easy enough without any humbling or chastening of the heart. Fasting is too often followed by feasting. For a little while the fleshly comforts of life are superstitiously put aside; but there is the full purpose of resuming them, and making up for lost time. 3. *Burnt offerings and oblations.* The people insulted Jehovah by heaping before him the carcases of slain beasts. An idol was best served, according to the teaching of its priests, by those who made the

largest offerings at its shrine. All these doings only emphasized the disobedience of the people. They were very diligent in giving what Jehovah did not want, vainly thinking it might stand in place of what he imperatively required. When God asks us for repentance and obedience, it is the merest trifling both with his expectations and our interests to bring some unusual demonstration of will-worship. Let quality, not quantity, be the first thing. A little of the right is better than the utmost profession of the wrong. A little of the right, firmly rooted, will increase and strengthen with wonderful rapidity.

III. THE SHAPE OF THE SEVERITIES. Sword, famine, and pestilence are coming; coming, plainly set forth as the consuming agents of Jehovah. When Jehovah makes men his *sword*, it is vain to contend against them. The history of God's people had often shown how a few could be victorious and a multitude vanquished. It is he who can put strength into the arm that wields the sword or take that strength away. These invading armies were, of course, not conscious that Jehovah was wielding them in this way. They had their own selfish aims, which God could subordinate and mould toward his own ends. It is the worst of blasphemy for the leader of an army to talk as if he were going on God's errands. Attila was not the scourge of God because he said so, though God may have used him in ways beyond Attila's power to conceive. *Famine.* Here was a destroyer which there was no guarding against. The sword could at least be drawn against the sword, however vain the result. But who could stop a general famine? And even supposing a few rich men could store up grain for a while, there was a third foe in reserve—the *pestilence.* David had his choice as to which of the three dread agents he would prefer; but here they all come together. God has a variety of weapons, and his enemies cannot evade them all. How wise men would be if, instead of vainly trying to shut out alike Divine Law and penalty, they would at once and for ever take up the attitude of entire submission to God! Then they would be defended indeed. By sword, famine, and pestilence, these rich men of Judah and Jerusalem were for ever separated from their ill-gotten gains. But "who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Assuredly not famine or sword," says the apostle; nor pestilence either, he would have added, if he had thought of it. We may be persuaded that nothing has power to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The mischief is that we reject the protections of that love and all other benefits flowing from it.—Y.

Vers. 13—16.—*The peculiar doom of the false prophets.* I. THE SIN OF THE PROPHETS. That they are found liars is, comparatively speaking, a small part of their offence. Their lie is productive of so much that adds to the peril of the position—so much that is peculiarly insulting to Jehovah. Their sin and the punishment of it were not unlike the sin and punishment of Ananias and Sapphira. Ananias and Sapphira were smitten, not because they had lied, but because they had lied against the Holy Ghost. So with these false prophets here; they prophesied falsely; but that in itself might not have brought a peculiar doom upon them. The offence lay in this, that the false prophecy came at a time when it was peculiarly obnoxious to Jehovah. It was not a distant danger that these false prophets made light of, but one close to the door. The prophet's difficulties, arising from the natural disposition of his auditors, were already great enough. No false prophet was needed to come in with his contradiction. It must also be remembered that there was a peculiarly insulting sin in that these men told their lies *as prophets.* What a dreadful thing for a man to go forth with "Thus saith Jehovah" in his mouth, when the words are the deceit of his own heart! This expression, "the deceit of their heart," seems to suggest the possibility that in some instances these false prophets were not deliberate liars, but were themselves deluded by a fanatical exaggeration of patriotism. Nevertheless, even so, the sin was none the less, for the spirits of the prophets were subject to the prophets. We had need be very sure that we are duly commissioned when we undertake to speak in the Name of God, else we may land ourselves in most humiliating exposures, and come to a most admonitory end. Thus we come to notice—

II. HOW THE SIN OF THESE PROPHETS WAS MADE CLEAR. Jeremiah said one thing, the false prophets said the direct contrary, and at the time there seemed no means of vindicating the true prophet beyond all chance of cavil. Doubtless those who were

rightly disposed did listen and believe. Their very disposition was in itself a touchstone by which to discriminate between the false and the true; while those disposed to reject could make anything serve for an excuse. The important thing to notice is that the occasion of this great sin was seized upon to predict in due time a terrible, an indisputable, revelation of the sin. Thus an opportunity came for adding detail and emphasis to the prophecy already given. What could not be made plain at the moment would be made abundantly plain hereafter. Sword and famine were not only *certain*, they were ***near***; coming within the lives of these living men, who would see these very false prophets die by the sword and famine which they had sneered at as impossible. Those who during *life* had told so many inexpressibly mischievous *falsehoods* with their lips, were made the instruments, their own will not being at all consulted, of uttering most impressive truth in their death. God and his truth and his true prophets and faithful witnesses can wait. Time is increasingly on the side of all truth, while false prophets are condemned out of their own mouths.

III. THE DECEIVED AUDITORS SUFFER JUST AS MUCH AS THE DECEIVING SPEAKERS. The people were not at liberty to plead contradictions in the messages as a ground for continued inaction in the matter of repentance. Such a plea was certain to be seized on, but, while it might help to drug the conscience, it availed nothing to lighten the judgments which Jehovah was bringing on his unfaithful people. That God who is to be reckoned true, though such reckoning makes every man a liar, has assuredly not left himself without ample witness. False prophets can be tested at once by the heart of each individual to whom they appeal, although their exposure before the whole universe may not come for many ages. God gives us for our own sakes the present means of guarding against them. As to his Name and glory, we may be sure he will vindicate them in his own time and way.—**Y.**

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XV.

Vers. 1—9.—Second rejection of Jeremiah's intercession; awfulness of the impending judgment.

Ver. 1.—**Though Moses and Samuel, etc.** It is a mere supposition which is here made; there is no allusion to any popular view of the intercession of saints (see my note on Isa. lxiii. 16). If even a Moses or a Samuel would intercede in vain, the case of the Judahites must indeed be desperate. For these were the nearest of all the prophets to Jehovah, and repeatedly prayed their people out of grievous calamity (comp. Ps. xcix. 6). Jeremiah had already sought to intercede for his people (see on ch. vii. 16). **Cast them out of my sight**; rather, *Dismiss them from my presence.* The people are represented as praying or sacrificing in the fore courts of the temple.

Ver. 2.—**Such as are for death, etc.**; a sternly ironical answer. Death, sword, famine, captivity, lie in wait for them in every possible road. "Death" here means "pestilence" (comp. "the black *death*" in the Middle Ages), as in ch. xviii. 21; Job xxvii. 15. Similar combinations of evils occur in ch. xliii. 11; Ezek. xiv. 21; xxxiii. 27.

Ver. 3.—**Appoint**; *i.e.* give full power to them as my vicegerents (ch. i. 10). **Four kinds**; literally, *families*; i.e. kinds of things. The first-mentioned has reference to the living; the remaining ones to the unburied corpses (ch. xiv. 16; xix. 7; xxxiv. 20). **To tear**; rather, *to drag along.*

Ver. 4.—**Cause them to be removed into**; rather, *make them a shuddering unto.* So in the Deuteronomic curses for disobedience (Deut. xxviii. 25).

Ver. 5.—**For who shall have pity?** or, *for who* can *have pity*, etc.? (the imperfect in its *potential* sense). The horror which will seize upon the spectators will effectually preclude pity. **Who shall go aside?** As one turns aside to call at a house. So Gen. xix. 2 (literally, *turn aside*, not "turn in").

Ver. 6.—**Will I stretch**; literally, *I stretched*—the perfect of prophetic certitude (so in next verse). **I am weary with repenting**; *i.e.* with recalling my (conditional) sentence of punishment (see on ch. xviii. 1—10).

Ver. 7.—**The gates of the land.** The phrase might mean either the cities in general (comp. Micah v. 5; Isa. iii. 26) or the fortresses commanding the entrance into the land (comp. Nah. iii. 13). The context decides in favour of the latter view. Ewald's explanation, "borders of the earth" (*i.e.* the most distant countries), seems less natural. **I will bereave them, etc.** The proper object of the verb is **my people** (personified as

a mother). The population are to fall in war (comp. the same figure in Ezek. v. 17). The tense is the perfect of prophetic certitude; literally, *I have bereaved*, etc.

Ver. 8.—**To me**; *i.e.* at my bidding. It is the dative of cause. **Against the mother of the young men**; rather, *upon . . . young man*. The widow has lost her husband, the mother her son, so that no human power can repel the barbarous foe. The word rendered "young man" is specially used for "young warriors," *e.g.* ch. xviii. 21; xlix. 26; li. 3. Others, following Rashi, take "mother" in the sense of "metropolis," or "chief city" (see Authorized Version, margin), in which case "young man" must be connected with the participle rendered "a spoiler;" but though the word has this sense in 2 Sam. xx. 19, it is there coupled with "city," so that no doubt can exist. Here the prophet would certainly not have used the word in so unusual a sense without giving some guide to his meaning. The rendering adopted above has the support of Ewald, Hitzig, and Dr. Payne Smith. **At noonday**; at the most unlooked-for moment (see on ch. vi. 4). **I have caused him**, etc.; rather, *I have caused pangs and terrors to fall upon her suddenly*.

Ver. 9.—**That hath borne seven**; a proverbial expression (comp. 1 Sam. ii. 5; Ruth iv. 15). **Her sun is gone down**, etc. The figure is that of an eclipse (comp. Amos ix. 9). **She hath been ashamed**, etc.; rather, *she is ashamed*, etc. Ewald supposes the sun, which is sometimes feminine in Hebrew, to be the subject (comp. Isa. xxiv. 23); but the view of the Authorized Version is more probable. The shame of childlessness is repeatedly referred to (comp. ch. l. 12; Isa. liv. 4; Gen. xvi. 4; xxx. 1, 23).

Vers. 10—21.—These verses come in very unexpectedly, and are certainly not to be regarded as a continuation of the preceding discourse. They describe some deeply pathetic moment of the prophet's inner life, and in all probability belong to a later period of the history of Judah. At any rate, the appreciation of the next chapter will be facilitated by reading it in close connection with ver. 9 of the present chapter. But the section before us is too impressive to be cast adrift without an attempt to find a place for it in the life of the prophet. The attempt has been made with some plausibility by a Jewish scholar, Dr. Grätz, who considers the background of these verses to be the sojourn of Jeremiah at Ramah, referred to in ch. xl. 1, and groups them, therefore, with another prophecy (ch. xxxi. 15—17), in which Ramah is mentioned by name as the temporary abode of the Jewish captives. We are told in ch. xl. 4, 5, that Jeremiah had the choice given him of either going to Babylon with the exiles, or dwelling with the Jews who were allowed to remain under Gedaliah the governor. He chose, as the narrative in ch. xl. tells us, to stay with Gedaliah; but the narrative could not, in accordance with the reserve which characterizes the inspired writers, reveal the state of mind in which this difficult choice was made. This omission is supplied in the paragraph before us. Jeremiah, with that lyric tendency peculiar to him among the prophets, gives a vent to his emotion in these impassioned verses. He tells his friends that the resolution to go to Gedaliah may cost him a severe struggle. He longs for rest, and in Babylon he would have more chance of a quiet life than among the turbulent Jews at home. But he has looked up to God for guidance, and, however painful to the flesh, God's will must be obeyed. He gives us the substance of the revelation which he received. The Divine counsellor points out that he has already interposed in the most striking manner for Jeremiah, and declares that if he will devote himself to the Jews under Gedaliah, a new and fruitful field will be open to him, in which, moreover, by Divine appointment, no harm can happen to him. Whether this is really the background of the paragraph must remain uncertain. In a case of this kind, we are obliged to call in the help of the imagination, if the words of the prophet are to be realized with any degree of vividness. There are some great difficulties in the text, and apparently one interpolation (vers. 13, 14 being in all probability an incorrect copy of ch. xvii. 3, 4).

Ver. 10.—**Woe is me, my mother!** This is one of those passages (comp. Introduction) which illustrate the sensitive and shrinking character of our prophet.

> "If his meek spirit erred, opprest
> That God denied repose,
> What sin is ours, to whom Heaven's rest
> Is pledged to heal earth's woes?"
> (Cardinal Newman, in 'Lyra Apostolica,' lxxxviii.).

I have neither lent on usury, etc.; a speaking figure to men of the ancient world, to whom, as Dr. Payne Smith remarks, "the relations between the money-lender and the debtor were the most fruitful source of lawsuits and quarrellings."

Ver. 11.—**The Lord said.** The prophets are usually so tenacious of the same formulæ that even their slight deviations are noteworthy. "The Lord said," for "Thus saith the Lord," occurs only here and in ch. xlvi. 25 (where, however, the phrase has possibly been detached by mistake from the preceding verse). **It shall be well with thy remnant**; rather, *I have loosed thee for (thy) good*,

or, *thy loosing* (*shall be*) *for* (*thy good*), according as we adopt the reading of the Hebrew text or that of the margin, which differs in form as slightly as it is possible to do. If we accept the historical setting proposed by Grätz for this paragraph, the reference will be to the "loosing" of Jeremiah from his chains mentioned in ch. xl. 4. The rendering given here is, however, only a probable one; it is in conformity with the Aramaic usage of the verb (the Targum uses it in this sense in ch. xl. 4), and is supported by its suitability to the context and, philologically, by the fact of the growing influence of Aramaic upon Hebrew. Gesenius, in his anxiety to keep close to the native use of the root, produces a rendering (of the Hebrew marginal reading) which does not suit the context, viz. "I afflict thee for (thy) good." Jeremiah does not complain of being afflicted by God, but that all the world is against him; Ewald, comparing a different Aramaic verb to that appealed to above, renders, "I strengthen thee," etc., which is adopted by Keil, but does not accord with the second half of the verse so well as the rendering adopted. The Authorized Version follows the Targum, the Vulgate, Aquila, Symmachus, Rashi, and Kimchi, assuming that *shērīth* is contracted from *sh'ērīth* (as in 1 Chron. xii. 38), and that "remnant" is equivalent to "remnant of life." But, though the sense is not unacceptable (comp. vers. 20, 21), the form of expression is unnatural; we should have expected *akhārīth'ka*, "thy latter end" (comp. Job viii. 7). **I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well.** This expression is as difficult as the preceding, and our rendering of it will depend entirely on our view of the context. If "the enemy" means the Chaldeans, the Authorized Version will be substantially correct. Rashi has already mentioned the view that the phrase alludes to Nebuzaradan's respectful inquiry as to the wishes of Jeremiah in ch. xl. 2—5. In this case, the literal rendering is, *I will cause the enemy to meet thee* (*as a friend*); comp. Isa. xlvii. 3; lxiv. 4. But if "the enemy" means the Jews, then we must render, *I will cause the enemy to supplicate thee*, and illustrate the phrase by the repeated applications of Zedekiah to the prophet (ch. xxi. 1, 2; xxxvii. 3; xxxviii. 14), and the similar appeal of the "captains of the forces," in ch. xlii. 1—3.

Ver. 12.—**Shall iron break, etc.?** Again an enigmatical saying. The rendering of the Authorized Version assumes that by the northern iron Jeremiah means the Babylonian empire. But the "breaking" of the Babylonian empire was not a subject which lay within the thoughts of the prophet. It was not the fate of Babylon, but his own troubled existence, and the possibility that his foes would ultimately succeed in crushing him, which disquieted this conscientious but timid spokesman of Jehovah. The Divine interlocutor has reminded him in the preceding verse of the mercy which has been already extended to him, and now recalls to his recollection the encouraging assurances given him in his inaugural vision (ch. i. 18, 19). Render, therefore, *Can one break iron, northern iron, and bronze?* The steel of the Authorized Version is evidently a slip. The Hebrew word is *n'khōsheth*, which means sometimes (*e.g.* ch. vi. 28; Deut. viii. 9; xxxiii. 25; Job xxviii. 2) copper, but more commonly bronze, since "copper unalloyed seems to have been but rarely used after its alloys with tin became known" (Professor Maskelyne). "Steel" would have been more fitly introduced as the second of the three names of metals. "Northern iron" at once suggests the Chalybes, famous in antiquity for their skill in hardening iron, and, according to classical authors (*e.g.* Stephanus the geographer), the neighbours of the Tibareni, in the country adjoining the Euxine Sea, the Tibareni being, of course, the people of Tubal, whom Ezekiel mentions (xxvii. 13) as trafficking in vessels of bronze. Any Jew, familiar with the wares of the bazaar, would at once appreciate the force of such a question as this. Even if iron could be broken, yet surely not steel nor bronze. Thus the verse simply reaffirms the original promises to Jeremiah, and prepares the way for vers. 20, 21.

Vers. 13, 14.—**Thy substance, etc.** These verses form an unlooked-for digression. The prophet has been in a state of profound melancholy, and the object of Jehovah is to rouse him from it. In vers. 11, 12, the most encouraging assurances have been given him. Suddenly comes the overwhelming declaration contained in vers. 13, 14. And when we look closely at these verses, two points strike us, which make it difficult to conceive that Jeremiah intended them to stand here. First, their contents are not at all adapted to Jeremiah, and clearly belong to the people of Judah; and next, they are repeated, with some variations, in ch. xvii. 3, 4. It should also be observed that the Septuagint (which omits ch. xvii. 1—4) only gives them here, which seems to indicate an early opinion that the passage only ought to occur once in the Book of Jeremiah, though the Septuagint translator failed to choose the right position for it. **Without price**; literally, *not for a price*. In the parallel passage there is another reading, "thy high places," which forms part of the next clause. Hitzig and Graf suppose this to be the original reading, the Hebrew

letters having been partly effaced and then misread, after which "not" was prefixed to make sense. However this may be, the present reading is unintelligible, if we compare Isa. lii. 3, where Jehovah declares that his people were sold for nothing, *i.e.* were given up entirely to the enemy, without any compensating advantage to Jehovah. **And that for all thy sins, even,** etc.; literally, *and in all thy sins and in all thy borders.* The text is certainly difficult. Externally a parallelism exists between the two halves of the clause, and one is therefore tempted to render literally. As this will not make sense, however, we are forced either to render as the Authorized Version, or to suppose that the text is not accurately preserved. The parallel passage has a different but not a more intelligible reading. Ewald omits "and" in both halves of the clause, which slightly diminishes the awkwardness. **And I will make thee to pass,** etc. The natural rendering of the Hebrew is, "And I will make thine enemies to pass," etc., which clearly cannot be the prophet's meaning. The parallel passage (ch. xvii. 4) has, "And I will make thee to serve thine enemies," etc.; and so the Septuagint, the Syriac, the Targum, and many manuscripts here. **For a fire is kindled in mine anger;** a reminiscence of Deut. xxxii. 22, suggesting that the judgment described in the Song of Moses is about to fall upon Judah.

Ver. 15.—**O Lord, thou knowest,** etc. The prophet renews his complaints. God's omniscience is the thought which comforts him (comp. ch. xvii. 6; xviii. 23; Ps. lxix. 19). But he desires some visible proof of God's continued care for his servant. **Visit me,** equivalent to "be attentive to my wants"—an anthropomorphic expression for the operation of Providence. **Take me not away in thy long-suffering;** *i.e.* "suffer not my persecutors to destroy me through the long-suffering which thou displayest towards them." "Take away," viz. my life (comp. Ezek. xxxiii. 4, "If the sword come and take him away"). **Rebuke;** rather, *reproach;* comp. Ps. lxix. 7 (Ps. lxix. is in the style of Jeremiah, and, as Delitzsch remarks, suits his circumstances better than those of David).

Ver. 16.—**Thy words were found.** Jeremiah here describes his first reception of a Divine revelation. Truth is like "treasure hid in a field;" he alone who seeks it with an unprejudiced mind can "find" it. But there are some things which no "searching" of the intellect can "find" (Job xi. 7; xxxvii. 23; Eccles. iii. 11; viii. 17); yet by a special revelation they may be "found" by God's "spokesmen," or prophets. This is the train of thought which underlies Jeremiah's expression here. The "words," or revelations, of Jehovah are regarded as having an objective existence in the ideal world of which God is the light, and as "descending" from thence (comp. Isa. ix. 8) into the consciousness of the prophet. So Ezek. iii. 1, "Eat that thou findest." **I did eat them;** I assimilated them, as it were (comp. Ezek. ii. 8; iii. 3). **I am called by thy name;** literally, *thy name hath been* (or, *had been*) *called upon me;* i.e. I have (or, had) been specially dedicated to thy service. The phrase is often used of Israel (see on ch. xiv. 9), and, as here applied, intimates that a faithful prophet was, as it were, the embodied ideal of an Israelite.

Ver. 17.—**In the assembly of the mockers;** rather, *of the laughers.* The serious thoughts arising out of his sacred office restrained him from taking part in the festive meetings to which his youth would naturally incline him (comp. on ch. xvi. 2). **Because of thy hand.** The Hand of Jehovah is a figurative expression for the self-revealing and irresistible power of Jehovah; it is, therefore, equivalent to the Arm of Jehovah (Isa. liii. 1), but is used in preference with regard to the divinely ordained actions and words of the prophets. Thus we are told, in the accounts of Elijah and Elisha, that "the hand of the Lord came upon" them (1 Kings xviii. 46; 2 Kings iii. 15). Such a phrase was probably at first descriptive of a completely passive ecstatic state, and was retained when ecstasies had become rare, with a somewhat laxer meaning. Isaiah uses a similar expression but once (viii. 11); Ezekiel, however, who appears to have been unusually filled with the overpowering thought of the supernatural world, is constantly mentioning "the hand of Jehovah" (see Ezek. i. 3; iii. 22; xxxvii. 1; and especially iii. 14; viii. 3). We may infer from this variation in the practice of inspired writers that, though symbolical, anthropomorphic language is not always equally necessary in speaking of Divine things, yet it cannot be entirely dispensed with, even by the most gifted and spiritual teachers. **Thou hast filled me with indignation;** rather, *thou hadst filled me.* Jeremiah was too full of his Divine message to indulge in impracticable sentimentalities. There was no thought of self when Jeremiah received his mission, nor any bitterness towards those who opposed him. His "indignation" was that of Jehovah, whose simple instrument he was (comp. ch. vi. 11, "I am full of the fury of the Lord").

Ver. 18.—**Why is my pain perpetual?** One who could honestly speak of himself in terms such as those of vers. 16, 17, seemed to have a special claim on the Divine protection. But Jeremiah's hopes have been

disappointed. His vexation is perpetual, and his wounded spirit finds no comfort. **As a liar**; rather, *as a deceitful stream.* The word "stream" has to be understood as in Micah i. 14. Many of the water-courses of Palestine are filled with a rushing torrent in the winter, but dry in summer. Hence the pathetic complaint of Job (vi. 15). The opposite phrase to that used by Jeremiah is "a perennial stream" (Amos v. 24). The force of the passage is increased if we read it in the light of Dr. Grätz's hypothesis.

Ver. 19.—**If thou return,** etc. Most commentators regard these words as containing a gentle rebuke to Jeremiah for his doubts respecting God's care of him. It may be questioned, however, whether such passing doubts could be described as a turning away from Jehovah. If the word "return" is to be interpreted in a spiritual sense, we must surely conclude that the people is addressed (comp. ch. iii. 12; iv. 1). But this does not agree with the context. Hence Grätz's view seems very plausible, that the reference is to the proposal that Jeremiah should place himself under the protection of Gedaliah (comp. ch. xl. 5, "Go back also to Gedaliah," etc.). **Then will I bring thee again**; viz. into the right relation to me, so as to be my minister (Keil). But by altering one of the vowel-points (which form no part of the text), on the authority of the Septuagint, we get a more satisfactory sense, *I will give thee a settled place.* The verb must in any case be coupled with the following one. Jeremiah longs for a quiet home, only as supplying the conditions of prophetic activity. **Thou shalt stand before me.** The phrase is taken from the wont of slaves to stand in their masters' presence, waiting for commands. It is also applied to courtiers (Prov. xxii. 29) and royal councillors (1 Kings xii. 6), to angels (Luke i. 19) and to prophets (1 Kings xvii. 1; 2 Kings iii. 14). Jeremiah was by God's will to find a new and important mission to the Jews with Gedaliah. **If thou take forth the precious from the vile,** etc. The metaphor is derived from metallurgy (comp. ch. vi. 27—30). The prophet is compared to a smelter. By the fervour of his inspired exhortations, he seeks to draw away from the mass of unbelievers all those who are spiritually capable of better things. The "vine-dressers and husbandmen," whom Nebuzar-adan had left after the capture of Jerusalem, though outwardly "the poor of the land," might yet be ennobled by the word and example of Jeremiah. [Some explain "the precious" and "the vile" differently, taking the former to be the pure Word of God (comp. Ps. xii. 6; Prov. xxx. 5), the latter the base, human elements which are apt to be mixed with the Divine message (comp. ch. xxiii. 28). But was it not the very fidelity of Jeremiah which exposed him to the persecutions of which he has been complaining? Others suppose an inward purification of Jeremiah himself to be intended, "the vile" being those human infirmities of which he had just given evidence, as opposed to "the precious," *i.e.* the spiritual impulses which come from above. But is not such an explanation too evangelical, too Pauline, for this context?] **Thou shalt be as my mouth.** For devoting himself to this possible "mustard seed" of a better and holier people, the prophet should be rewarded (1) by close prophetic intercourse with his God, and (2), as the next clause states, by a moral victory over his opponents. "Mouth" for "prophet," as Exod. iv. 16 (comp. Exod. vii. 1). **Let them return unto thee,** etc.; rather, *they shall return unto thee, but thou shalt not return unto them.* They shall come over to thy side, and thou shalt not need to make humiliating advances to them.

Ver. 20.—**And I will make thee,** etc.; a solemn confirmation of the promises in ch. i. 18, 19.

Ver. 21.—**Out of the hand of the wicked,** etc. The "wicked" (literally, *evil*) and the "terrible" may be the banditti, composed of desperate patriots, who ultimately assassinated Gedaliah (ch. xli. 1—3).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*Various destinies of punishment.* I. PUNISHMENT WILL BE ASSIGNED AS A DEFINITE DESTINY. It is not casual. It cannot be evaded. It is decidedly appointed and inflexibly executed. The destiny it involves, though not original but a consequence of voluntary actions, is as certain as if it were in accordance with a primary law of nature (Gal. vi. 7, 8).

II. PUNISHMENT WILL BE ASSIGNED IN A VARIETY OF DESTINIES. All the wicked will not suffer alike. There will be various forms of penalty and various degrees of suffering. Some are appointed to the painful death of the plague, some to the sudden death of the sword, some not to death at all but to exile. Punishment will be various, (1) because men's constitutions, capacities, and susceptibilities are various, so that the

form of suffering which is suitable for one may not be suitable for another; and (2) because guilt varies in degree (Luke xii. 47, 48).

III. PUNISHMENT WILL BE ASSIGNED TO ALL THE GUILTY WITHOUT EXCEPTION. They may be numerous, yet some penalty will be found for all. The variety of destinies might suggest that among them some would find a way of escape, but, alas! they are all penal. This variety will ever secure the punishment of all. They who escape one form of punishment will only fall into another. Some hope to elude justice because their case is very exceptional. But exceptional punishment is found for exceptional crime.

IV. PUNISHMENT WILL BE SEVERE IN ALL CASES. There is a choice of destinies, but the list is given with somewhat of irony. How terrible is the mildest fate! All future punishment must be inexpressibly awful (Heb. x. 31). Therefore let us not delude ourselves with hoping that ours will be of the milder kind, but seek deliverance from the certain fearful doom of sin in the forgiving mercy of God in Christ.

Ver. 6.—*God weary of repenting.* I. GOD OFTEN APPEARS TO REPENT. He seems to repent of his merciful intentions when the conduct of men has called forth his righteous indignation—even repenting that he had ever made men (Gen. vi. 6), and to repent of his wrathful intentions when his children repent of their sins (*e.g.* Exod. xxxii. 14). Absolutely it cannot be said that God repents (1 Sam. xv. 29). He never does wrong, never errs, is never moved from reason by passion, knows the end from the beginning, and therefore never sees a new thing to modify his thoughts. Yet he acts as if he repented, *i.e.* he grieves for the sorrow he has righteously brought, and desires that it may cease as soon as possible; and he changes his action towards his children as they change their conduct towards him. This fact is not inconsistent with the essential Divine immutability. The sun does not vary in itself because, after developing a flower in moist weather, it withers it in drought. A government does not change its policy if it enters into amicable arrangements with a loyal dependency, though it was carrying out warlike measures so long as the province was in revolt. So God does not change in his own nature because his action is varied according to the varied requirements of his people. Such variation is rather a result of his essential changelessness. Righteousness, which requires the punishment of the guilty, approves of the forgiveness of the penitent; so that if the action of God did not change from wrath to mercy with the change of the guilty person to penitence, it would seem as though the nature of God had been turned aside from its essential righteousness. *Because* the sun is stationary it appears to rise and set as the earth revolves; if it did not so appear it must be moving too; and *because* God is eternally good it must seem to us, who are constantly giving occasion for differences of treatment from the hand of God, that he repents. We can only speak of God after the manner of men; therefore we say he repents.

II. GOD MAY BE WEARY OF REPENTING. Here is a second anthropomorphic expression, which corresponds to a great and terrible fact. 1. We may cease to repent of our sin; then God will cease to repent of his wrath. 2. We may sin so deeply and so persistently that he may no longer find it possible to withhold his threatened punishment. God is long-suffering; he waits for the return of his children. Though the recompense of evil-doing is due, it is deferred; God spares the guilty for the sake of the intercession of the righteous. But this cannot be for ever. We may sin away the grace of God. Though God's mercy endureth for ever the enjoyment of it by the impenitent cannot be perpetual. Eternal mercy may have to give place to eternal justice.

CONCLUSION. Consider (1) the wonderful love of God in repeatedly "repenting" of his wrathful intentions, showing that he does not desire the woe of his children, but does all that is possible to avert it; (2) the great sin of persisting in impenitence after God has shown so wonderful a love; and (3) the danger that God may be weary with repenting, and therefore the folly and presumption of relying upon our present immunity for future safety.

Ver. 9.—*Sunset at noon.* A premature ending of any human affairs may be compared to sunset at noon.

I. THIS IS A COMMON OCCURRENCE. A nation suddenly collapses; a sovereign is overthrown in the height of his power; a life is cut off in middle age. How often do we see these things!

II. THIS IS AN UNNATURAL OCCURRENCE. No such event could occur in the physical world. Therefore it proves that the human world is deranged.

III. THIS IS A CALAMITOUS OCCURRENCE. National modifications may be both peaceful and profitable. Empires are slowly welded together, colonies gradually assume powers and rights of independence, internal reforms are quietly effacing the old order. To the individual natural death in old age is painless. It is the violent and premature end that causes disaster.

IV. THIS IS AN OCCURRENCE RESULTING FROM ERROR OR WRONG-DOING. We cannot say that the cause is always to be traced immediately to the sufferers. With nations it may be generally so, but not with individuals. But still a law of morality, of social order of nature, has been broken, if not by the sufferers still by some agent.

V. THIS IS AN OCCURRENCE THAT MAY COME AS AN ACT OF DIVINE JUDGMENT. It is not universally so, particularly in regard to individuals. But it often is the case. Thus it was with the Jews, with Rome, in the dark ages, etc. Therefore let us beware of presuming on the apparent distance of the day of judgment.

Ver. 15.—*The prayer of the persecuted.* I. THE GROUNDS OF HIS PLEA. 1. *A confessor's fidelity.* Jeremiah was suffering for God's sake. This plea implies (1) innocence; (2) a special claim for God's help. He who can urge such a plea is the heir of one of the great beatitudes (Matt. v. 10). It is important to note that the promise of Christ rests, not on the mere fact of persecution, nor even on unjust persecution, but on persecution for righteousness' sake. The martyr is honoured, not for his suffering, but for his fidelity. 2. *The knowledge of God.* "O Lord, thou knowest." When men misjudge, God knows all. They who are cruelly maligned by men may take refuge in the fact that God knows their innocence. It is better to have his approval in face of a world's scorn and hate, than the flattery of the world for false merits together with the anger of the all-seeing God. How happy to be in such a case that we can fearlessly appeal to God's knowledge of our fidelity in suffering! Too often trouble is consciously deserved. 3. *The long-suffering of God.* The best man can but ask for God's mercy. Often has that been sought in the past. Yet God is not weary of hearing his helpless children's repeated cries. "His mercy endureth for ever."

II. THE OBJECTS OF HIS PRAYER. 1. *To be remembered by God.* It is something to know that God thinks of us. His sympathy is a great consolation. The traveller in the desert is not utterly alone when he calls to mind those dear ones at home, in whose memory he is constantly cherished, and who are therefore with him in spirit, while the unfortunate man who is buried in a crowded city, neglected and forgotten by his old friends, is essentially lonely and desolate. God's remembrance of us is the prelude to his active help. He remembers "for good." If Christ remembered the dying malefactor when he came into his kingdom, that fact carried with it the assurance that the poor man should be with Christ in paradise (Luke xxiii. 42, 43). 2. *To be visited by God.* Our consolation is not in a pitying though absent God, but in an abiding presence and a close communion. If God visits he will come in power to save. 3. *To be avenged of his enemies.* This was a natural desire, considering that (1) the prophet was in the midst of his distresses,—it is easy to judge coolly from the outside when we are not feeling the oppression of cruel persecution; (2) he lived in Old Testament times; and (3) he did not desire to execute vengeance himself but appealed only to the great Judge. For us Christians the right prayer is, not for harm to come upon our enemies, but for their forgiveness, as Christ and Stephen prayed. Still, we may rightly seek for the overthrow of wicked powers, the frustration of iniquitous schemes, and the just and necessary punishment of persistent evil-doers. 4. *For life to be spared.* Jeremiah does not ask for triumph, for comfort and ease, for liberation from his arduous lifelong task, but simply for life. The love of life is natural. Men have work to do, a mission to fulfil, and it is right to desire to have time to complete this. Others were benefited by the life of Jeremiah. He was the prophet of his age, and a voice speaking for all ages. It is our duty to seek to escape persecution if we can do so honourably, that we may continue to serve God and work for the good of mankind (Matt. x. 23). Courting a martyr's death is practically equivalent to committing suicide out of personal vanity, and much the same thing as falling under the second of Christ's temptations. Yet if

martyrdom is unavoidable without unfaithfulness, we may honour God and benefit men more by our death than by our life.

Ver. 16.—*The words of God found and eaten.* I. THE WORDS OF GOD REQUIRE TO BE FOUND. They are not emblazoned on the face of the world that the most careless may not miss them. They are hidden treasures to be dug for, pearls of great price to be sought after. Divine truth in nature is only discoverable after thoughtful observation and reflection. The prophets were especially commissioned to toil in deep mines of spiritual thought. Revelation was born in them with labour, fasting, watching, praying. But the words of God are not so hidden that they cannot be discovered by the earnest and prayerful seeker after truth. He that seeks *shall* find (Matt. vii. 8). Many honest, earnest men pass through a season of doubt, but few such remain hopeless sceptics all their lives. Of those who never find the light probably some are suffering from some moral or intellectual perversity which distorts their vision, and others are not content to trust to the measure of light that has been given to them, and remain restless and questioning because they desire satisfaction in a direction wherein it cannot yet be afforded. But so long as all such men do not convert doubt into settled unbelief, and are not satisfied with doubt, we may be assured that ultimately the Father of lights will dispel the darkness that now troubles their souls.

II. THE WORDS OF GOD ARE FOOD. Truth is food for the soul. Christ, the "Word made flesh," is the "Bread of life." Truth is not simply revealed to amuse our curiosity; it is intended to feed our starving souls. The object of relevation is practical. The result of rightly using revelation is seen in an increase of spiritual vitality, in refreshment, heightened energy and growth in the inner life. If the words of God have not attained this end, they have failed of their object. They are food because they are not empty breath but the vehicles of vital truths—of spirit and life (John vi. 63). God is in his own words. They are inspired words. With the spoken words we receive the life-giving Spirit.

III. THE WORDS OF GOD MUST BE EATEN TO PROFIT US. It is not enough that they are spoken, heard, understood, believed, remembered, admired; they must be eaten. 1. We must *apply* them to ourselves. The starving man gains nothing by looking at food through a shop-window. The external intellectual study of truth is profitless to the soul. We must bring it to bear upon our own circumstances—hear the voice of God speaking directly to us and in regard to our immediate conduct. 2. We must *meditate* over the words of God. Food must be masticated and digested. Truth must be analyzed, ideas separated and compared, "inwardly digested," hidden in the soul and quietly thought over. Our common habit is to treat it too superficially and hastily. 3. We must *abstract the vital ideas* from the dry husk of words. Words are not profitable so long as they are regarded from the outside as mere language. We must break the shell and get at the kernel, casting aside the flesh that profiteth nothing and assimilating the spirit that quickeneth.

IV. THE WORDS OF GOD BRING JOY WHEN THEY ARE FOUND AND EATEN. To some they appear to be dull sayings, to some stern utterances of law, to some harsh messages of judgment. This is because they are not properly applied. They must first be truly found and eaten—applied, meditated on, spiritually assimilated. Then they lead to joy, for: 1. All truth is essentially noble, beautiful, and glorious. 2. Even the darker truth is wholesome as a warning, like nauseous medicine that cures pain and restores the serenity of health. 3. The highest truth is a revelation of the love of God—a gospel of good will to men.

V. THE SECRET OF THE JOY AND PROFIT OF GOD'S WORDS IS IN THE RELATION OF THE SOUL TO GOD. Jeremiah is called by the Name of Jehovah, the God of hosts. If we are strangers to God, his words will seem distant and of little interest. We prize the words of those we love. God speaks helpful and comforting words to his own reconciled children.

Ver. 17.—*The sadness and solitude of a prophet.* I. A PROPHET'S COMMUNION WITH GOD DOES NOT PRECLUDE EARTHLY SADNESS AND SOLITUDE. Jeremiah was not plunged into grief through any unfaithfulness; he was under no shadow in regard to heavenly communications; yet he was sad and solitary. 1. Consider the *sadness*. While we are

in this world we suffer with it and from its action upon us, even though we may be living very near to God. Christ was a man of sorrows; he sighed and wept and groaned in spirit. It is not sinful to grieve. It is not a proof of unbelief. Faith should engender patience, resignation, peace, and hope; but it cannot destroy natural sorrow. It would not be pious but simply unnatural for the Christian mother not to be wrung with grief at the death of her child. 2. Consider the *solitude*. A good man will not be wrapped up in himself, for out of the love of God springs naturally the love of man. Godliness rouses human sympathy, and this inclines to sociability. So Christ was remarkable for his social habits. Yet there may be an inevitable solitude, and a solitude which is good both for self and for others. The more a good man sympathizes for his brother men the less can he sympathize with them when their conduct is wicked.

II. A PROPHET'S COMMUNION WITH GOD MAY LEAD TO EARTHLY SADNESS AND SOLITUDE. Jeremiah was sad and solitary because he was filled with Divine indignation. His was no atrabiliar moroseness, no theatrical Byronic self-pity. The prophet's sorrow and solitude were reflections of the grief of God for his people's sin and the aloofness of God produced by their wanderings from fidelity. 1. A prophet's communion with God will induce *sorrow for the world's sin and wretchedness*. Jeremiah was a young man. The scenes of mirth which he shunned may have been pure, innocent, and naturally attractive; but his vision of the thought and heart of God made him look behind this superficial joy to the wretchedness it sought to cover, and then it seemed but a mockery to him. 2. This will lead to a *separation from the world*. It will cause a perpetual separation from the spirit of the world as far as that is earthly and sensual, and at times a complete withdrawal to solitude. The Christian is to live in the world as its salt, its light, its leaven of righteousness, and not to flee to the wilderness, selfishly cultivating his own soul for heaven, while he leaves his task undone and his fellow-men in hopeless sin and ruin. But he will meet with occasions for solitude and scenes from which he must withdraw himself, and sometimes feel an inner sense of loneliness as he moves among the gay crowds, since he is a pilgrim and stranger, a citizen of another country, possessed by thoughts and swayed by motives quite outside those of worldly life. Thus Christ, in character and outward habit the most social of men, was in inner life and in secret thought the most lonely. The Christian has a life which is "hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3).

Ver. 19.—*A wide recognition of the good without compromise with the evil.* Jeremiah is bidden to return from his solitude to his mission among his people, when he will be owned and encouraged by God if he will see the goodness that still lingers among them, and yet not enter into any unrighteous compromise with the wicked ways of the multitude of them.

I. WE SHOULD EXERCISE A WIDE RECOGNITION OF THE GOOD IN ALL THINGS—take out the precious from the vile. The gold-washer may find but a grain of gold in a ton of gravel; yet he will search diligently for it, and treasure it when he finds it. Carelessness and uncharitableness lead to an unjust, wholesale repudiation of what is no doubt largely corrupt. But it is not right to judge of things thus "in the lump." 1. Apply the principle to *persons*. Because ninety-nine men out of a company of a hundred are guilty, it is grossly iniquitous to condemn the whole hundred—the one innocent man with the rest. Jeremiah was directed to look out for the pious remnant among the mass of the unfaithful people. We are too ready to ignore the existence of the seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Goodness should be recognized in bad society, in heathen nations, in corrupt Christian communities, in questionable avocations. We should beware of sweeping condemnations of a whole class; *e.g.* of actors, of publicans, etc. 2. Apply the principle to *religious systems*. Few are wholly good; but few are wholly bad. The dross and precious metal are mixed, though in varying degrees, in all of them. The various Church systems of Christendom partake of this mixed character. Most Churches have some peculiarly precious ideas to which it seems to be their mission each severally to testify. It is well if we have the insight to seize on these, and the charity to begrudge none of their value because of the error, the superstition, or the perversion with which they may be associated. Thus, not by an amorphous eclecticism which can minister to no deep, organic unity of life, but by a genuine assimilating power, we should learn to gather from all sources the good of

spiritual thought. The same process should be observed in dealing with non-Christian religions. Beneath a vast heap of the vile a few glittering gems of precious merit may be found in the Talmud, and also in the Zend-Avesta, in the Koran, in the religious writings of Greece, India, China, etc. 3. Apply the principle to *life generally.* Take the precious from the vile in literature, in conversation, in social usage, in recreation, in politics. Discriminate in all these things. Do not reject the whole of any of them, even if the larger part may be bad, but select the pure and good and reject the evil.

II. WE SHOULD MAINTAIN A STOUT REFUSAL TO COMPROMISE WITH THE EVIL IN ANYTHING. Jeremiah is not to sacrifice principle for the sake of any advantage. He is not to embrace the vile for the sake of the precious, but to separate the two. He is not to yield his position of truth and right for the sake of winning the friendship of his neighbours, but patiently to expect them to come over to him. It is the very love of truth that should make us welcome it in the most unlikely quarters; but if we go on to receive the error that is closely associated with it, we at once become unfaithful to the very motive of our search. The silver is useless so long as the dross is preserved with it. The largest charity cannot sanction any compromise with evil. Compromise belongs to the region of expediency, not to that of truth and righteousness. It is a mistake to conciliate our enemies by yielding up our fortress. If we abandon the essential mysteries of Christianity for the sake of winning over our opponents, we are really only giving them the victory. Should we come to terms, this is at best on their grounds, and the peace we ratify is no record of a victory for Christ. In the end the policy of compromise fails. It indicates weakness and leaves no decided position about which to rally. We must dare to be firm to our principles, and wait patiently till the world comes round to them. This was how Christ acted. If we eagerly recognize the good in everything and earnestly desire to take forth the precious from the vile, we shall find our uncompromising fidelity to principle resting on a firmer and safer basis than if we are narrowly jealous of all good outside our own little circle of notions and habits.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Sins for which saintly intercession cannot avail.* Moses is spoken of as an intercessor in Exod. xvii. 11; xxxii. 11; Numb. xiv. 13; Ps. cvi. 23: Samuel in 1 Sam. vii. 8; viii. 6; xii. 16—23; xv. 11; Ps. xcix. 6. Noah, Daniel, and Job are mentioned similarly (Ezek. xiv. 14). It is, then, in their special intercessory character that these fathers are referred to. At the time when their intercessions took place they were the leaders and representatives of Israel, and because of their saintliness they had favour with God. But the sins for which Judah and Jerusalem are now to be punished are by this reference declared of a more heinous description than any that took place in those days. It is a mere supposition which is made, evidently no description of the normal relation of glorified saints to Jehovah, but simply a hypothetical statement as to what they, in their earthly capacity, would have failed to do.

I. THE INTERCESSIONS OF RIGHTEOUS MEN AVAIL MUCH. Many a time in the wilderness had Moses stayed the impending wrath of God because of murmuring and disobedience; and this not simply because he was the civil leader of the people, but through his own saintly, high-priestly character. This is a principle of God's dealings with men. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much;" and one of the chief occupations of the Church is represented as praying for the salvation of the world and the coming of the kingdom of God. It is because such men represent the future hope of the race, being a kind of firstfruits of them that shall be saved, that they have this power. In themselves too, because of what they are, they are pleasing to God, who delights in their prayers and praises. There is something very striking and touching in this spectacle of one standing for many, and we have to think of how great has been the blessing which has been thus secured to the world through its saints. But they all appear trifling compared with that which Christ has secured through the intercession of his prayers, obedience, and sacrifice. In his case (what could scarcely be said of any saint) his intercession has a solid objective worth because of what it is in itself, and avails as a consideration with God for the cleansing of all who identify themselves with him through faith.

II. BUT THERE ARE CONDITIONS WHICH DESTROY THE EFFICACY OF SUCH INTERCESSION. Their influence is but partial and imperfect, depending as it does upon their own inadequate fulfilment of the Law and will of God. If it were a question of strict account, they themselves would not be able to stand in his presence. It is of his grace that, even for a moment, they may be said to have influence for others. And it may be said that their intercession is but provisional, and, if not followed up by the obedience of those for whom they pray, it will be followed with the more condign punishment upon the transgressors. It is a great tribute to the vicarious power possible to saints that even the most eminent of them should be quoted in such a connection. But it shows how inadequate such a mediatorship would be for the general sin of man. We may do much, each of us, to avert just judgments, to secure opportunities of salvation, and to bring the grace of God to bear upon the hearts of others; but we cannot save them by any communication of our own acceptance with God to them. They must stand or fall according to their own relation to the will of God and the person of his Son. And there are degrees of guilt which far surpass any intercession of this kind. The sin of unbelief especially, if it be unrepented of, will prevent any benefit being received. The permanent position of our souls with respect to Divine grace will depend, therefore, upon their own action or belief. Even Christ cannot save if we do not believe in his Name and obey him.—M.

Ver. 10.—*The offence of faithful preaching.* That the preaching of the gospel should stir up the evil passions of men would at first appear strange. It is the declaration of good news to them that are perishing, and an effort to restore men to happiness and peace. But that it has been accompanied with such manifestations of ill will from the beginning is sufficiently well known. The preaching of the cross has in every age been resisted and resented by the world. It is "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 23).

I. WITH WHAT THE FAITHFUL PREACHER COMPARES HIMSELF. Jeremiah says that he might have been a brawler, a dishonest debtor, or a usurer to have stirred up the strife and hatred which he experienced. As has been said, lending and borrowing cause most lawsuits. "'I have not lent nor borrowed.' My dear Jeremiah! Thou mightest have done that; that is according to the custom of the country; there would be no such noise about that" (Zinzendorf). Elijah was reproached by Ahab, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" (1 Kings xix. 17). St. Paul was persecuted. Even Christ himself was accused of stirring up sedition, and the preaching of the Word has often been accompanied by demonstrations of violence.

II. TO WHAT THIS MAY BE ATTRIBUTED. It is due chiefly to the dislike of men to the truth itself, in whatever shape presented. The natural heart is enmity against God and his Word. Care must be taken to distinguish between accidental and essential provocations of this spirit. The manner of the preacher should never be such as of itself to dispose men unfavourably towards his message. The greatest care ought to be taken to conciliate and to win. But the original hatred of men to truth must not be ignored. It exists, and will have to be reckoned with in one form or another. One man will object to it *in toto;* another to the degree of obedience which it exacts. With some the idea will be pleasing but the practice irksome. If men hated Christ, we need not suppose that they will be more amiable towards us if we are faithful.

III. CONSOLATIONS. These troubles need not afflict us if we remember, with respect to our hearers, that it is not theirs but them we desire. The worst enemies have been reconciled and the fiercest natures subdued by the power of the Word. It is well too in the midst of suffering to have the testimony of a good conscience. To him also who is faithful in the midst of opposition and hatred is that beatitude, Matt. v. 11. But perhaps the strongest consolation of all is in the fellowship of him for whose sake the opposition is experienced.—M.

Ver. 15.—"*Thou knowest it.*" There is One to whom the true prophet and saint must stand or fall. He is anxious, therefore, for his approval. He labours ever as in the great Taskmaster's eye. "Thou God seest me," which is the terror of the sinner, is the chief reward and comfort of the saint. The prophet here consoles himself—

I. BY AN APPEAL TO THE JUDGMENT OF GOD. In this connection it is as if conscience itself had been invoked. And yet, better still, if conscience should vacillate God would remain the same. In this way it is well for the best of men to test their motives by continual reference to God. There is no better way of self-examination.

II. BY A REFERENCE TO THE SYMPATHY OF GOD. The mere fact that the all-knowing One was constantly regarding his sufferings for his sake, that he had put his tears in his bottle, and that he was able to appreciate his motives, was a comfort to the prophet. If possible, this source of consolation is deepened and enlarged by the greater nearness of God in Christ. The fellow-feeling of our great High Priest and Elder Brother is real and can be depended upon from moment to moment. It is a well of salvation from which we can draw inexhaustible supplies.

III. BY COMMITTING IT TO THE DIVINE RESPONSIBILITY. It was in God's hands because it was in God's knowledge. It was not for the prophet to trouble himself as to means of retaliation. He could commit his cause to his Father. The wider issues of it, nay, even its mightiest results, were beyond his own power. What he had to do was to be faithful and trusting and diligent.—M.

Ver. 16.—*God's words a heartfelt joy.* In the midst of the prophet's sorrow this passage occurs as a relieving feature—a memory of spiritual joy. At the same time it is recalled as a consideration that will weigh with him to whom he addresses himself. It defines his entire relation to God and to Israel, and describes his claim.

I. THE WORDS OF GOD TEST AND EXHIBIT THE INWARD LOYALTY OF THE SAINT. It is not merely that a certain feeling has been excited in the mind, but that a welcome has been given to God's revelation. A profound difference is thereby instituted between the prophet and those who were opposed to him. As the psalmist cries, "Thy word have I hid in my heart," in proof of his earnestness and his love of truth, so the prophet would commend himself to God by the attitude he had assumed to the message when it was revealed to him. It is as if he had said, "I have never resisted thy Word, but ever held myself ready to utter and obey it." The test which they apply to the spiritual nature is full of dread to the unworthy; but to those whose hearts are right with God it is a satisfaction and a source of confidence. "The thoughts and intents of the heart" thereby disclosed are seen to be right and good.

II. THEY REFRESH AND STRENGTHEN HIM FOR SUFFERING AND DUTY. It is as if the prophet were drawing comfort from recollection because his present circumstances are so troublous. But many a time the Word of God comes in a time of perplexity and darkness, bringing with it comforting light. It is greedily welcomed at such seasons and is devoured as by one who has long fasted. It penetrates thereby more deeply into the spiritual nature and more radically influences the springs and motives of conduct. It comes as a distinctly supernatural aid and makes men masters of what had previously overpowered them.

III. THEY BIND HIM MORE CLOSELY TO THEIR AUTHOR. The nature which has been so affected by the words of God cannot be nor regard itself as in the same position with others. Its whole character and destiny are altered. The life is leavened by that which supports and nourishes it. The indwelling Word is a consecrating influence and withdraws men from the pursuits and fellowship of the world. In this way the saint becomes identified with his Lord; a child of grace; a worker in the same great cause; a subject of like hatred and opposition, and an heir of the same kingdom. By producing the character of holiness they inscribe the Divine Name upon the heart, and link the life and destiny of the saint with the cause of God.—M.

Vers. 19—21.—*The preacher's weakness and strength.* I. HUMAN MOTIVES OFTEN LEAD HIM ASIDE FROM THE PATH OF DUTY, ETC. The prophet is a man like other men and subject to the same passions. It is difficult for him to maintain the attitude of continual spiritual loyalty. Flesh and blood will fail and he will fall into temptations peculiar to his office. Of these he must be especially jealous, and a stricter standard of holiness should govern his conduct. Unfaithfulness in such a position will produce an exaggerated effect upon those whom he influences. His influence itself will cease to be purely spiritual, his love less certain, and his conduct less irreproachable. Deflection like this should be at once corrected, and he who "tries the reins" is especially watch-

ful over those who have to deliver his message and represent his cause. "If thou return." How instant and yet how gentle the reproof!

II. REPENTANT FIDELITY WILL BE REWARDED WITH USEFULNESS AND STRENGTH. 1. *Mediatorship*—to "stand before me." 2. *Infallibility*—"As my mouth." 3. *Irresistible power*—a "brazen wall;" "but not prevail over thee." 4. *The presence and protection of God.*—M.

Vers. 1—9.—*Fearful aspects of the Divine character.* These verses and this whole discourse reveal to us an implacable God. He will not turn away from his wrath nor be moved: 1. By the spectacle of misery presented (ch. xiv.). 2. By the remembrance of former love (ch. xiv. 8). 3. By the earnest prayers of his faithful servant (ver. 1). 4. By the prospect of more terrible miseries yet to come (ch. xiv. 17—xv. 9). Therefore—

I. INQUIRE. Why is God thus? The answer is, he will not change, because the sinner will not. "To the froward he will ever show himself froward."

II. LEARN. That while God's mercy is infinite to those who turn to him, for those who refuse there is no mercy at all.—C.

Ver. 1.—*The limits of intercessory prayer.* "Though Moses and Samuel," etc. 1. This verse seems at first sight to be in contradiction to the many Scriptures which assure us that the "effectual fervent prayers of righteous men avail much." The Bible teems with promises that God will hear when we call upon him. But here is a decided declaration that, let even the holiest and the most eminent for their intercessions stand before God in prayer, they should not avail to secure what was denied. 2. And were there only this verse, the difficulty would not be so great. But experience is continually supplying us with fresh instances in which blessings earnestly sought have yet been denied. 3. And this also in regard to spiritual things. Were it only temporal blessings God refused to give although we asked him for them, we could readily understand that, though they seemed so good in our eyes, in his they might be seen to be hurtful. We know that in such things we do *not* know what is best. But the refusal of prayer is found in regard to things that we know are good and well pleasing to God—in regard to things spiritual and eternal, *e.g.* in the prayers of parents for the conversion of their children, of teachers and pastors for those committed to their charge. 4. Hence from this verse and from such experience of rejected prayer, the sad conclusion has been drawn that, in spite of the most earnest intercession, the souls we pray for may be lost, our intercession be of no avail. For does it not say even to Jeremiah, who himself was an eminent intercessor with God, that there were yet greater than he—such as Moses and Samuel—but that if even they, etc. (cf. references for instances of their intercession). 5. And some have tried to escape the difficulty by drawing a sharp contrast between the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ and that of these men of God. They have said, had Jesus interceded, it would have been otherwise. But this is not true, for our Lord would not have interceded as Jeremiah did. He also foretold great calamities as overhanging Jerusalem and her people, but we have no record of his ever having prayed that they might not come. He sought unceasingly their eternal salvation, but he did not pray against the destruction of Jerusalem. It is not permissible, therefore, to account for the failure of such intercession as that of Jeremiah, on the ground that it is only human intercession and not that of the Son of God. 6. But before we certainly conclude that intercession for the eternal spiritual well-being of others may after all be in vain, though the intercession have been such as that of the great servants of God here spoken of, who touched the utmost limits of intercessory prayer, let us note (1) *That it was not for spiritual blessings that Jeremiah was interceding.* His piteous entreaties were "concerning the dearth" (ch. xiv. 1), that that might be removed. It was strictly a prayer for temporal mercies and deliverances. It is, therefore, unjust to conclude that intercession for things spiritual and eternal may fail because, as we well know, it may fail for things material and temporal. Note also (2) *That the utmost limits of intercession had been reached.* The prophet himself had offered no scant or insincere petition, and the intercession of these great saints of God spoken of was, we know, of the mightiest order. Before, then, we conclude that such intercession in regard to spiritual things can be of no avail, let us be

sure that such intercession has been tried. Is our own such? There may be customary and too often formal prayers offered by parents, pastors, teachers, for the spiritual good of those about them. But can we say that such prayers are mighty intercessions, like those of Moses and Samuel? If we know they have not been such, let us pause before we conclude that such intercession avails not. But in order to ascertain if our intercession has been real, let us note if we are in earnest about our own soul's salvation. If we care not for our own acceptance before God, how can we be solicitous for that of others? And are our prayers followed up by practical effort in the direction of our prayers? Do they lead us to see what can be done to secure the ends for which we pray? Or are they substitutes for such endeavour? Hence it may very often be that we ask and have not, because we ask amiss. We do not intercede in that real, believing, earnest way which alone has a right to expect the blessing it seeks. It is by no means intercession such as that of Moses and Samuel. 7. But if intercession have been such as theirs, then, though answer may be delayed, we are to believe that it will yet come. Delay is not denial. 8. Neither this verse nor experience sets aside the many promises which encourage such intercession. 9. And experience proves its worth. The Church of to-day is in the main the product of the intercession of the Church that has passed into the heavens. Instead of the fathers have risen up the children. 10. Learn, therefore, (1) if God refuse us temporal blessings, it is because he knows better than we do what is best; (2) how best to deal with transgressors God alone knows, and what his wisdom determines none may set aside; (3) that intercession for souls is well pleasing to God and full of hope, since the beloved of God have been ever distinguished for such intercession, and, above all, God's well-beloved Son.—C.

Ver. 1.—*Great intercessors.* I. SUCH ARE MENTIONED HERE. Moses, Samuel, etc. (cf. Exod. xvii. 11; xxxii. 11; Numb. xiv. 13; Ps. cvi. 23; 1 Sam. vii. 8; viii. 6; xii. 16—23; xv. 11; Ps. xc. 6; Ecclus. xlvi. 6). Noah, Daniel, and Job are mentioned in similar way (Ezek. xiv. 14), and Jeremiah himself (2 Macc. xv. 14). And there have been such oftentimes granted to nations, Churches, families (cf. Mary Queen of Scots saying that she feared John Knox's prayers more than all her enemies). And who has not known such intercessors in connection with Christian Churches—men and women whose prayers were amongst the main supports of the life, joy, and strength of those for whom they were offered?

II. THEIR VALUE IS UNSPEAKABLE. Cf. Abraham praying for Sodom. Though the cities of the plain were destroyed, yet what an amount of sin God was ready to pardon in answer to his prayer, if but the conditions which should have been so easy to fulfil had been forthcoming! And "the few names even in Sardis" (Rev. ii.), who can doubt that they, as all such do, warded off for long periods those visitations of God's anger which otherwise would have come upon that Church? And it is not only the evils from which they defend a Church, but the positive good they confer. Such power with God is ever accompanied by a consistency and sanctity of character which is blessedly attractive, inspiring, contagious; and as a magnet they gather round them a band of kindred souls, like as our Lord gathered his disciples round himself. And thus a hallowed influence is sent throughout a whole community.

III. THEIR QUALIFICATIONS. 1. *Sympathy with God.* They must see sin as God sees it—as utterly hateful and wrong. There must be no weak condoning of it or any failure to behold it in its true character. If we ask God to forgive sin, indeed, if we seek forgiveness for wrong done from a fellow-man, are we likely to be acceptable in our request if we regard him who has been wronged as not having much to complain of after all? No; he who would wish God to forgive sin must see it as God sees it, and consent to his judgment concerning it. 2. *Deep love for those for whom he intercedes.* And this cannot be created in a moment. It must be the result of much thought, labour, and pains spent upon them. When we have thus given ourselves to them, we are sure to love them. Places, persons, things, most unattractive to others are deeply loved by those who have devoted themselves to them. And all great intercessors have been such, and must be such as become so, not on the spur of the moment or from any mere movement of pity, but as the result of long and loving labour lavished for their good. 3. *Freedom from the guilt of the transgression, the pardon of which is sought.* Under the Old Testament the priest first offered atonement for himself and

then for the sins of the people. Not until he was purged from sin himself could he intercede for others. The intercessor must be one untainted with the guilt he prays to be removed. The prayer of the wicked can never aid. 4. *Experimental knowledge both of the blessings which he craves and of the sorrows and sufferings which he intercedes against.* Of our Saviour, the great Intercessor, it is said, "He himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases." He was made "in all points like unto his brethren." The joy of God's love and also, by holy sympathy, the bitterness of the dregs of that cup of which the wicked have to drink—were alike known to him. Thus, though he knew no sin, he was *made sin* for us. It was to him as if all the sin of those he so loved were his own, so intensely did its shame, its misery, its guilt, fill up his soul. And with human intercessors there must be like experience. 5. *Faith in God, which firmly holds to the belief that his love for the sinner is deeper than his hatred of the sin.* Unless we believe this we can have no hope in interceding either for ourselves or for others. Faith in the infinitude of the love of God is essential.

IV. THEIR GREAT EXEMPLAR—the Lord Jesus Christ. See how all the qualifications above named combine in him.

CONCLUSION. 1. To the sorrowful and sinful. You need a great intercessor. You have one in Christ. "Give him, my soul, thy cause to plead." 2. To the believer in Christ. Seek to become as Moses and Samuel, and, above all, as our Lord—mighty in intercession.—C.

Ver. 4.—*The sins of the fathers visited upon the children.* This verse contains an explicit declaration that such is God's rule. The calamities about to fall on Judah and Jerusalem were "because of Manasseh the son of," etc. No doubt the sins of Manasseh were flagrant in the extreme, and they were the more aggravated because he was the son of the godly Hezekiah. No doubt his reign was one of dark disgrace and disaster. The sacred writers dismiss it with a few short statements, hurrying over its long stretch of years—it was the longest reign of all the kings of Judah—as if they were (as they were) a period too melancholy and shameful to be dwelt upon. But why should we find that his guilt and sin were to fall upon those who were unborn at the time, and who therefore could have had no share therein?

I. SUCH VISITATION IS AN UNDOUBTED FACT. It is plainly declared to be a Divine rule, and that once and again (cf. Exod. xx., etc.). And apart from the Bible—in the manifest law of heredity—there is the dread fact patent to all. Workhouses, prisons, hospitals, asylums, all attest the visitation of God for the fathers' sins.

II. IT IS A GREAT MYSTERY. It is one branch of that all-pervading mystery into which all other mysteries sooner or later run up—the mystery of evil. There is nothing to be done, so far as its present solution is concerned, but to "trust," and so "not be afraid."

III. BUT NOT WITHOUT ALLEVIATIONS; *e.g.* 1. *If the sins of the fathers are visited on their descendants, yet more are God's mercies.* The sins descend to "the third and fourth generation," but the mercies to "thousands" of generations—for this is meant. 2. *The descent is not entire.* The sins come down, it is true, upon the descendants, but in their fruits rather than in their roots. A father cannot force on his child his wickedness, though he may his diseases and tendencies. 3. *The entail may be cut off* in its worst part at any moment, and very often is. Coming to Christ may not deliver me from physical suffering, but it will from sin. Grafted into Christ a new life will begin, the whole tendency of which in me and in mine is to counteract and undo the results of the former evil life. 4. *And the visitation of the fathers' sins is but rarely because of the fathers' sins only.* The descendants of the age of Manasseh did their works, and what wonder that they should inherit their woes? 5. *And it is a salutary law.* Children are a means of grace to tens of thousands of parents. "Out of the mouth of babes," etc. For, for their children's sakes, parents will exercise a watchfulness and self-restraint, will seek after God and goodness as otherwise they would never have done. The remembrance of what they will inflict on their children by virtue of this law fills them with a holy fear, as God designed it should.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Parents.* What legacy are you leaving for your children? Shall they have to curse or bless you? O father, mother, "do not sin against" your "child." 2. *Children.* What have you received? Is it a legacy of evil example, evil tendency,

evil habit? God's grace will help you to break the succession. Refuse it for yourselves, determine you will not hand it on to others. But is it a legacy of holy example, tendencies, and habits? Blessed be God if it be so. What responsibility this involves! What blessing it renders possible for you and those who come after you!—C.

Ver. 9.—*The darkened home.* "She that hath borne . . . was yet day." Perhaps in all the range of human sorrows there is none greater than that which befalls a home when the dearly beloved mother of many children, yet needing sorely her care, is early cut off. Such a piteous case is described here. The prophet, bewailing the coming calamities of his country, adopts the heartbroken language of a husband bitterly mourning the death of his wife and the mother of his many children. He seems to think of her who is gone, and all her sweetness and grace and goodness rise up before him. He thinks of their children and how they will need their mother's care, terribly need it, though never more can they have it, and his heart dies down within him. He thinks of himself and how utterly lonely his lot must be. At such times heart and mind almost give way, and faith and love Godward receive a blow beneath which they reel and sometimes never recover themselves. But this verse is as a holy angel of God, and enters that darkened home; and—

I. IT CALLS TO MEMORY WHAT THE LOST ONE WAS. Her life was as the shining of the sun—bright, cheerful, generous, inspiriting, attracting, healthful, and joy-giving to all.

II. IT DENIES NOT THE FACT WHICH IS SO BITTERLY MOURNED. Her premature death, her sun went down, etc. Nothing can alter that fact. And perhaps, as the very words indicate, circumstances of peculiar sorrow may have surrounded her death. Like her told of in this verse, "she may have breathed out her life as if in laboured sighs, expiring in heavy heart-breaths of grief." Not a calm, gradual, bright sunset, but the very reverse, the sun going down in dark clouds. The power to utter those blessed parting words of counsel and comfort taken from her, and in darkness and silence she had to wend her way to the unseen. But amid all this depth of gloom this verse—

III. SUGGESTS MOST BLESSED TRUTH. The sun of her life has not perished but shines elsewhere. We know that when the sun sinks below our horizon it has gone to gladden and bless other shores. And so with the life of the blessed dead. They all live unto God. All that in them which was so pure, so sweet, so full of the grace of God, has not perished; it is shining elsewhere, it has risen on another shore, the eternal and the blessed. And on us it shall rise again, as the sunrise follows in due time the sunset. That life is not lost but is hidden with Christ in God, and so "when he who is our life shall appear" then shall that now hidden life "appear with him in glory."—C.

Ver. 12.—*A vain contest.* "Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?" So asks the Lord God of his, at this time not simply lamenting prophet, he was rarely anything but that, but also his complaining prophet. And as we read these verses with which the striking inquiry contained in this verse is connected, we cannot help feeling that his lamentations become him far more than his complaints. Still, who are we, to criticize a great hero of the faith such as Jeremiah undoubtedly was? These verses, from the tenth onwards, are no doubt on a lower, a less spiritual and less self-forgetful level than that which the common strain of his prophecies and prayers maintain. It will be seen that these verses come at the close of a long and most earnest appeal addressed by him to God on behalf of his countrymen. They were suffering fearfully from the dearth of which the opening of the fourteenth chapter tells. Now, all this was then present before the prophet's mind, and these chapters record the expostulations, the pathetic appeals, and the almost agonized prayers which he pours forth on behalf of his suffering land and people. He makes full confession of their sins, but pleads the all-merciful Name of the Lord, and when that did not suffice, he urges the evil teaching that they had received from their prophets and that therefore they may be held guiltless or far less guilty, and when that plea also was rejected he returns to his confessions and earnest entreaties; but it is all of no avail. At the

opening of this chapter God says, "Though Moses and Samuel"—men who had once and again proved themselves mighty intercessors for the people, yet even if they—"stood before me, my mind could not be toward this people." The crimes of Manasseh, King of Judah, that king who reigned so long, so disgracefully, and with such disastrous results over Judah, had never been repented of, and never really forsaken. They were rampant still, and therefore the Lord declares this judgment which he had sent upon them must go on—no prayers of his faithful servant could avail to stay its execution. Upon this the prophet pours out a piteous lamentation over the woes of his people, and then, turning to his own position, he complains bitterly of the hatred which was felt towards him by those whom he had sought to bless. "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!" He had been no usurer nor fraudulent debtor, "yet every one," he cries, "curses me." Then to him the Lord replies, promising him deliverance in the time of evil, and asks the question, "Shall iron break . . . steel?" The ancients knew comparatively little of the manufactures of iron and steel. Amongst the Israelites it was very coarsely wrought, but the best iron was from the north. So bad was their own that an admixture of brass, which among us would be rather thought to lessen its value, was regarded as in improvement. But the iron and steel procured from the people who lived in the far north, on the shores of the Black Sea, was the most celebrated for its tenacity and hardness. Against it the common iron of every-day use could offer but little resistance, and when opposed to it could make little or no impression; it could not "break the northern iron and the steel." And the question of this verse is a proverb denoting the impossibility of any force, though great in itself, overcoming one which by its very nature and by its effects had been proved to be greater still. Our Lord teaches the same truth when he speaks of the folly of that king who thought, with his army of ten thousand, to encounter and overcome another king who came against him with twenty thousand. But whilst the meaning of this verse is plain enough, its application is not so clear. If we connect it with the verses that immediately precede, as many do, then it is a question whose tone is bright, cheerful, and reassuring. But if we connect it with those that immediately follow, its tone is altered and is full of solemn admonition and serious warning. In the first case it refers to Jeremiah himself, and is for his comfort and confidence. It tells him that the enemies who are against him, however ironlike they might be—cold, hard, fierce, strong—and however much they may oppress and afflict him, yet assuredly they shall not prevail against him; for God will make him as the northern iron and the steel, against which all their might shall be in vain. God had promised at the very outset of the prophet's ministry that he would thus strengthen him. Behold, he says, in the first chapter, "I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, . . . and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." And in the twentieth verse of this chapter the like promise is given over again. So that they have much reason on their side who regard these words as a heart-cheering assurance conveyed to the prophet under the form of a question, and assuring him that, let the power of those who hated him be what it might—as ironlike as it would—the grace of God which would be given him would make him stronger still, would make him as the northern iron and the steel. Let us, then, view these words—

I. As a reassuring promise, and make two or three applications of them. 1. And first, to such as Jeremiah himself was at this time—a faithful servant of God, *but much troubled and tried.* What right have we to expect that all things will go smoothly with us in this world, or to be surprised when sore troubles come? Did not our Lord say, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep amongst wolves"? Well, it would be strange if the sheep were to find all things just as they wished amid such surroundings as that. But, as one has said, the sheep have beaten the wolves after all. There are to-day tens of thousands of sheep for every wolf prowling on the face of the earth. It did seem very likely, when the sheep were so few, that the wolves would most certainly have quickly made a clearance of them. But, though here and there one like Saul "made havoc of the Church," the flock, the Lord's fold, went on increasing and multiplying in a marvellous way. Spiritually as well as literally the sheep outnumber the wolves who would destroy them. And what is the explanation but this, that to those who

have no might the Lord has increased strength? He has let the wolves be indeed like iron, but his sheep he has strengthened as the northern iron, etc. And this he will ever do. God can temper our souls to such degree of hardness and tenacity that they shall blunt and beat back every weapon that is formed against them. The arrows hurled against us shall fall pointless to the ground, and the armour of God wherein we stand engirt shall more than defend us from the adversary's power. The shield of faith is made, not of our enemies' untempered iron, but of the northern iron and steel told of here. Oh, then, child of God, how is it with thee? Is the world frowning upon thee? are circumstances adverse and involved, and thy way hedged with difficulties? Has death invaded thy home or is it about to do so, and is thy heart saddened thereby? Does disappointment dog thy steps and baffle all thy best-meant endeavours? Is anxiety creeping over thee and filling thee with foreboding fear? Hearken to this word of God, "Can iron," etc.? Can these things, hard and terrible as they are, break down thy defence or break through thy shield? Oh, bring thy soul to Christ, tell him how weak, how defenceless, in thyself, thou art; come to him for the armour of proof thou needest; ask him to give thee good courage and to strengthen thine heart; and then, as thou comest off more than conqueror over all these things, thou shalt triumphantly ask this question for thyself. 2. And we may ask it again in reference *to the opposition of the world against the Church of God.* For that Church is girt with invincible power, and stands like a rock amid the raging of the sea. In vain the tempests hurl the mighty waves against it, in vain do they fiercely smite it as with force sufficient to make it stagger and fall; but whilst you look expecting to see it overthrown, lo, the huge seas that smote it are shivered into clouds of spray, and multitudes of foaming cataracts are seen rushing down its sides but leaving it unharmed and immovable still. And—to return to the metaphor of this verse—the iron of its adversary's weapon has broken against the steel of its impenetrable shield, and the Church of God is unconquered still. Heresy has sought with insidious power to turn it from the truth. Persecution with its fires and all manner of deadly cruelties has threatened every member of its communion, and slain thousands upon thousands of them. Superstition has come with its priestcraft and pretended supernatural powers and taught men to worship idols in the name of God. Infidelity, the sure offspring of Superstition, disgusted with the miserable shams and the mass of wretched fables which Superstition has taught men for truth, has thrown off all belief, and denied the very existence of God and the whole of the precious faith that the Church has received. The world, a more deadly foe still, with her soft blandishments and her mighty bribes, has done more to pervert the right ways of the Lord than perhaps all the other enemies of the Church altogether; just as on the mass of iron used in the construction of the great railway bridges which span so many of the valleys, straits, and rivers of our land, it is found that a warm morning's sunshine does more to deflect them from their true horizontal line than is accomplished by the ponderous weight of the heaviest engines and trains rushing over them at their highest speed. The soft warmth does more than the heaviest weight. And again and again in the history of the Church of God it has been found that when the world is most smiling then is it most deadly to the best interests of the Church. And in our day, fresh forms of unbelief or disbelief are gathering round the Church, and like a mist enwrapping the minds and hearts of not a few, so that the blessed firmness of faith which once was the common characteristic of the Church is giving way to a general doubt, vagueness, and uncertainty, upon which no firm foothold can be had. But what is our confidence in view of all this? Is it not in the truth, made sure to us by the experience of all the ages, that the Church of God is his especial care, and that therefore his omnipotence is around it, and all the powers of hell shall not prevail against it. Here the Church of God is to-day, in numbers, zeal, faith, charity, not one whit behind the former days. Here in this direction and that there may be loss, but if so, then in other directions we find gain. And the witness of all the history of the Church is this, that the forces that oppose her are but as untempered iron, whilst the power that defends her is as the northern, etc. And should there be any anxious heart who is in much doubt and fear as to his own personal salvation because of the multitude and magnitude of his sins, we would bid such a one take home to him the truth of our text. For although his sins be all he thinks them, and even more—of strength like iron—yet the Saviour's

will to save is as the northern iron and the steel. True, the retrospect over the past may be grievous, and since that was forgiven it may have been too often reproduced again. "Thy backslidings," as God told Israel, "have been many;" but art thou hoping in God? dost thou grieve and mourn over sin and truly desire to be made whole? Then it *shall* be so with thee; thy salvation shall be accomplished, for thine accusers' power is but as the iron, whilst thy Saviour's is as the northern, etc. Therefore yield not to doubt, still less to despair, but go to him who is mighty to save, and ask him to give thee of his strength that thou mayst now conquer thy sin; so shalt thou no more doubt of his grace or of thine interest therein. Such are some of the applications of this question which, taking it as an implied promise, we are justified in making. But as we said at the outset, if we connect our text with the verses that follow, it will rather supply lessons of serious warning and admonition. For thus understood, the iron tells of the power of Israel and "the northern . . . steel" of the invincible power of the Chaldean armies that were so soon to come against them, and therefore this question is a declaration of the sure overthrow of Israel when the time of conflict came. The power of God was against Israel, and then what hope could there be? Their poor defence would be soon broken, and they would lie at the mercy of their foe. It is, therefore—

II. A SAMPLE OF THE FATE THAT ATTENDS ALL RANGING OF MERE HUMAN POWERS AGAINST THE WILL OF GOD. Whenever any such unequal contest is contemplated or being carried on, this question may be fitly asked. And therefore we ask it: 1. *Of all these, and they are very many, who think that they can, unarmed of God, successfully wage the war with sin.* We would be unfeignedly thankful that there is felt the desire to wage this war at all, that there is no fatal apathy or content with sin, but that there is a real purpose to subdue it and keep it under and to live in all righteousness. Yes, wherever that purpose is, let thanks be given to God. But what all such need to remember, yet what they very often do not remember, is that the evil of their own hearts is as "the northern . . . steel," whilst all the strength of their own resolves is but as common "iron," and when these two come in collision we know the result. Remember that first of all there is the *guilt* of sin to be provided for, and even supposing you were to contract no further sin, what is to be said of all the past? How can your own right resolves and correct future conduct—if it be indeed correct—atone for that? But supposing it were true that in an amended life there is atonement for the past, as we overlook the sins of youth, if the mature life be what it should be—supposing that were true, which it is not, even amongst men, if the past crimes have been of a serious kind—but supposing it were, and that if a man really turned over a new leaf all the records of the foregoing leaves should be destroyed, no matter what those records were—have you any guarantee that the future leaves will be altogether different from those that went before? The Word of God, and experience also, teach us that we have not. No doubt some sins may be given up, some evil actions forsaken, especially if they be such as bring upon us the reproach of man, but the true nature of the man remains unchanged—he is in himself what he was. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin," etc.? "then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." So speaks the prophet of God; so, too, speaks the experience of life. Of course we do not affirm all this in regard to the coming up to the standard of society, or of maintaining an external decency of life, but we do affirm it in regard to the attainment of that renewed and alone morally excellent character to which God calls us and of which our Lord Jesus Christ set us the example. You cannot bore through rock with wooden tools; you cannot with soft iron cut or pierce the hardened steel. And so you cannot, by the power of your own resolves, break that heart of evil, hardened like very steel, which every man carries about in him until it is regenerated by the Spirit of God. The grace of God alone can help you. It is at the cross of Christ, where you gain forgiveness from all the guilt of the past, that you gain also strength for the better life of the future; and it is in daily coming to that cross, daily looking unto Jesus, that blessed Lord who is both your Redeemer and your perfect Pattern, that you become changed into the same image and made like him. Iron is striving to "break the . . . steel," whilst you are endeavouring of yourself to save yourself from the past results and the present power of sin. You cannot do it, and in view of the gracious help the Lord Jesus Christ offers you it is a sin and an insult to him to persist in the attempt.

2. Finally, I think of another hopeless contest in which also many are still engaged, in which the iron is thinking to "break . . . steel." *It is the contest with God, the combat with the Most High.* God has made us all for himself. Now, he himself so obeys the law of truth and righteousness and goodness that we say he *is* righteousness. "The Lord is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works." "God is love." Therefore he bids us surrender our hearts, our wills, to him, to obey, love, and serve him. It is not simply right, but most blessed for us as for all his creatures to do this, and the vast majority of them do, and are blessed in consequence. But man has the power of saying "Nay" to God's "Yea," and "Yea" to God's "Nay," and that power he has chosen to exercise. In other words, he has set up his will against the Divine will, and refuses obedience where the will of God and his own are opposed. This is the contest that is over going on—God seeking to win man's will, his heart to himself, and man persistently refusing. Man wants to have his own way, believing and insisting that it is the good way for him, whilst God knows well that it is a way of evil and of evil only. Therefore by all means God is seeking to draw us from that way to his own. By the voice of conscience and of his Spirit pleading within us, by his providences, his Word, his ordinances, and in other ways still, mostly gentle and gracious, others of them of a sterner kind, but by them all he is aiming at but one result—this, of inducing us to yield to him, to acknowledge his authority, and confess him Lord. And remember this will of his is no passing wish, one which, when he finds he cannot have it, he will cease to care for. Oh no, but it is his steadfast purpose, that upon which his heart is set. "As I live, saith the Lord, all the earth shall be filled with my glory." "To Jesus every knee *shall* bow, and . . . Father." Can we think, then, that instead of this, God will be content with simply destroying man? That would be to confess failure on his part, and so would also the mere infliction of vengeance. Therefore we feel sure that the rebel will have to yield, and the stoutest heart to bow. The iron cannot "break . . . steel." Shall the will of man for ever defy God, and hold out against him? But ah! what of agony and woe will not the rebel will have to go through ere it will own itself wrong! All the awful words of Christ about the quenchless fire and the undying worm—those dreadful sayings of his at which the soul shudders—still are his setting forth thereof. Oh, you whose hearts are still unsurrendered to him, will you provoke him to this? will you force him to hold you down to the consequences of your own doings until you come to see them as he sees them? Then not alone because of the sorrow that must attend the refusal to yield to him, but because such yielding is so right, so blessed, let us cease from the vain and sinful conflict; let the iron no more foolishly think to "break the northern iron and steel," but "let us come and worship and bow down"—not with the knee alone, but in heart—"before the Lord our Maker" and our Redeemer.—C.

Ver. 16.—*How to study the Scriptures.* This verse declares—

I. How we should deal with God's words. 1. *We are to "find" them.* We are not to be content with mere surface reading, but to "search the Scriptures." It is certain that without this searching they will never be found. Now, it is this conviction which has led to the recent revision of the Scriptures. They who undertook that work were not ignorant of nor indifferent to the many objections which would be brought against their enterprise. They knew it would be said that such revision would disturb the faith of simple men and women, that it would provoke discord, that it would encourage restless spirits to be ever seeking change, that it would destroy old and sacred associations, that it was unnecessary because by means of commentaries and sermons the true meaning of any passage could be given; but they felt it to be their duty to set forth, as clearly as possible, the very words of Scripture, so that men may "find" them as before they could not do. They knew such work was needed, and they were encouraged by the history of former revisions, that of Jerome and that of our present Authorized Version, against which all the present objections were brought but were soon seen to be futile. Faith has not been disturbed; union and not discord has followed, the meaning of Scripture has been made more manifest, and what is and what is not of real authority—as the Apocrypha—has been declared. And they were encouraged by the fact that the present was an especially favourable time for their work: the existence of so many capable scholars, not only to do the work, but

to test it after it was done; the increased knowledge of the Greek language and literature—a knowledge that, in view of the growing disregard for the languages of antiquity, was not likely to be ever greater than at present; the deepfelt love for the English of our Bible, thus ensuring the preservation to a great extent of its present tone and style; the spirit of concord which the proposal has elicited between this country and America, and between all sections of the Christian Church. Hence for all these reasons it was felt to be a favourable time to set out afresh on the search for the very words of God, in order that men might be enabled to "find" them the more readily. And we may gratefully believe that to a large extent the ends proposed have been secured, and that by the labours of the revisionists God's words in the New Testament Scriptures have been "found" as they have not been heretofore. 2. But this which others have done for us *we must do for ourselves*. *We* must "find" God's Word. We must study it, diligently read it, exercise ourselves in the Scriptures by careful, frequent, continuous reading, resolved that we will not merely read over the words, but know their meaning. For the Word of God needs finding. It is hidden away beneath the sound of familiar words and phrases which, from frequent hearing or repetition, have lost their power either to arrest or arouse our thought. And prejudice, formality, indolence, indifference, and other besetments of the soul beside, all do their part to hide from us the true sense of God's Word. 3. *And, when found, God's Word should be spiritually "eaten,"* i.e. we must take his words so into our soul's life that, as our daily food ministers to our bodily life, these words of God shall minister to our soul's life. By the strength derived from our daily food all the organs of our body, all its functions and forces, are sustained in health and in working power—brain, heart, limbs, etc. And so, when God's words are "eaten," they sustain and strengthen the functions and forces of the soul—its faith, courage, hope, joy, etc. Abraham so believed God's word that he was able to offer up his son Isaac in obedience to what he believed was God's command. Job, by the same means, bore in glorious patience his heavy trials. Our blessed Lord baffled and vanquished the tempter by his threefold thrust of the sword of the Spirit—"It is written." And all the heroes of the faith have become heroes by reason of this same "eating" of God's Word. Now, God's Word is thus taken into and made the life of our souls, not by *memory* alone. Mere learning page after page by heart, as we say, will not feed the soul. Let Sunday school teachers remember this. Nor will *meditation* and reflection upon it be sufficient. There must be added *fervent prayer* that, by the Divine Spirit, God's Word may be so inwrought in us that it shall be for us as a sacrament, a veritable eating of the flesh of Christ. Now, if the Word of God be thus found and eaten, see—

II. How God's Word will deal with us. It will become "the joy and rejoicing of our hearts." True religion is ever a joyful thing. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and," etc. What is that entire hundred and nineteenth psalm but one continuous affirmation of joy in God's Word? We shall see in the *histories* which the Bible records the evidence of a Divine overruling, in its *prophecies* the proof that the future as well as the past is under the same control; in its *precepts* and its holy Law the righteousness of the Divine rule; and in *the Gospels* the love that is beneath, around, amidst, and above all. And to the man of God, what can all this be but "the joy and rejoicing of his heart"? God's words have done much for us when they have brought us to repentance, more when we are led to trust in God, yet more when they enable us to live the life of obedience; but they have not done all they were designed and are able and willing to do, until they have become "the joy," etc. But we cannot have the joy first; repentance, trust, obedience, must precede and accompany; let these be lacking, and joy cannot be.

III. The ground of this joy and rejoicing. "For I am called by thy Name," etc. The prophet was known as the "man of God." He was so identified with God, so notoriously consecrated to him, as to be called by his Name. It was the prophet's joy and delight to be so called, and yet more to be so in reality. Therefore everything that was the Lord's had interest for him, as an affectionate child rejoices in the letters of his parents, reads them over and over again, treasures them, obeys them. And he would joy in these words also because by them he had been led to the joy of his present favour with God, and by them he was sustained therein. Hence, he being so unreservedly and joyfully the Lord's, all the Lord's words could not but be what they

were to him. And it is ever so, in proportion as we are the Lord's by a living, loving consecration, will his words be "the joy and," etc.—C.

Ver. 1.—*Fruitless intercession.* These words are addressed to the prophet in his character of intercessor for the people. He had already been told to plead no longer for them (ch. xiv. 11), seeing that their case was hopeless, and the Divine sentence that had gone out against them was irrevocable. Observe—

I. THE POWER THAT HUMAN INTERCESSION MAY HAVE WITH GOD. The fact that such intercession is declared in this case to be vain implies that, under other conditions, it might be effectual. Moses and Samuel often stood before the Lord as mediators on behalf of the people whom they represented (Numb. xiv. 13—20; 1 Sam. vii. 9; Ps. xcix. 6). Not that they had officially any priestly function. They were not priests; their power with God lay in the elevation of their character and the intimacy of their fellowship with him. Every age has borne witness to the reality and efficacy of this power. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" on behalf of his fellow-men. Who can tell how much it is owing to such intercession that a guilty world has been saved from hopeless abandonment?

II. THE LIMIT MAN'S OBDURACY PUTS TO THAT POWER. There are times when no human intervention is of any avail. Even the pleading of Moses and Samuel could not have averted the threatened judgments. "My mind could not be towards this people." Why? Simply because of the obstinacy of their unbelief and irreligion. It is not that God is not merciful and gracious and ready to forgive, or that the pleadings of good and holy men have no power with him. It is that the inveterate obduracy of men nullifies all the persuasive influence alike of Divine and human love. God's mind cannot be towards those who with obstinate impenitence refuse his grace. There is a limit beyond which even Divine patience cannot go. The very pleading love of the great Intercessor is defeated in the case of those who will not forsake their false and evil ways. It is not so much an irrevocable Divine decree, it is their own self-willed perversity that dooms them and leaves the stern, retributive laws of God to take their course.—W.

Ver. 16.—*The living Word.* The prophet, remonstrating with God on account of the hardness of his lot, here looks back regretfully to the time of his first call to the prophetic office. It is the language of one disappointed and disheartened by the apparent issue of his life, and the bitterness of whose grief is intensified by the remembrance of hopes unfulfilled, and a joy that has for ever passed away. It is as if God were "altogether unto him as a liar, and as waters that fail." Apart, however, from the peculiar experiences that called it forth, this passage is full of instruction. Note—

I. THE METHOD OF GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF TO MEN. "Thy words were found." The term "found," in a case like this, is suggestive of that which comes to the soul, not so much as the result of its own seeking, but of a spontaneous Divine purpose. All those on whom the quickening light of Divine truth has shone feel more or less distinctly the reality of this. The inspiration has come to them in mysterious and unexpected ways. It has "pleased God to reveal his Son in them." It is not so much that they "know God" as that they are "known of God" (Gal. i. 15, 16; iii. 9). The initiatory step in this gracious process is his, not ours. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," etc. (John xv. 16).

II. THE VITAL RELATION TRUTH BEARS TO THE DIVINELY ENLIGHTENED SOUL. "I did eat it." No physical image could be more suggestive of the intimacy of this spiritual relationship. It indicates: 1. *The soul's preparation to welcome the truth.* There is a divinely awakened appetite. 2. *The active participation of the powers of the soul in the process.* It is more than a mere passive reception. 3. *The assimilation of the truth into the very being of the man.* As food is transformed into the living fibre of the body, so that truth becomes a part of the very substance of his spiritual nature, the stay of his strength, the inspiration of his life. The word is translated into the form of holy character and Godlike deed.

III. THE GLADDENING EFFECT OF DISCOVERED TRUTH. "Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." There can be no purer, nobler joy than that which

springs from conscious communion with the mind of God. His Word admits us to the realities of a world undarkened by the shadows and undisturbed by the storms that trouble this. Rising through it to the heights of Divine contemplation, the glory of the unseen and eternal surrounds us, and we drink of "the river of the pleasures of God."

IV. THE SELF-CONSECRATION THAT IS THE RESULT OF THE REALIZED POWER OF DIVINE TRUTH OVER THE SOUL. "I am called by thy Name," literally, "Thy Name is called over me." This was the seal and symbol of his personal dedication to his prophetic work. The Word of the Lord dwelling richly in the soul is the unfailing spring of a consecrated and holy life. "Sanctify them in thy truth: thy Word is truth," etc. (John xvii. 17, 19).—W.

Ver. 1.—*The uselessness of intercession once more emphatically stated.* I. A REMINDER OF GOD'S LONG-SUFFERING IN THE PAST. Moses and Samuel had stood interceding before him, and again and again he had glorified himself in mercy and pardon. The mention of these two great historic names suggests to Jeremiah that God can appeal to all the past, confident that no man can complain of him as wanting in long-suffering with the waywardness of his people. They had wandered far and often, and often needed mercy and restoration; but when God forgave them, they soon forgot the mercy and renewed favour. Thus we are enabled to feel how very bad their condition must have become in the time of the prophet. To have listened to the plea of any intercessor would have been to show a mercy which yet was no mercy—a mercy which, while doing no real good to Israel, would have done evil in confusing the boundaries of truth and falsehood. God's mercy must ever be shown as part of his wisdom, and the time comes when severity to one or two generations may be the truest mercy to the whole world.

II. THE HONOUR DONE TO THE MEMORY OF THE GOOD. As servants of Jehovah, Moses and Samuel were great in many ways, but in none greater than as urgent prevailing intercessors. With regard to Moses, see Exod. xxxii. 11—14, 31, 32; Numb. xiv. 13—19. With regard to Samuel, see 1 Sam. vii. 9; xii. 23. The listenings of God to these men showed that his general will was that supplications should ever be made on behalf of all sinners. God delights in seeing his servants pitiful towards all the needs of men, especially those needs which arise from their forgetfulness of God himself. This reference was surely meant to teach Jeremiah, for one thing, that God not only permitted intercession but expected it. Further, the intercessions here referred to were those of righteous men. Moses and Samuel fully appreciated the evil-doings of those for whom they interceded. Doubtless they quite apprehended that evil-doing might on certain occasions reach such a height that intercession could not be expected to prove successful. Those who had had the opportunity of pondering God's dealings in the Deluge and the destruction of Sodom would well understand that intercession had its limits.

III. JEREMIAH WAS THUS REMINDED OF THE DIFFICULTIES OF GOD'S SERVANTS IN FORMER DAYS. Moses and Samuel were not only intercessors, they were intercessors for those who had made life largely a burden and a grief to them. It was not upon a scene where they were comparative strangers that they came in, did their interceding work, and then passed out to return no more. The success of their intercession meant the renewal of their struggles with a wayward and careless nation. If only Jeremiah considered the whole history of Moses and the whole history of Samuel, he would be led to say, "Who am I that I should complain?" These conspiracies, this bitter opposition, this feeling of solitude, were nothing new. We can only serve God in our own day and generation, and we must accept that generation with all its difficulties, only let this be remembered, that there is no servant of God, in any generation, but will need all his faith and meekness and endurance to encounter and vanquish these difficulties in a right spirit.

IV. HONOUR WAS PUT UPON JEREMIAH HIMSELF. His influence with God as a faithful servant was shown every whit as clearly as if he had been successful in his intercession. That influence, indeed, the people might fail to recognize; but this was a small matter if only the prophet himself was made to feel that his God respected the spirit of his prayer. God's way of honouring us is not by making us stand well with the fickle crowd, but by his own smile shining into our hearts and making gladness

there. The mention of these two great historic names lifts Jeremiah in the esteem of God to something like a level with them.—Y.

Ver. 10.—*The man who felt he had been born to strife and contention.* These words of the prophet are not, of course, to be taken too literally. They are the language of excited feeling and of poetry, and would not be permissible as a prosaic statement to which the man who makes it may be expected deliberately to adhere. The proper way of regarding the words is to take them as vividly indicating a position which no words could sufficiently describe. Jeremiah sometimes felt himself so hated and so isolated that there seemed but one way of accounting for his experience, and that was that he had been born to it. We know, indeed, that the truth was far otherwise (see ch. i. 5). There we see how Jehovah himself reckoned Jeremiah to have come into this earthly existence, not for suffering, but for a career of noble and useful action, which, rightly considered, was a high privilege. But a man who is constantly suffering from the sin of his fellow-men in all its shapes and all its degrees, cannot be always looking at the bright side and speaking in harmony with such a view.

I. A SERVANT OF GOD MAY HAVE TO LIVE A LIFE OF INCESSANT CONFLICT. Jeremiah's case appears to have been an extreme one, and yet the history of the Church shows that a company by no means few might be reckoned as companions in his peculiar tribulation. It is not for us to say how far our lives shall be marked by external conflict. We must not seek conflict; but we must be ready for it if it comes. God gives to every one who is willing to be his servant a way in which to walk, a way which does not infringe on a single real right of a single human being. From beginning to end that way may be trodden, not only without injury to others, but with positive benefit to them. At the same time, nothing is more possible than that treading in such a way may expose him who strives to walk in it to all the various forms which, according to circumstances or opportunity, opposition may take. And therefore, when we are beginning to feel our way to the carrying out of God's will, we must lay our account with opposition. How much of it may come, how far it may go, how long it may last, we cannot tell; and as we must not provoke it through mere exuberance of energy, so neither must we avoid it for the sake of a temporary peace which is really no peace. If opposition comes—even intense opposition—to the truth faithfully proclaimed, this only shows that the truth has proved itself an arrow, striking home and making its wound, whatever the ultimate consequence of that wound may be.

II. THE MESSAGE OF GOD IS NOT THE ONLY CAUSE OF STRIFE AND CONTENTION. Jeremiah was reckoned as a troubler of Israel, and so in one sense he was; but Israel could only have been troubled by him because, first of all, it was in a condition which admitted of commotion. The wind troubles the waters and raises the waves into destructive fury; but this is just because they are in a condition easily acted on. The prophet, however, has another answer, an answer which served to show how much he marvelled at the universality and intensity of the opposition with which he was met. He is far from being the only troubler of Israel. Suppose he becomes silent; strife and contention would not therefore cease. When he comes in with his reproofs, warnings, and threatenings, it is not upon a scene hitherto tranquil and harmonious that he enters. He finds abundance of quarrelling already, and one fertile source of the quarrelling lies in the relations between borrower and lender. They may cease their strife, and join their forces for a little while against the prophet who is their common enemy; but their mutual exasperation is not forgotten, their quarrel is by no means composed. They will return to it with as much bitterness as ever. The prophet, it will be noticed, speaks as if the hostility to him was a marvel. God has sent him to these men for their good; he has come to turn their steps from the way leading to destruction; and yet, because he tells them the truth, he has become their enemy. We see that his faith in human nature, as easily knowing its own best interests, is hard to shake. He does not at all wonder that the borrower should hate the rapacious lender and the lender hate the defaulting borrower; but there is a deep mystery when the man who comes to warn of danger is hated for his message, and hated all the more just as he becomes more earnest and persistent in the utterance of it.

III. WE SEE THE PROPHET'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PURITY OF HIS OWN MOTIVES. He is sure that *in him* there is no reason for hostility. He had defrauded none; he had

oppressed none. With all his complainings here, it was well that he had no cause for self-reproach. Difficulties we must ever expect from that action of others which we cannot control; but let them not be increased needlessly by our own selfishness, obstinacy, and arrogance.—Y.

Vers. 15—17.—*The prophet's claim upon Jehovah, and the grounds of the claim.* That which urged the prophet thus to cry to God for succour is stated with great emphasis in ver. 18. He is suffering as from a perpetual pain and an incurable wound. It is by such a cry as this that we are able to estimate something of the continuous reproach which he must have had to endure. We know how, in later days, the Jews dogged the steps of Christ and afterwards of Paul; and these persecutors of Jeremiah were their ancestors. Against them Jeremiah could do nothing himself. So far as human sympathy was concerned, he was alone or nearly alone, not able to command even the forbearance of his own kindred, and therefore he had to turn all the more to God. It was well, indeed, that he was thus shut up to the one resort. In his approach to God, we find him stating three claims for God's immediate attention to his position.

I. SUFFERING FOR JEHOVAH'S SAKE. Every suffering man has a claim upon God, even when his suffering comes by his own transgression. God is very pitiful to the tortured conscience of the man who has been wakened up out of a selfish and disobedient life. It can be no pleasure to him to see a being of such sensibility as man suffering from any cause whatever; and when a man is suffering for truth, for righteousness, for the gospel and the kingdom of God, then we may be sure that there is a peculiar movement of the Divine nature to help and strengthen such a sufferer. God would help his servant in this very instance, by enabling him to look at his suffering in the right way. The suffering was an evidence of successful work; successful because it had been faithfully and courageously done. If only the prophet had softened some words the Lord had put into his mouth and omitted others, he might have escaped reproach. But reproach smiting on a good conscience is better than contempt falling deservedly on the coward who trims to stand well with everybody. Then the prophet would also be made to feel that it was a good thing to bear what God was bearing himself. His long-suffering towards his enemies requires that his friends should also be patient. It is better to be abused in bearing testimony for God than to share in the rancorous conflicts of selfish men. Prophet and apostle alike had this for their experience, that they were compelled to suffer for the Lord's sake; and he who bore the clearest, purest testimony of all, viz. Jesus himself, was the one who suffered the most. That good and true men, trying to serve God, should often become impatient under biting, bitter words is not wonderful. The true thing to be desired in such a state of mind is not to escape the reproaches, but to have the inward joy increased, so that it may be an effectual counterbalance to all that comes from outside. "If ye be reproached for the Name of Christ, happy are ye" (1 Pet. iv. 14).

II. THE COMPLETE ASSOCIATION OF THE PROPHET WITH THE PROPHETIC WORD. He did not receive it into his mind reluctantly and listlessly, but as one who hungered and thirsted after righteousness. As the word fell on his inner ear it was devoured. It came to him as from the excellent glory; he recognized it as Divine. He was not as many, who will pamper and cram themselves with delicacies that are pleasant to the taste, and turn away with unconcealed aversion from food full of nutrition and health. Hence they became to him the joy and rejoicing of his inward life. All words of God, apprehended in their real meaning, give strength, peace, satisfaction, harmony in the nobler parts of human nature. Jeremiah is thinking of the parallel which may be drawn between food for the body and food for the spirit. The food which we take, just because it is pleasant for the taste, may be anything but a joy and rejoicing to the heart. We must eat what is really good for food, evidently intended for food, if we would be kept from ill consequences. It was because these words were readily accepted and fully received that they became a joy and rejoicing to the heart, and then in the strength, fortitude, zeal, thus communicated, the prophet went forth to his arduous work. Here surely is the secret of his steadfastness. God had put his words in his servant's mouth (ch. i. 9); but that was all he could do. It was for the prophet himself so to treat the words that he should give them with all the added force of his own sanctified personality. Other men might have uttered the same words, yet so as

to rob them of all force and sting. Notice in particular that if these words of God to the prophet—words mostly so stern, spoken nearly all from the judgment-seat—were nevertheless the joy and rejoicing of his heart, how much more may such an experience be expected from receiving the evident gospel words of the Lord Jesus! "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life" (John vi. 63).

III. THE PROPHET'S LIFE WAS CONSISTENT WITH HIS MESSAGE. According to his message, which was soon proved to be a word of truth, the whole land was advancing ever more swiftly into a season of the greatest suffering and sorrow. Yet the people would not believe the message, but went on, just as usual, assembling for their merry-makings. If now the prophet had joined in these merry-makings, the people would have had some plea for their neglect. As it was, they could find no excuse in any inconsistent conduct of his; as he spoke, so he acted. Probably some of them tried to draw him in, to get him away from what, in their shallowness and haste, they would reckon mere morbid fancies. Others would accuse him as being one who cared for no pleasure of life himself, unless it was the pleasure of souring the pleasure of others. And yet we see the prophet could be as thankful for joy and rejoicing of heart as any one. It is the greatest possible mistake to suppose that those who keep away from the world's pleasures are filled with gloom. A service of God, filled with joy, may soon become a real experience. But if talking about it stands instead of the reality, then the pretence will soon be shown by the avidity of our turning towards worldly pleasures.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVI.

With this chapter should be taken the first eighteen verses of ch. xvii. The heading of the Authorized Version well expresses the contents of vers. 1—9, provided that "the types" are understood to be typical actions of the prophet himself. "The prophet, under the types of abstaining from marriage, from houses of mourning and feasting, foreshoweth the utter ruin of the Jews." To the inquiry, why these calamities should come upon them, the old and well-known answer is to be given (vers. 10—12), accompanied by a definite prediction of captivity (ver. 13). Then, to relieve the picture, a glimpse of a happier future is introduced (vers. 14, 15); but only a glimpse, for already the Chaldeans, like so many fishermen and hunters, are on the track of the Jews, for a "double" retribution must precede the Messianic promise (vers. 16—18). Strange contrast—the heathen coming to the truth and the Jews (those of the present, not of the future time) deserting it (vers. 19—21)! We will take up the thread of thought again at the opening of the next chapter.—The date of this prophecy would appear to be nearly the same as that of the preceding one, the circumstances of which are similar. The latter part of it will enable us to fix it more precisely (see on ch. xvii. 1—18).

Ver. 2.—**Thou shalt not take thee a wife.** So St. Paul, "I think therefore that this is good by reason of the present distress, namely, that it is good for a man to be as he is" (1 Cor. vii. 26, Revised Version); and Hosea has already drawn an awful picture of "Ephraim bringing forth his children to the murderer" (ix. 9). In ordinary times it was a kind of unwritten law among the Israelites to marry and beget children. Most of the prophets (*e.g.* Isaiah) appear to have been married. **In this place**; *i.e.* in the land of Judah. A Jeremianic phrase (comp. ch. vii. 3).

Ver. 4.—**Grievous deaths**; literally, *deaths of sicknesses*; i.e. all kinds of painful deaths, including (as ch. xiv. 18 shows) death by starvation. **They shall not be lamented.** The absence of sepulture has already been pointed to several times as a feature of the horror of the times (ch. viii. 2; xiv. 16; comp. ch. vii. 33), but this is a new and affecting touch. Dr. Payne Smith aptly refers to the plagues of Athens and London, in which the gentler elements of human nature were for the time almost extinguished.

Ver. 5.—Compare this prohibition with that given to Ezekiel (xxiv. 15—27). **The house of mourning**; literally, *of screaming* (an uncommon word, only occurring again—of banquetters—in Amos vi. 7). It is, no doubt, the wail of mourning relatives which is meant.

Ver. 6.—Nor cut themselves, nor make themselves bald. Both practices are forbidden in the Law (Deut. xiv. 1; Lev. xix. 28; xxi. 5), but the prohibition was at any rate unknown to the masses (see, for the former, ch. xli. 5; xlvii. 5; and for the latter, ch. xlvii. 5; Isa. xxii. 12, "The Lord Jehovah called . . . to baldness;" Amos viii. 10; Micah i. 16; Ezek. vii. 18). St. Jerome remarks, and incidentally gives a valuable evidence of the tenacity of primitive customs, "Mos hic fuit apud veteres, et usque hodie in quibusdam permanet Judæorum, ut in luctibus incidant lacertos," etc.

Ver. 7.—**Tear themselves for them.** The verb is used in Isa. lviii. 7 of breaking bread (the accusative is there expressed), and there is no doubt that this is the meaning here. The only question is whether *lāhem*, for them, should not rather be *lĕhem*, bread (this was read by the Septuagint, Peshito, Vulgate, Targum). St. Jerome sees here an allusion to the funeral feasts (comp. the *parentalia*), and surely he is right. The Jews had a conception of the nature of the life of the other world only less distinct than that of their Egyptian neighbours. The funeral feast was not merely for the living, but for the dead. Indeed, it was primarily intended for the spiritual nourishment of those who had gone before to the unseen world (comp. Bonwick, 'Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought,' p. 48). Chardin, the old traveller, asserts that "the Oriental Christians still make banquets of this kind by a custom derived from the Jews." **The cup of consolation.** It would seem as if the funeral feasts had dwindled among the Jews into little more than a refection for the benefit of the mourners.

Ver. 9.—The voice of mirth, etc.; a striking description, repeated from ch. vii. 34.

Ver. 12.—Imagination; rather, *stubbornness* (ch. iii. 17).

Ver. 13.—A grim irony. **In the foreign land ye shall serve your idols to your hearts' content, day and night if ye will,** "*because*, [not, **where**] *I will not have mercy upon you*" (by delivering you, and so calling you back from your idols).

Vers. 14, 15.—The text of these verses occurs in a more characteristic form and in a better connection in ch. xxiii. 7, 8. The connection here would be improved by inserting the passage before ver. 18; and as displacements are not unfamiliar phenomena in manuscripts, this would not be a violent act. The difficulty is not in the therefore introducing the promise, which frequently occurs in prophecies immediately after threatenings (*e.g.* Isa. x. 23, 24), as if to say, "Things being in such a miserable plight, your God will interpose to help you;" but in the position of ver. 18. How can the prophet say, "And *first* I will recompense their iniquity double," when vers. 16, 17 contain a description of this very double recompense?

Vers. 16, 17.—**I will send for** should rather be, *I will send*. **Fishers and hunters,** by a divinely given impulse, shall "fish" and "hunt" the unhappy fugitives from their lurking-places. There may, perhaps, be an allusion to the cruel ancient practice of "sweeping the country with a drag-net" (Herod., iii. 149), and then destroying the male population: Samos, *e.g.* was thus "netted" and depopulated by the Persians. Habakkuk may also refer to this when he says (i. 15), "They catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag."

Ver. 18.—**First**—*i.e.* before "I bring them back again into their land"—**I will recompense . . . double;** *i.e.* amply, in full measure (comp. ch. xvii. 18; Isa. xl. 2; Rev. xviii. 6). **With the carcases,** etc. The idols, which "defile the consciences" of those who worship them, are compared to the most unclean and loathsome objects.

Ver. 19.—**O Lord, my strength, and my fortress,** etc. Jeremiah falls into the tone of the psalmists (Ps. xviii. 2; xxviii. 8; lix. 17). All that is choicest and most permanent in Old Testament religion finds its adequate lyric expression in the Book of Psalms. **The Gentiles shall come unto thee.** The article, however, is not expressed. "Nations," *i.e.* a crowd of peoples, hitherto ignorant of the true God, shall hasten to the scene of Jehovah's great interposition; they have been convinced by Israel's unlooked-for restoration of the unique divinity of Jehovah.

Ver. 20.—**But the Jews of this generation,** in spite of the manifold proofs of the true religion which have been vouchsafed to them, are deserting the real divinity for the unreal. In a tone of surprise the prophet exclaims, **Shall a man make gods unto himself,** etc.?

Ver. 21.—**The final answer of Jehovah.** There will be no further grace-time. **I will this once cause them to know;** rather, *I will this time* (comp. on ch. x. 18) *cause them to acknowledge*. The judgment which Jeremiah has had the sad duty of announcing will prove to the blinded Jews that Jehovah alone is true God, alone can strike and heal.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*"Forbidding to marry."* I. CELIBACY IS NOT A SCRIPTURAL VIRTUE. Marriage is a Divine institution. It is natural, and God is the Author of nature; it is recognized and regulated by inspired teaching and blessed by Christ; it is a means of human welfare.

II. CELIBACY MAY BE WISELY OBSERVED IN CIRCUMSTANCES OF PECULIAR TROUBLE. Such were the circumstances of Judah in the days of Jeremiah; such, in the opinion of St. Paul, were the circumstances of his own time (1 Cor. vii. 26). Those were not times for wedding festivities; the married would be encumbered and hindered from doing their best for the public weal, and children born then would be born only to a heritage of misery. Similar circumstances may recur.

III. CELIBACY MAY BE WISELY OBSERVED BY MEN WHO ARE CONTEMPLATING TASKS OF PECULIAR LONELINESS, DANGER, OR DIFFICULTY. There are risks that a man may encounter for himself which he should avoid if others would be seriously involved in his fate. There is work which precludes the enjoyment of domestic life. It is not right to undertake obligations to another that cannot be fulfilled. The pioneer of dangerous travel, the John the Baptist of wilderness missions, is better unmarried.

IV. CELIBACY IS A DUTY FOR ALL UNTIL THEY ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE A SUITABLE MAINTENANCE FOR A FAMILY. It is not heroic but selfish to bring a family into a life of certain hardship and misery. The principle which applied to the public circumstances of distress in Jeremiah's age applies to the private circumstances of distress which are met with in every age.

Ver. 12.—*"Worse than your fathers."* I. EACH GENERATION SHOULD BE BETTER THAN THAT WHICH PRECEDES IT. The natural movement of all mankind should be onward and upward. We have the lessons of past history to warn and to inspire us; the continued, increasing, long-suffering mercy of God to urge us to serve him more faithfully; and the growing light of slowly accumulating knowledge to guide us into better paths. Later generations have more aids of Divine revelation than were vouchsafed to the earlier. The Jews under the prophets had more light, more Divine inducements to fidelity, than the Jews under Moses; and Christians have a much clearer light and much more powerful motives in the revelations of God's will and of God's love in Christ. To go back when we ought to go forward is doubly inexcusable. Christians are bad indeed if they fall lower than the men of Old Testament ages, and Protestants of modern times if they do not live up to the attainments of the Mediæval Church.

II. EVIL INCLINES TO GROW WORSE FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION. Men ought to improve; but if they begin a course of evil they deteriorate in it. Nothing in the world is stationary. Nations are either progressing or retrograding. Each generation is either better or worse than its predecessor. Evil has a contagious property, and if it is unchecked it is certain to spread like an epidemic. It is a leaven that, left to itself, will surely leaven the whole mass. We should, therefore, seek to stamp out a sin in its earlier stages. We must not trust to any necessary law of progress, any idea of the inherent goodness of human nature, any thought of the temporary character of evil, but seek at once to resist and overthrow the sin. Here is a warning to parents. Evil tendencies are hereditary. The vice, which seems to do little harm in our own day, taking root and spreading, will break out into worse fruits in our children's time. How sad to leave only a bad example for our children to be referred to!

III. IF EVIL IS TO BE CONQUERED IT MUST BE BY SOME SUPERHUMAN METHOD. The natural laws of progress fail here. Depravity unchecked grows more depraved. Innumerable practical reforms, new systems of morality, draconian codes, etc., have been tried, and all in vain. Josiah made the experiment with his violent reformation, but it failed of anything but superficial good. Some are now trusting to sanitary improvements, to industrial progress, to popular education; but these too will not touch the root of the sore. The history of sin furnishes the greatest proof of the need of a Divine redemption if the world is ever to be saved. For this Christ came, and now the highest progress of the world is to be traced to that new influence of life which he introduced to turn the current of history from deepening depravity to growing truth and righteousness.

Vers. 14, 15.—*The greatest gratitude for the latest blessings.* The circumstances of the Jews are illustrative of those of all of us in the fact that we all have occasion to feel most thankful for the most recent gifts of God's goodness. The reasons for this are manifold, viz.—

I. THE LATEST BLESSINGS ARE MOST THOROUGHLY APPRECIATED. A present impression is stronger than a memory. Even if the good things we are now enjoying are not equal to those we formerly possessed, the immediate good we derive from them is greater than that which we derive from a mere recollection of better times. Thanksgiving tends to become formal and conventional—the empty repetition of phrases which had a deep signification when they were the spontaneous response of the soul to fresh tokens of God's love, but which have become almost meaningless after the occasion for them has fallen into the past. To be real, gratitude must refer to the real mercies which we are now enjoying.

II. THE LATEST BLESSINGS ARE ADDITIONAL PROOFS OF THE GOODNESS OF GOD. We should "sing a new song" as we see new manifestations of Divine love. We have more to be thankful for when we have received two gifts than we had when we were only possessors of one of them. God is constantly adding to the vast pile of his favours to us. The latest stands highest, is, so to speak, mounted on all that precede; and therefore this calls for the strongest expression of gratitude. Inasmuch as the longer we live the more we have to be thankful for, so also the more deeply should our hearts be stirred with gratitude. The restoration of the Jews is an additional mercy following that of the Exodus. One such stupendous deliverance should call forth never-failing songs of praise, but a second should intensify the volume of those songs.

III. THE LATEST BLESSINGS ARE ALSO THE GREATEST. The restoration is referred to as containing grander blessings than those of the Exodus. Gratitude should be proportionate to favours. This is often not the case, because the best things are least appreciated. Their merits are not superficial nor discernible at first. The spiritual blessings are the highest; yet to unspiritual men they are the least valued. Thus the chief elements of the Messianic promises of restoration were spiritual, and therefore not so acceptable to the mass of the people as the material blessings promised to the Jews in the first possession of the "land flowing with milk and honey." We are too ready to complain of the present and regret the lost past, ungratefully selecting the troubles of our own time for notice and ignoring its bright features, while we forget the hardships of the past and remember only its last pleasant features, like the Jews, who forgot the rigours of the slavery from which they had escaped, but remembered with regret the flesh-pots of Egypt (Exod. xvi. 3). The Bible favours no sentimental regrets for "the good old times;" it teaches us that God's goodness is increasingly manifest. The latter times are better than the former, the Gospel age than the Old Testament era, the later years of Christendom than the earlier. The best is not yet revealed. The songs of the future should be sweeter than those of the past, since God has greater mercies in store for us than any we have yet enjoyed. Already God has favoured us more highly than our fathers. We need not search the musty annals of antiquity for proofs of the goodness of God. This is a present goodness, and the richest fruits of it are the latest.

IV. THE LATEST BLESSINGS ARE GIVEN IN SPITE OF OUR GREATEST ILL DESERT. We have added to the tale of our sins while God has been adding to the tale of his mercies. As his goodness has increased with many, their sin has also increased. The Egyptian bondage overtook the innocent; the Babylonian captivity was a punishment to the guilty. Deliverance from the latter was an act of forgiving mercy. It was a proof of God's forbearance that he continued to be gracious, and of his pardoning love that he forgave the sinful people. Our greatest reason for praise is in God's latest mercy of redemption, restoring us after our falls into sin.

Vers. 16—18.—*Fishers and hunters.* I. THE CHASE. The guilty will be sought after for punishment. If they do not seek God in penitence he will seek them in judgment. However far we may flee from obedience we cannot flee from responsibility. Jonah fled "from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah i. 3), but he was overtaken by a Divine judgment. If God's present long-suffering makes him appear indifferent, the day will come when his wrath will be swift, searching, and far-reaching. Then none of the impenitent can escape. None can *hide* from the approaching doom; hunters "shall

hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks." It will be useless then to "call on the hills to cover us," etc. None will be *overlooked*. Fishers will come with their drag-net, gathering all classes as fish of all kinds and of all sizes are collected in the sea. Rank counts for nothing when kings are hunted like foxes; intellectual ingenuity can then find no covert of sophistry beneath which to elude the keen scent of the bloodhounds of justice; exceptional originality can secure no position beyond the reach of the broad sweeping net of a general judgment.

II. THE REASON FOR EXPECTING A FATAL RESULT TO THE CHASE. God undertakes the direction of it (ver. 17). He knows all; he is ever watching every one of his children, for their joy if they are obedient and submissive, for their shame if they are rebellious and impenitent. 1. God's *eyes* are upon their ways. He does not depend upon hearsay evidence, upon the testimony of his emissaries. Hence (1) none can elude his searching gaze, and (2) we shall not be convicted on false evidence. 2. God's eyes are upon their *ways*. He notes conduct, action, behaviour. 3. God's eyes are upon *all* their ways. The most secret do not escape his notice. Little faults are observed; hidden sins are known; all is fairly weighed and compared. God does not select conduct for judgment; he observes both the good and the bad, and judges of the whole. 4. *Iniquity* is not hidden. God looks beneath the *ways* to the iniquities which prompt them; he reads the heart, and judges of conduct by motive. Who can escape such a searching ordeal?

III. THE FATAL END TO THE CHASE. (Ver. 18.) After conviction follows the sentence. 1. This is a *recompense*. It is earned and it is fairly proportionate to guilt. None of us dare ask for the simple reward of our conduct.

> "Consider this—
> That in the course of justice, none of us
> Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy."

2. It *increases* in severity with the increase of sin. The successive sieges of Jerusalem were successively more terrible; so were the repeated raids upon Rome. The longer we treasure up wrath for the day of wrath the greater must be the weight of it that will ultimately burst on our heads. 3. It is justly required by *great* sin. This was (1) great moral and religious corruption; (2) practised in "the holy land"—in God's inheritance, and therefore a sacrilegious defilement of Divine things; and (3) an abuse of God's blessings in the land God had given the people. The sin of those who enjoy Divine privileges and hold positions in the Church by means of which they can glorify or dishonour the Name of God is, on these accounts, especially culpable.

Vers. 19—21.—*God revealed to the heathen by his judgment on his people.* I. GOD IS REVEALED IN JUDGMENT. Blessings reveal God's love; judgments, his righteous power. They who ignore the perennial tokens of God's loving-kindness may be roused by startling manifestations of his justice. The judgments which fall on the professed people of God are the most striking proofs of his unflinching and impartial justice.

II. THE HEATHEN MAY LEARN THE LESSONS WHICH ARE LOST TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD. The heathen seem to be here described as returning to God before the Jews. Nothing is so blinding as sin against light. The publican repents before the Pharisee. Worldly men are more ready to receive religious impressions than people who were once religious and have fallen away.

III. THE REVELATION OF GOD VOUCHSAFED TO THE SPIRITUAL-MINDED IS HIGHER THAN THE REVELATION MADE TO THE HEATHEN IN JUDGMENT. The latter is grand and striking, but it does not open up the choicer stores of the knowledge of God. Jeremiah prizes these. To him God is a Strength, Fortress, and Refuge. God is not a mere Judge. He is a gracious Father, and this is his chief character. He is a *Strength*—actively saving and inspiring energy; a *Fortress*—protecting us when attacked in the hard battle of life; and a *Refuge* in the day of affliction, affording solace to his sorrowing children. God's people enjoy personal relations with him very different from those of men who simply recognize the terrible presence of God in judgment. Thus Jeremiah says, "*My* Strength," etc.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Celibacy as an obligation of the minister of God.* This passage has been quoted in support of the Romish doctrine of the celibacy of the clergy. Like other favourite references of the advocates of this regulation, however, it only requires to be examined to show that its bearing is quite of an opposite character. Its terms are not by any means absolute or universal. Not even the whole lifetime of the prophet nor his entire ministry are within the scope of the prohibition. It was a special revelation for exceptional circumstances, and must not be converted into a general rule.

I. THE LIMITATIONS IMPOSED UPON THE PROPHET, AND THEIR REASONS. 1. *The command related to:* (1) *The prophet himself.* It was in the second person singular. A matter affecting himself alone. (2) *The holy land—"in this place."* Should circumstances lead him elsewhere, the inference is that the restriction would be withdrawn. (3) *The period of time elapsing between the delivery of the special "word of Jehovah" and its fulfilment.* 2. *That Jeremiah himself was alone required to observe this restriction might at first appear strange were it not for his exceptional position.* (1) *As a symbol of the Divine attitude and intention towards Judah.* Not only special actions, such as the hiding of the girdle, were to be of this character, but the whole personality of the prophet. He was representative both of God and the ideal Israel. Therefore he represents the mind of God towards those who usurped the place of the latter. The conditions of the then present relations of God and Judah were not such as warranted an assumption of responsibilities implying for their happy fulfilment the Divine acceptance and favour. In the midst of a luxurious people his celibacy would be impressive. (2) *As an example to others.* The inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah, whatever they might experience in the future, would not be able to say they had been entrapped or deceived into a false security. The self-restraint and serious, sad aspect he presented were intended to influence the action of the people at that juncture. The calamities foretold would not come upon those who had been unwarned.

II. THE BEARING OF THESE UPON THE QUESTION OF THE "CELIBACY OF THE CLERGY." It is obvious that, as there were many other ministers of God in Judah and Jerusalem at that time to whom the command was not given, it was intended for one occupying an exceptional position. Further, there is no necessary permanent obligation attaching to it. A certain contingency is regarded—a time of distress and bloodshed—and the conduct of the prophet is directed with regard to that. But the celibacy of the clergy is a permanent institution with those who uphold it. No regard is paid to special circumstances or times. And the office of the Christian minister is not to be considered as occupied for a season of short-lived, delusive peace, but instituted and maintained in a world which is being reconciled to God; in which the Holy Spirit is given to them that ask it for direction and comfort; and whose institutions are more and more influenced by the laws of the kingdom of God. So in St. Paul's day it was the "present distress" which gave rise to the injunction. The world was conceived of as approaching a grand climateric; a sudden and overwhelming calamity was to inaugurate Christ's reign amongst men. Much will depend upon this, viz. Is the minister of the gospel a prophet of evil or a preacher of peace and glad tidings? If the latter, it can hardly be necessary that he should assume the bearing of Jeremiah. And the influence of a celibate clergy upon the general institutions of marriage has been found to be pernicious, lowering its relative sacredness and violating the law of nature, which is its greatest safeguard.

III. PRINCIPLES OF GENERAL OBLIGATION INVOLVED. The duties and restraints here imposed upon the prophet are not rightly apprehended when supposed *entirely* peculiar to office and position. They are not wholly those of a class or a special individual, but rather the generally obligatory principles of the spiritual life intensified and specialized. Every Christian ought to hold himself ready to sacrifice and to adapt himself as the duties imposed upon him under given circumstances may require. 1. *The responsibilities of marriage.* One's own happiness merely is not to be consulted in marrying, but the probabilities of comfort and right upbringing of children that may be born. A season of calamity such as that now foretold was a sufficient reason against contracting

marriage, as by that means its effects would only be the more widely extended. 2. *Consciousness of God's displeasure ought to exert a restraining influence upon men.* The marriage feast and the usual rejoicings that take place on such occasions show that they are regarded as of a joyous nature, and not amongst the sterner duties. It was but fitting, therefore, that it should be refrained from in view of what was about to take place. It would have shown a heedlessness of God's anger provoking the more signal punishment. The "marrying and giving in marriage" of the antediluvians was a sign of their godlessness and unbelief. 3. *The responsibility of example is here presented in an extreme form.* What would have applied to the case of a private person thus forewarned was of greater force in that of one occupying an exceptional position and necessarily of great public influence. If the declarer of the Divine message had himself exhibited no sign of restraint or chastened severity of life, how could others be expected to believe him? The life of the preacher is the best illustration of his doctrine, and it naturally is regarded by others with special and critical attention.—M.

Vers. 10—13.—*The destiny of sinners a self-created one.* I. As it is in itself. It is a fearful prospect which is here held out to the unbelieving Jews. They are to experience a complete change of condition. The land of promise, national independence and honour, family purity and happiness, and the institution and ordinances of true religion are to be forfeited. The land to which they are to be exiled is unfamiliar to them—full of strange scenes and customs; a scene of bondage and tyranny. This is but an illustration of the eternal destiny of sinners. Much must necessarily be vague in their conceptions of it, but it will be a greater change from their present circumstances and experiences than can be imagined. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus teaches that there will be a complete reversal of relations and conditions. How impossible for the lost to reconcile themselves to circumstances so different from those to which they have been accustomed! Their nature will be wholly enslaved, and the best service they can render will be exacted for objects unworthy of it and known to be so. Hell, so far as Scripture allusion to it can be understood, is represented as abnormal, unnatural, a state in which the soul shall be filled with fruitless regret, and sink into lower and still lower deeps of degradation and misery. It is depicted as a strange and sunless land, irradiated by no celestial smile and no sunrise of hope.

II. As the sinner regards it. The picture drawn by Jeremiah is vague and yet terribly suggestive. It is so foreign to the experience and expectation of his hearers that they look upon it with incredulity and astonishment. Instead of evoking from them expressions of repentance and fear concerning the way in which they are walking, it provokes questions that exhibit the callous indifference and self-deception of hardened hearts. They cannot conceive of such a fate awaiting them. What have they done? Is it just that their conduct should be so dealt with? If any offence had been committed, surely it was out of all proportion to such a judgment, and so on. Is not this the attitude of the sinner to-day? The more awful the future predicted for him the more secure he feels in himself now. He fails to trace the definite line of connection between the germ and the fruit of his sin. It is a part of his infatuation to misapprehend the law of the Divine reward and punishment, and even the real outlines and proportions of the Divine character. 1. *A destiny in his view so disproportionate to his offence becomes incredible.* And just as the Jew could not conceive of the features and characteristics of the life upon which he was to enter when this prophecy should be fulfilled, the transgressor now fails to realize the position he must occupy when circumstance will depend only upon character. Passing consequences may be seen and partly estimated, but the final outcome of it all is, because of its very nature and extent, unreal to him. 2. *The future of the sinner is strange and unreal to him, and therefore fails to impress him as it ought.*

III. As explained by God. This is one of the main purposes of revelation, viz. to connect the present with the future and to interpret their relations. Whilst it is true that every sinner already contains within himself the elements of his future punishment, it is also true that of himself he could not forecast the actual extent or nature of the destiny he is working out. It is necessary, therefore, both for emphasis and enlightenment, to supplement experience with revelation. 1. *Their punishment was but the natural development of their sin.* The latter was of old date. Their fathers

forsook Jehovah, did not keep his Law, and went after other gods. The tendency was inherited by themselves, and in aggravated degree: "Ye have done worse than your fathers." They now paid more attention and honour to idols than to Jehovah, and when this is the case it cannot last long. The veil of decency will be cast aside, the real character will betray itself, and shame will cease. They became more and more "sold under sin." The vices of a false religion weakened their character and made them a ready prey to the ambition and rapacity of their neighbours. The same law is apparent in spiritual destiny. Let the sinner be warned. He may be sure his sin will find him out. 2. *It was but right that they should be so punished, as they had added to their ancestral offence an intolerable personal aggravation.* The terms of the covenant were flagrantly violated, and they had forfeited the land by their moral unfitness to occupy it. If an earthly country could be so hallowed as not to admit of being occupied by unclean idolaters, how much less possible must it be for confirmed sinners to stand in the presence of God amidst the multitudes of redeemed! Heaven would be hell to such persons. 3. *The spiritual condition that was so dealt with presented no ground for consideration.* God said, "I will show you no favour." It was a deliberate sin, and there were no signs of repentance. The day of grace, however, was with them whilst the prophet spoke. So is it represented to be with the preaching of the gospel. Whilst God calls to us his mercy still continues. "Now is the accepted time; . . . now is the day of salvation." But in that day present obstinacy will be the worst condemnation. "I called, and ye refused," etc.—M.

Ver. 13.—*Sin a tyrannous and exhaustive service.* I. THAT WHICH WAS AT FIRST A FREE CHOICE WILL IN TIME BECOME A COMPULSORY SERVICE. The waywardness and capricious eclecticism of the idolatrous Jews was to be sternly visited upon them. They had toyed and compromised with idols; soon it would be discovered that that dalliance could not be prolonged. 1. *Jehovah will not continue to accept a half-hearted service.* It was only his forbearance that had suffered it so long. Whilst it might appear possible that Judah would repent, the imperfection of its service was overlooked; but when that imperfection seemed likely to be stereotyped, or when it was increasing with the growth of idolatrous practices, it was no longer to be endured. A mixed worship is dishonouring to God. He refuses to accept half a heart. It is impossible to serve him aright with divided attention and interest. Permission to worship and know him even in part is a privilege which may be withdrawn. The "idolater" would not always be able to walk on the heights of critical spiritual eclecticism. The time would come when what he thought so irksome would be taken away. God would send upon him "strong delusion to believe a lie." And this is rather to be looked upon as a repudiation of Judah by God than as a departure from Jehovah permitted by him to his own hurt. Spiritual power and hallowed circumstance would alike be forfeited, and God would cast off the idolaters. For: 2. *Sinful tendency, when let alone, confirms and strengthens itself.* Daily contact with the obligations and influence of the Law and the temple was a real benefit to the Israelites. It kept them from settling down utterly into idolatrous habits. That religious observance which is so wearisome to the sinner is his safeguard; it keeps him from complete abandonment to the inner depravity of his nature. He is alarmed, warned, disturbed, whenever he is inclined to more than ordinary licence; and even his ordinary lax and sinful life is constantly judged and corrected by the truth which he hears. The Spirit of God continues to plead and wrestle with him, and although he does not wholly yield himself to its influence, he is prevented from wandering quite beyond recall. But let this restraining influence of grace once be withdrawn, the natural impulse to evil, all unchecked, will begin to develop and gradually overmaster the entire nature. This is the explanation of many a life that seems to linger long upon the debatable line between duty and sinful inclination—it is the Spirit of God that has not ceased to strive with it, and not the mere power of the man over his own desires and habits. 3. *The circumstances and opportunities of Divine worship, if persistently neglected and abused, will be withdrawn.* Palestine under the theocracy was a breathing-space for the spiritual aspirations of man. It was a school of purest affection and the most exalted righteousness. Divine power outside of, and also working within, Israel had defended it against the most tremendous invading forces. Let that power be with-

drawn, the possibility of every man worshipping God under his own vine and fig tree would be taken away. The Jews would be overpowered by the laws and customs of the idolatrous nations amongst whom they would be dispersed. How much do we owe to the political, social, and personal influences that make for righteousness around us! How slowly and at what infinite cost have they been acquired! And they depend upon unceasing effort for their support and advancement. Civilization is the product of long, manifold, and harmonious effort and growth. It is a gossamer fabric which a day might destroy. Yet is it but an outwork and coarse expression of religion. The latter is the breath and inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Let that breath be withdrawn, and it ceases to live; and its most characteristic and essential institutions gradually become obsolete and sink into a mockery and a snare. We shall probably never know how much we owe to the mere circumstance of religion that surrounds us. Freedom to worship God, encouragement to obey him, and sustaining power to give effect to our spiritual desires, all result from the favourable position in which we are placed. Let us, therefore, seek to foster the institutions and increase the social and political influence of Christianity in the world. Without its presence amongst men, and the hallowed institutions, customs, and observances that embody its spirit, we should find it infinitely more difficult to serve God with conscientious and honest service.

II. THIS SERVICE WILL AFFORD NO REAL SATISFACTION OR PEACE. The exhaustive and absorbing devotion which idolatry entails is not the sign of spontaneous enthusiasm. It arises from the nature of the idols, as senseless, helpless blocks. They, indeed, must cry loudly who would be heard by such gods. In proportion as ritual is more laborious than righteousness, so is idolatry more exacting than true religion. But "the idol is nothing," only the representative of the lusts and ignorance of its worshippers. It is in reality the latter that receive and demand the service. All sin is idolatry in some form or other, and will prove as exacting of the attention and labour of the sinner. Who is not willing to admit that sin is a hard taskmaster? And yet, what are its rewards? The poor soul, hurried and driven by its own overmastering lusts and passions, has no rest, and no solid residuum of comfort is secured; nay, rather a sense of deepening gloom, indefinite, unquenchable craving, and a foreboding of the final wrath of him whom it has insulted and disobeyed. To the victims of wicked habit, etc., as to the devotees of a false religion, the words of Christ are addressed, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," etc.—M.

Vers. 14, 15.—*The old deliverance forgotten in the new.* I. THE GREATER AND MORE INVETERATE THE TRANSGRESSION, THE GREATER WILL BE THE PUNISHMENT. It was not to be supposed that he past judgments of God, however great, were all that he could or would do. He has many ways of bringing transgressors to their senses; and it is impossible to conceive a limit to his power of imposing penalty. His stern, uncompromising attitude to sin has been witnessed to by many an awful judgment and destruction, even where previous calamities might seem to have exhausted his anger or his invention.

II. THE PROMISE OF GOD APPEARS SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE FIRST ANNOUNCEMENTS OF HIS JUDGMENTS. Even in the way in which it is threatened there is encouragement and hope. It will be an awful experience, but God will redeem his people. So in the beginning of the curse our first parents received an anticipatory evangel. The failures of God's people in social and political experiment were the occasion of the most glorious predictions of Messianic times. This shows the real purpose of God's threatenings. They are intended to produce repentance, and yet there is reality enough in them if that repentance be not forthcoming. Fear is appealed to, but freedom of choice is preserved, and spiritual power called into responsible action.

III. THE MERCIFUL POWER OF GOD WILL BE MORE GLORIOUSLY MANIFESTED IN EVERY NEW CALAMITY WHICH HIS PEOPLE BRING UPON THEMSELVES. The captivity of which the prophet speaks will but give occasion for a grand deliverance, in comparison with which the Exodus from Egypt will sink into insignificance. The judgments of God, however great they may appear, are limited with the strictest exactness, and are within his control. There is reason, therefore, to expect his interference whenever the folly or unbelief of his people imperils his cause. He will preserve a people to praise him, and raise up a generation to call him blessed. So with the backslider from gospel

privileges and obligations. He whom Christ has washed in his blood will not be suffered wholly to pass into spiritual death. Grander exhibitions of the Divine grace and power will be afforded. The good Shepherd will go over the dark mountains to recover the wanderer. Those who have been entangled again in the yoke of bondage will be redelivered if they but turn with new obedience and faith to their Saviour. They will be saved, if "as by fire."—M.

Vers. 19—21.—*The heathen turning to the true God.* The prophet, disappointed and broken-hearted, is driven to Jehovah for his own comfort and support. We see here how much it cost him to speak the words he had to utter. Every true minister of Christ must feel in the same manner when he has to deal with hardened sinners, and to become the mouthpiece of Divine warnings and threats. The soul that stands up for righteousness will often find itself without sympathy and alone amongst unbelieving men. Prayer is the refuge that is ever open in such hours. An extremity like this is of all others God's opportunity. Like Elijah in the wilderness, he will receive unexpected succour. He will live, not on bread, but on words and revelations of God. To Jeremiah was given this vision.

I. WHILST JEHOVAH IS DESERTED BY HIS OWN PEOPLE THE HEATHEN WILL SEEK HIM. There is a law of displacement visible in God's dealings with his Church from age to age. Like the man in the parable, who prepared the feast and bade many, he is determined that his house shall be filled. 1. *In this way God shows his people that he does not specially need them.* His favour depends upon their faithfulness; if they fail he has others to supply their place. His election is no blind favouritism or arbitrary distinction, but proceeds upon spiritual conditions. 2. *Apostasy from God is due to imperfectly understanding him; but the heathen who turn to him do so with full experience of the effects of their idolatry.* The vanity and nothingness of idols drives them in despair to the true God. Henceforth for them idolatry can have no power. It has been, as the Law was to Saul, a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ. Lessons acquired in so stern a school are not soon forgotten; and the half-hearted disciple, led away of his own lusts and enticed, is supplanted by a steadfast and faithful convert. So every day is the Church of Christ being recruited from the ranks of those who have been the "chief of sinners." We cannot tell in what depths of degradation those may now be sunk who are to shine as stars in the eternal firmament. Let the individual Christian strive, therefore, to make his calling and his election sure. Let the Church see that its candlestick be not removed.

II. IDOLATRY IS A SYSTEM WHICH REFUTES ITSELF. 1. *It disappoints the expectations which it has awakened.* 2. *The conscience at last revolts against the excesses to which it leads.* 3. *By-and-by the evident truism, that what man makes cannot be his god, is realized and acted upon.* This process is going on to-day in the great seats of idolatrous worship, and the fiercest iconoclasts are to be found amongst those who have been brought up in heathenism. A similar process to this goes on in the lives of good men as they are gradually freed from the illusions of life and the ensnaring influences of worldly ideas and aims. The disappointments of life are so many waves casting us upon the shore of a heavenly life, and the general drift of earthly experience is in many and many an instance bringing men surely to God.

III. FAILING A BETTER REVELATION, THE JUDGMENTS OF JEHOVAH UPON HIS OWN PEOPLE WILL SHOW THE HEATHEN THAT HE IS THE ONLY REAL GOD. This is not the way in which God would prefer to show men his glory and his power. It is by his saving grace he would commend himself to them. And the saints are the appointed teachers of the world. They could tell of his power and his grace, of their own deliverance. They could exhibit the blessings of a people whose trust is Jehovah. But, failing this, they would be made examples. The justice of God will take the place of his mercy which has been abused. In its exceptional severity, its evident connection with and suggestion of supernatural agency, etc., it will attract attention and arouse curiosity. Israel, therefore, even in its calamity and suffering, will serve God. A vicarious virtue will lurk in its captivity, its desolation, and its persecution. God is dealing thus with the unfaithful branches of his Church to-day. The perplexities, entanglements, and griefs that are due to worldly alliance and secular ambitions and desires are well enough understood even by worldly men. Not from Eden, but

from the wilderness to which she has banished herself, will the bride, the Lamb's wife, be brought for her new espousals, and with her shall come, as virgins in her train, many who have been taught by her judgments and disciplines.—M.

Vers. 1—9.—*Commands countermanded.* There are three such in this section.

I. THE COMMAND TO MARRY. 1. In every way whereby the will of God can be expressed—by his Word, his providence, his laws, written, moral, social, physical, God has commanded that "a man shall leave his father and mother," etc. "A good wife is from the Lord," her companionship is the most blessed in the world. All artificial hindrances to marriage are, therefore, to be condemned. The same enemy that destroys such myriads of souls for eternity, ruins their happiness, oftentimes, in this life also. For it is the world which frowns upon marriages, unexceptionable in other respects, in which a certain style cannot be maintained or a certain amount of income be secured; and all superstitious teachings that inculcate celibacy as a state more pleasing to God, are equally guilty both in regard to God and man. Disobedience to this command involves such frightful consequences as in themselves to clearly manifest the Divine will, that "it is not good for man to be alone." 2. But here in these verses *the prophet is distinctly forbidden to marry.* (Ver. 1, etc.) And the reasons were probably that, by his abstaining from marriage, he might more powerfully confirm his words as to the coming calamities. It would show his own belief in what he had foretold when it was seen that he would not make for himself a home under such circumstances. It would leave him more free for the arduous duty which he had to discharge. It would save him great sorrow when the evil days should come. And so now there are special cases in which God's will seems to be that a man should not marry. The poverty-stricken ministers of religion, of whom there are so many; the missionary exposed to daily peril of climate, pestilence, savage heathendom; or any to whom it is evident that by their marriage more evil than good will result;—then, just as we may be called upon to do without many other great earthly advantages, so we may be called upon to deny ourselves this. And there may be physical conditions forbidding marriage. No man has a right to transmit to others hereditary disease, whether of body or mind. And there are spiritual hindrances. A man ought to marry only "in the Lord." But all these exceptions are rare; God's general rule is that men should marry.

II. THE COMMAND TO "WEEP WITH THEM THAT WEEP." That there would be no stint of sorrow, no lack of mourners, the awful declarations of this section plainly show. And generally God's will, shown in a thousand ways, is that we should, by sympathy and condolence, "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ." But here such sympathy and "weeping with them that weep" is prohibited (ver. 5). This does seem a stern command, and no doubt it is so. But we do not feel called on to condole with criminals on account of the penalties they have to bear; were any to do so, we should regard it as misplaced and mischievous sympathy, calculated only to do harm. And whilst those to whom the prophet was sent were hardened in their sin, sympathy with them on account of their punishment would be also mischievous and wrong. We have continually to be on our guard—for many never are—lest our sympathy for the sinner's suffering should make us forget or think lightly of the sinner's sin. No matter how glaring the crime, there are always some who are ready to agitate for a mitigation of the penalty. Now, it is this hurtful sympathy which God here forbids the prophet to show.

III. THE COMMAND TO "REJOICE WITH THEM THAT DO REJOICE." This also is a constant injunction of the Divine Word, as it is an instinct of the benevolent and Christian heart. Jesus was as ready to go to the marriage festival as to the grave-side. And so should we be. But here again the command is countermanded (ver. 8). And the reason is manifest. God would not suffer his prophet to be in any wise a solace to sinful men. Too many professed Christians are. Nothing is a greater "comfort to Sodom" than the sight of the serenity and joviality of men who profess to believe that sinners are on their way to everlasting woe. The sinner argues—and it is an argument very difficult to refute—that Christians do not believe this, no matter what they say, and hence they, the ungodly, are in no such awful peril after all. The prophet of God was commanded to abstain from all festivity and all outward joy, and no doubt the reason was, lest by any sharing therein, he should throw doubt on the awful message he

was charged to deliver. Are the ministers of God bound to do the like now? Our Lord did not. His apostles did not. Nowhere are we bidden to abstain from all earthly joy. Rather are we assured that God has "given us all things richly to enjoy." And the unbeliever's objection on the ground of the inconsistency of our calmness, and yet more of our gladness, notwithstanding the awful peril of ungodly souls, may be met by the reply that we cannot say of those whom yet we would fain see drawn much nearer to God than they to our eyes are, that they are, as those whom Jeremiah addressed, absolutely doomed. We are not forbidden to pray for them, as Jeremiah was; nor to hope that even yet they may turn to God and find mercy. The prophet had no hope; we have much, and it is on the ground of that hope which we cherish that our calmer, brighter moods are justified. Still, one shrinks from saying aught that would seem to sanction the terrible indifference we all too much manifest in regard to the spiritual condition of the world around us. But yet we may say that that condition is not such as to demand—even were it possible, which it is not, to comply with the demand—that we should all cease from joy, and clothe ourselves unceasingly in sackcloth and ashes. We cannot do that; we are not bidden to do that, nor would it be of use were we to do so. We have a gospel to proclaim, a living Saviour to hope in, and a Holy Spirit's energies to second all our prayers and endeavours to win men to God. But at the same time, the believer in God and in his righteous Law cannot and ought not to find pleasure in the rejoicings of the ungodly, or to give any countenance to their defiance of God. No; we are not to go "in the way of sinners," not to sit "in the seat of scorners," though it may be a scene of festivity and mirth. From all such we must turn away. We cannot rejoice with them when they rejoice; in their gladness we cannot share, but only mourn that they do not mourn. Let them turn to God, and we will dwell among them, and in their joy and in their sorrow we will gladly share. But until they do, for us as for God's prophets his ordinary commands as to sympathy with them are countermanded, and we must stand aside. Light cannot have fellowship with darkness, nor the children of God with the children of the wicked one.—C.

Vers. 10—13.—*Conscience dead.* Conscience is given us of God, to serve as a faithful sentry, warning of the approach of sin and summoning the energies of our souls to resist and reject the intruder. Or as a just judge to unhesitatingly condemn sin, let it be wrapped up in what specious disguise it may. It is the Ithuriel's spear which, the moment it touches any moral action, compels such action to reveal itself of what sort it is. Oh, the unspeakable blessing of an enlightened, healthful conscience that will not suffer sin, any sin, even the least, without prompt and powerful protest! God help us all diligently to guard, profoundly to reverence and faithfully to obey this inward monitor, this true bearer of "the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." But these verses reveal a condition of things in which conscience is dead. It has lost all power of perception, its voice is hushed, or rather, what is worse, it sees and speaks falsely. It is a mockery of life, which would be grotesque were it not so profoundly sad. A caricature and parody of what it once was, its powers utterly perverted, bent, warped, so that they "call evil good, and good evil." Note—

I. THE FACT. How else can such a question as this of ver. 10 be accounted for? Was not their sin clear as the sun at noonday? Had it not been for years crying aloud to God for vengeance? Had it not been condemned by all the servants of God, by the written Law of God, by all the voices of God in long succession? And yet these people are asking, "Wherefore hath the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us." It is as if the convicts in our prisons were to begin to ask why they were so treated, and to profess ignorance of their having done aught amiss. But in such case we should say they were playing the hypocrite, pretending an innocence to which they well knew they had no claim. In this case, however, there is no hypocrisy. The question, monstrous as it seems to us, is asked in all good faith. The prophet of God is bidden to give it a serious answer, not to denounce those who ask it as a set of conscious hypocrites. Just as in Matt. xxv. 44, which is a portentous parallel indeed, the condemned there are heard asking when they had been guilty of the sins laid to their charge. It is evident in that case and in this, not that they were consciously liars, but that conscience was simply dead within them. The writer knew also of one who had cruelly defrauded a large number of people, who, believing him to be an eminently religious man, had

entrusted to him their hard-earned savings, with all of which he had made away; but, when brought to justice, condemned, and imprisoned, he could not be got to confess that he had done wrong, but would keep quoting, in regard to himself, texts which tell of the afflictions of the righteous, and how "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."

II. THE CAUSE. Conscience is starved by neglect of that seeking of God's grace which is its nutriment and strength. And it is stunned by repeated acts of sin. Men can and do nibble, if we may so speak, at conscience, and gradually rid themselves of it. The clamour of sin drowns the still, small voice, and its protests, perpetually unheeded, are at last withdrawn. So that at length men find themselves able to do evil and think nothing of it; the little rift that sin first made has widened and widened until the whole torrent of waters bursts through, for the faithful dyke that held them back has been gradually destroyed, and so now the whole nature of the man is overwhelmed, submerged beneath the deluge of sin. And, what is most sad, the man feels, no more than do the sunken cities and towns that lie at the bottom of the Zuyder Zee, the rush of the waves that for centuries have rolled over them.

III. THE CURE. Thank God there is one. The sharp surgery of God's judgments arouse the deadened conscience. The rags, the hunger, the degradation of the prodigal woke up his conscience and brought him "to himself." And so it was with the Jewish people. God's judgments made them hate and abhor, as they have done ever since, the idolatries which brought those judgments upon them. It would be dreadful to think that God had no resources whereby, in full harmony with its freedom, he could bring into due subjection and order "the unruly wills of sinful men." Can we conceive of God having created a force greater than himself, which can for ever defy him, and ever maintain, as Milton's Satan in hell, a rebellious though wretched rule? God knew how to convert Israel, Saul, the penitent thief, ourselves, and we may trust him to find means whereby at length to Jesus every knee shall be made to bow. Vers. 14 and 15 contemplate a converted Israel (cf. also Isa. xxx. 18; Matt. xxvii. 33—39). But let a man tremble at the thought of compelling God to deal with him thus. Let him beware how he wastes his conscience, lest it turn against him and suffer him to sin unrestrained.—C.

Vers. 14, 15.—*Great mercies the forerunners of greater still.* At first reading of these verses their truth is hardly apparent to the ordinary reader of the Bible. The deliverance from Egypt was so magnificent an event, accompanied by such manifestations of the Divine glory, that the quiet return of but a comparatively few of the exiles from Babylon pales into insignificance. Hence it is the latter event that seems not worthy to be spoken of in comparison with the former, and not the former in comparison with the latter. The second temple was so greatly inferior to the first that old men who had seen the first wept when they thought of those glories which to the second were quite unattainable; and so the return from Babylon seems to fall far short in glory of the redemption from Egypt. But these verses affirm that the glory of the return from Babylon was to be far the greater. Now, how could this be? It may be said: 1. That in this return there was a display of the *moral power of God rather than his physical might.* That which was needed to bring this about was the exercise of the Divine power on men's hearts rather than any material force. It was by mighty miracles that Israel was brought out of Egypt; it was by the action of God's Spirit on his people's hearts that those who returned from Babylon were induced so to do. For their lot was happy, prosperous, peaceful, so far as this world was concerned. The Books of Esther, Nehemiah, and Daniel show this. Hence it was a strong religious yearning that led to the return of those who returned. The mass of the nation were content to remain, and did remain, and formed "those of the Dispersion," of whom in so many ways we hear in after ages. Hence, as Zechariah says (iv. 6), it was "not by might, nor by power, but," etc. 2. Then, also, in this return there was a *display of God's pardoning love.* Israel was a forgiven people. They had received at the Lord's hand double for all their sins. But God is ever more glorified in the display of pardoning love than in any manifestations of mere power. 3. And there was in it *such a fulfilment of prophecy,* such a demonstration of the overruling power of God in and through all the movements of different nations and ages, as proclaimed God's glory more than power alone could ever do. For these reasons the return of the exiles was a more glorious event than the

deliverance from Egypt. 4. And this will be seen yet more if we take the verses as pointing on to *the ultimate restoration of Israel*. Zechariah (xiii. and xiv.) speaks of this, as do many other Scriptures. It was the "hope of Israel" of which Paul told, and he places it in connection with the second advent and the resurrection. 5. And still more if we understand by Israel the spiritual Israel, and regard all these promises as predicting the triumph of the Church. Thus regarded, the deliverance from Egypt was by comparison a very little thing. But when that great triumph comes, where shall *we* be? God grant that it be amongst those whom on that day he will confess before his Father and the holy angels. But this notable instance in which past mercies promise greater ones to come is only one out of many more. Apply the principle declared—

I. TO THE CHURCH AT LARGE. What mercies in the past, what deliverances, the Church has enjoyed: from persecutors, "grievous wolves," superstition, infidelity, etc.! But all these are to be regarded as pledges of yet greater ones when they shall be needed.

II. TO INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF THAT CHURCH. Who of us cannot recount, in the course of our lives, *temporal* deliverances: from sickness, poverty, perplexity, sorrow, death, etc.? We are to take them all as reasons to anticipate greater things still, more to follow. And especially *spiritual* deliverances: from living on in disregard of God, from the power of the world, temptation, sorrow. But there are greater ones still. The Church in its full redemption shall prove the truth of this, and so shall separate members of the Church. All shall confess that the Lord hath "kept the good wine until now."

CONCLUSION. 1. Be not dismayed at the troubles of the present; do not think God's grace is exhausted. 2. See to it that you share in the first deliverance—that from guilt and sin. Unless we have known the first, we cannot know the second and greater—that final deliverance from all guilt, all sin, all sorrow, all death, in the presence of God for ever.—C.

Vers. 16—21.—*Sin found out.* The striking imagery of these verses teaches us that there shall be no hiding-place, whether by sea or land, where God will not find those whom his vengeance pursues. The sinner may be sure that his sin will find him out.

I. MEN DOUBT THIS. Reasons are: 1. Long impunity has made them bold. 2. Such findings of them out as have taken place, in defilement of conscience, hardening of the heart, loss of peace with God, etc., they do not care for. They only care for public exposure and punishment. 3. They see others go on in sin unpunished. 4. The power which we all have to believe what we wish to believe. 5. The direct agency of the devil in fostering such false belief.

II. BUT THE DECLARATION OF GOD ON THIS MATTER IS NEVERTHELESS TRUE. 1. The Scriptures affirm it (cf. all those which teach the omniscience and omnipresence of God). 2. Conscience attests it. 3. There is nothing in sin to show wherefore it should not be. 4. The revelation of the future life distinctly provides for it. 5. And even now it is continually being proved true. A man's sin finds him out in many ways—in body, mind, estate, reputation, etc. And in one or more of these sin does ever find a man out, even now. 6. The apparent exceptions are accounted for on the ground of (1) God's long-suffering to the sinful; (2) God's purpose to test and exercise the faith of his own people.

III. A DEEP AND ABIDING CONVICTION OF THIS TO BE GREATLY DESIRED. 1. What restraint it would exercise on the will! (cf. "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"). 2. How exceeding sinful it would make sin appear! 3. What force it would lend to all endeavours after the reclamation and reformation of the sinful!

IV. AND SUCH CONVICTION MAY BE HAD. It is the sacred and salutary power of prayer thus to make God real to us. In prayer we look to him and we see him looking upon us; we speak to him and he speaks to us; by aid of it we walk with him and he walks with us. He who thus lives in daily fellowship with God can never be without the conviction spoken of.

V. BECAUSE SIN IS SURE TO FIND US, LET US AT ONCE SEEK AND FIND CHRIST.—C.

Ver. 19—ch. xvii. 3.—*The accusers of the ungodly.* The prophet appeals to—

I. THE ANTICIPATED CONVERSION OF THE HEATHEN. Ver. 19, "The Gentiles shall come," etc. These heathen peoples will declare the vanity of those idols in which Judah is now trusting (cf. Matt. xi. 20—24).

II. CONSCIENCE. Their sin was "written as with," etc., "on the table of their heart" (ch. xvii. 1). Nothing could erase the memories they all had of their own grievous sin. It was written as if in rock, and as with a pen of iron and a point of diamond (allusion, probably, to the inscriptions on rocks, so frequent in the East). What a witness is conscience! It cannot be silenced nor sophisticated. It keeps a man's sins "ever before" him. "My sin is ever before me," said David. The writing of our sin on the heart's tablets is so deep, so incisive, so clear, that nothing can destroy it. No storms will wash them out; no lapse of time obliterate and decay; no rush of business and occupation will fill up and conceal those deep engravings; no rough contact with the events of life will break them. There they stand, clearly legible, written on the tablets of our hearts—our conscience—as letters written by an iron or diamond pen on rock. To this evidence the prophet appeals (cf. our Saviour's appeal to conscience in the case of the accusers of the woman taken in adultery, John viii.).

III. THEIR WORSHIP. Not alone their conscience, but the horns of their altars, testified against them. These horns, smeared with the blood of their idolatrous sacrifices, blackened with the smoke of their altar fires, reeking continually with the fumes and smoke of their offered victims,—these also were witnesses whose testimony could not be set aside. And what a witness against a man will the worship he offers—the horns of *his* altar—often be: its coldness, its carelessness, its infrequency, its insincerity, its formality, and sometimes its hypocrisy! Yes; the horns of the altar will prove swift witnesses against all who worship God otherwise than "in spirit and in truth."

IV. THEIR CHILDREN. (Ver. 2.) "They would never lose the impression of that horrible idolatry which had snatched so many from their midst. So deep was this impression that the mere sight of green trees and high hills was sufficient to refresh the hideous memory continually." Or it may mean that their children, retaining and practising the idolatry of their fathers, are witnesses against those fathers such as none can set aside. Children may become the means of their fathers' condemnation. They cannot help testifying against them. In their memories, their habits, their very bodies, their sins, they will declare what their fathers were. Thank God, they can and do testify *for* the godly and righteous parents, as Timothy did of his mother and hers. But how awful to think of having one's own children brought forward as witnesses against us! Let ungodly parents ponder this.

CONCLUSION. With such weight of evidence against Judah, what wonder that her punishment was so severe! The sin of Judah, however, too much resembles, in its aggravation and in the evidence brought against it, sin of which *we* may be all too conscious. What can we do but turn to him who has said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," etc.; and whose blood "cleanseth from all sin"? Blessed be God that we may do this; but "how shall we escape if we neglect," etc.? —C.

Vers. 1—4.—*Domestic relations become a curse.* It is evidently implied that, even in the present deplorable state of Israel, there was much that appeared attractive and profitable in domestic relations. Jesus reminded his servants that, in the days before the Flood, there was "marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark;" and so we may conclude that in the time of Jeremiah there was also marrying and giving in marriage, down to the very coming of the invader on the land. Individuals would go on, following out the promptings of their affections, unable to discern the signs of the times, and the approach of a calamity such as would overwhelm every family existing when it came. When society is in its ordinary state, marriages ending in misery are believed to be exceptional. But here there is a trouble which is to come upon every household. Every family is to be smitten, and Jeremiah, in his loneliness, is called to notice how, though deprived of domestic relations, he is to gain a compensation in other ways. Perhaps at times he was inclined to murmur that he—a man of strife and contention to the whole land—had no home where he might turn and find some refuge and relief, if only for a short interval. Even in those apostate days there must surely have been a few homes at least where there was fidelity to Jehovah; where the parents taught his truth to the children, and the children reverenced the parents according to his commandment. But Jeremiah's way was closed up, so that he

had no opportunity of forming such a household for himself. His celibate life did not come by his own selfish resolution, but by the will of God, clearly expressed, and based on certain necessities of Jeremiah's prophetic mission. The prophet, therefore, while he lost some things, was spared some great sorrows when the long-predicted blow at last came on the nation. The external circumstances of life are wonderfully equalized, when the sum of them is able to be calculated. We can only be robbed of the best possessions by our own fault. Jeremiah, however lonely his path may have been, however like to that of him who had "not where to lay his head," was advancing to the state where "they neither marry nor are given in marriage."—Y.

Vers. 5—9.—*The house of mourning and the house of feasting alike forbidden.* It is made plain upon the surface of this command that the house of mourning and the house of feasting are not forbidden in themselves. The man on whom the injunction is laid is a special man, and he is spoken to in special circumstances. All others may cross the threshold of such houses; the prophet alone must remain outside. This peculiar conduct was meant to emphasize his predictions. Every time there is a funeral or a marriage-feast, the terrible judgments shortly coming on the land are once more set forth. The worst sorrows of the present are but as a child's shallow grief compared with the universal and dreadful experiences that are yet to come; and in the joys of the present it would be unseemly for the man to share whose breast is filled with the sense of how soon these joys must pass away. A man who had to live as Jeremiah lived, in such an age, with such a message, seeing visions of so much woe, how could he receive pleasure from any festive gathering, or bring pleasure to it? The more he advances in his mission as prophet the more he has to walk alone. This commanded attitude towards the house of mourning and the house of feasting indicates to us the spirit in which those who may have to make such visits should pay their visits. We must not go to fall in with the wishes of those who are visited, but rather to do the will of God, at whatever cost, and with whatever difficulty. Consider this—

I. WITH REGARD TO THE HOUSE OF MOURNING. One feels that the prophet must have been exposed to much misapprehension in carrying out this command with the symbolic prophecy involved in it. It would be said that he was not only an unpatriotic man but an unfeeling one. Happily we have abundant proof that, whatever the imperfections of Jeremiah, a cold indifference to the griefs of others was not one of them. He may often have had to do violence to his own impulses in keeping away from the homes where the dead were lying; and yet he only did by command what we should sometimes like to do by preference, if it were only possible to do it without wounding the feelings of others. Think of the houses of mourning where little or nothing can be said that is comforting. What could have been done to comfort stricken parents that night when there was one dead in every Egyptian household? There is a way of offering sympathy which, well intended as it is, only exacerbates instead of mollifying. What false consolations, what hackneyed commonplaces, are made use of in the house of mourning! There is a falling back on what is called the good moral character of the dead. Death-bed repentances may be made too much of. The chamber of mourning is the stronghold of an immense amount of very dangerous error in the attitude of man towards God. The temporary pain of the freshly wounded heart of man is more considered than the abiding truth of God. Then what censurable regrets there are! what utter and unconcealed selfishness on the part of survivors! It is not a feeling of pain for what the departed may have lost, but rebellious wrath for what the survivor may have lost. And so we may say that, to enter into a house of mourning where there is the right and Christian spirit, is a matter for joy and not for grief, because indeed the peace and the loving-kindness and mercies of God are there. Let us aim so to live, in such unworldliness and heavenliness of life, that survivors shall not be tempted into vain consolations when we are gone.

II. WITH REGARD TO THE HOUSE OF FEASTING. The absence of Jeremiah from festive gatherings would be as a most significant presence; seeing that he was absent, not by accident, not from any personal feeling, not from any ascetic dislike to such gatherings, but by the special command of God. Not only was he forbidden to become himself a bridegroom, he could not even congratulate any other. It will be noticed that the marriage-feast in particular is referred to. The wedding was a time for a special gather-

ing, and invited guests would make special efforts to be present. Jesus, for instance, at the wedding-feast at Cana. Mere rioting and revelling, and the laughter of fools and such merry-making as cost the Baptist his life, were at all times forbidden. There is much of rebuke to us in this command of the prophet here. He did not take part even in an innocent festive gathering. It jarred on him as he thought of the future, so different and yet so near. And possibly, if we thought more as we ought to think on what has yet to come in the way of judgment and destruction, we should walk through the world feeling that we had no heart even for what is reckoned innocent merriment. We can never be sufficiently serious when the burden of human life, with all its vast and varied trials, comes to lie upon our thoughts.—Y.

Vers. 14, 15.—*Two great recollections.* Here once again we come upon the evangelical element in Jeremiah's prophecies; and once again we have to notice that, when this element does appear, it makes up for its infrequency by the brilliance and emphasis of the prediction. The prophet has just been compelled to speak of domestic suffering, national exile, and the withdrawal for a season of Divine favour. These necessary judgments must be magnified and stated in all their severity; not one of them can be omitted; the cup poured out by Jehovah must be drunk to its last drop. But when all these experiences are over, terrible and yet full of discipline, a glorious future remains. The manner of the prophecy is full of encouragement, and not least in this, that there is such a sudden turning from the deepest darkness to the brightness of noon. We have to consider—

I. THE INDICATION OF WHAT HAD BEEN ONE OF THE MOST CUSTOMARY FORMS OF OATH HITHERTO. On important occasions, when a promise had to be made or an assertion verified, it was the Israelite's habit to make a solemn appeal to the living Jehovah. "As Jehovah liveth" was the general formula, to be combined with more particular references, agreeing with the occasion, as to what this living Jehovah had done in the past. The reference might be to something that had happened in the experience of the individual, and probably still more frequently to greater events in the larger experience of the nation. To give such an appeal all possible solemnity it was needful to think of Jehovah in the most magnifying way; and what could magnify him more than a recollection of the great deliverance from Egypt, which he had wrought out for Israel? That deliverance gave Israel its great chance of service and glory as the people of God. Up to that time a nation of helpless slaves and sufferers—helpless, that is, for anything they could do—they nevertheless became in a very few days a nation of free men, travelling towards a land of their own. And all this was by direct Divine intervention; and not only was it a great deliverance in itself, but all the circumstances made it doubly memorable. The narrative of what had been done needed no embellishments to grave it indelibly on the memory of each generation. Moreover, Jehovah himself had made provision for the continued recollection of the deliverance by the institution of the Passover. He wished it to be remembered. We may well conclude that such a form of oath as appealed to him in his character as the Deliverer of Israel from Egyptian bondage, was peculiarly agreeable; it being always presumed, of course, that the oath was uttered sincerely.

II. THE INDICATION OF HOW THIS VENERATED OATH WAS TO BE SUPERSEDED. Probably at the time of the deliverance from Egypt many Israelites may have said to themselves, "Nothing can ever happen in the history of our nation more memorable than this. Whatever our vicissitudes, whatever our perils, we cannot be more in need of Jehovah's intervention than we have lately been." But when either nations or individuals speak thus, it is in utter ignorance of how deep and terrible human need may become. There was a worse bondage than that of Egypt; it came with no external inconveniences, it was invisible to the outward eye, and, worst of all, it was heedlessly accepted by the bondman himself. The Israelites had fallen into the bodily slavery of Egypt by no fault of their own; there was no point at which it was possible for them to stop the process. But the spiritual enslavement to idols and to every sort of consequent evil came by their own act. They had stooped to the yoke. It is a greater thing that has to be done now, *so far as the result to the Israelite is concerned*, than was done when he was taken out of Egypt. Then he was delivered from *Pharaoh and his host*—a simple matter *comparatively*, for the destruction of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea did all

that needed to be done. But now the Israelite has to be delivered from *himself*. There has to be some sort of change within him, and this we may well believe was brought about by the exile in Babylon. It is not enough to say that, after a time of exile, God brought them back to Jerusalem. The mere transport from one place to another would have been no whit more memorable than the deliverance from Egypt. Surely there must have been a state of heart in the returning generation which made them very different from the generation going away into captivity seventy years before. That they came back to a true, spiritual, steadfast service of Jehovah is not to be supposed; but neither would they come back to the old idolatry. The sin into which they were hereafter to fall was a formal service of the true God, mere ceremonialism and Pharisaism, not apostasy to idols. The great effect of the exile in Babylon was deliverance from formal idolatry, evidently a matter to be more celebrated than the deliverance, centuries before, from bondage in Egypt. But in the future beyond there was something greater still to be looked for. There was a possibility of yet another form of oath, if Jesus had not recommended his disciples to dispense with all additions to the simple, veracious "Yes" and "No." Israel needed to be delivered, not only from formal connection with false gods, but from a *mere formal* connection with the true God. The Lord lives, who brought Israel out of Egypt. The Lord lives, who further delivered Israel from temptation to fabricate idols and grovel before them in licentiousness and cruelty. And we may also add that the Lord lives, who makes individuals of every nation his children by the accepted indwelling of his Spirit; makes them partakers of the Divine nature, with all the glorious consequences thereof. Further, we may say that Jesus lives, who made the blind to see and who raised the dead. But it is a still greater thing to say, Jesus lives, who died to restore men to his Father, and rose again to bring life and immortality to light.—Y.

Vers. 19—21.—*The confession of the idolatrous Gentiles.* I. THE PROPHET'S DESCRIPTION OF JEHOVAH. God, he says, is his Strength, his Fortress, and his Refuge. 1. *The way in which the describer individualizes himself.* To the prophet individually Jehovah has a satisfactory relation. So far as external sufferings and losses are concerned, the prophet cannot escape some share; but so far as concerns his most important interests, he is effectually separated from his fellow-countrymen. When the invader comes they lose everything; but just then the prophet will be able to say more than ever that Jehovah is his Strength, Fortress, and Refuge. What he has learned to value most cannot be spoiled by any human hand whatever, and so it is seen that each one of us may be in the midst of a perishing multitude and yet not of them. These people had long boasted of their resources, their securities, and their satisfaction in life. They had virtually said to the prophet, "What better are you than us? Though you speak differently and live differently, your end will be the same." But the end was not the same. The invaders took from the people all that was precious to *them*, and then it was made evident that what was most precious to the prophet remained secure and uninjured with him. 2. *The necessity that the prophet should be able to say this.* Strength, defence, and security for the individual—even in the midst of a nation having none of these things—was not only possible but necessary. In the last resort, no amount of strength in the community in which we live will do us any good. There may be strength of a certain kind all around, but that may only emphasize our own weakness. Suppose the position of Jeremiah reversed. Actually he was living almost a solitary believer amid a nation of unbelievers; and yet this was far better than to have been an unbeliever amid a nation of believers. There is no way to make God our Strength, Fortress, and Refuge, save by personal trust and obedience. 3. *The sufficiency of that in which the prophet here expresses his confidence.* It is when we really address Jehovah, thinking of what we need and of what he is, that the feeling of an inexhaustible sufficiency will come to us. And this is the way one may come to speak who knows history, who has had somewhat in personal experience both of need and supply, and, above all, who looks heavenward, assured by a feeling of the heart which rises above all reasoning, that he is connected with One able to do exceeding abundantly beyond any conceivable need of man.

II. THE ANTICIPATED CONFESSION OF THE GENTILES. The words here are words of strong contrast. The Gentile is openly mentioned, but the children of Israel are thought

of at the same time. 1. *The Gentiles are represented as coming to Jehovah.* They have groped their way out of darkness and disentangled themselves from superstitions, while the very people whom Jehovah had brought to himself with so much power and patience, making their way clear and safe, would not inwardly come, even though they were outwardly brought. Their hearts were not changed with their changed circumstances. And it is a thing which cannot be too much remarked, that the Gentiles have long had an understanding, not only of the New Testament, but equally of the Old, which the children of Israel have been utterly unable to reach. And not only are these Gentiles to come; they are to come from the ends of the earth. God's drawing power is felt everywhere. Jerusalem is the centre from which light and truth in their great historical manifestations have gone out. But God can make his centre of spiritual light anywhere, according to the necessities of the individual and of the time. 2. When these Gentiles come they have *a confession to make.* They have to confess the utter emptiness and falsehood of their idolatries. They have, indeed, been taught all these things; sucked them in with their mothers' milk; but this makes their own turning from them all the more remarkable, for what a man is taught he too often clings to, just because he has been taught. It is to be further noticed that these idolatries have always had the same character. The conception is not of gods who once were strong and true, but who have at last come into dotage and are unable to help their worshippers. The lies that tend to deceive and ruin the present generation have actually deceived and ruined many generations before. And yet those things which the Gentiles show signs of forsaking Israel clings to with a mad persistency. Israel has chosen lying, vanity, and loss, and forsaken that great Jehovah whom their fathers inherited. The lesson is, not to value tradition for its own sake, seeing it may only hand down lies. A tradition is nothing unless it is something more than a tradition. There must be the personal experience of God, the personal reception of truth. Every man must come out of Egypt, cross the flood, and come to Sinai for himself. To every such one tradition will become invaluable; for of the things handed down he will know which to receive and transmit, and which to reject. Each of us who comes to reject—intelligently and decidedly, courageously and openly—a lying and empty tradition, at the same time weakens the force of that tradition just as far as our individual influence may extend.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVII.

Vers. 1—18 are closely connected with the preceding chapter. We have just been pointed to the striking contrast between the conduct of the heathen and that of the backsliding men of Judah. The inspired orator's indignation swells as he thinks of the inveterateness and indelibleness of Judah's sin (vers. 1—4 are, however, omitted in the Septuagint). Then he passes to a subject immediately suggested by the policy of the court, viz. the true source of safety in dangerous times. Trust in man brings a curse; trust in Jehovah a blessing (vers. 5—13). From this portion of the prophecy we can venture to fix the date of the whole. Ver. 11 is, in fact, a shorter form of the denunciation in ch. xxii. 13—19, which is directly addressed to Jehoiakim; and the most natural view of vers. 5—10 is to regard them as a warning against the negotiations with Egypt entered into by Jehoiakim after his revolt from Nebuchadnezzar (see Ewald, 'History of Israel,' iv. 261). The emphasis on the deceitfulness of the heart, in ver. 9, is readily intelligible in this connection; it reminds us of the woe pronounced by Isaiah against those who "seek deep to hide their counsel from Jehovah" (xxix. 15), and which undoubtedly refers to a projected Egyptian alliance.

Ver. 1.—The sin of Judah, etc. "Judah's sin" is not merely their tendency to sin, but their sinful practices—their idolatry. This **is said to be graven upon the table of their heart,** for it is no mere form, but carried on with passionate earnestness, and as indelible as if engraved **with an iron pen.** How unlike, however, is this record to that of which the same expression is used in Job xix. 24! **With the point of a diamond;** or, *with a point of adamant* (harder than flint, as Ezek. iii. 9 says). Fragments of adamant, says Pliny ('Hist. Nat.,' xxxvii. 15), are sought out by engravers and enclosed in iron; they easily

overcome every hardness. **Upon the horns of your altars.** First of all, what altars are referred to? Those erected for the worship of idols or the two in the temple of Jehovah, which had been defiled by idolatry? And why is the sin of Judah said to be engraved upon the horns of the altars? Probably because the "horns," *i.e.* the projections at the four upper corners (Exod. xxviii. 2) were smeared with the blood of the victims. The direction in Exod. xxix. 12 and Lev. iv. 7 was doubtless not peculiar to the ritual of the Law.

Ver. 2.—**Whilst their children remember,** etc. The connection of this with the preceding verse is rather obscure. Probably it is intended as an exemplification of the "sin of Judah," the inveterateness of which is shown by their thoughts spontaneously turning to the altars and symbols of the false gods whenever they are near a leafy tree or a high hill (probably "*under* the green trees" is the right reading; comp. 1 Kings xiv. 23; so Targum). To make "their sons" the accusative (with Hitzig and Keil), rendering, "As they remember their children, [even so they remember their altars]," seems unnatural; why should "children" and "altars" be associated in idea? **Groves;** rather, *idols of Asherah*, the Canaanitish goddess.

Ver. 3.—**O my mountain in the field;** a still more obscure passage. The question is whether "my mountain in the field" is a vocative or an accusative dependent on "I will give." If the former, then the phrase will mean Jerusalem (comp. "rock of the plain," ch. xxi. 13). This, however, does not suit with the second half of the verse ("thy high places," etc.), and still less with ver. 4, which evidently refers to the people of Judah. Added to this, if Jerusalem were here addressed we should certainly expect feminine suffixes. It remains to take "my mountain," etc., as an accusative. It describes, not Jerusalem, but Mount Zion as the site of the temple, the mountain of the house of Jehovah (Isa. ii. 3; Zech. viii. 3; Ps. xxiv. 3). Render, therefore, *my mountain in the field will I give.* The prophet magnifies Zion into a mountain with a widely extended prospect (comp. ver. 12 and ch. xxi. 13). **Thy substance and all thy treasures;** *i.e.* those of the people. The part of the verse which begins here is almost the same as ch. xv. 13 (see note). **And thy high places for sin.** Keil explains, Jehovah declares that he will, on account of the sinful practices upon them, deliver up the high places throughout the land. Gesenius, "He will deliver up the high places *with* the sin attaching to them;" Hitzig, "... *as* a sin offering." There is a question, however, whether there is not a corruption in the text, and whether we should not read, with Ewald, "without price for thy sins" (as in the parallel passage, ch. xv. 13).

Ver. 4.—(Comp. ch. xv. 14.) **Even thyself;** literally, *even with thyself*, i.e. with thy bare life (if the text, which is here evidently rather out of order, is correct). **Shalt discontinue.** The word involves an allusion to the Law in Exod. xxiii. 11 and (especially) Deut. xv. 2 (see the Hebrew). The latter passage suggests a correction of the difficult "even with thyself," just preceding, into "thy hand." Thus we get for the opening of this verse, "And thou shalt let loose thy hand" (*i.e.* as Authorized Version, "shalt discontinue").

Vers. 5—11.—In the higher gnomic or proverbial style. God and man, flesh and spirit, are natural antitheses (comp. Isa. xxxi. 3; Ps. lvi. 4). The prayer of the believer is, "Be thou (O Jehovah) their arm every morning;" not Egypt, not Assyria, not any "arm of flesh."

Ver. 6.—**Like the heath in the desert;** as forlorn as some well-known desert plant. But which plant? St. Jerome explains, "Et erit quasi myrice ['tamarisk'], quæ Hebraicè dicitur Aroer (?) sive, at interpretatus est Syrus, lignum infructuosum." The versions agree in supposing the comparison to be to a plant; and a very similar word in Arabic (*ghargar*) means the mountain juniper; Tristram, the dwarf juniper. Most, however, take the word to be an adjective equivalent to "destitute." Dr. Thomson tells a story of a poor destitute woman he found in the desert (comp. ch. xlviii. 6—the form there is *Aroer*, here it is *'ar'ār;* Ps. cii. 18). **Shall not see;** *i.e.* shall not perceive, or feel any evil consequences (comp. Isa. xliv. 16, "I have seen the fire," equivalent to "I feel the flame"). **A salt land;** *i.e.* one entirely barren (comp. Deut. xxix. 23).

Ver. 8.—**Shall not see;** rather, *shall not fear*—this is the reading of the Hebrew text, and of the Septuagint, Peshito, and Vulgate. The Authorized Version represents that of the margin, which is conformed to ver. 6, but is against the parallelisms.

Vers. 9, 10.—The crooked devices of the human heart, which is characterized as deceitful above all things (or, as Delitzsch, 'Biblical Psychology,' English translation, p. 340, "proud;" literally, *uneven* or *rugged;* comp. Isa. xl. 4; Hab. ii. 4, Hebrew; Ps. cxxxi. 2, Hebrew), **and desperately wicked,** or rather, *desperately sick* (see ch. xv. 18, where it is explained by the words, "which refuseth to be healed"). The Septuagint reads this verse differently, "The heart is deep above all things, and it is a man."

Ver. 11.—**As the partridge . . . hatcheth them not;** rather, *as the partridge sitteth on eggs which it hath not laid;* a proverbial

illustration of the Divine retributive justice. The prophet assumes the truth of a popular belief respecting the partridge (still a common bird in Judæa), that it brooded upon eggs which it had not laid. As the young birds soon leave the false mother, so unjustly acquired riches soon forsake their possessors. [Canon Tristram rejects this explanation, on the ground that the statement is not true to natural history; the partridge neither steals the broods of others nor needs to do so, as it lays a very large number of eggs. But grammar requires us to translate as suggested above, and consequently excludes any other explanation. May not the unusually large number of the eggs laid by the partridge have led to the fancy that they could not be all its own?]

Vers. 12, 13.—An address to Jehovah in two parts, the first specially referring to the temple regarded as the sacramental symbol of the Divine presence (comp. Ps. v. 7), the second to Jehovah himself. It seems to us, no doubt, singular thus practically to identify Jehovah and his temple; but the prophet's meaning is that God can only be addressed in so far as he has revealed himself. The temple was not, strictly speaking, the "Name" or revelation of God, but it was "the place of the Name of Jehovah," and in the language of strong feeling might be addressed as if it were really the Divine Name. The disciples of the incarnate Name were familiar with the idea that their Master was in some sense the antitype of the temple (Matt. xii. 6; John ii. 19). In proposing this explanation, it has been tacitly assumed that the Authorized Version, **A glorious high throne . . . is the place of our sanctuary**, is wrong. Grammatically, indeed, it is not indefensible; but it is a weak rendering in such a context. Render, therefore, *Thou throne of glory, a height from the beginning, thou place of our sanctuary, thou hope of Israel, Jehovah.* The temple is called "the throne of thy glory" in ch. xiv. 21; "height" is a common synonym for heaven (Ps. vii. 8, Hebrew; Isa. lvii. 15, Hebrew), but is also applied to Mount Zion (Ezek. xvii. 23; xx. 40, quoted by Keil), which is also in Isa. lx. 13 called, "the place of my sanctuary." By adding the concluding words of the address (at the opening of ver. 13), the prophet prevents the suspicion that he attached importance to the mere outward buildings of the temple, like those formalist Jews, whose words are quoted in ch. vii. 4.

Ver. 13.—**They that depart from me.** The abrupt change of person is extremely harsh; the Vulgate, followed by Ewald and Olshausen, supposes that a final *caph* has dropped out, rendering, "they that depart from thee." **Shall be written in the earth**; a contrast to that which is recorded for all time "with a pen of iron" (ver. 1). **The fountain**, etc.; a favourite phrase of our prophet (see ch. ii. 13).

Vers. 14—18.—A prayer of the prophet in this his hour of need. He who makes his boast of Jehovah may reckon upon his help. This is Jeremiah's principle. He prays for healing, **Heal me, . . . and I shall be**—rather, *that I may be*—**healed.** He is one of those "broken in heart," whom Jehovah alone can "heal" (Ps. cxlvii. 3).

Ver. 15.—The occasion of this prayer is the hostility of his neighbours, and their mocking question, **Where is the word of the Lord?** The prophecy seems to be floating as it were in mid-air, unable to alight (Isa. ix. 8) and fulfil itself, so that Jeremiah could be plausibly treated as a false prophet (Deut. xviii. 22). Hence, as Keil remarks, the discourse of which this forms the conclusion must have been spoken before the first Babylonian invasion of Judah.

Ver. 16.—**I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow thee**; *i.e.* I have not eagerly withdrawn from following thee as a shepherd (or prophet). The prophet does not follow his own vague inclinations; he is but an under-shepherd, and waits on the will of his superior. He is, as Hosea calls him (ix. 7, Hebrew), "the man of the Spirit." If God leads any one, whether people or individuals, it is through the agency of the Spirit (Isa. lxiii. 11, 12); and it is the characteristic of the typical prophet that his ear is "wakened morning by morning" to receive his daily lesson. Only by thus "following" the Divine Leader, can a prophet act as pastor to his people. [The construction is, however, rather simplified by the rendering—a perfectly legitimate one, *. . . from following thee as a companion.*] **The woeful day.** The word for "woeful" is the same rendered "desperately wicked" (ver. 9); the "day" of Judah's calamity is metaphorically "sick," like the heart of man. So, other words being used, Isa. xvii. 11 (end). **Was right before thee**; rather (since some adjective must be supplied), *was manifest before thee.* He appeals to the all-seeing Eye as a witness to his fidelity to his mission.

Ver. 17.—Jeremiah reckons on Jehovah's protection; he therefore entreats that his God will not bring him to shame by leaving his prophecies unfulfilled. **A terror** is a weak rendering; *a consternation* would be better.

Ver. 18.—(On this terrible execration, with reference to Jeremiah's character, see the general Introduction.) **Destroy them with double destruction.** "Double" here means "amply sufficient" (comp. Rev. xviii. 6, and see on ch. xvi. 18).

Vers. 19—27.—An exhortation to a more

strict observance of the sabbath. The reward held out is Jerusalem's continuance in all its old pomp, both temporal and spiritual, and the penalty the destruction of the city by fire. This passage stands in absolutely no connection with the preceding and the following prophecies; and we have just the same sense of suspicion in meeting with it here, in the midst of perfectly general exhortations, as in reading the parallel exhortations to sabbath-keeping in Isa. lvi. and lviii., surrounded as they are by the moving and almost evangelical rhetoric of the second part of Isaiah. Geiger and Dr. Rowland Williams have hence been led to conjecture that this section (or part of it) was introduced into the roll of Jeremiah's prophecies to assist the reforming movement of Ezra and Nehemiah. Certainly the regard for the sabbath, so conspicuous in the later Judaism, dates, so far as we can see, from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (see Neh. xiii.), though it is credible enough that the perception of the high importance of this holy day (comp. Heine's 'Princessin Sabbath') began to acquire greater distinctness as the other parts of the social and religious organization were seen to be fading away (comp. art. "Sabbath" in Smith's 'Bible Dictionary').

Ver. 19.—**In the gate of the children of the people.** It is uncertain which of the gates of Jerusalem is meant, and not perfectly clear what is the meaning of the title. Does it mean Israelites as opposed to foreigners, or laymen as distinguished from priests? **Whereby the kings of Judah come in.** Jeremiah appears to use the phrase "kings of Judah" in a particular sense (see on ver. 20). He may, no doubt, simply mean to say that those who are from time to time sovereigns of Judah enter by this gate. But once grant that the prophet does sometimes use the phrase in a sense of his own, and that in the very next verse, and it is very difficult to avoid interpreting it so in this passage.

Ver. 20.—Jeremiah addresses himself first of all to the **kings of Judah.** As it would be very unnatural for a public orator to appeal to the yet unborn members of the reigning dynasty, and as there are several indications that the "house of David" was able at this period, as also in that of Isaiah, to exercise a decisive political and civil influence, even, as appears from ch. xxi. 11, 12, monopolizing the judicial functions, it is natural to suppose that "kings of Judah" is here used in a very special sense, viz. of the members of the various branches of the royal family ("The sons of the king," Zeph. i. 8; comp. ch. xxxvi. 26, "Jerahmeel, a king's son"), and their descendants, who received the royal title by courtesy (parallels for this will be found in Gesenius's 'Hebrew Thesaurus,' *s.v. melek*). The queen-mother was probably the leader of this clan; "the mistress," as she was called (see on ch. xiii. 18), and the royal princes (among whom the "house of Nathan," Zech. xii. 12, would doubtless be reckoned), constituted in fact a body almost as numerous as they did (according to Brugsch Bey) in Egypt, and politically much more influential; so much so indeed that only a king of unusual force of character, like Hezekiah or Josiah, could venture, and that timidly, to oppose them. The weak-principled Zedekiah seems to have been entirely dominated by this powerful caste, and to have been little more than a *maire du palais* (the same sense of the phrase is required in ch. xix. 3, and probably in ch. xxv. 18).

Ver. 21.—**Take heed to yourselves**; rather, *Take heed heartily, conscientiously*; literally, *in your souls.* So in Malachi (ii. 15, 16), "Take heed in your spirit" (not, "to your spirit," as Authorized Version).

Ver. 22.—Neither **do ye any work**; according to the fourth commandment (Exod. xx. 10; Deut. v. 14).

Ver. 23.—This verse is modelled on ch. vii. 26, 28.

Ver. 25.—Parallel passage, ch. xxii. 4, where, however, we simply meet with "*kings* sitting upon the throne of David," not, as here, "kings and princes." Has the latter word come in by accident, owing to the frequent combination of **kings and princes** in Jeremiah (i. 18; ii. 26; xxv. 18; xxxii. 32; xliv. 17, 21)? **Shall remain for ever**; rather, *shall be inhabited for ever.*

Ver. 26.—Parallel passage for the catalogue of the districts of Judah, ch. xxxii. 44. Three divisions are mentioned. (1) The neighbourhood of Jerusalem (including the "cities of Judah"); (2) the land of Benjamin, *i.e.* the northern part of the kingdom; and (3) the tribe of Judah, with its three subdivisions—the Shefela or lowland country by the Mediterranean Sea, the hill country, and the Negeb or "dry" south country (comp. Josh. xv. 21—62). The sacrifices are described with equal explicitness; they fall into two classes, the bloody (burnt offerings and other sacrifices) and the unbloody (the vegetable offering or *minkhah*, and the incense which was strewed upon the *minkhah*, Lev. ii. 1). **And bringing sacrifices of praise.** This was, no doubt, the title of a particular variety of sacrifices (Lev. vii. 12; xxii. 29); here, however, it seems as if all the preceding sacrifices were summed up under this designation. St. Paul says, "In everything give thanks;" and this seems to have been the prophet's ideal of the sacrifices of the future.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*Engraved sin.* I. SIN LEAVES A RECORD OF ITSELF. It is not an isolated act. It begets consequences, plants memories, creates guilt. The record remains even if we do not read it. God still notes it, and will some day confront us with it. Hence it is not enough to amend our ways for the future. We need to have past transgressions blotted out if we are to be restored to peace with God.

II. THE RECORD OF SIN IS ENGRAVED ON THE HEART OF THE SINNER. 1. It is written on the *memory*. Men who have forsaken the scenes of their evil deeds cannot shake off the clinging burden of the memory of them. The criminal is haunted by his crimes. They people his dreams with horrors; they overshadow his waking hours with gloom. Even when sin is put out of mind it is probably buried in the secret chamber of memory, to be ultimately brought to the light of consciousness. The experience of those who have been recovered from drowning and from delirium suggests the idea that forgotten memories can be revived, and that probably the whole of the soul's experience is indelibly written upon the memory. No other recording-angel may be wanted. The soul carries its own indictment in the record it bears of its own conduct. 2. This is also written on the *affections*. Sin begets the passion for sin. Vice springs from the heart, and it corrupts the heart. That which is first committed under the stress of temptation comes at length to be sought with the hunger of a natural appetite.

III. THE RECORD OF SIN IS ENGRAVED ON THE ALTAR OF SACRIFICE. Judah desecrated the altar of Jehovah with idolatrous rites. We desecrate Divine things by sinful conduct. 1. *We cannot leave our guilt* behind us when we enter the temple of worship. If it is not repented of it will vitiate the worship. The sin of the week-day renders worthless the offerings of the Sunday. 2. *Sin directly connected with religion* is peculiarly wicked. The altar is defiled. Thus the offering of gifts from base motives, deceit, and unholiness in worship, stamps our sins with peculiar guilt on the altar of God.

IV. THIS RECORD OF SIN IS NATURALLY INDELIBLE. It is graven with an adamant. 1. It is, therefore, useless to *ignore it*. 2. It is vain to try to *wash it away* by any effort of our own. 3. It is foolish to expect *peace with God till this terrible hindrance has been removed* out of the way. 4. We have every motive to seek in penitence and in faith that God should blot out our sin, not only from his book of remembrance, but also from our hearts, even though it is so deeply written there that nothing short of the creation of a new heart will remove it (Ps. li. 10).

Vers. 5—8.—*The desert shrub and the flourishing tree.* I. THE DESERT SHRUB EXEMPLIFIES THE CURSE OF WORLDLY CONFIDENCE. 1. Note the *character* of worldly confidence. (1) Trust in *man*. There is a trust in man that is natural and right. The foolish and wrong confidence is when man takes the place of God, when the highest trust is in man, when the power of the prince, the skill of the physician, or the astuteness of the lawyer are thought to be sufficient to secure us against the greatest dangers. (2) Reliance on the *arm of flesh*. This illustrates the ultimate ground of such confidence as trust in man. It turns to the flesh rather than to the spirit, *i.e.* to worldly influences rather than to principles of truth, to the mortal rather than to the Divine, to the man who will perish rather than to the God who is eternal. (3) The *departure of the heart from God*. We cannot have a true confidence in God together with a supreme worldly confidence. The one excludes the other. The tree cannot be growing both in the desert and by the water-course. This departure is of the heart. In the heart we trust. Outwardly we may still seem near to God, but if faith has gone the heart has forsaken God. 2. Consider the *curse* of this worldly confidence. It makes one like a desert shrub. (1) *Dwarfed* and stunted in growth—a shrub, not a tree—a miserable shrub of the desert. Though departure from God does not involve sudden destruction, it lowers the spiritual energies, dwarfs the whole life. (2) *Not even benefited by blessings received*. The shrub "shall not see when good cometh." The breath of spring, which brings fresh bloom and growth to other plants, passes over it with no more fruitful effects than the chill blasts of autumn produce. He who has departed from God and lives only in worldly confidence derives no real benefit from the blessings that God still sends him. (3) Suffering from *lack of the chief good*. The shrub is in a parched land,

is withered for lack of water (see ch. ii. 13). (4) *Lonely.* "In a salt land, and not inhabited." The soul that is separated from God is essentially solitary, deserted, destitute though immersed in the tumult of worldly society.

II. THE FLOURISHING TREE EXEMPLIFIES THE BLESSEDNESS OF TRUST IN GOD. 1 Note the *character* of trust in God. (1) It is *intelligent.* It is trust in God revealed as Jehovah, as supreme, self-existent, eternal, known in the past for merciful helpfulness. (2) It is *whole-hearted.* It is a simple trust in God, not divided by partial worldly confidence. (3) It is *hopeful.* "Whose *hope* the Lord is." The strongest faith rises into hope. 2. Consider the *blessedness* of this trust in God. (1) *Full and flourishing life*—a tree, not a shrub. He who trusts in God is not only endowed with external blessings, he is enlarged and developed in his own life. (2) *Nourished and refreshed.* The tree is planted by the waters, etc. Trust in God brings and plants us near to the "river of life." (3) *Secured against trouble.* "And shall not see when heat cometh," etc. While the shrub derives no benefit from the most favourable weather, the tree planted by the water does not suffer from the most trying. Trust in God does not prevent the approach of trouble, but it fortifies us against suffering real harm from it. Hidden sources supply the Christian with spiritual nourishment when outwardly the heavens are as brass and the earth as iron. (4) *Perpetual fruitfulness.* "Neither shall cease from yielding fruit." Fruitfulness is a sign of health, perpetual fruitfulness of unbroken health. Fruitfulness is a blessing. The Christian is most blessed in being able to work for good, and to distribute blessings to others as the chief glory of the tree is its fruit-bearing.

Vers. 9, 10.—*The evil heart searched and judged.* I. THE EVIL OF THE HEART. 1. The most important question concerning a man is as to the *state of his heart*—his thoughts, affections, intentions. In the heart we find the true man. The outer life is but the clothing and may be the mask of the man. From the heart spring all the actions of life. The character of the fountain determines that of the stream (Matt. xv. 18, 19). 2. The root of the evil of the heart is *self-will.* It is *rugged* above all things, proud, not compliant with God's will, wrapped up in self. 3. The character of the evil of the heart is *desperate sickness.* (1) *Sickness,* for sin is a disease of the soul, though one for which we are responsible, and it results in suffering, general derangement of life, and finally death; (2) *desperate* sickness, for sin is no simple scratch on the skin of life, no mere temporary functional disorder, but heart-disease, an organic constitutional disease, terrible in its present condition, alarming in its future prospects. 4. The evil of the heart is *inscrutable* to man. "Who can know it?" This is the case, (1) because we cannot read the hearts of our fellow-men, but only judge from external conduct, which is often deceptive; (2) because we are blinded to our own sin by pride, prejudice, and self-admiration; (3) because there is an intricacy and subtlety about all wickedness which makes it difficult to trace it out, a shamefacedness that seeks concealment, and an essential falseness that belies its own nature; and (4) because the disease has made so great progress, has penetrated so deeply, ramified so far, and infected every function of the soul so completely, that it is beyond all measure.

II. THE DIVINE SEARCH AND JUDGMENT. The heart is difficult to understand, but God thoroughly searches it. "Who can know it?" "I the Lord." 1. God *searches and tries,* (1) by his own silent, all-penetrating gaze that detects the darkest secrets; and (2) by the outward action of providence in events which test a man's nature and reveal it to the world, for the judgment of God is ultimately open and with a fair trial, that all may see and acquiesce in the righteousness of the sentence. 2. God *knows* the heart. The search is effectual. The trial is fruitful. God knows us, while the world is deceived. How foolish, then, to play the hypocrite! for it matters little what men think of us, but God's thoughts concerning us are of infinite moment. God will judge justly and reasonably, for he knows all. 3. God will *administer judgment* according to the character of men's actions revealed by his searching and trying. God's knowledge is followed by his action. He is not simply a great contemplative Being. He has an arm to make bare for action as well as eyes to see the evil and the good. Judgment will be for our actions, but according as these are read in the light of the state of our heart. God searches and gives to men according to their ways. This judgment is universal—"to every man," discriminating—to each "according to his ways," and

natural—"according to the *fruit* of his doings, according to their natural products, each in its own kind, so that men shall reap what they sow as by a law of nature.

Ver. 11.—*Partridge-nests.* I. ILL-GOTTEN RICHES BETOKEN AN UNNATURAL CONDITION OF SOCIETY. It is not natural that strange eggs should be found in a partridge-nest. Violence and fraud and more subtle sharp-practice are proofs of a disorganized state of society.

II. ILL-GOTTEN RICHES MAY BE MINGLED WITH JUST GAINS. It may not be that all the eggs are strange. The business man who is dishonest in some transactions may be honest in others; but his very correctness may be only a cloak for his fraud.

III. ILL-GOTTEN RICHES MAY PROSPER FOR A TIME. The eggs are hatched. Schemes of fraud succeed. The wicked prosper.

IV. ILL-GOTTEN RICHES WILL ULTIMATELY BE LOST. How often does the ablest device of dishonesty fail of ultimate success! The swindler is taken at the height of his prosperity. If he is not discovered he cannot take his wealth with him when he dies.

V. ILL-GOTTEN RICHES LEAVE THE POSSESSOR OF THEM CONVICTED OF FOLLY. He thinks himself supremely clever, and smiles with contempt on his credulous victims. But he is really the greatest dupe of his own devices, since in the end all his labour is wasted and his ultimate condition ruinous (Luke xii. 20, 21). "Honesty is the best policy" in the long run, though, as has been shrewdly observed, no man is truly honest who only acts on this maxim.

Vers. 12—14.—*The Hope of Israel.* I. THE REVELATION OF THE HOPE OF ISRAEL. 1. God is revealed as the *Hope* of his people; *i.e.* as the source (1) of their highest good—a "fear" at first (Gen. xxxi. 42), but when better known a "hope;" (2) of a good not yet attained—a hope, not a full fruition; but (3) of a good assured for the future—a true hope resting on good promises, not a vain dream. 2. God is thus revealed in connection with the *sanctuary*, (1) because the worship of God enlarges the knowledge of God; (2) because the sanctuary is the centre of religious instruction, either by symbolic service as that of the temple, or by direct teaching as that of the Christian Churches. God must be known to be loved and trusted. They who neglect the duty of public worship lose the privilege of receiving light on Divine truth which would be a comfort and help to them. 3. *Experience* confirms this revelation of God. The glorious character of God has been true of him "from the beginning." The antiquity of the temple was the proof of this to the Jew, the history of Christendom should be more so to the Christian.

II. THE FOLLY OF FORSAKING THE HOPE OF ISRAEL. 1. It is *foolish* to forsake God. We know that it is wrong; we have to learn that it is also injurious to ourselves. The character of God should make this apparent. Such a character as has been above ascribed to him shows that he is "the Fountain of living waters," *i.e.* the one Source of pure, life-giving energy. Though no true religion can be founded on low motives of self-interest, self-interest should at least show us the mistake of irreligion. 2. The results of forsaking God are *shame and destruction:* (1) *shame*, because the stay of confidence which was chosen in preference to God is seen at last to be a rotten reed, while God is manifested as worthy of all trust; and (2) *destruction*, for "they shall be written in the earth;" sin is graven as with a pen of iron upon a rock, but the life of the sinner is written in dust, to be dissipated and forgotten, a wasted career, with nothing solid and lasting about it.

III. THE PRAYER OF CONFIDENCE IN THE HOPE OF ISRAEL. (Ver. 14.) 1. A prayer for *healing.* Though we hope in God we may suffer at present. We need not so much improved circumstances as a bettering of the condition of our own souls—not so much wealth as health. 2. A prayer for *salvation.* The prophet feels himself in danger. Dangers of various kinds wait on all of us. Salvation is a large word, meaning deliverance from all real harm. It is a large thing to ask for, but not too much for faith. 3. A prayer of *assurance*—"I shall be healed." What God does he does effectually. 4. A prayer of humble *thankfulness*—"For thou art my Praise." True faith rests, not on our merits, but on God's mercy, and therefore all prayer should confess his goodness and all supplication be mingled with thanksgiving (Phil. iv. 6).

Vers. 19—27.—*The sabbath.* As Gentiles we were never under the special regulations of the Jewish Law, and as Christians we are free from all formal laws of "ordinances," and called to free spiritual obedience. Like St. Paul, we may be able to see that no one day is more sacred than other days (Rom. xiv. 5); and if we are unable to go so far as this, we must admit that there is, in the New Testament, no direct command to Christians to observe the first day of the week just as the Jews observed the seventh. Still, to him who is in sympathy with the thoughts of God and desires to do the will of God rather than to seize excuses for liberty only to exercise his own self-will, there is much in the Old Testament sabbath requirements which must command the reverence of his conscience as springing out of Eternal Divine counsels, and representing what is inherently good and profitable.

I. CONSIDER IN WHAT THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH CONSISTED. 1. *Rest.* "Bear no burden." Work is holy, but so also is rest, and if work usurp the place of rest it becomes unholy, as anything does which is in the wrong place. Men bear burdens on their minds. If the shop is shut but the mind of the tradesman continues devoted to business cares on the Sunday, he is making no more sabbath of the day than if he were openly buying and selling. The rest needed for refreshment is rest from the toils and anxieties of the mind, quite as much as a cessation of manual labour. 2. *Hallowing* the day. The Jew treated the sabbath day as essentially holy. We may have freer notions. But we, too, can hallow the day if we devote it to sacred uses. We should remember that it is not the day that hallows the conduct, but the conduct that hallows the day. Sacred days, like sacred places, are not endowed with a mystical consecration, which transfers its grace to whatever is done in them, but they are simply made sacred by the acts of goodness to which they are devoted. 3. *Personal care* to observe the rest and sanctity of the day. "Take heed in your souls;" "diligently hearken." The observance of the sabbath was to the Jew a duty to be personally regarded and conscientiously executed. If we feel any corresponding duty, the example of the more lax conduct of others should not affect us, nor should we be content with the outward decorum which satisfies the world.

II. CONSIDER THE OBLIGATION TO KEEP THE SABBATH. 1. The sabbath was instituted by the *command of God.* It was required by one of the ten commandments, and thus exalted to a position of peculiar sanctity. To the Jew who felt that this law of God was binding on him, the duty of implicit obedience was imperative. When once we know God's will no valid excuse can be found for neglecting it. Though the letter of the Mosaic Law was limited and temporal, the spirit of its obligations is eternal, since they spring from the changeless character of God. It is for us to discover the eternal Divine principle which led to the institution of the sabbath, and see that this is obeyed. 2. It corresponded to the *constitution of nature.* Changes in nature are recurrent. Rest and labour alternate in the physical world. 3. It was designed to *benefit men.* (Mark ii. 27.) The wealthy might not have felt the requirement, but the burden-bearers and hand-labourers did, and must have enjoyed the repose it afforded them. Do we need this? If in quieter times such a rest was necessary, is it needless in the rush and roar of our wearing modern life? If seasons set apart for religious observances were ever profitable, are they useless amid the pressing claims and innumerable distractions of the age we live in?

III. CONSIDER THE BLESSEDNESS OF OBSERVING THE SABBATH. The Jews had promises of blessings to the court, the city, the country, and the Church (see Matthew Henry, *in loc.*). 1. This might be expected as the *reward of obedience.* It is always blessed to do the will of God, though the first doing of it is often painful. 2. This might also be expected, because the sabbath was *made for man.* It was a beneficent institution. It is found by experience that the observance of a weekly day of rest is conducive to the prosperity of a people. 3. Accordingly, the *neglect* of the sabbath might be expected to bring disaster (ver. 27). This was the case with the Jew, not because of the inherent sanctity of the day or of the essential immorality of working on it, but because the breach of the sabbath was a breach of the Law, an act of overt rebellion against God. If we disobey what we believe to be the will of God, this must be to our own hurt. 4. The blessedness of the observance of the Jewish sabbath teaches us all to avoid treating the day of rest as a *gloomy day*, and making children and dependants dislike it on account of the formalism or harshness of our behaviour. The day of rest

should be the brightest day of the week. To the Christian, Sunday is "the Lord's day," the day of Easter gladness, commemorating the joy of the Resurrection.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Sin's record.* I. THE RECORD IS INEFFACEABLE. This is contrary to the notions of very many. Sin, when it is committed, wears the aspect of insignificance and triflingness. It is the gratification of a momentary impulse, of a personal and individual character; and it is not supposed that any one else, or at any rate any large number of persons, can be affected by it. The sinner supposes that he himself will be able to condone it, and that, when the active prompting of which he is conscious retires into the background, he will be as he was before. All sins, *e.g.* idolatry, which deeply engage the affections and the highest capacities of men, have a lasting influence upon their character. And when they are systematized into a religion they exert a daily influence which at last fixes itself. But the same is true, in a very serious degree, with all sins. They are contradictions of conscience and the Law of God, and can only be repeated without scruple by inverting and hardening the moral nature. In this sense we are all guilty before God. Our every sin has had its influence upon us, and has left its indelible impress. Conscience stores the guilty memory in its archives; habit perpetuates the evil impulse in conduct; and our relations and associations are involved in the wicked practices which ensue.

II. HOW USELESS, THEREFORE, ATTEMPTING TO EXCULPATE OURSELVES! This arrangement, by which sin leaves its impress upon the character and life, is of God. It is a law of nature, and cannot be set aside by private understanding. Even where it appears to be inoperative, its effects are only accumulating themselves in a more hidden manner, and some day they will be the more overwhelming in their manifestation. It is the common question of the sinner, when addressed by the ministers of God, "Wherein have we sinned?" But this only shows a dulness of spiritual self-knowledge and a general lowering of the moral standard. Others are not so oblivious to the fact. They have witnessed the excesses and been involved in the complications of their immorality. In this case the children whose companions had been sacrificed to Moloch looked on the horns of the altars with aversion and loathing. It was a memory of horrid cruelty never to be effaced. There is every reason to believe that the sin we commit does not cease its work when its immediate outward effects take place. An ever deepening and widening circle of influence results. And, just as now it is impossible for us to plead innocence with so many proofs of our guilt staring us in the face, in the great day of judgment the secret sins will be set in the light of God's countenance, and the thoughts and intents of the heart revealed. Our character will be our condemnation, and many witnesses will rise on every side to swell its testimony.

III. HOW NECESSARY, TOO, THAT THE PRINCIPLE OF SALVATION SHOULD BE RADICAL AND THOROUGH! The sinner needs a saving power that can penetrate to his inmost nature, cleansing the conscience, rectifying the character, and making the weaknesses and defects created by sin a means of grace. And this is supplied by the gospel, which furnishes a new motive and principle to the character and a new law to the conduct. So profound is its effect that it may be said by the saved sinner, "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." It is as a character-power that the "cross" asserts its pre-eminence over every other principle of reformation. There is nothing superficial, partial, or one-sided about it.—M.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Heart mysteries and their Interpreter.* The repudiation of his charges by Judah and Jerusalem leads the prophet to advert to the causes of this behaviour. They not only declare their innocence when guilty, but pursue after unholy aims on the plea of serving God. How are such ignorance and infatuation produced? The reply is that the natural heart is deceitful and corrupt above everything else.

I. THE MYSTERY OF THE HEART. 1. *It is a "mystery of iniquity."* The heart is affected by what it contains. It is itself the greatest dupe and sufferer. And, being so inextricably bound up with evil, it is involved in its danger and judgment.

2. *Exceeding human diagnosis.* No one is so ignorant of his own depravity as the sinner himself; and no earthly eye can read the true significance of the symptoms. 3. *Pre-eminent in this respect.* It is the source of it all. The master is greater than his work. The centre contains all the threads of connection.

II. ITS INTERPRETER. 1. *Jehovah.* Because (1) he made it; (2) he is related to it in its constitution and conscience; (3) "All things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do." 2. *This qualifies and authorizes him to judge.* It is not his only qualification, nor is that the sole reason for his knowledge. But it is obvious that, as knowing man so intimately, he also is able to judge of his state. And he alone has the standard of perfect righteousness.—M.

Vers. 12, 13.—*The saint's Refuge.* The construction of the clauses of the twelfth verse is very difficult, and it is not easy to determine their exact relations. It may be better to take them as simple and independent exclamations, united in their being addressed to a common object rather than by any grammatical nexus: "O throne of glory, height from the beginning, place of our sanctuary!" But, taken by itself, this would have no particular sense. It is only as a preface to ver. 13 that we can thoroughly understand its bearing. Jeremiah, full of anxiety and distress at the general depravity, looks instinctively upon Jerusalem, and reflects that only through that which it represents can the future of Israel be secured. There is a gradually ascending climax of spiritual reference, culminating in the words, "Hope of Israel, Jehovah."

I. THE SAVING POWER OF THE HOLY CITY IS DERIVED FROM HIM OF WHOM IT IS THE SHRINE. It is obvious that the descriptions of Jerusalem are all relative to this, which gathers up and concentrates everything in a person. The series of epithets of vers. 12 and 13 are cumulative, and express a gradually deepening spiritual insight. Through the material the prophet looks until his eye rests upon the spiritual. *God is the centre of attraction and the Saviour of the worshipping soul.* Everything in the ritual and teaching of the temple pointed to him. The glory of the temple was his. It was only as he condescended to use it that men could find therein the spiritual rest and safety they needed. And the same is true of the Church of Christ. It is not the institution which saves, but Christ working in and through it. There is danger of this being overlooked by non-spiritual men. Association connects the grace of salvation with the means or instrumentality, and ignores the original source. It is the virtue of the prophet's insight that it penetrates the veil of rites and ordinances, and fastens itself upon God as the only saving power. 1. *Spiritual men should examine themselves and see whether they rest upon this true spiritual foundation.* The process of the prophet's mind is one through which all true saints have to go. In many instances there will not be the eagle-like directness and happy immediacy of his discovery. There may be clouds and difficulties. But no true satisfaction can be attained until he be discovered and rested in. We are all prone to stay ourselves upon prescription, antiquity, authority, that are merely human. The doctrine, the rite, the priesthood, may intervene, not to unite, but to separate. 2. *It behoves those who call themselves by God's name to exalt and honour him.* If there is danger of his being ignored or pushed into the background, the more need is there of a bold and frequent assertion of his power and grace. 3. *It is only by a living, experimental, practical faith that this connection with God can be sustained.* The sorrow and trouble of Jeremiah drive him inwards for comfort. His meditation was like a voyage of the soul through the straits and shallows of ceremonialism into the great ocean of the personal presence and love of God.

II. THE THREEFOLD CLAIM OF GOD'S CITY TO THE REGARD OF MEN. Jerusalem, as the seat of the theocracy, was: 1. *The seat of authority and splendour.* The power of Israel amongst and against the nations consisted in the spiritual influence emanating from Jerusalem and its temple. The house of God, as the centre of all rule and influence, is a *throne.* It is its own protection, and its authority is self-sustained and self-commended. It is a refuge for the oppressed and a place of justice for the wronged. "Go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks;" for this city is our city, and "this God is our God for ever and ever." "Because thou hast made the Almighty . . . thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy

dwelling." And this power to enforce its mandates and its authority brought with it the glory of security, honour, and respect. Its whole history had been one of growing lustre and renown, and its influence had ever "made for righteousness." The saved sinner breathed freely within its precincts, and the victories of Divine love were celebrated within its courts. Those who believe in Christ constitute a Church which is his abode and "the praise of his glory." The distinction and eternal glory of God is that he is "just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly." 2. *It is chosen from eternity.* Although only for a few centuries the actual centre of Divine rule in the earth, it was not by accident it had become so. From the beginning it was foreseen in God's thought: "It was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the world was." This was a conviction deeply fixed in the hearts of all true Israelites. The eternal purpose of God had not only determined upon Jerusalem as his dwelling-place, but, through Jerusalem, that purpose was being carried out in the redemption of mankind. And the Church of Christ must be regarded in like manner as the abode of God's Spirit, chosen from eternity. It is a new dignity for the saints that they had been set apart for this long ere sin had desolated the world. It links the Church with celestial and eternal institutions, and precludes the possibility of its ever having originated in accident or human contrivance.—M.

Vers. 14—18.—*Divine prophecy and human impatience.* I. THE CREDIT OF THE PROPHET IS BOUND UP WITH HIS MESSAGE. He is conscious that this is the case. It is the test laid down by the Law (Deut. xviii. 21, 22), and that it should be so is beneficial. This is the universal law for all who declare the will of God. It is tried by human experience, by spiritual results. The prophet is expected to "heal."

II. MEN TRY HIM BY CHALLENGING A SPEEDY FULFILMENT. Just as in nature men, as Bacon says, would *anticipate*, so in grace. There is a lack of patience, or impatience is made a mask for unbelief. In either sign it is a lack of faith. So men manufacture tests for prayer, for reality of conscience.

III. HE FINDS REFUGE AND COMFORT: 1. *In the answer of a good conscience toward God.* It was not idleness, love of filthy lucre, or eagerness for pre-eminence that led him to the work, but a consciousness that he was speaking God's own word, no man's fancy or device. 2. *In earnest prayer that God will make good his word.* There are elements in this prayer from which we shrink. But should we? The fulfilling of evil prophecy may sometimes be a national benefit. 3. *In the unshaken faith that what God willeth will be.* He appears to be sore distressed. Perhaps personal perplexity enters into his grief. But there is no sign of lack of faith in its ultimate fulfilment. What a support is that to him who foretells or does the will of God! "In due season we shall reap if we faint not." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away."—M.

Vers. 19—27.—*The sabbath and its obligation.* I. IT WAS OF UNIVERSAL OBLIGATION. The prophet was to stand in "the gate of the children of the people" and "all the gates" to proclaim its sanctity. The laity and the priests, the princes and the people, were all bound to observe it, as one of the patriarchal and Mosaic institutions. It is expressly enjoined in one of the "ten words," and without reservation of any class.

II. HOW IT SHOULD BE OBSERVED. 1. *By rest.* Labour was to cease as far as practicable. The body was to be set at liberty from its burden. Traffic was to cease. The constant stream which flowed out and in the gates of the temple might still go on, but for a different purpose. Care and worry were to be laid aside. The mind was to abstain from business. 2. *By religious exercises.* (Ver. 26.) It is worthy of remark that this portion of the command is not spoken of as a binding duty like the other, or a merely negative one. It is referred to as part of the blessing that would ensue on thorough sabbath observances; that they should have sacrifices to give, and be willing and eager to offer them. With the cessation of secular traffic the religious instincts of the people would recover themselves, and their natural channel would be filled. The true rest of man consists, not in mere abstinence from labour, but in the free play of his higher faculties—a change of occupation and interest. And the real wealth and success of man will show itself in his religious gifts. They are poor who have nothing to spare for God. Their conception of life is such that the true riches exist not for them, how-

ever they may have succeeded in accumulating material resources. The chief end of man is thus to be secured in the increase of Divine service and the hearty dedication of himself and his substance to Jehovah.

III. THE BLESSINGS THAT WOULD ATTEND UPON SABBATH OBSERVANCE. 1. *National perpetuity.* Jerusalem, the centre of the theocracy, should remain for ever. This indicates the essential and fundamental position occupied by the sabbath amongst Mosaic institutions. It was in this way that the idea and authority of Jehovah were to be impressed upon the heart of Israel. But to the preservation of this primitive revelation was due the strength of Israel within herself and against the heathen. 2. *National prosperity.* It is a goodly spectacle that is presented in this promise. There is no lack of gifts nor of willingness to give. Only a time of profound peace and of abounding harvests could furnish such a demonstration. 3. *National unity.* Jerusalem is the convergent point of many pilgrim trains: "from the places about, . . . from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south." In this way the brotherhood and the solidarity of the people would be sealed. 4. *National piety.* This is the natural outcome even of rudimental religious observances. It is the tendency of true religion to increase upon itself. It cannot remain stationary. Therefore this outburst of enthusiasm and Divine service.

IV. HOW IT IS REPRESENTED IN EVANGELICAL TIMES. So far as it was a physical requirement for the health and efficiency of man, it must still be observed. This is a question for comparative physiology. But the essence of the sabbath is rather in its religious observance. What becomes of that? The spirit of it is still preserved in the Lord's day, although under new associations and under other obligations.—M.

Ver. 1.—"*The sin of Judah.*" That which the prophet has to say concerning it in this part of his prophecy is in answer to the question of ch. xvi. 10, 11, where Judah inquires what their sin is. In reply, the prophet—

I. RECITES THEIR INIQUITIES. (Vers. 11, 12.)

II. DENOUNCES GOD'S JUDGMENTS. (Vers. 13—18.)

III. CITES WITNESSES AGAINST THEM.—C.

Ver. 12.—"*The place of our sanctuary.*" Some four hundred years had passed between the date of these words and the marriage of Solomon with the daughter of the Egyptian king. But that remote event, fruitful of consequences as it was at the time, was fruitful also in results for generation after generation in the centuries to come. And it is to one of those results that this verse has reference, or rather was occasioned by it. For ever since that marriage there had been an Egyptian party in the court of Judah, which sought to sway the affairs of Judah in harmony with those of Egypt. On the other hand, there were the representatives of another near and mighty monarchy which sought to render Judah subservient to their interests. This was the Assyrian power. There was consequently a perpetual tendency on the part of Judah, when trouble came, to make alliance with one party or another. Now the Egyptian alliance was preferred, and now the Assyrian—Isa. xxx. and the history of the reign of Josiah and his death are instances in proof. But the prophets of God were ever against these alliances, and lifted up their voices, though in vain, in protest. These verses, 5—12, are one of those despised utterances, denouncing the false trust and exhorting to the true. This twelfth verse—

I. SPEAKS OF THE TEMPLE AT JERUSALEM. 1. For that temple has *a throne.* It was the earthly throne of God. There was the mercy-seat and the cherubim bowing in profound homage over it, and between them was the visible presence of the glory of God, that Shechinah, that wondrous appearance so bright and awful that but one out of all Israel, and he only once a year, could look thereupon and live. "In Salem was his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion." 2. And it was *a glorious throne.* By reason of its external magnificence; but more especially of the glorious manifestations of God which had been seen in connection with it. 3. And *a high as well as a glorious throne.* Not only because Jerusalem was a mountain-city, the loftiest in the world, so high and lifted up was the "mountain of the Lord's house," but also because of the spiritual glory—so far excelling all other—which belonged to it. The ancient psalmists and prophets were never tired of declaring and demonstrating how the Lord

was "King above all gods." 4. *Venerable also:* "from the beginning," from the first days of their national life, God had chosen a place for his Name—beneath the rugged cliffs of Sinai then, and now in the magnificent temple, the place of their sanctuary. But—

II. IS DESIGNED TO SUMMON GOD'S PEOPLE TO TRUST IN HIM. 1. For to assert that the place of their sanctuary was a "throne," was to assert that Jehovah was *a King.* Kings occupy thrones. The sovereignty of God is declared by the prophet's words. And what a King! How *glorious,* let all the records of their race declare. How *pre-eminent* over all the gods of the nations, let the gods of Egypt, of Philistia, of Tyre, and others confess. And he was the *eternal God.* "From the beginning" his rule and majesty had been confessed. But the prophet reminds his countrymen of all this that they might see and own the folly of trusting in gods of the heathen as they were so prone to do. 2. And he reminds them *of the nearness of God.* For the place of their sanctuary was his court, his throne, his abode. Therefore to forsake such a God, and one so near, for idol-gods, and they afar off,—what folly, what ingratitude, what sin that! But the same memory cherished concerning God, his glorious sovereignty, his all-superintending power and his nearness to us,—how would this strengthen and cheer our hearts oftentimes! Our sins and sorrows, our faint-heartedness, our fears and dismay, are all largely owing to our forgetfulness of that glorious and precious truth which the prophet here declares. And—

III. MAY BE TAKEN AS A SETTING FORTH OF WHAT OUR SANCTUARIES SHOULD BE. 1. *For God should rule in them.* A Christian Church, whether we speak of the fabric or the people, should be a throne of God. His Law supreme, his will the rule confessed of all. Human governance in any shape or form which will infringe on the Divine authority, is forbidden. Christ is the Head of the Church, and the "crown rights of the Redeemer" should be jealously maintained.

"Let Cæsar's dues be ever paid
To Cæsar and his throne,
But consciences and souls were made
To be the Lord's alone."

2. And if our churches be the Lord's throne, he will make it "*a glorious high throne.*" We should try to make our church buildings glorious outwardly, so far as we may, coveting what is splendid, majestic, beautiful, in architecture, music, adornment, to lay as a tribute at our Sovereign's feet. Where, consistently with other claims, this may be done, it should be. But he himself will make our Churches his "glorious high throne," by coming into their midst. On how many a Sunday his people have known that he has been with them!

"The King himself comes near
And feasts his saints to-day."

And by asserting his power over men's hearts. This is his most glorious power—to sway the spirit, to lead the will, to bend the heart. And this, by his Spirit in connection with the proclamation of the Word of his grace, he will do, and so the Church will become "a glorious high throne" of the Lord. 3. And because of "the communion of saints," and the consequent union of the Church of to-day with the Church of all the ages past, therefore the Church is God's throne which has been "*from the beginning.*" The Church of to-day is in the honoured succession of the Church of the first days, through its long line of patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, saints, and thus may claim to have been the "glorious high throne" of the Lord "from the beginning." Let us cherish and seek to hand on this succession, and thus justify our claim to the august title contained in these words. But most of all these words—

IV. REMIND US OF CHRIST AND HIS CROSS, THE TRUE SANCTUARY OF SOULS. The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ—type of all ignominy and shame, though it was—has become the Lord's "glorious high throne." From it and by it he has wielded a sovereignty so glorious, so wide, so holy, so enduring, that, far more than the mercy-seat, its ancient symbol, it deserves thus to be described. Whether we consider the number of his subjects, their character, the means by which his rule over them has been won and is sustained, or the nature of his rule,—all justify the ascription to his cross and to him

the supreme reference of these words. Let each one ask in *conclusion*—Is the cross of Christ the place of *our* sanctuary, the place where we worship, the beloved retreat of our souls? God grant it may be!—C.

Ver. 17.—"*Be not a terror unto me.*" It is a common observation how all things are affected by the medium through which we view them. This is true in regard to the natural vision, but yet more true in regard to that which is mental and spiritual. Thus God, whom the prophet speaks of (ver. 13) as "the Hope of Israel," the "Fountain of living waters," and as the alone true Healer, he now prays not to be "a terror" unto him.

I. GOD IS SO TO THE UNGODLY. All his attributes are terrible to them. His *holiness*, for it condemns their sin. His *justice*, for it demands their punishment. His *power*, for it reveals the means whereby he can requite them. His *love*, for it makes their sin without excuse. His *wisdom*, for it renders them unable to deceive him. Hence it is that of the wicked it is said, "God is not in all his thoughts." They like not to retain God in their knowledge. To think steadily of them must be a terror to their souls. But—

II. HE SEEMS SO AT TIMES EVEN TO THE GODLY. God *is* to them what in their happier moments they delight to call him—their Father, their Redeemer, their Strength, their Refuge (cf. ch. xvi. 19). But at times he seems to be "a terror" unto them. *The causes* of this are sometimes: 1. Morbid state of health. 2. Lack of submission to the Divine will. 3. Backsliding. 4. False theological teaching. 5. Dwelling too much on the darker and more mysterious aspects of the Divine providence. 6. Depression of spirits. 7. Prolonged affliction.

III. BUT TRUER AND BRIGHTER THOUGHTS OF GOD MAY BE REGAINED. Various means may be suggested. 1. *Dwelling resolutely on the mercies and loving-kindnesses of God.* This is why St. Paul bids the "careful," those weighed down with care, to make known their requests to God, not only "by prayer and supplication," but "with thanksgiving" also. And elsewhere he bids us "in everything give thanks." For this compels us to go over in our minds the happier circumstances of our lot, and when we do this we shall find—

> "Our cheerful cry will oftener be,
> 'See what the Lord hath done for me.'"

2. And, as the words of St. Paul teach, "*prayer*" will help us. We

> "Kneel and cast our load,
> E'en while we pray, upon our God,
> Then rise with lightened cheer."

The public worship of God in his sanctuary, in union with his people,—how often, like Hannah, the soul has come to God's house burdened but gone away "lightened"! 3. And "*supplication.*" This tells of the more private, personal outpourings of the soul before God. Like the supplication in Gethsemane compared with the prayer—the Lord's Prayer—given for the common united use of his people. Here, too, vast relief is found, and the cloud clears away between us and God, and his face shines upon us once more. 4. Careful conscientious *obedience* and perseverance therein. 5. *Seeking to comfort others.* We learn in teaching, and this is true of the love of God as well as of other truths. 6. *Coming again to the cross of Christ* as having nothing, but looking for all in him.—C.

Vers. 19—27.—*Sabbath sanctification.* I. IN WHAT IT CONSISTS. Not in the mere Judaic strictness of the Old Testament Law, or of that set forth in these verses. All that might be, and yet in its true sense the sabbath be flagrantly violated and its purpose destroyed. But in: 1. *Rest.* This to be both of body and mind. The student may no more pursue his studies than the labourer his toil. Rest both of body and mind from their ordinary pursuits; rest, not mere slothfulness, but such as will recreate the exhausted limbs or brain. 2. *Worship.* Not that it is to absolve other days from worship or to sanction their unhallowed use, but to lead to the more religious regard of all our days, the one day in seven is specially set apart. 3. *Charity.* In works of

mercy and love to our fellow-men. Proclaiming the gospel, teaching the young, visiting the sick, relieving the poor.

II. IT IS OF DIVINE COMMAND. It is coeval with the creation of man (Gen. i. 31; ii. 1—3; Exod. xx. 8—11). And its embodiment in the moral Law seems to denote its permanence and abiding obligation.

III. ITS TRANSFER TO THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK DOES NOT ALTER ITS OBLIGATION. Our Lord taught us "the sabbath was made for man," and therefore, though for various reasons its observance was in substance transferred from the seventh day to the first, yet, because the need is permanent, the obligation is likewise.

IV. ALL GOD'S LAWS—AS WELL AS HIS WRITTEN LAW—SANCTION IT. Those that are: 1. *Physical.* The body requires it, is blessed by it, harmed if deprived of it. 2. *Religious* Religion demands set times and observances. Without these it will die out. The sabbath, therefore, is imperatively needed if religion is to be maintained amongst any people. 3. *Moral.* Secular pursuits tend to absorb all the energies of the soul. Worldliness is dominant enough as it is in every man; but the break of the sabbath does much to hold these mighty but malevolent forces in check, and gives opportunity for the exercise of other and counteracting ones. 4. *Social.* The indebtedness of happy family life, of prosperous national life, of friendship between man and man, to the weekly day of rest is unspeakable (cf. prize essay, 'Workman's Testimony to the Sabbath'). 5. *Spiritual.* What records have the sabbaths of spiritual blessing gained on and through the holy observances of that day? Sinners won to God, burdened consciences blessed with peace, tempted souls strengthened, sad and troubled ones made joyful in God, believers helped forward in the heavenly road, etc. All these facts attest the graciousness and the obligation of the command to hallow God's sabbath. And, on the other hand, its disregard has ever been followed by moral and spiritual and often secular deterioration. It has been ill with those who have set at nought this sure law of God. Therefore let us each one do what we may to preserve to our land the unspeakable blessing of the weekly sabbath. Better to err on the side of strictness in its observance than on the side of laxity. But let us not think that we have hallowed the sabbath unless the ends for which it was designed have been secured by us. It is but a means, not the end, and, unless it have furthered in us love to God and man, each sabbath as it returns is but a lost day.—C.

Vers. 5—8.—*Trust: human and Divine.* The prophet here presents before us a vivid contrast between two types of human character. He does this by the use of suggestive images drawn from the realm of nature, as one accustomed to see the great lessons of man's moral life and destiny reflected in visible forms in the sandy desert and sterile places of the wilderness, and in the fertile valleys and woody banks of the flowing river. The imagery is peculiarly Oriental. We can all appreciate it in some measure, but those who have seen the scanty, stunted vegetable growths of the desert side by side with the rich foliage that clothes the moist ravines and the borders of the water-courses, can best understand the exquisite truth and fitness of the analogies. Consider these two opposite kinds of trust—(1) *trust in man*, (2) *trust in the Lord.*

I. TRUST IN MAN. To "make flesh one's arm" is suggestive of personal reliance on merely human and earthly resources, in neglect of the spiritual and Divine. It takes the form of undue self-confidence—confidence in one's own wisdom and strength, or confidence in our fellow-creatures, who are as ignorant and weak and fallible as ourselves, or confidence in that which is outward and circumstantial—worldly riches, sensible gratifications, material guarantees. The features of such a trust are: 1. *Vanity.* Its hope is false and delusive. It has no sure foundation. It seeks life in the region of death. As the plant finds nothing to nourish it in the barren sand, so man can never draw the nutriment his being needs from mere human and earthly resources.

> "Unless above himself he can erect himself,
> How mean a thing is man!"

And how can that which is fleshly, and therefore perishable, ever satisfy the necessities of an immortal spirit? 2. *Loss:* "He shall not see when good cometh." As the influences that come down upon it from the heaven above are lost upon the plant that is rooted

in the desert ground, so this earthly trust robs a man of the power to use aright even the opportunities of higher good that are within his reach. Heavenly influences appeal to him in vain. He knows not the richer possibility of good that surrounds him, fails to apprehend it, cannot see when it cometh. 3. *Fruitlessness.* The "parched places in the wilderness" yield no solid food. Labour bestowed on them is profitless. Such is the "curse" that rests upon the man who makes the "arm of flesh" his trust—a vain hope, destitution of the good that might be his, a withered, wasted life.

II. TRUST IN THE LORD. Blessed is the man whose whole being is rooted and grounded in God. His is a life fed at the unseen and eternal fountains. "Your hearts shall live that seek God" (Ps. lxix. 32). The image of the "tree planted by the waters" is suggestive of certain important aspects of that life. 1. *Growth.* As the tree, by the mysterious prolific energy with which it is endowed, strikes its roots deeper, and spreads forth its branches over a wider space, so the freshness and force of Divine life in the soul manifests itself in ever-deepening, enlarging, heightening forms of moral and practical goodness. This is a matter both of Divine purpose and of natural organic tendency. Spirit-life, like plant-life, knows no stagnation. Where there is no growth there is decay. 2. *Beauty.* Of all the fair objects of nature, a well-grown tree is one of the fairest. The symmetry of its proportions, the blending in harmonious negligence of its forms and colours, the play of light and shade among its leaves and branches, all combine to make it the fitting type of moral dignity and loveliness. We cannot wonder at the graceful imagery of Hebrew poets and prophets when we remember how they dwelt in a land of olives and palm trees, of cedars and lign aloes and pomegranates. Godly character is supremely beautiful. The actual forms of religious life that one sometimes meets with are intensely displeasing. But these are caricatures, not just representations. Only as our piety is pleasing and attractive to men is it divinely true. "Whatsoever things are true, . . . honest," etc. (Phil. iv. 8). 3. *Strength.* Here is the idea of a resistive force. The tree, in the vigour of its life, is able to resist the pressure of unfriendly climatic influences. It fears not the scorching heat, or the driving blast, or the rushing torrent. It is as though it "saw" them not. All religious life is a conflict with difficulties. It flourishes just so far as it is able at once to appropriate the good and repel the evil that environs it. Christ gives "the spirit of power" to them that believe in him—power to overcome the most oppressive and the most seductive influences of a hostile world.

"Where is true faith, all change comes graciously."

And neither providential trials nor the assaults of evil can shake the steadfastness of him whose heart is thoroughly "established with grace." 4. *Productiveness.* "Neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (see also Ps. i. 3; xcii. 14). The fruit of the producing tree is the final development, the end and aim of its life. All religious thought and feeling, and all Divine methods of spiritual culture, point to this as their ultimate issue—the production of enduring forms of practical goodness. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (John xv. 8). If Christ is our living root, there can be no limit to this process. The new-born soul knows no decay of its vital energies, but rather an eternal enlargement. "It gives, but still increases." The more it gives the more it increases. "As the outward man perisheth, the inward man is renewed day by day." And when death comes and cuts the body down and lays it in the dust, it only sets the spirit free to put forth the powers of its sanctified life in new forms of service in a nobler sphere, to bear fruit for ever in the paradise of God.—W.

Vers. 1—4.—*The profound impression of Judah's sin.* I. THERE IS IMPLIED JUDAH'S OWN INDIFFERENCE TO ITS SIN. With supernatural clearness of vision, the prophet saw the sin of Judah; and he spoke concerning that sin with words which Jehovah had put into his mouth. And yet it is evident the people would not admit his representations as being correct and as needing urgent attention. The great bulk of them thought that he was inventing or at least exaggerating. They had lived so long amongst evils as to have become quite used to them; nay, more, they made a pleasure and a profit of them. And this is just one of the great difficulties in preaching the gospel and trying to persuade men to repentance. They cannot be brought to see that there is anything to

repent of; that, as far as the east is from the west, so far are they from being in a right state.

II. Over against this evident indifference there must be set the prophet's EMPHATIC STATEMENT OF THE HOLD WHICH SIN HAS UPON THE PEOPLE. That we do not see the evil of our life proves one of two things—either that there is no evil to see or that we are spiritually blind and cannot see the evil which there is. Now, spiritual blindness has for its usual concomitant spiritual pride; and the man spiritually blind is the very last who will admit that he is so. If we are left to ourselves we shall never discover the original cause and fountain of all our troubles; something outside of ourselves must come in and lead to an altered view of the purposes and possibilities of life. This is not the place to speak of all that is required to produce that alteration of view; but it is very plain that statements such as that of the prophet here must be helpful to produce it. Is it not a great matter for preachers to be able to fall back upon the thorough-going, uncompromising statements of the Word of God? For, though these may find no present practical response in the consciousness of the hearer, yet this very failure is a reason for repeating them over and over again, until in some critical hour the faculty is given of seeing ourselves as God sees us, which is a faculty much more to be desired than the one so often commended of seeing ourselves as others see us. Two things are here referred to—the inscribing instrument and the substance on which the inscription is made. There is a necessity for both in order to make a deep, abiding, noticeable impression. A pencil may make upon a stone a mark of some sort, but it is a mark very easily rubbed out; a pen of iron may write some great truth upon the sand of the seashore, but one wash of the rising wave sweeps it all away. But when you have the materials for a deep inscription, then something is produced which can only be destroyed by destroying that on which it is written. Little wonder was it that these people of Judah would not face the task of inspecting their hearts. Sin is so intimately mixed with the heart that you cannot get it away save by a process tantamount to the removal of the old inward life and the substitution of a new one. Hence the fitness of the petition, "Create in me a *clean* heart, O God, and renew a *right* spirit within me." But there is something more to show the hold which sin has on these people, and that is *the terrible effect upon their children.* A great many details might have been heaped up to show the reality of Judah's idolatry, but one crowning illustration was better still. Not even the most hostile to the prophet could well deny that the force which compelled them to inflict such cruelties on their children in the name of religion was a hideous force. Every evil, in default of ability immediately to see its real nature, must be measured by its worst visible effects. And this is just what the prophet does here, when he puts in the front of his accusation the sufferings of the little ones of Judah. As if these little ones had not enough of unavoidable pain to suffer, without suffering being sought out for them.

III. THE EFFECT OF ALL THIS DEEPLY ROOTED EVIL AS SEEN IN JEHOVAH'S CONSEQUENT INFLICTIONS. (Vers. 3, 4.) The people may cry, in professed amazement, "Why all these sufferings? What have we done that we should be treated in this way?" The answer is that all this spoiling, all this turning of the promised inheritance into a place not worth having, all this bitterness of exile, were not produced in some arbitrary, incomprehensible way. The prophet was not astonished at these judgments coming; he saw them approaching, and knew why they came. Great effects always have great and appropriate causes; and great causes, left to operate freely, will produce great and proper effects. Every human heart holds within it enough to make indescribable misery; and unless that greater cause which God offers to put in certain operation comes in with its counteracting force, we may be sure that indescribable misery will be produced. Wherefore let us pray that more and more we may have eyes to see and perceive, ears to hear and understand.—Y.

Ver. 6.—*The curse upon the man who trusts in man.* In considering this passage it is important to bear in mind that two different Hebrew words (גֶּבֶר and אָדָם) are rendered by the one word "man." A recollection of this difference will bring much more meaning out of the passage.

I. There is suggested for consideration MAN IN HIS OWN OPINION OF HIMSELF. He reckons himself as גֶּבֶר, the strong one. He likes to estimate his great resources and use

them for his own aggrandizement. He is filled with the ambition of achieving greatness in many ways. It is by his strength that he builds Babel and the Pyramids and all the great structures of both ancient and modern times. He gathers great armies and makes extensive conquests. He leans to his own understanding and is wise in his own conceits. And it must be admitted that it is hard for a man in the full strength of body and mind to take in, as a practical check upon all his castle-building, the necessary weakness of human nature. The discovery of our weakness will always be a humiliating thing, at least in the first aspect of it. We do not like to relinquish the glory which comes from physical strength, intellectual skill, in short, from the employment of all those faculties enabling a man to achieve what is called a successful career. Genius is semi-deified, while the Spirit of God working through some common man, who would be nothing without that Spirit, is despised or neglected. Successful military and naval commanders are made into nobles with the general approval. Every fresh application of natural forces is hailed as a tribute to the glory of mankind. Even those who are not deceived by the coarser forms of human power are deceived readily enough by the finer ones.

II. MAN IN GOD'S ESTIMATE OF HIM. This is set forth by a threefold indication of man's folly and wickedness. 1. *He trusts in man;* man as set forth by the word אָדָם. The strong man is assuredly no stronger than that upon which he leans. A building may be of substantial materials, but all its strength will avail nothing if the foundation be weak. Mark that it is not a question of trusting in sinful and fallen men. God does not find fault with us for trusting in bad men rather than good ones. He is speaking of all that essential defectibility, that susceptibility to temptation, which belonged to man even before he fell. We might put the matter thus: Cursed is the man who trusts in Adam, who forgets that he himself is beset with temptations, and that in a moment of heedlessness and vain self-confidence he may fall into shame, confusion, and perhaps despair. 2. *He makes flesh his arm.* All strength must act through an arm of some sort. A great deal of human power makes itself felt in a very literal way through the arm. Sheer strength in wielding the sword or the hammer; skill, as in holding the painter's brush, the sculptor's chisel, the musical instrument, and the innumerable tools of all sorts of handicraftsmen. Thus the arm becomes a great representative, showing all the varieties of human strength in action. Now, where man shows his folly is in this—that wishing to get his own way, to work out his own pleasure and glory, he has no better instrument than flesh. What a poor, uncertain creature man is, if he has nothing better to depend upon than his natural faculties! The eye may lose its vision, the arm its strength, the hand its skill, and then where are the schemes and projects of the ingenious brain? The thing intended by God is that man should be as an arm to carry out into action the wise and loving projects of the Divine will. Then there is no failure, no disappointment. What cannot be done in one way will assuredly be done in another, if only the will and counsel of God stand supreme in our regard. 3. *His heart departs from Jehovah.* The great privilege given to Israel was that they had been brought near to Jehovah. Fallen Adam had been cast out of Eden, but believing Abraham had been drawn near to God. And his descendants in particular, the chosen nation in the wilderness, had been made to approach to Jehovah, the great I Am, the Source of whatsoever strength and energy are to be found in his universe. Thus, then, we see the peculiar folly of the children of Israel. All men are fools because they trust in man and make flesh their arm; but the Israelite is a fool more than others because his heart departs from Jehovah. He cannot depart altogether; he cannot get away from the constraints of the Omnipotent; he must go through all the sufferings that are coming upon the guilty land; and even when he departs to Babylon he will not leave Jehovah behind. What folly, then, that he does not make an instantaneous clearance of his miseries by cleaving with purpose of heart to Jehovah as Jehovah desires to cleave with fulness of blessing to him! And let us recollect that, however far from Jehovah our hearts may depart, from his judgments and penal visitations it is impossible for us to depart.

III. THE CURSE WHICH RESTS ON ALL THIS MISTAKEN SELF-CONFIDENCE. Though there seems some uncertainty as to the meaning of ver. 6, it is best for practical purposes to take it in contrast with ver. 8. If we plant ourselves down confidently among our own resources, deceived by the smiles and attractions of first appearances, we must

not be astonished if in due time the appearances vanish and leave the cheerless realities of the wilderness. Where man by his natural vision sees the garden with all manner of rich possibilities, God teaches the believer to discern the desolation and barrenness that lie underneath. Gardens very soon become wildernesses if the heart of the cultivator departs from Jehovah. Men who in the days of their prosperity draw around them crowds of flatterers and dependents no sooner fall into adversity than they fall also into comparative solitude. The time is coming when, if we have nothing better than the help of man to trust to, we shall really have no help at all.—Y.

Vers. 7, 8.—*The blessing on the man who trusts in Jehovah.* I. MAN'S CLAIM TO BE RECKONED AS STRONG NEED NOT BE AN EMPTY ONE. He deserves the appellation of גֶּבֶר if only he will set the right way to obtain it. Weak as he appears from the point of view given, when his natural resources are fully opened up and tested, he may nevertheless become strong by the favour of Jehovah to perform the most extraordinary achievements. From one extreme where the strength of the godless is found to be but a mockery, we are taken all the way to another extreme, illustrated by the confident assertion of the apostle that he could do all things through Christ who gave him inward strength. We are every one of us meant to be strong with a strength which can meet the severest tests; and those who are the weakest in other respects often prove the strongest in spiritual life with what it requires both of activity and endurance. And it is of particular importance to be observed that the man weak of will, easily yielding to temptation, bound these many years by the chain of some dehumanizing habit, can be made strong enough to overcome his enemies and trample them under his feet. There is that in him which can be so renewed, so vivified, that he will become steadfast and energetic in attaining the Divine purpose of existence. Recollect the instance of the man who was above forty years old when his feet and ankle-bones received strength. Jesus of Nazareth did not bring this about merely for this man's physical benefit; but chiefly that those who were inwardly lame should be stimulated to seek him, and have the feet and ankle-bones of the inward man strengthened for a holy and a truly manly service. God must needs pour contempt upon the boastings of the natural man, in order that, when he has effectually humbled him, he may then exalt him into the possession of true strength.

II. THE REQUISITE FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF TRUE STRENGTH IS POINTED OUT. Pointed out clearly and simply. He is the strong man who trusts in Jehovah, and he is strong just as far as he does trust. Notice how the requirement of trust is expressed twice over, first by a verb and then by a noun, both of which have the same root-letters. It is as if we first saw the man in the active exercise of trust, and then the habitual confidence of his nature. We see the man trusting and we also see the trusting man. "All things are possible to him that believeth." When God speaks, the trustful hearer readily acts upon the strength of God meaning what he says. The statements of the gospel transcend human powers of discovery, and they can only be believed because God makes them—he whose regular and beneficent ways in nature prove him to be so true. Man by faith puts himself in the hands of God, his Maker, and then he can do things far beyond what he has hitherto imagined to be practicable. Look at the sublimest illustration of this ever given upon earth; when the man Christ Jesus believingly said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Then, in a very few hours, the strength imparted even to the dead was revealed by the resurrection of Christ.

III. THE ILLUSTRATION OF HOW THE BLESSING COMES. Possibly there is here a reference to some regular practice of the foreseeing planter of trees. The necessity of planting trees near water-courses is not obvious to us, seeing that in our moist climate we often see noble umbrageous trees far enough from anything of the kind. The children of this world are wise in their generation. They bear in mind—they have to bear in mind—the scorching heat, the rainless, cloudless heavens, or, if clouds there be, too often waterless clouds, mocking, tantalizing beauties of the sky; and so they plant their trees where they may stretch out their thirsty roots to the passing stream. And yet these same children of this world, prudent for their trees, may yet be foolish for themselves, taking up a position in life admirable for the gaining of temporal ends, but leaving at a great distance the river that flows from "the throne of God and of the Lamb." Thus there is here a lesson from the tree which cannot choose to the man who

can choose. We all have our choice of the *essentials* of position. There are two sets of circumstances—those we cannot choose and those we are bound to choose. It is in the power of us all to be planted by the waters. God's gifts of grace flow through fixed and well-defined channels, and to these we must go. We are not allowed to make compromises. A very little seeming difference may, in reality, make all the difference between wisdom and folly in this matter. It did not need that the tree should be planted very far away from the water, a few yards more or less might determine the result. There is also in this illustration the notion of a hidden means of supply. To outward appearance there is no connection between the tree and the river; the connection is underneath, and it is real, increasing, and constant.—Y.

Vers. 9, 10.—*The searching and knowing of the heart.* One is reminded here of the oft-quoted piece of advice, "Know thyself." The prophet's assertion places man before us as the victim of self-ignorance, self-confidence, and self-deception. He talks of truth when his mind is full of error, and thus he is prevented from taking the only real way by which he can attain to the knowledge of truth. In the prophet's assertion and question, and the Divine answer given to the question, there is much which upon the first aspect may humiliate. But the humiliation will itself prove a cause for rejoicing if only it leads us to profit by God's certain knowledge in matters when we are profoundly ignorant.

I. THINK OF THE VAST AND INCREASING EXTENT OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE. If a man be ignorant of his own heart it surely cannot be because he himself is unfitted for the knowledge. He may have become unfit, and the unfitness may, by neglect, become more pronounced, but he cannot be unfit by reason of his original constitution. One may say that God must have intended him to have sufficient knowledge to keep his inward life right. Otherwise we have this curious contradiction—that man has achieved an immense amount of knowledge with respect to his physical constitution, but is doomed to remain in uncertainty and bewilderment as to the laws of a healthy and a happy inward life. "Who can know the heart?" says the prophet. And yet even with the limited knowledge of his age there were many men, doubtless, who knew many things. We all have the powers of observation, comparison, and experiment, and it is the largest pleasure of some minds to exercise these powers. And yet it is just to minds that are most trained, most confident in the principles of science, and most stored with the results of it, that this question might be put. It is not a question for the child just beginning to learn or for the savage unaccustomed to think; let it be put to man in his highest civilization, and then the fact will be seen that the question is no vain and inappropriate one.

II. Thus we are led to notice THE DREADFUL IGNORANCE WHICH MAY PREVAIL IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS KNOWLEDGE. The progress of the world does not make the prophet's question one whit less pressing. Nay, it becomes more pressing than ever. Other objects of knowledge have an ever-increasing light cast upon them, and by the very force of the contrast man's inward life appears in still deeper darkness. Whatever the cause of the continued ignorance may be, that ignorance does continue, so far as man's unaided effort to remove it is concerned. In one single mind we too often see exemplified vast intellectual knowledge and complete spiritual ignorance. He who seems to know everything does not know his own heart, and apparently does not care to know it; reminding one of the man who had travelled over the whole world and yet had never beheld a scene as wonderful as any which was visible from a point on his own estate. The time is coming when knowledge will vanish away. But the neglected heart will still remain to force itself, in a way which cannot be resisted, upon the thoughts of its long indifferent possessor.

III. THE CAUSE OF THIS IGNORANCE IS MADE PLAIN. It all lies in the deceitfulness and utter corruption of the human heart. And notice in particular that it is by the heart that the heart is to be known. Heart-knowledge is not like other kinds of knowledge; it depends on the character of him who knows. There is no *essential* contradiction between high intellectual acquirements and a hard, selfish, and perhaps even, in some instances, a profligate life. Men of refined tastes and great intellectual sensibilities may be thoroughly selfish, careless about the toil and suffering of the world, so long as these plant no thorn in their pillows, infuse no bitterness into their cup. But one who would know the heart must be very sure of his own motives, otherwise he may make human

nature to appear better in some respects and worse in others than it really is. The description here may, therefore, be taken as applying even more forcibly to the heart that knows than to the heart that is to be known. Here the great difficulty and danger lie. For the deceitful and corrupt heart can be known, if not by any one else, at all events by Jehovah himself. But the deceitful and corrupt heart cannot know; it does not, in the fullest sense of the word, know anything at all. With hearts put right, what a wonderful increase of knowledge and of the profit and pleasure of knowledge will there be! But till then we are not unlike those who suffer from diseased intellects. They come into great contrast with sane people from the way in which their minds get filled with hallucinations and incongruities. And so, if we try to compare ourselves in our notions of things with Christ's teaching, we shall see the difference between the view taken by a sincere sound heart, such as was that of our Lord, and the view taken by corrupt, deceitful hearts, which ours are and must be till we discover the need of a new and pure life to be put into them.

IV. GOD'S PERFECT KNOWLEDGE STANDS IN THE PLACE OF OUR IGNORANCE AND ERROR. God knows us in all our motives, through all our concealments, and can set our secret sins—the operation of destroying causes that lie even below our consciousness—in the light of his countenance. When once we discover how competent God is to search and try, we shall then see that it is vain for us to deny what he affirms, to excuse what he condemns, and to make out that we are not responsible when he lays evil at our doors. Jeremiah's scornful audiences may have said to him, "How come you to know *these* things about us? How come you to be so uncharitable as to bring these dreadful charges?" But then we know that they were not the prophet's own charges, but came from God himself. It was part of Jeremiah's grief that, on Jehovah's authority, he should have to believe things so bad of his nation. What God did to Israel was just; and more and more, as time went on, it was seen to be just. In all great exhibitions of Divine wrath we must be silent, recollecting that God knows what we cannot know, and perceives necessities where we can perceive none.—Y.

Ver. 11.—*Riches wrongly gotten, and the consequence.* Here is an instance of an illustration which, so far as our knowledge is concerned, is more obscure than the thing to be illustrated. But there was, no doubt, with regard to some bird a popular opinion which made the prophet's reference very suggestive to his hearers. The fact supposed is that some bird gathers the young of other birds, despoiling the nests of the real parents, only to find, when the young ones get sufficiently strong, that they can no longer be kept to its nurture and control. Whether there was a real fact corresponding matters very little. If we want a familiar and sufficiently corresponding instance, we may find it in the not unfrequent one of a hen hatching a brood of ducklings, only to find how soon their alien nature is manifested when a pool of water comes within reach. Note—

I. THERE IS A RIGHTFUL GETTING OF WEALTH. External property occupies a position of approval in the Old Testament which is denied to it in the New. All the way through the New Testament the perils and deceptions attaching to mere external wealth are strongly insisted on. If not condemned *per se*, which of course is not possible, it is yet put forward as a heavy burden and perpetual stumbling-block to the Christian who has it. But in the Old Testament that very wealth is magnified, doubtless as a symbol of those better riches which would appear in something of their proper glory and satisfying power through the energetic ministrations of Christ's Spirit. God saw fit for a time to recognize ability, industry, and integrity in a way which would be plain to the most carnal of men. Take Job, for instance. And even in the New Testament a sharp line is drawn between wealth gotten honestly and that which came by extortion and cheating. There is a standard of integrity recognized by the natural man; and God also recognizes this standard, so far as it goes. Miserably short does it fall of his appointed height of perfection, but it is better than nothing. Those who fall short of even the moderate requirements of their fellow-men God will condemn. On them he will set an unmistakable mark. But in order to do this there must be some sort of modified approval of those who, in seeking wealth, strive to keep their integrity and refrain from doing that which may degrade and impoverish their fellow-men.

II. THE PECULIAR UNCERTAINTY OF ILL-GOTTEN WEALTH. All external wealth is uncertain. "Riches take to themselves wings and flee away." They furnish one of the most impressive testimonies to the instability of terrestrial society. But ill-gotten gains are peculiarly unstable. Every rich man is envied, and few such escape slander. But he who becomes rich by unscrupulous methods has to lay his account with hostility on the part of all whom he has spoiled. Methods of unjust gain cannot but provoke the resolute, persevering, and ultimately successful opposition of all who hate injustice. Recollect the sudden and complete loss which came to the slave-holders of America, when their slaves were freed as a matter of military necessity. It is true that unjust gains seem to be often as stable as just ones; but still the peculiar uncertainty remains. A Christian possessing external wealth bears in mind the uncertainty of it, just as he bears in mind the uncertainty of his own natural life; but the heaper-up of *filthy* lucre has to reckon, not only with the perils of all human life, but also with those inseparable from his own evil courses. In some great storm, fatally threatening the ship of state, such a one may have to be thrown overboard, Jonah-fashion, in order to secure the safety of the rest.—Y.

Vers. 12, 13.—*An inspiring invocation.* We must take ver. 12 as invocatory rather than indicative. The prophet speaks suitably in the language of apostrophe as he refers to the throne of Jehovah and the holy heights where he dwells. "O throne of glory, height of beginning, place of our sanctuary!" It will be felt that this apostrophe is well fitted to make the Hope of Israel a source of real hope in the hearts of Israel.

I. THE THRONE OF GLORY. This may be taken as having, by contrast, a double reference. He who sits on this throne is the Deity, Jehovah; hence all the seats of the Gentile gods may in like manner be considered as thrones. And because he who sits on a throne is reckoned as a king, there is also a contrast with human kings. This reference to the throne of glory amounts, therefore, to a condemnation of all idol shrines and human thrones as places to be ashamed of. The shrines were richly decorated and regarded with the utmost veneration, but this did not make them glorious. The practices of those connected with the shrines and the character of the worshippers showed that instead of glory there was shame. It has been the mark of all who have turned from formal idolatry or from the equally real idolatry of a worldly spirit to the living God, the God of Sinai and the tabernacle, of Calvary and of Pentecost, that they have become more and more ashamed of their ungodly past. Its defilement and unworthiness have been seen in a new light and with new eyes. When the slave becomes a freeman, servitude is more and more seen to be inexpressibly degrading. And so with regard to the thrones of human kings: these are just the places where human selfishness and pride are most conspicuous. To see how base and fiendish a man can become, we have only to select from the occupants of thrones. It is not meant that kings have been worse than common men; but their elevated position has both enlarged their opportunities for mischief, and also exposed them to the gaze of all succeeding generations. A Tiberius or a Nero gets an immortality of infamy, whereas an obscure villain of the same age passes swiftly into oblivion. Those kings who have really glorified thrones did so only as far as they were viceroys to him who is the King of kings. Human thrones may or may not be thrones of glory so far as glory can belong to the creature. Jehovah's throne must be glorious seeing that it is for ever transfigured with the effulgence of him who sits thereon.

II. THE HEIGHT OF BEGINNING. "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth." It is man coming in afterwards who has misemployed and degraded what God fashioned with certain Divine and supremely beneficial ends in view. Out of that which God has made for *his* glory man raises up things to glorify *himself*. The proudest system of idolatry, the system most deeply rooted in the hearts of millions, is but of yesterday when compared with those heavens which are God's throne and that earth which is his footstool. Measured against this height of beginning, the most ancient of human families is only an upstart. It is like the mushroom of a night when set over against some immemorial tree. The abode where and whence the glory of Jehovah is manifested is not a Babel edifice, which, however *high it may rise*, is humiliatingly conditioned by the unstable foundation on which it rests. Human

power, at the summit of its splendour, has traversed and conquered large tracts of the earth; and so kings get the name of great; but the greatness is only a momentary, unsubstantial swelling. Their power, like that of the sudden torrent, swiftly passes away. One can imagine how the prophet, while he talked of this height of beginning, looked to the heavens, so unaffected by all the strife and pride of the generations which succeed one another in this lower world. Jehovah has not climbed through long struggles to his height of glory. There may be evolution and graduation among the creatures of his hand, but such conceptions of progress are nothing less than blasphemous when we try to apply them to him.

III. THE PLACE OF OUR SANCTUARY. The place which God had condescended to make holy in his special connection with Israel—the place where the ark of the covenant rested—had become also a place (the history of Israel being witness) where the people of Israel might have every confidence in God. The temples of idols had not an invariable connection with the triumphs of their worshippers; but just in proportion as Israel honoured the ark of the covenant and the God of the ark, in the same proportion they were made to see the effect of their conduct in triumph over their enemies and success in their own affairs. It was because they forsook the ark that they themselves were forsaken in humiliation, adversity, and shame. Not, of course, that the prophet is thinking of the ark only here. The true place of sanctuary is also in his mind—the invisible abode of the invisible Jehovah.—Y.

Ver. 13.—"*Written in the earth.*" I. AN INDICATION OF WHY MEN DEPART FROM GOD. "Those who depart from Jehovah," says the prophet, "shall be written in the earth." Therefore we conclude that their aim is to be written in some more durable and trustworthy substance. When they are spoken of as departing from God, the description is one accommodated to our thoughts rather than exactly correspondent with reality. The connection has been *real* so far as mere opportunity and privilege were concerned, but *nominal* also, because the opportunity and privilege were never seized. God has drawn near to the man; the man has not been inclined to draw near to God. It has seemed to him that in drawing near there would be such a subordination of self as would amount to self-effacement. The lusts of the natural man are everywhere checked and contradicted by the commandments of God. Hence man strives to get away from God and into such relations with his fellow-men as will, he thinks, cause his name to be counted for more. It may be that it is self-glory he is seeking for; to have his name deeply graven on the world's memorial tablets as one who has achieved much and stood out like a Hercules from the common crowd. It may be that he hopes for great power; to have his name written on the hearts of thousands whose interests will be bound up with his so that they cannot succeed if he fails. It is very gratifying to the pride of man to feel that others cannot do without him.

II. THE SURE RESULT OF DEPARTURE FROM GOD. Men go away from God expecting to have their names written in the marble, and a very short experience shows that they are written, as it were, on the most shifty of all materials. From a certain point of view, nothing seems more irregular than the preservation of what was written in ancient ages. Deep letters on hard stones are long faded away, while characters written on parchment or even paper survive to this day, and are now watched with an attention which bids fair to preserve them for many a year to come. But every one can see that what is written in the earth must, in the very nature of things, be quickly obliterated. Such writing may be the amusement of a child; it could never be the serious occupation of a man. And yet it is just by this figure that the folly of apostates from God is set forth. They write their names on a spot exposed to the trampling crowd of their fellow-men; and in their own selfishness they forget of how little account they are to others as selfish as themselves. And yet, in spite of such a warning to those who depart from God, they go on complaining because men forget them. It is just the way in which they must expect to be treated. It is the way of the world. After all, we are but weak creatures, with very limited powers, and we may well be excused if we cannot keep constantly in our minds those who have some claim on our sympathy and help. It is no fault of earth that it is earth instead of adamant. The fault lies with those who allow their names to be written there instead of in the enduring place which God has provided for them.

III. THE EQUALLY SURE RESULT FROM CLEAVING TO GOD. Though not stated in so many words, it is cheeringly implied that those cleaving to God have their names written whence they can never be erased. For their names are indeed written, as it were, on the heart of God himself. He cannot either forget or forsake them. They are ever remembered in the wisdom of his thoughts and the resistless movements of his ways. The best thing that can happen to us in purely human relations is to be written in the hearts of those who love us; when they remember us, not because it is their interest to do so, but out of an unselfish fulness of desire for our welfare and happiness. But how much better is it to be thus remembered by God, seeing that with him there abides a love inexpressibly deeper than any human affection, and, along with this love, a wisdom and power with which even the highest human wisdom and power are not for a moment to be mentioned!—Y.

Ver. 14.—*He whom God heals is really healed.* I. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF INDIVIDUAL NEED. The prayer is "heal me;" "deliver me." The prophet shows how deep and pressing is his own need by the use of two figures. He feels the need of something being done internally and externally. Internally he is sick at heart, wounded and bruised in spirit. He needs healing from the state of mind produced through being despised and rejected by his fellow-countrymen. Still worse is the gnawing pain produced as he views the wickedness of the land and takes knowledge of the steadily advancing calamities. But we cannot doubt that beyond all this there was the consciousness of his own heart's pollution and unworthiness. So far as natural constitution and natural tendencies were concerned, he who spoke was no better than those to whom he spoke. Thus, in trying to waken others from their lethargy, he became more thoroughly wakened to his own state. The word which God had put into his mouth was spoken, not only to the outside audience, but down to his own sinning and ignorant heart. God cannot take for prophets and apostles those who care little about their own spiritual need. Paul became a better apostle because he reckoned himself, in such sincerity, the chief of sinners. It ought to be no marvel that those to whom we speak are indifferent to their state, if we who speak to them are largely indifferent to our own.

II. THE VANITY OF SEEKING ELSEWHERE THAN TO GOD. The very confidence which Jeremiah expresses that, if only God heals him, he will be truly healed, seems to indicate that he had some experience of other modes of healing, such as had looked very promising at first, but proved utterly vain in the end. As a general rule, we have to be disappointed in human agencies of healing before we can be satisfied with the Divine one. It cannot be said that the nature and depth of the disease are adequately discovered, until we discover, from experience, how vain human resources are against it. We may be able to mitigate symptoms, to deaden pain, to rouse into a temporary cheerfulness; but in the end the relapse is certain and more confirmed than ever. It was a great thing for the prophet to be brought to feel, as he evidently was, that anywhere else he went would be with the probability of failure. With God there is not only the certainty of success, that success is *with him alone.*

III. THE PROPHET'S CONFIDENCE IN GOD AS A HEALER. The way in which he expresses this confidence is most worthy of notice. His confidence is, not that God will do something for him, but that whatever God does will be adequate for the end in view. It is much to feel that one may count upon Divine sympathy and effort; it is still more to feel that whatever help God gives will rise to the intensity of the need. He who gives the spirit of conviction, working deep in the natural heart and showing its diseased state and defiling, polluting activity, gives also the spirit of a real healing. The great ground of apprehension arises, not from the magnitude of the spiritual disease, but from the indifference of the sufferer and his indisposition to submit his heart to God's searching, healing power. The moment we are willing to submit ourselves to the great Physician, that moment the worst disease becomes a manageable and a virtually conquered thing. The course of the healing process may be long, tedious, and painful; but what matter these, if the end be perfect healing and everlasting health?—Y.

Ver. 15.—"*Where is the word of the Lord?*" I. THE PRETEXT AND AIM OF THIS QUESTION. The prophet's subsequent comment on the question shows with what bitter

hatred to him it was asked. Sad, indeed, it is to reflect that these very words might be asked in a far different spirit; that they might come from the depths of an ignorant seeking heart, wandering long amid idolatries and human systems of philosophy, without hearing anything to serve as bread of heaven for the deep hunger within. There are people upon whom God's Word has been pressed in every variety of appeal and representation. The Word has sought them out again and again; and yet in the end all they can do is to cast a scornful doubt on whether it is the Word of God at all. It may, indeed, be allowed that they did not mean to insult Jehovah; all they had in view was to express, in the most stinging way, their bitter hatred of this pertinacious, plain-spoken prophet—this man who had come as a comparative youth from little Anathoth, rebuking those who were high in rank, old in years, and looked up to by the bulk of the people. No fallacy infecting the regions of practical life is more pernicious than that which, professing to admit the authority of him who sends, yet discredits the status of his professed messenger. It is thus very easy to evade unpleasant, humiliating messages. So the Jews of our Lord's time were fanatically solicitous to honour their conception of Jehovah, and, as part of this devotion, they ended by crucifying Jesus as a blasphemer. The very people who asked, "Where is the word of Jehovah?" may have been the first to frame plausible repudiations of any wish to blaspheme him. Their great aim and purpose was to put this upstart Jeremiah in his proper place. They probably thought that these scornful speeches might become at last as a gag in his mouth. The lesson is plain: do not reject truth, or in any wise try to evade it because it comes through some one you do not like. What Jeremiah said here, respecting the character and work of these men, was true; and they do not deny the truth. They simply ignore the charges, and by one scornful question hint that the threatenings connected with the charges are but as empty words.

II. THE WAYS IN WHICH THIS QUESTION MAY BE ANSWERED. Jeremiah, we perceive, has his own answer appropriate to his individual circumstances. He falls back on his integrity. God knows the fidelity and obedience of his heart. God had put into his mouth the words he had spoken. They did not rise out of his personal feeling; they were not the breathings of an egotist, a fanatic, a madman, an enemy of his country. But inasmuch as this question is ever being asked by a certain class who will not believe in a Divine plan of the world—partly revealed in Scripture and the partial execution of which is shown in history—it is well to remember how Jehovah has honoured his servants who have had in any way to fill the office of prophets. He who has gone forth to threaten the persistently impenitent has never been without some achieved judgment of God which he might adduce as an illustration. The shadows cast forward into the future have their correspondences in the substances belonging to the past. If we could only summon out of the invisible world the generation which perished in the Flood, the dwellers in the cities of the plain, Pharaoh and his army, those who were destroyed in the gainsaying of Korah, and many others, they would be able to give no uncertain answer to the question, "Where is the word of Jehovah?" The kingdom of God is not in word only; it has in it a power which can be manifested in all needful abundance, with all needful rapidity, and in whatever aspect may be proper to the occasion. God's Word becomes a complete and plainly perceptible deed exactly when the time is ripe. Shall man be able to arrange a time-piece so that when the hour hand and minute hand together point to twelve there shall be the striking which signifies noon has arrived; and shall not God be able to order the mysteries and complexities of the world so as to bring out the intended results just when he wants them? It is not for us to know times and seasons; but most emphatically it is for us to believe that every word of God is true. These very scorners of Jeremiah were about to add, in the course of a few short years at most, an illustration as forcible as any that what God has spoken may be taken as already done. God's calm advancing of his kingdom should do much to make his people calm. It is our fault if the sarcasms of the unbelieving become anything more than words; and mere words are best met by a silent, patient, and believing continuance in well-doing.—Y.

Vers. 16—18.—*The prophet's consciousness of integrity.* We may take it that this one question, "Where is the word of Jehovah?" stands for a great deal in the way of taunt. The appeal to God, with which the prophet follows up the mention of this

question, shows how much he felt the attacks made upon him. It would be too much to say that he did not expostulate with his enemies upon their injustice; but evidently his great resort was to the God who had sent him. If men perversely attributed to him daring imposture and bitter malignity, he could do nothing but fall back on God's knowledge of his course and motives. Four points are noticeable.

I. HIS OFFICE AS A PROPHET WAS NOT THE RESULT OF DISCONTENT WITH A PREVIOUS OCCUPATION. He had not hastened from being a shepherd. He was perfectly willing to have continued as a shepherd at Anathoth. It was not he who, looking out on the larger world, had wished to become conspicuous on a busier scene. He left his sheep because God had called him, as he called Moses, David, and Amos. It is true that, if a prophet would do his work *ex animo*, he must choose it; but first of all he must be chosen. It must be made perfectly plain to him, in a sober, wakeful moment, when all the faculties of life are collected, that *he, and not some other person*, was called to this work; to *this work*, and not to some other work. The office of a prophet, with all its toils, sufferings, perils, and temptations, was assuredly not an office to be grasped at. It needed that one should count the cost. We are not told much of the earlier history of the prophets, but some of them, at least, must have known long periods of discipline. For Jeremiah to say that he had not hastened to be a prophet really means that he had gone into the work with great deliberation, slowly and steadily following where God slowly and steadily walked before him. There is no haste in God's dealings, though in crises there may be suddenness and rapidity of action; and therefore there can be no haste with those who are the instruments and messengers of God's dealings.

II. THE REPUDIATION OF EVERYTHING LIKE PERSONAL MALIGNITY. He was *compelled* to speak of a calamitous day, but he spoke as one whose inexpressibly painful duty it is to break bad news. Moreover, it was bad news which concerned him as much as every other member of the nation. He was not a mere outsider, looking on with pity at events which did not concern him individually. The calamities of his native land, although he might be free from their worst effects, could not leave him altogether unsmitten. Doubtless there were moments when he, like Paul, could have wished himself accursed for his brethren's sake. His feelings when he had to speak of impending calamities would be of the same kind (not, of course, so pure and intense) as those which Jesus had when he apostrophized Jerusalem, rushing to its fall, and careless about the things which made for its peace. Terrible truth may be spoken very tenderly and beseechingly. Juries find verdicts condemning to death, and judges pass the corresponding sentences, which they would all of them gladly escape if fidelity to truth and duty left an open way. That tenderness which shirks duty because of present pain and difficulty, often proves in the end to be the worst of cruelty.

III. THE WORDS OF THE PROPHECIES ARE EXPRESSLY ATTRIBUTED TO GOD. It is a natural course to hold a man responsible for all that comes from his lips. The prophet could not escape this responsibility. It was not his to complain that his auditors challenged him as the constructor of these unpalatable speeches. If they looked to him, he in turn did the wise thing, the only thing that could be done—he looked to God. He was able to do this because he had been faithful. He had not garbled or mutilated his message to make it more tolerable. He understood perfectly well what, nevertheless, many fail to understand, that truth depends, not on what men are able to understand, but on what God clearly reveals. The prophet was in no manner of doubt as to the authority by which he spoke. Looking back and reviewing his utterances, he was perfectly sure that he had not confused his own thoughts with the commanded words of Jehovah. If what God reveals for us to speak, we speak; and if what he reveals for us to believe and act upon, we do believe and act upon; then with the utmost confidence we can go to him for support and defence. What could Jeremiah have done in his extremity if he had not been conscious of his fidelity as a prophet of God?

IV. GOD KNEW THE TRUTH OF ALL THAT THE PROPHET WAS ASSERTING. "Thou knowest." God knew his servant's heart; knew the sincerity and simplicity of his service. It was of no use arguing with men. Either they were unable to discern how true and apposite were his words, or, discerning, they were not willing to make a corresponding acknowledgment. But where men were ignorant God had perfect

knowledge; where men were indifferent God showed the deepest interest. Hence the prophet could look to him confidently for continued support and ample vindication. Rightly considered, there is nothing revengeful or merely personal in ver. 18. We may well believe that the prophet's great anxiety was that the truth of Jehovah should be honoured, even though it might be by terrible judgments upon despisers and unbelievers.—Y.

Vers. 19—27.—*The hallowing of the sabbath day.* I. THE PLACE FOR ANNOUNCING THE MESSAGE. 1. *It was a place where the king, as much as the people, would hear.* Whatever else may be signified by "the gate of the children of the people," it seems clear that it was a gate in which, at certain times, the king would be found. In his own house it might be impossible to gain access to him; but the gate was open to all; and there he could not choose but listen to a man who would speak earnestly and commandingly; because the word of Jehovah lodged in him, came from the depths of his concurring heart. The kings, doubtless, by their own individual leadership and encouragement, were responsible for much of the evil of sabbath-breaking. The state of Jerusalem in particular would be largely influenced by them. A corrupt court makes a corrupt capital, and a corrupt capital is not without effect towards the making of a corrupt nation. 2. *It was the place for the greatest general publicity.* One gate is specified, but not one of the gates was to be omitted. The king, with his peculiar responsibilities, was warned in a peculiar way; but there was no one in such a private and irresponsible position as to be without concern in the message. The ten commandments were commandments for every individual among the people; hence the need of a warning which, in the mode of giving it, should be likely to arrest the attention of all. It was Jehovah's message delivered at least as many times as there were gates in Jerusalem. We may well believe that it was delivered over and over again. No note of time is given, but of course the prophet would choose the time when there were most passengers; nor would he omit to deliver the message upon the sabbath day itself. 3. *The message was given upon one of the most conspicuous scenes of transgression.* If the prophet went to one of the most frequented gates on a sabbath, there he found transgressors, crowds of them, in the very act of transgression. They could not deny the act, and all he needed to do was to adduce the commandment against it. God can always make it clear that he does not send forth his prophets without occasion.

II. THE MESSAGE ITSELF. This command with respect to the sabbath day seems to come in very abruptly here. And yet no one who considers the prominence of Jehovah's injunction to "remember the sabbath day to keep it holy" will wonder at the definiteness and emphasis of the prophet's message. The details of his message make it only too sadly evident how far the people had departed from the original commandment. Here we have one of two extremes of disobedience in which the practical attitude of Israel towards this commandment appears. The sacred day which God had hallowed both in word and deed was recklessly and shamelessly made into a common day. If a stranger went into the streets of Jerusalem on a sabbath, he might have great difficulty in discerning by any external sign that it was a sabbath. The people would be going into the city and coming out of it much as on any other day. The other extreme is seen in the reasonless and fanatical formalism of the Jews, who so often attacked our Lord. There is certainly a great difference *externally* between these two extremes. It is very wonderful to consider that such a transition should be possible from the careless crowding of the gates with burdens on the sabbath, to the savage bigotry which attacked Jesus for healing sick folk on the same day. Yet underneath external differences there was the same unabated, worldly, ungodly spirit. Those whom Jesus had to denounce for their shameless trafficking in the holy precincts were the children of those whom Jeremiah had to denounce for doing their own selfish will and needless acts on God's sabbath. And so we see that this passage from the prophet needs to be considered along with those passages in the Gospels where Jesus deals with the sabbatarianism of his time. His painful experiences of such professed honourers of God, and his searching exposures of them, need to be complemented by this message of Jeremiah. We shall always find in Scripture something to check us from "the falsehood of extremes." Sabbatarians twist a commandment; sabbath-breakers trample it underfoot. The evil which Jeremiah deals with here is dealt with even more solemnly

by Ezekiel (xxii. 1—12, where in ver. 8 sabbath-breaking is particularly referred to as one of many terrible transgressions. See also Neh. ix. 14; xiii. 15—22; Isa. lvi. 2; Ezek. xx. 12—24; xlvi. 1—5).—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVIII.

This chapter is the introduction of a group of prophecies (extending to ch. xxv.) of various dates; their sequence has evidently not been determined by chronological considerations. The prophet's first object is, perhaps, to refute the scoffing inquiry (ch. xvii. 15), "What has become of the [threatening] word of Jehovah?" and to justify the glorious promise given at the conclusion of the last chapter. The fulfilment of threatenings and promises alike is conditioned by the moral attitude of the people (comp. Ezek. xxxiii. 11). God, as it were, holds them in either hand, and there is still time (contrast ch. xvi. 21) to choose the sweet and reject the bitter by sincerely turning to their true Friend. Unhappily the people misuses its day of grace, and, instead of listening to God's messenger, seeks to rid itself of him by persecution. Upon this, Jeremiah falls again into the tone of bitter complaint, and, so far from interceding for his people, does the very opposite; on which painful and mysterious phenomenon, see remarks in general Introduction.

Vers. 1—6.—The simple and familiar craft of the potter becomes a parable of religious truth (comp. Isa. xxix. 16; xlv. 9; lxiv. 8; Ecclus xxxiii. 13; Rom. ix. 20; and the account of man's creation in Gen. ii. 7, which has doubtless given rise to the figure). God has the sovereign right to do as he wills with his own handiwork; thus much can be expressed by the figure. But the moral element in Jeremiah's teaching stands outside this, viz. that the Divine action is governed, not by mere caprice, but a regard for character. "The thought is not so much the arbitrariness as the patience of God, who will bring men to be what he would have them be in the end, as the potter eventually twists the clay to the shape he originally intended, stubborn as the clay may be." But whether Jeremiah meant the lesson which Mr. Maurice deduces from his words may be gravely doubted. It is not of individuals that the prophet is thinking, but of the nation, and not of the nation as destined to be all but certainly saved, but as placed before a serious and awful decision. (For different lessons derived from the same figure, see the 'Rabbi Ben Ezra' of Browning.) Egypt and Palestine were, as it seems, at one in the extreme simplicity of the potter's art. Dr. Birch has given us an account of the Egyptian potter at his work, as he appears in the pictorial representations at Beni Hassan ('Ancient Pottery,' pp. 33—35), and Dr. Thomson has described the procedure of a potter in modern Palestine ('The Land and the Book,' p. 520). The chief difference between them seems to be that in Egypt the wheel was turned with the left hand, and the vase shaped with the right, while in modern Palestine the wheel is turned with the foot. "Taking a lump in his hand," says Dr. Thomson, "he placed it on the top of the wheel (which revolves horizontally), and smoothed it into a low cone, like the upper end of a sugar-loaf; then thrusting his thumb into the top of it, he opened a hole down through the centre, and this he constantly widened by pressing the edges of the revolving cone between his hands. As it enlarged and became thinner, he gave it whatever shape he pleased with the utmost ease and expedition." It should be observed that in ver. 3 the "wheels," or rather "two wheels," spoken of are simply the two round plates which formed the horizontal lathe of the potter.

Ver. 4.—**And the vessel that he made**, etc.; rather, *And whensoever the vessel . . . was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it again another vessel.*

Vers. 7, 8.—At what **instant**, etc.; rather, *One instant I may speak . . . but if that nation, against which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.* A similar rendering for the next verse.

Ver. 12.—**And they said**; rather, *But they go on saying* (comp. Ezek. xxxiii. 17, 20). **There is no hope.** The rendering may be easily misunderstood. The speakers are not, as we might suppose, despondent about their state and prospects, but they seek to check the troublesome preacher by the warning that he has no chance of success (so ch. ii. 25). **Imagination**; rather, *stubbornness* (as constantly).

Ver. 14.—**Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon**, etc.? This passage is unusually

obscure. Literally we must, it would seem, render, *Doth the snow of Lebanon fail from the rock of the field* (or possibly, *cease to flow from the rock unto the field*)? This is explained as pointing a contrast to the infidelity of God's people. "The snow never leaves the summit of Lebanon; the waters which take their rise therein never dry up; but my people have forgotten the law of their being, the source of their prosperity." The rendering of the first clause is, however, grammatically dubious (there is no example of this construction of *'āzabh*), and all the old versions point to (or at least favour) a reading, *Shaddai* (the Almighty) instead of *sādai* (the field). If we keep the text, we must explain "the rock of the field" on the analogy of "my mountain in the field" (ch. xvii. 3), as meaning "the rock which commands a wide prospect over the open lowland country," *i.e.* Mount Lebanon. **The cold flowing waters**; *i.e.* the numerous "streams from Lebanon," referred to in Cant. iv. 15. **That come from another place**; *i.e.* whose sources are foreign. But as this does not suit the connection, it is better to take the Hebrew word (*zārim*), usually rendered "foreign," in the sense of "pressing or hurrying along," with Ewald, Graf, and virtually Henderson. It thus becomes descriptive of these streams "as contracted within narrow channels while descending through the gorges and defiles of the rocks." Comp. "like an oppressing stream," Isa. lix. 19 (a cognate verb). **Be forsaken.** The Hebrew text has "be plucked up" (*i.e.* destroyed?); but as this is unsuitable, we must transpose two letters (as in not a few other cases), and render, *dry up*. So Gesenius, Graf, Keil, Delitzsch, and Payne Smith.

Ver. 15.—**Because my people hath forgotten me**; rather, *Surely*, etc.; or better still, *Yet surely*. It is not uncommon for a particle of asseveration to acquire a contrasting force from the context; see *e.g.* ch. iii. 20; Isa. liii. 4; and, still more completely parallel, Isa. ii. 6; ch. ix. 1, where Authorized Version, with substantial correctness, has "nevertheless." Israel "forgot" Jehovah (as ch. ii. 32); no doubt he was responsible for so doing, but still it was not "of malice prepense." **To vanity**; *i.e.* to the unreal idol-gods. **And they have caused them to stumble**; viz. the idol-gods; these are responsible (for they have a real existence in the consciousness of their worshippers) for this interruption of Israel's spiritual progress (comp. 2 Chron. xxviii. 23). **In their ways from the ancient paths.** "From," however, is interpolated by the Authorized Version; the Hebrew places "the ancient paths" in apposition to "their ways." "Stand ye in the ways," Jeremiah cried at an earlier period, "and see, and ask for the old paths, which is the good way" (ch. vi. 16). These "old" or "ancient" paths were ideally "their ways," the ways appointed for the Jews to walk in. **To walk in paths**; rather, *in tracks*, footpaths leading up and down and often ending in nothing; or, in other terms, in a way not cast up (Isa. xl. 3, 4, gives a graphic picture of the operation of "casting up a way").

Ver. 16.—The effect of this is to make the land of the transgressors an object of horror and *astonishment* (so render rather than desolate).

Ver. 17.—**As with an east wind.** The east was a stormy wind (Ps. xlviii. 7; Job xxvii. 21). **I will show them the back**; as they have done to Jehovah (ch. ii. 27; xxxii. 33).

Vers. 18—23.—A fresh conspiracy (comp. ch. xi. 18), called forth by the preceding discourse; Jeremiah's prayer.

Ver. 18.—**The law**—or rather, *direction, instruction*, which was a special function of the priests (Deut. xxxiii. 10; xvii. 9—11)—**shall not perish from the priest.** The Jews were but obeying the Deuteronomic Law (on which Jeremiah, as we have seen, laid so much stress) in alluding to the priests. Unhappily, the priests in Jeremiah's time (ch. ii. 26), as in Isaiah's (Isa. xxviii. 7), were forgetful of their high mission. **Nor counsel from the wise.** The wise men formed an important order in Jewish society, the importance of which in the Divine education of Israel has not been sufficiently recognized. It was their custom to sit in public places, generally in the chambered recess in the city gate, and give advice on questions of moral practice to those who applied for it. But there were wise men and wise men. Some appear to have "mocked" at the earnest preaching of the prophets (hence the solemn rebukes in the Book of Proverbs), others to have as it were prepared the way for the latter by a more or less distinct recognition of the religious foundation of morality, and of these we have ample monuments in the canonical Proverbs. There may also have been other shades and varieties of wise men, for their characteristic was not a faculty of intuition, but rather of reflectively applying fundamental moral principles. One highly esteemed branch of "wisdom" would, of course, be political, and this would be the most liable to perversion. It is of such that Isaiah, like Jeremiah, says that "the wisdom of their wise men shall perish" (xxix. 14). **Nor the word from the prophet.** "The word" is a general term for prophesying. Of course, the speakers take no account of the advance in prophecy from

the time, at any rate, of Amos. They are satisfied with the lower order of prophets ("false prophets," as the Septuagint calls them); but still they are afraid of Jeremiah, much as Balak was afraid of Balaam, when that soothsayer was blessing Israel (Numb. xxiii. 25). **Smite him with the tongue**; *i.e.* by slanderous accusations. The same figure as in ch. ix. 3, 8.

Vers. 19, 20.—**Them that contend with me. Shall evil, etc.?** Compare the phraseology of Ps. xxxv. 1—12 (either Jeremiah imitated this psalm or *vice versâ*); and for another point of contact with this psalm, see on ch. xxiii. 12. **They have digged a pit, etc.** Comp. Ps. lvii. 6. **To speak good for them.** See Jeremiah's intercessions in ch. xiv. 7—9, 19—22.

Ver. 21.—**Pour out their blood by the force, etc.**; rather, *spill them into the hands of*, etc. (see Ps. lxiii. 10); a phrase akin to that in Isa. liii. 12. The sword is personified. **Let their men be put to death**; another personification, for the Hebrew has "slain of Death"—pestilence is referred to, as ch. xv. 2.

Ver. 23.—**Let them be overthrown before thee**; *i.e.* count them as those who have been brought to ruin. This explanation seems required by the parallelism, the companion clause meaning "do not regard their sin as cancelled." The ruin may be either spiritual or temporal; the parallelism favours the former (comp. ver. 14; Hos. xiv. 10, where "fall" should be "stumble"). **Deal thus with them.** "Thus" is interpolated by the Authorized Version; "deal" should rather be *deal terribly* ("deal" is constantly used in a pregnant sense; see on ch. xiv. 7).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*The potter and the clay.* The relations of the potter to his clay afford a familiar and apt illustration of the relations between God and his human family. At first sight this illustration suggests a harsh view of providence and a hopeless prospect for human endeavour. But on closer consideration, while it teaches lessons of humility and reverent submission on our part, it also throws light on the merciful goodness of God, and encourages us both to hope and to act for that which will lead to our highest blessedness.

I. MEN ARE UNDER THE ABSOLUTE POWER OF GOD, LIKE CLAY IN THE HANDS OF THE POTTER. The potter has power to leave the clay untouched or to make out of it either a vessel of honour or a vessel of dishonour, a beautiful vase or an ugly piece of crockery, a dainty cup for a prince's banquet or a coarse culinary utensil. God has absolute *power* over us. He is the Almighty. No man can eventually succeed in resisting the will of God. No Divine purpose can be eternally frustrated. God has also absolute *authority* over us. He has the ultimate right of supreme sovereignty to do as he will with his subjects. Yet there is nothing alarming in this fact, but rather an infinite consolation. For God is not a heartless, conscienceless despot, displaying arbitrary power by mere caprice; he is holy, and exercises his sovereignty according to principles of strict justice, truth, and right. He is gracious, and rules with purposes of love for the good of his creatures. Our dependence on God is, like that of the infant on its mother, the security of our own welfare. Those horrible applications of the doctrine of Divine sovereignty which attribute to it designs that would be accounted cruel in any responsible being are blasphemous insults to the impartial justice and love of God's character. If God's actions are not limited by any physical compulsion or constitutional law, they are governed by his regard to eternal righteousness and by the beneficence of his nature.

II. MEN CAN NO MORE ATTAIN A WORTHY END IN LIFE WITHOUT GOD THAN THE CLAY CAN BECOME A SHAPELY VESSEL WITHOUT THE POTTER. There lies the clay—a dead, heavy, amorphous mass, with no possibility of spontaneously generating forms of beauty, with no secret principle of evolution to work it into something orderly. We are as clay. Except God wrought in us and upon us, we could simply lie helpless, only to waste away with the flux of circumstances. If we are more than clay, it is because God breathes his life into us and sustains us every moment by his indwelling Spirit. If we seem to effect anything actively, it is because he first works in us both to will and to do.

III. GOD HAS A PURPOSE IN EVERY LIFE AS THE POTTER HAS WITH THE CLAY. There is a meaning for the strange discipline of providence. God is shaping us into

that form which he deems most fitting. Every life has not the same purpose. The potter makes vessels of innumerable shapes. Yet each life is successful as its own particular purpose is fulfilled. The homely jug may be perfect, though it is very different from the graceful vase. A life is no failure because it is lowly and put only to lowly uses so long as it attains the end for which God designed it. It is important to note that God's first work with us is in forming our own souls aright. The first question is not as to what we do, but as to what we are. The potter is making vessels; God is making characters, souls, lives. After *this* we may be put to some further end —used for good after we have been made right, as the vessel is of service after the potter has done his work with it.

IV. GOD SHAPES OUR LIVES BY THE DISCIPLINE OF PROVIDENCE AS THE POTTER THE CLAY UPON HIS WHEELS. The wheel of time spins fast, but not carrying us away, changing but not destroying each separate individuality. In providence there are wheels within wheels. We do not understand their meaning. The clay is pressed now below into a solid base, now above into a dainty rim, but it is difficult to see what the final outcome will be till all is finished. So our lives are pressed on one side and on another—something which in our eyes is indispensable is taken away, something which to us seems needless is added. But out of the dizzy whirl, the rush and confusion of life, God is steadily working out his purpose.

V. GOD WILL ULTIMATELY ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSE IN US, THOUGH AT FIRST IT SEEMS TO FAIL. (Ver. 4.) The clay is refractory. It must be broken up and remodelled. Man is more than clay. He has free-will, mysterious as may be the connection of this with the almighty sovereignty of God. In a much more terrible way he too is refractory, wilfully and stubbornly. For this he must be broken. His life must be disturbed and shaken up, but only that God may begin again to fashion him for his destined end. Great disappointments, destructive events, the failure of a man's work, the disruption of a Church, the revolution of a nation, may seem simply disastrous. But we see how that by means of these things God, in his infinite patience and gracious perseverance, will finally effect his own great purposes, and so secure the true blessedness of his creatures.

Vers. 7—10.—*God's action determined by man's conduct.* These verses may be read as balancing those that precede. The illustration of the potter at his work shows us simply the Divine side of life. The following verses take us round to the human side, and the human conditions in accordance with which God exercises the rights and power of his absolute sovereignty.

I. GOD DETERMINES HIS ACTION ACCORDING TO THE CONDUCT OF MAN. He does not act blindly, inconsiderately, on general principles alone, without regard to individual cases, nor with one changeless course irrespective of the changes in the behaviour of his creatures. He takes note of these changes and modifies his treatment of men by their varying requirements. 1. This fact is not derogatory to the *absolute sovereignty* of God. A just sovereign considers his people. God acts according to his own will; but his will, though inflexible in moral principles, varies in the choice of particular actions according as the application of those principles varies with the circumstances of the world. 2. This fact is not inconsistent with the *definiteness of the purposes* of God. The potter has his definite design, yet he proceeds with his work to the conclusion or breaks up the clay and begins again, according as he finds it plastic or brittle.

II. A CHANGE ON MAN'S PART FROM REBELLION TO PENITENCE WILL BE MET BY A CHANGE ON GOD'S PART FROM WRATH TO MERCY. God's threats are conditional. Forgiveness is the result of no after-thought, of no change in the "temper" of God. It is contemplated by God from the first, and promised on condition of repentance whenever repentance is genuinely experienced. Therefore there is every encouragement to repentance and hope. The darkest denunciations of judgment refer only to the impenitent. It is not too late to expect the forgiving mercy of God, so long as it is not too late for us to repent. This is reasonable, since the end of punishment is not vindictive but remedial. The mere paying of a penalty is of no good in itself. It might please a vain and vengeful despot, but not a merciful father. If the restoration of his child is effected without it the father will gladly acknowledge that it is needless,

III. A CHANGE ON MAN'S PART FROM FIDELITY TO APOSTASY WILL BE MET BY A CHANGE ON GOD'S PART FROM MERCY TO WRATH. This is a necessary consequence of the preceding principles. God's promises are as conditional as his threats. It would be neither just nor merciful to us for God to continue his favours unabated after we had departed from him. The removal of them is a wholesome warning to us. It springs naturally from the personal relation of God to his people, one which depends on reciprocal sympathy. Therefore it is vain to presume on our past experience of God's goodness for immunity from the consequences of our later sins, or to suppose that a happy condition of peace with God once attained can never be lost. We may lose it and be in a worse condition than if we had never had it (Heb. vi. 4—6).

Ver. 12.—*Rejected preaching.* I. THE BEST PREACHING MAY BE REJECTED. Jeremiah was a true messenger of God and an able preacher, yet he was unpopular. Christ, who "spake as never man spake," was "despised and rejected of men." No greater mistake can be made than to judge of the value of any preaching by the popularity of it.

II. IT IS THE DUTY OF THE FAITHFUL PREACHER TO BEAR HIS TESTIMONY EVEN IF IT BE REJECTED. He must not be unfaithful to his mission in order to catch the ears of his audience, nor must he silence his voice because it is unheeded. His duty is to speak, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. If he loyally discharges this duty his conscience is clear.

III. THE REJECTION OF THE PREACHING OF TRUTH IS OFTEN TO BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE PRIDE OF INTELLECT. People have their "own devices." Divine truth does not require the contradiction of intellect nor the suppression of it, but it requires the submission of intellect to well-grounded faith in a God who is worthy of trust, even when he requires our acceptance of dark and painful doctrines.

IV. THE REJECTION OF THE PREACHING OF TRUTH IS OFTEN TO BE ATTRIBUTED TO STUBBORNNESS OF WILL. The Jews are represented as saying, "We will every one practise the stubbornness of his evil heart." The excuse of intellectual doubt may be sought as a cloak for moral aversion to Divine truth. Many who have no doubt of the truth of the message of the servant of God refuse to accept it from sheer opposition to its spiritual requirements.

V. THE TRUTH PREACHED IS NOT AFFECTED BY THE REJECTION OF IT. If the word would be true when accepted it would remain true when rejected. We cannot alter facts by closing our eyes. If we refuse to hear the words of faithful admonition, we shall not escape the doom against which they warn us, but only the more surely run into it. We shall then simply rush blindfolded to meet our fate.

VI. THE REJECTION OF THE PREACHING OF DIVINE TRUTH IS ITSELF A GREAT SIN. If the truth is recognized as Divine, rejection of this is rejection of the voice of God. It is an act of direct resistance to the will of God. It is sinning against light. It is refusing to accept offers of mercy, and returning insult for favours.

Ver. 14.—*Mountain snow.* Any one who has found himself in the valley of Chamounix on a sultry summer afternoon must have felt the striking contrast between the eternal winter of the vast snow-fields of Mont Blanc, spread out in blazing sunlight high above his head, and the dust and heat of the parched land around. The permanence of this mountain snow is suggestive of spiritual lessons.

I. MOUNTAIN SNOW IS AN EMBLEM OF SPIRITUAL LIFE MAINTAINED IN THE MIDST OF WORLDLY SCENES. Mountain snow is found in the hottest countries. You need not travel to arctic regions for perpetual snow, it may be found in the tropics. Christians need not be transported to heaven in order to live a pure Divine life. The duty of the Christian is to preserve this fresh and holy in the midst of the world, not to flee from the world. By remaining in the world the Christian is a means of blessing it as the mountain snow descending in glaciers and streams refreshes and fertilizes the valley. But the Christian's mission to the world is dependent on the preservation of his unworldly spirituality, as the refreshing streams that flow down the gorges of the mountain are dependent on the snows high above them. If the snow fails the stream is dried up. If the spirituality fails the Christian work becomes barren.

II. MOUNTAIN SNOW IS AN EMBLEM OF SPIRITUAL LIFE MAINTAINED IN THE MOST

TRYING TIMES. The remarkable fact about the mountain snow is that it is perpetual. It is nothing that there is snow on the hills in winter; are not the plains then equally snow-clad? The Christian who only remains faithful under favourable circumstances is but superficially religious. The difficulty is to be true when all things are adverse, in the heat and burden of work, under the fierce onslaught of temptation, while the spirit of the age is against us, when Christianity is out of fashion, out of season. Yet we are to be instant out of season as well as in season (2 Tim. iv. 2), to be independent of the weather, of the social atmosphere, in the changeless purity of a spiritual life.

III. THE CAUSES OF THE PERSISTENCE OF MOUNTAIN SNOW ARE SUGGESTIVE OF THE CAUSES OF THE PRESERVATION OF THE FRESHNESS AND PURITY OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. How is it that we find snow in the tropics, snow in summer? 1. *Great elevation.* A few thousand feet in height will produce climatic changes equal to those caused by a distance of many degrees of latitude. The Christian must find his fidelity preserved by elevation of life. He must live on high, a risen life, with affections above the earth, with a treasure in heaven, and his heart there also. By constant communion with heaven constant purity on earth may be maintained, as the silent solitudes of snow remain through the summer in the cool regions of their great elevation. 2. *Constantly renewed supplies.* The snows melt under the sun and send roaring torrents down the hillsides, and in course of time they would disappear unless they were renewed. But clouds gather round the mountain summits and descend in fresh snows, and winter on its return makes up for the partial loss of snow in summer. So the Christian must maintain his spiritual life, not only by the elevation of his own thoughts, but by receiving repeated supplies of heavenly grace. He may be thankful that he is favoured by "times of refreshing" when the fierce heat of trial is abated, and strength is accumulated for the time of need.

Ver. 18.—*The opposition of officials.* I. IT IS COMMON TO SEE OFFICIAL PERSONS RESISTING THE WORK OF GOOD AND GREAT MEN. The prophets usually met with this opposition, and it forced them to become nonconformists. Christ received the most bitter enmity from the official classes. This opposition may be traced (1) to *pedantry*—the official only believes in what comes in the regular way of officialism; (2) to *jealousy*—the official is jealous of the greater influence of the unauthorized teacher; (3) to *conviction of unfaithfulness*—the true prophet exposes the faults of his official contemporaries. The inevitable result is discredit and shame to them, rousing a spirit of revenge.

II. THE OPPOSITION OF OFFICIALS FINDS EXCUSE IN OFFICIALISM. Have they not their appointed office? Are they not discharging their regular functions? They have been so accustomed to the unbroken routine that this seems to them part of the eternal order of things. They can believe in nothing better. They cannot conceive the possibility of any alteration in it. True, the spirit of the Law has evaporated from the service, but the droning of the letter of it shall not depart from the priest. The wisdom of spiritual insight is no longer enjoyed by the wise man, but there is no end to his casuistical pleading with old worn maxims. Prophecy in its higher flights is denied to the professional prophet, but there seems to be no abatement of the power to echo the cries of the day and win the popular favour by flattery and hollow rhetoric. Why, then, listen to the disturbing words of the new teacher? Thus officialism is always excusing its opposition to new good movements on the plea of its own self-sufficiency.

III. THE OPPOSITION OF OFFICIALISM IS POWERFUL FOR HARM. For how many scenes of martyrdom is it responsible! It was this that crucified Christ. It has peculiar weapons of its own. It carries the weight of prestige. It is very effectual with the thoughtless, who are ready to submit to the voice of the recognized authorities, partly out of indolence, partly out of fear, partly out of ignorance. It needs independence of thought and courage to recognize that this may be all wrong, and truth and right with the irregular minority—the peasant apostles rather than the haughty Sanhedrim, the plain German monk rather than the cardinals of Rome, the simple teachers of truth rather than the recognized masters of the world.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10.—*The potter and the clay.* The revelations of God are often given in unlikely places, and common circumstances and scenes may symbolize the divinest mysteries. The profoundest things in God's universe are side by side with the simplest. If the mind be open and the spirit susceptible we shall see God in everything. Is there not a fitness in this ancient handicraft of the potter becoming the symbol of the eternal action of God? The potter's clay suggests—

I. THE INFLUENCE OF GOD UPON HUMAN DESTINY. Some of the forms into which human life builds itself impress the imagination with the presence of a power greater than human, which conditions and determines them. The race, the nation, the Church, represent relations and affinities which are not of merely human origin. But even the individual life, if properly studied, will be found to be associated with the same mystery and full of the same suggestion of a Divine influence. In the case before us it is the Jewish nation which is suggested to the mind of the prophet. The hand of God is apparent in its formation and history. God's influence upon these is felt to be (1) *omnipotent*, (2) *sudden*, (3) *irresponsible*, (4) *to create or to destroy.*

II. CIRCUMSTANCES IN HUMAN NATURE THAT AFFECT DESTINY. The clay in the hand of the potter was marred and had to be remoulded. The allusion here was to the idolatrous practices of the Jews in Jeremiah's own time. The causes at work, therefore, in the marring of the vessel are not mechanical or constitutional in their nature, but moral. The history of the same people has shown that external circumstances are of little account in this question. The chief hindrances to God's purposes with man in nations, institutions, and individuals arise from (1) *original depravity* and (2) *wilful disobedience.* The free-will of man may thwart even the grace of God.

III. THE PURPOSE OF GOD WITH REGARD TO MAN. This is essentially and persistently a creative one. The first effort of the potter is formative; and when, through the marring of the vessel, he has to reduce the clay into the lump again, there still remains an intention to form anew. The effects of sin are shown to be profound from the fact that the potter is obliged to remake what has been marred. The effort of restoring love succeeds upon another, and "where sin abounded grace did much more abound" (Rom. v. 20). There is no nation which has not had many opportunities of recovering its position and influence forfeited by unfaithfulness and unbelief, and there is no sinner hardened in his sins who has not repeatedly rejected a heavenly voice. Each proclamation of God's Word is a fresh opportunity which may avail for salvation to every one who will embrace it.—M.

Vers. 11, 12.—*The fatalism of the wicked.* The conception of God's judicial omnipotence furnished in the parable of the potter is misinterpreted by the wicked. It is made a reason for continuing in their sin, they arguing that it is their fate, or needs be, to follow in the path they have chosen.

I. IN THIS WE HAVE AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE POWER OF EVIL HABIT. Sin has acquired such influence over the nature that it becomes its ruler. A recklessness born of desperation takes the place of prudent and hopeful counsels. The inward indisposition colours the view that is taken of the possibilities of the situation. Instead of the sinner seeing that his condition is due to a continual withdrawal from God, he declares that he is "past feeling," that God's grace cannot save him, and that it is "no use." But—

II. IT IS NOT JUSTIFIED BY: 1. *The condition of God's opposition.* It is the perverseness and unreality of man. He refuses to suffer. False religion God will not accept. 2. *The circumstances of the sinner.* So long as life continues there is hope. The repetition of the gospel's appeal has the same significance. Are there any signs of relenting in his mind now? any stirrings of heavenly aspiration? any shame and sorrow for past sin? God's Spirit has not ceased to strive with him, and he may yet be saved. 3. *The means of salvation that offer themselves.* Christ is both able and willing to save. His sacrifice on the cross is a finished work and a complete atonement for our sin. "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities." He is able to save "unto the uttermost," etc.

III. IT IS A SUPREME EXPRESSION OF WICKEDNESS AND WILL BE PUNISHED AS SUCH. —M.

Vers. 14, 15.—*Jehovah an unfailing Help to his people; or, the "snow of Lebanon."* One of the most striking scenes visible from a great distance is Hermon, with its snow and vapours. It is covered with white snow all the year round, and from its summits flow down cold, pent-up streams to the valley beneath. God asks why Israel has forsaken him; whether there was any failure of his grace and power. Has he not been constant and ever ready to help? How is it, then, that he is forsaken? The snow of Lebanon is, like the dew of Hermon, a symbol of the grace of God abiding upon Zion, from which the streams of grace flow forth in inexhaustible supply.

I. THOSE WHO FORSAKE GOD DO SO BECAUSE OF THEIR OWN PERVERSITY AND NOT BECAUSE OF GOD'S NEGLECT. "Is his arm shortened that it cannot save?" is a question we ought to ask ere we make up our minds to leave God. The secret of spiritual disaffection and apostasy is in ourselves and not in God.

II. APOSTASY FROM GOD IS A TRANSCENDENT INSTANCE OF INGRATITUDE. 1. The providences of God have been unceasing, manifold, and overflowing. They have come without effort of man. Yet the sinner has gone away and obstinately continues in his sin. 2. But in the grace of God there are elements that appeal to our deepest affection and trust. It is so rich, undeserved, and free. Why should he have chosen any one? How often has he healed the backslidings of his people! The cross of Christ is the grandest expression of love of which we know. It "passeth knowledge."

III. WHEN SINNERS FORSAKE GOD IT IS TO THEIR OWN INJURY. 1. *By their pursuit after sinful gratifications they forfeit the enjoyment of Divine mercy.* Providential mercies may not always be withdrawn, but their beneficial effect is destroyed. The fellowship and presence of God are lost. His favour and help cannot be expected. 2. *The sources of pleasure they apply themselves to are disappointing and fatal.* Sinful pleasures soon pall. There is no enduring rapture in the gratification of sense, but an enduring sting remains. The constitution of the sinner is sapped and undermined by his excesses, and the general, social, and political life of the nation corrupted. There is no sorrow so profound and incurable as that which results from the abuse of religious privileges and the loss of the heavenly birthright; it "worketh death." But, in addition to all this, the anger of God is kindled, and who shall extinguish it? He himself can. With him is forgiveness that he may be feared, and plenteous redemption that he may be sought unto. "His mercy endureth for ever." It is only needed that we change in heart and life to recover our lost estate and experience again more than our lost joy.—M.

Ver. 18.—*Ecclesiastical succession versus individual ministry.* The spirit of these words is not hard to divine. "We have a succession of priests, teachers, and prophets assured to us by our traditional institutions; so there is no great loss if Jeremiah be discounted; and we need not fear the cessation of the Divine revelation,—is it not provided against by a sacred succession?"

I. THERE ARE MANY WHO BELIEVE IN THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY AS AN INDEPENDENT SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND TRUTH.

II. THIS IS ALLEGED IN EXCUSE FOR: 1. *Refusing support to special religious effort.* 2. *Contempt and opposition of individual ministers.*

III. IN CORRECTION OF THIS ERROR MAY BE NOTED: 1. *That it is not countenanced by God.* 2. *History has frequently shown its falsehood.* 3. *It is really a reliance upon the human and not the Divine.* 4. *God does his special work nearly always through individuals.* 5. *The dishonour done to the servant is done to his Master.*—M.

Vers. 18, 19.—*The preacher's foes; or, false tongues and deaf ears.* I. THESE OPPOSE MORE OR LESS EVERY TRUE MINISTRY. The persecutors of Stephen "stopped their ears and ran upon him."

II. THEY ARE AN INDIRECT TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH AND FAITHFULNESS OF THE MESSAGE DELIVERED.

III. THEY MAY RETARD, BUT THEY CANNOT STIFLE, THE DIVINE MESSAGE. The

slander can be lived down. The voice of just men done to death will speak when they are dead. *Magna est veritas et prevalebit.*

IV. THERE IS A SILENT WITNESS WHO SHALL TAKE ACCOUNT OF ALL. 1. *It is of less consequence to us that men approve and attend than that God should do so.* The preacher addresses not only a visible, but an invisible, audience. Of every word that proceeds from his servants' lips God takes note. 2. *He will protect his servant until his work has been accomplished.* 3. *The slanders and indifference of those to whom the Word is spoken will be punished.* (Matt. xii. 36, 37.)—M.

Vers. 1—10.—*The blessed parable of the potter and the clay.* Few passages of Scripture have been more misread or with sadder results than this one. From St. Paul's reference to it in Rom. ix. it has been thought that it taught the absolute sovereignty of God, his right to dispose of men as he pleases; that, in the exercise of that sovereignty, he makes some vessels unto destruction, and that the vessels so made have no ground of complaint whatsoever. Now, we affirm that, whilst there is much truth in these representations, they are not "the whole truth," still less are they "nothing but the truth." God is Sovereign, we cheerfully confess, and has right to dispose of us as he will. But that he exercises these rights in any arbitrary, or capricious, or cruel way, as is taught by this misreading, or that if he did the vessels made for destruction would have no ground of complaint, we altogether deny. Such teaching has clouded the face of God to many souls and made God our Father "a terror" to them. But blessed be his Name, this misreading is not the truth. Let us try to see what that truth is. In passing, we may note how the command to the prophet to go down to the potter's workshop teaches us how workshops and our common work may have precious lessons about God to teach us if we be like as was the prophet, willing to learn them. The star-studying Magi were led by a star to Jesus. The centurion by his soldier-life gained true comprehension of Christ. The fishermen-apostles of how they were to be "fishers of men." Manifold are the ministers and ministries of God to attentive souls.

"There is a book, who runs may read,
Which heavenly truth imparts;
And all the lore its scholars need,
Pure eyes and Christian hearts."

That is said of the book of nature, so it may be of the book of our lawful work. Now let us go down to the workshop told of here and learn what we may. And we are taught—

I. THAT "IT DOTH NOT YET APPEAR WHAT WE SHALL BE." *We* are the clay. But who can tell what is to be fashioned out of that mere mass of material? Every human soul is but as clay in process of formation into some designed result.

II. GOD HAS WISE AND GRACIOUS INTENT IN REGARD TO ALL. The meanest vessel that the potter makes is an advance in worth and excellence on the clay ere it was fashioned by him. How much more, then, in the case of the "vessels of honour"!

III. BUT THE CLAY CAN FOR A WHILE MAR AND FRUSTRATE THE POTTER'S PURPOSE. The vessel the prophet saw was marred in the making. What innumerable instances there have been and are of this! Not Israel and Judah alone, but other nations, other churches, innumerable separate souls. And they have had to be broken up and set down from the place of honour for which they were at first intended. They have with shame to take a lower place. But—

IV. EVENTUALLY THE MAKER'S WILL WILL BE DONE IN REGARD TO THEM. "So he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." It is never "all the same" to a man if he sins against God. He may not be destroyed, but his will be "another" position and a worse one.

V. AND ALL THIS IN HARMONY WITH THE NATURE OF THE MATERIAL WROUGHT UPON. As the potter's work was in harmony with the clay out of which he fashioned his varied vessels, so God's work will be in harmony with the mental and moral nature which he has given to us. It is to us an inexplicable problem—the harmony of the Divine sovereignty and human freedom. We cannot tell *how* it will be done, only that it *will* be done.

VI. THE LESSONS OF THE WHOLE ARE: 1. *Of inquiry.* Are we, by obedience to the Divine will, furthering the work designed in us or by disobedience hindering? Ver. 9 teaches that, however good and gracious a purpose God may cherish concerning us, if we "do evil" then God's work will be marred. 2. *Of admonition.* Seeing how terrible a process is the "making again" of the marred vessel—what was it not to Judah and Israel? and the process is not finished yet—let us repent of sin and turn to God now, and so be delivered from so great a woe. It has been said that the most terrible part of the road to heaven is that which the sinner goes over three times—once in his first following of Christ, next when he by sin goes back that way, and the third time when in bitter repentance he travels over it again. 3. *Of praise* to God, that he has revealed so gracious a purpose concerning man, and that his will *shall* be done. 4. *Of prayer*, that we may be found not resisting but ever obedient to that will.—C.

Vers. 8—12.—*A never-to-be-forgotten principle of interpretation.* These verses plainly teach that all God's threatenings, even the most terrible, and all God's promises, even the most blessed, are *conditional on the continuance of the moral character to which they were addressed.* Now, this is—

I. A CORDIAL AGAINST DESPAIR. When the convicted sinner—as the men of Nineveh—hear the awful denunciations of God's judgment, all hope seems to be forbidden. The Ninevites, to encourage themselves in a forlorn hope, could only say, "Who can tell whether God will be gracious?" But this and the like Scriptures, confirmed by so many facts of experience, forbid all such despair.

II. A CHECK TO PRESUMPTION. How many prate concerning final perseverance who are not persevering at all except in sin and worldliness? But they need to be reminded of this sure condition, one which the great adversary of souls is ever striving to make us forget.

III. AN EXPLANATION OF THE STERN WORDS OF SCRIPTURE. When one would give the alarm of fire he does not whisper the word. So when God would warn sinners he does not soften his words, but in most vivid manner sets before men the awful doom of the ungodly. Thus would God, by his terrors, scare men—if naught else will do—to "flee from the wrath to come," so that "he may repent of the evil he thought to do unto them." Such words are not the utterance of absolute decrees against any soul to whom they are addressed, but loving warnings to such soul to turn to God and live.

IV. A REASON FOR ITS WORDS OF WARNING. These are found in varied form, addressed to disciples of Christ, to those to whom the most glorious promise had been made. See the sermon on the mount; how full of warnings! Therefore this conditionalness of God's words speaks: 1. *To the believer*, and bids him "Be not high-minded, but fear." "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee." 2. *To the ungodly.* See the sure end of thy way: how awful! But see, too, God's earnest desire that thou shouldest forsake that way.—C.

Ver. 12.—*Despair, its causes, consequences, and cure.* "And they said, There is no hope," etc. There is a show of humility about this word. The man has evidently no hope in himself, nor in any Church, nor in any human help whatsoever. Now, this so far so good. To get men away from trusting in an arm of flesh is ever one of God's purposes. And when a man is thus weaned from self and all human reliance it is a good sign. But such distrust at times goes beyond this, to belief that there is no hope anywhere, which is despair. Now, this a sore evil (cf. homily on ch. ii. 25, "A dread snare of the devil"). And to help in overcoming it we would speak—

I. OF ITS CAUSES. They are of varied kinds, but a man is near to despair when he sees: 1. *That his sin is inveterate.* When year after year goes by and still there the sin is. 2. That it is *continually successful* in reducing his will to consent to it. 3. That his defences are only those derived from considerations of the consequences and punishment of his sin. Motives of love to God and Christ, hatred of the sin itself, have ceased to rule him; it is only the fear of what may happen that holds him back, though, indeed, such defence is weak enough. 4. That his sin has rendered ineffectual many special dealings of God with him in regard to it. He has broken through all

these gracious barriers one after another. All these are dreadful facts to contemplate, and tend to fill a man with the belief that "there is *no* hope." The good Lord forbid that we should ever have such facts to contemplate concerning ourselves.

II. ITS CONSEQUENCES. They are dreadful in the extreme. They produce *sullen obstinacy* in evil. "They said . . . but we *will* walk after our own devices." Also *unrestrained licence*. The thought comes, "We can but be lost; we will have what enjoyment we may." This is a frightful fruit of despair. If, then, any considering these dread consequences of despair tremble lest they should yield to it, but yet by reason of such facts as those above named are sore tempted thereto, let them remember there *is* deliverance for them. Consider, therefore—

III. ITS CURE. It can only be, it ought only to be, by good hope of deliverance from that which is the cause of thy despair—thy sin. But whence can come this deliverance? Wise and godly men have counselled after this manner. 1. Seek to gain and keep before the mind a deep sense: (1) Of *the guilt* of thy sin. You who have received such light and grace are involved in far deeper guilt and your sin is far more heinous than that of others. (2) Of *the danger* of it. The danger of being hardened by its deceitfulness. Of bringing down on thyself some great temporal judgment as God's punishment of thy sin. Of losing thy peace with God and strength to serve him. Of eternal destruction. (3) Of *the evils* of it. It grieves the Holy Spirit of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is wounded afresh by it. All thy usefulness will be destroyed. God will neither bless thee nor make thee a blessing. 2. Wrestle in prayer. 3. Watch against occasions and advantages of sin. 4. Go again to the Lord Jesus Christ, especially to him as your dying, crucified Lord. Live near his cross, for "his blood cleanseth from all sin." Cleave to him and let thy faith fasten upon him. So—his Word assures and experience proves, for there is no instance to the contrary, but innumerable ones in proof—the chain of thy sin shall be broken, and the sight of this shall so cheer thy heart that the demon of despair shall spread its dark wings and depart and leave thy soul unclouded. (See on all this, Owen on the Mortification of Sin.)—C.

Vers. 18—23.—*Persecution.* The cruel sufferings of God's prophet which here and in other parts of his prophecy are recorded throw not a little light on all like persecution. For, though its rough and brutal forms have for the most part disappeared, still in others it yet lingers, and is the source of much distress. Note, then—

I. ITS CAUSES. They are ever the same—hatred to the faithful Word which the persecuted one persists in preaching. Persecution, therefore, is inevitable where a faithful messenger of God comes into collision with those who hate and will not submit to his message.

II. ITS PRETEXTS. Zeal for the Church and for sacred institutions imperilled by the prophet's preaching. We see them standing up for the priests and the Law and the prophetic order, all which, of Divine appointing, were wronged and injured by the prophet. Persecutors never will own, even to themselves, their own true motives. Those who sought to kill our Lord ever insisted on the highest motives for their conduct. Persecution is such an odious thing that, unless some fair disguise be thrown over it, no one would have anything to do with it. And no doubt some persecutors—like Saul of Tarsus—have been deceived by this disguise, and have sincerely thought they were doing God service. There is never any need for persecution, though our forefathers thought there was; for if any doctrine be of man only it will come to naught. The facts of life, the Word of God, reason and conscience, are all against falsehoods, and will expose and so extinguish them without persecution. For the nature of man is made for truth, and hence what is contrary to truth cannot long live.

III. ITS INTENT. Revenge and the forcible silencing of an adversary.

IV. ITS METHODS. 1. *Defamation.* "Let us smite him with the tongue." 2. *Ostentatious disregard of his teaching.* "Let us not give heed," etc. (ver. 18). 3. *Whatever "devices" will most of all tell against him.* Sometimes open hostility is not safe. It was not against John the Baptist, nor our Lord, nor here (cf. ch. xxvi. 16). And then other devices have to be sought out, and the finding, when sought by the persecuting spirit, does not take long.

V. ITS RELIEF. Not compromise. To give way where conscience commands stead-

fastness is to incur such spiritual shame and distress, such hiding of the face of God, as to be more intolerable than the fiercest persecution (cf. the history of Cranmer and his piteous misery). But—as with Jeremiah—turning to the Lord in *prayer*. We cannot commend the spirit of his prayer, it is all unlike our Lord's in regard to his enemies, and therefore not a pattern for us to follow; but it was right, and ever is so, when persecuted by man to turn to him "who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." His grace will keep us from being wearied and faint in our minds. *Patience*, too, will greatly help. Persecutors soon tire when they find that their methods are of no avail. *Prudence*, likewise, should not be forgotten. Sometimes we may get out of its way, and at no time is there need to provoke persecution by imprudent, ill-timed, and ill-toned obtrusion of the distasteful theme. There are times when at all costs a man must stand to his post and speak out, but there are other times, and more of them, when the quiet, consistent life will do more for God and his truth than the longest and loudest speech. But in such difficult circumstances it is well to keep near to God in constant prayer for counsel and direction how to bear one's self wisely as he would have us. Relief also is found in contemplation of—

VI. ITS SURE RESULTS if faithfully endured. It makes us have real fellowship with Christ. It wins for us a glorious recompense at his coming. Even now the soul is cheered by the communications of his approval and the clear vision of the shining of his countenance upon his faithful servant. And not seldom likewise by beholding the lion turned into the lamb, the persecutor becoming an apostle and preacher of the faith he once destroyed. These are consolations indeed. And confirmation in the truth for which we have suffered is gained by seeing the manifest displeasure of God against the persecutors. How it hardens them in their sin! How it fills up the cup of their iniquity! How sore the vengeance that befalls them! These considerations are derived from the contemplation of the persecution of the Lord's servant Jeremiah. They will be all of them strengthened if we mark the sufferings of the Lord himself. Here, but there most vividly, are seen warnings most solemn against this great sin, and consolations most precious to all the "blessed" who endure.—C.

Vers. 19—23.—*The prophet's prayer for vengeance on his enemies.* (Cf. homily on "Imprecatory prayers," ch. xi. 20.)—C.

Ver. 6.—*The potter and the clay.* The analogy here instituted enshrines truths that are of universal application. They have their individual quite as much as their national bearings. Nowhere does the representative character of the house of Israel appear more clearly than in this passage; nowhere do we get a more striking view of the general method of the Divine dealings with the human race. It suggests—

I. GOD'S ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE BEING AND LIFE OF EVERY MAN. The figure of the potter and the clay is one of frequent occurrence in Holy Scripture (*vide* Job x. 9; Isa. lxiv. 8; Rom. ix. 10). It vividly represents the subjection of our nature and our personal history to the Divine control. The fact of our moral freedom, the mysterious prerogative that belongs to us of choosing and following our own way, must needs make the comparison defective. There is some point at which all such physical analogies fail duly to set forth the realities of moral and spiritual life. But it is deeply true as suggestive of the power God has over us to mould us as he pleases. Free as our will may be, is not our whole nature as plastic material in the hands of him who made us? Free as we may be to pursue our own chosen course of life, can we ever escape the "Divinity that shapes our ends"? There is a hidden power, whether we acknowledge it or not, the mastery of which over thought, feeling, purpose, and action is the deepest reality of our existence.

II. HIS FORMATIVE PURPOSE. Distinguish between a sovereign power and one that is arbitrary and capricious. Complete as the Divine mastery over us may be, it is not lawless or purposeless. It has always a definite end in view, and that end is wise and holy and good. As the potter seeks to fashion the clay into some beautiful or useful form that his own brain has first conceived, so God, by his providential and spiritual control, seeks to work out a Divine idea in our being and life, to body forth in us some archetype of moral beauty that exists in his own eternal mind. He would fain fashion us into a noble form and fit us for some noble use. In God's "great house" there are

many utilities. And even the vessel "unto dishonour" has its place and its purpose. Our faith in the infinitely wise and holy love that governs all leads us to rest in the thought—

> "That nothing walks with aimless feet;
> That not one life shall be destroyed
> Or cast as rubbish to the void,
> When God hath made the pile complete."

But he who formed us for himself would not have any of us to be content with an inferior position and a lower aim. He would so mould and fashion us that we shall be "vessels unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use" (2 Tim. ii. 21).

III. HIS LONG-SUFFERING PATIENCE. When the potter's work is marred, he presses the clay into a shapeless mass and casts it upon the wheel again. We are reminded of the various methods God employs in moulding us to his will, and how if one fails he will often subject us to another. There are events that sometimes break up the whole form of a man's life; old ties are severed, old associations pass away; he begins an altogether new career, with new responsibilities, new moral tests, new possibilities of good. There are afflictions that change the whole tenor of a man's inward life; his spirit is crushed, wounded, softened, that it may the better receive Divine impressions. "God maketh my heart soft," etc. (Job xxiii. 16). "My heart is like wax" (Ps. xxii. 14). Thus does God "humble us to prove us, to know what is in our heart, whether we will keep his commandments or not" (Deut. viii. 2). There may come a time when all these Divine methods fail and the soul is found to be reprobate. In ch. xix. 1—11 we have a figurative prophecy of the ultimate abandonment of the Jewish people to their fate. In this case the vessel has been baked in the fire; it is incapable of taking a new shape, and is broken so "that it cannot be made whole again." Such is the doom of the finally impenitent and intractable. But God's patience is very wonderful. In this world at least the door of mercy is always open. There is always the possibility of a new and nobler life. He "is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. iii. 9).—W.

Vers. 1—10.—*The clay in the potter's hand.* I. THE PURPOSE OF THIS PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION. It is a practical illustration in the most suggestive sense of the word "practical." Jeremiah had not to go out of his way to produce a sufficiently impressive figure of what God was about to do. He had to go through a very peculiar and protracted experience to bring out the lesson of the marred girdle. But here he has only to go down to the potter at his wheel, a thing he could do at any time; and there is a lesson particularly plain and forcible, as coming out of the daily life, the simple and common life, of the people. Notice, then, that Jeremiah was not sent down to learn just what his own unaided observation might tell him concerning the potter and the clay. He might, indeed, have drawn out many important lessons, yet overlooked the one that was most important of all. God wished the prophet clearly to understand and then distinctly to impress upon the people this truth, that as the potter is to the clay, in respect of the control which he has over it as clay and in its plastic condition, so Jehovah is to Israel in respect of his control over its temporal destiny as a nation. Hence we have to look at the potter's action upon the clay, positively and negatively. We have to recollect both what he can do and what he cannot do. Within certain limits his power is resistless; outside those limits he has no power at all. Give the potter a piece of moist plastic clay; he takes it up, designing to make from it a vessel of a certain shape and for a certain use. Suddenly he finds it desirable to change the shape, and because the clay is still moist and plastic he can do this with the rapidity, expertness, and success which come from long practice. It is this particular power of the potter which God would have us to understand is his power over us. What the potter does is limited by the nature of that with which he works. He cannot turn clay into something else than clay. Clay it is when he first touches it: clay it remains when its shape is finally decided. Let the vessel be baked in the furnace and come out hard, its shape cannot then be altered. If it is thrown to the ground it will be broken, it may even be shivered "so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit" (Isa. xxx. 14). No

volition or power of the potter will give to the clay vessel the qualities of a wooden vessel or one of metal. He may fashion it for a vessel of honour or dishonour, just as he pleases; but whatever its use its material is still of clay. And similarly we must recollect that, whatever God does with us, he does in harmony with our nature. He finds us, as to the affections and purposes of our hearts, free agents, and, however great the changes he may affect in our circumstances and our future, all must be done without touching this freedom. The Divine potter here was changing the circumstances of the human clay, just because that clay was so stubborn in submitting to his will so clearly, so lovingly, so often expressed. If we refuse to be moulded into the shape that means for us true peace, glory, and blessedness, then we must be moulded into the shape which will secure at the least peace and blessedness in God's kingdom, and manifest glory to his great Name.

II. THE GREAT RESULT WHICH SHOULD BE PRODUCED BY OUR CONSIDERATION OF THIS ILLUSTRATION. Too readily is it said by many, "If we are as clay in the hands of the potter, then we need not trouble ourselves. God will shape our destiny, whatever we do." But if we look honestly and humbly at this illustration, we shall see that what God would have us above all things to learn from it is that the shaping of our destiny lies practically with *ourselves*. In selfish and ignorant obstinacy we wish our life to take a certain mould. Strenuously, and heedless of all Divine counsel and warning, we try what self can do toward the shaping. Then at last *our purpose* comes to be broken off. All that we have been and all that we have done prove useless so far as our aims are concerned. But for all that we cannot be useless to God. God wishes to work in us a change which would make all our circumstances those of liberty. He wishes to renew our hearts and establish in them a holy love as the central principle. If we refuse this Divine appeal, then we must come under ever-narrowing constraints. We are asked to walk in the liberty of God's children; if we refuse and confess ourselves the enemies of God, then we must be loaded with chains and put in the innermost dungeon. Our wisdom is to turn from our hardness and impenitent hearts, and allow God to lead us into the full μετάνοια (Rom. ii. 4). Then with understanding shall we address God, "We are the clay, and thou our potter" (Isa. lxiv. 8). If we by repentance come back to God and make ourselves clay, such as will have in it a peculiar responsiveness to the touch of God, then we may leave ourselves to his loving-kindness. He will fashion us into just that shape whereby we shall be meet for the Master's service. And if men say in their ignorance that we are turning out but vessels of dishonour, let us recollect that of honour and dishonour God alone is judge. If we only stoop from our pride to do the will of God, God will take care of our position. For is not God he who exalts the humble and abases the proud?—Y.

Vers. 18—23.—*Jeremiah's enemies and his prayer against them.* I. THE CAUSE OF HIS SUPPLICATION. His enemies have entered into a plot against him, and he has heard of the plot. He has to do, we may imagine, not only with the open threats of passionate men, face to face, but also with secret wiles. The language of intense provocation in which he speaks must be remembered in trying to estimate the extent, depth, and bitterness of the hostility against him. *Who were they that thus proposed to join together in ruining the prophet?* Doubtless the three classes embraced by the reference that is made, namely, priest, wise man, and prophet. The priest would go to the wise man and prophet, saying, "See how this fellow speaks against us all." A common hatred and a common peril swallow up for a time all jealousies amongst bad men, and constitute a strong bond of union, a strong incitement to all the ingenuity and designing powers of the mind. We are not left without means of judging as to the motives of these three classes of men and their methods of proceeding when we consider the similar conspiracies against Jesus himself. Men belonging to conspicuous classes of the community attacked him, and they are constantly mentioned as being joined together. This attack gives the strongest evidence, both of the appropriateness of Jeremiah's message and his fidelity in delivering it. Such truth as a prophet has to speak must be met either with penitent friendliness or with bitter and active enmity. It must be reckoned no strange thing if the faithful proclaimer of truth is exposed, not only to reproaches, misrepresentations, and loss of old associates, but even to deep-laid conspiracies. These men, while they were bent on

ruining Jeremiah, wished also to do it in a safe and plausible way. It was to be done by a plan. They were going to smite him with the tongue. Very likely they hoped to get him put to death under judicial forms. *Again, one asks—How came the prophet to hear of these plans?* The wise men must have shown a very imperfect kind of wisdom in not being able to keep their designs secret. Indeed, they may have thought that they were secret. The Jews who swore not to eat or drink till they had killed Paul did not reckon that Paul's own nephew had discovered their designs.

II. THE SUPPLICATION ITSELF. In reading this supplication, we vainly try to escape from feeling what a ferocious, savage tone the words have. The dreadful meaning of the words, taken in their natural signification, is only too plain. We must by no means try to defend the prayer; we can only do something to extenuate the language by remembering the provocation the prophet had received, and the spirit of the age in which he lived. It is at least important to remember that he is distinctly conscious of having had good motives towards these enemies. He knew that God meant their good, and he, in speaking, had meant the same. It must be noticed also that, whatever his feelings, he expresses them as a prayer to God. He does not take retaliation into his own hands. His rights and interests, whatever they are, he leaves in the hands of Jehovah. He has, indeed, his own estimate as to what his enemies deserve, but he seeks that they may get their deserts in the way of manifestly Divine judgments. Then he evidently spoke in great excitement. The wrath even of a good man may boil over into language which he would not wish to be held by in cooler moments. We may be perfectly sure that if, in after years, Jeremiah had been reminded of this prayer, and asked if he really, seriously meant that the innocent connections of his enemies should be ruthlessly slaughtered, he would have been quick to plead that his words were those of excitement. Shall it be thought wonderful that *he* should utter such a wish when the disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus had drunk in so little of the spirit of their Master as to wish fire from heaven to come down upon the inhospitable Samaritans? The passage under consideration is just one of those which strongly shows the difference which has been made by the sermon on the mount. If Jeremiah had been a Christian apostle instead of a Jewish prophet, his prayer would have been a very lamentable utterance indeed.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIX.

With this chapter, vers. 1—6 of the next ought undoubtedly to be connected to complete the narrative. Jeremiah here comes before us performing another symbolical action. By breaking a potter's vessel he foreshows the ruin impending over Jerusalem for the idolatry practised in the valley of Hinnom. Not (remarks Graf) as if the worship of Moloch had been restored after the death of Josiah; ver. 13, in fact, sufficiently shows that the Tophet had, ever since Josiah's time, continued to be an unclean place, and the sins which are here rebuked are the unexpiated abominations of Manasseh's reign (described in ch. xv. 4, as the immediate causes of the Captivity). Jeremiah's prophecy on the Tophet is followed by one on the fate of a certain Pashur, a high officer in the temple.

The principal prophecy presents striking points of contact with ch. vii. (comp. vers. 4—6 with ch. vii. 30—32; and ver. 13 with ch. vii. 18; viii. 2), and we may presume that the events here related belong to the time to which we have already referred ch. vii., viz. the early part of the reign of Jehoiakim. The same date is confirmed for the narrative of Pashur by the office which is therein given him; for according to ch. xxix. 25, 26, the office was not held by him, but by Zephaniah.

Ver. 1.—**A potter's earthen bottle.** Dr. Thomson speaks of the extreme cheapness and brittleness of the common pottery of Palestine (comp. Isa. xxx. 14). **The ancients of the people.** The natural popular representatives (comp. Exod. iii. 16; 2 Sam. xix. 11; 1 Kings viii. 1; xx. 7). It was an announcement concerning the whole people that Jeremiah was about to make. **The ancients of the priests** (comp. 2 Kings xix. 2).

Ver. 2.—**The valley of the son of Hinnom** (see on ch. vii. 31). **The east gate**; rather

the potsherd gate, i.e. the gate where potsherds were wont to be thrown. Another possible rendering is "sun gate," of which "east gate" is but a paraphrase. But there is evidently a connection between the name of the gate and the action performed by Jeremiah. The Authorized Version seems to have misled Captain Warren into identifying the valley of Hinnom with that of Kedron. He confirms his view, it is true, by the Arabic nomenclature, which speaks of the Kedron as the Wâdy Jehinnam—a nomenclature, however, which is by no means uniform (see Robinson, 'Biblical Researches,' ii. 396, 403). The situation of the "potsherd gate" must remain uncertain.

Ver. 3.—**O kings of Judah**; *i.e.* the numerous clan of royal princes, kings by courtesy (see on ch. xvii. 20). **His ears shall tingle** (so 2 Kings xxi. 12; comp. 1 Sam. iii. 11).

Ver. 4.—**Have estranged this place**; rather, *have treated this place as strange*; i.e. as one that did not belong to their God, that was unholy (comp. ch. xvi. 18, "They have defiled my land"). **With the blood of innocents**; comp. "Innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters" (Ps. cvi. 38)—the children sacrificed in Hinnom to Moloch.

Ver. 5.—**Baal.** This seems to be used loosely for Moloch (comp. on ch. ii. 8).

Ver. 6.—(Comp. ch. vii. 32.) **Tophet**; rather, *the Tophet* (see on ch. vii. 31).

Ver. 7.—**I will make void**; literally, *I will pour out*, alluding to the etymology of the word rendered "bottle" in ver. 1.

Ver. 8.—(Comp. ch. xviii. 16.)

Ver. 9.—**The same description, almost** verbatim, is given in Deut. xxviii. 53; (comp. Lev. xxvi. 29; Ezek. v. 10). For the fulfilment, see Lam. iv. 10.

Ver. 11.—**As one breaketh a potter's vessel** (comp. Isa. xxx. 14). Dr. Thomson speaks of the utter indifference with which the common pottery of Palestine is handled. It is not only brittle, but so cheap that no one is distressed at breaking it. **And they shall bury them in Tophet**, etc. These words form the conclusion of ch. vii. 32 (see note), the greater part of which is repeated in ver. 6. They are certainly out of place here, and are wanting in the Septuagint.

Ver. 12.—**As Tophet**; *i.e.* an unclean spot, avoided by mankind.

Ver. 13.—**The houses of the kings of Judah**; *i.e.* the palaces and other buildings which together made up "the king's house" (ch. xxii. 6). **Shall be defiled as the place of Tophet.** This is one of the few places in which the Authorized Version has allowed itself to interfere with the received text; for the Hebrew has "which are defiled," etc. The common reading, in fact, seems untranslatable. **Because of all the houses**; rather, *even all the houses.*

Vers. 14, 15.—Here begins a fresh section of the narrative. Jeremiah has executed his commission, and now proceeds to the temple, where he repeats before the assembled people his announcement of the awful judgment.

Ver. 15.—**Upon all her towns.** The cities of Judah are regarded as in a manner subject to the capital.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—13.—*The broken bottle.* That was a strange scene—the royal family, the nobles, the chief priests, together with the populace of Jerusalem, gathered, at the summons of a prophet whose power could not be ignored though his teaching was opposed, in the valley of Hinnom, now reeking with the odours of foul crime; and the prophet facing them, alone and fearless, with a common potter's vessel in his hand, while he draws a most awful picture of impending calamity, and sternly charges his audience with the terrible wickedness which is bringing it upon their heads, and brings his discourse to a dramatic climax by breaking the vessel to pieces.

I. CONSIDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DISCOURSE. 1. It was addressed especially to the *leaders* of the people (ver. 1). "To the poor the gospel is preached," but to the great sterner messages must often be declared. Nothing in the history of the prophets is more exemplary than the directness of their accusations of guilt in high places. They were no flattering court preachers. Yet they were court preachers. They did not reserve their harsh words for the poorest and lowest of the people, as modern popular preachers are too apt to do. The leaders were first in crime; they should be first in responsibility. 2. It was spoken on the *site of the greatest wickedness.* The guilty people had the memorials of their crimes before their eyes while judgment was being pronounced for them. Men naturally shun these valleys of Hinnom, these scenes of old sins, the sight of which stings the conscience. But they must revisit them. It is sometimes the duty of the preacher to take his hearers back in memory to the

circumstances of the past which they would gladly forget. 3. It was *clearly and boldly expressed.* The language was precise, detailed, and graphic, the description of the approaching ruin vivid and appalling. Jeremiah used no euphemisms. His words are enough to make our blood curdle as we read them, more than a score of centuries after they were spoken. How must they have sounded in the ears of the criminals who heard them as the sentence of their own doom? Lurid pictures of future punishment frequently strike one as unreal, as though only drawn for effect; they rouse unbelief in some, despair in others, or a hardening in sin. Yet a clear and uncompromising statement of the scriptural revelation of the horrors of the future is not to be set aside for more pleasing doctrines, especially in preaching to the great and the self-satisfied. 4. It was accompanied by a *significant action.* Jeremiah broke the bottle in the presence of his audience. This would strike the eye and impress the imagination. It is not enough that we convince the reason of a truth; we must rouse the imagination to realize it before it will be effectual. The Eastern imagery of the Bible is useful to us in this way. The preacher finds the value of illustrations in making truth vivid and interesting. Ideas may be received through the eye as well as through the ear.

II. CONSIDER THE SUBJECT OF THE DISCOURSE. 1. It *accused of sin,* (1) in forsaking God and (2) in practising vice and cruelty. We must feel the intensity of guilt to realize the justice of punishment. 2. It denounced a most *terrible doom.* This was to correspond to the crimes committed. The Tophet of sin was to be the Tophet of punishment. They who had sacrificed children to Moloch would eat the flesh of their sons, etc. 3. It exposed the rottenness of *false confidence.* "I will pour out the counsel of Judah." People imagine that somehow, without repentance, by ingenuity or by daring, they may escape the consequences of their sins. They will find that all such devices must end in ignominious failure. 4. It was accompanied by a symbol of *hopeless destruction.* The bottle was broken. (1) This potter's vessel was a comparatively worthless thing: wickedness robs men's lives of all value. (2) It was very brittle: nothing is so unstable as the security of the wicked before their sins have wrought out their natural consequences. (3) It was broken to pieces: the punishment of sin is destruction—the destruction of a nation for national sin as seen in the breaking up of the Jewish people, the destruction of a soul in the killing out of it of spiritual activities and all the higher capacities of its being.

Vers. 14, 15.—*The warning confirmed.* The warning of the discourse in the valley of Hinnom is confirmed by a repetition of it under more ordinary circumstances.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CONFIRMATION OF THE WARNING. 1. It was *repeated.* The scribe must bring from his treasury things old as well as things new. Men need "line upon line." Unpopular truths must not only be revealed once for all, they must be impressed upon people until they are accepted. 2. It was repeated in the *temple.* The horrible associations of Tophet were wanting there. All was decorum, order, propriety. Yet the message was not the less true there than in a more congenial place. Terrible truths must be uttered in face of the religious respectability of our Church worship. Such outward correctness should not make us forget the true condition of men's hearts, which is apparent enough in the darker scenes of life, in the Tophets of iniquity. We are tempted to be deceived by the appearance of religious assemblies into a blindness to the greatness of sin which is visible enough in common life. 3. It was repeated in *the ears of all the people.* The leaders were first selected to hear the warning (ver. 1). But it was not confined to them. The people generally were guilty. They had quietly acquiesced in the wickedness of their great men. Nay, they had furthered them in it (ch. v. 31), had followed their example, and become guilty of similar crimes. They, too, must not expect to escape in the hour of judgment.

II. THE FORM IN WHICH THE WARNING WAS CONFIRMED. 1. It was *epitomized.* Truth needs to be broken up into detail that it may be clearly understood and vividly conceived by the imagination. But it is possible to lose ourselves in details and miss the drift of the sum of them. Hence the advantage of broad, sweeping enunciations of principle. 2. It was repeated as a *prediction of real facts.* The warning was not to be regarded as an empty threat, nor as the indication of a danger that might be evaded. "I will *bring* . . . the evil that I have pronounced," etc. It is both weak and cruel to

threaten without the intention of executing the threat—*weak*, for the hollowness of the alarm is soon discovered by experience, and then it is impotent; *cruel*, for why create distress about a mere "bogey" danger? God is merciful, but firm. His threats are conditional, but, while the conditions subsist, the execution is as certain as any event that depends on the uniform laws of nature. 3. It was repeated *without diminution. All* the evil pronounced will fall on *all* the towns. The effect of stern warnings fades with the lapse of time. We are tempted to think that things will not be so very bad as at first seemed likely, and to take comfort from such reflections. But danger is not lessened by our growing indifference to it. 4. It was strengthened by an appeal to the *increasing necessity* for it. "Because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words." A deep consciousness of guilt makes the just punishment of it seem inevitable. Wilful persistence in wickedness after warning can only increase the guilt and make the punishment the more certain and the more severe.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2, 10, 11.—*The breaking of the potter's vessel.* Another symbolic action, but in this case the revelation to the mind of the prophet was not dependent upon its being performed. It is because of the public significance of it he is enjoined to perform it. The "elders of the priests" and the "elders of the people" are invited to the scene.

I. THE SYMBOL. This was a "potter's earthen bottle [or 'vessel']," and thus had to be carefully distinguished from the "clay" spoken of in ch. xviii. The latter is soft and unshaped, and may be moulded as the potter wishes; but the vessel is already formed and hardened into a certain definite shape, which it is impossible materially to alter. As that represented the *stuff* or *material* of which nations and institutions could be made, this must stand for the *Jewish nation, with its character historically matured and fixed.* Jehovah had already given it the form he intended it to assume, and placed it in certain relations with himself as a theocracy. *The historic institutions and nations of the world are the creation of God.* He has raised them up and controlled the forces that moulded and determined their specific character and work. "The powers that be are ordained of God." *The position, character, and life of individual men are also his work.* No man is "self-made" in any fundamental sense of the word. A gracious providence has nurtured and cared for him; and, it may be, saving grace has redeemed and sanctified him. He "is the noblest work of God."

II. THE ACTION. This was threefold, viz: 1. *The vessel was bought.* "Get;" literally, "buy." Jehovah had redeemed Israel to be a people for himself. The outlays of Divine love and mercy are suggested. The providence and grace of God are now being expended. The blood of Christ was shed for all nations, "the Jew first, and afterwards the Gentile;" and for every man born into the world. "Ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price." A deeper obligation is thereby incurred to him, and a grander authority on his part justified. We are all made and saved, or, as it may be expressed, made and remade by him. 2. *It was probably poured out.* Ver. 7, "I will make void [literally, 'pour out']." This action would be natural under the circumstances, and highly impressive. And if it be objected that the vessel was empty, that very fact might still render the action the more emphatically significant. Their counsels were also vain and empty. God suffers wicked nations and men to devise evil, but only as it works out his own ends is it allowed to be executed. He will bring to naught the counsel of the ungodly. That which is devised without his blessing will come to no successful issue. 3. *It was broken.* (Ver. 10.) This was intended to depict the extreme and final character of the impending judgment—"As one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again" (ver. 11). The nationality of the Jews was to be destroyed. The Babylonion captivity, although only obscurely predicted, is apparently alluded to; but some hold that, as this was but an incomplete fulfilment, the Roman conquest must have been meant. *All nations and individuals are on their trial,* and may be subjected to this extreme penalty. God holds the sovereign power in his own hand. There is no remedy; the past is irrevocable. And

there is no appeal from his sentence, when the limit of his forbearance has been passed. 4. *It was disgraced* by being cast into Tophet. A double purpose was thereby expressed. The scene of idolatrous rites was to be disgraced by being made the burial-place of the slaughtered thousands of Jerusalem, as, on the other hand, such a burial and the necessity for it would be humiliating to the metropolis of the faith.

III. THE ATTENDANT CIRCUMSTANCES. 1. *It was done in presence of the representatives of the nation.* "Take of the ancients [elders] of the people, and of the ancients of the priests." They were probably responsible for the national guilt, and by their personal and official influence might be able to avert the catastrophe. Those who influence a nation's life—kings, princes, statesmen, ministers of religion, authors, etc.—should be specially appealed to in cases of national sin. So the parent for the child. It is both respectful and just that such persons should be addressed in the first instance. But every man is responsible for his own sin. His intelligence and moral nature must, therefore, be addressed. 2. *The language used was such as to recall the general penalties to be incurred by breaking the Law.* (Deut. xxviii.) The fact was thus suggested that the judgment was wilfully and knowingly incurred. There is nothing new about the evils that come upon transgressing nations and individuals, or about their history. It is not for man to judge. God knows the reasons for his procedure, and the sinner himself is not ignorant. 3. *The meaning of the breaking of the vessel is fully explained beforehand.* This is ever the Divine order. There is "space for repentance" given even to the worst sinners. No man will go wholly unwarned into perdition. Nay, even the historic and so-called secular character of nations, institutions, and individuals is precious in God's eyes, and effort is constantly made to convert it into an influence of blessing. The sinner is offered the "means of grace" that he may become a saint and a servant of the Most High. And it is only as he obstinately continues in his sin that the irrevocable judgment falls.—M.

Vers. 1—15.—*Denunciations of doom.* This chapter is filled with these awful warnings of the prophet. And they are made the more awful by the reflection that, fitted as they were to rouse the most careless and hardened, yet they failed with those to whom they were addressed. And so this sad chapter teaches us such lessons as these: 1. *The earnest purpose of God to save man from his sin.* Hence these warnings. 2. *The awfully hardening power of the sin which could despise them.* 3. *What wise methods are to be employed in the endeavour to arouse and alarm the ungodly.* On this we will dwell awhile. This chapter shows—

I. THAT THOSE MOST LIKELY TO INFLUENCE THEM SHOULD BE SPECIALLY APPEALED TO. Cf. ver. 1, "Take of the ancients," etc. No doubt this was because of their influence over the people generally. If they could be won the rest would follow.

II. WE SHOULD AVAIL OURSELVES OF ANY LOCALITIES LIKELY TO LEND FORCE TO WHAT IS SAID. The prophet led forth his audience to "the valley of the son of Hinnom." It was the Tophet, the Gehenna, the place haunted with memories of Divine wrath against idolatry, and whose ever-burning fire and gnawing worm symbolized the quenchless anger of God against it. With what added power, then, would the prophet's message come when spoken in such a place!

III. SUCH MODES OF ADDRESS SHOULD BE ADOPTED AS WOULD BE MOST LIKELY TO IMPRESS. The prophet was bidden take an earthen bottle, and, after he had solemnly denounced the doom of God against the idolatrous city, he was to dash the bottle on the ground and shatter it utterly, past all possibility of mending. By this dramatic action he was to declare the coming destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. Thus vividly and powerfully to the minds of such as witnessed him would the awful truth he had to tell be impressed on their minds. But also in clear words and in full copious detail he set forth what was to come. Now, such symbolic action as that of the prophet might be of very little service to such as we speak to, however impressive to the Oriental mind, but it teaches us that whatever is likely to deepen the effect of our words upon men's minds we are to use, and fearlessly, as did the prophet, set forth the coming judgments of God. And most of all—

IV. OUR MESSAGE MUST BE GOD'S MESSAGE. *God* put into the prophet's mouth the words he was to speak and taught him how to speak them, and he obeyed. Here is the great essential. If denunciations of judgment be spoken simply as part of an

orthodox sermon, or for any other reason than that God has borne in upon our souls the conviction that we must speak such words, we are likely to do but little good—indeed, harm rather than good. And let such servant of God who speaks as God bids him remember that, even when speaking thus, his words may fail in the effect designed and desired. "Lord, who hath believed our report," etc.? They did so here. But they will never entirely fail. God's promise is against that. Some will receive them. Some did even in Jeremiah's day. There was a faithful remnant. And the preacher will have delivered his own soul, and God's righteousness in the doom of the impenitent will be vindicated before all. May we be delivered from the necessity of declaring such doom as that which Jeremiah had to speak of; but if we have to, may we be taught of God, as he was, and have better success.—C.

Ver. 14—ch. XX. 6.—*The sin and punishment of Pashur.* This man is to be distinguished from him of the same name mentioned in ch. xxi. 1. The Pashur mentioned here was a priest, and one holding high office in the temple. After Jeremiah had delivered his discourse at Tophet, he seems to have returned to the city and temple, and then to have spoken in substance the same predictions of woe. Whereupon Pashur, with less patience than those who heard the prophet and had seen his symbolic declaration of the coming ruin when he broke the earthen bottle at Tophet, falls upon him and smites him, and tortured him by putting him in what is called the stocks (see Exposition). Thus—

I. HE CRUELLY PERSECUTED THE PROPHET OF GOD. It was sad that any one should do this. But yet more that it should be the act of a priest of God, and holding high position amongst the priests. What hope can there be of the people when their appointed leaders and those to whom they are wont to look up for instruction and example in what is good thus prostitute their office? Thus the "wicked husbandmen beat" the servants who were sent to them (Matt. xx. 35). And it was the same order that ever opposed, and yet more fiercely, our Lord himself. The sanctity and authority attaching to the priest's office have ever been fatal to the integrity of unworthy holders of the office, and have caused that amongst the most infamous of mankind not a few priests should be found. But—

II. HE FAILED TO SECURE THE END HE HAD IN VIEW. Jeremiah was not silenced, but goaded, as it were, to declare yet more terrible judgments in which Pashur himself should be awfully involved (cf. Paul, "God shall smite thee," etc., Acts xxiii. 3). The stout heart of a true servant of God is an anvil on which many hammers may fiercely smite, but it will wear them out long before they wear it out. Saul of Tarsus found that the persecution he had done so much to further in connection with Stephen only made matters worse. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. And the reason is that a faith for which men are willing to die convinces all beholders that it must be exceedingly precious and well founded, and inspires them with an irresistible desire to know and possess it for themselves, or at least to know what it is.

III. HE BROUGHT DOWN ON HIMSELF SORE JUDGMENT. Jeremiah declares to him that the Lord "has changed his name to Magor-Missabib, for he will be given up a prey to the torments of mortal anguish, his friends shall be slain before his eyes, Judah carried away to Babylon, all its treasures plundered; he himself shall witness all this and die and be buried in Babylon, "There thou, and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied lies." Thus, look where he would, he should see nothing but terror. Above—the anger of God; beneath—a dishonoured grave; around—calamity and woe on all near and dear to him, and of which he had been largely the procuring cause; within—a conscience tormenting him day and night. It was an awful doom. "Let persecutors read it and tremble; tremble to repentance before they be made to tremble to their ruin."—C.

Vers. 1—13.—*The breaking of the potter's vessel.* I. THE PRELIMINARIES OF THE BREAKING. Spectators of the proper sort needed to be deliberately gathered together in the proper place. We may suppose that the elders of the people and of the priests were peculiarly responsible for all that concerned the safety of the city. This symbolic action was best performed before the select responsible few. As they went forth with the prophet they had time to ask themselves what the meaning of this unusual summons

might be. It is, perhaps, a little to be wondered at that they should have gone with the prophet at all. And yet, although none might have quite the right motive for going, each would have his own motive, and so an acquiescent assembly be formed. God knows how to subdue and blend the motives of men for his own purposes. In some minds there would be a superstitious regard for the prophetic office; in others, curiosity would operate; and in a few there might be somewhat of the hearing ear and understanding mind. We are, then, to imagine this company going forth; and they do not go forth at random. It is not for mere seclusion they go out of the city. They are led to the very place which, because of the abominations practised in it, is to be one of the principal causes of future woe. Thus we see how carefully God arranges the circumstances in which his truth is to be proclaimed.

II. THIS BREAKING HAD A REASON. The thing was not done in mere wantonness and thoughtlessness, nor in passion, nor in carelessness. The prophet did not draw his lesson from a jar which some one else had happened to break. He got the vessel with the deliberate purpose, divinely put into his mind, of breaking it. This was far enough away from the purpose with which it was made, and the vessel, once shattered, could be of no further use for this first purpose; but in its destruction it served a far nobler end than if it had been carefully kept to carry water for many long years. Rightly considered, indeed, the vessel was not destroyed, but only its service divinely and wisely changed. So, looking from the symbol to the reality behind it, we must bear in mind that the capture of Jerusalem and the conquest of the land of Israel served certain purposes of God. He did not separate this people and give them this land that at last they might be scattered, even beyond the usual scattering of a conquered people. But when the scattering did come, he sought to make it evident that it was from his hand. It was not a mere chance of war, but something prepared for and prophesied—something to teach and warn the thoughtful among all nations.

III. THE REASONS WHY THIS VESSEL WAS THUS SHATTERED BEFORE THESE SPECTATORS. 1. *To show the ease with which God can shatter any construction of man.* One lesson had already been drawn from the potter's vessel (ch. xviii. 1—10). That lesson was drawn from the plasticity of the raw material. Now another lesson has to be drawn from the fragility of the finished article. This fragility was part of the nature of the article. The potter could not be blamed because the result of his work was so fragile. Fragility, indeed, is a relative quality. An insect could no more have broken this vessel than men by a single blow could level a forest tree. Men talk of their power to do and their power to resist; but this is only in ignorance of the immense, exhaustless power which God in mercy hides from the eyes of man. A potter's vessel may be preserved for millenniums if it is sufficiently guarded; *but it has no strength in itself.* These people of Jerusalem were reckoning on the natural position and artificial securities of their city. Yet these very things would only heighten their calamities and miseries. For they would persist in defence, ever hoping against hope, until, in their extremity, they were forced to devour their very children. We need to bear in mind that, however great our natural advantages, our prudence and foresight, we, as far as our natural life is concerned, are but as this fragile vessel in the prophet's hand. 2. *To show the impossibility of man retrieving the disaster.* "That cannot be made whole again" (ver. 11). This vessel was not merely cracked. It was more than simply broken. It not only fell, but was dashed to the ground with special force and determination. These people of Israel, once scattered, could not gather themselves together again. God could do it, but only God. And God would not do it; because that would only have been to reconstitute the fragile. The breaking of this vessel is only one of many lessons by which God would teach man his natural weakness. He destroys the old and the fragile, that he may put in its place the new and the indestructible. Our wisdom is not to waste time in trying to strengthen what is inherently weak; but to accept with glad thankfulness that real mercy of God which, in destroying the old Jerusalem, makes way for the new and heavenly Jerusalem, that city of God based on the truly everlasting hills.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 1.—**The continuation of the preceding narrative. Pashur the son of Immer.** This man belonged to the sixteenth of the sacerdotal families or classes (1 Chron. xxiv. 14). Another of the same name is referred to in ch. xxi. 1 (see note). The one here mentioned was "chief overseer" (there were several inferior overseers, 2 Chron. xxxi. 13); the eminence of the position appears from the fact that Zephaniah, Pashur's successor (ch. xxix. 26), is second only to the high priest (ch. lii. 24). **Heard that Jeremiah prophesied**; rather, *heard Jeremiah prophesying.*

Ver. 2.—Pashur, being charged with the police of the temple, smites Jeremiah, *i.e.* causes stripes to be given him (a legal punishment, Deut. xxv. 3; comp. 2 Cor. xi. 24), and then orders him to be put into **the stocks**; literally, *that which distorts*—some instrument of punishment which held the body in a bent or crooked position (comp. ch. xxix. 26). The "stocks" were sometimes kept in a special house (2 Chron. xvi. 10); these mentioned here, however, apparently stood in public, at the **high**—or rather, *upper*—**gate of Benjamin, which was by**—or, *at*—**the house of the Lord.** The gate, then, was one of the temple gates, and is called "the upper" to distinguish it from one of the city gates which bore the same name (ch. xxxvii. 13; xxxviii. 7). It is presumably the same which is called "the new gate of the Lord's house" (ch. xxvi. 10; xxxvi. 10), as having been comparatively lately built (2 Kings xv. 35).

Ver. 3.—Symbolic change of name. **Not . . . Pashur, but Magor-missabib**; *i.e.* terror on every side. There is probably no allusion to the (by no means obvious) etymology of Pashur. Jeremiah simply means to say that Pashur would one day become an object of general horror (see on ver. 10).

Ver. 5.—**The strength**; rather, *the stores.* **The labours**; rather, *the fruits of labour*; i.e. the profits.

Ver. 6.—Comp. the prophecy against Shebna (Isa. xxii. 18). Since we find, in ch. xxix. 26, Pashur's office occupied by another, it is probable that the prediction was fulfilled by the captivity of Pashur with Jehoiachin. **To whom thou hast prophesied lies** (comp. ch. xiv. 13). Pashur, then, claimed to be a prophet.

Vers. 7—13.—A lyric passage, expressing the conflict in the prophet's mind owing to the mockery and the slander which his preaching has brought upon him, and at the same time his confidence of victory through the protection of Jehovah; a suitable sequel to the narrative which goes before, even if not originally written to occupy this position (see general Introduction).

Ver. 7.—**Thou hast deceived me**, etc.; rather, *thou didst entice me, and I let myself be enticed.* Jeremiah refers to the hesitation he originally felt to accepting the prophetic office (ch. i.). The verb does not mean "to deceive," but "to entice" (so rendered in ver. 10, Authorized Version), or "allure." The same word is used in that remarkable narrative of "the spirit" who offered to "entice" (Authorized Version, to "persuade") Ahab to "go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead" (1 Kings xxii. 21). In Ezekiel, too, the same case is supposed as possible of Jehovah's "enticing" a prophet (Ezek. xv. 9). The expression implies that all events are, in some sense, caused by God, even those which are, or appear to be, injurious to the individual. Was Goethe thinking of this passage when he wrote the words, "Wen Gott betrügt, ist wohl betrogen"? Applying the words in a Christian sense, we may say (with F. W. Robertson) that God teaches us by our illusions. **Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed**; rather, *thou didst take hold on me, and didst prevail.* The expression is like "Jehovah spake thus to me with a grasp of the hand" (Isa. viii. 11).

Ver. 8.—**For since I spake, I cried out**, etc.; rather, *For as often as I speak, I must shout; I must cry, Violence and spoil*; I can take up no other tone but that of indignant denunciation, no other theme but that of the acts of injustice constantly committed (not merely, nor indeed chiefly, against the prophet himself). **Was made**; rather, *is made.*

Ver. 9.—**Then I said**, etc.; rather, *And when I say, I will not make mention of him*, etc., *then it becometh* (i.e. I am conscious of a feeling) *in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I weary myself to hold it in, but cannot.* The prophet has repeatedly been tempted to withdraw from the painful duty, but his other and higher self (comp. 'Old Self and New Self' in the 'Lyra Apostolica') overpowers these lower cravings for peace and quiet. The fire of the Divine wrath against sin burns so fiercely within him that he cannot help resuming his work.

Ver. 10.—**For I heard**, etc.; rather, *For I have heard the whispering of many; there is terror on every side. Inform (say they), and let us inform against him.* This gives us the reason for his momentary inclinations to silence. He was surrounded by bitter

enemies, who were no longer content with malicious words, but urged each other on to lay an information against him with the authorities as a public criminal. The first clause agrees verbatim with part of Ps. xxxi. 13 (this is one of the psalms attributed, by a too bold conjecture, to Jeremiah). "There is terror on every side" (see above, ver. 3, and also note on ch. vi. 25) means "everything about me inspires me with terror." **All my familiars** is, literally, *all the men of my peace;* i.e. all those with whom I have been on terms of friendship (same phrase, ch. xxxviii. 22). **Watched for my halting**; *i.e.* either laid traps for me or waited for me to commit some error for them to take advantage of. The phrase, "my halting," is borrowed (?) from Ps. xxxv. 15; xxxviii. 18 (Hebrew). **He will be enticed**; viz. to say something on which a charge of treason can be based.

Ver. 11.—**As a mighty terrible one**; rather, *as a formidable warrior.* **They shall not prevail.** This was, in fact, the Divine promise to Jeremiah at the outset of his ministry (ch. i. 19). **For they shall not prosper**; rather, *because they have not prospered.*

Ver. 12.—Repeated, with slight variations, from ch. xi. 20.

Ver. 13.—In the confidence of faith Jeremiah sees himself already delivered. He writes in the style of the psalmists, who constantly pass from the language of prayer to that of fruition.

Vers. 14—18.—Jeremiah curses the day of his birth. The passage is a further development of the complaint in ch. xv. 10, and stands in no connection with the consolatory close of the preceding passage. There is a very striking parallel in Job iii. 3—12, and the question cannot be evaded Which is the original? It is difficult to believe that Jeremiah copied from an earlier poem. Deep emotion expresses itself in language suggested by the moment; and, even after retouching his discourses, Jeremiah would leave much of the original expression. But impressions of this sort cannot be unreservedly trusted. The argument from parallel passages is only a subsidiary one in the determination of the date of books.

Ver. 16.—**As the cities which the Lord overthrew.** It is, so to speak, the "technical term" for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah which Jeremiah employs. So deeply imprinted was the tradition on the Hebrew mind, that a special word was appropriated to it, which at once called up thoughts of the awful justice of God (see Gen. xix. 25; Isa. i. 7 (?); xiii. 19; Amos iv. 11; Deut. xxix. 23 [22]; ch. xlix. 18; l. 40). **The cry . . . the shouting.** The cry of the besieged for help; the shouting of the suddenly appearing assailants (comp. ch. xv. 8).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Pashur.* At length the smouldering opposition to Jeremiah breaks out into open persecution. Hitherto, though he has been answered by words (ch. xviii. 18) and threatened with violence, no overt act has been committed. Secret enemies have elaborated dark designs, which are alarming enough but come to no serious issue. But now violent hands are laid upon the prophet; and it is not an obscure band of illegal conspirators who contrive evil against him, but the official head of the temple guards formally arrests him and executes upon him the recognized punishment of a criminal. This action bears testimony to the excitement produced by the burning words of the discourse in the valley of Hinnom. So overawing were the utterances of the prophet that no one dared to touch him then; but when he confirmed them in the temple courts the circumstances were altered, and, either from alarm or from rage, Pashur, the chief of the temple police, laid hold of the prophet and brought him to severe punishment. The conduct of Pashur and the fate that is threatened him deserve our careful examination.

I. THE CONDUCT OF PASHUR. 1. Pashur was a *priest* and of high rank in the service of the temple of Jehovah. Such a man should have been able to recognize a true prophet of Jehovah as his fellow-servant. Yet he was first in persecuting him. Official religious positions are no guarantees for spiritual wisdom. But it is scandalous when the professed leaders of the Church are foremost in resisting the declaration of Divine truth and the execution of the will of God. 2. Pashur was a responsible *officer of justice.* Such a man should not have allowed himself to be carried away by a flood of popular indignation, influences of class jealousy, or impulses of personal spite. Judicial crimes are always the most atrocious crimes. They poison justice at its very fountain, they abuse high trusts, they disorganize society, and all this in addition to

the inherent wickedness of the acts, which is the same in all who commit them with similar motives. 3. Pashur replied to the words of prophecy with the *arm of force.* He could not answer Jeremiah, so he attempted to repress him. Unable to refute the arguments of the prophet, he endeavoured to restrain the utterance of them. Here we recognize the folly, the injustice, and the cruelty of such persecution: the *folly,* for to silence a voice is not to destroy the unpleasant truth it declares; *injustice,* for nothing can be more unfair than to do violence to a man for uttering words which we cannot deny to be true; and *cruelty,* for it is a man's duty to make known what he believes to be important truths.

II. THE THREATENED FATE OF PASHUR. Jeremiah stood alone, unpopular and unprotected. Pashur was strong in the powers of office and supported by the sentiment of the country. Yet the prophet was more than a match for the officer. Sensitive and naturally retiring, Jeremiah was bold in the conviction of truth, the sense of duty, and the consciousness of the Divine presence. Pashur's policy proved a failure. Jeremiah was not silenced by scourge and stocks. Either Pashur had too much sense of justice left to retain the prophet in prison, or he feared that such an action would be recognized as illegal and damage his position, or he thought the severe but brief corporal punishment of the prophet sufficient. Jeremiah was set at liberty on the day after he was arrested, and then, instead of cautiously measuring his language, he boldly threatened Pashur with a share of suffering in the coming calamity. This was peculiar. Pashur was not to experience the worst, but to witness it. 1. He was to be punished by *fear.* Tyrants are cowards. A long-enduring, harassing fear is more painful to bear than a short, sharp, visible trouble. Many evils are worse in prospect than in experience. Courage and active resistance may make the facing of danger easy, but to be haunted with vague terrors, powerless to do anything to avert them, lashed and stung by innumerable ideal and therefore intangible torments,—this is torture. You can fight a foe of flesh and blood, but a fear is like a ghost. The blow aimed at it passes through it, and it remains still glaring at its victim till his blood freezes with horror. May God deliver us from the awful punishment of an eternal fear! 2. He was to see the words of the prophet *verified by experience.* He tried to silence the warning voice; he could not stay the approaching evil. They who have rejected warnings will be dismayed and confounded when they see them realized in facts. 3. He was to witness the *calamity of his nation.* Probably there was a genuine love of his country in this man. His attack on Jeremiah may have been influenced by a sincere desire for the national welfare. But if so he had put his country before his God. His punishment would come in the humiliation of his nation. Patriotism is no excuse for resisting the will of God. The godless patriot may be punished by seeing the troubles that are brought on his country through its irreligion.

Ver. 7.—*Enticed and overpowered by God.* I. GOD ENTICES HIS SERVANTS. Jeremiah had been led to undertake the prophetic mission with assurances of success and victory (ch. i. 17—19), and he was surprised when he met only with contempt and apparent failure. So others have entered God's service with much confidence in the joy and but little anticipation of the trouble it would bring. There is really nothing either false or unkind in this. 1. *Nothing false;* for (1) though all the future trouble is not predicted, its approach is not denied; we are simply left in the dark in regard to it; and (2) ultimately the servants of God will triumph, and the trouble will be all forgotten and swallowed up in victory. But if the darker experience were clearly revealed at first, it would throw such a shadow over the future that the ultimate triumph would be scarcely thought of, and thus a more false idea of the whole course of life would be produced than that which comes from hiding from us some of its darker scenes. 2. *Nothing unkind.* If the trouble must be faced it need not be anticipated (Matt. vi. 34). If God hides approaching trouble from us he does not forget to provide against it. He takes the burden of it upon himself, so that when the trouble is revealed the grace to endure it is also revealed. Moreover, on the whole, the blessedness of the service of God vastly outweighs its distresses. If the alarm of the latter drove us from the service, the result would be loss to ourselves. It is, therefore, merciful in God to condescend to our weakness and thus lead us on through partial views of truth until we are strong enough to grasp the whole. Still, when the prospect of trouble is revealed it should be

faced. Something of this must be considered by us or we may make an ignominious failure. Jeremiah was warned of opposition. Christ discouraged rash, heedless enthusiasm (Luke ix. 57, 58), and bade men count the cost of his service.

II. GOD OVERPOWERS HIS SERVANTS. Jeremiah complained that he was not only enticed but prevailed upon by God by force. "Thou art stronger than I." God never forces a man's will. But still he hedges a man in and uses such influences upon him that many of the experiences of his life may be ascribed to God's supreme power rather than to the man's spontaneous action. If these result in shame and apparent failure, as they often may, at first sight it seems as though God had been dealing harshly with his servant. 1. But we should remember that it is a *blessed thing to suffer for God.* It is an honour to be a true martyr to God's will (Matt. v. 10, 11). 2. We should understand that *good purposes* are being effected through such suffering. It is not without its end. God is honouring us as he glorifies his Son, by making us the sacrifices for the accomplishment of a blessing to mankind. 3. We should believe that a *great reward* in heaven will compensate for the patient endurance of these brief earthly troubles. Without this the problem would be inexplicable. With it all wrongs will be righted.

Ver. 9.—*The burning fire of inspiration.* I. THESE WORDS ARE A PROOF OF THE GENUINE INSPIRATION OF THE PROPHET. He is not thinking of convincing others of the fact of his inspiration, but simply pouring out the trouble of soul that it occasions. The ingenuousness of the utterance and the indirect allusion to the inspiration make them the more valuable. Then, the words of prophecy gained the prophet no power nor popularity, but only contempt and persecution. It is impossible to study the language of Jeremiah without feeling that he was overwhelmed with the consciousness of a Divine spiritual influence, while the dignity, vigour, and moral sublimity of his prophecies make it unreasonable to suppose that he was a self-deceived fanatic.

II. THESE WORDS ARE AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE POWERFUL INFLUENCE OF INSPIRATION. This was not a mere illumination; it was a power. The inspired prophet was not simply gifted with insight into truth; he was swayed by the might of it. He did not feel at liberty to deal with it as he pleased, to mediate on it by himself, to suppress it, to utter it only as his convenience was suited; it was his master, a hand laid heavily upon him, a fire burning in his bosom, that must come out. The same experience is felt by all men who have spiritual relations with truth. They do not hold truth; they find that truth holds them. That inspiration influences the will as well as the intellect is strikingly proved in the case of Balaam (Numb. xxiv.). The reason of this is found in the real presence of the Spirit of God. Revelation is by inspiration, and inspiration is the breathing of God's Spirit into a man's spirit, so that he becomes possessed by it. The tremendous importance of the truth revealed increases this compulsion of utterance. Jeremiah had revealed to him no barren, abstract dogmas, no trivial religious notions, no empty answers to curious prying questions of little practical moment, but terrible truths concerning his people and their highest interests. How could he hide such truths as we have seen he had been entrusted with? If God speaks it must be to utter important words. The burden of them urges their custodian to declare them.

III. THESE WORDS ARE AN EVIDENCE OF THE PAINFUL EFFECTS OF INSPIRATION. No man need desire to be a prophet from motives of worldly ambition or selfish pleasure. The high privilege of inspiration carries with it danger, toil, anguish, terror. Prophecy has its Gethsemanes and its Golgothas. If its mission is faithfully carried out it leads to the cross. If this is faithlessly abandoned the prophet is consumed with inward fires. Inspiration is no substitute for mental labour, no excuse for intellectual indolence. On the contrary, it rouses the whole soul, quickens its energies, and works them to weariness. In so far as any of us are possessed in varying degrees by spiritual influences we shall find the Word of God a fire within us, which burns till we have discharged the mission it brings.

Vers. 10, 11.—*A prophet persecuted by spies.* I. THE PERSECUTION BY SPIES. 1, Consider the *persons* persecuting. (1) They were *mean and weak.* Their names are not given; we know little of their characters and actions; yet the despicable conduct

here ascribed to them proclaims them to have been of low and shallow natures. Only such can play the part of a spy. Yet these men could trouble Jeremiah. A spy can persecute a prophet. A gnat can sting a lion. Mean and despicable creatures that can do little good have considerable power of doing harm. This fact is humiliating to our common human nature, and it shows the great need of a Providence to restrain the outrages of wickedness which are so easily executed. (2) They were *numerous*. The prophet stood alone beset on every side with malicious spies. How difficult to be faithful in that dreadful solitude of a crowd of unsympathizing persons! (3) They were Jeremiah's *familiar acquaintances*. Religious and political differences separate the best of friends. When a man's own near acquaintances turn against him the very ground he stands upon seems to be breaking away from beneath his feet. Such men have peculiar power for harm, because (*a*) they have been trusted and (*b*) they know the weak places in a man's armour. 2. Consider the *character* of the persecution. The persecution of spies must have been peculiarly harassing. (1) It was *not open*. It is so much easier to meet a frank foe in the field than to cope with the secret devices of spies. (2) It must have been *tainted with untruth*. The spy would hear enough to misunderstand, and would unconsciously misrepresent in the effort to make his report consistent and telling. The "whispering" would heighten the colour of every tale as it passed from one to another. (3) It was *perpetual*. The spies were always on the watch, ready to take advantage of the first unguarded moment. (4) It was *malicious*. The spies were eager for Jeremiah's halting, hoping to entice him to some mistake.

II. THE REFUGE FROM THIS PERSECUTION. Jeremiah found his refuge in God. 1. He could do so because he was *innocent* and because he was suffering in the *service of God*. How happy to be able thus fearlessly to challenge the arbitration of God between ourselves and our detractors! 2. The help of God is sought because he *knows all*. He sees "the reins and the heart." If the spy is watchful, with his prying looks capable of seeing only the surface of things and with only partial views, and listening only to catch up broken fragments of speech to distort and misrepresent, God is righteously watchful of *all* that his creatures say and do. 3. The help of God is trusted in because he is "a mighty terrible one." "The God is a man of war." The might and majesty of God—so terrible to the godless—are the refuge of his people. It should be remembered by all of us that God is actively concerned with human affairs, and in his providence, without requiring what we call "miracle," can frustrate the devices of the wise and defeat the efforts of the strong.

Ver. 13.—*Thanksgiving for future blessings.* I. WE MAY BE THANKFUL FOR BLESSINGS NOT YET RECEIVED. Jeremiah closes his prayer with praise. No sooner has he asked for God's help than he feels so assured of receiving it that he anticipates it in imagination, and breaks forth into grateful song as though he were already enjoying it. This is a proof of genuine faith. Faith makes the absent seem near and the future appear present (Heb. xi. 1). It influences our whole being—the imagination among other faculties—so that it enables us to conceive the good thing trusted for so vividly and so confidently that the thought of it affects the mind just as strongly as if we saw the object with our eyes and grasped it in our hands. Such an effect is a test of the earnestness and faith of prayer. Some people could not be more surprised than by receiving the exact answer to their prayers.

II. THE FULL DELIVERANCE FROM ALL HARM IS A FUTURE BLESSING FOR WHICH WE MAY BE GRATEFUL. 1. It is a *future blessing*. Jeremiah was not delivered immediately. His life was beset with danger to the end. After the time to which our text refers, he met with worse troubles than any that had hitherto befallen him. The Christian must not expect a sudden and perfect escape from all distress and temptation the moment he prays to God for help. Perfect deliverance can only come with the conquest of the last enemy, death. "Now is our salvation"—our perfect deliverance—"*nearer* than when we first believed" (Rom. xiii. 11), but it is not yet enjoyed. 2. It is, nevertheless, a blessing for which we may be truly *thankful at once*. For it is positively assured to the Christian. The heir of a great inheritance may rejoice in his prospects, though for the present he is in want. But earthly pleasures of hope are checked by fears of possible disappointment. The buds may be nipped by frost; the promising young man may break down before achieving any great work. Nevertheless God is too powerful,

as well as too faithful, to fail in fulfilling his promises. Therefore we should anticipate the praises of heaven on earth, sing the songs of Zion in the strange land, and enjoy the vision of the celestial city from Beulah heights though valleys of humiliation and waters of death may lie between.

III. IT IS A GOOD THING TO EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE FOR FUTURE BLESSINGS. 1. *All gratitude should find utterance in praise.* The grateful heart should rouse the singing voice. Of all feelings thankfulness should be the last to be mute. We may pray for mercy in secret communion with God; we should utter praise as a public testimony to others and as an uncontrollable gladness that must relieve itself in song. 2. The utterance of praise for future blessings is an *assurance of our faith.* It will react upon us and strengthen faith. It will be a solace for the dark hours that may yet intervene before the enjoyment of the anticipated good.

Vers. 14—18.—*Jeremiah cursing the day of his birth.* I. TROUBLE MAY LEAD A GOOD MAN TO THE VERGE OF DESPAIR. Jeremiah was a prophet, a good man, a man of faith, a man of prayer. Yet he cursed the day of his birth. Jeremiah was not without precedents for his conduct. Not to mention Jonah, whose character is by no means exemplary (though, poor man, he may have been good at heart), the patient Job and the courageous Elijah had both regarded existence as a curse, and cried passionately for death. Jeremiah had great provocations to despair. His mission seemed to be a failure; his old friends had become spies in league with his inveterate foes; he stood alone, watched, maligned, hated, cruelly misjudged. We cannot be surprised that his patience broke down. Though impatience and a yielding to despair are proofs of weakness, they are far less culpable than unfaithfulness. Many would have quietly declined the tasks which Jeremiah manfully performed, though they led him to the verge of despair. It must be noted that, though the prophet cursed the day of his birth, he did not flee from the mission of his life; though he longed for death, he did not commit suicide. From his experience, (1) the sorrowful may learn that deeper depths of sorrow have been traversed than any they are in, and yet the light has been reached on the further side; (2) the desponding may see how good men have been near despair before them, and so be encouraged by knowing that their despondency is not a sin of fatal unbelief.

II. IT IS FOOLISH AND WRONG FOR A MAN TO CURSE THE DAY OF HIS BIRTH. He may be a good man who falls into despair, still his despair is a failing. This condition of Jeremiah must be distinguished from that of Simeon. Simeon was ready to depart when his life's work was finished and at God's time. His prayer was one of placid submission to the will of God (Luke ii. 29). But Jeremiah had not finished his life's work; life itself was regarded by him as an evil; his despair was contrary to a spirit of resignation to the Divine will. Jeremiah's language should also be distinguished from that of St. Paul when he expressed his longing to "depart and be with Christ" (Phil. i. 23). The apostle was inspired with a hope of heaven, the prophet moved only by a loathing of life; the apostle was willing patiently to remain and do his work, the prophet felt impatient of life. 1. Such conduct is *foolish*, for the whole value of life is thus judged by one hasty thought in a mood of gloom and distress. Life is too large and multifarious to be estimated in this way. There are recuperative energies in all of us beyond what we can imagine in our moments of weakness. Besides, if the present is dark, who knows what the future will produce? 2. Such conduct is *wrong*. We are not the judges of our own lives. To despair is to complain of the justice of God. The mistake of Jeremiah's hasty impatience is apparent when we consider the value of his life. Jeremiah's life worthless! Why, it was the most valuable life of the age. There may be persons of whom it can be said that it were better for those men if they had never been born. But these are not the men who are usually most ready to despair of their lives. The despondent may take courage from the mistake of Jeremiah, and know that when they think their lives most worthless they may really be of most service.

III. THE CHRISTIAN HAS STRONG INDUCEMENTS NOT TO CURSE THE DAY OF HIS BIRTH. Jeremiah lived before the light and grace of Christianity had been bestowed. We should be without excuse if, while enjoying higher advantages, we imitated his despair. 1. Christianity sheds *light on the purpose of sorrow.* This was a profound mystery to the Jew. Christ has shown us the blessedness of sorrow, the glory of the cross, the

utility of sacrifice. 2. Christianity brings *new grace* to help in the endurance of sorrow. Christians have the example of the suffering Christ, the sympathy and healing of the great Physician and the new baptism of the Spirit, to help them to endure the baptism of sorrow. 3. Christianity reveals fresh ground for *confidence in God* in the darkness of trouble. God is seen as our Father. His will must be wise and good. All life must be wisely ordered by him. Thus we are taught to bend submissively to the higher will that we cannot understand. 4. Christianity inspires *hope* in the final triumph over trouble. It lifts the veil from eternal things and makes known the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." It assures us that no true life can ultimately fail, that no true man lives in vain, that, though evil may vaunt itself in the present, ultimately truth and right shall triumph.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The behaviour of the wicked towards the truth.* I. THEY REGARD THE TRUTH AND ITS MINISTERS AS THEIR GREATEST ENEMIES. If Pashur had known better he would have refrained from such exhibitions of temper. The prophet would then have been accounted the greatest benefactor of his country. Not the soldier on the battle-field nor the statesman in the councils of empire could have rendered so signal a service as Jeremiah did in simply but persistently telling the truth. Much of what he said was patent to every honest observer. By saying what he did the prophet did not bring into existence that which did not exist before; and, if it really existed, it was better that it should be recognized and reckoned with. The evils he denounced were the real enemies of the country, and not those who pointed them out and suggested their reform. It is, however, unpleasant to the carnal mind to have its faults and sins exposed. With many the calamity is not that evil should be done, but that it should be found out.

II. THEY ARE NOT SCRUPULOUS AS TO THE MEANS THEY EMPLOY TO SILENCE THEM. He "smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks." These means of punishment were at hand, and he used them at once. It was legal power used illegally, or law employed to the detriment of righteousness. Passionate hatred is shown by the whole course of action. Could anything else be expected of those who tried to subvert righteousness? They must needs do it unrighteously. Even the condemnation of Christ was legal only in appearance.

III. THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE OPPONENTS OF THE TRUTH IS FREQUENTLY CONDEMNED BY ITS OWN INCONSISTENCY AND VACILLATION. "It came to pass on the morrow, that Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks." 1. *The course dictated by passion is seen to be impolitic and foolish.* 2. *The guilty intention is weakened by the outcries of conscience.* It is this conscience which makes cowards of us all—or heroes. Here it led to vacillation, which discredited the policy to which Pashur was already committed, and made its author ridiculous. This is one of the reasons why men can do nothing against the truth. It shines by its own light and confounds the machinations that have been wrought in darkness. 3. *Truth has a powerful ally in the bosoms of its worst enemies.*

IV. OPPOSITION TO THE TRUTH IS CERTAIN TO FAIL. "Then said Jeremiah unto him," etc. (ver. 3). The prophet is only the more vehement and enthusiastic. Ill-timed antagonism to his message has provoked him to coin a nickname for Pashur, which linked the impending judgment inseparably with his memory. It was a bad eminence richly deserved. He was to be the refutation of himself, to see all his predictions falsified, and to reap the curses of those he had deceived as they perished in their sins. How often in his disgraceful exile he must have wished he had let the messenger of God alone (Acts v. 38, 39)!—M.

Vers. 3—6.—*Magor-Missabib; or, the fate of a false prophet.* The person here mentioned cannot with certainty be identified. He will the better serve as a type and representative of his kind. There is no age or country that has not had its Pashur.

I. THE INFLUENCE HE EXERCISED. 1. *Its character.* Absolute and despotic. At

the suggestion of his own evil heart. Capable of destroying civil rights and character itself. The whole civil and sacred machinery of the land was at his disposal. The public trusted him. The state of things condemned by Jeremiah it was his immediate interest to support, and in turn he could rely upon official support. He identifies himself with the ruling party and becomes its representative and mouthpiece. Vested rights, traditional religion, etc., are his watchwords, because he owes everything to them. 2. *How it was acquired.* Family connection—"the son of Immer the priest." Not by striving to reform abuses, but by fostering and upholding the *status quo.* He who was so oblivious to the wrongs of which the prophet spoke could not have been scrupulous as to the means by which he rose to position and influence. Oriental corruption and intrigue had doubtless had their part in securing his elevation. ("Pashur" probably means "extension," "pride," "eminence.") 3. *How it was employed.* Hastily, on the passionate impulse of the moment. Without regard to the essential justice of the case. And when the error is discovered no true repentance or effort at amends is visible. Cf. the time-serving policy of Agrippa (Acts. xxvi. 32).

II. THE CHARACTER AND DESTINY HE EARNED. By making himself the champion of apostate Judah, and insulting the prophet of God, he is sentenced to the same fate, but in a peculiar and aggravated degree. 1. *It would be his fortune to be looked upon as the representative and embodiment of the system of falsehood which had ruined his country.* He who prophesied falsely will be justly punished by such an association. Instead of saying, "It was Moloch or Astarte that deceived us," the victims of the common disaster will say, "It was the prophet of these false gods who led us astray." How readily does personal influence acquire such a representative character! There are many evil forces and influences at work in society, the state, the Church, etc., which would cease to exist were it not for their accidental connection with some personage who becomes their advocate or their bulwark. 2. *His character and influence would be exposed.* The assurances he had given would one by one be falsified by the fulfilments of Jeremiah's predictions. Instead of being honoured and looked up to, he would become a loathing and a byword. He would outlive his credit, his self-esteem, and his happiness. Shunned by others, he would be unable to trust himself. Each fresh catastrophe would deepen his disgrace and remorse. A "terror round about" would be the name he would earn. 3. *His exemption from immediate destruction would but enhance his punishment.* Like the criminal obliged to stand in the dock and hear all the counts of his indictment made good by the evidence of witnesses, he should outlive the first effects of the national ruin, see all his statements falsified, bear the reproach of his own wicked lies, and yet linger on when life had ceased to be desirable. There is a grotesqueness about this punishment that would make it ludicrous were it not so sad and awful. A more severe punishment could hardly be conceived. And yet it is not more than Pashur deserved. Would that our modern "prophets of lies" could be compelled to witness the consequences of their advice and example! A modified degree of this experience has, indeed, been the sentence inflicted upon many a good man. But Christ takes up the entail of sin and breaks it. We may do better than to stand by and see the evil consequences of former folly; it is for us to strive to rectify them. So the past may be retrieved and the evil days redeemed by those who have been servants of sin "turning many to righteousness."—M.

Vers. 7—18.—*The sorrow and joy of God's servant.* There are many such photographs of the inner heart-life of God's people. It is the touch of nature which brings them near to us. The words and work of Jeremiah become more living and influential when we witness his spiritual struggles.

I. THE SPIRITUAL NECESSITY OF HIS POSITION IS ALTERNATELY COMPLAINED OF AND ACQUIESCED IN. The saint cannot always continue amidst his highest experiences. There are ups and downs, not only of our actual outward circumstances, but of our inward spiritual states. Do not condemn Jeremiah until you are able to acquit yourself. The heavenly mind is not formed easily or at once. There is an inward cross in every true heart, upon which it must needs "die daily." But "the powers of the world to come" ever tend to increase their hold upon the believer. This alternation of mood and feeling is a necessary accompaniment of spiritual growth. Some day the heart will be fixed. "The reproach of Christ" will then be esteemed "greater riches

than the treasures of Egypt." This is what we should strive after—inward oneness of heart and purpose with our Master.

II. HIS EXPERIENCE IS TRANSITIONAL. 1. *From doubt to faith.* (Vers. 11, 12.) 2. *From sorrow to joy.* (Ver. 13.) 3. *One day the struggle will end in triumph.*—M.

Ver. 9.—*Why God's servants labour on.* "Then I said, I will not make mention," etc. It was under no small provocation that Jeremiah uttered these words. It was in no fit of mere indolence or infidelity that he cried, "I will not make mention of God, nor speak any more in his Name." He had stretched out his hand, but the people to whom he was sent refused; he had called, but they would not answer. And this had been their wont persistently, until he was weary, utterly weary, and out of heart, and then it was he spoke as we read here and declared he would try no more. If any one be inclined to judge him harshly, let us but read the story of his life—a story most sad, yet glorious too, so far as the grace of God and the true honour of his servant are concerned; but yet a sad story, and one which, when we have read it, will most assuredly check all disposition to censure, with anything like severity, the deeply tried servant of God who in his utter weariness said he would speak no more in the Name of God. Now, all of us who are familiar with our Bibles or who know anything of the way in which those who labour for God often fail, will know that Jeremiah by no means stands alone in his sense of hopelessness and weariness in his work. We remember Moses (Exod. v. 22; Numb. xi. 11); and how Elijah faltered beneath his burden (1 Kings xix. 4); and John the Baptist (Matt. xi. 3); and even the holy Saviour himself (John xii. 29; Luke xxii. 42). Such is the stress which doing the will of God amongst wicked men puts upon the human spirit; no wonder that it well-nigh gives way. From the experience, then, of our Saviour and of so many of his servants we must all of us who are his servants lay our account with manifold and often great discouragements, and yet more with being tried by the temptation on account of these discouragements to abandon our work altogether and to speak no more in the Name of the Lord. Now, *where is the spirit that will resist this temptation*, that will prevent the half-formed resolve to cease endeavour from being wholly formed and carried out? There is such a spirit. This strong temptation may be and has been resisted again and again. What is the secret of Christian constancy and steadfastness in the work of the Lord? We have the answer in this verse. However much any of God's servants may be tempted, as Jeremiah was, to give up his work, he still will not do so if, as was the case with Jeremiah, "the Word of the Lord is in his heart as a burning fire shut up in his bones;" then he will be "weary with forbearing," and he will find that he cannot stay. Even as Elihu (Job xxvii. 18), who said, "I am full of matter," etc.; and as Peter (Acts iv. 20), and Paul (Acts xvii. 6; xviii. 5; 1 Cor. ix. 16); and our Saviour (Luke ii. 49; xii. 50). In all these utterances we have the expression of that spirit which alone can, but surely will, bear up the servant of God amid all his difficulties and hold him steadfast to his duty in spite of every discouragement. But dropping all metaphor, let us inquire into this excellent spirit which renders such service to the tried and desponding soul. *It does exist.* The records of *the mission work* of the Church at home and abroad will furnish not a few instances of men and women whose hearts the Lord hath touched, and who, moved by this Divine impulse, have felt themselves constrained to be up and doing, to penetrate the spiritual darkness around them, and to resist the power of the devil everywhere present. Under the influence of this holy zeal, such servants of God have looked upon the heathen, the degraded, the vile, not with the natural eye alone. That revealed to them only a foul mass of vice and cruelty, sensuality and all human degradation. From such scenes and people nature turns away and would let them alone. But amid and beneath all this moral, spiritual, and physical repulsiveness, the ardent soul of God's servant sees jewels which may be won for Christ, spirits which may be regenerated and restored. His eye looks right on to what, through the grace of the gospel, these degraded ones may become; and absorbed, swallowed up by a holy Christ-like love, he determines to spend and be spent in bringing to bear on that mass of sin and evil the power of that gospel which has done so much already and which is "the power of God unto salvation unto *every one* that believeth." "The Word of God has been in their heart as," etc. *There have been times in our history* when *we* have known somewhat of this sacred impulse which fired the soul of the prophet Jeremiah.

Have we not known seasons when the impulse was strong on us to say something for God? It has come when we have been preaching or teaching, and we have broken away from the calm, not to say cold, tone in which we have been going on, and have spoken to those before us words which have come up from the very depths of our soul, and we have seen in the countenances of our children or our congregation that they, too, were conscious that they were being spoken to in a manner other than usual, and that portion of the day's lesson or the sermon has been remembered when all the rest has been forgotten. And sometimes this impossibility of keeping silence for God has come to us on the railway journey, in the quiet walk with a friend or child, or in social converse, or in the casual talk with a stranger into whose society we may have been for a while thrown; and then we have felt we must say something for God, and it has been said feebly, weakly perhaps, but nevertheless the testimony has been borne, the endeavour has been made. God would not let us be silent; we could not stay from speaking; necessity was laid upon us. These are in their measure instances of the same Spirit as that which moved the prophets and apostles of old, though in a far less degree. But it is evident how well it would be for us all who bear Christ's name to possess in far larger measure than we do this holy and irresistible impulse. The spur is what we too often need; how rarely the bridle! not the holding back, but the urging on. *Whence, then, comes* this sacred and mighty Spirit, under whose influence so many of the saints of God, even as the Son of God, have laboured on in spite of all discouragement and suffering and wrong? It is evident, from the history of Jeremiah and of all other faithful servants of God, that the method by which God impelled them to their work was by bestowing on them such gifts as these—

I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN. For he who has this knows how appalling is the evil under which men live. To him this present world and its inhabitants present but one aspect, that of being under a yoke which no man can bear. He has seen the vision of sin, and it was a sight so terrible that he can never forget it. It haunts him, for he knew it was no dream of the night, but a dreadful reality of the day and of every day. It was no chimera, no fiction of his own imagination, but a real and awful power that has ruled men and still is ruling over men. What scenes of beauty it has destroyed! What fearful misery it evermore produces. There was the *garden of Eden* in all its loveliness, with every fair flower and noble tree, with luscious fruit and every herb fit for the food of man or beast; it was all beautiful, so beautiful that even God pronounced it "very good." And as chief over this fair inheritance there were the first created of our race, in form and mind and soul harmonizing with the beauty and goodness that was all around them. How blest their condition! But the scene changes. We see no longer the garden of Eden, but a weary land bearing thorns and briars; we see, too, haggard and careworn people bending in sore agony over the murdered corpse of their child, murdered by his own brother, their eldest born. What hath wrought this change? An enemy, without doubt, but what enemy? It is sin—the heart of man in rebellion against God. The Bible is full of scenes like these—misery, shame, ruin, death, all, all the work of sin. And sin reigns yet, as he to whom God has given to see the vision of sin knows full well. Who can recount its doings? Who can describe the woes it causes? What ocean would be vast enough to receive the tears it has made to flow? What colours dark enough to depict the moral and spiritual evil it has engendered? And then the sorrows of the souls that are lost, the doom of the accursed of God—the antitype of that which Jesus describes as the "fire that is never quenched, and the worm that never dies." It is the vision of this,—the appalling evil, past, present, and most of all to come,—that has risen up before the soul of him who, beholding those around him under its dominion, finds himself utterly unable to forbear telling them of the Word of the Lord to the end that they may be saved. No wonder that, in view of these dread calamities, "the Word of the Lord was in his heart," etc.

II. But a further knowledge has been given to him to contribute to this same result. Were the vision of sin all, utter and dreadful despair would be alone left to him; but it is not all. Along with the knowledge of sin there is given to him THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOSPEL in the Word of the Lord. It is brought home to his soul, by evidence he cannot question, that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is the sure remedy for all human ill. He has a deep conviction that trust in the Redeemer, reliance on his

atoning death and sacrifice, will bring peace to the conscience, purity to the mind, strength to the will, hope to the heart, and final and eternal acceptance in the presence of God. Very much of what it can do for the soul in this life he knows it has done for him, and he has seen it do yet more for others. He sees, not only the need of such great salvation as God has provided in Christ Jesus for guilty and miserable man, but also the fitness and adaptation and the actual power of this grace of God. Such is his conviction concerning the Word of the Lord, the gospel of the grace of God; and, thus persuaded of its power to bless and save mankind, he hears on all sides, and coming up from all depths of sorrow and sin, the imperative summons to him to tell of this Saviour and this salvation, and by no means to keep silence. From every hospital and asylum where the victims of vice and sin are reaping what they have sown; from every prison cell; from every place where the ruined in health, in fortune, in character, and in soul are dragging out the remainder of their wretched life; from every gallows-tree; from every impenitent's grave; and from the sinner's hell;—there comes the solemn adjuration which the apostle so keenly felt, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!" And not the sins alone, though they most, but the *sorrows* of mankind also, utter forth the same appeal. For the gospel of the Saviour is a healing balm to the sick at heart, oil and wine to the wounded spirit; it is the gospel of consolation, of hope, and of peace to the sorrowing myriads of mankind. Feeling all this, how can it be otherwise that "the Word of the Lord is in his heart as," etc.?

III. But there is one other gift needed to the full possession of that Divine Spirit which finds expression in our text. It is THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST. By this is meant, not merely an acquaintance with and belief in the truths concerning our Lord's nature and work, nor even simply such belief in him as will save the soul, but such knowledge of him as is involved in deep love to him and sympathy with those objects on which his heart is set. To know Christ as your own loving Saviour, who has died for *you*, redeemed and pardoned and accepted *you*, and given *you* an inheritance amongst his own; to know him by oft and earnest communion with him, by toil and suffering for him;—this is that knowledge of Christ which, when added on to that other knowledge of sin and of the gospel of which we have already spoken, will lead to that irresistible desire to serve him which his true servants have so often felt and shown. The love of Christ must be the constraining motive, and then there will come love and labour for the souls for whom Christ died. I do not know that it is possible for us to have a deep regard and concern for those whom we have never seen or known unless we see in each individual member of mankind one of the brethren or sisters of Christ, part of Christ's body, one of his members, he being the Head of all. If this be believed, then we see that the soul of each of these men and women, though they may be of different clime and colour, and be altogether strange and perhaps repulsive to us, still, the soul of each of them is as precious to Christ as our own, and as capable of honouring and as ready to honour him as was our own. This love of Christ will lead to the love of Christ in all men, for indeed he is in all men, and this will beget a Divine charity which will be ever a mighty motive to seek their good. Then shall we possess the mind which was in him who wept over Jerusalem and prayed for his very murderers. Then shall we willingly bear disappointment, reproach, loss, or aught other ill which may come to us as we toil on in our Master's service. Here, then, in this deep knowledge of sin, of the gospel, and of Christ, have we the secret of that burning zeal which consumed the heart of Jeremiah and of others like minded to him. May God, of his mercy, give to all who labour in his cause this holy and quenchless zeal! Labouring under such impulse, let come what will to us in this world as the result of our toil, we will still labour on. Blessed Lord Jesus Christ, let thy Word be in our hearts as a burning fire, so that when tempted to forbear making mention of thee and speaking any more in thy Name, we may be weary of such forbearing and feel we cannot stay.—C.

Vers. 14—18.—"*Is life worth living?*" Here is one who evidently thought it was not. How bitterly he grieves over the fact that he was ever brought into existence! It is an illustration, as has been pointed out, of the maddening force of suffering. It drives a man to the use of wild language. For great sufferings generate great passions in the soul. They rouse the whole man into action. And these great passions thus

roused often become irrepressible. Many men of no ordinary meekness and self-control are overborne at such times—Jeremiah, Job, Moses, Elijah; and then they express themselves in unmeasured terms. It is as a flood broken loose. Its rushing, foaming waters pour along, and over all that lies in their path. Hence it is that the prophet here, not content with cursing the day of his birth, utters wild execrations on the messenger that announced it to his father. Thus passionately does he protest against the misery and misfortune of his life. Nor has he been alone in such dark thoughts concerning life. Cf. Job iii., where the patriarch, in almost identical language, deplores the fact of his birth. And Moses prayed that God would kill him out of hand (Numb. xi. 15); and Elijah (1 Kings xix. 4). And there have been a whole host of men who have in the most emphatic way affirmed their belief that life is not worth living by refusing to live it any longer—Saul, Ahithophel, Judas, and the suicides of all ages declare this. And many more who have not given this dread proof of their sincerity have yet maintained the same. Sophocles said, "Not to be born is best in every way. Once born, by far the better lot is then at once to go back whence we came." Goethe, as he drew near his end, notwithstanding that all men regarded his career as one which had been highly favoured and very enviable, is reported to have said, "They have called me a child of fortune, nor have I any wish to complain of the course of my life. Yet it has been nothing but sorrow and labour; and I may truly say that in seventy-five years I have not had four weeks of true comfort. It was the constant rolling of a stone that was always to be lifted anew. When I look back upon my earlier and middle life and consider how few are those left who were young with me, I am reminded of a summer visit to a watering-place. On arriving one makes the acquaintance of those who have already been some time there and leave the week following. This loss is painful. Now one becomes attached to the second generation, with which one lives for a time and becomes intimately connected. But this also passes away and leaves us solitary with the third, which arrives shortly before our own departure, and with which we have no desire to have much intercourse." And the gloomy musings of Hamlet, "To be or not to be, that is the question," is another example, which has been followed by the whole tribe of those who are called pessimists, of representing life as a curse rather than a blessing. And we cannot deny that there are many now whose lot in life is so sad, that, if we looked only at the present, we could not vindicate the justice and still less the goodness of God in regard to them. And the terrible lottery that life is, a lottery in which the blanks far outnumber the prizes, goes far to account for the apathetic indifference with which the deaths of such myriads of children are regarded. If all parents knew for certain that the lot of their children would be bright or mainly so, how much more jealously would their lives be guarded and avenged! And there are many men who, whilst they stammer out some kind of thanksgiving for their "preservation and all the blessings of this life," fail utterly to feel thankful for their "creation." They would much rather not have been. So that there can be no doubt that there is a larger and it is to be feared an increasing number of people who are desperately or despairingly asking the question which stands at the head of this homily, and which this passionate protest of the prophet against his birth has suggested. But how is all this? Let us therefore inquire—

I. WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF SUCH CHEERLESS THINKING AND SPEAKING? We reply: 1. *Temperament* has a great deal to do with it. Some are born with a sunny, bright, cheerful disposition; let them go down on their knees and give God thanks for it, for it is a better gift to them, more surely secures their happiness, than thousands of gold and silver. But others are born with a temperament the very reverse—pessimists from their mothers' womb, always seeing the dark side of things, melancholy, foreboding, complaining. It is a positive disease, and calls for mingled pity and careful discipline. 2. But more often still it is, *the continued and sore pressure of sorrow.* So was it with Job and here with Jeremiah. And it is still the bitter disappointments, the miserable failures, "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," trouble upon trouble,—these are prolific sources of the sad views of life of which we speak. 3. But most of all, *sin*—moral evil—is the real cause. The "philosophy of melancholy" finds its true parentage there. It is this which causes that unrest and torment of soul, that hiding of the face of God and uplifting of the scourge of conscience, which throws all life into shadow and blots out the sun from the heavens. It is this which

leads it to be said of and felt by a man, that it had been better for him that he had never been born.

II. WHAT IS THE TRUTH ON THE MATTER? *Such conclusion as that of the pessimist never can be right*, for our deepest moral instincts teach us that, if life were more of a curse than a blessing, he who is the God of mercy and righteousness would never have given it; and that if it were better for a man that he had not been born, he would not have been born. Life *must* be a blessing or it would not be given. 1. Universal instinct says so. See how men cling to life. The law of self-preservation is the first law of nature. 2. The summing up of the hours in which we have enjoyed peace and satisfaction, and of those which have been darkened by pain and distress, would probably in *all* lives show a vast balance on the side of the former. Let any one honestly make the calculation for themselves. 3. The laws of life all tend to produce happiness; "In keeping of God's commandments there *is* great reward." 4. Good men who may have held dark views of life have done so "in haste," as Ps. xxxi. 22 and cxvi. 11; or through looking at one point of their lives only (cf. the joyous praise of ver. 13; what a contrast and contradiction to the verses that follow!); or in ignorance of the truths and consolations which the gospel has introduced. Thus was it with Job and the Old Testament saints generally, and, of course, with all pagan nations. 5. Evil men are not to be credited. They have themselves poisoned life's springs, and whilst they speak truly enough concerning their own life, they are not competent witnesses as to what all life is. 6. Then "it is the Lord that hath made us, and not we ourselves," and because of this all lands are bidden "be joyful in the Lord" (Ps. c.). Now, how could this be if life were not worth living? 7. The future which Christ has prepared. Let that be taken into view and *quæstio cœdit*. Life is but the porchway to that which is life indeed—the eternal life. Our afflictions, therefore, which here we suffer are light, and "but for a moment," and so, "not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed." (1) Then, "Sursum corda," "Lift up your hearts;" "*Be* joyful in the Lord," because he hath made us. (2) Be reticent of such thoughts and words as these of Jeremiah. How far short he falls of the apostles of our Lord! They *rejoiced* in tribulations. Jeremiah had better not have so spoken; better have copied him who said, "If I speak thus I shall offend against the generation of thy children." (3) Pray to be kept from temptation so to speak or even think, for such temptation is hard to overcome.—C.

Ver. 9.—*A burning fire within.* The mental condition of the prophet here recalls the beginning of his ministry. Just as he then shrank from taking its responsibility upon him, so now he is ready to throw it up in despair. His life seems to him altogether a failure. He is a disappointed and defeated man. He will "make mention of the Lord no more, nor speak any longer in his Name." Many an earnest ministering spirit has felt like this, overborne by the force of the world's evil, impatient of the slow progress of the kingdom of truth and righteousness. But the prophet cannot so easily throw up his work. God, as at the beginning, is "stronger than he," and holds him firmly in his grasp; holds him to his office and ministry by the force, not so much of outward circumstance as of a spiritual persuasion, by the strong necessity of an inward law. "His Word was in my heart as a burning fire," etc. Note here—

I. THE INHERENT PROPERTY OF THE WORD OF GOD AS A LIVING POWER IN THE SOULS OF MEN. "A burning fire" (see also ch. xxiii. 29). All Divine truth possesses a quality that may justly be thus represented. The Law that came by Moses was a "fiery Law," of which the thunders and lightnings of Sinai were the appropriate associations (Deut. xxxii. 2). And even the inspiration of gospel truth was fitly symbolized by "cloven tongues of fire" (Acts ii. 3). There is not only light but heat, not only a flame but fire. The moral effects are manifest. 1. *Melting.* Icy coldness, hard indifference, stubborn self-will, impenitence, etc.,—all these are softened by the fire of God when it really enters into the soul. A tender sensibility is thus created that prepares it to receive all Divine impressions. 2. *Kindling.* Heaven-tending affections are awakened by it that did not exist before. Latent germs of nobler and better feeling are quickened into new life. There is no limit to the holy energies that may be developed in our nature by the inspiration of the truth of God. In this good sense we may say, "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" 3. *Consuming.* It

destroys everything in us that is destructible. All that is false, selfish, sensual—all that is "of the earth, earthy"—has in it the elements of dissolution and decay, and cannot resist the purging, purifying force of Divine truth. The dross is consumed that the precious gold may come forth in all its beauty and purity. The solid grain is quickened into fruitful life, the chaff is burnt up as with unquenchable fire.

II. THE OBLIGATION IT IMPOSES. "I was weary with forbearing," etc. (see ch. vi. 11). The soul of the prophet was acted upon by a force that overcame, not only the weakness of his fears, but the strength of his self-will and of every motive that would induce him to relinquish his work. Every earnest, heroic servant of truth is sensible of this inward constraint. It is the constraint (1) of a Divine call, (2) of a masterful conscience, (3) of conscious power to benefit others, (4) of an instinctive impulse to communicate the good one's own soul possesses. St. Paul stands before us as a conspicuous example of this when he says, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me," etc. (1 Cor. ix. 16). There is no clearer mark of a noble, Christ-like nature than submission to such a constraint as this.—W.

Vers. 1—6.—*A changed name and a dreadful doom.* The change here, from Pashur to Magor-Missabib, reminds us of other divinely indicated changes of name in Scripture; *e.g.* from Abram to Abraham, from Jacob to Israel, from Simon to Peter, from Zacharias to John. These changes, however, were indicative of advancement and honour; were suggestive of the rise out of nature into grace. But here is a name which becomes at once the memorial of great wickedness and of the sure judgment following upon it.

I. THE NAME BEFORE THE CHANGE. Whatever doubt there may be as to the precise signification of the name Pashur, it seems quite clear that the very meaning of the word had in it something peculiarly honourable. The man himself belonged to a privileged order and held an office of influence and honour; and the name must have been given to him because of something auspicious in the circumstances of his birth. An honourable name is an advantage to its bearer, and to a certain extent also a challenge. He who bears it may so live that in the end there will be the greatest contrast between the name and the character. A less suggestive name, one less provocative of contrasts, might have saved Pashur from the new and portentous name which, once given, would never be forgotten. We are bound to consider well the associations which will gradually gather around the name we happen to bear. Now, at least, the particular name has very little signification in itself; but the longer *we* bear it the more significant it becomes to all who know us. Every time it is mentioned it brings to mind, more or less, our character. Even on prudential considerations one must ever become increasingly careful of what he does, for a single act may obliterate all the associations of respect and confidence which belong to his name. Instead of becoming, what every one may become, the object of respect and confidence to at least a few, he may end in being an object of execration far and wide.

II. WHAT BROUGHT THE CHANGE. His treatment of Jeremiah. His treatment of him, bear in mind, as a prophet. We feel that Jeremiah was not put in prison on even a plausible allegation that he was an evil-doer. That he was a false prophet was the only possible charge to lay against him. Now, Pashur must have known that *he himself* was a false prophet, speaking as God's truth what was only the fabrication of his own self-willed and deceitful heart. If Jeremiah was speaking falsehood, Pashur's duty was to convince him of error, and show the people that he was either a fanatic or a mere impostor. We are not allowed to suppose that what Pashur did he did from some excusable outbreak of zeal on behalf of the building of which he was custodian. A great punishment from the hand of God always argues a correspondingly great offence. It is not so amongst men; there may be a great punishment and a very small offence; sometimes, indeed, no offence at all, measured by the highest law. But when God punishes severely it lets in light upon the character of him whom he punishes. We know that Pashur must have been a bad man; we know it as well as if all his iniquity had been detailed in the most forcible language.

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHANGE. We have not information enough to give us the exact meaning of Pashur; and one might almost think this was meant to

heighten the certainty as to the meaning of Magor-Missabib. At present Pashur was in a position of comparative security. If security can be claimed for anything in this world, it seems sometimes to belong to such as hold official positions. But with regard to Pashur all depended on the continuance of Jerusalem. The Lord's house where he was governor was to be destroyed, and then where would he be? Hitherto Pashur has been a nameless unit, involved, but not peculiarly involved, in the general doom. But now he has a prediction all to himself. Henceforth he will be known, must be known, as the man whom Jeremiah threatened with this new and dreadful name. Evidently the name stuck. Some speakers and writers have had this power of giving names that stick. It is not an enviable one, and has often been cruelly used. But God, on whose lips it will always be rightly used, can make it to serve good purposes. The best proof that the name stuck is seen in this, that the prophet's enemies tried straightway to fix the name on him (ver. 10). But everything depends on who gives a name. Jeremiah's enemies might speak of terror, but they could not terrify. God both spoke of terror and in due time brought the terrifying realities around the doomed man. There was nothing at present, and might not be for some time, to show what was coming. But God can wait. We have no doubt that in due time Pashur was forced to the confession that the name was fully justified.—Y.

Vers. 7—9.—*A conflict not to be avoided.* The heart of the prophet is here revealed to us as the scene of a bitter conflict between two sets of motives; one set originating with the vehement will of God, the other in the utterly unsympathizing dispositions of men. The prophet makes us feel that it is utterly insufficient to describe his work simply as difficult. It is done amid a continuity of reproaches, some of which a less sensitive man might not have felt, but which were peculiarly irritating to a man of Jeremiah's sensibilities. Generally it may be observed that God did not send thick-skinned men to be his prophets.

I. THE DIVINELY PRODUCED CONVICTION UNDER THE FORCE OF WHICH HE BEGAN THIS WORK. The people might say, "You speak irritating words to us, and you must not complain if we speak irritating words to you. Those who live in glass houses must not throw stones." Thus it is well for the prophet to assert most emphatically, as he does in ver. 7, that he spoke from *a divinely produced conviction of duty.* God impressed—as God alone can impress—certain irresistible considerations on his mind. Not only was he persuaded, but it was *God* who had persuaded him. The reasons for his prophetic action were not such as he had sought out and discovered for himself. God put them before him in their proper aspect, order, and totality.

II. THE FIRST PAINFUL RESULT OF FIDELITY TO GOD. Perhaps in the youthful confidence with which he began his prophecies he would anticipate that since God had so clearly sent him, the people would as trustfully and obediently receive him. But not all the *genuineness* of a Divine message can commend it any more to the selfish man who naturally hates to be disturbed and threatened. The prophet intimates that the reception he met with was daily, universal, invariable. He seemed to be ordained to stir up the nests and dens and hiding-places of every noxious being amongst men. He who goes among hornets and scorpions must not complain if he has to suffer great agonies from their venomous sting. We are sure, indeed, that the prophet must have had some sympathizers, but the treatment which caused him such agony would also have the effect of making friends keep silent, lest they might be the next to suffer. It is no strange thing that men should become resentful and savage under the home-thrusts of spiritual truth. Men who *love* evil resent even the gentlest approaches of God in trying to take that evil away.

III. THE EARLIER RESULT PRODUCED BY THIS INTOLERABLE TREATMENT IN JEREMIAH'S OWN MIND. It is easy to criticize the prophet, and say that he should not have been so much affected by all these hard words. But it was just the multitude of them that made them intolerable. A man would be cowardly to complain of being stung now and then; but if he is to be exposed to stinging insects every hour of the day, that is an altogether different matter. God made one of the terrible plagues of Egypt out of multitudes of tiny creatures, such as, individually, counted for almost nothing. Let us not, then, talk condemningly of this proposed repression of the prophetic message. He had reached a crisis in which, we may well believe, Jehovah, who

sent him, was peculiarly near to him. May we not reverently say that even as Jesus reached the inexpressible culmination of his mental agony in Gethsemane, so the prophets, in their lesser measure, may have had crises, not unlike that of Gethsemane, when the forces arrayed against them seemed more than they could possibly resist? Profound should our feeling be that it may become a very hard thing to bear faithful testimony for God in an ungodly world.

IV. THE FINAL RESULT. The risk of unfaithfulness is put beyond Jeremiah's control. He is put between two great "cannots." He cannot bear the reproaches of the people. That on the one hand. But, on the other hand, he finds that he cannot keep unexpressed the message of Jehovah. God takes his Word into his own keeping. The pain of prophesying, great as it was, was less than the pain of withholding the prophecy. It is not till we come to deal with God that we learn the real meaning of the word "intolerable." It is ever a mark of God's true servants, that in times when there is great need of testimony they cannot keep silent. Better to burn at the stake than to have one's true, inner life burnt up in resisting God. Paul is a grand example of a man who was forced to speak by the fire within. He could not be silent; he could not temporize, compromise, or postpone. Luther is another instance. Those destitute of the fire in their hearts cannot understand those who have it; and therefore it is the very height of ignorant audacity to censure it. Nothing is more to be desired, whatever pain it may bring with it, than that we should have God's truth as a living and growing fire in our hearts; and in order to do this, we must be careful not to quench it in the beginnings of its risings within us.—Y.

Vers. 10—13.—*The name Magor-Missabib wrongly applied.* I. THE HOPES OF JEREMIAH'S ENEMIES. We have seen in the preceding passage (vers. 7—9) how the prophet was incessantly exposed to exceedingly irritating taunts from his enemies; and how the pain of these taunts in a measure tempted him to try if he could not escape the pain by ceasing to prophesy. Jehovah perfectly preserved him from this danger. The prophetic fire within him, divinely kindled and sustained, was too strong to be thus extinguished. It grew more and more, and the very taunts of the ungodly became as fuel to make it burn more fiercely. But this very faithfulness of the prophet only increased his danger as an object of persecution. His enemies will themselves begin to feel in danger from this continual reference to their evil doings. Mere mockery has itself a tendency to go further. Bengel, referring to the development of the persecuting spirit, as illustrated in the apostolic days, says, "The world begins with *ridicule;* then afterwards it proceeds to *questioning;* to *threats;* to *imprisoning;* to inflicting *stripes;* to *murder*" (see 'Gnomon' on Acts ii. 13). Jeremiah has already been for a night in prison, and he knows not how soon a longer and worse imprisonment may come. He hears threatenings on every hand. The name Magor-Missabib that, by Divine direction, he has applied to Pashur, is retorted on him, as being, in the opinion of his enemies, a name eminently appropriate to his present circumstances. So far as the human elements were concerned, his chances of safety appeared very poor indeed. His enemies are numerous and crafty; and, sharpened by self-interest, they needed no exhortation to be watchful. Those who compare these confessions of the prophet at different times with the experiences of Jesus at the hands of his enemies, will notice a remarkable parallelism. What Jesus said with respect to the scribes and Pharisees is peculiarly forcible when considered in the light of Jeremiah's trials: "Ye are the children of them which killed the prophets" (Matt. xxiii. 31).

II. THE SUFFICIENCY OF JEREMIAH'S PROTECTION. Here is the man of strong faith, and of a speech full of confidence and calmness. He may well be depressed; beset as he is with so much malice, brought into close contact with the worst wickedness of the human heart. But, on the other hand, he has this for his comfort, that, the closer wicked men come to him, the closer he finds himself to God. This is the service the wicked render to the witnesses of God, that, the more they persecute them, the more they press them towards the great Helper. The ungodly little dream of the service they render in this respect. So far as abiding results are concerned, the spirit of intolerance has done the direct contrary of what it was intended to do. The purposes of evil might have been better served if the Church of Christ had had an easier time of it in the beginning. He who is potentially the mighty, terrible One in the midst of his people,

needs the opposition of the wicked in order that all his power to defend his people may be known. This, indeed, is one of the lessons taught by the sufferings of Jesus even to death. Darkness was to get its hour and its power, that so the Light of the world might be more fully glorified. Never was it more emphatically true than when Jesus was laid in the grave, that Jehovah was with him as a mighty, terrible One. We look with the natural eye, and we see a cold corpse apparently gone the way of all flesh; we look with the eye of faith, and we discern One standing by who at the appointed hour will raise that corpse, and make it the channel of manifestations of life such as were not possible before.—Y.

Vers. 14—18.—*The prophet cursing the day of his birth.* It is very perplexing to find these words following so closely upon the confidences expressed in vers. 11—13. And yet the perplexity is to some extent removed when we recollect how largely man is the creature of his moods. That he is bright and confident to-day may not hinder him from being in the depths of despair to-morrow. It is well for us to see how low a real and faithful prophet of God can sink. One is reminded at once of the similar words put into the mouth of Job. We have advantages, however, in considering this expression of Jeremiah which we lack in considering the similar expression of Job. Of Job we know nothing except as the subject of one of the sublimest poems in the world. What substance of fact may have suggested the poem it is beyond our powers to determine. But Jeremiah stands before us unquestionably a real man, a prominent character in the highway of history.

I. THE FEELING THAT UNDERLIES THIS TERRIBLE IMPRECATION. The *form* of the imprecation is not to be too much regarded. The same feeling will be very differently expressed in different languages and among different races. What Jeremiah means is made clear in ver. 18. Just at this particular time it seems to him that life has been nothing but one huge failure. He has no heart to accept suggestions such as might mitigate his gloom. He will not even allow that life has had any other possibilities than those of failure and shame, and therefore the congratulations attending his birth were misplaced. The more we look into his language here, the more we see that it was very wild and foolish. The important matter is that, in approaching the consideration of these words, we should have a distinct impression of how recklessly even a good man may talk. A recollection of Jeremiah's utterance here will keep us from wondering that there should be so much of foolish and impious talk in the world.

II. THE FACT WAS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE FROM CORRESPONDING TO THE FEELING. We look at Jeremiah's career as a whole, and at the permanent value of his prophecies, and then we see how little moods and feelings count for just by themselves. We gain nothing by saying of any man that it might have been better for him if he had never been born. It is true that Jesus spoke thus of Judas, but we are not at liberty to say what he says; and besides, he was speaking in the language of necessary hyperbole, in order to emphasize the dreadful wickedness of the traitor. The safe ground for us to take is that entrance upon human life in this world is a good thing. Even with all the trials of life, the position of a human being in this world is a noble one, and his possibilities for the future are beyond imagination. While it is right that we should have the deepest compassion for the deformed, the defective, the infirm, we must also recollect that it is better to be the most deformed of human beings than the shapeliest and healthiest of brutes. In face of all the present afflictions of human nature, one thought should be sufficient to brighten them all, namely, the thought of how perfectly comprehensive is the renewing power of God. Within its grasp it comprehends the most imperfect and distorted of human organizations. Jeremiah was making the huge blunder of looking at things entirely from the point of view of his own feelings, and his present feelings. His actions were better than his words. Speaking out of his own feelings, he talked great folly and falsehood; speaking as the prophet of God, his utterances were those of wisdom and truth. The fact was that of no one belonging to his generation could it be more truly said than of him that his birth was a good thing; good for the nation, good for himself, good for the glory and service of Jehovah. We must not bemoan existence because there is *suffering* in it. Suffering may be very protracted and intense, and yet life be full of blessing. Jesus had to suffer more than any man. He shrank from the approach of death with a sensitiveness which we cannot

conceive, who have in us the mortal taint by reason of indwelling sin. Nothing reconciled him to the thought of all he had thus to endure save that it was the clear will of God. What was Jeremiah's mental suffering compared with that of Jesus? And yet, though the *life* of Jesus was to be one of peculiar and unparalleled sufferings, his *birth* had angels to announce and celebrate it.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXI.

The chapter falls into three parts, two of which seem to be in some sort of connection, while the third is isolated. First comes a warning to the messengers of Zedekiah of the unfortunate issue of the rebellion against Babylon; this is followed by a counsel to the people to give up their futile resistance, and "fall away" to the Chaldeans. The last four verses contain an exhortation to the "house of David" to fulfil their high duties with greater conscientiousness, for fear of the judgment which had already begun to take effect when the former part of this chapter was written. Compare Zedekiah's embassy to Jeremiah with that of Hezekiah to Isaiah on a similar emergency (Isa. xxxvii. 2).

Ver. 1.—**Pashur.** A different Pashur from the one mentioned in ch. xx. 1. This one reappears in ch. xxxviii. 1; he belonged to the fifteenth of the sacerdotal families, named after Melchiah (comp. 1 Chron. ix. 12). **Zephaniah**; mentioned again in ch. xxix. 25; xxxvii. 3. He was of the priestly family or class of Maaseiah (comp. 1 Chron. xxiv. 18), and was next in rank to the high priest (ch. lii. 24).

Ver. 2.—**Nebuchadrezzar.** This form predominates in Jeremiah and Daniel, and is the only form found in Ezekiel. It is, in fact, the correct way of spelling the name, which is in Babylonian *Nabu-kudura-uçur*, i.e. "Nebo, protect [or perhaps, 'has made'] the crown." **According to all his wondrous works**; *e.g.* the destruction of Sennacherib, which must have occurred in the first instance to the minds of devout Jews.

Ver. 4.—**I will assemble them into the midst of this city**; *i.e.* I will compel the warriors to give up resistance, and shut themselves up within the walls.

Ver. 7.—**And such as are**; rather, **left** *which are left.* (There has been an obvious error in the repetition of "and.")

Ver. 9.—**He that abideth in this city**, etc. No doubt Jeremiah often gave this counsel to his fellow-citizens (comp. ch. xxxviii. 1, 17), and it appears from ch. xxxviii. 19; xxxix. 9; lii. 15, that many of the Jews acted in accordance with it. **Falleth**; more distinctly, *falleth away* (as ch. xxxvii. 14, Authorized Version); *i.e.* goeth over to.

Ver. 11.—**And touching the house**, etc. The formula with which this section is introduced shows that it was attached to vers. 1—7 at the same time as vers. 8—10, although obviously written at a much earlier period.

Ver. 12.—**O house of David.** The "house of David" here, as in Isa. vii. 13, means the various branches of the royal family, the same, in fact, which are called by courtesy "kings of Judah" in ch. xvii. 20 (see note). They appear from the present passage to have monopolized the judicial function. **Deliver him that is spoiled**, etc. The poor man would have no advocate to plead for him; in this case the judge was to see that he suffered no injustice in consequence.

Ver. 13.—Jehovah, standing, as it were, on the Mount of Olives, addresses the proud city beneath him. **O inhabitant of the valley, and rock of the plain**; rather, *O inhabitress*; Jerusalem is personified as a virgin. The poetical description of the capital as a "valley" (the word, however, signifies a valley as wide as a plain) reminds us of "the valley [or rather, 'ravine'] of vision" (Isa. xxii. 1, 5); while "the rock of the plain" recalls "my mountain in the field" (ch. xvii. 3). So, as Graf points out, Babylon is called "a mountain" in metaphorical language (ch. li. 25). It is, however, singular that the prophet should call Jerusalem a "valley" and a "rock" in the same passage. In the former, perhaps, Jeremiah is thinking specially of the lower city, and in the latter of Mount Zion. **Who shall come down against us?** viz. from the "hills round about Jerusalem."

Ver. 14.—**In the forest thereof**; *i.e.* in the forest of houses (comp. ch. xxii. 6, 7).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*God consulted in vain.* I. IT IS VAIN TO SEEK GOD'S HELP WITHOUT REPENTING OF OUR SIN. Zedekiah sends to Jeremiah in his alarm. But he gives no sign

of repentance. The dread of coming trouble and the desire to escape it are not penitence; the fear of hell is not penitence. All men naturally desire to be safe from suffering. But God will only deliver those who also desire to be free from sin, who regret the evil they have done, not merely that which they endure.

II. IT IS VAIN TO SEEK GOD'S HELP WITHOUT SUBMITTING TO HIS WILL. Zedekiah consults God as an oracle; he wants information. But he gives no indication of a willingness to obey the command of God. He would be glad of Divine aid for his own plans, but he has no thought of yielding himself up to the execution of God's will. Many men would have God for their servant; their prayer is that God would do their will. Such presumptuous conduct must be rebuked by failure.

III. IT IS VAIN TO SEEK GOD'S HELP FOR DELIVERANCE FROM THAT WHICH IS MORALLY NECESSARY. There is a moral necessity as well as a physical. No sane man would pray that two and two might make five. There are moral impossibilities equally impregnable. A just God cannot forgive the impenitent. All that God does must be for the best, and nothing can induce him to turn from what he knows is best. If men need chastisement God will give it them, though they may most earnestly desire to be delivered from it. It was good for the Jews as a discipline, as well as just as a punishment, that they should be carried captive to Babylon. Therefore, even if all thoughts of inflicting the penalties of justice were in abeyance, God's merciful intentions to his people would make their prayers for escape vain.

Vers. 8—10.—*The choice between life and death.* I. THE CHOICE WAS FREE. It was left to the Jews to choose which course they would take. God has endowed every man with freedom of will, opening up to him a vast range of possibilities. All of us have opportunities for choosing life and blessedness if only we will seek them. A Divine vocation marks out for us a course which we *ought* to follow in preference to the fancies of our own inclination, and a Divine destiny sets us down in a certain sphere bounded by definite limitations beyond which we cannot go; but within these limits we are free from compulsion, and even in regard to the vocation no force is exerted to make us follow it. We are under moral obligation to do so, but we are left to freely acknowledge or reject the claims of that obligation.

II. THE CHOICE WAS MOMENTOUS. It was between life and death. These were the great alternatives of the Deuteronomic covenant (Deut. xxx. 19). The same alternatives are set before us spiritually (Rom. vi. 23). Life is not to be played with; tremendous issues depend on the manner in which it is conducted. Religion is no mere topic of abstract speculation for learned leisure, no empty toy for idle sentiment; it is of vast practical moment, for it deals with the choice of the greatest possible alternatives—life and death.

III. THE CHOICE WAS LIMITED. The choice which was set before the Jews by Jeremiah was gloomy enough. The best prospect offered to them was escape from massacre indeed, but escape to exile and captivity. We may come to such a condition that no effort will restore the lost possessions and gladness of the past. Even though there is no ground for despair, though the worst may be avoided, our conduct may bear such inevitable fruits in poverty, loss of position, alienation of friends, sickness, etc., that our best prospects may be far from satisfactory. This is necessary, for moral choice cannot undo past facts nor overleap the barriers of physical law. It is wise, for the disagreeable fruits of sin may be useful medicines in the form of chastisement. Yet the New Testament offers us a freer choice for the ultimate future; as the alternative of death not captivity and a life of sorrow, but eternal life and liberty, the full restoration to the blessings of God's favour (1 John v. 11, 12).

IV. THE CHOICE OF LIFE INVOLVED SAFETY WITH SUBMISSION. Jeremiah said that death would await those who stayed in Jerusalem to resist the invader from behind the city walls, while they who went out to the field to yield themselves up without fighting would be spared. For this advice the prophet was regarded as a traitor. It was justified, because (1) resistance was utterly hopeless, (2) submission was required by God to a divinely appointed chastisement, (3) the Divine aid with which the Jews had won their victories in the past would not be forthcoming in this case. It is never dishonourable to submit to the will of God. True patriotism will seek the good of the nation rather than its transient glory. The method of escape offered to the Jews

illustrates the Christian method of salvation. The Jews were to escape by leaving their ramparts and meeting their foes defenceless in the open field. We are to save our life by losing it. The Jews found safety in submission. The Christian salvation is secured, not by fighting and grasping at our rights, but by yielding to the will of God in Christ, and submitting to this even when it brings chastisement.

Ver. 13.—*God against Jerusalem.* In the fact that God was against her, Jerusalem was to see that all resistance to the Chaldeans must fail. This terrible secret of hopeless ruin may be found in others besides the Jews.

I. IT IS POSSIBLE FOR GOD TO BE AGAINST THOSE WHO WERE ONCE HIS MOST FAVOURED PEOPLE. It is Jerusalem, of all cities, that finds God to be her opponent. Therefore they who have enjoyed the friendship of God in the past have no right to presume that nothing can break that friendship. Moreover, God may be *actively* opposed to us. The opposition may not be all on our side. Though God is love, he can be angry, since even love itself will rouse anger when it is abused; and though he desires ultimately nothing but good, he may first send partial and temporary evil as a means for effecting this.

II. THEY WHO OPPOSE THEMSELVES TO GOD WILL ULTIMATELY FIND GOD OPPOSED TO THEM. The original enmity is on our side, so is the offence, the wrong-doing, the evil passion which stirs up contention. God would ever be at peace with his children, and it is they alone who have imported strife into his family. But after they have done so it is impossible for God to be indifferent to their conduct to him. His honour, insulted, must needs be vindicated—not, indeed, in the selfish way of personal pride, but in the righteous regard for the just and orderly government of his kingdom.

III. NO MORE TERRIBLE FATE CAN BEFALL MEN THAN FOR GOD TO BE AGAINST THEM. The horrors of the sieges of Jerusalem are amongst the darkest scenes of history. Yet the moral effects of God's wrath are far more serious than the material. 1. If God is against us, we *lose all the help* of his favour. It is impossible to measure the grace which, in multiform influences, streams into us and sustains and strengthens us for duty and trial. If all were removed we should perish. If God were wholly against any soul, that soul must at once be driven to outer darkness—be crushed and destroyed, and by negative causes alone; simply through the loss of God's light and life. But no man in this world has been so cursed. Yet even while God withdraws his special favours the loss is so great as to entail certain failure in life. The fruit may not be dashed from the trees, but the summer sun will never come to ripen it. 2. If God is against us, *terrible evils* will befall us. God is ever active in his presence. If we are not blessed by it, we suffer from it. How fearful to have God for our enemy! All the laws and forces of the universe are then against us. Nature and providence, earth and heaven fulfilling his will, must direct their vast resources against the wretched outlaw. Our opposition to God will be to our own injury, but what much more fearful results must follow his opposition to us! This dreadful fate is illustrated by our Lord's words, in which he compares those who shall fall on the stone with those on whom the stone shall fall (Matt. xxi. 44).

IV. IF GOD IS AGAINST US, REDEMPTION MUST INVOLVE A CHANGE OF GOD'S RELATION TO US. The atonement must have an aspect towards God as well as one towards man. While man is reconciled to God, God must be propitiated to man. It is true that this language is only possible because we speak of God after the manner of man, and that the atonement does not originate in us or in an independent third party who seeks to reconcile man and God, but in God himself, who sent his Son to redeem the world to himself. Yet, though desiring to be only gracious to men, God must have recognized the necessity of that intercession and sacrifice of Christ which won the favour of the Father to his beloved Son, and so to mankind, of whom Christ was the representative Priest. In Christ, therefore, we need not fear that God is against us (Rom. iii. 25).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Zedekiah's message; or, the prayer of the ungodly.* I. AN EXAMPLE TO BE IMITATED. Whatever might be said of the general behaviour of the king, his conduct

on this occasion appears at first highly sagacious and commendable. 1. *For its acknowledgment of Jehovah as the only Deliverer.* A tremendous danger threatened the state. Zedekiah "counted the cost" and sent to the representative of Jehovah. He did not waste his resources in useless expedients, but frankly accepted the calamity as sent from God, appealing through God's prophet for deliverance. Most men in similar circumstances lose themselves in secondary causes. "It is this unfortunate accident or that. In time circumstances will be better, and we shall right ourselves." 2. *Its respect for God.* Great officers of state sent to a poor prophet. Religion after all may be the chief concern; at least a very important matter, and worthy the attention of the highest in the land.

II. AN EXAMPLE TO BE AVOIDED. 1. *It was tardy.* The warning of the prophet had been given long before, but it was not believed. Not until the visible proof of his veracity appeared before the city was Zedekiah eager to come to terms with the God he had offended. However great the alacrity of men to betake themselves to the offices of religion in times of calamity, their earnestness has not the spontaneous character to which it pretends. They are spurred on by fear. 2. *The power instead of the grace of God was appealed to.* A compliment to Jehovah's past achievements is delicately suggested. No petty business would bring him to ask a favour of God, but this trouble is great and urgent, and beyond human means of dealing with it; therefore God is called in. "It is worthy of his interference who always 'doeth wondrously.'" Now, there is no real humiliation here. Recognition of God's claims is grudgingly and of necessity made, but no word is mentioned of sin or repentance from it; no appeal is made to the forgiving love of God. Human nature is proud even in its necessities and prayers. "Help me now, at this juncture, and—afterwards I shall be able to help myself." God will not accept us unless we come humbly as well as prayerfully. Sin must be confessed. 3. *It contained no promise of amendment.* Jehovah is summoned as a *Deus ex machinâ* for the solution of a humanly impossible problem; but there is no indication that the "desperate resort" will grow into a course of constant waiting upon God. 4. *The duty which ought to have been personal was delegated to others.* Under the garb of respect religion is often really evaded. The Bible teaches the great doctrine of mediation, but it does not tell us how to perform our religious duties by proxy. 5. *Certainty, the note of Divine faith, is conspicuous by its absence.* "If so be that." The case is stated as a distant possibility. The language sounds respectful; it is so diffident, so unpresuming; but it really veils a profound scepticism. There ought to be, there is, no "perhaps" in believing prayer. The king was told that if he and his people repented, God would instantly avert the calamity or convert it into blessing. Perhapsos like this are profanities. Besides, the suggestion is dishonouring to God, viz. that he should stay his judgments and the sinner nevertheless continue impenitent. 6. *The whole tone of the message is false and unsatisfactory.* It is that of one driven up into a corner by an unexpected exigency, but resolved that what he is obliged to do shall be barely done, and in such a manner as to give it quite another aspect to those who look on. A moral distance is observed, as of one who is unwilling to allow that religious duties are of personal as well as official and conventional obligation. It is the courtly language of diplomacy, and does not come hot-burning from a heart full of sorrow, faith, and love. What wonder it should not be answered save in scorn and added severity? The sarcasm is sublime.—M.

Vers. 13, 14.—*God's answer to earthly presumption.* The indifference and callousness of Judah and her king would appear to have reached a climax. Ignorance could not be alleged in excuse of it. It had become ingrained systematic unrighteousness; and had added this to itself, that it had rejected the warning counsels of God's prophet. How was it to be dealt with?

I. IT COULD NOT BE LET ALONE. 1. *The long-suffering mercy that had already been shown had been misunderstood.* To delay longer was therefore impossible. 2. *For all sin is a contradiction of the Divine Spirit and rule in the earth.* It is a direct challenge to Heaven. Especially is this the case when a positive law has been revealed, and a direct intimation of God's will made by a living representative. God's honour is therefore involved in the issue. 3. *The interests of truth and the kingdom of God on earth would suffer.* The transgression of one child of God is a stumbling-block

to many, and those who enjoy Divine privileges should be especially careful as to how they behave. The world of heathenism witnessing the behaviour of Judah would be confirmed in its unbelief, or would misinterpret the genius of the religion of Jehovah. It might suppose that Jehovah was but a likeness of one of its own gods, full of partiality. This impression must be dissipated, and it could only be so by firm and prompt dealing with the offence.

II. A FINAL PEREMPTORY SUMMONS TO REFORMATION IS GIVEN. It might be supposed enough to have dealt silent and summary punishments upon the guilty land and its king. But this would not consist with: 1. *God's revelation of righteousness.* In blessings as well as in punishments a rational connection had to be shown with the behaviour and deserts of their subjects. The sinner's own conscience had to be addressed ere he was cast off for ever; and the indictment was of world-wide concern. A warning and an example were required for the general guidance of men, and for their apprehension of the justice of Heaven in punishing those upon whom the calamity came. 2. *God's mercy.* The scheme of redemption does not exclude the possibility of the sinner himself being saved. On the contrary, this is its chief aim. Just as it would not be consistent with God's character to suffer unrighteous practices to continue unrebuked, so "God would not be God" were the penalty to be unannounced and without alternative of salvation. With many sinners of to-day he deals in like fashion. The warning is given with gentle, repeated, and terrible emphasis, and the way of escape is pointed out so plainly that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, may not err therein."

III. HE HIMSELF WILL BE THE ANTAGONIST. "I am against thee" (cf. ver. 5). 1. *This was a reversal of his normal relation to Israel.* It would be hard for people of their habits of thought to realize; and it is stated boldly in order to emphasis. Not mere neutrality. He is to be a belligerent—the belligerent with whom they have to do. They must have felt foredoomed to failure. They knew his power and resources, for had they not been employed on their own behoof in the past? Is not this the present consciousness of many? They know that God is against them. Are they prepared to carry the war on to the end? 2. *It represented the utter wrongness and hopelessness of their cause.* The "rock of the plain" would be of little avail against him. The forces of the world were at his command; and their own hearts would fail them for fear against this ghostly combatant. Against the righteous one the sense of an evil cause would be the parent of discomfiture.

IV. YET THE PUNISHMENT WAS TO COME FROM WITHIN THEMSELVES. "I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings;" "I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof." It is not easy to gather from these vague statements the precise form the punishment would assume. But the description agrees best with the circumstances of Jehoiakim's reign, who built palaces of cedar, and ruled with despotic violence. A literal rendering of the terms of the judgment is scarcely permissible. Is civil war meant? Or court intrigues, that may issue even more disastrously? In any case it would be the result of a reaction against the tyranny and wrong-doing of the court. 1. *The elements of destruction are within the sinner himself.* Many already know something of what hell is in themselves. 2. *The results of sin will be its punishment.*—M.

Vers. 1—14.—*Saved so as by fire.* This chapter has been by some means put out of its proper place; for it treats of King Zedekiah, whilst in later chapters circumstances connected with the reigns of the kings who preceded him are given. But being placed here it serves to show how God's servants, despised at first, come to be honoured at last. The stocks had been good enough for Jeremiah—so the last chapter tells—and his enemies had smitten him as if he were a common felon. Here we find the king and high officers of the court coming and beseeching his intercession and help to avert the calamity which was so fast coming upon them and the nation at large. "Give us of your oil," said the foolish virgins to the wise. And again and again has it been and will it be that the ungodly shall come to covet earnestly the place in God's favour which his servants only enjoy, but which, together with them who sought it when they did not, they have heretofore despised. Those who honour God he will honour, and will cause their enemies to come and confess that God is with them of a truth. Thus

did the enemies of Jeremiah at this time acknowledge him as the true servant of God. But it was too late to secure what they desired. "The door was shut." But as the foolish virgins were bidden go to them that sell and buy for themselves, so the prophet of God has one counsel to give them whereby they might be "saved, yet so as by fire." "Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death" (ver. 8). But when we come to see what that way of life was, we see how far different it was from what the king and his people would have chosen for themselves. Note, therefore—

I. WHAT THIS WAY OF LIFE WAS. 1. *It was bare life*—life only. They were to suffer defeat; their weapons to be of no avail, their strong fortress to be taken, their city and their temple in which they gloried to be burnt with fire, and they themselves led into captivity. That now was all that was possible for them. It was too late to avert their calamities, much less to gain victory, or honour, or glory in the war which they were waging. A glorious deliverance such as Hezekiah had known was out of the question. 2. *And even this bare life on hard conditions.* They must surrender themselves to their enemies when the summons came, and meanwhile they must reform their ways (ver. 12). On these terms they should be allowed to live. Refuse them, as many did, and they perished miserably. It was indeed a salvation "so as by fire."

II. ITS MOURNFULNESS. How full of this it was is seen by the plaintive psalms of the Captivity: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept," etc. And that which made it so mournful was the remembrance of how different their lot might have been. Had they but hearkened to the pleadings of those prophets of God, whose prayers when it was too late they importunately sought, how happy had it been with them then! Salvation in fulness, as their fathers had experienced and rejoiced in again and again, they too might have known. But now—

III. ITS PLAIN TEACHING FOR OURSELVES. Life may be retained, but made so wretched that only one thing could be worse—to have lost it altogether. This certainly true of the present life, it is probably true of the life after this. Beware of that false doctrine which encourages men to believe, that if only they can get within what they are pleased to call "the door of heaven," they need desire no more. This is not humility, but the evil desire to escape that faithful following of Christ which alone will win "the *prize* of our high calling." And since salvation in fulness is offered to us and God desires it to be ours, let us be content with nothing less, lest we be "ashamed before him at his coming," and have "with shame to take a lower place." To any now suffering under judgment of God this history says, "'Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.' Accept his terms, see in them your only hope."—C.

Ver. 8.—*A sad but common necessity.* The surrender of a part to save the whole. This was the "way of life" the prophet put before the people. The way of death would be their refusal. "If they would submit to the irresistible pressure of the Babylonian power, then whatever blessings were bound up in the preservation of the house of David and of the holy city would remain intact" (cf. Stanley, 'Lectures on the Jewish Church,' Lect. xi. vol. ii. p. 533). But to resist would not merely be useless, but mischievous in the extreme. It would rouse the rage of their conquerors and involve the destruction of all they held most precious. It would be "a way of death." At the final siege of Jerusalem the Christians retired, but the Zealots drew down upon themselves the rage of the armies of Vespasian and Titus, and so hurried on the ruin of the whole Jewish state. Stanley says of Jeremiah, "It was not indifference to his country, but attachment to its permanent interests, with the yet larger consequences wrapt up in them, which induced him to counsel submission. It was his sense of the inestimable importance of that sacred spot, with its sacred institutions, which caused him to advise every sacrifice for the sake of retaining it. He had the courage, so rare in political leaders, to surrender a part for the sake of preserving the whole—to embrace in his view the complete relations of the great scheme of the world, rather than fix his attention exclusively on the one pressing question of the moment. As there are times when the constitution must be broken to save the commonwealth, when the interests of particular nations or doctrines must give way to the preponderating claims of mankind or of truth at large, so Jeremiah staked the eternal value of the truths which Jerusalem represented against the temporary evils of the Chaldean dominion. It was a bitter pang, but the result seemed to him worth the cost."

"To steel his melting heart,
To act the martyr's sternest part;
To watch with firm, unshrinking eye
His darling visions as they die;
Too happy if, that dreadful day,
His life be given him for a prey."

(Keble).

Now—

I. THIS DREAD NECESSITY IS ONE WHICH MAY BE SEEN CONTINUALLY PRESSING ON MEN. Illustrations are numerous: the throwing over the cargo in storm at sea; the abandonment of outposts to concentrate strength on the key of the position; the cutting off a limb to save the life; the giving up a less important branch of trade to safeguard one more so. And in the religious life we are perpetually summoned to such sacrifice. "Whoso loveth his life shall lose it, but he that loveth his life for my sake shall find it;" "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die," etc. All ventures of faith. And death—"for corruption cannot inherit incorruption," and therefore that the true life may be ours, the fleshly life must die. And our Lord represents the awful doom of the wicked to be a "cutting off of a diseased part," a κολλασις, that—so it should seem—entire destruction may not be needed. It is an awful process, but sternly necessary. God save us from it! And what is the submission of our will to God, the self-surrender for which he ever asks, but the prudent conduct of that king who feels that with his puny force of ten thousand he cannot meet the king who comes against him with twenty thousand, and therefore straightway sends an embassage desiring conditions of peace? But—

II. MEN SHRINK FROM IT. Those before whom Jeremiah placed this "way of life" shrank from it. They would not listen to him. They cruelly persecuted their far-seeing and God-inspired prophet. And it is so still. In common life the proverbial saying, "Nothing venture, nothing have," implies that men are loth to venture. Many a craft hugs the shore, thinking to find safety there, and is driven on the rocks and wrecked, when by putting boldly out to sea the storm might have been safely weathered. The historian of the Crimean War finds fault, once and again, with our generals for their timid policy, which he maintains brought so great sufferings and losses on our army, whilst had a more daring strategy been adopted—as in our recent Egyptian campaign at Tel-el-Kebir—the war might have been speedily and gloriously ended. And in the religious life, how men shrink from this self-surrender! What frantic but futile efforts there are to serve God and mammon, notwithstanding our Saviour has said, "There is no man that hath left house, or lands," etc. (Mark x. 29)! But men cannot be persuaded to believe this. The young ruler who had great possessions (Matt. xix.) went away sorrowful, because he could not make the great venture. And the feeble religious life of so many, the absence of all joy in God's service, is owing to this same cause. Men are ever trying to find a *via media* between the "way of life" and "way of death." The husbandman does not refuse to cast into the earth all he has left of last year's corn, in the trust that it will yield him a bounteous harvest. But we are slow to believe in the wisdom of such sowing in spiritual things.

III. BUT THE REFUSAL TO SUBMIT IS FATAL. It was so in case of those to whom Jeremiah preached, and it has been so a thousand times since. A ship was sinking. A man leaped from her deck into the sea. He was a good swimmer, but he had fastened round him a belt containing gold, which he could not bring himself to abandon, and its weight sank him ere he could reach the boat for which he was making. Our Lord bade him who should be on the house-tops when Jerusalem was besieged "not go down to fetch his clothes." Such carefulness might cost him his life. Our Lord tells of many of the Pharisees who believed on him, but were afraid to confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. And perhaps there are few of the worldly and irreligious amongst us who have not sunk down to where they are now, and will sink down to lower depths still, through this same refusal to give up all for Christ. It may be humiliating and involve present loss, and therefore men let go the eternal gain. To refuse such sacrifice is the way of death. But—

IV. TO CONSENT TO IT IS LIFE. Take our Lord as the supreme example, who, not for himself but for us, threw away that infinite glory, that equality with God, which, being in "the form of God," was ever his; but St. Paul tells us (Phil. ii. 6) he counted

it not a thing to be grasped at, a prize which he should cling to with eagerness and retain with tenacity, but "emptied himself of it, and made himself of no reputation." Thus for the time of his incarnation submitting himself to the cruel might of sin and Satan, he gained thereby that infinite exaltation, that salvation of mankind upon which his loving heart was set. "Let this mind," therefore, "be in us which was also in Christ Jesus." And whenever it is found, God rewards it. Self-sacrifice, the cross, is the way to supreme reward. The shepherds were told, at the Nativity, that there was born to them "a Saviour, Christ the Lord." And when they came to Bethlehem they found a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger. What correspondence was there between that saying of the angels and that sight of the infant Jesus? To the outward eye none, but to the eye instructed by God's Word and God's providence, there is every correspondence. For those outward signs of poverty and humiliation which were the characteristic of his life, have formed his title-deeds, his royal right, to the homage of every human heart. "Blessed are the meek," etc.; "He that humbleth himself shall," etc. It is ever so; and especially when we humble ourselves before God, giving up self and sin, giving up and losing, as the world would say, our very life, —then it is we find it, as God grant we may.—C.

Vers. 1—7.—*A king appealing for a prophet's intercession.* I. A KING'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT HUMAN RESOURCES ARE UNAVAILING. The hour and the danger so long and often predicted, referred to all the more earnestly as the hour draws nigh, has come at last. No time is here taken up in narrating the attempts Zedekiah may have made himself to repel the invader. The Scriptures were not meant to give us details of sieges. The likelihood is, however, that it was long before Zedekiah reached anything like an extremity that he made this appeal to the prophet. When an unusual danger comes close at hand it is easy to exaggerate. The man who has been indifferent, imprudent, heedless of all hints that have been given him to make provision for the future, is the very man who, when peril comes, rushes into panic and becomes unable to use the resources he has.

II. A KING'S PRESUMPTUOUS ATTEMPT TO AVAIL HIMSELF OF DIVINE RESOURCES. Nothing is more beautiful than to see one who has found out the vanity of human help turning to God. Only he must come in a right spirit, having made a clear discovery of why it is that man could not help him. Anything of this sort was utterly lacking in Zedekiah's approach. There is no sign of repentance, no word of confession, no resolution of amendment. The only thing in the shape of acknowledgment is that Jehovah is the God who does wondrous works. This is an acknowledgment which we find often in the Old Testament, but it is acceptable to God only when accompanied with a sense of why it is that God does his wondrous works. The more we consider Zedekiah's request, the more will the blindness and audacity of it appear. Here is the king in Jerusalem, bound, if any man ever was, to know the significance of the history of Israel as a whole; and yet he can only see certain great manifestations of power which encourage him to hope that a similar manifestation may now come for his own deliverance. There is no real coming to God, unless we come for things that are according to his will. His power cannot wait upon our selfish needs. There is no telling what might have happened, even at this more than eleventh hour, if Zedekiah had only come with something of true penitence. God knew beforehand that this could not be expected; and thus there is no clearer evidence of the righteousness of Jerusalem's doom and of Israel's expatriation than is furnished from Zedekiah's own lips. He shows that he has lost all sense of the meaning and the necessity of God's great covenant with his people. If only they had been obedient they would never have lacked the benefit of many wondrous works.

III. THE PLAIN AND NECESSARY ANSWER OF JEHOVAH. We see through all that God here says a purpose to make plain that he is now full of activity against his apostate people. The object was not to be attained simply by leaving them, in their natural resources, to the natural resources of the Chaldeans. The contest is not of man against man, but of the man who has forsaken God against the man whom God has taken to be the instrument of his righteous indignation. God must specially intervene and make his presence manifest, to show that all this visitation of suffering is from him. If God has, for a time, to forsake his people, he must needs oppose them. If God be

not for us, he is against us; and so here the defenders of Jerusalem are represented as having difficulties to deal with such as have arisen through God's own operation. Their weapons of war do not produce the usual effect. God turns them back upon those who wield them. This may be more than a mere general figure of speech. It is quite possible that either the arm wielding the heavy, sharp sword becomes as the arm of the little child, or else, that remaining strong, the weapon becomes but as the child's toy. Thus the Chaldeans themselves would learn that some mysterious power was at work, and that the glory of the victory was not theirs. Furthermore, God was to fight against these apostates with a weapon of his own. He can make the wicked and the ambitious his sword, but pestilence is of his own sending. Not all the might of the Chaldeans could bring a pestilence, nor take it away once it had come. Thus we see how all this dread combination of events was intended to impress on all, alike amongst besiegers and besieged, who had minds to understand that God himself was terribly at work. He was indeed dealing with the people according to his wondrous works; works necessitated in order to prevent his holy and reasonable wrath from being nothing more than empty wind.—Y.

Vers. 8—10.—*Escape for the individual among the calamities of the nation.* Even amid all the thick, impending horrors indicated in the previous passage, a clear and immediate way of escape is indicated for the individual. Every one going over promptly and resolutely to the Chaldeans would be at least safe. What might be reserved for him in the future it was not proper to say. Enough for him to know that he had security for the present. He who is made safe may expect further communications of positive blessing in due time. We are not, indeed, to suppose that every one who remained in the city, exposed to sword, famine, and pestilence, would assuredly perish. That can hardly have been the case. But this certainly is meant, that every one so remaining would have to take a tremendous risk. Whereas every one who took the suggestion as to what is here called the way of life, found that the great Preserver of life had thereby entered into a special covenant with him.

I. THE PLACE LEFT FOR INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY. God is dealing with a whole nation. His representative and the representative of this nation's king have just been in conference. His dreadful, necessary decision as to the nation's fate is communicated. But now each individual is impressively informed that God is thinking also of him. The individual must, to some extent, share in the suffering of his people. How far he shall share depends, however, on his own choice. We cannot be dragged into the worst experiences of human life merely as sufferers from the wrong-doing of others. The worst pains, the gloomiest hours of life, can only come from our own wrong-doing. Whatever faithful remnant there might now be in Jerusalem had a great chance given to them. Complete exemption from suffering was not possible; but they were offered a kind of shelter, where the great storm of God's wrath would leave them untouched, however much it might affect their temporal belongings.

II. ALL THAT THE BEST OF MEN MUST EXPECT FOR THE PRESENT IS A MITIGATION OF SUFFERING. Whatever advantages come from our connection with the temporal body politic must be accepted with the risk of corresponding disadvantages. Even while Israel was in this doomed degenerated state it was the medium of benefits to those who could use it aright. No Israelite needed to regret that he had belonged to Israel; if only he had the wisdom to accept all uncomfortable experiences as part of a discipline that would work out unmixed and abiding good in the end. Those here addressed had much reason to be thankful that at such a terrible crisis God did so much to make their position safe. He who has got safe to land from the sinking ship would be reckoned a monster of ingratitude if he did nothing but grumble because all his property was lost. He may still have the opportunity of a prosperity as great as he had in the past, or even greater.

III. THIS REQUIREMENT GAVE A SEARCHING TRIAL TO THE FAITH OF THE BELIEVING. If any good was to come out of the proposition it must be by acting on it at once. And such action could not but have some appearance of cowardice and desertion. Indeed, under certain circumstances, it would have been cowardice and desertion. If Israel could have been looked on as a human state and nothing more, if the Chaldeans had been a human enemy and nothing more, then such a departure, *self-prompted*, would

have been nothing less than apostasy from national duty. The sentiment is a noble one: better to die a freeman than to live a slave. This aspect of things vanishes, however, when we recollect that Jerusalem was divinely doomed. This Chaldean army was nothing less than the sword of God, and a timely surrender to the Chaldean was really a timely surrender to him. To go over to them might look questionable enough on a mere hasty, superficial glance; but time would show that it was the right, trustful, obedient course. The real bravery is to withstand the taunts and misrepresentations of unbelieving men; enduring "as seeing him who is invisible." Some, indeed, who escaped to the Chaldeans did so, we doubt not, in a really cowardly spirit. But the Lord knows who are his; and their motives would be revealed in the end. A brave heart cannot be for ever misrepresented; and a mere outward appearance of obedience will have to pass through that fire which tries every man's work, of what sort it is.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXII.

Ch. xxii. and xxiii. are connected together by similarity of subject. The temporal and spiritual leaders of the people, who are mainly responsible for the national catastrophe, receive their merited castigation. Vers. 1—8 of ch. xxiii., properly speaking, belong to ch. xxii.; thus we get a well-rounded discourse on the conduct of the kings, with four symmetrical parts or strophes—vers. 1—12, 13—19, 20—30, and ch. xxiii. 1—8. Each begins with a general exhortation or meditation, and continues with a poetical description of the fates, successively, of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin. The prophecy is concluded, according to the good old rule of Isaiah, by a Messianic promise.

Ver. 1.—**Go down.** Not literally, for the royal palace was probably the highest building in the city (comp. ver. 6); but because of the spiritual eminence of the temple (comp. ch. xxvi. 10, "They came up from the king's house unto the house of the Lord").

Ver. 2.—**And thy people.** The Septuagint reads, "And thy house and thy people;" thus the passage will agree with ch. xxi. 11, 12.

Ver. 4.—Parallel passage, ch. xvii. 25.

Ver. 5.—**I swear by myself.** "Because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself" (Heb. vi. 13). A synonymous expression is, "As I live, saith Jehovah" (ver. 24).

Ver. 6.—**Unto the king's house of Judah;** rather, *concerning the house of the King of Judah;* i.e. the royal palace, which, on account of its height and its being constructed so largely out of cedar-wood (comp. vers. 14, 23), is called "Gilead, and the summit of Lebanon," just as Solomon's palace was called "the house of the forest of Lebanon" (1 Kings vii. 2). Of Gilead in general, Canon Tristram writes, "No one can fairly judge of Israel's heritage who has not seen the luxuriant exuberance of Gilead, as well as the hard rocks of Judæa." And again, "Lovely knolls and dells open out at every turn, gently rising to the wooded plateau above. Then we rise to higher ground and ride through noble forests of oak. Then for a mile or two through luxuriant green corn, or perhaps through a rich forest of scattered olive trees, left untended and uncared for, with perhaps patches of corn in the open glades" ('Bible Places,' p. 322). The cedars of Lebanon, however diminished, still bear witness to the ancient fame of this splendid mountain district. **A wilderness, and cities which are not inhabited.** The comparison has a terrible significance when read in the light of De Vogüé's and Freshfield's discoveries. For Gilead itself is full of ruined cities of massive stone architecture. "It is no uncommon thing," says Mr. F. A. Eaton, "to see these houses in a complete state of preservation, built of huge blocks of black basalt, with slabs of the same for the roof, twelve feet long, a foot and a half wide, and half a foot thick, and entrance doors also of basalt . . . great solid stones of the same material being used as lintels at the top and bottom" (Speech at the meeting for setting on foot the survey of Eastern Palestine, November 30, 1880: *Statement of Palestine Exploration Fund*, January, 1880, p. 11). *Cities which are not inhabited;* not, indeed, the cities of Gilead of the time of Jeremiah, but constructed of materials which may reasonably be presumed to have been chiselled in a far more remote antiquity. (The date of the cities in their present state is subsequent to the Christian era.)

Ver. 7.—**I will prepare;** literally, *I will consecrate;* the Babylonians being instruments of the Divine vengeance (see on ch. vi. 4).

Vers. 10—12.—There is a fate worse than

that of the dead Josiah. **Weep not**, in comparison, for him, but **weep sore for him that goeth away** (or rather, *that is gone away*). The king referred to is probably Jehoahaz, who, though two years younger than Jehoiakim (2 Kings xxiii. 31; comp. 36), was preferred to him by the people on the death of Josiah. The counsel to "weep sore" for this royal exile was carried out, as Mr. Samuel Cox observes (and we have, perhaps, a specimen of the popular elegies upon him in Ezek. xix. 1—4): "A young lion of royal strain, caught untimely, and chained and carried away captive,—this was how the people of Israel conceived of Shallum" ('Biblical Expositions,' p. 120). The conjecture is incapable of proof; and Ezekiel, we know, was fond of imaginative elegies. But probably enough he was in harmony with popular feeling on this occasion. The identification of Shallum with Jehoahaz is confirmed by 1 Chron. iii. 15 (Shallum, the youngest son of Josiah); the name appears to have been changed on his accession to the throne, just as Eliakim was changed to Jehoiakim (2 Chron. xxxvi. 4). There is, therefore, no occasion to suppose an ironical allusion to the short reign of Jehoahaz, which might be compared to that of the Israelitish king Shallum (somewhat as Jezebel addresses Jehu as "O Zimri, murderer of his lord," 2 Kings ix. 31). This view has the support of F. Junius (professor at Leyden, 1592), of Graf, and Rowland Williams; but why should not the Chronicler, though writing in the Persian period, have drawn here, as well as elsewhere in the genealogies, from ancient traditional sources? There is nothing in ver. 11 to suggest an allusion to the fate of the earlier Shallum.

Ver. 13.—Shallum, or Jehoahaz, in his short reign of three months, had no opportunity of distinguishing himself for good or for evil. It was otherwise with Jehoiakim, whose eleven years were marked by the worst characteristics of idolatry and despotism. He "had, besides, a passion for building splendid and costly houses; and as he esteemed his own position secure under the protection of a superior power, he did not scruple severely to oppress his helpless subjects, and wring from them as much money as possible" (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' iv. 252; see 2 Kings xxiii. 33—35). The building mania, to which Oriental sovereigns have always been prone, had seized upon Jehoiakim. The architecture of the original palace no longer, perhaps, suited the higher degree of civilization; the space was as confined as that of a Saxon mansion would have appeared to a Norman. **That buildeth his house by unrighteousness**; *i.e.*, as the second half-verse explains, by not paying the workmen (comp. Hab. ii. 12).

Ver. 14.—**A wide house**; literally, *a house of extensions*. **Large chambers**. The Hebrew specifies "upper chambers"—the principal rooms in ancient houses. **Cutteth him out windows**; and it is cieled with cedar; rather, . . . *his windows, roofing it with cedar*. (This involves no change of letters, but a very slight rearrangement, and the alteration of one point; grammar gains greatly by the change.) "Cutteth out" is, literally, *rendeth*; it is the word used in ch. iv. 30 of the apparent enlargement of the eyes by putting powdered antimony upon the eyelids. Windows are, as it were, the eyes of a building (Graf compares Eccles. xii. 3). Beams of cedar wood were used for the roof of the palace, as being the most costly and durable (comp. Isa. ix. 10). **And painted**—rather, *and painting it*—**with vermilion**; a taste derived from the Egyptians rather than the Babylonians, who seem to have had a difficulty in procuring red.

Ver. 15.—**Shalt thou reign**—rather, *dost thou reign*; i.e. dost thou prove thy royal qualities)—**because thou closest thyself in cedar?** The second part of the clause must at any rate be altered. Some render, "because thou viest (with thy forefathers) in cedar" (*i.e.* in building cedar palaces). Hitzig would strike out "in cedar," as having intruded from the preceding line (such a phenomenon meets us occasionally in the received Hebrew text), but this does not help us to a connected translation of the passage. Graf's rendering is grammatical, and not against usage; it is, "Dost thou reign because thou art eager about cedar-wood?" and yet the impression left on the mind is that there is some error in the text. The Septuagint finds a reference to one of Jehoiakim's predecessors, "because thou viest with Ahaz" (so the Vatican Codex), or, ". . . with Ahab" (so the Alexandrine and the Sinaitic or Friderico-Augustan). The latter king is celebrated in the Old Testament on account of his buildings, especially his ivory palace (2 Kings xxii. 39). The former was at any rate addicted to the imitation of foreign ways (2 Kings xvi. 11; xx. 11). **Did not thy father eat and drink?** There was no call upon Jehoiakim to live the life of a Nazarite. "Eating and drinking," *i.e.* enjoying the good things within his reach, was perfectly admissible (Eccles. ii. 24); indeed, the Old Testament view of life is remarkable for its healthy naturalness. There was, however, one peremptory condition, itself as much in accordance with nature as with the Law of God, that the rights of other men should be studiously regarded. Josiah "ate and drank," but he also "did judgment and justice," and so "it was well with him."

Ver. 17.—**But thou, O Jehoiakim, art the**

opposite of thy father. ***For*** (not, **But**) **thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness.** "Covetousness" includes the ideas of injustice and violence (comp. ch. vi. 13; viii. 10); hence the second half of the verse emphasizes the cruel tyranny which marked the internal policy of Jehoiakim.

Ver. 18.—Josiah had been bitterly missed and universally lamented (2 Chron. xxxv. 25); and so, only perhaps with less heartiness in most cases, Jehoiakim's other predecessors (ch. xxxiv. 5). The Babylonian kings, too, received the honours of public mourning, *e.g.* even the last of his race, who surrendered to Cyrus, according to the British Museum inscription translated by Mr. Pinches. **Ah my brother! or, Ah sister!** The Septuagint omits the latter part of this phrase, apparently because it seemed inappropriate to the death of Jehoiakim; but the parallelism requires a two-membered clause. According to Movers, the funeral procession is to be conceived of as formed of two parts, condoling with each other on having to share the same fate ('Die Phönizier,' ii. 248). Or perhaps mythology may supply a reason; it is possible that the formulæ of public mourning were derived from the ceremonies of the Adonia; Adonis was an androgynous deity (Lenormant, 'Lettres assyriologiques,' ii. 209), and might be lamented by his devotees as at once "brother" and "sister." (For another view, see Sayce's edition of G. Smith's 'Chaldean Genesis,' p. 267). Ezekiel (viii. 13) testifies to the worship of Tammuz, or Adonis, and the highest compliment a king could receive might be to be lamented in the same terms as the sun-god. Jeremiah does not approve this; he merely describes the popular custom. The recognition of the deeply rooted heathenism of the Jews before the Exile involves no disparagement to Old Testament religion; rather it increases the cogency of the argument for its supernatural origin. For how great was the contrast between Jeremiah and his semi-heathen countrymen! And yet Jeremiah's religion is the seed of the faith which overcame the world. **Ah lord! or, Ah his glory!** *Lord* is in the Hebrew *ādōn* (comp. Adonis and see above). *His glory* is against the parallelism; we should expect "lady" or "queen."

Ver. 19.—Jehoiakim's miserable death, without even the honour of burial. The prediction is repeated in ch. xxxvi. 30, where the statement is made in plain language. At first sight it appears to conflict with 2 Kings xxiv. 6, "So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead;" but it is only appearance, and when we remember that the complete formula for describing the natural death of a king of Judah is, "slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David" (1 Kings xiv. 31; xv. 24; xxii. 50; 2 Kings viii. 24; xv. 7, 38; xvi. 20), and that the phrase, "slept with his fathers," is used of Ahab, who fell on the field of battle (1 Kings xxii. 40), we are naturally led to the conjecture that Jehoiakim did not die a natural death, but fell in battle in some sally made by the besieged. **Buried with the burial of an ass;** *i.e.* cast out unburied. **Beyond the gates;** rather, *far from the gates.*

Ver. 20.—A new strophe begins here, relative to Jehoiachin, the son and successor of Jehoiakim. **Go up to Lebanon, and cry.** The people of Judah is addressed, personified as a woman (comp. ch. vii. 29). The penetrating character of the long-toned cry of an Arab has been mentioned by Dr. Thomson. In Isa. xl. 9 a similar command is given to Zion; but in what different circumstances! **From the passages;** rather, *from Abarim.* The range of Abarim—Nebo, from which Moses surveyed the land of Israel, belonged to it (Deut. xxxii. 49)—completes the circle of mountain stations; Lebanon was in the north, Bashan in the north-east, Abarim in the south-east. **All thy lovers;** viz. the nations whom self-interest had combined against Nebuchadrezzar, and between whom and Judah negotiations had from time to time been entered into (ch. ii. 36; xxvii. 3). "Lovers" (comp. ch. iv. 30; 30; Ezek. xvi. 33, 37).

Ver. 21.—**From thy youth;** *i.e.* from the time that thou didst become a nation (comp. ch. ii. 2; Hos. ii. 15). It is the Exodus which is referred to.

Ver. 22.—**Shall eat up all thy pastors.** The verb is that connected with the participle rendered "pastors;" strictly, therefore, *shall pasture upon all thy pastors.* The "wind" referred to is doubtless the parching east wind, the symbol of calamity, which is actually called a "sharp" wind in ch. iv. 11.

Ver. 23.—**O inhabitant**—rather, *O inhabitress*—**of Lebanon.** It is the people of Jerusalem which is meant; the "Lebanon" are the palaces of cedar-wood which together are called "the house of the King of Judah" (ver. 6). **How gracious shalt thou be!** rather, *How wilt thou sigh!*

Ver. 24.—**Coniah.** A shorter form of Jeconiah (1 Chron. iii. 1), found again in ch. xxxvii. 1. Perhaps this was the name this king bore prior to his accession, after which it was certainly Jehoiachin; Jeremiah has already spoken of one king by his earlier name in ver. 11. The Divine speaker solemnly announces that though, as the representative of Israel's invisible King, Coniah were—or rather, *be*—the signet upon

his **right hand** (a most valued jewel), **yet would**—or rather, *will*—he **pluck him thence**; *i.e.* depose him from his high dignity. The same figure is used in Hag. ii. 23, "I will take thee, O Zerubbabel, and make thee as a signet;" and Ezek. xxviii. 12, where there is a well-attested reading, "Thou (O King of Tyre) art a deftly made signet-ring." (For the fulfilment of the prediction in this verse, see 2 Kings xxiv. 12, 15; ch. xxiv. 1; xxix. 2.)

Ver. 26.—**Cast thee out.** The Hebrew is stronger—"hurl thee" (comp. Isa. xxii. 17, Hebrew). **And thy mother**; *i.e.* the queen-mother Nehushta (comp. ch. xxix. 2; 2 Kings xxiv. 8). She seems to have been particularly influential (see introduction to ch. xiii.).

Ver. 28.—**Is this man Coniah, etc.?** The prophet's human feelings are stirred; he cannot withhold his sympathy from the sad fate of his king. What! he exclaims; is it possible that this Coniah is treated as a piece of ill-wrought pottery ware (comp. ch. xviii. 4), and "hurled" into a strange land? **He and his seed.** These words have caused some difficulty, owing to the youth of Jehoiachin. According to 2 Kings xxiv. 8 he was only eighteen when he was carried captive, while 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9 makes him still younger, only eight (Josiah's age on his accession). Hitzig thinks the latter number is to be preferred; his chief reasons are the prominence given to the queen-mother, and the fact that the length of Jehoiachin's reign is given with more precise accuracy in 2 Chronicles than in 2 Kings. It is true that the king's wives are mentioned in 2 Kings xxiv. 15. But that he had wives may, according to Hitzig, have been inferred by the late compiler of Kings from the passage before us; or the "wives" may have been those of Jehoiachin's predecessor (comp. 2 Sam. xvi. 21). Graf's conjecture is, perhaps, the safest view of the case, whether we accept the number eighteen or the number eight; it is that the "seed" spoken of was born to Jehoiachin in his captivity, and is reckoned to him by anticipation. It should be mentioned, however, that the Septuagint omits "he and his seed" altogether.

Ver. 29.—**O earth, earth, earth.** The repetition is for solemnity's sake (comp. ch. vii. 4).

Ver. 30.—**Write ye this man childless**; *i.e.* enter him in the register of the citizens (comp. Isa. iv. 3) as one who has no heirs. He may have children, but none of them shall succeed to his place in the community. This is all that the passage means; there is no discrepancy with history: how should there be, when Jeremiah himself has mentioned the posterity of Jehoiachin (ver. 28 and the latter part of this verse)? Yet the Septuagint thought it necessary to avoid the appearance of such a discrepancy by rendering, not "childless," but "one proscribed" (*ἐκκήρυκτον*).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Court preaching.* Jeremiah has been preaching in the valley of Hinnom, in the temple courts and in the streets of Jerusalem; now he is called to enter the king's palace with a message from God. The preacher must not wait for his audience to run after him, but he must create it. He must make his work public, not hiding it in modesty, but bringing it to bear on the widest possible field. He must not be content to maintain his unopposed ministry in the Church, but must boldly carry out his mission in the world. Religion is not a concern for religious people alone; people who will not come to church may be supposed to need it more than those who manifest their interest in it by attendance at regular services. If the court is irreligious there is the more need for the prophet to go into its midst.

I. THE HIGHEST RANK SHOULD NOT BE EXEMPT FROM THE MOST FAITHFUL PREACHING. The Hebrew prophets were remarkable for their clear and bold utterances before kings—often at the peril of their lives (*e.g.* Amos vii. 10—13). Christ expects his servants to be equally faithful and fearless (Acts ix. 15). When court preachers descend to become court flatterers they are doing their utmost to ruin their patrons. Kings may not often need to be addressed in the style of John Knox, in his sermons before Mary Queen of Scots; but they certainly should not be treated only to the drawing-room delicacies of Atterbury. The fastidiousness which makes strong words about unpleasant subjects seem in "bad form" in fashionable congregations is really a sign of sacrificing truth and right to mean pleasantness. Kings are men, and have human failings and sins. Rank confers power for evil as well as for good. The privileges and talents of a high position involve such great responsibilities, that the neglect or abuse

of them is a crime of first magnitude in the sight of God. To ignore these truths is to act cruelly to the persons whom the preacher deceives by his smooth words.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE COURT IS OF GREAT INTEREST TO THE NATION. As men, the king and his courtiers have a right to be dealt faithfully with by the preacher. But as persons in authority, their influence makes their condition of importance to all. The people are largely responsible for the condition of the court, since popular applause and popular censure always carry great weight there. Thus Jeremiah associates the people with the king in the address which is intended chiefly for the king. Even under a constitutional government such as that of our own country, the court has immense influence especially in social circles, and it is of vital interest to us all that this influence should be pure and true and righteous.

III. THE PROSPERITY OF A COUNTRY LARGELY DEPENDS UPON THE MORAL CHARACTER OF ITS GOVERNMENT. This great truth is one of the chief lessons to be derived from the Bible accounts of the history of Israel. We commonly rely too much on physical resources, wealth, commerce, military power, etc.; on political resources, legislative schemes, diplomatic complications, etc. We in England have yet to learn how much of our prosperity depends on honesty in trade, fairness in dealing with foreign nations and a high tone of political morality. To judge by some of our newspapers, it would seem that religion has no business with politics; that a county is glorified when her leaders stoop to underhand work that would disgrace the name of the most unscrupulous lawyer. The doom of Israel should warn us against this political atheism. Three duties are specially to be noted in the discourse of Jeremiah. 1. To *execute* judgment and righteousness; not only to pronounce just verdicts, but to carry out an active policy of justice. 2. To deliver the oppressed; non-intervention may be cowardly and selfish when the weak claim our help. 3. Not to oppress the weak; this applies to nationalities as well as to individuals, and is a warning for our conduct with dependencies, and the native races with which we come in contact in the colonies. For righteousness in these respects the promised reward is, not a mere deliverance from approaching calamities, but glory, riches, triumph.

Vers. 8, 9.—*On visiting the ruins of a city.* What a picture we have here! Many nations passing by on the high-road between Egypt and the East struck with amazement at the ruins of Jerusalem. Is not the sight of a city in ruins always a source of pathetic interest? As we wander about the silent streets of Pompeii the stillness of death is appalling by contrast with the tumult of pleasure and commerce which formerly thronged those once busy thoroughfares. Such a melancholy spectacle rouses thought and inquiry. Gibbon tells us that it was while seated among the ruins of the Capitol that he first thought of writing the history of the decline and fall of the city of Rome. The magnificent ruins of Carnac and of Persepolis naturally lead us to ask how prosperity and power came to pass away from Persia and Egypt. So must it have been in ancient times with the ruins of Jerusalem. Jeremiah warns the citizens that their city, now brilliant in splendour and prosperity, will soon astonish all beholders with its overthrow. We have in the words of the prophet a question and an answer.

I. THE QUESTION. (Ver. 8.) It is put by the heathen nations. These people who cannot understand the religion of Jerusalem can see clearly enough her ruin. The world has eyes for the shame of the Church in her overthrow, though none for her highest glory, that of the beauty of holiness. The question is asked by many nations. The spectacle is open to all, and so startling that many are arrested by it. How true is this even in the case of individual men! If a Christian falls into sin and shame the scandal rings through the world. 1. This question bears witness to the *horrible* doom of sin. The ruins are so extensive and so completely wrecked, that all who pass by are fascinated and appalled by the sight of them. If strangers are so struck, how must the children of the city feel? Well may they hang their harps on the willows, and sit them down in despair by the waters of Babylon. Yet the temporal ruin of a city is slight compared with the spiritual ruin of a soul. 2. The question bears witness to the *surprise* that this calamity excited. (1) It was in contrast to former *prosperity*. We are too ready to see in prosperity the promise of its continuance. But no delusion can be greater. (2) It was in opposition to the *boasts* of the Jews. They had regarded their city as sacred and invulnerable. So the French under the empire were taught to

consider Paris. And this self-confidence carries weight with others; for the world is indolent and thoughtless enough to take people very much at their own estimate of themselves. Nevertheless it is vain. (3) It was in spite of the *supposed protection of God*. The Jews were the elect nation. Hence the expectation of their immunity; but a vain expectation. No Divine favouritism will save us from the consequences of our sins. 3. The question suggests *no possibility of help* from the nations. They may pity, but they can do nothing. The stare of the crowd only aggravates the calamity. Well may such a prospect strike grief into the people interested.

II. THE ANSWER. (Ver. 9.) 1. The cause of this calamity *may be known*. Even the heathen nations may know it. Providence is not so mysterious as we suppose. No study is more lofty or more useful than the study of the moral philosophy of history. Treated only on secular grounds, it may be perplexing and unsatisfactory. But regarded in the light of the principles of the Bible, it may be fruitful in sound results. 2. The cause is *moral*. The hosts of Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem. Swarms of northern races and Asiatic hordes swept away the power of imperial Rome. Paris fell before the guns and discipline of the German army. Yet in each of these cases moral corruption was behind the physical cause of ruin, sapping the strength of the doomed city and provoking the onslaught of its foes. 3. The special cause was *unfaithfulness to God*: (1) forsaking God—for God never withdraws his protection from his people till they have abandoned their fidelity to him; (2) breaking the covenant—for this had two sides, and God's promised grace is conditioned by the conduct of his people; and (3) positive idolatry—for the unfaithful servant of God never rests with the abandonment of his God. He must serve some master. Such moral and religious corruption justifies punishment and requires chastisement. We may believe that a right understanding of the guilt and necessities of men will ultimately convince us of the righteousness and wisdom of God's sterner dealings, which at first naturally excite our wonder and dismay.

Ver. 10.—*Misspent tears.* I. WHY NOT WEEP FOR THE DEAD? It is natural to do so. The religion of the Bible is not stoicism. Christ wept by the grave of Lazarus. Yet there are times and circumstances which make it fitting not to weep for the dead, and there are always grounds for the mitigation of such grief. 1. The dead are *taken from the evil to come*. This is the idea of Jeremiah. If death was a calamity, the fate of the living at the overthrow of Jerusalem would have been a worse one. If an evil, death is still the less of two evils. Even if we only think of the dead as leaving the sunlight of this upper world and passing to the dim land of shades, still they go to the place "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." In less calamitous times we should feel that, as God knows all, he may have taken our loved ones to save them from some fearful evil which he, though he alone, saw in their path. 2. The dead are removed according to *the will of God*. David wept for his child while it lived; after it was dead he dried his tears, for then he knew God's will and resigned himself to it (2 Sam. xii. 22, 23). This resignation is more than a sensible recognition of the inevitable; it is a calm and trustful acquiescence in the will of God as righteously supreme—for if the Lord gave, may he not take away?—wise, and good. 3. The dead have *fallen into the hands of God*. In what better hands can they be? How much better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of man! We dare not dogmatize concerning the deep mysteries of futurity. But one thing we know—"The mercy of the Lord endureth for ever." He is just, he may seem stern; the impenitent must suffer punishment, which can be nothing else but fearful, though fair. Yet may not this be the very best thing for them, even during their sufferings? For it is better for us to suffer for sin than to sin without suffering. And who knows what ultimate designs God may have? 4. The *dead in Christ never need our tears*. We may weep for our own loss, but this is their gain. Weep that the battle is over and victory won? Weep that the pilgrimage is finished and the pilgrim safe at home? Weep that the toil and sorrow, the temptation and sin, of this world are left behind, and the joys of heaven inherited? that the night has ended, the shadows flown away? that the light of the celestial city is beaming on the weary wanderer? Such tears are tears of unbelief.

II. WHY WEEP FOR THE LIVING? This may be required by special causes. Life is a blessing. God gives many joys to his children in this world. The continuance of

life is a privilege carrying with it the extension of advantages for faithful service. The brave and loyal servant of God will not selfishly crave a premature release from the duties of his life. Still there is a pathos about all life. "Our sincerest laughter with some pain is fraught." Special circumstances may make it fitting to weep for the living. There are calamities that are worse than death. Such seem to have been realized in the horrors of the sieges of Jerusalem. It is worse to live in sin than to die. The lost and ruined life claims our pity far more than that which is cut off by an early death. What curse could be greater than that of the "Wandering Jew"? Matthew Henry says, "Dying saints may be justly envied, while living sinners are justly pitied. And so dismal perhaps the prospects of the times may be, that tears even for a Josiah, even for a Jesus, must be restrained, that they may be reserved for ourselves and our children (Luke xxiii. 28)." Why should not this situation justify suicide? Because (1) we are not the masters of our own lives; (2) no man can tell what may follow the gloomiest prospects in the boundless possibilities of life, even in this world; (3) the man who lays violent hands on himself in rash, cowardly, and wilful rebellion against God, may expect a worse condition in the future life than that of the man who is called away by Providence, and possibly far worse than any he is attempting to escape.

Ver. 13.—*Dishonest builders.* In no age could these words of Jeremiah be more appropriate than in our own. Whilst we must be most careful to discriminate and not to vent wholesale censure, there can be no doubt that the building trade of our day furnishes numerous instances of an unrighteousness in business transactions which is a scandal to the commercial character of our nation, and which, if it becomes general, must be a sure presage of ruin.

I. THE WICKEDNESS OF THE DISHONEST BUILDERS. 1. It is seen in *bad work.* Attempts are made to palm off wretched work with external decorations. There is a double crime here—lying and stealing; the work pretends to be what it is not, and undue payment is wrung out of the purchaser. Is not this commercial immorality to be witnessed in many branches of trade? In how many instances is it impossible to draw the line between the trader and the swindler? We find people accepting it as a maxim that every advantage should be taken of the ignorance, weakness, and trustfulness of others. It is forgotten that work should be done well for its own sake and in justice to others. Remember, God judges us more by the character of our work in the week than by the appearance of our worship on Sunday. 2. This wickedness is seen in the *treatment of workmen.* Those who live in rapidly growing neighbourhoods know how common it is for poor tradesmen to be ruined by the speculative builders to whom they have supplied materials, and for the artisans to have the utmost difficulty in obtaining their wages. This is especially bad, because it is the oppression of the poor and the abuse of confidence. We have no right so to speculate as to risk the property of other people. The cruelties of slavery which accompanied the gigantic building operations of antiquity (*e.g.* in the building of the Pyramids) may be equalled in wickedness by the crime of those who steal the work of the poor to increase the chance of their own aggrandizement.

II. THE RUIN OF THE DISHONEST BUILDERS. "*Woe* unto him," etc.! Undue anxiety to get rich overreaches itself and ends in bankruptcy. Dishonesty in trade is poison to successful business in the ultimate issue, for it cuts at the root of the mainspring of all business—trust. The abuse of confidence must finally destroy confidence. No doubt commercial depression is largely due to this cause. If the abuse were general, there could be no commerce in the form that this must assume if it is to be carried on largely with the complicated civilization of modern life. We may be assured, too, that God will not overlook this wickedness. Success may be attained at first. The rich man may have built his palace and may be enjoying its luxuries. The commercial man may have brought his dishonest transactions to a successful termination. Yet the fraud and the cruelty are noted in heaven; and if there is a Judge above, the palace of the great will be no citadel to protect the guilty man from the thunders of Divine judgment.

Ver. 21.—*The voice of God disregarded in prosperity.* I. GOD SPEAKS TO US IN OUR PROSPERITY. 1. There are *important words* which need to be spoken to us at such a time. We can never have all the *wants* of our souls supplied by the richest abundance

of material good things, and we need heavenly words for our soul's sustenance then as much as in the conscious helplessness of trouble. We have special *duties* belonging to the time of prosperity. Prosperity brings talents, opens up opportunities for enlarged service, calls for renewed devotion of love and gratitude. There are also peculiar *dangers* attending prosperity, and it is well that we should hear a Divine voice warn us against them, and heed a Divine counsel which will direct us how to conquer them. 2. There are *means* by which God speaks to us in prosperity. He is ever speaking to us, even when we do not hear his voice—by the Bible we should be reading, by the ordinances of the Church and the institution of preaching, by the course of providence, by the life of nature, by the still small voice of conscience. But there are special voices of prosperity. Prosperity speaks to us of the goodness of God exercised towards us in spite of our ill-desert and in a degree beyond all reckoning.

II. THERE IS DANGER LEST WE SHOULD DISREGARD THE VOICE OF GOD IN PROSPERITY. God does not thrust his messages upon unwilling ears. We may refuse to hear. Yet he speaks so that we may always hear, so that if we do not heed his voice it must be because we will not hearken to it. 1. Prosperity may disincline us to do this because it *seems to satisfy* us without God. Really satisfy us it cannot. But temporarily it acts as an opiate, and when we do not feel the need of God we are tempted selfishly to disregard his voice. 2. Then prosperity is *distracting*. Sorrow is lonely and silent, and leaves us in the dark night to listen to heavenly voices and gaze on the wonders of the world above. The garish day of prosperity, with its noisy and dazzling distractions, withdraws our attention from such things. 3. Further, prosperity *begets pride*. It leads us to think much of self, to yield to self-will, and to rebel against the requirement to act as God's servants and stoop beneath the yoke of his will. Hence it inclines us to a rebellious disregard for his voice. 4. If men have been hardened against God from their *youth*, it is not likely that they will heed his voice in the time of prosperity. The longer we neglect this voice the more deaf do we become to it. It is terrible to think of the folly and wickedness of persistent disregard to God's truth while he is patient and long-suffering and persevering in seeking access to our hearts. Some great shock seems to be required to disturb this habit of hardened indifference. An earthquake of adversity may be required to break up such fallow ground. If trouble comes with this end it is a great blessing. The adversity of the Captivity was such a blessing to the Jews; it led them to regard the voice that was unheeded in their prosperity. So our sorrows are often blessings if they make us to hear the voice of our Father in heaven.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—23.—*Truth-speaking under difficulties.* The prophet is commanded to go down to the king's palace and deliver his prophecies in the royal audience. His mission did not admit of time-serving or evasive utterance. Like that prophet who said to David, "Thou art the man," he had to speak to the king face to face and with great plainness.

I. GOD'S CHILDREN ARE OFTEN CALLED UPON TO WITNESS TO HIM IN DIFFICULT PLACES. In king's courts; in society; in unbelieving homes; in the office, workshop, etc.

II. THEIR WITNESS IS OFTEN IN SHEER CONTRADICTION TO THE ACTIONS AND HABITS THAT PREVAIL THERE. The sin of Judah was flagrant and open, affecting the most elementary laws of righteousness. The Law of Moses guarded the widow and the orphan. The Law of God, in its righteousness, purity, and love, is still strange to the world's life, and is constantly violated in it. But the duty of witnessing is only rendered the more imperative.

III. THEY ARE SUSTAINED BY: 1. *The consciousness of inner rectitude and duty.* 2. *The witness of conscience in the transgressors.* 3. *The presence and promises of him who sends them.*—M.

Vers. 5, 7, 13, 14.—*Building in unrighteousness.* The building of a house, be it small or great, is always an interesting and suggestive process. It is a lengthened operation, expensive, and representing a great part of a man's aims and efforts. Various purposes may be sought in it according to the character, circumstances, etc., of the

builder—mere shelter, comfort, splendour, protection. As these come into view the object in which they are to be realized becomes representative of the living personality and character with which it is associated. Jehoiakim was a despot, bent upon aggrandizement, and so he sought to build a magnificent palace with forced, unpaid labour. The ambitions of unspiritual men, the exclusive and absorbing projects of earthly life, resemble the palace-building of this Hebrew tyrant in—

I. THE UNION OF EXTRAVAGANT DESIRES AND DISHONEST, UNLAWFUL METHODS. Easy for Jehoiakim to "go in" for a splendid palace, as he is not in the habit of paying his *employés*. Are there not many in modern life who act on the same principle? The desire for self-advancement and aggrandizement overtops every other consideration. 1. *Unlawful methods of securing these are employed.* Speculation; getting on in business in order to get out of it; adulteration; insufficient wages; prices that do not admit of honest manufacture; clap-trap advertisements, etc. 2. *Imagining that others exist for the sake of one's self.* This reverses the golden rule and the spirit of Christ's life.

II. ITS FUNDAMENTAL SIN. This is selfishness—self-glorification, neglect of God and of human claims. The great principles of the Divine kingdom are contradicted;—justice, mercy, brotherly sympathy, etc.

III. ITS RESULTS. 1. *The ruin of the building;* i.e. the life-project—the unhallowed aim. 2. *The ruin of the builder*—for time, perhaps for eternity.—M.

Vers. 8, 9.—*Monumental judgments.* I. EXCEPTIONAL PENALTIES WILL ATTEND THE ABUSE OF EXCEPTIONAL PRIVILEGES. 1. *As a measure of justice.* The position attained by Jerusalem was due not so much to its site as to its being the centre of a theocracy. The foundation of its prosperity was a spiritual one. It was God's elective favour which had lifted it up above the cities of the earth. Presuming upon this, the first laws of righteousness had been violated and the whole conditions of the covenant relation ignored. This assumption of the inalienability of Divine blessings is at the root of every great apostasy. It is doubly unrighteous. (1) As a robbing of God. (2) As a misuse of a falsely acquired advantage and reputation. The robbery of such things is of infinitely greater heinousness in so far as they transcend in their value merely earthly treasures, and differ from them in the terms of their acquisition. It is free grace and unrequited love that are trampled on, and the punishment must therefore be the more exemplary. 2. *As a necessary precaution.* Pretensions so great are apt to mislead others. People who say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we," may be taken at their own estimation if no marked change takes place in their external condition. God, therefore, uses his judgment in its external signs as an index of his reprobation. Other nations than Israel have illustrated this principle in their decline and fall. The great peoples of Christendom are on *their* trial. There is nothing more hateful in the sight of God than a people that has outlived its religion and yet retains the profession of it. Although the chief peualties of unfaithfulness in spiritual things must be inward, external evidences will not be wanting of what has taken place. How colossal the ruin of a power that has once been Christian, and has been exalted through Divine grace for the fulfilment of pledges which have never been redeemed (Matt. xxiii. 37; xi. 23)!

II. THE JUDGMENT OF GOD WILL BE ENDORSED BY THE VERDICT OF THE WORLD. Even the ruins of Jerusalem would be a thing to gaze at. Its desolation would be unlike any other. The epitaph of a forfeited spiritual supremacy would seem to be graven on the very stones. There is ever something unmistakable and peculiar in the condition of those who are rejected by God. Their misery is not as other misery, their ruin not as other ruin. 1. *The spectacle will be self-explanatory.* Not that every sin and failing of God's people would be written in earthly chronicles, but the causes of their decay would be broadly apparent. So is it with the Church from which God removes his candlestick, and the soul in whom the light has become darkness. 2. *It will be morally impressive.* Even in its misery the people of God will instruct the nations; and the Church of Christ will be a spectacle to angels and to men in its failures as in its successes.—M.

Vers. 10—12.—*Fates worse than death.* Josiah's death was still fresh in the memory

of the people. But their hopes were reviving at the accession of the young Jehoahaz, his son. For three months he reigned in Jerusalem, following the evil and not the good of his predecessor, and "Pharaoh-Nechoh put him in bands at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem." After appointing Eliakim, another son of Josiah, to reign in his stead, he took the captive prince to Egypt, where he died (2 Kings xxiii. 31—35). The exile of "Shallum" was quite recent at the time of this prophecy, and the nation was naturally more concerned over the tragic fate of Josiah than the evil fortune of his son. Jeremiah hastens to correct this mistake by assuring them of the miserable death of Shallum in Egypt. From this we learn that—

I. DEATH IS NOT THE GREATEST CALAMITY THAT CAN BEFALL MEN. Shallum living, but in shameful exile, was really more to be pitied in himself and to be deplored for the sake of his country, than Josiah dead. The latter was free from the degradations to which his descendants were exposed, and saved the pain of seeing his country rendered tributary; he had also children to occupy his place. But Shallum experienced all his nation's shame, as it were, vicariously, and was helpless to rescue it from the foreign yoke under which the intrigues of his brother had brought it. The hopes of Israel had in a special but easily understood way centred upon Shallum, in whom it trusted to see the restoration of ancient glory. All these are cut off by a decree more than human. He became, therefore, the type: 1. *Of forfeited possibilities of usefulness.* 2. *Of national ignominy.* 3. *Of an irremovable curse.* The apostate professor of religion, the impenitent sinner, etc., are worse than dead. It were better for the offender of the little ones that he had never been born (cf. Heb. x. 26; 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21).

II. THE COMPASSION OF MEN SHOULD BE CALLED FORTH FOR THE MISERY OF THOSE WHOSE WRONG-DOING THEY HAVE SHARED. 1. *Because of its vicarious character.* 2. *Because of the Divine displeasure which it represents.* This extends to themselves, even although they are not personally punished. Shallum, in this respect, is a type of him who was "made sin for us." 3. *In order to practical measures being taken for its relief.* There are many in our own day who, like Shallum, are the victims of national crimes and social sins. It is for those who have escaped the penalty to seek, by practical measures and the earnest presentation of the gospel, to redeem them to a happier life. The outcast and the fallen will be the brightest gems in the crown of the Church which gives itself to their redemption.—M.

Vers. 15, 16.—*True royalty.* The contrast between Josiah and his son has had many a parallel. The family emerges from honest homespun into splendid dishonour, dropping its virtues and its religion as it goes. In all periods of external development and material civilization it is well to remember that true greatness must be in the man and not in his circumstances, and that the richest amongst us cannot afford to do without the graces and benevolence that dignify and adorn even the humblest life.

I. SHAM ROYALTY. "Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar?" With such persons the pomp of circumstance is everything. Autocratic imperiousness is mistaken for empire. The whole superstructure is unsafe because the foundation is false. The ground is undermined. In proportion as men lose the reality of power they grasp at its shadow.

II. TRUE ROYALTY. Essentially a spiritual thing. 1. *In what it consists.* In moral authority and real influence over men. This is never impaired by mere loss of external circumstance. The true king does not require his crown. 2. *How it is secured.* By (1) dependence on God, (2) simplicity of personal wants, (3) singleness of patriotic purpose, (4) sympathy with the ruled. "It was well with him." This repetition is intended to impress. "*Then* it was well with him"—an emphasis of time that was to be noted. Josiah himself had gone away from this ideal life and God cast him off.—M.

Vers. 1—10.—*The mighty pleadings of God.* These verses contain record of what we may fitly term a Divine wrestling with his sinful people to induce them to abandon their wickedness and live, so intense and urgent are the motives which he brings to bear upon them. Note—

I. FOR WHAT GOD PLEADS. "That they should execute *righteousness and judgment.*" It is the King Jehoiakim who is addressed specially, a monarch one of the worst who filled the throne of David. "He remained fixed in the recollections of his countrymen

as the last example of those cruel, selfish, luxurious princes, the natural products of Oriental monarchies, the disgrace of the monarchy of David." For the estimate formed of him, cf. ver. 13, etc. To him, therefore, God thus appeals. Now, this appeal is one God is ever making. Righteousness is his supreme solicitude (cf. homily on ch. vii. 1—34, on "Relation of religion and righteousness"). False or corrupted religions are ever characterized by indifference to righteousness. So long as outward adhesion to the creeds and customs they enjoin is given, a wide margin is allowed for the indulgence of the natural and evil propensities of humanity. But a constant characteristic of the religion taught us in God's Word is its demand for righteousness. The gospel is no less stringent than the Law, yea, is more and justly more so, as it has brought to our aid a Divine force by which the demands of righteousness may be more readily met. It does not make void the Law. So far from that, it establishes the Law. If we understand by "belief" that which a man "lives by," which some say is the etymology of the word, and at any rate its meaning, then the scornful lines of the sceptic may be admitted to be true—

> "For creeds and sects let senseless bigots fight;
> His can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

For if those principles of conduct, those governing motives of a man's life, lead him to right, then, though encrusted with what amount of error and superstition soever they may be, they nevertheless, because bearing such fruit, cannot be wrong at the root. And, on the other hand, however orthodox and scriptural the professed creed, if it do not tend to right conduct then that fact proves that the professed belief is not the real one, but one far other. "Be ye holy as I am holy," is ever God's demand. Note—

II. How he pleads. See what forcible arguments he employs. 1. *The mighty attraction of hope.* Thus he would *draw* men off from sin. If those to whom he appeals would but hearken, he would work what would be virtually a miracle for them. He would stay the progress of ruin and decay which were now threatening the state; he would turn back the tide of events which was now rushing on in such vast volume and force to overwhelm the throne and people, and he would re-establish the ancient monarchy of David in all its pristine glory (cf. ver. 4). To do this now that matters had gone so far would be as great a moral miracle as the cleaving of the waters of the Red Sea, and the Jordan, and the destruction of Sennacherib's army, were physical ones. But God would do that if but the wicked king would turn from his wickedness and execute righteousness and judgment. 2. *The mighty compulsion of fear.* Thus he would *drive* them off from their present evil ways. See the terrible threatenings of ver. 5, etc. What a picture the prophet draws of calamity and of shame, which would be theirs if they did "not hear these words"! And to prevent the force of this threat being diminished, he distinctly warns them that his affection for them and the joy he ever had in them will not hold him back from doing what he said. They had been as Gilead and as Lebanon for beauty, fertility, majesty—his choice possession, his precious heritage; nevertheless his wrath would go forth against them if they refused his words. And this appeal to the King of Judah is like the Divine appeal addressed to sinful men now. What promises to draw men to himself, what threatenings to drive them from their sins, the Bible is filled with! So intent is the Divine mind upon righteousness. In face of this earnestness of God in this matter, what fools they must be who make a "mock at sin"!

III. Why he thus pleads. Because of: 1. *His love of righteousness.* It is the element in which God lives and moves and has his being. He cannot live in an atmosphere of unrighteousness. It is hateful to him. Righteous men feel thus; how much more, therefore, the righteous God! 2. *His love of men.* How would a father feel towards any one who was ever causing distress and ruin to his children? How he would detest such a person! And, on the other hand, how would he desire that which ever furthers his children's good! Thus God must, out of love for us his children, hate that which ever hurts and harms us, and desire that for us which ever ministers to our good. 3. *His love for the sinner.* God separates between the sinner and the sin, and whilst his love yearns over the sinner, his wrath burns against the sin. All his dealings with us are designed to effect a severance between the two. Death is the

last and most effective separater; its keen sickle cuts the last bond that binds God's children to the dominion of sin. "He that is dead hath ceased from sin." Blessed be God that it is so! His providence, his Word, conscience, the strivings of his Spirit, are all designed to the same end, and our Lord was called Jesus because he should "save his people from their sins."

IV. WITH WHAT RESULT HE PLEADS. In this case it was of no use (cf. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16, etc.). And—alas that it should be so!—it is often the same. When sin has got a certain hold on the will, no considerations will stay its course. No promises, no threats. How solemn a fact this! How it calls us to resist the beginnings of sin, to dread lest it should become such a habit of the soul as that God should say, "He is joined to his idols: let him alone"! But what is the result of God's pleading *on ourselves?* That is the question. God grant we may be able to answer it as he would desire!—C.

Ver. 10.—*Misplaced sorrow.* "Weep ye not for the dead," etc. Reference is to Josiah, the pious and patriotic King of Judah, who died deeply lamented (2 Chron. xxxv. 24, 25), being spared the pain of seeing and sharing the disgrace and suffering of his country (2 Kings xxii. 20). And by "him that goeth away" Shallum is probably meant. He was a younger son of Josiah, and was raised by the people to the throne under the name of Jehoahaz, but was soon carried captive into Egypt, never to return (2 Kings xxiii. 31—35). Taking the words of this verse generally, we note—

I. WE DO WEEP FOR THE DEAD. Not, however, in the same hopeless way in which the dead were mourned ere Christ brought life and immortality to light by the gospel. Still, though in a very real sense Christ has abolished death, we yet weep for the dead. 1. For the *beloved* dead. We can hardly comprehend how, if they be conscious, they can be happy without those they have loved here on earth. We know how much her children were to the fond mother of whom they have been bereaved, how she delighted in them and they in her, and hence we cannot see how she can be happy and blessed apart from them. And the fearful vacancy which the removal of the beloved dead causes in the circle of those who mourn them, the constant and dreary sense of irreparable loss,—all this is sufficient to make us weep for the dead. 2. And for the *holy* dead, as we think of the influence they exerted, the power for good they were to the family, the Church, the neighbourhood. 3. And *for all* who die we mourn. For life itself is a blessing: "All that a man hath will he give for his life." If, therefore, they have been cut off in the prime of their existence, their "sun gone down while it was yet day," we grieve over the possibilities of honour, happiness, and usefulness which are thus lost to them. And if they have been unbelieving and godless, we weep yet more. So far as we can see, the door of heaven is shut on them ere ever they have sought entrance there. It is a fearful thing for a man to die unforgiven, impenitent, and unbelieving. But it is not of such that mention is made in this verse. How can the thoughtful soul do aught but weep for them? But—

II. WE SHOULD AT TIMES WEEP MORE FOR THE LIVING. Great blessing as life is generally, there are times when death is less a reason for tears than life is. It is so when life is a prolonged sorrow, or shame, or suffering, or, especially, sin. Our Lord himself bade the women of Jerusalem weep not for him, but, etc. (Luke xxiii. 28). He thus declared that death—even such as his was to be—was preferable to life such as theirs would soon be. And death is a relief in cases not a few. Has not many a mother, heart-broken by the wild, wicked ways of a godless son, felt often that had he been taken from her when a little child, that sorrow had been less than his life now causes her? And our Lord said of Judas, "It had been better for that man if he had never been born." If sore sorrow can make life to be more pitiable than death—and it can—how much more grievous sin? Such a one is making the worst of both worlds. What is *our* life?

III. BUT IS NOT DEATH, FOR THE GODLY, ALWAYS PREFERABLE TO LIFE? Is it not always the living who are to be pitied? St. Paul says, "To depart and be with Christ . . . is *far better*." And the author of Ecclesiastes declares, "Better is the day of one's death than the day of one's birth." And without doubt the condition of the blessed dead is better than any earthly lot whatsoever. An old divine represents one such as saying to those who mourned him, "Weep not for me. For," he says, "con-

sider the evils I am freed from. I had a sickly, crazy body, especially toward my latter end; wearisome days and nights were appointed me. What would I have given many times for an hour's rest? But now all this is at an end. I shall be no more sick, no more pained; my head shall now ache no more. And are you sorry for this? I had my share also of worldly losses and crosses in my worldly affairs. I had one house burned over my head, and almost all that was in it, in a few minutes, and have had other cares and troubles besides; but now farewell all such cares. And are you sorry for this? You know that as long as I was able I was laborious in my particular calling. I never ate the bread of idleness, but of honest diligence; but now all that toil is over. I am got to bed, where I rest from my labours—from all my labours of that kind—never to return to them again. And will you grieve for this? A great deal of pains I have taken in travelling and attending upon holy ordinances, on sabbath days and on week-days, sometimes above and beyond my strength; but I am now where I have communion with God at the spring-head, without the conduit-pipes of ordinances. And will you grieve for this? You all of you have, and I doubt not some of you feel, a body of death. I am sure I did; and many a time it made me cry out, 'O wretched man that I am!' You know what I mean—the corrupt nature in the carnal mind, the sin that dwells in us, a proneness to evil, a backwardness to good; but death has eased me of that burden. When the health went out of the body that indwelling sin went out of the soul. There was an end of the leprosy that was in the walls. What all the praying and hearing, the sabbaths and sacraments, the care and watchfulness, of forty years would not do, death has done at one blow. Weep not for me, then. I had daily grief in my heart for my own sins, for the sins of others, and for the afflictions of my friends, and for the troubles of the Church of God; but now all tears, even those of godly sorrow, are wiped away from mine eyes. Therefore let none be in yours upon my account. And, lastly, the bitterness of death is past with me. I have shot the gulf; that last enemy, that son of Anak, is vanquished, and I am triumphing. 'O Death, where is thy sting?' And, therefore, weep not for me. But this is not all. If you consider the happiness I am entered into, that fair palace in which death was but a dark entry, you would not weep for me, but rejoice rather. Would you know where I am? I am at home in my Father's house, in the mansion prepared for me there. I am where I would be, where I have long and often desired to be; no longer on a stormy sea, but in a safe and quiet harbour. Would you know how it is with me? I am made perfect in holiness. Would you know what I am doing? I see God. I see him as he is; not as through a glass darkly, but face to face. I am in the sweet enjoyment of my blessed Redeemer, whom my soul loved and for whose sake I was willing to part with all. Would you know what company I keep? Blessed company, better than the best on earth. Here are holy angels and the spirits of the just made perfect. I am set down 'with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God,' with blessed Paul, and Peter, and James, and John, and all the saints. And here I meet with many of my old acquaintance that I fasted and prayed with, who got before me hither. And, lastly, will you consider that this is to continue? It is a garland that never withers, a crown that fadeth not away."

IV. STILL WE ARE TO CHOOSE LIFE, IF IT BE GOD'S WILL. St. Paul did so; and we all, notwithstanding the blessed revelation of the gospel, desire life. And it is a natural and lawful desire. God has placed us here; he has visited us here; he has given us something to enjoy and something to do here. He expects us to value what he has bestowed. Christ did not desire that his disciples should be taken out of the world, but only kept from its evil. Paul desired to abide in the flesh, even when he was ripe for glory, and they are the healthiest Christians who in this matter tread in his track.

V. HOW, THEN, SHOULD THE TWO CONDITIONS OF LIFE AND DEATH BE REGARDED BY US? Are we, as this verse implies, and as is the common way, to count death a great misfortune? Certainly not. The world does, but the believer in Christ should not. Then, on the other hand, should we count life a misfortune, and weep and moan over it? As certainly not. In morbid, unhealthy, and therefore unhappy moods (cf. ch. xx. 14—18), a man may long to die and to have done with the weary woefulness of his life. And at such times—and they do occur—he has felt some sort of sympathy with the ancient stoic, who said that "the best gift the gods had given us in this life was the

power of putting an end to it." But the universal instinct of man condemns this, and life is valued even for its own sake, and so it ought to be. "All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come"—such should be the soul's language, even under the heaviest trial. But the right regard of life and death is that of St. Paul. He was "willing to wait, but ready to go" (Phil. i. 23, 24). To be in his "strait" is the best position for us. To be evenly balanced between the two desires for life and for death—that is the happiest mood in which a man can be. For the desire of life greatly to preponderate is to come under that fear of death which makes some "all their lifetime subject to bondage." And a preponderating desire for death is certainly not good. The strait of St. Paul is the place. God bring and keep us there! His desire for the "far better" lot of companionship with Christ was met and counteracted by his desire to glorify Christ in life through being helpful to his brethren, for whom it was "more needful" that he should abide in the flesh. And so he was kept in equilibrium, as it were, by these opposed forces, and the result was, as it ever will be, a saintly and devoted life. Paul's "strait" is the only easy position on the earth. Oh, to be in it! If you are held by both of these bonds you will not fear a fall on either side. "Although your life, instead of being in your Father's hands, were at the disposal of your worst enemy, in his utmost effort to do you harm he would be shut up between these two—either to keep you a while longer in Christ's work or send you sooner to Christ's presence. That were indeed a charmed life that should tremble evenly in the blessed balance. This way, we shall do good to men; that way, we shall be with the Lord." Weep not, then, either for the blessed dead or for the holy living; bemoan neither, but bless God for both. But we may weep sore for him that goeth away an exile from God, never in this life, so far as we can see, to return. That sorrow is just; all other is misplaced.—C.

Ver. 13.—*The Nemesis of oppression.* "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness!" It is one of the many precious characteristics of the Bible that it ever represents God as the Avenger of the poor and oppressed. It tells over and over again how God "plentifully rewardeth the proud doer." And it is interesting and most instructive to note the manner in which God does this. Not so much by direct punitive inflictions of his wrath as by the results of those laws according to which his universe is ordered. That law of his universe is against the oppressor, and sooner or later overtakes and overwhelms him.

> "Though the mills of God grind slowly,
> Yet they grind exceeding small."

Now, here, in these verses, we have a Divine denunciation of oppression: "Woe unto him," etc.! And we note—

I. THERE HAS BEEN, AND YET IS, OPPRESSION. We trust that there is far less of it than once there was, but that it has disappeared we cannot affirm. Here, in our own land of liberty, we may know but little of it, but in the lands of the East, its original home, it prevails still to terrible extent. And the ancient kings of Israel were sorely tempted to allow themselves in it, and often did so, and would have more largely had it not been for the perpetual protest maintained against it by the prophets of God. But if we feel, as we do, that a tyrant and an oppressor would meet but with short shrift in such a liberty-loving land as our own, how was it that oppression became so easy and so common in other lands? Therefore note—

II. THE CAUSES OF OPPRESSION. These will be most readily seen by noticing the lands wherein it has most prevailed. It has ever been where the earth has brought forth fruit of itself abundantly and without demanding much labour from the cultivator. And these lands, with scarce an exception, lie along that belt of the earth's surface which reaches from the East Indies and on westward to Mexico and Peru. It includes the Euphrates valley, Egypt, and then, crossing the Atlantic, it comprises the extinct civilizations of Equatorial America. It may be remarked in passing that Judah and Jerusalem were, at the time of Jeremiah's prophecy, in alliance with Egypt, one of these lands of oppression, and whence the evil lesson would be easily learnt. But it will be asked, Wherefore was oppression more rife in these lands than in others? It

has never been so in Northern countries as in these more favoured lands. The explanation lies in such facts as these: 1. All these lands have abundance of heat and moisture. The tropical sun furnishes the one and their magnificent rivers the other. And sometimes, in addition to these rivers, if not in place of them, as in the Gulf of Mexico, a large extent of coast-line ensures that vapours shall arise plentifully from the sea, which, descending on the already heated soil, provides the moisture it needs. 2. In consequence of all this the soil becomes very fruitful, and yields such abundance, and that with so little cost of labour, that it permits the formation of a leisure class, who subsist on its superfluous wealth. 3. These have become the intelligent and learned, and so the powerful, classes. 4. Meanwhile the wage-receiving population has multiplied greatly, and the wage fund having to be spread over so much larger surface, the share of each labourer has become less and less. 5. Here, then, on the one hand is a vast swarm of impoverished people, and as ignorant as they are poor, and on the other a rich, intelligent, and therefore powerful minority. And as the rich grew richer and richer the poor grew poorer and poorer, and gradually sank down, as in these countries they have ever done, into a mass of slaves, the ready victims of the oppressors' power. No doubt other forces were at work at the same time to favour the growth of this oppression—the superstition of the people and the enervating influence of the climate. But thus oppression grew, and its fruits are still visible in the huge Pyramids, temples, palaces, and the like, which remain to show the abundance of labour and the prodigality with which it was used. 6. But in the colder climes of the North the more niggard soil demands continuous, careful, and laborious cultivation, and thus the growth of population was checked and the distribution of wealth became more equal; and at the same time the rugged soil seemed to impart its character to those who cultivated it, and rendered it impossible that such men should ever become the passive victims of oppression. And so, whilst the soft, luxurious climes such as those referred to have never been favourable to the development of the people inhabiting them, those more stern and inhospitable regions, where toil, severe and continued, is necessary would men live, have nurtured races of men who, more than any others, have approached the true ideal of manhood. But whilst the facts now noted became the occasion, opportunity, and temptation to oppression, other laws have been at work, securing that, where this temptation has been yielded to, as it has been so often, there the oppressed shall ere long be avenged. Note—

III. THE NEMESIS OF OPPRESSION. There is such an avenger. For oppression ever kills patriotism and loyalty. What can a horde of wretched slaves care for a country or a rule which has never been other than horribly cruel to them and theirs? Patriotism and loyalty are the offspring of freedom and righteous rule, but never of the oppressor's rule. And thus, sooner or later, "woe" ever cometh "to him who buildeth his house by unrighteousness." For when such a land is invaded, or insurrection arises, or in any way the authority of the rulers is threatened, they have no support in the people who are altogether indifferent as to who their rulers may be, and feel that almost any change must be for the better. See this illustrated in the revolt under Jeroboam, whereby Israel was for ever separated from Judah; in the fall of Nineveh and of Babylon, and in the oft-recurring revolutions and invasions amid the dynasties and thrones of the East (cf. also Buckle's 'History of Civilization' for further illustration). Thus in nature and in providence, as well as in his written Word, God has pronounced "woe" on oppression and the oppressor. Learn from all this: 1. To accept gratefully the sterner conditions of life which may be appointed for us. Sunny skies, warm climates, and prolific soils nurture slaves rather than men. No cross, no crown, is a universal law. 2. Adore and trust in that God who has said so emphatically that he will judge the poor and needy, and hurl the oppressors from their seats. 3. Remember that the woe against unrighteousness falls on *every* house that is built thereby.—C.

Vers. 13—19.—*Son and father: a sad contrast.* A wicked son. Jehoiakim is not only reproached with his wickedness, but reminded of the very different conduct of his honoured father. The contrast is very striking, varied, and instructive. It is seen—

I. IN THE PARENTAGE OF THE TWO PRINCES. Jehoiakim had the great advantage of being the son of an eminently good father. All the impulse and help that could come from such a fact was his. Josiah, on the other hand, was the son of a pre-eminently bad

man—of King Amon, of whom it was said, "Amon sinned more and more." Yet, in spite of his godly parentage, Jehoiakim became so evil, whilst Josiah, notwithstanding his evil parentage, became so good. T. Fuller, noting in connection with the genealogies of our Lord a similar fact, quaintly remarks, "I find a good father had a bad son; that is ill news for me: but I find also that a bad father had a good son; that is good news for my son." For further consideration of facts like these, see homily (*infra*) on "Exceptional facts in the law of transmission of character."

II. IN THEIR CONDUCT. Jehoiakim lived in splendour amid the misery of the nation, and amused himself with building palaces when the whole land was ground down by heavy taxation (cf. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 3; 2 Kings xxiii. 25). He also took the people's forced labour without pay for these buildings, in violation of Lev. xix. 13; Deut. xxiv. 14, 15 (cf. also vers. 13—15). But Josiah his father did "judgment and justice;" "he judged the cause of the poor and needy" (ver. 15).

III. IN CHARACTER. Jehoiakim's is summed up in the short, stern sentence, "He did evil in the sight of the Lord his God" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 5). And the facts above noted show his rapacity, cruelty, and oppression. But what a contrast to what his father Josiah was (cf. 2 Chron. xxxiv.)!

IV. IN HAPPINESS. With all his tyranny Jehoiakim could not command happiness for himself. The mutterings of the thunder of the Divine judgments were continually being heard, and the rebukes of the prophets of God, together with those of his conscience, which could not have been silent, and the sullen discontent of his people, all combined to haunt his palace with omens of wretchedness and to fill his heart with fear. On the other hand, it is said of King Josiah that he "did eat and drink, and it was well with him;" the meaning of which is, that he was no ascetic, that he enjoyed life and lived prosperously and joyously. It is ever so. "In keeping of God's commandments there is great reward"—in the sunshine of the soul which comes from the consciousness of the Divine approval, and the testimony of a clear conscience, and the love and esteem of those over whom rule is exercised.

V. IN THEIR DEATH. The actual circumstances of Jehoiakim's death are not declared. But sufficient hints are given to show that his sun went down in clouds and darkness, that his end was miserable. "According to one account," says Stanley, "his memory was held in detestation; there were no funeral dirges over him, as there had been over his father and brother, but his corpse was thrown out, like that of a dead ass (cf. ver. 18), outside the walls of Jerusalem, exposed to the burning sun by day and the biting frost by night. And this prophetic curse was darkened with a yet deeper hue by the legend which described how, on the skin of the dead corpse, as it thus lay exposed, there appeared in distinct Hebrew characters the name of the demon Codonazer, to whom he had sold himself. He remained fixed in the recollections of his countrymen as the last example of those cruel, selfish, luxurious princes, the natural product of Oriental monarchies, the disgrace of the monarchy of David." But of King Josiah the record is far otherwise. "So mournful a death had never occurred in the Jewish annals. All the population of the city and the kingdom attended the funeral. There was an elegy over the departed king, probably as pathetic as that which David had sung over Saul and Jonathan. It was by Jeremiah, the most plaintive of the prophets, who then first appears on the scene of public acts. Long afterwards was that sad day remembered, both as it was celebrated on the field of battle and at Jerusalem. The lamentation of Jeremiah was preserved in the memory of the male and female minstrels as a national institution, even till long after the return from the Captivity. Every family shut itself up and mourned apart. In the prospect of the heaviest calamity that could befall the nation, this was the mourning which recurred to them, mourning as one mourneth for his only son, in bitterness as one is in bitterness for his firstborn. The childless mother laid herself down to die; the sun of her life went down as at midday, as in the total eclipse of that fatal year. Josiah was the last royal hero of Israel." Such are some of the contrasts presented by these two careers of the son and father. They teach us: 1. That whilst we should be thankful for the blessings of a pious parentage, we are not to presume upon it as if it were a sure safeguard or a certain prophecy of what our end shall be. 2. That should it be our lot to be the child of ungodly parents, the same grace that made Josiah what he was can surmount all early disadvantages, and make us far other and better than what our start in life may have led men to expect. He

who, as did Josiah, will set himself whilst he is yet young to seek the Lord shall surely find him, and also that he who honours God, God will honour.—C.

Ver. 18.—*Exceptional facts in the law of transmission of character.* "Concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah King of Judah." The law is that like begets like. It is so physically and mentally to large extent, and morally and spiritually as well. Generally, blessed be God, the children of his servants become his servants too. And, on the other hand, the habit of sin in the parent is reproduced in the child, so that we have criminal *classes*, hereditary drunkards, profligates, and much else of a similar sad sort. But the law has frequent exceptions on both sides. The two names in this verse are both of them instances of such exception. Now, how are we to account for them? We have frequent instances in the Old Testament. The sons of "Aaron the saint of the Lord;" of Eli, the devout high priest; of Samuel, the upright judge. What a set David's children were! And here we have Josiah the good, father of the infamous Jehoiakim. But we have nothing of this in the New Testament. It does not seem to be recognized there that the children of the godly can be otherwise than godly themselves. Even when one of the parents was an unbeliever, a heathen, the faith of the other was held to have such virtue that of their children St. Paul says, "Now are your children holy." We have very many instances of whole households being believers, but none of the children of believers being other than what their parents were. Would to God it were always so now! And, on the other hand, we have, as in the cases of the pious Hezekiah, son of the wicked Ahaz, and Josiah, son of Amon, who "sinned more and more," instances of ungodly parents having godly children. Now, how are these to be accounted for? Consider the sad case—

I. THAT GODLY PARENTS SHOULD HAVE UNGODLY CHILDREN. We are accustomed to assent to the possibility and frequency of this as an unquestionable truth. But is it so? We would ask two questions with a view to a better understanding of the matter. 1. Is it meant that godly parents who have been both able and anxious to train their children for God may yet have ungodly children? (1) *Some godly parents are not thus able.* Probably Josiah was not. The might of evil, the fearful sweep and rush of its tide, was probably in those days, and in that court and city, too great for even the godly king to withstand, and it bore away his son before his eyes. For a prince in that age to be godly was almost a miracle. And that which we have suggested as perhaps and probably accounting for the ungodliness of Josiah's son may explain some similar cases now. (2) *But more are not really anxious about it.* If parents were as anxious about the godliness of their children as they are about their health, education, and start in life, and took as much pains to secure it, such cases as we are considering would be more rare than they are. (3) *The children of believers ought not to need conversion.* They should grow up in the kingdom of God in which their baptism declared them to be already members. But there is a deadly doctrine all too influential in thousands of Christian homes, that children must go into the far country first, and there live more or less prodigal-like, and then afterwards come to themselves, be converted, and return. And of course what is expected of such children happens, as far as the going away is concerned: not always the return. But why should they ever go into that far country? The elder son, though, like Jonah and many a devout Jew (cf. Paul's "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God," etc.), he was perplexed at the Father's gracious way of dealing with repentant sinners, was the elder son still who had been ever obedient, and to whom the father said, "Son, *thou* art ever with me, and all that I have is thine;" as much as to say, "Why do you complain of my treatment of your poor wretched brother? Yours is far the better lot; you are so much the happier that *you* assuredly ought not to complain." *So* did the father "entreat him," and, no doubt, successfully. But from most mournful forgetfulness of the fact that there is no need that our children should go away, and that they ought not to go away, many parents let them go, or at least acquiesce in their going as something that is inevitable. Hence, as it is of no use to be anxious and guard against the inevitable, they take no such pains about their children's godliness as they do about those other more temporal matters which concern their welfare, and which they know do very largely depend upon the endeavours they, their parents, put forth. They cannot avoid desiring

their children's highest good, and in family prayers and private ones it is remembered before God. But the energies of the will are never roused up to seek it as other and lesser things are sought. Would to God they were! Now, we say that if you have a case of real ungodliness in the children of the godly, it is to be accounted for by the fact that either the parents were not able or else not really anxious to train them for God. More often the latter is the sad truth. 2. But we ask, also—What is meant by ungodly? Do you mean those who for a while go astray, but afterwards come back? Of course, if the sin be like Manasseh's, very flagrant and long-continued, then, even though there may be the after coming back, as there was in his case, it must be allowed that such are ungodly. But that stern word should generally be reserved for a life wholly without God, and not be cast carelessly on those who, like so many of God's saints have done, may fall yet rise again; still less on children because of their natural thoughtlessness and incapacity of thinking seriously for a long time about anything. God forbid they should! But if the word "ungodly" be confined, as it should be, to those whose lives are wholly or for the most part without God, then we affirm that such children do not spring from parents both able and really anxious to train them for God. To affirm that they are would be to contradict: (1) *God's word; e.g.* "Train up a child . . . and when he is old he *shall not* depart from it;" "Ask, and ye shall receive;" and the many promises to answer prayer. Now, we know that the godliness of our children must be in accordance with the Divine will, therefore all these promises must be set aside if, etc. And St. Paul bids parents train their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" and he never hints that such training may after all be thrown away. What was the constant baptism of households but an indication of the apostolic and primitive belief that, *as a matter of course,* in the faith of the father the children would share? The promise was to them *and their children.* (2) *Analogies.* If there be real pains to train children in a given manner educationally, socially, morally—as there is on the part of parents—success is gained nearly always. And so it would be in things spiritual. There is no slight done to the truth of the Holy Spirit's agency in this great matter, but all that is urged is that we obey the laws of the Spirit. (3) *Facts.* No instance can be shown where there has been *real* solicitude and opportunity on the part of the parents that their children should be godly, of such children having been permanently ungodly. There has not been permanent failure, though there may have been temporary. It would be horrible to believe that God had drawn forth the earnest yearning of the parent's heart for the salvation of their children—a yearning attested by all loving and consistent endeavour in the way of example, education, influence, direct and indirect—and yet, after all, such desire to be miserably and for ever disappointed. We will not believe it. And, on the other hand, there are innumerable instances which show that it is the rule that godly parents should have godly children. Nearly all the godly to-day are the children of the godly. Instead of the fathers have risen up the children. Such is God's blessed order, and we should be slow to believe that he ever sets it aside. It is well for every father and mother to take it to heart that if their children turn out ungodly the fault is, in all probability, theirs. But now note the opposite case—

II. THAT UNGODLY PARENTS SHOULD HAVE GODLY CHILDREN. We have referred above to such cases. And they frequently occur. The chaff nourishes the wheat in its bosom. The ungodly home nurtures godly children. How is this? 1. Sometimes it is because ungodly parents are more careful than even others about the companionships of their children. They try to gain a good for their children which they know they have not for themselves. Many a bad parent wishes his child to be good. 2. Sometimes the children, seeing how wretched sin makes their home, are led to seek "a more excellent way" for themselves. The ways of godliness seem like paradise to the victim of the ungodliness of many a home. How Sunday school children—many of them from terrible homes—love their school! 3. God willing to show them that there is nothing too hard for the Lord. Can a man bring forth a clean thing out of an unclean? Certainly not. But God can, and in these instances does. And the reasons for such gracious action may be: (1) Pity for the children. (2) Instruction to his Church. They are to despair of none. (3) The glory of his Name. Hence he snatches these, trophies as it were, from the very gates of hell; plucks them as brands

from the burning. 4. *Conclusion.* Let us give God thanks that he does this. That Amons have Josiahs for children; Ahaz, Hezekiah; Henry VIII., Edward VI. That from such a court as that of the previous reigns our own beloved queen should have come. God be praised for this and every such instance!—C.

Ver. 29.—*The impassioned cry of God to man.* This cry, "O earth, earth, earth," etc., sounds out like the alarm of fire, or some bitter cry of distress. It startles by its earnestness, arrests and demands attention, and compels us to inquire into its cause. Note, therefore—

I. THE OCCASION OF IT. This will show us what word of the Lord's is meant. It was wrung out from the prophet's heart by the sight of the calamities now so swiftly coming upon his beloved land. To think of that land overrun by the cruel armies of Babylon, the holy city burnt with fire, the temple of the Lord desecrated and destroyed, and her kings, one after another, ending their days in misery; Josiah, the happiest of them, slain in battle; Shallum, his son, exiled in Egypt, and dying there; Jehoiakim carried off by Nebuchadnezzar, and perishing at a very early age, and in some miserable manner—"buried with the burial of an ass" (ver. 19); Jeconiah, with his mother, seized by the Chaldeans, torn from his home and taken to Babylon, and there living and dying in drear exile—he the last of the royal race, after whom none other filled the throne of David. It was the sight of all these calamities, and the shame and disgrace attached to them, and especially the remembrance of the cause of them all, that extorted this loud cry of pain, this impassioned appeal. (Cf. Stanley's 'Lectures on Jewish Church,' Lect. xl., for history of period.) Would we realize the prophet's distress, let us endeavour to imagine that the circumstances were our own; that it was our own land, people, temples, princes, thus threatened, thus exiled, thus miserably perishing. What should we think then? No wonder that Jeremiah was "the weeping prophet;" that he felt the woes of his country to be so great that he could appeal to all who witnessed them, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if," etc. (Lam. i. 12). And, like Dives in hell, who bethought himself of his five careless, godless brethren, and would have them warned; so the prophet of God, knowing how all the world was heedless of God, even as his own land had been, to its sore cost, now passionately cries, "O earth, earth, earth," etc. He would have sinners everywhere take heed, by Judah's awful fate, of how God will surely punish sin. The word he would have them hear was the word of warning. This is the lesson which the occasion of this appeal teaches us. There are many other words which God addresses to us—words of mercy, promise, instruction, and the like; but unless we take heed to this word and dread the sin which works such woe, all the others will be but lightly esteemed. And that which makes this word yet more emphatic is the position of privilege and honour and security which those now judged of God once occupied (cf. ver. 24). Coniah was as God's signet-ring, precious, honourable, and guarded with all care. But it made no difference: as a ring might be plucked off and cast away, so now God would root out and cast away these evil-doers, though once so dear to him. It matters not, then, what position of privilege, profession, reputation, service, and the like we fill, disobedience to God's commands will cast us down and work our ruin. "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall;" "Be not high-minded, but fear;" "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."

II. THE MANNER OF IT. This will show how disregarded this word of the Lord too commonly is. There would have been no need of such impassioned appeal if men were eager to listen. But the cry has to be loud, repeated, and ever louder still. The world has but to whisper; the lowest accents of pleasure, self-interest, and often of sin, are caught in a moment and obeyed. But the word of the Lord finds no such reception ready. How different this from all other creatures of God!—from the holy angels that "excel in strength and do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word," down to the meanest and humblest of all the works of his hands. Man alone stands out in disgraceful exception. One should have thought that the near approach of danger would quicken the sense of fear and lead to increased caution. As when the ship nears a perilous coast how frequent the soundings, how sharp the look out! But the ungodly, the nearer they come to the shore of the, for them, awful other world, the less concerned they seem to be, the more dull of hearing the word of the Lord. Like the cold, which

benumbs and paralyzes the more intense it becomes. Hence, if man is to be awakened from his spiritual slumber, God must cry aloud, lift up his voice with strength, as here, "O earth, earth, earth," etc. Does not our own conscience bear witness to the truth of our backwardness to hear God's word which the manner of this appeal implies. How often God has called to us, by his Word, his Spirit, his providence, and we have not answered!

III. THOSE TO WHOM IT IS ADDRESSED. Thus we shall learn the importance and universality of this word. For by the earth which is appealed to we may understand: 1. *Inanimate nature.* As Isa. i., "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth." As if the prophet would call on the very stones to cry out and attest the momentous importance of this word of the Lord; as if the earth might be trusted to hear though man would not. And is not this word important, in these days especially, when the sense of sin has become so feeble, and men trifle with it as a matter of indifference? It is every day ensnaring souls and hardening them more and more. And the time for awakening them is short. The crash of the gates shutting against them will arouse them, but then it will be too late. When the ship has struck, the shock of the blow is but the prelude to the cry of despair, which tells that there is no hope, for there is no time to escape. Yes, men need to be warned, need to hear this word of the Lord; and woe to them whose duty it is to declare it if they fail so to do. 2. But earth or land tells of the people who dwell thereon—*the inhabitants of the world.* The prophet appeals to them all, not to a mere section of them. Not to Palestine, still less Judah only, but to the whole earth. For it is a word which all need to give heed to: the believer, that his compassion for sinners may be aroused; the undecided, that his indecision may come to an end; and the ungodly, that they may tremble with a holy fear. Lastly—

IV. THE AUTHOR OF IT. This will show to us the heart of love that utters itself in it. The stern "threats of God do not lessen his love but enhance it. They are the crowning marks of mercy. A shepherd, foreseeing a snowstorm that will drift deep into the hollows of the hill, where the silly sheep, seeking refuge, would find a grave, prepares shelter in a safe spot and opens its door. Then he sends his dog after the wandering flock to frighten them into the fold. The bark of the dog behind them is a terror to the timid sheep; but it is at once the sure means of their safety and the mark of the shepherd's care. Without it the prepared fold and the open entrance might have proved of no avail. The terror which the shepherd sent into the flock gave the finishing touch to his tender care, and effect to all that had gone before it. Such precisely, in design and effect, are the terrible things of God's Word" (Arnot). It is because God is so intent on moving us from impending woe that he utters his impassioned appeals, and draws, in such terrible descriptions, the portraiture of his wrath. A mother seeking her child lost in the bush does not once whisper its name, but she repeats it again and again, with shrill, clear, loving, strong cry. And it is the like cry of God that is heard in all his warning words, awful as some of them are. God wants that we should be saved.

CONCLUSION. But by the earth which is bidden hear the word of the Lord, our thoughts have suggested to them the company of the dead. They are in the graves. They are gone "earth to earth;" and concerning them our Lord says, "Behold, the hour cometh when all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth" (John v. 25—28). What shall be the manner of that awakening, when the trumpet shall sound and the cry, "O earth, earth, earth," etc., is again heard? What? Shall it be unto life and immortality, or to shame and everlasting contempt? All depends on how we hear the Word of the Lord now. May he grant that we may both hear it and hear it aright!—C.

Vers. 1—9.—*A king addressed in mingled promise and warning.* Here is the announcement of what Jehovah requires from the king and his executive in particular; although it will be seen that exactly the same principles apply to the conduct of the king as to the meanest of his subjects. But inasmuch as the king was in circumstances of special power, responsibility, and temptation, it was just what might be expected from the Divine consideration for every man's position, that the king should receive special counsels. If he acted wrongly, his conduct would be quoted and his example followed by every one who wished to act in the same way. This warning message here,

however, so timely and so plain, would take away all ground from those who thought they might do what a king did. Jeremiah, preaching righteousness to the meanest of the people, could insist on this, that he asked no more from them than he had been specially enjoined to ask from the very king himself. Note—

I. THOSE WHO WERE TO BE APPROACHED. This is a message for the king and for such people as live in palaces. Remarkable to notice how God's messengers have been brought into contact with the kings and grandees of the earth. Divinely guided, they have been able to find their way where others, even with large worldly influence, have been excluded. So Moses comes to deal with Pharaoh; Jeremiah with this king here; John the Baptist with Herod; Jesus with Pontius Pilate; Paul with Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. As God can make a way for his servants out of prisons, so he can also make a way for them into palaces. And once entered into the palace, the prophet was to address himself first and chiefly to the king. Kings have many counsellors, and their temptation is to say what may be agreeable to the royal ears. This king, maybe, had not one honest, disinterested man about him; if so, all the more need for Jeremiah's counsels. Further, the king is reminded of a former distinguished occupant of his throne. In pondering this expression, "the throne of David," there was much to fill the heart of a king, who was also a true man, with noble purpose and endeavour. David, even with all his transgressions and vicissitudes, was a fine example of the success and glory following on sensitiveness to God's commandments. If David had not been enabled to do so much that was good, his successors would not have found scope for the doing of so much that was evil. Then from the king there is a turning to those around them. Kings cannot help being a great deal influenced and even limited by those who stand next to them. God, who knows all conditions of life, sees the peculiar difficulties of kings and sympathizes with them. One of the greatest troublers of David's life was his headstrong servant Joab.

II. GOD'S DEMAND UPON THOSE WHO HOLD POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY. He sent his servant to show how a king's government may become stable, glorious, and happy. Nothing is said about victorious armies and increased territories. These were the things the Gentiles sought after, but God wished the powers and opportunities of the kings of his people to be used for far other ends. There was plenty of room for this king to make conquests, and conquests not easily made. He had his own selfish inclinations to repress, and the selfish proceedings of many of his people to undo. He is commanded to execute judgment and righteousness. He must not neglect the ever necessary functions of a judge; righteous principles must rule in all his decisions; and thirdly, he must see that the decisions are carried into effect. How can any human government be approved of God unless there are both righteous laws and a resolute execution of them? The king must also be the vigilant guardian of the weak and defenceless. From out of his palace his servants should go forth commissioned to champion those who are unable to protect themselves. Never should a strong man more exult in his strength than when it enables him to become sword and shield to the feeble. A righteous government will not wait until it is dinned with importunities. In many instances the king was the only one who could rescue from the hand of the oppressor. Every temporary occupant of the throne of David was in his turn a type of that abiding King and anointed One, of whom it is true in the highest sense that salvation is in no other (Acts iv. 12). And as the king was to deliver from the oppressor, so he was to be careful not to oppress. So subtle is selfishness in its influence upon us that we need to be peculiarly on our guard against taking advantage of the weak. Lastly, the king is not to be a shedder of innocent blood. He must not be weakly indulgent as to the blood of the guilty. If a man by the laws of the land has deserved to die the death, there must be no tampering with just deserts. And so, on the other hand, a king was not to allow his fury free course against some one who had offended him, and seek his death simply to gratify resentment. It is easy to see that the despotic character of Eastern kings in ancient times would make this injunction against the shedding of innocent blood to have an application such as it fails to have with the constitutional governments we are accustomed to.

III. The prophet has to point out that ACCORDING TO THE RECEPTION OF THESE COUNSELS THERE WILL BE CORRESPONDING RESULTS. The king is plainly told that it is for him to determine whether his reign shall be glorious and his palace continue and

increase in splendour. The king who can rise above all temptations to mere outward show; who can be gloriously independent of selfish traditions and examples; who can show the spirit of a real king by living for his people, instead of expecting his people to drudge and sweat and groan for him;—this is the king whom God will reward. The reward will come in the very way such a man will desire. His throne will become more stable for his successors; the land more prosperous and better worth living in. On the other hand, if there is negligence of these counsels, the ruin of the negligent ruler will be correspondingly terrible. No man, however great his resources, can build up anything glorious and satisfactory on a foundation of disobedience to God. Against that tree of temporal prosperity which has been planted in selfishness and nurtured in selfishness, a consecrated axe is laid—laid at the root of the tree to cut it down altogether. The greatness of the prosperity measures the greatness of the ruin. We must delight in the Law of the Lord if we would be as trees of God's own planting; and then, assuredly, no weapon formed against us can prosper.—Y.

Vers. 10—12.—*The mistakes of the mourner.* Two persons are presented here as furnishing occasions for lamentation. One is Josiah, King of Judah, lately dead; the other is Shallum, his son, just succeeding him, and taken into captivity by Pharaoh-Nechoh, King of Egypt. The prophet, therefore, looks upon his countrymen as sorrowing both for the dead and the living. Moreover, he sees that, in accordance with all the natural tendencies of the human heart, a deeper sorrow is professed for the dead than for him who has been taken away into a foreign land. And yet this was not according to the necessities of the position. The captivity of Shallum, rightly considered, was a more distressing event than the death of his father. It may be truly said that we always exaggerate death as a calamity. In the instance of Josiah, his comparatively early death—for he seems to have been no more than forty when he perished in battle—produced peculiar feelings of pity. He seemed to be one whose "sun had gone down while it was yet day." But we must remember that this very death had been prophetically spoken of as a blessing (2 Kings xxii. 20): "Thine eyes shall not see all the evil that I will bring upon this place." For one who is faithfully trying to serve God, it can matter very little when he dies. His service goes on. A man may benefit the cause of God more by the faithful testimony of a Christian death than by fifty years of continued work. If a man has come to death by his own folly and recklessness, we do well to grieve over him; but death in itself is an event which we may only too easily come to look at in a distorted, exaggerated way. There are things far worse than death. Again and again it happens that people fall into severe illnesses, recover, and then return into the world, only to find that the years seemingly added in mercy to life have become a period of disaster and shame. In the midst of a world of misery, we cannot be too pitiful, too sympathetic, but we must be careful not to make erroneous estimates as to what most deserves our pity and sympathy. We can do nothing for the dead. When the last breath is breathed, there is straightway a great gulf fixed between us and them. But we may do much for the living, if only in a self-denying spirit we keep them in our recollection and strive to help them; seizing every opportunity, and economizing our energies so as to make the most of it.—Y.

Vers. 13—19.—*A right aim pursued by a wrong and cruel method.* I. A RIGHT AIM. What this aim was is indicated in ver. 15. Jehoiakim wanted to be a king. In one sense he was a king, without any effort of his own, for he had succeeded to the position and honours of his father. But very rightly he sought to be reckoned a king by virtue of something more than mere rank. He wished to do something which would mark off his reign as peculiar. He wished something more to be said of him than that he merely reigned so many years. His office would have made him to be remembered in a certain way, but he preferred that his office should be a mere vantage-ground to give him the chance of showing what he could do as a man. Bad as Jehoiakim was, he had individuality of character—a strong feeling that a king was bound to do something more than just sit on a throne, wear a crown, and hold a sceptre in his hand. There is nothing pleasing to God in our being mere colourless copies of those who have gone before us. Jehoiakim was right in so far as he wished to go in a way that was more than the mere beaten track of others.

II. A WRONG NOTION OF HOW THIS AIM WAS TO BE ATTAINED. Jehoiakim thought he could get great renown for himself individually by building a splendid palace. There would be such a contrast between it and the common houses in Jerusalem as to make people ask at once, "Whose abode is *that?*" and, in so acting, Jehoiakim showed that he understood pretty well the way in which popular opinion is most easily influenced. The way of the world is to estimate men by the visible splendours they can gather around them. One who lives in a wide house is looked at through the medium of his possessions, and thus becomes correspondingly magnified himself. But with all the worldly shrewdness of Jehoiakim, he was taking the wrong way to become really celebrated. Even supposing he had not been guilty of the peculiar wickedness rebuked in this passage, he would not have attained his end. The building of a big house sufficiently showed his ambition; but it did not of necessity show any of those peculiar powers by which men live lives that are remembered. Many of those whose fame will last as long as the world lasts, lived and died poor men. At least, they did not reside in wide houses. And thus the careers of such men, whenever they are considered, cast a permanent irony on the pursuit of mere external wealth.

III. THE PECULIAR WICKEDNESS CONSEQUENT ON THE TAKING OF THIS WRONG WAY. Jehoiakim's scheme was not only vain-glorious and delusive in itself, but very oppressive to his subjects in the carrying of it out. What we read of here makes us regard very dubiously many of the monuments of architectural power belonging to ancient civilizations. We may suspect that only too many of them were constructed by forced labour. How much of unrequited toil there must have been, not only in temples, palaces, Pyramids, but also in such plainly useful works as roads, bridges, and aqueducts! The results have been pleasing enough to the eye, and rich in giving resources to the lovers of art; but their beauty becomes only deformity, if we have reason to believe that force, fraud, and cruelty had a considerable share in the production of them. Even Christian cathedrals and churches may have been built in this way to a greater extent than we should like to think possible. There must always be a great temptation to the natural greed of man to get the largest amount of labour with the least remuneration. And this prophecy here shows that God has his eye on all such doings. His prophet sets forth principles which are the condemnation of slavery in all its forms, and by which every extortionate and greedy spirit will have to be judged.

IV. A CONTRAST WITH ONE WHO TOOK THE RIGHT WAY. Jehoiakim had been favoured with constant nearness to a good example of how a king should live and act, which made his wickedness the greater. Josiah, succeeding to a throne, had also wished to be more than a nominal king. But he had very different notions from his son as to how authority should be exerted. He was just and righteous, and paid special attention to the poor and humble, and the result was that all went well with him. Jehoiakim may have been feared, but he would be hated at the same time, or, if loved, loved only by those who found their chances in helping his pretentious schemes. Josiah was feared, but by the extortioners and knaves among his subjects. And he would be equally loved by all who, needing justice, knew that at his throne it was never sought in vain.

V. THE DISGRACEFUL END OF JEHOIAKIM'S PRIDE. He would die unregretted, and be buried like a beast. None of all who had been his associates while alive, would pay the slightest regard to him when dead. The prophecy here does not, of course, mean that God approves of such indecency to a corpse. He is simply pointing out how little selfish men may expect from their selfish associates. He who squeezes others like sponges, and throws them away when he can squeeze no more, only meets what may be expected when he comes to be thrown away in turn.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The first eight verses form the necessary conclusion of the group of discourses summarized in ch. xxi., xxii. Like Isaiah, our prophet follows up denunciation with consolation, and will have the mind rest on the sure promises of God for the Messianic

future. A part of the people has been already scattered abroad. In ch. xxiv. 8, "those who dwell in the land of Egypt" are a section no less important than "those who remain in this land;" and the Babylonian Captivity is an event only too certain to take place (comp. ver. 8). Unhappy Judah! for though not free from responsibility, it is the kings who are the prime authors of the calamity. Yet happy Judah! for "the days come" that an ideal king shall arise, even the promised Messiah. (Comp. Ezek. xxxiv., which seems like a development of this section.) Some have represented the promises of this chapter as fulfilled in the return from Babylon, with perhaps the Maccabean glories in addition. The fulfilment would in this case correspond but ill to the prediction; the context, too, is equally opposed to it. For, as Hengstenberg points out, the "gathering" and "bringing back" of Israel is in ver. 4 closely connected with the raising up of good shepherds; and, according to ver. 5, that promise is to find at any rate its culminating fulfilment in David's "righteous Branch," the Messiah. The mistake has been partly caused by a reluctance to increase the number of prophecies still awaiting their fulfilment, and partly by the false supposition that the events described must take place simultaneously (against this view, see vers. 7, 8). Hengstenberg himself thinks that the fulfilment lies in the conversion of Israel to the gospel. "Canaan had such a high value for Israel, not because it was its fatherland in the lower sense, but because it was the land of God, the place where his glory dwelt." To be in Christ is to be in the true Canaan.

Ver. 1.—**Woe be unto the pastors, etc.!** This "woe" is a pendant to the "woe" upon Jehoiakim in ch. xxii. 13. The original form of the verse shows the strong feeling with which the prophet both wrote and spoke: "Woe! shepherds who destroy," etc. By "shepherds" Jeremiah means rather the civil than the spiritual authorities, especially the kings—ποιμένες λαῶν, as Homer calls them. This is, in fact, the general Old Testament application of the term (see on ch. ii. 8). **That destroy.** If it is true of all sin that no one can calculate its issues, this is specially true of the sins of rulers. *Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi;* or, as an inspired teacher puts it, "The leaders of this people became false guides, and those whom they led were lost men" (Isa. ix. 16). How these evil shepherds "destroyed" the people we are not here told; but from ch. xxii. 3, 13, it is clear that sins of injustice, ranging from oppressive exaction to murder, are specially intended. **Scatter;** the captivities of the Jews being directly owing to the want of good government and teaching. How could the prophets stem the tide of popular corruption, when the ruling classes opposed their efforts? **The sheep of my pasture;** or, *the sheep of my pasturing*—the "pastors" are Jehovah's under-shepherds. The figure is a favourite one, especially with the psalmists of the school of Asaph (see Ps. lxxiv. 1; lxxvii. 20; lxxviii. 52 (comp. 70—72); lxxix. 13; lxxx. 1).

Ver. 2.—**The Lord God of Israel;** strictly, *Jehovah the God of Israel.* This national title of Jehovah suggests, in such a connection, that the crime of the kings is nothing short of sacrilege. **Ye have scattered,** etc.; *i.e.* been the cause of their scattering. **Have not visited them.** "To visit" often, by a natural association of ideas, means "to give attention to." By an equally natural association, it means "to fall upon, to punish." Hence, in the next clause, **I will visit upon you.** We have the same combination of meanings in Zech. x. 3.

Ver. 3.—Parallel passage, Ezek. xxxiv. 12—15. **I will gather the remnant.** For the ill usage of foreign oppressors has supplemented that of home tyrants, so that only a "remnant" is left. **And they shall be fruitful and increase.** The fertility of the Jewish race in modern times has been a frequent subject of observation, and supplies the best comment upon Jeremiah's prophecy.

Ver. 4.—**And I will set up shepherds;** *i.e.* rulers, not necessarily kings (see on next verse). **Which shall feed them.** For the evil shepherds "fed themselves, and fed not my flock" (Ezek. xxxiv. 8). **And they shall fear no more.** Ezekiel again contributes an essential feature to the description. The neglect of the shepherds left the flock exposed to the ravages of wild beasts (Ezek. xxxiv. 8). **Neither shall they be lacking.** A speaking phrase. Too many of the sheep had fallen down precipices or been carried off by lions. Yet the context rather favours a slight and palæographically natural emendation of Hitzig, "Neither shall they be terrified." The Septuagint omits the word altogether, which favours the supposition that they read as Hitzig would read, for they are apt to condonse by omitting synonyms.

Vers. 5, 6.—(Comp. the parallel passage, ch. xxxiii. 15, 16.)

Ver. 5.—**Behold, the days come. The use**

of the analogous phrase, "And it shall come to pass in that day," would lead us to suppose that this verse describes a fresh stage in the progress of events, as if the faithful shepherds (ver. 4) were to precede the "righteous Branch" (ver. 5). Such a view, however, is not very plausible, for the Messiah, according to prophecy, is to appear in the darkest of times. The prophet simply means to impress upon us the greatness of the revelation which he is about to communicate. **I will raise unto David.** The promised Messiah, then, is certainly to be of the family of David (comp. Isa. ix. 7; xi. 1; Micah v. 2). **A righteous Branch**; rather, *a righteous Plant:* the root means "to bud, or sprout." This is the first time in which the title "the Plant" is unmistakably applied to the Messianic King (possibly, but less probably, to the Messianic kings). It indicates that this great personage stands in connection with the divinely ordained and ancient royal family, but that he is in some way unique, and far surpasses his human ancestors. He "springs forth;" therefore he is not a sort of meteoric appearance, without any natural home among men, but rather the blossom of the Jewish nation, the embodiment of its highest qualities. And yet there is something extraordinary about him, for it is needful that Jehovah himself should "raise" this Plant from the almost worn-out stock of David. Note that the word rendered here in the Authorized Version "Branch" is not the same as that in the parallel passage in Isaiah (xi. 1). It is, however, the word employed in Isa. iv. 2, which is taken by many, especially the older interpreters (but with very doubtful justice), to be a prophecy of the Messiah. It is also the word used by Zechariah (iii. 8; vi. 12), as a *proper name* of the Messiah, which is one strong reason for rejecting the view mentioned above that the word rendered "the Branch," or "the Plant," is to be taken collectively as equivalent to "branches," or rather "plants" (the article is not expressed in the Hebrew). In short, this passage and the prophecies referred to in Jeremiah are exceptions to the general Old Testament usage of the Hebrew word (*çemakh*), which is elsewhere a collective term equivalent to "plantation." It is true that in ver. 4 "shepherds," in the plural, are spoken of, but there is no reason why this title should be confined to kings—it may as fairly be extended to the chief rulers under a king as the term "king" itself (see on ch. xvii. 20); and true, further, that in ch. xxxiii. 17 a continuous succession is promised of Davidic heirs to the throne, but this is not decisive in favour of the collective meaning, any more than Isaiah's later prophecy that "the [reiguing Davidic] king shall reign in righteousness" disproves the strictly Messianic reference of his earlier promise in Isa. xi. 1. All prophecy is conditional; there may have been moral reasons why a continuance of the Davidic dynasty was held out by Jeremiah at one time as a possible prospect. (It is, however, extremely probable that ch. xxxiii. 14—26 is the work of some other inspired writer; see *ad loc.*) The thirty-fourth chapter of Ezekiel, which is so closely parallel to this section, appears to interpret the prophecy of a single Messianic king (Ezek. xxxiv. 23). **And a King shall reign**; rather, *and he shall reign as king;* i.e. he shall be the realized ideal of an Israelitish king—a second David. **And prosper**; or, *and deal wisely.* There is the same doubt as to the rendering of the verb in Isa. lii. 13 *a*. The radical idea is that of wisdom, and the analogy of Isa. xi. 2 favours the alternative rendering here. **Shall execute judgment**; in contrast to the neglectful conduct of Jehoiakim (ch. xxii. 3).

Ver. 6.—**Israel shall dwell safely.** In the parallel passage (ch. xxxiii. 16) we read "Jerusalem," and there can hardly be a doubt that "Jerusalem" ought to be restored here. This is not the only instance in which, by mistake, the scribe has written "Israel" instead of "Jerusalem" (see ch. xxxii. 30, 32; li. 49; Zeph. iii. 14; Zech. xii. 1). In Zech. i. 19 the scribe discovered his mistake, and wrote the right word, "Jerusalem," after the wrong one, "Israel," but without cancelling the latter (Grätz, 'Monatsschrift,' 1880, pp. 97—101). **And this is his name whereby he shall be called.** There is a various reading, which may be rendered either, *whereby they shall call* (*him*, or *her*), or, *which they shall proclaim*, supported by the Peshito, Targum, Vulgate, and a few manuscripts (St. Jerome, too, mentions this reading). There is also a more important difference among the commentators as to the person who was to bear the name. The older Christian interpreters contended with all their might for the view that the name belonged to the Messiah, partly on real philological grounds, partly with the illegitimate theological object of obtaining a proof-text for the orthodox doctrine of the person of the Messiah and (in the case of Protestant writers) of justification. It is much to the credit of Hengstenberg that he sets this object aside, and while maintaining the Messianic reference of the pronoun, interprets the name with a single eye to the requirements of the context, "He by whom and under whom Jehovah will be our righteousness." The objection is, that in the parallel passage (ch. xxxiii. 16) Jeremiah assigns the name "Jehovah-Tsidkenu," not to the Messiah, but to Jerusalem. The prophet must be allowed to be his best interpreter,

so that we must, it would seem, at any rate, reject the Messianic reference. But then how are we to explain the pronoun? It is right to refer the parallel pronoun in ch. xxxiii. 16 to "Jerusalem," because the pronoun there is feminine, and evidently refers to a city, but it is not natural in our passage to explain "his name" of "Israel," seeing that the subject of the noun in the parallel line is, not Israel, but the Messiah. But is the text here correct? A comparison of the parallel psalms xiv. and liii., and of the corresponding chapters in Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, will show how easily errors made their way into duplicate copies of the same passage. Granting that we have such duplicate copies of this prophecy in Jeremiah, there can be no doubt which is the more original; the form of ch. xxiii. 6 has a difficulty from which ch. xxxiii. 16 is free—a difficulty of interpretation and a difficulty also of grammar. For, as Ewald has already pointed out ('Hebrew Grammar,' § 249 *b*), the contracted suffix is very rarely attached to the simple imperfect, and the clear style in which this section is written justifies us in regarding any unusual form with suspicion. "Israel" thus was probably written by mistake for "Jerusalem," and this error soon led to others—first, the omission of "her," and then the prefixing of "his name" for clearness, and (on the part of the authors of the points) the mispointing of the verb (so as to include in the form the pronoun "him"). It is some confirmation of this view that there are several other passages in which the words "Israel" and "Jerusalem" appear to have been confounded (see preceding note). Read, therefore, as in ch. xxxiii. 16, *And this is the name wherewith she shall be called.* **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**; Hebrew, *Yahveh* (Jehovah) *Tsidkēnū*. The name is formed on the analogy of other symbolic names, such as El-elohe-Israel (Gen. xxxiii. 20), Jehovah-Nissi (Exod. xvii. 15), and especially Jehovah-Shammah (Ezek. xlviii. 35), also a name of Jerusalem. These names are, in fact, sentences; Jehovah-Shammah, for instance, means "The Lord (is) there;" and the name in the present verse, "The Lord (is) our Righteousness" (Hengstenberg's view mentioned above seems less natural). It is singular that Zedekiah's name should come so near to that announced by the prophet. But there is still a difference between them. Zedekiah must mean "The Lord (is) righteousness," *i.e.* is ever faithful to his revealed principles of action. But Jehovah-Tsidkēnū may be correctly paraphrased, "The Lord is the author of our prosperity," or, more strictly, "of the justification of our claims in the sight of our enemies" (comp. Isa. xlv. 24; l. 8; liv. 17; lviii. 8; lxii. 1, 2). Similar applications of forensic language are familiar, *e.g.* "When they speak with their enemies in the gate" (Ps. cxxvii. 5).

Vers. 7, 8.—This is another of Jeremiah's repetitions (see ch. xvi. 14, 15). Either the Septuagint translator or the copyist of the Hebrew manuscript which he used appears to have thought that the passage might, therefore, be dispensed with. In the Septuagint it is placed at the end of the chapter (being possibly supplied from another Hebrew manuscript), and the form given in this version to the close of ver. 6 (Ἰωσεδὲκ ἐν τοῖς προφήταις, combining the opening words of ver. 9) shows that ver. 9 followed immediately upon ver. 6 in the Hebrew manuscript.

Vers. 9—40.—These verses form a complete prophecy, the title of which Jeremiah himself supplies in the words, "Concerning the (false) prophets" (see below); comp. ch. xlvi. 2; xlviii. 1; xlix. 1, 7, 23, 28. It is true the rendering of the Authorized Version (ver. 9), **Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets**, is not purely arbitrary; it is favoured by the exegetical tradition represented by the Hebrew accents. But it is not probable that two entirely different causes should be given for the prophet's deep emotion (see the latter part of the verse). Besides, "breaking of the heart" is nowhere a sign of anger (as Authorized Version would suggest), but either of grief (see on ch. viii. 21), or, as the context implies here, physical disturbance at the solemn message of Jehovah (comp. ch. vi. 11; xx. 9). **All my bones shake.** It is a very uncommon verb, occurring only twice elsewhere (Gen. i. 2; Deut. xxxii. 11, in Piel). **The words of his holiness**; or, *his words of holiness*; i.e. his holy words, the words of the Holy One on the unholy doings of the false prophets.

Ver. 10.—**The land is full of adulterers.** The false prophets connive at flagrant immoralities, one of which is mentioned as a typical sin. As to the nature of the adultery, see note on ch. v. 7. **Because of swearing**; rather, *because of the curse*; the curse, namely, with which God punishes the guilty earth (comp. Zech. v. 3; Dan. ix. 11; and especially Isa. xxiv. 6, where in the original there is a paronomasia very similar to that here). **The land mourneth**; a figurative expression, suggested partly by the assonance of the word for "curse." Drought is what is meant (comp. ch. xii. 4; xiv. 1, 2). **The pleasant places of the wilderness**; rather, *the pastures of the prairie-land* ("wilderness" suggests ideas very alien to the context). **Their course**; literally, *their running* (comp. ch. viii. 6). The subject is "the inhabitants of the land." **Their force is not right**; rather, *their might* (or, *heroism*)

is untruth. They are "mighty men" only in telling untruths (comp. ch. ix. 3; Isa. v. 22).

Ver. 11.—**Both prophet and priest are profane**; *i.e.* are unholy, disobeying the Divine commands (see on ch. v. 7). The same two important classes specified as in ch. vi. 13. **Yea, in my house**, etc. Evidently some sin specially incongruous with its locality is referred to, either idolatry (comp. ch. vii. 30) or the totemistic worship of figures of animals (Ezek. viii. 10, 11). Comp. note on ch. v. 7.

Ver. 12.—**Their way shall be unto them as slippery ways**, etc.; rather, *slippery places.* The passage has a manifest affinity with Ps. xxxv. 6 (in one of the Jeremianizing psalms; see on ch. xviii. 19, 20). **They shall be driven on**; or, as Ewald, taking over the last word of the preceding clause, *they shall be thrust into the darkness.* This involves a reminiscence, probable enough, of Isa. viii. 22*b*. It is against the accentual tradition, but improves the rhythmical division of the verse. If we ask who "thrusts" them, Ps. xxxv. 5 supplies the answer—it is not merely external circumstances, but "the Angel of Jehovah," *i.e.* Jehovah himself. As Bishop Hall says, "God wounds us by many instruments, but with one hand." **I will bring evil upon them**, etc. Favourite expressions of Jeremiah (comp. ch. xi. 23).

Vers. 13, 14.—The prophets of Samaria were no doubt guilty enough, but their offences dwindled by the side of the "horrible" transgressions of those of the southern kingdom. The prophet apparently means, not only that the former, having fewer spiritual advantages, were less responsible than the latter, but also that they had not violated the moral code so conspicuously.

Ver. 13.—**I have seen folly**; rather, *absurdity* or *unseemliness*; literally, *that which is unsavoury* (comp. Job vi. 6). The word occurs with a similar reference to Jehovah in Job i. 22; xxiv. 12. To "prophesy by Baal" was absurd," "unseemly," because Baal was a "non-entity" (Isaiah's word for an idol). **In Baal**; rather, *by*, or *by means of, Baal* (see on ch. ii. 8).

Ver. 14.—**I have seen also**, etc.; rather, *But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen.* **Horrible**; as in ch. v. 30. **They commit adultery**, etc.; literally, *the committing adultery and the walking in lies*—a much more forcible way of putting it. **They are all of them**; rather, *They have become all of them*; viz. either the prophets or the people in general. **The inhabitants thereof**; viz. of Jerusalem.

Ver. 15.—On the punishment here threatened, see note on ch. ix. 15.

Vers. 16—22.—A warning addressed to the people against the false prophecies (comp. Ezek. xiii.).

Ver. 16.—**They make you vain**; *i.e.* fill you with vain imaginations. A similar phrase occurs in ch. ii. 5, on which see note. **A vision of their own heart**; the heart being the centre of the intellectual as well as of the moral life, according to the Hebrew conception.

Ver. 17.—**Unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said.** The Septuagint and the Syriac render the same text (the consonants are alone the text) with different vowels, thus: "Unto those who despise the word of the Lord." In favour of this it may be urged that the phrase, "The Lord hath said," is nowhere else used in this abrupt way to introduce a real or supposed revelation, and Hitzig and Graf accordingly accept it. **Ye shall have peace**; as ch. vi. 14. **After the imagination**; rather, *in the stubbornness* (see on ch. iii. 17).

Ver. 18.—**For who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord**; rather, *in the council.* This verse is connected with ver. 16; it gives the reason why the false prophets were not to be listened to. None of them had been admitted to the secret council of the Lord; the interrogation is here a form of denial. "To stand in the council" is not the same as "to sit" (Ps. i. 1); the latter phrase implies taking an active part in the consultations. It is specially applicable to the true prophets, according to ver. 22, and this, as we gather from other passages, in a twofold sense. Sometimes the prophets had visions, in which their inner eye was granted a sight of Jehovah in consultation with his trusted servants (Isa. vi. 1, comp. 8; 1 Kings xxii. 19); and the words of Eliphaz, "Wert thou listening in the council of God?" (Job xv. 8), appear to be descriptive of a similar experience. But the phrase may also be used in a wider sense of entirely unecstatic revelations. Amos says (iii. 7), "Surely the Lord Jehovah will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret counsel unto his servants the prophets;" and a psalmist extends the term "secret counsel" to the communion which God grants to the pious in general (Ps. xxv. 14; comp. Prov. iii. 32). Thus there is no hard-and-fast line between the experiences of the prophets and those of humbler believers. In so far as the latter are "disciples of Jehovah" (Isa. liv. 13), they too may be truly said to "stand," at least in the doorway, "in the council of Jehovah;" just as a well-known collect inherited from the Latin Church beseeches that "by God's holy inspiration we may think those things that be good." **Who hath marked his word?** A Jewish tradition, represented by the marginal notes in the Hebrew Bible, has taken offence at this variation in the expression, and would correct the reading to "my word." But

such changes of person are of frequent occurrence, and we know that the prophets were thoroughly assured that the word which they spoke was not theirs, but that of him who sent them.

Vers. 19, 20.—These two verses seem to be connected with ver. 17. The false prophets say, "Ye shall have peace." How different the message of the true! (A duplicate of these verses occurs in ch. xxx. 23, 24.)

Ver. 19.—**A whirlwind of the Lord**, etc.; rather, *A storm of the Lord, even fury, is gone forth, and a whirling storm—upon the head of the wicked shall it whirl.* The hurricane has already broken out; it will soon reach Jerusalem. This seems to be the force of Jeremiah's expressive figure.

Ver. 20.—**The anger of the Lord.** The prophet's interpretation of the image. It is the judicial anger of Jehovah, personified as Divine manifestations so often are (hence "shall not return"). The form of the verse reminds us of Isa. lv. 11. **In the latter days**; rather, *in future days*, as Dr. Henderson rightly renders. It seems better to restrict the term "latter days" to the Messianic period ("the coming age," Matt. xii. 32), to which, in fact, it is often applied (*e.g.* Isa. ii. 2; Hos. iii. 5). The phrase in itself simply means "in the sequel of the days," *i.e.* in the future; its Messianic reference, when this exists, is inferred solely from the context. In the passage before us, and in Deut. iv. 30, xxx. 29, there can be no intention of pointing to the Messianic age. Precisely the same phrase occurs in an Assyrian inscription, where its meaning is clear from the context (*ana akhrat yumi irib*, "For a sequel of days—*i.e.* for a future time—I deposited"). In the present case it is no distant period to which the prophet refers, for he continues, **Ye shall consider it**, etc., or rather, *ye shall understand it clearly*, viz. that the calamities which will have come upon you are the Divine judgment upon your sins.

Vers. 21, 22.—In vers. 17—20 Jeremiah has shown that these cannot be true prophets, because their message is diametrically opposed to the true revelation. He now proves it from the absence of any moral effect from their preaching.

Vers. 23—32.—Jehovah has observed and will punish the false pretensions of the prophets.

Vers. 23, 24.—**Am I a God at hand**, etc.? ("At hand" equivalent to "near.") Eliphaz may again assist us with an illustration. "And thou sayest"—he is expostulating with Job—"What doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud? thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not; yea, he walketh upon the vault of heaven" (Job xxii. 13, 14). It might seem, from the preponderance of the false prophets over the true, as if Jehovah were unaware of the mischief. Not so; Jehovah is omnipresent.

Ver. 25.—**I have dreamed.** Jeremiah mentions it as one of the marks of a false prophet that he appealed to his dreams (comp. ch. xxix. 8); true prophecy contented itself with less ambiguous media of communication with the unseen world. It may be objected that Abraham (Gen. xv. 12), at any rate, and Abimelech (Gen. xx. 3) received Divine revelations in dreams; but these were not officially prophets. Nathan and the contemporaries of the author of Job had messages from God by night, but these are called, not dreams, but visions (2 Sam. vii. 14, comp. 17; Job iv. 13). Deuteronomy (and this is one of its striking points of agreement with Jeremiah) expressly describes a false prophet as "a dreamer of dreams" (Deut. xiii. 1; comp. 1 Sam. xxviii. 6). Two passages in the Old Testament seem inconsistent with this discouragement of dreams as a medium of revelation—Numb. xii. 6, where the Lord is said to make himself known to prophets by visions and dreams, and Joel ii. 28, where the prophetic dreams of the old men are one of the features of a Messianic description; but it is noteworthy that the first of these refers to the primitive period of Israel's history, and the second to the distant Messianic age. In its classical period prophecy kept itself sedulously aloof from a field on which it had such compromising companionship (comp. Eccles. v. 7).

Ver. 26.—**How long shall this be in the heart**, etc.? *i.e.* how long shall this be their purpose, viz. to prophesy lies? But this rendering leaves out of account a second interrogative which in the Hebrew follows "how long." It is better to translate this difficult passage, with De Dieu and many moderns, thus: "How long (*quousque durabit hæc ipsorum impudentia*)? Is it in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies, and the prophets of the deceit of their own heart; are they thinking (I say) to cause my people to forget," etc.? On this view, ver. 27 resumes the question interrupted in ver. 26.

Ver. 27.—**Every man to his neighbour.** Not merely one prophet to another prophet, for it is "my people" whom they cause to forget my Name (comp. ver. 32), but the prophet to his fellow-man. **Have forgotten my name for Baal**; or, *forgot my name through Baal.*

Ver. 28.—**Let him tell a dream**; rather, *let him tell it as a dream*; let him tell his dreams, if he will, but not intermix them with Divine revelations. Jeremiah, then, does not deny that there is a measure of truth in what these prophets say; he only

demands a distinct declaration that their dreams are but dreams, and not equal in authority to the Divine word. For, as he continues, **What is the chaff to the wheat?** What right have you to mix the worthless chaff with the pure, winnowed grain? How, he implies, can such an adulterated message produce the designed effect of a prophetic revelation? (St. Paul has a somewhat similar figure, 1 Cor. iii. 10—13.) So Naegelsbach. Keil, however, denies that there is any thought of an adulteration of the Divine word by the "false prophets." According to him, the question in this verse is simply meant to emphasize the contrast between the false, dream-born prophecy of Jeremiah's opponents and the true revelations. How can the false prophecy pretend to be the true? They are as different as chaff and wheat. Both views are admissible. Naegelsbach introduces a new element by suggesting the intermixture of false and true in the utterances of the "false prophets;" but his view is not inconsistent with what the prophet has stated before, and it is favoured by ver. 30 and by the command, **Let him speak my word faithfully**; *i. e.* in its genuine form; comp. ch. ii. 21, "A faithful or trustworthy [*i.e.* a genuine] seed;" also, for the general sense, 2 Cor. ii. 17.

Ver. 29.—**Is not my word like as a fire?** As in vers. 19, 20, so here, the prophet contrasts the message of the false prophets with that of the true. The former flatter their hearers with promises of peace; the latter speak a stern but potent word, which burns like a fire, and crushes like a hammer. Observe, the prophet does not define the activity of the fire as he does that of the hammer; for the fire has a twofold effect—protection to God's friends and destruction to his enemies. On the figure of the hammer, comp. ch. l. 23; li. 20.

Vers. 30—32.—The punishment solemnly introduced by a three times repeated, **Behold, I am against**, etc., corresponding to three several features of the conduct of the false prophets. First we are told that the prophets **steal my words every one from his neighbour.** The latter part of the phrase reminds us of ver. 27, but the "neighbour" in this case must mean, at any rate primarily, a fellow-prophet, one who has really received a revelation at first-hand from Jehovah. The "false prophets," not trusting to their "dreams" alone, listen greedily to the discourses of men like Jeremiah, not with a view to spiritual profit, but to making their own utterances more effective. We must remember that they lived by their prophesying (Micah iii. 5).

Ver. 31.—**That use their tongues**; literally, *that take their tongue*, like a workman's tool—as if prophecy could be turned out to order. **And say, He saith.** The word rendered "he saith" is one which the prophets habitually used to affirm the revealed character of their teaching. It is the participle of the verb rendered "say." Adopting a Miltonic verb, we might render, "and oracle oracles." The "false prophets" adopt the same forms as the true; but they are to them only forms.

Ver. 32.—**That prophesy false dreams** (see on ver. 25). **By their lightness.** The word is an uncommon one, and implies arrogance or boastfulness (comp. Zeph. iii. 4); the root means "to bubble over." **Therefore they shall not profit**; rather, *and they cannot profit.*

Vers. 33—40.—The abuse of a consecrated phrase. The prophets were accustomed to apply the term *massā* to their prophetic declarations in the sense of "oracle," or "utterance"—a sense derived from the use of the cognate verb for "to lift up the voice," *i.e.* to pronounce clearly and distinctly. But the word *massā* was also in common use for "load, burden," and hence the "false prophets" applied the term derisively to Jeremiah's discourses. "Rightly does he call his word a *massā;* it is not merely a solemn utterance, but a heavy burden;" as De Wette puts it, not merely a *Weissagung*, but a *Wehsagung.* The passage is important as indicating the sense in which the true prophets understood the term. It should be added that the term *massā* is prefixed to at least four Biblical passages which, not being of threatening import, do not admit of being entitled "burdens" (Zech. ix. 1; xii. 1; Prov. xxx. 1; xxxi. 1; comp. Lam. ii. 14). How remarkable is the line adopted by Jeremiah! He simply abandons the use of the term *massā*, consecrated as it was by the practice of inspired men! Better to adopt a new phrase, than to run the risk of misunderstanding or, even worse, profanity.

Ver. 33.—**What burden?** etc. The Hebrew text, as usually read, is extremely difficult; the Authorized Version is entirely unjustifiable. It is just possible to explain, with Ewald, "As to this question, What is the burden? the true meaning of the word is that," etc. But how harsh and artificial! By a change in the grouping of the consonants (which alone constitute the text), we may read, *Ye are the burden.* So the Septuagint, Vulgate, Hitzig, Graf, Payne Smith. We must in this case continue, *and I will cast you off*, as the same verb is to be rendered in ch. vii. 29; xii. 7. Instead of carrying you with the long-suffering of a father (Deut. i. 31; Isa. xlvi. 3, 4; lxiii. 9; Ps. xxviii. 9), I will cast you off as a troublesome load (Isa. i. 14).

Ver. 35.—**What hath the Lord answered?** *i.e.* a simpler phraseology is to be used,

Jehovah hath answered, saying, or, *Jehovah hath spoken*, according as a definite question had been put before the prophet or not.

Ver. 36.—**And the burden of the Lord**, etc.; *i.e.* ye shall no longer use the word *massā* at all. **Every man's word shall be his burden**; rather, *the burden to every man shall be his word*; i.e. his derisive use of the word *massā* shall be a burden which shall crush him to the ground. **Ye have perverted**; "*i.e.* have turned them round, and put them into a ridiculous light" (Payne Smith).

Ver. 38.—**But since ye say**, etc.; rather, *But if ye say*, etc. In case the false prophets disobey, and persist in using the old expression, the threatening already uttered shall come into operation.

Ver. 39.—**I, even I, will utterly forget you**; rather, *I will even take you up, and cast you off*. This involves a slight difference in the pronunciation of the text from that adopted by the Massoretes, but is adopted by the Septuagint, Peshito, Vulgate, a few manuscripts, and most critics; it is, in fact, almost required by the figure which fills the verse. **And cast you out of my presence.** "And cast you" is not in the Hebrew; nor is it necessary to supply the words, if the preceding clauses be rightly translated.

Ver. 40.—**With this verse**, comp. **ch. xx. 11.**

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*The character of leading men.* The character of its leading men is a matter of first importance to a people. Israel had been led astray by his kings; one of the first blessings promised to him on his return is the possession of good leaders. In the most free state there must always be leading men—men exercising influence by reason of their office, their rank and position, or their capacities. Observe this in regard to the various classes of leading men.

I. POLITICAL LEADERS. On their character depends the questions (1) whether laws shall be justly framed and justly executed, (2) whether the welfare of the subjects shall be honestly worked for, and (3) whether the dealings with foreign nations shall be just and peaceable.

II. SOCIAL LEADERS. The moral influence of the court is always great and widespread; how important that this should be pure! There are people whom rank or personal attractiveness, or powers of persuasion, endow with power to influence the customs of their age. These need be well advised that their influence may be on the side of truth, purity, and humanity.

III. INTELLECTUAL LEADERS. Shall the reformer be a Luther or a Voltaire? the poet a Wordsworth or a Byron? the historian an Arnold or a Gibbon? the philosopher a Butler or a Hume? Surely for the real welfare of a people the moral tendency of its literature is more important than the intellectual brilliancy.

IV. RELIGIOUS LEADERS. Are these men barren controversialists, or earnest practical guides to their flocks? Are they loyal to truth, or merely bigoted defenders of their own crotchets? Are they spiritual-minded servants of Christ, or ambitious priests? Are they true shepherds, or wolves in sheep's clothing? These questions touch the welfare of a people very closely. Note, the one essential is that the leading men should desire to serve the good of others and not simply to increase their own power and honour; to feed the flock, not to scatter it by reckless indifference, selfish ambition, or tyrannous cruelty. The power of leading men is a great and dangerous gift, only entrusted by Providence to those who possess it for the sake of the good it may be the means of conferring on the community at large. The state is in a healthy condition only when public characters are inspired by public spirit.

Ver. 5.—*The Branch of David.* The glorious prophecy of the Messianic future which here bursts forth from Jeremiah, after his denunciation of his nation's sin and lamentation over its approaching calamities, is necessarily clothed in the language of the age, and viewed in an especial relation to contemporary wants. The people are suffering from bad rulers and an unrighteous government. A good king, administering his kingdom happily and justly, is promised for the golden age of the future. Associated with this king is, no doubt, that succession of righteous sovereigns referred to in the fourth verse. It was not given to anticipatory visions to show how unique and solitary and eternal was to be the kingship of the Messiah. Yet even there he stands forth in

marked prominence, and towers above his successors, who are only regarded as following his initiative. Regarding the prophecy with the fuller light of Christian times, we may see how it is a true foreshadowing of the nature and work of Christ, though, of course, only partial and limited, as the shadow can only indicate the general form of its object, and that in but one aspect.

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE MESSIAH. 1. He comes from a *human stock*. He is called a "Branch," or, rather, a "Sprout." Christ entered the world by birth; he was "made of a woman." Hence his oneness with us, his human sympathy, true example, and representative character as the High Priest of the race. 2. He comes of the *family of David*. This historical fact is significant. Christ is a born King, a rightful Sovereign. He realizes the ideal which the kings of the Jews had failed to attain, but which the best of them had aimed at. 3. He comes *quietly and gradually*. The sprout springs from a bud by slow growth. Christ began his life as an infant, and grew in physical, mental, and spiritual powers (Luke ii. 52). He did not astonish the world with a sudden apparition of majesty. His kingship is like his kingdom, a quiet and gradual growth as that of a tree from a seed (Matt. xiii. 31—32). 4. He comes with close relations to the *circumstances of the world*. The sprout is vitally connected with the earth and the atmosphere. It grows in the natural season of growth. Christ is associated with all human interests. The ages before his advent were preparing for him. He is the representative of their highest aspirations, the satisfaction of their deepest needs. He comes in the "fulness of time." 5. He comes from a *Divine origin*. God raises up the righteous Branch. The text tells us no more than that the coming of Christ is providential and through special Divine influences; but we know that God not only raised him, but was in him, as one with his very being.

II. THE OFFICE OF THE MESSIAH. He is to be a King. It was natural that the Jews should anticipate a temporal sovereign, and natural, therefore, that they should have been disappointed at the appearance and conduct of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet was he not, is he not, a King? He professed to be a King (John xviii. 37). The apostles claimed submission to him as to a King (Acts xvii. 7). His influence is kingly. The essence of kingship is not seen in the sitting on a material throne and wearing a visible crown, but in the exercise of power over men. Christ is the one true King, because he rules the thoughts and affections and wills of men. Human sovereigns can only command external obedience. While the slave cringes before the throne he may be cursing his master in his heart. Christ is satisfied with no such superficial loyalty. He seeks the allegiance of the heart, and he wins it from all his people. We must, therefore, recognize this great fact—Christ is a King as well as a Saviour. While he delivers us from ruin, he expects submission to his authority. He is a Saviour partly by being a King, for his royal influence is one means of his deliverance of mankind. Therefore the selfish Christianity which would accept escape from ruin, but would not accord loyal obedience, is a delusion. We cannot even be safe, cannot even escape from the ruin of our sin, except by bowing to the rule of Christ. We can only find rest unto our souls by taking on us his yoke. True faith, therefore, includes trust in the kingship as well as in the redemption of Christ, *i.e.* active fidelity in addition to passive confidence.

III. THE CHARACTER OF THE MESSIAH. 1. He is *righteous*. This was much in contrast to the unrighteousness of contemporary rulers. Taking the word "righteous" in the largest sense, we have assurance of the truth, justice, holiness, and goodness of Christ. If this righteousness of the Messiah is a ground of rejoicing to the prophet, how much more shall we Christians rejoice in witnessing his gentleness, compassion, and love? 2. He *rules righteously*. The character of the government is necessarily determined by that of the ruler. The great King comes to live not for himself, but for his people, and not to execute stern judgments upon them, but to secure their highest good. Christ reigns for the good of his people. If we submit to his rule we find our own blessedness secured thereby.

Ver. 6.—*The new name*. (See also ch. xxxiii. 16.) God's people are to have a new name. In the epistle to the Church at Pergamos, every one "that overcometh" is assured that he will receive "a white stone, and in the stone a new name written" (Rev. ii. 17). This is suggestive, not only of a change of character, but of a change of

reputation. The redeemed will no longer be thought of in connection with the old associations of their sin and shame. These will be forgotten, and a new name given to them, describing their holier character and happier condition. Consider the significance of this new name—"The Lord our Righteousness."

I. GOD IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF HIS PEOPLE. 1. He *justifies* his people in the face of their maligners by proving the rightness of their cause. For this, like David, they may appeal to him (Ps. xxxv. 23, 24). 2. God's righteousness is the *ideal* of righteousness for his people. True righteousness is that which is after God's mind. Men have their notions of right, which are often perverted by passion and prejudice. But the redeemed have a vision of a higher law and a purer type of goodness. God is righteousness to them. He is the Good, the only true Good (Mark x. 18). 3. God is the *Source* of righteousness to his people. None can make himself righteous; righteousness is an inspiration. This idea is suggested by Plato in the 'Meno,' where he represents Socrates as saying, "To sum up our inquiry—the result seems to be, if we are at all right in our view, that virtue is neither natural nor acquired, but an instinct given by God to the virtuous;" and again, "Then, Meno, the conclusion is that virtue comes to the virtuous by the gift of God." How singularly near is this to St. Paul's teaching about "the righteousness of God without the Law" (Rom. iii. 21—26)!

II. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS COEXTENSIVE WITH SALVATION. When the people are saved, they receive the new name. We are not delivered on account of our righteousness, but in our sin and need and ill desert. Nevertheless, salvation brings righteousness, includes the gift of righteousness—is, indeed, essentially a restoration of righteousness, a deliverance from sin to a state of holiness. The two ideas may be separated in thought; they cannot be separated in experience. It would be unjust and unholy for God to deliver a man from the penalties of his sin while he remained in the practice of it. But when deliverance comes, no part of it is more full of joy and blessedness to the redeemed, and none reflects more glory on the Redeemer than the salvation from the power of sin and the creation of a new nature of holiness.

III. THE DIVINE RIGHTEOUSNESS IS CONFERRED THROUGH CHRIST. The giving of the new name follows the advent of the Messiah and the exercise of his kingly rule. Here we are carried beyond the vague and apparently casual Platonic notion of the inspiration of virtue to the definite Christian doctrine of righteousness through Christ. 1. Christ secures redemption for us by his life-work and his sacrificial death, and with this comes righteousness. 2. Christ is the incarnation of the Divine righteousness, and breathes that into us by his vital contact with his people. 3. Christ rules in righteousness over a people whom he teaches to follow and obey him with righteousness. Therefore, if we crave the honour and the blessedness of the new name, let us yield our souls in trust and obedience to the claims and grace of Christ.

Ver. 16.—*Uninspired prophecy.* The Jews were warned not to listen to the prophets, because they were not inspired by God. This fact was considered to be a sufficient proof of their inefficiency, and necessarily so, since the prophets professed to be acting as the oracles of God, and not merely indulging in their own speculations and conjectures. Herein lay the danger of their position. They held official rank as religious teachers, their claims were backed by venerated tradition, they boldly professed to speak with Divine authority; yet they were not sent by God. The same danger accompanies the pretensions of men in our own day, who claim a right to be heard without question by reason of their high office in the Church, and yet have no Divine commission. The appearance of this uninspired prophecy in Jeremiah's age may, therefore, be a warning to modern times.

I. THE ORIGIN OF THIS PROPHECY WAS PRIVATE SPECULATION. The prophets spoke "a vision of their own heart." Such a vision could only be a revelation of themselves. This is what uninspired religious speculation amounts to. It is a revelation of man, not a revelation of God. Attempts are made to arrive at truth in three ways. 1. By *observation*. But observation cannot reveal (1) the future, (2) the Divine. 2. By *reasoning*. This must be based on experience, and can bear no more strain than its basis. It is not found that we have sufficient data in normal experience to warrant important predictions of history and conclusions on vexed theological questions. 3. By *intuition*. Intuition does reveal truth, but only the truth of our own nature. We

have no reason for supposing that this is always a counterpart to the facts of the larger world.

II. PRIVATE SPECULATION WAS ESPECIALLY LIKELY TO IMPORT ERROR INTO THIS PROPHECY. It was always fallible, but in the present instance it was peculiarly likely to err. 1. It was attempting *too great a task.* The prophets were venturing to predict the future of their nation under the most difficult circumstances. 2. It was *biassed* by prejudice, passion, and interest. The prophets were swayed by their own inclination. In religious questions personal considerations blind men to pure truth.

III. NEVERTHELESS THIS PROPHECY WAS VERY POPULAR. 1. It was recommended by the *official* teachers. 2. It was recommended by the *majority* of the prophets. Jeremiah stood almost alone; his opponents were numerous. 3. It was *flattering* to the people; it represented them as less guilty, as deserving less punishment than was threatened by Jeremiah. 4. It was *pleasant.* The prophets spoke smooth words and promised comfortable things. Such teaching is only too popular.

IV. NO PROPHECY IS RELIABLE WHICH IS NOT INSPIRED BY GOD. The prophecy is condemned simply for want of this one fundamental condition. The history of religious speculation proves the helplessness of all attempts to solve the great problems of the future and of the spiritual by bare human intelligence. If, therefore, we believe that the Bible is inspired, weight should be given to its teaching as to an authority. In our own thought, and our meditation on the Scriptures, we need those lesser degrees of inspiration by which all Christians may be led into truth (John xvi. 13).

Vers. 23, 24.—*The omnipresence of God.* I. THE FACT. God must be thought of as fully present everywhere; not as a great Being who fills a great space with, however, only distinct parts in each section of space. The whole of God is present everywhere. He is as much present in every separate locality as if he existed nowhere else. All his infinite attributes of knowledge, power, and goodness are present, to be brought to bear on each individual of the infinite variety of things in the universe. God is as much present in the less seemly places as in those that are recognized as fitting temples for him to dwell in. He is in the earth as well as in heaven. Heaven is described as his throne, earth as his footstool. He is present with the godless as well as with the godly, in the heathen world as well as in Christendom. More particularly: 1. God is present with those who *do not recognize him.* The sunlight is not limited by man's vision; it shines as clearly about the blind man as about one with keen eyesight. So, though we may not think of God's presence, it is not the less near to us. 2. God is present with those who *refuse to obey him.* We cannot remove ourselves from the observation and control of God by forsaking all allegiance to him. Jonah could flee from his mission, but he could not flee from his God. God's eyes are on the evil as well as on the good. 3. God is present with those who are far *from enjoying the blessedness* of the full manifestation of his presence. God is present with the Christian all through his earthly pilgrimage. Though God appears to hide himself for a season, though thick clouds intervene between the soul and that beatific vision which is reserved for the future state, God is as truly with his people on earth as he will be in heaven.

II. PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. *It is foolish to expect to escape from the judgment of God.* God never abdicates his right to be the Judge of all his creatures. There is no possibility of hiding from him. God searches us and knows our deepest heart-secret. Will it not, then, be best for us to be true and open and frank with him? 2. *We must not ascribe the confusion of the world to God's indifference.* If he knows all and does not set it right, this must be (1) partly because he gives large liberty to his creatures for the possibility of attaining higher good than would be reached by the exercise of any irresistible power, and (2) partly because he must have higher ultimate designs than any we can conceive of in the present imperfect condition of the world. 3. *No change of place will bring us nearer to God.* "He is not far from every one of us" (Acts xvii. 27). Therefore (1) it is needless to wait for some better time for approaching God. No time will be better than the present. He will never be nearer to us than he is now. He only waits that we should open our eyes. (2) It is a mistake to suppose that any outward event will lead us nearer to God. Death will not bring us more closely into his presence. No journey to a heavenly world will do

this. We only need a change of heart to recognize and enjoy the eternal presence of God, which will make heaven wherever it is felt. 4. *Christians need fear no harm.* They must meet with troubles and temptations, but God is present to uphold them. They must go through the valley of the shadow of death, but God is there. They must enter the strange land of departed souls, but he is there also. And wherever God is it must be well with his faithful children.

Vers. 33, 34.—*The abuse of a word.* This is not a mere play upon a word, but a mocking abuse of the meaning of it, designed to convey a sinister insinuation. It illustrates what a dangerous and uncertain weapon language is. We are all inclined to attach too much importance to words, forgetting that they are not rigid landmarks of thought, but variable in meaning with the variations of the ideas we import into them.

I. THE WORDS OF TRUTH MAY BE USED IN THE SERVICE OF FALSEHOOD. The Jews repeated the phrase of Jeremiah, but with a new and false signification. The "burden" as an utterance, was entirely distinct from the "burden" as a weight to be borne. Of course, mendacity belongs to our thought and intention, not to our mere language. We may tell a lie by using true words in such a way as to infuse into them a false meaning. Such conduct is peculiarly mean and dishonourable. It is robbing the armoury of truth to turn its weapons against itself. No condemnation can be too strong for the treachery and dishonesty of those persons who appropriate the consecrated phrases of Christianity as a subterfuge under which to attack its spiritual truths. Let us be careful in using the Bible, not to read our own thoughts into the text, but to search simply for the original meaning of it.

II. CONTROVERSY BECOMES DISHONEST WHEN IT IS MAINTAINED BY THE CONFUSION OF WORDS. This is the essence of sophistry. A word is spoken with one meaning; it is replied to with another. Often and often this is done unconsciously. Indeed, a large part of our contentions rest on nothing but "misunderstandings." Under such circumstances we may deplore the error, but we cannot severely condemn the moral conduct of the misguided disputants. But it may be done deliberately, to throw dust in the eyes of an opponent, to raise a laugh without justification, to gain a point by mere word-fencing. When this is the case it is untruthful and ungenerous. If we must dispute, let us be frank and fair, using every effort to understand our opponent, carefully guarding against misrepresenting him. So long as a word is used as the embodiment of a thought, it is a sacred thing to tamper with which may be to murder a truth.

III. NO VERBAL BULWARKS WILL PRESERVE THE INTEGRITY OF TRUTH. This is just a corollary on what precedes. But it is sufficiently important to claim distinct and emphatic notice. Truth must find its expression in words, and to be intelligible these should be clear and definite. Hence the need of formulæ. But nothing is more unreliable than a formula. Since it may be used against truth with all the force of its prestige if a new false meaning is foisted into it, we need to be constantly considering it afresh in the light of facts. Creeds may be useful as the expression of "views" of truth, but history proves that they are of little good as defenders of the faith.

IV. WHEN A WORD HAS GIVEN TROUBLE IN CONTROVERSY IT MAY BE WELL TO ABANDON IT. Jeremiah is bidden no longer to use the word "burden." We are too jealous of words. There is a superstition of phrases. It is foolish to fight for a word. Anxiety about words is generally a sign of the loss of hold upon truth. If we are sure of possessing the truth and feel the living reality of it, we can afford to abandon any form of language, and can soon find other words in which to clothe it. Truth will not suffer. If it loses the aid of old associations, it loses also the hindrance of misunderstandings and antagonisms, and it gains the freshness of new suggestions. Let us be careful not to be the slaves of a vocabulary. We shall often find it wise to melt down our theological phrases and cast them in a new form, or rather to bury the old ones and let new ones naturally spring up as the embodiment of fresh living thoughts. Remember, "the letter killeth."

Vers. 33—40.—*The "burden."* I. IT IS A MISTAKE TO REGARD THE REVELATION OF TRUTH AS A BURDEN. It comes to lighten our burdens. At first it may seem to

increase them by making us conscious of them. It opens our eyes to our own condition. The very light may serve to reveal the existence of the deep mystery all around us, which was not felt while the soul slumbered in darkness. Yet the light does not make the darkness that fringes its radiance. Revelation does not create the burdens of which it makes us conscious. It has rather the opposite effect. 1. All truth clears away some of the *burden of superstition.* Men people the unknown with horrors. Midnight shadows shroud dread nightmares. Daylight dispels the shadows, and the evil dreams melt away. 2. Divine truth is expressly designed to liberate the soul from *spiritual burdens.* It is a light of blessing, not a message of death; an evangel promising consolation to the weary. Even the darker elements of truth have this object to attain, since the evil that they reveal is only made manifest that we may see how to escape it, or be prepared to endure it, or receive it so as to profit by it. On the whole and in the end the truth of God is revealed for the loosening of the weary weight of men's greatest burdens, the burden of unforgiven sin, the burden of impossible duty, the burden of unendurable sorrow, the burden of unintelligible mystery.

II. MEN WHO DO NOT RECEIVE THE REVELATION OF TRUTH MAY REGARD IT AS A BURDEN. Thus these Jews derided Jeremiah by mocking his language with words, however, which expressed their own sentiments if not their deeper convictions. To them his word was a weariness, a very burden. Is it not so regarded by many? We should note the causes of this sad mistake. 1. *Ignorance.* The word is heard, but it is not understood. On the outside it is harsh. This is the characteristic of much Divine truth. Far off it sounds like grating thunder, terrific and repellant. We must be near to hear its sweet but hidden music. 2. *Want of sympathy.* All truth is burdensome to those who have not sympathy with it. Spiritual truth is a weariness to the unspiritual. 3. *Partial faith.* Jeremiah's words produced enough conviction to rouse fear, but not enough to lead to confidence in the wisdom, righteousness, and goodness of God in his acts of discipline and chastisement. A weak faith always makes truth a burden. To be joyous and exultant we must be trustful.

III. THE REJECTION OF TRUTH WILL BRING A BURDEN. The revelation is not a burden, but the neglect of it will make one (ver. 36). Men turn from God's truth for the trouble they think it threatens. They will find that this very act will bring the greatest trouble upon their heads. 1. This involves the *loss of the blessing* that truth is designed to bestow upon us. If we reject the truth we must bear the inevitable which the acceptance of it would have lightened. We then go our own way to meet unaided the crosses and toils of life. 2. This involves the *addition of a new burden* of guilt for the sin of rejecting truth. A wilful rejection of light is, of course, wicked and most culpable in the sight of God. It must bring trouble.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*False shepherds and the true.* The reference here is to the kings of the house of David, as the leaders of a theocratic people; and secondarily, to the spiritual purpose of all true kingship.

I. THE MISCHIEF OF FALSE SHEPHERDING. This is twofold, viz. scattering and destroying. The false shepherd has no real interest in the sheep; being but a hireling, his chief consideration is a selfish one. The kings of Judah had sought to realize their own ambitions and to indulge their own lusts. The moral and spiritual advancement of the people—the foundation of all real material prosperity—was not sought. The royal example which ought to have been influential for righteousness was directly opposed to this, and all classes of the people were infected with the licentiousness of prince and noble. The results appeared in crime, idolatry, and banishment.

II. ITS JUDGMENT. The calamity was to come chiefly upon those who had been unfaithful stewards of great responsibilities. Office which is thus abused will soon be taken away. According to responsibility will be punishment. He who causes to offend is worse than the offender, and will meet with corresponding severity of judgment. The nation outlives the dynasty. Unfaithful shepherds of the theocracy sink in ignominy and ruin, but God preserves a seed to serve him, and a generation to call him blessed.

III. ITS CORRECTION. The deceived of God's people, being distinguished from the deceivers, will undergo a kindlier discipline. The shepherd's care, as the symbol of royal responsibility, is intended as an ideal corrective. It teaches the principle that the king exists for the people, and not *vice versâ*. It is under Christianity that popular liberties, national development, and social purity have become the aims of rulers. In modern times there have been many who have illustrated this ideal of royalty; but Christ alone is the Head of redeemed humanity—the good Shepherd that lays down his life for his flock. In him the throne of David is eternally restored. Not yet do we see all things put under him, but the time draws nigh when he shall reign from shore to shore, and from the river even unto the ends of the earth. Ancient Israel depended for its very existence upon spiritual obedience to God's Law. The Church of Christ in all its offices must respect his authority and be actuated by love to him. Its character and influence must be purely spiritual, or its message will be neutralized and soon perverted to unholy ends.—M.

Vers. 5, 6.—"*The Lord our Righteousness.*" I. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WOULD RULE IN THE MIDST OF HIS PEOPLE. The question of the singular or plural interpretation of the word "scion" need not trouble us. To the prophet it was enough to declare that the offspring of David would yet reign in righteousness. All lesser fulfilments of this prophecy are thrown into insignificance by the great Son of David, who so grandly fulfilled the essential conditions of the prediction. 1. *Righteousness would yet become the law of human life.* 2. *This would be achieved through a personal influence.* The King of men will wield a spiritual sceptre, but his influence will be the more real. Righteousness will be manifested as a life and vindicated in sacrificial death. 3. *The house of David would be restored in him as its offspring.*

II. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WOULD BE TRANSFERRED TO HIS PEOPLE. "The Lord our Righteousness," be it the title of Prince or people, is sufficiently significant to explain its own essential meaning. There would be a transfer of the righteous character of the Ruler to the ruled; their spirit and aims would be identical with his; and he would embody their ideal life and present it to God. Through him the Divine righteousness would be the possession of the least saint. This evidently could only be perfectly accomplished in Christ. Nothing less than a unity of spirit and life with Jesus Christ, through faith, could achieve such a result.

III. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD THUS EMBODIED AND COMMUNICATED WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE. 1. *The power of this righteousness.* 2. *Its desirability.* 3. *Its attainableness.* The ideal future of Israel and the Church.—M.

Vers. 16—18, 22.—"*Trying the spirits.*" In ver. 18 read, "For who hath stood in the counsel of Jehovah? Let him see and hear his word: who hath marked his word? Let him proclaim it."

I. HEARERS ARE TO DISCRIMINATE BETWEEN FALSE PROPHETS AND TRUE. A very serious permission. But not for an occasion only: to be exercised whenever the witnesses conflict. The essential principle of Protestantism. The prophet is one who speaks in God's Name and reveals his will. The question, therefore, is of interest for all time; is exceedingly important, but not morally difficult. 1. *The effect of false prophecy is disastrous.* 2. *Earnest and prayerful discrimination is the best safeguard against religious indifference.*

II. A DISTINGUISHING TEST IS FURNISHED. It is a moral one. By their relation to the Law of Moses were the different prophets to be judged of. 1. *The marks of the false prophet.* His influence is an unrighteous one. He encourages evil-doers, either by directly unrighteous teaching or through the indirect influence which he exercises. 2. *The marks of the true prophet.* He is as unmistakably in favour of morality and religion. He is distinguished: (1) By his reverence. "He who hath stood in the counsel of Jehovah." To *sit* in that counsel would be to pretend to be equal and advise; but the true prophet has no word from himself. His messages proceed from God, and in his Name he speaks. In every age the messenger of God is one who has communion with him, is conscious of a living Presence and a revealing Spirit. "That which I received of the Lord, delivered I unto you:" not "I think; I am of opinion," etc. No pretence of infallibility. (2) By diligent and devout attention to God's revelations.

In the first place the *written* Word, and in the next the *spoken*. Of the latter, only the prayerful and studious soul can be the vehicle. We have to be silent that God may speak. The Word of God already revealed will be respectfully and faithfully observed. Consecration and quietness are marks of waiting upon God. And the message delivered will be faithful to the original that was seen or heard, and agreeable to what is already known of the will of God. The careless arrogance of the false prophet is soon corrected by what God has already revealed of himself. It is the devout "hearer" who alone has right to speak in God's Name, and his testimony will be approved by the spiritual sense of believers and "signs following." The spiritual character of the messenger of God—how much of his message does it represent?—M.

Ver. 21.—*Unauthorized ministry.* The credentials of the ministers of God are ever a matter of consequence. Exceptional service in the Church demands exceptional qualifications, and amongst these a direct Divine call is imperative. The wickedness of those who usurp sacred office is that they ignore the necessity for such a call, and, adding deliberate falsehood to impiety, they speak in the Name of God without having heard his voice.

I. THE CONDITIONS OF LEGITIMATE SERVICE IN GOD'S NAME. 1. *Those who minister in his Name must be appointed by himself.* "I have not sent them." For the sake of order an outward and conventional human recognition of office may be requisite. But that is not the essential thing. The minister of God—prophet, priest, Christian minister—must be sent and set apart in the first instance by God. This is an immediate spiritual, Divine act. It may be performed variously, as we find in Scripture it actually was; but the original impulse and impression of obligation are from the Spirit of God. It may be impossible to define the mode, yet the fact and the nature of it cannot be mistaken. So as to the degree of intensity with which the "call" should be attended difference of opinion may exist; but the greatest ministers of God have been those who waited until the Divine ordination was certain and confirmed. A feeble impulse at the outset is less likely to result in a grand consecrated ministry. And yet there is a sense in which the "calling" cannot be made sure until after it has been acted upon. So little is it a mechanical act that sinks into historical background,—the individual must ever have it present to his consciousness and crescent through active fulfilment of it. And the "call" is ever a *differentiated one*, having regard to special service. It is not enough for one to assume the minister's office merely because he is fired with the general spirit of Christian enthusiasm. 2. *Only as he reveals it to men can they declare his truth.* "I have not spoken to them." The prophecies of the Old Testament were the outcome of special and particular inspirations, as a reference to the descriptions of prophets themselves will prove. With some the period of active inspired utterance was comparatively brief; others were visited by the inspirations of God all through life. But even the (generally) inspired prophet might be destitute of inspiration on particular occasions, or might outlive it. In such cases silence is highest duty and truest wisdom. "The Word of God" on special occasions, as generally, is a finely organized spiritual emanation, a delicate creation or outbirth of the infinite Spirit, and may be misrepresented by unsympathetic, unenthusiastic reception. He must first be a reverent, believing "hearer" who would worthily prophesy or preach (the modern phase of the same essential work). It is only as the Spirit takes the "things of Christ" and shows them to us that we can understand, appreciate, and livingly present them to others. This necessary experience is finely expressed in the old phrase, "It was laid upon me," or, as Jeremiah has it, "But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones" (ch. xxv. 9).

II. HE WHO USURPS THE SACRED OFFICE IS GUILTY OF THE GRAVEST SIN. It is instructive to observe that that which, when worthily fulfilled, is pleasing to God, is altogether otherwise if illegitimately performed. Because: 1. *True prophets are thereby discredited.* 2. *Divine truth is misrepresented.* By bald unsympathetic literalism, etc. 3. *Divine truth is actually contradicted.*

III. GOD WILL REPUDIATE AND DISCREDIT ALL SUCH. Through genuine revelations. In the event. By the results attendant upon faithful preaching. In the great day of account.—M.

Vers. 23, 24.—*The omnipresence of God.* I. A PERSONAL ATTRIBUTE. 1. *Infinitely near to all his creatures.* 2. *All-seeing.* 3. *Filling all in all.*

II. A MORAL INFLUENCE. The question is asked. Every conscience confesses it. The dispensation of the Spirit which convinces the world "of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment" is the latest expression of this. 1. *Deterrent.* 2. *Intensifying.* 3. *Encouraging.*—M.

Vers. 25—27.—*Dreams that make the Name of God to be forgotten.* This is a very difficult passage, but its general sense is plain. It seems to be this: The false prophets whom Jehovah had not sent imitated the form of inspired utterance—the dream as distinct from the vision—which could most easily and with least chance of detection be fabricated. This vehicle of communicating their false doctrines they strongly affected. "I have dreamed, I have dreamed." Although delivering these utterances in the Name of Jehovah, they thereby sought to alienate the people from him, and to cause his Name to be forgotten.

I. PERSONS MAY SPEAK IN GOD'S NAME WHO ARE REALLY HIS ENEMIES. These false prophets used the Name of God to commend their own deceitful doctrines and practices. The latter would have no permanent influence apart from this association. It is a favourite device of Satan to appear as an angel of light. There is nothing more diabolical, and the pretence should ever be regarded with critical suspicion, and exposed without hesitation when discovered. "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my Name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matt. xxiv. 5.

II. IT IS EASY TO IMPART A RELIGIOUS ASPECT TO THAT WHICH IS OPPOSED TO TRUE RELIGION. Here one of the chief vehicles of inspiration is employed for quite another purpose than the revelation of God's truth. Its mystery, vagueness, etc., imposed upon the people; and detection was rendered difficult, as no one could be sure whether the prophet dreamt or not. The real message they delivered was one of personal ambition, lust, etc. So men baptize their carnal dreams and desires with Christian names. It is very necessary to discriminate and to be sincere. Now it is a dream, anon an ordinance, at another time a doctrine.

III. FALSEHOOD IS MOST TO BE DREADED WHEN IT SIMULATES TRUTH. 1. *Because it is essentially unaltered.* By saying this is truth, it is really no more so than at first, but it gets the character of it. 2. *The association thus created greatly increases its power.* The sanctions of religion are given to ungodly and sinful practices. Delusion is most inveterate when it blends with superstition. 3. *It destroys those whom it professes to bless.* The mental habit is thereby corrupted, and the spiritual nature rendered unfit for real Divine communications. The danger is not discovered until it has made fearful advances and worked irrevocable mischief.

IV. IT SPECIALLY PROVOKES THE ANGER OF GOD. It is blasphemy; mocks him; and arrogates his place and functions, becoming more daring with apparent impunity.—M.

Vers. 28, 29.—*The faithful utterance of Divine revelation.* If God in very deed reveals his will to men, it is essential that it be simply and truthfully conveyed.

I. HUMAN INTERMIXTURES WITH DIVINE TRUTH ARE HURTFUL AND WEAKENING IN THEIR INFLUENCE. The word of human origin is placed on the same level with the Divine. When the former is proved fallible or untrue, the latter is discredited. Efforts after novelty and strangeness generally ensue; and these are condemned by the Word of God (vers. 30, 31).

II. THESE ARE WHOLLY UNNECESSARY, AS THE WORD OF GOD IS SUFFICIENT FOR ITS PURPOSE. "God's Word shall not return unto him void" (Isa. lv. 11). It is the truth, and must prevail.

III. THE SPURIOUS INTERMIXTURE WILL BE REVEALED BY THE DIFFERENCE OF ITS EFFECTS. "What has the straw to do with the grain?"—a question sure to arise in those who receive such messages. The connection of the one element with the other is evidently incongruous. The stalk sustains the ear which develops from it whilst growing; but when the field has been harvested the two are separated, and have to be used apart. To mix up the chopped straw with the grain would only be to spoil the latter. And so it is when human ideas are mixed with Divine revelations: the mixture

fails to edify or satisfy. And in its effect upon the moral nature the true message distinguishes itself from the false. "Fire," in its scorching, consuming power, cannot well be counterfeited; but such is the effect of the Word of God. The "hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces" demonstrates its legitimacy as an instrument of grace by its power upon the hard and impenitent heart (Heb. iv. 12).—M.

Vers. 33—40.—*Despising prophesyings.* I. THE HONOUR OF GOD IS BOUND UP WITH HIS WORD. 1. *It expresses his character.* A careful, gradual unfolding of himself in his attributes and personal relations. 2. *It declares his will.* (1) His Law; (2) his gospel; both of which express his purpose. The prophecies of God with his promises and appeals. 3. *In its loftiest embodiment—Jesus Christ—it is identified with himself.* (John i. 1.)

II. HE WILL NOT SUFFER IT TO BE TREATED LIGHTLY. To do so would be to court contempt, if not to condone the offence. As a sign of his displeasure: 1. *He will give the false prophets another message to deliver.* This is said satirically (ver. 33); their circumstances will prove that the true message is not one of acceptance but of rejection. The whole nation will be thrust out of covenant relationship. 2. *Special penalties will be inflicted upon particular offenders.* (Ver. 34.) Handling the Word of God deceitfully will bring upon a man evident tokens of the Divine displeasure. 3. *The word "burden" itself will have a new and fearful significance.* It was a spiritual offence to talk about "burdens" so lightly. People to whom the true message of God had no awful impressiveness would be taught reverence and fear by that which he would inflict upon them. It would be a true "burden," not so readily got rid of (vers. 39, 40).—M.

Ver. 6.—"*The Lord our Righteousness.*" How pleasant it is, after a traveller has for long days of travel been occupied in passing through a dreary, monotonous country, to come to a region where Nature puts on her loveliest and most attractive aspect; where, instead of flat plains, unrelieved by hill or dale, or any object on which the wearied eye can fasten with delight, you find yourself in a land of noble rivers and rushing torrents, lofty mountains and exquisite valleys, flourishing cities and noble buildings! With what pleasure does the traveller enter such region after the far different and far less delightful scenes he has been fatigued with for so long! Now, akin to such pleasure is that of the persevering student of these prophecies of Jeremiah, when at length, quitting the monotonous and painful recitals of Israel's sins, and the distressing records of the dread judgments of God which were to come upon them in consequence, with which the foregoing chapters have been mainly filled, he enters, in these verses which belong to our text, on a portion of the prophet's writings which tells, not of sin, but of righteousness; not of the Lord the Avenger, but of the Lord the Redeemer and Saviour; the Restorer because the Righteousness of his people. It is like an oasis in the desert; like what Elim must have been to the Israelites after their weary journey to Marah, where burning heat and thirst and much distress had been their continued lot. And no doubt Jeremiah and the faithful few who adhered to him were wont to solace their saddened minds by turning their thoughts, as they do here, away from the dark and terrible present to the bright and happy future when Israel should dwell safely under the rule of the Lord their Righteousness. That was a bright onlook, by means of which the heavy burden of the days in which the prophet actually lived and laboured became more endurable, and their spirits were kept from being utterly overwhelmed. Now, concerning this glorious name of Jehovah, "the Lord our Righteousness," we will first show that—

I. THIS NAME BELONGS TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. It is impossible to conceive of any devout Jew ascribing the name of Jehovah to an ordinary earthly monarch, however great or famous he might be. Every Israelite would count it blasphemy so to speak of him. Moreover, the extravagance of the assertions here made, if regarded as descriptive of an earthly monarch, preclude the possibility of their having been so intended. How could any such be called the righteousness of his people? Zerubbabel was undoubtedly a noble prince, and in such measure as was possible to him answered to the prophetic description. He was a branch of the house of David, and nothing is known against him. But his power was very limited, and in no sense did he fill up the portraiture that is given here. Jew and Christian alike agree that neither he nor

any of his obscure descendants could possibly answer to this name of "the Lord our Righteousness." Both alike affirm that the promised Messiah is meant, and to him along can it belong. And that our Lord Jesus was that Messiah the Scriptures constantly assert. He was "the Root and the Offspring of David," was born "of the house and lineage of David" according to the flesh. He was the tender Shoot, the Sprout that sprang from the original root when all the stock and branches of the stately tree that had once grown on that root had died down, decayed, and disappeared. But he was more than the Branch of Jesse: he was the Lord from heaven, the Son of God. Therefore to speak of him as Jehovah is consistent with all the Scripture representations of his Divine dignity. And although the day of his complete triumph has not yet come, nor is his kingdom fully set up, still we clearly see its beginnings, its advance, and its continual growth, so that it is not hard to believe in all those coming glories of his reign on which the ancient prophets, as Jeremiah here, loved to dwell. On all these grounds, therefore, we claim this high and sacred title for the Lord Jesus Christ. He the Church has held all along is "the Lord our Righteousness" whom the inspired prophet foretold. And—

II. THIS NAME IS ALTOGETHER APPROPRIATE TO HIM. Not because of the righteousness of his character alone, nor either because of the happy condition to which he would one day bring the Jewish people. We believe that he will do for them all that is here said. We see no objection to the taking of the promises made concerning them in their literal meaning. But if this were all that is contained in this name, then St. Paul could not be justified in claiming, as he perpetually does, the righteousness of Christ to be to and upon *all* them that believe. This view is limited to no one age, no one country, no one people, but reaches out to all everywhere and of every age. But the true justification of this glorious title lies in such facts as these: 1. *The Lord Jesus makes us righteous in God's esteem.* God ever demands righteousness. It is his incessant appeal here in all these prophecies. But it is here that men have ever failed. They have evaded this Divine demand, and have endeavoured to substitute all manner of things in its place, and so to compensate for it. They have refused nothing so long as they might be let off this. Hence the word of the Lord, "There is none righteous, no, not one." It is in this emergency that "the Lord our Righteousness" comes forward, takes up our case, and causes us to be esteemed righteous before God—causes us to be looked upon as what we really are not; as righteous when there is much unrighteousness in us all, and scarce aught else in some. Of course this is objected to and cavilled at not a little, and many fail to see how it can righteously be. But all the while the like is occurring every day. Does not the government of a land continually do things which involve the whole people of the land, although many of them may entirely disapprove? Still it is the whole country that is regarded as acting by and through its government. And yet we assent to this arrangement, this principle of representation, as equitable, just, and necessary. And not merely in dealings between man and man, but in those between God and man, this same principle of representation may be seen perpetually at work. Assuredly the whole human race was represented in its first parents, and God held it to be so, so that the consequences of their actions have passed over to their posterity right down to the present day. And in each family the head of it involves all the members, so that there are many innocent victims of their fathers' sin, and more, we trust, who are recipients of favours won by their fathers' virtues and obedience to God's will rather than their own. It is the principle of representation again. Is it, then, a thing to wonder at that a good and gracious God should devise another system of representation to meet and counteract that which has wrought so much ill? That is, is it to be wondered at that the Lord Jesus Christ should be constituted as much the Head and Representative of his people as Adam was constituted the head and representative of all who have descended from him; that there should be a second Adam as well as a first, and that Christ should be that second Adam, as St. Paul declares he is? Surely there is nothing unreasonable in all this. It is in harmony with what we perpetually see. And if he who is our Representative *desired so to be*, as our Lord did—for he yearned to draw all men unto and into him—surely this, his own desire, makes his being constituted our Representative more reasonable still. And because *he qualified himself* for this office so perfectly. He came and was one of us, lived our

life, bore our burdens, submitted to our sorrows, bore the penalty of our sins, "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Now, if the principle of representation be just at all, surely it is still more so that the Lord Jesus should be that Representative. But if he be, then, because he is altogether righteous, acceptable, and well pleasing before God, we must be so too; yea, we are so, for he is "the Lord our Righteousness." God looks not upon us, but he beholds Christ, who is "our Shield;" he looks on "the face of his Anointed." "We are accepted in the Beloved." "Christ is made unto us righteousness." 2. *And he makes us to be as the righteous in our conditions.* So only can the paramount and predominant features of God's dealing with us now be accounted for. Man being what he is, why should he be dealt with so mercifully as he is? The answer is, because it is the Lord who is our Righteousness. If I see a number of poor destitute people taken, and clothed, and fed, and dealt with in all kind and beautiful ways, and I ask the explanation, I am at once pointed to some one who has secured all this favour for them, and by whose kindness it has become theirs. And when I see man, despising God, prayerless, sinning daringly day by day, ungrateful, evil, disobedient continually, destitute of all goodness, and yet treated with all kindness and love, must I not conclude that the righteousness of another is the secret of his mercies, and the real cause of the goodly portion he enjoys? 3. But Christ is "the Lord our Righteousness" *because he makes us righteous in ourselves.* If it were possible that God could for ever esteem and deal with as righteous, not only those who were not righteous, but who never could become so, we should find it difficult to maintain the truth taught us by this name. But God's counting us righteous in Christ is reasonable and right, because we are in the sure way to become so. For when any come to the Lord Jesus Christ in living faith, a new will is given them. They are, as our Lord says, "born again." It is as on a railway, where by one movement of the points the whole train is turned on to another line, and proceeds afterwards in quite a different direction. So by this coming to Christ the man is placed on another line, started in a new direction; a new will is his, and he is a new man. When the turbid stream of the Rhone falls into the Lake of Geneva it loses its old character, and its waters assimilate themselves to the exquisite clearness and colour of that lake, so that when they flow out at the other end they are as a new river altogether — "old things have passed away, and all things are become new." So is it in the great change when a man comes to Christ. And when we remember that whilst man looketh at the outward appearance, God looketh at the heart, it is easy to see that God may count a man to be righteous whom we should not think so at all. If the will, the heart, be Christ's, though it may be once and again overborne by the fierce rush of temptation, as David's was, yet, because the heart is right, God counts that man righteous still. And this new will, the new heart, ever tends to embody and express itself in act. It will be like a hidden fire, struggling and struggling on till it can find vent and work its good desire. And it shall do this in due time. Meanwhile God but anticipates; looks on to the harvest as the husbandman does even when the blade has not shown itself as yet above the ground. But he imputes the righteousness of the harvest to those fields though not a blade appears. The parent imputes the righteousness of the intelligent, loving youth to the little infant just born, not because it has it, but because he believes it will have it. And God counts us as righteous, not alone because Christ is our Representative, but because he will restore our souls. He will make us righteous in ourselves as well as before God. And he does this by setting before us in his own life the perfect example, and attracting us thereto by an ever-increasing attraction; and by imparting to us his own Spirit, who nourishes us in all goodness; and by bringing to bear upon us the mightiest motives which can ever control or influence the human heart—love, gratitude, holy fear, bright, blessed hope,—all these and yet others; so day by day does he strengthen and confirm the good will which, when we first came to him, he gave us as his first gift. Thus does he make those righteous whom God for his sake now counts to be so. And now—

III. CAN WE SAY THAT THE LORD IS "OUR" RIGHTEOUSNESS? We may have correct views on this great doctrine, we may believe in a general and abstract way that the Lord is the Righteousness of his people, but all this is far short of being able to say that the Lord is *our* Righteousness. We can only say this as we daily and habitually trust him—as we "keep touch" with him, as it were, continually looking to him and

relying upon him. For faith it is which vitalizes our connection with him. The wires of the electric cable may stretch all the way beneath the ocean, and each shore of the Atlantic be joined together by them; but there is no communication until the electric current is sent along that cable, and then the circuit is complete. And so the channel along which our faith may pass is provided; but until faith goes from our heart —that electric force of faith—the connecting bond may almost as well not be. Until then Christ is a Representative of man before God, but he is not *our* Representative. It is faith that vitalizes that connection, and he is not our Righteousness until we believe. Faith brings us into real union with him, reproduces in us the mind which was in him, lays hold on the grace which he holds out to us, leads us to repent, to love, to obey, to follow him in the daily walk and conversation. Remember, the Lord demands righteousness. We have it not in ourselves. In this our destitution the Lord comes to us and offers to be our Righteousness. We have but to appropriate and claim that which he offers. Shall we be so sinful, so mad, as to refuse? The great day when the banquet for God's saints shall be spread is hastening on, and we shall all of us be eager to crowd in and take our place there with the blessed. But what if, when the King comes in to view his guests, we have not on the wedding-garment, but are dressed in some robe of our own, which we think will answer as well? You know how he was dealt with who presumed so to do. Oh, then, that such may not be our doom, let us hasten unto Christ, and pray him now and for ever to be "the Lord our Righteousness."—C.

Ver. 28.—"*What is the chaff to," etc.*? One seems to see the flash of the prophet's eye, the tremulous emotion, the indignant scorn, with which he bursts out with this scathing question; one can almost hear his loud, vehement tones as he taunts with it the false prophets, against whose wickedness he had been protesting throughout the greater part of this chapter. What sternness, what biting severity, characterize it! As one has said, "It cuts like the edge of a razor. As a sabre flashing over one's head; a sword gleaming to the very point; a fire lurid with coals of juniper;—we are appalled as we glance at it. It strikes with implacable resentment. There is no word of mercy toward the chaff; not a thought of clemency or forbearance. He bloweth at it as though it were a worthless thing, not to be accounted of—a nothing, that vanishes with a puff." It reminds us, as so much in Jeremiah's character and experience does, of our Lord's indignation against the false teachers of his day. What terrible, burning words were those which *he* uttered against the "scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites," who swarmed around him! Where there is deep love of God and of man, there cannot but be such holy hatred of such as are what those were whom our Lord and the prophet denounced. Jeremiah in this chapter, from the ninth verse downwards, has been pouring out his soul against them. He declares himself broken-hearted because of them—by their conduct and the woes it was bringing upon his people. He laments the grievous wickedness of the nation, but charges it all upon these faithless prophets, who taught men to sin by their bad example, and encouraged them therein by their false teachings. And as he thinks of the worthlessness of the men and of their prophesyings, his sacred anger and scorn mount up and burst forth in these terrible words, "What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not *my* word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Yes, these are terrible words; but how applicable, how necessary they are to be insisted upon, even now! For, monstrous almost as it may appear, men are, as they have ever been, most prone to care more for the chaff than for the wheat; to spend themselves on securing that which is worthless, whilst that which is most precious they despise. And the danger is increased because those things which are as the chaff to the wheat are often, as the chaff and wheat themselves, closely associated together, have grown up together, are very difficult to separate, and are mutually dependent one upon another. It is easy enough, when we see the wind driving the chaff away, to discern the difference between it and the wheat, and the inferiority of the one to the other; but it is not so easy whilst the two are together, and seeming so much as if they were all of one nature and value. Now, apply all this in regard to sundry matters in which this discrimination needs sorely to be made. And—

1. To THE PROPHESYING OF THE PRESENT DAY. The occasion and connection of the

words we are considering at once suggest this application. And let us be grateful to God that, amid the much prophesying of our own day, we have much of that "sure Word" to which St. Peter bids us give heed, as to a light shining in a dark place. Yes, there are faithful ministries, blessed be God for them; and that they are like the precious wheat, in contrast to the worthless chaff, has been proved over and over again by the testimony God himself has given to them. For, like the pure grain, they nourish the souls that are fed upon the Word they minister. The instruction that builds up, consolidates, and strengthens the spiritual frame is shown by that very fact to be not as chaff, but as wheat. And he would not only be ungrateful, but untruthful, who should deny that God has given and is maintaining many who minister to his people, whether young or old, in the congregation, the family, or the school, the pure Word of God. And the other striking characteristics of the true Word of God which are here spoken of are also found in their prophesyings. The Word of God which they minister is as *a fire*. How it enlightens, how it cheers, as on a cold wintry day! How it consumes the dross of the evil nature, burning on until all the evil in us be burnt out! Ah, yes, the pure Word of God—which still, thank God, is preached—is as a fire consuming the miserable pretences of self-righteousness in which the souls whom it touches have hitherto been trusting, and compelling them to hasten for shelter to him who is "the Lord our Righteousness." And it is *a hammer*, which, smiting the obdurate heart, causes the tears of true repentance to flow forth and refresh those who long have been thirsting to see such living waters. As at Pentecost the hammer of that Word fell upon those hearts which had been hard enough to crucify the Lord, and it so smote them as to break them, rock-like though they were, and they cried out, "What *shall* we do?" These are the signs of the Word of God, and they are not wanting still. *But yet there is much of instruction given that is far different from this*—as unlike it as chaff is unlike wheat. It may be the ministry of eloquence, or of ritual, or of philosophy, or of human learning, or of taste, or of fashion; and not a little of such ministry there is in the present day. It is brilliant, attractive, followed by crowds, admired, applauded; it is associated with all that art, culture, music, and ritual pomp can supply; it is very fashionable; for the sake of it humbler worship is abandoned, though that which is abandoned may be purer and more wholesome by far. But because in connection with all this ministry so pleasing to human likings there may be lacking that which alone nourishes the soul, and which has upon it the sure tokens of the Word of God, therefore, when there is this lack, God calls it chaff, and despises it accordingly. Do not think that all these things are in themselves to be despised. No; we would fain have the ministry of the Word of God surrounded with all that can serve to win attention, command reverence, and excite interest; we should be alert to look out for such things, and to secure them so far as we may; but let us see to it that they be but subordinate, that they all are used as aids to what is far higher and more important than themselves—that within this husk the pure grain of God's Word is enshrined and preserved. What is the good of any preaching or instruction, however pleasing or attractive it may be, that does not set the pure wheat of God's Word before hungry souls? Souls must live, and they cannot live on chaff. Oh that all those who preach and teach may more and more hear ever sounding in their ears this startling word, "What is the chaff," etc.! Apply this word—

II. To OUR OWN INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER—what we, each one, are. If we are the children of God, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and humbly striving day by day to do his will and to be well pleasing to him, then there is much that is wheat-like in us. That repentance, that faith, that regenerating grace, that law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, its meekness, patience, zeal, love,—all these things are as the wheat, and blessed be God they are to be found in some measure—would that it were larger—in us all. But *there is so much of a contrary nature*, so chaff-like, as well. Yes, verily, as chaff lying close by the side of our heart, wrapping it round, long associated with it, grown up with it, hard, hard indeed, to be parted from it; so is the evil of our hearts, the fleshly nature, the carnal mind, which yet clings to us as the husk does to the grain. And often we are at a complete loss to tell whether there is more of wheat or chaff about us—whether our destiny is to be stored in the garner, or to be as the chaff which the wind driveth away. But do we think about the chaff and the wheat as God thinks about them? Are we willing—yea, longing—to be utterly

rid of the chaff? Are we content to bear "the bruising flails of God's corrections" until they have "threshed off from us our vain affections"? Do we desire that every portion of this chaff may be got rid of, and "that we, wholesome grain and pure may be," and that only? Perhaps God's flails are laid upon us now, or his winnowing work is stripping off much from us, and making "our very spirit poor." Oh, if it be but to rid us of this chaff, let us not complain. Death itself is but God's chief flail "to purge the husk of this our flesh away, and leave the soul uncovered." Complain not, for "what is the chaff," etc.? And not only the sin in us, but *much that looks and is reckoned as far other than sin*, may be, after all, only chaff. Much of that feeling and conduct which is associated with our religious life may be of itself of a very worthless sort. Those tears which flow so freely when the preacher is in a pathetic mood,—what are they all worth if they never lead to a genuine repentance, a real turning of the soul to Christ? And that open profession of religion, coming to the table of the Lord and partaking of the sacred bread and wine, what is that if it be not the index and outward sign of a heart that trusts, that loves, that is consecrated to Christ? And that correct and orthodox creed for which we are so ready to show fight, and the deniers or doubters of which we so eagerly condemn, what is the good of it if it be not the guardian of a God-fearing and righteous life? And that giving of money—for it is to the amount kept back after we have given, and to the motive which prompts the gift, that God looks to determine which is wheat and which is chaff. And that eager activity in many forms of Christian work which some show, unless it be the outcome of a heart aglow with love to Christ, counts for very little with him who here asks, "What is the chaff," etc.? Again we say we do not despise these things—we would that there were more of them; but if at the heart of them there be not faith and love towards Christ, which alone are the wheat which these things are intended to serve and minister to, then they are but as the chaff which the wind driveth away. We are apt to think a great deal of them, and to rely upon them not a little for ourselves and for others. But they are not the wheat, only its husk, and "what . . . Lord." Apply this question—

III. To THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCH. And without doubt it may be affirmed that if the pure wheat of God's garner be not to be found in the fellowship of the Church, it is to be found nowhere. What our Lord said of his Church at the beginning, "Ye are the salt of the earth . . . ye are the light of the world," is true still. Oh, how many, thank God, of meek, pure, devout, consecrated souls has the Church ever numbered in her fellowship, and does so even yet! But still, even on the best threshing-floors the chaff is mingled with the wheat. Even those Churches which claim to be most careful over admission to their fellowship, and demand valid evidence to be given that there has been a real change of heart, a true conversion to God—even those can no more keep out the chaff than others who throw the responsibility of religious profession entirely on those who make it. But the presence of the chaff along with the wheat could be better borne if the two were always estimated as they should be. But it is not so. Let an unspiritual, worldly minded, hard, and unloving man find his way into a Church—and many such do—and if he be rich, or hold a good position in the world, he will at once be allowed an influence and an authority which he ought not to have—no, not for an hour. And if a Church can get hold of a number of such people, if wealth, and social influence, and education, and fashion flock to their doors, there you have the Church of Laodicea reproduced in most exact form. They will count themselves, and others also will count them, to be "rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing." But what will the Lord say when he cometh with his winnowing fan to throughly purge his floor? We are sorely tempted, all of us, to crave with a great craving the presence amongst us of persons of influence, wealth, and power. And all well and good if they be earnest, godly men at the same time. But we are in danger of welcoming them even if this great qualification be largely absent. And that we do too often find this sad intermixture of the worthless with God's wheat, is seen in the quick falling off of some of those who once were gathered with the Church of God. A little persecution, loss of worldly advantage, desire to stand well with those around,—these have all served as pretexts for not a few to break away altogether. Like "the nautilus, which is often seen sailing in tiny fleets in the Mediterranean Sea, upon the smooth surface of the water. It is a beautiful sight, but as soon as ever the tempest

begins to blow, and the first ripple appears upon the surface of the sea, the little mariners draw in their sails and betake themselves to the bottom of the sea, and you see them no more. How many are like that! When all goes well with Christianity many go sailing along fairly in the summer tide, but no sooner does trouble, or affliction, or persecution arise, than where are they? Ah, where are they? They have gone." Let us see to it that we esteem the wheat, however poor its surroundings, above all chaff, however richly it may be endowed. And above all, let us by our own loyalty to God, our sympathy with Christ, our love to our brethren, our cheerful self-sacrifice, our daily obedience, show that *we* are of those whom the Lord will own at the last, and not as the chaff which he will despise and destroy.

IV. To GOD'S FINAL ESTIMATE OF US ALL. For the great question which concerns every man who reads or hears these words is—Which am I, chaff or wheat? And that question is to be decided, not according to man's estimate, but God's. It is what *he* will judge, not what we may. Here in this world we are all mingled together, in every Church, family, town, village, society, or community whatsoever. In all places, under all circumstances and in all ways in this world, this commingling of the evil and the good is found; the chaff is ever closely associated with the wheat. "Let both grow together until the harvest," is our Lord's command, and no endeavour of ours can sever the two completely. But the very word "until" which our Saviour employs shows that there shall be a separating time; the two shall not for ever be conjoined as they are now. "Then two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left." In the same church, sitting side by side in the same pew, there may be found both chaff and wheat. Anticipate that awful separating time. It will come upon us as it came upon those ten virgins, five of whom were wise and five were foolish, but which was which none knew until the cry was heard, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh!" And so, though now none of us can tell what those are who gather with us, and join in the same holy service, listen to the same gospel, and unite in the same prayers, praises, and confessions, though outwardly we are all as the wheat of God, yet whether we be so or no God alone can tell. But do any ask—How can I, though consciously worthless as the chaff, yet become as the wheat? Blessed be God, such a great change is possible. Go to the Lord Jesus Christ; tell him how poor, wretched, evil, you know yourself to be. Cast yourself down at his feet. Call upon him for his aid. Thou shalt become a new creature in Christ, old things shall pass away, all things shall become new. The chaff shall be changed into the wheat, death shall be exchanged for life, and now, worthless once, thou art in Christ precious for ever, and the garner of the Lord shall be thine everlasting home. Come unto Christ in faith and love, for the heart so yielded is alone God's wheat; but if when the great separating day comes thou seekest to find safety in aught else, however precious you and others may deem it, he will spurn both it and you. For "what is . . . Lord."—C.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Jehovah-Tsidkenu.* It is in his kingly character that the uprising of the Messiah is here predicted. The shepherds that destroyed and scattered the flock of God were the corrupt rulers of the line of David. God was visiting upon them one after another "the evil of their doings;" and after them he would raise up men of a nobler sort—men like Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Maccabees, who should be true leaders and commanders of the people (ver. 4). But these, again, would but prepare the way for One far greater. Beyond all these changes the eye of the prophet is fixed on the time when out of the seemingly withered root of David a sapling shall arise, "the righteous Branch;" One who shall perfectly realize the Divine idea of "a ruler of men" (2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4)—the King who shall "reign in righteousness," and of the "increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end" (Isa. ix. 6, 7; xi. 1—6; xxxii. 1; Zech. ix. 9). Towards him the hopes of loyal hearts through every previous age reached forth. In him the "desire of all nations" finds its glorious fulfilment. "And this is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." In unfolding the full significance of this name, consider (1) *the personal righteousness of Christ,* (2) *the way in which that righteousness becomes ours.*

I. HIS PERSONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS. He is emphatically "Jesus Christ *the Righteous,*" the one only absolutely righteous being ever born into the world. Our human nature,

the beauty and harmony of which, in the person of Adam, the father of our race, the touch of moral evil had defaced and destroyed, appeared again in him, the "second Adam," in all its sinless, faultless perfection, absolutely free from the taint of evil. And this not as a development, but as a new Divine revelation; not as the consummate product of moral forces inherent in our nature, but as a supernatural phenomenon, a miracle, in the sphere of man's moral life. In him the "righteousness of God" appeared, embodied and illustrated in human form. Our faith in this historic fact rests on different grounds. 1. The angelic testimony (Luke i. 35). 2. The direct testimony of the Father (Matt. iii. 17; xvii. 5). 3. His declarations respecting himself (John viii. 29, 46; xiv. 30; xv. 10; xvii. 4). 4. The witness of his enemies (Judas, Herod, Pilate and his wife, the Roman centurion). 5. The apostolic testimony (Acts iii. 14; 2 Cor. v. 21; Heb. vii. 26; 1 Pet. ii. 22; 1 John ii. 1; iii. 5). 6. The profound impression left on our spirits by a careful study of the Gospel records. The absolute sinlessness of Jesus is one of the foundation-stones in the fabric of Christian doctrine, and to doubt or deny it is to undermine and destroy the whole. But his righteousness means more than faultless personal character. It includes the positive fulfilment of the Father's purposes and of the work the Father had given him to do. "I have glorified thee on the earth," etc. (John xvii. 4). "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering," etc. (Heb. x. 5—10). His was a righteousness wrought out through all the patient obedience of a blameless life, consummated in the vicarious shame and sorrow of the cross. As the sunbeam receives no contamination from the foulest thing on which it may chance to fall, so did he pass triumphantly through all the evil of the world and go back to the bosom of the Father with a purity as unsullied as that in which he came. "Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. i. 4).

II. How his righteousness becomes ours. 1. *As the ground of our forgiveness.* Faith in him as our righteous "Advocate with the Father" delivers us from condemnation. We believe in no "transference of a moral quality." As a man's sins are his own and not another's, so whatever of virtue there may be in him belongs to himself alone. But is it incredible that God should deal with sinful men in the way of mercy because of the perfect righteousness of "the man Christ Jesus"? "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. v. 21). There is an instinctive witness in our souls to the fact that if "grace reigns" towards us it must be "through righteousness." This is God's answer to that instinct: "By the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. v. 18). 2. *As the inspiring cause of our personal sanctification.* The gospel is God's method of making men righteous, not a scheme by virtue of which he reckons them to be so when they are not. Faith in Christ's mediatorial work as the ground of forgiveness draws the soul irresistibly into living sympathy with himself. It is impossible to dwell in fellowship with him without sharing his spirit and becoming "righteous even as he is righteous." Not more surely does the prepared surface receive the picture the sun's rays paint upon it, than does the reverent, trustful, loving soul reflect his image. "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass," etc. (2 Cor. iii. 18). Thus does his righteousness become ours. 3. *As the rectifying power in the general life of the world.* "A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of his kingdom," and wherever he reigns the discords of the world are resolved into a blessed harmony. He is the Creator of "the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—W.

Vers. 23, 24.—*The omnipresent God.* It is an essentially heathen conception of the Deity against which these grand words bear witness. There were two false tendencies of the heathen mind to which the Hebrew faith was a perpetual rebuke—one was that of thinking of the Deity as dwelling remote from the ways of men, "throned in sequestered sanctity," too lofty to take any interest in the affairs of earth; the other that of localizing and limiting the Deity, conceiving of him as exercising a partial jurisdiction, as belonging to a particular place and people. The God of the Jews was no mere distant abstraction, but an ever-present, ever-active power; not the God of one nation only, but of the "whole earth." Consider—

I. THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD HERE INDICATED. Two attributes—omnipresence and omniscience—are asserted. But they are so mutually dependent and so inseparable as to be virtually one. By the very necessity of his Being as the infinite Spirit, God is not more in one place or sphere of existence than another, but alike in all, "afar off" as well as "at hand," filling heaven and earth; and wherever he is, there he is in all the fulness of his perfect intelligence, not observant or cognizant of some things or beings more than others, but having infallible knowledge of all. Note respecting this divine attribute: 1. *Its mystery.* The being of One who is thus superior to the limitations of space and time and to all our finite conditions—to whom there is no nearness and no distance, neither past nor future, nothing new and nothing old, to whom "all things are naked and opened,"—must needs be inscrutable to us. Our boldest images are but the veil of our ignorance, and even the sublimest representations of the inspired Word leave the problem as insoluble as ever. The celebrated dictum, "His centre is everywhere and his circumference nowhere," in no way helps us to any real comprehension of infinity; and such grand poetic utterances as those of the hundred and thirty-ninth psalm, however much they may find their echo in the depths of our spiritual consciousness, only call forth the confession, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." 2. *Its moral significance.* The moral conditions involved, the moral attributes associated with it, and their direct relation to ourselves, clothe it with profound interest and solemn importance. If God were at an impassable distance, it might little signify to us what his moral attributes were. But now that he is thus near—a presence from which we cannot escape, an eye that is always searching us through and through, a hand that is always laid upon us—the question as to what his dispositions towards us are is one of unspeakable moment. His absolute knowledge of us is connected with a present secret act of judgment, prophetic of the open judgment to come. And it is his perfection that is thus coming into perpetual contact with our imperfect thoughts and ways. His holy love is the light that searches into us, the fire that tries us. This attribute of omniscience derives tremendous importance from the fact that "our God is a consuming fire." 3. *The individuality of its application.* "Can any hide himself?" Like all other Divine truths, this is nothing to us until we bring it to bear on our own personal condition and doings. The fact itself is independent of all our thoughts about it, and even of our very existence. But for it to have any real influence over us we must reduce it from its vague generality to the narrow compass of our own being, and concentrate the force of it upon the single line of our own daily history—"Thou God seest *me*." We apprehend the universal truth aright only so far as that cry of Hagar expresses our soul's deepest consciousness—as if the whole world of accountable beings around us were annihilated, and we stood, as in the solitudes of a desert, alone with God.

II. THE PRACTICAL EFFECT THAT TRUTH MAY BE EXPECTED TO PRODUCE. We cannot imagine one more fitted to have a salutary influence in every way upon us. Let God be to you only a distant object of contemplation, as he is to the mere theological disputant, and with whatever attributes you may clothe him, they touch no part of your being with any living power. Conceive of him, in a dreamy pantheistic way, as a mere impersonal, all-pervading force, and there is nothing in your belief to elevate your moral character and ennoble your life. But believe in the God of the Bible, whose voice is heard in the text, and you embrace the grandest and most influential truth the human soul is capable of entertaining. The truth, rather, will possess you, as no other truth can, moulding and governing your whole nature, and adapting itself in an infinite variety of ways to every aspect of your being and life. Chiefly two lessons are enforced: 1. *Self-scrutiny.* We shall be concerned to become acquainted with ourselves that we may know how far the spirit and tenor of our moral life is in harmony with the will and the life of God. Not that a mere curious and anxious habit of testing the quality of one's own feelings, and weighing and measuring one's motives, has necessarily any healthy moral effect. It may be the reverse. But the sense of God will naturally awaken a desire that the relation in which we stand towards him may be a right and happy one. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart," etc. (1 John iii. 23, 24). The loyalty of the heart to God is the essential principle of a religious life. The sin of these false prophets was the loosening of the bond of their spiritual allegiance to him. "They stood not

in the counsel of the Lord." In the case of the Pharisees, their external proprieties were but the veil of internal hollowness and corruption and death; and Christ said to them, "Ye are they that approve yourselves unto men, but God knoweth your hearts." Let our hearts be right with God, let the main stream of our inner life be flowing heavenwards, and we need not tremble to know that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." 2. *Earnest preparation for the future and final judgment.* "He hath appointed a day," etc. (Acts xvii. 31); "We must all appear," etc. (2 Cor. v. 10). Your personal alienation from God may give you little trouble now, but "what will you do when he riseth up? when he visiteth, what will you answer him?" (Job xxxi. 14). There is no way of preparation for the solemn judgment of the future but in that personal forgiveness and reconciliation, that moral cleansing and righteousness of life, that comes through fellowship with the Saviour (Phil. iii. 9).

"Low at his cross we view the day
When heaven and earth shall pass away,
And thus prepare to meet him."

W.

Vers. 1—4.—*Shepherds, bad and good.* I. THE SENTENCE ON THE UNFAITHFUL SHEPHERDS. This is perhaps the most special and emphatic of all Jeremiah's references to the unfaithful shepherds. Nowhere does he go into such detail as Ezekiel does (ch. xxxiv.). But whatever may be lacking in illustrative detail, the essential facts are mentioned. Here are men upon whom is laid a charge such as is laid on a shepherd by the owner of the pasture and the flock. The business of such a man is to provide food for the flock, defend it from beasts of prey, prevent as far as he can any of the flock from wandering; and if any should wander do his best to restore them. This might be a task of no small difficulty to the literal shepherd of the literal sheep. It required courage, watchfulness, patience, promptitude, and above all, fidelity. And yet even a shepherd enriched by these virtues might have many losses and failures. God knew, indeed, that for kings and persons in authority to guide those under them was a task more arduous far than that of shepherding sheep; and it was not mere failure that he complained of. He complained because there had been no serious attempt to attain success. The very men who should have ruled firmly and righteously and with fidelity to Jehovah had been spoilers of the sheep, using them to serve their own ends, and leaving every one to do what was right in his own eyes. The rulers had thus rejected the authority and service of Jehovah and set up self in his place. Self was to rule, self was to be served. The sentence upon this traitorous conduct is given in very general terms, but was none the less real and effective. God did visit on these rulers the evil of their doings. It was necessary to give a hint of this in passing, to show that, while God delights in mercy, he must also always be just. The great matter to be spoken of here is the restoring and securing of the scattered flock, and if the judgment on those who have helped to make the mischief is simply mentioned in passing, it is enough. Besides, we must remember that the sheep also had their share of the shame. The rulers could not have done so much harm if under them there had been a people of a widely different spirit.

II. THE RESTORATION OF THE SCATTERED. The pastors are spoken of as those who have destroyed and scattered the sheep. The mischief they do is therefore not confined to a simple scattering. That which is destroyed cannot be restored. But the part that has been scattered, God has in his keeping; and in due time he will bring it together again. Note how Jehovah, who announces punishment to the unfaithful shepherds because they have scattered and dispersed his flock, goes on to say that his own hand has been concerned in this same dispersion. Here is a beautiful illustration of how God overrules calamities. Though it is the recklessness of evil men that has scattered Israel, yet the good hand of God is stronger than any hand of man; and the dispersion has been into such directions as God saw to be best. Though these remnants of the flock were far from their proper pasturage, they were nevertheless in safe places, where they would be exercised in a truly profitable discipline. They were perhaps but a very feeble remnant as man counts feebleness, and yet in God's hands a small part may be more effectual for his purposes than the incongruous whole from which it has been separated.

There may be in it a peculiar coherency and submissiveness, and a peculiar energy of growth; so that the promise of fruitfulness and increase will be amply fulfilled. The Divine course of action with this remnant seems to be much the same as that followed with Noah and his family in the repeopling of the world after the Deluge.

III. THE SUFFICIENCY OF PASTORAL OVERSIGHT PROMISED FOR THE FUTURE. Of bad shepherds there have been only too many, and of good shepherds none have been so good but what they might have been a great deal better. The cause of all these bitter experiences has, however, lain with the people themselves. Wanting to be like nations round about, they desired kings; and God gave them these desires to the full, to show what the end would be. Then when the folly of the sheep, in trying to choose shepherds of their own devising, has been illustrated sufficiently, God sends shepherds who shall be true shepherds. He alone is able, as he alone has right, to appoint such shepherds as will be equal to all the serious charge put into their hands. No pastors will be able to do anything for God's flock save those who are indubitably of God's appointment. Our wisdom is to allow God to provide out of his knowledge, rather than try ourselves to provide, seeing how ignorant we are. The acceptance of God's true teachers and guides has to come at the last, and many disappointments and vexations would be spared if this acceptance were allowed to come at the first.—Y.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The righteous Scion of David.* What is general in vers. 3 and 4 now becomes exceedingly definite. Attention is directed to one particular person in whom shall centre all the blessings that can come through a king worthy of the name. The days are coming in which he will rule in the midst of a kingdom worthy of him. Jehovah sees these days coming as a watchman might observe people approaching in the far distance and moving steadily in the right direction. These days are on the way, and the actual experience of them is only a matter of time. In these days will appear—

I. A SCION OF DAVID. "Branch" is a somewhat misleading word here, especially considering the use which is made of the branch in the New Testament. The branch is properly taken in relation to the trunk, both being parts of a living whole. "I am the Vine, ye are the branches." Instead of the Christ being spoken of as a Branch from David, David is rather to be spoken of, by virtue of his faith in the coming One, as a branch of the Christ. The real meaning, of course, is that, at some time in the future, one of the lineal descendants of David will fulfil these purposes of God and the consequent hopes of devout men. Hence the importance which belongs to the genealogies in Matthew and Luke. The more the Gospels are looked into, the more it will be seen how they are constructed on certain lines indicated in the prophecies. The two Gospel genealogies become additionally credible when we reflect what a motive there was to preserve the record of lineal succession from David. Considering how uncertain it is that any man will have lineal descendants centuries after his own times, it is a peculiarly noticeable miracle that he who appeared something like a thousand years after David to do such great works, should have been unquestionably David's descendant, born at Bethlehem and named as Son of David by the common people.

II. A RIGHTEOUS SCION OF DAVID. In a not unreasonable sense of the word, David was himself a righteous man. We cannot say anything for him, any more than for ourselves, if we contrast him with the righteous God. But we have also to look at him over against the vile men with whom he was so often in conflict, men who appear not to have had one generous feeling or upward aspiration. Especially we must contrast him with some of his own descendants. When we look down the line as far as history gives the opportunity, we see first good men and then bad men. And it is a great mystery in the Christ's human nature that he should have been a Scion of the bad as well as the good in this line. We are, therefore, obliged to recollect: 1. That David, who was righteous in a modified sense, was in due time followed by a descendant who was completely righteous. He who was ever reaching forward, trying to approximate more and more to the will of God, was followed by One who revealed that will in all the conduct of his life on earth. 2. That even as a bad father had a good son (or take, as a very striking illustration, the bad grandfather Manasseh and the good grandson Josiah), so all these bad kings had in due time a successor in Jesus of Nazareth, who was undefiled by any taint that might reasonably be supposed to have come down from them. As

we think of the contrasts thus furnished, the use of all these deplorable records in the Books of Kings and Chronicles comes manifestly out. The mischief and misery which wicked kings can work must be seen in all their hideousness, so that all the more a disposition may be excited to attend to the blessings which Jesus will secure and multiply when he comes to reign as King.

III. THE PROSPERITY OF THIS RIGHTEOUS KING. It must be made clear in some great and everlastingly conspicuous instance that practical righteousness is followed by prosperity, and that nowhere is the connection more sure between a cause allowed fully to operate and its full effect. The most hurtful kind of wickedness, the men who commit it do not delight in for its own sake. Their aim is outward prosperity, to secure riches in the easiest and most rapid way; and this may necessitate a degree of wickedness of which oftentimes they seem not in the least conscious. Then, of course, in the end the prosperity proves corrupt and ruins the man who risked everything for it. But now turn to the individual experience of Jesus. His course in this world had nothing in it of prosperity as some count prosperity. He lived in poverty; he did not live long; and he died as criminals die. All these experiences, however, only bring out the real prosperity. After the cross the manifestation of his glory and power began in the acceptance of him by hearts that he had completely subdued. There never has been such a king as Jesus of Nazareth; never any one who has elicited such whole-hearted homage, such complete, faithful, self-denying service. He prospers and he makes his servants prosper. The more his glory shines, the more their lives are brightened. This surely is indeed a royal prosperity.

IV. THE PROSPERITY OF THE PEOPLE IS INDICATED: 1. By the king's own action in judgment and righteousness, or, as we might otherwise put it, in righteous judgment. As one in authority and power, he has to give decisions, and these decisions are always righteous. Human kings were arbitrary and capricious; their likes and dislikes, their political necessities, had much to do with the decisions they gave. But with this righteous Scion of David it is very different. He lays down great principles which, if men would only attend to them and take in the spirit of them, would stop all disputings and litigations. 2. By the security of the people. The subjects of Jesus have true safety. They are safe in themselves and safe in their spiritual possessions. He who enables them to acquire the true riches shows also how to hold them fast; else the riches would not be true riches at all. And it is not the least boon that he gives them the power, if only they have faith to exercise it, of living without anxiety and distraction. It is very dishonouring to our great King not to believe that all our best interests are perfectly safe in his charge.—Y.

Ver. 14.—*Prophets strengthening the hands of evil-doers.* Jeremiah had much to say at different times on the unfaithfulness of the prophets—how flatly opposed they were in all their conduct to that required by the duties of their office, how utterly negligent they were of the great opportunities of rebuke which were peculiarly their own. And there stands in this verse an expression which gives a climax to their evil-doings. A prophet shows himself most of all an evil-doer when he upholds the hands of evil-doers.

I. THE PROPHET IS REQUIRED IN A SPECIAL MANNER TO DO WHAT HE CAN TO WEAKEN THE HANDS OF EVIL-DOERS. All who respect the will of God, and feel sympathy with what is right and true and Divine, are bound to hinder bad men in their actions; but he who held the office of a prophet among the people of God was looked to as speaking with an authority higher than that of a private person. Officialism, with all its drawbacks and perils, with all its risk of self-assertion, has been of great advantage to practical religion. It is true, on the one hand, that to put a bad man into a holy office is to bring that office into contempt, but surely it is also true, on the other hand, that a good man in a holy office has his power for good much increased. Here in Israel at this time there was a multitude of evil-doers, doing evil with both hands earnestly. At the same time, there were doubtless those who did evil with weak and uncertain hands. It is matter of thankfulness that evil-doers are so often practically restrained in this way. Disposition is willing, but resolution is weak. There is the desire to do very bad things, but the courage is lacking. We have an instance of this in those enemies of our Lord who were so often hindered in their designs because they

feared the people. If all the evil could be done that is desired to be done, society would become intolerable. Now, the peculiar mischief that these prophets did was in strengthening the hands of wicked men who were also weak. They spoke encouragingly, and perhaps drew them on by example. Hence evil was done *openly* that otherwise might have been done *secretly*. Conspiracies and alliances became more practicable. Evil was made to put on the aspect of good, and men did energetically with perverted consciences what otherwise they might have done with much hesitation, and therefore with diminished force. There are certain men always to whom evil-doing becomes easy when it becomes respectable. Thus we see how great were the responsibilities and opportunities of the old Hebrew prophets.

II. Hence we see something of what A DUTY AND OPPORTUNITY BELONG TO ALL CHRISTIAN PEOPLE. Are not all the Lord's people prophets, if only they choose to regard their opportunities? With regard to evil men, it is especially laid on us to hinder *their action* by all wise and rightful means. The formation of their designs we cannot hinder; we cannot see beneath the surface, and prevent the germination of the poisonous growth; but when it appears above the surface, we may do our best to pluck it out. Under the specious guise of love for individual liberty we may tolerate the greatest evils till they grow beyond our control. The man who took a tiger's cub for a pet found it become perilous long before he expected. We should do all we can to strengthen those who are the modern equivalents to the Hebrew prophets. Such men appear from time to time, and we should pray for insight that we may discern their mission and claims. Such men are sent to weaken, and ultimately to paralyze, the strong hands of the wicked. They are the representatives of great causes; and if through cowardice, self-indulgence, and fear of being thought peculiar, we neglect them, then we may do much harm.

III. THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF STRENGTHENING THE HANDS OF ALL WHO WANT TO BE GOOD. They are so often weak in action. "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." They are hindered by strong temptations which come in their way, when they are striving to get nearer God's ideal for them. They are in need of sympathy. They have to be helped in reaching encouraging views of Divine truth. They need to be remembered in prayer, and generally to have more heart and spirit put into them; then, having abundant life within, they will not lack force, steadiness, and persistency of hand. If we are actively engaged in strengthening the hands of the good, we are to this extent weakening the hands of the evil. And, finally, it is very consoling to recollect that when those who profess to be good are found strengthening the hands of evil-doers, this is precisely the time when God's indignation is aroused and his opposition most effective. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"—Y.

Ver. 16.—*Speaking the vision of one's own heart.* Observe—

I. THERE IS THE PUTTING OF ONE'S OWN IMAGINATION IN THE PLACE OF GOD'S TRUTH. A prophet, divinely sent, expresses the words which God has put into his mouth, or reports the vision which God has made to rise before him. If, then, it was true that these prophets, as prophets, were speaking only the vision of their own hearts, it was quite enough to condemn them. It is very possible that they had brought themselves to believe that they were speaking the truth. In the days when prophetic vision was vouchsafed to man nothing was easier than for a heated imagination to see whatever it wanted to see; and then the subject of this vision would persuade himself that the vision was of God. How, then, was *a prophet to know that what he had seen was truly of God?* The answer is very largely to be found in considering the sense of burden and responsibility which evidently rested on true prophets. About a true prophet there was nothing egotistic, conceited, or impetuous. Generally, too, he had to say things which were painful for a sensitive man to speak, and humiliating for self-willed people to hear; whereas these prophets against whom Jeremiah warns the people managed to say things very agreeable. We read that they proclaimed peace and prosperity to the evil-doer. Now, whatever peculiarity there was in the visions given to the prophets, it is plain that there could be nothing contradictory to God's holiness and his laws, so clearly expressed, for human life. When prophets came with visions contradicting human self-will and human expectations, there was in this a presumption that they were sent of God. David desired to build a house for God in place of the old

tabernacle, and doubtless the desire seemed to be one to which there could be no possible objection. Nathan, however, had a vision by which David was forbidden to build. It would have been pleasanter to go to the king with a message more accordant to his wishes, but he could only speak what God had shown him—a word requiring submission of the human will to a higher and a wiser one. So, turning to the New Testament, we find Ananias at Damascus and Peter at Joppa receiving visions which seemed to them full of incredibility, going right in the face of all their previous experiences and convictions. Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that some, at least, of these lying prophecies were purchased with money. People paid the diviners to hear pleasant things, and pleasant things must be told them even if they were false.

II. THERE WERE EFFECTIVE TESTS FOR THESE VAIN IMAGINATIONS FOR ANY WHO CARED TO EMPLOY THEM. Honest minds know how to receive a true prophet. There is a subtle sympathy between speakers of the right sort and hearers of the right sort. God, who sent so many prophets to Israel, was not likely to leave Israel without a sure way of testing them. So if the prophet or dreamer of dreams gave the people a sign or wonder, and then told them to go *after other gods*, they might thereby know that he was a deceiver. No sign, however specious and wonderful it be, can make that a truth to-day which yesterday was a lie. Every fresh prophet must be in harmony with the tried and approved prophets who have gone before him. There is, indeed, no greater peril than to turn away from any true messenger of God; and happily there is no need to do so, through uncertainty as to his credentials. Any one who points out a present wrong in our lives that needs to be put right immediately, is to that extent a prophet of God; and if, in addition, he ventures on certain predictions, then all we can do is to wait. Gamaliel's shrewd advice cannot be too constantly kept in mind. What we cannot be certain about while a thing is in the seed will be made clear when it comes to the fruit. The most important matters are ever those on which we have to decide at once; and God never fails to send forth his light and truth so as to make the decision right.—Y.

Vers. 23—32.—*The giving forth of the word of man as the word of God.* I. GOD'S UNFAILING OBSERVATION. All the reasonings within the minds of these false prophets are open to God. They themselves, audacious, and to some extent self-deluded, reckon on not being detected. They speak what the people wish to believe, and are thus pretty certain of finding acceptance from them. But they forget, or rather they have never properly understood, the omnipresence of God. If this attribute of God had been a reality to their minds, they would not have come so much under idolatrous influences. The possibility of lying or in any way distorting and manipulating the truth seems to depend on an utter forgetfulness of the fact that God is indeed everywhere, filling all space, so that his eye and ear are everywhere. When we read of God appearing to men in different places, we know that the men travelled from one place to another; but God, even when he appeared to them in the new place, was not a whit the less remaining in the old. That God is everywhere is a truth meant to have a most confirming and cheering influence upon the mind of man; but because this truth is not apprehended man both loses what he was meant to enjoy, and becomes presumptuous and reckless in his practical denial of God's authority. God, therefore, makes his assurance through the true prophet that his eye is upon every movement of the false ones. Those who assure themselves that God is ignorant would be far wiser in reckoning on the ignorance of the most vigilant and penetrating mind among their fellow-men.

II. God's observation being such, THE PROCEEDINGS OF THESE PROPHETS CAN BE EXACTLY KNOWN. What is here said of the false representations of these prophets is given forth, not as the result of human inquiry, but of a divinely perfect observation. Not all that God thus saw was here described, but only such things as the needs of the times demanded to be made known. Far more might have been told that was true, but there was no need to tell it. God does not publish the wickedness of these prophets for any delight that he has in exposing them, but that he may be justified in the sight of the people for the things that he is about to do. In their hearts, the prophets must have known that the thoughts of those hearts were discovered. How important it is to bear in mind that many of the indications as to the wickedness of wicked men in the Scriptures come from him who is the omnipresent and omniscient One, who sees

everything exactly as it is, and who puts into the mouth of those speaking his Word just those expressions which will describe the things essential to be known! God published the deeds and character of these false prophets that those who were true to him might guard against them. So Jesus warned his disciples against the time-honoured, time-consecrated pretensions of the Pharisees. God puts into the hearts of those who keep near him a feeling which guards them against all who for their own selfish ends make a pretence of being interested in holy things.

III. There is in this passage a special charge against the prophets, to which the preliminary and more general accusations lead up. The prophets are charged with making A CONFUSION BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND THE DIVINE IN THEIR UTTERANCES. This charge is summed up in the question, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" or, as it is more nearly rendered, "What has the straw to do with the grain?" The straw and the grain, close together as they may be for a while, are separated at last; and one will by no means serve the purpose of the other. Grain is meant for man's support, and straw will not take its place. Straw has its own place, and may be very useful, so long as it is kept in it. But if straw and grain are to be all mixed up together, the result will be very unsatisfactory. We all need to bear in mind this illustration, for we may all have, to some extent, the duty and opportunity of being prophets of God. He is a rare man who can tell forth things exactly as they are. It is not for man, by a plausible eclecticism, to take something of human experience and something of Divine revelation and mix them up into what he trusts may somehow prove acceptable to men. Human experiences and conjectures have their part. When a man honestly tells us what *he* thinks and feels, we know how to estimate his statement; and when he comes professedly with a Divine message we have some notion how to test him. But what shall we do with him who claims to limit and modify Divine revelation, so that it may fit into what he is pleased to call the inexorable moulds of human reason? We must ever make the distinction between the straw and the grain in our search for truth. Some truth is discoverable by observation, experiment, deduction; other truth only by the spiritual intuitions of a devout and humble mind placing itself before the statements of Divine revelation. So with regard to human and Divine government. There is no possibility of acting so as to please both God and men. There is no possibility of building up a perfect society out of such elements as we have at present. On one hand, we have to bear in mind the limitations of society in the actual existence of it. What we make a law to ourselves, in our own individual relations to God, we cannot impose on others. On the other hand, we must not allow the low conceptions which others may have of God's claims to drag us down to their level. Let God's Law stand out distinct and authoritative before our minds to guide us in our individual life. That Law must not be in any way modified, under a notion that compliance with it is impossible of attainment. If we persevere in receiving God's Word and persevere in repeating it, we shall find that it will make its way mightily, not as by brute force, but because it is *the* Word of truth, the Word that has abiding fitness for the deepest needs of men.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Again Jeremiah's ungrateful task is to take up an attitude of direct opposition to the king (comp. ch. xxii. 13—30), though, indeed, Zedekiah personally is so weak and dependent on others that he neither deserves nor receives a special rebuke. He and all the people that are left are likened to very bad figs, the good figs—the exiles—having been picked out and sent to Babylon, whence they will one day be restored. The vision is purely an interior process. This is indicated, not only by the phrase, "Jehovah showed me" (comp. Amos vii. 1, 4, 7; viii. 1), but by the contents of the vision.

Ver. 1.—**Two baskets of figs** were **set before**, etc. (comp. Amos viii. 1—3). The description is apparently based on the law of firstfruits (comp. Deut. xxvi. 2), where the "basket" is mentioned, though not the word here used. The baskets were set down in readiness to be examined by the priests, who rigorously rejected all fruit that was not sound. **The princes of Judah.** A short phrase for all the leading men, whether members of the royal family or heads of the principal families (comp. ch. xxvii.

20). **The carpenters and smiths**; rather, *the craftsmen and smiths* ("craftsmen" includes workers in stone and metal as well as wood; the Hebrew word is rendered "smith" in 1 Sam. xiii. 19).

Ver. 2.—**Like the figs that are first ripe.** The early spring fig was considered a special delicacy (comp. Isa. xxvii. 4; Hos. ix. 10); "ficus præcox," Pliny calls it ('Hist. Nat.,' xv. 19, quoted by Trench). Tristram suggests that the "bad figs" were those of a sycamore tree.

Ver. 5.—**Acknowledge them**; or, *take knowledge (notice) of them* (as Ruth ii. 10, 19).

Ver. 6.—**I will build them**, etc. (comp. ch. i. 10; xii. 16). As the next verse shows, it is not merely outward prosperity that is meant, but spiritual regeneration.

Ver. 8.—**And as the evil figs.** (So ch. xxix. 16.) **That dwell in the land of Egypt.** Those who had fled thither during the war (comp. ch. xlii., xliii.); hardly those who had been carried captive to Egypt with Jehoahaz, who would presumably have been of the better sort, such as are symbolized by the good figs.

Ver. 9.—**And I will deliver them**, etc. (see on ch. xv. 4, and comp. ch. xxix.; Deut. xxviii. 37).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*Two baskets of figs.* I. MORALLY MEN ARE DIVISIBLE INTO TWO DISTINCT CLASSES. The two baskets of figs represent two classes of Jews: the basket of good figs, Jeconiah and his followers; the basket of bad figs, Zedekiah and his party. The great distinction between these was moral. There were princes in both classes; yet the one stood far higher in the sight of God than the other. 1. The deepest line of cleavage which runs down through all sections of mankind is *moral;* all other separating marks are more superficial. 2. There are in the main *but two* classes—the good and the bad—though, of course, within each of these great varieties occur. 3. Both of these classes tend to grow *extreme.* The good figs are very good, the bad are very bad. Character is tendency. As character develops it moves further on along the lines on which it is founded. Good men incline to grow better and bad men worse. Like the rivers which flow down the two sides of a great watercourse, lives that begin in similar circumstances and are near together for a season, if they once diverge, are likely to separate more widely as the years pass.

II. THE BEST MEN MAY BE THE GREATEST SUFFERERS. The good figs represent the Jews who suffered most severely from the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, who were torn from their homes, robbed of their property, driven into captivity; the bad figs represent the seemingly more fortunate Jews over whose head the tide of invasion passes, leaving them still in their homes and in quiet, and also those who escaped from it entirely by a flight into Egypt. We may often notice that very good people are not only not spared, but suffer the most severe calamities. The sinless One was a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." No greater mistake can be made than that of the three friends of Job. Great misfortunes are certainly not indications of great guilt; often of the reverse. 1. High character may *directly invoke trouble.* It rouses the opposition of the wicked; it feels called to dangerous tasks and to a mission which excites enmity; it maintains a fidelity that excludes many avenues of escape which would be open to men of lower moral principles. 2. God *may bless and honour* his better children by sending to them the severer trials. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." Therefore chastisement is an evidence of God's love. Good men should understand this, and not be surprised at the advent of trouble, but expect it; not be dismayed at the incongruity of it, but recognize its fitness; not despair of themselves, and think that they must be hypocrites after all, nor doubt and distrust God, but submit to what is clearly foretold and wisely arranged.

III. GOD LOOKS FAVOURABLY ON THOSE WHO SUBMIT TO HIS CHASTISEMENTS. The good figs represent those Jews who obey the message of Jeremiah and submit to the invasion of the Chaldeans as to a Divine chastisement; the bad figs stand for those Jews who resist. It requires faith to recognize the wisdom and duty of submission. On the face of it such conduct would appear unpatriotic and cowardly, while resistance would seem noble and brave. It may take more courage, however, to submit than to resist. There is a yielding which is calm and reasonable and really brave, since it involves the curbing of instinctive combativeness and the pursuit of an unpopular

course—one sure to be misunderstood and to provoke calumny. The sole guide must be sought in the question of what is right, what is God's will. We are not called to a fatalistic passiveness. There are circumstances in which self-defence or flight may be evidently right. What we are to submit to is not all opposition, all possible trouble, but God's will, the trouble which we know he has sanctioned. All the good fruit of chastisement will be lost if we rebel against it. No greater proof of faith in the goodness of God and loyalty to the majesty of God can be found than a quiet, unmurmuring acceptance of his harder requirements.

IV. THE HARDEST SUFFERING MAY LEAD TO THE HAPPIEST RESULTS. The captives are to be restored. Those Jews who remain in the land are ultimately to be driven forth as "a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse." The short, sharp suffering will end in ultimate good. The temporary escape will be followed by final ruin. 1. God's chastisements are *temporary;* they will give place to lasting blessedness. The present affliction is light just because it endures "but for a moment" (2 Cor. iv. 17). Even if they outlast the present life, what is this brief span of earthly trial compared with the blessedness of an eternity? 2. God's chastisements *work our good.* They directly tend to produce the happier future. The tearful sowing is the cause of the joyful harvest. The spiritual improvement wrought in the soul by the discipline of sorrow is at once a source of future blessedness and a justification for it. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." 3. *A culpable avoidance* of Divine chastisement is *highly dangerous.* The escape from temporary trouble must incur greater future trouble; for (1) it prevents the chastisement from working the good in us which would have led to a happier future, and (2) it adds a new offence of direct rebellion against God which must invoke upon the head of the offender a terrible judgment.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Prosperity restored.* I. AFTER CHASTISEMENT HAS BEEN RIGHTLY RECEIVED, GOD LOOKS FAVOURABLY ON HIS CHILDREN. He sets his "eyes upon them for good." Men shrink from the eyes of God as from a keen and fatal scrutiny. But God is not always looking as the Judge. He beholds his children with love. There is a wonderful tenderness in this gaze, like that of a mother fondly watching over her suffering infant—a deep pity for sorrow, an earnest care to ward off harm, a kindly will to bestow all real good. It is blessed indeed to be so beheld by God. There are men possessed of such great power and influence that some consider a favourable look from them sufficient to make their fortune. What must be the effect of God setting eyes on a man for good?

II. WHEN GOD LOOKS FAVOURABLY ON HIS CHILDREN HE MAY SECURE THEIR TEMPORAL PROSPERITY. This will not always happen, for it will not always be for the real good of men. Still, it does often occur. We are too ready to confine the recognition of God's action in our lives to the sterner sides of it. God sends prosperity as well as adversity. If he banishes, he restores; if he pulls down, he builds up again. And the joy of the restoration and the glory of the latter building exceed those of earlier times. If earthly prosperity comes from God it is real and solid. God can maintain it after he has bestowed it. He will build so that none shall pull down. The man who is innocently enjoying a prosperity sent by God need have no superstitious fears of a jealous Nemesis. He is not secure from trouble; but he has no special ground for apprehending it simply because he is happy at present.

III. WHEN GOD LOOKS FAVOURABLY ON HIS CHILDREN HE WILL CERTAINLY SECURE THEIR SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY. This is seen in a restoration of a true knowledge of God. 1. It is *good for us* to know God. The knowledge of God is here represented not so much as a subject of duty as in the light of a form of spiritual blessedness. The loss of this knowledge leads to the darkness of a godless life. The enjoyment of this knowledge is eternal life (John xvii. 3). 2. A true knowledge of God is the recognition of God *as he is*—quite another thing from our common conception of his nature. Then we see and feel the grandeur, the mystery, the glory of "the eternal." 3. This knowledge of God depends on the condition of our *hearts.* The "heart" represents the whole inner life. When this is rightly disposed we can know God, and only then. What we need, therefore, is not a new revelation, but a change of heart. When our soul is in sympathy with God, when our spiritual vision is open, we can see indications of God's presence and character which would otherwise be obscure. 4. The right condition of

heart for knowing God must be *produced by God.* God promises to give them a heart to know him. He only can create the heart anew. The greatest blessing of redemption is that he will do this.

IV. THE WELFARE OF GOD'S CHILDREN IS RESTORED BY THE RESTORATION OF THE CLOSE RELATIONS BETWEEN HIM AND THEM. "They shall be my people, and I will be their God." This relation is twofold. God exercises paternal influences, they engage in filial duties. 1. *God takes them under his care.* They are his people, to be guarded and blessed by him. So Christians are God's peculiar people (1 Pet. ii. 9). 2. *They take God for their portion.* He is their God—theirs to worship, serve, love, rejoice in.

V. THE RESTORATION OF TRUE PROSPERITY DEPENDS ON THE GENUINE RETURN OF GOD'S PEOPLE TO THEIR FIDELITY TO HIM. The restoration was not a mere compensation for the troubles of the exile. Happiness does not necessarily follow trouble. The father runs to meet the prodigal son when he returns, but cannot regard him favourably before this. 1. This return must be with *the heart.* Repentance, of all acts, must be genuine and heartfelt. A formal acknowledgment of God without a change of heart is a mockery and an insult to him, which can bring us no good. 2. This return must be with the *whole* heart. A partial return to God is no true return. He claims the whole heart or none of it.

Ver. 10.—*Sword, famine, and pestilence.* I. TROUBLE BEGETS TROUBLE. War devastating the fields, checking industry, robbing stores, etc., leads to famine; famine and war create horrible causes of pestilence. Trouble does not tend to relieve itself, but the reverse. The poor become poorer, the wretched more miserable. Hence the need of a salvation outside ourselves.

II. TROUBLE IS CUMULATIVE. The full force is not often felt at first. One by one the blows fell upon Job. Thus each is felt most acutely. Though we can bear present calamities unaided, we still need a refuge for the future.

III. TROUBLE IS VARIOUS IN FORM—sword, famine, pestilence. If we are not touched by one kind of trouble, we may fall under another. Of what avail is it to escape the sword, only to perish of the pangs of hunger or to fall a victim to the ravages of pestilence? Future punishment will probably be various in kind, yet so adapted to all varieties of character and condition that none of the impenitent will be able to escape.

IV. TROUBLE MUST BE CONQUERED BY REDEMPTION, NOT EVADED BY FLIGHT. We may flee from some trouble, but cannot from all. When this is judicial it is searching and penetrating, so that none can elude it. It is vain to rest in the assurance that we have been able to devise means for resisting many troubles. The army of them is so vast that no victory over scattered detachments can affect our ultimate condition. This fact should not induce despair, but urge us to turn to the full deliverance of Christ's redemption (Rom. viii. 1).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10.—*The two baskets of figs; or, predetermining influences.* These are not to be understood of the opposite development of character in two sets of persons in slightly differing circumstances, but rather of the primary influence of Divine faith as contrasted with the want of it amidst the trials of life. The people left behind were disposed to felicitate themselves over their brethren who had been carried off into Chaldea, but this impression is corrected by Jeremiah. The exiles were the true people of God, and were to be under his constant supervision and loving care; the others were to be cast off, to become a prey to inner corruption and the unchecked destructive influences of the world.

I. THE MYSTERY OF THE DIVINE ELECTION. From comparatively similar circumstances to evolve distinct types of character and destiny. Out of the same clay to mould the saint and the sinner. It is the old lesson of the potter in another form. There is nothing in a man himself to account for God's favour. He chooseth whom he will and rejecteth whom he will. Yet is it true that he willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that all should come unto him and live.

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH ELECTIVE GRACE MANIFESTS ITSELF. 1. *Recalling.* (Ver.

6.) How unlikely under the circumstances! Yet rendered credible by the remarkable individuality of the Jewish people from age to age. *Reconstituting.* (Ver. 6.) The figure is twofold—building and life-growth (cf. Eph. ii. 21, 22). *Spiritually recreating.* (Ver. 7.) The aim of the previous discipline; but the beginning of great national glory and blessedness. For connection of these processes, cf. Rom. viii. 28—30. 2. *Circumstances are made to subserve a merciful purpose.* The immediate condition of the Chaldean exiles might appear a harder one than that of their compatriots at home; but in the end this would turn to their salvation. Not only will God overrule all things for the good of his people, but he will use them for their spiritual education. The influence of circumstances is thus shown to depend for the most part upon the spiritual state of those who are surrounded by them. 3. *Circumstances are appointed for the destruction of the obstinately impenitent.* Moral reprobation and political annihilation were to come upon these. There would be no swerving or slackening in the execution of their sentence. This is agreeable with the character of him who hates sin with an eternal hatred. The climax of misery here indicated is but a faint suggestion of that which will follow upon rejection of the gospel. And yet how simple are the elements of such a punishment! God has but to withdraw his grace, and the inner depravity of nature will work unchecked its fearful consequences, accelerating and directing the external circumstances of life. And all this has another aspect, which is full of comfort to those who are spiritually inclined. The faintest dawn of repentance is the opening of the "door of hope;" and when the heart is changed the tendency of untoward circumstance at once is altered, and the positive blessings of God again return.—M.

Vers. 1—10.—*Calamity with God and without him.* I. TO THE CHILD OF GRACE. 1. *It is a chastening.* 2. *A restoration.*

II. TO THE UNGODLY. 1. *An influence depreciating character.* 2. *A source of restlessness and fresh transgression.* 3. *An ever-increasing evil.* 4. *An ultimate destruction.*—M.

Vers. 1—10.—*Punished for salvation; left alone for destruction.* A general principle of God's moral government. The flower of Judah, about to be deported to Babylon, are followed by the prophet with wistful gaze. They are the seed of the true Israel; whereas those who are allowed to remain quietly at home are to be of no account in God's purpose.

I. HOW DIFFERENT OFTEN ARE THE EXTERNAL FROM THE SPIRITUAL PROSPECTS OF MEN! Jeconiah and his companions might have been pitied by their friends left behind. The outward position of any one is no index of his relations with God.

II. PRESENT TRIAL MAY BE A PROOF OF DIVINE LOVE, AND PRESENT IMMUNITY FROM MISFORTUNE IS NOT ALWAYS TO BE TAKEN AS AN EVIDENCE OF DIVINE FAVOUR. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Punishment was needed to atone for the past and purify for the future. The exile in Babylon, with its deprivation of political and religious privilege, was a new point of view for the captives. It is a familiar experience to hear men who have done well in the world, or who have had a comparatively smooth life, say, "God has blessed us." This statement is often open to question. God may simply let alone those whom he has given up. The lethargy induced in many by good fortune is to be guarded against. Count them happy that "endure, as seeing him who is invisible." Inward depravity will soon work the destruction of those in whom it remains.

III. THE GLORY OF THE DIVINE IN MAN IS EVOLVED FROM THE HUMILIATION OF THE HUMAN. A mere remnant. How few of those who went forth would return! Children's children might be blessed, but not they themselves. And even then it would require not only reorganization, but rebirth in spirituality. It is ever so. A profound and radical change is needed ere any one can become a member of the true eternal Israel. Israel after the flesh is sentenced to death, that Israel after the Spirit may live for ever.—M.

Ver. 6.—"*I will set mine eyes upon them for good.*" The distressed and afflicted for his sake he ever regards with special attention and interest. "The captives are dearest

to God." Banished from Palestine, they are still "*his* banished ones," and he will make them to return. Those who are undergoing severe trials, in circumstances, in faith, etc., but who are truly seeking after God, are to be comforted with this word. It is a promise that has been gloriously fulfilled. It pledges—

I. GOD'S CARE. 1. *Protection.* 2. *Provision*, temporal and spiritual. Although we see him not, he ever sees us and regards us with complacency and love.

II. GOD'S FAVOUR. This indicates interest, but because of something evoking it—the first germs of faith and repentance. When others see them not, he sees the longings of the soul and its efforts after better things; and he will further them.

III. GOD'S GUIDANCE. Although they were led away into a strange land and amidst an alien people, he would never lose sight of them; but, directing their footsteps, would bring them back again to the land they had left and to himself. It was a strange way, but it was God's way, and his influence would be continually in them and upon them for good. It is the surest proof that God's eye is upon us for good when his Spirit is within us. As many as are led of the Spirit are the children of God.—M.

Ver. 7.—*The conditions and relations of salvation.* I. THE ABILITY TO KNOW GOD IS THE GIFT OF GOD. Not more facts, external, historical, etc., are required. Not a new Bible—the letter of the Bible is probably completed already. Nor even a new mode of spiritual demonstration. But a new heart. We cannot make a new heart. God will save us by renewing: 1. *The moral nature.* 2. *The whole life through it.*

II. THE BLESSINGS OF SALVATION CAN ONLY BE SECURED IN ABSOLUTE CONSECRATION. "They shall return unto me with their whole heart." Complete salvation is impossible without complete faith. To believe—to believe simply, to believe wholly,—this is the condition of perfect salvation.

III. THE IDEAL ISRAEL MUST EVER BE A THEOCRACY. In the obedience of faith they shall be God's people, and he will be their God. That upon which we depend in faith is that which we observe and respect in practice; it is the law and inspiration of life. Christ leads us to the Father that he and we may be one in God; not merged, confounded with Deity, but in eternal and ever-blessed subordination to him.—M.

Vers. 1—10.—*The two baskets of figs; or, our character and destiny independent of our circumstances.* I. THE SYMBOLS EMPLOYED. The two baskets of figs—one very good, the other very evil. But: 1. *They had each the same advantages and disadvantages.* The same seed, soil, training, climate, sunshine, and other influences teeming on them. 2. *They were of directly opposite character.* (Ver. 2.)

II. THE PEOPLE REPRESENTED BY THEM. The men of Judah and Jerusalem. Now: 1. The circumstances of all these were the same. Parentage, religion, teachers, disciplines, privileges, opportunities. 2. But some of these people were symbolized by the good figs, and the other by the evil. Those who had been carried off to Babylon were the good; those who remained still in Jerusalem were the evil. 3. The reverse results might have been looked for. For the good had been dealt with more sternly than the evil. How terrible and sad their lot appeared! Torn away from all their wonted privileges; made to endure a fate which others deserved far more than they; surrounded with idolaters and blasphemers of God. But the evil continued in the possession of all those aids to religion and piety of which those others were deprived. So that the circumstances of the good were less favourable, and those of the evil far more so. Exile, which might have been thought to injure the captives, had done them good; whilst exemption from it, which might have been thought to benefit the evil, had wrought them harm. "With the exiles were some of the choicest spirits of the nation. Ezekiel, second only to Jeremiah himself in the prophets of this epoch; and, probably, the ancestor of Mordecai; and Daniel, with his three companions." "The exiles became humble, repentant, reformed. The resident Jews became insolent, self-secure, defiant. The former became worthy of comparison with 'the first ripe figs;' the latter as the 'naughty figs, which could not be eaten.'"

III. THE LESSONS TAUGHT THEREBY. *That character and destiny do not depend on circumstances.* We should have thought that either all would be alike, or else that the characters and destinies would have been the reverse of what they were. 1. Let the good who may be placed in adverse circumstances take encouragement from this

fact. They can surmount and triumph over all the evil influences which surround and oppose them (cf. ver. 7.) 2. And the evil are to take warning. Prolonged privilege and opportunity have no necessary saving power. Such advantages *may* leave them worse than before. It was so here.

IV. OBSERVE THE GREAT ILLUSTRATION OF THE TRUTH TAUGHT HERE IN CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH. 1. Christ was "as a root out of a dry ground." How utterly opposed to all prospect of his becoming great, and his Name above every name, were the early circumstances in his history! And yet he has triumphed over all. 2. And so with the history of the Church. It was small as "a grain of mustard seed," feeble as "sheep amidst wolves," was as a thing of nought and despised. And yet what has it not become, what will it not become? And what is true of Christ and his Church shall be true likewise of all that are his. "Fear not, little flock," said our Lord; "it is the Father's good pleasure to give *you* the kingdom."—C.

Ver. 7.—*A heart to know the Lord.* It was "for good" that God sent the captive portion of his people "into the land of the Chaldeans" (ver. 5.) The germs of the better life of the future were preserved in them, and their very tribulations were the instruments of his gracious purpose and blessings in disguise. In the "evil figs"—the refuse left behind—there was nothing worth preserving (ver. 8). Of all the beneficent Divine purposes, this had in it the promise of highest good—"I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord."

I. A TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD HAS ITS SEAT IN THE HEART. Intellect cannot solve the mystery of his being. Reason alone cannot even demonstrate his existence. "Who by searching can find out God?" "The world by wisdom knew not God." It is a matter of pure spiritual sensibility. Moral sympathy is the true key to this knowledge. Reverence, humility, love, trust, submission, affections of the heart, are its conditions. Even right ideas of God depend very materially on the state of the heart towards him. The exhalations of a vain, frivolous, corrupt, or carnal heart pervert the soul's vision and obscure his glory. Only as our hearts are purged from every form of earthly defilement can we behold him as he is. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

II. GOD HIMSELF CAN ALONE IMPART THIS KNOWLEDGE. "I will give them," etc. It is a matter of direct Divine revelation; a Divine science in which mere human teaching is of little avail. A secret, silent, gracious power above all natural influences can alone awaken in us those moral affections which lie at the root of it. A true knowledge, like a true Christian faith, must stand "not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." The blindness of the man of science to the deeper meaning of nature, and of the sceptical philosopher to the manifestation of God in Christ, and of the worldling to the Divine presence in his own life, does but indicate the lack of this power. God must unveil himself to us, by drawing our hearts into lowly and loving fellowship with himself, before we can truly know him.—W.

Vers. 1—10.—*The good and bad figs.* I. CONSIDER THE FIGS GENERALLY. We cannot, of course, say why figs should be chosen rather than another fruit, though the choice can hardly be a mere accident. Some reason probably appeared to the observant of that time which we are without sufficient information to discover. Possibly the goodness of good fruits was more obvious against the badness of bad ones, in the case of the fig than in the case of other fruits. It is to be noticed also that the figure chosen to set forth the difference between the good and the bad in Israel is *taken from fruit.* It was something presented as the result of growth and in connection with culture. The question was suggested how such a difference should come between the good and the bad. For if trees of the same sort grow in the same soil and have the same attention, and the same external influences, how comes some of the fruit to be very good and some very bad? Notice also *the sharpness of the distinction.* These fruits were either good or bad. To be excluded from one is to be included in the other. There is no third, no medium class. This exactly agrees with the way of speaking in the New Testament, especially by Jesus himself: *e.g.* the seed in the good and bad ground, the sheep and goats, the good kinds of fish and the bad ones, the five wise and the five foolish virgins. It is of the first importance to bear in mind

that the imperceptible gradations, as we reckon them, count for nothing with God. There are only two kinds of hearts, the good and the bad.

II. CONSIDER THE BLESSINGS ON THAT CLASS IN ISRAEL SET FORTH BY THE GOOD FIGS. Painful external experiences cannot destroy the blessing coming from satisfactory internal character. These people represented by the good figs might say, "If we are indeed as good figs, why make us pass through such pains?" To this it might be answered, in the first place, that it was because of this very goodness that God thus treated them. They were being pruned and cleansed that they might bring forth more fruit. Secondly, when they looked on the fate of those represented by the bad figs, even captivity in a distant land would be seen as a blessing. God bends every word that he here speaks through his prophet so as to form a total of strong consolation and hope. 1. Though these people are called captives of Judah, yet this is only the conventional mode of description. In reality, Jehovah himself sends them into the land of the Chaldeans. So Joseph was made to feel that it was God who had brought him into Egypt. 2. God's eye is upon his people for good. That which God sees to be good he always regards for good. Whosoever has, to him is given more. Note, too, that the people were not merely remembered, as if God had stayed behind in the land of Israel. He was equally in Israel watching over it against the day of his people's return, and in the land of the Chaldeans watching over his faithful ones there. 3. There is to be in due time a restoration. He who sends away can also bring back. The external circumstances of his people are completely under his control. He was speaking to those in whose history was written down all the marvellous things of the Exodus from Egypt. 4. There is to be a Divine building and planting. What others had built God had pulled down, what others had planted he had uprooted. Every plant not of the heavenly Father's planting must be rooted up.' All this was done, not for any delight God took in the ruin and the wilderness, but that a nation might be built up in righteousness, and bring forth only good fruit. 5. The giving of a true knowledge of God. God must give this knowledge, for it can only come to a renewed heart. The mere exhibition of God's name and person to the natural man is not enough. There may be very elaborate intellectual conceptions of Deity without the slightest profit or comfort. When the renewed heart begins to know, then God begins to be truly known. His love must not only be set before us, but must be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us.

III. THE CURSE ON THOSE SET FORTH BY THE BAD FIGS. There is the greatest possible contrast between the treatment of good fruit and bad fruit. And so there was the greatest possible contrast between the treatment of the people taken to Babylon and the treatment of those remaining at home and nearer home. Upon the surface and at the first aspect it might seem as if these latter had the best of it. And, indeed, there might be no immediate way of making clear the difference. But a difference there assuredly was, and every succeeding year would manifest and emphasize it the more. In the mean time here stood the contrast between the good and bad figs, which would be quite enough for the eye of faith. How the history of the Jewish people justifies the bitter words of vers. 9 and 10! Again and again the Gentile has treated the Jew according to the words of this prophecy, and found in them and similar words a justification of his treatment. Not, of course, that the prophecy did really justify the treatment, but God could speak beforehand of the way in which human passions would assuredly work.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXV.

This chapter may be illustrated by a comparison of it with ch. xlvi. There Jeremiah exults over the destruction of a nation (Egypt) which was one of the chief enemies of God's people, and on hearing or reading the inspired eloquence of the prophet the heart of a Jew could not but be moved with the liveliest sympathy. But it is another strain which meets us in this chapter, and one which to a Jew would certainly neutralize the favourable feelings which prophecies like that referred to must have awakened. Here Jeremiah announces that the last moment of grace for Judah is past, and the

time for judgment come. The long-suffering of Jehovah has been exhausted; the fall of the commonwealth cannot any longer be delayed. Such was the strange destiny of the prophet; he was sent to "pull down" and "to build," but the destructive element (as ch. i. 10 suggests) was largely predominant. Specially predominant is it in this important chapter, in which the prophet begins to fulfil the mission to the heathen with which twenty-three years ago he had been entrusted. One by one, "all the nations" directly or indirectly connected with Israel are called up to hear their punishment. There is no indulgence, no respite; only a gleam of hope in the promised final destruction of the tyrant-city Babylon (vers. 12—14). The prophecy falls naturally into three parts, vers. 15—29 forming the centre. The date assigned to this chapter in the first verse is remarkable: it is the fatal year of the battle of Carchemish, which brought Syria and Palestine within the grasp of Babylon.

Ver. 1.—**The first year of Nebuchadrezzar** (comp. 2 Kings xxiv. 12; xxv. 8; ch. lii. 12; xxxii. 1).

Ver. 3.—**From the thirteenth year**; etc.; alluding to the chronological statement in ch. i. 2. **The three and twentieth year**; counting nineteen years under Josiah and four under Jehoiachin, and including the three months of Jehoahaz.

Vers. 4,5.—(Comp. ch. vii. 25; xi. 7; xxxv. 15.) **They said**; literally, *saying*. The prophet mentally resumes the statement of ver. 4, "He hath sent his servants the prophets." **Turn ye**; rather, *return ye*, conversion being the return of the sinner to his natural home.

Ver. 9.—**The families of the north** (comp. ch. i. 15, note). **And Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant.** This is the rendering of the Targum, the Syriac, and the Vulgate, and corresponds with the reading of a few extant manuscripts. The received text, however, reads, "and unto Nebuchadrezzar," etc. Neither reading is satisfactory. The latter one is intolerably harsh; the former makes Nebuchadrezzar a mere adjunct of the tribes of the north. In the other passages, moreover, where this king is solemnly entitled "my servant," the clause is the most prominent one in the sentence (see ch. xxvii. 6; xliii. 10). The words in question have a sort of family resemblance to the glosses which meet us occasionally both in the form of the Hebrew text represented by the Massoretic recension, and those by the principal ancient versions. The words are omitted by the Septuagint. **My servant.** Generally to be a "servant" of Jehovah or of any supposed deity is to be a worshipper. Thus Daniel is called by Darius, "servant of the living God" (Dan. vi. 20), and thus Abdallah, "servant of Allah," has become a favourite surname of the followers of Mohammed. In the Book of Jeremiah itself (xxx. 10; xlvi. 27, 28), and in Ezekiel (xxxvii. 25), "my servant" is the form in which Jehovah addresses his chosen people; and in the second part of Isaiah the suffering Messiah is so styled. Here, however, a foreign king is thus entitled. How is this to be explained? Cyrus, no doubt, in Isa. xliv. 28, xlv. 1, is called "my shepherd" and "my anointed one;" but then Cyrus, in the view of the prophet, was a genuine though unconscious worshipper of the true God (Isa. xli. 25), whereas Nebuchadrezzar was known to be a polytheist and an idolater. We must, therefore, take "servant" to be applied to Nebuchadrezzar in a lower sense than to the other bearers of the title. The Hebrew *'ebhed*, in fact, may be either "slave" in something approaching to the terrible modern sense, or in the sense in which Eliezer was one (*i.e.* little less than a son, and a possible heir, Gen. xxiv. 2; Gal. iv. 1), and which is still in full force in Arabia. **An astonishment** (see on ch. ii. 11). **An hissing** (comp. ch. xviii. 16; xix. 8).

Ver. 10.—**The sound of the millstones.** Modern travel enables us (so conservative is the East) to realize the full force of this image. The hand-mill is composed of two stones. As a rule, "two women (comp. Matt. xxiv. 41) sit at it facing each other; both have hold of the handle by which the upper is turned round on the 'nether' millstone. The one whose right hand is disengaged throws in the grain as occasion requires, through the hole in the upper stone" (Dr. Thomson). "The labour," remarks Dr. Robinson, "is evidently hard; and the grating sound of the mill is heard at a distance, indicating (like our coffee-mills) the presence of a family and of household life" ('Biblical Researches,' ii. 181). Add to this **the light of the candle** (or rather, *lamp*), and we have two of the most universally characteristic signs of domestic life. No family could dispense with the hand-mill, and, as the sermon on the mount implies, the poorest household had its "lamp" (Matt. v. 15—the poverty of the family is indicated by the various uses to which the lamp-stand was applied). Comp. this verse with the imitation in Rev. xviii. 22, 23.

Ver. 11.—**Shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.** Widely different opinions are held as to the meaning of this prophecy. The most probable view is that "seventy"

is an indefinite or round number (as in Isa. xxiii. 17), equivalent to "a very long time." This is supported by the analogy of ch. xxvii. 7, where the captivity is announced as lasting through the reigns of Nebuchadrezzar, his son, and his grandson—a statement evidently vague and indefinite (see *ad loc.*), and in any case not answering to a period of seventy years. Besides, we find the "seventy years" again in ch. xxix. 10, a passage written probably eleven years later. Others think the number is to be taken literally, and it is certainly true that from B.C. 606, the fourth year of Jeboiakim, to the fall of Babylon, B.C. 539, sixty-seven years elapsed. But is it desirable to press this against the internal evidence that Jeremiah himself took the number indefinitely?

Vers. 12—29.—The judgment upon Judah and the nations.

Ver. 12.—**Perpetual desolations.** Thus, too, we read in Isa. xiii. 20, that Babylon "shall never be inhabited." There is a dispute between Dr. Keith and Dr. Kay on the one side, and rationalistic commentators (*e.g.* Kuenen) on the other, whether these prophecies have received a circumstantial fulfilment. The truth is that authorities are not entirely agreed on the area covered by the site of Babylon. General Chesney remarks that, so far from being uninhabited, "A town of considerable population, villages, date groves, and gardens, are found still on the very site of ancient Babylon" (extracts from a private letter in B. W. Newton's 'Babylon: its Revival and Final Desolation,' pp. 38—42). Similarly M. Menant, a veteran French Assyriologist, remarks that "Hillah, according to M. Oppert, was a quarter of Babylon, probably that which was inhabited by the working population, without the precincts of the royal palaces. Numberless traces of ancient habitations indicate this origin of the modern town" ('Babylone,' p. 177). Mr. George Smith, however, in his 'Assyrian Discoveries,' simply states that, "A little to the south rose the town of Hillah," apparently assuming (what is impossible to prove, as the walls of Babylon have not yet been discovered) that Hillah lay just outside the city enclosure. But even he adds that it was "built with the bricks found in the old capital," which is, strictly speaking, inconsistent with the absolute abandonment of the site of Babylon implied in Isa. xiii. 20—22. The dispute is an unfortunate one, as it tacitly implies that circumstantial fulfilments are necessary to the veracity of prophecy. The truth seems to lie in the mean between two opposing views. As a rule, the details of a prophetic description cannot be pressed; they are mainly imaginative elaborations of a great central truth or fact. Occasionally, however, regarding the prophecies in the light of gospel times, it is almost impossible not to observe that "the Spirit of Christ which was in" the prophets (1 Pet. i. 11) has overruled their expressions, so that they correspond more closely to facts than could have been reasonably anticipated. Such superabundant favours to believers in inspiration occur repeatedly in the prophecies respecting Christ. They may, of course, occur elsewhere for a sufficient reason, but we have no right to be surprised if we do not meet with them. The general truth of the prophecy is that the *empire of Babylon* shall fall for ever. As Dr. Payne Smith remarks, it was practically the work of one man (Nebuchadrezzar), and after his death it only lasted for a few years, during which its history is a series of murders and usurpations.

Ver. 13.—**And I will bring,** etc. Clearly this verse cannot have formed part of the original prophecy, but must have been added whenever the collection of prophecies against foreign nations finally assumed its present form (see introduction on ch. l., li.). It should be mentioned that the Septuagint separates the last clause of the verse, "that which Jeremiah prophesied," etc., and makes it the heading of the group of prophecies against the nations, which in the Hebrew Bible stand at the end of Jeremiah's prophecies, but which, beginning with "Elam," the Alexandrian Version inserts at this point.

Ver. 14.—**For many nations . . . shall serve themselves of them also;** *i.e.* put forced labour upon them also. The same phrase is used of the conduct of the Egyptians to the Israelites (Exod. i. 14). *Of them also;* and "also" suggests that the calamity of the Chaldeans is a retribution (comp. Isa. lxvi. 4), as the next clause, in harmony with ch. l. 29, li. 24, emphatically declares.

Ver. 15.—**For thus saith,** etc. Out of this verse and the following, to the end of the chapter, the Septuagint makes the thirty-second chapter, ch. xxv. being completed by the prophecy against Elam (ch. xlix. 34—39). The symbolic act which the prophet is directed to perform is mentioned in order to explain the word of threatening just uttered. So, at least, we must understand it, if we accept the arrangement of the Hebrew text. But the connection is certainly improved if we follow Graf, and omit vers. 11 *b*—14; ver. 15 thus becomes an explanation of the threat against Judah and the other nations in vers. 9—11 *a*. **The wine-cup of this fury;** or, *this wine-cup of fury.* The wine with which the cup is filled is the wrath of God. The figure is not an unfrequent one with the prophets and the psalmists (comp. ch. xlix. 12; li. 7;

Isa. li. 17, 22; Ezek. xxiii. 31—34; Hab. ii. 16; Ps. lx. 3; lxxv. 8).

Ver. 16.—**And be moved, and be mad**; rather, *and reel to and fro, and behave themselves madly.* The inspired writers do not scruple to ascribe all phenomena, the "bad" as well as the "good," to a Divine operation. "Shall there be evil in a city, and Jehovah hath not done it?" (Amos iii. 6). "An evil spirit from Elohim came upon Saul, and he became frenzied" (1 Sam. xviii. 10; see also Isa. xix. 14; xxix. 10; 1 Kings xxii. 19—23, and especially the very remarkable prologue of the Book of Job). To understand this form of expression, we must remember the strength of the reaction experienced by the prophets against the polytheism of the surrounding nations. It was not open to them to account for the existence of evil by ascribing it to the activity of various divinities; they knew Jehovah to be the sole cause in the universe. To us, "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," such a doctrine occasions "great searchings of heart," and is sometimes a sore trial of our faith. But the prophets were not logicians, and their faith, compared to ours, was as an oak tree to a sapling; hence they can generally (see, however, Isa. lxiii. 17) express the truth of the universal causation of Jehovah with perfect tranquillity. **Because of the sword.** Here Jeremiah deserts the figure of the cup, and, as most commentators think, uses the language of fact. It is not, however, certain that "the sword" means that of God's human instruments; Jehovah himself has a sword (ch. xlvi. 10; xlvii. 6; l. 35—38; Isa. xxvii. 1; xxxiv. 5; and elsewhere), just as he has a hand (Isa. viii. 11; lix. 1) and an arm (Isa. xl. 10; liii. 1). All these belong to a group of childlike symbolic expressions for the manifestation of the Deity. Jehovah's "sword" is described more fully in Gen. iii. 24; it "turns hither and thither," like the lightning—a striking figure of the completeness with which God performs his work of vengeance (see also on ver. 27).

Ver. 17.—**Then took I the cup . . . and made all the nations to drink.** It is too prosaic to suppose either that Jeremiah made a journey to "all the nations," or that he actually went through the form of presenting the cup to the ambassadors who (it is conjectured, comp. ch. xxvii. 3 *b*) had come to Jerusalem to take measures against the common foe (so J. D. Michaelis). But the supposition arises (as Keil has well observed) out of an imperfect comprehension of the figure. It is not a cup with wine which the prophet receives from Jehovah, but a wine-cup filled with the wine of God's fury, which wine (one may add) is no more a literal wine than the "sword of Jehovah" is a literal sword. The "making all the nations to drink" is simply a way of expressing the prophet's firm faith that the word of Jehovah will not "return unto him void"—that a prophecy once uttered must fulfil itself; and "sent me," in the last clause, merely means "entrusted me with a message" (comp. Prov. xxvi. 6). For the fulfilment of this detailed prediction, see on ch. xlvi.—li.

Ver. 18.—**The kings thereof** (see on ch. xix. 3). **As it is this day.** As to the meaning of this phrase, see on ch. xi. 5. The words evidently presuppose that the prediction has already been fulfilled (comp. ch. xliv. 6, 23); consequently, they cannot have stood here in the original draft of the prophecy. An early editor, or even Jeremiah himself, must have inserted them. They are omitted in the Septuagint.

Ver. 19.—**Pharaoh king of Egypt.** After leaving Judah and Jerusalem, the prophet turns to the far south—to Egypt; then he ascends to the south-east (Uz), and the south-west (the Philistines); thence he passes to the east (Edom, Moab, Ammon); and thence to the west of the Holy Land (Phœnicia). This suggests the maritime lands "beyond the sea" (including especially Cyprus); a sudden transition brings the prophet to the Arabian tribes (Dedan, etc.), from whence he passes by the road of the north-east (Elam, Media) to the indefinitely distant north. Last of all, in solitary grandeur or infamy, Babylon is mentioned.

Ver. 20.—**The mingled people**; Septuagint, *καὶ πάντας τοὺς συμμίκτους*: Vulgate, *et universos generaliter.* The Hebrew *'erebh* probably means, not "*mingled* [*i.e.* 'motley'] people," as the Authorized Version, but "foreign people," *i.e.* a body of men belonging to some particular nation *intermixed* or interspersed among those belonging to another. This explanation will account for the use of the word in all the passages in which it occurs (here and in ver. 24; also Exod. xii. 38; Neh. xiii. 3;[1] 1 Kings x. 15; ch. l. 37; Ezek. xxx. 5; and perhaps 2 Chron. ix. 14). The context here and in 1 Kings x. 15 seems to imply that the name was given especially to the tribes (probably Bedawin tribes) on the frontier of Judah towards the desert, though in Ezek. xxx. 5 it is evidently applied to a people which in some sense belonged to Egypt. In Exod. xii. 38 it may be doubted whether the phrase is used from the point of view of Egypt or of the Israelites; in ch. l. 37 it

[1] In Exodus and Nehemiah the word is pointed *'ērebh* (with *çere* instead of *seghol*), but no one will think of denying that the word is the same as in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and 1 Kings.

is used of the foreigners in Babylon in 2 Chron. ix. 14 the Massoretic critics have pointed the consonants of the text wrongly (*'arabh*, Arabia, instead of *'erebh*), but without injury to the sense; the Vulgate and Syriac have done the same in 1 Kings x. 15. The notion that the word means 'auxiliary troops" arises (as Thenius on 1 Kings x. 15 remarks) from the free rendering of the Targum at 1 Kings x. 15 and ch. l. 37. **Uz.** The land associated with the name of Job, and probably east or south-east of Palestine, and adjacent to the Edomites of Mount Seir (Lam. iv. 21). **Of the Philistines.** Observe, Gath is alone omitted of the five Philistine towns (Josh. xiii. 3; 1 Sam. vi. 17). It had been reduced to complete insignificance (Amos vi. 2), through Uzziah's having "broken down" its walls (2 Chron. xxvi. 6), and is equally passed over in Amos (i. 6—8), Zephaniah (ii. 4), and Zechariah (ix. 5, 6). **Azzah**; *i.e.* Gaza, the Septuagint form (the G representing the initial *ayin*), which is everywhere else adopted by the Authorized Version. **The remnant of Ashdod.** A significant phrase, which can be explained from Herodotus (ii. 157): For twenty-nine years Psamnutichus "pressed the siege of Azôtus without intermission." We can imagine that he would not be disposed to lenient dealings with the town upon its capture. (An earlier and shorter siege of Ashdod is mentioned in Isa. xx.)

Ver. 22.—**Kings of Tyrus . . . kings of Zidon.** Under the names of the two leading cities, the prophet includes the various dependent Phœnician commonwealths. Hence the plural "kings." **The isles.** The Hebrew has the singular, "the isle," or rather, "the coast-land" (more strictly, *the region*), *i.e.* perhaps either Tartessus in Spain, or Cyprus (which Esarhaddon describes as "lying in the midst of the sea," and as having two kings, 'Records of the Past,' iii. 108).

Ver. 23.—**Dedan, and Tema, and Buz.** Three tribes of North Arabia, bordering on Edom. The two former are mentioned as commercial peoples in Isa. xxi. 13, 14; Ezek. xxvii. 15, 20; xxxviii. 13; Job vi. 19. Elihu, Job's youngest friend, was of Buz (Job xxxii. 2). **All that are in the utmost corners**; rather, *all the corner-clipped* (see on ch. *x*. 26).

Ver. 24.—**All the kings of Arabia.** Not "Arabia" in our sense (which is never found in the Old Testament), but the desert region to the east and south-east of Palestine, occupied by nomad or "Ishmaelitish" tribes. **The mingled people**; rather, *the intermingled people* (see on ver. 20); *i.e.* probably in this passage populations of a different race interspersed among the Aramaic tribes to which most of the inhabitants of the desert belonged.

Ver. 25.—**Zimri.** The Zimri were a people to the north-east of Assyria, against whom various Assyrian kings waged war (*Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archæology*, 1873, pp. 13, 15, 34; 'Records of the Past,' v. 41). Whether they are to be connected with the Zimran of Gen. xxv. 2 seems doubtful; their locality hardly suits. **Elam.** Elam, one of the most ancient monarchies in the world (comp. Gen. xiv.), is again coupled with Media in Isa. xxi. 2. It was a region on the east of the lower Tigris, bounded westward by Babylonia, northward by Assyria and Media, southward by the Persian Gulf. To say that it is put either here or anywhere else in the Old Testament for the whole of Persia seems a mistake, as the Persians were hardly known before the time of Cyrus.

Ver. 26.—**The kings of the north.** The distant, mysterious north. **Far and near, one with another.** The Hebrew has, "the near and the far, the one to the other;" *i.e.* whether near or far in relation to each other, for of course with regard to Judah they were all "the far north." **All the kingdoms of the world**, etc. This is far from being the only instance in which a special judgment upon a nation or nations is apparently identified with a great final judgment upon the world (see Isa. ii. 12; iii. 13; xiii. 9; xxiv. 1—12). The truth is that every great self-manifestation of the Divine Governor of the world is a fresh act in that great drama of which the universal judgment will be the close. Hence the prophets, whose perspective was necessarily limited, seeing the end but not all that was to precede it, speak as if the end were nearer at hand than it really was. **The king of Sheshach**, etc. This clause, however, is omitted in the Septuagint, and is too manifestly the insertion of an unwise copyist or editor. For, though perfectly true that Babylon was to suffer punishment afterwards, it is most inappropriate to mention it here at the end of a list of the nations which Babylon itself was to punish. "Sheshach," it should be explained, is the form assumed by the word "Babylon" in the cypher called Athbash (A = T, B = SH, etc.). It happens to convey a very appropriate meaning, viz. "humiliation" (comp. Isa. xlvii. 1). A similar instance of cypher allegory occurs in ch. li. 1. "Sheshach" occurs again in ch. li. 41, where, however, it is omitted by the Septuagint. [Dr. Lauth, of Munich, thinks that Sheshach is equivalent to Sisku, the name of a district in Babylonia; but the reading Sisku is uncertain. (See *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archæology*, 1881, p. 48.)]

Ver. 27.—**Therefore thou shalt say**, etc.; rather, *And thou shalt say*, etc. This verse is probably a continuation of vers. 16, 17, vers.

18—26 being apparently inserted by an afterthought. The message given to Jeremiah to deliver is that the judgment is both overpoweringly complete and irreversible. If God's own people has not been spared, how should any other escape (comp. ch. xlix.12)?

Ver. 29.—**I will call for a sword.** It is probably that awful sword referred to in ver. 16 (see note).

Vers. 30—38.—The judgment upon the world.

Ver. 30.—**Therefore prophesy thou,** etc. Babylon, like the smaller kingdoms which it absorbed, has fallen, and nothing remains (for nothing had been revealed to the prophet concerning an interval to elapse previously) but to picture the great assize from which no flesh should be exempt. As the lion suddenly bursts, roaring, from his lair, so Jehovah, no longer the "good Shepherd," **shall roar from on high** (comp. Amos i. 2; Joel iii. 16) even **upon his habitation,** or rather, *against his pasture,* where his flock (ch. xxiii. 1) has been feeding so securely. **He shall give a shout.** It is the technical term used at once for the vintage-shout and for the battle-cry. In Isa. xvi. 9, 10, there is a beautiful allusion to this double meaning, and so perhaps there is here (comp. ch. li. 14).

Ver. 31.—**A noise.** The word is used elsewhere for the tumultuous sound of a marching army (see Isa. xiii. 4; xvii. 12). **He will plead;** rather, *he will hold judgment.* Jehovah's "contending" sometimes involves the notion of punishing, *e.g.* Ezek. xxxviii. 22; Isa. lxvi. 16. In 2 Chron. xxii. 8, the same verb in the same conjugation is forcibly rendered in the Authorized Version, "to execute judgment."

Ver. 32.—**A great whirlwind;** rather, *a great storm* (as ch. xxiii. 19). **The coasts of the earth;** rather, *the furthest parts of the earth.* The storm, as it appears on the horizon, comes as it were from the ends of the earth; perhaps, too, there is an allusion to the distant abode of the foe (comp. ch. vi. 22).

Ver. 33.—**The slain of the Lord;** *i.e.* those slain by the Lord, as Isa. lxvi. 16, where his sword is further spoken of as the agent (see on ver. 16). **They shall not be lamented,** etc.; parallel to ch. viii. 2; xvi. 4.

Ver. 34.—**Wallow yourselves** in the ashes. Supply rather, *in the dust* (comp. Micah i. 10), as more suitable to the figure (see on ch. vi. 26). The shepherds, and the principal (or, *noble ones*) **of the flock,** are, of course, merely different forms of expression for the rulers. **The days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are accomplished;** rather, *your days for being slaughtered are fulfilled; and I will scatter you* (or, *dash you in pieces*). This is the reading of an old and valuable manuscript at St. Petersburg, and is partly favoured by the pointing; it is adopted by most modern critics, the form in the text being ungrammatical. **Pleasant;** or, *precious* (comp. Dan. xi. 8, Authorized Version). Compare the figure in ch. xxii. 28.

Vers. 36, 37.—The prophet seems in his spirit to hear the lamentation to which in ver. 34 he summoned the "shepherds." **A voice of the cry** should be, *Hark! the cry* (omitting "shall be heard"); the clause is an exclamation. **Hath spoiled;** rather, *is spoiling* (or, *laying waste*). **The peaceable habitations;** rather, *the peaceful fields* (or, *pastures*). **Are cut down;** rather, *are destroyed;* literally, *are brought to silence* (comp. ch. ix. 10).

Ver. 38.—Close of the prophecy with a fuller enunciation of the thought with which the paragraph was introduced. **He hath forsaken;** comp. ver. 30, and notice the impressive non-mention of the subject (as ch. iv. 13, etc.). **Their land;** *i.e.* that of the shepherds. **The fierceness of the oppressor.** A various reading, supported by some manuscripts, the Septuagint and the Targum, and accepted by Ewald, Hitzig, and Graf, and is "the oppressing sword" (so ch. xlvi. 16; l. 16). The text reading is very difficult to defend, and the punctuation itself is really more in favour of the variant than of the received text.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*A melancholy review of twenty-three years of work.* I. THE CHARACTER OF THE WORKER. A three and twenty years' experience furnishes a good test of character. So long a time is quite sufficient to eliminate the accidents of passion and temporary enthusiasm, and to bring to light the general principles of a man's conduct. These constitute his character; they reveal the true features of him. We should not judge a man by his latest action, perhaps a hasty and quite uncharacteristic one; to be fair, not to say charitable, we should consider the whole course of his life. To know ourselves we must look back on the years of our lives, and not pass a superficial judgment on our present mood. The character of Jeremiah, revealed by the test of twenty-three years of work under the most harassing circumstances, is worth our reverent study. Consider the salient points in it: 1. *Fidelity.* All this time he was working as God's

servant, in opposition to the spirit of the age, provoking enmity, calumny, hatred. The bearer of a message which it must have been a pain for him to deliver, a message of denunciation and menace, Jeremiah boldly declared it and adhered to it, in spite of every inducement to follow the fashion of the prophets of flattery. We meet with men who are proud of representing the spirit of their age. Nothing is easier. Nothing is more simple than to be an echo, a reflection, a mouthpiece to the general voice. The difficulty is to utter a contrary voice, not out of stubbornness, or a spirit of wilful antagonism, but out of calm fidelity to duty. This is the task of the great. 2. *Perseverance.* For three and twenty years Jeremiah had persisted in his unpopular course. We know that he continued equally staunch for many more years. Here is the great test. It is possible to be an Elijah, and stand alone facing the howling multitude of priests and slaves of Baal in one supreme moment of conflict and speedy triumph, and yet after this to flee to the wilderness, and to feel unequal to the task of constant fidelity, in season and out of season, through long dreary years, without the excitement of a dramatic scene of heroism, worn and fretted by incessant, petty, spiteful enmity. Yet this was the experience of Jeremiah. 3. *Earnestness.* "I have spoken," he says, "rising early and speaking." The prophet is not a passive martyr, nor a mere confessor who dares to speak out his conviction when it is directly challenged. He goes forth on a mission urging his message upon men. He is a model preacher. He is no perfunctory official droning through a dreary task, no mere professional preacher, honestly discharging his work, but with little interest in it, like a hired pleader. His heart is with his work. He has an end in view, and he sets himself with all his might to accomplish it. In all this the prophet reveals to us the long-suffering and earnest desire of God to deliver his children. All this while God was inspiring Jeremiah, as he had inspired a succession of prophets, to rouse and urge the people to repentance.

II. THE RESULTS OF THE WORK. Apparent failure. "Ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear." It would seem that all this labour, earnestness, persistence, and fidelity had been so much wasted work. 1. *The preacher must not be blamed for apparent fruitlessness.* No greater mistake can be made than that of judging a man by the manifest effect of his work. The most popular preacher is not necessarily the most faithful servant of God. The unpopularity and seeming failure of a preacher is not in itself a reason for condemning him. No fault can be found with the preaching of Jeremiah, yet it was not successful. Christ spake as never man spake, and "the Pharisees derided him." He was popular for a season, but ultimately "all men forsook him." The most important truths may be the least popular. 2. *The preacher must not be too confident in expecting time to reveal the fruits of his work.* Twenty-three years made no such revelation to Jeremiah. A faithful man may toil on through the long night of a whole lifetime of difficulty, and die without seeing the results of his labour. It is well to be prepared for this possibility. 3. *The responsibility of rightly receiving a Divine message rests with the hearers.* We are always lecturing the preachers. "Take heed how ye speak." These words are not in the Bible. Christ was more anxious about the hearers. "Take heed how ye hear." Of course the preacher has his high responsibilities, but so have the hearers. The poorest sermon of a good man who is trying to expound Divine truth may contain something of profit to a devout listener, who is more anxious to receive the good in it than to pass a barren criticism on its defects; for if the messenger is sadly wanting, and his language and thought as poor as possible, the message which he handles so badly is not the less God's truth. But if the preaching of a Jeremiah, of a Christ even, is unheeded, what qualities in the preacher can command success with an unsympathizing audience? 4. *Still no good work ultimately fails.* Jeremiah did not speak for nothing. His message bore good fruit with many of the captives—perhaps with Daniel. Preserved to our time, it has been a blessing to generations.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The chief purpose of prophecy.* Jeremiah here sums up the general purpose not only of his own mission—extending now over twenty-three years—but of that of the whole series of Hebrew prophets. We may thus see the one great aim towards which all their labours were directed.

I. PROPHECY IS PRACTICAL. Jeremiah's summary takes the form of an exhortation. The prophets were preachers, not philosophers. Their aim was not to satisfy curiosity

but to affect conduct. In this they are an example to all preachers. The preacher's duty is to lead men, not merely to teach doctrines. Still the exposition of truth is necessary to effect this end. The prophets did not content themselves with simple exhortations to good conduct. These exhortations needed the enforcement of clear conviction. Their authority was not magisterial (a mere command of superior power) nor priestly (an influence of spiritual rank erected on unquestioning faith), but reasonable (the authority of truth seen and felt). Hence their revelations of God and of the future. Yet these were all given for a practical end. The preacher should make his most abstract expositions of truth point towards some course of conduct.

II. PROPHECY IS A CALL TO REPENTANCE. This urgent call rings through the messages of all the prophets. It was revived by John the Baptist (Matt. iii. 2), adopted by our Lord (Matt. iv. 17) and his apostles (*e.g.* St. Peter, Acts ii. 38; and St. Paul, Acts xvii. 30), and by all great reformers, such as Savonarola, John Knox, John Wesley, etc. 1. Men must be preached to about their *own condition* as well as about God's will. We want a Divine revelation that we may know ourselves just as much as that we may know God. A large part of the Bible is occupied with revelations of human nature. 2. Together with these revelations there comes the call to *turn and change*. The result of the exposure of mankind to itself is not satisfactory. This exposure alone is a call to turn from our evil ways. The mere exposure, however, is of little use. A Juvenal is not a Jeremiah. A satirist is not a prophet. There must be the call to a better life, and a declaration of the way to find it. 3. The prophets imply that men not only need to change but *can change*. The most fundamental change of heart must be through the influence of God. Yet this is only possible when men freely and willingly turn to him in repentance. 4. The special sin denounced was *apostasy from God*; the special repentance called for was a return to God. These are always the fundamental elements of sin and repentance.

III. PROPHECY IS A VOICE OF WARNING AND OF PROMISE. Evil is denounced to the impenitent; good is promised to the penitent. This is the simplest form in which the motives to repentance can be put. But the tracing out of it is not simple. It required an inspired prophet to detect the seeds of ruin in riotous prosperity and the dawning of a day of redemption in the stormy night of adversity. The prophets not only detect these facts, they discern the principles that govern them. Thus they speak for all ages. They show us how sin is ruinous; how God has a sure blessedness in store for his faithful children—a blessedness which is eternal.

Ver. 9.—"*Nebuchadrezzar . . . my servant.*" A strange expression! It is not found in many manuscripts and versions. But it is more likely that dull officious scribes should erase such an "improper" phrase than that any should insert it in the manuscripts and Targum where it is preserved. We cannot suppose that Nebuchadrezzar is called God's servant in consideration of any characteristics of his later career, such as the repentant state following his insanity recorded in the Book of Daniel (iv. 33—37). The prophecy of Jeremiah belongs to a much earlier period. Nebuchadrezzar, a heathen, an idolater, entirely ignorant of the religion of the Jews, just appearing as the great conqueror and oppressor, and striking Syria dumb with terror by his victory at Carchemish—this man is called God's servant. The expression is significant.

I. GOD'S AUTHORITY EXTENDS TO ALL MANKIND. He is not the God of the Jews only, nor of the Christians only, nor of the religious only. He is the God of heaven and earth, the Sovereign and supreme Master of all creatures. We talk of the godless heathen. They may be living without the knowledge of God, but not without his knowledge of them, his care, his influence.

II. GOD CAN USE FOR HIS PURPOSES MEN WHO DO NOT KNOW HIM. Nebuchadrezzar did not know the true God. Yet he was an instrument in God's hands for the chastisement of the Jews. Many a man is unconsciously working out God's will even when he thinks he is fighting against it. God's purposes are deeper than our thoughts.

III. GOD CAN MAKE BAD MEN DO HIS WILL. Such men do not do God's will in themselves, but by doing their own evil will they produce results which fall in with God's larger designs. Of course this is no justification for their conduct, since our responsibility turns on our motives, not on the unexpected results of our conduct. It must not be supposed that God sanctions the wicked passions that drive a man to an

action which God overrules for good. Nebuchadrezzar is to be punished for the very act in which God uses him as his servant (ver. 12). Yet the relation between God and his wicked servants is wholly mysterious.

IV. GOD EXERCISES AUTHORITY OVER THE MOST IRRESPONSIBLE TYRANTS. Nebuchadrezzar is the greatest monarch of the world. He is just inflated with one of the grandest victories in all history. Naturally he is an autocratic tyrant who makes an idol of his own will. This man is really God's slave. God overrules all kings, shapes and moulds all history, and manifests his providence in the great onward march of humanity. This fact should give us confidence in the midst of the darkest events. It should humble the great to feel that they are as nothing before God.

V. THE UNCONSCIOUS SERVANTS OF GOD DO NOT KNOW THE BLESSEDNESS OF HIS HIGHER SERVICE. As they do not willingly serve, so they do not reap the spiritual joys of service. The service is nothing to them, though much to the world. The true servant of God knows his master's will and delights to do it, sacrifices his own will and submits obediently to the higher will. To fulfil such service is the highest privilege of mankind. In the accomplishment of it is peace and blessedness (Ps. xl. 6—8).

Ver. 15.—*The wine-cup of fury.* I. THE WRATH OF GOD IS LIKE INTOXICATING WINE. 1. It is *powerful.* The wine is strong drink. We are too ready to close our eyes to this aspect of the Divine nature. The love of God is so treated by some that it leaves no room for anger. But God is not weakly indulgent; if he were so, even his love would be found wanting, for there is no wrath more terrible than that of outraged love. 2. The anger of God *produces terrible effects.* The wine intoxicates. It cannot be a matter of no concern to us to know how God feels towards us. All affections tend to actions. The anger of a man is not likely to waste itself in aimless fury; it will flow out in deeds. God is a King whose wrath will find expression in acts of sovereignty, a Father whose anger must necessarily affect his treatment of his children. If there are men at whose anger we may smile, there are others who cannot be safely despised. But who dare disregard the wrath of God? Once it is outpoured it must be overwhelming, must take possession of men. 3. It will not only produce outward distress, but *inward confusion* and helplessness, so "that they shall reel to and fro, and behave themselves madly." Therefore the man who is smitten by Divine wrath has not those internal sources of comfort and strength with which we try to bear up under outward calamity.

II. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE WINE-CUP OF FURY IS POURED OUT. It is not always flowing. Though "God is angry with the wicked every day," he is forbearing, and restrains his wrath till it cannot longer be justly withheld. Then we may suppose that the longer it has been accumulating the worse will be its outflow. Men have been treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Such seasons of the outpouring of the cup of fury may be noted in history; *e.g.* in the invasions of Nebuchadrezzar, the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, the sacking of Rome by Alaric. It is important to note that this happens in seasons. It is not always harvest. But the spring sowing prepares for the autumn reaping. We may be now preparing for an outburst of wrath. How foolish not to guard against it because it has not yet come! Delay of judgment is no excuse for doubt about it, for this is part of the Divine method of action.

III. ALL THE GUILTY MUST DRINK OF THE WINE-CUP OF FURY. Jeremiah summons the various nations to partake of it. The Jews are not spared though they are the "elect people." The heathen are not excluded though they do not recognize God truly. God is still the impartial Father of all, and must execute judgment upon all classes, while, of course, he has due regard to the light and opportunities of each. "Religious" people will have to drink of the dreadful cup, if they are morally corrupt. Worldly people will also have to receive it, though they may profess to have nothing to do with God and his laws. There is no escape in the day of judgment. Men may refuse to taste of God's love; they cannot refuse to partake of his wrath (ver. 28).

IV. THE BITTER CUP WHICH CHRIST DRANK IS AN ANTIDOTE TO THE WINE-CUP OF FURY. God could never have been angry with his beloved Son. He must have regarded him as he was in his pure goodness; could not have imputed to him sins of which he was not guilty, nor have looked wrathfully upon him when he was regarding him with nothing but love and approval. But Christ was so one with us, so took our place as our

High Priest, that he must have felt, as the most guilty man never felt, the horror of the wrath of God against the sinful world of which he stood forth as the Representative. He drank to the dregs the bitter cup of spiritual woe as well as that of his bodily passion. The gospel of his grace proclaims to us that they who are liable to the outpourings of a Divine judgment on their sins may find through Christ's sacrifice peace with God. By faith in Christ we are reconciled to God, and find that his anger is put away for ever in the free pardon of our sins.

Ver. 29.—*The ineffectual palladium of a great name.* Jerusalem was called by God's name; yet Jerusalem was not to be spared in the general outpouring of the wine-cup of fury. The Jews were vainly trusting in their name. We are all inclined to think too much of mere names. Certainly there is something in a name; it may command respect, influence, etc. Yet this applies only in regard to human considerations; it can have no weight with God. Even with men it is less potent than its possessors would fain believe. The influence of it is slowly won, easily lost, and only recovered with the utmost difficulty, if at all.

I. A NAME MAY BE GREAT BECAUSE IT REPRESENTS CONNECTION WITH THE GREAT. It may indicate relationship to a family, a clan, a nation. We are proud of the name of Englishmen. St. Paul, professing himself a Roman, was able to claim the rights of Roman citizenship (Acts xxii. 25). But the name is here useful only in so far as the privilege it implies extends. St. Paul had a right not to be scourged, but none to save him from being beheaded by the order of the emperor. We may claim undue privileges because we bear the name of Christian, because we were born in Christendom, are citizens of a Christian state, are members of a Christian Church. These associations count for nothing before God. We shall "*all* appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body" (2 Cor. v. 10). It will be vain then to say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name," etc.? if Christ must answer, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. vii. 23, 24).

II. A NAME MAY BE GREAT BECAUSE IT REPRESENTS HIGH RANK. Social distinctions cannot be ignored while they exist, and in them the favoured necessarily enjoy many amenities that are denied to the commonalty. But they are snares when they tempt their owners to expect peculiar privileges with Heaven. In spiritual matters we approach God, not as rich or poor, not as prince or beggar, but as man. Rank goes for nothing there; character is everything. This applies to ecclesiastical rank. They who hold high office in the Church are tempted to expect exceptional judgment. They will be judged, not as officials, not as popes, bishops, priests, but as men, and will find that their holy office will be no sanctuary when the awful sword of Divine judgment is unsheathed.

III. A NAME MAY BE GREAT BECAUSE IT REPRESENTS A GOOD REPUTATION. If the reputation is justly earned, the name is a real honour. "A good name," says the wise man, "is rather to be chosen than great riches" (Prov. xxii. 1). Shakespeare's Cassio exclaims, "Reputation, reputation, reputation! Oh, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial." Yet, if reputation is "got without merit," it is a poor refuge to flee to from before the all-seeing God. Even when it is solid and honest it stands only as a record of the past, and a presumption in our favour when our conduct is equivocal. But it does not mitigate the guilt of subsequent offences. We are judged by our conduct, not by our fame. It is vain to have a name to live if we are dead; the name will not galvanize us back into life.

IV. A NAME MAY BE GREAT BECAUSE IT REPRESENTS A GREAT PROFESSION. Men assume big names and flourish them before the world in pretended evidence of their own excellence, and the world, being too blind and too indolent to make very searching inquiries, commonly takes men much at their own reckoning. The advantage of such a deception can only be superficial and transitory. The foolish boast will soon be exploded. Before God it matters little what a man calls himself. The one question is as to what he is.

Vers. 34—38.—*Howling shepherds.* In the general calamity of the nation the shepherds are especially called upon to howl and cry and wallow in the dust. The

shepherds are the leaders of the people. These leaders, therefore, are not to be exempt from the distresses of the common people; on the contrary, trouble is to fall upon them in an aggravated degree.

I. HIGH RANK IS NO SECURITY AGAINST TROUBLE. It may free a man from many annoyances, it cannot defend him from all kinds of calamity. It is chiefly a safeguard against the smaller vexations of life; the more serious troubles sweep over it unchecked. It is like a small breakwater that will keep back the little waves of a fresh sea, but is overwhelmed in the storm. When it is most needed it is of least use. Rank is no protection against disease and death, against general human calamities, such as the desolation of an earthquake, the ravages of a plague, the devastation of a war. Nevertheless men do trust to rank unreasonably, and find it a snare when their false confidence is exposed.

II. LEADERS OF MEN SUFFER FROM THE TROUBLES THAT FALL UPON THEIR FOLLOWERS. The shepherd suffers with his flock. The patron is dependent on his clients. The king is great with the greatness of his people, and brought into trouble by his nation's distress. This is more than sharing a general calamity. It is experiencing a trouble that is directly caused by the distress of dependants. History has proved the mistake of those tyrants who have thought to secure their own grandeur by the brutal degradation, the bondage and misery of their subjects. The truly prosperous sovereign is not the Pharaoh reigning in lonely magnificence over a nation of slaves, but the beloved ruler of a free and enlightened people.

III. PERSONS IN EXALTED POSITIONS ARE LIABLE TO PECULIAR TROUBLES FROM WHICH ORDINARY MEN ARE EXEMPT. Not only are they not free from the common distresses of mankind, not only are they directly affected by the distresses of those beneath them; they are also subject to special dangers arising from their high and prominent position. 1. They are burdened with a *responsibility* that is proportionate to their elevation. If much has been given to them, much is expected of them. Every eye is upon them. Any mistake of theirs which might pass unnoticed in obscure men, is dragged into the full blaze of jealous criticism. If such men abuse a great trust they may expect to be visited with a great judgment. 2. They are liable to *special attacks of animosity*. Like officers in the field, they are picked out by opponents. Kings have dangers of assassination which obscure men need never fear. The highest tree catches the fiercest blast of the gale, while humble shrubs grow at peace in sheltered nooks. 3. They *feel the blow of trouble most acutely*. They who stand highest can fall lowest. Poverty is not the calamity to a born pauper that it proves itself to a bankrupt prince.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Messages recapitulated.* I. CAREFUL REMINDER OF THE EXTENT OF HIS MINISTRY. (Vers. 1—3.) 1. *The moral value of this is great.* It is no vague indictment, but one made out with all accuracy and conscientiousness. We ought to take note of the extent of our privileges and opportunities, for we shall have to give an exact account of them all. 2. *Its evidential value is equally great.* The date of the prediction is thus fixed, and history becomes a long verification of his prophetic truth.

II. ASSERTION OF HIS OWN AND OF GOD'S DILIGENCE AND FAITHFULNESS. (Vers. 3—6.) 1. *God has been diligent.* He has "risen up early." The welfare of his people is of intense interest to him. The delays of his dispensations are only seeming. No earnestness on the part of the creature can ever anticipate or outrun his love or readiness to provide. 2. *His servant the prophet was so also.* It was God's Spirit in him that they heard. He was obedient to the heavenly Spirit, and announced its messages as they were received.

III. THE PERSISTENT UNBELIEF AND DISOBEDIENCE OF THE NATION DENOUNCED. (Vers. 3—7.) There is something very impressive in the repeated "Ye have not hearkened." It defines and characterizes the guilt of the apostate. There was not even the beginning of serious attention (vers. 5, 6); and their indifference had become systematic and habitual. What wonder that God should have been provoked to wrath? And this is the sinner's position to-day. It would be impossible to fathom the depths of our depravity by nature, or to trace it to its ultimate issues.

IV. THE SPIRIT AND SUBSTANCE OF THE MESSAGE IS REPEATED. How great is the long-suffering of God! The unbelief of the people had been marvellous, considering the signs which had been given. Another opportunity, however, was afforded ere the catastrophe should take place. No details of the teaching are entered into, but great plainness of speech is used. The emphasis is upon essentials and permanent principles. The "spirit of prophecy" is intensely moral; and this is why the "testimony of Jesus" represents it. It is the grand resultant of all the forces working through ancient prophecy, and casts its revealing light backward upon the prophetic page. These repentances so often urged but never forthcoming, these "returns" and obediences which were to crown with blessing and surround with Divine favour, are only possible through his Spirit. The future of the world, as of every individual and nation, is inextricably associated with the cause of righteousness, and therefore with the gospel.—M.

Vers. 7—11.—*Judgment plainly declared.* The agents of the visitation are more precisely defined than hitherto, and the leader of the invasion is actually named. The extent also of the region to be devastated, and the time the captivity is to last, viz. seventy years, are set forth.

I. THIS TENDED TO HEIGHTEN THE MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PEOPLE. A vague indefinite calamity or series of calamities would have failed to strike deeply enough into the conscience of the transgressors; whereas a precisely marked off and defined set of occurrences could not be misunderstood. 1. *The nearness and inevitable character of the judgment are thereby realized.* 2. *It is seen to be imposed by the moral government of God.* "My servant." God permits, nay, appoints, Nebuchadrezzar.

II. IT PRESENTED THE PERIOD OF CALAMITY AS PART OF AN ORDERED WHOLE, WITH A DEFINITE OUTCOME AND OBJECT. Great as the trial would be, it was nevertheless a measured and therefore a bearable one. There need be no wild abandonment to despair. The believer could possess his soul in patience. The allurements of heathenism would lose much of their power. A quiet, reverent, and repentant study of the meaning of the dispensation would be encouraged; and in this way it would act as discipline for the future. *We* can never be certain as to the limits of our trials; but we have the assurance that our Saviour, who has a fellow-feeling with his people, will not impose anything above what we are able to bear. And through the revelation of spirituality in the gospel, and the greater spiritualization of our hopes and aims through its teaching, we are able with greater calmness to contemplate our "light affliction, which is but for a moment."

III. THE PROPHECY WAS THEREBY PROVED TO BE GENUINE, AND THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD REVEALED BEYOND DISPUTE. As if conscious of this, Jeremiah for the first time calls himself "the prophet," when he has fairly committed himself to exact dates and personages. It would be open to the survivors of that predicted dispensation to denounce him an an impostor, and to discredit the practice of prophesying. But the seer was certain; and the verdict of history confirms his forecast, and demonstrates that it was no *ex post facto* fabrication, but real Divine foreknowledge of events yet future.—M.

Ver. 29.—*Judgment beginning at the house of God.* I. THE ORDER OF GOD'S JUDGMENT. 1. *It begins with his own people.* 2. *Reasons for this are:* (1) *The harmony of the Divine rule in the earth.* The Church is his own house. It ought, therefore, to be in perfect order first. His authority ought to be recognized among those whom he calls his own. He will therefore deal with them first, and then with better grace address the impenitent and unbelieving world. (2) *The purity of God's character.* He cannot endure wrong —cannot look upon sin. Yet he is to dwell in the Church, in individual believers. It is necessary, therefore, that they be made pure as he is pure. Their discipline must be immediate if they are to become vessels prepared unto honour. (3) *The justice of God.* Immediately the sin of the child is worse than that of the stranger, because it is done in the midst of light and privilege. Sharp and immediate chastisement is the only way in which he can show his sense of the wrong done (Amos iii. 2). (4) *The mercy of God.* If it begins with the children of God, it is that they may the sooner be saved. He embitters the breast of the world to wean them (Leighton). It is because he

loves he rebukes and chastens. But the grief of sin begins first in the breast of God and in the person of his Son. It is of the nature of Divine love to suffer for the sinful, even to die, that he may be made a child of grace.

II. THE EXTENT OF IT. "All the inhabitants of the earth." Thus early—nay, from the first sin onwards—does he *begin* the judgment of the whole earth. The sin of one is but a symptom of the universal depravity of all. The oneness of the world in its fall and the evolution of its sin, is constantly declared in Scripture. 1. *This is demanded by the justice of God.* "Should ye be utterly unpunished?" It would be manifestly unfair that the child of God alone should suffer for that which is primarily a sin of all mankind. 2. *It is founded upon the solidarity of the race.* There is a universal kinship in sins. "In Adam (they) all die" (1 Cor. xv. 22).

III. THE MEASURE OF IT. "A sword" (cf. ver. 33). This signifies destruction, death. That which opposes itself to him will be utterly destroyed. He *begins* his judgment upon his own, but it passes from them and rests for ever upon his enemies. The picture painted by Jeremiah (vers. 30—38) is but one of many similar ones in the Bible. The utter holiness of God cannot endure the sinfulness of men; it must consume it and all that identify themselves with it. In the New Testament the horizon widens, and the spiritual world participates with the living upon earth in the sentence of the Judge. The first duty, therefore, of every awakened sinner is to flee from the "wrath to come." Whilst he remains unconverted he is a "child of wrath." Punishment has a different significance to him from what it would have if he were "in Christ." It is the same principle of solidarity which condemned us that now avails for our salvation. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. xv. 22).—M.

Vers. 30—38.—*The vision of final judgment.* A sublime and terrible description; corresponding with many others throughout the Old and New Testaments.

I. IT SERVES A GREAT ETHICAL PURPOSE. The sense of wrong-doing is thereby intensified, and some idea is given of the awful consequences of sin and its hatefulness to the mind of God.

II. AN EVIDENCE OF THE HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE OF SIN AND SALVATION. By such visions as these the ages of the world are linked together and shown to be convergent in one point. There are not to be so many judgments of isolated offences, but one judgment, towards which all the world has looked forward. Sin increases with the lapse of time, and develops into a more pronounced opposition to truth and goodness Only in final judgment can all its significance be comprehended and its issues be stayed.

III. AN EVIDENCE OF THE REALITY OF THE PROPHETIC GIFT AND ITS SPIRITUAL END. This vision is corroborated by the universal instincts of man, on the one hand, and by the endorsement of Christ on the other. The various minor judgments which have intervened between that time and this are so many proofs of the correctness of the prophet's intuition. And the manner in which he and other seers have laid chief emphasis upon this event exhibits the fundamental moral purpose of all prophecy. Its intention is to reveal the righteousness of God, and to lead men into its practice and love.—M.

Vers. 1—7.—*A twenty-three years' ministry.* Here we get a statement, brief but not at all uncertain, of what had been done in the prophetic way during twenty-three years. Three parties are concerned in this statement: (1) *God;* (2) *the prophet;* (3) *the people.*

I. GOD. Nebuchadrezzar, who is to act as the servant of God (ver. 9) in the great overthrowing work, has just come to his throne, and is unconsciously preparing for that to which God had appointed him. Hence it was fitting that, just at this crisis, God should point back over the past and show how very much he had done to bring about a different result. Not that this comprehensive view was likely at the eleventh hour to make any change in Israel itself; but it is well that it should stand recorded in the history. It is well that we who come after should be made to see clearly how continuously God protested against the wickedness of his people. Jeremiah himself, out of his own experience, speaks as a witness of what had been going on for twenty-three years; and he knew further that he was only one out of many agents by whom God had been doing the same kind of work.

II. THE PROPHET. Not Jeremiah peculiarly, but Jeremiah as representative of all the faithful prophets; those to whom he here refers as having been engaged in the same kind of service. He brings against the people a serious charge of persistent neglect; but it also involves a serious confession with respect to himself. A serious confession, but not a shameful one. Though his long ministry has not had the desired end, it is by no means a failure. For twenty-three years the work has been laid upon him of denouncing national apostasy and individual transgression, in all the varieties of it. The substance of this long ministry is written down and the spirit of the ministry made evident. We know the things he spoke of, and how he spoke of them; the enemies he made, the sufferings he endured, the pangs with which his heart was torn. In his ministry he gave himself, without stint. Nor does his work stand alone. He was not the first to exhort to repentance. He succeeded men who had been as faithful as himself, and engaged as long a time in the service of God. And yet, after so many remonstrances, the nation remains stubborn in its apostasy, infatuated as ever in its rapid descent to ruin Hence we learn how chary we should be in talking of unsuccessful ministries. No ministry, whatever its other results may be, can be unsuccessful in the sight of God, if only there is unshaken fidelity to him. It is fidelity that he rewards, not obvious results. In spite of all the husbandman's care, digging about the tree and dunging it, it may yield no fruit; but the fidelity of the husbandman deserves a reward all the same. Industry cannot overcome the bad elements in what is given him to cultivate. All who have to engage in preaching and prophesying duties must learn the lesson, that more is needed for success than mere perseverance. Perseverance is like the dropping water which wears away the stone; but what is here required, is that the stone should be changed as to its nature, not worn away. If Jeremiah had been able to prophesy twenty-three centuries, instead of twenty-three years, the result would have been the same. All he could do was to reiterate, in the ears of the people, the necessity of repentance. It is in the light of a passage like this that we learn more of what Jesus meant when he said he came to fulfil the prophets. It was his not only to accomplish their predictions, but do what they could not possibly do by all their appeals—turn the hearts of the disobedient to God. Compare the barren ministry of Jeremiah, prophet of Jehovah, with the fruitful ministry of Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ. Yet Paul did not speak one whit more earnestly concerning righteousness and repentance and submission to God. The difference lay in this, that Paul was not only a preacher, but when he preached there was a subduing and renewing Spirit.

III. THE PEOPLE. This is a serious charge brought against them, that one man had been in their midst for all these years, with one message, never varying and never slackening, and yet that they had paid, as a nation, not the slightest heed to it. When Nebuchadrezzar did come, there was no chance for them to say that they had not received proper warning. They could not blame Jeremiah. Their very persecution of him was a witness against themselves. Thus there is a warning to those who are hearers of the gospel with all the voices with which it is addressed to them. It is not outside of themselves they must look for explanations of why the truths of the gospel have found no lodgment in their hearts. The cause is within. How many have been listening to the news of Jesus Christ for many more years even than twenty-three, and every year seems to bring a lessening probability that they will treat the message as having a practical concern for themselves!—Y.

Ver. 9.—*Nebuchadrezzar, the servant of God.* I. THE CONTRAST WITH OTHER SERVANTS. Observe the mention, in ver. 4, of those very different servants of God, the prophets (so mentioned elsewhere). God had sent many of them and many times, and hardly any attention had been paid to them. Higher motives had been appealed to in vain. Considerations of duty and prudence were thrown to the winds. And now the mighty king Nebuchadrezzar comes, with a very different sort of force—not looking at all like a servant of God; and yet he is just as much the servant of God as is any of the prophets. Indeed, king of a great people though he was, his rank in the service of God was not so high as that of the prophets. He appears in this place as nothing more than the final executioner of justice.

II. NONE THE LESS EFFICIENT A SERVANT BECAUSE THE SERVICE WAS RENDERED

UNCONSCIOUSLY. Nebuchadrezzar, despot as he was, would have been very wrathful if he had known exactly how he appeared in the sight of God. He had certain purposes of his own, and he succeeded in effecting them; but the very energy with which he worked for himself only made him to render his service to God more complete. And may it not be happening in the world, a great deal more frequently than we think, that the very success of selfish and domineering men is being so handled by God as all the more to serve his purposes?

III. THE LIMITATIONS OF NEBUCHADREZZAR'S SERVICE. The service, with all its completeness, was only within certain limits. It does not require much intelligence to destroy what is destructible. But if there is to be a building-up work for God, then there must be a conscious, voluntary, and devoted service. Israel was meant to be a servant of God in the fullest and noblest sense of the word. It had been instructed in the will of God and borne with patiently in many failures to obey that will. Hence the description of Nebuchadrezzar as a servant is an implied rebuke of those who had refused to be servants. Note the great contrast found in the New Testament, where Christ's apostles, at the beginning of their Epistles, hasten to proclaim themselves as the servants of God.—Y.

Ver. 31.—*Jehovah's controversy with the nations.* This necessary controversy explains all the proceedings described from ver. 15 to the end of the chapter. Jeremiah is not a prophet to Israel only, but to all who are guilty of similar transgressions. The cup of God's holy wrath goes on filling wherever he beholds wrong-doing. It is easy to see, if we only ponder a little, that some such outburst as this must come in all true prophecy. As the Apostle Paul puts it, the nations that sinned without law perished without law. The peculiar light vouchsafed to Israel was not the only light for which men were responsible to God. Accordingly we find that it seems to have been one main ground of appeal taken by the apostle to the Gentiles that God had not left himself without witness amongst them. If, on the one hand, he could denounce Israel for being so indifferent to the Law he had formally given, so, on the other hand, he could denounce the Gentiles for their negligence of the light of nature. Idolatry, as we perceive, had produced the most fearful results in Israel; but everywhere else it must, of course, have produced results quite as bad, only they do not happen to occupy such a prominent position in history. And thus we have indicated to us here, as indeed in so many places elsewhere, the way in which to consider the decline and fall of great nations. It is not enough for the Christian to rest in the consideration of secondary causes. And if a nation's decadence be so gradual and imperceptible as to show no obvious sign of what secondary causes may be operating, then there is all the more need to rise to the height of a true faith in God and believe that his judgments are assuredly at work. Wherever there is unbridled self-indulgence, still spreading wider and wider, there we may be sure God is carrying on those judgments which cannot fail. But is there not also a brighter side suggested by one passage in this chapter? As we read of all these lands to which, in a kind of apocalyptic vision, Jeremiah presented the cup of Jehovah's fury, we cannot but think of that other list so graciously represented on the day of Pentecost. Nations, in the manifold wisdom of God, may rise, decline, and fall; but such a fate will trouble none save those who exaggerate patriotism into a cardinal virtue. The serious matter is when the individual will not show a timely wisdom, and in humble repentance put away his mistaken past, and in humble faith accept the redemption and guidance which God alone can provide.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JEREMIAH'S TRIAL AND DELIVERANCE.

The prophecy in vers. 2—6 is a summary of that contained in ch. vii. 1—15; the narrative, which stands in no connection either with ch. xxiv. or ch. xxvii., relates the consequences of that bold declaration of the word of the Lord. The present position of the chapter is only surprising to those who assume that the works of the prophets were necessarily arranged chronologically. How many violations of chronological order meet us in other books, *e.g.* in Isaiah! It is only

reasonable to expect similar phenomena in the Book of Jeremiah.

To estimate the circumstances of the prophecy aright, we must remember that in Jehoiakim's reign a Chaldean invasion was the danger by which all minds were constantly preoccupied.

Ver. 2.—Jeremiah is to take his stand **in the court of the Lord's house**; *i.e.* the outer court, where the people assembled (comp. ch. xix. 14), and preach **unto all the cities of Judah**; *i.e.* to the pilgrims who had come from the provincial towns (comp. ch. xi. 12). His discourse is not to be an eloquent appeal to the feelings, but a strict and peremptory announcement; he is to **diminish** (or, *subtract*) **not a word** (comp. Deut. iv. 2; xii. 32; Rev. xxii. 19).

Ver. 3.—**That I may repent**; literally, *and I will repent;* the idea or object is derived from the context. (On the Divine repentance, see note on ch. xviii. 8.)

Vers. 4—6.—The contents of the discourse (see especially on ch. vii. 12—15). The priests and the prophets interfere, arrest Jeremiah, and accuse him of a capital crime. It would appear that some at least of the "false prophets" were priests; thus Pashur, we are told, was a priest (ch. xx. 6).

Vers. 7—11.—To all devout Jews this prediction of the destruction of the temple must have been startling; but to those who placed their confidence in the mere existence of a consecrated building (ch. vii. 4), it was like a blow aimed at their very life. Besides, were not the majority of the prophets of Jehovah of entirely another way of thinking? Did they not promise peace? And what could justify Jeremiah in announcing not merely war, but the downfall of the Divine habitation itself? Hence no sooner had the prophet concluded his discourse, than he was arrested, accused, and condemned to death.

Ver. 8.—**Had made an end of speaking.** They allowed Jeremiah to finish his discourse (of which we have here only the briefest summary), either from a lingering reverence for his person and office, or to obtain fuller materials for an accusation (comp. the trial of Stephen, Acts vi. 12—14). **All the people.** The "people" appear to have been always under some constraint. As long as the priests and prophets were alone, they dominated the unofficial classes, but when the princes appeared (ver. 11), the new influence proved superior. In ver. 16 princes and people together go over to the side of Jeremiah. **Thou shalt surely die.** Death was the legal penalty both for blasphemy (Lev. xxiv. 16) and for presuming to prophesy without having received a prophetic revelation (Deut. xviii. 20). Jeremiah's declaration ran so entirely counter to the prejudices of his hearers that he may well have been accused of both these sins, or crimes. True, Isaiah and Amos had already predicted the destruction of Jerusalem (Isa. v. 5, 6; vi. 11; Amos ii. 4, 5; vi. 1, 2); but it may have been contended that the timely repentance of Judah under Hezekiah and Josiah had effectually cancelled the threatened doom, and though Isa. lxiv. 10, 11 evidently refers to a time later than Josiah, and represents the ruin of Jerusalem as practically certain, it would seem that the prophetic book (Isa. xl.—lxvi.) to which this belongs (to say the least) was not generally known.

Ver. 9.—**Were gathered against**; rather, *assembled themselves unto;* i.e. constituted themselves into a legal *qāhāl*, or assembly (see on ver. 17).

Ver. 10.—**The princes.** The term will include the members of the various branches of the royal family, who acted as judges (see on ch. xxi. 12), and the "elders," or heads of families (see ver. 17). Without the presence of the former, Jeremiah could only have had a mock-trial. **Came up**, etc. (see on ch. xxii. 1). **Of the Lord's** house; better simply, *of the Lord.* The gate is the same which is referred at ch. xx. 2.

Ver. 11.—**This man is worthy to die**; literally, a *sentence of death* (*belongs*) *to this man.*

Vers. 12—15.—Jeremiah's defence. He is conscious that he has not spoken uncommissioned, and leaves the result. He urges the people to amendment of life, while there is time, and warns them that his own unmerited death will bring a curse upon themselves.

Vers. 16—19.—The truth makes an impression upon the princes and the people, who declare Jeremiah to be a true prophet, and therefore innocent.

Ver. 17.—**The elders of the land** add their voice in favour of Jeremiah, not, however, without first of all consulting the people whose representatives they are. The whole verse is thoroughly technical in its phraseology. The word (*qāhāl*) rendered "assembly" is the traditional legal term for the "congregation of Israel" (Deut. xxxi. 30); comp. ver. 9, where the verb is the corresponding one to *qāhāl*. Thus, with all the faults of the government of Judah, which Jeremiah himself reveals to us, it was very far removed from the Oriental despotisms of our day. The "elders" are still an important element in the social system, and form a link with that earlier period in which the family was the leading power in the social organization. Originally the term denoted, strictly and in the full sense, heads of families; they have their

analogue in the councils of the Aryan village communities. "References to their parliamentary status (if the phrase may be used) occur in Exod. iii. 16; 2 Sam. xix. 11; 1 Kings viii. 1; xx. 7. The institution lingered on during and after the Babylonian Exile (ch. xxix. 1; Ezek. xiv. 1; xx. 1; Ezra v. 5; vi. 7; x. 14; Matt. xxvi. 3, 47; Mark xiv. 43; Acts iv. 5, etc.)." We find another reference to their quasi-judicial authority in Deut. xxi. 2.

Vers. 18, 19.—**Micah the Morasthite**, etc. The "elders" appeal for a precedent to the case of Micah (called after his native place, Moresheth-Gath, to distinguish him from other Micahs), who had been equally explicit in his declarations of woe to Jerusalem, without incurring the charge of blasphemy. The prediction referred to is in Micah iii. 12, the form of which agrees verbally with our passage.

Ver. 19.—**Thus might we procure**, etc.; rather, *and we are about to commit a great evil against our souls* (not merely "against ourselves"). The blood of the slain would cry for vengeance against his murderers, who would come to an untimely end, their "souls" being sent down to lead a miserable parody of a life (*βίος ἄβιος*) in Sheol or Hades.

Vers. 20—23.—The murder of the prophet Urijah. At first sight, these four verses appear to belong to the speech of the elders, but the appearance is delusive, (1) because the issue of the affair of Urijah cannot possibly have taken place "in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim" (ver. 1); and (2) because the passage stands in no connection with what preceeds, whereas it is related, and that very closely, to ver. 24 (see below). The case is similar to that of certain passages in St. John's Gospel, where the reflections of the evangelist are put side by side with the sayings of our Lord. Jeremiah, writing down his experiences at a later time, introduces the story of Urijah to show the magnitude of the danger to which he had been exposed. The notice of Urijah has an additional importance, as it shows incidentally how isolated a spiritual prophet like Jeremiah was, and how completely the order of prophets had fallen below its high ideal. We have no further knowledge of the prophet Urijah.

Ver. 20.—**Kirjath-jearim**; a city in the territory of Judah, on the west frontier of Benjamin.

Ver. 21.—**His mighty men.** The "mighty men" (*gibbōrim*) are not mentioned again in Jeremiah, and the Septuagint omits the word. But it is clear from Isa. iii. 2 that the "mighty men" were recognized as an important part of the community. From 1 Chron x. 10 it appears that the term indicates a position of high command in the army, which is in accordance with the notice in 2 Kings xxiv. 16. **Went into Egypt.** Egypt was the natural refuge for a native of Palestine (comp. 1 Kings xi. 17, 40; Matt. ii. 14), just as Palestine was for a native of Egypt. The latter, however, proved to be not a safe asylum for Urijah, as Pharaoh was the liege lord of Jehoiakim (2 Kings xxiii. 34), and the extradition of Urijah as a criminal naturally followed.

Ver. 22.—**Elnathan.** The name occurs again in ch. xxxvi. 12, 25. Possibly this man was the "Elnathan of Jerusalem" mentioned in 2 Kings xxiv. 8 as the father-in-law of Jehoiakim.

Ver. 23.—**Into the graves of the common people**; literally, *of the sons of the people* (comp. ch. xvii. 19; 2 Kings xxiii. 6). "The graves" is equivalent to "the graveyard," as Job xvii. 1.

Ver. 24.—**Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam**, etc.; *i.e.* in spite of the prepossession against prophets like Jeremiah which this incident reveals, Ahikam threw all his influence into the scale of toleration. The same Ahikam is mentioned in circumstances which reflect credit on his religion in 2 Kings xxii. 12—14. One of his sons, Gemariah, lent Baruch his official room for the reading of the prophecies of Jeremiah (ch. xxxvi. 10); another was the well-known Gedaliah, who became governor of Judah after the fall of Jerusalem, and who was himself friendly to Jeremiah (ch. xxxix. 14; xl. 5).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*The duty of declaring the whole truth.* I. THE DUTY. Jeremiah is commanded to "diminish not a word" from the Divine message. A similar obligation rests upon every man who is called to speak for God to his fellow-men. The duty is urgent for two reasons: 1. *Truth is a trust.* Thus Timothy is admonished by St. Paul to keep that which is committed to his trust (1 Tim. vi. 20); and the apostle speaks of the "gospel which was committed to my trust" (1 Tim. i. 11). 2. *Truth is needed by the world.* It is not a private monopoly; it belongs to mankind. The world is dying for lack of it. He who has possession of it and refuses to reveal it to others is like a man who has discovered a secret spring of abundant water and

churlishly keeps his knowledge to himself though his companions are perishing of thirst. Divine truth is of practical moment. It is not a mere curiosity, to be exposed or hidden as its owner thinks fit, as though his treatment of it made little difference to other men. When the four lepers of Samaria found the Syrian camp deserted, their first impulse was to pillage it quietly and hide the treasures, keeping the great discovery secret; but wiser thoughts prevailed, and they hastened to acquaint the citizens with their unexpected deliverance (2 Kings vii. 3—11). So every one who has seen the redemption of Christ has no right to keep his knowledge to himself while the world is in sore need of it. The Church is entrusted with the gospel, not for her own enjoyment alone, but for the good of the world. The same duty applies also to the possession of darker truths. It is evident, indeed, that a certain liberty and discretion are left with us. It is for us to arrange and present truth as it seems best to us; to give relative prominence to its various parts according to our idea of their importance; to lead men up to the reception of it by degrees. It may be that there are truths which the teacher sees, but which the scholar is not yet fit to receive. If they were declared to him he would not understand them, and they would only injure him. A wise teacher will reserve these. We act in this way with children. It may be right sometimes to do the same with those who are babes in knowledge. But is not this a violation of the duty of the text? By no means. For: (1) If we are sure the truth will be misunderstood we cannot really teach it; for to teach a thing is to make another understand and know it, not merely to speak out unintelligible words about it. We are not to cast our pearls before swine, though we are to remember that no human beings are to be regarded as hopelessly and for ever swinish. (2) Truth may be withholden for a time with the object, not of suppressing it, but of the better leading them up to the ripe reception of it. (3) The vision of truth must be distinguished from the mission to declare it. No doubt the one directly leads to the other. But they may not be contemporaneous. Questions of method, order, seasonableness, come between. The duty is to diminish nothing of the prophet's message.

II. THE TEMPTATION TO FAIL IN THIS DUTY. 1. *Personal fear* may tempt a man to "diminish" part of the Divine message. Jeremiah knew that the full utterance of his message would provoke violent opposition. He was warned not to shrink from declaring it on that account. In Christian lands and quiet times we do not feel the same terrible temptation to unfaithfulness. But it comes to us in another form. There are ideas which we believe to be true, but we fear they are unpopular; they will excite controversy, they will provoke ridicule, they will lead to neglect of the preacher. He is tempted to shun these truths that he may swim with the tide of popularity. But he is guilty of gross unfaithfulness if he thus shuns to declare the whole counsel of God. 2. It may appear that *men will not receive the message.* Of course, as has been remarked, we must use wisdom and discretion, seeking rather to convince men than to provoke them. But it may even be a duty to declare a truth as a testimony against men. In any case the responsibility for rejecting it will lie with them, as it should. But who can tell whether or no his work will be fruitless? The most unsympathetic hearers have sometimes been reached and affected and subdued by the truth which they came to mock or oppose. When the bow is drawn at a venture it may hit the most unlikely marks. It is certain that more good has been missed by our faithlessness in not "sowing beside all waters" than harm done by our rashness in blurting out truths in unseemly circumstances. 3. Certain truths may seem to be of *no practical use.* We are inclined to neglect these for those that are plainly profitable. Now, there can be no doubt that some truths are of more practical importance than others, and these should naturally receive our more earnest attention. But it is a mistake to neglect any truth on this account. Truth should be loved and taught for its own sake. It is degraded when it is regarded solely from a utilitarian standpoint. It is well that men should be true philosophers—lovers of wisdom. Moreover, it is impossible to tell what will be the future practical influence of a truth. Some of the most abstruse scientific inventions have led to results of great, though unexpected, human advantage. If research were confined within the limits of the evidently practical, it is certain that many of the most important discoveries—discoveries of the greatest use to man—would never have been made. Thus, if electricity had not been studied for purely scientific purposes we should never have had the telegraph. We

do not know all the effects of Divine truth. It may not affect others as it does us. It may have special effects in the future, not felt as yet. It is our duty to preserve and transmit it to the ages when it may bear most fruit. 4. Some truths may appear *difficult and mysterious*. Of course, if a truth is wholly unintelligible, it cannot be taught. We are only uttering words when we try to expound it. But without being unintelligible it may be mysterious, it may be inexplicable; it may come, so to speak, with trails of dark shadows. The temptation is to leave this and only touch what is clear throughout. But the very sense of mystery may be beneficial. So much of the truth as is clear may be useful. If we are convinced that a thing is true, we may accept it without explaining the whole rationale of it. The mystery may grow clearer as we practise what we know of the truth. In any case the Christian teacher is God's ambassador, commissioned to declare his Master's message entire, unmutilated, whatever opinions *he* may have of the utility of it.

Vers. 8—19.—*A scene in a Jewish court of law.* We have here a graphic picture of the procedure under the Hebrew criminal law, for it would appear that Jeremiah was indicted and tried in accordance with correct legal order. The details of such a trial are not unimportant to the student of constitutional history. But they are also full of human interest. The law-court is a strange mirror of character. Many as are the objections to the publication of police news in the daily papers, it does at least serve to open our eyes to the eccentricities as well as the enormities of our variegated human world. Let us see what light this trial of Jeremiah throws upon the various persons concerned.

I. THE ACCUSERS. The leading accusers are priests and prophets. The priests, also, were foremost in the accusation of our Lord. Jeremiah had threatened the temple; it is not wonderful that temple officials should be enraged with him. Religious persecution is generally instigated by the professional clerical class, whose vested interests have been attacked by the reformer. The prophets were directly opposed by the teaching of Jeremiah. If orthodoxy is to be decided by the vote of the majority, they were the orthodox of their day. They were annoyed by the contradiction of the greatest man of their order. Unable to answer him, they tried to suppress him. The conduct of these men may suggest some general lessons, viz. (1) fidelity to the ordinances of worship is no proof of fidelity to God; (2) professional religiousness may be far removed from religiousness of character; (3) they who claim to be regular teachers of religion may be the last to recognize fresh truth; (4) they who are interested in a controversy are bad judges of the merits of the case.

II. THE ACCUSED. 1. Jeremiah remains faithful to his message. He reiterates it with new emphatic warnings. His defence is that he is sent by God to speak as he has spoken. He rests on innocence, truth, Divine authority. With such a plea he dare not recant. The true servants of God will know that they ought to "obey God rather than men," and therefore, like St. Peter and St. John, that they "cannot but speak the things which they have seen and heard" (Acts iv. 20). 2. Jeremiah showed indifference to his own life (ver. 14). He was a brave man, though his enemies accused him of advocating a coward's policy. It is noble thus to have strength to act on the conviction that truth is more precious than life. 3. Jeremiah warned the people of the consequences of injustice (ver. 15). This he did more for their sakes than for his own. Nothing can be more fatal to a country than the corruption of justice.

III. THE JUDGES. The princes and elders seem to have the position of judges. They are cool and impartial. In the Jewish state the office of judge came with birth and rank. The most radical friend of the people may see that the superior culture and freedom from popular passions of these men may have fitted them in some measure for their work. Unhappily, Jeremiah has exposed another side of their character. It speaks well for them, however, after the severe castigation he had given "the shepherds" (*e.g.* ch. xxv. 34—38), that they had the magnanimity to lend the prophet an impartial hearing, in spite of the virulent opposition of the priests. But possibly these two classes of leading men were not on the friendliest of terms with one another. Even if this be the case it is well that, unlike Herod and Pontius Pilate, they did not come to an agreement through the sacrifice of an innocent victim. Some of the elders cited the

precedent of Micah's case. We see here the value of such an illustration. It serves to detach the principle under consideration from the prejudice of the passions of the hour.

IV. THE JURY. The assembly of the people seems to have acted as a jury. The priests and prophets present their accusation to them and the princes. The people and the princes pronounce the opinion that Jeremiah is innocent. The elders address themselves exclusively to the assembly of the people. This assembly shows the weakness of a popular concourse. The people are swayed from side to side. First they side with the priests, then with the rulers. It also shows its advantages. The people are open to impression; they do not care for formal consistency to a previous conviction; they like to see fair play. When their broad human instincts are appealed to they respond rightly.

Vers. 20—23.—*The story of an obscure martyr.* I. UNORIGINAL MEN MAY DO GOOD SERVICE IF THEY FOLLOW GOOD LEADERS. Urijah had no new message; but he followed Jeremiah fully and firmly. Accordingly, though not especially inspired, he was able to prophesy "in the Name of the Lord." It is more important to be true than to be original. It is the duty of the Christian teacher to speak in the Name of God, but only according to the teaching of prophets and apostles, and above all, Jesus Christ. If we do this we can speak "with authority."

II. SMALL MEN MAY EXERT GREAT POWER WHEN THEY ARE ON THE SIDE OF RIGHT AND TRUTH. Urijah is an insignificant personage, yet all the court is in dismay at his preaching. There is irony in this fact, if not intended by the language with which it is described. We have "Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all his princes," alarmed and enraged at the preaching of one obscure man. What a testimony to the power of truth! *Magna est veritas et prevalebit.*

III. OBSCURE MEN MAY SUFFER WHEN GREATER MEN ARE SPARED. Urijah is killed; Jeremiah is acquitted. The Jews were overawed by Jeremiah; Urijah was an enemy small enough to be made a victim without danger. There is something terribly humiliating to human nature in this. How often do we see the same meanness choosing the underling rather than the leader for spiteful but safe revenge!

IV. IT IS SOMETIMES SAFER TO FACE DANGER THAN TO FLEE FROM IT. Jeremiah held his ground, and his life was spared; Urijah fled to Egypt, and he was dragged back to Jerusalem and ignominiously slain. The dauntless courage of the one man overpowered opposition; the cowardice of the other tempted it. It is always better even for ourselves to be brave and faithful. After his previous recantations Archbishop Cranmer could feel little of the triumph of a Ridley and a Latimer in the flames of his martyrdom.

Ver. 24.—*A friend in need.* Ahikam proves himself to be a true friend to Jeremiah by standing by him in the hour of danger. He is not like Joseph of Arimathæa, who was unheard of till he came and begged the dead body of his Lord. When the danger was greatest, he first made himself known on the side of the prophet.

I. HE WAS JUST. Jeremiah had been maligned. But Ahikam knew him to be innocent. To have allowed him to perish would have involved complicity in the murder of the prophet. Yet how many would have washed their hands and contented themselves with taking no active part in a public crime! It is not enough to refrain from joining in an injustice; duty requires us to resist it.

II. HE WAS INDEPENDENT. Jeremiah was unpopular. Though the unanswerable truthfulness of his defence secured him a verdict of acquittal at the regular trial, there can be no doubt that his life was in imminent peril from unscrupulous conspirators, now that the general sentiment was against him. It is a proof of staunch fidelity to stand by a man when he is unpopular. There is little merit in showing friendship for men who are fawned upon by fashion.

III. HE WAS COURAGEOUS. He could only defend Jeremiah at the peril of his own life. By siding with the prophet he allowed his name to be associated with all that was disliked and feared in the persecuted man, and he must have known this. For a person in high station to come out in this way by himself and defend a solitary, persecuted man required no little boldness.

IV. HE WAS USEFUL. Ahikam could not prophesy; but he could save a prophet's life. Possibly but for him Jeremiah's mission would have been cut short. To him, therefore, we owe the possibility of all the remainder of the great prophet's work. It is noteworthy that Ahikam had shown respect for the prophetic order before this, when, with his father and others, he went on an important mission from King Josiah to consult the prophetess Huldah (2 Kings xxii. 12—14). Many a man who can do little directly may be the means of securing immense good by fostering and furthering the work of others. It would be happy for us to think less of our own prominence and more of the accomplishment of God's will, no matter who may be the honoured instrument. We may look beyond the human friend and see the hand of Providence in this deliverance of the prophet. God raises up helpers when we least look for them. Among all the blessings of life none should command more thankfulness to God than the gift of good friends.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*God's mercy shown in his messages.* I. IN THEIR BEING REPEATED. It was substantially the same message as had been delivered before and been rejected. The question was not finally closed. Jehoiakim might show a disposition to repent and alter the policy of his father's government. In any case a new chance is afforded him and his people. God is slow to anger (Rom. x. 21). The invitations of his love are still extended to us, notwithstanding the sins of the fathers and our own repeated violations of his Law (Heb. iv. 6—9). Even the backslider is addressed with frequent warnings and appeals—a proceeding which would have no meaning apart from God's reserved purpose of grace.

II. IN THEIR TIMELINESS. It was not only at the middle or end of Jehoiakim's reign, when he might have thought himself involved too deeply to retrace his steps, but at the very beginning. With a new king a fresh opportunity is offered for the nation also to return to its allegiance. Similarly does he stand at the threshold of every life and the opening of every career. He has "risen up early" and anticipated the transgressor in his evil way, or guided his faithful child into the paths of peace (cf. John i. 9).

III. IN THEIR FAITHFULNESS. "Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah; . . . diminish not a word." To declare "all the words of this life" is the commission of Christ's servants, and to do this "in season and out of season." The exact situation of men, and the relation into which sin has brought them with respect to God, must be plainly stated; there is no room for flattery. It is absurd to suppose that such a policy is due to vindictiveness. It can only be explained on the hypothesis of an earnest and thorough-going scheme of salvation. Sinners require to be faithfully dealt with, in order to awaken their conscience and constrain them to take advantage of the means provided for their deliverance.

IV. IN THEIR REVELATION OF HIS WILLINGNESS TO SAVE. It might almost appear weakness, yet is not Jehovah ashamed of this long-suffering. The attribute of mercy does not detract from the dignity or authority of Divine character; rather is it its glory. This forbearance and hesitation to inflict punishment can be attributed to no base motives. It is in harmony with his behaviour at all times. How important is it that the repentant sinner should know the merciful disposition of him with whom he has to do! It is essential in every preaching of the gospel that this impression should be produced. The failure of one generation, again, is no reason for another being condemned before probation. God is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. iii. 9).—M.

Vers. 1—17, 24.—*The prophet of God arraigned by the nation.* Jeremiah's position, as that of all prophets, was necessarily a public one; to every man is he sent with the message. It is inadmissible for him to soften or lessen what he has to speak, which is nothing else than an indictment of the entire people (vers. 4—6). In default of their repentance his arraignment by them is, therefore, all but inevitable. Indifference could not well be feigned; words like his were certain to produce an effect.

I. HIS RECEPTION. It is tumultuous and threatening. He is treated as a criminal. The people, under the influence of his enemies, the priests and the prophets, said,

"Thou shalt surely die," and were "gathered together against" him (vers. 8, 9). It was to be expected that the priests and the prophets should have been his accusers (ver. 11), and they already anticipate an unfavourable verdict. It is the educated and influential amongst the laity who are his judges (ver. 10)—a fortunate thing for him, as the event showed. They seem to have been more open to conviction, as they were probably better acquainted with the moral condition of the court and the political situation. The opposition of men is to be expected by the follower and witness of truth, for "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. viii. 7). But some will ever be found, if not convinced by him, yet, through the work of the Spirit, open to conviction. There is nothing which true religion demands in these crises but a fair hearing and an impartial judgment.

II. HIS DEFENCE. He declares the reality of his mission—"the Lord sent me" (vers. 12, 15); his faithfulness to his instructions, and the merciful aim which he had in view (ver. 13); his helplessness and indifference to personal consequences (ver. 14); and his own innocence of any evil design against the nation. God's servants, when thus arraigned, ought to be gentle and yet faithful to their message; the issue is to be left to him. The fear of man is to be forgotten in the fear of God and the enthusiasm of salvation.

III. HIS DELIVERANCE. 1. The verdict is sensible and wise (ver. 16), and receives the adhesion of the people. It is the false prophets who are most obstinately opposed, who would probably have aroused the popular prejudices, had it not been for the interference of certain elders who recalled previous instances in point (vers. 17—23); and the strong personal influence of Ahikam, son of Shaphan. We are reminded of our Saviour's experience at the bar of Pilate (Matt. xxvii. 19—25). 2. The most prominent feature of the judgment is its consequence. God's children must frequently be disappointed in their appeals to men and their expectation of results from his Word. His ways are hidden, inscrutable, and hard to acquiesce in. A clear and intelligent verdict is not to be expected from those who are not prepared to yield themselves to God's authority. The clearest and most faithful expositions of truth will frequently appear to fail of immediate effect. The servant of God is to care chiefly to deliver his soul; his personal safety may be left to God. God can raise up influential friends for his people in critical times, but he will work out his schemes in his own way.—M.

Ver. 6.—*Spiritual prerogative not inalienable.* The utterance of these words is the chief charge against the prophet; only, as in the case of Stephen (Acts vi. 13), the statement is mutilated in the accusation, the condition of the prophecy being entirely ignored (vers. 9, 11). The principle of indestructible consecration is still clung to by many in the face of the plainest declarations of Scripture. It may be well, therefore, to discuss its bearings in the present instance.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF ITS BESTOWAL. It was Divine grace to which it was due; but for this Jerusalem would have been like other cities. This favour had to be continued from moment to moment, being indeed only secured by the continued indwelling of the Holy Spirit. What was due to grace could be freely withdrawn by its Donor. As a matter of history, the most sacred places of Israel were repeatedly ruined and profaned. This destruction is matter of ancient prophecy, as in the present instance (Dan. ix. 26; Mark xiii. 2).

II. THE TERMS OF ITS TENURE. The repeated warnings and injunctions given prove that the consecration of the sacred places depended upon their occupancy by God's Spirit, and this in turn upon the faithfulness of his people. Either these had no meaning or the grace could be taken away. Jeremiah said, "If ye will not hearken to me, then will I make this house like Shiloh." The testimony of 1 Kings ix. 6—8 is precisely similar (cf. Ps. lxxviii. 60; ch. vii. 12).

III. ITS OWN ESSENTIAL NATURE. Strictly speaking, all things made by God are good and holy, but they may be desecrated, in a secondary sense, by being misused, profaned, or defiled. Institutions, buildings, or material or mechanical structures of any sort, are at best but secondary receptacles of Divine grace. "God dwelleth not in temples made with hands." It is the person occupying these who is the true temple, and when he is defiled by sin or unfaithfulness there can be no virtue inherent in the places which he frequents. Consecration is alone transmissible through the operation

and presence of the Holy Spirit, and ceases with the withdrawal of the same. It consists primarily in the personal character through which it is expressed, and only secondarily in places and things, through the uses and practices carried on by holy men in connection with them. To the unholy, therefore, every place and thing will be unholy, and *vice versâ* (Titus i. 15). Material edifices, organization, and official prerogative, are nothing apart from this personal consecration associated with them; and the loss of that involves the loss of usefulness, of peace, and of sacredness, even in connection with that with which they have been most identified.—M.

Vers. 8, 9.—*The perils of prophesying.* I. THE PROPHET OF GOD MEETS WITH UNIVERSAL OPPOSITION.

II. HE IS IN PERSONAL DANGER. 1. *The responsibility of the judgments predicted is attached to himself.* This is due to a false principle of association, having its root in human ignorance and depravity. Not even *God* is responsible. The sinner must blame himself (Gal. iv. 16). 2. *The worst consequences are threatened.* Hatred to God expresses itself in hatred to his servant. It is, therefore, violent and in defiance of all justice. Transgressors think to escape judgment by denying it and destroying its witnesses.

III. CHARACTER IS JEOPARDIZED. The verdict was but a half-hearted one, and did not meet with general assent. The worst charges are brought against Christian men who are faithful to their convictions; and it is not always the case that their groundlessness is made clear. This is part of the "reproach of Christ."—M.

Vers. 12—15.—*The defence of the witness for the truth.* I. AN APPEAL TO CONSCIENCE. The message repeated in its baldest form. Its genuineness insisted upon, and its reception earnestly urged upon men. A high moral standpoint is maintained, and there is no compromise or apology. He stands at the bar of human conscience.

II. OBEDIENCE TO LAWFUL AUTHORITY. He hands himself over to them to deal with him as they will; is careful to state his case as God gives him ability; and appeals to no unlawful means of deliverance.

III. REFERENCE OF THE WHOLE MATTER TO GOD. God sent him—that is sufficient. He has been faithful to his instructions; is really not to be judged by man, but leaves all with God.—M.

Ver. 24.—*Help raised up for God's servants in times of peril.* I. OF WHAT SORT IT IS. 1. *Unexpected.* 2. *Opportune.* 3. *Effective.* 4. *Not what man would choose.*

II. WHAT IT TEACHES US. 1. *The infinite resources of God.* 2. *The weakness of evil.* 3. *Those who will not willingly obey God are made to serve him unwillingly.* 4. *God chooses his own way of dealing with his servants and his truth.*—M.

Ver. 11.—*Jeremiah reckoned worthy of death.* I. WHO THEY WERE THAT PRONOUNCED THIS JUDGMENT. There is already a statement in ver. 8 that priests, prophets, and people had laid hold on Jeremiah with a threatening of death; but we must allow something for the feelings produced on the first reception of an exasperating and humiliating message. The case is worse when the priests and prophets, having had some time for consideration, however short, press upon the princes and people a demand for the death of Jeremiah. The lead the priests and prophets here take goes a long way in showing who were mostly responsible for the deplorable state of things in the land. If things were to be put right, these two classes of men must be conspicuous in repentance. Those who were so ready to sentence Jeremiah to death were really most of all deserving of death themselves. He had simply spoken words against the city and the temple, words which were not his own; those who condemned him had so lived that their life had been a sedulous undermining of all that constituted the prosperity and glory of their country.

II. WHAT IT WAS THAT PROVOKED THE JUDGMENT. Jeremiah had prophesied against the city. Observe, not simply that he had spoken blasphemous and contemptuous words against the city; but that he had *prophesied* against it. Thus did the priests and prophets show how little they understood the nature of true prophecy. They did not understand that when the Lord sends forth a man to speak, he puts a

word in his mouth which shall commend itself to all who love truth and certainty. To the mind of these priests and prophets everything began with this postulate, that nothing must be said against Jerusalem and the temple. And to them it was no sort of answer that the sins of Jerusalem deserved and demanded that something should be said against it. The good name of Jerusalem, however lacking in any sort of correspondence with reality, had become a sort of point of honour. Thus we see how the pride of men goes before their destruction. A conventional sense of honour leads them into paths thickly strewn with stumbling-blocks. These men had become so stuffed with spurious patriotism that they could not bear to have Jerusalem spoken against. Hence they are logically compelled to imply that Jeremiah is a false prophet, and that God has not spoken at all. They were as those who shut their eyes, and then say there is nothing to be seen.

III. THE DOOM THEY INVOKED. The man who speaks against Jerusalem is reckoned worthy of death. We must not, of course, measure this judgment by our notions of what may require the death-penalty. To speak against a parent was by the Law of Moses to incur the death-penalty. As the Apostle James uses many forcible expressions to illustrate, great is the power of the tongue; and a bad man may do mischief with his tongue worthy of the severest punishment men can inflict. If Jeremiah had gone about among the people stirring them up to rebellion and national discord, there would have been nothing very astonishing in an attempt to put him to death. But he gave no exhortation to the people save what each one could carry into effect without the slightest injury to any one; nay, rather the obedience of each would be to the real and abiding advantage of all. He spoke not of anything he himself intended to bring about, but of what was going to happen altogether irrespective of him. His death, supposing he were slain, would make no difference; nay, it would only help to proclaim his message louder and more abidingly. Those who feel themselves attacked by the truth, strike out recklessly with the first instrument they can get hold of; but though they may seem thus to destroy God's agencies, it is found in the end that they are efficiently promoting his work. They that were scattered abroad by the great persecution which arose at the time of Stephen's death, "went everywhere preaching the Word."—Y.

Ver. 16.—*Jeremiah reckoned not worthy of death.* The contrast is very decided between ver. 11 and ver. 16. In ver. 11 there is what appears an irresistible and deadly accusation, coming from men who hardly knew a check of any kind. In ver. 16 there is the answer of those to whom they speak, refusing to ratify their demand. What has happened between? Only the appeal of one who was strong in the consciousness that he had been a faithful servant of God. If we consider his words carefully, we shall see that underneath them there are three considerations, of which the first is more important than the second, and the second more important than the third.

I. We may say that, first of all, HE IS THINKING OF THE GOD WHO HAD SENT HIM. That which threatened him at the same time insulted and tried to thwart Jehovah. Not that Jeremiah was careless about his own safety, but the glory of his God was paramount in his thoughts. He had in him the true spirit of apostleship; the claims he had to make were not his own claims; he was a sent man, and sent of God. Just in proportion as a man feels that God has sent him, must be his distress to find that others do not recognize the credentials of the messenger and the importance of the message. On one side the prophet was dealing with God, on the other with men. Every day deepened on him the impression of God's intimate presence with him; and yet this same God who was so much to him was nothing to these people; the name that thrilled and subdued his susceptible heart, was perhaps the least potent of sounds in their ears. Hence the need of appealing to them again and again, if perchance there might be roused in them some sort of apprehension that they were dealing, not with a brother man, but with the almighty and holy God. While they were all absorbed in considerations of their own territorial dignity, God in his justice was coming ever nearer. Whatever happens to the people or to the prophet himself, that prophet will at all events exalt God before them to the latest hour of his existence. If he has to die, the message of God shall live more gloriously in his closing hours.

II. HE IS THINKING OF THE INTERESTS OF THIS APPARENTLY OBDURATE PEOPLE.

Though at the present moment it is he who seems to be in danger, he well knows that his peril is but a surface trifle when compared with that attaching to the scowling enemies who are crowded around him. He can be rescued, if so it please God; but who is to rescue those who are striding onwards, ever more swiftly, to a righteous doom? God can deliver the prophet from his enemies, for the prophet himself interposes no obstacle to his deliverance; but these people of Judah and Jerusalem interpose insurmountable obstacles, in that they will not amend their ways and doings and obey the voice of God. More than that, it seems as if they were about to add a fresh obstacle by shedding the innocent blood of God's latest messenger. The persecutor is always in greater peril than the persecuted. Physical pain and physical death are transitory and unreturning ills, but the evil-doer has to face the worm that dieth not. Compare with the words of the prophet here the words of Jesus as he was being led to crucifixion: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children" (Luke xxiii. 28).

III. HE IS THINKING OF HIS OWN PRESENT POSITION. (See ver. 14.) This verse reveals a calm, intermediate position between the reckless fanaticism that even courts death and the spirit that turns back the moment threatening is heard. "I am in your hands," says the prophet. He admits their power to the fullest extent, and he does not in any way dare them to the exercise of it. He is neither anxious for life nor afraid of death. This surely is the spirit to be gained if one would be a true witness for God. Jeremiah seems to speak here as one who had gained, for the moment at least, something of the calm of eternity. And his very calmness must surely have been a considerable element in determining the rapid change of feeling among the multitude. Perfect presence of mind, when it comes from an all-sufficient Divine stay within, must have a wondrous power in checking those whose fury is roused by an attack on their base and selfish interests.—Y.

Vers. 17—23.—*An argument from history.* A prophet, a king, and a people belonging to a past generation are brought forward to justify the conclusion to which the princes and the people here had come. Here, then, is an eminent instance of what a practical study history may become. One must be so acquainted with the past as to seize just that completed event which will cast light on the duties and necessities of the present.

I. AN INSTANCE OF A PROPHET'S UNPALATABLE MESSAGE. No word could have been more provocative of resentment than this. It threatened those to whom it was spoken in the closest possible way. It meant that they were to be subjected to their enemies, driven from their homes, and deprived of their most substantial possessions. The message being such, what comfort Jeremiah might obtain from recollecting that his predecessors treading his thorny path before him were now remembered in such an honourable way! Micah had been faithful to his God, his message, and his audience; and the impression of his faithfulness is still deep when something like a century has elapsed. These people now listening to Jeremiah were thus made responsible for Micah's words as well as Jeremiah's. What harmony there is in true prophecy! False prophets, from their very position, cannot be got to agree; but here Jeremiah's words at once recall to mind Micah's similar words, and help to drive them with a deeper impression into some at least of this subsequent generation. Thus also, reciprocally, Micah's words help Jeremiah's. And not only was there harmony between the prophecies; there was harmony between the characters of the prophets as well. All the prophets would have understood one another perfectly if they had been gathered together in one assembly.

II. AN INSTANCE OF HOW A PROPHET SHOULD EVER BE RECEIVED. Jeremiah is able to look back on a man of like spirit with himself in the prophet Micah, but the present leaders of Israel have their thoughts turned to a very different king from Jehoiakim. We can guess how Hezekiah behaved toward Micah from the way in which he behaved toward Isaiah. The narrative here concerning the fate of Urijah seems to be introduced to show that, though Jeremiah escaped from peril at the hands of these priests and prophets, their nature and the nature of Jehoiakim remained the same. When Hezekiah heard the truth, bitter as it was, he humbled himself and averted doom. But Jehoiakim and his profligate and rapacious circle hated every one who spoke the

truth. Hence it was not enough for them that Urijah fled; they followed him and brought him back to suffer their vengeance. Thus it is made evident how Jehoiakim was a man of very different spirit from Hezekiah.—Y.

Ver. 24.—*A friend in need.* I. THE EVIDENT PERIL OF JEREMIAH. A large body of the people had been somehow influenced to take his side, but how long their favourable mood of mind might continue, who could tell? There was no Hezekiah on the throne to encourage such a feeling and make it permanent. Moreover, there is an ebullition of fury which is fatal to one who, as far as the record enables us to judge, occupied a far less prominent position than Jeremiah. If Urijah was slain, how could Jeremiah hope to escape? We must try to get a distinct impression of all the peril in which Jeremiah was in order to appreciate the services rendered to him by Ahikam.

II. THE TIMELY HELP OF AHIKAM. Nothing is told us save the bare fact of protection. We must not assume that Ahikam was fully in sympathy with Jeremiah. We have no means of judging as to his character and his motives, as to the risks that he ran, and the ultimate results to him. The one clear thing is that at this time he was a man of power, and was for some reason disposed to shield the prophet. It may be that, if we could lay bare and analyze his motives, they would be found very mixed as to their kind. But, whatever the motives, the practical service was the same. Jehovah could, of course, have protected his servant by supernatural means, but it is his principle of working not to employ the supernatural when the natural would serve the purpose. Hezekiah could do more than Ahikam, seeing that he turned to God and kept back the dreadful visitations. But Ahikam did all that was necessary for the present occasion. Compare the position of Ahikam here with that of the Duke of Lancaster towards Wickliffe and the Lollards.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXVII.

This and the two following chapters are closely connected. They all relate to the early part of the reign of Zedekiah, and contain warnings arising out of the deepening gloom of the political horizon. It must, however, be noted that there is evidently some mistake in the first verse of ch. xxvii., and also that the contents of ch. xxix. point to a somewhat earlier time than ch. xxvii., xxviii. (viz. the first or second year of King Zedekiah). To understand the circumstances of ch. xxvii., we must remember that Zedekiah had accepted the throne as the vassal of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings xxiv. 17). The self-righteousness and formalism of the people, however, would not allow them to remain quiet under such a humiliation. Deuteronomy, it seemed to them, had promised success and prosperity to an obedient performance of the Law, and the priests and the prophets assured them that these conditions had been complied with. In the fourth year of Zedekiah (comp. ch. xxviii. 1) the popular discontent was still further stimulated by the presence of ambassadors from the neighbouring nations, who had come to organize a common movement against the common enemy. Jeremiah believed that he could not give more forcible expression to the Divine warnings of which he was the bearer than by a symbolic act akin to that related of Isaiah in Isa. xx. 2. He appeared in some public place, where the ambassadors would be sure to pass, with a yoke upon his neck, and in this strange guise delivered an impressive exhortation to the foreign visitors. It would appear as if Jeremiah's exertions on this occasion were successful, so far as Judah was concerned; for we are informed (ch. li. 59) that, in the fourth year of his reign, Zedekiah took a journey to Babylon, doubtless to renew his oath of fidelity to the King of Babylon.

It is instructive to compare this chapter as given in the Hebrew Bible with the form in which it appears in the Septuagint. We must not too hastily assume that the Greek is incorrect, but examine in each case which form gives most force and expressiveness to the prophecy.

Ver. 1.—In the beginning of the reign

of Jehoiakim. The Syriac substitutes for "Jehoiakim" "Zedekiah," to bring the passage into conformity with ch. xxviii. 1, where the fourth year of the reign of Zedekiah is expressly mentioned. But is this emendation sufficient? Can the fourth year be called "the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah," when that reign lasted altogether only eleven years? Is it not probable that the transcriber has inadvertently copied the heading of ch. xxvi., which corresponds verbally with ch. xxvii. 1, except that "unto Jeremiah" is wanting?

Ver. 2.—**Make thee bonds and yokes**; rather, *bands and poles*; i.e. the bands which secured the two pieces of wood placed respectively above and beneath the neck of the ox, so forming a yoke. Hence, in Lev. xxvi. 13, we find the phrase, "the poles [Authorized Version wrongly, 'the bands'] of your yoke." It is clear from ch. xxviii. 10 that this account is to be taken literally.

Ver. 3.—**And send them**, etc. The letter of the text certainly suggests that Jeremiah actually delivered a separate yoke to each of the five ambassadors. Some commentators, however, finding such an act almost incredible, suppose the statement to be allegorical, and the "sending of the yoke" to mean the declaration of the subjection of the nations to Nebuchadnezzar which follows, somewhat as in ch. xxv. 15 the "causing all the nations to drink" means the utterance of a prophecy of woe to the various peoples concerned. But we can hardly pronounce upon this passage by itself. We have to consider whether a whole group of similar statements is or is not to be taken literally. It may be enough to instance ch. xiii. 1—7. **Which come**; rather, *which are come*.

Vers. 5, 6.—Jehovah is the Creator and Proprietor of the earth and all that is therein. Therefore he can give any part of it to whomsoever he will. Therefore, Jeremiah being his trustworthy prophet, the kings are called upon to take notice that Jehovah has transferred their kingdoms to Nebuchadnezzar. Observe, in chs. xxvii.—xxix. the form employed is not "Nebuchadrezzar," but "Nebuchadnezzar" (so also ch. xxxiv. 1; xxxix. 5). (See on ch. xxi. 7.)

Ver. 6.—**My servant** (see on ch. xxv. 9). **The beasts of the field**; *i.e.* the wild beasts. This last feature indicates the unlimited character of Nebuchadnezzar's power.

Ver. 7.—**Him, and his son, and his son's son.** This is intelligible only if the seventy years predicted by Jeremiah in ch. xxv. 11, 12, xxix. 10, are a round number. Nebuchadnezzar died in B.C. 561, and was succeeded by his son Evil-Merodach, who, after two years, was put to death by Neriglissar. In B.C. 555 Laborosoarchod (?) became king, but after nine months a usurper belonging to another family, Nabonedus or Nabuuita, ascended the throne, which he occupied till B.C. 538, the year of the fall of Babylon. "Seventy years," taken literally, only brings us to B.C. 555, seventeen years short of the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus. **Until the very time of his land come**; rather, *until the time of his own land come*. Nebuchadnezzar cannot ensure his realm against captivity. **Shall serve themselves of him.** (For the meaning of the phrase, see on ch. xxv. 14.)

Ver. 9.—**Your dreamers**; rather, *your dreams*. So in ch. xxix. 8 the "dreams" of the people are expressly distinguished from the utterances of the prophets and soothsayers. In our passage the "dreamers" are appropriately mentioned between the "diviners" and the "enchanters," because the skill of the soothsayers partly lay in the interpretation of dreams (comp. Gen. xli. 8; Dan. ii. 2).

Ver. 10.—**To remove you far**; or, more distinctly, *that I may remove you far*. So Isa. vi. 12, "(Until) Jehovah have removed men afar off." The deportation policy of the Assyrians and Babylonians was overruled by God for his own deep purposes.

Ver. 11.—**The nations that bring their neck**, etc. The Hebrew has, "The nation that shall bring its neck," etc.

Vers. 12—15.—But the warnings of Jeremiah were not confined, far from it, to the neighbouring kings. Zedekiah had received a precisely similar message. **Bring your necks.** The plural is used, for Zedekiah was but an individual among a number of much more vigorous personalities (comp. on ch. xxii. 2).

Vers. 16—22.—The warning to the priests and to the rest of the people. The last four verses of this section appear in a much shortened form in the Septuagint, and it must be admitted that the description is singularly lengthy. It is, therefore, quite conceivable that this is one of the cases in which the Hebrew text has been disfigured by wilful interpolation. On the other hand, it is also possible that the description was filled out by an editor, *e.g.* by Baruch, conscientiously for the benefit of later readers.

Ver. 16.—**The vessels of the Lord's house**; *i.e.* the golden vessels which Solomon had made, and which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away (1 Kings vii. 48—50; 2 Kings xxiv. 13). **Now shortly.** These words are wanting in the Septuagint, and, considering that the Greek is also without the prediction in ver 22, that the vessels of the temple and of the palace should be brought back in the day of visitation (which seems inconsistent with ch. lii. 17), the question arises whether the words "now shortly" here are not due to a hasty copyist.

Ver. 18.—**But if they be prophets, etc.** The "false prophets," so Jeremiah declares, have neglected one of the principal functions of a prophet, viz. intercessory prayer (comp. on ch. vii. 16). Seeing that a part of the sacred vessels had been carried to Babylon, all true prophets ought to intercede with Jehovah that those still left might be spared. The end was that the remaining vessels were carried off on the capture of Jerusalem (2 Kings xxv. 13).

Ver. 19.—This and the two following verses are thus given in the Septuagint; "For thus saith the Lord, . . . and the rest of the vessels which the king of Babylon took not, when he carried Jeconiah captive from Jerusalem; they shall come to Babylon, saith the Lord." This shortened form throws a light on the fact of the absence of "now shortly" in ver. 16 (see note). **The pillars**, etc.; *i.e.* the two bronze pillars called Jachin and Boaz (1 Kings vii. 21). **The sea**; *i.e.* the molten "sea," or basin (1 Kings vii. 23). **The bases** (1 Kings vii. 27).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 5.—*The rights of the Creator.* This address on the rights of the Creator is made to heathen men because God has rights over all men, and because they who cannot yet understand his higher character may be able to recognize his natural rights.

I. THE FOUNDATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CREATOR. 1. They rest on the fact that all things that exist were *created.* It is a fundamental axiom of science that everything that has a beginning must have a cause. The universal testimony of experience is against the notion that existences could spring forth spontaneously from nothing, or that organisms could come of themselves from a lawless chaos. The theory of an endless chain of causation is illogical. If this is regarded as cyclic we have nothing to account for the motion of the whole cycle. The notion is parallel to that of a wheel revolving because the several parts of the circumference press on those which are before them—a mechanical absurdity. If, however, the chain is regarded as infinitely long, we have another absurdity. Since it is made up of finite links each of which is no perfect cause in itself, we have not solved the question, we have only driven it back to the infinite distance. It is the grand lesson of the first chapter of the Book of Genesis—whatever we may think of the details of that chapter—that it comes to our rescue with the assertion of a personal Creator, the only doctrine that will fit the requirements of the case. 2. The rights of the Creator rest on the fact that all things were created by *his energy.* We do not know what subordinate agencies God may employ. But in any case the fundamental power must be his. He cannot delegate powers of creation in the sense of investing any beings with them without any dependence on his power. The power must be God's, though the channel through which it flows may be some lower agency. The doctrine of evolution would not touch this fact. The important question is not as to the method of creation, but as to the originating power. This lies behind the question of design. It is the question of primitive causation. Whether with successive sudden emergencies or through gradual development, it is equally true that God has created the world by his great power and by his outstretched hand.

II. THE NATURE OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CREATOR. They are absolute. We know nothing like them among men. A man is supposed to have a right to dispose of the work of his own hands. But his work is not creation. If he has built a house he has not made the ground on which it stands, nor the stone and wood of which it is constructed. But by Divine creation we understand not merely building up the materials of the universe into new forms, but the original making of these materials and the determination of the laws of nature. From this fact comes the right of God to dispose of his creation as he thinks fit, to give the world and its contents to whomsoever he pleases. But in admitting this we are saying that he will do that which is best for the world itself. For God is just and good and merciful. He will please to do that which is right, and that which will bless his creatures. God exercises his rights through his will. If creation reveals the rights, Christ reveals the will. Through this higher revelation we see reasons for acquiescing in God's exercise of sovereignty, not with mere resignation to the inevitable, nor even only with dutiful yielding to recognized law and authority, but with thankful submission to the care of a merciful Father. Thus we see that the exercise of God's rights is limited by his character; limited by his justice, so that he can never dispose of things arbitrarily or cruelly; limited by his love, so that

he will dispose of them so as to secure the welfare of his children. This is a consideration of the first importance. The neglect of it has led to the interpretation of such words as those of our text so as to represent God as an arbitrary, capricious Sovereign, who may be feared and must be submitted to, but cannot be loved or freely adored.

Vers. 6, 7.—*God's disposal of man's possessions.* I. GOD HAS A RIGHT TO DISPOSE OF MAN'S POSSESSIONS. He made them, and they are always his, only lent to be withdrawn or transferred when he wills. If the Lord gave, he has a right to take away (Job i. 21). If he takes much, we should be thankful for what he leaves—for this even we have no claim. Nations should feel that God has rights over them. Their liberties are subject to his government, their territory to his disposal.

II. GOD DOES DISPOSE OF MAN'S POSSESSIONS. He exercises his right. He is no *roi fainéant.* God does not reserve his interference for the last day of judgment. He is always working among the nations. In a national disaster we should recognize the hand of Providence; so should we in the advent of national glory. God does not only overthrow; he appoints, prospers, gladdens.

III. GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS GIVE THE GREATEST POWER TO THE BEST MEN. Nebuchadnezzar was a bad man; yet God gave him the largest dominion in the world. We may believe that he was best suited for the work that was required of him. His mission was to be a scourge of the nations. An angel would find himself ill at ease in such a work. In appointing a hangman we do not expect to get the most high-souled person in the kingdom for the post. God can overrule the evil nature of bad men and make it serve some good end, as we can employ the refuse of one factory as useful materials in another.

IV. GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS GIVE THE MOST ABUNDANT POSSESSIONS TO THE BEST MEN. We see bad men enriched, good men pauperized. Goodness seems on the whole to be favourable to temporal prosperity, but with innumerable exceptions. Therefore we must conclude that God does not value earthly prosperity so highly as we value it. He regards it as subordinate to higher interests.

V. GOD'S DISPOSAL OF MAN'S POSSESSIONS DOES NOT HINDER THE FREE EXERCISE OF MAN'S POWERS. God gave Nebuchadnezzar his powers, but the king put these forth of his own will. By his daring, his energy, the use of his resources, he won his brilliant victories and conquered his vast dominions. God works through our work. He gives to the diligent.

VI. GOD'S DISPOSAL OF MAN'S POSSESSIONS DOES NOT LIMIT MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY. If Nebuchadnezzar got his territory by violence and rapacity, he was not the less guilty because God assigned it to him. For he was responsible for his own actions and their motives, irrespective of any unknown design that God might work out through them. We cannot throw the blame of our misconduct on the providence of God. He overrules the issue of our actions, but he does not fetter or force the choice of our wills.

Ver. 11.—*The duty of non-resistance.* Again and again in various forms Jeremiah recurs to the advice of submission to Nebuchadnezzar. In the present instance he addresses it to representatives of foreign nations, and urges it as politic, while to the Jews he was more anxious to show that it was in accordance with God's will. Viewed from various standpoints there were several grounds for non-resistance.

I. THE WILL OF GOD. This was the highest reason. It could not be fully appreciated by the heathen; yet even they were reminded that the Creator was the supreme disposer of the destiny of nations. The condition of the Jews, however, was peculiar. They were living under a theocracy. The prophets were the ministry of the Divine King. Their utterances were revelations of law for the government of the people. To resist Nebuchadnezzar in opposition to these utterances was to rebel against the decree of the supreme Sovereign of the nation. We do not stand in the same outward circumstances. But we should learn that the first thought in public as well as in private affairs should be as to what is right, what is God's will; and all considerations of glory etc., should be subordinate to this. We cannot learn God's will from oracular teachers but we can ascertain it from a devout study of revelation, prayer, and honest thought

II. SOUND POLICY. Events proved that Jeremiah was politically as well as morally right. Religious duty lies nearer to useful policy than either fanatic dreamers or worldly

statesmen are able to see. History shows that all resistance to the mighty flood of the Babylonian invasion was futile. Timely submission alone could secure a mitigation of its violence. It is foolish for a nation to flourish empty notions of glory above considerations for the welfare of the people. The loyal statesman will care less for the fame of a great name, or the splendour of brilliant achievements, than for the peaceful prosperity of his fellow-countrymen. The first interest of a nation is this peaceful prosperity. There may be times when to maintain it self-defence becomes a duty. But when self-defence cannot secure it, when it is rather hindered than helped by resistance, it is foolish to resist for the sake of mere pride.

III. WHOLESOME MORAL GOOD. The Jews were taught that the invasion by Nebuchadnezzar was sent by God as a chastisement for sin. To submit to it was to submit to profitable correction. In the end the nation might hope to be the better for it. We have no right to complain of troubles which our own misconduct has brought upon us. We may "count it all joy" that we have fallen into tribulation if this works our higher and lasting good. Temporal distress should be patiently borne in the prospect of eternal blessedness, material adversity calmly endured when this is the means of securing inward spiritual good.

Ver. 18.—*Prophecy tested by prayer.* I. IT IS THE DUTY OF A PROPHET TO PRAY. He should be spiritually what the priest can only be ceremonially, the mediator between man and God. Mediation has two sides. It implies the work of the intercessor as well as that of the prophet—the speaking to God for men as well the speaking to men for God. The former work, however, is in more danger of falling into neglect. It is more spiritual, it requires more humility, it gains less credit from men. But no prophet can even discharge his mission to men aright unless he is also a man of prayer. God reveals himself to those who seek him. Revelations from Heaven are vouchsafed to those who live in communion with Heaven.

II. INSPIRATION IS REQUISITE FOR PRAYER AS WELL AS FOR PROPHECY. The true prophet is the inspired man; he also has the first requisite for prayer. We need inspiration for prayer to bring us into sympathy with God. Prayer is more than asking for the satisfaction of our wants—it is communion with God; and communion implies sympathy. Like the bird which soars aloft because its wings rest on the surrounding air, we can only rise heavenwards as we bear ourselves up through an atmosphere of heavenly thought. Without the breath of God's Spirit in us we cannot withdraw from the world and attain to the vivid consciousness of spiritual things. For prayer involves the rising above our common, our ordinary life. Thus we may understand the mission of the Spirit as an intercessor. Christ intercedes for us with God. The Holy Spirit intercedes for God in us, helping our infirmities, teaching us what we should pray for, and how to pray, and breathing into us yearnings deep and unutterable (Rom. viii. 26).

III. DIVINELY INSPIRED PRAYER WILL BE REASONABLE AND ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL. If the prophets were inspired they would not ask for the impossible; they would not pray for that which they knew was contrary to God's will; they would not utter prayers of greed and pride. Inspiration does not make a man irrational; on the contrary, it makes him see facts as they are. If these prophets were inspired they would see the folly of asking back the lost vessels. Inspiration is concerned with the present and the future. It is foolish to waste time in lamenting the irretrievable. Let us see that we preserve what still remains with us, and secure what is best for the future. It is absurd to be boasting of great things when we cannot secure small ones. If the prophets could not protect the vessels in Jerusalem, much less could they recover those which had been already removed to Babylon. They might be uttering great prayers about the lost treasure; but while they made no prevailing prayer to secure the treasure still in hand they only exposed their own incompetence.

IV. PRAYER AND ITS RESULTS ARE TESTS OF A MAN'S SPIRITUAL CONDITION. If it can be said of a person, "Behold, he prayeth!" we may know much of him. Prayer is the barometer that rises or falls with the changing tone of the spiritual atmosphere. When we "restrain prayer" this is a sad sign that our better life is failing. It is useless to boast of spiritual attainments such as those of the professional prophets; these are nothing but delusions if the prayer-test reveals a condition of spiritual deadness,

The results of prayer are a further test. We cannot say that a particular prayer is not acceptable to God because it does not bring us the particular thing we seek, since we are always making foolish requests, and God mercifully deals with us according to his wise and good will rather than according to the letter of our language. Still, if no answer is ever received to prayer, something must be wrong. Either all our prayers are mistaken, which shows we could not be receiving the help of God's inspiration; or our spiritual condition is one of separation from God, in which condition no prayer could be answered. If not in every detail, yet in the main, religious experience may be tested by the facts of life. The prophet must find his prediction confirmed by history. The man of prayer must show some fruits of his devotion.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—22.—*Divine judgments not to be resisted.* A conference of ambassadors from neighbouring nations had been held at Zedekiah's court to consider plans of revolt against Nebuchadnezzar. The king himself and a patriotic party were bent upon resistance. This movement Jeremiah checked at its very outset by his symbolical warning.

I. GOD IS RULER OF ALL THE KINGDOMS OF THE EARTH. He made them, and controls their destinies. Of the earth he says, "I have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me." His control over human interests, possessions, and destinies is absolute and unlimited.

II. EVEN THE UNGODLY MAY BE INSTRUMENTS OF HIS PURPOSES. "Nebuchadnezzar, my servant,"—a remarkable title when applied to a heathen prince. The character of the authorities, the agents, and the instrumentalities by which we are opposed is not in itself a reason for resisting them if they are evidently of Divine appointment. In such a case we should be fighting against God. Moral evil is ever to be resisted and witnessed against, but that which God appoints must be acknowledged and submitted to.

III. IN SUCH CASES CIRCUMSTANCES WILL CLEARLY SHOW WHETHER THE APPOINTMENT IS OF GOD OR NOT, AND NOW WE MUST BE GUIDED IN OUR CONDUCT. The advice of the prophet is not to be interpreted as an expression of mere political prudence. It was the moral significance of Nebuchadnezzar's supremacy to which he appealed. In default of revelation our own conscience and common sense must be our guides. 1. *In cases of unmistakable Divine dispensations the law of submission is clearly taught.* Of this class is the rule of submission to the powers that be; of cheerful contentment with one's lot in life, so far as it seems beyond our own legitimate control or to be providentially arranged. 2. *The ordinary miscellaneous trials and difficulties of life are not to be regarded in this way.* Where there is not witness of conscience enjoining submission, energetic effort must be made. The Bible is no book of fatalism. It inculcates self-help, manly fortitude, and believing, intelligent enterprise.

IV. GUIDANCE AND INSTRUCTION MAY BE GRANTED TO MEN EVEN WHILST UNDER DIVINE DISCIPLINE. 1. *Injunctions.* To be punished does not mean to be cast off; quite the contrary. And therefore, if there be any gracious purpose in the dispensation, it is well that it should be explained. False prophets have foretold favourable turns of fortune with mischievous effect. These must be contradicted, and their tendency exposed. The Bible is full of instruction to the perplexed in all ages, and the Spirit of God still speaks to the hearts of his children. 2. *Signs.* Sometimes these will be of one kind, sometimes of another. Here a crucial test was proposed, viz. the challenge to the false prophets to bring back the vessels of the temple from Babylon. If God heard their prayer, then it would appear that their advice was sound. Signs will never be wanting to those who earnestly seek to know God's will. 3. *These are to be sought through prayer and waiting upon God.*—M.

Ver. 18.—*Prophets tested by prayer.* I. BY THIS THEIR DISPOSITION WAS DISCOVERED. Prayer is one of the most vital indications of the presence of spiritual life. It is only by constant devotion and spiritual intercourse with God that any one can be truly acquainted with him or know his will. The taunt of the prophet is to the effect that they are not over addicted to this practice, but prefer to indulge in political

trifling and bombast. They had no pleasure in the exercises of true piety; and it might be were even afraid directly to invoke Jehovah. It was the neglect of the latter by themselves and their idolatrous followers which had entailed the present evils upon Judah. The prophet points out, therefore, the true method of discovering the will of God, and of restoring, not only the vessels to the temple, but the exiles to their land.

II. THEIR PRETENSIONS WOULD BE TESTED BY THE EFFICACY OF THEIR INTERCESSION. This is the most disinterested form of prayer. By betaking themselves to it, instead of prophesying lies, they would do real service to the nation. Because he who can effectually intercede: 1. *Is a source of blessing to all who are about him.* He has true sympathy and insight, and can bring down forgiveness even upon the undeserving. The grandest promises of Holy Scripture are encouragements to this practice. 2. *Is thereby acknowledged and accepted by God.* As Elijah provoked with a similar challenge the prophets of Baal, so Jeremiah taunts his enemies with their spiritual impotency. The restoration of the vessels under the circumstances would be nothing short of a miracle, and supernatural aid would be required. He alone is truly great who can prevail with God. And the greatest of the prophets is he who makes intercession for mankind according to the Divine will.—M.

Vers. 1—11.—*Jehovah's consideration towards some neighbours of Israel.* I. GOD FORESEES THE NATURAL PROBABILITY OF A STRUGGLE. Nebuchadnezzar and his hosts are not to drop from the clouds on the land of Jehovah's people whom Jehovah has now doomed. These hosts come from a distant land, and have many intervening lands to pass through; and how can they pass through in any but a destroying, impoverishing fashion? If the King of Babylon is to reach Jerusalem, the lands here mentioned must assuredly suffer from him scarcely less than Judah itself. And naturally they will prepare to meet him. Alliances will be formed; resources will be accumulated; the greatest strain will be put on every one in order to make the defence successful. These attacked people cannot assume that, because Babylon is such a mighty power, it is folly to think of resisting it. Thus they seem to have sent to Zedekiah, hoping to make a confederation strong enough to drive the invader back.

II. NATURAL AS THE STRUGGLE MIGHT BE, IT WAS DOOMED TO CERTAIN FAILURE. Doomed, not because it was the strength of many against the weakness of few, but because God's great purposes required that any scheme of defence should be a failure. If the defenders had become as the invaders in point of strength, and the invaders as the defenders, this apparently decisive exchange of resources would have left the result unaffected.

III. The struggle, therefore, being vain beyond all doubt, THE TRUE WISDOM WAS NOT EVEN TO ATTEMPT IT. These nations, persevering in a vain struggle, were only committing self-slaughter. If the issue had been in any way uncertain, self-respect would have said "fight." But the issue was clear; and to make it clear and impressive by some visible symbol, God commands his prophet to send these yokes to the kings of the nations by their messengers. When the yoke is seen on the neck of the ox labouring at the plough or drawing the waggon, that yoke signifies, not only submission, but a submission that is inevitable. The ox is made for the service of man, and although when young it may rebel and defy for a while, it must submit at last. The superior intelligence and the ordained master cannot but conquer. And what the ox is in the hands of man, that every nation, even the strongest and bravest, is in the hands of God. Babylon, conqueror and spoiler as it was, was no more free from God's yoke than any of the nations it defeated. It is quite compatible with the carrying out of God's great purpose that there should be the most striking disparities in the temporal conditions of both individuals and nations. That Babylon should be the victor and these other nations the vanquished, was in his eyes a matter of very secondary moment. He cannot recognize, as a state of things to obtain even a modified permanence, that any nation should have the right to any particular territory. Men count it a great matter that they can show a title, as they call it, to a piece of land. This simply means that for the purposes of present society it is better for one particular person to have the piece of land than any one else. But wars and revolutions make short work of these so-called rights of property. The Lord has given the earth in trust to the human race, and one division he puts here and another there, one man

here and another there. From the throne where Jehovah sits in his righteousness, human patriotism and mere territorial pride are esteemed as nothing more than the feelings of ignorant children. We also, as taught of God, must become less interested in the traditions and rivalries of the kingdoms of earth, and more interested in that great procedure of God by which the whole earth will become a part of the kingdom of heaven.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Hananiah's false prophecy; his reprimand from Jeremiah; and his fate. The preciseness of the date in ver. 1 is to emphasize the supernatural character of Jeremiah's prediction. The latter was uttered in the fifth month of the fourth year of Zedekiah, and Hananiah died in the seventh month of the same year (ver. 17).

Ver. 1.—**In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah.** It seems strange that the fourth year of a reign which only lasted eleven years in all should be called "the beginning. Is it not probable that the clause was interpolated here by a later copyist on account of ch. xxvii. 1, where at present a similar clause (see note) is found? Originally placed in the margin as a gloss upon the words "the same year," it would very easily find its way into the text. **Hananiah . . . the prophet** (see on ver. 15). **Gibeon.** This was a priestly city (Josh. xxi. 17), so that Hananiah was probably himself a priest like Jeremiah (ch. i. 1) and Pashur (ch. xx. 1). The modern El Jîb, on an isolated, rocky hill, doubtless represents the ancient Gibeon. **In the presence of the priests and of all the people.** Apparently the event took place on either a new moon or a sabbath, when the people would throng to the temple.

Ver. 2.—Hananiah opens his prophecy with the usual formula, claiming Divine inspiration in the fullest sense. His message is short and sweet: **I have broken**—*i.e.* I have decreed to break (the perfect of prophetic certitude)—**the yoke of the king of Babylon.** Had Hananiah stopped here, he might, perhaps, have escaped Jeremiah's indignant rebuke. But with light-hearted arrogance he ventures to fix a time close at hand for the event, which, no doubt, was destined to occur, but after a long interval. Dr. Payne Smith suggests that he probably cherished the belief that the confederacy then on foot (ch. xxvii. 3) would defeat Nebuchadnezzar.

Ver. 4.—**And I will bring again . . . Jeconiah.** Hananiah thus directly contradicts the assurance of Jeremiah (ch. xxii. 26, 27) that Jehoiachin would not return, but would die in a foreign land. **Has he a** political object in his favourable prognostication for the deposed king? Does he, in short, belong to a Jehoiachin party opposed to the friends of Zedekiah? The view is possible, and may seem to be confirmed by the emphatic repetition of the fall of Nebuchadnezzar, the liege lord of Zedekiah. Still there is evidence enough in modern history that the return of an exile is not necessarily tantamount to his reinstatement in his office.

Vers. 5—9.—Jeremiah's reply. He heartily wishes that Hananiah's prediction were capable of fulfilment, but it runs directly counter to the declarations of all the older prophets. "War, and evil, and pestilence" was their constant burden, for the people to whom they prophesied were unworthy of the golden age of felicity in which the prophets so firmly believed. Only by a terrible judgment could the people of Israel be purified for the Messianic age. This appears to be what Jeremiah means by ver. 8. True, he speaks of "countries" and "kingdoms" in the plural, but all the great prophets include the nations best known to them within the range of their preaching, and even of their Messianic preaching. Isaiah, for instance, threatens sore judgment upon Egypt and Assyria, and yet he holds out the cheering prospect that Egypt and Assyria will have a part in the Messianic felicity. Thus Hananiah's prediction has probabilities very strongly against it. He not only prophesies "peace," but attaches no condition to his promise, which, therefore, has double need of verification by the event (comp. Deut. xviii. 22).

Vers. 10, 11.—Instead of any rejoinder, Hananiah has recourse to violence, tears off and breaks the yoke on Jeremiah's neck, and repeats his declaration of the fall of Nebuchadnezzar within two years. Jeremiah meekly suffers.

Vers. 12—17.—No long time after this the prophet is commissioned to tell the bitter truth more fully than he had done before, and to warn Hananiah of his coming punishment.

Ver. 13.—**The yokes of wood**; rather, *a yoke of wood.* The word rendered in the Authorized Version "yokes" means properly "poles," two of which, with the "bands," composed a "yoke" (see on ch. xxvii. 2).

But thou shalt make; rather, *but thou hast made*. The sense in which Hananiah is said to have made "a yoke of iron" (we should render in the singular) comes out in ver. 14. The point is that there was a certain justification for Hananiah's violent act, but not that which he supposed. Jeremiah's wooden yoke was really an inadequate symbol; the prophet was too tender to his people. Thus God made the truth appear in still fuller brightness from the very perverseness of its enemy.

Ver. 14.—**The beasts of the field** (see on ch. xxvii. 6).

Ver. 15.—**The prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet.** In one sense Hananiah was a prophet as much as Jeremiah. He claimed to have received the prophetic call, and God alone, who searcheth the heart, could pronounce upon the justice of his claim. Whatever training was regarded as necessary for the office he had probably gone through, and now for a number of years he had been universally recognized as a member of the prophetic class. Probably he had those natural gifts, including a real, though dim and not unerring, "second sight," which seems to have formed the substratum of Old Testament prophecy; but he certainly had not the moral backbone so conspicuous in Jeremiah, and he lacked that intimate communion with God (this became clear on the present occasion) which alone warranted the assurance that "Jehovah, the God of Israel, hath sent me."

Ver. 16.—**I will cast thee**; rather, *I send thee away*. Possibly, as Hitzig suggests, there is an allusion to the preceding verse, in which the same verb occurs. **Thou hast taught rebellion**; literally, *thou hast spoken turning aside*. To "speak turning aside (or, 'rebellion')" is a phrase of Deuteronomy (xiii. 6), where it is used, as here, of opposition, not to Jehovah, but to revealed truth.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—17.—*The story of Hananiah the prophet.* Hananiah, priest and professional prophet, now presents himself as the rival and opponent of Jeremiah. A rude and shallow man, he probably thrusts himself forward unasked, as the representative of the popular prophets of smooth things whom it is the true prophet's painful duty to refute and rebuke. His own conduct and Jeremiah's behaviour to him are both clearly brought before us in this chapter.

I. THE CONDUCT OF HANANIAH. 1. He utters a *pleasing prophecy*. He promises a speedy overthrow of the tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar. Even Jeremiah heartily echoes the wish that the prediction could be true. It is always easiest to prophesy smooth things, to soothe and flatter rather than convince men of sin and persuade them to accept the darker truths. 2. Hananiah speaks with *great positiveness*. He boldly claims the authority of God for what he says (ver. 2). His assertions are definite, minute, inherently consistent. Daring assumptions such as those of Hananiah carry the unthinking as by storm. A brazen face, a loud voice, a positive assertion, are enough to convince many people without the slightest ground in reason. You have only to say a thing very strongly and to repeat it very often, and the mere force of utterance will make way for it where calm, measured reasoning quite fails. Hananiah is definite in detail. People have a tendency to believe what they can understand clearly and imagine vividly. We must be warned, therefore, (1) that they who make the loudest claims to speak for God may have least right to do so; (2) that the truth of a statement must be measured, not by the vehemence with which it is asserted, but by the strength of the grounds on which it rests; and (3) that the reality of things cannot be ascertained by reflection on the consistency, clearness, and fulness of our subjective ideas about them. 3. Hananiah manifests a *stupid insolence* under contradiction. He cannot reason with Jeremiah, he cannot refute the great prophet's words, he has no new thoughts to contribute; he can only repeat his former assertion with loud words and passionate actions. He is a poor, unintellectual creature, whose notion of controversy is like that of foolish people we sometimes meet with—people who imagine that to argue is just to repeat an assertion with dogged obstinacy. Hananiah loses his temper and behaves with rudeness to Jeremiah. The last refuge of the helpless controversialist is insolence and abuse.

II. THE BEHAVIOUR OF JEREMIAH TO HANANIAH. 1. He heartily assents to the false prophet's *desire for the happiness* of the nation. "Jeremiah said, Amen: the Lord do so," etc. (ver. 6). He had been accused of a traitorous wish to see his

country humiliated. No charge could be more false. The preacher who feels it his duty to threaten Divine punishments to wicked men should not be acoused of wishing them evil. He may speak with grief and regret, as God also punishes reluctantly (Ezek. xxxiii. 11). 2. Jeremiah appeals to the *example of the older prophets.* He is true to their teaching, while Hananiah contradicts it. This appeal should be unanswerable to one who, like Jeremiah's opponent, professes to be the successor of these men. Amongst men who believe in the Bible the appeal to Scripture should be a first resort. How can a Christian teacher maintain his ground if he is contradicting this highest authority? Jeremiah was fond of "the old paths," the traditions and examples of earlier prophets. There is a consistency in prophecy, a common spirit, common ideas and principles in the prophets, and in revelation generally. 3. Jeremiah appeals to the *confirmation of facts.* (Ver. 9.) He dares to await the verdict of history; he challenges Hananiah to do the same. We are too hasty in following the loud and pushing popular spirits of the hour. Wait and see the issue of their work when the first excitement has died away. 4. Jeremiah meets the insolence of Hananiah with *quiet courtesy.* He calmly reasons with him at first. When he finds his opponent proof against arguments which only rouse his temper, he quietly leaves him. There are times when men are too heated for argument, and there are men with whom it is always useless to argue. Under such circumstances the interest of truth, our own rightful dignity, and charity to our opponent, caution us to leave him in silence. 5. Jeremiah *reiterates his prediction* at a later time, with more stringent threats, and pronounces a solemn *sentence of death* on Hananiah. This he does after receiving fresh communications from Heaven and under the urgency of a Divine commission. It is always our duty to forgive our enemies; but if they are also the enemies of God, we may recognize the justice of God's judgment on them. It is to be noted that Jeremiah did not compass the death of Hananiah; he only foretold it, and this under a Divine impulse. The words of Jeremiah were verified. Hananiah died long before events proved the futility of his own prophecy. Perhaps this was best for him. His death is a solemn warning to people who may be tempted to sacrifice truth for popularity.

Ver. 8.—*An appeal to ancient prophecy.* I. THE PRINCIPLES OF THE APPEAL. Several important principles are here illustrated. 1. The value of a *precedent.* Novel circumstances demand novel actions. The spirit of progress should teach us to improve on the conduct of our forefathers. Yet the most radical progressionist must often see the use of a precedent. It is an appeal from the confusion and excitement of the moment to an example which can be studied more calmly. If the precedent is respected by both parties of a quarrel, there is in it a common meeting-place for a reconciliation. The Bible is useful to us in this way for its great examples. 2. The duty of *referring to Scripture.* Jeremiah did not simply refer to antiquity; he referred to ancient prophecy—to the authority of a series of inspired teachers. This is the justification of our appeals to the Bible. It is not that the Bible is an old book, but that it is the fountain of special Divine illumination. 3. *The unity of Scripture.* The most original thinkers have usually started on the foundation prepared by their predecessors. But such men as Kepler and Newton have left their teachers far behind, and exposed the error of much of their teaching. It is different with the Bible. Here, too, there is the progressive development of thought, the growing light of revelation. But while the outer husk of the earlier ideas of the Bible is cast aside, those ideas themselves are not discarded, but enlarged and glorified by a fuller evolution. Definite laws are changed, but vital principles remain. Thus there is a marvellous unity in the Bible.

II. THE RESULT OF THE APPEAL. This led to a confirmation of the darker view of the future. It was a sad result. It is only too true that the old prophets were preachers of repentance, threatening wrath and judgment. Their visions of the brighter future were few compared with their more stern predictions. The former, too, referred to distant times, the latter to circumstances of immediate interest. It is a terrible thought that an inspired view of human nature should lead so many great and good men to this gloomy conclusion. If these men rose from their graves and lifted up their voices in our own cities would they completely change their tone? Such a man as Thomas Carlyle seemed to realize something of the spirit of these old Hebrew prophets, and to him the condition of the modern world suggested the gloomiest forebodings. Happily,

we do not look to the verdict of a prophet for our salvation. Christ has come. We listen to the teaching of apostles as well as to that of prophets. We have a New Testament. If the prophet exposes our sin and threatens our ruin, the gospel teacher points to the remedy in the redemption of the world by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Vers. 13, 14.—*Yokes of iron.* Hananiah broke the wooden yoke which Jeremiah wore in token of the approaching servitude of the Jews. In return he was told that the real yoke of Babylon would be much more severe—a yoke of iron.

I. FACTS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN OPINIONS. If the rule of Babylon really would be as a yoke of iron, what was the use of circulating milder views of the future? We are too much inclined to judge of ideas by their fitness for our own previous notions, instead of testing them solely by their consistency with facts.

II. THE FUTURE MAY BE WORSE THAN WE EXPECT. There are dreadful events in past history. May there not also be dreadful events in future experience? Life is not a harmless plaything, nor the earth a thornless garden. There are terrors, judgments, agonies, in this strange world of ours. Who knows what may be in the next? This much we should all know: God is not the easy, indulgent Being of lax principles that shallow optimists fancy him to be, but wisely firm as well as infinitely merciful where mercy can be justly exercised.

III. NEGLECT OF TIMELY WARNING WILL INCREASE FUTURE SUFFERING. If the yoke of wood is broken, a yoke of iron shall be forged to take its place. The longer we delay hearkening to the warnings of God the worse must be our future punishment, because our sin is increasing while we remain impenitent; because to sin against light, against admonition, is to sin more plainly and wilfully; and also because the rejection of a warning sent in mercy is itself an act of resistance to the will of God.

Ver. 16.—"*This year thou shalt die.*" It is a great mercy that God has hidden from us the date of our death. If this were known all life would be deranged; some would grow reckless, some negligent of their highest duty till death was near, some despondent and unfit for all work, some overclouded with grief for the approaching separation from loved friends. We may be thankful, therefore, that God keeps the secret to himself. "Our times are in his hand." Still, it may be profitable for us to question ourselves how we should act if such a revelation were made—if an angel came to us with the message, "This year thou shalt die." What would be the effect of such a message?

I. IT WOULD URGE US TO PUT OUR TEMPORAL AFFAIRS IN READINESS FOR DEATH. We should wish to "put our house in order," to see that all was left right and straight for those who come after us, to do all in our power to provide for those who are dependent on us. But none of us knows but that he may die this year. We should not, therefore, delay in providing for those who will be left. It is foolish for a man not to make his will till he knows he is dying. Cruel injustice has often been done through the postponement of this duty until too late.

II. IT WOULD URGE US TO BE READY FOR ANOTHER WORLD. It would matter little what happened to us for the few months that remained of our earthly course. This life would then seem a poor shadow, its treasures not worth a thought. All anxiety would be fixed on "that undiscovered country." But we do not know but that we shall die this year; and we do know that life is fast fleeting. Should we not be ready in any case? Should we not feel as pilgrims and strangers, and seek for better treasures than those of earth, which all lie a prey to thief and moth and rust? Besides, spiritual preparation for death is not the simple, mechanical thing it appears to be in conventional language. Do we know we shall ever be able to fit ourselves for another world if we postpone all considerations of this momentous subject? It should be remembered, too, that he who is not fit to die is not fit to live; that spiritual condition which is real preparedness for heaven is just the condition for serving God here; if we are rightly living now we are fit to die—then and only then.

III. IT WOULD URGE US TO A DILIGENT COMPLETION OF OUR LIFE'S WORK. It would be a call to earnest effort to redeem the short remainder of our days. There would be much that we should desire to see finished. It would be sad to let the task fall from our hands unaccomplished. But the same appeal is made to all of us. Life is short, and the work of life is great. There is much for the longest life to do. In

any case there is no time for idle postponement of service. Every day has its duty; neglect this, and you can never return to it without neglecting the duty of the morrow. Let us all "work while it is day," seeing that "the night cometh, when no man can work" (John ix. 4).

IV. IT SHOULD NOT TROUBLE THE CHRISTIAN WITH ANY FEAR. To him death has lost its sting. The natural human shrinking from it may remain, but this should be overwhelmed by the thought of the home beyond. For him to die is to end "the heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to," and to enter the rest, the safety, the joy of heaven. But to the spiritual man it is more than this. All his better days he has been seeking to be nearer to God; for God he has been panting and yearning. Death will be the fruition of this his heart's hunger; it will make him "for ever with the Lord." Earthly ties will still be strong, but he will feel that all is well that is God's will. If God's will be that he live, he will rejoice in the privilege of service; if it be that he die, he will feel this as "gain," so that, "whether he live or die, he is the Lord's."

"LORD, it belongs not to my care
Whether I die or live;
To love and serve thee is my share,
And this thy grace must give."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—17.—*How to answer those who oppose the truth.* Where the light is there will be the deepest shadow; the truth is ever sharply defined against falsehood. Just when it was most important that the will of God and the real position of Israel should be ascertained, there were many striving to deceive and misrepresent. The behaviour of Jeremiah on this occasion was twofold.

I. ACCORDING TO HUMAN KNOWLEDGE AND JUDGMENT. 1. *With moderation.* "Amen: the Lord do so." Under such trying circumstances the behaviour of the prophet is praiseworthy in the extreme. The contradiction and indignity to which he had been subjected might have excused a hot rejoinder. He is willing to have the dispute settled in a very effectual way. Meanwhile he is careful to make it clear that he too desired what his opponent had prophesied. This was the disposition of the Master, and should be copied by all his disciples. "A soft answer turneth away wrath;" "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men." 2. *By an appeal to the great principle that the event will determine the truth of their predictions or the wisdom of their conduct.* (Vers. 8, 9.) This was an appeal to the conscience of his opponent. 3. *Quiet submission to the will of God.* "And the prophet Jeremiah went his way." When there is no sign of reasonableness in our antagonists, or no prospect of immediate success, it is well to submit quietly and to wait God's time. This is the test of spiritual reality. True Christianity will show itself in earnest, unobtrusive actions and patient waiting for Christ. The most eloquent enforcement of the gospel is a quiet, consistent life.

II. AS INSPIRED. Whilst he had no direct message he was silent. But God, who will not leave his servants without a witness, and who resents the slightest dishonour to which they are subjected, came to his rescue. The whole attitude of the prophet is now changed. With certainty he recovers also his vivacity, energy, and fearless power of denunciation. He is now the minister of judgment. 1. *To the nation.* The yoke of wood gives place to one of iron. The complicity of the people in the guilt of the false prophet must be punished. Their resistance to the will of God and disbelief of his servant involves them in a heavier sentence. So it is with all impenitence and rejection of God's Word. The position of the transgressor cannot remain the same. With each step he plunges into deeper guilt and more fearful judgment. 2. *To the originator of the offence.* In this case the sentence is proportionately heavier and more immediate. Death is pronounced against the offending prophet with terrible brevity and clearness. There is ever a distinction between offenders and those who cause them to offend. Primacy in disobedience will ensure a special and unmistakable mark of God's anger. This announcement of doom, simple as it was in itself, must have been

appalling to its hearer, whose inner sense of degradation and falseness would enhance its force. It is possible that the time and manner of this communication may have been intended to awaken repentance; failing which it was carried into effect. All around us such judgments are taking place, and it is well for men to examine what manner of spirit they are of ere they presume to occupy sacred offices or to set themselves against the laws of God's kingdom.—M.

Vers. 10, 11.—*Presumption increasing with impunity.* The meekness of Jeremiah's reply emboldened the false prophet, and he forthwith proceeded from words to actions. The symbol appointed by God was publicly removed from the shoulders of Jeremiah and destroyed. Opposition to the spirit and will of God could scarcely go further. The interpretation given to the action reveals how false and dangerous the position assumed.

I. THE SERVANTS OF GOD ARE FREQUENTLY AT APPARENT DISADVANTAGE AS COMPARED WITH THE SERVANTS OF SATAN. The action was so sudden and unexpected that Jeremiah had but little to say, and eventually went his way, sad but silent. Everything seemed to favour his opponent. The "patriotic party" was enthusiastic, and not to be restrained. The wisdom of this world is prompt and versatile because it is unprincipled; and it is bold because it is profane and unbelieving. Yet this is the condition under which the followers of the truth are to contend.

II. THE SERVANTS OF SATAN ARE THEREBY ENCOURAGED TO MORE PRONOUNCED BEHAVIOUR, AND COMMIT THEMSELVES BEYOND RECALL. Hananiah's case illustrates this in two ways, viz.: 1. *Sacrilegious action.* Touching the person of the prophet. Deliberately destroying the yoke which he must have known was of Divine appointment. 2. *Its definitive interpretation.* He not only rebelled against the Lord, but committed himself to a prediction with a fixed date, and one that must soon arrive. The necessity of the position he had assumed was upon him. Woe to the prophet of lies who ventures upon definite and verifiable prophecies! There is no halting-place to those who begin systematically to oppose God's truth. They must ere long be caught in their own snares. With the sense of reverence the fear of consequences is forgotten and caution is discarded.

III. BY SO DOING THEY HASTEN THEIR OWN JUDGMENT. The triumph is brilliant but short-lived, and purchased at terrible cost. Let sinners pause when their crimes are made easy for them and excess follows upon excess. The motion of the rapid may but precede the fall (Jude 8—13). When human resources and precautions are exhausted, it may be a sign that God will undertake his own cause. His servants are justified at such a time in looking for and invoking his help, which is likely to be of a very signal and determining kind.—M.

Vers. 1—17.—*A false prophet and his fate.* I. HANANIAH'S PRESUMPTION. Note *his direct challenge to the true prophet.* He seeks out Jeremiah in the house of Jehovah, "in the presence of the priests and of all the people." A prophet was, of course, bound to make his utterances in public, but Hananiah waited his chance until he found an opportunity of bearding the hated Jeremiah in as open a way as possible. He speaks *explicitly in the Name of Jehovah.* He is not afraid to take the great Name in vain. Let us be warned lest we heedlessly utter, under the pretended authority of God, what is nothing more than the daring imagination of our own hearts. The false prophet ventures on *the very figure which had been employed by the true prophet.* It would almost seem as if Jeremiah had habitually borne something in the shape of a yoke, and if so, it must have been a very irritating sight to the false prophets. Little wonder that, under the pretence of a prophetic mission, he ventured on the removal of this yoke. Above all things, there is *the confident assertion with respect to time.* Notwithstanding all the manifest difficulties of the achievement, Hananiah is not afraid to say that in two years Judah will again be firmly resting on its old foundations. Thus from all these indications of presumptuous action, we have an illustration of how confident heretics are in their error. Too often we are doubtful and partial in our statements of truth. We lack that faith and that thorough-going assertion of the truths God has revealed which are so necessary to make those truths full of operative and irresistible force. Hananiah here is as confident as he can be in all his deadly

errors. He has not the least fear of plunging into the greatest responsibilities with regard to definite predictions. He passes from the ground of mere expostulations and remonstrances, and ventures on statements which in a very short time must either make him or ruin him. Let us learn from our enemies, and labour to be confident and determined in our assertion of truth, seeing there is no lack of determination on the part of those who have cast in their lot with error.

II. HANANIAH'S PERSISTENCE. It is very noticeable that Jeremiah does not meet him in anything of an angry or denouncing manner. It would have well pleased the true prophet to see the predictions of the false prophet brought about; for it is made abundantly evident that the sufferings of his country were an unspeakable grief to Jeremiah. An angry reply served no good purpose. The true prophet could manifest a dignified patience, and leave time to vindicate both the validity of his prophetic claim and his fidelity in speaking the truth. Meantime, he can only recommend Hananiah to consider well the lessons of history, and how the prophets of old had spoken of stern dealings with many wicked nations. Unfortunately, bad men are hardly ever discriminating students of history. Hananiah was here given an opportunity of repentance, if only he had chosen to avail himself of it. But so full was he of his own devices that gentle treatment only increased his audacity, and he drew public attention more than ever to himself by removing the symbolic yoke from Jeremiah's neck. That he was allowed to do all this should teach us a lesson of patience and trust when we see wicked men pursuing, undisturbed, their chosen path. They are only climbing higher that their ultimate ruin may become more widely manifest.

III. HANANIAH'S DOOM. The first result of his presumptuous conduct is to bring a more emphatic prophecy with regard to the captives. The second is to bring a sentence of death on the false prophet himself. He who has dealt rashly with the ordering of times and seasons is to know by a bitter experience that God has these times and seasons in his own hands. He is to die within the year. Notice the sin which he is charged with committing. He is doomed to death, not simply for the falsehood or the profanity, but for this, that he had taught rebellion against Jehovah. His words were an incitement to make a useless and premature attempt at liberation. God's prediction with regard to the captivity in Babylon had in it the nature of a command.

IV. HANANIAH'S DEATH. It came very quickly. Two months at the outside was the space between the utterance of a false rebellious statement and the confirming of a true one. The death came at such an interval as was very impressive. Compare the relations between Jeremiah and Hananiah here with those between Peter and Ananias. Both Hananiah and Ananias dealt presumptuously with the holiest of things.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Despised and rejected at home, Jeremiah turned his thoughts to those distant brethren in captivity, whom he had already likened to "good figs, very good" (ch. xxiv. 3, 5). He had heard with sorrow that they could not readily submit to their altered circumstances; Judah, with its consecrated associations, was still too near to them in spirit. Probably a rumour of the expected confederacy (ch. xxvii. 3) had troubled their minds, and the discontent was increased by the pernicious discourses of prophets and soothsayers similar to that Hananiah of whom we have just heard. Two of these in particular are mentioned, and a terrible fate is held out to them. The appendix (vers. 24—32) deals with another prophet of the same type, who had not, indeed, offended so deeply as his companions, but had stirred up those at home to persecute Jeremiah in revenge for the preceding letter.

The chapter is evidently, what it professes to be, a letter, at any rate in substance. From the looseness of its structure (see especially on vers. 16—20) it has been thought to have been dictated, like those Epistles of St. Paul, of which it may be regarded as a precursor (Ewald). The date seems to be a little earlier than that of the two preceding chapters (comp. ver. 2 with ch. xxiv. 1);

the messengers in ver. 3 are therefore not to be regarded as Zedekiah's companions in the journey mentioned in ch. li. 59.

Ver. 1.—**The residue of the elders**; *i.e.* the surviving elders. Some may, perhaps, have died from natural causes, some by violence, some from grief.

Ver. 2.—**The queen**; rather, *the queen-mother* (see on ch. xiii. 18). **The eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem.** A marginal gloss appears to have intruded itself into the text, for there is no other passage in which the "eunuchs," or (as the word may equally well be rendered, with the margin), "chamberlains," are called "princes of Judah."

Ver. 7.—**Seek the peace of the city**, etc. Interest yourselves in the "peace" or welfare of the city, whether Babylon or any other place where ye may be in exile, and pray for its welfare, for your own well-being is inseparable from it.

Ver. 8.—**Let not your prophets and your diviners**, etc. It seems as if the Babylonian "Jewry" were a copy of that at home. It had not only its "princes" and its "elders," but its "prophets" and its "diviners," who encouraged the same false hopes as those in Judah (comp. ch. xxvii. 9; xxviii. 2). **Your dreams which ye caused to be dreamed**; or, *which ye cause yourselves to dream* (comp. ch. xxvii. 9).

Ver. 10.—**Seventy years** (see on ch. xxv. 11). **At Babylon**; rather, *for Babylon*. A long period, such as seventy years, is appointed for Babylon "to enjoy" the fruits of her ambition; when this is over (comp. Gen. xv. 13—16), God will pay heed to his people. **Visit you.** To "visit" frequently has the sense of "taking notice of," or "paying heed to" (*e.g.* ch. xxiii. 2). **My good word.** "Word," equivalent to "promise;" the allusion is to ch. xxiv. 6.

Ver. 11.—**For I know the thoughts**, etc.; *i.e.* though seventy years must pass over you in exile, yet do not apprehend that I have forgotten you, for I know full well what my purpose is towards you—a purpose of restoring to you "peace" and prosperity. **An expected end**; rather, *a future and a hope*; i.e. a hopeful future (comp. ch. xxxi. 17, "There is a hope for thy future"). That unexpectant apathy which is the terrible accompaniment of so much worldly sorrow was not to be an ingredient in the lot of the Jews.

Ver. 12.—**And ye shall go and pray unto me.** "Go," that is, to the places "where prayer is wont to be made." The clause seems to refer to common prayer for a common object. Comp. striking passages in Solomon's prayer (1 Kings viii. 48), and in Deuteronomy (iv. 29, 30).

Vers. 15—23.—Jeremiah's denunciation of two leading false prophets at Babylon, with a digression on the fate of Zedekiah and Jerusalem. Some eminent critics maintain that vers. 16—20 are an interpolation, and this view is certainly supported by the omission of these verses in the Septuagint. It must also in fairness be admitted that the natural connection of ver. 15 is with ver. 21, not with ver. 16. But it does not follow that vers. 16—20 are an arbitrary interpolation. They may be regarded either as a digression in the original letter, or as inserted by an after-thought when the substance of the letter was brought into its present form.

Ver. 16.—**Know that thus saith the Lord**; rather, *Surely thus saith the Lord.*

Ver. 17.—**I will send upon them**, etc.; alluding to ch. xxiv. 10. **Vile figs**; literally, *figs exciting a shudder.* The figure involves an allusion to ch. xxiv. 2, 3.

Ver. 19.—**But ye would not hear.** The prophet, by a very natural illusion, falls out of the style of letter-writer into that of the prophet. For the moment he fancies himself addressing an audience of his countrymen (comp. ch. xxv. 3, 4, 7, 8).

Ver. 21.—**Zedekiah.** The name is interesting; it shows that this prophet belonged to a family which took pleasure in the thought of Jehovah and his righteousness. Doubtless, too, he did so himself; but he under-estimated the demands of that righteousness, which extended to the heart as well as to the outward conduct.

Ver. 22.—**A curse**; *i.e.* a formula of cursing (comp. Isa. lxv. 15). There is here a play upon words, such as the Biblical writers delighted in, partly with the view of assisting the memory. "A curse" is in Hebrew *kelālāh*, and "to roast" is *kālāh*. **Roasted in the fire.** "Casting into the midst of a burning fiery furnace" was a common punishment both among the Assyrians and the Babylonians, see *e.g.* 'Records of the Past,' vol. ix. p. 56; and comp. Dan. iii.

Ver. 23.—An important and melancholy addition to our knowledge of these false prophets. They were not only misleading prophets, but immoral men in their private capacities. **Villany**; rather, *folly*, as the word is always rendered elsewhere. The phrase "to commit folly in Israel" is always (except Josh. vii. 15) used of sins of unchastity.

Vers. 24—32.—A threatening oracle against the false prophet Shemaiah. Great excitement had been caused among the so-called prophets in Babylon by the emphatic language of Jeremiah. Accordingly one of them, named Shemaiah, wrote letters to the Jews at home, and especially to a high

official called Zephaniah (see on ver. 26) to put a stop to Jeremiah's bold agitation. Zephaniah, however, was not the man for whom Shemaiah took him, and read the letter to the intended victim. Upon this, Jeremiah received a special revelation, announcing dire punishment to Shemaiah and his family (according to the principle of the Divine government described in Exod. xx. 5).

Ver. 24.—**To Shemaiah**; or, *of, concerning* (as the same preposition is rendered in vers. 16, 21, 31). The oracle itself speaks of Shemaiah in the third person (vers. 31, 32). The Authorized Version, however, can be defended by its accordance with ver. 25. **The Nehelamite.** This is evidently a patronymic, but whether of the family or the locality of the bearer cannot be decided. The analogy of "Jeremiah of Anathoth" (ver. 27), however, favours the view that it is local.

Ver. 26.—**In the stead of Jehoiada the priest.** Some (Grotius, Hitzig, Graf) think that this Jehoiada was the famous high priest of that name, who is said to have "appointed *officers* over the house of the Lord" (2 Kings xi. 18; 2 Chron. xxiii. 18). It is true that Zephaniah was not literally the successor of Jehoiada, but he was so in the same metaphorical sense in which the scribes are said by our Lord to "sit in Moses' seat" (Matt. xxiii. 2). It is safer, however, to suppose that another Jehoiada is meant, of whom we have no further information. It is not said that either Jehoiada or Zephaniah was high priest, and as the special object of the elevation of the latter is said to be the supervision of the temple police, it is more probable that Jehoiada and he were successively "second priests," or, to use a phrase which seems to be synonymous, "deputy governors in the house of the Lord" (ch. xx. 1). The passage may thus without violence be harmonized with ch. lii. 24; 2 Kings xxv. 18, where Seraiah is called "the chief priest" and Zephaniah "the second priest." It is possible that Jehoiada had been favourable to the better class of prophets. In this case there will be a delicate hint to Zephaniah that God had his own purpose in promoting him to honour, viz. that unruly prophets like Jeremiah might be held in with a tighter hand (Ewald). **That ye should be officers**; rather, *that there should be officers*. Zephaniah himself was an "officer" or "deputy" (see above); but he was also "chief in the house of the Lord," and had the appointment of inferior "officers," whose duty it was to preserve order in the temple. To understand the following words, we must remember that the outer court of the temple was a favourite place for prophetic teaching (comp. ch. vii. 2; xxvi. 2). **For every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet**; *i.e.* to keep an eye upon "madmen" and prophetizers. The term "mad" is used in a disparaging sense (as 2 Kings ix. 11; comp. Hos. ix. 7), with regard to the apparently senseless behaviour of those who were overpowered by the spirit of prophecy. In earlier times, no doubt, the phenomena of prophecy were more violently opposed to everyday life than in Jeremiah's time; but such symbolic acts as appearing in public with a yoke upon his neck would at least excuse the application of the epithet even to Jeremiah. It is more than probable, however, that it was not so much the abnormal actions as the contents of Jeremiah's prophecies which stirred up such vehement opposition; observe how in the next verse only the sound of these descriptive nouns is retained ("which maketh himself a prophet"). It was the making prophecy a reality which disturbed the men of routine, and Shemaiah well knew this when he made this appeal to Zephaniah. There was no harm in being nominally a "prophet," but to "make," or rather, "show one's self as a prophet," to be an energetic prophet, a prophetizer (if the word may be invented),—this was wormwood to those who cried, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace. **In prison, and in the stocks**; rather, *in the stocks* (see on ch. xx. 2) *and in the collar*. The meaning seems to be that Jeremiah was subjected to both forms of punishment at once.

Ver. 27.—**Reproved**; *i.e.* threatened with punishment.

Ver. 28.—**For therefore**, etc.; *i.e.* the consequence of Jeremiah's not having been kept within bounds by authority is that he has even ventured, in his fanatical zeal, to trouble the exiles in Babylon. **This captivity is long**; rather, *It (is) long;* a more forcible expression.

Ver. 29.—**And Zephaniah the priest**, etc. This should rather be printed as a parenthetical remark.

Vers. 30—32.—**Then came the word of the Lord**, etc. A fresh introduction of the Divine oracle was rendered necessary by the long description of Zephaniah's letters. The reason for Shemaiah's punishment, however, is stated here a little differently. Of course, it was equally contrary to the will of God to deliver a false prophecy and to stir up persecution against his true prophet. **Taught rebellion** (see on ch. xxviii. 16).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 4—7.—*How to make the best of adversity.* Jeremiah advises the captives in Babylon to take a course that is eminently brave and wise. The first inclination would be to stir up a useless revolt, the second to sit down in sullen despondency. When trouble overcomes us we are tempted to follow one or other of these courses—to rebel or to despair. Jeremiah teaches us, as he taught the Jews of his day, that neither is right. He indicates a better way.

I. SUBMIT PATIENTLY TO INEVITABLE ADVERSITY. We are not required to court trouble, nor to yield weakly when we might successfully throw it off. But when it is plainly inevitable resistance is wrong as well as foolish. 1. It is *foolish*. Why dash our heads against the prison walls? The brain will suffer before the granite. The Jews could not successfully revolt against Babylon; to live on the eve of rebellion, as restless conspirators, would be dangerous and futile. The mistake of such misplaced patriotism was seen later in the wretched failure of the fanatic attempts of the Jews to throw off the yoke of Rome. The folly of the Jews would be the greater that the lengthy duration of the Captivity had been predicted and revealed as a Divine judgment. When we know the providential assignment of adversity, to resist this is to resist the power of Heaven. 2. This resistance is *wrong*. The Captivity was ordained by God (ver. 4). It was sent as a wholesome chastisement. To those who understood the teaching of the prophets on this point, rebellion was at once disobedience to God's will and the refusal of a useful corrective. We should remember this when we grow impatient under trouble, and learn to bow silently before the will of our King and our Father, to receive without complaining the discipline which is intended to cleanse and strengthen our spiritual life.

II. SEEK THE BRIGHTEST COURSE UNDER THE DARKEST CIRCUMSTANCES. The captives could not return home. They were not, therefore, to treat the land of their exile as a hopeless desert, but to build and plant and eat the fruit of it. 1. How often trouble is *worse in prospect* than in experience! The Captivity loomed in the distance as a very purgatory; when it came it was found to contain many of the fruits and flowers of quiet happiness. 2. Our lot in life will be very much *what we make* it for ourselves. If we treat it as a "waste, howling wilderness," it will be that to us. But the hardest lot will prove to have many alleviations for him who searches for its mercies rather than for its grievances. Surely it is best to do this. Mourners are inclined to nurse their sorrows with a melancholy satisfaction in aggravating the pain of them, or as though any abatement of grief were a sacrilege. But we should learn a more robust treatment of adversity. There is no virtue in distressing one's self beyond necessity.

III. CHERISH HOPES FOR THE FUTURE UNDER THE MOST TRYING PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. The Jews were to remember the promise of the restoration. They were not to allow their race to die out (ver. 6). A great future was still before them. History has confirmed the prediction of the prophets. The scattered and ruined people were recalled to their homes. From the stock of the despondent exiles there sprang not only all that was great and good in later Jewish history, but also Jesus Christ and Christianity. In our darkest moments we should not forget that, though not a ray of light has yet appeared on the horizon, the sun will surely rise and the day return. Christianity is peculiarly a religion of the future; it encourages us to press forward to the golden age which is yet to come.

IV. FIND OUR HAPPINESS BY SEEKING THE WELFARE OF OTHERS. "Seek the peace of the city . . . for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." The alien was to act with the loyalty of a citizen. Though a nation may be under the unrighteous rule of a conqueror, it should still remember that it has duties to the government under which it lives, and claims of charity in regard to the people of the superior power. If it is our duty to seek the peace of a strange city, how much more are we bound to interest ourselves in public duties for the good of our own country? Private citizens will find their personal condition improved through the successful discharge of public duties. The citizens reap the fruits of the peace of the city. In ministering to others generally we shall discover the secret of our own blessedness.

Ver. 7.—*Civic duties.* From the duty of the Jews to the cities of their exile we may deduce the still more urgent duties of citizens to their own city.

I. ONE OF THE FIRST INTERESTS OF A PEOPLE IS PEACE. There are times when war is necessary and right—to defend the hearth and home, to save the weak from oppression, etc. But such war must only be the means for securing a better, more lasting peace. The glory of war is an empty dream. The people gain little and suffer much, though the kings may win fame and power.

II. PEACE IS TO BE SOUGHT BY THE ACTION OF CITIZENS. Individual men cannot wage a war or declare a truce. But the units constitute nations. If each is peaceable the nation is peaceable. Insignificant people have vast power for harm if they choose to execute it. It should be understood that seditious conduct is not only a political offence, it is a sin in the sight of God, a cruelty to the many people whom it disturbs and injures.

III. PRIVATE MEN HAVE PUBLIC DUTIES. We all reap benefits from the state. It is mean to accept them without taking our part in bearing the burdens of the state. There are people who deny the right of Christian men to take part in "worldly politics," yet these people are glad to avail themselves of the protection and other advantages which are provided for them by the secular government they affect to despise. The neglect of public duty evidences a narrow and selfish disposition.

IV. PRIVATE MEN ARE BENEFITED BY PUBLIC PROSPERITY. We are members one of another. There is a general harmony and health of the whole body, over and above the well-being of each member, when all work together for the mutual good. As individual men, we have great reason to be thankful for the general prosperity of the nation and for the maintenance of public peace.

V. WE SHOULD DISCHARGE OUR DUTIES TO THE STATE THOUGH WE MAY NOT APPROVE OF THE GOVERNMENT. To be in opposition is no excuse for being in sedition. Unless we can change the government it is foolish and wrong to revolt against it. The nation is larger than the government.

Ver. 10.—*Seventy years.* I. SEVENTY YEARS ARE A LIMITED TIME. Babylon was to tyrannize for a limited period only; the Jews were to suffer for a limited period. 1. God has set a limit to the triumph of evil. The storm rages; yet God says to it, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further." The lions roar, but they are chained. Wicked men fling the reins to their passions, break through all restraints of respect for the will of God and appear to be at liberty to work evil and revel in the fruits of sin *ad libitum;* but God has put bounds about their course. In due time he will lay his hand upon them and arrest them. 2. God has set a limit to the duration of trouble. The sorrow of God's people is temporal; their blessedness will be eternal. Every trouble is weighed and measured by God. "Our times are in his hand."

II. SEVENTY YEARS ARE A SHORT TIME IN THE HISTORY OF A NATION. The Captivity was to last for seventy years; prosperity had been enjoyed for hundreds of years before this, and would return and endure long after. The troublesome times are conspicuous, while the quiet times glide by unnoticed. Hence we are likely not to note how much more we have of the latter. History reads like a record of wars and commotions, because the happy but dull annals of prosperity do not contain many striking events. It is much the same in private life. For most of us the blessings greatly outnumber the troubles, the times of quiet far exceed those of distress. Yet it is difficult to recognize this, because what hurts us impresses our memory more than what pleases us.

III. SEVENTY YEARS ARE A LIFETIME. Few, if any, of the first captives would survive the exile. To the individual man it was as bad as if it were perpetual. Yet if they were true patriots the national hope must have been a great comfort in the darkness of personal suffering. And the patriotic hope of Israel was one of the grandest features in the Hebrew character. We are all too selfish in our hopes. Christians should consider the cause of Christ and the interest of humanity as of far more importance than their private prosperity. If in the end Christ will triumph, and the world will be lifted out of the sin and sorrow which have overwhelmed it, should not we rejoice, though our lot may not be to live till this is accomplished? Moses rejoiced in the Pisgah-view of the land he could never enter; Simeon was glad at seeing the infant Saviour, and could

depart in peace with the assurance of a redemption not yet accomplished. Still, the Christian may have a great personal hope beyond this. Seventy years!—but a span compared with eternity! When these swift days have flown the door will be opened to the infinite ages of eternity. What if the little life be tempest-tossed? the voyage is short, the haven is near (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18).

Ver. 11.—*God's thoughts concerning us.* I. GOD THINKS. If God exists he must be a thinking being. To apply the name "God" to a stream of tendencies, a collection of laws, the totality of being, etc., is to misapply it. Either God is personal or there is no God, for the conception of personality is essential to that of divinity. If God is a person he may be "without parts or passions." The anthropomorphic ideas of repentance, wrath, etc., may be as much mere metaphorical images as those of the eyes and the hands of God; but thinking is essential to the nature of what we understand by a person, by a spiritual being. Unless God thinks, he is no spirit, no person.

II. GOD THINKS ABOUT US. As far as he is revealed to us in the Bible and in Christ, and as far as we may verify this revelation by experience, he is directly concerned with his works and his children. His thoughts are not to be imagined as only consisting of vast abstractions, infinite ideals. They may soar to lonely heights where no finite intellect can follow, but they can also stoop to humble concerns of human life. He is but an imperfect thinker who is so absorbed with philosophic speculation that he has no room in his mind to consider his family. The greatest thinker will be wide as well as lofty, able to take in small details in addition to grand abstractions, and, above all, wise to apply the highest thinking to the simplest practical necessity. It is a great comfort for us that God so thinks. With sublime ideas of eternity, and innumerable cares of the universe in his infinite mind, God has yet room for thoughts about us, and condescension to concern himself with them.

III. WHAT GOD THINKS ABOUT US IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO US. 1. God thinks what is *true and wise and good.* If, therefore, we can know God's thoughts about anything we shall see the thing in its true light. Our thoughts are blinded by prejudice, coloured by passion, limited by ignorance, broken, fragmentary, perverted. God's only are clear and perfect as truth. 2. God's thoughts are the *prelude to his actions.* If we know what he thinks concerning us we know how he intends to act. God's thinking is not the contemplation of the philosopher, it is the consideration of the king. We forget this when we are so very anxious about what the world will think of us and so very indifferent about God's thoughts concerning us. A brave man will learn to dare the world's misjudgment, its scorn, its condemnation. But who can face God's thoughts if they mean evil to us?

IV. GOD THINKS THOUGHTS OF PEACE CONCERNING US. So Jeremiah saw in the case of the Jews; so we may see for all mankind how that Christ "has broken down the middle wall of partition between us." Even when God finds it necessary to punish his desire is to bless, and when he chastises it is in mercy, that he may reclaim. But this is not seen at the time. There are things which prevent us from seeing that God's thoughts are of peace. Thus—the peace is not yet enjoyed; when God chastises us it looks as though he meant evil to us, because we feel the blow before we see the good fruit of it; we cannot see God's thoughts, and must accept them in faith, waiting for a later confirmation of experience. Yet if God does think thoughts of peace concerning us, is it necessary for us to know the exact nature of them? They are known to him if they are not known to us, and he can carry them out without any previous understanding of them on our part.

V. GOD'S THOUGHTS OF PEACE WILL BE ULTIMATELY REALIZED. God promises that he will make "a future and a hope." God's best thoughts are not memories, but hopes, promises, intentions. The grandest page of revelation is prophecy. But though these thoughts refer to the future, we must not lose faith in their practical interest. 1. The realization is *delayed by our fault,* not by God's will. He thinks, intends peace. But he is hindered from carrying out his intention by our conduct. He waits to be gracious. If, therefore, we prepare ourselves for the accomplishment of God's thoughts, there is nothing further to prevent us from enjoying the peace they presage. 2. God is as *great in power* as he is wise and good in thought. He has bestowed upon us the noble but perilous faculty of free-will, and we cannot measure the limits of this faculty.

Yet we may rest assured that by some means the infinite God can and will ultimately accomplish all his great designs of peace for his children.

Ver. 13.—*Seeking God with the whole heart.* I. GOD MUST BE FOUND BEFORE HE CAN BE KNOWN AND ENJOYED. "He is not far from each one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being." Yet this natural nearness of God may be unrecognized by us, and may not be sufficient to bring us into the spiritual communion with him. The God of nature may be "the unknown God," or he may be recognized and yet not enjoyed as the "Portion" of the soul. 1. *Sin* hides the vision of God, and drives the soul into remote spiritual banishment from God, even though it cannot affect his physical presence. 2. Our *natural limitations* of thought and experience surround the idea of the Divine with mystery, and make us feel that though God is partly known there are still ways of God that are far beyond our ken, so that we exclaim in bewilderment and distress, "Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself!" (Isa. xlv. 15).

II. TO BE FOUND, GOD MUST BE SEARCHED FOR WITH THE WHOLE HEART. 1. He must be *searched for.* God does discover himself to men unexpectedly, as to Hagar in the desert and to Moses on Horeb, though we may rest assured that even such exceptional revelations were made to souls whose habit it was to seek after him. Nevertheless before such experience, God draws near to those who do not seek him, to urge them to search and find him (Isa. lxv. 1). He seeks us before we seek him. Our search is the response of our hearts to his invitation (Ps. xxvii. 8). But this search must be made. The promise of finding is attached to the condition of seeking (Matt. vii. 7). The prodigal must return to his father before he can receive the welcome home. Men are waiting for God to visit them, reveal himself to them, do something that will bring them back to him. They may wait for ever, and in vain. God is waiting for us. It is our part to arise and seek him. 2. This search must be with *all the heart.* The reason why we are disappointed of the answers of our prayers is often that our prayers are so insincere, so cold, so half-hearted. It is reasonable to expect God, the all-seeing, to answer our prayers, not according to the vigour of the language, but according to the fervency of our desires. If we value the knowledge and communion of God aright, we shall seek him with all the heart: (1) with the heart, *i.e.* sincerely, spiritually, inwardly, not with mere formal inquiries; and (2) with the whole heart, *i.e.* with singleness of purpose, intensity, earnestness.

III. THE REWARD OF SEEKING GOD WITH ALL THE HEART WILL CONSIST IN FINDING HIM. 1. The search will be *successful.* God may not be found at first, or, being found, may not be recognized in the way expected. But Scripture and experience both testify to the utility and fruitfulness of the soul's search after God. If we have not yet found, that may be because (1) we have not sought with "all the heart;" or (2) have not sought in the right way as far as our light and knowledge have indicated it—*i.e.* humbly, penitently, and as Christians through Christ. 2. The success of the search will be *its own reward.* The finding of God is described as a blessing of the restoration. It will bring other and lower benefits in its train (ver. 14), but it is itself the greatest boon. "Blessed are they that seek God with all the heart, for they shall find him,"—that is enough for a perfect beatitude. To find God is to find our light, our rest, our home. To know him is life eternal; to commune with him is the joy of heaven.

Vers. 20—32.—*Shemaiah.* I. HIS ACTION. 1. He is *irritated* at the letter of Jeremiah. From Babylon he writes back in a rage. It is foolish to be thus angry with those who tell us unpleasant truths, but it is very common. 2. He describes Jeremiah as *mad.* People often depreciate the intelligence of those who differ from them. Weak men set down strong words to the excitement of the speaker because they have not the imagination or the nerve to receive them as true. 3. He urges the temple officials to *arrest and punish* Jeremiah. We have here another instance of the common effort to suppress those whom we are unable to answer.

II. HIS MORAL CONDUCT. 1. He *usurps* the name of a prophet, though he is not sent by God. His pretence to speak in the Name of God is unwarranted. A prophet is one who acts as God's messenger, as an apostle is one who acts as the messenger of Christ. No man has a right to enter the ministry of Christ unless he is called to it, nor to

speak as God's ambassador unless he is convinced in his conscience that he is sent by God. 2. He *deceives* the Jews into "trusting in a lie." It is not only that he falsely claims to be a prophet; his prophetic message is also false. Truth is sacred; to tamper with it is a sin, but to deceive others to their hurt increases the sin. 3. He instigates *revolt* against God. If it is wrong to utter a falsehood to serve a good end, it must be more wrong to do so with a bad intention. But all false religious teaching tends to induce disobedience to the will of God.

III. HIS DOOM. 1. He is to be *punished.* The evil that he discredits shall fall upon him. This is a severe but an appropriate punishment for a deceiving prophet. 2. His *children are to share* his doom. There is a great mystery in the hereditary character of punishment, and it is increased in some respects by the fact that tendencies to sin are also hereditary. But the fact is as clearly visible in nature as it is revealed in Scripture. 3. He is *not to see the joy of the restoration.* They who refuse wholesome chastisement cannot receive the happy fruits that follow it. It is natural and reasonable that the wilful rejection of Divine warnings should be followed by a severe judgment.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—14.—*Duties and consolations of God's captivity.* I. THEIR DUTIES. The imposition of definite lines of conduct and policy upon the exiled, was one proof that they were not cast off; the promise of deliverance was another. Although amongst the heathen, they were not to be as the heathen; neither were they to be wholly given over to despair. As children of God they were to exhibit the virtues of: 1. *Industry.* (Ver. 5.) Misanthropy and despair are the parents of idleness; Divine faith endues men with energy. The exiles had a testimony to bear before the heathen. It was a present duty to achieve an honest independence. 2. *Domestic attachment.* (Ver. 6.) The family, with all its joys and responsibilities, is still to be cared for. If the present be forfeited the future is still capable of being redeemed. The new generations would reap the advantages of which the fathers had been deprived. 3. *Public spirit.* (Ver. 7.) They were not to abstain from the duties of citizenship merely because they were amongst heathen conquerors. Even there they might exert an influence for good. The fundamental law of God's kingdom is to seek the good of all men. Work faithfully rendered to the commonwealth would not be vain or without its reward. Even the heathen and the men of this world can appreciate good citizenship. That a distinctive work and testimony still remained to the Church as a Church, is no reason for neglecting those less direct and more general duties which so powerfully commend the religious profession that inculcates them. 4. *Cheerfulness* This is not so much to be classified along with the preceding as to be understood as the spring and governing principle of them all. What more natura. than a spirit of resentment under the circumstances? How easy to hang the harp on the willows! But this would only be to misunderstand God and thwart his purposes. He seeks the happiness and prosperity of his people—even here and now, and notwithstanding the discipline to which he may be subjecting them. Not resignation merely, but cheerful acquiescence and co-operation, are, therefore, to be expected of his people. "I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it."

II. THEIR CONSOLATIONS. These were partly to consist in the natural results of the course of conduct enjoined, or the happiness inseparably associated with the observance of it; but chiefly in the anticipation of the future. 1. *A definite term was set to their captivity.* (Ver. 10.) It was one that could easily be verified, and was not too far distant to extinguish hope. Some of those who as children were taken to Babylon, might in their old age return to the land of promise. There is measure as well as meaning in all God's discipline. He never imposes upon his people a burden greater than they can bear. The darkest night is illumined by light beyond. When they sorrow, their sorrow is not without hope. 2. *The present was linked with the future.* They might be comforted in the fulfilment of their daily tasks by the knowledge that everything done in obedience to God and the spirit of true benevolence would have its influence upon the promised deliverance. At the very worst, what was done in this disposition would not retard that event or rob it of its fulness of blessing. In like manner the children of God are assured that this earthly life is but a "sojourning,"

and that "all things work together for good." This life will have an immense influence upon the complexion of the next. The duties of every day are therefore to be attended to in the full conviction of their absolute worth and avail in the sight of God. They have the promise not only of the life which now is, but of that which is to come. 3. *Spiritual blessings were promised.* (Vers. 11—14.) The good will and faithfulness of God; the restoration of religious communion; the gathering and reconstitution of the theocracy.—M.

Vers. 12—14.—*Signs that God's favour is restored.* I. WHAT HE DOES IN HIS PEOPLE. 1. *In turning their hearts to himself.* They had been worshipping Baal and the gods of heathendom. Only now and then did they offer a half-hearted worship to Jehovah. The idolatries that pandered to their lusts were uppermost in their thoughts, and it was only occasionally, in seasons of desperate need, they bethought themselves of Jehovah. Now he was to assume a higher place in their regard. Their views of life, its purposes and destinies, would be elevated, and he would become their chief desire. The new era of favour and happiness would be distinguished by intense personal love for God. In Nehemiah's day a measure of spiritual affection like this showed itself, but it could only be fully developed through the personal manifestation of Christ, who was to draw all men unto him. 2. *In pouring forth the spirit of true prayer.* Where the heart's affections go forth towards God the spirit of true prayer commences. It is that which cries within us, "Abba, Father," which is the spirit of prayer and supplications. It has been supposed that the first clause of ver. 12 refers to private and the second to public prayer. The habit and delight of devotion were to be restored. Where these are there is already the earnest of all substantial and eternal good. Pentecost was prefaced and penetrated with prayer.

II. WHAT HE DOES FOR HIS PEOPLE. 1. *In revealing himself.* They who seek for him with their whole heart will find him. The veil will be withdrawn, and calamity, understood as fatherly chastisement, patiently borne. In the subsequent history of Israel this was largely experienced; but the fulness of the spiritual meaning of the promise was only realized in Christ and the outpourings of his Spirit. 2. *He will hearken to their petitions.* The sense of acceptance will come, even in the midst of captivity. Faithful hearts will fill with presage of coming deliverance, and prayer will not only be effectual but be felt to be so. It is in this exercise the true relationship of God and his people becomes evident, and the blessings of a present and ultimate redemption are secured. There can be no more marked proof of God's favour towards any one than answers to his prayers. 3. *He will bring back to the promised land and the privilege of covenant relationship.* That is a matter of course, seeing he already hears them. And yet none the less imposing will their redemption be. How complete the restoration! how miraculous! Its supernatural character is to be as evident as that of their dispersion. That which under anomalous circumstances has been a difficult, unauthorized, or intermittent exercise will become easy, honourable, and constant, as they will return to their own land, where every man will sit under his own vine and fig-tree, none daring to make him afraid. In the case of the Christian this promise will be fulfilled in either the gradual conquest of the world by the Church, or entrance into heaven. But there is a foretaste of this in the self-conquest and perfected spiritual life of the regenerate soul.—M.

Vers. 20—32.—*The punishment of false prophets.* The opposition between Jeremiah and the false prophets is one of the most interesting phenomena of the period to which these prophecies belong. It is a real battle, albeit not with earthly weapons. The question between them could not be suffered to remain doubtful, as it involved immense consequences. A striking correspondence is discovered in the antagonism to the labours of the apostles. There is the same barefaced, fearless lying and dishonesty, the same terrible denunciation of judgment. (We are reminded of the sentence on Simon Magus, "Thy silver perish with thee," etc., Acts viii. 20—24; and the reply to Ananias, the high priest, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall," Acts xxiii. 3.) How is the latter to be regarded? Evidently as the word of God through his true servants, and not as the expression of vindictive feeling. In regard to this punishment notice—

I. ITS NATURE. It had direct reference to that concerning which they spoke. From the future they had denied they were to be cut off. In the case of Ahab and Zedekiah the instrumentality of man is indirectly employed; in that of Shemaiah it is brought about by what we might regard as natural causes. In both instances the penalty was: 1. *Exceptionally severe.* The fate of the lying prophets, even apart from its associated consequences in the eternal sphere, was tragic in the extreme, and presents hardly an element of hope. Ahab and his companion are subjected to a fearful death and an eternity of shame in Israel. Shemaiah is consigned to effacement and deprived both as regards himself and his posterity, of the promised blessings. 2. *Exemplary.* Unmistakably these men were but the leaders of many of like mind, and it was intended they should be marked out for signal retribution. Their fate would appeal to the imagination and spiritual feeling of their people, and in either case it corresponded closely with the peculiarity of their conduct. In their heathen exile they were to be taught that God's hand could still reach them and that an exact justice waited upon their actions. Ahab and Zedekiah so lived that even a heathen monarch had to make them examples. 3. *Graduated according to heinousness of offence.*

II. ITS JUSTIFICATION. 1. *The opposition to God's truth was necessarily direct and malicious.* Nothing could well be more consciously wicked than their whole behaviour. It occurred at a critical period, when great destinies were determined. The prophet of God was thereby discredited and hindered, and the people prevented from receiving and acting upon his message. In every season of critical consequence and great spiritual activity such manifestations occur. Merely to overcome them is not sufficient. The victory must be signal and conspicuous. 2. *The offence was one to which God himself is ever most sensitive.* It affected his character and prerogatives, and was therefore nothing else than blasphemy (cf. Matt. xii. 32. "Even I know, and am a witness, saith the Lord," ver. 23). 3. *The interests of truth required the penalty.* The people had to be overawed by the presence of the supernatural; their obedience had to be won to the direction of the true prophet, and the spiritual ends of the Captivity were thus to be secured. A moral demonstration like this was requisite, and enables the human mind more completely to realize the Divine conceptions of righteousness and truth.—M.

Vers. 4—7.—*God's message to the captives.* There is an encouraging tone in this Divine message to the captives in Babylon that must have been strikingly fitted to call forth every better element of thought and feeling within them. They were not, indeed, to dream of deliverance. The appointed time must run its course. The generation then in their prime could not hope ever to see their own land again. But their children should. Their wisdom, therefore, lay in making the best of their condition, and nourishing, as far as possible, the resources and the strength of their family life. Let them build, and plant, and marry, and enjoy the good of that strange land as if it were their own. Let them sow, though it be with many tears, for the better and happier future. Let them so live as to commend themselves to the good will of their conquerors, that even "their enemies may be at peace with them," identifying themselves with the interests of the place of their captivity, seeking by their prayer to bring down blessings upon it from above, seeing that in its well-being and peace they would find their own. This is strictly in harmony with the general Divine purpose as to the relation in which the Jews should stand towards other nations. They were called to be a separate and peculiar people only that they might the better be instruments of blessing to the world. The Captivity was not merely a punishment for their sins, but a part of the method by which God taught them to fulfil their mission. Important lessons are suggested respecting the relation the people of God should always maintain towards the world in which he has placed them. Note—

I. THE FREE USE IT IS PERMITTED THEM TO HAVE OF THIS WORLD'S GOOD. "Build ye houses, and dwell in them," etc. In being carried beyond the bounds of Israel these captives were not passing beyond the domain of Israel's God. He is the "Lord of the whole earth." And whether in Jerusalem or in Babylon, all resources, all materials, all power to labour, and all products of labour, are his. Shall not the children of the heavenly Father make themselves "at home" in their Father's world, free to use and to enjoy whatever good he puts within their reach? Remember St. Paul's counsel to the Corinthians, "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles," etc. (1 Cor. x. 25, 26). All

natural good has the stamp of God's ownership upon it. Whatever, therefore, comes to you in the honourable commerce of life do not shrink from it or refuse it. It is yours to enjoy because he made it; it is yours because it is his. The freedom of the earth is given to his true children. There is a sense in which it may be said of all outward good that they who know best how to use it aright have most right to its use. There is no "possession" of these things like that which springs from spiritual affinity and sympathy with him who gave them, and from the power to discern and appreciate their inner meaning. There is no "right" like that of Divine sonship. "All things are yours," etc. (1 Cor. iii. 21—23). We dishonour our Christian faith when we move about in the world timidly or gloomily, as if we had no right to live in it, or as if it were a mere "house of bondage;" hedged in on all sides with painful restrictions, bound with fetters of restraint; afraid to share with a free, hearty, childlike gladness any of its innocent delights. If this is "Emmanuel's land," have we not the range of all its delectable mountains? Is it a world that our Father's hand has made and filled with the tokens of his beneficence, and that has been trodden by the feet of the great Redeemer, and shall we throw over it the shadow of our discontent or fear (Neh. viii. 10; Eccles. ix. 7; 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5)?

II. THE IDENTITY OF INTEREST SUBSISTING BETWEEN THEM AND THE WORLD. "Seek the peace of the city," etc. Captives and bondmen as these Jews were, they were nevertheless involved in all that affected the welfare of the Babylonian state. The administration of its affairs for good or ill, for peace or war, must needs be a matter of great interest to them, since they would so largely share the consequences. (See illustrations in Joseph and his brethren, Daniel and the three Hebrew youths, Esther and Mordecai, etc.) The citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem have also an earthly citizenship to maintain, the bonds of which are not broken through their being raised spiritually to a higher level than that of the worldly life around them. Rather are those bonds correspondingly raised and made more sacred and binding. Their Christian faith elevates the character of their earthly citizenship, invests it with a new dignity, attaches to it higher and diviner sanctions. "In the peace thereof shall ye have peace." All parts of the social system are so linked together by a law of mutual dependence and influence that the well-being of one is, in a measure, the well-being of all. "The eye cannot say to the hand," etc.; "Whether one member suffer," etc. We are all personally affected for good or ill by the political order and the general tone of the moral life around us. There are deep rankling wounds in the body politic—ignorance, drunkenness, roving beggary, domestic vice and violence, the systematic training of the young in crime, the oppression of the hireling in his wages, etc.—which it is to the interest of us all most earnestly to seek to heal. No class of the community can escape the ill effect of these things, and religion does but bring us into the deeper sympathy with those who most suffer by such forms of wrong.

III. THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO LIVE FOR THE WORLD'S HIGHEST BENEFIT. "Seek the peace of the city, . . . and pray to the Lord for it." Real peace is the fruit of righteousness. There can be none while the Divine order is violated and the Divine will set at nought. The gospel is in every way God's message of peace to the world. The Church is called to be the "light of the world" and the "salt of the earth," as a witness for God's truth and righteousness. The Christian philanthropist alone has in his hands a thorough cure for the diseases and wounds of our humanity; and of all the weapons he can wield in his conflict with them, none so mighty as prayer, inasmuch as that unseals the fount of all blessing, and brings down from heaven the healing, saving power. Well may a Christian apostle enlarge and emphasize the old prophetic message, saying, "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men," etc. (1 Tim. ii. 1—4).—W.

Ver. 11.—*Thoughts of peace.* Such is the consoling word that God sends to his "banished ones" in their affliction. He bids his servant "speak comfortably" to them, even now that their "warfare" is only beginning, and they are having their first taste of the bitterness of exile. Blending with the lamentations of the weeping captives as they "hung their harps on the willows by the waters of Babylon," we can imagine that this gracious word would have a more salutary effect upon them than the living voice of the prophet ever had. What message has it for us?

I. THE MIND OF GOD IS A PROFOUND MYSTERY TO US, BUT HE KNOWS HIS OWN COUNSELS. 1. *God has his "thoughts," even as we have ours.* We believe in a God who is no mere philosophic abstraction, but a living, personal being, of whose infinite intelligence ours is but the dim and distant reflection. 2. *His thoughts are immeasurably higher than ours.* "As the heavens are higher than the earth," etc. (Isa. lv. 9). We cannot solve the mystery or trace the course of our own mental processes, and how should we be able to comprehend his? Our minds, with all their utmost range and activity, move but upon the outskirts of the glorious realm of the infinite and eternal thought of God. 3. *His thoughts are all conformed to the eternal truth of things.* Indeed, they *are* themselves the eternal truth of things. For what are all created existences—material and spiritual, all laws, forces, etc., but embodiments and reflections of the "thoughts" of God? And whatever his purposes may be they are not variable; they partake of the immutability of his essential nature. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. xxxiii. 11).

II. GOD'S WAYS OF DEALING WITH US ARE OFTEN PERPLEXING, BUT A GRACIOUS PURPOSE GOVERNS ALL. "Thoughts of peace and not of evil" lie concealed within his darkest providences. 1. *The constitution of the universe, in spite of all its discords, bears abundant witness to the benign spirit that inspires it.* We have no sympathy with that gloomy and morbid view of it according to which, for aught that appears, it might have been fashioned by some spirit of cruelty and hate. True as it may be that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together," there is proof enough that "God's tender mercies are over all his works." 2. *The Bible has its anomalies, but it is the unfolding of a redemptive purpose.* The revelation of God's mercy towards a guilty, ruined world in the person of the Christ is the key to all its historic dispensations. As every chastisement inflicted on the Jewish people had some gracious design in it as regards themselves, so the whole course of their national life and ecclesiastical polity played its part in the development of that world-wide plan. And through all the changes and storms and conflicts that may yet be in store for the Church and the world, Scripture keeps alive the blessed hope of the future. The prophetic word is "as a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in our hearts" (2 Pet. i. 19). 3. *The saddest experiences in our personal life have their beneficent Divine intent.* Every cloud has its "silver lining." Our keenest sorrows often prove to be "celestial benedictions in a dark disguise." God's "thought of peace" is at the heart of all our earthly tribulations (Heb. xii. 6—11).

III. THE ISSUE ALWAYS JUSTIFIES GOD'S THOUGHTS AND WAYS. The "expected end," when it comes, never fails to solve the mystery of the path that led to it. The gracious purpose, hidden in the secrecy of the Eternal Mind, veiled under many forms of dark disguise, is then made manifest. God is his own Interpreter, and the day of his glorious self-vindication will surely come.

"His ways are love—though they transcend
Our feeble range of sight,
They wind through darkness to their end
In everlasting light."

W.

Vers. 1—7.—*The letter to the captives.* Notice the mention of those who bore this letter. We may conclude they were not mere messengers having no interest in the message they conveyed, but those who themselves would have much to say over and above what was written.

I. GOD'S CONSIDERATION FOR HIS PEOPLE IN THEIR CAPTIVITY. He not only means to bring that captivity to an end in his own time, but while it lasts it is to be made as little like captivity as possible. It was not enough that he should leave the nation in Babylon till the time of his chastisement expired. While they remained there, they were to have the largest opportunities compatible with the circumstances in which he had found it necessary to place them. And so when the circumstances of any life are untoward, when perhaps we have made them so by our own folly, God shows his solicitude that we should nevertheless have peace in our own hearts, and such ample guidance as may turn even the untoward into the helpful. God will not banish circum-

stances merely because we find them hard; but this we may always be sure of, that he will enable us to make the very best of them.

II. GOD'S ASSERTION OF HIS PART IN BRINGING THIS CAPTIVITY ABOUT. He had caused his people to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon. The place of their present abode was by his arrangement. It was their own fault as a nation that they had had to leave Jerusalem; but it was in God's own wisdom that they were planted in Babylon rather than another place. Clearly to perceive that the omnipotent God was disposing their outward relations, would enable them to listen all the more attentively to what instructions he had to give them for making the best of their present circumstances.

III. GOD'S PLAN FOR THE PROFIT AND COMFORT OF THE PRESENT GENERATION. The people are plainly told that they are to be there for seventy years. No energy of their own can get them away a year sooner; and no might of their captors can keep them a year later. Hence it is the true wisdom to accept the divinely settled position. No man among them was to neglect the possibilities of his brief temporal life by reason of a baseless expectation that he might soon return to his own land. He might indeed say, "If I show signs of settling down here, I shall be reckoned a very poor patriot." And so over against all temptations to restlessness and utter waste of existence there is this explicit direction from Jehovah. If any Israelite lives a wasted life in Babylon it will be his own fault. So to speak, God makes Babylon, for the time, a sort of substitute for the promised land. If the Israelite has only sufficient of the spirit of true faith and obedience in him, he may make even the land of captivity a place of blessing. For the nation Babylon was a mere place of sojourning, but for the individual it was to be his chief abode on earth. Hence the loving-kindness of God is manifest in telling him he might build a house and make a home and plant fields, thus settling down to a useful and cheerful life.

IV. GOD'S WILL WITH REGARD TO THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND BABYLON. Israel was to seek the peace of Babylon. It was to support everything that promoted peace and security. Naturally Israel would expect to find its chance in the difficulties of Babylon. If any formidable foe threatened the country, or the equal danger of civil war, it might only too easily seem to Israel that this would give the chance for liberty. But so far from this being really the case, God assures his people that Babylon's peace is their peace. This sets before us a principle of action which Christian people cannot too diligently observe. While it is true that we are not of this world, but must constantly rise superior to its habits and maxims, yet at the same time we cannot do too much to maintain the stability of governments and the public order of the land in which we live. While Christ would have us turn away from the cant of what is called patriotism, he would also have us to abhor everything that tends to anarchy. While the Spirit of God promotes the highest individuality, he also promotes the greatest order (1 Tim. ii. 1—4).—Y.

END OF VOL. I.

HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH.

VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

THEME	PAGE
The External Surroundings of the Life of Jeremiah	4, 9
Predestination	5
Diffidence overcome	5
The Power of Prophecy	6
The Almond Rod	7, 17
The Seething Pot	8, 17
Encouragements to Fidelity ...	8
Introductory Statements concerning Jeremiah's Parentage, etc. ...	10
The Dread Commission	11
The Ministry for a Corrupt Age ...	13
Jeremiah's Visions	13
Jehovah calls Jeremiah, etc.	15, 19, 20
The Vast Compass of the Prophet's Work	16
A Protracted Ministry	18
"What seest thou?"	20
Hastening Ills	20

CHAPTER II.

Recollections of the Happy Past ...	28
The Ingratitude of Sin	29
Wickedness in Leading Men ...	30
Broken Cisterns	30
Sin Self-Corrected	31
The Stains of Sin	32
False Confidence	33
A Sweet Remembrance embittered ...	33
The Divine Ideal, how lost and regained	35
Jehovah's Indictment against Israel	36, 39
The Sinner's Attempt to wash away his Sin	37
A Dread Snare of the Devil ...	37
The Restlessness of Sin	37
God's Estimation of his People's Love	38
First Love to God	38
Guilty Instruments of Divine Judgment	38
The Marvel of Unbelief	40
The Unreasonableness of appealing to Worldly Assistance in Spiritual Enterprises	40
God's Method of punishing Apostasy	41
The Shameless Shame of Idolatry ...	41
"Lords many and Gods many" ...	41
Rejecting the Chastisements of God	41
The Plea of Innocence a Culminating Sin	41
Israel's Desertion of Jehovah viewed in the Light of the Past	41
Heathendom gives an Unconscious Rebuke to Apostate Israel ...	42
Forsaking the Fountain of Living Waters	44
A Shame to be ashamed of ...	45
Why the Confidences of Men do not prosper	46
The People's Sin	47

CHAPTER III.

Filial Reminiscences of God ...	53
Insincere Repentance	54

THEME	PAGE
God inviting the Return of his Sinful Children	55
Religious Individualism	56
The Blessings of Redemption ...	56
Invitation and Response	57
From False to True Salvation ...	58
Shame	58
A Call to the Young	59
"Backsliding Israel"	60
The Offer of a Great Forgiveness ...	61
Israel's Cry to the Father and the Friend	62
Actions speak louder than Words ...	63
God will provide Pastors according to his own Heart	64
The Superseding of the Ark ...	65
The Gathering of the Nations to Jehovah's Throne	66
A Sincere Repentance in an Appropriate Place	67
Sin, Law, Grace	68
An Old and Sad but very True Story	69
The Comparative Advantages of Judah and Israel; Professors and Non-Professors	70
Confession of Sin the Indispensable Prerequisite for its Pardon ...	71
Married to God	73
The Great Difficulty overcome ...	74
God's Way of Restoration; or, the Experiences of a Young Convert ...	76
Supercession of External Religious Ordinances and Institutions ...	77
"Put among the Children" ...	77
Typical Penitence	78

CHAPTER IV.

Fallow Ground	82, 87
Divine Illusions	83
The Cleansing of the Heart a Necessary Condition of Salvation ...	83
The Folly of Misdirected Wisdom ...	84
Chaos the Result of Sin	85
The Abject Helplessness which resorts to False Pretensions, and its Failure	85
The Duty of Reality in Religious Profession	86
Human Uncertainty co-existing with Divine Illumination	86
The Wisdom of this World ...	87
Vain Thoughts	88, 94
The Peril of Profession without Possession of Real Religion	89
The Proclamation of Woe	91
Inflicted Infatuation; or, the Deceived of God	91
The Loving Charge of the Great Searcher of Hearts	92
God's Reserve of Mercy	95
A Surely Coming Confession compelling a Present Serious Question	99
"The Fellowship of Christ's Sufferings"	100
Broken Reeds	102
"There shall be Weeping" ...	103
The Kind of Return which Jehovah requires	104
Jehovah's Requirement with Respect to the Oath	105
Thoroughness in Spiritual Culture ...	106
Despair among the Leaders in Israel	107
The Uses of the Wind	108
The Unwashed Heart and the Vain Purposes cherished in it ...	109
Those who are Wise to do Evil ...	110
A Threatened Return from Cosmos to Chaos	111
Departed Charms that cannot be restored	112

CHAPTER V.

Forgiveness for Many through the Righteousness of One	116
Fruitless Chastisement ...	116, 122
Culpable Unbelief	117
Suitable Retribution	118
Man rebuked by Nature	118
The most Appalling Condition to which a Nation can sink ...	119
A Wicked City spared for the Sake of One Saint	119
What God requires of Man ...	120
Sparing Mercy	121
God's Power in restraining the Forces of Nature	121
Can a Righteous Man be found in Jerusalem?	121
The Vineyard spoiled because of the Degenerate Branches	123
Those who call the Word of Jehovah a Lie	124
A Lesson from the Raging Sea ...	125
The Worst Kind of Wickedness found among the People of Jehovah ...	126
Mutual Helpers in Wrong-Doing ...	127

THEME	PAGE
True Manhood	128
An Unfailing Appeal	131
The Sorrow of Sorrows	131
The Rich and the Poor meet together	132
The Moral Disadvantages of the Poor	133
How Men curse their Blessings ...	134
Battlements not the Lord's ...	135
The Silken Fetter	136
God's Gifts of the Rains and the Harvest	138
The Devil's Lure	142
A Wonderful and Horrible Thing indeed	142
Nature's Witness against Blind Eyes and Rebellious Hearts	143

CHAPTER VI.

Wells of Wickedness	149
The Indifference of Men and the Burden of Truth	149
False Peace	150
The Old Paths 151, 155,	171
Watchmen	152
Worthless Sacrifices	152
Testing Fires	152
The Apostate City that cannot be let alone	153
The Ministry of Deceit	154
The Reasonableness of the Divine Judgments	156
The Prophet a Spiritual Assayer ...	156
A Dreadful Onlook	157
Signal-Fires	159
The Lord's Pasture	159
Sorrow because of Eventide ...	160
How the Kingdom of Heaven is to be taken	163
The Real Director of Human Affairs	163
Sin compared to a "Fountain" ...	164
The Worst Woe of the Wicked ...	165
"Turn back thine Hand"	165
The Preacher's Bitter Cry	166
The Uncircumcised Ear	167
The Vampires of the Soul	168
The Sin against the Holy Ghost ...	170
At the Meeting of the Ways ...	173
God's Appeal for Vindication of his Vengeance	174
The Fruit of Thought	174
Abhorred Sacrifices	175
"The Bellows are Burned" ...	175
The Good Way	176
Jerusalem like a Fountain casting forth Evil	177
Covetousness a Universal Sin ...	178
Healing the Hurt slightly ...	179
The Ancient Paths to be sought and walked in	180
Sweet and Fragrant Things made Abominable to God	181
"Reprobate Silver"	182

CHAPTER VII.

Preaching Repentance	187
The Confidence of Superstition ...	188
The Voice Unheeded	188
Forbidden Prayers ... 189,	206
Declension	190
Horrors of Retribution	190
Keeping the Temple Gate	191
Who shall dwell in the House of the Lord?...	192
"Rising up early"	192
Idolatry a Detailed Insult to Jehovah	193
The Desecration of Tophet ...	194
The Relations of Righteousness and Religion	194
The Indispensable Condition of all Grace	196
How Men deceive themselves ...	197
Strange Church-Goers	199
Sacrilege	200
Warning Voices	201
Shiloh, or the God-Forsaken Shrine ...	201
The Divine Long-Suffering worn out...	204
Idolatrous Worship both a Warning and a Model	206
The Recoil of Sin	207
The Innocent Victims of Sin ...	208
The Indispensable Condition of Well-being	209
The Harvest of Sin	209
"Lying Words"	210
The Doom of the Temple	210
The Family joined in Idolatry ...	211
The Inveterate Disobedience of Israel	212

CHAPTER VIII.

Persistent Depravity	217
A Lesson from the Birds	217
Untrustworthy Literature	218
Despair	219
Harvest Contrasts...	219

THEME	PAGE
"Balm in Gilead" ...	220, 232
Apostasy an Anomalous and Incalculable Thing	221
"Peace, Peace; when there is no Peace"	221
False Hopes ministering Despair ...	222
Occasions of Hoped-for Salvation that have not availed	223
"Physician, heal thyself"	223
Befooled indeed	224
Backsliding in its Worst Forms ...	226
The Way Home	227
The Prophet's Grievous Lament ...	229
Christ and the Holy Ghost Realities	230
The Bones of the Dead Idolaters cast out before their Cities	233
A Pitiable Condition: Death Preferable to Life	234
The Unnatural Conduct of Jerusalem	235
The Exposure of Pseudo-Wisdom ...	236
The Serpents which cannot be charmed	237
"The Life is more than the Meat" ...	238
Why the Hurt of Israel is not healed	239

CHAPTER IX.

Grief for Others	243
Falsehood	243
A Visitation of God	244
The Causes of National Disaster ...	244
False Boasting and True Confidence	245
Impartial Justice	246
Vicarious Grief	246
The Man of God's Longing for Seclusion	247
The Self-Opposition and Futility of the Sinner's Life	247
The Affliction of God's Professed People an Enigma to be explained	247
The Death of the Wicked contrary to Nature	248
The Knowledge of God the only Real "Glory" of Man	249
The Testimony of Tears	249
The Moral Degradation of Women ...	251
Sighings after the Wilderness ...	252
The Doings and Doom of Deceit ...	253
The Terrible Threatenings of Love...	254
The Inquest on the Slain of Judah and Jerusalem	256
Hereditary Sin Real Sin	257
Death's Doings	258

THEME	PAGE
"Whereof to glory"	259
The Chief Good	260
Incessant Weeping over the Calamities of Israel	261
The Lodging-Place in the Wilderness	262
Wickedness prevailing, and why it prevails	263
The Social Bond a Rope of Sand ...	264
Exultation of Heart and Life according to the Will of God	265

CHAPTER X.

The Folly of Paganism	271
The Incomparable Greatness of God	271
The Nature of God	272
God the Portion of Israel	272
Confession and Correction	273
The Helplessness of Heathen Gods a Conclusive Argument against them	274
The Uniqueness of Jehovah ...	274
Grief borne that cannot be cured ...	274
Idolatry	275
"The Portion of Jacob"	277
Wherefore God doth judge the World	280
Submission	281
The Ruin wrought by the Prayerless Pastor...	283
Fruits of a Chastened Spirit ...	286
"The Way of Man"	288
What Men fear and what they ought to fear	289
The Dismay of the Heathen at the Signs of Heaven	290
The Way of Man not in himself ...	291
God's Correction of his People ...	292

CHAPTER XI.

The Ancient Covenant	296
Idolatry confounded	297
The Olive struck by Lightning	297, 311
The Conspiracy of Anathoth ...	298
The Response of the Spiritual Conscience to the Words of God ...	299
Spiritual Atavism; or, the Sins of the Fathers	300
The Staying of Intercession ...	300
Perils of Prophesying	301
The Doom of Disobedience... ...	302
The Precious Recompenses of Obedience	303
The First Last	305

THEME	PAGE
The Limits of Long-Suffering Love...	307
The Baffled Plot	308
The Covenant with the Fathers Binding on the Children	310
Intercession Unavailing	310
The Prophet in his own Country ...	312

CHAPTER XII.

The Prosperity of the Wicked ...	315
God Near to the Mouth but Far from the Life	316
A Dark Prospect	317
The Forsaken Heritage	318
Profitless Labour	318
General Punishment and General Restoration	319
Moral Difficulties with the Providence of God	320
A Prophet's Foes they of his own Household	320
Leaving All for God	321
Mercy and Judgment	321
Perplexing Questions	322
Imprecatory Prayers	323
Failure in Little Things	324
The Hiding of God's Face... ...	325
The Speckled Bird	325
The Tide that has no Ebb, but ever flows	327
The Prophet's Complaint	327
The Prophet puzzled by the Prosperity of the Wicked	329
The Inheritance that has lost its Charms...	330
Shepherds where they ought not to be	331
Sowing Wheat and Reaping Thorns	331

CHAPTER XIII.

The Spoiled Girdle 335, 338, 341,	349
The Parable of the Wine-Flagons ...	336
Darkness	336
Royalty Humbled	337
The Ethiopian's Skin and the Leopard's Spots	337
Broken Pitchers; or, Worldly Sufficiency and its Punishment ...	339
Days of Grace, and how they should be spent	339
Moral Helplessness: how induced ...	340
Vessels of Wrath	342
The Last Results of Sin	342
"Be not Proud"	342
Lost upon the Dark Mountains ...	343
The Neglected Trust demanded ...	344
Sin its own Scourge	346
An Awful Condition indeed ...	346
The One Thing Needful	347
A Solemn Warning	348
A Moral Impossibility	349
A Demand for the Timely Giving of what is due to Jehovah	350
A Searching Question to the Shepherd	352
A Natural Impossibility	353

CHAPTER XIV.

A Plague of Drought	356
A Plea for Mercy in Spite of Guilt ...	357
The Hope of Israel a Stranger in the Land	357
False Prophets 358,	366
Prayer for Mercy rejected	359
Prayer for Rain	359
A Prayer for God's People in Time of his Judgments	360
Prayer a Fruit of Chastisement ...	361
Invoking the Honour of God ...	361
Thankfulness through Contrast: a Harvest Sermon	362
An Absent God deplored	363
False Teachers no Adequate Excuse for Evil Conduct	364
The Distracting Power of Great Distress	365
A Dreadful Apprehension	366
The Miseries produced by Lack of Water	368
An Appeal out of the Depths of Separation from God	369
The Severities of Jehovah—Sword, Famine, and Pestilence	370
The Peculiar Doom of the False Prophets	371

CHAPTER XV.

Various Destinies of Punishment ...	376
God Weary of Repenting	377
Sunset at Noon	377
The Prayer of the Persecuted ...	378
The Words of God found and eaten ...	379
The Sadness and Solitude of a Prophet	379

THEME	PAGE
A Wide Recognition of the Good without Compromise with the Evil	380
Sins for which Saintly Intercession cannot avail	381
The Offence of Faithful Preaching ...	382
"Thou knowest it"	382
God's Words a Heartfelt Joy ...	383
The Preacher's Weakness and Strength	383
Fearful Aspects of the Divine Character	384
The Limits of Intercessory Prayer ...	384
Great Intercessors	385
The Sins of the Fathers visited upon the Children	386
The Darkened Home	387
A Vain Contest	387
How to study the Scriptures ...	391
Fruitless Intercession ...	393, 394
The Living Word	393
The Man who felt he had been born to Strife and Contention	395
The Prophet's Claim upon Jehovah, and the Grounds of the Claim ...	396

CHAPTER XVI.

"Forbidding to marry"	399
"Worse than your Fathers" ...	399
The Greatest Gratitude for the Latest Blessings	400
Fishers and Hunters	400
God revealed to the Heathen by his Judgment on his People	401
Celibacy as an Obligation of the Minister of God	402
The Destiny of Sinners a Self-Created One	403
Sin a Tyrannous and Exhaustive Service	404
The Old Deliverance forgotten in the New	405
The Heathen turning to the True God	406
Commands Countermanded ...	407
Conscience Dead	408
Great Mercies the Forerunners of Greater still	409
Sin found out	410
The Accusers of the Ungodly ...	410
Domestic Relations become a Curse ...	411
The House of Mourning and the House of Feasting alike forbidden ...	412
Two Great Recollections	413
The Confession of the Idolatrous Gentiles	414

CHAPTER XVII.

Engraved Sin	419
The Desert Shrub and the Flourishing Tree	419
The Evil Heart searched and judged	420
Partridge-Nests	421
The Hope of Israel	421
The Sabbath ... 422, 425, 428,	441
Sin's Record	423
Heart Mysteries and their Interpreter	423
The Saint's Refuge	424
Divine Prophecy and Human Impatience	425
"The Sin of Judah"	426
"The Place of our Sanctuary" ...	426
"Be not a Terror unto me" ...	428
Trust: Human and Divine	429
The Profound Impression of Judah's Sin	430
The Curse upon the Man who trusts in Man	431
The Blessing on the Man who trusts in Jehovah	433
The Searching and Knowing of the Heart	434
Riches wrongly gotten, and the Consequence	435
An Inspiring Invocation	436
"Written in the Earth"	437
He whom God heals is really healed	438
"Where is the Word of the Lord?"	438
The Prophet's Consciousness of Integrity	439

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Potter and the Clay 444, 448, 450, 453,	454
God's Action determined by Man's Conduct	445
Rejected Preaching	446
Mountain Snow	446
The Opposition of Officials ...	447
The Fatalism of the Wicked ...	448
Jehovah an Unfailing Help to his People; or, the "Snow of Lebanon"	449
Ecclesiastical Succession *versus* Individual Ministry	449

THEME PAGE
The Preacher's Foes; or, False Tongues and Deaf Ears 449
A Never-to-be-forgotten Principle of Interpretation 451
Despair—its Causes, Consequences, and Cure 451
Persecution 452
Jeremiah's Enemies and his Prayer against them 455

CHAPTER XIX.

The Broken Bottle ... 457, 459, 461
The Warning Confirmed 458
Denunciations of Doom 460
The Sin and Punishment of Pashur 461

CHAPTER XX.

Pashur 464
Enticed and overpowered by God ... 465
The Burning Fire of Inspiration ... 466
A Prophet persecuted by Spies ... 466
Thanksgiving for Future Blessings ... 467
Jeremiah cursing the Day of his Birth 468, 479
The Behaviour of the Wicked towards the Truth 469
Magor-Missabib; or, the Fate of a False Prophet 469
The Sorrow and Joy of God's Servant 470
Why God's Servants labour on ... 471
"Is Life worth Living?" 473
A Burning Fire within 475
A Changed Name and a Dreadful Doom 476
A Conflict not to be avoided ... 477
The Name Magor-Missabib wrongly applied 478

CHAPTER XXI.

God consulted in Vain 480
The Choice between Life and Death 481
God against Jerusalem 482
Zedekiah's Message; or, the Prayer of the Ungodly 482
God's Answer to Earthly Presumption 483
Saved so as by Fire 484
A Sad but Common Necessity ... 485
A King appealing for a Prophet's Intercession 487
Escape for the Individual among the Calamities of the Nation ... 488

CHAPTER XXII.

Court Preaching 492
On Visiting the Ruins of a City ... 493
Misspent Tears 494, 500
Dishonest Builders 495
The Voice of God disregarded in Prosperity 495
Truth-Speaking under Difficulties ... 496
Building in Unrighteousness ... 496
Monumental Judgments 497
Fates worse than Death 497
True Royalty 498
The Mighty Pleadings of God ... 498
The Nemesis of Oppression ... 502
Son and Father: a Sad Contrast ... 503
Exceptional Facts in the Law of Transmission of Character 505
The Impassioned Cry of God to Man 507
A King addressed in Mingled Promise and Warning 508
The Mistakes of the Mourner ... 510
A Right Aim pursued by a Wrong and Cruel Method 510

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Character of Leading Men ... 518
The Branch of David 518
The New Name 519
Uninspired Prophecy 520
The Omnipresence of God ... 521, 526, 534
The Abuse of a Word 522
The "Burden" 522
False Shepherds and the True ... 523
"The Lord our Righteousness" ... 524
"Trying the Spirits" 524
Unauthorized Authority 525
Dreams that make the Name of God to be forgotten 526
The Faithful Utterance of Divine Revelation 526
Despising Prophesyings 527
"The Lord our Righteousness" ... 527
"What is the Chaff?" 530
Jehovah-Tsidkenu 533
Shepherds, Bad and Good 536
The Righteous Scion of David ... 537

THEME	PAGE
Prophets strengthening the Hands of Evil-Doers	538
Speaking the Vision of one's own Heart	539
The Giving Forth of the Word of Man as the Word of God	540

CHAPTER XXIV.

Two Baskets of Figs	542, 544, 546, 547
Prosperity Restored	543
Sword, Famine, and Pestilence ...	544
Calamity with God and without him	545
Punished for Salvation; left alone for Destruction	545
"I will set mine Eyes upon them for Good"...	545
The Conditions and Relations of Salvation	546
A Heart to know the Lord ...	547

CHAPTER XXV.

A Melancholy Review of Twenty-Three Years of Work	553, 560
The Chief Purpose of Prophecy ...	554
"Nebuchadrezzar . . . my Servant"	555, 561
The Wine-Cup of Fury	556
The Ineffectual Palladium of a Great Name	557
Howling Shepherds	557
Messages Recapitulated	558
Judgment plainly Declared ...	559
Judgment beginning at the House of God	559
The Vision of Final Judgment ...	560
Jehovah's Controversy with the Nations	562

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Duty of Declaring the Whole Truth	564
A Scene in a Jewish Court of Law ...	566
The Story of an Obscure Martyr ...	567
A Friend in Need ...	567, 573
God's Mercy shown in his Messages	568
The Prophet of God arraigned by the Nation	568
Spiritual Prerogative not Inalienable	569
The Perils of Prophesying	570
The Defence of the Witness for the Truth	570
Help raised up for God's Servants in Times of Peril	570
Jeremiah reckoned Worthy of Death	570
Jeremiah reckoned not Worthy of Death	571
An Argument from History ...	572

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Rights of the Creator	575
God's Disposal of Man's Possessions	576
The Duty of Non-Resistance ...	576
Prophecy tested by Prayer ...	577, 578
Divine Judgments not to be resisted	578
Jehovah's Consideration towards some Neighbours of Israel	579

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Story of Hananiah the Prophet	581
An Appeal to Ancient Prophecy ...	582
Yokes of Iron	583
"This Year thou shalt die" ...	583
How to answer those who oppose the Truth	584
Presumption increasing with Impunity	585
A False Prophet and his Fate ...	585

CHAPTER XXIX.

How to make the Best of Adversity ...	589
Civic Duties	590
Seventy Years	590
God's Thoughts concerning us ...	591
Seeking God with the Whole Heart ...	592
Shemaiah	592
Duties and Consolations of God's Captivity	593
Signs that God's Favour is restored ...	594
The Punishment of False Prophets ...	594
God's Message to the Captives ...	595
Thoughts of Peace	596
The Letter to the Captives ...	597