

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR:

OR,

ANECDOTES, SIMILES, EMBLEMS, ILLUSTRATIONS, EXPOSITORY,
SCIENTIFIC, GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND HOMILETIC,
GATHERED FROM A WIDE RANGE OF HOME AND
FOREIGN LITERATURE, ON THE VERSES
OF THE BIBLE.

BY

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II. KINGS.

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INTRODUCTION TO II. KINGS.

THE CHARACTER AND SCOPE OF THE BOOK OF KINGS.—The book was clearly designed to be a continuation of the history contained in the Book of Samuel. The writer records the fulfilment of the promises which God had made to David and his line. A son was to succeed David, whose kingdom should be established of the Lord, who should build a house for the name of Jehovah, and to whom God would be a Father, and from whom the mercy of the Lord should not depart (2 Sam. vii.). To show that this prophecy was fulfilled is the object of the Book of Kings, and whatever does not conduce thereto is passed over by the compiler with but little notice. There elapsed, no doubt, some considerable time between the plague in Jerusalem, with which the Book of Samuel closes, and the weak age of David described in the opening paragraph of the Book of Kings. But to give historical events in their full and complete order is no part of our writer's aim, as we can see from every portion of his work. He therefore begins his narrative with so much, and no more, of the story of David's later days as serves to introduce the accession of Solomon. Thus he takes up the thread of the previous book, and, his subject once opened, he follows the same line throughout. The glory and prosperity of Solomon at first; then his decline from God's ways, and the divinely sent chastisements that followed thereupon, fill a large part of the early chapters. When the kingdom is divided, and the Northern tribes have adopted a forbidden form of worship, the history follows Israel in her long line of wicked princes till sin has brought destruction, while the fortunes of the line of David are so traced as to bring prominently before us the constantly preserved succession; while the closing record of the book tells how in Babylon one of the royal line still remained, and was lifted up and kindly dealt with by the successor of the monarch who had led him away captive. "What God hath promised to the house of David He has thus fulfilled," expresses the main character of the book, and, except where political and military matters illustrate the subject with which he deals, the compiler gives them a very passing notice, and, as we can see from a comparison with Chronicles, he has left out altogether large passages of such history, which he had before him. (*J. R. Lumby, D.D.*)

THE UNITY OF THE HISTORICAL BOOKS OF THE BIBLE.—The division into two books, being purely artificial and, as it were, mechanical, may be overlooked in speaking of them; and it must also be remembered that the division between the Books of Kings and Samuel is equally artificial, and that in point of fact the historical books commencing with Judges and ending with 2 Kings present the appearance of one work, giving a continuous history of Israel from the time of Joshua to the death of Jehoiachin. It must suffice here to mention, in support of this assertion, the frequent allusion in the Book of Judges to the times of the Kings of Israel (xvii. 6, xviii. 1, xix. 1, xxi. 25), the concurrent evidence of chap. ii., that the writer lived in an age when he could take a retrospect of the whole time during which the judges ruled (vers. 16–19), i.e., that he lived after the monarchy had been established; the occurrence in the Book of Judges, for the first time, of the phrase "the Spirit of Jehovah" (iii. 10), which is repeated often in the book (vi. 34, xi. 29, xiii. 25, xiv. 6), and is of frequent use in Samuel and Kings (e.g. 1 Sam. x. 6, xvi. 13, 14, xxi. 9; 2 Sam. xxiii. 2; 1 Kings xxii. 24; 2 Kings ii. 16); the allusion in i. 21 to the capture of Jebus, and the continuance of a Jebusite population (2 Sam. xxiv. 16); the reference (xx. 27) to the removal of the ark of the covenant from Shiloh to Jerusalem, and the expression in those days pointing, as in xvii. 6, to remote times; the distinct reference, in xviii. 30, to the captivity of Israel by Shalmaneser; with the facts that the Books of Judges, Ruth, Samuel, and Kings, form one unbroken narrative, similar in general character, which has no beginning except at Judges i., while, it may be added, the Book of Judges is not a continuation of Joshua, but opens

with a repetition of the same events with which Joshua closes. In like manner the Book of Ruth clearly forms part of those of Samuel, supplying as it does the essential point of David's genealogy and early family history, and is no less clearly connected with the Book of Judges by its opening verse, and the epoch to which the whole book relates. . . . And generally the style of the narrative, ordinarily quiet and simple, but rising to great vigour and spirit when stirring deeds are described, and the introduction of poetry or poetic style in the midst of the narrative, constitute such strong features of resemblance as lead to the conclusion that these several books form but one work. (*W. Smith, D.D.*)

CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.—The history comprehends the whole time of the Israelitish monarchy, exclusive of the reigns of Saul and David, whether existing as one kingdom under Solomon and the eight last kings, or divided into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. It exhibits the Israelites in the two extremes of power and weakness; under Solomon, extending their dominion over tributary kingdoms from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean and the borders of Egypt (1 Kings iv. 21); under the last kings, reduced to a miserable remnant, subject alternately to Egypt and Assyria, till at length they were rooted up from their own land. As the cause of this decadence it points out the division of Solomon's monarchy into two parts, followed by the religious schism and idolatrous worship brought about from political motives by Jeroboam. How the subsequent war was between the two kingdoms necessarily weakened both; how they led to calling in the stranger to their aid whenever their power was equally balanced, of which the result was the destruction first of one kingdom and then of the other; how a further evil of these foreign alliances was the adoption of the idolatrous superstitions of the heathen nations whose friendship and protection they sought, by which they forfeited the Divine protection—all this is with great clearness and simplicity set forth in these books, which treat equally of the two kingdoms while they lasted. (*Ibid.*)

THE FRAMEWORK OF KINGS.—The first step in the analysis of the book must be to trace the process by which it was first thrown into something like its present shape. It so happens that this inquiry is facilitated by a very clear indication of editorial activity, namely, the recurrence of a regular series of notices by which the different reigns are introduced and concluded. This set of formulas constitutes a sort of framework, by which the narrative is at once held together and at the same time divided into definite compartments; and its structure is so uniform as to make it practically certain that the scheme was carried through by a single writer. It will appear afterwards that the author of the "framework" was the first to arrange the material in its present order, and is therefore entitled to be regarded as the main compiler of the Book of Kings. It is worth while to look somewhat closely at the structure of this framework. The complete Introductory Formula for the kings of Judah embraces the following items: (a) the date of accession according to the year of the contemporary king of Israel (which we shall call, for brevity, the Synchronism); (b) the age of the king at his accession; (c) the duration of the reign; (d) the name of the queen-mother; (e) a judgment on the religious character of the reign. The corresponding formula for the kings of Israel is similar in form as regards a, c, and e; but is simplified by the omission of b (the age of accession), and d (the name of the queen-mother). The Concluding Formulas contain (a) a reference to the proximate source from which the author has drawn some of his materials; (b) a notice of the king's death and burial; and (c) the name of his successor. With the exception of the Synchronisms, which were possible only for the period of the divided monarchy, the framework is applied consistently and with few intermissions to the whole history, from the death of David (1 Kings ii. 10) to the accession of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah (2 Kings xxiv. 18 f.). The entire absence of either formula is extremely rare. And although fragments from the annals are frequently taken up into the framework, there is only one case (or at most two) where any considerable part of the narrative has been allowed, as it were, to slip out of the framework altogether, i.e., to appear between the conclusion of one reign and the introduction of the next: 2 Kings ii. (xiii. 14-25). How far these irregularities are designed, and how far they are due to alterations of the text, is a question that has to be considered for each case separately. Now, even in the bare and formal statements of the framework there are several indica-

tions that its author is the person mainly responsible for the selection and disposition of the historical material of which the book is composed. 1. The chronology of the framework furnishes the key to the somewhat peculiar arrangement of the parallel histories of Israel and Judah. The method adopted is to treat the affairs of each kingdom independently, and carry forward the narrative till it reaches the end of a reign in which a change of sovereign has occurred in the sister kingdom. Then the records of the other monarchy are taken up, and continued in like manner, till they have gone beyond the date at which the first series stopped. Such an arrangement is obviously impossible without the control of a systematic chronology; and since the order corresponds perfectly with the data of the framework, there is a presumption that both proceed from the same author. 2. The manner in which the writer of the framework refers to written documents for information which is not to be found in the book strongly suggests that he has exercised his personal judgment as to the matters that ought to be embodied in the history. 3. But the most important point is that in the religious judgments of the introductory formulas the writer reveals a definite theory or point of view, which could hardly fail to exert an influence on the historical presentation as a whole. These judgments involve several religious principles. e.g., the duty of whole-hearted loyalty to Yahweh, and the sinfulness of idolatry in all its varied forms and degrees. (*Twentieth Century Bible*.)

CHRONOLOGICAL SYSTEM.—It is plain that the author had a chronological system within which his materials were arranged. The chronological scheme is only approximately, and not strictly, precise. Both in the Book of Judges and here we have striking examples of the free use of numbers. In 2 Samuel v. 4, 5, it is stated that David reigned forty years, and then that he reigned seven years and six months over Judah, and thirty-three years over all Israel. It would appear that, according to the chronological system observed in this book, the whole history of Israel, from the Exodus to the close of the Babylonian Exile, fell into two great cycles of 480 years each, or twelve times forty. The first of these great periods extended to the beginning of the building of the temple, and this is given as a leading date in 1 Kings vi. 1. Unless, however, we are to regard this as merely a rough approximation based on the convenient reckoning by forties, it is difficult to reconcile the date with computations of the details and with statements of other books. The perplexity of the chronology increases when we come to details of the several reigns. For example, the book gives the synchronism of the two kingdoms, as we have seen. Yet if we add up the numbers given in detail, from the disruption of the kingdoms to the extinction of the Northern line, we obtain a total of 242 years for the kingdom of Israel, while the total for the kingdom of Judah up to the same point is 259. Or again, if we count from the disruption of the kingdom to the death of Ahaziah of Judah and Joram of Israel, who were killed at the same time by Jehu (2 Kings ix. 24-27), we get ninety-five years for the Judæan kings and ninety-eight for the Israelite; and from that date onward to the fall of the Northern kingdom, the number is 165 years for the Judæan and 144 for the Israelite. It is evident that there is not precise accuracy either in the synchronisms or in the statements as to the duration of the reigns; and it seems, on the whole, probable that parts of years were not reckoned, and also that, in the synchronisms, the last year of one reign was sometimes counted as the first of another. We must, in short, be content to take the numbers as approximate, and not shut our eyes to the evident partiality for what was apparently a Hebrew habit of reckoning by forties. (*The Temple Bible*.)

DATE OF COMPOSITION AND AUTHORSHIP.—The Book of Kings bears on the face of it that it is a compilation of materials, of the nature of which we shall have to speak presently. A work covering so long a period could be nothing else. The question now to be considered is—At what time the materials, relating to different times, and not all coming within the personal cognizance of the writer, were brought together to form the connected work before us? The latest date mentioned in the book, as has been already stated, is the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin, or, say, the year 562 B.C. That was about twenty-four years later than the final deportation and the downfall of Jerusalem, and about twenty-four years before the Edict of Cyrus permitting the return of the Jews to their own land. And as there is no mention of the return, nor indication of

the close of the Exile, we may conclude that the last touch was given to the book in the Captivity. The question is whether the whole work received shape at this late date, or whether the late writer was merely an editor who brought up to date a work which had been written at an earlier period. On the one hand, we find not only the closing notice of the release of Jehoiachin from prison, but brief intimations and expressions here and there which may be taken as implying the time of the Exile. Thus, under the reign of Solomon, we read that he "reigned over all the kingdoms from the river" (i.e. the Euphrates) "unto the land of the Philistines," that "he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphssah even unto Azzah" (1 Kings iv. 21, 24). The expression here used in the A.V. "on this side the river" must be rendered "beyond the river," and the context shows that the writer is estimating the limits from the Euphrates westwards, and so, presumably, his own standpoint is on the east of the river, namely, in the land of Exile. The passage, however, from ver. 20 to ver. 25, has the appearance of an insertion. Other passages that have been taken by some writers as proving an Exilian date cannot be relied on as establishing that inference, for they are such as are frequently found in the prophets who threaten Judah with the extremity of Divine displeasure long before the time of the Exile. See, for example, 1 Kings ix. 7-9, xi. 39; 2 Kings xx. 17, 18, xxi. 11-15, xxii. 15-20, xxiii. 26, 27. On the other hand, there is a note of time, expressed in the words "unto this day," which recurs pretty frequently in the narrative; and, although in not a few cases it is employed in such a general way that we cannot deduce from it any conclusion as to date, in several other cases it is used in connections which conclusively imply a pre-Exilian date. For example, in the account of the dedication of the temple, after saying that the staves for bearing the ark were drawn out till the ends were seen in the Holy Place, the narrative continues, "and there they are unto this day" (1 Kings viii. 8), a statement which could only apply so long as the temple was standing. Again, in regard to the descendants of the old Canaanite inhabitants of the country, it is said that Solomon laid upon them a service of taskwork "unto this day," implying a time before national independence came to an end (1 Kings ix. 21). We even read in one place, "So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day" (1 Kings xii. 10), apparently implying the co-existence of both kingdoms, and certainly implying the survival of the "house of David." So also "Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day" (2 Kings viii. 22). And, to mention only one other passage in the description of the fate of the Northern kingdom, we are told that the mixed people who were settled in the territory formerly occupied by the ten tribes, "unto this day do after the former manners"—a description which, no doubt, would be applicable after the Exile, although the terms would be more suitable if coming from one living near to the locality and observant of the events. On the whole, therefore, it is most probable that, though the book received an editorial addition at the end, and a few explanatory insertions after the Exile, yet it was composed substantially as it lies before us while the kingdom of Judah was still in existence, though not long before its extinction. (*The Temple Bible.*)

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CHAPTER I.

VERS. 1-6. And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice.—*Worldly royalty and personal godliness* :—I. **WORLDLY ROYALTY IN A HUMILIATING CONDITION.** 1. A king in mortal suffering. 2. A king in mental distress. 3. A king in superstitious darkness. II. **PERSONAL GODLINESS DIVINELY MAJESTIC.** Elijah is an example of personal godliness, though, in a worldly sense, he was very poor, and his costume seemed to be almost the meanest of the mean. But see the majesty of this man in two things. 1. In receiving communications from heaven. "But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite." 2. In reproving the king. Which is the better—a throne or a godly character? Fools only prefer the former. (*Homilist.*) *Ahaziah* :—I. **THAT MEN IN CALAMITY NATURALLY SEEK A REFUGE.** Whatever was the character of the accident which befel Ahaziah, it awakened in his mind the greatest concern, so that he was apprehensive of his life, and he wanted to know the issue of his affliction. And, so like Ahaziah, all men seek shelter when the storm gathers around them, that they may be shielded from its violence. II. **THAT THE REFUGES OF THE WICKED ARE OFTEN VAIN.** Ahaziah sent his messengers to Baal-zebub, as his only hope in distress, but they were not permitted even to reach the shrine of that deity. So that the god of Ekron was of no help to the King of Israel. III. **THAT CALAMITY OR AFFLICTION ALONE IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO LEAD MEN TO REPENTANCE.** Sometimes it is thought that by means of adverse circumstances men can be brought to God; but it was not so in the case of Ahaziah. IV. **THAT GOD WILL VINDICATE HIS OWN HONOUR AGAINST THE REBELLION OF THE WICKED.** Ahaziah, by seeking to consult Baal-zebub, ignored Jehovah, and thus dishonoured Him in the eyes of the people. In whatever way men may refuse to acknowledge God, and rebel against Him, He, in His own time, will bring them to nought, and vindicate His character as a God of honour, majesty, mercy, and love. (*T. Cain.*) *False religious appeals* :—Ahaziah, the man of whom this chapter speaks, was the son of Ahab and of Jezebel. He was badly born. Some allowance must be made for this fact in estimating his character. Ahaziah fell through the lattice, and in his helplessness he became religious. Man must have some God. Even atheism is a kind of religion. When a man recoils openly from what may be termed the public faith of his country, he seeks to apologise for his recoil, and to make up for his church absence by creating high obligations of another class: he plays the patriot; he plays the disciplinarian—in some way he will try to make up for, or defend, the recoil of his soul from the old altar of his country. It is in their helplessness that we really know what men are. The cry for friendship is but a subdued cry for God. Sometimes men will invent gods of their own. It is said of Shakespeare that he first exhausted worlds, and then invented new. That was right. It was but of the liberty of a poet so to do. But it is no part of the liberty of the soul. Necessity forbids it, because the true God cannot be exhausted. Who can exhaust nature? Who can exhaust nature's God? Still, the imagination of man is evil continually. He will invent new ways of enjoying himself. He will degrade religion into a mere form of interrogation. This is what Ahaziah did in this instance: "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub" (ver. 2). All

that we sometimes want of God is that He should be the great fortune-teller. If He will tell us how this transaction will turn out, how this speculation will fructify, how this illness will terminate, how this revolution will eventuate—that is all we want with Him; a question-answering God; a God that will specially take care of us and nurse us into strength, that we may spend that strength in reviling against His throne. How true it is that Ahaziah represents us all in making his religion into a mere form of question-asking: in other words, into a form of selfishness! Nothing can be so selfish as religion. (*J. Parker, D.D.)*

Elijah and the god of Ekron.—The 5th of February 1685 witnessed a sad scene in the palace of Whitehall. The second Charles lay in the last agony, while, amid the courtly circle around his bed, stood Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Ken, the Bishop of Bath and Wells. “The king is really and truly a Catholic,” whispers the Duchess of Portsmouth to the French ambassador; “and yet his bed-chamber is full of Protestant clergymen.” The fact had been long suspected, and gave additional earnestness to the holy men who desired to prepare the dying monarch for his inevitable and solemn change. “It is time to speak out, sir,” exclaims Sancroft; “for you are about to appear before a Judge who is no respecter of persons.” “Will you not die in the communion of the Church of England?” anxiously asks Ken; the king gives no response. “Will you receive the sacrament?” continues the bishop; the king replies, “There is no hurry, and I am too weak.” “Do you wish pardon of sin?” rejoins the favourite prelate, whose hymns are still sung in our Christian churches; the dying man carelessly adds, “It can do me no hurt”—on which, says Macaulay, “the bishop put forth all his eloquence, till his pathetic exhortation awed and melted the bystanders to such a degree, that some among them believed him to be filled with the same spirit which in the old time had, by the mouths of Nathan and Elias, called sinful princes to repentance.” To complete the parallel we propose, we must notice another incident in this dying scene. “If it costs me my life,” exclaims the Duke of York, afterwards James II., “I will fetter a priest.” With some difficulty he is found. He is smuggled into the royal presence, and the chamber of death. “He is welcome,” says Charles. The monarch who refused to listen to Sancroft and Ken, had an open ear for Father Huddleston. The monarch who was unwilling to die in the Church of England, is perfectly willing to die in the Church of Rome. For three-quarters of an hour he “confesses,” adores the “crucifix,” receives the mysterious virtues of “extreme unction,” and at length, with an apology to his attendants that he has been “a most unconscionable time dying,” he breathes his last, an apostate from the faith inseparable from England’s throne, and for his abandonment of which his own successor died an exile on the charity of a foreign land. Let Ahaziah take the place of Charles II.; let his idolatry be represented in the Popery of the British monarch; let the application to the god of Ekron be symbolised in the welcome given to the Romish monk; and, last of all, let Elijah by the bedside of the King of Israel, dealing faithfully with the soul departing there, be the type of good Sancroft and Ken by that other couch, using all their entreaties to make the sufferer think of his approaching end—and the parallel is well-nigh complete. The mention of Ekron and Baal-zebub introduces the subject of the heathen oracles, which played such an important part in all the nations of antiquity. Even among the Jews, it is believed by many, a true oracle existed—namely, the Urim and Thummim (“lights and perfections,” as the words denote), on the high priest’s breastplate; and that, when the Divine response was to be given, it was manifested either in an audible voice from the twelve precious stones, or in their appearance changing in keeping with the answer—brighter for an affirmative, and duller for a negative reply. What are usually known, however, as the heathen *oracula* were very different. They were also very numerous: the small province of Bœotia, in Greece, having twenty-five, and the Peloponnesus as many; but the most celebrated were Delphi, Dodona, and Jupiter Ammon in the deserts of Lybia. We get a glimpse of one of the oracular priestesses in the life of Paul, where the reference, we think, abundantly proves that the heathen oracles were under Satanic control. Such being admitted, we need not add they were only a system of imposture and falsehood, a “lying in wait to deceive,” “cunningly devised fables,” as Peter expresses it, where the allusion is unmistakable. There was more than mere fury about the Pythia; and it may be that the commonplace expression about there being “method in madness” has been literally borrowed from her. Never did ambiguity find itself of such use as on the con-

separated tripod, or beneath the decayed oak-tree. Croesus, King of Lydia, asks what will be the issue of a war with Persia, and he receives as reply, "If you war with them, you will destroy a great kingdom." Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, desires to know what will be the result, if he assists the Tarentines against the Romans, and the response may either mean that he is to conquer the Romans, or that the Romans are to conquer him. In both instances, Croesus and Pyrrhus were defeated and ruined, but of course the oracle was right, and its credit maintained. Many lessons might be drawn from that darkened chamber, where lies the son of Ahab, arrayed in the last robe he will ever need. We mention only one—the folly of men when they forsake the ways of God to pay homage to idols of any kind, or in hopeless attempt to unveil the future. As to the former all the Ekrons of earth—whether pride of reason, or personal merit, or the general mercy of God—are only vanity and a snare; there is but one Rock of hope, security, and strength, "and that Rock is Christ." As to the latter—the attempt to unveil the future, we know what Saul made of it in his visit to Endor, and we have seen what Ahaziah made of it in his proposed message to Ekron. "Just men made perfect" have other occupation than to be the tools of the clairvoyant; and lost spirits, we may be sure, are in no mood for such work. Away with your mediums, their bandaged eyes and pencilled messages, hands waving in the air, and all the dark arts of this latest charlatanry, the most wretched and profane of all modern shams. "God is His own interpreter"; and neither to shrines at Ekron nor Boston, neither to Baal-zebub nor Daniel Home, will He give the power of unlocking the destinies of men. (*H. T. Howat.*) *Religion only needed in trouble*:—It is the habit of some people only to seek spiritual support in times of trouble and difficulty. When the clouds have passed they think no more of the truths that comforted them in sorrow. Dr. Moule, the Bishop of Durham, in his recently published book, *From Sunday to Sunday*, relates the following incident: "A friend told me the tale a few years ago as we paced together the deck of a steamship on the Mediterranean, and talked of the things unseen. The chaplain of a prison, intimate with the narrator, had to deal with a man condemned to death. He found the man anxious, as well he might be; nay, he seemed more than anxious—convicted, spiritually alarmed. The chaplain's instructions all bore upon the power of the Redeemer to save to the uttermost; and it seemed as if the message were received and the man were a believer. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, the chaplain had come to think that there was ground for appeal from the death-sentence. He placed the matter before the proper authorities, and with success. On his next visit, very cautiously and by way of mere suggestions and surmises, he led the apparently resigned criminal towards the possibility of a commutation. What would he say, how would his repentance stand, if his life were granted him? The answer soon came. Instantly the prisoner divined the position; asked a few decisive questions, then threw his Bible across the cell, and, civilly thanking the chaplain for his attentions, told him that he had no further need of him nor of his book." The Bible, like prayer, was never meant exclusively for the hours of darkness. It has a message for every time and every occasion of life. *Prayer through fear*:—When I was at school in France, an English boy who was sleeping in the next bed to mine in a large dormitory said, "There will be thunder and lightning to-night!" When I asked, "How do you know?" he replied, "Because So-and-so," referring to a French boy who seldom prayed, "is saying his prayers." He meant that this boy only said his prayers when he was frightened, or by fits and starts. Ah! that is what we are all liable to do, and that is the very danger I want to guard you against. Beware that you do not pray by fits and starts. (*Quiver.*)

Vers. 9-16. Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty.—*The destruction of the two captains with their companies*:—Consider—I. THE STEPS WHICH LED UP TO THIS MIRACLE. 1. Seeking help where it was not to be found, in direct violation of the law of God. If a member of a family were to break his arm, and instead of applying to the family surgeon who had in the past given full proof of his skill, were to seek the advice of a quack, he would be sinning against himself, and insulting the man who was able and willing to cure him. This was the conduct of Ahaziah towards the God of his nation. 2. A Divine rebuke (ver. 3). God does not leave transgressors to pursue their way without remonstrance. 3. A message to take Elijah prisoner. II. THE MIRACLE ITSELF. 1. The fire, if not miraculous in itself, was miraculous in its manner of executing the will of God. It came from heaven

at the call of Elijah. 2. It was in keeping with the recent proof of Elijah's Divine commission given on Mount Carmel (1 Kings xviii. 38). 3. The miracle was arrested, and the prophet was arrested by a force not sent by the king (vers. 13-15).

LESSONS. 1. Help must be sought where God has appointed that it shall be found (John xiv. 6; Acts iv. 12). 2. The responsibility of the individual man. 3. When God has spoken He cannot change His word unless the sinner changes his way. 4. The only strength that can conquer heaven is the strength of supplication. (*Outlines of Sermons by a London Minister.*)

*Man in three aspects:—*I. MAN RUINED THROUGH THE CONDUCT OF OTHERS. This awful judgment came upon them not merely on their own account, but as messengers of the king. Throughout the human race there are found millions groaning under the trials and sufferings brought on them by the conduct of others. II. MAN EMPLOYED AS THE EXECUTOR OF DIVINE JUSTICE. God's plan in this world is to punish as well as to save man by man. III. MAN STEPPING INTO THE PLACE OF THE DEAD. The King Ahaziah dies, Jehoram steps into his place. "One generation cometh, and another passeth away." Places, positions, and the various offices of life are no sooner vacated by death than they are stepped into by others. (*Homilist.*)

*On tolerance of error:—*Now, it is obvious that, terrible as this judgment seems to us, it was not contrary to God's will. It is easy to say that the captain was only executing the king's orders, and that the fifty soldiers had no responsibility save that of obeying their leader. But we have still more right to say that He, who would have spared Sodom if ten righteous had been found in it, would not have consumed these two bands of fifty men if any God fearing men had been amongst them. The king's attempt to seize the prophet was an open defiance of God, and, moderate as the wording of the captain's summons seems, the tone may easily have shown utter contempt both for God and for Elijah. We may well believe, therefore, that Elijah on this occasion, as when he destroyed the priests of Baal, knew that he was fulfilling God's purpose of judgment. But now, thank God, all judgment has been committed to Him who died for sinners and prayed for His murderers. The Cross of Christ has completely changed the attitude of Christian people towards the enemies of God. How dare we treat as reprobate those for whom Christ died! While the day of grace lasts there is hope for the very worst. There is little fear, however, of Elijah's example being followed in the present day. Protestants, at any rate, have given up issuing excommunications and hurling anathemas at the heads of notorious offenders. We are all for toleration now, and any attempt to restrain men's liberty of thought and action is hotly resented. Surely the pendulum has swung too far. We need not in our dread of religious intolerance fall into religious indifference, and regard all errors in faith and practice with complacent apathy. Truth must always be intolerant of error. Nine times nine are eighty-one, and you would not tolerate a teacher who said they were eighty. Truth cannot tolerate error without denying itself. Where personal comfort and safety are concerned society is absolutely intolerant. Few would tolerate having a smallpox patient in their house. Is it reasonable to be so intolerant of infection for the body and so careless as to moral infection for the mind and soul? Shall the authorities step in and strip off the very paper from the walls in their zeal for sanitation? and shall we allow men of known impurity of life and those who scoff at prayer to mix freely with our sons and daughters? The zeal of the Crusader who gloried in slaying the infidel is surely more righteous than the indifference of the modern Laodicean, who has not a single truth that he thinks worth fighting for. We want more hatred of evil in these days. The popular novelist delights in confusing the issues, and making sin seem right and beautiful. There is a sacred liberty of thought which is the dearest right of Protestants, but it is not to be made a cloak of maliciousness. We have no right to think wrong thoughts. While all the progress in the world is due to freedom of thought, it is the correctness of the thought, not the freedom of it, which has achieved the good. Loose thinking is as bad as loose living. The man who is filled with the Spirit will witness plainly and fearlessly against both. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*)

*The captains of Ahaziah destroyed by fire:—*1. See, here, the power of God, revealing His wrath from "heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." In all, and each, of these cases, the authority was that of God, the power was that of God. Let no man, therefore, wrest this Scripture to his own destruction, nor look upon it as furnishing any precedent, or encouragement to persecute, in our own day, the enemies of the Lord. 2. Our duty is to confess Christ before men, and neither by word, nor deed, to compromise any, the minutest parts, of His gracious counsels. We must

rebuke the gainsayers, recall the erring, confirm the wavering, and instruct the ignorant; but, in doing this, we must not take a single step in our own strength, or wisdom: we must look ever unto Him, who in this, as in every other case, hath left us "an example that we should follow His steps"; "not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing, knowing that we are thereunto called, that we should inherit a blessing." 3. Elijah's history furnishes us with fresh motives to prayer and perseverance. If God hath spoken, here, in the accents of terror, He hath spoken, also, in the accents of compassion; if the destruction of two of Ahaziah's captains, with their companies, points out the danger of persecuting the saints of God, and the speedy death of Ahaziah exposes, no less clearly, the wretched presumption of the rebel creature, when he attempts to set at nought God's counsels; yet, the withholding punishment from the third captain, who fell on his knees before Elijah, and entreated that the life of himself and of his followers might be precious in his sight, proves no less clearly that, in His wrath, the Lord remembers mercy! What greater encouragement to well-doing can the faithful servant of God receive, than the protection here vouchsafed to the Tishbite? 4. Assuredly, the records of Elijah's ministry have placed this blessed truth plainly and palpably before us; may they lead us more heartily to obey the will of Him who revealed it! May the lustre which the Gospel pours upon those records, reveal more distinctly the weakness of our own nature, and the glorious hope of redemption, set before us through Christ! May this guide our footsteps in peace along the course of the life that now is! (J. S. M. Anderson, M.A.) *Destructive forces in the hand of God*:—The Bible does occasionally lift the veil, and shows us how the destructive forces of nature have been the servants of the will of a moral God. It was so when the waters of the Red Sea returned violently on the Egyptian pursuers of Israel. It was so when at the prayer of Elijah the messengers of Ahaziah were struck dead by lightning. It was so when Jonah was fleeing to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord: "The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken." It was so when there arose a great storm on the Sea of Galilee, that the disciples might learn to trust the power of their sleeping Master. And it was so when St. Paul, bound on his Romeward voyage, was wrecked on the shore of Malta. In all these cases we see "the wind and the storm fulfilling His word"; because the Bible enables us to see exactly how in each case God's word or will was fulfilled. But there is much in modern history, perhaps in our own lives and experience, which seems to us to illustrate the matter scarcely less vividly. Our ancestors saw God's hand in the storm which scattered the great Armada; and a century later the wind which buried the intruding successor of the saintly Ken beneath the chimneys of his own palace at Wells, seemed to pious Churchmen of the day to be not improbably a mark of the Divine displeasure. There are obvious difficulties which our Lord points to in His allusion to the loss of life at the fall of the Tower of Siloam; there are obvious difficulties in pressing such inferences too confidently or too far. But we may see enough, and we may have reason to suspect more that enables us to be certain of this, that nature is in the hand of the Ruler of the moral world, and that we may be sure of a moral purpose, whether we can exactly make it out or not, in the use which He makes of it. (Dean Farrar.)

Ver. 13. Let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants be precious in thy sight.—*The preciousness of life*:—Question naturally arises, Is life precious? How does God value it? And how should His servants regard it? I. THIS QUESTION SEEMS TO BE ANSWERED IN THE NEGATIVE. 1. By the general tenor of the Old Testament. Sinai thundered and lightened. The sight thereof was terrible. The voice was death. The Flood. Destruction of Sodom. Overthrows in the wilderness. Death of the two captains with their fifties. 2. By God's continued judgments on the impenitent. The Galileans in our Lord's day. "Except ye repent" (Luke xiii. 1-5). Many instances of this in the New Testament: Ananias and Sapphira; Herod Agrippa, in Acts xii. II. BUT FOR TWO REASONS THE REPLY IS IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. 1. Because many lives were spared in the Old Testament. (1) Through entreaty, as in the case of this captain. So Abraham entreated for Sodom. Moses and Aaron for the children of Israel (Num. xiv. 15-20, xvi. 22). (2) Through God's sovereign mercy. People of Nineveh. 2. Because the greatest life of all has been given for all the children of men. Herein the Mosaic law fulfilled, which said, A life for a life. Nothing

so highly esteemed of God as "the precious blood of Christ." It was the full price of our salvation, and its efficacy is eternal (Ps. xlix. 8; Heb. ix. 12). Application. 1. There is no need that you should doubt whether God will receive you. You need not even retreat, "Let my life be precious in Thy sight." It is precious. The best proof of this has been given. 2. Do not manifest an un-Christlike spirit. "Vengeance is mine." Our duty is plain, to be like Christ in valuing the lives of our brethren. He came not to destroy life, but to save. (*J. G. Tanner, M.A.*)

Vers. 15, 16. Go down with him, be not afraid.—*The old courage again* :—The age of the Mosaic Law, which shed its empire over the times of Elijah, was pre-eminently the era in which those awful and splendid attributes of the Divine character—God's holiness, justice, righteousness, and severity against sin—stood out in massive prominence; as some of us, from the ancient capital of Switzerland, have seen the long line of Bernese Alps, rising above the plain in distant and majestic splendour; cold in the grey dawn; or flushed with the light of morn and eve. It was only when those lessons had been completely learnt, that mankind was able to appreciate the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord. That there was no malice in Elijah is clear from his willingness to go with the third captain, who spoke with reverence and humility. "And the angel of the Lord said, Go down with him; be not afraid of him. And Elijah went down with him unto the king." I. THE MEKKNESS AND GENTLENESS OF CHRIST. The only fire He sought was the fire of the Holy Ghost. "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I if it is already kindled." He strove not to avenge Himself, or vindicate the majesty of His nature. "He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself." II. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF GOD EVER CONDONING DEFLANT AND BLASPHEMOUS SIN. We have fallen on soft and degenerate days when, under false notions of charity and liberality, men are paring down their conceptions of the evil of sin, and of the holy wrath of God, which is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. III. ELIJAH'S FULL RESTORATION TO THE EXERCISE OF A GLORIOUS FAITH. In a former time the message of Jezebel was enough to make him flee. But in this case he stood his ground, though an armed band came to capture him. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1-15. And it came to pass when the Lord would take up Elijah.—*Elijah translated* :—1. In the glorious end of Elijah's earthly life we see not simply the reward of one faithful man, but the Divine grace manifested to every believer at the end of his earthly career. One of the purposes, doubtless, of this translation of Elijah was to make plainer to our dull understandings the upward heavenly going of every saint when his work on earth is over. We are so apt to follow the body with our thoughts, and to imagine our departed friends in the grave, that here God made the body go upward that we may be weaned of this wrong and heathenish notion. To the spiritual mind the whole Old Testament is full of views of the future state; and this ascent of Elijah is one of the many instances in which we behold the immediate contiguity of heaven to earth in the experience of God's holy ones. When, therefore, we are called upon to bend over the mortal form of a departing saint, it is for us to feel how close at hand is the transfer to heaven. "The spiritual heaven is neither 'up' nor 'down,' and this narrative of Elijah's disappearance from Elisha must not be pressed." In reply to this we say that we can press it. We assert that "up" is always used in accordance with the need or weakness (if you please) of our nature to designate the heaven of the departed soul where it abides with God. This is but in conformity with the universal instinct of man. Why it should be so we cannot tell, nor are we called on to explain. The prophet Elijah ascending through the air teaches us of a present heaven to which his life was transferred. We cannot otherwise regard the incident. The mind refuses to see in it that he went into unconsciousness or annihilation or to purgatory or to hell. The "heaven" is not simply the outward heaven of sense, but the heaven of bliss and of God, just as in the case of our Lord Jesus, who led His disciples out as far as to Bethany; and it came to pass, while He blessed

them, He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. 2. "Elijah went up into heaven." It was Elijah that went up, not Ahab. It was a man of God, one who had been faithful to the Divine will and commands, one who had been jealous for God's name and worship. It is well for us to note this. Only God's saints go up to heaven. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Those who think God will or can take an unholy heart to heaven know nothing of God. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." While no man can derive these requisites from his nature, depraved as it is, he can receive the blessing of the clean hands and pure heart from the Lord, even righteousness from the God of his salvation. (*H. Crosby, D.D.*) *The translation of Elijah*:—"When the Lord would take up Elijah,"—when. There is a great doctrine of Providence there. The life of man is absolutely at the disposal of the Lord—that is the doctrine. One might suppose that man would have some choice as to when he would go. Not the least in the world. We might think that man would be permitted to stay a year or two longer—he might be engaged in finishing a work which would require that time to complete it. No. Well, says one, I have built the column, and the capital is nearly ready to put on: I shall have it done the day after to-morrow—cannot I stay until then? No. "When the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven"; not when Elijah would go, but when the Lord would take him. Is there not an appointed time unto man upon the earth? God knows when our work is done; sometimes we think it is done when it is not; we wonder what more there is to do to it, it seems so trifling, as if it were not worth while doing, reminding us of what the great sculptor said to some one who wondered that he was so long over his marble: "I know I am doing but a few things that look like trifles, but trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle." So with us: many a poor life we have seen seems to be doing nothing, and we wonder why it does not go forward into the eternal state. "When the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven."—What is heaven? Critics cannot tell us: they have met in council and can make nothing of it. We must die to know. It hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive God's house. And so Elijah goes to Gilgal: it is set down here as if it meant nothing—on to Bethel and to Jericho, as if he were a restless kind of spirit, here and there, going on like some fussy old man who does not know where to rest. But there is plan here, purpose, scheme, Providence; and so there is in our travel and in our movements. "By a whirlwind."—There is a lesson here for us: and it is this. That the way of our going, as well as the time, is of the Lord's determination, and not of ours. He appoints the time, He makes the way, and thou hast nothing to do with it, poor dying man. One says, "I want to die on my birthday"; and God says, "No, perhaps the day after." Another says, "I want to die suddenly"; and God replies, "No, that is not the way: it is in the book, it is all written down in the book: you are to have a lingering death." "I should like to die lingeringly, but quietly," says another man; and God says, "That is not the way in the book: suddenly a bolt shall strike thee: thou shalt go to bed well, and in the morning be in heaven, without pang or spasm or notice given to any one: they shall find thee sleeping on the pillow like a child at rest." Another man says, "I should like to die like a shock of corn fully ripe"; and God says, "No, thou shalt be cut down in the greenness of thy youth, in the immaturity of thy powers." There are others who would like to die in childhood—pass away before five, when the eyes are round wonders, and they know nowise of anything—when everything round about is mystery and puzzle and enchantment; and God says, "No, you shall die at ninety: it is all focussed, all settled." What have we to do, therefore? God allows us to express our own wishes and wills, He allows us to say what we would like to have done, and trains us to say, "Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done." He sends for some in a beautiful chariot made of violets and snowdrops and crocuses, and these are the young folks that go up to heaven in the spring chariot: the vernal coach is sent for them and they go away—so young! They have just left school, just finished the last lesson, and shut it up, and said "Good-bye" to master and governess, and are supposed now to be ready for life; and God says, "Now, come up"; and they go up amid all the sweet modest spring flowers. And others go up in old age, feeling as if they had been forgotten on the earth, allowed to linger and loiter too long, as if God had forgotten them—some by long affliction, some by sudden call. Elijah did not say to Elisha, "I am going to die," or "I am going to heaven," but, "I am going to Bethel—stand there." You know what we say to one another in view of the great

event: we say, "If anything should happen to me"—a form of words we understand. We do not seem to be able to say plainly and with frankness, "Now, if I should die next week—" No, but we say, "We do not know what may happen, and in the event of anything happening to me—" We do not like to mention the monster, and to point a long plain finger into the pit. so we say, "If anything should happen to me—in the event of anything happening to me—going to Gilgal, and to Bethel, and to Jericho, and to Jordan, and—" The rest is silence. That is the way in the chamber of affliction. We say, "If the wind would only get round out of the east and into the south-west, perhaps we should get you up a little." Never—and we know it. And our friend, unwilling to break our heart, says, "I have been thinking that if the weather were milder, I might perhaps be able to get out a litt'e." Thus touch is not made to the quick; this man says he is going to Gilgal, and he knows he is going to heaven; he says he is going to Bethel, as if it were nothing—only going to pray with the young ones there. He says he is going to Jericho, as if he is going to stop there—he knows perfectly well he will only be there one night; he is a pilgrim with a staff in his hand and cannot linger. He says he is going to Jordan, and he knows perfectly well that he will never come back over Jordan, but all the time he never says anything about it. So we let our friends down easily, and prepare them for great events by doing certain intermediate things. Elijah says, "Ask what I shall do for thee." Heaven is so near, yet he is still thinking about the earth: he is going to join the angels, and yet wanting to do something for the poor creatures yet to linger upon the earth for ten or twenty years. Oh, bold man, bold, bold Elijah! "Ask what I shall do for thee." Why, what could he do? He had no money to leave, what could he do? Can a poor man do something—can a man who has no will to make yet will a great deal? It would seem so. "What can I do for thee, child, before going?" I know what you can do: put out those poor bony hands and put them upon his head and say, "God bless the lad." That will do. "What can I do for thee?" Leave me a blessing, leave me one of your old letters, let me have your old Bible: utter one more prayer for me, mention me in the last prayer, let the last sigh mean poor me—me—me. Ay, we can help one another in that way. "Ask what I shall do for thee." Now, what is your supreme prayer? What do you want your father, mother, friend, to leave you? Let them leave you a good example, let them leave you a noble testimony on behalf of the truth, let them leave you an unsullied character, and then they will leave you an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. "If thou see me." And Elisha said, "I will see thee, if it be possible; I will keep my eye upon thee." And did God ever disappoint the eyes that were turned upwards? Did He ever say, "The morning shall not shine upon those who look towards the east"? Never. And so if you look into the perfect law of liberty—look into the Bible, you will find it always new, always a revelation, always something fresh—May bringing its own flowers, June her own coronal ever, August its own largess of vine and wheat. "If thou see me." Is there any counterpart to that in the New Testament? There is: O wonderful counterpart—"If thou see Me, thou shalt have it, if not, it shall not be so." "And He led them"—that greater He—"led them out as far as to Bethany." And He ascended, and they watched Him and saw Him, and a cloud received Him up out of their sight. They watched, they saw, they returned to Jerusalem, and were endued with power from on high. That is God's law, that the watching man gets everything, the man who is nearest and looks keenest gets all and sees all—and it is right. The mountain gets the first gleam of the sun, and then the light gets down into the valleys by and by. And so—and so—these great rocks of God are watching men: Elisha was a watching spirit: those who see Christ taken up are endued with power from on high. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; look, and ye shall see; knock, and it shall be opened. Sir Isaac Newton was once asked why he was so much greater than other workers in his particular science. He said, "I do not know, except that I, perhaps, pay more attention than they do!" Just consider. What is attention? We think anybody can attend. Hardly a man in a hundred can attend to anything. The sluggard gets nothing, the shut eyes see not the morning when it cometh, the slumberer's closed vision cannot see the first sparkings and scintillations of the coming day. Lord, open our eyes, that we may see! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Elijah translated*:—The translation of Elijah means more than a historic statement. The theme is concerned with the great scriptural doctrine of immortality, in whose light we consider it. Observe—I. THE DUAL NATURE OF

MAN. This truth is directly implied in the account of the Creation. The bodily form was made "of the dust of the ground"; but when the "Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, man became a living soul." It is of this dual nature Paul speaks, "there is a natural body and there is a spiritual body; howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural." A denial of this fact asserts that man is on a level with the brutes. The more common belief, however, asserts the existence of the two natures, yet clings to the idea that, somehow, the two are interdependent. This idea is unscriptural, since, in such a case, death could not be a gain. The spiritual body controls the material and earthly, but is not controlled by it. II. FLESH AND BLOOD ARE NOT IMMORTAL. The apostle calls this the corruptible body, and then declares that corruption cannot inherit incorruption; that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. What is perishable cannot enter heaven. III. THE NATURE AND MINISTRY OF DEATH. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"; this is the sad history. "The sting of death is sin"; this is the law. In the translation of Elijah we behold what would, perhaps, be the type of death but for sin; but, aside from such a consideration, we turn to a few important lessons in the scene. 1. The power of the human purpose to perpetuate itself. It is in this manner we see the power of Elijah in his care for the schools of the prophets. These organisations were to continue, after his departure, what his unwearied efforts had begun. "I am left alone," was his early cry; yet when upon the cloud of flame he ascended, Bethel, Gilgal, and Jericho, with their throngs of prophets, were left. The theocracy which, in spite of Ahab and Jezebel, he had founded was perpetuated in these schools. There is a future for all men on the earth if they will only plan wisely. As Elijah had been the founder and defender of the faith, so did he become, by these centres, the conservator of that same faith. 2. The unwearied activity of the good man. The true life has no spare hours apart from its purpose. It was "as they still went on and talked" that the chariot came. The last hours were as full of service as if no change were coming. The invisible world needed no further special thought. 3. The immortal life. The history of Carmel's prophet seems hardly complete without the scene on Hermon. A thousand years had passed since the chariot of fire swept the sky. The three favoured disciples had fallen asleep even in their Master's prayer. Nought but that wondrous voice broke in upon the stillness of night. By some revelation the disciples caught the accents of the heavenly visitors. The one, fifteen hundred years before, had trodden the crest of Sinai and spoken face to face with God. It was he who had surrendered his claim to Egypt's crown for the reproach of Christ. It was he whose face had shone with a borrowed glory he wist not of. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *The departure of good men* :—Two subjects are here presented for notice—I. THE DEPARTURE OF A GOOD MAN FROM THE EARTH. Death is a departure from the world, it is not an extinction, it is a mere change of place. II. THE POWER OF GOODNESS IN A GOOD MAN'S DEPARTURE. See what a grand spirit Elijah displays in the immediate prospect of his exit. 1. A spirit of calm self-possession. 2. A spirit of strong social interest. 3. A spirit of far-reaching philanthropy. Elijah goes to Bethel, but wherefore? Probably to deliver a valedictory address to the "sons of the prophets." (*Homilist.*) *The Christian a native of heaven* :—A Christian man's true affinities are with the things not seen, and with the persons there, however the surface relationships knit him to the earth. In the degree in which he is a Christian, he is a stranger here and a native of the heavens. That great city is, like some of the capitals of Europe, built on a broad river, with the mass of the metropolis on the one bank, but a wide-spreading suburb on the other. As the Trastevere is to Rome, as Southwark to London, so is earth to heaven, the bit of the city on the other side the bridge. (*Alex. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Life's eventide* :—Here is a man on the borders of heaven. He is living in intimate fellowship with God. Of each step in that last journey he can say: "The Lord hath sent me." Enoch, the first to be translated, "walked with God." Elijah most clearly did the same. So St. Paul says: "If we live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit"; or, literally, "let us also step in the Spirit." Not merely the walk as a whole, but each successive step should be in fellowship with God. Nothing short of this can be adequate preparation for such a change. Surely if we knew the Lord was coming for us in a few days, those days would be days of infinite and unbroken fellowship; there would be no hours out of touch with the Master. We ought when thus in perfect fellowship to be able to say of each step, "The Lord hath sent me."

But this man on the borders of heaven, is found in a retired spot and seeks to be alone. We find him with Elisha at Gilgal, probably the "Gilgal beside the oaks of Moreh," mentioned in Deut. xi. 30, R.V. There he proposes to leave Elisha whilst he journeys alone to Bethel. We can understand his desire for solitude. And he has no wish to parade his approaching honour. He will not talk about it to Elisha; and Elisha refuses to discuss it with the sons of the prophets. This man on the borders of heaven, is full of a genuine humility. No traces of self are seen in him during this last journey. There was a sweet attractiveness, however, about this grand old warrior. Elisha felt it, and refused to leave him. Who shall say how far Elisha's brightness and buoyancy were the reflection of the glorious sunset, without clouds, which closed the earthly course of this true-hearted veteran. But, again, this man on the borders of heaven takes an interest in his stewardship. There were schools for the sons of the prophets at both Bethel and Jericho. Elijah's steps were no doubt guided to these places that he might leave at each a parting message of counsel and direction. He who said, "Occupy till I come," is not pleased if His servants neglect the work entrusted to them. Nor, however, should we be so engrossed in our work as to forget His promised return. Once more this man on the borders of heaven has no thought of his own needs, but is only anxious to leave a blessing behind. "Ask what I shall do for thee, before"—mark the limitation: Elijah knew his power of helping those on earth would cease when his life in the body was ended—"before I be taken away from thee." And this desire of Elijah's was fulfilled. He was staggered first of all at the boldness of Elisha's request. Most truly, Elijah left a blessing behind him. The sons of the prophets were forced to acknowledge, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." And nine hundred years afterwards the angel Gabriel could say no greater word concerning the promised forerunner than that he should "go before in the spirit and power of Elijah to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." And the very blessing which Elijah left behind him we may have. The Lord God of Elijah has not changed. Surely, as the coming of the Lord draweth nigh, and the promise, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," receives its fulfilment, we may look for an increase of the "spirit and power of Elijah" in our midst. Men say, "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." But this is the cynical pessimism of an unbelieving age. Really good men never die. Their influence lives; they reproduce themselves in those around them. Judged by earthly standards, Elijah's career might seem almost a failure, for his chief public triumph was so soon discounted by unbelieving flight. But the man is more than his ministry. Character is more than success. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*) *Evensong*.—There is always something beautiful in the declining years of one who in earlier life has dared nobly and wrought successfully. Younger men gather round the veteran to whom they owe the inspiration and model of their lives; and call him "father," enwreathing his grey locks with crowns in which love is entwined with reverence. Seeds sown years before and almost forgotten, or reckoned lost, yield their golden returns. Memory rescues from the oblivion of the past many priceless records; whilst hope, standing before the thinning veil, tells of things not perfectly seen as yet, but growing on the gaze of the ripened spirit. The old force still gleams in the eye; but its rays are tempered by that tenderness for human frailty, and that deep self-knowledge, which years alone can yield.

I. THE WORK OF THE CLOSING YEARS OF ELIJAH'S LIFE. The Christian traveller among the Western Isles of Scotland will hardly fail to visit one small, bare, lone spot out amid the roll of the Atlantic waves. It is thy shore, Iona, of which I write! No natural beauties arrest the eye or enchain the interest. There is but one poor village, with its two boats, and a squalid population. Yet who can visit that low shore, and stand amid those crumbling ruins, without intense emotion?—since it was there that Columba built the first Christian church, to shed its gentle rays over those benighted regions; and to shelter the young apostles who carried the Gospel throughout the pagan kingdoms of Northern Britain. With similar emotions should we stand amid the ruins of Bethel, Gilgal, and Jericho; where, in his declining years, Elijah gathered around him the flower of the seven thousand, and educated them to receive and transmit something of his own spiritual force and fire.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF HIS SPIRIT IN ANTICIPATING HIS TRANSLATION. The old man clung to those young hearts, and felt that his last days could not be better spent than in seeing them once more; though he resolved to say nothing of his approaching departure, or of the

conspicuous honour that was shortly to be conferred on him. Here is the humility of true greatness! Alas! what a rebuke is here for ourselves! The prophet's evident desire to die alone shames us, when we remember how eager we are to tell men, by every available medium, of what we are doing for the Lord. There is not a talent with which He entrusts us, which we do not parade as a matter of self-laudation. There is not a breath of success that does not mightily puff us up. What wonder that our Father dare not give us much marked success, or many conspicuous spiritual endowments—lest we be tempted further to our ruin!

III. THE AFFECTIONATE LOVE WITH WHICH ELIJAH WAS REGARDED. It strongly showed itself in Elisha. The younger man stood with his revered leader, as for the last time he surveyed from the heights of Western Gilgal the scene of his former ministry. And, in spite of many persuasives to the contrary, he went with him down the steep descent to Bethel and Jericho. What is the Lord to thee? Is He a dear and familiar friend, of whom thou canst speak with unwavering confidence? Then thou needest not fear to tread the verge of Jordan. Otherwise, it becomes thee to get to His precious blood, and to wash thy garments white; that thou mayest have right to the tree of life, and mayest enter in through the gates into the city. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *The ascension of Elijah*.—I. THE TYPE. 1. The last intercourse between Elijah and Elisha is hardly what we should have expected. Elijah knew that he was about to leave Elisha, but almost seems to act with coldness towards him, and to want to throw him off. Elisha had left all to follow Elijah, to be his disciple and attendant. 2. It was a mark of lowliness in the prophet. He was to be honoured by God in a most marvellous manner, and he shrank even from Elisha's witness of the great event. The law of the spiritual life, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted," even then held good. 3. Further, it might have been to test Elisha, his affection, and his detachment. It would seem that there was something which governed Elijah's request, though he does not reveal the motive of it. The strong asseveration, too, of Elijah, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee," repeated thrice, shows how Elijah's proposal had stirred the depths of Elisha's soul. 4. The repeated suggestion that he should depart reveals the perseverance of Elisha. It gave to his will the opportunity of exercising steadfastness and constancy. In this mysterious intercourse we see how graces were set in motion and developed. The crossing of Jordan seems to have been the acme of Elisha's probation; for now Elijah turns to him, and makes a proposal of a very different kind. "Ask what I shall do for thee," &c. 5. Then Elisha is ready with the petition, "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." II. THE ANTTYPE. 1. There are two ways of approaching the mysteries of Christ—one direct, the other indirect. One through the Gospels, the other through the types and prophecies of the Old Testament. Besides these, there is the road of experience in the Epistles. 2. We take now the indirect route. We find in this narrative, first, a type of Christ's ascension into heaven. Of the points of resemblance between the two events, no unbiased mind could doubt. Even Scott says it was "a prefiguration of the Redeemer's ascension." In both cases there was the miraculous elevation of a human body from earth to heaven. Both had to be seen, to secure a gift. 3. But it is a law of the antitype to outstrip the type. Christ was self-raised. He who by His Divine power could walk on the water, could mount up into the air. III. LESSONS. 1. "Exemption proves the rule." Let the exemption of Elijah from the law of death remind us that we have to pass through the dark valley, and must prepare for the journey; for "what man is he that shall live, and shall not see death, that shall deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?" (Ps. lxxxix. 48, R.V.). 2. Dispositions are necessary for receiving spiritual gifts—the lowliness, detachment, steadfastness to be traced in the last intercourse between Elijah and Elisha, bear witness to this. 3. To approach the mysteries of Christ through the types of the Old Testament, seeing in them how all leads up to Him, and that therefore the disparagement of the Old Testament cannot but end in an under-valuation of the New (Luke xxiv. 44). (*Canon Hutchings, M.A.*) *Elisha's love for Elijah*.—

The length of our lives in this world is in the hand of God. We have no independent lease of life, so that we may decide of our own accord that we will remain for a year, or ten, or twenty years on earth. We have only a lease at the will of God. All the physicians in the world could not insure our lives for a single year—nay, not for a single month, or even a single day. Elijah went when God called him. The record does not say that when Elijah saw that his work was done he decided that it was time for him to go home to heaven; there is nothing of that

kind. It is, "When the Lord would take up Elijah to heaven." God decided the matter. This thought ought to give us pause. He ought not to leave undone from one day to another what we would wish to do if we knew this day was the last, for we do not know that God intends to give us another day. Each day ought to see all our affairs in such a condition that we are all right with God and man if this day is the last, for our lives are just as certainly at the disposal of God as was Elijah's, and we have no power that Elijah did not have to stay the hand of God when He would call us away. There is another thought which stands in the introduction to our theme which is very comforting and very precious, and that is the plain statement that God took Elijah direct to heaven. All the good are there, gathered from all ages and from all lands. It is a land of innocence and beauty, of love and worship; a land of music and of light, where the weary find rest, where heroic souls like Elijah's sun themselves in the presence of God. It was Elijah's last day on the earth. Elijah knew it, and said nothing to Elisha. The old man's heart was tender towards the young man, and he was willing to spare himself the sorrow of parting as well as to spare Elisha if he could. But Elisha, too, had in some way been made aware that this was the day when Elijah would be taken from him. What thoughts must have filled the minds of the two men as they walked along the way on that momentous day. Perhaps they were very silent. Elijah's mind must have been full of the past. And Elisha—what is he thinking of? How keenly he remembers that morning on his father's farm, when Elijah came to him with the call of God; how well he remembers the farewell feast, and the tender parting with his parents, and his going forth with Elijah, who during all the years since that time has been to him not only teacher and leader, but father, and mother, friend, and in some sense in the place of God. Elijah has stood to him as the very incarnation of goodness, a goodness that is sustained by unwavering faith in God; and Elisha loves this man with a love in which admiration and reverence and devotion are mingled. His whole heart has gone out to him. His worship of God has seemed akin to his love for Elijah. As he has lived with Elijah he has daily come to know more of God, and the more he has loved Elijah the deeper has been his devotion to God, and he can hardly think what life will mean without Elijah present with him to sustain him and inspire him. All this must have been in his heart as he answered Elijah, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." There may well have been more than a present application to these words of Elisha. Elisha remained true to them after the death of Elijah; in heart and spirit he was never separated from his great friend and leader; throughout his life he remained true to Elijah, to his goodness, to his faith in God, to his heroic purpose, and to his lofty ideals. Now what message may we draw from the loyalty and love of this young man towards the older man? Should it not suggest to us that supreme love and devotion which we should show towards Jesus Christ our Saviour? True it is only a faint illustration, for Jesus has done infinitely more for us than Elijah did for Elisha. Elijah did not die for Elisha, but because he had by his goodness, by his obedience to God, and by his faithful affection, called Elisha to be God's servant and son, Elijah loved him thus devotedly and was determined to cling to him for ever. What, then, shall we say of the proper devotion which we should feel and show towards Jesus Christ? Elisha not only remained with Elijah because of the tenderest considerations of love and fidelity, but because he felt that every moment he had with Elijah was precious, and only by imitating Elijah would he be able to do the great work awaiting him. A still nobler Elijah stands as our example. And both these considerations appeal to us, for surely every moment we spend with Jesus is precious. Every hour which you will spend reading about Jesus, talking about Him, meditating upon Him, or praying to Him will be an hour of infinite value to you. Not only so, but as Elisha got his strength largely from his fellowship with Elijah in their common faith in God, so we are strong as we keep close to Jesus Christ. I would like to emphasise this message to all who have recently given themselves to the service of Christ. The secret of a growing Christian character, the secret of strength and steadiness in the Christian life, is to persistently keep close to Jesus Christ. Elijah could not remain with Elisha, but Jesus comes to us in the presence of the Holy Spirit to comfort our hearts. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee.—*Tested* :—The call that came to Elisha as he was ploughing at Abel-meholah was readily and

gladly obeyed. There was no ten days' tarrying between his master's ascension and his own wonderful enduement, as in the case of the apostles, and this was, probably, because he had been sufficiently tested and prepared beforehand. 1. He had learned to stoop and serve. Not one of the chosen twelve volunteered to take the place of a servant at the passover feast on the night of the betrayal. 2. He had learned to obey God rather than men. Mrs. Walton, in her book, tells us that the beautiful orange groves near the town of Jaffa are so sheltered that for some part of the year the perfectly ripe fruit of last year is seen hanging side by side with the blossom of this. Blossom and fruit were side by side on this journey: Elijah, so fully matured that he was ready for translation, side by side with Elisha, who was just blossoming out in the beauty of early faith and devotion. And yet Elijah himself was to apply the second great test to Elisha, to see whether he would obey God rather than men. God had commissioned Elisha to minister to Elijah. Would he persevere to the end, or would he allow the persuasions of others to draw him off? So three times he was tested by his own master. "Tarry ye here, for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel." "Tarry ye here, for the Lord ha' h sent me to Jericho." "Tarry ye here, for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan." It was that he might test Elisha's devotion, and see if he would follow right on to the end. So Elijah does not express a desire to be alone. He simply tested Elisha, as Naomi tested Orpah and Ruth. It is eight miles from Jezreel to Bethel. The road descends a steep hill into a narrow gorge which runs for some four miles to an ancient spring now called "the Robbers' Well." So far the road is easy, but for the next four miles the rocky bed of a dry watercourse is the only path. So Elijah suggests that he might be left to tread the last stage of his earthly pilgrimage alone. Very different was the attitude of the sons of the prophets. There were theological colleges, so to speak, at Bethel and Jericho, and Elijah's last journey took him past these. It would be an encouragement to him to see that God was not left without witnesses—that his championship of God's truth had not been in vain. But there was no special blessing for these sons of the prophets at this time. They fell far short of Elisha's portion. Their attitude and spirit were very different from Elisha's. Perhaps they wanted to discuss who was to succeed Elijah, and what effect his departure would have upon God's work in Israel. But there was no holy awe as they stood in the presence of one so soon to be summoned to the glorious presence of the King of kings. They felt no sense of need; they had no thirst for personal blessing. There are many to-day like these sons of the prophets. When God is working mightily in the quickening and deepening energy of the Holy Ghost, it is those only who follow closely, and right through to the end, who receive the blessing. Those who look on from a distance will never see the heaven opened, or share in the outpoured blessing. 3. Elisha had learned to put first things first. Once more he was to be tested. The two had crossed Jordan. That river which is the symbol of death had parted when smitten by Elijah's mantle. It was not fitting that he who was to be honoured by a deathless translation should wrestle with the swiftly flowing waters of Jordan. You say, "If I can get safely to heaven at the end, that is all I want"; but is that all God wants? How would you answer if the challenge, "Ask what I shall do for thee," were put to you? Would your soul leap forth with ardent longing for fulness of spiritual blessing, or would some craving for ease and honour and advancement be uppermost in your heart? (*M. G. Pearse.*)

Ver. 9. Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.—*A final interview between good men.*—The two names here mentioned represent two of the most remarkable men in the history of the world. Both stood faithful in a faithless age. Through both, heavenly wisdom announced its truths, and Almighty energy wrought its marvels. Both were valiant for truth. In this final interview of these illustrious men, we find something to lament, something to admire, something to study, and something to imitate. **I. HERE IS SOMETHING TO LAMENT.** The departure of a great and good man from this world is a subject for lamentation. There are two things that show this to be a lamentable occurrence. 1. The event involves a positive decrease in the amount of means for the world's improvement. Heaven's plan to raise the world is by the ministry of the good. Good men are God's agents to improve the world. 2. The event involves a positive increase in the amount of the world's responsibilities. The world's responsibilities are proportioned to its means of improvement;—"Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." The life of a good man adds to the world's

responsibility. Thus its mighty sum of accountability daily augments. The more good the life, the greater the addition to the amount. Christ's life was the best, and hence He said, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin." II. HERE IS SOMETHING TO ADMIRE. What do we see here to admire? 1. Sublime calmness in the most solemn crisis. Truly solemn was the position Elijah now occupied, for he stands on the line that separates time from eternity. On one side of the line there were many scenes on earth dear to memory, many persons precious to his heart, many works that he had wrought, and much that he had left unfinished. On the other side there was eternity. 2. A generous interest in friends in the last hour of earthly life. "Ask me," he says, "what I shall do for thee before I be taken from thee?" Though in close approximation to eternity, his affection for his friend was unimpaired. Death does not quench our love. 3. A consciousness of power to confer benefit in the last hour, "Ask what I shall do for thee," implying a consciousness of power to confer good. A good man has power at all times to confer good, even on his deathbed; on his expiring couch he can exhibit fortitude under suffering, resignation to the Divine will, intercessory sympathies for the living. Deathbeds have often proved signally useful to attendant friends. III. HERE IS SOMETHING TO STUDY. There are two important principles suggested in this text which demand our attention:— 1. That men can only benefit their race while they are living upon earth. "Before I am taken away from thee," said Elijah; implying I shall do nothing for thee when I am gone. I shall be where I cannot communicate thought, or render one act of service. Our work on earth is done when we leave it. When we die we cannot return to discharge any neglected duty. 2. That our power to benefit men will depend upon their consent. "Ask what I shall do for thee." If men resist we are powerless; our instrumentality is moral, our best thoughts, our purest sympathies, our devoted efforts will all go for nothing, if men will not consent to our influence. IV. HERE IS SOMETHING TO IMITATE. In the conduct of Elisha we see two things worthy of imitation. 1. A perception of real worth. "I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." 2. An aspiration after real worth. "I pray thee let a double portion." Here is coveting earnestly the best gift. (*Homilist.*) I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.—*Elisha's request*.—I. ITS MEANING. 1. "A double portion." (1) Not "twice as much as thou." That might have been the prayer not of ambition to excel Elijah, but of humility. In myself so inferior that I need double portion to succeed thee. (2) Better: the portion of first-born (Deut. xxi. 17); twice as much as any other son of the prophets. All claim a portion. My work and responsibility greatest; to be head of the family in thy place. Give me right of the first-born—a double portion. 2. "Thy spirit." God's Spirit: who came upon Samson, Saul, David, Elijah himself (ver. 16). But still Elijah's spirit (ver. 15). In three senses his:—(1) His own. Not separable, as property, friends, means of grace, &c. In him (John iv. 14). Not hand without upholding, but cordial within, strengthening. (2) His characteristically. One Spirit, but manifold gifts. Natural character remains, &c. (3) His in its influence. Elisha's request granted. Character moulded by Elijah's spirit, yet not obliterated. Still Elisha, not Elijah. Marked contrast between them. Elijah type of John Baptist, Elisha of Christ. II. ITS APPLICATION. 1. To intercourse of friends. Elijah friend of Elisha. 2. To official relations. Elisha pupil of Elijah. Conclusion. Our intercourse with friends, our relations as teachers, parents, ministers, &c., are they such as, when the parting comes, to warrant the request, "I pray thee," &c.? (*Arch-deacon Perowne.*) *The spirit of Elijah*.—Elijah, with his clear-eyed vision, saw that Elisha and not himself was the man to be considered at this hour; the parting meant more to Elisha than it did to himself. Elijah knew that all was right between him and God. He had no doubts about his future. I do not suppose he had the slightest intimation as to the peculiar manner in which he would leave the earth, although his words indicate a premonition that he was not to die in the natural, usual way. But in whatever way God called him, Elijah was safe. His work was done. His record was made up. Heaven and immortal glory, with the crown of eternal life, remained for him. Elisha, however, was in the midst of the struggle of life. He was to remain in the warring and striving world. He was to stand before wicked kings and ungodly men as the messenger of God. He would need every possible help and blessing that he might not fall or faint by the day. Ah, it is not death that the good man needs to fear. Living is infinitely more serious than dying. If we live well, we shall die well. We are

not for a moment to suppose that there was anything selfish or ambitious in the request of Elisha. He was not asking that he might be twice as great as Elijah. He was thinking of the great need of the people and how much the loss of Elijah would mean, and he felt how small were his own powers and gifts compared to those of the great man whom he had loved and followed. He is asking that upon his own gifts and powers, which seem to him so small, a double portion of the spirit that had made Elijah so great may rest and make him strong to do the work of God which was now to fall upon his shoulders. The response of Elijah was significant. He answered, "Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." Dr. William M. Taylor sees in this answer of Elijah this meaning: The sight of Elijah's ascension gave to Elisha a firmer and more vivid faith in the reality of the unseen life than he had ever had before and greater than even Elijah had ever known. It remains for us to find our message in considering what constituted this spirit of Elijah, a double portion of which Elisha desired as the greatest boon that could come to him. For every one of us who is striving to live the good life to-day will find it as valuable a possession as it was to Elisha. 1. It was a vital faith in the presence and power of God in the world. There was Elijah's power. He believed God. God was real to him. God was not lost to Elijah's sight by the creation which He had made. Elijah saw God present in the midst of His world with unlimited power and control. This gave him all his courage. It was the same force that made John Knox a greater terror to a wicked queen than all the armies of Scotland. It was the same force that made Luther the greatest man of his day. 2. The spirit of Elijah was the spirit of obedience. He obeyed God promptly, without questioning; we never should have heard of him but for that. He kept his ear open, listening to God, and he went swiftly to do the Divine bidding. That was what gave value to Elijah's conduct. Think of the millions of Christians in the world to-day. If they all had Elijah's spirit of obedience, what revolutions would come about. The gambling hell would be abolished for ever. War would die out of the earth, and the Gospel would speedily be preached to every creature, if only all the men and women who bear the name of Jesus Christ had Elijah's spirit of implicit obedience to God. 3. Elijah's spirit was a spirit of supreme courage born of this faith and obedience. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *The noblest legacy of the departed good.* :—I. THE GREATEST NEED, THE MOST SOLEMN POSITION, IS NOT WITH THOSE WHO ARE LEAVING THE WORLD, BUT WITH THOSE WHO REMAIN. Not Elijah, but Elisha requires strength and help. It was a perception of Elisha's greater need that prompted the invitation. II. OUR POWER TO BLESS OTHERS IS LIMITED BY OUR LIVES. "Before I be taken away from thee." Elijah cannot pledge himself to anything after his departure. While yet he lingers upon the earth he may help and bless his successor. We can only bless the world while we are present in it. III. THE NOBLEST LEGACY OF THE DEPARTED GOOD, AND THE MEASURE IN WHICH WE SHOULD ASK TO POSSESS IT. "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." This was the wisest request Elisha could have presented. What are we to understand by "thy spirit"? We think he must mean that which was the animating principle of Elijah's character, the master passion of his soul—his fidelity to God, and zeal for His name. This spirit of the great and good is their noblest legacy, our richest inheritance. 1. The spirit of Elijah was the secret of Elisha's power. We are prone to place a man's power in natural gifts and external advantages. But all experience proves that, in the work of the Lord, a simple, earnest, soul-possessing faithfulness is superior to all beside. He who has it, whatever else he may have or have not, is a true Elijah, who shall bring down the sacred fire, not upon a slaughtered bullock, but upon the souls of men. 2. The spirit of the great and good alone can compensate for their departure and loss. 3. The spirit of the great and good is alone unchanging in its character, and meets the requirements of every age. 4. To catch and inherit the spirit of the good and great is to attain the deepest and truest resemblance to them. (*W. Perkins.*) *What is the best service I can render my fellows?*—The giving fact of life is a fact permanent and wonderful. Steadily each of us is giving his fellows somewhat. I. VOLITIONALLY we may give—e.g. money, place, knowledge. Better than these, we may volitionally give a helping sympathy. II. But UNVOLITIONALLY, unconsciously, we are giving to our fellows; St. Peter's shadow (Acts v. 15). Every one of us is streaming upon his fellows an unconscious influence. Our practical question is—What is the best gift any one can yield his fellows? I find the answer in our Scripture. 1. The best gift one can yield his fellows is

character—the double portion of a noble spirit. 2. This fact, that the best gift we can yield our fellows is character, that the best service we can render them is the imparting of a noble spirit, has important applications—(1) To our friendships—noble friendships, as Elisha did with Elijah, we shall get nobleness. (2) To marriage. For the associations of marriage are the closest possible. And if each were noble, what nobleness has not each to each imparted? (3) To parenthood. The character of the parent is reproduced in the child. (4) The great character-giver is Jesus Christ. There is no failure in Him, as there was, to some extent, in Elijah. (*Homiletic Review.*)

Vers. 11, 12. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked.—*The ascension of Elijah*:—1. Observe, first, how he was employed at the time of his removal: they were “going on, and talking.” Without this information, many would have concluded that after he had received the intimation of his speedy departure, he was engaged alone in meditation and prayer. But it is a mistaken sentiment, that a preparation for heaven is to be carried on only by abstraction, contemplation, devotion. 2. Observe how he was conveyed from earth to heaven. “There appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” Was he removed by the instrumentality of a luminous cloud approaching and enclosing him, and then rising with a rapid curling motion? Or was he removed by the ministry of angels, disguised under these brilliant forms? This seems more probable. Is it not said that “He shall send forth His angels and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other”? Is it not said that Lazarus died, “and was carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom”? I. Let us consider it as a GRACIOUS RECOMPENSE OF SINGULAR PIETY. II. Let us consider it as AN INTIMATION OF THE FUTURE HAPPINESS THAT IS RESERVED FOR THE SERVANTS OF GOD. III. We may consider this translation as A SUBSTITUTE FOR DEATH. In some such way as this, it is probable, would men have passed from earth to heaven had they never sinned. In some such way as this will those living at the last day be qualified for glory. IV. We may regard it as A MODE OF TRANSITION MUCH TO BE DESIRED. Death is not a pleasing subject of meditation. It is called “an enemy.” It is said to be “the king of terrors.” Even exclusive of the future consequences, there is much to render it formidable. Nature cannot be reconciled to its own dissolution. (*W. Jay.*) *The translation of Elijah and the ascension of Christ*:—These two events, the translation of Elijah and the ascension of our Lord, have sometimes been put side by side in order to show that the latter narrative is nothing but a “variant” of the former. The comparison brings out contrasts at every step, and there is no readier way of throwing into strong relief the meaning and purpose of the former, than holding up beside it the story of the latter. I. The first point which may be mentioned is the contrast between THE MANNER OF ELIJAH’S TRANSLATION, AND THAT OF OUR LORD’S ASCENSION. It is perhaps not without significance that the place of the one event was on the uplands or in some of the rocky gorges beyond Jordan, and that of the other, the slopes of Olivet above Bethany. What a different set of associations cluster round the place of Christ’s ascension—“Bethany,” or, as it is more particularly specified in the Acts, “Olivet”? In the very heart of the land, close by and yet out of sight of the great city, in no wild solitude, but perhaps in some dimple of the hill, neither shunning nor courting spectators, with the quiet home where he had rested so often in the little village at their feet there, and Gethsemane a few furlongs off: in such scenes did the Christ, whose delights were with the sons of men, and His life lived in closest companionship with His brethren, choose the place whence He should ascend to their Father and His Father. But more important than the localities is the contrasted manner of the two ascents. The prophet’s end was like the man. It was fitting that he should be swept up to the skies in tempest and fire. Nor is it only as appropriate to the character of the prophet and his work that this tempestuous translation is noteworthy. It also suggests very plainly that Elijah was lifted to the skies by power acting on him from without. He did not ascend; he was carried up; the earthly frame and the human nature had no power to rise. How full of the very spirit of Christ’s whole life is the contrasted manner of His ascension! The silent gentleness, which did not strive nor cry nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets, marks Him even in that hour of lofty and transcendent triumph. There is no outward sign to accompany His slow upward movement through the quiet air. No blaze of fiery chariots, nor

ngitation of tempest is needed to bear Him heavenwards. The outstretched hands drop the dew of His benediction on the little company, and so He floats upward, His own will and indwelling power the royal chariot which bears Him, and calmly "leaves the world, and goes unto the Father." Nor is this absence of any vehicle or external agency destroyed by the fact that "a cloud" received Him out of their sight, for its purpose was not to raise Him heavenward, but to hide Him from the gazers' eyes, that He might not seem to them to dwindle into distance, but that their last look and memory might be of His clearly discerned and loving face. II. Another striking point of contrast embraces THE RELATION WHICH THESE TWO EVENTS RESPECTIVELY BEAR TO THE LIFE'S WORK WHICH HAD PRECEDED THEM. The falling mantle of Elijah has become a symbol, known to all the world, for the transference of unfinished tasks, and the appointment of successors to departed greatness. The mantle that passed from one to the other was the symbol of office and authority transferred; the functions were the same, whilst the holders had changed. The sons of the prophets bow before the new master; "the spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." So the world goes on. Man after man serves his generation by the will of God, and is gathered to his fathers; and a new arm grasps the mantle to smite Jordan, and a new voice speaks from his empty place, and men recognise the successor, and forget the predecessor. We turn to Christ's ascension, and there we meet with nothing analogous to this transference of office. No mantle falling from His shoulders lights on any of that group; none are hailed as His successors. What He has done bears and needs no repetition whilst time shall roll, whilst eternity shall last. His work is one: "the help that is done on earth, He doeth it all Himself." III. Whilst our Lord's ascension is thus marked as the seal of a work in which He has no successor, it is also emphatically set forth, by contrast with Elijah's translation, as THE TRANSITION TO A CONTINUOUS ENERGY for and in the world. Clearly the other narrative derives all its pathos from the thought that Elijah's work is done. But that same absence from the history of Christ's ascension, of any hint of a successor, has an obvious bearing on His present relation to the world, as well as on the completeness of His unique past work. When He ascended up on high, He relinquished nothing of His activity for us, but only cast it into a new form, which in some sense is yet higher than that which it took on earth. His work for the world is in one aspect completed on the cross, but in another it will never be completed until all the blessings which that cross has lodged in the midst of humanity, have reached their widest possible diffusion and their highest possible development. Long ages ago He cried, "It is finished," but we may be far yet from the time when He shall say, "It is done"; and for all the slow years between, His own word gives us the law of his activity, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." IV. The ascension of Christ is still further set forth, in its very circumstances, by contrast with Elijah's translation, as bearing on THE HOPES OF HUMANITY FOR THE FUTURE. The prophet is caught up to the glory and the rest for himself alone, and the sole share which the gazing follower or the sons of the prophets, straining their eyes there at Jericho, had in his triumph, was a deepened conviction of this prophet's mission, and perhaps some clearer faith in a future life. The very reverse is true of Christ's ascension. In Him our nature is taken up to the throne of God. His resurrection assures us that "them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." His passage to the heavens assures us that "they who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them," and that all of both companies shall with Him live and reign, sharing His dominion, and moulded to His image. That parting on Olivet cannot be the end. Such a leave-taking is the prophecy of happy greetings and an inseparable reunion. The king has gone to receive a kingdom, and to return. Memory and hope coalesce, as we think of Him who is passed into the heavens, and the heart of the Church has to cherish at once the glad thought that its Head and Pelper has entered within the veil, and the still more joyous one which lightens the days of separation and widowhood, that the Lord will come again. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The chariot of fire*:—Life is often compared to a journey which a man makes from the cradle to the grave. The close of Elijah's life on earth is very suggestive of such a figure. Elijah and Elisha had been walking all day from Gilgal to Beth el, and from Beth el to Jericho, and then across the Jordan, towards Gilead. Perhaps Elijah had that feeling, common to men, that he would like once more, before he died, to look on the old hills of Gilead where he was born and brought up. There are some striking and important lessons here: 1. We are all walking towards eternity. Every step we take brings

the end nearer. We are going right on like Elijah and Elisha, walking and talking, when suddenly, it may be without an hour's time to prepare for the change, God will call for us, and we must go to meet our Lord. 2. Elijah died as he lived. He had lived a life of wonderful faith, and striking manifestations of the presence of God had marked his whole career. His life was full of romance and heroism, through his faith in God and the supreme daring and implicit obedience to Divine commands which had marked his career. Through the last day of his life he kept up his work, setting God, trusting Him with his whole soul, and now, when God calls and sends His chariot down to the roadside on which he is walking, he is ready. He steps in, and is carried up to heaven. You must not imagine because the chariots are not seen, and the angels are not visible, that Elijah was the only man thus carried up to heaven. For aught we know God takes all His children home that way. Death will have no more effect on your character and personality than does your going out of one room into another. The Elijah that walked beside Elisha across the Jordan, who stepped into the chariot of fire, and was carried up to heaven, was the very same Elijah that Peter and James and John beheld at the transfiguration of Jesus on the holy mountain centuries afterwards. No, if you want to be a good man after you are dead, you must be a good man before you die. Death is not going to work any change of that sort in you. As the tree falls, so it will lie. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *The translation*:—I. THE FITNESS OF THIS TRANSLATION. 1. There was fitness in the place. 2. There was fitness in the method. 3. There was fitness in the exclamation with which Elisha bade him farewell. He cried, "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" Doubtless, amid that sudden flash of glory he hardly wist what he said. Yet he closely hit the truth. II. THE REASONS FOR THIS TRANSLATION. 1. One of the chief reasons was, no doubt, as a witness to his times. The men of his day were plunged in sensuality, and had little thought of the hereafter. 2. Another reason was evidently the desire on the part of God to give a striking sanction to His servant's words. How easy was it for the men of that time to evade the force of Elijah's ministry, by asserting that he was an enthusiast, an alarmist, a firebrand! III. THE LESSONS OF THIS TRANSLATION FOR OURSELVES. 1. Let us take care not to dictate to God. 2. Let us learn what death is. It is simply a translation: not a state, but an act; not a condition, but a passage. We pass through a doorway; we cross a bridge of smiles; we flash from the dark into the light. There is no interval of unconsciousness, no parenthesis of suspended animation. "Absent from the body," we are instantly "present with the Lord." 3. Let us see here a type of the rapture of the saints. We do not know what change passed over the mortal body of the ascending prophet. This is all we know, that "mortality was swallowed up of life." (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Waggons*:—Waggons came for Jacob to bear him to Egypt. Waggons will come for us by and by to carry us home. A chariot of fire, with horses of fire, came for Elijah, and bore him away into heaven. The chariots need not be visible—are not visible—that come for God's people; nevertheless, they are real. *A nation's true dependence*:—Elisha gives vivid expression here to his sense of his own and his nation's loss at Elijah's departure. His view of the situation was unselfish and patriotic; and yet it was the man who spoke rather than the Christian. Elijah had wrought wonders in Israel, and yet he was a man of like passions with others, as some acts of his life painfully show. Besides, he was simply God's instrument, as Washington was. Israel's true reliance was Jehovah Himself, and there was no occasion for the prophet's despair. Nations are prone to make a similar mistake: 1. In the way of false reliance for deliverance and abiding prosperity. 2. In looking to the outward instrument rather than the unseen guiding Power. 3. In magnifying natural laws rather than looking to supernatural forces. 4. In deploring their dangers and losses instead of falling upon their knees before God in prayer. (*Homiletic Monthly.*) *Chariots of fire for the New Year*:—Clear and distinct as the narration is in my text, both the actual circumstances and their significance have been popularly misconstrued. It is generally assumed that the prophet Elijah ascended in a chariot of fire, with horses of fire, although the narrative most unambiguously asserts that "Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." This misconception has hidden from view, or at least obscured, the import of the appearance of the fiery chariot and steeds which appeared at that fateful juncture in the history of these two great prophets; and especially has it veiled the fact that it was not Elijah, but Elisha, who was in sorest need of the celestial chariot at that

particular hour. In fine, I may say at once that, while the whirlwind came to transport Elijah to heaven, the chariot and horses of fire were sent to bear Elisha onward in the difficult way which lay before him, now that his leader and master was removed from his side. The dread responsibility which would descend upon his shoulders on the departure of Elijah had been weighing upon his mind as they travelled together. When the sons of the prophets asked him, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?" he replied in tense accents, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace." It was this new weight of responsibility that led him to seek at the last moment a double portion of the spirit of the departing prophet. To assure him of the Divine presence and power for his mission, he was granted, not only one wonderful glimpse of the translated prophet, but also a vision of the unseen chariots and horses of fire which were to remain as the permanent escort of the new prophet. The chariot and horses of fire "parted them both asunder." As Elijah was snatched out of Elisha's view, the empty space became filled with God's flaming equipage. The eyes that had looked to the prophetic master for direction and encouragement were now fastened upon the embattled might of Jehovah. Elijah had ascended, but the chariots and horses of fire remained. The experience was similar to that of Isaiah when he received his prophetic call. The hopes based upon the good King Uzziah ended with the king's death. Then Isaiah's eyes were opened, and he writes, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." The Lord God of Elijah remained to bear Elisha to the end of his journey. We have evidence that this vision remained as a permanent force and fact in the life of Elisha. In the sixth chapter of this Second Book of Kings we read of Elisha's servant being terrified by the surrounding host of Syrians, and of his receiving inward vision at the prayer of Elisha. "And he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Clearly, they were the prophet's permanent escort. I am glad to think that these fiery chariots were, not for the translated Elijah, who had but little need of them when he was being ushered into the immediate presence of the Lord of hosts, but for Elisha, whose earthly way needed to be sustained and cheered by an escort from the skies. Many are the mighty dead in whom our confidence was great. But there is no gap in the world. The vacant spaces are filled with the hosts of God. The Lord of hosts is with us. I. THERE CAN BE NO PROGRESS IN LIFE EXCEPT THROUGH GOD'S CHARIOTS OF FIRE. The only dynamic power is bestowed by invisible forces. We cannot make any real progress without the guidance of God's hand. II. The chariots of fire represent also DIVINE PROTECTION. They declare the presence of the Angel who redeems us from all evil. Through the panoply of science a myriad foes invade our safety. For our journey through the perils of the year we must seek the escort of the mailed hosts of God. III. The chariots of life represent THE IMPARTATION OF STRENGTH. It was a strengthened Elisha that smote the waters of the Jordan with Elijah's mantle, and cried with strenuous energy, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" IV. The chariots of fire are also THE FORCES OF PURIFICATION. To those whom God leads onward He is as a refiner's fire. The true law of the survival of the fittest is the survival of the purified. Without purification, the material of life becomes corrupt as a stagnant fen, and dies of its own self-created malaria. Yet visible fires cleanse not the soul. God is the only Purifier. V. It is further evident THAT THE RENEWAL OF OUR STRENGTH CAN BE OBTAINED ONLY THROUGH THE RENEWAL OF OUR VISION OF THE INVISIBLE GOD. 1. We need a new vision of Divine truth. God is a fire, and His chariots are flame. The vision shows the awful, immutable, all-pervasive energy of righteousness. His truth flames through creation in chariots of fire. 2. We must also have a new vision of the love of God. It is not well to see the infinite truth without beholding also the infinite love. It is impossible to understand the infinite love without having beheld the majesty of infinite truth. Love also is a fire, consuming all selfishness. Love in the heart of God is a fire that has kindled a mystery of sorrow in the temple of the Deity itself. The fires of God's chariots form letters of flame, and the reading is, "God is love." 3. We need a new vision of the nearness of God. His chariots are at hand. Leap into them, and His glory shall be round about you. 4. We need a new vision of God's intensity. God's horsemen linger not. (*John Thomas, M.A.*) And he saw him no more.—*Three partings*:—Life is full of partings. Every day we see some one whom we shall never see again. Homes are full of these partings, and churches are full of these partings, and therefore Scripture also, the mirror of life, is full

of these partings. When sin entered into the world, the first consequence was a murder, the second consequence was the Flood, but the third consequence was dispersion. "The Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth." Speech itself—that dearest, most delightful communion between heart and heart—was confounded, was made a Babel of sounds. This was that great parting asunder of the human family, which had in it the type, and the substance too, of all partings—allowing but one real reunion, begun on Calvary, realised in Pentecost, to be consummated at the Advent. We speak of three partings. I. **BODILY PARTINGS.** Those who were once near together in the flesh are no longer so. It is a thing of everyday experience. They are part of our lot. They remind us of the great dispersion; they should make us long for the great reunion. Some of these partings are easily borne. It is probable that every day we meet some one whom we shall never meet again till the judgment. There is little that is sorrowful in this—though even this has its solemnity. But some bodily partings have a more evident sadness. It is a serious thing to stand on the pier of some seaport town, and see a son or a brother setting sail for India or New Zealand. Such an experience marks, in a thousand homes, a particular day in the calendar with a peculiar, a lifelong sadness. II. **PARTINGS BETWEEN SOULS.** I speak still of this life. The sands of Tyre and Miletus were wet with tears when St. Paul there took leave of disciples and elders. But those separations were brightened by an immortal hope, and he could commend his desolate ones to the word of God's grace, as able to give them an inheritance at last with him and with the saved. I call that a tolerable, a bearable parting. III. **THE DEATH-PARTING WHICH MUST COME.** Set yourselves in full view of that—take into your thought what it is—ask, in each several aspect of earth's associations and companionships, what will be for you the meaning of the text, "He saw him no more." The life-partings and the soul-partings, all derive their chief force and significance from the latest and most awful—the one death-parting, which is not probably, but certainly, before each and all. (*C. J. Vaughan, D.D.*) *Two prophets parted*:—In various ways we become associated in life—similarity of tastes in art pursuits, in literature, in politics, trade, religion. Sometimes, having travelled, we meet with some companion to whose soul ours is knit so long as life lasts. It is only natural that we should like companionship. Few men are fitted to live alone. Long-continued solitude is irksome; we become bored with self. I. **A SUITABLE COMPANIONSHIP ON A HEAVENWARD JOURNEY.** "They two went on." The union between the two had been appointed by God. II. **LISTEN TO ELEVATING CONVERSATION BETWEEN HEAVENWARD TRAVELLERS.** The text tells us that as they journeyed they "talked." On what subject? Evidently it was concerning Elijah's departure. Both found it "greatly wise," not only to speak with the past, but to talk of the future. We should speak sometimes of the ending of life, not that we may become gloomy, but that we may realise the value of life—its seriousness and its far-reaching effects. The telegraph clerk holds in his hands, when at the dial plate, the power to communicate a wish at the distance of thousands of miles; and thus we hold in our hands the character of a life that shall extend deep down into the ages of eternity. Hence we should be most anxious as to the correctness of our aims in the present, and desirous that holy influence should not be lost in the hereafter. Words may flash along wires, and convey no meaning; music may flit from a string, and die in the distance; but the message and music of life should have meaning and volume, vibrating along the wires of immortal being. III. **WE HAVE NOW TO WITNESS THE SUDDEN SEPARATION BETWEEN HEAVENWARD COMPANIONS.** "As they still went on and talked, behold! there appeared horses of fire and a chariot of fire, and parted them both asunder." The ending was anticipated, yet sudden. What sort of companionship have we in our heavenward journey? What is the general tenor of our conversation as we journey? What sort of hope have we concerning the end of our journey? What state awaits us? (*F. Hastings.*)

Vers. 13, 14. He took also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him.—*The mantle of Elijah*:—When Elijah swept away from the side of Elisha in his chariot of fire, guarded by angelic horsemen, Elisha was for a moment overwhelmed. Ere long his eye fell upon the mantle of Elijah. That was all that was left to him that was physically tangible, but it meant a great deal. As his eyes gazed on it, his heart grew tender and soft as memory carried him back to that morning on his father's farm, years ago, when that mantle was thrown around his own shoulders and he

recognised it as God's call to the prophetic service. During all the years since that time that mantle had been constantly under his eyes. It had been the indication, the token, of the presence of God with Elijah. But it was only a token; the power was in the God who called Elijah and who strengthened him for his work. So we can imagine what deep pathos, what tender, worshipful emotion there was in the heart and voice of Elisha as with sincerest prayer he cried, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" As he said these words he smote the waters with the mantle, and God answered to his cry, and the waters stood back from the stroke, and he walked across on dry land. There is here: 1. A message for Christians in all ages who long to have in present emergencies the spiritual power known in the past. Our lesson is in this, that we cannot make the conditions of changing life conform to old conditions; but the attitude to God, the relation to God which made men and women the channels of Divine influence and blessing in any age of the world are possible to us. Elisha was a very different man from Elijah. If he had gone about trying to act like Elijah in all sorts of customs and habits of a minor nature he would have made himself the laughing-stock of his time. But we see that from the start Elisha grasped the kernel of the matter. It was not Elijah's mannerisms, nor Elijah's peculiar methods, but Elijah's faith in God that gave him his power. And so his cry is, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Joseph Parker says that by these words Elisha shows that he is not called to a merely official position, but that he is elected to represent the Divine Majesty upon earth. Had Elisha acted in a way which suggested self-sufficiency, his prophetic office would have been destroyed well-nigh before it was created. It is when we stand back in humility, and from the depths of our souls cry out of our desolateness to God, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" that we begin our work in the right spirit, and only then. Sometimes we hear men and women talking now about the days of Wesley, and of Whitefield, and the early fathers of the great Wesleyan revival and reformation, as though they thought by some change of clothing or change of outward physical living the power of those days could come back. But that cannot be true. That which was at the heart and was the moving centre of the great Wesleyan revival was the same power that made Elijah what he was and that gave Elisha force to continue his work. It was an abiding faith in God. What Christians need to-day, and what we must have if we are to know the power which has made the saints of God mighty in every age of triumph for the church, is the same spirit and the same faith that Elisha had when with the mantle of Elijah he smote the waters of the Jordan and cried from the depths of his soul, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" 2. God never fails to answer when His children call upon Him in faith. He immediately responded to Elisha's faith. He will be as faithful to us. 3. When with sincere hearts we serve God and surrender ourselves completely to do His will, God causes others to see. The young men at the prophetic school in Jericho were very quick to discern that the blessing of God rested on Elisha. They at once acknowledged that the spirit of Elijah had fallen on him. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *The prophet's mantle*:—Elijah's solemn, silent act was sufficiently clear and eloquent to Elisha. When a great teacher dies, says Sir John Malcolm in his *History of Persia*, he bequeaths his patched mantle to the disciple that he most esteems. And the moment the elect disciple puts on the holy mantle he is vested with the whole power and sanctity of his predecessor. The mantles which were used by ascetics and saints have always been the objects of religious veneration in the East. The holy man's power is founded upon his sacred character, and that rests upon his poverty and contempt of worldly goods. His mantle is his all, and its transfer marks out his heir. (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. Where is the Lord God of Elijah?—*The prophet as incarnating the Divine*:—I. THE GOD OF ELIJAH CALLS HIS SERVANTS TO TASKS IMPOSSIBLE TO UNAIDED HUMAN STRENGTH. God's servants in all ages are called to dare and do the impossible. In the common duties of our life we move constantly in that region. To conquer eight hundred and fifty priests of Baal was great; to conquer eight hundred and fifty thousand sinful influences assailing us week by week is as great. Elijah's energy exhibited the normal state of man's faculties inspired by God. We may share the same strength and achieve heroic things for Christ. The God of Elijah is with us, and will qualify us if we are but entirely consecrated to Him. II. THE GOD OF ELIJAH IS HE WHO MAKES THE OPPOSITES OF LIFE CONSPIRE FOR THE GOOD OF HIS SERVANTS. To the view of a shallow philosophy the universe

is made up of opposite and contradictory forces that cannot be reconciled. The faith that declares, "As the Lord liveth before whom I stand," sees in that light the contradictions of life harmonised in the one purpose of infinite goodness. So it was in the life of Elijah. There is the law of heredity, and the law of freedom and spontaneity. Faith unites and utilises both in the production of a new and original character. There is alternation in Providence. The years of plenty are followed by years of famine. Faith draws from each special benefit. Prosperity nurtured his inner life. Famine gave him his opportunity to drive home his lessons. John Bright and the Irish Famine in Free Trade Agitation. The faithless and faithful in society. The storm and the "still small voice." His historic career,—his posthumous influence. Faith united all these facts, and made them tributary to his work. III. THE GOD OF ELIJAH REQUIRES US TO LIMIT AND SUPPRESS ALL THAT MAY HINDER OUR ONE LIFE-PURPOSE. He was not æsthetic, but he won on Carmel. IV. IN THE GOD OF ELIJAH WE SEE REVEALED THE LIMITLESS PORTION OF THE GOOD. He satisfied Elijah. Surely He will suffice for us! V. THE GOD OF ELIJAH IS THE STRENGTH OF THE HUMBLER PROPHET. VI. THE GOD OF ELIJAH LOVES TO HAVE HIS GOODNESS, WISDOM, POWER, MIRRORED IN HIS SERVANTS' LIVES. Our knowledge is to reflect His thought, our benevolence His love, our strength His might. At the beginning of all enterprises, in contact with corrupt states of society, when we lament fallen heroes, when we face the difficult, we should catch the spirit of Elisha, and go on from conquering to conquer. (*J. Matthews.*) "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" :—It was a great thing when we could get people to ask questions about God. Philosophers talked a great deal about "the God-consciousness." Here was a man who had the "God-consciousness" wondrously developed. This man Elisha, when he asked this question, was not simply solicitous about God in general—he wanted a particular type of God. He wanted not any god nor every god, not any aspect of the true God, but the Lord God of Elijah. But was the Lord God of Elijah different from the god of other people? The implicit doctrine of this question seemed to be that He was. Did God reveal Himself in a hundred different ways through a hundred different personalities? He did, and that was the great fact that appeared in the text. It must be so, for God was infinite. Most people would dismiss this statement as a foolish platitude. But if we realised what it meant it would be obvious that God transcended intellectual conception. Let us not be distressed because we cannot understand God. Nobody could understand Him. As one of the greatest modern theologians had said, "It takes a God to understand God." In the ultimate sense no man could by searching find out God. Therefore, if we had an infinite God, He must be capable of expressing Himself in a hundred, in a thousand, ay, in ten thousand different ways. "Every man painted his own picture of God," and every man must be warranted in doing so if God was infinite. One individual saw God from a certain angle, another individual saw Him from a different one; different churches saw Him from different standpoints; but all were right, for God was infinite. Elisha wanted the type of God he had seen manifested in Elijah. It was a glorious doctrine, this doctrine that God revealed Himself through personality. Jesus Christ was in the supreme sense what every man is in a lesser sense—God's Word. A word was the manifestation of a man. What a grand opinion we should have of some people if they never opened their mouth! When we spoke a word we were known; a word was the expression of a personality. And Jesus Christ came down to this earth to articulate God to man. And what Christ did supremely every believer did in a lesser degree. Elisha had got all his theology from Elijah. Elijah never wrote a word; he left no volume of theology behind him, but there was no prophet who had made such a permanent impression on Israel and on the world. He lived his theology, and he gave such a revelation of God to his people that when he was gone they said, "Where is the God of Elijah?—the God of Elijah for me." Some of us had gathered most of our conception of God from some noble personality. That was our aim in life as believers to give a theology to men, to live a theology before men. Infidelity could answer argument, but argument was no answer to life. What sort of a God was the God of Elijah—God as represented in the teachings, and work, and life of Elijah? He was a God of wondrous power. We wanted a God of that sort to-day. The God of Elijah was a big God. What a little God some people had. Some people had a very shrivelled theology nowadays. People were doing to-day what the Israelites of olden times were charged with doing—they were limiting the High One of Israel, limiting the

Illimitable. What a ghastly irony ! There were people who were turning nature into a dungeon, imprisoning God in His own creation, chaining Him with what they called "Natural Law." There were people nowadays who instead of having the God of Elijah had a God to whom it was practically no use to pray. But what were natural laws but God's methods of working ? Elijah's God was a God of marvellous power in Nature. It would be wonderfully refreshing to have a little more of the God of Elijah to-day. Elijah's God was a supernatural God. He was a miracle-working God. The God of Elijah was a God who would have right done at all costs. Did some one say Elijah represented a very stern righteousness—that we should not like a stern Master to-day ? He was sure we should not. Elijah would not be at all popular nowadays. Did some one say that if Elijah had lived in these Christian days his sternness would have been modified ? Surely it was not too great a stretch of the imagination to say that in the last glimpse we had of him, on that snow-clad mount of Christ's transfiguration, he spoke no longer of justice but of redemption. But people said, "We believe nowadays in God's Fatherhood." But "Fatherhood" must be defined. It did not mean indifference to right and wrong. The manifestation of God that Elijah gave meant righteousness. Fatherhood was the great attribute of Elijah in the eyes of his disciple. He revealed God not only as a God of wondrous might, but as a tender Father. How tender that strong man could be ! The Lord God of Elijah was also a God of intense zeal. We did not get that God very much in these days. It was an unpleasant fact that the great majority of people were outside the churches to-day ; but what was worse was the fact that the majority of Christians were content with this state of things. It was an unpleasant fact that there was such a dearth of conversions, but it was worse that Christians were not concerned about it. Elijah's conception of God allowed him to pray. There are people to-day whose theology scarcely permits them to pray. Elijah was a most remarkable man for solitary communion with God. We must be men of prayer if we would be living manifestations of God. (*Dinsdale T. Young.*)

*The Lord God of Elijah :—*The meaning of the word Elijah is that Jehovah is God ; and to impress this truth, carried in His own Name, on the hearts of a people that wished to forget Him, and that were always prone to worship other gods—this was the object of his wonderful career. 1. Now, the first point I wish to dwell upon is this, that the name, the Lord God of Elijah, carries in it a revelation of a God that we need believe in in these days. Once we get a name revealed in this Book, or by God Himself, it cannot be asked what there is in a name. There is a great deal in a name if it is revealed from on high. 2. Again, the Lord God of Elijah is a God who can wield all the powers of nature and providence to bring down a rebellious people to acknowledge Him. 3. Again, the Lord God of Elijah is a God who honours all who honour Him in every age. Now, Elijah was a man of great faith. He asked for things that were never asked for before, but he was never disappointed. 4. There are special occasions when we cannot help exclaiming, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah ?" and one of them is when our leaders are taken from us. This was one such occasion. 5. Then, again, we are surprised that leaders are taken away in a time of great indifference with regard to religious truth. 6. Then, lastly, where is the Lord God of Elijah ? Let me tell you. He is now ready as ever to clothe any man with power from on high who believes in that power and believes that he cannot do without it. The self-sufficient man will never get it. Where is the Lord God of Elijah ? He is there, alive to the service of the most obscure of His servants ; He reckons them all, and rewards them. (*E. H. Evans.*)

*Good men, witness of God :—*The Rev. T. R. Stevenson says, in a sermon quoted in the *Chinese Recorder* : "During a recent visit to Japan I met with a gentleman who mentioned an incident which I can never forget. One rarely hears anything more impressive. He knew a missionary in China who one day encountered a Chinaman. The latter had been in the habit of watching the conduct of the former, and that very narrowly. He said, 'I want your God to be my God.' The missionary answered, 'What do you mean ?' 'I wish to be of the same religion as you.' 'Why do you ?' 'Because if your God is like you, He must be good.' *God's attractiveness as seen in the devout life :—*There was a boy dying in one of the English counties. He had heard Whitefield, with his marvellous voice, and glowing heart, preach about the Lord Jesus Christ, and the impression never left him. While yet a child, he had to die ; and as the fever flush mounted to his brow, and as the fire burned in his eye, he said, 'I should like to go to Mr. Whitefield's God.' What a testimony ! what a recommendation ! I say to

Paul to-day, as he tells me of how God's grace was sufficient for him, "I should like to go to Paul's God." (*J. Robertson.*) *Calling upon the God of another* :—"God of Queen Clotilda," cried out the infidel Clovis I. of France, when in trouble on the field of battle, "God of Queen Clotilda! grant me the victory!" Why did he not call upon his own god? Saunderson, who was a great admirer of Sir Isaac Newton's talents, and who made light of his religion in health, was, nevertheless, heard to say in dismal accents on a dying-bed, "God of Sir Isaac Newton, have mercy on me!" (*Daniel Baker.*) *Elijah's God* :—Elisha caught the mantle of Elijah, whose marvellous translation to heaven he witnessed. Smiting the waters of Jordan, as his master and predecessor had done, with the same mantle, Elisha cried, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Elijah had gone. Had God also gone? The parted river proved that Elijah's God was with Elisha. I. **ELIJAH'S GOD.** To see what kind of a God Elijah served, glance at some of the leading events in the prophet's life. Dense darkness hangs over Israel (1 Kings xvi.), idolatry being rampant. Elijah's challenge to Ahab (1 Kings xviii.). The prophet's threat of famine fulfilled. God's care over him by the brook Cherith. The unfailing oil and meal at Zarephath. The widow's son restored to life. The contest on Carmel. The God that answereth by fire. It seems as if God puts Himself into Elijah's hands, and the prophet receives whatever he asks for—a famine, or fire, or life for the dead, or the restoration of a nation to God. Why did God so honour Elijah? Because Elijah honoured God. II. **GOD'S ELIJAH.** Do we want Elijah's God? If so, we must be like Elijah. Notice the prophet's—1. Boldness. He was not afraid to stand alone. 2. Intense earnestness. His supreme desire was the salvation of Israel. 3. Earnest prayer. "He prayed earnestly." 4. Strong faith. He relied absolutely upon God—before Ahab, by the brook, on Carmel, &c. 5. Purity. His character would bear the test of God's searching eye. "As the Lord God liveth, before whom I stand." 6. Obedience. He obeyed God implicitly. 7. Constant communion with God. The Lord was his chief companion. 8. Power, with God and with men. Do we want Elijah's God to work for us and with us? Then we must have Elijah's character. The Almighty is always on the side of His Elijahs. (*Charles Cross.*) *Elijah's God* :—Elisha had now taken the place of Elijah, his master, and was going forth to prosecute Elijah's duties and to continue his work. We notice here :—I. **THERE ARE DIFFERENT WORKMEN, BUT ONE MASTER.** 1. God does not need any one particular man. Elijah was great, powerful, and good, but his departure did not hinder the Master's work. 2. It is the master-power that carries on the Master's plans. Elijah was nothing without God. Neither was Elisha. How deeply Elisha felt his powerlessness! He did not cry out "where is Elijah?" but "where is Elijah's God?" II. **THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS IS AN ENCOURAGEMENT FOR OURSELVES.** Elisha had seen the works of his predecessor, and knew that those works had been performed in the strength of the Lord. In that same strength he could also be helped. 1. The advantage of studying God's work in the past. 2. The faith which appropriates that work. 3. The urgency of prayer. Elisha's cry was a prayer, an appeal. III. **THE CUMULATIVE POWER OF THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE.** 1. Each minister inherits not only what his predecessor obtained, but what his predecessor did. And during the past thousand years all the knowledge, power, and experience of the whole army of preachers has been amassed and bequeathed to us. Elisha used Elijah's old mantle. He was content to follow the old paths. The new is not always best. At the same time neither the old nor the new can profit. It is the God we want, and He is always the same; and His revelation is made more complete through every succession of His servants. IV. **THE NECESSITY OF PUTTING GOD TO THE PROOF.** How many are content with crying out, "Where is God?" They cry, but don't put Him to the test. It is so. 1. In our religious experience. 2. In our daily work. 3. In our numerous trials. It is no use to cry unless you act. Elisha cried and smote the water. Then God proved His presence. The evil condition of the world now is because we cry so much and trust so little. (*Homilist.*) *Man's cry and God's response* :—I. **THE RELIGIOUS CRY OF HUMANITY.** "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" This question comes out in all hearts, in all religions. Where is God? Where is He who made me and for whom I am made, and who alone can satisfy my nature? Where is He? Oh that I knew where I might find Him? &c. It is a cry rising from the deepest depths of human nature, old as the ages and wide as the race. II. **THE MERCIFUL RESPONSE OF GOD.** When he "had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over." Elisha wanted

the manifestation of the God of Elijah, and for this purpose he smote the waters. The response of God here to the cry was—1. Symbolical. It came not in words, but in things. The response was—2. Prompt. No sooner did Elisha touch the waters than they divided. He was not left in suspense. The answer was at hand. The answer of this question is always at hand. The response was—3. Satisfactory. "And Elisha went over." Every man who earnestly asks this question may find a satisfactory answer, and cross the stream of all difficulties. (*Homilist.*) *Power, or one's might for duty*:—I was riding one night in the late winter on the elevated road through the Battery Park in New York City. As I looked out of the window I saw that the electric lights were blazing with almost the brilliancy of the sun. Their sharp scintillating beams fell on the branches of the trees that filled the park. But as those beams fell upon them I noticed that not a single leaf-bud stirred. I saw, too, that all the leaf-buds and all the twigs were cased in ice, and the imprisoning ice flashed back haughty gleam even to the powerful electric light. I began to think, if those trees were never to be touched by any other light there could never hang upon them any beautiful wealth of summer foliage. There is no force in that shining to push into movement the latent energy folded in those leaf-buds. There is only one force which can stir the trees to energy, and that is the marvellous power of the spring sun. Do you not think that Christians are often very like the folded dormant buds and the icy branches? Much light and various falls on them—light of knowledge, of worship, of Sabbaths, of preaching, of harmonious song, of culture; all the wonderful light of our Christian civilisation. But often they do not seem to stir much; they do not greatly grow; some churches, if they have a prosperous time financially, are not much discontented if there are no conversions. After all, is a tree with its leaf-buds folded snugly in and its branches ice-covered so bad a symbol of many a Christian, many a church? Is there any power that can stir them, as in the spring-time the wonderful sunlight stirs a tree, sending the life-currents thrilling through all its substance, swelling the leaf-buds till they must push out their folded banners, piling on to each least twig the succulent growth of another season? One cannot believe the Scripture and say anything but yes to such a question. 1. There is the old gospel. Paul calls it the power of God unto salvation (Rom. i. 16). What a power it was in the city of the Cæsars! What a power it is! 2. There is the living Christ. The powerful hand of Him who is death's victor is on the helm of things. 3. There is the abiding Holy Spirit. The reason why Christianity is not a history merely, like the reigns of the Cæsars, is because the abiding and vitalising Holy Spirit is in the world, charging the historic truth of Christianity with present energy. There is the power of the Spirit. 4. There is for Christians the promise of power. To such as have already become the sons of God, there is a promise given of still greater attainment, the power of the indwelling Spirit. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me. Plainly, such power will make duty easy and triumphant. The conditions of the gaining of such power are well illustrated in our Scripture and its surroundings. 1. Determination to have it. Elisha would not leave Elijah (vers. 2, 4, 6). 2. Determination to have it notwithstanding dissuaves. The sons of the prophets could not put sufficient obstacle in Elisha's way (ver. 5). 3. Such determination to have it as to dare to ask for it. "And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me" (ver. 9). 4. Such purpose to have it as keeps us in communion with Christ at all hazards. When Elijah went beyond the Jordan Elisha would go over with him (ver. 8). 5. Such determination to have it as makes us resolutely obedient to the conditions of its reception. Elisha would see the rapture of Elijah (ver. 12). Brave use of what power we have, sure that in the using more power will be imparted. "And Elisha took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and smote the waters." Christians or churches need not be like trees in winter with folded buds and branches ice-encased. There is melting, energising power for them. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. *They said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.*—*The recognition of spiritual superiority*:—This is clearly an instance, not of the flunkey spirit, but of justifiable deference, a commendable acknowledgment of spiritual superiority. In the religious world, as in other spheres, some men are meant to lead and others to follow. Yes, but every man can select his own hero. Worship he must, but it is not necessary that he should become an idolater. He can determine for

himself who or what shall be the object of his veneration and regard. No man is compelled to cast the pearl of admiration at the feet of swine. Hence to know the true status and quality of men it is sufficient to inquire at what shrine they prostrate themselves. To know the ideals he cherishes, the names he reveres, the heroes he admires, is to know a man at the most vital and central point. Where, then, does this test place these sons of the prophets that were at Jericho? It gives them the loftiest position; it stamps them as spirits of the wisest and noblest type. 1. How do we compare with these sons of the prophets which were at Jericho? What qualities do we require in men as the condition of our deferential regard? Is it enough that a man is of so-called royal descent? That by the accident of birth he occupies a throne and is called a king? How do we define these terms "royalty" and "kingship"? "Fine feathers" do not "make fine birds." Neither do the trappings of kingly office constitute royalty and entitle their possessor to the loyal devotion of the people. There is a royalty of mere blood and lineage which may be, and frequently is, associated with vice and vulgar display and crass selfishness and intolerant pride. On the other hand, there is an aristocracy of the spirit, a royalty of soul, that comes not by a birth of blood, but by regeneration of the Spirit, and that displays itself in all sweet and gracious and noble living. To which of these do we pay homage? 2. There is a further application of this thought on which we may dwell. It is sometimes said, "Oh, but we must have respect for the cloth." What cloth? If "cloth" be the badge of authority, if the possession of it constitutes a man's claim to special deference and regard, then how strangely is Elisha's first and mightiest credential overlooked here. For he comes carrying in his hand the well-known mantle of the great man who has just ascended. But these sons of the prophets do not appear to have noticed it. We do not read, "Now when the sons of the prophets saw the mantle of Elijah in the hand of Elisha . . . they bowed themselves. . . ." Their homage was rendered on totally different ground. They saw that "the spirit of Elijah" did "rest on Elisha." "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." In the administration of the Kingdom of God on earth there is, of necessity, a law of succession. There is but one unchangeable priesthood. Every other servant of Jehovah, however great and apparently indispensable, is presently withdrawn from the busy sphere. But he leaves behind him his mantle. He does not take with him the source of power. So the Spirit of the Lord moves with sovereign freedom, alighting upon whom He will. "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." Why Elisha? In almost every feature he is a striking contrast to his predecessor. "And when the sons of the prophets which were at Jericho saw . . . they said." Then Elisha's qualification for the high position was self-evident. It could be perceived and appraised by the onlooker. (*H. Davenport.*) *Elijah's legacy* :— I. IT WAS A LEGACY BEQUEATHED WITH DIFFICULTY. There is a great, general truth underlying these words. It is a hard thing to communicate moral qualities. It is easy to cause another to possess your material wealth; it is not so easy to enrich him mentally, morally, or spiritually. This is the experience of every good parent. You want to make men of your children. It is no easy task. What patience, what wisdom, what grace are needed to do it. Yet thank God it is a work in which many succeed. But, again, when Elijah said, "Thou hast asked a hard thing"—he meant, I think, that the request was beyond him. He could not give his servant what he sought. He might give him his mantle, and by doing so symbolise the transference of his office, but he could not give him his power. He could teach him—could from the resources of his own experience give him many a hint that was sure to be useful when he should fill his master's place—but the power—the spiritual force—required, and required as the chief thing—that he could not cause him to inherit. So is it with us in whatever capacity we act for the good of others. We draw a distinct line between our work, what we can do, and what is beyond us—as possible only with One higher than we. We can plough the fields and sow the seed, but we cannot quicken it. We can preach and teach, but we cannot change the heart. II. ELIJAH'S LEGACY WAS BEQUEATHED WITH GREAT WILLINGNESS. When Elisha said, "Let me have a double portion of thy spirit," Elijah's first thought was, "You ask what is very hard to give"; but his second thought was, "Well, but I am after all pleased with your request. Now, I don't say that I can give you this; but still what I cannot do I am sure the God whom I serve will do. Yes; it is a good desire, and if thou art faithful unto the end it shall be done unto thee." There is surely an important lesson to be learned by us here. We ought not to do only the

good that is of easy achievement. It will, indeed, be well for us if we always do what we can, yet the danger is to suppose that all we can do is what we can do with ease. We should remember that there is little value in the life that copes not with difficulties. III. ELIJAH'S LEGACY WAS BEQUEATHED BECAUSE ASKED. "I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." From the promptness in which the request was made it is apparent that this was the blessing his heart was set upon obtaining. When the heart is fully resolved the tongue does not hesitate. His master confesses that it was a hard thing to grant; but if he had not asked it would have been impossible to endow him with such a blessing. It is the seeking soul that is enriched, not because God would enrich only the few, but His blessing can only enter the open receptive spirit. We have not because we ask not, or because we ask amiss. The thing I ask is great, but the greatness of my faith is commensurate, and, lo! the promise is spoken—"It shall be so unto thee," and after the voice the heavens open and the blessing comes down. Let Elisha's case encourage us to ask for what we need. IV. ELIJAH'S LEGACY WAS BEQUEATHED AS THE RESULT OF FAITHFUL SERVICE. A condition was attached to the bestowment of the blessing asked, "If thou see me when I am taken from thee it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." (*A. Scott.*) *The true succession* :—The succession of Elisha was one marked by the sharpest and boldest contrasts. I. IN HIS ORIGIN. Elijah came from the mountainous country of Gilead. He was the wild man of the mountains. Elisha was called from the peaceful scenes of agricultural life. II. THE APPEARANCE OF THE MEN. This was totally unlike. Learn, that succession does not consist in dress; that a great man's successors are those who carry forward his work, not those who ape his appearance. The true succession is one of character, and not one of clothes. III. IN THEIR MANNER OF LIFE. So it should be always in the sphere of religion. There are other and better ways of succeeding to our Puritan forefathers than by singing Rouse's version, adopting the nasal tone, sitting in cold meeting-houses, and listening to forty-headed sermons. But how slow some good people are to distinguish between religion and its accidental dress! IV. THE PARTICULAR FORM OF THEIR WORK FOR GOD. Elijah's was destruction; Elisha's was construction. The first act of Elijah was to smite the land with a terrible curse. The first act of Elisha was to bless Jericho with the gift of good water. Lessons taught by the contrasts which I have mentioned. 1. The little stress which the Divine Arrayer and Architect places upon external sameness. We discover this Divine indifference far below the human level, and in the lowest spheres of life. The two blades of grass which grow at your feet are not exactly alike. They have their generic likeness, but they also have their points of difference. So with the roses. Each has its own style, its own peculiar blush. So with the noble pines which stand high up upon nature's battlements waving their majestic plumes. Each one of them stands up an individual giant, itself in girth, itself in height, itself in beauty. Men come forth from the Divine Hand as unique, as peculiar, as are the roses or the planets. Each has his own beauty; each has his own orbit; each bears the stamp of the day in which he lives. Take an old Roman coin, and compare it with one which comes forth clearly cut from our own mint. What a difference between them! Yet both are precious metal, both are coin. So is it with the man whom God forms and equips for His work. He lays stress only upon the soul, only upon the spirit of a man. 2. The variety and flexibility of means and methods allowed in the kingdom of God. From the necessity of the case, great flexibility and variety of method must be allowed to those who work for God. Because the generations change, knowledge increases, the line of battle shifts. He would be little better than a fool who should now preach to men in the style of the great divines of two centuries ago. As well might the soldier of to-day take the battle-axe, and go forth to the battlefield where the Minie whistles, and the shell shrieks, and the cannon-ball jumps miles at the touch of powder. And then as to Christian activity. Good men are afraid of many of its new forms. They shake their heads, as much as to question whether a soul, reached by the Gospel through the instrumentality of a layman, is after all much advantaged. Why, out yonder on the Western fields, the farmer harvests in one day with his reaping machine as much grain as he could do in a whole month with the old sickle. And he is not sorry; not sorry that he can cultivate five hundred acres instead of five. So, in these latter days, through the diversity of operations, the reaping power of the Gospel is multiplied a thousandfold. And yet men shake their heads. "This irregular preaching of the Gospel," they exclaim. "Are we not going a little too

fast? After all, hadn't we better leave the world harvest to the priests and their orthodox sickles?" That God's great work in this world always proceeds from that which is negative to that which is positive; from conversion to edification, from destruction to construction. In the Divine economy, threatening, correction, repression, destruction, mark only the first stage, the incipency of the work. They are only ordered for the sake of an end outside of and beyond themselves. And this, the Divine method, we should follow. 1. In our working for others. We must lead the penitent forward into the life of positive righteousness, or we never form the "new man." A man is like a vessel. He is formed to contain, and will surely be filled either with the good or with the bad. You cannot count on a vacuum in human nature; and, if you could, the world would get no benefit from it, and God would abhor it. You have not therefore saved a man, if you have but emptied him of that which is bad. 2. This truth has also application to our own religious life. Christianity, piety, are more than negation, and our religion, if it is long to satisfy us, must have its positive side. Inanity is well-nigh as bad as foulness, and it would be to the shame of your manhood and your Saviour if you stopped with it. Take some aims worthy of a new life. Begin on something positive in the way of goodness. 3. The proper use of the great and good men who have gone before us. This is to take up their work, and to carry it forward; not, perhaps, just as they did, but as the Divine Providence intimates, and as we are best fitted to do it. (*T. T. Mitchell, D.D.*) *Possessing the spirit of another*:—Said the late Dr. Gordon: "Imagine one without genius and devoid of the artist's training sitting down before Raphael's famous picture of 'The Transfiguration,' and attempting to reproduce it. How crude and mechanical and lifeless his work would be! But if such a thing were possible as that the spirit of Raphael should enter into the man, and obtain the mastery of his mind and eye and hand, it would be entirely possible that he should print this masterpiece. for it would simply be Raphael producing Raphael. This is the solution of our imitation of Christ. To be filled with the Spirit is the secret of becoming like our Lord. *A holy succession*:—A good man died a little time since, and when his body had been carried to the grave, the little funeral party returned to the house, and the minister after a few words of kindly comfort was taking his departure, the eldest son called him aside for the moment and said, "There is a place empty in the church. My father is gone, will you take me instead? I want to fill up the gap: I want to be baptized for the dead." (*Helps for Speakers.*)

Vers. 19-22. *And the men of the city said unto Elisha.—The bitter waters sweetened—Elisha the healer*:—Jericho, a city of high antiquity, was one of the most important in the land of Palestine. Its walls were so broad, that at least one person—Rahab—had her house upon them. Silver and gold were so abundant that one man—Achan—could stealthily appropriate 200 shekels. Between the city and the far East, there had existed for years, before its occupation by the children of Israel, a wide and extensive commerce, of which the "goodly Babylonish garment," purloined in the act of dishonesty just mentioned, may be accepted as proof. The New Testament notices of Jericho are full of interest. The lonely limestone rocks behind the city formed the scene of our Lord's temptation. It was down the banks of the Jordan, at Jericho, the Master had previously gone to be baptized. Three times in Jericho did our Blessed Lord give sight to the blind. Once in Jericho, the descendant of Rahab the "hostess" accepted the hospitality of Zaccheus the publican. For five hundred and fifty years a doom had lain upon Jericho. She had been the first city to resist the advance of Israel under the leadership of Joshua. She was therefore not only condemned to fall "before the captain of the Lord's host," and amid the much ceremony with which we are all familiar—the annihilation was accompanied with a terrible curse. The man who ventured to rebuild Jericho was to lay the foundation in his first-born, and in his youngest son to set up the gates. Josephus describes the district in his day as quite a fairyland, with its palms and roses, and fragrant balsams and thickly-dotted pleasure grounds—a perfect garden and paradise of Eastern beauty. At the period of the text, however, things were very different. The spring was still suffering from the old doom pronounced against Jericho, it was noxious, unfit for drinking, prejudicial to the soil: "The men of the city said unto Elisha"—who was at this time residing here in the sacred college—"Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my Lord seeth, but the water is naught, and the ground barren." 1. The Gospel is "a new cruse" for the world. Christi-

anity comes not in "the oldness of the letter" and the law, but in "the newness of the Spirit." The Gospel, too, begins at the origin of the evil—the heart—that is "the spring of the waters." What is needed is "a clean heart and a right spirit"; the poison is at the fountain head and must be dealt with there. Once again, like the salt in the cruse, how unlikely and insufficient at first sight the simple Gospel appears for the world's conversion. The words with which Elisha accompanied the casting in of the salt, and the consequent working of the miracle, are very noticeable: "Thus saith the Lord," exclaimed the prophet, "I have healed these waters." How the change was effected, we cannot tell. Means were employed to show that God in His greatest works has a place for the instrumentality of man. Elisha "cast in" the salt. 2. In the redemption of a lost world, God has room for the energies of believing men. "As ye go, preach." "Sow beside all waters." But God is the grand agent. The power of the healing waters comes from the Great Physician. "The new cruse" and "the salt" in it, both are God's—sufficient honour for poor sinful men to be their administrators—let God be "All in All." There was no mistaking the result of the Divine interposition by the hand of Elisha in relation to the bitter waters of Jericho. "Thus saith the Lord, there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land." 3. The figure is that of the Gospel again, both in its influence on society at large and the individual believing heart. Put "the new cruse" and "the salt" once really in, and a new heart leads to a new life, and the world at large, once its springs are really touched, feels it through all its tributaries and ramifications. What has Christianity not done for the social life of man? It has abolished polygamy. It has put honour on the marriage tie. It has created lazarettoes for the sick, and asylums for the penitent profligate. What has it not done for the cause of civil liberty? It has struck the fetters from the negro. It has proclaimed freedom of conscience. What has Christianity not done for the commercial enterprise and the outward prosperity of the world? The missionary is the pioneer of the merchant. (*H. J. Howat.*) *Cleansing the fountain*:—Elisha began his work as a leader of the church of his time by a deed of mercy. Elisha made no claim that he had healed the waters himself, and he did not pretend that there was any power in the salt to work the change. He was simply God's minister, and the salt was used simply as a symbol of God's presence in the cleansing of the fountain. We have in this cleansing of the fountain suggested to us: that a man's surroundings may be very pleasant, and his temporal circumstances such as to cause the envy of his neighbours, and yet his life may be embittered and his career utterly despoiled because of some malady of the spirit that takes away his peace, and ruins his happiness. Elisha assumed that it would be useless to change the water in the stream, for the evil fountain left unchanged would continue to pour forth its poisoned waters. So he went to the spring, and cast in the healing salt at the fountain head. We are reminded of the words of Jesus where He declares that "A good man, out of the good treasure of heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." And again our Saviour says, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies": and He adds, "These are the things which defile a man." The poisonous stream of conduct is poured forth because the heart is evil. It is one of Aristotle's axioms that the goodness or badness of anything is determined from its principle: hence it is that we call that a good tree that hath a good root, that a good house that hath a good foundation, that good money that is made of good metal, that good cloth that is made of good wool; but a good man is not so called because he has good hands, a good head, good words, a good voice, and all the lineaments of his body similar and composed, as it were, in a geometrical symmetry, but because he has a good heart, good affections, good principles of grace, whereby all his faculties, both of body and of soul, are always in a readiness to do that which is right. Plutarch tells us that Apollodorus dreamed one night that the Scythians took him and tortured him, and as they were putting him to death in the boiling cauldron, his heart said unto him, "It is I that have brought thee to this sorrow; I am the cause of all the mischief that hath befallen thee." And it is certainly true that the heart of man is the forge and the anvil where all the actions of his life are hammered out. You must give your whole heart to God, and obey Him in every way, or else all pretensions to religion are hypocrisy. The secret of Christianity's great power in the world is in this transformation of the heart. Elisha made sure that the water in the stream would be clean and pure, by cleansing the

fountain. Christ makes sure that the new life of the man who truly comes to Him shall be good, by cleansing the heart. (L. A. Banks, D.D.) *Elisha healing the water, and the means he used*.—What a true picture is here delineated of things on earth! What a living sample of its present state! Look where you will, go where you please, there is something pleasant and something unpleasant. May we not hereby learn how sin has defaced this fair creation, so that nowhere can perfection be seen. And now, therefore, the Lord will bring good out of evil. He will make this city a resting-place for his prophets. I. IN WHAT PART OF THE WATERS DID ELISHA EXERT HIS POWER? It was the spring. This conveys a deep spiritual truth. We can easily perceive that, had Elisha's attention been directed to the water only a few yards from the fountain-head, his labour would have been for nought. As fast as he sweetened the running water, the bitter fountain would still pour out its venom. But we do not so readily see and allow that, except the corruption of human nature be attacked at the fountain-head, the heart, all other remedial measures can only work a passing effect, since the bitter stream of innate depravity will still run out. II. THE MEANS ELISHA USED. "And he said, Bring me a new cruse," &c. Salt is a conspicuous article in Scripture. It was a pledge of fidelity, and is so still in the East. If you once eat salt with an Arab, his life is pledged for your life. Some few grains of salt and bread pass the lips, and then the words are used—"By this salt and bread I will not betray thee"; and in the Book of Chronicles we read—"The Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David by a covenant of salt" (2 Chron. xiii. 5). Salt was also a sign of maintenance. Thus, in the Book of Ezra, the adversaries of Judah, in stating their case to Artaxerxes the king, say, "Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace" (Ezra iv. 14), which is literally, as rendered in the margin, "because we are salted with the salt of the palace"—i.e., supported at the king's charge. When a native of the East means to say he is fed by any one, he uses the expression, "I eat such an one's salt." Salt was also a constant accompaniment of the ceremonial law. "Every sacrifice shall be salted with salt," are the words of Jesus; and it is in this sense that we find our Lord and His apostles using salt figuratively for grace, saying, "If the salt have lost its saltiness, wherewith will ye season it?" (Mark ix. 49, 50). Thus the means used by Elisha to heal the waters point to another deep spiritual truth—they remind every one of this inquiry, Have ye salt in yourselves? Is grace working in your heart, "mortifying your evil and corrupt affections, and inclining you daily to exercise all virtue and godliness of living"? But there is another feature in the means here used which may convey a useful hint—they were contrary to nature, contrary to any means that man would have employed to produce a like effect. Salt, we know, renders water bitter and nauseous instead of sweet and pleasant to drink, and naturally, therefore, the salt would have served but to increase the brackishness of the fountain. The fact, then, of Elisha using a remedy opposed to the effect wanted, not only went to make the miracle more evident, more palpable, but it also confirmed a stumbling truth—namely, that grace and nature are contrary the one to the other—that the ways of God (so far as seen in this fallen world) and the ways of man in curing an evil are altogether different; both will use means; but the means which it pleases Jehovah to use are not those which man would choose or even think of. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isa. lv. 8). Surely these opposites—these unlikely means fetching a good end—are meant to teach us something. What can it be? They were intended to humble man, and to bring him into submission to the righteousness of God. "God chooses foolish things of the world," or things foolish in the world's sight, to "confound the wise" (1 Cor. i. 27). (G. L. Glyn.) *The pleasant and the painful*.—I. LIFE AS IT IS. That is, with the pleasant and the painful associated. Now, this is a picture of every man's life. 1. It is so materially. How much we have in this material world that is pleasant to our senses, and healful and strengthening to our bodies; but amidst all there is the painful. There are malarial swamps, pestilential winds, roaring earthquakes, and poisonous minerals and plants, &c. &c. 2. It is so intellectually. There is much in the region of intellect that is pleasant—bubbling springs of thought, tempting regions of inquiry, bright visions and hypotheses bespangling the heavens. But with all this there is much that is painful—dense clouds of ignorance hanging over the scene, hideous doubts howling in the ear, terrific chasms yawning at the feet. 3. It is so socially. How much in social life is pleasant—the friendly grasps, the affectionate greetings, the sweet amenities of those with whom we meet and mingle. But with all this there is much that is painful—social unchastities, hypocrisies,

frauds, insolences. 4. It is so religiously. The religious, where the idea of God fills the horizon, there is the infinitely pleasant. But in this wonderful region how much of the painful do we experience, what temptation to doubt, what infidelity and blasphemy often assail us, and bring over us the horror of a "great darkness." II. LIFE AS IT MIGHT BECOME. The painful and the pleasant separated. Elisha here separates the painful from the pleasant. Two remarks here. 1. The separation was a happy one. He did not take away the pleasant from the painful, but the painful from the pleasant. 2. The separation was a supernatural one. "And he said, Bring me a new cruse," &c. The Gospel is the true "cruse" for separating the painful from the pleasant in the experience of human life. Thank God for the pleasant in your life. Seek earnestly that Gospel cruse whose salt alone can rid your life of all that is deleterious and distressing. (*Homilist*.)

Vers. 23, 24. And he went up from thence unto Beth-el.—*Elisha and the naughty children*.—I. THE EVENT AS REGARDS THE TRANSGRESSORS. They were the children of a small town among the hills, in one of the extremities of the land of Canaan; called Beth-el; the inhabitants depended chiefly for their living upon their flocks of sheep and the produce of the earth. 1. Wickedness arising from unexpected quarters. The children of Beth-el. 2. That there is a great responsibility connected with a family. Considering the tendencies of our nature to evil, and the bad examples around us, nothing but strong common sense, strong parental love and the fear of God, will enable parents to wash their hands from the blood of their offspring. 3. That neither age nor position exempts sin from being punished. The bears destroyed forty-two children of Beth-el. Rich and poor, high and low, old and young must be punished for their transgressions. God is no respecter of persons. II. THE EVENT AS REGARDS THE PROPHET. 1. It is dangerous to persecute God's people. No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper, whether it be the stocks or the burning faggots, the Pope or the drunken vagabond. Seeing godly men in trouble, we might think that God is angry with them, but that is a great mistake. 2. That religion does not deprive a man of the right of self-defence. Some people seem to think that a Christian must endure every species of injustice without uttering a word of protest. 3. That the kindest nature when aroused is the fiercest. In reading the history of the prophet we are struck with the generosity of his nature. (*W. Alonzo Griffiths*.) *The tearing of forty and two children by two she-bears*.—Elisha had started for Beth-el on prophetic business. As he was passing out of Jericho, he was followed by a crowd, not of innocent little children, but probably of servant boys. The phrase here translated "little children" was applied to himself by Solomon when he was twenty years of age (1 Kings iii. 7); and by Jeremiah to himself when he was old enough to enter upon the prophetic office (Jer. i. 6, 7); and it was applied to Joseph when he was at least seventy years of age (Gen. xxxvii. 2). These deriders were boys old enough to know what they were about, and old enough to have respect for the prophetic office. Probably they had had a pecuniary income from the business of fetching water into Jericho, so long as the water in the city was bad. As soon as Elisha healed the spring of the waters of the city, the occupation of these lads was gone. They were enraged at that. They were more interested in their pecuniary income than in the health of hundreds of citizens, old and young. Their cry after Elisha was not disrespect for old age. They did not call him "Bald-head." He was not old. There is no evidence that he was bald-headed; but, if so, those boys probably would not have known it, as there is no proof that they ever had seen his uncovered head. He could have had no artificial baldness. That was forbidden (Lev. xxi 5, Num. vi. 5). Because of the miracle of the healing of the water, and the consequent loss to them of their gain, they cried after him, "Go up, thou shaver! Go up, thou shaver!" It is to be remarked that he had performed the miracle as the ambassador of Jehovah, and that when those boys cried out after him they were insulting Jehovah. The prophet did not take it as a personal offence. He did not curse them in his own name. He cursed them in the name of Jehovah; and if they had not committed any great sin against Jehovah he would never have visited them with so frightful a retribution. They, themselves, were murderously selfish and impious. They watched the prophet's going out, and went out in a body for the purpose of insulting him as a prophet. It was justice that visited their sins upon them, and it was so connected with the miracle, that it seemed to be simply poetic justice, that whatever the punishment of their sins should be, it should be manifest as being

of a kind with their sins. That is the principle which reigns throughout all intelligent moral government. They desired the death of others that they might make money. There is no lesson in this passage of respect for old age. There is no exhibition of bad temper on the part of the prophet. There is nothing of cruelty in the conduct of Jehovah. That God abhors selfishness, and that when human selfishness sets itself in opposition to the movements of God's unselfish mercy and loving-kindness, then He will administer to it a severe rebuke; this is the lesson. Selfishness and irreverence are the sins against which this narrative is levelled. If it be said that it is not likely that so many lads so large as these would have been torn, as represented in the text, it may be replied that she-bears, robbed of their whelps, are described as especially ferocious; and that when these lads heard the malediction pronounced by a prophet who had wrought the great miracle of cleansing the waters in their town, and then saw immediately two ferocious bears rushing toward them, their guilt and peril united to demoralise them, and while they were in this condition so many of them were hurt. It is to be noted that not one of the wicked boys is said to have lost his life. None perished, while many were punished. The story, instead of setting forth Jehovah as a cruel deity, actually presents him as a God who administers justice mercifully. (*Sunday Magazine*.)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-3. Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign.—*Evil—the same in principle though not in form*:—Two subjects are here illustrated—I. THAT WHILST THE FORMS OF EVIL MAY CHANGE, THE PRINCIPLE MAY CONTINUE RAMPANT. His father and mother worshipped Baal, but the very "image" of the idol "that his father had made he put away." But notwithstanding that, "he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam." Observe: 1. Though the existing generation sins not in the form of the preceding, their sin is not less sin on that account. The forms in which barbarians and our uncivilised ancestors sinned, appear gross and revolting to us; nevertheless, our sins are not the less real and heinous in the sight of God. Our civilisation hides the revolting hideousness, but leaves its spirit perhaps more active than ever. 2. That mere external reformation may leave the spirit of evil as rampant as ever. Jehoram "put away the image of Baal," but the spirit of idolatry remained in him in all its wonted force. "He cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin: he departed not therefrom." This is ever true. You may destroy this form of government or that, monarchical or democratic, and yet leave the spirit in which these forms work, vital and vigorous to manifest itself in other forms. Another subject illustrated here is—II. THAT WHILST SIN MAY ONLY BE IN THE FORM OF NEGLECT OF DUTY IT MAY IN THE CASE OF ONE MAN ENTAIL SERIOUS EVILS ON POSTERITY. (*Homilist*.) *Manipulation of evil*:—A remarkable character is given of Jehoram. He was not an imitator of the evil of his father as to its precise form, but he had his own method of serving the devil. We should have thought that Ahab and Jezebel had exhausted all the arts of wickedness, but it turns out that Jehoram had found a way of his own of living an evil life. There is room in wickedness for the exercise of genius of a certain limited kind. The limitation is imposed by wickedness itself, for, after all, wickedness is made up of but few elements. Many persons suppose that if they do not sin according to the prevailing fashion they are not sinning at all. They imagine that by varying the form of the evil they have mitigated the evil itself. A good deal of virtue is supposed to consist in reprobating certain forms of vice. Jehoram made a kind of trick of wickedness; he knew how to give a twist to old forms, or a turn to old ways, so as to escape part of their vulgarity, and yet to retain all their iniquity. A most alarming thought it is to the really spiritual mind that men may become adepts in wickedness, experts in evil-doing, and may be able so to manage their corrupt designs as to deceive many observers by a mere change of surface or appearance. We do not amend the idolatry by altering the shape of the altar. We do not destroy the mischievous power of unbelief by throwing our scepticism into metaphysical phrases, and making verbal mysteries where we might have spiritual illumination. We are deceived by things simply because we ourselves live a superficial life and read only

the history of appearances. What is the cure for all this manipulation of evil, this changing of complexion of form, and this consequent imagining that the age is improving because certain phenomena which used to be so patent are no longer discernible on the face of things? We come back to the sublime doctrine of regeneration, as the answer to the great inquiry, What is the cure for this heart-disease? "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." We may change either the language or the manners of wickedness, or the times and seasons for doing wicked things; we may decorate our wickedness with many beautiful colours, but, so long as the heart itself is unchanged, decoration is useless; yea, worse than useless, for it is a vain attempt to make that look true which is false—an endeavour even to deceive Omniscience itself. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. *Elisha . . . which poured water on the hands of Elijah.*—*Contrast between Elijah and Elisha*:—The resemblances between Elijah and Elisha are occasionally so great, that it is scarcely surprising the one prophet is confused with the other. They both lived in one country and in one age. They were both the messengers of God to kings. They both wrought miracles, and even the same class of miracles, multiplying the widow's oil, and raising from the dead a mother's only child. Last of all, the life-work of both was to withstand and witness against idolatry, and restore the worship of the true God in the land of Israel. And yet to the careful reader there is no contrast in the Bible more striking or complete. What John was to Peter, Mary to Martha, Melancthon to Luther, that was Elisha the Prophet of Peace to Elijah the Desert Prophet—the Prophet of Fire. The one is John the Baptist, the other is the gentler John—the Evangelist, the disciple of love—who, leaning on his Master's bosom, caught and breathed a kindred spirit. In place of the long shaggy locks that had marked the awful Elijah, the head of the new and youthful prophet was shorn and smooth. Instead of the sheer-akin mantle, he wore the attire of the period. In his hand he carried a walking staff. His whole gait was that of the ordinary citizen. Elisha was no lonely man dwelling in the grot of Cherith or the solitudes of the wilderness. He had his own house in Samaria. He was known in far Damascus. Indeed the whole contrast between Elijah and Elisha is so significant and instructive as to be well worth following from point to point. 1. Elijah simply drops upon the scene. There is no warning, no period of pupilage or preparation. Of his previous history nothing whatever is known. Like Melchisedec he has neither "beginning of days nor end of life." We meet Elisha, on the other hand, for the first time in his father's fields, in "the meadow of the dance," at Abel-meholah. Shaphat is a man of means, for he has twelve ploughs at work; a man of piety also, for he has refused to do homage at the shrine of Baal. In particular, he has trained his son to know Israel's God. 2. During the whole of his public life—about twelve years at the most—Elijah to a large extent lived out of the world, or at least far above it, in stern sublimity. Elisha, on the other hand, is intimately mixed up with all the political movements and events of his day. Three kings seek him as their counsellor. Jehu is crowned at his bidding. Ben-hadad consults him in war. Joash attends at his death-bed. Whenever Elijah is seen in connection with kings and courts, it is always as their enemy—Ahab, Jezebel, Ahaziah. When Elisha is seen in the same connection, it is always as their friend—"My father, my father," is their uniform and reverent mode of address. 3. The miracles wrought by the two prophets form another interesting point of contrast between Elijah and Elisha. It is noticeable that Elisha wrought twice as many miracles as Elijah did, suggesting the inference that the parting request had been complied with to the letter: "And Elisha said. I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." On his introduction to work, Elijah begins with a miracle—the emblem of so much of his future career—a miracle of judgment: "There shall not be dew nor rain these years," referring to the drought, "but according to My word." Elisha begins with a miracle—the emblem also of so much of his future career—but it is a miracle of mercy: "There shall not be from thence," speaking of the bitter waters of Jericho sweetened, "any more death or barren land." The miracles of Elisha, in fact, remind us very much of the miracles of Christ—miracles of beneficence. The very grave of Elisha wrought a miracle that reads very like a miracle of Christ, for "when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood up on his feet." 4. As another point in the contrast between Elijah and Elisha, it cannot be out of place to say that of Elisha, like Joshua the son of Nun, not a single infirmity or failing is recorded. This cannot be said of Elijah, for he fled into the wilderness

and lay down under the juniper tree to escape a woman's vengeance, and in despair to die. The humbler Elisha may do the greater work. There is every reason to believe that in reclaiming Israel from idolatry, by the conversion of individual men and women, the "still small voice" of Elisha, conjoined with his healing acts and social intercourse, accomplished wider and more permanent changes than the fire and storm and national upheaval caused by Elijah. Nor is this to be wondered at. The ministry of Elisha in Israel lasted nearly five times longer than the ministry of Elijah. The rough and pioneer work had already been done. 5. The translation of the one, the ordinary death by dissolution of the other. In conclusion, the whole career of Elisha supplies us with some serious and useful practical lessons. His special feature of character was this—holiness. He was "a holy man of God." What a sublimity there is in this simple language! What honour or title is ever to be compared with it? Abraham was "the friend of God," David was "the man after God's own heart," Daniel was "the man greatly beloved," Elisha is "the man of God." All social distinctions that count so much with men sink here into insignificance. Whatever else we are honourably known to be, let us seek to "be holy even as God is holy." "Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee." (*H. J. Howat.*) *The present ministry*:—A young man, who a few years ago was a student of Harvard College, became noted for his quiet offices of kindness, religious and otherwise, among the younger students. Without patronage, he seemed to adopt the rôle of elder brother to many a boy who, but for him, would have gone wrong and reaped the consequences. Some one asked a question one day, and drew out the secret. He had confided to his pastor his determination to "enter the ministry" as soon as he had graduated. "Why not enter it now?" said the wise counsellor. "You will be all the better minister for ministering as you go along."

Vers. 13-17. And Elisha said unto the King of Israel, What have I to do with thee? —*Aspects of a godly man*:—Elisha was confessedly a godly man of a high type, and these verses reveal him to us in three aspects:—I. AS RISING SUPERIOR TO KINGS. 1. He rebukes them for their idolatry. The loudest professors of our religion in these times will crouch before kings, and address them in terms of fawning flattery. 2. He yields to their urgency out of respect to the true religion. "And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the King of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee." Jehoshaphat was pre-eminently a godly man (2 Chron. xvii. 5, 6), and that influenced this great Elisha to interpose on their behalf. "Those that honour me I will honour, saith the Lord." A godly man is the only truly independent man on this earth; he can "stand before kings" and not be ashamed, and rebuke princes as well as paupers for their sins. II. AS PREPARING FOR INTERCESSION WITH HEAVEN. What these kings wanted was the interposition of heaven on their behalf, and they here apply to Elisha to obtain this: and after the prophet had acceded to their request, he seeks to put himself in the right moral mood to appeal to heaven, and what does he do? "But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him." Probably his mind had been somewhat ruffled by the presence of these kings, especially at the sight of Jehoram, the wicked and idolatrous king, and before venturing an appeal to heaven he felt the need of a devout calmness. Hence he called for music, and as the devout musician sounded out sweet psalmody on his ear he became soothed and spiritualised in soul. Luther taught that the "spirit of darkness abhorred sweet sounds." There is a spiritual mood necessary in order to have intercourse with heaven, and this mood it is incumbent on every man to seek and retain. III. AS BECOMING THE ORGAN OF THE SUPERNATURAL. 1. Through him God made a promise of deliverance. Through him God effected their deliverance (vers. 24, 25). We would remind those who perhaps ridicule the idea of man becoming the organ of Divine power: 1. That there is nothing antecedently improbable in this. God works through His creatures; since He created the universe He employs it as His agent. 2. Biblical history attests this. Moses, Christ, and the apostles performed deeds that seem to us to have transcended the natural. A morally great man becomes "mighty through God." God has ever worked wonders through godly men, and ever will. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 15. But now bring me a minstrel.—*The minstrel*:—Elisha needed that the

Holy Spirit should come upon him to inspire him with prophetic utterances. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." We need that the hand of the Lord should be laid upon us, for we can never open our mouths in wisdom except we are under the divine touch. Elisha had noticed that the Spirit of God acted upon him most freely when his mind was restful and subdued. He found himself best prepared for the heavenly voice when the noise within his soul was hushed, and every disturbing emotion was quieted. Having ascertained this fact by observation, he acted upon it. He could not create the wind of the Spirit, but he could set his sail to receive it, and he did so. At the particular time alluded to in the text, Elisha had been greatly irritated by the sight of Jehoram, the King of Israel, the son of Ahab and Jezebel. In the true spirit of his old master, Elijah, the prophet, let Jehoram know what he thought of him; and having delivered his soul, he very naturally felt agitated and distressed, and unfit to be the mouthpiece for the Spirit of God. He knew that the hand of the Lord would not rest upon him while he was in that state, and therefore he said, "Bring me a minstrel." The original Hebrew conveys the idea of a man accustomed to play upon the harp. Under the influence of minstrelsy his mind grew quiet, his agitation subsided, his thoughts were collected, and the Spirit of God spake through him. It was a most commendable thing for him to use the means which he had found at other times helpful, though still his sole reliance was upon the hand of the Lord. I LET US STRIVE TO BE IN A FIT STATE FOR THE LORD'S WORK. If we know of anything that will put our mind into such a condition that the Spirit of God is likely to work upon us and speak through us, let us make use of it. 1. It is very evident that we, too, like the prophet, have our hindrances. We are at times unfit for the Master's use. Our minds are disarranged, the machinery is out of order, the sail is furled, the pipe is blocked up, the whole soul is out of gear. The hindrance in Elisha's case came from his surroundings. He was in a camp; a camp where three nations mixed their discordant voices; a noisy, ill-disciplined camp, and a camp ready to perish for thirst. There was no water, and the men-at-arms were perishing; the confusion and clamour must have been great. Prophetic thought could scarcely command itself amid the uproar, the discontent, the threatening from thousands of thirsty men. Three kings had waited on the prophet; but this would not have disconcerted him had not one of them been Jehoram, the son of Ahab and Jezebel. What memories were awakened in the mind of Elijah's servant by the sight of the man in whom the proud dame of Sidon and her base-minded consort lived again. Elisha acted rightly, and bravely. When he saw Jehoram coming to him for help, he challenged him thus—"What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother." When the king humbly and with bated breath confessed that he saw the hand of Jehovah in bringing the three kings together, the prophet scarcely moderated his tone, but exclaimed, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the King of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee." It was fit that he should be in that temper; the occasion demanded it. Still it was not a fit preface to the inward whisper of the Spirit of God, and the prophet did not feel ready for his work. Do you not occasionally find yourself in an unhappy position? You have to preach, or to teach a class in school, or to carry an edifying word to a sick person, but everything distracts you. What with noise, or domestic trouble, or sinful neighbours, or the railing words of some wicked man, you cannot get into a fit frame of mind. Little things grieve great minds. 2. Elisha's hindrances lay mainly in his inward feelings: he could not feel the hand of the Lord upon him until the inner warfare had been pacified. He burned with indignation at the sight of the son of Jezebel, and flashed words of flame into his face. I know of nothing that is more likely to put a man out of order for the communications of the Spirit of God than indignation. Even though we may be able to say, "I do well to be angry," yet it is a very trying emotion. Doubtless, also, the prophet's spirits were depressed. He saw before him the King of Edom, an idolater; the King of Israel, a votary of the calves of Jeroboam; and Jehoshaphat, the man of God, in confederacy with them. This last must have pained him as much as anything. What hope was there for the cause of truth and holiness when even a godly prince was in alliance with Jezebel's son? Moreover, the servant of God must have been the subject of a fierce internal conflict between two sets of thoughts. Indignation and pity strove within his heart. His justice and his piety made him feel that he could have nothing to do with two idolatrous kings; but pity and humanity made him

wish to deliver the army from perishing by thirst. Like a patriot, he sympathised with his people ; but, like a prophet, he was jealous for his God. 3. But what are our helps when we are pressed with hindrances ? Is there anything which in our case may be as useful as a harp ? " Bring me a minstrel," said the prophet, for his mind was easily moved by that charming art. Music and song soothed and calmed and cheered him. Among our own helps singing holds a chief place ; as saith the apostle, " Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Suppose, however, that singing has no such power over you ; let me recommend to you the quiet reading of a chapter of God's Word. II. WE SHOULD USE EVERY MEANS TO OBTAIN THE TOUCH OF THE DIVINE HAND. III. WE SHOULD MORE ABUNDANTLY USE HOLY MINSTRELSY. Saints and sinners, too, would find it greatly to their benefit if they said, " Bring me a minstrel." This is the world's cry whenever it is merry, and filled with wine. The art of music has been prostituted to the service of Satan. It is for us to use singing in the service of God, and to make a conquest of it for our Redeemer. Worldlings want the minstrel to excite them ; we want him to calm our hearts and still our spirits. That is his use to us, and we shall do well to employ the harper to that end. When the house is full of trouble, and your heart is bowed down, is it not well to say, " Bring me a minstrel, and let him sing to me the 27th Psalm : ' The Lord is my light and my salvation ; whom shall I fear ? the Lord is the strength of my life ; of whom shall I be afraid ? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear : though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.' " When we come to die we will breathe our last breath to music. Then will we say, " Bring me a harper," and like Jacob and Moses we will sing ere we depart. Our song is ready. It is the 23rd Psalm : " The Lord is my shepherd ; I shall not want. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for Thou art with me ; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." Suppose you have done with the minstrelsy which I have now mentioned, there is next the music of gospel doctrine. If these do not charm you, fetch a minstrel from experience. Think how God has dealt with you in times of sorrow and darkness long gone by, and then you will sing, " His mercy endureth for ever." If you want music, there is yet a sweeter store. Go fetch a minstrel from Calvary. Commend me for sweetness to the music of the Cross. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Minstrelsy and inspiration* :—A Levite, likely, he meant, that played and sung some psalm of David. Such a one the prophet here calleth for, to dispel his grief, say some Hebrew doctors, for the loss of Elijah ; from whose translation, till the then present occasion, the spirit of prophecy, say the same authors, rested not upon him. To compose his spirits, say some, much moved with indignation at Jehoram ; for which purpose also the Pythagoreans, every night when they went to bed, played on an instrument. And Plato in his laws attributeth the same virtue to music. But besides this, the prophet's mind might hereby be raised up to an expectation of God communicating himself. The way to be filled with the Spirit is to edify ourselves by psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. (*J. Trapp.*) *Music* :—Good music brings restfulness, and it brings ideas ; more, it seems to give one wisdom. George Eliot understood that so well. Hear a good deal of music—hear it, if you can, every day ; it is better, even, for the imagination, than the noblest verse, because it gives wings to thought, and sets the fancy free, and opens the doors of the unreal world. (*Walter Besant.*) *The Church's use of secular aids* :—We are apt to believe that the Spirit of God is a solitary agent acting by its own strength and conquering by its own power. We think of the beauties of holiness as *themselves* sufficient to inspire. Shall the hand of God work in unison with the harp of man ! Shall the soul be aided to its vision of Divine glory by listening to the strains of a purely human melody and thrilling to the notes of an instrument with mundane strings ! Elisha says " Yes," he calls for a minstrel before prophesying. The minstrel was probably a man vastly inferior to himself, and was perhaps not a religious man at all ; yet Elisha was not ashamed to use him for the service of God. Was he here again influenced by the memory of Elijah, by the tendency to imitate his master ? Did he remember how that master was fed by ravens ? Did he remember how the mightiest was supported by the ministration of the meanest ? Did he remember how the mere secular forces of life had been made to serve the kingdom of God ? I think it likely. Elisha must have felt that if the tempestuous soul of his master could be content to be fed by earthly streams, the quiet river

of his own life might well be thus satisfied too. At all events he was content. He was satisfied to sun himself in a worldly beauty, to cheer himself into the work for God by a study of the work of man. At the time when he had nothing to draw with, he let the Samaritan bring the pitcher. In the hour when his alabaster box was broken, he allowed his costliest treasures to be carried in earthen vessels. And the Christian Church has ever followed the example of Elisha. The voice of the Church has ever increasingly been, "Bring me a minstrel!" She began *without* the minstrel—in the humble precincts of an upper room. But she found that she needed stimulus. She was marching as an army to battle, and, like an army marching to battle, she acquired a blast of music. Christianity has ascended the hill to the tune of trumpets on the plain; and the feet of the Christian soldier have moved in unison with the measure of an earthly melody. The religion of the Cross has proceeded up the dolorous way crowned with the flowers of the world's field. It has availed itself of every secular aid. It has beautified the places of its worship. It has imparted human graces to its heavenly services. It has cultivated by natural art the voices of its choristers. It has sent its prophets to drink at the wells of worldly wisdom. It has given a literary form to its liturgies. It has incorporated with its psalmody the sentiments of men *not* called inspired. (*George Matheson, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. **Make this valley full of ditches.**—*Preparation for revival*:—In this story there were no less than three powerful kings, surrounded by numerous hosts of valiant men, marching forth, as they supposed, to easy victory, but when the water failed they themselves had failed in their enterprise. Moab may well be feared when there is no water for Israel, and for Judah, and for Edom. But oh, beloved, this is only a picture of the Church which has not constant supplies of God's refreshing grace, and of the Christian community from which the favour and the Spirit of the living God have been withdrawn. There may be riches and learning, there may be numbers and influence, there may be talent and organisation, but if there be not the Spirit of all grace, and the helpful influences that come from Him, these other things may prove but hindrances instead of helps. I notice in the story that though the kings were powerless, they were not prayerless. There is hope for any heart that has not forgotten the way to the mercy-seat, and for any child that still believes in, and practises the holy art of prayer. I. **IT IS MAN'S PART TO MAKE THE TRENCHES.** He set all the people of Israel, and Judah, and Edom to dig the ditches, that presently His power might be seen in filling them. 1. It is God's wont to use ordinary instruments. Sometimes, indeed, He goes out of His own beaten track, He is not necessarily confined to any one course; still, He is a God of order, and does everything accordingly. Nor have I forgotten that when Jesus was amongst men, He acted on the same principle exactly. He took the loaves and fishes of the lad, and multiplied them into a sufficient meal for the multitude. 2. Moreover, preparation for the coming blessing is essential. Suppose in this instance God had sent the water, but there had been no previous preparation for conserving it, it would have been virtually wasted. If there had been no trenches dug, the water would have speedily disappeared; there would have been a momentary refreshing, but nothing more. God will not have His gifts wasted. He outpours His blessings that they may secure the best possible results. This trench-making is not an inapt illustration of Christian effort. I know there are some hearts that will not receive God's blessing until there has been a good deal of digging in them first. There is nowhere to store it, no place to contain it. Their prejudices must be dug away, their doubts and fears must be uprooted. Digging is hard and difficult work, especially for those who are not used to it. I have found digging to be hard back-breaking work, but it is not so hard as is the labour of trying to get men's hearts right before God. There is something delightfully individual about this digging, inasmuch as every one can have a hand in it. You may not all be able to lead the hosts, but you can all have your spade and mattock with which to dig a ditch in your own immediate neighbourhood. It is humble work this; it is not like storming a citadel, or rushing on the foe, but it is just as necessary. Pick and shovel can be consecrated as surely as sword and spear. Do not be ashamed of delving for Christ, and of digging for Jesus. II. **IT IS GOD'S PART TO FILL THE TRENCHES WITH WATER.** Do not omit your duty; but do not attempt His. There are some who go to this extreme. They want to "get up" a revival. Revivals that are worth having are not got up, they are brought down; they are the work of the Spirit of God. 1. Mark

how mysteriously the water came. There was no sound of wind which generally precedes the rainstorm. There was no falling of the rain overnight. From whence did the water come? Was there some rock in the desert, struck as by the hand of God, that gushed its waters forth, as Horeb's did long years ago? When and where He pleases He does His sovereign will. I notice that the water came by the way of Edom—a most unlikely source. Let it come by way of Edom if it will, so long as it comes from God. 2. The Lord sent this blessing in spite of the sinners that were in the camp. They often hinder God's work, but sometimes He seems to set them aside, as if to say, "My time to work is come, and even Jehoram and the abominations of Baal shall not prevent, and for Jehoshaphat's sake, I will save this people, and do them good." 3. How copious was the supply, when it did come. It filled the whole of the valley: the deepest trenches were filled to the brim, and the longest had enough to fill them from end to end. Oh, that some such favour might come to us, till heart and home are filled with blessing, and the whole Church rejoices in the love of God, shed abroad in our hearts, and in the saving power of His grace, effecting wonders far and wide. 4. And this, mind you, was only the beginning of good things. God called it "a little thing" to fill the valley with water. "He will deliver the Moabites also into your hands," the prophet said. There are surprises in store for those who trust in God, and do their part. 5. Remember also, when this blessing came! It was in the early morning when the meat offering was offered. God wrought many of His marvellous acts when either the morning or the evening sacrifice was being offered. 'Twas then that Elijah called upon his God, who answered him by fire. 'Twas then that Ezra rose up from his heaviness. It was then that Daniel was touched by the hand of Gabriel. Nor can I forget that when Jesus Christ was sacrificed, our offering for sin, the rocks rent, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and many that slept arose out of their graves. Ah! there is a lesson for us here. The blessing comes at the time of sacrificing. (*T. Spurgeon.*) *Make this valley full of ditches*:—Many useful lessons might be gathered from this narrative if we had but time. Upon the very surface we are led to observe the weakness of man when at his utmost strength. Three kings, with three armies well-skilled in war, were gathered to subdue Moab, and lo, the whole of the leaguered hosts were brought to a dead-lock and a standstill by the simple circumstance that there was a want of water. How easily can God nonplus and checkmate all the wisdom and the strength of mankind! We may also learn here how easily men in times of difficulty which they have brought upon themselves, will lay their distress upon providence rather than honestly see it to be the result of their own foolish actions. Hear the King of Israel cast the blame upon Jehovah: "For the Lord has called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab." Providence is a most convenient horse to bear the saddles of our folly. I. OUR PRESENT POSITION. The armies of these kings were in a position of abject dependence: they were dying of thirst; they could not supply their need; they must have from God the help required, or they must perish. This is just the position of every Christian church. So dependent is the Christian Church upon the Holy Ghost, that there never was an acceptable sigh heaved by a penitent apart from him; never did holy song mount to heaven except he gave it wings; never was there true prayer or faithful ministry except through the power and might of the Holy Ghost. Sinners are never saved apart from the Spirit of God. II. OUR DUTY as the prophet tells it to us. The prophet did not tell the kings that they were to procure the water—that, as we have already said, was out of their power—but he did say, "Make this valley full of ditches," that when the water came there might be reservoirs to contain it. If we expect to obtain the Holy Spirit's blessing, we must prepare for his reception. Before the Nile begins to rise, you see the Egyptians on either side of the banks making ready first the deep channel, and then the large reservoir, and afterwards the small canals. and then the minor pools, for unless these are ready the rising of the Nile will be of little value for the irrigation of the crops in future months; but when the Nile rises, then the water is received and made use of to fertilise the fields; and so, when the treasury of the Spirit is open by His powerful operations, each one of us should have his trench ready to receive the blessed flood which is not always at its height. Have you never noticed the traders by the river's side? If they expect a barge of coals, or a vessel laden with other freight, the wharf is cleared to receive it. Have you not noticed the farmer just before the harvest-time—how the barn is emptied, or the rick yard is made ready for the stacks? Men will, when they

expect a thing, prepare for the reception of it; and, if they expect more than usual, they say, "I will pull down my barns and build greater, that I may have where to bestow my goods." The text says to us, "Prepare for the Spirit of God." Do not pray for it, and then fold your arms and say, "Well, perhaps He will work"; we ought to act as though we were certain He would work mightily—we must prepare in faith. 1. Prepare for a blessing: prepare largely. "Make this valley full of ditches," not make one trench, but as many as possible. For God, when He worketh, worketh like a God. Expect great things from a great God. "Make this valley full of ditches." Have a holy covetousness of the Divine blessing. Never be satisfied with what God is doing in the conversion of souls; be grateful, but hunger after more. 2. Moreover, prepare at once—not dig trenches in a month's time, but "make this valley full of ditches" now. 3. Furthermore, prepare actively. Ditchmaking is laborious work; God is not to be served by child's-play, or sham work with no toil in it. When a valley is to be trenched throughout its whole length, all the host must give themselves to the effort, and none must skulk from the toil. I believe with all my heart in the Spirit of God; but I do not believe in human idleness. Celestial power uses human effort. The Spirit of God usually works most where we work most. "Make this valley full of ditches," a little more plainly and pointedly. If we are to have a blessing from God, we are every one of us to have a trench ready to receive it. "Well, how shall I have mine ready?" one says. My answer is, have large desires for a blessing: that is one trench you can all dig. Next, add to these desires, faithful, vehement, and importunate prayers. Furthermore, if desires and prayers are good, yet activity is even more so. Every Christian who wanteth to have a blessing for himself or for others, must set to work by active exertion, for this is the word, "Make this valley full of ditches." One thing more, and I leave this point. With all the work that the Church does in making the valley full of ditches, we must take care that we do it in a spirit of holy confidence and faith. These ditches were to be dug, not because the water might come, but because they were sure it would come. III. DIVINE OPERATIONS. Observe how sovereign the operations of God are. When Elijah wanted rain, there was a cloud seen, and he heard a sound as of abundance of rain, and by and by the water descended in floods; but when God would send the water to Elisha, he heard no sound of rain, nor did a drop descend. I know not how it was that the trenches were filled. Whether adown some deep ravine, the ancient bed of a dried-up torrent, God made the mighty flood to return, as He did along the bed of Kishon of old, I do not know, but by the way of Edom the waters came obedient to the Divine command. God is not tied to this or that mode of form. 1. As the blessing comes sovereignly, so it comes sufficiently: there was enough for all the men, for all the cattle, and all the beasts. They might drink as they would, but there was quite enough for all. 2. Observe, that this flood came very soon, for the Lord is a punctual paymaster. Moreover, it came certainly; there was no mistaking it, no doubting it; and so shall God's blessing wait upon the earnest prayers and faithful endeavours of Christian people—a blessing such as the greatest sceptic shall not be able to deny, such as shall make the eyes of timidity to water, while he says to himself, "Who hath begotten me these?" IV. The Lord bade His servant tell them that not only should there be water, but he said, "This is but a light thing in the sight of God. He will deliver the Moabites also into your hand." GREATER THINGS ARE BEHIND, and are to be expected. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 20. And it came to pass in the morning there came water by the way of Moab.—*Defeat of the Moabites*.—I. THE THREEFOLD PREPARATION FOR THIS MIRACULOUS INTERPOSITION. 1. The preparation of supplication. The kings, in their need, "inquired of the Lord" (ver. 11) by means of His prophet. The act implies an application for the help of Jehovah. Preparation for the reception of special blessing by means of supplication is a law of God's kingdom. The prayer of the leper made way for Christ's miraculous healing (Matt. viii. 2-4); the beseeching entreaty of the Syro-Phœnician woman brought down the blessing she desired (Luke vii. 24-30). The "supplication" (Acts ii. 14) of the Early Church was the preparation for the descent of the Holy Spirit. Supplication is the placing of the wood in order upon the altar in readiness for the descent of fire from heaven. 2. The preparation of the prophet's mind for the reception of the Divine direction. "When the minstrel played, the hand of the Lord came upon him" (ver. 15). The soul that has to bear the message of God to others needs to

rise into some degree of harmony with the mind of God, to partake in some measure of the holy calm which belongs to Him. Music prepares the heart of the good man to receive, and hence to be the bearer of special help from the Divine Spirit.

II. THE MIRACLE ITSELF. That the flowing in of the water was miraculous is evident because it came without rain, where there were no natural springs, and in fulfilment of Elisha's prophecy. In the New Testament the supernatural Divine workings are classified into "signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost" (Heb. ii. 2). III. THE TWOFOLD EFFECT OF THE MIRACLE. It was the occasion of life to one army and of death to the other. The one was brought about by the supernatural interposition, the other by a natural, though mistaken, inference. The cloud that was the help of Israel at the Red Sea, became the destruction of the Egyptians. (*Sermon Outlines.*) *Attracted by grace*.—I noticed on one of our streets during the frost, when the pipes were all congealed and frozen and waterless, that the water authorities opened the main pipe early in the morning. The inhabitants got up that frosty morning, they turned the tap, but no water flowed. Then the neighbours began to tell one another that in a certain street the main pipe was flowing: and the bairns got their pitchers and buckets and flagons, and the women put their shawls over their heads in their hurry, and the domestics were sent out with the utensils from the kitchen. The cry had gone out that the water was flowing, and on that frosty morning they gathered round the main pipe. What brought them? Just the real flowing of real water. That was the reason of the crowd. If Christians were to experience freshly and literally and truly the grace of God, thousands would flock into every assembly in the city, and in the land, just drawn and won by the reality of the grace of Christ. (*J. Robertson.*)

Ver. 27. Then he took his eldest son . . . and offered him for a burnt offering. — *A king's sacrifice*.—The King of Moab's sacrifice a picture of the world's sacrifices. The King of Moab was besieged in Kirharaseth by the allied armies of Israel, and Judah, and Edom. Finding himself hard pressed, he resolved upon a sortie, in hopes of regaining the open country. Selecting seven hundred of the choicest of his troops, he headed an assault against the lines of the King of Edom, but was driven back. Turning in despair to his counsellors, says a Jewish legend, he inquired how it was that such feats of valour could be done by the men of Israel, and how such miracles were wrought in their behalf; to which his counsellors replied, that they sprang from Abraham, who had an only son, and offered him in sacrifice to God. "Then I, too, have an only son," said the King of Moab. "I also will go and offer him up as a sacrifice to my god;" upon which, as it is stated in sacred history, "he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall." It is not probable that the explanation of the Rabbis is correct. More than likely, as already has been hinted, the act of Mesha was done out of pure, blind, debasing superstition—as a peace-offering or bloody propitiation to the Moabitish war-god, Chemosh. Philo tells us it was a custom among the ancients, in times of great national disaster, instead of all being devoted to destruction, for those who had the rule in either town or country to give up the well-beloved child of their families to be put to death, as a ransom price to secure the favour of the gods (cf. Tennyson's poem, "The Victim." In a time of plague and famine the gods, when consulted, answer—

The king is happy in child and wife:

Take you his nearest; take you his dearest: give us a life.

Cf. also the speech of Caiaphas in John xi. 49, 50); and, doubtless, this was the custom in accordance with which the sheep-master offered up his son. Thus it was a picture of the way in which the unbelieving world has all along endeavoured to make peace with God. "How shall I obtain forgiveness? how ever shall a man be justified before God?" is the universal cry of the human heart; and thousands upon thousands in every age have answered it like Mesha: "By giving the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul." In heathen lands how many myriads of little children have fallen victims to this foul superstition? As if the guilt already incurred by a sinner could be wiped away by the simple process of contracting more! Let us thank God that even those among us who have not yet obtained forgiveness have been delivered from this miserable delusion. At the same time, there is room for inquiring if the dregs, at least, of that very superstition which made a victim of the son of Mesha on the wall of Kirharaseth, be not

remaining with us. Do we not sometimes offer, as our atoning sacrifice, with a view to purchase heaven's favour, if not the fruit of our bodies, the fruit of our souls—our good deeds, our moral lives, our excellent dispositions, our prayers, our praises, &c. ? They are as much a sacrifice of superstition as was that of Mesha. The only difference is, that Mesha's sacrifice was offered to an idol ; whereas ours is presented to the living God. If there be another point of difference, it is this, that Mesha knew no better, whereas we are well assured that all such sacrifices are vain. (*T. Whitelaw, M.A.*) *Sacrifice of the first-born* :—One of the most striking evidences of the widespread conviction among the Israelites of the efficacy of the sacrifice of the first-born son, whether infant or grown, is afforded by the story of the sacrifice of the son of the King of Moab. Each town or nation believed in the existence of its own special god, to whom it stood in a peculiar relation. At times it became necessary to strengthen the hands of that god, as it were, against the gods of hostile nations, who seemed to be too strong for him, or to arouse his interest, which seemed in some way to have been alienated or diverted. He may be offended, because he had not received that which was his due. Or it might be that the god was not able to withstand the power of other gods his adversaries. The King of Moab was sore pressed. As a last resort, whether to appease his deity, Chemosh, or to strengthen Chemosh's hands against the gods of his adversaries, the kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom, Mesha sacrificed on the wall of the city, in sight of the allied hosts, his son and the heir to the throne. The Israelites, Jews, and Edomites who beheld the sacrifice were filled with terror, knowing the meaning and power of this sacrifice, and believing that it would so arouse and strengthen the god of Moab that he would become almost if not quite irresistible. (*J. P. Peters, D.D.*)

CHAPTER IV.

VERS. 1-8. Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets.—*The widow's pot of oil* :—If we are to believe the voice of tradition as expressed by Josephus, the subject of this touching story was one who had seen far better days, being the widow of Obadiah, the Lord High Chamberlain of Ahab. While her husband lived she breathed the atmosphere of a court, and was nourished in the lap of luxury. But when he died she seems to have been reduced to the utmost poverty. That world which had smiled upon her in the days of her prosperity, now, with characteristic fickleness, turned its back upon her. Her friends forsook her, and refused to help her. She was plunged into debt, contracted in order to obtain the barest necessities of life. Having nothing of any value in the house, the hard-hearted creditor, in lieu of payment, threatened to take and sell her two only sons as slaves ; which, by virtue of one Jewish law and the extension of another, he had the power to do. It is true that the period during which slaves could be held in Israel was mercifully limited by the year of jubilee, and that year, which would break every fetter, might be near at hand ; but nevertheless, in her position, the enforcement of the law even for the shortest period could not but be felt as a grievous calamity. On account of these trying circumstances, her case was one that peculiarly warranted the interposition of Heaven. But she had another claim still, beside that of her wretchedness, upon the sympathy and help of Elisha. Her husband feared the Lord while he lived. He was the son of a prophet, and cherished the deepest regard for the person and the work of those who filled that sacred office. Elisha's first question to her evinced a wonderful knowledge of the human heart, and of the best mode of dealing with poverty and suffering. Instead of volunteering to give her aid at once, as most persons would have done, carried away by an overpowering impulse of compassion at the recital of the tale of sorrow ; like a wise and judicious friend, he inquires how far she herself has the power to avert the threatened calamity—"What hast thou in the house ?" His assistance must be based upon her own assistance. He will help her to help herself. And this is the only true way to benefit the poor. By reckless and indiscriminate almsgiving, we run the risk of pauperising the objects of our charity. Our assistance should therefore be of such a nature as to call forth the resources which they themselves possess, and to make the most of them. However small these resources may be, they should

be used as a fulcrum, by means of which our help may raise them to a better condition. The first question which we too should ask the widow or the destitute is—"What hast thou in the house?" No help from without can benefit, unless there be a willingness of self-help within. The widow of Obadiah had nothing in the house save a pot of oil. Was this oil grown by Obadiah during his lifetime—the last of the produce of his olive-yard? In all likelihood it was all that remained of the once extensive property of Ahab's steward. Out of this last pot of oil—the sign of her uttermost poverty—Elisha furnished the source of her comfort and happiness. In the fables of all nations we are told that a magician, by a mere wave of his wand, or by pronouncing a certain charm, produces at once wealth and luxuries that had no existence before. Aladdin rubs a ring, and immediately a genius appears, and at his command provides a rich feast for him out of nothing. He rubs an old lamp, and at once a gorgeous palace rises up before him in substantial reality, created out of the formless ether around. By putting on Fortunatus's wishing-cap the lucky possessors of it can get anything they want, and create things unknown before. But there is nothing like this in the miracles of the Bible. The Gospel miracle which most nearly resembles the multiplication of the widow's oil by Elisha, is the miracle of the loaves and fishes. In both cases the properties of the articles remained the same, and their substance only was extended. In both cases the point of departure and the completed result of the miracle were articles in familiar use among the people. Elisha simply multiplied the common olive oil of the widow into the common olive oil of the country, neither better nor worse. Jesus simply multiplied the common barley loaves and fishes of the fisher-lad into the common barley loaves and fishes which formed the ordinary fare of the disciples. In both cases the miracle was based upon the ultimate result of man's labour. The oil in the widow's pot was the juice expressed, out of berries gathered, from trees planted, grafted, and tended by man's toil and skill. The bread in the fisherman's possession was baked by man's hands, out of barley sown, reaped, gathered, threshed, and ground in the mill by man's skill and labour; the fishes were equally the produce of human industry and special knowledge. These examples show to us that even in miracles man must be a fellow-worker with God in subduing the earth, and in removing the limitations and disabilities of the curse. In these actions men prepared themselves by the miracle wrought within them—the triumph over natural unbelief and the objections of reason—to believe in and to benefit by the miracle about to be wrought without. The widow of Obadiah might well be astonished at the command of Elisha. If she had stopped to reason about the procedure required of her, she might well hesitate to undertake it. Taking a common-sense view of the matter, of what use would it be to borrow as many vessels as possible from her neighbours? What answer could she give them if they asked her what she meant to do with these vessels? Would they not laugh at her if she told the prophet's message, and ridicule the utter folly of the whole story? And yet, in spite of all these apparent absurdities and impossibilities—in spite of all the objections of reason and common sense, the widow hastened to obey the prophet's command. She stumbled not because of unbelief. Her faith triumphed over all difficulties. It is a significant circumstance that the prophet should have commanded the widow to shut the door upon herself and her sons, when she poured out the oil into the vessels. There is a reason for, and a meaning in, every detail of the Bible miracles; and doubtless the design of this apparently trivial injunction was to secure to the widow the privacy and calmness of mind necessary for the performance of the miracle, and for its producing the full and proper impression upon her own soul. If she had left the door open, the neighbours doubtless, moved by curiosity to see what she would do with the vessels she had borrowed, would flock around her, and sadly discompose her mind by their laughter, their sneers, and their unsuitable remarks. Reverence, stillness, and solitude are needed for the miracle. Rut, besides being necessary in order to prepare the widow of Obadiah for receiving the benefits of the miracle, the solitude and secrecy which Elisha enjoined were significant of the mysterious character of the miracle itself. It was withdrawn from sight. It was silent and unimaginable. The process by which the oil was multiplied we labour in vain to conceive. We cannot explain the phenomenon by the observation of any known laws; and yet in truth the miracle is not more strange, save in the rapidity with which it is effected, than that which is every day going forward in nature in those regions where the olive tree grows. You sow the seed of an olive tree; that seed contains a very small quantity of oil. It grows

and becomes a tree and produces an immense quantity of fruit ; so that from the little drop of oil in the small vessel of the seed, you have thousands of vessels in the shape of the berries, each filled with oil. He who makes the olive seed in the course of a few years, or the olive tree every season, to prepare and extract oil from the scanty soil on the arid rocks, and the dry burning air in which the tree delights to grow, concentrated, in the miracle in the widow's chamber, the slower processes of nature spread over months and years, into the act of a single moment. Of course the natural process does not explain the miracle, but it is a help to our faith. The one sheds light upon the other. The miracle teaches us that the natural process is not the result of an impersonal law or of a dead course of things, but the working of our Father in heaven ; while the natural process in its turn shows to us that God in the miracle is working in the line of the ordinary events and dispensations of His providence. The miracle blends with common life. How strikingly does this wonderful incident show to us that we must be fellow-workers with God throughout, from first to last, in our own deliverance and blessing. How wonderfully it illustrates the whole Divine economy of grace, under which we are enjoined to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, seeing that it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure ! We are all in the condition of the poor widow ; we are destitute of everything and are ready to perish. But God is far more tender and considerate to us than Elisha was to the widow. If we have but the feeling of want, but the desire for God's help, that very want or desire will be to us what the pot of oil was to the widow—the source of an abundant supply of all that we need. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

*A prophet's widow and a prophet's kindness :—*I. A PROPHET'S WIDOW IN DISTRESS. To-day some of the most enlightened, thoughtful, and really useful ministers are amongst the poorest. 1. That poverty is not necessarily a disgrace. It is sometimes the result of inflexible honesty and moral nobility. 2. That the best lives here are subject to trials. 3. That avarice feeds cruelty. II. A PROPHET AT WORK TO RELIEVE A BROTHER'S WIDOW. In her distress instinct tells her where to go, and she goes to Elisha, a man not only who knew her husband, but of kindred experiences and sympathies. See how Elisha helps this widow. 1. Promptly. He did not want arguments or testimonials. He helped her. 2. Effectively. (*Homilist.*) *The humble not forgotten :—*One thing which is prominent in the Word of God is vividly illustrated in this incident. God remembers His poor people. The Bible is the poor man's book. The wealth, honour, pride, power, and glory of this world are of small account in the sight of Heaven. The widow with her two mites, the jailer at Philippi, Lydia the purple-seller, Elisha the ploughman, Amos the herdsman, Peter and John the fishermen, were individuals of no social importance. The secular historian would have deemed them unworthy of notice. But they were chosen to play wonderful parts on the field of moral action. In the age when this poor Shunammite widow was living in obscurity, stupendous struggles were going on among the carnal empires, of which Herodotus, Xenophon, and Thucydides give most elaborate records. But of these the Bible takes no notice. In the New Testament Philippi comes before us in connection with a humble man and an insignificant woman : while the terrific battle which there turned the world's history is ignored ; nor are King Philip, the great founder, and Alexander the Great—brought up at Philippi—so much as alluded to. If we would be great in the sight of the Lord, we must be found in line with His purposes. It might have been imagined that Elijah and Elisha would concern themselves only with the important affairs of great people. But, as a matter of fact, while they had much to do with kings and nobles and generals and statesmen, yet they had still more to do with peasants, labourers, poor students, and lone widows. They belonged to the people. The Gospel is not for any one section of humanity ; but its blessings come first to the needy, the sad, the afflicted, and the guilty. (*Christian Commonwealth.*) *Elisha multiplies the widow's oil :—*I. THE PERSON FOR WHOM THIS MIRACLE WAS WROUGHT. "A certain woman." 1. She was the subject of accumulated sorrow. (1) Her condition was desolate. She was a widow. Few if any of the trying conditions of life are more pitiable than the widowed one. (2) Her condition was oppressed. Her husband had died insolvent. She was in debt. Her sorrow was increased with the thought of the possibility of losing her sons. Trouble seldom comes alone. 2. She was a woman of devout spirit. It is difficult to over-estimate the value of having a pious partner, a godly child, or a faithful companion ; but how important it is that we ourselves are holy. We may gather from this incident the following thoughts concerning

this woman. (1) She was devout in the manner of her address. She spake to Elisha in a reverent spirit. (2) She spoke kindly of her deceased husband. "Thy servant my husband is dead." (3) She was anxious about her living sons. Her motherly heart was filled with sorrow at the thought of her sons being sold. True piety is devout, it deals gently with the dead, it cares for the living. Such is a brief description of this woman's sorrow and character. Notice—II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS MIRACLE WAS PERFORMED. God was this widow's Helper. This is in harmony with His nature. He is loving, tender, faithful, and full of compassion. "A Father of the fatherless" (Ps. lxxviii. 5). 1. God took advantage of her extremity. Often "man's extremity is God's opportunity." God interposed just when this woman's sorrow was the heaviest, and when her outlook was the darkest. How often He deals with His children in like manner now. 2. Her faith was tested by the means employed. This woman's deliverance was effected in a short time and in a strange way. III. THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER WHICH THIS MIRACLE EXHIBITS. This miracle exhibits—1. The Divine law of righteousness. "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt." The Divine law is, "Owe no man anything but love." We are to be just in our material, social, and commercial relationships. 2. The rich resources of Divine wisdom. The promises which God has made concerning the deliverance of His children in seasons of trial are abundant, simple, precious: "Call upon Me" (Ps. l. 15). "When thou" (Isa. xliii. 2). In behalf of His children, God has brought twater from a rock, made a path through the sea, &c. 3. The greatness of Divine mercy. "Live thou and thy children of the rest." Enough to satisfy the creditor, and some to spare. How great is God's mercy. It is higher than the heavens. Conclusion. Let us be faithful, submissive, and heroic when duty leads us into trial. Many a cloudy morning has turned into a fine day. We all have trials; but what are our heaviest trials compared to those this woman endured? We may have the same Friend and Helper. If we trust in Him, our sorrow shall be turned into joy. (*John Wileman.*) *Christ anticipated*:—The way in which Elisha addresses himself to the circumstances of the case is very significant of the method of Jesus Christ. Elisha asked the woman, "What shall I do for thee?" Jesus often asked the same question of those who came to Him for healing or relief—"What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" Thus the petitioner is made a party to the case in no merely nominal sense, but in the sense of acquiring distinct responsibility of suggestion or advice. No doubt the prophet knew what the widow wanted, yet a good purpose was to be gained in causing her to state her case in her own words. This is how God Himself proceeds in the matter of our own prayers. Our heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him; yet it has pleased Him to make it part of our education to allow us to state our own necessities and argue our own pleas, leaving Him to be sole judge when the case is laid before Him. Elisha asked another question which Jesus Christ also put on some occasions. Elisha said, "Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" Jesus Christ asked the disciples what bread they had before He proceeded to satisfy the hunger of the multitude. It is God's plan to start with what we have. So we have certain preliminary duties to attend to; as, for example, finding out the whole of our resources, placing these at the disposal of the Master, beginning with a little as if it were a great amount, and gradually proceeding until we ourselves are surprised by the largeness and completeness of the miracle. Now Elisha proceeds to his work:—"Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels." This would have committed him to some degree of miraculous interposition, but this was not all he said; he added to his instructions, "Borrow not a few" (ver. 3). In Psalm lxxxi. 10, we read, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." It is God's joy, if we may so put it, to give large answers to the requests of men. Said Christ, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Not a partial joy, and not the beginning of a joy, but a complete, overflowing, redundant joy. It was the vessels that were exhausted, not the hand of God that was emptied. A notable lesson this, that it is never God who fails but always man who comes to the end of his capacity. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The widow's pot of oil and the empty vessels*:—There are three or four significant utterances here which I wish to speak of. 1. The woman's great need. Every sinner is in debt. We have broken the law of God and our debt is greater than we can ever pay. There is no one to pay the debt for us among our fellow-men. We must have a redeemer, and Jesus Christ is the only name given under heaven or among men who has the spiritual wealth and

the infinite love to redeem us, and He comes and asks us, as Elisha asked this poor widow, "What shall I do for thee?" What are you going to say to Jesus who is asking you that question? Will you say to Him, "Oh, I think you can do nothing for me now. I will go on awhile in my sins; I will think about it awhile longer; I will wear the handcuffs of evil habit and drag the ball-and-chain of sinful appetites a while longer; perhaps some time I will let you do something for me?" Can you imagine the poor widow answering Elisha like that? Can you dream of her saying to Elisha, "Oh, I think I will not have you do anything now; I will let the boys be slaves awhile; I will go on in my misery and my poverty. Perhaps after they have slaved it for a time, and I have starved awhile, I will let you do something for me?" Would you not say that that was infinite folly? And it is the part of wisdom for you to say, when Jesus asks what He can do for you, "Lord Jesus, redeem me from my sins. Save my soul. Do whatever you can do to lift me out of my sinful condition into goodness and peace." 2. Elisha says to this widow, "Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" That is in harmony with the way God always brings blessings to His children. So God deals with us. He will not waste anything that we already have. He will take into account whatever there is of good in us. While we have absolutely nothing in us which, taken by itself, can save us, yet every fraction of good teaching that we have received from our parents, every point of good discipline that has come to us in the stress of life, everything that is good in us, if it be so small as only to be compared to a widow's pot of oil, or a little lad's lunch of five loaves and two fishes, God will not throw away, or fail to take into account, but He will make all these a blessing to our souls if we give our hearts to Him. 3. Another very important message is to be found in the empty vessels. Many fail of salvation because they have no empty vessels. Their vessels are all full of their own self-righteousness, something that is utterly useless to redeem from the bondage of sin, but that shuts out the grace of God from the heart. When the publican and the Pharisee went up into the temple to pray, the Pharisee had no empty vessels with him. We must all come with the same humility of heart, with the same vessels emptied of all self, and throw ourselves on the mercy of God. There is no caste or aristocracy or social rank in sin; every sinner in the world, rich or poor, high or low, must come with supreme self-surrender at the foot of the Cross if he would find salvation. When the Duke of Kent, the father of Queen Victoria, was told by his physician that he could not live long, he was anxious about his soul. His physician, who was an old friend, endeavoured to soothe his mind by referring to his high respectability and his distinguished situation, but the Duke stopped him short by saying, "No; remember if I am to be saved, it is not as a prince, but as a sinner." (L. A. Banks, D.D.)

Ver. 3. Empty vessels: borrow not a few.—*The filling of empty vessels*.—The best of men may die in poverty. Here is the widow of a prophet left in destitution. We must not hastily censure those who leave their families unprovided for. Circumstances may render it impossible to do more than supply the pressing wants of the hour. This sorrowing widow went to God in her trouble, but through the mediation of the prophet. So we should go to Christ. It is well to tell friends, but never fail to tell Him who is the best friend. God was pleased to ordain by His servant a way of escape for the poor woman. It is the rule of God's providence that His children should cry to Him in the day of trouble, and that He should be gracious to them and deliver them. Yet the Lord allowed His handmaid to be very sorely pressed. The Lord does not promise to rescue us in our time, or to save us from waiting; wherefore I say to you whose turn seems to come last, be strong to wait. Waiting in faith is a high form of worship, which in some respects excels the adoration of the shining ones above. But the way in which this woman was delivered was one which proved and exercised her faith. I. IN REFERENCE TO THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS. All the miracle required was empty vessels. Full vessels were of no use. Righteous self is a greater hindrance than sinful self. All our Saviour wants of us is our need of being saved, and our acceptance of His salvation. The oil flowed as long as any empty vessel could be brought. How many empty souls are there here? Christ will continue to save sinners just as long as there are needy sinners to save. II. IN REFERENCE TO ANSWERS TO PRAYER. My conviction is that we do not pray enough; that is, do not ask enough of God. "Borrow empty vessels"—note the next word, "borrow not a few." It was needful to urge her to large things. You and I

have more to do with the measurement of our mercies than we think. Some have never brought their sins and prevalent temptations to God. Why carry your sin, your need, your care? These cares are all different sets of empty vessels for the grace of God to fill. We ought to treat others as if they were empty vessels for us to use, so as to glorify God in their salvation. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God wants our emptiness*.—Do you see that beautiful tree in the orchard loaded with fruit? It is a pear tree. From top to bottom it is covered with fruit. Some boughs are ready to break with the luscious burden. As I listen to the creaking boughs, I can hear the tree speak. It says "Baskets, baskets, baskets, bring baskets." Now, then, who has a basket? "I have got one," says yonder friend, "but it is of no use, for there is nothing in it." Bring it here, man; that is the very kind of basket the tree wants. A person over there says, "Oh, I have a basket, a splendid basket. It is just the thing. It is full from top to bottom." You may keep your basket to yourself. It is of no use to my loaded tree. . . . What is wanted by the Lord Jesus is an empty soul to receive out of the fulness God has treasured up in Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 6. And it came to pass when the vessels were full.—*God's way of giving*.—This incident is rich in suggestiveness. It may be employed to illustrate the rapid changes of human fortune; the crushing weight of cumulative trials; or the practical sympathy of a true prophet who is never so faithful in his calling as when he visits the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and exerts his influence in their behalf. There are, however, considerations suggested by the particular method adopted in this case which throw light upon God's way of giving, and indicate, not obscurely, the terms upon which we, who have no miraculous interpositions to expect, may become recipients of His continual bounty. I. IN THE COMMUNICATION OF HIS GRACE THE MOST HIGH MAKES THE CONFESSION OF OUR HELPLESSNESS THE CONDITION OF HIS HELP. The sense of need must be awakened before He will bestow the required aid. "Tell me what hast thou in the house?" was a question intended to fathom the depth of the woman's poverty. Until this insufficiency of all human resource has been felt and acknowledged, the Divine assistance will not be sought and cannot be given. The Saviour in His miracles of mercy made it apparent that He did not interpose until all human help had failed. When He was about to feed the multitudes He asked the disciples, "How many loaves have ye?" and measured the limits of ordinary means before drawing on the infinite capabilities of Omnipotence. The trembling sufferer who sought to touch His robe had tried all other measures before resorting to Him. The disappointed fishermen were obliged to admit that they had taken nothing ere they could be gladdened by a great success. So is it still. The choice gifts of God are withholden from the self-complacent and lavished on the needy—"He hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He hath sent empty away." II. HE ENRICHES US BY THE MULTIPLICATION AND INCREASE OF PREVIOUS GIFTS. It would be equally easy for Him to work without means, but He chooses rather to work by them. "What hast thou in the house?" is something more than a gauge of poverty; it is a wholesome reminder that in the poorest lot there is some remnant of former possessions, some basis for present hope. The multitudes whom our Lord miraculously fed might have been relieved by the creation of an altogether new and strange provision; but He used such common food as was available, and then multiplied the stock till every need was met. The persuasion of our helplessness does not warrant our neglect of such opportunities and the use of such talent as we have. Too often we covet fresh interpositions of Divine power when we have at our command previous gifts whose energy is unexhausted, and former experiences which may fitly stimulate activity and encourage hope. Moses held in his own hand the simple instrument whereby with God's blessing he would compel attention to his words (Ex. iv. 2); and if not in our hands, we may have in our house that which, like the widow's oil, shall be multiplied by the bounty of Him. III. HE MEASURES HIS BESTOWMENTS BY OUR CAPACITY TO RECEIVE. While there is an empty vessel to hold it, His grace continues to flow. He entrusts talents "to every man according to his several ability." A preoccupied heart has no room for the Saviour. He is "gladly received" when He is eagerly waited for (Luke viii. 40). In the dispensation of spiritual gifts the same rule obtains—"He giveth more grace," and again more, according to the ardour of our wishes and the measure of our preparedness to receive His favours. Still as of old—"He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness" (Ps. cvii. 9),

drawing out our desires, and at the same time enlarging our capacity. IV. **HE DELIGHTS TO EXCEED THE REQUIREMENTS OF PRESENT NEED.** Not content to give enough to satisfy the clamorous creditor, He supplied a store for the maintenance of the widow and her sons for some time to come. The fragments left after each feast in the wilderness far exceeded the original provision. This generosity is a conspicuous feature in all the communications of grace. David was overwhelmed at the bounty of which he was the recipient, yet what he held in possession was small compared with future blessings secured to him by promise (2 Sam. vii. 19). Jacob, in like manner, after giving up all hope that he should ever see Joseph again, was constrained to acknowledge that God had far exceeded his most sanguine expectation. "I had not thought to see thy face; and lo, God hath showed me also thy seed" (Gen. xlviii. 11). (*Robert Lewis.*) *When the oil flows*:—Now, if I may venture to be fanciful for once, let me tell you of three vessels that we have to bring if we would have the oil of the Divine Spirit poured into us.

I. **THE VESSEL OF DESIRE.** God can give us a great many things that we do not wish, but He cannot give us His best gift, and that is Himself, unless we desire it. He never forces His company on anybody, and if we do not wish for Him He cannot give us Himself, His Spirit, or the gifts of His Spirit. For instance, He cannot make a man wise if he does not wish to be instructed. He cannot make a man holy if he has no aspiration after holiness. Measure the reality and intensity of desire, and you measure capacity. As the atmosphere rushes into every vacuum, or as the sea runs up into, and fills, every sinuosity of the coast, so when a heart opens, and the unbroken coast-line is indented, as it were, by desire, in rushes the tide of the Divine gifts. You have God in the measure in which you desire Him.

II. **ANOTHER VESSEL THAT WE HAVE TO BRING IS THE VESSEL OF OUR EXPECTANCY.** Desire is one thing; confident anticipation that the desire will be fulfilled is quite another. And the two do not certainly go together anywhere except in this one region, and there they do go, linked arm-in-arm. For whatsoever, in the highest of all regions, we wish we have the right without presumption to believe that we shall receive. Expectation, like desire, opens the heart. There are some expectations, even in lower regions, that fulfil themselves. Doctors will tell you that a very large part of the curative power of their medicine depends upon the patient's anticipation of recovery. If a man expects to die when he takes to his bed, the chances are that he will die; and if a man expects to get better, death will have a fight before it conquers him. All these illustrations fall far beneath the Christian aspect of the thought that what we expect from God we get. That is only another way of putting, "According to thy faith be it unto thee." It is exactly what Jesus Christ said when He promised: "Whatsoever things ye ask when ye stand praying, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

III. **LASTLY, ONE MORE VESSEL THAT WE HAVE TO BRING IS OBEDIENCE.** "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." Desire, Anticipation, and Obedience. These three must never be separated if we are to receive the gift of Himself, which God delights and waits to give. All spiritual possessions and powers grow by use, even as exercised muscles are strengthened, and unused ones tend to be atrophied. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The oil and the vessels*:—So long as there were vessels to be filled the miraculous flow of the oil continued, and it only ceased when there were no more jars to contain it.

I. This is true in reference to **OUR PROVIDENTIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.** So long as we have needs we shall have supplies, and we shall find our necessities exhausted far sooner than the Divine bounty.

II. The same principle holds good with regard to **THE BESTOWAL OF SAVING GRACE.** In a congregation the Gospel is as the pot of oil, and those who receive from it are needy souls, desirous of the grace of God. Of these we have always too few in our assemblies.

III. The like is true with regard to **OTHER SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS.** All fulness dwells in our Lord Jesus, and, as He needs not grace for Himself, it is stored up in Him, that He may give it out to believers. The saints with one voice confess "Of His fulness have all we received."

IV. The same truth will be proved in reference to **THE PURPOSES OF GRACE IN THE WORLD.** The fulness of Divine grace will be equal to every demand upon it till the end of time. Men will never be saved apart from the atonement of our Lord Jesus, but never will that ransom price be found insufficient to redeem the souls that trust in the Redeemer. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The Spirit of God supplying the need of the Church*:—The multiplication of the oil ran parallel with the demand of each successive vessel. As the sons brought them they became full. Whatever their size or shape, they were carried back, and set down, filled to the

brim. When all were quite full, she bitterly lamented that there was not a vessel more. It is so that the Spirit of God has been supplying the need of the Church from that moment in the upper room, when the risen Lord began to pour Him forth. Vessel after vessel has been brought; men like Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine, Luther, John Knox have been filled, and still the stream of oil and grace of spiritual plenitude and anointing is being poured forth. (F. B. Meyer.)

Vers. 8-17. And it fell on a day that Elisha passed to Shunem.—*Hospitality* :—In these verses there are two very interesting subjects, and of a practical character. I. HOSPITALITY RIGHTFULLY EMPLOYED. The object of the hospitality was Elisha the prophet, and the author of it is called here a “great woman.” Observe, 1. The hospitality was very hearty. “She constrained him to eat bread.” 2. The hospitality was shown to a poor but a godly man. Genuine hospitality looks out for the poor and deserving, and constrains them to enter and be fed. 3. The hospitality involved considerable trouble and expense. II. HOSPITALITY NOBLY REWARDED. Elisha, instead of being insensible to the great generosity of his hostess, glowed with gratitude that prompted a strong desire to make some return. His offer, 1. Implies his consciousness of great power with man. Elisha’s offer, 2. Implies his consciousness of his power with God. (*Homilist*.) A great woman.—A great woman :—The monotony of a woman’s life is, perhaps, its greatest trial. Such a round of daily trivialities occupy her attention that, even though heart and conscience may be right, the body and nerves not unfrequently suffer. The “strain” and “over-pressure” from which her husband often suffers are not supposed in any way to affect her : his life is in the rush, but hers in the calm ; he is mixing with men, and taking part in all the movements of the day, while she is in the nursery and the home-place, with her easy duties and sheltered position. Yet while we have the story of the lady of Shunem before us, we cannot but see how possible it is for the life of a woman to be great even in the midst of very contracted interests. This woman lived at home with her husband, and was occupied with household cares ; but she never lost her own individuality, never allowed her little duties to make her little also ; she stands before us as a great woman, indeed—greater in character than any circumstances or position could possibly have made her. 1. As we read the narrative several points reveal her true greatness, and stand out as examples to us all ; and the first is her kindness. She cared for others. In our modern speech this expression means a great deal. “Do you care for him ?” is a question full of significance ; for when a woman loves she does care very much indeed. And this woman had a kind heart, whose sympathies centred at home, but reached out to all who needed her care ; and this heart, which royally ruled her whole being, had servants in eyes that were quick to see and hands that were swift to bless. 2. The lady of Shunem exhibited, also, that quality of greatness which is submission. Much nonsense is talked about the equality of the sexes ; but no one can read this history without suspecting that, in this case—a rare one, no doubt—the woman was more than the equal of the man. Had she been conscious of the fact it would have gone far to change it ; but she was not. 3. The loyalty of the Shunammite was another proof of her greatness. That she had everything she wanted, and nothing to wish for, we cannot imagine. Serenely contented as she might have been, she would have been less, or more, than a woman if greater possessions and a higher position would not in themselves have been acceptable. But she counted nothing a rise in life that took her away from her own people. 4. The marvellous self-control of the Shunammite was another element in her greatness. How quiet she was during all the tests that came to her ! 5. The self-control of the Shunammite was no more marked than the great force of character which in this case, as in every other, accompanied it. The strong individuality of this truly great woman shone out in all the circumstances of her life. She had that subtle power, with which only a few people are trusted, but which, in man or woman, is invariably felt by others. Her mastery of self gave her in great part the mastery over her fellows ; but her natural abilities were great, and no littlenesses spoiled them. She seems always to have had her own way ; but that was because her way was the best. 6. It was godliness, most of all, that made the woman of Shunem great. It is true that we are not told that she feared God ; but we can see that written between the lines of everything that is said respecting her. It was because Elisha was “a holy man of God” that the hospitality of her home was offered to him. It was the sustaining power of religion that made her strong to declare, “It is well.” (*Marianne*

Farningham.) *A great woman*:—The hotel of our time had no counterpart in any entertainment of olden time. The vast majority of travellers must be entertained at private abode. SHE WAS GREAT IN HER HOSPITALITIES. Uncivilised and barbarous nations have this virtue. Jupiter had the surname of the Hospitable, and he was said especially to avenge the wrongs of strangers. Homer extolled it in his verse. The Arabs are punctilious on this subject, and amongst some of their tribes it is not until the ninth day of tarrying that the occupant has a right to ask his guest, "Who, and whence art thou?" If this virtue is so honoured among barbarians, how ought it to be honoured among those of us who believe in the Bible, which commands us to use hospitality one toward another without grudging? Most beautiful is this grace of hospitality when shown in the house of God. A good man travelling in the far West, in the wilderness, was overtaken by night and storm, and he put in at a cabin. He saw firearms along the beams of the cabin, and he felt alarmed. He did not know but that he had fallen into a den of thieves. He sat there greatly perturbed. After awhile the man of the house came home with a gun on his shoulder, and set it down in a corner. The stranger was still more alarmed. After awhile the man of the house whispered with his wife, and the stranger thought his destruction was being planned. Then the man of the house came forward and said to the stranger: "Stranger, we are a rough and rude people out here, and we work hard for a living. We make our living by hunting, and when we come to the nightfall we are tired and we are apt to go to bed early, and before retiring we are always in the habit of reading a chapter from the Word of God and making a prayer. If you don't like such things, if you will just step outside the door until we get through, I'll be greatly obliged to you." Of course the stranger tarried in the room, and the old hunter took hold of the horns of the altar and brought down the blessing of God upon his household and upon the stranger within their gates. Rude but glorious Christian hospitality! II. THIS WOMAN WAS GREAT IN HER KINDNESS TOWARD GOD'S MESSENGER. Elisha may have been a stranger in that household, but as she found out he had come on a Divine mission, he was cordially welcomed. III. THIS WOMAN WAS GREAT IN HER BEHAVIOUR UNDER TROUBLE. Her only son had died on her lap. A very bright light went out in that household. The sacred writer puts it very tersely when he says, "He sat on her knee until noon, and then he died." Yet the writer goes on to say that she exclaimed, "It is well!" Great in prosperity, this woman was great in trouble. Where are the feet that have not been blistered on the hot sands of this great Sahara? Where are the shoulders that have not bent under the burden of grief? Where is the ship sailing over glassy sea that has not after awhile been caught in a cyclone? Where is the garden of earthly comfort, but trouble hath hatched up its fiery and panting team and gone through it with burning ploughshare of disaster? Under the pelting of ages of suffering the great heart of the world has burst with woe. IV. THIS WOMAN WAS GREAT IN HER APPLICATION TO DOMESTIC DUTIES. Every picture is a home picture, whether she is entertaining an Elisha, or whether she is giving careful attention to her sick boy, or whether she is appealing for the restoration of her property. Every picture in her case is a home picture. Those are not disciples of this Shunan mite woman who, going out to attend to outside charities, neglect the duty of home—the duty of wife, of mother, of daughter. No faithfulness in public benefaction can ever atone for domestic negligence. There has been many a mother who, by indefatigable toil, has reared a large family of children, equipping them for the duties of life with good manners and large intelligence and Christian principle, starting them out, who has done more for the world than many a woman whose name has sounded through all the lands and through the centuries. I remember, when Kossuth was in this country, there were some ladies who got honourable reputations by presenting him very gracefully with bouquets of flowers on public occasions; but what was all that compared with the work of the plain Hungarian mother who gave to truth, and civilisation, and the cause of universal liberty, a Kossuth? Yes; this woman of my text was great in her domesticity. When this prophet wanted to reward her for her hospitality by asking some preferment from the king, what did she say? She declined it. She said, "I dwell among my own people"—as much as to say, "I am satisfied with my lot; all I want is my family and my friends around me—I dwell among my own people." Oh, what a rebuke to the strife for precedence in all ages! V. THIS WOMAN WAS GREAT IN HER PIETY. She had faith in God, and she was not ashamed to talk

about it before idolators. Ah! woman will never appreciate what she owes to Christianity until she knows and sees the degradation of her sex under Paganism and Mohammedanism. Her very birth considered a misfortune. Sold like cattle on the shambles. Slave of all work, and, at last, her body fuel for the funeral pyre of her husband. Above the shriek of the fire worshippers in India, and above the rumbling of the Juggernauts, I hear the million-voiced groan of wronged, insulted, broken-hearted, down-trodden woman. Her tears have fallen in the Nile and Tigris, the La Plata, and on the steppes of Tartary. She has been dishonoured in Turkish garden and Persian palace and Spanish Alhambra. Her little ones have been sacrificed in the Indus and the Ganges. There is not a groan, or a dungeon, or an island, or a mountain, or a river, or a lake, or a sea, but could tell a story of the outrages heaped upon her. But thanks to God this glorious Christianity comes forth, and all the chains of this vassalage are snapped, and she rises from ignominy to exalted sphere and becomes the affectionate daughter, the gentle wife, the honoured mother, the useful Christian. Oh, if Christianity has done so much for woman, surely woman will become its most ardent advocate and its sublimest exemplification! (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall.—*The little chamber on the wall*.—I. HOW DID THIS LITTLE CHAMBER COME TO BE? It originated in the quick and clear perception of this woman of Shunem. "I perceive," she said to her husband, "that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually." I don't know that any very unusual faculty of perception was necessary for this. A much inferior person might have made the same observation as she made, but few would have made it in the same sense, and with the same fulness of meaning. What is said in one of the psalms, of the gods of the heathen, is true of too many human creatures. "They have eyes, but they see not." They see the mere forms of things but not the inhering, underlying substance. They see the outward movements of things, but not the inward significance. And suppose different people looking out of the window; will they all see alike? We know they will not. Why, there are some people who could see the same persons pass for year after year and never make an inference. "They have their own reasons, no doubt, for passing and repassing—what is that to me?" There are other people who could not see them pass many days without having certain conjectures about them, and beginning to take an interest in them; we mean not the barren interest of a mere curiosity, which is common enough, but the deeper concern of the heart. "That little boy is in a situation, for he passes the window daily at the same time. This woman who is going by is paler day by day, and wears sorrow on her face. Perhaps she has some great home care. Or she is brighter and happier, things are better with her." The "perceiving," the observing eye, is the gate of knowledge, the quickener of sympathy, the informer to benevolence. It brings before the benevolent heart the material on which it can act. It is at least the hewer of wood and the drawer of water to nobler faculties than itself. II. IMMEDIATE ACTION IS TAKEN. This action gives expression to the good impulse which attended so very closely on the quick perception. "Let us make a little chamber." There is a pleasure in seeing, simply as seeing. It is good to know men and things somewhat correctly; but the higher pleasure is later born, and is always associated with doing and with duty. And these two pleasures God hath joined together, although men are always rending them asunder. And so men, looking at the same things, take different courses. From the same point apparently they diverge—one along the pathway of duty and activity and helpfulness; and another by a shorter circuit, back again idly to the post of observation. "Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it." Make your little chamber, whatever it be, for helpfulness to others, as long as help can be given in that way. III. DO NOT THINK OF THESE DUTIES OF HELPFULNESS AS INVOLVING GREAT EXERTION, OR VERY CONSIDERABLE EXPENDITURE OF TIME OR MONEY. It is not so. It is even in some cases very much the reverse, as in this case of the good Shunammite. Her gift, after all, is very simple, and to herself and her husband very inexpensive. And yet I think I see something on the walls—one, two, three inscriptions at any rate are there—only a single word in each. Now we don't need this famous room for rest or for writing, but we do need it very much for some higher purpose. Let us stay in it for a very little time until we can read together these inscriptions. 1. Considerateness is the first. There was evidently a thoughtful and respectful considerateness in the way this

gift was offered to Elisha. Another word surely we can see in this little room, if we look—the word, 2. Simplicity. Nothing, in its way, could be simpler than this room and its furniture. “A bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick.” Of course this chamber was only for a passing traveller and not for a permanent resident. But how easy it is to make a grand display for a passing traveller! Monarchs have been known before now to impoverish some noble families by accepting from them a munificence of hospitality beyond their means. And should we be wrong in supposing that the simplicity of this one chamber is, after all, but the expression of a simplicity that reigned through the whole house of this good woman in Shunem? “How many things,” said Socrates, “there are which I do not need!” “How many things” there are, which, although we do need them a little, we can yet do very well without! Here is a bed, and that meets the need of almost one-third of our whole time here on earth. Here is a table, and that meets the need—for intellectual persons, for commercial men, and for some workmen—of another third of our time. If I am neither sleeping, working, nor eating, and yet am detained in-doors, I cannot stand all day; well, here is a stool to sit on and think, or think of nothing. Year in and out, there are twelve hours of dark to pass through,—well, here is a candlestick, or lamp, with oil in it—light it, and let it burn. And so we are at the end of the inventory! Beautiful simplicity! There is just one word more I want you to decipher, and that is the word, 3. Contentment. The whole history of this chamber shows that an unusual contentment reigned in this home. If the inmates had been dissatisfied or ambitious, here is a fine opportunity to advance themselves. The very ladder of elevation comes within their reach. A word from the prophet would set them almost anywhere. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. I dwell among mine own people.—*Influence* :—We contend that there is not a man, who does not dwell among a host of persons who are under his influence, who listen to his voice, and echo his thoughts. None are so mean and powerless as not to shape and bend in some way the mind of an acquaintance. None stand perfectly alone. The distant planets which are jostled in their orbits by the power of another sphere, are but the type of the moral universe, in which one star not only differeth from another star in glory, but kindles a thousand sympathies, and lights a thousand reflective fires. I. IT IS THE EMINENT PREROGATIVE OF THE MOTHER TO BE THE EDUCATOR OF THE FAMILY; a truth which is alike in the expression “our mother tongue” and “our mother country.” The arrangements of modern society and commerce separate the father from his family during a great part of the day; he dwells among other people, and exercises over them another sort of influence. It is the mother who is the keeper at home, and with boundless, indefatigable tenderness moulds the first lisplings, and extracts the first thoughts of her young children. They imitate her manners and pronunciation; and she is the interpreter of their self-invented or half-formed words with the world. II. IT MAY REMIND MOTHERS OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES TO STATE, that when a boy escapes from the nursery and enters upon his school career, he becomes in turn an educator, and dwells among his own people. Not to speak of that technical arrangement in some schools, which sets boys to teach boys, there is a constant play of mutual influence, wherever youths congregate. An eminent teacher, whose mantle seems to have fallen upon many of his successors, used to exclaim :—“If my sixth form desert me, all our success is at an end!” Boys at school are rarely unemphatic and harmless; they do then, as they will do hereafter, the work of God or of Satan. III. The Hebrew Rabbins used to maintain that they LEARNED MUCH AT SCHOOL, BUT MORE FROM THEIR CONTEMPORARIES IN ACTIVE LIFE. The most valuable part of our knowledge is self-acquired or obtained by the collision and play of our minds among those of our equals. Our educating power, then, expands with our years, and we teach more truly and successfully, if we are Christians indeed, the older we grow. (*T. Jackson, M.A.*) *The sphere in which we move* :—You cannot grow grapes on the north-east wall of a poor cottage, nor English pine-apples in the bare exercise-yard of a work-house. And you cannot grow noble in the society of those who never feel a noble sentiment or give birth to a fine thought; whose talk is of sport, or intrigue, or cattle, or money; whose one ambition is fine company, and whose god is gold. The soul of the large nature must have its suitable sphere, or like the lark that lives only with sparrows it becomes dumb. *On a contented mind* :—1. The temper of this worthy Shunammite stands in opposition to that restless and discontented

spirit which so often sets men at variance with their condition in the world, makes them look with contempt on that state of life and sphere of action which Providence has allotted them; and encouraging every real or supposed discouragement to prey upon their minds, makes them pine for some change of fortune. It is proper, however, to observe, that this moderation of spirit is not inconsistent with our having a sense of what is uneasy or distressing in our lot, and endeavouring, by fair means, to render our condition more agreeable. Entire apathy, or passive indifference to all the circumstances of our external state, is required by no precept of religion. What a virtuous degree of contentment requires and supposes, is that, with a mind free from repining anxiety, we make the best of our condition, whatever it is; enjoying such good things as God is pleased to bestow upon us, with a thankful and cheerful heart; without envy at those who appear more prosperous than us; without any attempt to alter our condition by unfair means; and without any murmuring against the Providence of Heaven. 2. But if this acquiescence in our condition is to be considered as belonging to that contentment which religion requires, what becomes, it will be said, of that laudable ambition, which has prompted many boldly to aspire with honour and success far beyond their original state of life?—I readily admit, that on some among the sons of men, such high talents are bestowed, as mark them out by the hand of God for superior elevation; by rising to which, many, both in ancient and modern times, have had the opportunity of distinguishing themselves as benefactors to their country and to mankind. But these are only a few scattered stars, that shine in a wide hemisphere; such rare examples afford no model for general conduct. I. DISCONTENT CARRIES IN ITS NATURE MUCH GUILT AND SIN. A contented temper, we are apt to say, is a great happiness to those who have it; and a discontented one, we call an unlucky turn of mind; as if we were speaking of a good or bad constitution of body, of something that depended not at all on ourselves, but was merely the gift of Nature. Ought this to be the sentiment, either of a reasonable man, or a Christian; of one who knows himself to be endowed with powers for governing his own spirit, or who believes in God and in a world to come? Besides impiety, discontent carries along with it, as its inseparable concomitants, several other sinful passions. It implies pride; or an unreasonable estimation of our own merit, in comparison with others. It implies covetousness, or an inordinate desire for the advantages of external fortune, as the only real goods. It implies, and always engenders, envy, or ill-nature and hatred towards all whom we see rising above us in the world. II. As this disposition infers much sin, so it ARGUES GREAT FOLLY, AND INVOLVES MEN IN MANY MISERIES. If there be any first principle of wisdom, it is undoubtedly this: the distresses that are removable, endeavour to remove: those which cannot be removed, bear with as little disquiet as you can: in every situation of life there are comforts; find them out, and enjoy them. But this maxim, in all its parts, is disregarded by the man of discontent. He is employed in aggravating his own evils; while he neglects all his own comforts. Let it be further considered, in order to show the folly of a discontented temper, that the more it is indulged, it disqualifies you the more from being free from the grounds of your discontent. First, you have reason to apprehend, that it will turn the displeasure of God against you, and make Him your enemy. Next, by your spleen and discontent, you are certain of bringing yourself into variance with the world as well as with God. Such a temper is likely to create enemies; it can procure you no friends. Such being the mischiefs, such the guilt and the folly of indulging a discontented spirit, I shall now suggest some considerations which may assist us in checking it, and in reconciling our minds to the state in which it has pleased Providence to place us. Let us, for this purpose, attend to three great objects: to God, to ourselves, and to the world around us. 1. Let us speak of God, of His perfections, and government of the world; from which, to every person of reflection who believes in God at all, there cannot but arise some cure to the discontents and griefs of the heart. For, had it been left to ourselves what to devise or wish, in order to secure peace to us in every state, what could we have invented so effectual as the assurance of being under the government of an Almighty Ruler, whose conduct to His creatures can have no other object but their good and welfare. Above all, and independent of all, He can have no temptation to injustice or partiality. Neither jealousy nor envy can dwell with the Supreme Being. He is a rival to none, He is an enemy to none, except to such as, by rebellion against His laws, seek enmity with Him. He is equally above envying the greatest, or despising the meanest of His subjects. 2. In order to correct discontent,

let us attend to ourselves and our own state. Let us consider two things there : how little we deserve, and how much we enjoy. 3. Consider the state of the world around you. (*H. Blair, D.D.*)

Vers. 18-37. And when the child was grown.—*The empty home* :—The Bible is the most perfectly natural and human book in the world. It deals not with philosophies and theories, but with real human life. The story of the Shunammite and her child is one of the most touching episodes in Scripture, and also one of the most beautiful and finished narratives in the whole range of literature. 1. We are introduced to "a great woman," a lady of great wealth and influence. She dwelt in Shunem, in the plain of Jezreel, the richest and most fertile tract of land in Palestine. She was a woman of keen spiritual perception ; and as Elisha passed to and fro on his Master's business, she recognised him to be a man of true piety. "I perceive," she said, "that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually." There is an Eastern proverb, "A myrtle in the desert will be a myrtle still." So Elisha was consistent in whatever circumstances he might find himself. 2. She was also a woman of large-hearted generosity. 3. But this great woman was hiding in her heart a great disappointment : she had no child to cherish as her very own. 4. But this great woman was to pass through a great sorrow. 5. But this great woman overcame by means of great trust in God. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*) *Concerning accidents* :—The remark was recently made by an earnest and thoughtful believer : "There is no catastrophe that can possibly come to a living Christian." The tidings had just reached him of a serious accident—as we are accustomed to say—that had befallen a dear relative, known not less for piety than for marked amiability of disposition. This was the sad occasion that suggested the above remark. The words were spoken tenderly, evincing no lack of heartfelt sympathy, showing no indisposition to administer comfort in the most substantial manner. While we stood silently contemplating the situation, this Christian friend added : "There is no catastrophe but the loss of faith." Very true. To abandon one's reliance upon the Heavenly Father's care is incalculable loss. The whole universe, without faith inspiring the soul, would, indeed, become a dreary chaos, a world distorted, meaningless. Laying aside all discussion of extraordinary events which befall those who are in rebellion against God—how far these events are under the supervision of that Almighty power which is so despised, consider that no catastrophe can possibly come to the living Christian. He is not exposed to accident in any true sense. The severest revulsions may come ; the sudden visitation of physical illness may change every earthly plan ; even the throne upon which reason sits may be demolished ; but not one nor all of these combined can touch that sacred relationship over which infinite love and power exercise perpetual guardianship. A living Christian has a living union with the Divine nature, enjoys a residence in the realm of faith, is upheld every moment by an arm that wearies not beneath the burden of universe. The child of our King—a victim of chance? Never! Sooner the covenants of God will be broken than this could be. Let every loyal heart rejoice in the absolute perpetuity of relationship with his Father, and in the consequent pledge on His part of unremitting care. *A day in a mother's life* :—There are times when everything goes on smoothly, and one day is like another. Again, there are times when changes come, and whole years of joy or sorrow may be concentrated into a single day. So it was with the household at Shunem. It was a hallowed day when Elisha first entered the house (ver. 8). It was a joyous day when a man-child was born (ver. 17). But most memorable of all was that day when the only son was lost and found ; was dead, and received back to life again (ver. 18-37). I. MORNING JOYS. It is the harvest time. "Man goeth forth unto his work, and to his labour until the evening" (Ps. civ. 22, 23). 1. We see mother and child at home. She is called "a great woman" (ver. 8). This implies not greatness in wealth, but in character (Prov. xii. 26 ; xxxi. 10-31). Doubtless she would show her "greatness," not only in her management of household affairs, but in her care of her child. 2. The next scene is in the harvest field. Here, too, all is joy. The father is glad at sight of his boy. His coming is not the result of command, but of his own choice. There is such love between him and his father as makes their meeting and intercourse a joy to both. They are happy together. II. DARKNESS AT NOON. How soon may the brightest sky be clouded. How quickly may the happiest home be darkened by sorrow and the shadow of death. "We know not what a day may bring forth." 1. It is a

cry raised in the midst of innocent labour. The work going on is good and not evil. It is in accordance with God's ordinance. It is wholesome and pure. Old and young may join in it freely. Such, at least, it was in the olden time, when the simplicity and purity of pastoral life were still known in the land (Ruth ii. 4). And yet here death comes. There is no place safe. There is no people or work with immunity from trouble. 2. The cry brought woe to the father's heart. His son's voice was sweet to his ear. 3. Picture the sad home-coming. "Carry him." The lad obeys. What a change. He came out full of life and frolic; he is borne back helpless as a clod. Alas, how dreadful the awakening! (ver. 20). Mark her gentleness. "On her knees"—where often she had dandled him with delight. III. LIGHT AT EVENING TIME. All is not lost, since God liveth. This woman, like her countrywoman of Gospel times, was great in faith. Therefore, instead of giving way to despair, she strengthens her heart in God. 1. Mark the preparation. What promptitude and decision! 2. The long ride to Carmel. 3. The passionate appeal to the prophet (vers. 27-30). Nothing will satisfy her but Elisha. 4. The return and restoration (vers. 32-37). Hope has sprung up again in her breast. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Trials will come. In the darkest hour God can help. Here the child cries to his father, the father sends to the mother, the mother appeals to the prophet, and the prophet casts himself on God. So let us cast ourselves on Christ, our God and Saviour (Isa. lvi. 13; John xi. 25). (*William Forsyth, A.M.*)

Ver. 20. He sat on her knees till noon, and then died.—*Death in early life*:—
I. LET US INQUIRE WHAT PROPORTION OF MANKIND DIE BEFORE THEY ARRIVE TO YEARS OF MATURITY. II. WHAT PURPOSES GOD MAY DESIGN TO ANSWER BY THE EARLY DEATH OF CHILDREN. Though there is no reason to doubt whether God has some wise and good purpose to promote by cutting short the lives of so many of mankind; yet it is not to be supposed that we can discover all the reasons which influence the kind Parent of the universe in bereaving fathers and mothers of their young and lovely children. But some of His purposes in such dispensations of Providence are plain and obvious. 1. He may intend, by taking away so many at an early age, to make this appear as a dying world. Though He has told us in His Word that it is appointed unto all men once to die, and that dust they are and unto dust they must return, yet these declarations generally fail of making mankind realise their frail and mortal state. The eye affects the heart, and the bare sight of death makes a deeper impression on the minds of the living, than any human or even Divine declarations concerning it. The frequency of death seems necessary to keep up a lively sense of it in the minds of dying creatures. A very dying time we know is always very alarming to the living. And by so many deaths of the young, God makes it appear to all, that they live in a dying world and are dying creatures. The frequent instances of mortality, not only from year to year, but from month to month, and from week to week, make it appear that death is continually carrying mankind to their long home, and causing mourners to go about the streets. If it be necessary, then, that the world should appear as a dying world, what wiser course could God take to produce this solemn and instructive appearance, than to cut off such a large proportion of mankind in their earliest days? 2. God may design, by the great mortality of children, to teach mankind His sovereign right to take away any temporal favours He has bestowed upon them. They are very apt to consider their children as their own property, and their own most precious property. They value them more than all their other earthly enjoyments, and claim a higher right to them. They possess many things which they do not consider as their own. They dwell in houses, and cultivate lands which are not their own. They borrow many comforts and conveniences from one another; but their children they hold by a stronger claim, and practically deny human or Divine right to take them away. But they ought to consider, that God has given them these desirable objects and precious blessings, and therefore that He has an original and sovereign right to do what He will with His own. This is a matter of so much importance, that God may, with propriety, take the most effectual method to display His sovereignty. And we can hardly conceive of any more effectual way to make mankind see, and feel, and acknowledge His sovereignty, than His stripping them of those blessings which they are most apt to claim, most apt to prize, and most reluctant to part with. By going into their families, and tearing from them the objects which lie nearest to their hearts, He gives them the most sensible and affecting evidence, that He has a right to dispose

of them and of all they have. The loss of children was the heaviest of Job's afflictions, and most effectually bowed his heart in cordial submission to Divine sovereignty. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." 3. God may design, by the death of some little children, to take them away from the evil to come, and give them cause to adore His sovereign goodness in early and safely conducting them to His heavenly kingdom. We are told that God sometimes takes away the godly from the evil to come; and why may He not do the same by some who die in infancy and childhood? 4. God may design, by the death of little children, to moderate the affections of their parents towards them. They are extremely prone to love their children too much. Jacob was too fond of Joseph and Benjamin. David was too fond of Absalom. Aaron and Eli were too fond of their sons. And parents in general are too fond of their children. And sometimes they are partial in their affections, and dote upon some son or daughter, who has the more promising appearance or talents. Now, God knows the feelings of parents better than they do themselves, and there is reason to think that He often takes away some of their darlings, to teach them to moderate their affections towards them that survive. 5. God may intend, by the death of children, to prevent parents from being too much engaged to provide for them in this life. Their great fondness for them often creates a worldly spirit, and an anxiety to lay up for them rich and large possessions. They are ready to think that they cannot do too much for them. They give themselves no rest, but employ their time and exhaust their strength and expose their own lives, for the sake of putting their children into the most easy and flourishing situation. 6. God may bereave parents of some of their children, on purpose to teach them to do their duty to the rest. So long as parents have high expectations of their children's living, they are apt to neglect to prepare them for dying; but when God takes away one or more of their children, by an early death, then they can hardly fail to realise that they are all mortal, and may be called out of time into eternity before they are prepared for the solemn and interesting event; which makes them feel, that it is of more importance to prepare their children for dying than for living. 7. God may bereave pious parents of their young and tender offspring, in order to try and purify their hearts. This seems to have been the primary purpose of God, in taking away for a time the child of the Shunammites. Every circumstance was directly suited to try the hearts of those professed friends of God. They were not fond of the world. They were amiable and exemplary persons, and much engaged in religion, and warmly attached to its friends. But it is probable that they idolised their only child. Accordingly, God meant to take away their idol, try their sincerity, and recall their supreme affections to Himself. 8. Another reason why God sometimes bereaves parents of their little children, is because He intends to make their bereavement the means of their own conversion. Such sensible and severe strokes of Providence have led thoughtless, careless, and prayerless parents to attend to the things of their everlasting peace.

III. IMPROVEMENT. 1. If so great a proportion of mankind die in childhood and youth, as has been stated, then all adult persons have great reason of gratitude for the preservation of life. 2. If God so often takes away infants and little children by death, then those parents have peculiar reason for gratitude to God, who have never suffered a single breach in their young and rising families. 3. If God so often and so early takes away children from their parents, then it is of very serious importance that parents should be truly religious. 4. If God may answer many wise and benevolent purposes by the death of little children, then those who are lamenting the sudden and surprising death of their lovely and only child, ought to be cordially submissive to the bereaving and afflictive hand of God. 5. This subject calls upon all to inquire whether the bereavements and afflictions they have experienced have been instructive and beneficial to them. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*)

Influence of a child's death upon his mother :—Princess Alice had just returned from her Italian trip, into which she had thrown herself with true enjoyment, and was still resting after the fatigue of the long journey. The two little princes had been playing by her sofa; Prince Ernest ran into the next room followed by the Princess, and in her brief absence Prince Fritz fell out of the window upon the stone pavement below. One moment in the most vivid radiant life and health, the next he lay senseless and crushed. He died a few hours later in his mother's arms. In her agony she sounded, as it were for the first time, the depths of scepticism. She searched in vain through the various systems of philosophy, but found no foothold. She did not speak of the transformation that was going on within; but slowly, silently,

and surely faith returned to her, never again to falter. "The whole edifice of philosophical conclusions which I had built up for myself, I find to have no foundation whatever—nothing of it is left—it has crumbled away like dust. What should we be, what would become of us if we had no faith—if we did not believe that there is a God who rules the world and each single one of us?" (*Miss Gladstone in "Contemporary Review."*)

The Shunammite's son.—I. THE DEAD CHILD. Beautiful, innocent, and pure. 1. His death was sudden. Although sufficiently grown to have passed the usual dangers of the infant age, he is not old enough to go out to the field to the reapers. 2. In the death of this child there is one of the hardest providences to understand. II. THE BELIEVING MOTHER. In reality she is the central figure in this story. 1. She manifested her faith by her determination. She tells no one of her plans, but prepares to go to find the prophet, and bring him to the chamber where the child has been placed. 2. She showed her faith again in not making known her errand until she met the prophet himself. She must pour her complaint into the ears of God's representative. 3. Her faith came out still stronger in her refusing to leave the prophet unless he would return with her. Gehazi had been sent with the prophet's staff, but this, to her mind, was not sufficient. Her intuition seemed to tell her that it would not restore the child, and Elisha must return with her. III. THE RESTORED SON. 1. He stretched himself upon the child. He "put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm." 2. This effort was a manifestation of the earnestness of the prophet. Elijah did the same. In both cases there was such an earnest longing for the accomplishment of the purpose that they would willingly give their own lives to restore the dead. (*G. S. Butters.*)

Ver. 26. Is it well with thee?—*Ministerial inquiry into the welfare of a people*.—I. WHEN MAY IT BE SAID TO BE REALLY WELL WITH ANY PERSONS? Many would think it to be well with us when we have food and raiment, when our flocks and herds increase. But, if this is to be well, and we are no better than "this world's goods," can make us, we are well only for time, and as it respects our frail and perishable bodies. In this sense, it was well with Dives. For it to be really well with us, we must come to things which concern the soul, and which have a reference to that eternal state whither we are going. Mark, then, what follows: It is well with us if our souls have been awakened—if we have found forgiveness—if the Lord Jesus Christ be precious to us—and if we be now walking in newness and righteousness of life. II. WHETHER IT BE THUS WELL WITH YOU? You may, as we have seen, be well as it respects this world and your abiding in it. But, is it well with your souls? Would it be well with you, do you think, if God were now to require your souls of you? Inquire, I pray you. Felt you ever your need of mercy? Has a sensibility of your guiltiness ever constrained you to cry for mercy? Have you, like her who had lost one of her ten pieces of silver, sought for it "till you have found it"? Is your heart "sprinkled from an evil conscience"? What do you love most? Christ or the world?—Christ or sinful pleasure?—Christ or the increase of your temporal wealth and honour?—Christ or yourself? What is your chief joy? The Christian "rejoices in Christ Jesus." Is He the object of your rejoicing? In what way are you living? The way in which we live will most clearly evidence whether we have been awakened, forgiven, and "accepted in the Beloved," or not; and, consequently, whether it be well with us or not. (*W. Mudge, B.A.*) It is well:—Death is not a calamity to the Christian. "It is well." I. IN VIEW OF THE UNSATISFACTORY NATURE OF LIFE. Paul would say, "To live is Christ," and yet he testified, "To depart and be with Christ is far better." II. IN VIEW OF THE HOME PREPARED FOR THE SAVED. III. "IT IS WELL" WITH THE CHILD OF GOD EVEN IN THIS LIFE. IV. APPEAL TO THE LIVING. Is it well with your soul? (*Homiletic Review.*) A searching inquiry:—In the late South African War, Major Child, when setting out one morning on reconnaissance duty, had a presentiment he might not return alive, and so said to a brother officer that if he fell that day he wanted written on his memorial stone just these words: "Is it well with the child?" "It is well." It fell out as he anticipated, but death had no terrors for him, and now he lies on the veldt with this question and answer above his grave. Suppose this question put to us: "Is it well with thee?" Can we answer, "It is well"? (*J. D. Jones, M.A.*) She answered, It is well.—*Submission under trial*.—I. THE TRIAL WHICH THE WOMAN ENDURED. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly

upwards." "The ills to which flesh is heir" are diffused with wonderful impartiality. The palace is as much accustomed to the visits of sorrow as is the cottage. The robe of honour cannot ward off the touch of pain any more than the garment of beggary. The glittering diadem often encircles an aching brow, and the silken robe often covers a bleeding heart. 1. In her trial there was the disappointment of a strong desire. She seems to have had only one strong desire ungratified. No child had ever called her mother; she had no son to perpetuate her husband's name in Israel. The desire to be a mother was peculiarly strong in the heart of a Hebrew wife, from the national relationship to the promise, that of the seed of a woman would come the Destroyer of the serpent and the Deliverer of Jacob. This desire in the heart of the Shunammite had almost died away, when the prophet assures her she shall yet "embrace a son." As the desire had been strong, so would the joy be great when the desire was realised. Who can blame her if her heart swelled with a joyful pride and a proud joy, as she clasped her baby to her breast, and pictured for him a future of happiness and honour? 2. An additional element in this woman's trial was the blasting of a bright hope. What sweet and sacred hopes cluster round every cradle! We all know the power of hope, and to how large a degree hope constitutes the beauty and blessedness of human life. 3. As another element of this woman's trial—her tenderest affections have been torn. Her child has been taken from her. The grief of "one that mourneth for a first-born" has passed into a proverb. She had lost her first-born—nay, she had lost her only child. II. HER CONDUCT UNDER THE TRIAL. Notice, first: 1. She is filled with the most pungent sorrow. When trial is sent, it is designed we should feel it. There may be sorrow, there must be sorrow, under the afflictions and bereavements of life; only it should not be despondent sorrow, nor rebellious sorrow, nor murmuring sorrow, but sorrow submissive and sanctifying, like that of this woman. 2. She acquiesces in the will of God. She says, "It is well." This is one of the highest achievements of Christian faith. 3. In her trial this woman cleaves to God. She does not sit down and brood over her bereavement, and nurse her grief, and indulge in "the luxury of sorrow." She goes at once to consult the oracle of God. (1) She may have gone to inquire whether there were not deliverance from her trial. (2) She may have gone to seek strength to bear her trial. The prophet was the mouth of God to her. (3) She may have gone to seek the sanctification of her trial. Whether this was one of the blessings she desired in going to the man of God, may be doubted; it cannot be doubted that this ought to be our main desire in going to God Himself in seasons of trial and sorrow. III. THE GROUNDS WHICH MAY PRODUCE AND SUSTAIN SUCH A COURSE OF CONDUCT AS THIS WOMAN PURSUED. There are three grounds which may contribute to this desirable result. A consideration—1. Of what we are who endure the trial; 2. of what He is who sends the trial; and 3. of the purpose the trial is designed to serve. (*G. D. Macgregor.*) *Reasons for trials:—* I. Affliction comes to "CALL OUR SIN TO OUR REMEMBRANCE," and to humble us for it beneath the cross of Jesus. II. Another end for which God sends His heavy hand upon His children is TO LOOSE THEM FROM THE WORLD—to make them cease from the idolatry of the creature. III. Again, another object of the trials which God sends His children is TO MAKE HIMSELF MORE DEAR TO THEM. Dear indeed He is to all who have learned to view Him as a God of love—as the God who hath "so loved the world as to send His only-begotten Son" to die for it—dear is He to all of us whose souls He has sprinkled with the blood of Christ, "in whom" He has "revealed His Son," and whom He has made heirs, through Christ, of life eternal. IV. A further end God has in view in laying crosses on His people is THAT HE MAY CONFORM THEM TO THEIR SAVIOUR, by admitting them into "the fellowship of His sufferings." "If we suffer," says the apostle, "we shall also reign with Him." Justly then might we feel uneasy to be the prosperous followers of a suffering Lord—light-hearted servants of a sorrowing and weeping Master. V. But, when God makes His children acquainted with affliction, He has a purpose in His view, beyond any of the objects we have yet enumerated. HE INTENDS BY IT HIS OWN GLORY. Eminently is that glory promoted and set forth by the patience of His people in the hour of trial, and by their cheerful acquiescence in His will. The world is then compelled to see that there is truth, that there is power, in His Gospel. "It is well," very well, with every child of God, however great be "the sight of affliction" he is called on to sustain. For look at the issue of these things! These afflictions are not everlasting. God "will not always chide, neither keepeth He His anger for ever." As soon as the ends of His chasten-

ing providence are answered, the dispensation will be changed. "It is well," then, with believers even in their most afflicted moments. The Shunammite spoke truth when she uttered that saying in the midst of her affliction. Christian brethren, are any of us her fellow-sufferers? (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *The uses of affliction*:—An artist asked a friend to come to his studio to see a painting just completed. He came at the time appointed, but was shown into a dark room, and there left alone. He waited for fifteen minutes, when his friend came in, greeted him cordially, and then took him to the studio. Before he left, the artist said laughingly: "I suppose you thought it queer to be left in 'hat dark room so long?" "Yes, I did." "Well," said the artist, "I knew that if you came into my studio with the glare of the street in your eyes you could not appreciate the fine colouring of the picture. So I left you in the dark room till the glare had worn out of your eyes." So God puts His children into the dark room of affliction, so that they may be able to see the beauty of heavenly things otherwise hidden from their eyes. (*Christian Commonwealth.*)

Ver. 29. *Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand.*—*The power and weakness of faith contrasted in Elisha*:—There are no less than five instances wherein the prophet exemplifies the man of faith and the man of love witnessing to the faith of God by his grateful deeds. I. THE POWER OF ELISHA'S FAITH, AND THE SUCCESS WHICH ATTENDED IT. II. THIS WEAKNESS AND THIS FAILURE IS TO BE SEEN AT THE VERY DAWN OF THE TRIAL NOW COMING UPON THE PROPHET. "The Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me" (ver. 27), is the querulous exposition of the now mortified prophet, even before the nature of the vexation had been ascertained. He is evidently greatly put out, not so much by the outward event itself, but at the circumstance of his friend being afflicted without his knowledge. How difficult it is to be honoured and lifted up, and yet to remain contented and humble! How many a follower of a great man upon earth is spoiled instead of improved by even just and moderate rewards of honour and confidence, and his previously gratified Lord has to take him down again! So it was with Elisha. He has a lesson to learn of dependent humility—and the Lord is going to teach it him. He follows up the hasty expression of his petulance and mortification by as hasty a proceeding, which, viewed in the most favourable light, is redolent of presumption and self-confidence: "Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand," &c. Here is no prayer, no earnest seeking, no humble inquiry of the Lord, "What must I do?" but, in the spirit of one aiming to work "lying wonders" rather than healing benefits, he puts his own staff into the hands of his servant, anticipating that a miracle might be wrought and a child restored to life by the simple touch of the holy staff, without his own presence or effort. Let us now examine ourselves on this event in Elisha's history. 1. On the power of faith and its success, as exemplified by the prophet. What is the working of faith in us? Have we faith? 2. Mark the weakness of faith and its consequent failure in Elisha. This weakness, we have seen, consisted in a self-confidence approaching presumption. (*G. L. Glyn.*)

Ver. 31. *And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child.*—*Personal power*:—Here is a remarkable thing in Bible history—nothing less than that a miracle should miscarry. Here is an attempt to work a miracle, which ends in failure. This is strange and most painful. Who knows what may fail next? Are there any purposed miracles suddenly broken in failure? Does the staff ever come back without having done its work? We are bound to ask these sharp and serious questions. Do not let us hasten perfunctorily over the melancholy fact of our failure; let us face it and wisely consider it, and find out whether the blame be in Elisha, or Gehazi, or the staff, or whether God Himself may be working out some mystery of wisdom in occasionally rebuking us in the use of means and instrument. Elisha was not a man likely to make vain experiments. We had, therefore, better know, with all frankness and simplicity, exactly what the case is, for in faithfulness may be the beginning of success. Gehazi came back and said, in effect, "Here is the staff, but it has done no good. There is neither sight, nor hearing, nor sound of returning voice; the child is not awaked." 1. Who was this Gehazi? An undeveloped hypocrite. There were three or four different men in that Gehazi figure. There are three or four different men in you and in me. Which man is it to whom I speak; who is it that announces the hymn, that offers the prayer, that reads the Scriptures, that proclaims the

Word? "Things are not what they seem." Gehazi was at this moment an undeveloped knave, and what can he do with Elisha's staff, or with God's sunlight? The bad man spoils whatever he touches. In the fall of man, everything with which man has to do must also fall. Virtue perished out of Elisha's staff; it became in the grip of Gehazi but a common stick. There is law in that deterioration; there is a whole philosophy in that mysterious depletion of virtue, and we ought to understand somewhat of its operation. Sin impoverishes everything. The universe is but a gigantic shell gleaming with painted fire to the bad man. To him there are no flowers in the garden; there may be some diversity of colour, but flowers as tabernacles in which God reveals Himself, creations of the supreme power, there are none, there can be none. A man cannot go down in his highest religious nature without going down all round. Whatever his pretence of interest may be in things beautiful and musical, and pure and noble, it is only a skilful hypocrisy. When the fool says in his heart, "There is no God," he also says in his heart, "There is no beauty, there is no virtue, there is no purity, there is no soul." God is the inclusive term, and denial in relation to that term is negation in reference to everything that belongs to it—all music and beauty, all virtue and tenderness, all chivalry and self-sacrifice. You cannot be theologically wrong, and yet morally and socially right. We know what it is to have done the evil deed, and then to have seen all the sunshine run away from the universe like a thing affrighted. Thus we may be coming nearer to the reason why the staff failed. The staff is good, the hand that wielded it was bad; there was no true sympathy or connection between the hand and the staff. The staff was only in the hand, it was not in the heart. There was a merely physical grasp, there was no moral hold of the symbol of prophetic presence and power. Gehazi had already stolen from Naaman, and already there had gone out from the court of heaven the decree which blanchied him into a leper as white as snow. Now, let us come home. We have an inspired Book as our staff, our symbol, but are we inspired readers? An inspired Book should have an inspired perusal: like should come to like. By inspiration, by the human side, I mean a meek, reverent, contrite and willing heart, a disposition unprejudiced, a holy, sacred burning desire to know God's will and to do it all. How stands the case now? You read the Bible and get nothing out of it. No, because you read it without corresponding inspiration on your part. No bad man can preach well. He may preach eloquently, learnedly, effectively. He may go very near to being a good preacher in the right sense of that term, but the bad man cannot preach well in God's sense and definition of the term. What can the bad man preach? Can he preach salvation by the blood of Christ, he who knows not what it is to shed one drop of blood for any human creature? Can he speak nobly who never felt nobly? (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

The personal element :—Personality is the one thing of real value. The other day I stood looking at ten or fifteen pounds of clay. It was valued at one thousand dollars. But this clay bore upon it the impress of personality. It had been touched by man's intelligence and innermost spirit. It had been designed, and moulded into beautiful form; painted by artistic skill; glazed and baked and perfected by man's inventive genius, and when it came from his hand, bearing the impress of his art, the beauty of thought, the very life of his personality, it had risen in value from zero to a thousand dollars—from worthless clay to a vase of surpassing value and loveliness. Whenever we purchase an article of any kind, in any store, we buy manhood, and not materials; personality, and not things. What we buy would be worthless without the impress of the human soul. Material things take their value from man. They rise in value as he rises in intelligence and moral power. The only thing of real value in the world is the human soul. (*Homiletic Review.*)

The child is not awaked.—*Are you awake?*—Many of you are, or have been, quite as "dead," in the truest sense of that word, as was the boy who lay still and white in the prophet's chamber at Shunem, and need to be "awaked" quite as much as he did. No doubt even in the youngest of you there are evil germs which may unfold themselves by and by, until you too die, or fall asleep, to God and goodness. No doubt even you often do wrong, and know that it is wrong while you do it. But, for all that, I do not call you "dead" if God is near and present to you, if you think of Him as your Father, if you are sorry when you do wrong, if you are quickly and easily moved to love, admire, and imitate whatsoever is right and brave and noble. But there are some of you who have lived long enough, and have long enough been "knocked about" in the little world of school, to have grown somewhat dull and "dead." God is not so real,

or He is not so much, to you as He was. You are not so ashamed of doing wrong as you were; it may be even that there are some things which you know your masters or parents would think wrong that you take a foolish pride in hiding from them. Perhaps you are getting greedy, selfish, hard to please; or, like Gehazi, covetous of the good things which others have, but you have not. Yes: I have often seen a most gruesome sight. I have seen a dead boy inside a living boy, and a dead girl inside a living girl! That is to say, I have seen girls and boys who had lost their sensibility to spiritual things, their love of goodness, truth, kindness, and gentleness, and were nevertheless quite content with themselves so long as they could get nice food to eat, nice clothes to wear, and plenty of pocket-money and amusement. Is it too much to say that such boys and girls are dead? And, then, some of you, if you are not dead, are at least "fast asleep." Your spiritual faculties and affections rust unused, or they are seldom used. You are dreaming, and pursuing dreams. For what we often call "the real world," the world outside us, is not truly the real one; but the world within it, and behind it, and beyond it. Thousands of men pass into this outward world, and pass out of it every day; and they can only take with them what they have stored up within themselves. So that it is this inner world which is the real world to us, the world in which alone true and enduring treasures are to be found. And if any of you think the outside world—in which you only stay for a few years at most—to be the real one, and are living only or mainly for that, while the inward and spiritual world, in which you are to abide for ever, is unreal and unattractive to you;—what can we say of you except that you are fast asleep, and do not see things as they are, and mistake dreams for realities, and realities for dreams? You have eyes, but they are not open. There are faculties in you capable of apprehending the true realities, but as yet they are not in exercise. Like the Shunammite's son, who was both asleep and dead, you need to be awakened; you need to be quickened unto life. I should like to creep into your very hearts, and whisper, "Are you awake?" and to go on asking it till you were roused from your dreams, and saw things as they really are; for it is my duty to you, as it is that of your other teachers, to rouse and wake you, if we anyhow can. But, at the very outset, you may turn upon me, and say: "How are we to know whether we are what you call awake? What is it to be awake, and alive, toward God? What do you want us to be and to do?" And I reply: Well, for one thing, I do not want to see you trying to become sanctimonious little saints. I should hate to see you behaving and to hear you talking as some of the "good children" behave and talk of whom you read in certain tracts and books. What I want is that you should set yourselves to become good, useful, and happy men and women, by placing the best and highest aims before you, by acting on right motives, because you know that God loves you, and is bent on making you good. How are you to know whether you are alive and awake, or asleep and dead? In a hundred different ways—such ways as these. If you are at school, and set yourself to learn your lessons well and to get on fast—you may have very different motives for doing your duty in school. You may care only to beat your class-fellows, to stand above them, to get on in your little world and be looked up to; and if that be your aim or motive, it is a selfish one, and you are asleep and dead to the true motives and aims by which you ought to be inspired. But if you are eager to learn because you wish to do your duty, and to fit yourselves for larger duties by and by, because you want to become wiser, better, more useful, or because you want to please your parents and show that you are not unmindful of how much they have done for you, or because you want to please God and to prove that you thankfully remember how much He has done for you and given you, then you are alive and awake: for, now, your motives reach up out of and beyond this present world, which will soon pass away, and you are trying to prepare yourselves for any life, or any world, to which it may please God to call you. And, lastly, some of you are growing up into men and women, and have to go out into the world to earn your daily bread. Are you diligent, thoughtful, eager to advance? Why, so far, well. But you may be diligent, observant, quick to seize every advantage and opportunity, mainly because you hate work and hope to get free from it the more quickly; or because you want to lay by money, to get rich, to make a fortune; or because you are bent on distinction, reputation, applause. And, in that case, you are dead and asleep; you are not alive and awake to the best things, the most satisfying, the most enduring. For this life, for which alone you are living, will soon be over,

and the riches which have wings soon use them and fly away. If you should die to-night, our Father would not have sorrowfully to say of you, "The child is not awake," and feel that He must put you into hard and painful conditions which will rouse and sting you to a sense of all that you have lost and thrown away. And if you should live to be never so old, still all your life will be a useful and happy preparation for the better life to come. (*S. Coz, D.D.*) *On being awake* :—A member of Whitefield's Sunday Afternoon Men's Meeting stopped Mr. Horne a little while ago and said, "I have a crow to pluck with you." "Oh, only one?" said Mr. Horne. "What is that?" "You have taken away my Sunday afternoon's nap!" "How is that?" asked the well-known preacher. "Well, I used to sleep all Sunday afternoon, and now I come to Whitefield's." "And how do you like it?" "Oh, I find it far more interesting to be awake!" The story is worth repeating, because there are tens of thousands of people who seriously assume that it is more interesting to be asleep. God has made us for wakefulness. and in all the departments of our life the wakeful man receives the surprises of the Almighty. How much the wakeful man can see in the country lane! There are uncounted numbers of village people who are still asleep, and whose senses have never begun to discern the transient glories of their own surroundings. I have just been staying with a man who makes it part of his ministry of life to open the senses of young villagers whose lives are cast in these entrancing spots. He tells me that they are entering into the unknown world with all the fascination exercised by a fairy tale. Birds and flowers have become the fairies in their once commonplace world, and now that they are awake they find it surpassingly interesting. (*Hartley Aspen.*)

Vers. 33-36. He went therefore, and shut the door upon them twain.—*The staff and the sacrifice* :—The story of the Shunammite and her son is one of the most charming idyls in the Bible. It abounds in the most beautiful touches of nature; and though the mould in which it is cast is peculiarly Eastern, its simple pathos appeals to the universal human heart. But passing from the simple, obvious instruction which the narrative bears upon the surface of it, I wish to use the significant incidents connected with the child's restoration as an acted parable. Looking at the incidents of the miracle of Shunem in this light, they seem to me to afford admirable illustrations of the two prevailing methods of doing good, both on a large scale, as affecting the highest interests of the whole human race; and on a small scale, as affecting the spiritual and temporal interests of individuals. The one method of doing good, which may be called the impersonal, is illustrated by Gehazi putting the staff of the prophet upon the face of the dead child; the other, or personal method, is illustrated by the prophet stretching himself upon the dead body, and by his own exertions and sacrifices restoring the life that had fled. I. THE IMPERSONAL METHOD. His action was impersonal; it was wrought by another, by a mere servant; it did not proceed from a true knowledge of the case, and it did not contain the requisite amount of faith. For these reasons it did not succeed. Death would not release his prey at the bidding of such a feeble and inadequate instrumentality. Elisha himself did not manifest any surprise when Gehazi returned from his fruitless errand, and told him, saying, "The child is not awakened." Having adopted the measure as a human precaution, and not at the instigation of God's Spirit, he could not count upon success; and therefore there was no revulsion of feeling, no shock to his faith. He knew by the result that he had committed an error in judgment. It will be lawful, in the first place, to apply this incident to the mode of salvation that existed in the time of Elisha—the method of imparting life to the dead body of humanity by the dispensations previous to the gospel. These modes were all impersonal. God Himself did not come into closest contact with men, did not identify Himself with their interests, did not assume their nature or tabernacle with them. As Elisha sent his servant to restore the dead child, so He sent His prophets and priests and godly men, and spoke to mankind at sundry times and in divers manners. He sent His servants with His commission, and gave them His staff, the rod of His power. He entered into covenant with Israel, and gave them laws and institutions for their guidance and blessing. But the result of all His impersonal dealings with the human race before the appearance of the Saviour, was like the result of Gehazi's laying the prophet's staff upon the face of the dead child. Some good indeed was done. The decay of religion was prevented; the process of spiritual decomposition was arrested; the possibilities of restoration were conserved; and the body of

humanity was kept at least from sinking into a deeper spiritual death, and yielding to the dissolving forces which were assailing it in the world. But no spiritual life was enkindled; the sleep of death was not broken; mankind, dead in trespasses and sins, heard no voice, and felt no touch potent enough to break the spell that bound it down in spiritual torpor and coldness. Scripture itself tells us of the insufficiency of all the means and appliances that were used under the old dispensations to quicken mankind into newness of life. It tells us that "the law made nothing perfect"; that it could not effect the restoration which it proclaimed "in that it was weak through the flesh"; that it had only "a shadow of good things to come." The law may induce a man actually to refuse the offers and allurements of evil, but it cannot grapple with the sin of the heart, and order aright the government of that invisible kingdom within where Satan wages his most successful war. Its terrors and its blessings have no effect in that inner world where we have to do, not with the realities, but with the ideal forms of sin—where there are none of the restraints and mitigations that hinder the full power of evil in the world without; where ambition is uniformly successful, and pleasure leaves no stains or stings behind; and vice, instead of being clothed in rags and fed on the beggar's dole, is clothed in purple and fares sumptuously every day. "If," says the apostle, "there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." But such is the inherent corruption of human nature, that no law, however holy or however sanctioned, could reach and cure the disease. The laying of it as a standard of righteousness before a soul dead in trespasses and sins, is as useless as was the laying of the prophet's staff on the dead child's face. It only shows the deadness of the soul all the more. And if this be the case with the great impersonal method for the salvation of the whole race and of the whole of human nature from all the evil effects of sin, we find that it is very strikingly the case with every individual attempt to overcome the individual evils of sin in particular persons. Much of the exercise of benevolence in these days is impersonal. Many try to do good by means of others. They send their servant; as the prophet sent Gehazi, to heal some clamant evil by the aid of their staff; by the help of something that is useful to them, but not indispensable; something that belongs to them, but is not a part of themselves; something that they can spare without inconvenience. The staff that they use represents their money, their help, whatever shape it assumes; and their Gehazi is the missionary or minister, the society or collector, whom they use in distributing their help. Thus they themselves never come into contact with the evil they seek to redress. We need not wonder that so many of our efforts to remove the evil of the world should be so unsuccessful. Its dead, cold form remains pulseless and motionless under the pitying heavens. There is no answering thrill of life, no voice to break the awful stillness. II. But there is a more excellent way—THE PERSONAL METHOD OF DOING GOOD, as illustrated by Elisha stretching himself upon the dead body of the child. And how significant is all this of the Divine method of restoring the dead body of humanity through the life and death of Christ. Does not the stretching of the prophet upon the dead child—each member of his own body being applied to the corresponding member of the lifeless corpse, and by this sympathetic contact imparting his own vitality to it, and ultimately raising it to life—figure forth in the most beautiful and suggestive manner the incarnation of God, by which He brought His infinitude within the limitations of human nature and human existence, touching it at every sympathetic point, and so raised it from a death in sin to newness of life in Himself? What does each joyful Christmas morning proclaim? Is it not the wonderful fact that the Eternal God incarnated Himself in the body of a little child; was born in Bethlehem, lay as a helpless babe on a mother's breast, grew in wisdom as in stature, and lived in humble dependence upon and submission to earthly parents in a human home in Nazareth? Does it not tell us that God in Christ was united to us by blood-relationship; knew all "the things of a man"; filled all the moulds of our conduct, and passed along all the lines of our experience? Does it not powerfully proclaim to us the one only method of salvation, to which all other methods, by their weakness and failure, pointed, and for which all other methods prepared the way—the personal method of God assuming the very nature that had sinned and suffered, and in that nature bringing back life and holiness and happiness and all that man had lost? And consider the awful cost of this personal method of salvation. The connection between them was only an outward one. But Jesus became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. In the first creation God stood aloof at an im-

measurable altitude above the creation when He summoned it into existence. But in the new creation He identified Himself with the work of His hands. He came into contact with sin and impurity that others might be cleansed and healed. The same remarks that are applicable to the great salvation of Jesus Christ, are applicable to every individual effort we make in the track and in the power of that salvation to redress the evil of the world. Among the many great lessons which the incarnation of the Son of God is designed to teach us, this lesson is assuredly not the least important—that if it was necessary for Christ to take human nature upon Himself in order to redeem it, so it is necessary for us to become incarnate as it were in the nature we wish to benefit. The servant, in this respect, cannot be greater than his Lord. We must, like Elisha, take the evil that we would remove to our own room; we must lay it upon our own bed; we must bear it upon our own heart; we must identify ourselves with it as far as we possibly can. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*) *Salvation by personal contact*:—The steamer *Ganges*, bound for Colombo, Ceylon, had a unique experience in the Red Sea. The captain observed a vessel which was flying signals of distress, when about two hundred and thirty miles from Perim, the nearest harbour. The skipper of the *Ganges* undertook the task of towing the helpless steamer *Fernfield* into port. Before he reached the port, however, the connecting hawser snapped. Determined to get her into the port of repair, the captain ran his vessel alongside of the *Fernfield*—a most difficult operation on the high sea—and lashed her to his steamer, and so escorted her into Perim, the novel sight of the two vessels coming in abreast excited no little attention there. The salvage was very great, as the disabled vessel had a rich cargo of tea, cocoa, cocoanut-oil, and cinnamon. In winning souls personal contact is always the surest method. A long-range hawser is always likely to break. If we lash ourselves with cords of friendship and sympathy to the man or woman we want to save, we can always bring them into port. There is no salvage ever awarded in the admiralty courts of earth equal to the treasures which God grants to the saviour of an immortal soul. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *The Church and her quickening ministry*:—The living Church has not yet stretched herself, Elisha like, upon the dead body whose quickening she prays for. She must grope her way into the alleys and byways of the city, and up the broken staircase, and into the bare room, and beside the loathsome sufferers. She must go down into the pit with the miner; into the tent with the soldier; into the fore-castle with the sailor; into the shop with the merchant; into the factory with the operator; into the field with the peasant, and into the workshop with the mechanic. Like the atmosphere, she must press with equal force on all the surfaces of society; like the sea, flow into every nook of the shoreline of humanity; and like the sun, shine on things foul and low as well as fair and high, if she is ever to accomplish that for which she has been commissioned by her glorified Head. And prayed unto the Lord.—*The relation of prayer to secondary causes*:—Shunem, a small village in the town of Issachar, lying between Samaria and Carmel, at the base of Mount Tabor, was the scene of this miracle. The resurrection of this woman's son may be looked upon in two aspects, as illustrating the reward of kindness, and the power of prayer. But the point which the incident before us presses on our attention is, The relation of prayer to secondary causes or to means. I. THAT PRAYER DOES NOT SUPERSEDE THE NECESSITY OF MEANS. We do not say that God never answers prayer without the employment of means. He has done so, as in the case of Elijah, when he prayed for rain. A diseased man may pray earnestly for health, yet he has no right to expect an answer to his prayer if he neglects the Divine conditions on which health is given. A poor man may pray earnestly for an amelioration of his secular distress, and for an increase of his comforts, yet his prayers will be fruitless if he neglect the ordinary means by which temporary advantages are obtained; the ignorant man may pray earnestly for knowledge, yet his prayers will go for nothing unless he attends to the settled terms on which intelligence is conferred. The sin-convicted man may pray earnestly to be saved from his sins and their attendant perils, but he will find hell even in praying unless he employs the right means to deliver himself from "the law of sin and death." The Church may pray earnestly for the extension of truth, for the conversion of the world, yet, all will be waste breath unless it employs the divinely established means for the purpose. The God of order carries on His government both in the material and moral department of His universe by certain laws, conditions, or means; and these, as a rule, He will not interfere with, even in answers to the prayer of His own loyal and loving children. This fact serves at least two pur-

poses. 1. It serves to reveal the wisdom of the Divine benevolence. We can conceive of benevolence communicating mercies in abundance, but doing so in such a way as would neutralise their value to the recipient, and prove an inconvenience to others. The kindness of earthly parents often proves, through the want of wisdom in this direction, an incalculable evil to the children in years to come. Thus it is not with Divine benevolence; that is ever exercised with Infinite discretion. The fact serves—2. To explain the inefficaciousness of modern prayer. Prayer is not a positive, but a moral institution;—its foundation is not on written rules, but deep down in the constitution of the imperishable soul. We remark from this marvellous incident—II. THAT PRAYER MAY SOMETIMES SUGGEST THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS. It is by no means improbable that the method Elisha now adopted in bringing his own living body in contact with the dead child had a natural adaptation to the end intended. There is nothing absurd in the idea of his imparting life and heal h by contact. Perhaps the life of the child was not so far gone, as not to be resuscitated by the vital magnetism of the prophet's frame. Be this, however, as it may, the placing of his body in contact with that of the child, it is not unnatural to suppose was suggested to his mind by his prayer. It was after his prayer that he did it. If prayer is answered in this way, it follows—1. That the sceptical assertion that answers to prayer imply an alteration in the Divine plan is without foundation. We grant that the universe is governed by secondary conditions, but we deny that prayer necessarily implies an interference with these conditions;—it rather implies a right attention to them. Its design, and tendency, are to induce and enable the soul to act rightly in relation to God's ordinances, both in the material and mental departments of nature. If prayer is answered in this way, it follows—2. That we should always engage in prayer with a determination to carry into practical effect whatever impression we receive in our devotions. For in this way the real answer to our prayer may come. To allow the practical impression to pass away is to neutralise our prayer. We remark from this marvellous incident—III. THAT PRAYER ALWAYS GIVES EFFICACY TO THE MEANS. The means which the prophet employed succeeded. The child was raised to life and presented to his mother. Whether there was a natural adaptation in the means he employed or not, the result must be ascribed to the interposition of Divine power. It was obtained by the prophet's prayer. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 34. And the child sneezed seven times.—*The seven sneezes*:—The child was dead. Although he had been the special gift of Divine promise and was therefore doubly prized by his parents, yet the little lad was not secure from the common hazards of life. The first clear evidence that the child was restored to life was his sneezing. Doubtless, it greatly rejoiced the prophet's heart. We too, who are seeking the good of others will greatly exult if we are favoured to see gracious tokens in those for whose good we labour. At all gospel meetings earnest people should be on the look-out for persons convinced of sin, aroused in conscience, or in any other manner made to feel the power of the life-giving Spirit. It will be well if these persons watch with instructed eyes, so that they do not look for what they will never see, nor overlook that which should give them full content. Of natural life we may discern the tokens more readily than those of spiritual life; we need practice and experience in reference to this more mysterious matter, or we may cause great pain to ourselves and to those whom we would befriend. Possibly we may gather instruction from the signs of life which contented the prophet:—the child sneezed seven times. 1. This evidence of life was very simple. Nothing is freer from art than a sneeze. It is so far from being artificial that it is involuntary. As a rule we sneeze, not because we will, but because we must. No instruction, education, talent, or acquirement is necessary to a sneeze, nor even to a series of seven sneezes; it is the act of a child, or of an illiterate peasant, quite as much as of a philosopher or a divine. We ought not to expect too much in enquirers: we ought not to be satisfied without signs of life; but the faintest sign of life ought to encourage us and lead us to encourage them. 2. This evidence of life was in itself unpleasant. To the child it was no pleasure to sneeze. We should most of us prefer to be excused from sneezing seven times. Many of the surest marks of the new life are by no means pleasurable. The regenerate are not at once happy; on the other hand, they are often in great bitterness for their sins, and in sore anguish because they have pierced their Saviour. The Divine life is not born into the world without pangs. When a man has been

nearly drowned, and animation is restored by rubbing, the first movements of the blood within the veins causes tingling and other sensations which are exquisitely painful. Sin causes numbness of soul, and this is attended by an absence of sensation; this is changed when life comes with its look of faith, for the first result is that men look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him. 3. A sneeze, again, is not very musical to those who hear it, and so the first signs of grace are not in themselves pleasing to those who are watching for souls. 4. "The child sneezed seven times," the evidences of life were very monotonous. Again and again there came a sneeze and nothing else. No song, no note of music, not even one soft word, but sneeze, sneeze, sneeze, seven times. Yet the noises wearied not the prophet, who was too glad to hear the sounds of life to be very particular about their musical character. The child lived, and that was enough for him. Much of the talk of enquirers is very wearisome; they tell the same melancholy tale over and over again. Let us not be disappointed because at the first we get so little which is interesting from young converts. We are not examining them for the ministry, we are only looking for evidences of spiritual life; to apply to them the tests which would be proper enough for a doctor of divinity would be both cruel and ridiculous. 5. Yet the sound which entered the prophet's ear was a sure token of life, and we must not be content with any doubtful or merely hopeful signs. We want evidences of life, and these we must have. The child might have been washed and dressed in his best clothes, but this would not have fulfilled the prophet's desire; the lad might have been decked with a chaplet of flowers, and his young cheeks might have been rouged into the imitation of a ruddy blush, but the holy man would have remained unsatisfied: he must have a sign of life. However simple, it must assuredly be a life-token, or it would be in vain. Nothing could have been more conclusive than a sneeze. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vers. 38-44. And Elisha came again to Gilgal, and there was a dearth in the land.—*Ministries to man, good and bad* :—Elisha had returned to Gilgal, the seat of a school of the prophets; he had come thither once more on his early circuit, and during the famine which prevailed in the land. As the students sat before their master, he discerned in their emaciated forms the terrible effects upon them of the famine. I. HERE IS THE MINISTRY OF SEVERE TRIAL. "There was a dearth in the land." A destitution of those provisions essential to the appeasement of hunger and the sustentation of life is undoubtedly one of the greatest trials. Such destitution is of two kinds, the avoidable and the unavoidable. The former is common. The latter kind of destitution, viz., the inevitable, is that recorded in these verses; it arose out of the sterile condition into which nature was thrown. II. HERE IS THE MINISTRY OF GROSS IGNORANCE. "The sons of the prophets," says Matthew Henry, "it would seem were better skilled in divinity than philosophy, and read their Bibles more than their herbals." What they put into the pot tended to produce death rather than to strengthen life. Every day men are afflicted through the gross ignorance of themselves and others. The cook, the doctor, the brewer, the distiller, how much death do they bring into the "pot" of human life! Through ignorance, too, men are everywhere putting "death in the pot" in a spiritual sense. Man's ignorance of God and His claims on the soul, its nature, laws, and necessary conditions of true spiritual progress, is the minister of death. III. HERE IS THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN KINDNESS. "And there came a man from Baal-halisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof." Whoever this man was he was an heaven-inspired philanthropist. Mercy, the highest attribute of heaven, was in him, and he left his home and came forth to minister to the needs of his suffering race. IV. HERE IS THE MINISTRY OF SUPERNATURAL POWER. Supernatural power through Elisha comes to the relief of these sufferers. The supernatural was manifested in two ways. 1. In counteracting the death tendency of what was in the pot. A supernatural power is required to counteract the pernicious in life. If the Almighty allowed evil to take its course free and full, death would run riot and reduce the whole race to extinction. The supernatural was manifested. 2. In increasing the supplies of life, Elisha commanded his servant to distribute amongst his starving pupils the provisions which the man that came from Baal-shalisha had brought. As the pot of oil increased in the pouring, so the provisions increased in the eating. It has been said of old of God that He will abundantly bless the "provisions of His people, and satisfy the poor

with bread." It is true that the tendency of moral goodness, truth, and justice, skill, prudence, and diligence, has a tendency to increase everywhere the provisions of human life, and it is doing so every day. (*Homilist.*) *The famine in Gilgal* :—There was a dearth at Gilgal. Palestine is about the most plentiful region in the world, although it now labours under the curse of the Turkish law and the malediction of God. There was death, there was famine at Gilgal. In the time of plenty, do you know that right on your heels there is coming a dearth, a famine? Never a child of God ever passed from the earth without a dearth, without a famine. You pencil the Sahara off—so many degrees longitude and so many latitude; and you say, "north and south of that burning desert you have plenty, but in those regions you have drought." So, certainly, in every human life there is a Sahara to be traversed, during which your soul will cry for bread. Caravans laden with provisions have plunged into the Sahara, and the camels have dropped and fallen, and the whole party has been lost in the desert. I never saw a life without a Sahara. Man, the caravans have come into your life. You have plenty of money, you have abounding health. The messenger that would come to you and say, "Sahara ahead!" you would greet with an incredulous "Get away," but death is before you. Men have tried to deck the death-bed with rose-leaves, but they have never managed it; and you have to tramp through the dark desert of the Sahara of death. Have you got a Joseph to give you bread? What is to be your hope on the death-bed, when the hands are fallen nervelessly over the coverlet? When Dr. Raleigh lay dying of a disease that prevented him from taking food, he said, "Never mind; Jesus is bringing to me the Bread of Life," and he passed away. (*J. Robertson.*) *Hard times* :—It is not likely the sons of the prophets fared sumptuously at any time. The provision for the maintenance of religion under the law had been diverted to the support of those who professed and taught the principles of idolatry; and little wonder it was that, when a season of famine occurred, they were reduced to great straits. 1. There is one lesson to be learned from this in common with many other passages of Scripture: God's people are not exempted from the ordinary afflictive visitations of Providence. The sons of the prophets must feel the effects of the dearth as well as the grossest idolater in all the land: there is no promise of any such exemption held out to them. If we attend to the words of our blessed Lord we shall find that He never seeks to allure His followers by promising them days of ease, or seasons of the enjoyment of any temporal comfort. Rather are they warned that they are to expect nothing in this life but a narrow way and a strait gate, much opposition, plenty of obloquy; and well for them if they meet not even with harder fare,—well for them if they escape persecution whilst they live, and are suffered to end their days by aught but a death of violence like the Master they serve. But they are promised what will sustain them under all these inflictions, and make them more than conquerors, even the heirs of a glorious immortality. 2. And there are not a few records of very remarkable instances in which providential supplies have been brought to the people of God in distress. Take another instance somewhat similar, recorded by Samuel Clarke, and quoted by Flavel in the fourth volume of his works, at the 396th page. I do not profess to give the exact words of either author, but the substance of the incident is briefly this: Mr. John Fox, in the latter part of the reign of Henry VIII, went to London, where he quickly spent the slender means with which his friends had supplied him or he had acquired by his own exertions, and began to be in great want. He was a faithful servant of God, but he was ready to perish for hunger, as many of the faithful have been. In this condition he sat one day in St. Paul's Church, every one seeming to shun such a spectacle of horror. But when he little expected but that his time had come, a person unknown to him thrust an untold supply of money into his hands, and bade him be of good cheer, for that he would ere long be placed in a position in which he might honourably earn his bread. Not long afterwards he was sent for by a person of rank and title, and entrusted with the charge of a nobleman's children. 3. But a common calamity ought always to foster a common sentiment of benevolence. This was the case with Elisha. His means were very slender, but he would treat the sons of the prophets with the best he had to give; and his example is well worthy imitation. We need not at present advert to those ghastly records which tell us that human nature loses all its better instincts in circumstances of extreme distress, and which mention instances of mothers forgetting their little ones so far as to snatch from them the morsel so much required—thus suffering the maternal affection, one of the strongest, deepest,

and purest of our nature, to be lost in a selfishness not only shocking but unavailing. There is not much to be learned from such extreme cases. It cannot be denied, it seems, that our better instincts may be suppressed, but as they will be sure to vindicate themselves as long as they remain, it ought to be our utmost endeavour to foster and preserve them by keeping them in constant exercise. (*J. Murray.*)

Vers. 40, 41. There is death in the pot.—*Poisons*.—Nature grows poison as well as food. The sons of the prophets little knew the hurtful quality of the food that was being poured into the pot. In all things nature has its poisonous side as well as its sustaining and comforting aspect. The bane and antidote are both before us in nature. Death lies very near to life in the great open fields. Even our most natural passions lie but a single step from their destructive application. Can it be possible that a son of the prophets went out to gather food for a natural appetite, and came back with poison? This is what is being done every day. We may turn honest commerce into a means of felony. We may go into the market-place to buy food, and yet by some action we may perpetrate in connection with the purchase we may take all virtue out of the food and make it contribute to our worst qualities. Blessed are they who eat honest bread: everywhere the great law of trespass is written in nature. By putting poisons upon the earth so plentifully, what does the Lord say in effect but, Take care, be wise, examine your standing-ground, and do nothing foolishly? Thus nature is turned into a great training-school, within whose walls men are trained to sagacity and discrimination, so that they may know the right hand from the left, and the good from the bad, and thus may turn natural processes and customary daily duties into means of culture. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Poison in the cauldron*.—There are now in the world a great many cauldrons of death. The colicoquintida of mighty temptations fills them. Some taste and quit, and are saved; others taste and eat on, and die. Is not that minister of Christ doing the right thing when he points out these cauldrons of iniquity and cries the alarm, saying, "Beware! There is death in the pot"? Iniquity is a coarse, jagged thing, that needs to be roughly handled. I want to go back of all public iniquity and find out its hiding-place. I want to know what are the sources of its power. I. UNHAPPY AND UNDISCIPLINED HOMES ARE THE SOURCE OF MUCH INIQUITY. A good home is deathless in its influences. Parents may be gone. The old homestead may be sold and have passed out of the possession of the family. Yet that place will never lose its charm over your soul. That first earthly home will thrill through your everlasting career. Rascally and vagabond people for the most part come forth from unhappy homes. Parents harsh and cruel on the one hand, or on the other lenient to perfect looseness, are raising up a generation of vipers. A home in which scolding and fault-finding predominate is blood relation to the gallows and penitentiary. Petulance is a reptile that may crawl up into the family nest and crush it. There are parents who disgust their children even with religion. They scold their little ones for not loving God. They go about even their religious duties in an exasperating way. Their house is full of the war-whoop of contention, and from such scenes husbands and children dash out into places of dissipation to find their lost peace, or the peace they never had. I verily believe that three-fourths of the wickedness of the great city runs out rank and putrid from undisciplined homes. Sometimes I know there is an exception. II. The second cauldron of iniquity to which I point you is AN IDOLENT LIFE. You will get out of this world just so much as, under God, you earn by your own hand and brain. Horatius was told he might have so much land as he could plough around in one day with a yoke of oxen, and I have noticed that men get nothing in this world, that is worth possessing, of a financial, moral, or spiritual nature, save they get it by their own hard work. It is just so much as, from the morning to the evening of your life, you can plough around by your own continuous and hard-sweating industries. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise." III. Another cauldron of iniquity is THE DRAM-SHOP. Surely there is death in the pot. Anacharsis said that the vine had three grapes: pleasure, drunkenness, misery. Then I remember what Gladstone, the Prime Minister of England, said to a committee of men engaged in that traffic when they came to him to deplore that they were not treated with more consideration: "Gentlemen, don't be uneasy about the revenue. Give me thirty million sober people, and I will pay all the revenue, and have a large surplus." But the ruin to property is a very small part of the evil. It takes everything that is sacred in the family,

everything that is holy in religion, everything that is infinite in the soul, and tramples it into the mire. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *The deadly pottage*:—The acts of Elisha are like rays of divine glory shining through his poverty and humiliation. "Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land." This is a picture of our world. Dearth is on every side. Of every stream that runs through it it may indeed be said, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." But in the midst of this dearth Elisha has a table spread for all his children. So the Lord Jesus has a table for His children in this land of dearth. And mark, this table is especially prepared not for Elisha but "for the sons of the prophets." The Lord takes care of His children. In the desert they shall never want. But in this land of dearth there is always danger near. The poison is always liable to find its way into the feast of the Lord. And so it was here. "And one went out into the field to gather herbs." But here lies the danger: we are poor, weak, blind creatures, and the "wild vine" mingles with the "true" everywhere around us. Worst of all, we "know it not." And the danger is worse from the fact of it being "a vine." If it were a thorn, a thistle, or some growth bearing the danger on its very front, we should avoid it. There would be no temptation to stoop down and gather it. But it is not from the thorn or the thistle that the danger arises. And is it not so still? Our danger lies not in the open blasphemer, the avowed atheist; not in the open vice, or profligacy, or crime; not in the sin that lifts itself up with unblushing front in our way. These are the thorn and the thistle that carry their own character on the surface. No; our danger lies in that which is so like the vine and yet not it. It lies in that which looks so good, so Christian, so generous, so liberal, so praiseworthy—Rationalism under a great display of the love of Christ, yet denying the innate depravity of the heart. It lies in the theatre, the ball, the concert, under the specious gilding of "charity." It lies in the world's follies and amusements, while yet maintaining family prayer, regular attendance at church and its ordinances. In these and a thousand other ways we see the "wild vine." We think it is "the true vine," and so, like the man here, we gather plenty of it. We carry the poison home with us. We shred it into the pottage. We carry the spirit of the "wild vine" into our hearts, our thoughts, our spirit, our whole life. And what was it we needed? To see the true character of this "vine" that it was "wild"; to see the true nature of these gourds that they were deadly. Yes, we wanted more spiritual sight, more prayer, more communion with God, more distrustfulness of self, more watchfulness, more of the Spirit of God. For lack of these we were unable to distinguish between the "true vine" and the "wild," between Christ and mere religion, between Christ and popular Christianity, between Christ and mere benevolence and charity, between Christ and the world. "There is death in the pot!"—everywhere God's truth blended with "wild gourds." In ten thousand different forms it is presented to us—in the Church and in the world, in doctrines, in preaching, in services, in private life and public life, at home and abroad. "So they poured out for the men to eat." How many in this day do the same thing! They literally *pour out* this mixture of truth and error, light and darkness, Christ and the world, self and Jesus, for men to drink! In the day in which we are living, this blending of opposites and "pouring them out for men to drink" is most conspicuous. And it will become more and more so. Strict and clearly drawn lines are not palatable to man's fallen nature. The death in the pot was only discovered in the eating. And then it is said, "they could not eat thereof." It is so still. It is in the eating that the proof lies. It is when the soul tries to enjoy Christ and the world it finds out the death—that is, if there be any conscience left, if it has ever known the joy of God's presence. Then it feels how impossible is this blending. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." It is then that the soul of the true child of God feels the force of this "cannot." We say it again: if the man has ever tasted the joy of God's presence, of abiding communion with Him, and if there is any conscience left in harmony with this, then it will be felt most keenly that "there is death in the pot"; then it will be felt that he cannot live nor grow in grace on this mingling of "wild gourds" with the pottage of the Lord. A spiritually sensitive soul will feel that, to enjoy the feast of the Lord, it must draw sharp lines between truth and error, light and darkness, Christ and the world. "There is death in the pot" will be felt, and there will be found no real food but in the "true vine," Christ alone. We notice here that the Divine mode of healing is not by taking out the evil, but by putting in something to counteract

it. When Elisha found the spring of Jericho bad he did not strive to draw out the evil, but put in the salt to counteract it. When Moses found the waters of Marah bitter he put in the tree to sweeten them. Throughout the Bible this is God's way. Man's is exactly the opposite. He begins by cutting off what he conceives to be the fruitless branches. He begins by reformation, forgetting that it is not reformation man needs, but revolution. Thus man cuts off the branches and leaves the tree unchanged. God lays the "axe at the root of the tree." The Holy Spirit is given to the sinner. It is a new and Divine power working from within. It is the meal cast into the pot, the tree cast into the bitter waters. Thus God's "new creation" begins. Hence the spiritual conflict—a redeemed soul in an unredeemed body—the new nature inside the old. Hence the struggle, the agony, the cry, "O wretched man that I am!" This goes on to the end, for the old nature is never made new. It is the old Adam to the last. When the Lord comes again we shall then have the redeemed body. This body will match the redeemed soul, and the conflict will end. Not till then. There will then be a redeemed soul in a redeemed body, and its result everlasting joy and blessedness. What is this "meal"? It is, spiritually, Christ. It is the Holy Spirit bringing Christ into the soul, into the house, into the duty, into all things. Christ is the one great antidote to all error. Christ is the life of all things. "He that eateth Me, he shall live by Me." The soul will find food in everything where He is, but it will starve without. (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*) *The poisonous pottage healed*:—Notice here—I. A SUPERNATURAL INTERPOSITION TO COUNTERACT A NATURAL MISTAKE. When the Son of God was invited to the marriage feast in Cana, He found there had been a mistake on the part of the provider as to the quantity of wine required, and He rectified the mistake by making more. Here the mistake was not in the quantity; there was enough—there was too much—there was death in the pot. But the mistake was in the quality of the food, and was such a mistake as could be rectified by supernatural intervention only. II. A SUPERNATURAL INTERVENTION WHICH DID NOT TAKE PLACE UNTIL THE VERY MOMENT WHEN IT WAS NEEDED. "And as they were eating," &c. (ver. 40). Man's extremity is often reached before God interposes. The wine was quite exhausted at Cana before the Saviour made more. Abraham's knife was lifted to slay his son, when the angel of Jehovah called to him (Gen. xxii. 11). Israel came to the very border of the Red Sea before the waters were divided. So here the hungry men tasted the pottage before the miracle was wrought. III. A SUPERNATURAL INTERVENTION IN WHICH HUMAN EFFORT WAS REQUIRED TO BE PUT FORTH. When Jesus was about to raise Lazarus, He said, "Take ye away the stone." So in the miracle at Cana, "Fill the water-pots with water." Elisha could have rendered the pottage harmless by the power of God without the meal, and the Saviour could have filled empty water-pots with wine quite as easily as those filled with water. But human effort must do what it can. LESSONS: 1. Mistakes made through man's ignorance can be made right by Divine power and wisdom. 2. Sincerity of purpose and good intentions are no guarantees of the harmlessness of actions. 3. We ought to seek to know for what work we are qualified. The man who volunteered to gather herbs for the pottage might have been well fitted for other work; but his undertaking that for which ignorance of the nature of herbs disqualified him had well-nigh been the death of all the sons of the prophets. (*Outlines of Sermons.*) *Inexorableness of law*:—God's laws will not be suspended to accommodate our disobediences, or indolences, or ignorances, or mistakes. If you sweeten your coffee with arsenic, it will kill you as surely that you did it by mistake as if you did it of wilful purpose. Nature's commandment is, "Thou shalt not make mistakes, thou shalt not be ignorant, thou shalt not be deceived, thou shalt not transgress any natural law."

Vers. 42-44. And there came a man from Baal-shalisha.—*The farmer's gift*:—I. A LESSON ON PROVIDENCE. This dearth came in consequence of sin. The proud and wicked people would never yield, except they were obliged by God's strong hand. And when He punishes, He makes men know how powerful He is. Some men nowadays would not be touched in any other way. When God takes to preaching, His voice is heard outside the churches and chapels. You cannot have retributive providences, and only the wicked suffer; the godly have their share of want. Elisha was in need. But the godly have some one to look up to. The God of to-day is the God of the Old Testament—the manna God,—the barrel of meal God,—the God who has said, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble,

and I will deliver thee." II. There is here A BEAUTIFUL EXAMPLE OF BENEVOLENCE. We don't know the farmer's name who relieved the prophet. He was one of a noble band of nameless ones. We know where he came from,—the village has got into the Bible, through the man's goodness. It is possible to make our birth-place famous by living for Jesus. We sometimes say, he gives twice who gives quickly. The farmer gave as soon as he could. Don't wait till you have churned, and give God the buttermilk. For many wait to be rich before they will be generous, only to find that their heart is too sour to give anything. First fruits! Give God the best part of your life, that which has the sunshine. If you will care for God with your May and June, He will care for you in November. 1. He came himself. He did not send it. If you want a thing well done, do it yourself. Especially is this true of acts of benevolence. Be your own almoner. "Pure religion, and undefiled, before God the Father, is to visit the fatherless and widow." 2. This farmer increased God's capital. The rule is, that God works by means. He does not usually act without the assistance of His creatures. Many of His plans are unfinished because the men are on strike! Let it be said, with all reverence, this miracle could not have been performed if the man had not come from Baal-shalisha with the corn and cakes. The prophet might have been fed, but not in this way. III. The good farmer ACCOMPLISHED A GREAT DEAL MORE THAN HE INTENDED. He meant feeding the prophet, and he fed a hundred others! And is not this the case nowadays? When Robert Raikes began his Sunday School he only thought of the poor ignorant children of Gloucester; he little thought that he would be imitated, and that there would be thousands of Sunday Schools. When Charles Wesley asked Böhler if he must tell of his joy in Christ, the answer was, "If you had a thousand tongues, tell it with them all." He little thought that the idea would be set to rhyme, but Wesley wrote—

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise!

and that has been sung by millions of happy Christians in all parts of the world. The fact is, God can make a much better use of our talents than any one else can. You cannot get so much interest for your money anywhere else. Lord Byron was a much greater poet than Isaac Watts, but they will be singing Watts' hymns when Byron's name is forgotten. Elisha would not have had the chance of feeding his students if the farmer had not brought the corn. And the good man was equal to his opportunities. In spite of the sneer of his wretched servitor, who was then in training for leprosy, he would have the cakes divided. "Give unto the people that they may eat." How like God! He does not sell, but gives, and so it is with the bread of life. It is given to whoever will come. Are you hungry? Does your soul need satisfying? His mercy can do it. (*T. Champness.*) *Love to our neighbour*:—It is love to our neighbour which has purged the slum, and built the orphanage, and gathered the children into schools. It has had compassion on the poor; it has given bread to the hungry and covered the naked with a garment; it has given the Bible to the nations; it has launched the lifeboat to the perishing; it has taken the prodigal by the right hand, and opened the door of repentance to the harlot and the thief. It was love to our neighbour, burning like a fire of God in the hearts of a Carey, a Livingstone, a Romilly, a Howard, a Clarkson, which sent missionaries to the heathen; modified the ferocity of penal laws; purified the prisons; set free the slaves. It was love to our neighbour which, enriching even an age of torpor and of mammon worship, sent Wesley to fan a flame amid the dying embers of religion; and Gordon to toil among his ragged boys; and Coleridge Patteson to die at Nukapu by the poisoned arrows of savages; and Father Damien to waste away at loathly Molokai, a leper among the lepers. It is a dim reflection of the love of Him who lived and died to redeem a guilty world. It differentiates the worldly life with its low aims from the noble and the Christian life, which is ready to do good to men that spitefully use it and persecute it. Every true life is nearest the life of Christ in love to its neighbour; and this love is the essence and epitome of all pure religion; it is the end of the commandment and the fulfilling of the law. (*F. W. Farrar, D.D.*) *Give unto the people that they may eat.*—*Punctual love*:—We wonder at the smooth working of the machinery for feeding a great city; and how, day by day, the provisions come at the right time, and are parted out among hundreds of thousands of homes. But we seldom think of the punctual love, the perfect knowledge, the profound wisdom which cares for us all, and is always in time with its gifts.

(A. Maclaren, D.D.) *Benevolence* :—The great ocean is in a constant state of evaporation. It gives back what it receives, and sends up its waters in mists to gather into clouds; and so there is rain for the earth, and greenness and beauty everywhere. But there are many men who do not believe in evaporation. They get all they can, and keep all they get, and so are not fertilisers, but only stagnant, miasmatic pools. *The people's needs provided* :—Oh, we are so glad when one seeks and finds the Bread of Life; when there is an Elisha to bring meal, sound and healthy, and life-giving, and when the meal is put into the pot, we are so glad when the hungry eat and go satisfied; there is joy in seeing the hungry feed. Away on the Marylebone Road, in London, there is a place where the hungry get free food, and those who supply it get their return for the money they give for the food in seeing the hungry eat. There was a wealthy young fellow who devoted a large sum to feeding the hungry, and he was always there. When he was asked why he was always among the poor, he replied, "It does me good to see them eat." Ay, and gospel preachers, when the Lord sometimes does not as much as give us a bite for ourselves, when we see the crowd hungry for Jesus, when we see one step forth into the hall where the feast is spread, we rejoice as much as the soul that is saved. (J. Robertson.)

CHAPTER V.

VERS. 1-19. Now Naaman, captain of the host of the King of Syria.—*The History of Naaman's disease and cure; illustrative of certain forces in the life of man* :—I. THE FORCE OF WORLDLY POSITION. Why all the interest displayed in his own country, and in Israel, concerning Naaman's disease? The first verse of this chapter explains it. "Now Naaman, captain of the host of Syria, was a great man," &c. Perhaps there were many men in his own district who were suffering from leprosy, yet little interest was felt in them. They would groan under their sufferings, and die unsympathised with and unhelped. But because this man's worldly position was high, kings worked, prophets were engaged, nations were excited for his cure. It has ever been a sad fact in our history that we magnify both the trials and the virtues of the grantees, and think but little of the griefs and graces of the lowly. 1. This fact indicates the lack of intelligence in popular sympathy. Reason teaches that the calamities of the wealthy have many mitigating circumstances, and therefore the greater sympathy should be towards the poor. 2. It indicates the lack of manliness in popular sympathy. II. THE FORCE OF INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCE. The influence of this little slave girl should teach us three things. 1. The magnanimity of young natures. 2. The power of the humblest individual. 3. The dependence of the great upon the small. III. THE FORCE OF SELF-PRESERVATION. The instinct of self-preservation is one of the strongest in human nature. "Skin for skin; all that a man hath will he give in exchange for his life." Men will spend fortunes and traverse continents in order to rid themselves of disease and prolong life. This strenuous effort for recovery from disease reminds us of—1. The value of physical health. This man had lost it, and what was the world to him without it? Bishop Hall truly says of him, "The basest slave in Syria would not change skins with him." 2. The neglect of spiritual health. IV. THE FORCE OF CASTE-FEELING. "And the King of Syria said, Go to; go, and I will send a letter to the King of Israel." He, forsooth, was too great to know a prophet—too great to correspond with any one but a king. 1. Caste-feeling sinks the real in the adventitious. The man who is ruled by it so exaggerates externalisms as to lose sight of those elements of moral character which constitute the dignity and determine the destiny of man. He lives in bubbles. 2. Caste-feeling curtails the region of human sympathies. He who is controlled by this feeling, has the circle of his sympathies limited not only to the outward of man, but to the outward of those only in his own sphere. All outlying his grade and class are nothing to him. 3. It antagonises the Gospel. Christ came to destroy that middle wall of partition that divides men into classes. The Gospel overtops all adventitious distinctions, and directs its doctrines, and offers its provisions to man as man. V. THE FORCE OF GUILTY SUSPICION. "And it came to pass when the King of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes,

and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore, consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me?" The construction that the monarch put upon the message of his royal brother was, instead of being true and liberal, the most false and ungenerous. Where this suspicion exists, one of the two, if not the two following things, are always found. 1. A knowledge of the depravity of society. The suspicious man has frequently learnt, either from observation, testimony, or experience, or all these, that there is such an amount of falsehood, and dishonesty in society, as will lead one man to take an undue advantage of another. 2. The existence of evil in himself. The suspicious man knows that he is selfish, false, dishonest, unchaste, and he believes that all men are the same. VI. THE FORCE OF REMEDIAL GOODNESS. Though the king could not cure, there was a remedial power in Israel equal to this emergency. That power, infinite goodness delegated to Elisha. The passage suggests several points concerning this remedial power. 1. It transcends natural power. "When Elisha, the man of God, had heard that the King of Israel had rent his clothes, . . . he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." The monarch felt his utter insufficiency to effect the cure. Natural science knew nothing of means to heal the leper. 2. It offends human pride. 3. It clashes with popular prejudice. "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?" 4. It works by simple means. 5. It demands individual effort. "Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God." Naaman had to go down himself to the river, and to dip himself seven times in its waters. 6. It is completely efficacious. "His flesh came again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." VII. THE FORCE OF A NEW CONVICTION. Observe—1. The subject of the new conviction. What was the subject? That the God of Israel was the only God. He felt that it was God's hand that healed him. 2. The developments of this new conviction. A conviction like this must prove influential in some way or other. Abstract ideas may lie dormant in the mind, but convictions are ever operative. What did it do in Naaman? (1) It evoked gratitude. Standing with all his company before the prophet, he avowed his gratitude. "Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant." (2) It annihilated an old prejudice. Just before his cure he despised Judæa. Jordan was contemptible as compared with the rivers of Damascus. But now the very ground seems holy. He asks of the prophet liberty to take away a portion of the earth. (3) It inspired worship. "Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice, but unto the Lord." VIII. THE FORCE OF ASSOCIATES. IX. THE FORCE OF SORDID AVARICE. Gehazi is the illustration of this in his conduct as described in vers. 20-22. In his case we have avarice—1. Eager in its pursuits. 2. This avarice is in one associated with the most generous of men. He was the servant of Elisha. 3. This avarice sought its end by means of falsehood. X. THE FORCE OF RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE. There is justice on this earth as well as remedial goodness, and Heaven often makes man the organ as well as the subject of both. Elisha, who had the remedial power, had also the retributive. Here we see retributive justice in—1. Detecting the wrongdoer. 2. Reproving the wrongdoer. 3. It punishes the wrongdoer. (*Homilist.*) *Naaman the Syrian*:—1. There is not a man or woman living, however happy or prosperous, in whose description sooner or later we do not come to a "but." There is always some drawback here, some drop in every cup that needs extraction, some thorn in every path to be removed. And even though this "but" were not in our health and circumstances, it is always in our nature. Leprosy is God's one great disease in the Bible to represent sin. It meant exclusion from the camp and distance from our fellow-men. Hideous and revolting in itself, it poisoned the springs of man's existence. Hence it strikingly represents that sin which is in man, and, in the absence of everything else, is the terrible "but" which mars and spoils the fairest earthly picture. Like man by nature, Naaman carried within him that disease which none but God could heal. 2. Contrast with this great man and honourable, the little maid. Torn away from her home and friends by rude hands, and probably amid the bitter tears of parental affection, she had been taken captive and sold as a slave. But amid all these discouraging circumstances she possessed a secret to which Naaman, with all his greatness, was a stranger. She knew of God and God's healing grace. Naaman felt the disease, she knew the healing. This made all

the difference between her and Naaman. This makes all the difference between a Christian and one who is not. This makes the mighty difference between one man and another. 3. God disposes each lot in life. Naaman has his own peculiar sorrow, and so has the little maid hers. They are widely different. Yet God measures out to each one their position and circumstances, their blessings and afflictions, as will best show forth His glory. God had been leading her, through that strange way, to do for this great man and honourable what he could not do for himself, nor any one in the royal court of Benhadad. "The Lord had need of her" for this His great work. Before passing on, notice another truth. Naaman's heavy trial had no power to subdue his haughty spirit. Sorrow of itself can never sanctify. Men may pass through God's hottest furnaces and only come out harder than ever. It is only when the Holy Spirit uses our sorrows—when we put them into His hands to use—that they will ever be made a blessing to us. Let us learn again, from the difference between Naaman and this little maid, that inequalities of social position are divine, and are means of blessing. We have seen two characters here, both of them representative—Naaman and the little maid. Let us now look at a third—Benhadad, King of Syria. In him we have man in his loftiness and arrogance. Nothing can be done, he feels, but through him. He prepares his litter, his gold and silver and raiment. All this is worldly religion—man's proud thoughts about God's ways. And yet all he does is but "labour lost." There is yet another character—Joram, King of Israel. Here is a man who knows about the true God, knows the revelation of His will, knows of the true Elisha at his very door, and yet, with all this knowledge, unable to take his true place and act God's part in directing the poor leper to the healer in Israel. Here is the man of religion, of true religion, of many privileges above others around him, yet all lost, and he utterly unable to direct the diseased one to the saviour prophet! 4. Let us now turn to the saviour prophet, Elisha, and his dealing with the poor leper. The King of Syria prepares a great price—£7500 value of our money. Naaman sets out with it on his journey, and King Jehoram acquiesces in it. Thus the idea of each is that the healing is to be obtained by a price. It is the latent thought of every man by nature. "Without money and without price" is God's Word, and this narrative of the healing of Naaman, and Elisha's dealings with him, are an illustration of this. And what is Elisha's message? "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." How simple, how plain! Then what am I to do with the £7500 and the raiment? Has it no value? None whatever in the eyes of Elisha. None whatever before God. Take it back with thee as the dregs of the sinner's righteousness, and learn that all thou art to receive, all that is to set thee free from sin and death and make thee a new creature in Christ Jesus, is of the free sovereign grace of God. Thus we see the pride of the natural heart. "Are not Abana and Pharpar better?" Here is the leper taking his own way of healing, and regarding it as better than God's. "He turned and went away in a rage." Here is the despising of God's remedy and the enmity of the natural heart showing itself. And Naaman was right. Abana's waters were clear and beautiful. Jordan's were clayey and muddy. There was nothing for sight in all this. It was only for faith. It was God choosing the base things of this world to bring to nought the mighty. Is it not so still? "What is this blood of Christ?" the sinner says. "What! are all my prayers, my good deeds, my sacraments, all my honest efforts to do my best and to please God to go for nothing? But the grace that can provide for a leprous soul can plead with a reluctant heart. It can use a ministry as well as open a fountain; and this ministry is, like the remedy, simple and artless, and exactly suited to its end, for one is divine as the other. Like the "little maid" before, it is the "servants" now, for such are God's means at all times. Human righteousness and greatness, and all nature's fond conceits are set aside completely. 5. Observe the effects of the healing, the form in which it was manifested: "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child." This is the new birth. It is put before us in this form in other parts of Scripture: "if there be a Mediator with him, the One above the thousands of angels to show man (God's) righteousness, then He is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found the ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth" (Job xxxiii. 23, 24). Here the same truth is brought before us. Again we have it in the New Testament: "Except a man be born from above he cannot enter the kingdom of God." "If any man be in Christ he is a new

creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new." 6. Observe, in the next place, the manifestation of this new nature in the conduct of Naaman. From this point it is seen there is a great change in him. His spirit, his tone, his language, his whole bearing seems from this moment to form a striking contrast to all that has gone before, so much so that, had his name not been mentioned, we should have said it could not possibly be the same man. "And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him, and he said: Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant." Observe the fruits of the new nature here, in their order. Naaman stands with all his company before Elisha. It is not now the proud and haughty Naaman, but the subdued and humbled one. Here is the first-fruit of the Holy Spirit in his character. He was humble because he was washed. Secondly, he makes a goodly confession of the one and only God. He had learnt the true God through the virtue of His grace exerted on himself—through the health and salvation he had received from Him. This is the only way the soul can ever learn Him. Thirdly, he presses his gifts upon Elisha, not now to purchase the healing, but because he has been healed. He has been forgiven much, therefore he loves much. Fourthly, he "will henceforth know no other God." To this end he seeks materials to raise an altar to the true God. And fifthly, he has now a renewed conscience, quick and sensitive about any, even apparent, departure from the God who had so blessed him. (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*) *Naaman the Syrian*:—There is scarcely a story in all Scripture of deeper interest than this of Naaman, the Syrian. I. THE CHARACTER AND CONDITION OF NAAMAN. There is no mention of Naaman in the Bible, save in this connection. There is, however, a Jewish tradition as old as the time of Josephus, which identifies him as the archer whose arrow struck Ahab with his mortal wound, and thus gave deliverance to Syria. Whether this be true or not, some brave deed of Naaman had lifted him into special prominence, and crowned him with exceptional honour. But he was a leper! This made him loathsome and a burden to himself. Here we learn that no honour, no valour, no victory, can place men beyond the reach of the sorest calamities of life. These are as likely to visit the rich as the poor; are as likely to fall on princes as on peasants. No king is always happy; no prime minister of state but has his fears and sorrows. Naaman stood next the king, but he was a leper, afflicted more than many a slave in Syria. There is no possession so vast, no position so high, no attainment so conspicuous, no employment so congenial, no association so sweet, as not to have its "but," revealing sorrow, or some great unmet want. There is, however, "a skeleton in every home." Each heart has, and knows, its own bitterness. One reaps advantage of one kind here, another of another kind there, but every man reaps disadvantage of one kind or another. The good and ill of life are far more evenly distributed than most imagine. II. THE CHARACTER AND SERVICE OF THE LITTLE MAID. She was by birth an Israelite, carried captive into Syria. There she became a servant in Naaman's household. In her early home, and among her own people, she had become familiar with the worship and history of Israel. It is possible that she had met the prophet Elisha. Those homes of Israel were schools for the household. The children there were trained to believe in, and worship, the God of their fathers. History with them was sacred. With scepticism and atheism those Israelitish homes were not darkened and afflicted as our homes are. Egypt, Sinai, Samaria were all alive with Divine deliverances, which old and young alike appreciated. God was among the people, and this the children understood. The confidence of children is remarkable in the beneficence of God and in the influence of the good with Him. Children may be, not only our greatest comforters, but our wisest teachers and our divinest helpers. In their simple, childish faith they often put us to shame, and in their generous desire to serve others, often rebuke our indifference. III. THE MIRACULOUS CURE. It appears that Naaman somehow heard of the desire and faith of this little maid in his home, and was encouraged to make trial of the prophet. It appears further, that, aside from the maid, none was more anxious for the cure than the king. Through the instrumentality,—possibly of some one overhearing the conversation of this maid with her mistress, or possibly of some one informed by this woman, and sent by her, or, it may be of Naaman himself, the king learned of the wish and the faith. It is more than probable that both Naaman and the king had heard of Elisha as a worker of wondrous miracles; for his fame must have reached to the farthest bounds of the kingdom. But be

this as it may, the leper sighs for help, and is ready for the experiment of seeking Elisha. Poor man! There he stood at the prophet's door, a leper, full of large expectations; yet dictating as to the manner of the cure, and falling into a frenzy because it was not to be effected with pomp and parade such as he thought became his rank and station. Why the prophet bade him go to Jordan instead of the waters of Damascus, he could not understand. He seems to have forgotten that Jordan belonged to the God of Israel, and that, in a miraculous cure, relation to God was of far more importance than the depth or beauty of the stream. Besides, Jordan was the river appointed; and if Naaman is to be cured by Divine power he must obey the Divine will. He was, however, proud and haughty—style and rank were offended. What now? Jordan has become a healing stream for this afflicted man. No longer shall he compare that river with the waters of Damascus. No longer shall Elisha be regarded as an enemy, or as indifferent to his welfare. To be cured of such a disease in such a manner was enough to convince Naaman of the power of God, and of Elisha as a true prophet of God. Experience is a wonderful teacher. This cure had been effected by consciously supernatural means. This he was ready to confess. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Naaman, the Syrian* :—I. In turning to the story of this Naaman, the first thing that I would notice is a CONTRAST IN SERVICE. We set him before us dwelling in the stately palace of the king, the commander of the king's armies; with authority to speak to the whole nation, and all men are ready to obey him: with troops of horses and hosts of chariots, and servants that wait upon him and minister to him. Altogether, in council and in camp, the foremost man in Syria. And as brave as he was wise, of whose valour many a stirring tale was told. Here is greatness: great in himself, great in his position, great in his possessions, great in his achievements, great in his authority: no element of greatness is lacking. Then do you notice how beside this word great there is set the word little; and alongside of this mighty man of valour is put the record of this captive maid? Poor little thing, her story is a very sad one. A troop of Syrians marching one day into Israel—fierce fellows, burning the homesteads of the villagers, before whom the frightened people fled to the mountains or caves—had come to some cottage, and there, it may be, tending a sick mother, too feeble to escape, or guarding some little one of the family whom she would not forsake, this girl is taken captive and carried away by the soldiers. They sell her as a slave to Naaman's wife. A stranger in a strange land, with the memory of her bitter griefs—in thought and feeling, and hope and religion, severed from those about her, so she must wait upon her mistress and do her bidding, with none to befriend her. We can think of her sighing in her loneliness. "Ah, me; if I were only King of Syria, or even this great lord, I would set right the wrongs of the poor folks, and bid the cruel soldiers stay at home. I would have no burning cottages, no ruined homes, and no poor captive men or maidens if I were king. How good it must be to be so great! But I am only a little maiden; what can I do? here there are so many troubles? It is dreadful to be so weak and little." And yet this little maid it is who brings deliverance to the great man of Syria, for in her are two things that are never little—a kind heart and faith in God. So, in the great world, with its sorrows, there is always room for loving-kindness and for faith in God. It is not greatness that the poor world wants mostly, not chief captains or men of valour; but love. The little, and the least, with love and faith, can always find a place for service; a service that is always blessed, and shall have its golden wages. Our measure for service is not in position, nor in gifts, nor in greatness, but in love. Her tender love and simple faith do set this little maid alongside of this great captain. Take it, I pray you, for whom it is meant, and give thanks to God. Say it and sing it within yourself: "If in this great world I can do nothing else, I can do this—and since I can do this I will envy none. Wherever I am I can keep a simple faith in God and a kind heart." Thank God, little one, that He has a place for thee. II. NOTICE THE WISDOM OF NAAMAN. He no sooner hears that there is a chance of his being cured than he sets off for the prophet. He does not despise the suggestion because it is a prophet of Israel who has the power. If this is a chance of his being cured he will go forth and seek it. He might very naturally have said, "I will get my master, the King of Syria, to write a letter to the King of Israel, and he can send the prophet to see me. The prophet is much better able to travel than I am; and it is altogether more fitting that he should come here. It is an enemy's country, and the people may oppose my coming, and I am ill fit to journey. I will send my horses and chariots, and a

company of soldiers for his escort, and I will pay him well for his coming." So he might have said, but that will not do. He will go himself. There must be no delay. If there is a chance of being cured he will do his best to avail himself of that chance. At once everybody in the place is set to work to hasten his going. Now do not let this Naaman the Syrian rise up in judgment against us. We have heard that in Jesus Christ is our salvation; that there is One who is able to break the power of our sin, to rid us from its loathsomeness, and to make us whole. To us the testimony concerning the salvation which is in Christ Jesus comes from ten thousand who have found in Him their deliverance from the curse and power of sin, the cleansing from its foul leprosy. Think if he should bid his musicians sing of this Elisha, and chant his greatness, and week after week should sit and listen to the story of the captive maiden. "I like to hear her," says he, "she is so much in earnest, and her gestures are so graceful, and her words so well chosen." O fool! and all the time the leprosy is eating into him with horrid cruelty, deeper and deeper, and every day he is growing more hideous and scarred, and his case becomes more desperate. And the longer he delays the more he questions about going at all. And now the King of Syria comes to see him. "Well, have you been?" he asks. "Been where?" saith Naaman. "Why, to the great prophet that can heal thee of thy leprosy," cries the king, wondering. "No," saith Naaman, "I have not exactly been to him, you know. But I have heard all about him, and have got quite familiar with his name and history, and what he has said and done." "But surely," cries the astonished king, "it were as well never to have heard of him if you do not go." Then one day the tidings spread, "Naaman is dead"; died of his leprosy. Dead! and he knew so much about the prophet. And in the palace is heard the wail of the little maiden, "Would God my lord had gone to the prophet that is in Samaria. Alas! it is only in religion that men play the fool like this: only in the deeper and more dreadful leprosy of the soul! Can you imagine any greater folly, hearing of Christ as the Saviour, year in and year out, and yet never coming to Him?"

III. NOTICE THE NEEDLESS PREPARATION. (*M. G. Pearse.*) Naaman, the leper:—Men who are called to like positions in our own day are generally the objects of envy. Doubtless, Naaman was such an object in the eyes of many. But how greatly were they mistaken in the estimate they formed. Naaman knew, before others knew, that the leprosy had marked him as its victim. The small spot, herald of the approaching disease, was upon him; the worm was at the root of the gourd; the cancer was beginning to prey upon his very vitals; the heart was already feeding upon its own bitterness. Naaman, the illustrious,—Naaman, the captain of the king's hosts,—Naaman, with all his greatness, must henceforth carry about with him a monitor of his own weakness, yea, his own sinfulness. And, upon the face of the record, do we not read this lesson,—I. THE SINFULNESS OF PRIDE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD? All pride will be humbled in like manner. "God resisteth the proud" (Jas. iv. 6) always, at all times, and in all cases. "He that exalteth himself shall be abased" (Luke xiv. 11). Pride is the idolatry of self. Where pride reigns, God cannot reign: but God will judge. Let each beware of pride. Pride does not help a man to fill his station; it leads him to overstep his station. Humility ennobles, for it is a Divine grace; but pride degrades, for it is earth-born, a satanic spirit. If the proud man does not seek the throne of grace, and humble himself there, pride will prove his ruin. II. Another truth, of which the experience of Naaman may remind us, is this,—OUR ENTIRE AND ABSOLUTE DEPENDENCE UPON GOD. We are not the arbiters of our own destiny. We cannot determine our own future. Even to-day's bread is dependent on God's bounty. "As He will," is the law of our condition, absolutely and without qualification. Naaman, the captain of the host of Syria, the mighty man of valour, was no exception to this law. In his leprosy he carried about with him a silent but a faithful monitor of the supremacy of God. There was manifestly a will above his will,—a will that had determined his affliction, irrespective of himself. III. But there is yet another, and a principal lesson, which the experience of Naaman enforces,—THE INSUFFICIENCY OF EARTHLY GOOD TO CONFER HAPPINESS UPON THE POSSESSOR. Naaman possessed fame, and honour, and friends, and wealth; but he was a leper. I ask, Is there not always some "but," or some "if," to act as a drawback on the earthly portion? Has the man ever lived who, being "of the earth, earthy," living for this world only, could say he was so happy as not to need something to be added or to be taken away? It has even become a proverb, "Man never is, but

always to be, blest." "Is the child happy?" asks one of our Puritan Fathers. "He will be, when he is a man. Is the peasant satisfied? He will be, when he is rich. Is the rich man satisfied? He will be, when he is ennobled. Is the nobleman satisfied? He will be, when he is a king. Is the king satisfied? Listen! for one is speaking, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.'" Each is devising a portion for himself, in which he thinks happiness will be found; but none attain happiness. Riches may be pursued and acquired; but riches cannot confer happiness. It is a true testimony, which all experience confirms: "They that increase riches, increase sorrow with them." There is always some "but" attached to the best estate. The knowledge that God is our God for ever and ever—that we are reconciled to Him by faith in Christ Jesus—that He will be our guide, the director of our steps, even until death,—this is the knowledge which alone discovers to us the secret of happiness—this is the knowledge which places in our possession the key which may be said to open to man a Paradise regained. (*C. Bullock.*) *Some modern lessons from an ancient story*:—This whole story of Naaman, ancient as it is, is not one out of relation with our present lives. It is a story which can easily teach us some most valuable modern lessons. I. THE UNIVERSAL SUBTRACTION FROM OUR ADDITION. Consider them in Naaman's case. 1. Consider the addition. (1) Captain of the host of the King of Syria. (2) A great man with his master. (3) And honourable. (4) Because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria. (5) He was also a mighty man in valour. How many items in this addition, and how large the sum of their values—high military command, great favour at court, splendid reputation, success, great personal bravery. 2. Consider the subtraction—one vast damaging item, but he was a leper. Take a New-Testament instance, that of Paul (2 Cor. xii). (1) Addition. Rapture (ver. 2). Presence in Paradise (ver. 4). Vision of the unspeakable glories (ver. 4). Abundant revelations (ver. 7). (2) Subtraction—thorn in the flesh (ver. 7). Are not these instances more or less exactly parallel in our own lives? You can add together many a favouring circumstance and possession: then here is sure to come the subtracting—but. Why is this? Why, in our common lot, must there be this universal subtraction from our addition? If this life were all, and were intended to be all, it would be cruel. But there is another life. These subtractions from our additions are allowed, lest we should solemnly settle into the feeling that this life is all. II. THAT OF FAITHFULNESS TO ONE'S RELIGION IN STRANGE PLACE AND CIRCUMSTANCE. The little Hebrew maid (vers. 2-4) how unlike her are those professing Christians who, moving to a new place or city, will not use their church letters but drop into the sad throng of non-churchgoers! III. THE UNWISDOM OF MAKING BEFOREHAND PLANS FOR GOD. 1. Behold the ancient picture—the letter; the presents worth \$50,000; the ostentatious arrival before the prophet's door; the message; the reply and rage (vers. 11-12). 2. Behold the modern counterpart. Simple was the remedy the prophet ordered—the washing in the Jordan. So simple is the Gospel—personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. But men, thinking their thoughts, making beforehand plans for God, say, "Are not the Abana and Pharpar of my moralities better?" or, "Are not the Abana and Pharpar of my penances better?" or "Are not the Abana and Pharpar of some shining experience I have imagined better?" IV. THE WISDOM OF DOING FIRST WHAT GOD SAYS (ver. 14). Have you not been delaying, and thinking, and imagining, and holding to your way long enough? Now, in the beginning of this New Year, will you not wisely submit to God, as Naaman did? Will you not accept Jesus Christ and so, in the only possible way, find forgiveness for your sin? (*Homiletic Review.*) *The method of grace*:—There is much modern application in these Old Testament circumstances. There is so much humaneness in the Bible which makes it always a new book. Principles know nothing of years. Truth is not hampered by time. The Scriptures are as old as eternity, and yet as new as every morning. The Gospel in the narrative may thus be developed. I. THE GOSPEL APPEALS TO THE MAN, NOT HIS ACCIDENTS. The prophet's message was to the leper, not to the courtier. Naaman came with his horses and with his pageantry. He came in a lordly air, but the prophet did not even meet him. The true man is never moved by glitter. Some of us would have bowed as sycophants; it would have been the reddest-letter day of our lives, if the premier of Syria had stood at our door. Even if a trinket, or a book, be given to us by a royal hand, we transmit it as an heirloom. There is a nobility of office, but there is a higher nobility of character. There is a kingliness of name, but there is also a kingliness of nature. We should not judge by appearance, but judge by right.

eous judgment. The prophet saw through all the haughtiness of Naaman, a leprous man. God sees through all life's accidents—all our intelligence, parade, wealth, and respectability—a heart of corruption and sorrow. He sees that the "imagination of the thoughts of man are evil continually." The message is to man, not to his circumstances. It speaks to us as sinners. It speaks, not to contingencies, but to the human nature that is in us all. It was man that fell, and to man the message is sent. "He came to seek and to save that which was lost."

II. THE GOSPEL MESSAGE AND CONDITIONS ARE ALWAYS SIMPLE. It speaks in a language all can understand. It speaks to the heart, and the heart has but one language, the wide world over. The tongue speaks many a vernacular, and the lips chatter many dialects, but the heart's voice never varies. The great universal heart beats in us all. The Gospel sees us fallen, and it sends forth the common message and a universal welcome: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden." The message is one, but its emphasis is varied according to our deafness, and its strokes to our hardness. The stone is hard, and the sculptor's mallet must be heavy, and his chisels sharp. The wound is deep, and the corrosive must burn, and the instrument probe deeply. The jewel is encased in adamant, and the lapidary must select his instruments accordingly. Our prejudices are great, our hearts are haughty, and the conditions are adapted. Christianity is to us what we are. Loving in disposition, it "speaks in a still small voice." Impenitent in heart, it speaks in thunder-tones. Some are so deaf that they can only hear thunder; others are so divinely sensitive, they can hear angels' whispers, and God's steps on the wind. According to our heart-life, God is either a Father, or a consuming fire. A revengeful God is the creation of a wicked life. The Gospel speaks to the heart, and of necessity must temper its voice to its disposition and difficulties. It is a message so simple that a child can understand it, and yet its inexhaustibleness challenges the highest mind. So plain, that the "wayfaring man" need not stumble; and yet its sublimity creates a sensation new in angel bosom. Its simplicity reveals its wonders, as its stoop manifests its height.

III. THE GOSPEL CONDITIONS ARE REPULSIVE TO HUMAN PREJUDICES. We might swear that it is night when the sun shines, but the light would only prove our insanity. We may curse the Book, but its truth is inviolable. We may blaspheme the Gospel, but the loudness of our voice may only reveal the perfectness of our idiocy. How presumptuous is man? 1. How we presume on God's ways? "I thought he would surely come out to me," &c. 2. How we presume on God's means? "Are not Abana and Pharpar . . . better than all the waters of Israel?" 3. How we presume on God's patience? "And he turned away in a rage." 4. How we presume on self-sufficiency? "Some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?" The conditions of the Gospel may arouse our resentment, but to resist is to be blind to our best interests. The prophet said: "Wash and be clean"; and Naaman turned away in a rage. Christ says: "Sell all thou hast and give to the poor"; and the young man went away sorrowing. The Gospel says: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"; and we are disgusted with the conditions. The Cross to the "Jew may be a stumbling-block," and to the "Greek, foolishness," but to as many as believe, it is the "power of God unto salvation." The answer to all our prejudices is, that it is God's appointed way. There is no royal road. The conditions are, believe and live, and the authority is, "he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." Our prejudices may recoil, and we may turn away in wrath. But we turn our face from the sun only to see our shadow. (*W. Mincher.*) *Naaman*:—Let us cast our eyes upon Naaman himself; and then upon the method of his restoration. I. NAAMAN'S CONDITION. 1. Official. 2. Personal. 3. Bodily. "But he was a leper"—the one drawback, and that a terrible one. II. NAAMAN'S RESTORATION. 1. First notice the providence of God. It was by means of a little captive maid. 2. Thus, what must have seemed a great calamity to the little maid's friends and to herself—to be captured and carried away into an idolatrous country—became a blessing. 3. Then we have the picture of Naaman, with his equipage and servants, in state at the door of Elisha, and the prophet sending a message to him with the command in the text. 4. Let us see the moral and spiritual purposes of Elisha's treatment. The spirit of pride had to be subdued. The prophet's method is unexpected, but not without design. There is no prayer or personal contact, only a message by a servant. 5. But for the kindly expostulation of the servants, Naaman would have returned into his own country a leper, as he set out from it. III. LESSONS. 1. From instances

of natural virtue in the heathen world, we learn that nature, though fallen, is not totally corrupt. We must keep a middle course between Pelagius and Calvin. 2. What weak and often unworthy means God uses for making known His truth! —the enslaved Israelite maid! 3. How children should strive to remember what they were taught in youth about God and His ministers, that it may be a blessing to themselves and to others! (*Canon Hutchings.*) *Greatness secondary to goodness*:—The great Augustine discovered this when a young man. His father, a heathen, had said to the lad, "Be great." His mother, Monica, a devoted Christian, had whispered, "Be good." "I will be both," he answered, "but great first." And when, after years of folly and then of philosophy, he resolved to "be good," he found himself a slave to sin. Not till he cast himself wholly on Divine power and grace did he gain the "new heart." Then, the things he had once been afraid to lose he cast from him with joy. "Thou expellest them," he cried, in an ecstasy of joy, "and comest in Thyself instead of them." Thus Augustine the sinner became Augustine the saint. But he was a leper.—*The fruits of adversity*:—How many might be tempted to envy him, how many of his fellow-men might be tempted to say, within themselves, "Would that I were in his place, would that I could have done with all these anxious cares, and weary disappointments which I meet with every day! Would that I could be free from all this drudgery, and see, at any rate, some result of all my toil! Here am I fighting every day against difficulty and hardship, yet gaining never a victory; here am I passing the best part of my days in obscurity, with never a prospect of rising in the world; there seems to be nothing for me but toils and cares from morning till night, from year's end to year's end. Would that I could be successful in life as Naaman was, could reach a high and honoured position as he did! Yet stay, Naaman has his drawback, he is not by any means the happy man you take him to be. "But he was a leper." Do not these words—five in English, but only two in the original Hebrew—seem to throw a deep, dark shadow over the whole life of Naaman? We cannot possibly know, as well as Naaman did, all that those words meant. None but a leper can truly know the meaning of leprosy. Yet we do know that it was something terrible; that it was a serious affliction; that it made life dark, gloomy, unbearable. There is, in fact, something in the life-history of every man which gives, or should give to him, lowly views of himself, which is intended to keep down his pride, and to remind him that this world is a pathway leading to a country where alone there is nothing to mar our pleasure, no interruption to our happiness, where alone there is no drawback. There is a "but" in the history of every soul on this side of the grave. That rich man you see, and upon whose wealth you may often have looked with envious eye, is the victim of some serious disorder; death is, as it were, staring him in the face. That strong and healthy man, who seems able and willing to do battle in the great world, who possesses an energy equalled by few, and surpassed by none, is yet a poor man; there is a large family depending upon him; many mouths to be filled, many backs to be clothed; and that strong, willing worker, heaves a sigh as he thinks that his earnings will prove miserably inadequate to the needs of his household. And, if you trace the matter right through, you will find that this drawback is a very common experience, known and felt not only by the poor, but also by the well-to-do; not only by those low down in the world, but also by those occupying high positions. And yet there is a value in these drawbacks; they are not so utterly hopeless as many would feign imagine; we are apt to look upon them as a great evil, with not a single redeeming feature. Not a few might feel disposed to ask, "Why should these things exist at all? Why cannot I be allowed to pass through life without having to encounter all these difficulties—these things which interfere so greatly with my happiness? Life is short, why should it be made miserable? Why should I not be able to enjoy, to my heart's content, these days and weeks, these months and years, which are passing all too quickly away?" These are the questions which probably are going forth from thousands of hearts to-day; they seem practical questions; let us deal with them in a practical way. Let us bear in mind that these things come to us not by chance, they are sent. That difficulty of yours, that matter which is costing you so many weary days, and sleepless nights, that great heart-sorrow, that heavy burden has not visited you at random as it were, but has been sent to you; that is the first thought, the first fact to be carefully remembered. And the Sender; Who is the Sender? God, the God who loves you with an amazing love, pities you with wondrous pity, sends you that very thing which is the cause of much

vexation, and which you could heartily wish had never been sent. Brethren, it seems strange, almost like a contradiction, but it is neither. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. iv. 12, 13). This is the kind action of a loving Father; He is training us and educating us for heaven. Never let us forget that, and honestly let us ask ourselves what would be the result if we had everything just as we wished. If, in this life, there were no difficulties, or trials, or sorrows to meet, what feelings and thoughts would take possession of us? Should we be filled with earnest longing to reach the heavenly city? Much of the choicest, holiest portions of a man's character is formed in those seasons of his life which call forth the pity of those about him. When they are pitying, heaven is rejoicing; rejoicing that the feet are turned Zionwards, that the wanderer is returning home. Brethren, let it be so with us. Remember "they who suffer with Christ shall also reign with Him," and that, "All things work together for good to those who love God." (*E. F. Chapman, M.A.*)

*The conquest of disadvantages:—*1. Among the figures of the Old Testament there is hardly any more interesting or more attractive than that of Naaman the Syrian. He belongs, indeed, to a class of persons which never fails to arrest notice and evoke admiration, the class of those who, afflicted by physical disadvantages which are commonly incapacitating, have such constancy of purpose, such strength of will, such nobility of character, that they triumph over their infirmities, and take rank among the leaders of mankind. Habitual suffering does incapacitate for exertion; physical infirmity disables the will and abashes the courage. Marked out from the rest by defects, repulsive or ludicrous, or practically disadvantageous, men are humbled and cowed by a consciousness of inferiority, which not rarely becomes a vague sense of wrong, a dreary feeling of unmerited exile from the common society, and along with these, an embitterment of character, which, in its turn, adds yet further obstacles to frank fellowship with ordinary folk. The annals of the English monarchy, for instance, contain no worthier names than those of Alfred, the traditional founder of our constitution, and of William III., its champion and restorer, and both those admirable sovereigns were chronic invalids. Our literature has no greater name than that of Milton, who was a blind man when he wrote his principal poem; no name more venerable than that of Johnson, who from childhood was afflicted with a repulsive malady. It would be hard to find among modern politicians a name more justly honoured than that of Henry Fawcett, whose sight was destroyed by a lamentable accident when he was twenty-five years old, but who "bore the calamity with a superlative courage," and won for himself a niche in the Temple of Fame. These show the class to which Naaman belonged, the class of the intrinsically heroic, to whom, whatever their creed or career, the description of Scripture seems properly to belong, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens." 2. It is matter of common experience that the class of heroes which Naaman represents, is a very large class; we all have known and could name from among our acquaintance persons who belong to it. Nay, in some sense, we all ought ourselves to come within it, for there is none of us, however fortunately placed, who is altogether without some disadvantage, which is capable of daunting and disabling us. Of course—if you will—this is the tritest of moralisations. But he knows little of human life as it proceeds in its cycles of customary work and common association, who has not discovered that immense injury to character, and waste of energy, and loss of happiness arise from the single cause of that sustained resentment of disadvantage which is one of the commonest of human faults. Perhaps there are reasons why, under the circumstances of modern life, such resentment should tend to increase among us. It is matter of common observation that among all classes there is a passion for enjoyment, which easily induces disgust of work and discontent with all limitations of liberty. Religion, we shall all agree, is the source of fortitude and the spur of moral effort. When religion loses authority over the will, and fails to move the heart, men fall inevitably under the empire of circumstance, having nothing outside themselves to sustain them under misfortune, nothing beyond the native resources of character. 3. The disadvantage in Naaman's case was one for which we may believe that he was

not personally responsible; the hideous disease by which he was stricken may have been inherited, or contracted by accidental contact with persons similarly afflicted, or the result of privations endured in his campaigns. He could not, in any case, blame himself as the cause of his calamity. In this respect the valorous Syrian represents a great multitude of afflicted persons. I notice that Mr. Samuel Laing ascribes the prevalence of pessimistic theories among us to this very circumstance. "In ruder states of society," he says, "such weaklings were got rid of by the summary process of being killed off, while with the more humane and refined arrangements of modern times they live on and 'weary deaf heaven with their fruitless cries.' It must be allowed that weak health and chronic pain ordinarily tend to induce such gloomy and morbid mental dispositions, and it is impossible not to feel compassion for those who, however deluded, are still the victims of their own undeserved misfortunes; but here, as in all other human affairs, there is an extraordinary latent power in man himself, which, if brought into action, can turn back the natural tendency of his circumstances, and bend those very circumstances to new and higher interests. The magnanimity of the ancient Stoics rises in the case of the sickly and crippled Epictetus to a genuine piety. 'Dare to look up to God,' he says, 'and say, Deal with me for the future as Thou wilt: I am of the same mind as Thou art; I am Thine; I refuse nothing that pleaseth Thee; lead me where Thou wilt; clothe me in any dress Thou chooseth; is it Thy will that I should hold the office of a magistrate, that I should be in the condition of a private man, stay here or be in exile, be poor, be rich? I will make Thy defence to men in behalf of all these conditions.' There is a ring of personal affection in such words which argues that the Stoic philosopher was (though he knew it not) a Christian in spirit. St. Paul's curiously similar language includes the confession of a discipleship which Epictetus could not own. 'I know how to be abased.' 4. But, though physical afflictions that are undeserved may bring a sore strain to bear on the character, and can hardly fail, save in the case of a few extraordinary persons, to cast a gloom over the mind, and give a melancholy tinge to the whole life, still it is not in such calamities that the most disabling and daunting influences are found. There are men among us, richly endowed with gifts of intellect, of character, of fortune, who are held in a state of degrading idleness by the disabling memory of some moral treason in the past. Men wonder at them, knowing nothing and suspecting nothing—but to their own consciousness the sinister fact stands out with threatening prominence. They have lost faith in themselves; self-respect, the backbone of character, is broken. I might borrow the words of the text to describe such a man—"a mighty man of valour, but a leper." (*H. H. Henson, B.D.*) The "buts" of life:—There you have a romance and a tragedy summed up in a single verse. You only need a little imagination to fill in the details, and lo! you have a book of human life, with its prides and humblings, its grandeurs, and its shames. The writer tells you in the same breath of this man's glory and of his awful cross. "But!" Ah, if we could only get rid of that little word, how happy we should be! Alas! it is always popping in to disturb our self-congratulating reflections. It drops into human speech at every turn. It is found at every stage of human experience. I hear it every day in the common talk of the people about me. I catch my own lips dropping it unawares times without number. There is always something to qualify our congratulations, praises, and thanksgivings. Fortune has dealt well with you, but! You have had a smooth and prosperous career, but! Your husband is almost perfection, but! Your children are doing well, but! That friend of yours has many admirable qualities, but! Your employer is generous and considerate, but! Your partner is honest and capable, but! Your church is orthodox and peaceable, and pre-eminently respectable, but! Your minister is a wonderful preacher, but! There is always that little or big cloud athwart your sunlight, always the wasp in the honey-cup, always the seamy side to your bliss, always the dull leaden background to the shield whose face is all gold. Mercy and judgment meet, and the darkness and the light make up one picture in every human lot. Naaman was a great man, and honourable, but he was a leper. Now sometimes we forget this other side in our thoughts of others, and frequently we make too much of it in thoughts of ourselves. And if the other side relates to character, we reverse the process, making too much of it in others and overlooking it in ourselves. I. REMEMBER THAT EVERY NAAMAN HAS HIS CROSS. The side of the shield which he shows to the world is perhaps polished gold, but he who walks behind it sees the heavy iron casing. How foolish we are

to envy the great their greatness, the rich their riches, the honourable their honours, and the wise their wisdom, and to fancy that because they have more of these things than we they are necessarily happier and more contented. And how blind we are to overlook our own blessings and joys, and repine because others seem more fortunate than we. Uneasy is the head that wears any sort of crown. Where Fortune drops its choicest honours, it imposes its heaviest burdens, and the path which is lined with roses has most of the prickly thorns of care. The more brilliant the sunlight, the darker the shadows. The more a man gets his own way, the more he frets when he cannot get his own way. You cannot climb high to pluck the choicest fruit and flowers without getting many a prick and bruise. The man who wears purple and fine linen before the world has often underneath, if you could see it, rough sackcloth and chafing cords; and there is a cloud of cares weighing like midnight on many a heart in which outward fortune seems constantly to smile. In the old ballad the queen rides by on her gallant palfrey, with cloth of gold and glittering jewels, and splendid array of attendants, and the village maiden, looking out of her lattice window, sighs, "Oh! to be a queen!" while the queen, looking up, sighs far more deeply, and whispers to her heart, "Oh! to be free from all this burden, and like that happy careless maiden!" Yes; there are cold blasts on the heights which those below never feel. And many a time, when all the things of the world go well with a man, his inner life is anything but right with God. The leprosy of doubt, or the leprosy of sin has crept over all his thoughts, and corrupted his human affections, and put a withering blight upon his world, and he knows nothing of the peace and gladness in which your simple faith walks continually. II. YOU ARE NOT LIKELY TO FORGET YOUR OWN CROSS. No; but do not make too much of it. No doubt there is a seamy side to your life. It is not all sunlight. But it is not well to keep the seamy side always uppermost and talk as if tears and cares and worries were your meat and drink continually. Why cannot we let our cheerful thoughts have free course sometimes without stopping them with that everlasting "but"? "Yes; I have many things to be grateful for, but!" That word often expresses the concentrated essence of ingratitude. It is a volume of murmurings and fretfulness bound up in three letters. Do not make too much, I repeat, of that other side. Your house is not so large as you desire. No; but maybe there is far more love and happiness in it than in many a bigger house. Your children are not all shaping as you would wish. No; but some of them, let us hope, bring brightness to your homes and put music into your hearts continually. Your business prospects are not brilliant maybe. No; but you have never lacked a sufficiency of comforts, and your way has always so far been made clear. We should be far happier and far more generous-hearted men if we did not make so much of that "but" in thinking of and discussing those who love us and whom we love. They please us in many things, but! Ah, well, magnify the many things, and let that other side go by. (*J. Greenough, M.A.*) *Alloy in grandeur*:—Naaman was a mighty man, but he was a leper. Every man has some "but" or other in his character—something that blemishes and diminishes him—some alloy in his grandeur—some damp to his joy: he may be very happy—very good; yet, in something or other, not so good as he should be, nor so happy as he would be. (*Matthew Henry.*)

VERS. 2-4. And the Syrians had gone out by companies.—*The Hebrew maid*:—I. HER FAITH IN GOD. Plainly she had very strong faith; and it was of the right sort. For there are wrong kinds of faith. Mere belief even of the truth may be perfectly powerless. The question is, what side does your belief make you take? It should be a living trust in a living person, a whole faith in the whole Saviour. Notice the beautiful signs of this girl's faith. In that land of idols and idolaters she was not ashamed to own her Lord. And her charity proved her faith sincere. What wonder if she had nursed revenge, and said in spite, "I'm glad my master is a leper: it is God's judgment upon him: it serves him right." How beautiful, how Christ-like her forgiving spirit! We should like to know how she became such a believing child of God. The people of Israel were then desperately wicked. It was the time of Elijah, of Ahab and Jezebel; and thousands had forsaken Jehovah for idols. But probably she had such a good mother as Timothy had. From her lips she learnt about the God of Abraham. Her mother's prayers were heard in heaven; and when sin rioted around, faith found a home in the heart of this dear child. II. HER FAITHFULNESS. Faithfulness is more than faith. As the Word shows, it is the fulness of faith. She had so much of the true faith that

it filled her whole nature, and made her faithful under terrible trials. It wrought in her loving loyalty to her loving God; it made her leal-hearted. Peter had faith, but not enough of it to make him faithful in the palace of the high priest. How sad that many who go to heathen countries are faithless to their religion. They act as if their religion should be shaped by the region where they happen to dwell; they are as the softest wax on which public opinion may set any stamp: men they are in this without manhood, who do not belong to themselves but to any owner who boldly claims them; they are tossed about like pitiable atoms in the centre of a whirlwind. We greatly value this unselfish loyalty to a cause that seems lost. The Bible is always pleading with us to be loyal to God, and true to our trust, whatever it may be. III. *HER FRUITFULNESS*. "Nothing but leaves," cannot be applied to her. Seeming the meekest human being in Syria, she proved one of the mightiest. "I am but one, but I am one. I cannot do much, but I can do something; and all that I can do I ought to do, and by God's grace will do." Thus she became really a great apostle and missionary. By her the true religion was known and respected in Syria, and Naaman became a worshipper of Jehovah; and so she has been thought worthy of a large place in God's book. But take care not to fall into a mistake here. You may fancy that you are to do good only by a great and happy effort once in a while. "How long did you take to paint that picture for which you ask £100?" a gentleman once said to a famous painter. "Two days," he replied. "And do you expect £100 for the work of two days?" "You forget," answered the painter, "that my whole life was a preparation for the work of these two days." So a few words from this girl moved the household of Naaman; but it was her whole life that prepared her for giving these few words at the right time, and in the right way. (*J. Wells*.) *The little lady's maid*:—Syria was a kingdom near to Canaan. For some time a little girl lived in Syria. She may not have been more than eight or ten years old. We wish to say seven things about her. I. *THIS LITTLE GIRL WAS A JEWESS*. She belonged to the best land and the best people. What advantages she had! In this respect you are equal, yea, superior to her; Canaan and the Israelites then compared with England and the English now. A complete Bible and a Saviour who has come. To whomsoever much is given, of them much shall be required. II. *THIS LITTLE GIRL WAS A SLAVE*. Think on her sad condition. Forced away from her land, home, friends, and parents. Many children have been in the same circumstances—Rome, Greece, America. Some even in the present day—Madagascar and Africa. "Slaves cannot breathe in England." Why? Education. Government. Above all, the Gospel. Should you not believe it and love it? III. *THIS LITTLE GIRL WORKED AS A SLAVE IN THE HOUSE OF NAAMAN*. She was in his house, and waited on his wife. A lady's maid. From this we learn that, though young, she was clever, and did all her work well. Imitate her in these things. Never be careless about what you do. Try to read, write, spell, &c., in the best way. In after-life you will then do things easily and well. This will be a great comfort to yourselves and others. IV. *THIS LITTLE GIRL WAS VERY KIND*. Here was kindness to one who had not been kind to her. This was the spirit of Jesus. Hear Him and see Him on the cross. It should be your spirit. You cannot have it without a new heart, any more than there can be a stream without a fountain. Because the little maid had the one, she had also the other. He who gave her a new heart will give you one. Ask Him for it. V. *THIS LITTLE GIRL WAS EXCEEDINGLY INTELLIGENT*. This is how she reasoned: Elisha, who, by the power of God, could raise a dead body to life, could also, if it pleased God, restore a diseased body to health. Wonderful reasoning for a little girl. Learn to put things together in your minds. Do this with your school lessons; when you are reading books, looking at persons, watching the birds flying, and the ships sailing. You will then be not dull, but clever, and so be able to push your way through the world. VI. *THIS LITTLE GIRL DID A GREAT AMOUNT OF GOOD*. Naaman was delivered from his leprosy, and likewise from his heathenism. Besides, the whole narrative has been used by thousands to illustrate the Gospel, by which multitudes have been saved from sin to holiness. Similar results have been produced by a single book, tract, action, or word. You can all do good; do it every day. VII. *THIS LITTLE GIRL WAS HIGHLY HONOURED*. By the attention she received from so many in Syria; by obtaining a place in the Bible; by having thousands speaking well of her, as we have been trying to do. Her case illustrates the text, "Them that honour Me, I will honour." Go ye and do likewise. Speak for God, like her. Speak for others, and especially the suffering, like her. (*A. M'Austane, D.D.*)

The faith of a little maid :—We are deeply attached to this impulsive officer, of sterling character but many faults, and to the little maid who, though a caged bird, sang so sweetly the songs of Zion that she led her master into the liberty of the sons of God. 1. See, then, one whom God determined to bless. Naaman was a heathen. Naaman was living in Damascus, a city which had stood for some 1100 years, and was enriched with the wealth and splendour of empires. God wanted a witness in that great city; and so this heathen general, dwelling in all the luxury of that great capital, became the object of God's peculiar favour. He was certainly one of fortune's favourites. Everything had gone well with him. He was a man of many victories. By him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria. This popular and successful man, who had gained all the world could give him, was the man God determined to bless. 2. But mark the mysterious means adopted. Strong measures were necessary, for such favourites of fortune are not easily won. First of all, Naaman was smitten with leprosy. What we think our greatest troubles often prove our chief mercies. But there was to be trouble and disaster in another quarter. A quiet country village on the borders of Palestine is disturbed by a sudden alarm. A band of Syrian horsemen is rapidly approaching. The peasants flee in terror and hide in the hills; but some are captured, and amongst them a little maid. And her friends, when they hear of it, wish that she were rather dead than the prey of the infidel. But God was working His purpose out. These two desolate homes were not a work of wantonness, but a part of the Divine programme of blessing. 3. Consider now the special instrument used. We love to dwell upon the scene in Naaman's home. The little maid soon found out that there were sore troubles in the world besides her own, and her heart was at once drawn out in sympathy with her mistress. It must have seemed like a nightingale's song from a distant grove, heralding the advent of spring. It was a gleam of sunshine breaking in upon a night of hopeless gloom. Naaman's house was full of idols. Sacrifices and libations without stint had been offered to gain the favour of the Syrian gods. And all had been in vain. But now this Hebrew child tells of a prophet who can save, of certain healing to be had in her own land of Samaria. No one could doubt either the sincerity of her confidence or the genuineness of her sympathy. It was the candid, artless statement of a truthful child, and it carried conviction to all who heard it. It reached the ears of the King of Syria, and he determined to act upon it at once. We see here the permanent results of early religious training. This captive maiden, because she had been taught to know and trust God, was so strong in faith that she was the means of bringing salvation to the house of her captivity, and of raising up a testimony for God which rang through the whole land of Syria. 4. But see the peculiar character of a child's faith. It is concrete and objective. It was the prophet who filled her whole area of vision. Though she knew well all about God's dealings in times past with her nation, her view of religion was summed up practically in this: the prophet that is in Samaria can raise the dead, heal lepers, or do anything. It is a splendid testimony to Elisha's character and influence, that he had awakened such confidence in the soul of this little maid. There is something wrong in the teacher or preacher if he cannot enlist the enthusiastic love of children. How simple and how real a child's faith becomes when the substance of the teaching is the living Christ! It is specially easy, alas! to inculcate error—to develop superstition instead of faith—false confidence in images and relics and human priests, rather than trust in the unseen Saviour. When father and mother can do such wonders, it is obvious to their simple minds that God can do greater wonders still, dealing with laws, and touching secret springs of influence unknown to the wisest men. This little maid was confident that Elisha could and would heal her master. It was nothing to her simple, generous faith that his disease was incurable, and he himself outside God's covenant. Surely a bigoted, sectarian child is one of the most unnatural and most odious monstrosities to be found on earth. Alas for England, if such a spirit ever prevails in those elementary and public schools which form the nursery of the nation. Oh for more of the child-spirit among Christians! "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Genuine faith in a real God and a real heaven makes the whole Church one. 5. And notice how far-reaching may be the influence of the most insignificant child of God. This captive maid would have been looked upon as the least influential person in all Damascus. Her simple faith was the means of winning her master, who became a living witness to all Syria; and, by her bright faith, she has been preaching to millions of Bible students for nearly three thousand years. When Naaman left

Damascus, he took with him treasures amounting to about £12,000 sterling. But he had with him also what was of infinitely greater value—the prayers of the little maid. Oh, children of God, live up to your high calling! In this, the land of your exile, you are only strangers and pilgrims. Confess it. Declare your faith in heaven, and your acquaintance with One who is able to save to the uttermost. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*) *The captive maid* :—The rich and the poor meet together. The mighty and the ignoble, the monarch and the slave, are, after all, near companions on the pilgrimage of life. Naaman the Syrian, mighty and honourable, is a dweller beneath the same roof with the little captive maid of the land of Israel. I. We notice, **HER RECOGNITION OF GOD IN PROVIDENCE**. She might have looked at the dark cloud of adversity hanging over her, and failed to discern a gleam of light; but she believed that the God of providence was behind the cloud, and would disperse it in His own good time. She had the conviction that God had directed, and would still direct, her steps. Is not her example a pattern to believers? The captive maid does indeed reprove and exhort us, in our mistrust of God in providence. Christian experience may well be tested by the Christian precept which enjoins us, as believers, to be “careful for nothing” (Phil. iv. 6). Afflictions, trials, disappointments, rightly regarded, would help us in the application of this test. We might safely reason thus: If we cannot commit the ordering of our earthly way to our Father, who hath loved us, and “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus” (Eph. i. 3); if we cannot confide in His wisdom, and trust in His goodness, under the trials and afflictions He may send us, have we not reason to examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith at all? Assuredly the measure of our faith in the God of grace will find no uncertain index in the measure of our faith in the God of providence. II. We notice, secondly, **THE USEFULNESS OF THE CAPTIVE MAID IN THE HUMBLE POSITION SHE OCCUPIED**. We see in her an illustration of God’s employment of simple means to accomplish mighty ends. How great is their folly who despise the day of small things! There is no station so humble, but God is able to find in it those who may render valuable service in His Church. Humility of circumstance, when attended with humility of character, especially commends a man as a fitting co-worker with God. “Not many wise men after the flesh,” &c. (1 Cor. i. 26–29). Let us beware of the delusive thought, which paralyses so much Christian exertion, that our station is too humble, our sphere of influence too circumscribed, to allow of Christian usefulness. III. As a concluding remark on the history of the captive maid, we notice **THE INESTIMABLE VALUE OF HER PIETY, BOTH TO HERSELF AND OTHERS**. This lesson may be commended to us in a twofold form. It may remind us of the value of a pious servant in every household, and of the value of piety to every servant. It is recorded of the Rev. Henry Venn, that he often thanked God for a pious servant; and he once said to his children respecting her, “Ruth is my servant here; but if your father is found at her feet at the Great Day his place will not be a low one.” Happy the servant who, by a life of piety, so “adorns the doctrine of God her Saviour,” as to win from those whom she serves such a testimony of her worth! (*C. Bullock.*) *A young captive* :—In the story of this Syrian girl there are some things which may suggest thoughts of sympathy with girls nearer home. I. The first suggestion is that of a **CHILD’S HELPLESSNESS**. We often say, “as helpless as a child.” The child of our story was a girl—an orphan girl, so far at least as she was bereft of the parental care—and she was a slave-girl. Thus the child of the Syrian household stands before us in a situation so pathetic, and seems to plead for her little sisters of our own time. II. The second suggestion of the text is of another kind, namely, a **CHILD’S HELPFULNESS**. Helpless as she was, the little maid of the story helped her master to the recovery of health, and the knowledge of God. Now the basis of her helpfulness was her religious training. She could help man, because she knew God. When they carried her away captive she could sing them the Lord’s song in a strange land. This child knew the Psalms better than some of us know them, and some of Naaman’s servants got the girl now and then to chant them. “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” It was as if they had brought an angel in their train when they carried that godly child to Syria. (*Samuel Gregory.*) *The little captive maid* :—I. **GOD CAN DO VERY GREAT THINGS BY VERY FEIBLE INSTRUMENTS**. The cleansing of Naaman from bodily leprosy was a very great thing. By means of it he was converted to the worship of the true God—a far greater thing. But, in all likelihood, had it not been for the little captive maid he would have died a leper and a heathen. II. **GOD CAN MAKE THE SINFUL ACTS OF MEN TO**

PRAISE HIM. Bringing this little maid a captive out of her native country was a sinful act. But she was brought into the household of Naaman, and God made her a means of unspeakable good to him. Very likely, after his conversion, Naaman proved a blessing to others. If so, she had a share therein. **III. WHITHERSOEVER WE GO, WE SHOULD TAKE OUR RELIGION WITH US.** This little Israelitish maid, though she was living in a heathen household, was not ashamed to own herself to be a worshipper of Jehovah. Many who are attentive to the outward duties of religion at home act like those who make no profession when they go among strangers. **IV. WE SHOULD LOVE OUR ENEMIES.** This little maid was a captive in Naaman's household. It would, therefore, have not been at all unnatural had she hated him. But, instead of that, she pitied him as a leper, and manifested her kindly feelings toward him by telling her mistress where he could obtain deliverance from his sad condition. The Lord, by His servant, the prophet Jeremiah, said to the captive Israelites in Babylon: "Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it." **V. THE MIGHTY OF THE EARTH SHOULD NOT DESPISE THE LOWLY.** The former do not know how greatly they may yet be indebted to the latter. No doubt, many a time Naaman, the commander-in-chief of the Syrian army, envied the robust health of a private. For that—could he have done it—he would cheerfully have given him his wealth and honours. But it was utterly impossible for him, in any way, to buy that unspeakable blessing. At length he obtained it, but he did so "without money and without price." (*T. Fenwick.*) *A helpful girl*:—The keeper of a lighthouse on the coast of Cornwall went ashore one day, and was seized and held a prisoner by a band of wicked men. They thought that thus they would prevent the lighting of the light, and ships would be dashed upon the rocks, and then they could get the spoils. But they forgot the little daughter of the lighthouse keeper. When it came time, all alone and frightened as she was, she climbed the long stairs and lit all the lights. Many of God's purposes are imposed in small agents for fulfilment. The Lord seems to delight in fulfilling His will by feeble instrumentalities. A child's hand can move the lever which launches a mighty ship.

Vers. 5-7. And the King of Syria said, Go to, Go.—*The problem of Naaman the leper*:—Naaman the Syrian was a brave, intelligent, resourceful, and successful soldier, but he was a leper. And that "but" was the fly in the ointment which made all his brilliant qualities of no worth. The problem was to remove the fly from the ointment before it was too late. The fact that Naaman was so capable and indispensable to his sovereign made the necessity the more urgent. The economist could not bear to see such magnificent plant lying idle. The patriot felt it grievous that the country should be deprived of the services of so valuable and loyal a servant. But the question was "How?" Leprosy was as incurable as it was incapacitating. A man might avoid it, but once within its toils he could in no wise escape. So every one thought until a chance word of an Israelite slave-girl reawakened hope. The little maid spoke with such confidence of the possibility, nay the certainty, of her master's cure, could he but be with the prophet in Samaria, that her suggestions became the staple of the conversation of the court, and finally reached the ears of the king. Her words carried such conviction that the courtiers found themselves actually taking the cure for granted, and proceeding to discuss the method by which it could be accomplished. On that matter everybody had his own theory. The problem is still with us. On every side are men and women of amiable qualities and natural ability, capable of estimable service in their day and generation, who, because of some moral defect, inherited or acquired, are missing their opportunity, and proving a burden to the commonwealth instead of a gain. Think for a moment not only of the personal suffering endured, but of the jeopardy in which the community stands, and the loss of service it sustains through the prevalence of the leprosy of impurity and drunkenness; of covetousness and gambling; of jealousy and falsehood; of hate and strife; of ostentation and laziness. The need of to-day then, as in Ben-hadad's Syria, is to cure the Naamans. Let us briefly glance at the suggested solutions of the problem. 1. The king's idea was to send the leper to the King of Israel. So the letter was despatched whose contents put the King of Israel in such alarm. "Am I God," said the perturbed monarch, "to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? But consider now how he seeketh a quarrel against me." This time, however, the shrewd suspicion of Jehoram was

at fault. The request was in good faith. It proceeded from a genuine expectation that if the cure was to be performed at all it must be by the king. In whom else would the requisite authority be vested? Quaint as the notion seems, it expresses a distinctly modern creed. For king read State, and you are in the twentieth century at once. Nothing is more remarkable, and in some respects more pathetic, than the rapid growth of the widely held belief in the power of the State as an instrument of reform. And without a doubt the State can accomplish much—much that was formerly thought not merely beyond its power, but beyond even its cognizance. It can restrain evil-doers, and reward them that do well. It can remove sources of temptation, adjust inequalities, and secure to every man a fair chance. It can alter conditions, and so modify habits. But its methods are slow, and subject to great alternations. Its chief instrument of immediate reformation is restraint, separation, stamping out. It keeps society healthy by shutting up the infected. The result of which is that, lest they should be found out, men cover up their leprosy and drive it below the skin. But they are lepers still. A change in the direction of a more equitable distribution of the results of industry would not in itself be a cure for covetousness. Prohibition of the sale of intoxicating liquors will not be followed by an immediate cessation of the desire for strong drink. The State has large and undoubted powers, but the best and truest advocates for the wide extension of its scope of action and administration nevertheless recognise its limitations, and disclaim on its behalf any attempt at usurpation of the prerogative of God, or of authority to remove the leprosy of sin.

2. To do Naaman justice, he did not set much store by the letter to the king. It was, of course, courteous and expedient first to present himself at the court. But his hope lay in an interview, not with Israel's king, but with Israel's prophet. So, as soon as he could, he relieved the king of the embarrassment of his presence, and turned the heads of his magnificent thoroughbreds to the humbler quarter of the city where dwelt the prophet. He had, of course, indulged in speculation as to the method the prophet would follow. The sequel shows how thoroughly he was mistaken. But Naaman's ideas still persist. The great feature in modern schemes of reformation is the attempt to preserve a man's self-respect, or, to use the expressive phrase we have borrowed from the East, "to save his face." If he is a leper, for pity's sake don't tell him so, or let him think that you think he is. Treat him as though he was not. Soon he will begin to think he isn't, and then he won't act as though he was. And then he won't be! So seems much current teaching. Further, it conduces much to a cure that a little ceremony and some symbolic act shall be introduced, with just a suggestion of magic or the occult! There is a growing trust in formalism.

3. There remains the suggestion of the unsophisticated and faithful servants of Naaman, and that was the way they had been taught to tread the way of humility and obedience. Consent to be, and to be treated as the leper you know yourself to be. Rid yourself of the idea that consideration is due to you on the ground of station, attainments, endowments, wealth, reputation. Consent to be just a leper, a vile leper. And then obey. Don't dispute the prescription, but follow it. Don't argue that, even if you agree to wash, it would surely be better to wash in the clear, limpid, and beautiful streams of Damascus than in the turbid waters of Jordan. Possibly Abana and Pharpar are all you think them to be. But Jordan is the stream chosen. It is a simple thing. Try it. Dip, dip seven times. (*F. L. Wiseman.*)

The pilgrimage:—This artless child-utterance opens unexpectedly to the diseased and despairing hero a door of hope—puts a new guiding-star into his midnight of darkness. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!" "Whosoever believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Yes; blessed be God, these and similar declarations are addressed to every spiritual leper in this sin-stricken world. As with the warrior of Damascus, so with them: they have a gracious "missive," a "letter of commendation" to the King of kings. There is a Greater than the greatest prophet in Israel, who can "recover them of their leprosy."

1. Naaman's first impulse, before setting out on his journey, was to go and tell his lord. Before he can adopt the suggestion of the young Hebrew, he feels it his duty, though the most exalted of Ben-hadad's subjects, to go to his sovereign, make him acquainted with his design, and receive the royal sanction. This reads us the preliminary lesson, regarding even the minor, ordinary everyday details of life, to be careful in observing its proprieties and courtesies. "Be courteous." "Let all things be done decently and in order," are alike moral and religious obligations. But is there not also a higher spiritual lesson here for the Christian

in his hour of difficulty and peril? When environed with perplexing paths and providences, and at a loss which to follow, swaying between the opposing forces of inclination and duty, may he not—ought he not, like Naaman, to repair to the King of kings—"to tell his Lord" of what is burdening his spirit? 2. Observe Naaman's departure and journey. "And," we read, "he departed" (ver. 5). His promptitude, in the true soldier-spirit of instant surrender to duty—"Go, and he goeth," is noteworthy. How unlike the case of many in spiritual things; who stagger through unbelief; allowing solemn monition and conviction to pass unheeded; conjuring up to themselves some supposed necessity for postponement and delay; resolving to set out on the pilgrimage at some time, but "not yet"; imagining the chariots and horses of salvation to be at their call whenever they wish, and their malignant leprosy a thing that may be safely postponed for a death-bed cure. As Naaman felt, so well may they, that restoration may be with them "now or never." The king said to the sufferer, "Go to, go." It is thus our Lord speaks. This is the Great Physician's prescription to the seeking soul, Wait not a moment; linger not in all the plain; confer not with any earthly adviser. Let the chariots be ordered. Haste thee; flee for thy life! "Go to! go!" for a long eternity is suspended on the resolve. 3. Let us note Naaman's reception. The journey is accomplished; the chief and his retainers have reached Samaria, the capital of Israel, situated on its steep hill; a city "which combined in a union not elsewhere found in Palestine, strength and beauty." Naaman sends one of his troop to the palace of Jehoram with the royal letter of Ben-hadad. The monarch reads it. Commencing, doubtless, with the wonted Oriental complimentary salutations, the perusal leads to a burst of indignant anger. It seemed little else than an insult; an arrogant imposition on royal credulity; the studied, designed occasion of a fresh quarrel. He sees in the letter only a pretext for drawing swords again, for anew ravaging his territories and deluging his valleys with blood. Alas! will the monarch of Israel—the head and ruler of the theocratic tribes—refuse to give glory to whom, as it specially became him to testify, glory is due? (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*)

Vers. 11, 12. *But Naaman was wroth, and went away.—Pride overcoming want:—* The great man and all his cortege are kept outside, and God's servant will not even come out, but sends the message, "Go and wash in Jordan." That uncourtly reception is no piece of vulgar arrogance, like the pride of a pope that keeps an emperor standing in the snow in the castle yard for three days, before he will absolve him. It is the wise dealing of that Divine Word. With soldier-like quickness of temper and pride, he flashes all at once into a blaze. The characteristics which offended Naaman, are the characteristics of God's cure for the leprosy of our spirits. They are its glory even though men may stumble at them. Look at them as brought out here. I. Note then, what in this man's eyes was a fault—what, to clearer vision, is a glory—**THE UTTER INDIFFERENCE OF THE GOSPEL TO ALL DISTINCTIONS AMONG MEN.** The community in the sickness of sin destroys all distinctions. There is a prince lying on that bed; there a stable-boy on that. They are ill of the same disease, which affects the man, not his office. They need the same treatment, and—thank God!—they get it from Him who is no respecter of persons. Such treatment is true to the fact of man's condition. For it is a fact that we are all alike in sin. In us all there has been and is a voluntary divergence and deflection from the line of right, which darkens a man's soul. "All the world is guilty before God"! You cannot refute, and you will not mend that old saying about man's condition. Let me put it into plain English. Whether do you think it matters most in your relation to God—yours and mine—that we are sinners or that we are cultivated people? Whether do you think it matters most that our hearts have started aside from Him and our hands have done evil, or that we can read Latin and Greek books and are scholars? There is something for you. If the distinctions on which you pride yourselves are worth anything, they will help you to apprehend and profit by God's gift. For this treatment of all men as alike sinners, is the precursor of as universal a mercy. All are alike in two facts—that we have sinned, and that Christ has died for us. And, therefore, some men turn away from it. There is the narrow gate! Plenty of room for you—no room for the load of adventitious distinctions that you carry upon your shoulders. And so "he turned, and went away in a rage"! And let me remind you how this superb indifference of the Gospel to all these distinctions of man from man, is its true glory, and has wrought wonderful things. The Gospel came into a world all

swathed in ligatures, all cleft into classes, parted from one another by deep gulfs which there was no bridging, where nations frowned at one another from their battlements, and caste and class and race and culture rent men apart from their fellows, and nothing but the grip of an iron hand and the false unity of conquest hold them together. The Gospel, the true democracy, came and struck the bonds from the slave, taught the sentiment of fraternity, gave a new word and a new thought to the languages of earth—"humanity"—made men and women equal possessors of an equal grace! "He turned and went away in a rage"! And the world turns, and will yet do so in all its peoples and classes—no longer parted, but blended in one faith and one Lord, to Him who is the equal Saviour to the whole race of men. II. We may draw from these words an illustration of what I venture to call THE NAKED SIMPLICITY OF GOD'S GOSPEL. He said, "Behold, I thought he will come, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and so by all that ceremonial he will recover the leper." And what does he get instead of all this? "Go and wash and be clean." It was very like a heathen, accustomed to muttered spells and magical incantations, whose whole religion clung close to the low levels of earth, whose gods and whose worship, whose hopes and whose fears were alike material, to crave for some external ritual of cleansing. It was very like a man to long for something visible and tangible for his wavering confidence to lay hold upon—some fixed point belonging to solid earth to which he might fasten the filmy frailty of his faith. It was very like God to contradict the desire and to give him instead—only a promise to grasp, and a command to obey, which was chiefly a test of his obedience, since common sense told him that water could not wash away the eating evil, and national pride rebelled against the pre-eminence of the river of Israel. The like apparent antagonism between men's wishes and God's ways meets us in the Gospel—and the like correspondence between God's ways and men's real wants. Christianity comes to us—or rather instead of that abstract word let us say Christ, who is Christianity, comes to us—trusting wholly and only to spiritual remedies. He, too, says "wash and be clean." The one power that cleanses is His blood for pardon, His spirit for holiness. The one condition of receiving these is simple faith in Him; all externals are nothing. And so people feel out of their element in a region thus purely spiritual and immaterial. The heathenism which is in all of us, the sense-bound materialism which sways us all, lays hold of the pure Gospel which Christ wrought and gives, and reforms it by tacking on to it an incongruous and heterogeneous appendage of rites and ceremonies, and by investing the simple ordinances which He enjoined with mysterious power. III. Then, there is connected with this consideration, and yet somewhat distinct from it, the other, THE UTTER REJECTION BY THE GOSPEL OF ALL OUR CO-OPERATION IN OUR OWN CLEANSING. The words of Naaman himself do not explicitly contain his refusal to do what was required, on the ground that it was so small a thing. But that was evidently in his mind, as well as the other grounds of offence; and it comes out distinctly in the common-sense remonstrance by which his servants brought their irascible master to reason. Men would be a great deal more willing to accept God's way of salvation if it gave them some share in their own salvation. But its characteristic is that it will have none of our work—not even so much as this man had to do in his healing. The Gospel rejects our co-operation just because it demands our faith. For what is faith? Is not an essential part of it the consciousness that we can do nothing, the forsaking and going out of ourselves, accompanying the flight to Him? The under side of faith is self-abnegation; the upper side is confidence in Christ. In like manner, remember that the same principle is further established because our faith is not the means of our cure, but only the bringing of our sickness into contact with the means. God's love in Christ, Christ's perfect work of reconciliation, Christ's Spirit poured out—these be the energies that heal; our faith is but lifting the eyelid that the light may fill the eye, but opening the door that the physician may enter. And, therefore, because there is not a crevice in the whole process where self-trust can creep through, because from beginning to end God is all and man nought, our hearts rebel. We do not like to be paupers. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The Syrian leper*.—I. THE CAUSES WHICH INDUCED NAAMAN TO REJECT THE REMEDY PRESCRIBED BY ELISHA. 1. He expected a direct communication of supernatural influence (ver. 11). 2. He sought, in the means appointed, that virtue which belonged to the promise of God (vers. 10–12). 3. He shrank from the humiliation involved, as he conceived, in the use of those means (vers. 12, 13). II. THE UNREASONABLENESS OF HIS CON-

DUCT. 1. It was not for him to dictate the method of his recovery. 2. He ought to have tried the means before denouncing them. 3. He should have sacrificed his feelings to his good. The whole case teaches:—1. The influence of self-government. 2. The value of faithful counsel. 3. The advantages of religious knowledge. (*Homilist*.) *The commonplace*:—This irritation of Naaman is so natural that it hardly requires any words of explanation. We recognise in a moment what vexed him so, just because we have been so often vexed ourselves. Naaman expected a striking and startling cure. He knew how the Syrian magicians would conduct themselves; they would come forth in procession muttering their incantations, and moving their hands in mysterious and magnetic fashion over the sufferer. Something of this kind, no doubt, Naaman was expecting when he rode up in state to Elisha's door. Then came Elisha's message, "Go and wash in Jordan"—go and do something that any man could do. I. THE WIDESPREAD IRRITATION AT THE COMMONPLACE WAS FAIRLY MANIFESTED IN THE CASE OF NAAMAN. I think I need hardly remind you of another Bible story where the most intense dislike makes itself manifest. "Is not this the carpenter's son? Do we not know his brothers?" It was with such words that the Jews discredited Jesus. Like Naaman, they were intensely irritated with the commonplaceness of this Messiah. It was a prevalent belief among the Jews that the second Adam would come in full-grown manhood like the first. They had the convenient habit, which we all possess, of forgetting the prophecies they wanted to. Suddenly, in some effulgence of glory, perhaps from the secret of the Temple, Christ would appear. They were looking for some spectacular performance, like Naaman when he came posting to Elisha. Then Christ was born in a little hillside village, and he wrought with Joseph who was a village carpenter, and he played with his comrades in a village street. But to come nearer home, and think of ourselves. Are we not all prone to the same irritation? Think, for example, of how we regard our newspapers. A man takes up his paper with a feeling of expectancy always, and almost always lays it down with a feeling of disappointment. We say, "There is nothing in the newspaper this morning—nothing;" and so we throw it down. What we really mean is there is nothing startling, nothing to thrill us, and hold us by its tragedy. For every morning there is the record of birth in it, the echoing music of new created life; every morning there is the record of death in it, with its untold sorrow and its unimagined fears. "There is nothing in it." Is that vain vexation not akin to Naaman's when he was bidden by Elisha to go and wash in Jordan? Does it not indicate it is very hard to realise the value of the ordinary? The fact is, we are half savage at our heart yet, and we have all the savage's delight in glaring colours. I cannot help thinking, too, that much of man's world-weariness, much of the disappointment that middle life brings with it is connected by very real, yet subtle, ties with this deep-seated vexation at the commonplace. When we are young we all dream heroic dreams. We are all going to be soldiers, sea-captains, car-drivers. We start from childhood, as Naaman started from Syria, not knowing anything, but seeing glorious visions. Like Naaman, we are bidden go wash in Jordan. Our joys have nothing remarkable about them; they are just the joys of every one else in the terrace. Our sorrows have nothing spectacular about them. There are a thousand hearts that have been torn like ours. We are not such geniuses as we once thought we were. Matched with the great world we have come to find our level. My point is that the wrong handling of that discovery is at the back of half the disappointment of maturity, at the back of half of its sin, and of its drunkenness and its divorce. How many men turn away in a rage from life's plain duty, not because it is difficult, but because it is dull. And in our Christian experience, for we are here under the banner of Christ as Christians, have we not known something in our Christian experience of Naaman's disappointments? I think that many men come to Jesus of Nazareth as the commander of Syria came to the prophet Elisha—we come because we need Him. We come because of the leprosy of sin. We have read such wonderful things about that great revival moving in the very heart of Wales, that we come all eager with glorious expectation. God forbid that I should even hint that these expectations are disappointed; He is able to save even to the uttermost. But when we come and cannot see Him, when we hear a voice that says, "Go, wash in Jordan," when instead of swift miracle there is only plain command that we have heard from our childhood, when instead of great deeds there is dull and dreary service, have not men, not to say women, been moved even against Christ with this feeling that animated Naaman? You must resist that feeling, you must

fight it down. To turn away from Elisha in a rage was a very poor and pitiable thing; but to turn away from Christ Jesus in a rage is the one fatal act of a man's life. II. THERE ARE FEW THINGS MORE DANGEROUS THAN THIS DISLIKE. Let me indicate to you three very plain reasons that make it so perilous to cherish this irritation. 1. Will you remember, first, that the commonplace is the warp and woof of life? It is the material out of which our days are made. Take yesterday; think how you spent it till sunset and evening star, and you have the record of a thousand ordinary things. The fabric of our common days is commonplace. We waken, we eat, we work, we pray—God grant it—and we sleep. We go through the dull routine of daily duty; we have our little undistinguished share of trial. One of our modern novelists says a wise thing about greatness, that sadly outraged and mismanaged word. Greatness, he says, is to take the common things of life and to walk truly among them. No matter how stirring your life may be, it will be a failure if you have never been awakened to the glory of the usual. There is no happiness like the old and common happiness—sunshine, love, duty, the laughter of little children. Only a fool could think that yacht or motor-car was to be laid in the balance with these abiding things. 2. Then the commonplace, remember, is God's preparation for the great. It prepares us to meet great hours when they come. Simple obedience to a very plain command, for us as for Naaman, is the path to glorious hours. What did our Lord mean in that parable when He makes the Master say, "Be thou ruler of ten cities"? What did He mean when He said, "Out of thy mouth I condemn thee, thou wicked servant. Take from him the pound and give it to him that hath ten pounds"? He meant that the capacity for royal government, the power to rise to great situations and play the king, was rooted in the brave and faithful handling of the commonplace and ordinary pound. It is always so. Trace back the failure that makes all the city talk, and you will find its roots in ill-regulated years. All a man's hope for a radiant to-morrow lies in his use of a commonplace to-day. If you cannot be faithful now when all is dreary, there is little hope of any victory then. 3. Think how Christ insists upon the commonplace. We all wish, do we not, to follow Him? The more I study Christ's life the more I am impressed by the value He sets upon the ordinary. He took a common lily that grew in tens of thousands, and He said, "Not even Solomon, in all his glory, is arrayed like one of these." He took a commonplace child—not over clean perhaps, but with such eyes—and said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." For Christ there was a whole universe within the mustard seed; for Christ there was a revelation in the sparrow. Instead of fretting like Naaman we shall say, "Yes, Lord, because Thou biddest me, I will go and wash in Jordan seven times." (*G. H. Morrison, M.A.*) Behold I thought.—*The danger of preconceptions*:—Naaman had heard of a man who could cure his leprosy,—so he thought out how this would be accomplished: He made a plan in his own mind, as we see in the eleventh verse. The great mistake that we have made is, that we thought we could find out a religion—we could make one. So we have set our inventiveness to work, and we have said, God must be thus and so. Religion must surprise by showing the unexpected way of doing things. Religion is not a condition of our *a priori* thinking. The religion of the Bible never professes to meet us half-way, to do half the work if we will do the other half. Man would rather be flattered and commended, and it would be pleasant to him to hear the old prophets say: "Thou art a clever man, and thy astuteness must be most pleasing to God and His angels; thou hast found out the secret of the Almighty; by thine own right hand hast thou captured the prizes of heaven." Who would not be pleased by such commendation? But it is never given. The Bible pours contempt upon the thought which preoccupies the mind, and has no blessing but for those who are poor in heart, meek, lowly, contrite, broken in spirit, childlike, who say with a tender loving reverence, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to be and to do?" "To this man will I look." How expectation is excited by that introduction. Who is the man? "To this man will I look, who is of a broken and contrite spirit, and who trembleth at my word." Let us apply this suggestion to two or three of the most vital religious inquiries. 1. Apply it to the subject of inspiration. Instead of coming to the Book without bias and prejudice, simply to hear what the Book has to say for itself, we come with what is termed a theory of inspiration. As if there could be any balance between the terms, as if in any degree or sense they could be equivalent to one another. Theory equal to inspiration—inspiration equal to theory. The word theory must be an offence to the word inspiration! Inspiration is madness, ecstasy, enthusiasm,

the coronation of the soul, the mind in its widest, grandest illumination. Now open the Book. The Book is as nearly not that as it is possible for a book to be. What is the consequence? The Book is not inspired, because, forsooth, it does not answer our preconception of inspiration! What does Naaman say about the Book? "Behold, I thought it would be all written in polysyllables; I expected it would be all sublime, with an unprecedented sublimity too grand for our language, and would need a language of its own too superior for our atmosphere, and would need an air created for itself." And, behold, it is so simple, so graphic, so abrupt, so social. What you have to do with the Bible is to read it straight through, without saying anything to anybody. You have not to dip into it just as you please, you have to begin at the beginning and read through to the final Amen. In doing so you have to be as fair to the Book as you would be to the meanest criminal that ever stood at the bar of justice. When you have read the Book thus straight through, there is no reason why you should not form a distinct opinion about it. Nowhere will the Book take away your power of thought, reason, and judgment. It will rather challenge you at the last to say, "Who or what say ye that I am?" The same suggestion has its application to the great question of Providence. Here, again, we lose much by the indulgence of preconception. Given God and man. God, almighty, all-wise, and man as we know him to be, to find out the course of human history. "Behold, I thought it would be thus. The good man will have a bountiful harvest every year. The praying man will see every day close upon a great victory of life. Honesty will be rewarded, vice will be put down, crushed, condemned, by the universal voice. The true man will be king, and the untrue man will be hated and despised. Virtue will lift up her head, and vice will pray some sevenfold night to hide its intolerable ghastliness." That was your preconception, what is the reality? Sometimes the atheist has a better harvest than the man who prayed in the seedtime, and prayed every day until the autumn came. Sometimes the righteous man has not where to lay his head. Sometimes the true man is put down, and the false man is highly exalted. Our preconception is so different from this that we feel the violence of a tremendous shock, and possibly may turn and go away in a rage. Let us consider and be wise. What business have we to invent a theory of Providence? We cannot tell what a day may bring forth. We have already forgotten all the incidents of yesterday, to-morrow we are never sure of: we are of yesterday and know nothing. What ought to be our mental attitude and moral mood? The Christian ought to stand still and say, "Lord, not my will, but Thine, be done. What I know not now I shall know hereafter. I am but of yesterday and know nothing. Thou art from everlasting to everlasting, and Thou knowest all the system of compensation which Thou Thyself hast established. In the long run Thou wilt justify thy providence to man." 3. What applies to Inspiration and to Providence applies, of course, to the greater question of Redemption. We had thought that the plan of redemption would be this or that, and all our preconceptions fail to reach the agony of the cross, and the mystery of a sacrificial death. You see the redemption once and the vision passes, you feel the mystery, and after that the life is transfigured and becomes itself a sacrifice. If the cross has got no further than your invention, your intellect, your range of scheming, and theorising, it is not a cross, it is but a Roman gallows. There is no theory of the heart. There is no theory of love. There is no theory of a mother's sacrifice for her ailing and dying child. You must feel it, know it by the heart, see it by some swift glance of a similar spirit, and after that you will have an understanding that cannot be put into words and phrases. As in the case of Naaman, so now. The surprise of Christian revelation is always in the direction of simplicity. Naaman had a programme, Elisha a command. Naaman had a ceremony, Elisha a revelation. Naaman required a whole sheet of paper on which to write out his elaborate scheme, Elisha rolled up his address into a military sentence, and delivered his order as a mightier soldier than Naaman. Let us burn our theories, inventions, preconceptions, prejudices, and our forecasts about God, Providence, Inspiration, Redemption, and human destiny, and throw ourselves into the great arms, asking only to be and to do what God would have us be and do. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Dangers of preconception* :—The history of Naaman, his position, disease, journey to Elisha, and the cure, so different from what he had expected. 1. IT IS NATURAL FOR US TO HAVE PRECONCEPTIONS. We instinctively form opinions in advance. Picture the looks of a person whom we expect to meet, or of a place we expect to visit. Imagine how

we will feel and conduct ourselves under certain circumstances. So with Naaman, who had pictured an impressive, dramatic scene. The prophet would come out to him, the great soldier, and there would be much ceremony and pomp. Men have conceptions. 1. Regarding the strength of conviction for sin. Wait for a certain kind and intensity. It is to be something that will take away sleep and appetite, that follows them day and night. They are to endure horrors, to be almost irresistibly driven to the Saviour. Is not this a widespread idea? 2. As to the manner of conversion. It is to be as if the heavens opened. Overwhelmed with joy and ecstasy. Not saved unless they pass from death to life shouting. 3. As to religious experience. A certain intensity of enjoyment. Clear and constant faith and joy, unmoved serenity, like that of some one else they knew. 4. As to the manner of dying. Clear mind, sight of angels, shouting. And yet the conviction, conversion, and religious experience may be altogether different from what we imagined or wished it to be. II. WHY WE SHOULD NOT BE INFLUENCED BY PRECONCEPTIONS. 1. May lose our souls by waiting for what will never come to us. Naaman had perished had he relied upon his way alone—had he not renounced his preconception. Such conviction, such conversion as you desire, may not be yours. 2. We will be rendered unhappy if we fall short of them. Better not have them. We will be unhappy because our conversion is not like that of some one else. We can't feel like others—we can't shout, and therefore think there is something wrong with us. Many good men are miserable because they have not the experiences of others. 3. God works along the line of individuality and temperament. No two look, or love, or are impressed alike. We are not cast in iron moulds. One man is reached through his reason, another through conscience, another through his emotions. One is alarmed by the thunders of Sinai, another melted by the Cross on Calvary. A man's conversion and religious experience are much like his temperament. There may be sudden light, like Paul saw, or it may come like dawn. He may speak in the tempest, or in the "still small voice." There may be ecstasy, or only a sense of quiet peace. 4. Our conceptions have nothing to do with our salvation. God's own way for each, not for others to say what it shall be. Nothing in the Bible about kind of feeling—mode of conversion—a command to all—"Repent"—"Believe." You are lepers exposed to death, Christ the only physician, repentance and faith the only means of salvation. Do not be deceived by false ideas. It is Christ or death. Call upon Him, obey Him, and you will be saved. (*J. L. Elderdice.*) "*I thought*":—At the outset, however, we will have a few words for believers. Preconceptions of what ought to be the Lord's mode of action are very injurious, even to those who have true faith in God, and yet they are very frequently indulged. We map out beforehand the path of Providence and the method of mercy, forgetting that the Lord's way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known. This folly is seen in believers sometimes in reference to their way to heaven. They are like the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt. There is a straight road to Canaan, why are they not allowed to take it? Does not Providence often perplex you, and run counter not only to your wishes, but to your deliberate judgment? That which for many reasons seems to be the best does not happen to you, while that which appears to be distressingly injurious overtakes you. Your forecastings do not come true, your day-dreams are not realised, your schemes for life are not carried out. The like fault will arise in connection with our prayers. We pray believingly, and an answer comes, for believing prayer never fails; but the answer comes in an unexpected fashion and not at all as we thought. We prayed God to bless our family, and, lo, our wife is taken away, or our child sickens. "*I thought*," say you, "but oh, how different from my thoughts!" Yes, but how much better than your thoughts! You shall find that the Lord is doing for you exceeding abundantly above all that you asked or even thought. God is enriching you by your poverty, He is healing you by your sickness, and drawing you nearer to Himself by driving you further away from creature confidence. We have cried with Jacob, "Joseph is not, Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me." May God save us from that cruel "*I thought*," which torments us and belies our God. On the other hand, we sometimes make flattering forecasts of the future which are equally untrue. "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong." That was David's thought. Everybody else might be tossed to and fro, but he would be calm and confident. Now listen to the sequel: "Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled." Like any other man, he feared, and his firm mountain

turned out to be only a rolling cloud which fled before the blast. Preconceived notions of the way of salvation are great hindrances to the very existence of faith in the minds of the unconverted. I. HOW COULD YOU EXPECT TO FIND OUT THE WAY OF SALVATION BY YOUR OWN THOUGHTS? There are a great many things which men can discover, and the inventiveness of the human mind about earthly things appears to have scarcely any limit; but, with regard to heavenly things, the natural man has not the faculty of discerning, and never did make a discovery yet, and never will. Whatever is known of God is made known by God. Upon the face of nature the existence of God is written, but we look in vain for any indication of a plan of salvation. Jesus alone is the Saviour: how can you imagine that His way of saving can be known to men except as He has revealed it? If you could discover the way to heaven for yourself, why has the Lord given you the Bible? That inspired volume is a superfluity if your thoughts are to appoint the way of salvation. I will ask every awakened sinner here who has been settling in his thoughts what the plan of salvation ought to be, what peace his thoughts have brought to him? How far have your inventions brought you? They have led you to physicians of no value; they have caused you to spend your money for that that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not. II. SHOULD THE PLAN OF SALVATION BE ARRANGED ACCORDING TO YOUR WILL AND JUDGMENT? You are a sinner and want pardon, your nature is depraved, and needs renewing: should the plan of forgiving and regenerating you be shaped to please your tastes and whims? Should the great Lord of mercy wait upon you, and consult you as to how He shall work out your salvation? As a reasonable man I beg you to tell me, has not the Lord an absolute right to dispense His favours as He pleases? Shall He not do as He wills with His own? You yourself perhaps are a man of generous spirit, and you relieve the poor; but suppose a poor man should dictate to you how he should be helped, and in what shape you should bestow your charity, would you listen to him for a moment? "No," you would say, "I am not bound to give you anything. If I give, I give freely, but I am not going to be bound by rules which you may choose to make." Beggars must not be choosers. Now, you, O unsaved one, are a beggar needing alms of God. Do you intend to dictate to the Most High how and in what manner He shall give His salvation to you? Act not so foolishly; as a reasonable man renounce such an idea. Furthermore, do you not think that, if the plan of mercy were left to your choosing, you would become very self-conceited? If you had the sketching of the system of salvation, and it were well done and fully accomplished, you would say, "My methods were admirable! Am I not wise? Did I not arrange it well?" Moreover, consider, O man, you who desire to sketch for yourself the road to heaven; do you not see how you derogate from the glory of God? Did the Lord ask your judgment when He made the heavens? when He digged the channels of the deep? when He poured out the water-floods? when He balanced the clouds? when He set the stars in their places? With whom took He counsel? who instructed Him? Who was with Him to stretch the line or hold the plummet? He Himself, in the old creation, made all things by His infinite wisdom; think you that He needs your aid in the new? In the work of redemption, did He ask your help or take your counsel when He made the covenant of grace and fixed it by firm decree? III. BY WHAT RULE ARE YOU ABLE TO PRECONCEIVE THAT PLAN? You refuse to be told what that plan really is, because you think you know beforehand. Now by what rule have you judged? I will tell you in one word. The most of sinners conceive the plan of salvation to be what they wish it to be. They thought; but their wish is father to their thought. But you assure me that you have conceived the way of salvation according to your understanding. Well, then, you have conceived it wrongly to a certainty, for what is your understanding compared with the understanding of God? "Well," say you, "but I have received my ideas from my parents." Well, then, who were your parents? for that is a very great point in such a case. Who were they, and were they saved? Suppose your parents were lost, is that a reason why you should be? Nobody here who has a blind father would consider it his duty to put his eyes out by way of honouring his parents. If a man were born of a crippled parent, and God blessed him with all his limbs and faculties, he would not consider himself obliged to limp, or use a crutch, or twist his foot. We have an old proverb that if a man were born in a stable he need not be a horse; nor should a man be of a false religion because of his family connections. If our parents were mistaken, that is no reason why we should be. We regret it for their sakes; but with the Word of God in our hands we do not intend to follow

them any farther than they were led by God. "Well," say you, "my idea of how I ought to be saved is gathered from what I have read and observed. I cannot submit to be saved by simple trust in Jesus, for I have been reading the biography of a good man, and I want to feel just as he felt: moreover, I noticed how my cousin was troubled in mind, and I observed that she had a very remarkable dream; and, beside, she obtained very extraordinary joys, and unless I have some of these I shall never believe." But, do you think that God is tied down to give to each penitent the same line of experience? "Yes," says one, "but I judge by the general current of society, and the opinions that I meet in everyday life. I am a man of the world, and I form my opinion from men of the world." Then, for certain, you form a wrong opinion, for the mind of the world never was the mind of God, and never will be. "Ye are of God, little children," saith John, "and the whole world lieth in the wicked one." To form your opinion of what light is by sojourning in darkness is ridiculous. To fashion a notion of liberty from the prison-house, or to describe life by observations made in a charnel-house, would be absurd. IV. HOW WOULD IT BE, SUPPOSING YOUR THOUGHTS WERE THE FACT? Let us examine the matter. You have thought, perhaps, that you ought to be saved by undergoing a ceremony. Suppose it were so; it would be a calamity. For it would give pardon without penitence, forgiveness without a change of heart. It would be a very unfortunate thing for you, if by external operation guilt could be removed, because it is clear that your evil heart would remain, and, therefore, you would still have no communion with God, and no fitness for heaven. You must be born again, you must believe in Jesus; these are the necessities of your nature if you are to be happy. True faith in Jesus works by love and purifies the soul: that is the Lord's way, accept it, and forsake your own thoughts. You wish, perhaps, to be saved by good works; self-righteousness is your thought. Alas, if this were the way it would be an impossible way for you, for you cannot perform good works. If you can, why have you sinned at all? Perhaps you think that God might as well pardon you at once and have done with it; that is your plan. Suppose He did so. Suppose that He at once blotted your sin from His book, and there was an end of it; what peace would that give you? What security for the future? A God who could pardon without justice might one of these days condemn without reason. V. Let me ask you, then, DO YOU MEAN TO BE DAMNED FOR THE SAKE OF A WHIM? Do you mean to lose heaven and be cast into hell for ever for the sake of your proud fancies? For, oh, I assure you in God's name His plan will not alter for you. If the Lord should alter His gospel for you, then He must alter it for another, and another, and it would be as shifting as a quicksand. There it is; take it or leave it, but alter it you cannot. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" is always true, and the other side of the question is true too,— "He that believeth not shall be damned." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Man's thoughts and God's thoughts* :— 1. How often are these words employed with regard to the dealings of Providence. In the midst of mysterious dispensations which befall us, whether as individuals or as communities, how apt are we to impugn the Almighty's faithfulness, question the wisdom of His procedure, and set up our wills in opposition to the Divine. Is not this oftentimes the silent utterance of the misgiving heart,— "Behold, I thought"—it were better had such an event been ordered otherwise? What is the answer to these and suchlike unworthy surmisings? "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord" (*Isa. lv. 8*). To the eye of sense, however baffling and mysterious be the ways of the Supreme Disposer, it is not for us to "think," but to believe; not to question, but, like Job, to kneel and to adore: not to say, "Behold, I thought" that Thy judgments are right, and I have been deceived; but, I know that they are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me: not, "I thought" that "all things are working together for good"; but, "I know" they are so. 2. But these three brief words admit of more solemn interpretation, and more solemn lessons still, if we connect them with the sinner and with an eternal world. Let us anticipate the scene. Let us conjure up some of those "thoughts" which, up to that moment, may have deluded and deceived, but which will then dissolve like a rope of sand. (1) "Behold, I thought," we may suppose one to say, "that I was as good as my neighbours. I saw no reason for curbing passion and leading an over-strict life. I brought myself to regard the tendencies and vices of a corrupt nature as pardonable weaknesses, too readily crediting the condoning verdict of my fellows, as they laughed at my scruples, and told me that there was no great

harm after all in indulging these failings and foibles—that I was but a child of Adam at the best, and that no perfection was to be looked for here.” And is not this the very dream which many are daily cherishing—the false and fatal casuistry which is luring them to destruction? They are content to measure themselves by themselves, and to compare themselves among themselves. With blunted moral sensibilities, and confounding moral distinctions, they invoke upon themselves the doom of the prophet—“Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness!” (2) Another, we may suppose, will then be ready to say, “Behold, I thought” I might with safety procrastinate. I thought I could presume on a strong pulse and vigorous arm and unwrinkled brow. I thought I had a long future yet to build upon; not an autumn-tint seemed to be on the leaf; the sun was yet far from the western sky; I was floating down the stream with arms folded, apparently secure in my barque, little imagining that the cataract was at hand. I was convinced of my folly, when I found myself suddenly in the swirl and vortex of the dark waters. I am here to bear awful testimony to the truth often listened to, but listened to in vain, that “as men live, so do men die!” And is not this, too, the daily reasoning of multitudes? Why, it may be asked, revert so often to this unwelcome theme of the peril of postponement? Just because it forms the submerged rock that has strewn the sea of life with more of mournful wrecks than any other. (3) We may imagine the avowal of another to be this—“Behold, I thought” that God would be too merciful to punish. “I thought” that He would never surely visit such stern retribution on the creature of His own hands; “I thought,” when I came really to confront His bar, that He would either modify His recorded threatenings, or else, perchance, by a great affluent exercise of His love, grant a universal reprieve and amnesty. “I thought,” when I gazed on His outer visible creation, I saw no hieroglyphic of wrath. I saw love pencilled on every flower; I heard it murmured in every breeze, sung in the chorus of birds, proclaimed by the gleaming sun by day, and serenaded by the silent stars at night. Moreover, in looking around me on the moral world, I imagined some dim foreshadowings might be seen of the Divine oblivion of sin and reluctance to punish. “Sentence against an evil work” was not, in the earthly economy, “executed speedily.” I saw, ofttimes, virtue languishing unrewarded, and vice raising unrebuked her brazen forehead. When the Almighty did these things, and “kept silence,” “behold, I thought” that He was “altogether such an one as myself!” To refute similar “thoughts,” to which, it is feared, multitudes are clinging, and who, in doing so, reduce the unchangeable Creator to a level with the vacillating creature,—it is enough, surely, to point to the Incarnation and Passion of the Divine Redeemer, and the awful lessons which cluster around them. (4) From another crowd in that great day of retribution, there will be heard the utterance of a more fearful “thought” still;—“Behold, I thought” that the whole world of spiritual realities was a myth—that religion was a falsehood—that God and heaven were illusions of fond fancy—that hell was a tale and nightmare of priestly terror—Revelation a repertory of artful and antiquated forgeries which superstition had palmed from age to age on a credulous world. “I thought” that there was light enough in my own intellectual nature to guide me. I heard the priests of the Temple—the recognised interpreters of the oracles of God—proclaim truths which were unaccredited and unauthenticated by any other testimony. External nature seemed to belie them. They spake of “the end of all things”; the dissolution of the existing economy; the coming of the Son of God in the clouds of heaven. I looked abroad on the material earth, with its canopy of firmament; it seemed to anticipate and echo my own sceptic thought—“Where is the promise of His coming?” All things continued as they were. Why practise a life of self-denial, as I see others do, on a mere peradventure? The visible testimony of the globe I live on is more reliable than the averments of some old parchment scrolls and devout dreamers. I shall take my chance of these alleged premonitions of coming wrath. Reason shall be the priestess of my altar, and Pleasure the enshrined goddess. Mine shall be the happy creed, of death an eternal sleep, and the grave a last, long home, whose slumbers no fictitious trumpet-peal of Judgment shall ever break! How many, in this age of rampant infidelity and unbridled licence, are deluding themselves with these very “thoughts”? The Divine injunction, with reference to those sceptic imaginations, is a message of tender compassion and love—“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy

upon him, and unto our God, and He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. lv. 7). (5) What is the great lesson to us all from this subject? Is it not now to take God at His word? Like Naaman, we "think," and pause, and hesitate, when the Divine injunction and exhortation is, "Only believe." (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *What bars the way*:—Naaman went to the prophet's door to tell him how to preach, and because the prophet did not take his lesson from Naaman, Naaman went home in wrath. My brethren, salvation is not cut to your pattern. Leprosy is not cured on your prescription; its true and only cure has laws, and rules, and obediences, and submissions, and sacrifices of its own that may all anger you to be told them, but it can be had in no other way. What do you say to humble yourself for once, and to try the thing that has hitherto most exasperated you to be tied down to it? All the chances are that your salvation lies not in the direction of your pride, and self-importance, and self-pleasing, and saving yourself of all trouble and pain. It may lie in the direction of far more secret prayer, far more self-denial, far less eating and drinking, far less talking, and far more submission of your opinions and habits of life to other men. It may lie in putting away all your present reading, and giving up much more of your time and attention to books that treat of the soul, its diseases, its discipline, and its salvation. I advise you to get over your temper, and to try that very way that you have up till now been so hot and so loud against. It will humble you to do it, and you are not a humble man; but if you ever come back from Jordan with your flesh like the flesh of a little child, you will be the foremost to confess that you had almost been lost through your pride, and your prejudice, and your ill-nature. (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*) *Pride must give way*:—Pride has to be broken; his lofty spirit must have a fall. One of the greatest oculists that ever studied the structure of the human eye was Von Grafe, who devoted himself, body and soul, to the hospital in the city in which he lived. His services were given to the poor. He took a delight in walking the hospital and in putting the results of his medical skill at the disposal of all. The Dowager Queen of Prussia was very anxious that Von Grafe should come and see her about her eyes; but he refused again and again. At last he gave way to the pleading of those at court, and left the hospital for Potsdam, where the Queen resided. A special train brought him to Potsdam, the carriages were waiting there to bring him to the palace. Upon his arrival there the lady-in-waiting of Her Majesty came to him and said that Her Majesty was not up yet, but "she says that she will receive you in an hour." Von Grafe took out his watch and said, "In an hour I will be in the hospital in Berlin." No such words had ever been spoken in the palace before. "Yes, in an hour, you can tell her, I will be back in my hospital." And she came, she hurried; three minutes did her, for Von Grafe had the royalty of manhood, while she had only the royalty of artificiality. And Von Grafe, after hearing and examining her, was back in his hospital in Berlin, with ten minutes to spare of his hour. Oh, you sometimes send word to God's messenger that it is not convenient just now; that if He will wait your convenience you will come and see Him; and Naaman just fell into that mistake. "Go and tell the prophet to come." Pride has to be broken, and God took a means, as He takes a means with all of us to break our pride, and tumble us in the mud, and make us glad to be saved. (*J. Robertson.*) *The two roads*:—There are two roads before us. The one steep, rough, narrow, hard, but always climbing steadily upward, and sure to reach its goal; the other broad, easy, flowery, descending, and therefore easier than the first. One is the path of obedience for the love of Christ. In that path there is no death, and those who tread it shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. The other is the path of self-will and self-pleasing, which fails to reach its unworthy goal and brings the man at last to the edge of a black precipice, over the verge of which the impetus of his descent will carry his reluctant feet. "The path of the just is as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble." (*Alexander Maclaren, D.D.*) *Superior sinners*:—I remember a gentleman taking exception to an address based upon the words of God concerning Jew and Gentile, that both are guilty before God. I remarked, "But the Word of God distinctly says, 'There is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God'" (Rom. iii. 22, 23). My friend replied, "Do you mean to say that there is no difference between an honest man and a dishonest one, between an intemperate man and a sober man?" "No," I remarked; "I did not affirm that there was no room for comparison between such cases; but my position is,

that if two men were standing here together, one an intemperate man and the other a sober man, I should say of the one, 'This man is an intemperate sinner, the other is a sober sinner.' " My friend did not know how to meet the difficulty, but answered, "Well, I don't like such teaching." Very quietly I replied, "Then I will make some concession, and meet your difficulty. I will admit that many are 'superior sinners' and that you are a superior sinner." I shall not soon forget my friend's expression of countenance when he had taken stock of the argument. (*Henry Varley.*) *Divine prescriptions must be heeded* :—When you take a prescription to the chemist you do not expect him to originate some medicine of his own imagining, but to make up exactly what the physician has written down. So we have not to discover some new remedy for sick souls, but to give them what the Great Physician has prescribed. His cure is infallible. *Seeking entrance at the wrong door* :—There are some even now who cannot make up their minds to come to God as sinners. Like the Pharisee, they go to Him with words of self-congratulation on their lips, thanking Him that they are not as other men. Pastor Spurgeon used to tell the story of a man who came to him in deep distress because he could gain no assurance of his soul being saved. He had been under religious influence from childhood, had read the Bible regularly, prayed, attended church, and lived a moral life, yet could not be sure that he was really a Christian—that he had been born again. He explained all this to Mr. Spurgeon, and asked him what he should do. "So you are not sure that you are in God's family, that you have entered His household?" "No." "Did you ever try to enter at the sinner's door? You know, in great houses there is a door for visitors, and a door for servants. Perhaps you have been trying to go in at the wrong door. If you go to God as a sinner, instead of as a good man, you will get in. None are refused who go in that way. It was sinners, not the righteous, Jesus came to call." The man went away meditating. He did not consider himself so great a sinner as others. But eventually he went to God pleading for mercy and claiming the promises made to sinners, and found peace. *Misconception as to what is primary* :—James Matthews tells that he called one time on an acquaintance in the West, where a young woman was boiling sorghum sap to make sugar. This is not a very cleanly business, as may well be supposed. Persons get daubed and begrimed with dirt and smoke and syrup, and hence are not in a very presentable condition. When the young woman saw "the minister coming," she hurried away from her work,—not to wash her face and hands, but to put on some brass earrings and a breastpin, to make herself presentable. "So," said Mr. Matthews, "there are people who are, anxious about dressing when they really need washing. They need to be cleansed up, and instead of that they go and ornament themselves." The first thing needful for a Christian is cleansing, not adorning.

Ver. 12. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel.—*Mr. Evil Questioning tried and executed* :—Proud Self and Evil Questioning are two of Satan's firmest allies, and two of the chief destroyers of the souls of men. Both of these adversaries attacked Naaman at once. I LET US DETECT OLD MR. EVIL QUESTIONING. He does not go by that name in the world. When he was brought up to be tried as a traitor, he had the impudence to tell the Judge that his name was not Evil Questioning at all. "My Lord," he said, "my proper name is Honest Enquiry, not Evil Questioning. There may be a man of the name of Evil Questioning, but I am not that person at all, and I hope it will never become a sin for a man to make an honest enquiry, and freely to ask the ground of any truth that is propounded to him. For, my Lord, if we are to take things upon mere credence, matters of faith upon the witness of men, indeed we shall soon make great fools of ourselves. My name is 'Honest Enquiry,' my Lord, and I think myself to be a very honest citizen." Since Evil Questioning goes by that name, then, and you will not, therefore, readily detect him, I must take you round to see if we can find him out by his speech, for it is not by his name, but by his prating, that you may know this fellow. Now, Lord Will-be-will, according to John Bunyan, in his allegory of the Holy War, kept an officer called Mr. Diligence, who used to go about listening under people's windows, catching every word he heard, and then he would bring to his Lord intelligence if any traitor were harboured within the gates. Let me play the part of Mr. Diligence, and we will listen a moment or two while we hear old Mr. Evil Questioning talk. He is a ready fellow, he can talk upon almost any subject; I heard him the other day preach a sermon upon doctrine. This minister had preached the truth as it is in

Jesus, and he had earnestly exhorted him to lay hold on Christ Jesus, but Mr. Evil Questioning put it thus—"Now, if there are so many to be saved, and there are a certain number of people that are not to be saved, then it can make no difference to me, I had better leave it as it is; for if I am to be saved I shall be saved, and if I am not to be saved I shall not be saved. Besides," said he, "it is irresistible grace that saves men. Now, if God sends that grace into my heart, then I shall be saved, and if he does not, why I cannot do anything, and therefore I may as leave sit still as try and do anything you know. I hear the minister say that faith and repentance are the gift of God; well, if they are the gift of God, how inconsistent he was to exhort me to believe and repent. The man does not understand logic. I shall not believe, I shall not repent. For, do you not see that it does not stand to reason that I should try to do either the one or the other, because they are both the gift of God." Thus the man satisfied himself, and while I heard him talking, I thought to myself, "I know you, Mr. Evil Questioning, well, and I know your father too; you are a descendant of the old fellow that was hanged in Bad Street, in old Bunyan's time, and I only wish I had the hanging of you again." He went another day to hear a preacher. He heard this preacher talking about the universal love, and the universal mercy of God; and this minister exhorted him to lay hold on Christ. But Mr. Evil Questioning is like a spider, he can suck gall out of any flower; so he went home and he said—"Well, if God is so infinitely merciful, then my sins are very little things indeed. I need not make all this fuss and bother about them. I will just go on in them, and no doubt God will not be hard with me at the last, but will just forgive those sins off-hand, whether I believe or not. And, besides," said he, "His mercy is so lasting, that when I come to die I will just say, 'Lord, have mercy upon me,' and then I shall enter into the kingdom of heaven as well as the best of them. And what is the use of that man exhorting me to believe and to repent, for he told me I might fall from grace? I might as well not begin, as begin now, presently to leave off, so I will wait till the end of my life before I begin, and then I shall run the less risk of falling from grace afterwards." Thus he reasoned with himself. Now whenever you hear that kind of argument, you may know at once there is a traitor there. You have discovered him. That is old Mr. Evil Questioning. Do not lose a moment, run straight up to your chamber, and tell the Lord that you have found out a traitor; ask Him to send at once a warrant after him, to arrest the fellow who is doing the utmost he can to destroy your soul.

II. We will go on to DESCRIBE HIM. Mr. Evil Questioning often boasts that he is the child of Human Reason; but I will let you know a secret or two about his parentage. Mr. Human Reason was once a very respectable man. He had a country-seat in the garden of Paradise, and he was then great and honourable. He served his God with all his might, and many a great and marvellous thing did he discover for the good of mankind; at that time he had a family, and they were all like himself, right good and loyal. But after the fall this man married again, and he took to himself one called Sin to be his partner, and this old Evil Questioning was one that was born after the fall. He does not belong to the first family at all. The first family was not so numerous as the last. There was one called Right Judgment born at that time. I hope he is still alive, and I believe he is. But the second family was very black and of tainted blood. They did not take at all after the father, except in one point, that at the time of the fall Mr. Human Reason lost his country-seat at Paradise, and together with the rest of the servants of Adam fell from his high estate and became perverted and depraved. His children are like him in their depravity, but not in their power of reasoning. They take after their mother, and they always have a predilection for sin, so that they "put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." The old gentleman never mentions his mother's name if he can help it. He always likes to boast that he is a lineal descendant of Human Reason, and so indeed he is, but he is a descendant of fallen Human Reason, not of Human Reason as it was in its glorious perfection. Now, all the powers of Adam were by the fall spoiled and ruined. They are there, but their bias was turned from that which is good to that which is evil, and now reason is not a trustworthy guide. Enlightened by the Spirit of God it can judge righteous judgment, but unenlightened and uninstructed, its bias is towards that which shall excuse man in his rebellion, which shall dishonour God, and which shall seek to raise the human race in proud rebellion against their Lord and Master. Understand then, that the parentage of Evil Questioning lies here; man's perverted reason meets with man's love of sin, and these twain do

join to bring forth these evil questions. It is not your reason that makes you talk against God, except it be your perverted reason. It is your love of sin that sets your reason on the wide-awake watch to try and discover some difficulty, and to make that a pretence why you should not be obedient to the heavenly command.

III. Having thus described this old enemy I bring him out to EXECUTE HIM. I must give you a bit from John Bunyan's Holy War, for it is so wonderfully suggestive, and so thoroughly worthy of its quaint author. Mr. Evil Questioning was detected harbouring four doubters, who had come to attack the town of Mansoul; when he was brought up, the indictment was that he had studied the ruin of the town of Mansoul, that he had feloniously and treacherously harboured four of the king's enemies, and that he had expressed in the hearing of one Mr. Diligence his wish that there were ten thousand such doubters in Mansoul. The old fellow when he was brought before the bar, first denied his name, and said his real name was Mr. Honest Enquiry, but when it was proved that he was old Evil Questioning, for Lord Will-be-will in the time of his evil estate had known him very intimately, then the old fellow pleaded "Not Guilty," and he began at once to utter his defence. "I answer," said Evil Questioning, "the men that came into my house were strangers, and I took them in, and is it now become a crime in Mansoul for a man to entertain strangers? That I also nourished them is true, and why should my charity be blamed? As for the reason why I wished ten thousand of them in Mansoul, I never told it to the witnesses nor to themselves. I might wish them to be taken, and so might wish well to the town of Mansoul. I also bid them take heed that they fell not into the Captain's hands, but that might be because I am unwilling that any man should be slain, and not because I would have the king's enemies escape." So Mr. Evil Questioning was true to his name, he kept on questioning till the verdict was given, the sentence of death pronounced, and carried into execution; for they hanged him, as Bunyan says, opposite the door of his own house at the top of Bad Street. Ah! but I am afraid that he is alive now, still living and going about: I wish therefore to bring him up again to trial, and we will see if we cannot bring some charges against him; we will empanel an honest jury, and I know what the sentence will be, we shall lead him out to execution. Men and brethren, if you have been questioning, instead of believing, if you have been making enquiries, instead of saying, "What must I do to be saved?" which is the only allowable question, let me first beg of you to drive out this Evil Questioning, because he is a traitor to the King of heaven. He does not wish your good, but your ill; more than this, he is sent by Satan to prevent your obeying the commands of God: he is come to betray you. And then, again, I beseech you turn him out, for he is a liar. All the conclusions to which he has brought you are false ones, and you know they are. Another accusation I bring against him is this: he has led you into a world of mischief. This habit of questioning has often blunted the edge of some sermon that you have heard; when the Word was coming right home to your conscience, this Mr. Evil Questioning has held up a shield and prevented the point from entering into your heart; besides that, have you not sometimes when under the influence of his delusive logic gone off to the place where your lust has been cultivated, and where your conscience has been lulled to sleep? I have one other charge, and then I shall have closed up the accusation. Men and brethren, this man must die, for he has been a murderer. Oh! what millions of souls has Evil Questioning sent to hell! There are many gates to hell, but this is one of the widest and it is one of the most frequented, because it is a respectable gate.

IV. Old Mr. Evil Questioning is the father of a large family, and John Bunyan tells you about HIS FAMILY. He says, he married one called Miss No-hope, she was the daughter of old Dark, and when old Dark was dead, her uncle Incredulity took her and brought her up as his own daughter, and then he gave her to old Evil Questioning, and he had by her several children. I will give you the names of them, because it shall be my earnest endeavour to fire a shot at them this morning, as well as at their old father. Their names are these—Mr. Doubt, Mr. Legal Life, Mr. Unbelief, Mr. Wrong Thoughts of Christ, Mr. Clip Promise, Mr. Carnal Sense, Mr. Live-by-Feeling, and Mr. Self Love. All these were the offspring of the father, and against all these a warrant was issued by the prince Immanuel that they should be hunted down, and every one of them given to the sword. Now, I will take the eldest son, there is Mr. Doubt,—Is he not the child of Evil Questioning? Why, you can see his father's image in his face. Another child is Mr. Clip-Promise. Do you know him? He does not doubt the promise, but he clips the edge of it. He makes out that it will

not all be fulfilled, only a part of it. Now there is a proclamation issued against Mr. Clip-Promise, that whoever will arrest him shall be greatly honoured, for he is a notorious villain, by whose doings much of the King's coin was abased, therefore it was expedient that he should be made a public example. And, Bunyan says, "They did take him, and they first set him in the pillory, and afterwards they tied his hands behind him and they whipped him through the streets of Mansoul, bidding all the children and servants whip him, and then at last they hanged him. And," says mine author, "this may seem very hard treatment, but when one considers how much loss the town of Mansoul may sustain by the clipping of the promises which are the coins with which they trade, I can only say I hope that all his kith and kin may be treated with the like severity." Oh! if you have attempted to cut the promise down, have done with it I pray you; and do take it as it stands in all its plenteousness of grace and all its sufficiency. Then there is Mr. Wrong Thoughts of Christ. Do you know him? Do you know what this fellow had the impudence to tell me? He said, "Oh! Christ will never receive such a sinner as you are." And when I had come to Christ, and He received me, he said, "Oh! Christ will not hold you fast." He will if you let Him, but then you will not let Him, for you are such a sinner He cannot hold you, and He will not. He has often made me doubt my Master's immutability or His faithfulness, or His power to save. But as far as I am personally concerned of late, I was able to seize him, and I have laid him in prison; I think he is dying of a consumption, for I have not heard much of him lately. Glad enough shall I be to have him buried once for all. There are two others whom some of you may have known, Mr. Legal Life, and Mr. Live-by-Feeling. I think they were twins. Mr. Legal Life sometimes gets hold of the Christian and makes him judge himself by legal evidences, and not by evangelical evidence. When the Christian has kept a commandment, Mr. Legal Life will say, "There, now, you live by your works." He knows that Christians would die by their works, and that the best of them can only live by faith. And when a Christian has made a slip, and has not kept the commandment, in comes Mr. Legal Life, and he says, "You are a lost soul, for you have not kept the commandment," though he knows right well, "that if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Yet he tries to make his life by the law, which no Christian ever did do or ever will do, for the law is of death and not of life. Then there is Mr. Live-by-Feeling, who makes us judge ourselves according to what we feel. If we feel happy and devout, "Oh," he says, "now you are in a blessed frame, the Master will accept you." Anon you feel unhappy, and dull, and cold, and dead. "Oh," says Mr. Live-by-Feeling, "you are no child of God, or else you would not be like this." Now catch both these fellows, if you can, and away with them; away with such fellows from the earth. One of the children of old Evil Questioning was Mr. Carnal-Sense. Now John Bunyan tells us, and I believe that he is right, at least I have his authority for it, and that is no mean authority, that there is a proclamation set up in the market-place at Mansoul, that whosoever shall bring Mr. Carnal-Sense, dead or alive, to the King Immanuel, shall be made a nobleman, shall have a right to sit at the king's table every day, and moreover, he shall be made keeper of the treasury of the city of Mansoul. There, you see, is a noble opportunity for you. There remains another one upon whom I must speak just for a minute. It is one called Mr. Self-Love. Ah, he is one of the biggest of the children of Mr. Evil Questioning. Now Mr. Self-Love was tried and condemned to die, but he had so many friends in the city, that they did not like to hang him outright. There was, however, a brave man in the king's army, a common soldier, a man that was used to sleep out in the fields at night, and to do much hard work—his name was Mr. Self-Denial, and coming out from the midst of the crowd, just when the prisoner was going to be acquitted, he said, "If such villains as these are winked at in Mansoul I will lay down my commission." He then took him from the crowd and had him among the soldiers, and there he was put to death. For this, the king made the common soldier a lord, and he was honoured in the town of Mansoul. "Though," says Bunyan, "there were a good many people in the town that did not like it, and they used to mutter at it, but they did not say much as long as King Immanuel was there. Oh, do you know that old Self-Love? You will never get rid of him unless you get Mr. Self-Denial to help you; unless you are ready to deny the affections and lusts, to pluck out right eyes, and cut off right hands, and to yield up one delight after another, that so self may be trodden under foot, and Jesus Christ may be all in all. There is one other child—I have left him to the last

—and then I have done with the family—Mr. Unbelief. “Now,” says Bunyan, “Unbelief was a nimble fellow.” He was often caught, but he was like the hero of the wicked Shepherd, he always broke his prison and was out again. Although he has often been kept in hold, he has always escaped, and he is every day about somewhere or other. (*C. H. Spurgeon*). *God’s way and ours* :—“And Naaman said . . . Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage” (2 Kings v. 12). We have here another illustration of the truth that a man himself is not necessarily the best judge of his condition, or of the course he should take to improve it.

I. OUR ATTAINMENT OF KNOWLEDGE, and of that practical wisdom which fits us for our earthly life. We cannot acquire this without laborious study, patient observation, repeated thought and consideration. The mastery of the elements of learning often seems to be wearisome drudgery, and if we do not “go away in a rage,” we are tempted to break off in vexation and to long for the “royal road” to learning and wisdom. But we must accept the method which God has prescribed for us, or remain in ignorance or folly.

II. THE FORMATION OF OUR CHARACTER. We wish to be strong and brave, to be characterised by fortitude and endurance, to be masters of ourselves, to be able to respect ourselves, and to command the esteem of the wise and good. We should like to be all that is admirable and, if possible, all that is noble in the character that we form. But how shall we build up within ourselves this honourable character? God has arranged that we do this (1) by the hourly discipline of the home, by parental and fraternal instruction, direction, correction, and even friction; (2) by the conscientious and careful discharge of daily duties, some of them of infinitesimal consequence; (3) by meeting and mastering the vexations, the minor difficulties and disappointments of our lot, as well as (4) by enduring the larger sorrows of life and gathering experience therefrom. But it may not be. “This is the way, walk ye in it.”

III. OUR ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM OF TRUTH. We want to know all that can be learned about God, about our spiritual nature and its capacities, about our human life and its possibilities, about the future world. We prefer to solve these great problems by the exercise of our mental faculties, by interrogating our own nature, by scientific researches, by logical and philosophical reasoning. But this is not the path that conducts to the gate of heavenly wisdom. We must become “as little children” if we would enter the kingdom of truth—must be docile, trustful, inquiring.

IV. OUR POSSESSION OF ETERNAL LIFE. Of all the great questions we ask, the greatest and most practical is this, What shall we do that we may enter into the life which is eternal, that life which is found in the favour, the likeness, the near presence of God? Here we are disposed to insist upon the course which commends itself to our own judgment. (*W. Clarkson, B.A.*) *God’s method of healing offensive to the pride of man* :—**I. THAT GREAT MEN ARE NOT EXEMPTED FROM THE EVILS WHICH ATTACH TO OUR COMMON NATURE.** From one class of evils riches might exempt their possessors—the evils of poverty, perplexity, anxiety, and embarrassment. But from other ills they have no exemption. 1. None from those which attach to the body. 2. None from those which attach to the soul. Great men like others are involved in the effects of the original transgression. **II. THAT THERE ARE NO EVILS ATTACHING EITHER TO BODY OR SOUL, WHICH GOD CANNOT REMOVE.** 1. He can heal the body. 2. He can heal the soul. **III. THAT THE SIMPLICITY OF GOD’S REMEDIES ARE FREQUENTLY OFFENSIVE TO THE PRIDE OF MAN.** Look at the case before us. What could be more easy than the remedy suggested? “Go, and wash in Jordan seven times.” But its simplicity was that which rendered it objectionable with Naaman. 1. It led the Jews to reject Christ. They desired the Messiah, as Naaman desired a cure. 2. It leads many to reject the peculiar doctrines of the gospel. The divinity of Christ, the doctrine of the atonement, and spiritual regeneration. 3. It hinders many from closing in with God’s method of justifying the ungodly. He offers a free pardon to men as sinners. The pride of the human heart rejects this, and brings a price—comparative innocence, works of righteousness, acts of charity, or tears of penitence. **IV. WHEN GOD’S REMEDIES ARE ADOPTED, THEY NEVER FAIL TO SUCCEED.** Look at the case before us, verse 14. In the cures by the brazen serpent, in the case of the man whose eyes were anointed with clay, in the conversion of St. Paul, of the Philippian jailer, of the great cloud of witnesses in every age, and especially of the present. Conclude—1. With an address to those who are insensible of their disease. See how the moral leprosy has affected all your powers. 2. Address those

who desire to be healed. The Jordan is flowing, the fountain is open. Come now, wash and be clean. (*Skeletons of Sermon.*) *Submission to God's way of salvation* :—Mr. Moody remarks : "A man dreamt that he built a ladder from earth to heaven, and when he did a good deed up went his ladder a few feet. When he did a very good deed it went still higher, and when he gave away large sums of money to the poor, up it went further still. By and by it went out of sight, and as years rolled on, it went up, he thought, past the clouds, clear into heaven. When he died, he thought he would step off his ladder into heaven, but he heard a voice roll out from paradise : 'He that climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.' Down he came, ladder and all, and he awoke. He said if he wanted to get salvation he must get it in another way than by good deeds, and he took the other way, which is by Jesus Christ." *Saved in an irregular way* :—When we were in Scotland during a former visit to Great Britain, there was an employer who became converted, and he then went to work among his employees and tried to lead them to Christ. He tried to get them to the meetings and succeeded, with one exception. The young man with whom he experienced the difficulty said, "If I am going to be converted, it shall be in the regular way—in the Presbyterian Church. As for those two impertinent Americans, Moody and Sankey, I am not going to hear them." His employer tried every way to induce him to come, but he did not succeed. We went into the north of Scotland, to Inverness ; this employer sent the young man to that city on business, thinking he might possibly there come to hear us. One day we were out on the banks of the river preaching. The young man happened to be passing, and seeing a crowd gathered, he wondered what was going on. He came to see, and the text pierced him like an arrow. The truth entered his soul. The man was saved ; he was converted in the very way in which he said he would not be converted. (*D. L. Moody.*)

Ver. 13. And his servants came near, and spake unto him.—*Naaman, a type of the world* :—The Syrian Naaman, whose story is contained in the chapter from which our text is taken, was a type of the world. As face answereth to face in water, so the heart of man to man ; and we cannot read this story without discovering in it the history of ourselves. It needs no argument to convince men that they are sinners. They all acknowledge it—at times with sorrow and grief. They feel the corruption of their own hearts, how incapable they are to live up to their own standard, much more to attain perfection. While they think they are still masters, they have become slaves, and sin holds them in an inexorable grasp ; its chains are iron. You have all seen such a man, perhaps the intemperate, striving with tears and sighs against the evil that beggars his family and ruins himself, and alas ! how often striving in vain. Then perhaps, when you have found how vain is human help, when you have learned by painful experience how true is that Scripture doctrine of man's inability to reform and save himself, you take up your Bible or you go to church, with the inquiry in your heart, if not on your lips, What must I do to be saved ? Go, wash in Jordan seven times, is the reply you hear. Repent of your sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ ; use the means of grace God has placed in your hands, the sacraments and ordinances of the Church. Like Naaman, you are wroth, and go away. You thought surely the prophet would come out to you. You expected, or at least you wished, some miraculous call—that there might be some wonderful interposition of Providence on your behalf ; that, like St. Paul, you might see a light from heaven or hear a voice ; that, like Cornelius, you might see a vision, or, like the wife of Pilate, dream a dream. So doing, you would give the true reason of your present refusal and delay. You would answer the question of Naaman's servants "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it ?" Simply to wash and be clean, simply to repent and believe, to seek grace in the waters of baptism, or in the broken body and shed blood of their dying Lord, or in the laying on of hands, gives them no credit. It adds nothing to their glory ; it undervalues, as they think, the Abana and Pharpar of their love. It mortifies their vanity and humbles their pride ; for it shows them that, so long as they refuse to look at the brazen serpent or to step into the troubled pool, so long they are not only wretched, but helpless ; so long must they be content to move on, great men and honourable it may be, but lepers still. It takes away all pretence for human merit ; it is mercy and grace, and not a deserved gift. It robs the rivers of Damascus of their pretended virtue, and remits the world to that fountain in which

alone Judah and Jerusalem may wash ; which, taking its rise in the blood of the Cross, has extended its cleansing streams into all lands. It is offered freely and without price, and men refuse to purchase ; it is the gift of grace, and they will not accept it. What we need is to realise the nature of our own hearts, and to feel that God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble, that obedience is better than sacrifice, and that the humble and contrite spirit is with God of greater price than the rivers of Damascus, or all that the wit of man can devise. (*G. F. Cushman, D.D.*) *Relation between master and servants* :—Naaman must have been a considerate master, and his servants must have been reliable men, or that sensible and timely remonstrance of theirs would have been impossible. It implied friendly relations on both sides. Among the ruins of ancient Rome was discovered not long since a broken urn containing some half-burned bones. They were really the ashes of one who, as appeared from the inscription on the tablet, had belonged to the Imperial Household, and whose virtues as a faithful, honest, and devoted servant the emperor himself had taken means to record. Near the “grey metropolis of the North” is a cemetery, where can be seen a monumental stone, erected by the late Queen Victoria to the memory of an attached and honoured domestic. The gifted John Ruskin once wrote : “There is no surer test of the quality of a nation than the quality of its servants.”

Ver. 14. Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan.—*Naaman's cure* :—The story of Naaman's cure is a brief, yet beautiful, episode in the current of Jewish history. It is inserted in order to convey an impressive lesson. That lesson is, God's particular interest in each individual. I. NOTE NAAMAN'S DISEASE. “He was a leper.” 1. There is a singular equity in God's administration. In every station of life there is some drawback. 2. This affliction was specially severe. Whether it was the direct effect of personal sin in Naaman (as in others), history does not say. The core of the calamity was this: it was incurable by art or skill of man. If there be anywhere a remedy for leprosy stored up in the cells of herbs, it has never been discovered. 3. Leprosy is an emblem of human sin. The Jewish prophets were accustomed thus to view it. For, like leprosy, sin gradually spreads its malignant virus through the whole man. It degrades, and corrupts, and destroys every part. And as leprosy, in olden time, excluded a man from temple worship, so still the leprosy of sin creates a gulf between man and God. “Your sins have separated between you and Me, saith the Lord.” II. NOTE THE SIMPLE PRESCRIPTION. The prescription was that he should dip himself seven times in Jordan. 1. The prescription was marked by great simplicity. The prophet's counsel was as plain as language could run. There was no difficulty on the ground of painfulness or expense. No course of treatment could be easier ; nothing could be pleasanter than to bathe in the cool stream. If, disregarding so simple a remedy, he should retain his disease, would not his soul be stung with remorse ? Would he not become a laughing-stock among his comrades ? And is not the remedy of the Gospel equally simple ? To repose a sincere trust in the Son of God is simplicity itself. “The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son, cleanseth from all sin.” 2. Yet the prescription was galling to Naaman's pride. It is pride that keeps men back from a frank confession of their sins. Pride prevents our making reparation for the wrong done to others. Pride hinders us from putting our whole trust in God's mercy. Pride blinds our moral vision, so that we do not see the baseness of our deeds ; and often the pride in us disdains to be saved on the same terms as thieves and harlots. “Pride goeth before destruction.” “The proud, our God knoweth afar off.” Humility is the first essential to salvation. 3. The prescription obtained all its value from the power of God. “My soul ! wait thou only upon God.” III. OBSERVE THE SPEEDY CURE. 1. The cure was almost missed. Seldom has a man been so near the margin of ruin, and yet been rescued. His soldierly pride had been a tremendous stumbling-block. He had actually turned his back upon the healing stream ; but the tender appeals of his own servants loosened the tenacity of his pride. An hour or two more, and his mettled steeds would have left afar in the rear the vale of Jordan, and death would have put his irrevocable seal upon him. The hour of opportunity was just about to close, the last days were fading in the west, when lo ! his self-will relented. He turned his face toward Jordan. 2. The cure was sudden. Life was a new experience, the dawn of a better day. Speedily his home was invested with fresh charms, filled with an atmosphere more sacred than before. He would bestow an earthly fortune upon

that little serving-maid. Already he foresaw the festive welcome that awaited him on the threshold of his palace. Already he heard the congratulations of his army, the congratulations of his king. The suddenness of his joy was a very peril to his life. The winter of his misfortune was in a moment transformed into summer glory. 3. Such gladness may be the symbol of our own. (*J. Dickerson Davies, M.A.*) *The cure of Naaman*.—But in studying our subject of the cure of Naaman, let us note: I. THAT HE GOT TO THE WRONG HOUSE. In the community there are other houses which are strong beside those which seem so, which are strong on invisible and Divine lines. In estimating the forces which make for "the health of my people," we must not leave out of count the most effective of all—those homes, whether rich or poor, where God is honoured, His laws observed, His name revered, His love enjoyed. These are the homes which are the health-givers of the community, the places from which the Divine and vitalising leaven works which is to leaven the whole of the body politic. You cannot enumerate the salvatory forces of the world and leave the man of God out. He may be overlooked or sneered at, as he sometimes is, but the fact remains that if he is true to himself, to his fellows, and to the God whose commission he bears, he is one of the uplifting forces, and one of the strongest. Remove all such prophets, vocal or silent, and try to get on without them. Leave in those forces which work in the same direction, such as healthy writers and philanthropic institutions. They will run on for a time, like a coach slipped from a railway train; but at length there will be a slowing down, a stop, then a rush back down the incline to crash and wreck. Such men keep God's waterway open, keep it from silting up; they are dredgers, if you like, true ministers, serving men's best interests by bringing to bear God's truth and power upon the world's life. II. WHEN HE GOT TO THE RIGHT HOUSE, HE LOST HIS TEMPER. "And he turned and went away in a rage." Now, what is it that is the matter with Naaman? It is that which is the fruitful mother of hindrances to God's doing. His best for men—"the pride of life." Elisha's method is "not good enough," not great enough. Naaman wants something which shall be more on a level with his position, something more adequate to that society standard which is, of course, the unquestioned standard. By no means is Naaman without his modern representatives. Thousands of proud men do not understand, or will not recognise that, for the most part, the power of God moves on lowly levels. It is in a peasant child and in lowliest circumstances that He incarnates Himself when He comes for the world's salvation; Divine and authoritative wisdom comes from the lips of the working man of Nazareth. His throne of redeeming power and grace is a Cross, and Naaman joins hands with those to whom the Cross is folly or a stumbling-block. Yet it is the power of God unto salvation. It is a pity when a man holds his head so high that he cannot see God at his feet. It is both a pity and a mistake when a man resents and forsakes the methods of God's communication with him because they are "not good enough"; when the river of their spiritual Israel and of their healing becomes too small, or too something; when that Church or agency which has, under God, laid the foundation of our home, and has fostered all that is best in our character, is forsaken and ignored, and that not for conscientious reasons, against which, of course, no objection could be raised, but simply from motives which rule in the social world. It is a pity and a mistake both, when the birthright is sold. Abana and Pharpar are not better, for healing purposes, than all the waters of Israel. III. NAAMAN HAD THE GRACE AND GOOD SENSE TO FALL IN WITH THE DIVINE ARRANGEMENT. New heavens and a new earth opened to Naaman when, coming up out of the Jordan waters, he found that his flesh was as that of a little child. The steadily accumulating mortal burden of years is lifted off, and he swings free, clean shoulders; the east wind fades out of the sunshine; the fatal flaw is remedied. How he must have longed to go post haste to tell his wife the good news! It says much for the natural goodness of this fine character that at once he recognised the God who had healed him. He will take home two mules' burden of earth on which to erect an altar that he may always sacrifice to Jehovah. And so the story which begins in a heathen land, in a palace, in pride, in leprosy, finds a resting-place, for the present, in Israel, at the prophet's humble door, in a clean heart and a right spirit, in cleanness and sweetness and health. It is on parallel lines with the whole Gospel story, with all the saving operations of the Almighty as we know them. The law of entrance is the humbling of our pride; the lintel of the door is low, and we must bend our heads to get in. But when we do bend our heads and enter in, the oppressive burdens are removed, the soul is cleansed

from all its defilement of flesh and spirit, and we go free into all the gracious liberty wherewith God makes His children free. (*J. Feather.*) *God's plan of salvation*.—We propose to take the narrative as illustrative of the great truth—the necessity of conforming with God's plan to secure salvation. I. THAT GOD'S PLAN IS CONTRARY TO THE EXPECTATIONS OF MAN. So it was here. Naaman had been thinking within himself how the prophet would act. "Behold, I thought," &c. Men would cross the ocean and wander in far-off lands in search of wisdom, they would survey the heavens, and descend to the lowermost parts of the earth, but God's word of life is nigh unto us, in our mouth and in our heart. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." II. THAT GOD'S PLAN TENDS TO HUMBLE THE PRIDE OF MAN. Naaman thought there was some royal cure for a royal patient, and an honourable way to deal with such an honourable man. How indignant he felt when the prophet only sent a messenger to him, and the remedy prescribed being so humiliating too. So God's plan of salvation is mortifying to the pride of the sinful heart. The Pharisees were offended at the Saviour for making no distinction between them and the sinners. We find Peter, having received the consent of the Master, walking on the sea; but the moment he began to trust himself, and feel safe in the power of his own strength, the boisterous winds and the treacherous waves frightened him, and, conscious of his weakness, he with gladness entered the ship, and was "safe in the arms of Jesus." The gate is strait, and the road is narrow, but he who is humble and obedient is led at last to safety and bliss. III. THAT HE WHO TRULY FEELS HIS NEED WILL ACCEPT GOD'S PLAN. Though Naaman was at first most seriously disappointed, and turned away in a rage, yet on the counsel of his servants, strengthened by his own need and his inward conviction, he complied with the directions given by the prophet. When the sinner really feels sin a burden, and believes that the meek and lowly Jesus is powerful to remove it, he will not quarrel with the method of salvation, but will come at once and cast his burden down, and when he truly feels his guilt he will come to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. IV. THAT CONFORMITY TO GOD'S PLAN WILL SECURE A MAN'S SALVATION. Naaman obeyed, and he was accordingly cured. "His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." 1. Some means are generally used. The miracles of the Old and New Testaments are similar in this, that means were used in bringing about such wonderful deeds. 2. The means were not sufficient in themselves apart from the blessing of God to cure his leprosy, but as it was God's plan it effected its purpose. 3. Naaman's cure was instantaneous. What a happy moment for him when he discovered that the cause of his anxiety, trouble, and humiliation was removed. So the man who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, and flees to Him for refuge, is from that moment free from condemnation. The Son hath made him free, and he is free indeed. 4. His cure was complete. His flesh was made like "the flesh of a little child." So he who accepts God's plan is wholly renewed, created anew in Christ Jesus. (*H. C. Williams.*)

Vers. 15, 16. Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.—*Naaman's money*.—This chapter contains valuable lessons concerning money; how the servants of God ought to use and to regard it. Some of our Lord's weightiest and most solemn sayings were addressed to those who had much money, or were spoken with reference to them, as in the case of the rich fool, the man clothed in purple and fine linen, and the young ruler. The prominence given to this matter in Scripture need not be wondered at; for, 1. Money represents the good things of this world, which all are prone to love too well (Mark x. 22). 2. As the Lord Jesus has bought us, He claims absolute proprietorship over us (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20), and therefore His claim extends to our money. 3. The manner in which a man acknowledges or repudiates this claim is, to a great extent, decisive of his spiritual condition (Matt. vi. 21). In the latter part of this chapter the money test is applied to three characters, Naaman, Elisha, and Gehazi: I. NAAMAN LONGS AT ONCE TO PROVE HIS GRATITUDE, convinced that he was indebted to the God of Israel for the cure of his leprosy (Ps. cxvi. 12; Luke xvii. 15). He was wealthy, and to offer Elisha a present was the most natural way of showing his thankfulness. It is well when thank-offerings are common in families, when special gifts are offered for special mercies received by individual members of the household; thus the young are trained to recognise God's claim on their possessions. But, more generally, a man who, through the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, has been

cured of the leprosy of sin, will (if he has the means) pour his grateful offerings into the Lord's treasury (2 Cor. viii. 1-5). II. But ELISHA FIRMLY DECLINED THE GIFT. He feared lest Naaman should imagine him to be influenced by selfish considerations, and to be exercising the prophet's craft for filthy lucre's sake. He must not leave Naaman with false impressions as to the principles of the worshippers of the true God. Bishop Patrick says: "It gives great authority to a teacher of virtue, not to be covetous." This example shows what an all-pervading principle true piety is; it leads its votary to make the glory of God his supreme end, and to shape his course accordingly (cp. Acts viii. 20; 1 Cor. ix. 15). III. TRIED BY THE MONEY TEST, GEHAZI IS FOUND WANTING. He had every religious advantage: the constant attendant of Elisha, the witness of his miracles, the hearer of his words, the observer of his godly life, he ran well for a time. Covetousness, the love of money, is his ruin (1 Tim. vi. 10; see ver. 20). It made him a liar, and his lie made him a leper (Prov. xxi. 6). Compare the cases of Judas and Demas. (F. F. Goe, M.A.)

Vers. 18, 19. In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant.—*Compromise*:—Naaman returned to Elisha; full of gratitude and generous recognition of his own error and Elisha's successful power, he and all his company came and stood before him. He paid a willing and a grateful homage to the God of the conquered Israelites, and like Saul of old, with the same generosity and openness and natural disposition, he was compelled at once upon conviction to own the errors of the past, and to declare his firm intention of reformation for the future. His next act was the offering a gift to Elisha; free and generous in heart, he noticed the poverty of the prophet, and he wished to relieve it. On the refusal, Naaman put forward the request to be permitted to have two mules' burden of earth: for, said he, "thy servant shall henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." This request is based on the old impression that the Syrian earth was sacred, as especially belonging to the land that God had blessed. Of course he might have taken as much as he pleased, but the gift of the prophet, in Naaman's eyes, consecrated the burden. He probably intended to raise an altar in his own land, on which to sacrifice to the true God, from an impression of the high sanctity of the country in which Elisha ministered, and the healing Jordan flowed. It is a singular circumstance that there was a strong impression amongst the heathen nations that earth conveyed a sanctifying influence. The Mahometans value the smallest modicum of earth from Mecca; and the Jews themselves have so high a veneration for the earth of Palestine, that they count it their highest privilege to be carried from the land of their sojourn to be laid in the dust of their fathers. If this is impossible, their custom is to have small portions of the sacred earth, which is placed under the head of the corpse. This is the case at this day among the Jews in England, so that earth is brought over in quantities continually to be laid in and consecrate their graves. Elisha seemed to imply that Naaman might do as he wished, and take what he would. Are we right in dissembling our real opinions and faith in God in deference to the opinions of another, even though he be our superior and master? Is the permission of Elisha to extend to all cases of difficulty such as the one in which Naaman was placed? or is there some exceptional condition in the position of the Syrian, which excepts the applicability of his case to our own? But we must find the solution to this difficulty in the peculiar kind of difficulty which Naaman represents, and for that purpose we must look back to the traits which I have mentioned. We have seen throughout that there was a consistency as well as a peculiarity in his condition. He was like thousands around us—honest in heart and in intention; earnest-minded and desirous to do their duty; nevertheless, as being in the position of recent converts or of young beginners in religion, such men are placed in positions of difficulty and peril: everything depends on the sincerity and integrity of their purpose and the simplicity of their mind. These were determined in the case of Naaman by certain traits of character. The disposition must be tried by the standard of these traits before the conduct of the individual can be included within the limitations to which Elisha's permission was granted. Here lies the point of the question. Once sufficiently show that the character be exactly that of the Syrian captain—so simple, so sincere, so little open to second motive, so fresh and earnest in its efforts to know and serve God, and Elisha's permission takes effect. If God be satisfied with the integrity of our purpose, if with a full and fair opportunity of knowing our character, a religious teacher grant us a

permission to act as Naaman wished to act, we are safe in doing it; but where such conditions do not exist, we take that permission to the peril of our souls. But I will take some cases in order to illustrate more clearly my meaning. A young person in the bosom of a family, whose parents have called forth from him deep sentiments of respect and affection, has a strong conviction that a certain course of conduct, hitherto pursued under the sanction and wish of those parents, is wrong, and can only be persevered in to the danger of the soul, and at the expense of duty to God. It may be that a certain circle of society in which such a man has hitherto moved bears to him an irreligious aspect; or an amusement has been indulged in which appears in a more than doubtful character. It is difficult, in such cases, for a young person to appear to set himself up as a teacher by breaking away from what his parents have hitherto esteemed harmless. May he continue the suspected practice in deference to the wish of the parent, and despite the violation of his own sense of right? or is he bound at once to denounce the practice, and virtually those who defend it, by suddenly giving it up? Where there is an entire simplicity and honesty of heart in such a person towards God, may we not feel that, in deference to Elisha's permission, he had better still pursue the suspected course? And may we not feel that where a religious adviser can discover such traits of simplicity as the prophet might have done in the Syrian, that he may grant the permission to succumb externally to the prejudices and mistaken notions of others who stand in the relationship of authority. And that for many reasons, partly lest vanity or an over-strong expression of egotism be developed in the young; partly lest sincere intention, though mistaken judgment, might be so hindered in such a manner as to check religion or improvement in the character altogether. If, however, there be a swerve from perfect integrity of purpose, such advice would be out of place. Our own infirm nature and the world outside us offer so many temptations for lowering the standard of truth, that we should live in continual anxiety lest the conditions laid down above be not applicable to our case. Then the bowing in the house of Rimmon would simply be an attempt to serve God and Mammon. (*E. Monro.*) *No compromise*:—I have often found myself wishing that this incident was not recorded in the Bible, not because it is not possible to offer a guarded justification of Elisha's consent to what was undoubtedly an insincere action, but because under the shelter of his prophetic authority so many deeds of moral cowardice and hypocrisy have contrived to exist. To any one who is a believer in a progressive revelation, and who does not expect to find in the Old Testament as final a statement in regard to what is right and what is expedient as in the New, it is sufficient to say that this sanction of Elisha to Naaman's request belongs to an early stage in the education of the conscience. So long as a man believes in polytheism, or so long as he believes nothing, no moral problem presents itself. But when a man is driven to the conviction that this faith and worship alike are false and idolatrous, and that they hold back mind and soul from the recognition of the true God, clearly a serious problem in ethics arises. May a man with such a belief render in the temple of idols even an external and formal homage to that from which his whole soul revolts? To what extent is it possible here to have what we call a compromise? Is it right that any man should act so as deliberately to suggest that he believes what he does not believe, and supports what he cannot support? Is it right that action should speak one way and conscience another, and that attitude should be allowed to contradict the sacred conviction of the mind? This is the problem. Naaman has enough, shall I say, of the spirit of the diplomatist left to foresee the situation that must arise when he returns to his duties at the Court. He tells Elisha that on no consideration will he ever again offer burnt-offering or sacrifice unto other gods, but only unto Jehovah. But on those occasions when his duty binds him to accompany the king to the idol temple to worship, and when he is required to bow down in formal homage to the idol of the house, he prays to be forgiven this offence against truth and conscience. Elisha reassures him, and tells him to go in peace. Now, one can easily see how far this view of compromise might carry a man, and how disastrous it might become to sincerity and reality in matters of religion. It is, if I may say so without any offence, the perilous theory that is inseparable from a State establishment of religion. We have had, for instance in England, eminent examples of kings, such as Charles II. and James II., who were Romanists at heart, and even avowedly. Their position, however, as head of a Protestant Church, required them to take an oath denouncing their own most cherished convictions. They did it. I daresay they would have said that they

bowed down in the house of Rimmon. But clearly the one horrible result of such an attitude is that you can no longer believe that any one speaking in that capacity does honestly and heartily mean what he says. As soon as you begin to transfer the casuistry of diplomacy to the sphere of religion you inflict an irreparable injury upon the religious life. Men begin to make statements, sign creeds, wear vestments, and perform ceremonies which it is diplomatic to make and sign and wear and perform. And the suspicion soon ripens into conviction in the popular mind that even in the sphere of religion men do not act out of a perfectly sincere, honest heart, but having regard rather to what is expedient than to what is right and true. Unreality and insincerity may be, and are, objectionable everywhere. Nobody likes them in social life. They create in business life an atmosphere of distrust. But they are mortal to religion. If Christianity is not built upon conscience, it is a mockery. We are so often told of the harm that is done by being over-scrupulous—a temptation which does not appear so especially to beset the twentieth century—that we may do well to trace out a little further the education of the conscience. Elisha sanctioned this particular compromise, under which Naaman was permitted diplomatically to honour where conscientiously he abhorred. But now pass on to a piece of Old Testament literature which, as we know, was the product of a much later age. What was the view taken of the obligations imposed by conscience, and the possibilities of compromise, in the Book of Daniel? The Book of Daniel introduces us again to the problems connected with a State-established religion. Here is the narrative of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up, and to which all the nation was compelled by law to do homage. Now notice how convenient to the three Hebrew youths had been Elisha's sanction of compromise if they had only felt able to plead it. They were only required to bow down in the house of Rimmon. An outward and formal gesture of conformity was all that was necessary, and a man may keep his thoughts to himself. But during the interval it is quite evident the sense of the obligations due to conscience as a Divine monitor had developed. Compromise of the Elisha sort has become impossible, even contemptible. A man must avoid even the appearance of falsehood, and face the most fiery ordeal sooner than lend formal sanction to what his conscience and intellect condemn. That is an early part of the Book of Daniel. Later on comes an even closer parallel to the case of Naaman. For Daniel himself is a Government official, a State officer, as was Naaman; and what is required of Daniel is not a public overt homage to a false and idolatrous system, but merely to refrain from any conspicuous practice of his own forms of religious worship. Here surely is a proper case for compromise. As one in influence at Court, it will not be politic to resist the law. And, after all, no law could prevent his putting up silent petitions to Jehovah, though he were compelled for the time to discontinue a religious custom. But so inexorable has become the law of conscience that to cast a slight upon his own sacred convictions and a slur upon his own sacred convictions and a slur upon his own religion, to discontinue the public confession and worship of the God of him and of his fathers, is a thing now unthinkable. And it remains true, I think, that, in the sober judgment of mankind, Daniel's protest on behalf of liberty to worship God after his own fashion was not an impolitic act, diplomatically foolish, but an honourable and heroic deed of moral integrity. Well, now, the question will, I doubt not, arise whether Christianity strengthened or modified these later Jewish beliefs as to the sovereignty of conscience. I have always personally maintained that Christianity is transcendent common sense. When its principles came to be applied among people who lived under other governments, and in the presence of various idolatrous customs which had the sanction of the State, problems arose exactly similar to those presented in the Book of Daniel. We are all of us familiar with that popular pictorial representation of the fair young Christian maiden offered life on condition that she would drop the sacred bean into the censer of Diana. It was understood to be merely a formal compliance with a State custom, and she could preserve her faith and her life by consenting to this compromise. According to the diplomatic view of religion, she would have been entirely exonerated if she had been governed rather by policy than by principle. But the early Church, less confused, perhaps, by casuistries and doctrines of expediency than we are, was inflexible in its resistance to what used to be called in England, in later days, occasional conformity. The State censer of Diana remained empty, and the uncompromising Christian carried her clear, free conscience to the scaffold,

and died without a blot upon her escutcheon, or a stain upon her honour. And mark, it is vain to deny that it was this heroism of constancy that broke down the power of an established paganism, as it never would have been broken down if Christianity had consented to weak compromises. The clear dictates of conscience are the beliefs which require and deserve to be supported, even by the awful final argument of martyrdom. At the same time, we must fairly and frankly recognise that even then all Christian people did not take the same view as to what conscience demanded, and many people who would never have abjured the faith did, for the sake of what they would have called, I think, peace and social harmony, feel justified in doing things which to others were doubtful, if not criminal. So far I have been rather stating principles than dealing with the practical difficulties of their application. But I do not want to deny or to ignore those difficulties. There are plenty who say, "These principles are possible of application in the Church, but impracticable in the State." The great thing we need in the State is a *modus vivendi*. If the Daniels of Society insist upon their own personal convictions against the settled judgment of the general citizenship, Society becomes impossible. There must be give and take. The majority must rule, and the minority must accept its ruling, and cheerfully submit. To that statement of civic duty there is clearly something to be added. It becomes the problem of a wise State not to intrude into that sanctuary where a man's religious beliefs have their being, and not to seek to compel him to give direct sanction and support to what he believes to be error and falsehood. Of course, this is a modern principle of civic life. In Mr. Morley's classic discussion of compromise he has some very caustic things about the theory of what he calls the "plenary inspiration of majorities" and "the House of Commons' view of human life." We are familiar with the idea. If a man happen to be intellectually and spiritually built so that he is in a permanent minority in this country, he may, therefore, be compelled to contribute financial aid to institutions against which his most sacred convictions hourly protest. Political attempts to outrage religious convictions are few and far between, and, despite recent experience, they will become less and less frequent until it is recognised, as it must be recognised some day, that what is impolitic is not the resistance of the individual to laws that outrage his conscience, but the action of the State that can endeavour to put such laws into operation. But, men and women, there remains a larger and nobler cause to plead. The religion of Jesus Christ is the religion of no compromise. In this sense I mean: He asks all or nothing. Paganism would have given Him a place in the Pantheon among all other deities. It is impossible; He will accept no divided loyalty. When He speaks He expects to be obeyed. Lord, suffer me first to do this or that. No, no; Christ first, and this or that afterwards. No master was ever so exacting. The half-and-half life may succeed here and there; it is a deadly failure in Christianity. Christ's service is to command our uncompromising support. No man ever made his mark as a Christian who was not out and out. "Put on," said Paul, "the whole armour of God." To wear one piece of the harness, or two, is to invite failure, and it is to play at Christianity. Christ's will—the whole of it; Christ's teaching—the whole of it; Christ's blessed gift of life—pardon, sanctification, redemption, all He has to give and all He stoops to ask—the whole of it. No compromise. That is Christianity. God give us grace to seek Him and serve Him with all our heart. (C. S. Horne, M.A.)

The house of Rimmon; or, questionable conduct:—What is related in the context concerning Naaman may help us in some measure to account for these words. He does not appear to be a thorough-going, substantial, steady character; on the other hand, he is turned about by every wind. After having expressed his unqualified contempt of the waters of Israel, which he had no occasion to do, in a very short time he professes such attachment to the soil of Israel, that he begs two mules' burden of it to carry home with him, which is equally unreasonable. Surely, then, the man who could thus fly from one absurd extreme to another, in obedience to mere impulse, was not one from whom we should have expected great consistency of conduct. We should have expected the very reverse; we should have expected him to be weak, changeable, and undetermined—professing the highest reverence for God, and yet doing what he feared God would not approve of. Possibly the prophet made allowances for him on this account; he knew something of the instability of his character, still, he would hope the best concerning him; hence, instead of reading him a lecture upon the necessity of firm, consistent, uncompromising adherence to duty, he simply said, "Go in peace,"

trusting, perhaps, that as he became more enlightened in Divine truth, his loyalty to it would increase in proportion. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent; and no man needs to understand this more than God's prophet; for even the most excellent speech, if spoken at an inopportune moment, may produce a certain amount of positive harm. The conduct of Naaman was to some extent excusable. Had it not been so, it is not probable that the prophet would have said, "Go in peace." 1. He was but imperfectly enlightened in Divine truth. This must have been the case; for he was a benighted heathen upon whom the light of knowledge was only beginning to dawn. We read of no one about his person who could have instructed him, except, indeed, the little captive maid who dwelt in his house; but it is not very likely that she had the power to teach him a great deal, and it is still less likely that she had the opportunity of doing so. When a heathen is converted to Christianity in our own day, the missionary is not so sanguine as to hope to find him at once a fully developed Christian. He is glad to witness the beginning of the Divine life in his heart; he despises not the day of small things; he is content, if by months, or even years, of diligent instruction, he will grow into anything like the full proportions of Christian manhood. But we may look nearer home. When an aged sinner, who has all his lifetime been accustomed to do evil, comes under the saving influence of the gospel, we hardly expect great things from him. We know the terrible power of vicious habits, especially such as have been long contracted, and the immense difficulty with which they are overcome. Consequently we excuse divers imperfections in him which we should have deemed unpardonable under different circumstances. We need not wonder, therefore, that the prophet, while really disapproving of Naaman's conduct, should be disposed to say at the time, "Go in peace." 2. It may be that Naaman's patriotism led him to speak thus. In spite of certain shortcomings he was unquestionably "a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour." It appears that he was, in fact, the king of Syria's right-hand man. By his wisdom in counsel and bravery in battle, he had saved his country from the power of its enemies. His services were therefore essential to the well-being of his nation. But it is just possible, that by refusing to accompany the king into the house of Rimmon, he would have disqualified himself in the eye of the law for the post which he held. He may have reasoned thus: "If I decline to take part in this trivial ceremony, this bowing down in the house of Rimmon, I shall deprive myself of all my power to serve my country; and what real advantage after all will the truth gain by my consigning myself to a life of obscurity? Will it not be far better for me to retain my position—influence—power, when it can be done at so small a sacrifice, and employ them in promoting the welfare of my people and the interests of truth?" To a man in his circumstances, I think such thoughts as these would have naturally suggested themselves. Be it observed, however, that though Naaman may have been excusable, in consequence of the peculiarities of his condition, still you must not rashly conclude that all others are excusable, who may adopt a similar policy. The Jesuits hold that no act is blameworthy by which their own sect may be served. No matter how unjustifiable the act may be in itself, the object secured is a sufficient set-off. The end, they say, sanctifies the means. This is a most pernicious doctrine. Moreover, the conduct of Naaman himself, though excusable, was nevertheless extremely dangerous. 3. By going into the house of Rimmon, he might have relapsed again into idolatry. He might have been gradually, and almost unconsciously, led to give over sacrificing to Jehovah, and think of calling upon no other god than Rimmon, his old and first love. We have seen men who had indulged for years in certain vicious habits, mustering sufficient courage to renounce them at once and for ever. By one tremendous effort they broke their bonds asunder, and reached the vantage-ground of liberty. But these invariably found, that their safety lay in avoiding their former associates, their former haunts, their former ways, everything, in fact, that might have tempted them to fall back into their old sins. 4. By going into the house of Rimmon he set a bad example before others. He occupied a high position, he was popular among his countrymen, he was looked up to as a man of sterling worth and blameless conduct. It would have been impossible to estimate the influence he must have wielded, he could have had no conception of it himself, people whom he had never known, never seen, never heard of, watched his movements and copied his example. Have you ever thought of the responsibility by which power is ever accompanied? No

matter how trivial, how insignificant, the power may be, there always attaches to it a certain amount of responsibility. 5. Let us, therefore, dwell upon the following subject:—The evil of following a questionable course of conduct. I do not merely affirm that it is wrong to do what is positively bad—what is considered wicked by universal consent, but I maintain that it is wrong to do that concerning which we have any misgivings, that which we only suspect to be evil, that respecting which the heart entertains but a vague dissatisfaction. Consider that—(1) It degrades the conscience. That conscience of yours is a sacred trust, a precious inheritance; and no sacrifice should be deemed too great to be made for its preservation. A good conscience is better than gold, better than power, better than fame, for it puts man on a level with the angel, directs his steps in perplexity, and strengthens him to endure sorrow; while a bad conscience makes man a demon, leaves his ruthless passions without a curb, and ultimately sinks him down to the lowest hell. That man is utterly lost whose goodness is altogether dependent upon external influences, who has within him no sense of justice and honour by which to shape his conduct. This, however, is precisely the state in which men with depraved consciences find themselves. The law of the land, public opinion, worldly interest—these are the only checks upon his vices. But I would give little for the restraint of law, or of public opinion, or of worldly interest; for there are innumerable circumstances in which they can exercise no power whatever. What is it, then, that degrades the conscience? This must be a question of unspeakable importance. I should like, therefore, to give it a straightforward answer. The conscience is degraded when its judgments are spurned, when its voice is silenced, when its reproofs are softened down. And no one does this more effectually than the man who knowingly pursues a course of conduct whose righteousness is questionable. (2) It weakens the moral power. True strength—real power—of whatever kind it may be, ought to be coveted. Weakness is no advantage, either to yourself, or to the world at large. Hence the apostle said, “Quit you like men, be strong.” In what sense? Bodily?—intellectually? Doubtless the apostle appreciated strength in both senses. But he referred in these words to a nobler strength—moral strength—which is after all the true strength of a moral being, and without which he is the embodiment of weakness itself. When Martin Luther faced the great Council at Worms, and declared, at the peril of his life, that he would not recant one iota of the principles of the Protestant Reformation, he displayed his moral power. This is at once the grandest and the mightiest power which man can possess. In proportion as we have it are we great; in proportion as we lack it are we small, worthless, and despicable. Now, mark! your going into the house of Rimmon, your doing things which are not strictly right, is sure to paralyse your moral nature. The thought of this will haunt you when you least expect it; the consciousness of it will make you feel powerless when you need most to be strong. (3) It hampers spiritual aspirations. This is the worst thing of all about it. Man has been created in God’s image; his soul is a temple for the Holy Ghost to dwell in; he is satisfied—content—happy, only as he is able to hold communion with the Infinite. (*D. Rowlands, B.A.*) *Worldly conformity*:—This portion of Scripture is often misunderstood. It is thought by many that Naaman asks permission to offer some measure of worship to Rimmon while he mainly worshipped Jehovah; and that the prophet grants his request. An examination of the passage will, however, set it in a different light. 1. Naaman came to Elisha as an idolater and a leper. The miracle by which he was cleansed made such an impression upon him, that he became a convert to the Jewish religion, and he asked from the prophet permission to take two mules’ burden of earth from the land of Israel, as possessing superior sanctity, to build therewith an altar, as is generally supposed, in his own country, declaring his resolution to offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord. It is very evident that Naaman does not ask permission to worship Rimmon, for he had just asserted that he would henceforth offer no sacrifice to any god, but the Lord. And we may observe that our translators have marked their sense of the passage, by using two different words in our text to express Naaman’s act, and his masters: “When my master goes to worship, and I bow myself,” an interpretation of which the original is susceptible, so that he asks no permission, in their opinion, to worship Rimmon. It seems that it was Naaman’s duty to attend the king of Syria when he went to pay his idol homage, and as the king leaned upon him with his arm upon his shoulder, and bowed very low, he could not well avoid bending his own body with the king.

And he meant to ask, whether, if he did this out of duty to his master, and not of reverence to the idol, he should commit sin. It showed great tenderness of conscience in him. If the same question were put to us, we should say that it would depend very much upon circumstances whether it would be right or wrong for Naaman to do this. Elisha said unto him, "Go in peace," that is, Do as you have said, and you will not sin. Was not the prophet right in this decision? There was a precisely similar question in the apostles' days. The meat in the markets had generally been offered before some idol, then taken away and sold, and it became a matter of scruple whether a Christian might eat of that meat. St. Paul decided the question just as Elisha did a similar one. If any ate of it without intending to honour the idol at all, there was no sin in eating; but if their act was considered as sanctioning idolatry, they were to abstain. There are cases of a similar nature occurring in the present day, that may be similarly settled. A Christian traveller sometimes gains admission to a mosque, but is required to put off his shoes at the entrance; now he does not consider that as sanctioning Islamism, nor does his guide suppose that he has changed his religion thereby; therefore, there is no sin in it. 2. But there is another explanation of our text which may be more satisfactory, though that already given seems conclusive. We need not consider Elisha's answer as at all deciding Naaman's question. He saw, perhaps, that Naaman was already doubtful as to the expediency of the thing; he knew that his heart was, in the main, right, and he may have preferred to leave him to the teachings of his own conscience, as he became more enlightened, rather than to give him a solution of his scruples. And therefore he may have waived the question, bid him go in peace, and not trouble himself for the present in the matter. Now, taken in this view, it is easy to justify the prophet's answer. Some regard must be had, in unfolding truth, to the state of the inquirer's mind. The natives of Hindostan, for instance, are divided into castes. If the missionaries were to insist at the outset on the entire renunciation of caste, they could do nothing, and therefore they prudently say but little upon the subject, and gain the beliefs of their converts to the great truths of Christianity, trusting that they will gradually renounce caste, as indeed they do. But it would be a very different thing to attempt to introduce caste into a Christian country. There was a like state of things in the apostles' days. Many of the Jewish converts were strongly attached to their old Jewish rites. They believed in Christ, and yet kept the laws of Moses. Now the apostles allowed them to go on in their customs, and to become gradually weaned from them, and did in effect say to them as Elijah did, "Go in peace." But when the question was, whether the Gentile converts should come under Jewish rites, every apostle was opposed to it. Let none call this a time-serving doctrine, nor condemn the prophet for not as decidedly refusing Naaman's request. Let none say that the whole truth should be told, and that every man must come up at once to the standard of duty. The whole truth must, indeed, be told, but some regard must be had to the order and mode of telling it, as our Lord has taught us in saying, that new wine must not be put into old bottles. We do not let in the full blaze of noon on the eyes of one just recovering his sight. Religion has its milk for babes and its strong meat for men. When a city is besieged, the first point is to gain the chief defences, and the besiegers do not stop to carry every private house that may contain an enemy, but press on and seize the fortress first, and then proceed to take other posts in detail. So Elisha was satisfied for the present with having gained the citadel of Naaman's heart, and expected that he would gradually yield in everything to the truth. 3. We may learn from our text, so explained, some useful lessons on the subject of worldly conformity. What Rimmon, Baal, and Belial were to ancient believers, the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world are to Christians. The only safe guide in the matter is a heart filled with the love and the Spirit of God. Elisha left Naaman to this guidance, and God leaves the Christian to the same. If we love God supremely, we shall be in no danger of loving the world too much; and if we love our fellow-men, we shall not embitter them against religion by any fanatical austerity. 4. We may learn, again, from our text, that no Christian can always judge how far his fellow-Christian may go in conformity with the world. 5. And finally, while we are charitable in our judgment of others, we ought to be strict in watching against worldly conformity in ourselves. (W. H. Lewis, D.D.) *Bowing in the house of Rimmon*.—Peculiar characteristic of the Bible that its claims upon us are of a sovereign order. We may dispute its authority. But friends and foes alike confess that the Bible makes pretensions

which other books fail to make or to sustain in anything like the same degree. Those who assail the Scriptures say that this very claim is their weakness. They point to commands which they allege are immoral or unjust, and which yet, they say, are asserted to have come from God, and they ask how can the Book be inspired which lends its sanction to immorality and injustice. And it must be admitted that the apologists of the Bible have not always been wise in their defence. They have treated every part of Scripture alike. They have not been careful to distinguish between what the Bible narrates and that which the Bible authorises. These remarks apply directly to the narrative in my text. Here we find Naaman making an excuse, it is said, for dissembling his religious convictions, and Elisha accepting the plea. Naaman is convinced that Jehovah is the true God, and will worship Him, but is not prepared to make any sacrifice for his faith. To bow in the house of Rimmon is the condition on which he retains rank and honour and his master's favour, and the prophet does not forbid the outward act of idolatry. What is this but to open a wide door for every species of dissimulation, and to make expediency, not truth, the rule of conduct? Now, to state the question thus is to answer it to every honest mind. But to state the question thus is not to state it fairly. 1. In the first place, even if Elisha did not accept Naaman's plan, it would not follow that he was right. An inspired prophet was not equally inspired at all times. Except when he distinctly claims to speak as a messenger of God, there is no reason to suppose that any Divine sanction attaches to his words (St. Peter publicly rebuked by St. Paul). 2. But in the next place, did Elisha accept Naaman's plea? The evidence turns entirely upon Elisha's answer: "Go in peace." These words, it is said, do give the permission which Naaman craves. But is it so? These words do not imply all that they may seem to our western ears to imply. They are the common form of Oriental leave-taking. Sometimes, it is true, in Holy Scripture, the phrase means something more than "Farewell," conveys apparently the further notion of approbation. (Instances: Ex. iv. 17, 18; Judg. xviii. 6; 1 Sam. i. 16, 17.) And we know how in the New Testament our Lord has given a sanctity to the phrase (Mark v. 34; Luke vii. 50). Such words in His lips were more than valedictions; they were benedictions also. But in the Old Testament they would have no such fulness of meaning. On the part of Elisha they do not necessarily express even acquiescence in the conduct which Naaman was seeking to excuse. They may have been little more than a courteous dismissal. Hence he would not sanction Naaman's want of consistency on the one hand, nor condemn it on the other. He declines the office of judge. He leaves conscience to do her work. Elijah would have thundered in his ears, "If the Lord be God, then follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." Elisha says, "Go in peace." The prophet saw Naaman's weakness, but he saw also Naaman's difficulty. Put the worst construction upon his words, and you will say he evades the question. Put the best, and you will say he exercises a wise forbearance. 4. But a question remains which may fairly be asked: how far is Naaman to be excused in urging the plea which he urges in the text for compliance with an idolatry which he professed to have renounced? If we would judge a righteous judgment we shall not judge Naaman by a light and according to a standard which he did not possess. We shall look fairly at his circumstances, we shall consider his opportunities. The miracle had deeply impressed him. He vows that henceforth he will worship no God but Jehovah. Doubtless he was perfectly honest in the expression of his convictions. He intended to make no secret of them; for he was prepared to build an altar to Jehovah. He was even alive to the inconsistency of his conduct; he felt that he was asking an indulgence for what he could not wholly justify—"The Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." But we see also that superstition mingled with his faith. He thought that one place was holier than another. The soil of Israel must, he thought, be holier than the soil of Syria; and so he will have two mules' burdens of earth of the prophets that he may build an altar to Jehovah. It is not from such a man that you could look for clear insight or heroic resolution. 5. But another and different question is suggested to us by this history. How far is Elisha's conduct a guide for those who go as missionaries to the heathen now? (1 Cor. viii. 10, 11). Here we have the broad principle of truth and charity which Elisha had not the knowledge, even if he had the courage, to lay down. But Naaman had no "weak brother" to be offended by his conduct. And the mighty, overpowering motive, "for whom Christ died"—Naaman knew nothing of this. Naaman had not heard, Elisha had not heard of One "Who being in the form of

God," &c. (Phil. ii. 6-8), that He might breathe into them something of His own spirit of self-sacrifice; that He might teach them to take up their cross daily and follow Him. (*The Dean of Peterborough.*) *There are no little sins:*—Some suppose that Naaman referred to the past; that when he said, "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant," he entreated forgiveness of what he now saw was criminal; and that when the prophet answered, "Go in peace," he announced the pardon entreated; but to this view of the case there is a serious objection. To avoid it, therefore, others conclude, and with them I fully concur, that Naaman spoke prospectively, and that the prophet, aware of Naaman's conviction, that bowing with the king in the house of Rimmon was wrong, left it to produce its effect; assured, that by the grace of God, he would soon see that idolatry must be totally abandoned, and that he who would serve God acceptably, must abstain from the appearance, as well as the reality of evil. Incorrect views of the evil of sin are, however, still entertained by those whose minds are altogether unenlightened; or only, as was most probably the case with Naaman, partially illuminated. Every attempt to extenuate sin discovers great depravity. You do not proceed thus as to trespasses against yourselves and society. Does a man take away, without authority, a part of your property? You do not call it a mistake, or a misappropriation, but a theft. Yes, in such cases you are sagacious in discerning, and inexorable in judging; you make no allowance for the suddenness of surprise, or the power of temptation; a single failure convinces you of the absence of moral principle, and is deemed sufficient to blast the reputation—to destroy the character of him who discovers it. But, I ask, are you thus eagle-eyed, jealous, and rigorous, as to sins against God? Let the expressions current among us furnish a reply. Is a man proud? He is said to maintain his proper dignity. Is he full of wrath? It is said, the things he suffered were enough to make him angry. Is he profane? It is said, he has contracted an unfortunate habit. Does he eat and drink to excess? It is said, he lives rather too freely.

I. THAT MANY ACTS WHICH MEN ACCOUNT LITTLE, HAVE BEEN VISITED WITH SIGNAL EXPRESSIONS OF GOD'S DISPLEASURE. Why, for instance, were Ananias and Sapphira struck dead? It was in each case for a single act of equivocation! Why was a prophet devoured by a lion? because he yielded to the solicitations of another prophet, to eat and drink, instead of pursuing his way? Why were forty-two young persons torn in pieces by bears? because they mocked Elisha! Why was an Israelite stoned to death? because he gathered sticks on the Sabbath Day!

II. TO ASSIGN SOME REASONS FOR THE DIVINE PROCEDURE. And be it remarked, 1. That an act in itself inconsiderable, may indicate the existing state of feeling as clearly as one that is more palpable. As the motion of a leaf shows the quarter from which the wind blows, as certainly as the agitated branches of an oak, so you may gather any one's dislike, though he does not strike you, or abuse you, or attempt insidiously to destroy your reputation. 2. That a sinful act is not isolated and alone, but is commonly the commencement of a series of iniquities. So it is in reference to the individual. "Sins," says Henry, "are like circles in the water, when a stone is thrown in; one produces another." Gehazi committed the sin of avarice,—this urged to the sin of fraud; and the sin of fraud prepared for the sin of falsehood. Cain cherished the sin of unbelief,—this gave rise to the sin of anger; and the sin of anger issued in the sin of murder. One leak may sink a vessel;—one spark may explode a fortress;—one wound may kill the body;—one lust may damn the soul! 3. That every sin is inimical to the character and government of God. A common and sound principle of judgment has determined that the guilt of an act depends, in part, on the object at which it is aimed. To strike a beast wantonly is inhuman—to strike a father is parricidal—to strike a king is traitorous, and, by the consent of nations, merits death. "Against thee, O Lord, against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."

III. TO TRACE THE BEARINGS OF THIS SUBJECT ON OUR KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE. 1. The subject casts a revealing light on the future punishment of the wicked. 2. The subject urges on us faith in Christ, and habitual dependence on Divine influence. 3. The subject demands the cultivation of Christian delicacy. This is easily distinguished from hypocritical scrupulosity; the one regards great things, the other all things; the one is accompanied by bitterness, the other by kindness of spirit; the one is merely public, the other is secret also; the one is transient and occasional, the other regular and habitual.

IV. This subject should stimulate us to THE EMPLOYMENT OF EVERY COUNTERACTIVE AND EVERY PREVENTIVE OF SIN. Some

of you are in possession of means of usefulness, which God has greatly owned and blessed. As heads of families, walk before your households with a perfect heart, and "train up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." As teachers of the young, aim diligently and devoutly to lead them to Him, who "gathers the lambs with his arm, and carries them in his bosom." As visitors of the ignorant,—the poor,—the destitute, show with affection, faithfulness, and zeal, how they may become "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven." And consecrating your time, your talents, your property, your influence, to the cause of God, go forward, until the curse shall be removed, and "righteousness and praise spring forth before all nations." (*C. Williams.*) *The new convert and idolatry*.—On Naaman's bowing in the house of Rimmon, and Elisha's non-interference (2 Kings v. 18, 19), Dean Farrar writes thus: "Elisha's permission must not be misunderstood. He did not hand over this semi-heathen convert to the grace of God. . . . The position of Naaman was wholly different from that of any Israelite. He was only the convert, or the half-convert, of a day. . . . To demand of one who, like Naaman, had been an idolater all his days, the sudden abandonment of every custom and tradition of his life, would have been to demand from him an unreasonable, and, in his circumstances, useless, and all-but impossible self-sacrifice. The best way was to let him feel and see for himself the futility of Rimmon-worship. . . . But the general principle that we must not bow in the House of Rimmon remains unchanged." *Conscientiousness*.—Von Zealand, Frederick the Great's finest general, was a Christian although his Royal master was a scoffer. One day he was making his coarse jokes about the Saviour, and the whole place rang with guffaws of sympathetic laughter; and it was too much for old Von Zealand. Standing up amid the hush of the Court flatterers and parasites, shaking his grey old head solemnly he said: "Sire, you know I have not feared death. I have fought and won thirty-eight battles, but I am an old man, and shall have soon to go into the presence of a greater than thou, the Mighty God who saved me from my sin, the Lord Jesus Christ, against whom you blaspheme. Sire, I cannot stand to hear my Saviour spoken of, as thou hast spoken of Him. I salute thee, sire, as an old man who loves the Saviour, on the edge of eternity." Then he sat down. Frederick, with a trembling voice, replied, "General, I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon." The company dispersed in silence, and the king that night reflected as he had never done before on the King of kings whom his brave general revered as his Saviour. (*Life of Faith.*) *True to conscience*.—Our late Queen, Victoria the Good, once noticed a sergeant of the Scots Guard drilling one of the Duke of Connaught's children, and being pleased with him she invited the sergeant to appear at some private theatricals. The sergeant hesitated, and then asked if Her Majesty would graciously allow him to decline, for the theatre had been a snare to him in the past. The Queen agreed at once, and said she liked to have about her men who kept to their convictions, and shortly afterwards sent him a token of royal favour.

VERS. 20-27. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha.—*Gehazi*.—The name Gehazi means "valley of vision," and is appropriate enough if we think of what Gehazi saw as to the nature of wickedness when the prophet opened his eyes. 1. Gehazi was "the servant of Elisha, the man of God." Surely then he would be a good man? Can a good man have a bad servant? Can the man of prayer, whose life is a continual breathing unto God of supreme desires after holiness, have a man in his company, looking on and watching him, and studying his character, who denies his very altar, and blasphemes against his God? Is it possible to live in a Christian house and yet not to be a Christian? Cause and effect would seem to be upset by such contradictions. There is a metaphysical question here, as well as a question of fact. A good tree must bring forth good fruit; good men must have good children; good masters must have good servants; association in life must go for something. So we would say—emphatically, because we think reasonably. But facts are against such a fancy. What is possible in this human life? It is possible that a man may spend his days in building a church, and yet denying God. Does not the very touch of the stones help him to pray? No. He touches them roughly, he lays them mechanically, and he desecrates each of them with an oath. Is it possible that a man can be a builder of churches, and yet a destroyer of Christian doctrine and teaching generally? Gehazi did not understand the spirit of his master. He did not know what his master was doing. How is it that men can be so far separated from one another? How is it that a man cannot

be understood in his own house, but be thought fanciful, fanatical, eccentric, phenomenally peculiar? Gehazi had a method in his reasoning. Said he in effect: To spare a stranger, a man who may never be seen again; to spare a beneficiary, a man who has taken away benefits in the right hand and in the left; to spare a wealthy visitor, a man who could have given much without feeling he had given anything; to spare a willing giver, a man who actually offered to give something, and who was surprised, if not offended, because his gift was declined! there is no reason in my master's policy. It never occurred to Gehazi that a man could have bread to eat that the world knew not of. It never occurs to some men that others can live by faith, and work miracles of faith by the grace of God.

2. Gehazi prostituted an inventive and energetic mind. He had his plan (v. 22). The case was admirably stated. We have no hesitation in saying that the men of the world in most cases overmatch the men of the Church in matters of strong thinking regarding practical subjects and practical ministries and uses. We who are in the Church are afraid: we want to be let alone; not for the world would we be suspected of even dreaming of anything unusual; we would have our very dreams patterns of neatness, things that might be published in the shop windows, and looked upon without affronting the faintest sensibility on the part of the beholders. But the Gehazis, if they were converted, they would be men of energy, dash, courage, fire; we should hear of them and of their work.

3. But Gehazi was successful. Now all is well: lust is satisfied, wealth is laid up; now the fitness of things has been consulted, and harmony has been established between debtor and creditor, and Justice nods because Justice has been appeased. Were the test to end with the twenty-fourth verse we should describe Gehazi as a man who had set an example to all coming after him who wished to turn life into a success. Who had been wronged? Naaman pursues his journey all the happier for thinking he has done something in return for the great benefit which has been conferred upon him. He is certainly more pleased than otherwise. The man of God has at last been turned, he thinks, into directions indicated by common sense. All that has happened is in the way of business; nothing that is not customary has been done. Gehazi is satisfied, and Elisha knows nothing about it. The servant should have something even if the master would take nothing. It is the trick of our own day! The servant is always at the door with his rheumatic hand ready to take anything that may be put into it. We leave nothing with the master; it would be an insult to him. So far the case looks natural, simple, and complete; and we have said Elisha knows nothing about it. Look at Elisha: fixing his eyes calmly upon Gehazi, "Went not mine heart with thee?" Oh that heart! The good man knows when wickedness has been done: the Christ knows when He enters into the congregation whether there is a man in it with a withered hand; He says, There is a cripple somewhere in this audience. He feels it. "Went not mine heart with thee?" Was I not present at the interview? Did I not hear every syllable that was said on the one side and on the other?

4. Then the infliction of the judgment: "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever" (v. 27). Thou hast touched the silver, thou didst not know that it was contagious and held the leprosy; thou didst bring in the two changes of garments, not knowing that the germs of the disease were folded up with the cloth: put on the coat—it will scorch thee! "He went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." A splendid conception is this silent departure. Not a word said, not a protest uttered; the judgment was felt to be just. Men should consider the price they really pay for their success. Do not imagine that men can do whatever they please, and nothing come of it. Every action we perform takes out of us part of ourselves. Some actions take our whole soul with them, and leave us poor indeed. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Defilement of God's work by covetous men*:—It is at once most surprising and most saddening to know that some of the best works that have been done on earth for God, and some of God's most eminent workers, have been defamed and lowered, if their influence has not been actually counteracted and nullified, by inferior workers and by unworthy men. This defiling of God's work has generally come from one source, and is the result of one vile lust or passion, covetousness—the desire for the means of gaining power or wealth, or place, or self-indulgence; the desire for dominion or money as the means of self-exaltation and aggrandisement. As illustrating this I need only mention the repulsive histories of Balaam, of Achan, of David's impious numbering of Israel, the story of Gehazi now before us, and the dark atrocity of the life and death of Judas Iscariot. 1. The action

and duplicity of Gehazi are of singular unworthiness. Like so many other histories they show that intercourse with good men and association with God-like work may become only the occasion of worse villainy in a man. The followers of Luther were seldom worthy of him. The followers of Calvin have not been true to their master. The adherents of the hallowed Wesleys did not take their sacred work only. The converts of Paul almost broke his heart. And the followers and servants of Jesus—where is there one of us who is worthy of his Master? Too often has it been found that one of the most repressive influences about the work of great men and good servants of Jesus Christ is in the fact that some of their nearest followers have had unworthy souls; and could turn their Master's greatness into the service of their own inferior aims and into the means of advance in this world. Do not many of us come to Christ with selfish feelings and serve our God for hire? Being with the good and great will not necessarily make us similar; otherwise Gehazi would have been a better man. 2. Gehazi's covetousness was of a gross, material kind—the love of money; and the miserable influence of it upon him is seen in this: that it produced inability to appreciate Elisha's spiritual motives. All that Gehazi let himself see was, that with the departing Naaman so much money went away too. More especially, however, notice that, as with Gehazi, so, generally, the covetous and unprincipled man lowers himself to a level on which he is unable, in daily life and business, to appreciate other motives than those of getting gain; or to measure anything in life's movements and enterprises by any other gauge than that of the money that can be gained or must be lost. Because of this abasing and prostituting of nature, Paul earnestly declares covetousness to be practically idolatry, and has its legitimate consequences on man's inner life, in antipathy to Jesus, and self-mutilation, with much sorrow. Gehazi could not feel the power of Elisha's spiritual motives in sparing Naaman and letting him go free of payment. He rather thought—why should my master not have taken the money? What good was it to let the talents of silver and gold and the beautiful Syrian robes go? The fair damask raiment of Damascus—why should it be lost? Naaman could afford it; and it would be far less than the equivalent of what he had received from Elisha. Look which way he would, the money that had been lost, the gain that had not been made, was ever alluring his debased soul. Elisha's noble determination that the mercy of his God should, in Naaman's case, be had literally “for the asking”: his resolve that the goodness of God should be then, as we say now, of grace, and not of buying or deserving, either before or after it had been obtained,—this to such a soul as Gehazi's was useless, fanciful, intangible. 3. In several other ways Gehazi's covetousness involved him in sin, and further defiled the good work that had been wrought by Elisha. To notice these is to see a testimony to a law of God that the young cannot heed too much—the law that forbids the possibility of solitary sins, isolated transgressions. There are no lonely, single sins. Sin needs sin to help it along, to buttress it, to back it, and give it success. One deception leads to another, and needs it. One lie begets another, and requires it to succeed. And it may be well for us all to remember that all the good and gains of this grand world are not worth one little lie. 4. Now we come, as men say they have so often in daily life and business, to face this misery—the success of the lie. The falsehood has thriven; to deceive has been found to be the short road to wealth; to insult God, to defame His work, to misrepresent Elisha and plunder Naaman, these things have “paid,” as men say. (*G. B. Ryley.*) Let us note THE DANGER OF UNIMPROVED AND ABUSED SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGES. A voice of warning:—Gehazi's religious advantages, in all probability, began at a date anterior to the time and mission of Elisha. One tradition speaks of him as the boy who sped at the bidding of the Tishbite to the top of Carmel, to watch the rising of the expected cloud over the Mediterranean, precursive of the longed-for rain. This, at all events, we know, that seven years previous to Naaman's pilgrimage, he was the witness of Elisha's greatest miracle, when he brought back the Shunammite's son to life. Doubtless, during these intermediate years, he had seen many other signs and wonders authenticating his master's Divine call. He had mingled with the youths—his own contemporaries and fellow-students—in the college of the prophets: and, above all, in common with them, and more than them, he had been the privileged eye-witness of the pure, exalted character and consistent walk of his honoured superior. Alas! that no fall is so low and so fearful as the fall of a man “once enlightened,” and who has “tasted of the heavenly gift.” No recoil to sin is so terrible as the recoil on the part of one who has “tasted the good word of God,

and the powers of the world to come." The religious training and pious fellowship which softens and ameliorates the docile, teachable heart; if abused and rejected, will only serve to stir up the natural, innate tendencies of evil. Let us write "Beware" on our seasons of loftiest privilege, and on our moments of highest inspiration. "Beware" of a spirit of indifference to Divine things, harbouring aught that would blunt the fine edge of conscience, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God; allowing religion to become a weariness; outwardly professing godliness, while inwardly in league with the world, the flesh, and the devil. II. A second lesson we may learn from the story of Gehazi, is **THE CERTAINTY OF SIN'S DETECTION**. It was a boldly conceived and a boldly executed scheme of the audacious criminal. Such were the air-castles which Gehazi, in common with thousands of accomplished graduates in crime, have reared for themselves. But he forgot, or tried at least to bury from remembrance, the truth which he had embodied in his own thoughtless imprecation, that "Jehovah liveth." It is true that sentence against an evil work is not always (indeed, is seldom) executed speedily. God many times seems to "keep silence"—to be like the Baal of Carmel, "asleep." The daring and presumptuous venture their own sceptic conclusions on this forbearance of the Most High, in thinking Him "altogether such an one as themselves"—"The Lord doth not see, neither doth the God of Jacob regard" (Ps. xciv. 7). If, however, there be in the present state, exceptions to this great retributive law in God's moral economy, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." And as the detection will be sure, so also will the punishment be commensurate with the crime. In the case of Gehazi, most meet and befitting was the nature of the retribution. He would rob the restored Commander of his festal garment; a white garment, too, he shall have in return, but very different truly from the one he has avariciously appropriated:—a garment of terrible import, which in a terrible sense shall "wax not old," for it shall go down a frightful heirloom to his children's children. It is a robe of leprosy, "white as snow." Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap! III. A third lesson we may draw from the narrative is, **THE TENDENCY OF ONE SIN TO GENERATE ANOTHER**. When the moral sense becomes weakened, and moral restraints are withdrawn, the horde of demons gather strength;—the avalanche of depravity acquires bulk as well as velocity, in its downward course of havoc and ruin. "These wild beasts—the wolves of the soul—may hunt at first singly, but afterwards they go in packs, and the number increaseth the voraciousness thereof." When the citadel of the heart is carried by assault, one bastion after another is dismantled, and its treasure abandoned to the enemy. The Reaper angels, in the final harvest of wrath, are pictured as gathering, not single stalks, or even sheaves, but "bundles to be burnt." Mark the sad experience of Gehazi:—1. Note his covetousness. Avarice was the besetting sin of his nature—the prolific parent of all the others. 2. But the motive-power of covetousness roused into action other depraved, and, till now, slumbering forces. We have to note next, his untruthfulness. Isaac Watts' child-hymn, in simplest child-language, expresses in brief the sad experience of this covetous attendant—

For he who does one fault at first,
And lies to hide it, makes it two.

3. Scarcely distinguishable from Gehazi's sin of falsehood—akin to it, and a part of it—(a sister-spirit of evil)—let us note his hypocrisy. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) **Gehazi:—I. THAT THE HIGHEST RELIGIOUS ADVANTAGES, UNLESS DULY IMPROVED, WILL FAIL TO PRODUCE ANY SAVING RESULTS. II. THAT WHERE UNHOLY DISPOSITIONS ARE CHERISHED IN THE HEART, THEY WILL BREAK FORTH, WHEN A FAVOURABLE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTS ITSELF, IN CORRESPONDING ACTION. III. THAT WHILE WE PROCEED IN A COURSE OF INIQUITY, IT IS IN VAIN FOR US TO EXPECT EITHER CONCEALMENT OR IMPUNITY.** 1. All your sin is known to God. Man cannot read the heart of his fellow-man without a special revelation from heaven; but though man can only judge from outward appearances, and is consequently incapable of forming a right estimate, all things are known to God. "I, the Lord, search the heart and try the reins of the children of men." 2. All sin thus beheld is abhorred by God. The Lord is a God of infinite purity and righteousness. There is no object we can contemplate or conceive, that is half so offensive to the most delicate eye as sin is to God. 3. God, in His infinite wisdom, has a thousand means which we cannot conceive, of bringing to light the

hidden works of darkness. Gehazi thought that his secret wickedness would never be discovered; but the whole scene passed, as it were, in panoramic view before his master. The Lord can suggest a single thought to the mind of a person acquainted with us, that may lead to a train of reflections, observations, and inquiries which will discover our secret iniquities. (*T. Jackson.*) *Gehazi:—*Let us derive a few general and useful reflections from the whole narrative. I. PERSONS MAY BE VERY WICKED UNDER RELIGIOUS ADVANTAGES. The means of grace and the grace of the means are very distinguishable from each other, and are frequently found separate. II. HERE IS A WARNING AGAINST THE LOVE OF MONEY. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." III. SEE THE ENROACHMENTS AND PROGRESS OF SIN; AND LEARN HOW DANGEROUS IT IS TO GIVE WAY TO ANY EVIL PROPENSITY. IV. HOW ABSURD IT IS TO SIN WITH AN EXPECTATION OF SECRECY! "There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves." V. ABHOR AND FORSAKE LYING. It is in common peculiarly easy to detect falsehood. Hence it is said that every liar should have a good memory. And what an odious character is a liar! How shunned and detested when discovered! To every mortal upon earth, the appellation of a liar is the most detestable. A liar is the emblem of "the devil, who was a liar from the beginning, and abode not in the truth." (*W. Jay.*) *Gehazi:—*In dwelling on our subject we have suggested:—I. GEHAZI'S INESTIMABLE PRIVILEGES. He held no ordinary position. He was servant to the greatest of prophets, and lived in an atmosphere of the most exalted purity and the highest piety. He had an example to contemplate which few others have been favoured with. Hence he could not excuse himself by the plea of ignorance. He had the means of knowing what was right. He was in constant contact with God's Divine word, and knew well the Divine law. He saw and probably enjoyed the ministrations of his master. Yet notwithstanding all this he sinned in a notable and presumptuous manner. II. GEHAZI'S COMPLICATED SIN. How one crime is tied to another! They follow like children of a family. They are like the birds that collect after carrion. We seldom see one prominent sin hovering in the moral atmosphere unaccompanied by others. Bad men consort together. Bad spirits seek congenial company. III. GEHAZI'S EXEMPLARY PUNISHMENT. We may imagine the radiant glee of Elisha's servant as he returned home well satisfied with his day's work on his own behalf. He was proud at the success of his well-contrived and ably executed stratagem. With these self-complaisant thoughts he went in and stood before his master, and glibly covered his sin with the lie. As if he could deceive God! He went out! In one moment he was transformed, both body and soul. We sometimes come upon these sudden revulsions of feeling, when in a single instant the whole current of a man's life is changed at once and for ever. The lessons which this subject has for ourselves are manifest:—1. We see the danger of a covetous spirit. It is the mainspring of half the sins of the present day, as it has been the exciting cause of half the wars and crimes of the world. 2. We see in Gehazi the type of all sin. All sin is like his in its method. It never remains stationary. It grows and stretches from one thing to another. All sin is like Gehazi's in its selfishness. Surely he might have respected his master's honour and position in the sight of the foreign prince. Sin is selfishness. It is placing personal interests and ease and aggrandisement before the interest of others. And the simile is continued in the last point. All sin is alike in the certainty of its punishment. The wicked may persuade themselves that their wickedness is unobserved, but it will soon be manifest that every thought is known and that the day of reckoning must arrive. (*Homilist.*) *One man's blessing another man's curse:—*Judging only as we are able to do of one another now, Gehazi's plan had succeeded, and he had done well for himself. But he had left out of his scheme the remembrance that God had something to do with it. I. LYING AND FALSE WAYS OF EARTHLY PROSPERITY ALWAYS LEAVE OUT GOD. Liars and deceivers ignore God's interest in their life, God's knowledge of their plans and schemes and the execution of them. And in their apparently untroubled doing without God these men and their actions become most hurtful stumbling-blocks to many tender souls, such as that most pure and deep thinker Asaph—or the man who wrote psalms for his use, who mourned over the wicked that "they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches." Such sin is either a practical ignoring of God altogether, atheism in daily action and business (which is much more pernicious

than atheism of intellect), or it is a defaming and insulting of God's omniscience.

II. ONE SIN, ONE LIE, MAKES OTHERS EASIER AND WORSE. The lie came from him easily and readily: for he had prepared himself beforehand, and the lie he had told to Naaman trained him to insult, by deceiving, his master. The way to perdition is downhill, on a slippery way, with a descent that is ever quickening.

III. GEHAZI'S EXPOSURE AND SHAME come now before us. How soon the scheme came to an end, and such an end! How soon the bubble burst! Gehazi had deceived Naaman and had gotten his money, but he had misled himself much more.

IV. ELISHA'S PATRIOTISM CRIED OUT AGAINST GEHAZI'S SIN. V. GEHAZI PIERCED THROUGH WITH MANY SORROWS. He had sought his good here; but with Naaman's money he got his leprosy, too. The blessing of the Syrian became the curse of the servant of the man of God. (*G. B. Ryley.*) *The covetousness of Gehazi:—*I. WE HAVE HERE COVETOUSNESS SEEKING TO MAKE GAIN OF A CONNECTION WITH GOODNESS. Gehazi was the servant of Elisha. It was surely no small privilege to be an attendant upon the prophet of God,—to be brought into such close connection with a man so good and holy. One might have supposed that he could scarcely help feeling the influence of Elisha. Now, covetousness of any kind is bad enough; but covetousness hanging on the skirts of goodness,—covetousness taking advantage of some outward connection with religion, and even with unselfishness,—this is surely one of the lowest forms of vice. Oh, it is a fearful thing when a man comes to value his religious reputation chiefly as a portion of his stock-in-trade.

II. WE HAVE HERE COVETOUSNESS LEADING ON TO FALSEHOOD AND THEFT.

III. WE HAVE HERE COVETOUSNESS HINDERING THE PROGRESS OF THE DIVINE KINGDOM. Like a true prophet as he was, Elisha was seeking to advance the kingdom of God. He cared far more for the extension of Jehovah's name and the promotion of Jehovah's glory than for his own advantage. If he magnified his prophetic office and stood on his honour, it was that, through him, Jehovah might be honoured. This was no doubt the secret of his treatment of Naaman. (*T. J. Finlayson.*) *Deception detected and punished:—*I. THE DECEPTION PRACTISED. Naaman was proceeding on his way, thoughtful, grateful, prayerful, hopeful, joyful. He is overtaken by Gehazi, who, unknown to his master, asks a gift of him. After all Gehazi's profession and all his religious opportunities, who would have expected such action? Influences of pious homes, &c., are sometimes all lost. The secret of Gehazi's action was covetousness. This is a rock on which many split. Gehazi thinks of all Naaman is taking back, and of his willingness to make the prophet a present. He regrets the loss of an opportunity of gain. He longs for the silver, &c. He resolves to seek for it. It is dangerous to parley with temptation. Unobserved, as he supposes, by the prophet, he pursues after Naaman. Unheard, as he supposes, by the prophet, he tells his story. II. THE DECEPTION SUCCEEDING; that is, for the time, and so far as regards the obtaining of that for which he asked, and more than he asked for. Naaman pauses, descends from his chariot, kindly inquires after the prophet's welfare, listens to Gehazi's application, grants all he sought and more. Note the confidence, the artlessness, the unsuspiciousness of a young convert to the faith of the God of Israel. He cannot suppose a prophet's servant could be guilty of a falsehood. Men expect much of those who profess godliness; guilty indeed are they who, by disappointing such expectations, cast a stumbling-block in the way of young believers (*Matt. xviii. 6*). Gehazi obtains his desire; but how does he feel as he returns to his master? III. THE DECEPTION DETECTED. *Ver. 24*, "When he came to the tower." In the Revised Version that reads—"When he came to the hill"; probably the hill brow from which he could see his master's house, and where his master, therefore, might possibly see him, he then hid his ill-got treasure. He did not think of that eye that ever sees (*Ps. cxxxix. 1-12*; *Jer. xxiii. 24*). Could he think to hide from the prophet of the Lord that which he had done? He did so think; but it was not hidden (*vers. 25, 26*). He thought he had managed all very cleverly! . . . Deception led to falsehood; it often does. Yet only ultimately to increase the shame of detection. "Be sure thy sin will find thee out."

IV. THE DECEPTION PUNISHED. Shortlived is the prosperity of the wicked. If Gehazi will have Naaman's treasure, he shall have Naaman's leprosy. (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *Avarice a fatal vice:—*Andrew Fuller one day went into a bullion merchant's, and was shown a mass of gold. Taking it into his hand, he very suggestively remarked, "How much better it is to hold it in your hand than to have it in your heart!" Goods in the hand will not hurt you, but the goods in the heart will destroy you. Not long ago, a burglar, as you will remember,

escaping from a policeman, leaped into the Regent's Canal, and was drowned—drowned by the weight of the silver which he had plundered. How many there are who have made a god of their wealth, and in hasting after riches have been drowned by the weight of their worldly substance! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *When disguises are removed*:—A large lake in a nobleman's park was a little time ago drained off for repairing purposes. During the day it had shone under the sunlight like a sheet of gold, and at night a silver shoen from the moon turned it into poetic beauty. It looked an emblem of purity and peace. But when the water was drawn away what an awful contrast! Down in the oozy slime at the bottom of the lake were thousands of crawling and wriggling abominations of reptile and parasitic order. The waters, so fair in outward seeming, were a very haunt of evil squirming horrors. What a terrible revealing will the withdrawing of life make to many a Christless soul. When all disguises, veils, and falsities are taken away, and the horrors of cherished sin are all laid bare. (*H. O. Mackey.*)

Ver. 25. *Thy servant went no whither—A lie sticks*:—A little newsboy, to sell his paper, told a lie. The matter came up in the Sunday school. "Would you tell a lie for a penny?" asked a young lady teacher of one of her boys. "No ma'am," he answered very decidedly. "For sixpence, then?" "No ma'am." "For a shilling?" "No, ma'am!" "For a thousand shillings?" Dick was staggered. A thousand shillings looked big. Wouldn't it buy a lot of things? While he was thinking, another boy behind him called out, "No, ma'am." "Why not?" asked the teacher. "Because," said the boy, "when the thousand shillings are all gone, and all the things they've got with them have gone too, the lie is there, all the same." It is so. A lie sticks. Everything else may be gone, but that is left, and it must be carried with you, whether you will or not. *Heredity not wholly a disadvantage*:—A young man complains to Jupiter that in consequence of his father's debaucheries he is pierced with pangs and punished with pains for sins not his own. Jupiter replies that in accordance with the very law of which he complains, he also receives from his father delicate nerves, vigorous muscles, and keen senses which are inlets of joy and many noble capacities and faculties of mind and heart. Jupiter offers in his case to suspend the offensive organic law; but warns him that, in losing his pain, he shall also lose all advantages and benefits through that same law of hereditary descent. And he further reminds him that even his pain is a monitor to warn him from the paths of vice trodden by his father. The sufferer withdraws his complaint, resigns himself, and resolves by pious obedience to all bodily laws to bring back his body to a normal and healthy state. (*Combe on the "Constitution of Man."*) *Continuity of evil influences*:—Suppose a company of shipowners started a sea captain with an imperfect chart and with an unseaworthy vessel, and after the vessel has been gone five days they feel sorry about it, and wish they had not let the vessel go out in that way. Does that make any difference to those who have gone out? No! In the first storm the captain and the crew go down. And if you come to God in the latter part of your life, when you have given your children an impulse in the wrong direction, those ten, or fifteen, or twenty years of example in the wrong direction will be mightier than the few words you can utter now in the right direction. So it is with the influence you have had anywhere in community. If you have all these years given countenance to those who are neglecting religion, can you correct that? (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Heredity may transmit predisposition to disease*:—We know from experience that a full measure of health is not often the happy condition of human tissues; we have, in short, a variety of circumstances which, as we say, predispose the individual to disease. One of the commonest forms of predisposition is that due to heredity. Probably it is true that what are known as hereditary diseases are due far more to a hereditary predisposition than to any transmission of the virus itself in any form. Antecedent disease predisposes the tissues to form a nidus for bacteria; conditions of environment or personal habits frequently act in the same way. Damp soils must be held responsible for many disasters to health, not directly, but indirectly, by predisposition; dusty trades and injurious occupations have a similar effect. Any one of these three different influences may in a variety of ways affect the tissues and increase their susceptibility to disease. Not infrequently we may get them combined. (*Newman, "Bacteria."*)

Ver. 27. The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto

thy seed for ever.—*Gehazi smitten with leprosy*.—The sin which led to this punishment suggests—I. THAT IT IS A MARK OF THE HIGHEST CONTEMPT OF THE HOLY GOD TO LINK HIS NAME WITH OUR SINFUL PURPOSES. “As the Lord liveth,” said Gehazi, “I will take somewhat of him” (ver. 20). To stamp base metal with the image and name of the king is regarded as a great crime against the country and the monarch. How much greater the crime of stamping upon our evil actions the name of God. Yet some of the most diabolical acts that stain the page of history have been wrought in the name of the sinless Redeemer. II. THAT THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE FIRST TABLE OF THE MORAL LAW IS A STEP TO THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE SECOND. The man who will speak lightly of a good master will find it an easy matter to misrepresent the character of his fellow-servant. The child who dishonours a good parent will not be likely to be a kind brother. Those who “fear not God,” will as a rule “regard not men” (Luke xviii. 2). The sin against the less, comes easily after the sin against the greater. Gehazi first profaned the name of God, and then wronged his earthly master. III. THAT THOSE WHO WILL LIE IN ORDER TO DECEIVE, MUST LIE IN ORDER TO CONCEAL. Gehazi’s lie to Naaman was soon followed by another to Elisha. It has been said that “a lie has no legs.” There are men in the world who have no limbs upon which they can walk, and are indebted to the artificial help of crutches to make their way in the world. So a lie must be kept up by the crutches of other lies. The punishment for the sin teaches—That those who sin and seek to cover it by concealment, will be compelled, in time, to be the means of its revelation. (*Outlines of Sermons by a London Minister.*)

CHAPTER VI.

VERS. 1-6. The place where we dwell is too strait for us.—*A church-extension enterprise*.—If there was a church in Israel at all, the school of the prophets undoubtedly constituted a part of that church. They were a communion of godly men. I. This church-extension enterprise was STIMULATED BY THE PRINCIPLE OF GROWTH. The old sphere had become too narrow for them, they had outgrown it. This is a principle on which all church-extension should proceed, but in these modern times it is not only ignored, but outraged. Although statistics show that the churches and chapels in England fall miserably short of the accommodation necessary for the whole population, it is three times greater than is required for the number of attendants. II. This church-extension enterprise was CONDUCTED IN A MANLY MANNER. 1. The best counsel was sought before a step was taken. 2. Each man set to honest work in the matter. “Take thence every man a beam.” III. This church-extension enterprise ENCOUNTERED DIFFICULTIES UNEXPECTED. “And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water: and he cried and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.” IV. This church-extension enterprise OBTAINED SUPERNATURAL HELP WHEN NEEDED. When the man who had lost his axe and was crying out in distress, Elisha, the “man of God” said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.” (*Homilist.*) *Age and youth*.—Few questions are more perplexing than the question as to what should be the character of the relationship between the old and the young. Many of our young people are impatient of the restraints which older people would put upon them, while those who have had long experience of the world are apt to be equally impatient of the impulsive ardour and restlessness of youth. I. CONSIDER THE CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH. These are well known, and failure to recognise them must mean failure in all dealings with them. “Wisdom comes not to the child.” We must deal with people as they are, not as we wish them to be. Among the characteristics of youth we select a few:—Dissatisfaction. The sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, “Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us.” Elisha seems to have been very content; not so the young men. They wanted a larger place. Desire for improvement (ver. 2). This is the outcome of the other. The desire increases, and the young want to measure their strength against the world. 3. Strength. Compared

with the old, the young possess a large amount of energy, so much indeed that they cannot rest. 4. Thoughtlessness. "As one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water." With the least care on his part that would never have happened. What, then, ought the young to do? Seek the help of those who are older and wiser than themselves. II. CONSIDER THE POWERS POSSESSED BY AGE. 1. They have knowledge of the world. They know its temptations, how subtle and how persistent they are. 2. They have experience of human life. They have seen lives begun in promise go out in darkness. 3. They know the power of God. They can tell which way victory lies. They have seen Jesus and learned of Him. (1) Let no one think the time wasted which is spent in cultivating the friendship and love of the young. Some shallow people would have said that the prophet was wasting his time. (2) What attention we ought to pay to ourselves. Every man is reproducing his own character in others. "No man liveth to himself." (3) To do this, we must become friends of Jesus. Elisha is a type of Christ. (*A. Jubb.*) *Helping somebody*:—On one occasion the wife of General Sir Bartle Frere drove to a railway station to meet her husband. She told the footman to go and find his master. The servant, who had been engaged in Sir Bartle's absence, asked how he should know the General. "Oh," replied Lady Frere, "look for a tall gentleman helping somebody." The description was sufficient. The servant went, and found the General helping an old lady out of a railway carriage. How well it is for men and women themselves, as well as for the world they bless, when they are known by God to be persons who are always trying to help somebody! (*Quiver.*)

Ver. 2. *Take thence every man a beam.*—*Every man a beam*:—I. THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS PROCURED FOR THEMSELVES WHAT THEY WANTED. The college had become too small. There was not room enough for the increasing numbers who gathered to be instructed at the feet of Elisha. Now in their difficulty these young men might have reasoned something after this fashion. A college is for the good of the nation. The instruction we receive here is to be used by us hereafter in the religious service of the country. The country should, therefore, build us a larger and better house. They might have reasoned in this way and made an appeal to the religious public to help them. And so, instead of appealing to others, they resolved that as they wanted a larger building they would lay down their books, take up their axes, and go out and cut down the trees, building the place with their own hands. In this we have an illustration of an old maxim, that if you want anything done it is best to do it yourself. As regards the ordinary duties of life and the claims of business the preacher has little need to dwell upon this maxim. But we may be permitted to apply the maxim in the realm of church life and work. In every church there are men who are great talkers but little doers. They are ready enough to suggest improvements, to point out what others should do; but as to giving a helping hand themselves, nothing is further from their thoughts. Now I hold that no man has a right to suggest an improvement unless he is prepared to do his part in working it out. If every one who has a knowledge of music took an active part in the psalmody, and allowed his voice to be heard in the song of praise, how much better the worship would be. We are conscious of the need above all things of spiritual blessings, of conversions and spiritual revival in our churches. If every one so conscious would only express himself so in private and at the prayer-meeting, what hallowed prayer-meetings and what glorious revivals there would be among us! Some churches seem to live on the begging system. II. EVERY MAN WAS PREPARED TO DO HIS SHARE OF THE WORK. It was a serious matter even in these primitive times to build a house. The timber had to be felled and cut up into planks of convenient size. This called for the expenditure of strength and skill. By united effort and mutual assistance the arduous task was easily and quickly accomplished. And when there is unity among the members of a church, when every member is actuated by the same spirit of earnest desire for the prosperity of God's cause, how powerful the church becomes, how manifold the organisations that gather around it, and how efficiently conducted. In a well-ordered church there should be a task for every member. All cannot carry the same "beam." But every man should carry the load which his strength will allow, and render as much service as he is able. In ordinary churches a considerable sum of money is needed in the course of the year to carry on the ministry and maintain the schools and other societies. When every member

conscientiously gives to the cause, not what others give, but what God enables him to give, there would never be crying out for lack of funds. If all who could teach would volunteer for the Sunday school, if all who could pray would show their faces at the prayer-meeting, it would be better for them and for our churches. (*J. Menzies.*) *Satisfaction of having done one's part of the work:*—Several years ago, when the great Cathedral of Cologne was finished, there was a great stir all over Europe. Four centuries had been occupied in the erection of this wonderful building, one of the most magnificent in all the world. People flocked from all directions to take part in the grand ceremonial of rejoicing. It was a large and brilliant and fashionable crowd. But right in the midst of the grandest people stood a humble workman, with torn clothing, a dilapidated hat, and shoes all out at the toes. As he stood there, with his eyes fairly glowing as they took in all the noble proportions of the buildings, he was heard to exclaim: "Oh! yes, indeed, we have made a glorious building of it!" "Why," said a gentleman, who overheard the remark, "what did you have to do with it?" The workman turned to answer him, with his eyes still glowing. "I mixed the mortar for a year," was the proud reply. That is it. We cannot all be builders. Sometimes we may not be able to place even one brick upon the structure. But we can each and every one help to mix the mortar for others to use, for certain it is that if the mortar be not mixed, the building itself cannot be built. *Purposeful activity:*—Everything depends on the spirit with which we work. The labour of many people amounts to nothing because it means nothing to them. There is no definite grip of purpose in what they do. I saw a little boy take up a rake in a New Hampshire hayfield in July, and he went raking about, imitating the men, except that the teeth of the rake were turned up. The raking was easier that way, but he gathered no hay. I know some preachers and Sunday school teachers and Christian workers who do all their raking that way. They rake a great deal and go through lots of motions, but they rake with the teeth up, and never gather any hay. Good results are only obtained by people who set the teeth of their purpose deep into what they are doing and rake for results; such people bring things to pass. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*)

Vers. 5-7. But as one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water.—*The axe-head:*—1. The first thought presented is, when Christ dwells in the hearts of His people there is a deep inward conviction of our own narrowness. The sons of the prophets dwelling with Elisha are conscious of the straitness of their dwelling, and earnestly long for enlargement. So it is with every true child of God. The soul that dwells in Christ and Christ in it is conscious of its straitness. It longs for enlargement. More room for Christ—this is its intense inward breathing. And this yearning cannot rest with inaction. Its course is always onward. "Let us go, we pray thee, to Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye." "Let us go"—that is its motto. This is the only form in which the yearning within can find rest. It carries the soul with it into higher aims and holier aspirations. It lays hold of everything that would lift it nearer to God. 2. But observe, there can be no onward movement, no enlargement of soul, without God's presence with us. "And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go." The language of this unknown one is that of every true child of God, under all circumstances. The believer knows that God's abiding presence with him can alone assure growth in grace, or security against evil. Without the constant presence of the Lord he has nothing to keep him from lapsing into coldness or deadness, nothing to meet the powers of evil that lie so thickly in his path. The presence of the Lord is his joy, his pavilion in trial, temptation, and danger, his light in darkness, and his life in death. 3. We see these remarks confirmed by what happened in this narrative. "So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water." Here at this critical moment, the very weapon needed most of all for carrying on the work—the axe-head—suddenly and unexpectedly fell into the water. Alas, alas! how is the wood to be cut down now? How is the building to go on? What are we to do? All is over now! At one sudden stroke everything collapses, and there is a cry of despair. If Elisha had not been with them in this crisis what could they have done? They would have wrung their hands in unavailing sorrow, and the work must have ceased. And are there not such crises in the history of every believer? Has not the Church of

Christ, in her passage through this world, volumes of such to record? Some great work of the Lord is prospering when, suddenly, the one who is the very centre of it, on whom it all seems to hang, is taken away by death. Happy for those who have with them the presence of the true Elisha. They "sorrow not as others who have no hope." Their hope is in God. 4. But notice another truth in the reason given for this sorrow here: "Alas, master! for it was borrowed." The axe-head was not this man's own. It belonged to another. See how this applies to the believer. Like these sons of the prophets dwelling with Elisha, he dwells with Christ. Abiding in Him, he fully realises that everything he possesses is only lent. It belongs to another, even God. It is just given him to use for his Master's glory, and nothing else. It is but the axe-head which is "borrowed." 5. But now observe what "a very present help" Elisha was: "And the man of God said, Where fell it?" This was all. All the responsibility now was Elisha's. So is it in the Christian's life. In all our circumstances the Lord is saying, "What is it? Tell Me." He is ever asking us to lay before Him these emergencies. He sends them for this purpose that we may "show Him the place." When this is done He will "undertake for you." You cannot bring up from the deep that that will fill your soul with joy, but He can. So it was here: "And Elisha cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim." The axe-head—that which your soul needs, that which can alone enable you to make your way, the true Elisha can bring back to your soul. It may seem to you to be hopeless, lost in the fathomless deep; and a world that can see nothing beneath the surface may pity, and write despair on your hopes. But Elisha, Jesus, is with you. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm: and ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed." Oh, trust the Lord! With such assurances as these how can you doubt? He will undertake for you, and the lost hope shall "swim" again before your eyes. You shall "eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God." 6. Here is presented a picture of death and resurrection. In the axe-head down in the waters, we see man "dead in trespasses and sins," "far off" from God, a lost and ruined sinner. Who shall go down into the waters of death and bring him up? Jesus, He has done it. "All thy waves and thy billows have gone over Me," was His cry. Thus He went down to the depths, and brought up the poor lost one. In His death the sinner has died. In His resurrection the believer has "risen again from the dead." 7. "And he put out his hand, and took it." Faith is the hand. Have you indeed put it forth, and taken hold of Jesus for your soul? Is it religion with you or Jesus? Which? (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*) *The lost axe-head:*—Elisha's recovery of the lost axe-head is a sad stumbling-block to rationalists. The miracle seems to them childish. They cannot explain it away, and they do not like to accept it. The Christian, however, does not sit in judgment upon God's Word. It is unreasonable to believe in God and to object to miracles; nor are we fit judges as to what is or is not a sufficient cause for God to interfere, as we call it, with His own laws, but to learn more of God's faithfulness and thoughtful care. The prophet's college was overfull; there was no room for the growing number of students. This was very encouraging. There had been no such difficulty in Elijah's day; but Elisha had reaped where Elijah had sown. This blessing entailed increased responsibility. It always is so; the reward of work is more work. There can be no standing still or resting upon our oars. The Divine command is always "Spare not," "Stretch forth." We must be ever pressing forward, both in the pursuit of personal holiness and in our efforts to win lives for God. They wish to build, therefore, and they go about it wisely. But, in spite of Elisha's presence, a serious embarrassment arose. "Alas, master," he cried; "for it was borrowed." He was an honest man, you see. He might have exclaimed, "What a stupid and worthless tool—the owner deserves to lose it"; or, "That's not my fault, it was pure accident; what a good thing it isn't mine." We must not let our good be evil spoken of. Dishonour often accrues to God's cause if we are careless about what is due to others. Elisha saw it would be for God's glory that the axe-head should be restored. But what a beautiful parable the story makes. We are all workers for God. We work with borrowed power. This power may be lost, not only from indolence and neglect, but even through over-energy in God's work. God's carpenters sometimes show more strength than skill. The energy of the flesh or the wisdom of the flesh leave no room for God to work, and

so the power is lost. Learn then how the lost power can be regained. 1. The man stopped working. Of course, you say; how could he cut down trees when the axe-head was gone? But Christian workers are not always so wise; they think to make up by their own energy and earnestness for the lack of Divine power. They use the haft of human wisdom or ecclesiastical status, although the cutting, driving power of God has been forfeited. 2. He told Elisha at once. That is always the first thing to do. Go and tell Jesus; confess to Him that you have lost the power. In this case the confession was made in public. Sometimes it is well for ministers and workers to acknowledge openly that they have lost the blessing they had. Generally, however, it is enough to tell Jesus. You do not need to tell others; they see it for themselves. 3. He showed Elisha the place where it fell. It is always well to be definite. Confess exactly where it was you lost touch. Perhaps you were puffed up with your success; or you began to distrust and doubt when that trouble came; or you were contaminated by that company; or you allowed that new interest, that book or game, to rob you of your secret time with God. 4. Elisha at once brought it within reach. Interpret as you like, the casting in of the wood. There is one power that always brings forfeited blessing within reach: it is the Cross of Calvary. The precious blood of Christ has brought within faith's reach every blessing that we need. Bring the Cross to bear upon your lost peace and power, and at once it is within reach. 5. The man put out his hand, and took it. There must be the personal appropriation of faith. He did this at the bidding of Elisha. Do the same at the bidding of the Lord Jesus, who still says to His disciples, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." (F. S. Webster, M.A.)

The borrowed axe:—I. THAT IT IS THE PRIVILEGE OF GOD'S PEOPLE TO EXPECT AND RECEIVE DIVINE INTERPOSITION, WHEN OVERTAKEN BY TROUBLE OF MISFORTUNE, IN ANY LAUDABLE UNDERTAKING. The enterprise in which these young men were engaged was both laudable and praiseworthy. "Into the water!" What an unusual, perplexing occurrence. How trivial it would have been, if it had fallen on the land. Such is life. It is the unexpected that happens. It is what may be called the stupid and vexatious occurrences of life that cause much of our daily trouble and disappointments. This young man was evidently careless, or he would not have allowed the axe to come clear off. I also learn from this narrative that, if a poor man should have no axe, and not well able to buy one, that God has no objections if he should go to a neighbour and borrow one. II. THAT IT IS THE PRIVILEGE OF GOD'S PEOPLE TO LOOK FOR AND RECEIVE DIVINE INTERPOSITION IN SEASONS OF LEGITIMATE ANXIETY AND WORRIMENT. Every honest man should feel worried, who has borrowed the property of another and cannot return it according to promise. Christian people, especially, should be very sensitive on this point. A religion that does not make a man honest and truthful is spurned and ridiculed by the world, and justly so, for it is worse than no religion at all. This young man had a noble sense of honour and equity about him. As I look at the Divine interposition, in behalf of this anxious, disappointed young man, I draw lessons of encouragement. 1. Let us be sure, first of all, that the business, the enterprise out of which our troubles arise, is legitimate and proper. 2. That we entered upon it in the right spirit. That, during its prosecution, we sought to go in and out under the smile of God. 3. That our troubles are not the result of our own ignorance, indolence, or sin, but from causes we did not suspect, and over which we had no control. The axe is off, and in the water. Legitimate anxiety and worryment from unusual and unsuspected quarters. The zeal and energy of this young man brought him this trouble. I suppose that some men could have used that axe all day, and it might not have slipped a quarter of an inch. But he swung it as a man who intended to make the chips fly. Therefore, I should say it came off, and all this trouble came on. So, the man who works with both hands heartily, in felling souls for the spiritual temple of the Lord, will be sure to make himself trouble. A cold, formal Church and the wicked world will unite to oppose and do him harm. Indeed, any man who has anything worthy of the name of zeal, in the cause of God, will soon find cause for legitimate anxiety about himself, his reputation, and his work. III. THAT GOD'S METHOD OF INTERPOSITION, IN BEHALF OF HIS PEOPLE, IS FREQUENTLY THROUGH HUMAN INSTRUMENTALITY. Elisha was the instrument God used to help this young man out of his trouble. So now, God often helps us, even answers our prayers, through persons to whom he has given the will and power to do it. There are many striking instances of God's interposition in behalf of His people, in temporal matters. IV. THAT, ALTHOUGH IN THIS CASE THE IN-

TERPOSITION WAS MIRACULOUS, THE END WAS NOT FULLY SECURED WITHOUT HUMAN CO-OPERATION: "Take it up to thee." In the Divine economy, man must be more than a mere negation,—he must be more than a passive recipient of God's interpositions and blessings. He has raised us to the dignity of co-workers with Himself, in the great work of rescuing our sin-cursed race from the service and dominion of Satan. Just as God and man work together in nature, He always doing the supernatural,—producing the seed, and the vast possibilities of life slumbering in the face of nature, and the external influences fitted to call them forth: and man, as though everything depended upon him, clearing the ground, sowing the seed, cutting weeds and thistles, arranging his fields, gardens, and orchards, until the face of nature is a very paradise of beauty and blessing. So in the spiritual world, God's purpose is that through human and Divine co-operation. Oh for the eager promptness of this young man, in grasping our lost blessings. Reflections:—1. Learn from this narrative that God is not displeased with His zealous, whole-hearted servant, who by his extra zeal disables himself or loses his axe; and that he would rather work a miracle, to put him in working trim, than to see him lazy and sleepy at his work. 2. That every man who has lost his axe of spiritual power must find it again, or, so far as he is concerned, the work of God is stopped. That one idle man among God's workmen counts more than one in the aggregate of his influence. His very presence will retard the workman and slacken the movements of many. 3. That in seasons of misfortune, it is well to be calm, and not by our own impulsiveness and imprudence make matters worse. Like the man I saw in a machine shop who chafed his hand in attempting to put the belt on a machine, and became so furiously angry that he cut the belt in pieces, but had to replace it, at the cost of nearly a week's wages. 4. That the sinner should not make his case any more desperate by continuing to sin against God. That it is dangerous, unmanly, and very displeasing to God for one to deliberately add to the moral turpitude of his case, thus necessitating a greater miracle of Divine mercy, in order to save him. (T. Kelly.) *The iron axe-head that swam*:—"Our trials are often the shadows of coming mercies. God will appear at the ebb of the tide. He will turn the year at the shortest winter's day. When He has shown us our entire dependence upon Himself, He will stretch out His glorious arm, and work deliverance." The life of the true child of God is as constantly watched over, guided, protected, and blessed, as though the bright spirits who attend about His throne came visibly to minister to the heirs of salvation. The idea that the Almighty One, who made and governs all things, could not so change the usual course of nature as to cause the iron to swim, is simply absurd. In the working of a great printing-press, if any thing goes wrong with the paper, the feeder has only to touch a lever with his foot, and, while the ordinary movements of the press are undisturbed, the impression is not made upon the sheet. The skill and genius of man have brought the laws of nature under his control so far that distant countries are reached by the steamship and the telegraph. And even so, the God of nature bends these mighty forces to suit His own good pleasure. God gave power to Elisha to befriend the disconsolate young man, when he lamented the loss of the axe-head. And in every generation since, He has enabled other faithful ones to do Elisha's work, and make the iron to swim. The trifling and licentious Charles the Second locked up John Bunyan in Bedford jail, and kept him there with his Bible for twelve long years. There the despised tinker wrote the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and that iron is likely to swim for many ages yet to come. The lukewarm age in which we live is satisfied with ordinary prayers, ordinary faith, ordinary works—and, hence, it has to put up with ordinary blessings. The power of God to do wonderful things is none the less than in ancient days; and His hand only seems shortened, because the faith has died out in selfish, worldly hearts, that "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark ix. 23). (J. N. Norton.) *The restoration of the axe*:—It cannot be denied that the restoration of the lost axe was miraculous, if we consider—1. That the man who lost it appealed to the prophet, and to him alone, for help in his extremity, as the only person who could help him, because he was the only person to whom it was given to exercise supernatural power. 2. That the axe came to the surface at the very spot where it was dropped. The Jordan is a rapid river, and if the axe had floated from any natural cause, it would have risen to the surface lower down the stream. 3. The means used to raise it were in no way adapted to the end in view. The narrative suggests—I. THAT THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE GREAT WORKS OF THE WORLD DEPENDS VERY MUCH UPON KEEPING LITTLE THINGS

IN WORKING ORDER. A great victory may be lost by the snapping of the linch-pin of an artillery wheel. The sons of the prophet could not raise a house to the honour of God without the help of an axe. "Great weights hang on small wires."

II. THAT WHAT IS SMALL AND WHAT IS GREAT DEPENDS ENTIRELY UPON ITS RELATION. To many men the loss of a five-pound note would be a mere trifle, scarcely worth the mention; to millions it would be the loss of all their ability to feed and clothe their families for many days. So there were many men in Israel to whom the loss of an axe would have been nothing, but to this member of a poor community it was a misfortune so serious that it could only be remedied by a miracle.

III. THE SMALLEST TROUBLE WHICH COMES UPON A SERVANT OF GOD, OR UPON A COMMUNITY OF MEN ENGAGED IN HIS SERVICE, IS A MATTER FOR DIVINE HELP. The Lord God Almighty is indeed the "high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity" (Isa. lvii. 15), yet He "considereth all the works of men" (Ps. xxxiii. 15), "His eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men" (Jer. xxxii. 19), and "He dwells with him also that is of a humble and contrite spirit" (Isa. lvii. 15). This is sufficient to account for His interposition in the matter of the lost axe. (*Outlines of Sermons.*) *Miracles ethical*:—Oh, how frightened some people are of these miracles! A young fellow-student and a preacher to-day, under the influence of modern criticism, told me that he could not swallow this miracle—he is very narrow in the swallow anyway!—he could not swallow this miracle about the axe-head that swam, "because, you know," he said, "it has a suspicious look about it. I'm all right, I trust," he said, "I'm all right upon the miracles of our Lord. But between you and me, M'Neill, that miracle, you know, is not ethical." That is the great word, "ethical"; if you are not ethical, you're not in it. "It is not ethical!" I said. "Well, now, that is very funny. It is very ethical, according to me. Do you mean to say," I said, "if you borrow an axe-head from me, that it is quite ethical to come back with a bit of stick, and the head . . . gone! Why," I said, "the miracle is bottomed upon ethics. God was so anxious that the axe should be given back by the fellow who borrowed it, as he borrowed it, that He worked miracles on behalf of the ethics that underlie borrowing and lending." And then he said, "I have no difficulty about the miracles of our Lord, because they are ethical." "Well now," I said, "there is one of our Lord's miracles, and if you are squeamish about the axe-head that swam, then logically you ought to be squeamish about it, too, although our Lord worked it, for it is this kind of 'grotesque miracle'—making a display of Divine power. You remember," I said, "one day when our Lord had to pay His taxes and He did not seem to have enough loose money about Him—it is a kind of pathetic touch, you know—He did not have enough loose money about Him, but He evidently considered tax-paying ethical, and He wanted to pay them, and, of course, He might have borrowed from somebody, or He might have got it in some way or another; but in spite of these critics He went away and made a display of the miraculous, and He said, 'Go to the sea and cast in a hook, and the first fish that comes up you will find my taxes in its mouth.' " The pride of intellect. Oh, if you are troubled, and if you boggle and stumble at the miraculous, Jesus will be the biggest stumbling-block and rock of offence of all the miracle-workers in the Bible. (*John M'Neill.*) *Divine concern*:—The French Marshal Turenne was the soldiers' hero. He shared in all their hardships, and they entirely trusted him. Once when the troops were wading through a heavy morass, some of the younger soldiers complained. But the older ones said, "Depend upon it, Turenne is more concerned than we are; at this moment he is thinking how to deliver us. He watches for us while we sleep. He is our father, and would not have us go through such fatigue unless he had some great end in view which we cannot yet make out." How much happier and stronger we should be if with this kind of simple confidence we trusted the Captain of our Salvation, Jesus Christ, who came on earth to share all our hardships! (*Quiver.*)

Vers. 8-23. Then the King of Syria warred against Israel.—*Elisha at Dothan*:—Seeing the invisible! Here is the young business man. He spends his days in a close and musty counting-room, casting up interminable figures, or behind a distasteful counter, selling goods. But he sees something more than the ledger and the counting-house and the dry goods. He sees a beautiful home, and a warm fireside, and a happy family, and an easy competence for old age. It is this glimpse of the invisible that makes him toil on, early and late, uncomplainingly and patiently. Just so is it with the inventor. There was Palissy, the potter,

who laboured sixteen years to perfect his invention. But he saw something more before him than the clay and the potter's wheel. He had in his mind's eye all the time the beautiful vase which, after those wearying years, he should produce. Howe had before him the perfect sewing-machine while working away at his crude experiments, and Morse had in his mind's eye the perfect telegraph machine, and Stephenson the perfect locomotive—long before any one else could perceive these machines. It was the vision of the invisible which gave these men courage. Nothing great or good would ever have been accomplished did not these visions of the unseen beckon men on to glorious deeds. Nay, we could not endure this treadmill life, we should die from very weariness of doing the same thing over and over, did not these glimpses of the invisible spur us on. Surely, then, this lesson which Elisha at Dothan teaches us of the unseen power of God is of the utmost practical importance. If we realised the unseen as he realised it, we too should always be brave, and calm, and trustful. In order to obtain a more definite impression, let us ask what are the characteristics of this unseen spiritual power, as here revealed? I. IN THE FIRST PLACE, ITS MIGHT AND PLENITUDE ARE TAUGHT US. The forces of God which are fighting for our souls, if we could only see them, are more and stronger than the forces of the devil which are fighting against our souls. However full of evil and temptation this world which we see and feel may be, the unseen world is more full of motives and incitements to truth and righteousness, could we but gain the vision. The drunkard often urges, as his excuse, that his appetite is so strong that he cannot overcome it; the worldly man allows his love of money to master every other impulse; the libertine lets his lusts win the victory; and then these men whine that temptations and circumstances and environment are too strong to be resisted. But all the time the hosts of God are round about and ready to do battle for them, if only they are called upon, and these hosts are stronger than appetite and avarice and lust. All the time the crown hangs over their heads; and the crown, if they would but see it, is more attractive than the muck-rake. II. THAT THESE INVISIBLE POWERS OF GOD ARE VERY NEAR US. The invisible horses and chariots of fire were round about Elisha. The hill on which Dothan stood was full of them. The young man had only to open his eyes, and there they were. The clanging chariots and neighing horses of the Syrians were no nearer to the man of God than were the heavenly steeds. I have read the story of an escaped prisoner in our late war, who wandered for many days and nights, seeking the Union lines. At last, in the dusk of early twilight, he came to a camp which he supposed belonged to the Confederates. Before he knew it he was surrounded by the pickets and captured, to be hurried back to prison, as he thought; but what was his surprise and joy, on looking a little closer, to find that it was the Union blue, and not the Confederate grey, that the soldiers wore. He had been captured by his friends. When he thought that his friends were far away, they were all about him. O wanderer, and fugitive from God, lift up your eyes, the hosts of your friends surround you. God is near you. III. THE AGENCY OF PRAYER IN REVEALING THE INVISIBLE. Over and over in this brief story does the prayer of the faithful prophet move the arm that moves the world. In answer to his own devout prayers, doubtless, he saw the invisible hosts himself, so that he could calmly, trustfully say to his servant, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." How often has this been illustrated in other lives than that of Elisha. When the wise men could not interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel prayed to God, and his three companions joined him in prayer. "Then," says the simple Bible narrative, "was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision." "Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven, and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His. He revealeth the deep and secret things; He knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with Him." "There is a God in heaven which revealeth secrets," is his bold and confident affirmation to the king. IV. THE SYMBOL WHICH GOD USED TO CHEER AND ENCOURAGE HIS SERVANT AT DOTHAN. He sent heavenly horses and chariots, and filled the mountain with them. The very same means which the enemy used to distress and terrify him, God used to defend and encourage him. Every Syrian horse that had come to harm was duplicated by a heavenly steed that had come to save. Every hostile chariot had for its double a friendly chariot. The enemy could send nothing against him which God could not match, and more than match, in his defence. Here, too, is a helpful thought for us. It seems to us that Satan is more ingenious and more mighty than ever. He adapts himself with such nice skill to each particular age

and phase of life. It looks sometimes as though he had the mastery, and that nothing could overcome the horses and chariots with which he assaults us. The evils of our times are peculiar, we think. Intemperance, Sabbath-breaking, lax divorce laws, dishonesty, worldliness in the Church—over all this catalogue of evils we groan, and think that never was such a host of the devil's horses and chariots arrayed against God and truth. But if our eyes could be opened, we should see that the hosts of evil are exactly met and matched at every turn by the hosts of God. We should see that, nicely as the powers of darkness are adapted to pull down, the powers of light are better adapted to build up; that God is always ready for the emergency; that there can never be a horse and chariot of evil which He cannot exactly match and overcome. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

Elisha's safeguard:—God's people may make use of these words in reference to their adversaries oftener than they think of; but let no one apply them lightly; it were sad to make a mistake in such a matter. As regarded Elisha, he could show proof of what he asserted. It would appear that the prophet was, so to speak, the visible representative of the Providence of God, which was engaged for the preservation of His people.

1. Observe the proof we have here of the long-suffering of God to His people. Much provocation had Israel given Him by their idolatries and backslidings, but still they were helped and forewarned of coming danger, and were furnished with innumerable proofs that the God of Israel was the supreme Lord of all the earth. And it was only when all means failed, and Ephraim was joined to his idols, that God at length gave him up to the spoiler.
2. Another reflection is suggested to us by the miserable suspicions of Ben-hadad. This man waged an unrighteous war with the people of Israel, and was therefore engaged in a nefarious course, and when things went against him he was ready to fancy all sorts of treacherous defections on the part of his servants. What a dreadfully bad time of it they must have had with him when his affairs did not prosper as he expected, and his unworthy suspicions were hatching! Many an innocent man would be regarded with the dark scowl of aversion, and many a faithful one must have seen that his lord and master held him in distrust. And not one of them might speak a word concerning that which every one must have seen.
3. Elisha's way of treating the Syrians is worthy of consideration. And let us at once confess that it is unlawful in any circumstances to tell an untruth, and this will show that in our opinion Elisha told none. On the contrary, it will appear, upon strict examination, that he spake what was literally true. He was no longer in the city, for he had advanced to meet them; and when he had brought them to Samaria, he kept his word and revealed himself to them, although it was then their turn to be in fear. If that explanation will not suffice, and if it be supposed that in certain conditions a person may say what is untrue to promote some good end, it will be well that any one who is of this unsafe opinion shall only act upon it when he is assured of having the same monitor as Elisha had to guide him. If, on the other hand, exception be taken to the fact that Elisha meant to deceive the Syrians, we have no defence to offer, because it is our belief that none is required.
4. In the perusal of this and other passages of Scripture in which the wonderful power of prayer is recorded, it will be well to have due regard to the circumstances in which these instances occurred. Any one who should attempt to foil an army in our days by means of prayer and no other weapon, as Elisha did, would run a great risk of being mocked for his pains, without any advantage to set over against it. We are to remember that Israel was the visible Church, and that God was pleased to afford miraculous proof of the care and superintendence which He exercised over it. Besides, prayer was the only means at Elisha's command. He never advised the king to disband his army, and trust entirely to his prayers for the preservation of himself and the nation. But the power of prayer may not be less now than it was in ancient times, although its effects are less apparent.

(*J. Murray.*) *Within the circle of flame*:—I. THE SAINT'S POWER AND PERIL.

1. Observe to what heights of power a saint may come.
2. See how Peril waits on Piety that comes to Power. Where is the marauder who can calmly brook the parrying hand of a saint? "Let us alone, what have we to do with thee?" cry the lawless when chocked by the godly. Ambition turns to rage, foaming like baffled breakers at the cliff-foot.

II. WITHIN THE FLAME-CIRCLE, AND AT REST. Two men stand in the seraph-ring. One is a saint, the other a possible saint. One is serene; panic takes the other. Elisha's serenity is the quiet of a man all of whose heart-strings are lovingly held in the hands of Infinite Power—a quiet which is only broken by rising praise, as a wave will sometimes edge up,

whiten, and turn in music in the midst of a gentle blue sea ; or by that profoundest of merriment, the laughter of a fearless soul facing peril. In the processes of sublimation Elisha has become conscious of an ever keener sight for the life men call unseen ; and of a familiarity with that border-land of human life, and that infinite beyond out of which heavenly helps come trooping. Serenity is the still air, drenched in smiling light, that entraps the soul that traffics steadily with God the Undaunted, God the Unshakable. It is the quiet breathing of faith cradled in "the everlasting arms." III. WITHIN THE CIRCLE, YET AFRAID. 1. Elisha's servant is trembling. He is like "a reed shaken with the wind" at the foot of a granite crag. Though the ring of fire belts them twain, he does not attain serenity. Where Elisha saw the sun-white host his servant found a blank. The blank upon the hill coincided with a blank in his soul. Little did it avail him that his eyes were young and keener to detect the common furniture of earth than the old man's—his master's. Even had Elisha been stone-blind, and the youth's eyes so superb that he could fix the forms of flying motes ; or tell the spot a mile beneath grey seas where the *Euplectella* hides its loveliness in slime ; or figure forth the astral systems careering in the infinite beyond the glittering fence of the Milky Way, such seeing would not be worth a thought beside the vision, the ever-widening, ever-strengthening vision of the seer's pure and spiritual heart. All life's advantages are not the heritage of youth. Holiness is heir to more and greater. The lamp of faith illuminates a wider and a grander world than the shining of the sun. 2. The seer who has saved his king now saves his own servant. Deep in saintliness, as an integral part of it, is this amazing versatility of helpfulness. Away over the young man's head flies Elisha's prayer. Every day such intercessions flock heavenward, carrying often the ripest faith and love the Church Militant can show. (*J. Dunk.*) *The encompassing defence of the faithful* :—I. That the GREATEST FORCES IN THIS WORLD ARE THE FORCES WHICH WE CALL SPIRITUAL AND INVISIBLE, and the strong, brave, fearless men are the men who believe in these forces, lean upon them, and in a certain sense see and grasp them. It is not so with the man of facts and figures, with what the Bible calls the darkened mind of the children of this world. He sets at naught all that he cannot see and measure. He stupidly thinks that the five senses take in everything. He takes stock of his material resources, counts men, weapons, machinery, and money, throws in perhaps a little brain, scientific knowledge, intellectual smartness, and then concludes that he has all the equipment which he needs for life's battle, or at least all the equipment which it is possible to gain. Turn to the Bible, and you at once get into the company of men whose might is in other weapons, who are covered with the invisible panoply of God, and who see around them the spiritual chariots and horses. They take little account of material masses and numbers. They laugh at huge figures. A grain of faith outweighs the resources of a kingdom. And there is no question about their heroic strength and fearlessness. The sceptic would call it imagination, but it is the kind of imagination which invests them with wonderful power. For these men are the world's masters ; they have all a touch of the superhuman. Moses defying the might of Egypt ; Gideon with his little regiment charging the vast army of Midianites ; Elijah in lonely grandeur challenging the furious rabble of Baal's prophets ; Daniel setting at naught the king's princes, nobles, and hungry lions of Babylon ; Peter and John scornfully resisting the browbeating magistrates. Magnificent figures were all these. We would give all our goods to be like them. Yet it was simply their belief in the unseen forces which made them what they were. They saw the fiery chariots and the armies of heaven. They knew that God and Omnipotence were on their side, and only the fickle whims and passions of men against them. II. IT IS ALWAYS THESE UNSEEN FORCES THAT WE RECKON UPON IN OUR CHRISTIAN WARFARE TO-DAY. What we call faith is just Elisha's vision and the steadfast heart which it brings. Faith, if not actually compassed about by invisible armies, is nerved, inspired, and energised by thoughts, upliftings, and confidences which make a man more than a match for his fellow-men. Without that, the battle for God's truth and religion would be a forlorn and wretchedly hopeless business. The valiant fighters in it are always outnumbered and overmatched. Religious censuses would fill us with despair if we weighed spiritual forces in ordinary scales. Where there is one man mightily earnest in this struggle there are ten standing aloof, and ten more lukewarm. The odds are all apparently on the evil side. Yet we never lose heart until we have lost all faith. We are always optimists until our eyes become blind to the unseen forces. These unseen forces are operating on every man. We

have allies in every man's heart. When he is most against us, there is something in him that is for us. Every man has occasional visions of the fiery chariots. There is a judgment throne which he can never wholly forget. There is an eternal righteousness which he knows he must reckon with. There is something in every man which secretly sides with the good. There is conscience, and memory, and unrest, and a lurking fear of the very God whom he denies. The warfare is not unequal, as it seems. III. Remember that THESE AND COUNTLESS UNSEEN FORCES ARE OVER AND AROUND EVERY ONE WHO IS RESOLUTELY BENT ON LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. We often hear of the difficulties of the Christian life. I think we hear more about its difficulties than about its helps. We get into the murmuring vein of the children of Israel, who were always magnifying shadows into mountains and ordinary foes into terrible giants. Yet surely there is another and brighter and diviner side to all that which the darkened eyes do not see, and which the despondent mind often forgets. There are many things against the godly life, but there are more things for it. Yes, we have more helps than temptations, more inspirations than discouragements, more incentives and wings than drawbacks and chains. (*J. G. Greenhough, M.A.*) *Elisha's defenders*:—I. GOD IS THE PROTECTOR OF HIS PEOPLE. Was Elisha so much dearer to God's heart than His other children that for him alone the forces of heaven came down to earth? Cannot all God's people say, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge"? II. THE REALITY AND NEARNESS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD. The unseen is not the unreal. It needed just the opening of the eyes, and nothing more, to reveal to this young man agencies unseen and unsuspected before. We are citizens of two worlds—one material, the other spiritual. We cannot too frequently remind ourselves of this fact: that the world we see is not the only one in which we live. All about us is another, vast and mighty, although invisible and silent. When Dr. Judson was at Rangoon for the last time, endeavouring to gain a footing for the Gospel, he heard one day that the savage Burman magistrate had stationed guards with orders to seize every native seen coming out of the house of the teacher. Mrs. Judson writes: "I shall never forget the expression of my husband's face, as though really piercing to the invisible, when he exclaimed. 'I tell you, if we had but the power to see them, the air about us is thick with contending spirits, the good and the bad, striving for mastery.'" However many and strong our foes, our friendly helpers are yet more numerous and powerful. Elisha's bodyguard was more than a match for the Syrian host. Rank upon rank they stood about him, countless as sunbeams; chariots that were billows of fire, and horses that were clouds of flame. So God's defending hosts surround His people, invisible, innumerable, invincible. III. THE MINISTRY OF THE ANGELS. As sons of God by creation, we of the human race do not stand alone. There is another race of intelligent beings, to whom, by the fact of a common fatherhood, we are nearly related. They are our brethren in the household of the divine offspring. They are the elder, we the younger, born. With them there is neither childhood nor age, for they came into being, not by successive generations, but swept forth in all their glittering hosts, full-statured, at a single fiat of creative will. They are no flock of idle dreamers, sauntering along streets of gold, lying on fleecy clouds, listening to the music of fountains, their gravest task to practise psalmody and carry their part in some grand chorus. The word assures us that they are employed, every one, in rendering service in this earthly life to them who are heirs of salvation. There is something impressive and stimulating in the thought that we are constantly surrounded by these unseen helpers. No power of evil can avoid their scrutiny. Wherever a foe lurks an angel watches. They attend us in our solitudes, walk by our side in danger, and mingle with us in our solemn assemblies. Over the sorrowing, the tempted, the toiling, the dying they bend in true and tender sympathy. (*George W. Brown.*) *Our allies*:—Dothan is not an unusual place for the at least occasional residence of a Christian man. Sometimes the Christian man is in the Dothan—(1) Of hard circumstances; (2) of business disappointments; (3) of the sudden re-emergence of an old sin he thought conquered; (4) of a whelming sorrow; (5) of sickness and failing physical energy; (6) of a chilling doubt. Beleaguered Dothan is not a place so unusual for a Christian man to stand in. But, in the ancient story, Elisha, though in Dothan, and so beleaguered, was not fearful. It is a good thing, amid the stress and strain of life, to count up our allies. I have often found great heartening in doing it. 1. Though a man be in Dothan, God the Almighty is his ally. (1) When a man looks out upon this universe, the arresting thing he sees is perpetual change,

The universe is a vast procession of effects. What we at first call causes, on analysis resolve themselves into effects. But every effect must have a cause. Every effect must have a cause adequate to the effect. The fountal cause must be God the Almighty, since only an Almighty cause can be efficient for such vast and varied effects. (2) The evident design everywhere. But design implies mind; mind implies thought; thought implies a thinker; a thinker implies a person. And so a man rises to the conception of an Almighty Person, above him and around him. (3) Man looks at himself and finds that, on every side, limitations of all sorts bind him in; but the finite implies an Infinite, some unlimited One; and so the intention of the Infinite springs up within him. (4) Man finds he has a conscience. That conscience stands for righteousness. There must be some righteous cause, of which such conscience, protesting for righteousness, is effect. And so man comes to the intention of a righteous, a holy God. And when a man stands in Dothan, and will choose the most right he knows, he may be sure that this Almighty, infinite, personal, holy God is his ally. 2. Consider further, though a man stand in Dothan, Christ the Saviour is his ally. The Saviour is evidence—(1) Of the Divine love. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son," &c. (2) Of the Divine nearness; in Incarnation Deity assumes our nature. (3) Of the Divine forgiveness through the Atonement. And when a man stands in Dothan confessing and forsaking sin, he may be utterly sure that Christ the Saviour is his ally. 3. Consider further, though a man be beleaguered in Dothan, the Holy Spirit is his ally. John xvi. is full of promise here. 4. Consider further, though a man be in Dothan, good angels are his allies (Heb. i. 14). 5. Consider further, though a man be in Dothan, God's Providence is his ally (Rom. viii. 28). 6. Consider further, though a man be in Dothan, God's Promises are his allies. Fear not, therefore, because of oppositions, because of your weakness, because of your mistakes, because of your sins even, because of death. Count up your allies. "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) *Secure amid perils*:—It is related that, on the first awful day of the fight against fire made on board *The City of Rome*, the passengers had been driven out of the forward cabins and their quarters were shifted aft. It was impossible to set the evening meal in the first cabin, and it was spread aft also. It is a remarkable fact that the discipline of the ship made it possible to serve the evening meal, and perhaps still more remarkable that most of the passengers gathered at it, and many of them enjoyed it. In fact, it was even a cheerful meal, and the prevailing spirit seemed to reflect the motto of the Atlantic Line, "*Secure amid Perils*." If voyagers could sit down and eat their dinner quietly and with good cheer, knowing that they were hundreds of miles from land and an awful fire was raging in the hold underneath them, because of their faith in the captain and the heroic fidelity of the crew, how much more should we on the voyage of life trust the Great Captain, and face the storms of human living with good cheer and confidence. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*)

Ver. 17. Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see.—*The power to see*:—Here is a scene which is worthy of the pencil of the finest artist, but a scene of such simplicity and beauty that no artist could improve it. It represents the triumphal struggle of simple unarmed truth against the massed and mailed battalions of error. It brings before us a man, with a great soul of love, standing up in the omnipotence of his faith to defy kings and all their hired hosts. Lessons of this kind are to be found on almost every page of history. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." It is to the thinker, the seer, the godly, that the victory belongs. He believes more than others because he sees more. He lives in two worlds, and draws his forces from both. The chariots and horsemen of truth are ever about him, and he sees them, though others near to him have no eyes to see. This is the plain story of the incident with which our text is connected. In looking at the account one cannot but be impressed with Elisha's strong and unshaken confidence. His servant was blind and was greatly stricken with fear. He had not yet formed the habit of looking at things invisible. He could take stock of material masses but he had no perception of spiritual forces. Ten thousand men with their chariots, horses, and swords were to him stubborn facts; facts which, to a certain extent, he could measure and calculate. But the powers on the side of his master he could neither gauge nor understand. He could appreciate Elisha's skill, he knew how brave he was. But he also knew that Elisha was only one, and that if he added himself—though his poor faltering

heart would make a very bad second—that, even then, there would be ten thousand with arms to two without arms. No prospect could be more unpromising and gloomy. It looked as if they might as well dash themselves against the mountain as contend against a force so numerous and well equipped. Then it was that the prophet's faith and confidence shone forth. With two clear eyes fixed on the unseen, surveying with the wondrous look of spiritual insight the immeasurable forces of the living God, he answered cheerfully, "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they which be with them," and then looking at his servant, and pitying his nervous terror, he added, "Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see." There are spiritual truths taught by this incident which are of considerable value. Here we see, 1. That that which gives to men masterhood and confidence is the power to see. What is it that makes the difference between the great man and the small man—between the thinker and the clown—between the hero and the coward—between the saint and the sinner—between the Pauls and the Neros? You may say that there are a hundred things which go to make up this difference. But analyse them and you will find them to centre mainly in one. The greatest and wisest and purest men are in some sort prophets—or seers, as they used to be called; men who see further, see deeper, see more than other men. Your poet is not a mere manipulator of words, a jangler together of rhymes. He is one who sees flashes of resemblance, brilliant analogies, angelic and heroic thoughts, where ordinary men see nothing but what is common and uninteresting. Your artist is one who can see more in a tame Dutch landscape than others can see in an Italian sunset or in the snowy Alps. Your sculptor can see more in a rugged, unwashed gipsy than the common eye can see in a white-robed angel. Sometimes we look upon these men as creators. But they create nothing; all is created for them. What they do is simply to see that which they find. "George Eliot" used to weave her wonderful romances out of the common facts of common homes and common lives. She seemed to linger by loving preference among that which was common; yet she found miracles and marvels and thrilling episodes from every page. She did not create them, she found them. They were there all the time; all that was wanted was the open eye, the power to see. All the great leaders and thinkers at whose feet we have sat for instruction, or by whose words and works we have been charmed and soothed and inspired, have been simply men and women who have looked at things with larger eyes than others. They have been the world's masters because they have seen more than the servants have seen. Christ saw what blind eyes could not see, and He was therefore calm and joyful, even in the presence of agony and death. To others there were only the cross, the jeers, the wails, the fierce cries of a drivelling multitude. To Him there was a great world beyond. He could recognise a moral power knitting together the hearts alike of men and of nations. Some tell me that a man's life is rich in proportion to his material possessions. No fallacy was ever more misleading; a man is rich only in proportion as he has power to see. One man will find more pleasure in a flower which he is too poor to buy than another will find in some earthly paradise which is all his own. A book which cost fifty cents is a richer treasure to some than is a mission which costs ten thousand dollars a year to others. A chapter in the Gospel is a richer field of gold to many a humble soul than is a lordly estate to a wearied voluptuary whose vision is bleared by excess and debauchery. It is not, How many friends have you? but, How much can you see in each friend? It is not, How far have you travelled? but, How much can you see without travelling? One man may find more in his own house than another can find in a tour round the world. Paul was a far richer and happier man than Cæsar, though Cæsar owned the world and Paul owned nothing, simply because he saw more. He saw an infinite soul in every man that he met; he saw the world of possibilities in every child; he saw eternity stamped on all the changes of time; he saw God's good purposes writing golden lines under every page of sorrow and of sin; he saw heaven's rich colours transfiguring every earthly scene, and his life was filled to overflowing. "As sorrowing, yet always rejoicing; as having nothing, yet possessing all things." It is such men as the Apostles who are the master spirits, the brave, joyful spirits of the world. It is not those who have much, it is those who see much, and who make us cry, whenever we come into their society. "Lord, open Thou our eyes, that we also may see." Now, from all this, it follows that our daily prayer for ourselves, and for others, is the prayer for the power to see. 2. But in order that we may offer this prayer aright we must be

conscious of our need. No man will be passionate in his cry for help who does not realise his own helplessness. Nothing is more common than for men to imagine that that which they do not see does not exist. It is said that a dog writhes in agony under the most exquisite music; the more elevating the music the more the dog writhes. But who thinks any the worse of the music on that account? The most you can do is to pity the dog. When the vibrations of a musical chord attain a certain rapidity the music is no longer heard by ordinary ears. It is too high, too refined; in a sense, too spiritual. It is only the keen ear of a practised musician that can catch it then. The same law runs through all life, and it should be a warning against our too ready criticism, and should check our faulty and uncharitable judgments. There are numbers of men who think that it is an easy thing to fathom a human soul and take in the sum of its mysteries. But you might as well attempt to measure God's heavens with an opera-glass. The men and women who are to us as closed doors, with dark and empty chambers behind, are full of the choicest treasures to those who have found the secret key. They are like closed instruments to us, which yield no music to our touch because our hands lack the cunning which is required to play on them. But as soon as our kinship with them shows us what chords we are to touch, and how to touch them, their whole nature will break out in symphonies, and they will become to us an unmeasured source of delight and joy. Christ said, "The prince of this world cometh and findeth nothing in Me." Fancy that! The prince of the world looks into the royal and Divine soul—or thinks he looks—and declares that he finds nothing. The very fulness of God, the overflowing fountain of eternal love and delight, is to the prince of the world only emptiness, darkness, and silence. A man may be clever at analysing light and distilling clouds, and yet have none of the artist's discernment. He may be clever with chisel, and saw, and hammer, and scalpel, yet when he has to deal with a magnetic current, or an electric spark, he may be as helpless as a child. These subtleties escape him because neither his instincts nor his discernments are sufficiently fine. And in the same way there are clever dogmatists who think that they know all about the things of God, who laugh at those who profess to see more than they see, but who themselves never touch the very fringe of the subject of Divine things. They have eyes but they see not, and none more than they need to pray, "Lord, open Thou our eyes that we also may see." The psalmist's prayer was, "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." To the common eye this book is a book of letters and syllables, of sentences and paragraphs, of verses and chapters. But to the eye of the thoughtful and enlightened Christian, the man with spiritual insight, every chapter sparkles with beauty, and pulsates with life. Some time ago I met with a picture representing two women in great sorrow. Standing behind the chairs on which they were sitting there appeared the figure of Christ stretching out His hands over them. They could not see Him, because their eyes were dim, but He was none the less present with them. He was near in all His effulgent brightness, with all His sympathetic consolation, and with all His helpful power. At the foot of the picture this verse was written:—

Unheard, because our ears are dull,
Unseen, because our eyes are dim,
He walks on earth, the Wonderful,
And all great deeds are done for Him.

What we need then, brethren, is the power to see—to see the chariots and horses on the mountains; to see God all about us; to see the strong right arm of the Almighty stretched out to help us; to see that the darkest clouds and most threatening surroundings are under the all-controlling power of the Everlasting Father. And, seeing this, we shall have the prophet's hope, and the prophet's faith, and the prophet's trust that they who are with us are more than they who are against us. The prayer, then, that befits our lips day and night continually is, "Lord, we pray Thee, open our eyes, that we may see." (*W. Jubb.*) *The vision permitted to Elisha's servant as illustrative of the true faith of the soul:—* 1. Here we see, as if through a microscope, the act or process of faith in the human soul. What is faith? "It is," says the apostle, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;" that is to say, it is the faculty which reaches to that which is beyond the senses, yet which apprehends it as certain—as being at least as certain as the things which we see. Faith, then, is not an act of the

natural imagination. Imagination deals with that which is not; faith with that which is; imagination with a fiction; faith with fact. The objects of faith and the objects of imagination may have this, if you will, in common, that they are both beyond the reach of the natural sight. But, then, there is this difference, that the objects of faith, being, as they are, real, may become visible to a higher sense than the bodily eye; while the objects of imagination can never be visible to the soul; being fictions, however beautiful, they occur to the soul always as such—as fictions, it may be, of its own creation, not as realities. When men speak of faith as a vivid and energetic form of imagination, they mean to imply this, without stating in terms that they do so: they mean to imply that just as the poet Virgil projected a picture of the nether world out of the immense wealth of his fancy, so evangelists and apostles have traced their own beautiful pictures of heaven, and their awful descriptions of hell and of judgment, on the pages of our Testaments, by the aid of an extraordinary variety of the religious imagination. The evangelists and apostles, whatever else they were—I say it with reverence—were not poets, they were eminently prosaic; and the remark of Rousseau that the inventor of the Gospel history must have been not less wonderful than its hero, if he were entirely unassisted from above, is at least a satisfactory reply to this theory of faith doing the work of pure imagination. Why, the apostles say with St. Peter, “We have not followed cunningly devised fables;” the apostles exclaim with St. John, “That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you”; and among ordinary Christians is it not a matter of daily experience that the most earnest, the most practical believers are constantly persons who are exceptionally wanting in the faculty of imagination, and who look at all the concerns of life in a matter-of-fact way which forbids the idea of their ever, under any circumstances, giving reins to fancy? In the case before us, Elisha’s servant did not create, by an act of imagination, a splendid picture in the air, after the manner of a Milton or a Rubens, a picture of fiery beings circling round the form of his beloved, of his imperilled master. The thing was psychologically impossible. He had his eye upon the hard and menacing fact before him, upon the lines of the Syrian troops who were sent to capture the prophet his master. He could, for the time, see nothing beyond the sphere of sense. But the world of spirits was a thing utterly independent of his imagination. It would have been none the less there if he had never seen it; just as the Syrian troops would have been none the less there if Elisha’s servant had been born blind, and had never seen them. His new power of seeing the chariots and horses of fire sweeping around Elisha did not create these spiritual forms and beings; there they were, whether he and other men saw them or not. The man’s new sight could not create, as his blindness could not have destroyed, the supernatural reality. Yes, but I hear it whispered, there is a common sense based on our ordinary experience, which resists these notions of an invisible world, actually around and about us. But what is the real worth of this so-called common sense? When the comet of October 1858 appeared, a lecturer made a tour of some country villages in Devonshire, with a view of telling the country people some facts about the beautiful object which, night by night, attracted so much of their attention; and among other points he touched upon the calculations which astronomers had made as to the enormous length of the tail of the comet. I recollect hearing a countryman, who treated this part of his lecture with contemptuous incredulity: “I saw the comet myself,” said the man to a sympathising crowd of villagers, “I saw the comet myself, and its tail was just four feet long; and how are we to believe this man who comes down here to tell us that it is ever so many millions of miles?” Now, that was the common sense of ordinary sight, pitted against the common sense of the higher insight into nature which is won by scientific investigation. The astronomer, with Lord Russell’s telescope at his disposal, sees, he does not imagine, the heavenly bodies utterly out of the reach of your ordinary sight or mine; and the servant of Elisha, when the eyes of his spirit are opened, sees—it is by the aid of a new spiritual faculty—sees what he would not, what he could not, have imagined, sees the world of spirits floating in all its power and its beauty round his endangered master. Nor is faith only the conclusion, the final act, of a process of natural reasoning. If this were the case, if faith were merely the conclusion of a syllogism, it would necessarily follow that all people with good understandings must necessarily be believers in Christianity. We know that many persons of great natural abilities, such as was Voltaire, are and have been unbelievers; and this alone

would seem to show that something besides intelligence is implied in an act of faith. No man whose mind was not impaired could go through a proposition of Euclid and refuse to assent to a conclusion; but many people do read Paley's *Evidences*, or, what is more to the purpose, what St. Paul himself says about the resurrection, and yet do not admit Paley's and St. Paul's conclusion that Christianity comes from God. If believing in Christianity were simply an affair of the natural understanding, this could not be. It would be just as inevitable to believe St. Paul as it is intellectually to believe Euclid. Why is it so? Why is acceptance of religious truth not just as imperative upon the human understanding as the acceptance of mathematical truth? Because the act of faith is not merely an act of the intelligence; because it is an act of the whole inward nature, an act of the affections and the will, as well as an act of the understanding. "With the heart," says St. Paul, "man believeth into righteousness." The affections and the will have a great deal to say to every pure act of faith. The understanding cannot compel faith. If faith were merely an assent of the understanding to a conclusion warranted by sufficient evidence, it is plain that St. Paul could never speak of it as he does when writing to the Romans and the Galatians. He tells them that it is that which justifies before God. Why, goodness of understanding could be no more reason for our acceptance with God than strong limbs or retentiveness of memory. Faith is thus spoken of in the New Testament because it is a test of the moral nature, because a man believes upon evidence, although not absolutely compulsory evidence, in obedience to the promptings of his heart and will. What is it which makes the desire, the heart, on the one side, and the evidence at the disposal of the understanding on the other side, result in the complex, in the perfect act of faith? What is it which strikes the sacred spark which thus combines the action of the understanding and the yearnings of the heart into the single act which supersedes while it combines them? "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Faith is, in the last resort, the fire which is lighted up in the soul by a ray from Heaven, by a ray of grace. It is a gift from God. It is a fresh gift, which nature can neither rival nor anticipate. Elisha might have insisted upon many considerations which ought, in reason, to have satisfied his servant that God and His holy ones were now, as of old, near at hand, that the near presence of the Syrians did not amount to a real reason for despair. Had not God helped the patriarch Jacob? Had He not delivered Israel in the wilderness, and David from the wild beast, and Elijah quite recently from the power of Ahab and of Jezebel? Was it to be supposed that He would desert His prophet now, or that, happen what might, He was unconcerned or powerless? Elisha did not argue. There are times when argument is most precious; there are times when it is worse than useless. Elisha prayed. Now this exactly agrees with what we are taught about faith in the New Testament. Faith is there represented as a new spiritual sense, as an endowment or gift bestowed upon the soul by the Holy Ghost. It is contrasted with natural sight. "We walk by faith, and not by sight," says St. Paul. It is contrasted with natural reason. "The natural man," says St. Paul, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." It is a higher reason than the reason which nature gives; it is a higher and more perfect sight, which God gives over and above the sight of nature, which nature cannot, if she would, achieve. "Faith," says St. Paul again, "is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Do not misunderstand me. Do I say that natural reason has no office whatever to discharge in the work of establishing our religious convictions? No. If this were so, not merely the evidential theology of the Church, but much of the language of the Bible itself, which unmistakably appeals to reason, would be a vast mistake. Reason can do very much for faith. Reason stands to faith just as did the Baptist to Christ our Lord. She is the messenger which goes before the face of faith to make ready its path within the soul. Reason can explain, she can infer, she can combine, she can reduce difficulties to their true proportions, she can make the most of considerations which show what, upon the whole, is to be expected; but here she must stop. She cannot do the work of God's grace; she cannot change, she cannot transfigure the moral nature so as to enable it to correspond to the conclusions of the illuminated intellect; she cannot open the eyes of the young man and make him see. 2. Let us see in this history a remedy against despondency, such as good Christians often feel on contemplating the

state of the world at particular periods. All seems to be going against the cause of right, of truth, of God. "The enemy crieth so, and the ungodly cometh on so fast, that they are minded to do me some mischief, so maliciously are they set against me." The Psalmist's cry is echoed by the Church, kneeling at the foot of the throne of Christ. It is echoed throughout the centuries. Intellectual assailants, political adversaries, all the passions, all the prejudices, all the misapprehensions of an unregenerate humanity, come down and besiege the prophet in Dothan. All might seem to be lost again and again if it were not that, again and again, the eyes of the spirit are opened to perceive that they which are with us are more than they which are with them. Courage; the unseen is greater than the seen, the eternal will surely outlive the things of time. An act of faith may cross the threshold of the door which separates us from that world which is beyond the senses, and may at once correct the apparent preponderance of evil by a vision of the throne, and the resources of the All-good. And see, too, in this history our true pattern of nobility. It has been a common saying, quoted again and again of late, to explain and justify changes on the Continent that have taken place within the last ten years, that it is better to be the citizens of a great state than the citizens of a small one. Brethren, it is better for many reasons, for this among the rest: there is an inspiration for good which comes from the sense of wide and noble fellowship, of high and distinguished associates and guardians, which is denied to those who are members of a small society that have it not. And, in His kingdom, God has provided us with this. It embraces both worlds, the unseen world as well as the visible. "Ye are come," says the apostle, writing to Christian converts, "ye are come by your conversion unto Mount Zion, unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect." The Church thus is a world-embracing society, consisting here of the faithful, there of the blessed angels and of the spirits of the dead, united in the bonds of one indissoluble communion, and all ranged beneath the throne of thrones, the throne of God, the throne of Jesus. Does this lofty conviction, think you, inspire nothing like hatred of sin, no longing for a higher life, no wish to live as should the companions of beings who constitute the household of God, and who are our predestined fellow-citizens? The Syrian host may press us hard; the host of temptations, and bad thoughts, and bad acquaintances; of haunting memories; but when, at the voice of prayer, the prayer of the Church or our own, our eyes open upon the realities around and above us, we must remember that we have a destiny before us, and means at hand to prepare for it.

3. Lastly, we see here the secret of real, effective prayer. Why is prayer, public prayer especially, in so many cases nothing better than the coldest of cold, heartless forms? For two reasons especially. Men enter on it without having any true knowledge of themselves whatever, of their sins and wants, as well as of their hopes and fears, of their real state before God, as well as of their reputed character in the eyes of men: in a word, they have no true knowledge of that for which prayer wins something like a remedy, and thus they have no personal interest of their own which they can import into, and identify with, the public language of the Church. They do not, for instance, know enough about themselves to say, with anything like sincerity before God, that they have erred and strayed from His ways like lost sheep, or that there are certain things which for their unworthiness they dare not and for their blindness they cannot ask. This is the first reason. But there is a second. Prayer is so cold and heartless a thing in numbers of instances because men see nothing of Him to whom prayer is addressed, nothing of God, nothing of Jesus, nothing of the spirit-world around the throne, nothing of the majesty, the beauty, the glory which encircles God, such as is possible, really possible to our finite and purblind gaze,—nothing of the everlasting worship which surrounds Him, nothing of the ministers of His that do His pleasure. (*Canon Liddon.*) *Blindness and reality*:—Close your eyes (this is how I sometimes bring myself back from half an hour's infidelity)—close your eyes; has the action of the house ceased because you cannot see it? Are the children all dead because you cannot see them? Has love ceased her sweet function because you cannot see the handmaid, the mother, or the sister, through whom that function operates? Has the exclusion wrought by blindness annihilated domestic or communal economy? Open your eyes: all your friends are about you, all the ministry of the house has been going on, though you could

not see it. What! have we the power of annihilating all the sublimest realities by simply shutting our eyes? Why, then we would blot out the sun; why, then we would sweep the heavens at night of all their jewellery; why, then we should turn the summer into the blackness of absolute gloom. So our inner eyes are closed at present; but that does not necessitate the absence of spirits, angels, ministrants divine, servants sent to minister unto us by the King of Heaven.

(*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Faith and sight*:—Faith is to sight and reason what the telescope is to the naked eye. By the use of this powerful instrument, the most distant planets are made known to us in detail. A map of Mars has been published showing canal-like seas, islands, and large mountains covered with snow. Faith brings the distant near, makes the spiritual the most real, and enables us to dwell in heavenly places. (*R. Venting.*) *The horses and chariots of God*:—

I. GOD IS THE UNSEEN BUT CONSTANT FACTOR IN THE LIVES OF MEN AND WOMEN. The King of Syria made his plans and tried to carry them out with his best cunning, but they all went awry because he was fighting against God. He did not take God into account. God is the most important factor in our lives, and there is absolutely no certainty of our success unless God is working in harmony with us. As Joseph Parker says, commenting on this case, it is the Unknown Quantity that troubles men, and gives them to feel that after they have completed their arithmetic their conclusion is a lie. II. THE SPIRIT-WORLD IS NEAR TO US. It is not a dumb, dead world, all clay and iron and gold, with no voice or hearing. It is not a thin empty world, all air and space. No, indeed: our Heavenly Father has many children, a universe peopled with them, the creatures of His love, just as we are. The ingenuity of heaven was not exhausted when God made the human body; He has millions of angels clothed upon with spiritual forms; bodies that we may not see with our earthly eye, but bodies none the less real and infinitely more enduring than those we do see. The Bible is a book of angels.

III. THE ARMY OF GOD CAMPS BETWEEN THE TRUSTING SOUL AND HIS ENEMIES. The military of heaven greatly exceeded that of the Syrians. I have seen a man who had been rescued from terrible sins and cruel appetites beset by a legion of devilish lusts and temptations that clamoured for his soul, and I have wondered if he would be able to beat them down and go on his way with steady step towards heaven. And I have rejoiced as I have watched and witnessed that, despite all the howling and barking of the wolves of temptation, the man grew stronger, his face firmer, his eyes shone with a loftier courage, and his brow was glorified with higher ideals. Then I knew that the secret of it was that between him and the howling pack of devilish temptations were encamped the hosts of God's angels.

IV. THROUGH PRAYER WE MAY PASS FROM THE LIFE OF SIGHT INTO THE LIFE OF FAITH. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *Horses and chariots of fire*:—I. THE SYRIAN ARMY SURROUNDING ELISHA, A SYMBOL OF THE FORCES THAT HAVE EVER BEEN ARRAYED AGAINST THE TRUTH. The attack upon Elisha and his servant was very unfair, and the forces apparently very unequal—an armed host against two unarmed men! Let us notice—1. That the foes were many—"a great host."

It seemed out of all proportion, and altogether absurd; and the escape of the prophet and his servant seemed hopeless. 2. The foes were mighty—armed men with horses and chariots, presenting a very formidable and imposing appearance, and threatening to sweep all before them. 3. The foes were malignant, they had crept up stealthily under the cover of the night, and they intended to pounce upon the man of God, and arrest him with violence. They had been told that the prophet had been the cause of all their defeats, so they would feel very spiteful and vindictive, and would be anxious to capture the man they regarded as their greatest enemy. Here we have a symbol of the forces that have ever been arrayed against the truth. II. THE PROPHET ELISHA IN THE MIDST OF THE SYRIAN ARMY A TYPE OF EVERY TRUE DEFENDER OF THE TRUTH. Elisha was unarmed with carnal weapons; and he had not gone to Dothan to destroy men's lives, but to save them. He was not an enemy, but a friend to the true progress and best interests of men; and in his gentleness and harmlessness he is a model of every true, godly, and Christy man. 1. Elisha was on the alert. He had not gone to Dothan to spend his time in idleness, for, early in the morning, he and his servant were on the move to prosecute their work and fulfil their mission. 2. Elisha was calm in the face of danger. His servant was greatly alarmed when he saw the armed host, and said, "Alas! my master, how shall we do?" But Elisha was calm, and said, "Fear not." He did not make flesh his arm, nor trust for deliverance upon what he could see with the eye of sense. He admitted human

weakness, but he apprehended Divine strength. He put his trust in God, and so his mind was kept in perfect peace. 3. Elisha found refuge in prayer. God had already shown him that he had a great host on his side; and now he wishes that his servant may see the army too. III. THE HORSES AND CHARIOTS OF FIRE UPON THE MOUNTAIN, AN EMBLEM OF THE FORCES THAT ARE EVER BATTLING ON THE SIDE OF TRUTH. 1. They were invisible to mortal eyes. The prophet Elisha had the spiritual vision to discern them; but the servant could not see them till his spiritual vision was uncovered. The horses and chariots of fire, formidable and real as they were, were not palpable to human sight. 2. They were innumerable. The mountain was full of them. Elisha was completely surrounded by celestial warriors; the army from the sky was mustered and marshalled as if on the eve of a terrible battle. 3. They were invincible. Taking up their position in the mountains suggests the idea that they would be immovable and impregnable; and they seemed to be "of fire," and fire, we know, suggests the ideas of aggression and irresistibility. The horses and chariots of Syria in the valley would be as nothing compared with this great host of fire upon the mountains. (*F. W. Brown.*) *Invisible realities*:—Sight is a wonderful thing by it we are connected and associated with the things that are around us. A man who has never seen is only self-contained and knows nothing of the wealth of glories which are within his reach. It is well to think sometimes of what our loss would be if our world were circumscribed by the orbit of our own darkened bodies. Vision is one of the most wonderful and blessed of all God's gifts. I. THE SCOPE OF HUMAN PENETRATION IS LIMITED. This is an indisputable fact. 1. Even with our wonderful organs of vision there are many material things which we cannot perceive. Think of animal life. How infinitely small some of its existences! They are too small for our perception. A pint measure may contain as many living creatures as the world contains inhabitants. The microscope has of late years taught us that around us on every side are existences so small and numerous that we can scarcely conceive of their multitude. But beyond the range of our most powerful microscope there lie still unexplained worlds of life. Think of the particles of inanimate matter. A ray of sunshine in a darkened room will reveal the existence of thousands of particles which we cannot ordinarily observe, and opens a wondrous field of imagination as to what may be beyond. 2. Besides material objects there are immaterial things which the age cannot perceive—electricity, sound, heat; smell cannot be practically seen. 3. Beyond all this there is the spiritual world. That this is close around us we know. God is everywhere. Satan is everywhere. There are for aught we know millions of angelic beings and even of human spirits within our call, but they cannot be seen. II. THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GOD'S PEOPLE AND THE WORLD ARE OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD. We cannot take a more striking example than that of our Lord Himself. Here was apparently a poor simple countryman, poor and despised, passing about from one place to another, attended by a few followers, still poorer and more neglected than Himself. And yet the whole resources of the universe were at this Man's fingers'-ends. At a word all creation would have asserted His position and would have avenged His cause. Ten legions of angels attended His course, and He had only to speak for inanimate things to obey. And as with Christ so with His people both before and since His earthly appearance. A few practical thoughts will urge this subject on our consideration. 1. Faith is not a matter of ideality or imagination. It is a realisation of actual facts. It is not supposing that we may be saved or that God will help, but it is grasping the fact that God has saved and that He truly helps. It is the evidence of things unseen. 2. How foolish is despondency or despair on the part of God's people. There is no circumstance so dark and no condition so extreme as to be without Divine help. God's resources are always near, far more powerful and far more numerous than those of any adversaries. 3. God does not parade His power. It is unseen both by foes and friends, but is always ready for immediate exercise. (*Homilist.*) *Ignorance of the unseen due to limitations of the senses*:—Science sneers at faith, and yet is often compelled to contradict itself. Huxley says: "The wonderful noonday silence of a tropical forest is, after all, due only to the dulness of our hearing; and could the ears catch the murmurs of these tiny maelstroms, as they whirl in the countless myriads of living cells which constitute each tree, we should be stunned as with the roar of a great city." Thus it is not said that because we have no sensation of them these murmurs have no existence. We claim the argument for God and for the spiritual world. Our ignorance of this may be

due only to the dulness of our hearing. *The reality of the invisible* :—You have seen pupils at the blackboard trying to strike a perfect circle or straight line for a mathematical demonstration. Some lines produced would be deemed successes and pronounced perfectly straight or exactly curved. But, put a strong glass upon them, and inequalities appear. Commonly, when we have done our best at drawing lines, we add, as we proceed to demonstrate, "Now suppose that to be a perfect curve or straight line." Yes, draw as well as we can, then suppose it to be what we have attempted, that is the best we ever do. An absolutely perfect curve exists only in the imagination, or indicated by the mathematician's formula. The astronomer works by the perfect curve for which his formula calls, not by the imperfect line of his own instruments. He discredits the accuracy of the visible line, but puts all confidence in the invisible. The trackless spaces of the heavens are all cut by curves of perfect exactness. But eye never sees them. Such perfection of lines exists also in our imagination, but is never reproduced in figures of our making. The imaginary lines are, therefore, the true and everlasting realities—the perfect patterns in which we believe and to which we work, while our figures are but imperfect efforts at reproduction, uncertain shadows of the reality. And that is the reality of the invisible, in which we believe. In other words, the invisible, according to our theme, is more real than the visible. We all believe that the perfect curve of the trackless heavens and of the imagination is a finer thing than that of our rule and dividers. The geometry of the sky beats all the geometries of the printed page. And we so believe, though one is seen while the other exists only in the imagination or lies but potentially in the mathematician's formula. Now, we shall find that whichever way we turn in the realms of thought or of action, the things invisible are the mightiest agencies of the universe and even of our practical daily life. You have a model business, social and Christian standard. You never quite attain it, yet there stand the invisible models which you will never abandon, if you are a true and growing man. Hence my theme, *The reality of the invisible*. The circles which the child draws, I declare to be the unreal thing, while the invisible circle which it tries to imitate is the reality. That is above criticism and everlasting. But it is a reality that is invisible. Take the matter of vegetable growth. We cannot see anything grow, no matter how rapid the growth. We can see, at the end of twenty-four hours, that it has grown, but the movement in the process our eyes cannot focus finely enough to detect. Yet no one would be unreasonable enough to question whether there can be growth in twenty-four hours, just because he cannot see the movement. I have heard a farmer say of his corn : "It grew so fast last night you might have heard it grow." He spoke jocosely. But the same might have been said in sober earnest and scientific accuracy, if only the human ear were sensitive enough to detect the sound which the growing actually did make. An ingenious man of science invented an instrument by which to test the power of vegetable growth. Applying it to a plant in his garden, the instrument revealed a lifting power equal to three tons. Perhaps we should want to see that instrument itself well tested. Still it revealed a real power and compels our belief to a large degree. Take another illustration, in the realm of sound. We have all heard music which charmed us by the exquisite delicacy and evenness of its flow. So you recall violin notes of such refinement, that when they ceased you were startled and half dazed, as one coming back from a spiritual realm. But science proves, as clearly as it proves anything, that the air is full of music, which we all fail to catch only because our organs of hearing are too coarse to detect it. Yet, the intelligent believe in such unheard music. For, sound is occasioned by vibrations of the air, and experiment proves that the lowest sound which the acutest human ear can hear is from vibrations at the rate of 16.5 per second, and the highest within reach of the ear is at the rate of 38,000 vibrations per second. But the vibrations caused by moving light go as high as 765,000,000,000,000 per second. So that we miss whatever music there is between the 38,000 and the 765,000,000,000,000 in vibration. How very little do we hear ! The swift wind roars through the tree tops that overhang our house, and the strings of the Æolian harp vibrate in sweetest notes to the zephyr that breathes across it on our window-sill. We believe in the roar of the wind and in the notes of the harp because we hear them. But the same laws which produce these sounds make music a necessity of every falling drop of rain or floating flake of snow. Even the very rays of sun and moon and star must sing as they slant their way through their air to our eyes. Shall we believe in the

laws of sound which hold perfectly through each step up to the point of our limit in power to hear, and then deny the holding of that same law beyond the reach to our ears? Surely not. We follow the law with our belief and our imagination clear out into the realm of the inaudible, and there revel in music unearthly. We are not wont to hold the Bible to the accuracies of physical science in its moral teachings; but the Psalmist was stating scientific truth, as facts now appear, when he wrote, "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to sing"—"to rejoice," our translators rendered it, instead of to sing, as the word means, only because they were ignorant then of what we now know, that the myriad rays of the rising and setting sun must all start and pursue their swift way, each singing its own sweet song, without an instant's interruption. The howl of the tempest we believe in, and the hum of the gnat's tiny wing. Shall we compel the law that produces those sounds to stand suspended just where we can hear no farther? No. If we can hear the hum of the tiniest gnat we ever saw, we easily believe there may be a hum too refined for our ears to catch. A ray of light cannot enter your room for your waking in the morning without singing its good morning, nor depart at night save with leaving on the air its delicate nocturne. Science demonstrates this, and, though our ears are too coarse to bear witness to the facts, we believe. No wonder the Bible tells how "the morning stars sang together." That is not poetic fancy, by license. It is scientific fact. So, too, we all believe in gravity, though invisible. Electricity, also, how firmly we believe in that and in its yet unrevealed wonders, though it is too subtle for the human eye to detect, for we must bear in mind that no human eye has ever seen electricity! We see the flash it makes, in motion, but never the electricity itself. I know of nothing in physical nature that so illustrates the reality of the invisible as does electricity. It is physical, and yet eludes us like a very spirit. It seems to be the finest possible attenuation of the physical verging off into the spiritual. But we believe in the fact of electricity as firmly as we believe in the fact of wood and stone. I hope you do not weary of these illustrations, much less lose the point of our text, or suspect the speaker of having lost it. "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." In the light of our illustrations this text begins to say: They who believe in and rely upon invisible realities have more with them than they who only believe in what they can touch and taste, and hear, and see. The mathematician who demonstrates and imagines and believes in an absolutely perfect circle has something better to go upon than the child stopping content with its imperfect line of chalk. The musician who accepts the laws of Nature and imagines and believes in the unheard music of the outer air, the unspeakable melodies of the rising and setting sun and the ever-glowing stars, has infinitely more with him than has he who only believes in the sounds he can make or hear, even as the deaf pianist I once heard, who went wild with ecstasy as his fingers flew over the keyboard, though he heard not a sound. All of which helps us to say, with cumulative power, that the man who believes with all his powers in a realm of spirits out of sight, and in the human spirit and its everlastingness, has vastly more with him than he who believes only in this body of decay and dust, holding nothing certain beyond its burial in the grave, and talking ever with uncertainty of the spirit world and his dear ones gone from him. The man who believes, as the main point of living only, in his possibilities of present pleasures of eating, drinking, family delights, and all indulgences that money can purchase, yea, even in the pleasures of thought upon present things—he, I say, has far fewer with him than has he who, enjoying all these in their place, lives mainly in the unseen, in his soul-life, and believes in the everlasting family of the everlasting Father, in the ever-developing and increasing power of the soul to enjoy, in the human passions and pleasures, ever purifying until his humanity shall affiliate with divinity, the finite with the infinite, enjoying it for ever. This is the instance of the reality of the invisible which I have been trying to illustrate. That army with horse and chariot and spear was instantly conquered by this invisible host, though not a visible blow was struck. Spiritual power ruled the physical forces, and they were led captive like weak children. They were inwardly possessed and spiritually disarmed. That angelic host, the spiritual energy of Jehovah, was the reality; the army with banners was but the shadow of real power. Now, the Bible is full of this kind of thing. It is God's effort to impress upon this world the facts of the invisible. These are what I would have you accept as realities. God, we are told and believe, reigns not only among the inhabitants of earth, but among the armies of heaven. He is

not dependent upon this world alone as His recruiting ground. When His people here are dangerously beleaguered, when His causes are in peril by reason of physical forces that cannot be matched by other forces that are physical also, then He calls upon the spiritual armies to come to the rescue. (*J. H. Taylor, D.D.*) *The blindness of men, and the nearness of the spiritual world* :—To the eye of unbelief, and of distrust, this visible, outward world is everything. Its value is the only assignable value; its history the only true history; its dangers the only dangers to be shunned; its help the only help to be sought. There were no chariots there, nor horses; but there were spiritual hosts, who showed themselves before the imagination of the young man. Let us take up the vision presented to the young man in the text, as a rebuke to distrust, and generally to unbelief, that worldly state of mind, content with the outside of things, from which, in an hour of danger, distrust proceeds. The unbelieving man, we are taught, is a superficial man, and a blind man. There are things the most momentous in the whole world, which he cannot perceive, nor apprehend. There is a world around him, in him, larger, mightier, more enduring than the earth's rocky base, with bearings on life and destiny of untold importance, a world which meets him on every hand, follows him along while he travels through this world. into the noiseless workings of which he is unable to penetrate, the existence of which, therefore, enters not into his plans, nor affects his desires. Is he not blind in such thick unbelief? Or, if he admits into his mind the existence of such a world, and is continually falling back into distrust, so that goodness seems to him to have no power on its side, is he not still but a blear-eyed man, whose eye needs to be opened in order to see the array of spiritual forces that are under the command of God? Let us apply the text to that particular form of unbelief, namely distrust, which is especially referred to. The blindness and sinfulness of distrust will be apparent, when we take into view the plans and resources of the invisible world. It is a part of the plan that this invisible world does not manifest itself by obvious interferences in the present order of things: everything which we can touch, taste, see or hear, goes on by law and process as much as if there were no God. It is another part, that, although evil has entered into the system, and although there is an everlasting conflict between evil and good, yet no act of power is put forth by Him, who must be conceived to side with goodness and to love it with all his heart. Now the blindness of such distrust is made apparent from considerations already implied in our text. 1. God is ever active, and has an intense sympathy with what is good and true. Between this and atheism, there is no middle ground, for the distrustful man of this day will not fall into the Epicurean's belief, that God is indifferent to human things, and indisposed to interfere; or into the Manichean belief, that there is an equal contest waging between light and darkness. Such being the case, we say that God must have a plan, and that the plan may consist partly in leaving the subordinate combatants on the sides of good and evil to themselves, without Divine interference in favour of what God must love. It is as if the general of an army, whose troops were raw and needed to be inured by long discipline to military hardships and military skill, suffered them to undergo partial defeats until they were ripe for some great movements of decisive battle. Must such a general, of necessity, be hard-hearted, or devoid of love to his country and his cause? So God may suffer the conflicts of this world to go on in order to fasten the hearts of His loyal people to Himself. The power of Divine help may be nigh and ready, if an act of trust be put forth. 2. But we pass on to consider the attitude which unbelief takes in regard to spiritual power and presence. There is a more radical and deadly form of doubt than distrust. Distrust believes and disbelieves at once, or passes to and fro in its various moods of courage and apprehension, from one state of mind to its opposite, but there is an unbelief which is fixed and unbroken by any fits of belief, which recognises no spiritual agency or none affecting the conduct. Distrust catches a glimpse now and then of the horses and chariots of fire, and again loses the sight, as we lose the sight of a star or distant mountain on the horizon; but unbelief sees and hears nothing except the sights and sounds of this material world. Unbelief must in fact admit, while it denies, the existence of some kind of spiritual world. The unbeliever, though he may be a materialist and a sensualist, recognises those immaterial forces which we call the human soul. 3. In this invisible spiritual world, even if we confine it to mankind, great and most remarkable events are going forward, which the unbelieving man is too blind to perceive, or to which he fails to give their true value. Let us look at some of

these events or classes of events which belong to this spiritual kingdom, in order to estimate their importance, and the blindness of him who takes no account of them. We refer first to the life of a man once obscure and unnoticed in an obscure nation, who by the force of His life and of His character has awayed more souls and done more for man's inner life than all other human beings put together. What would the external manifestations of man's nature, manners, morals, law, art, science, government, be at this day apart from Jesus Christ; and yet His peculiar province is the invisible region of the soul. Listen to the words in which a noted novelist of Germany, Jean Paul, speaks of Him: "Jesus, the purest among the mighty, the mightiest among the pure, with His pierced hand lifted kingdoms off their hinges, the stream of centuries out of its bed, and still rules the ages on their course. An individual once trod on the earth, who by moral omnipotence alone controlled other times and founded an eternity of His own; one, who, soft-blooming and easily drawn as a sun-flower, burning and attracting as a sun, still, in His mild form, moved and turned Himself and nations and centuries together towards the all-enlightening primal sun: it is that still Spirit, which we call Jesus Christ. If He existed, either there is a Providence, or He is that Providence. Only quiet teaching and quiet dying were the notes wherewith this higher Orpheus tamed men-beasts, and turned rocks by His music into cities." The power, then, by which this wonderful life of Jesus fed itself, was wholly of the spiritual world. And by what instruments has He worked so mightily on human hearts and characters? By spiritual ones, by the feeling of guilt, the longing for purity and peace of soul, by offering pardon and the promises of life-giving assistance to the contrite, by a life and example of united love and holiness, by unveiling God and the soul's unending life. 4. These events of the spiritual world among mankind depend on the existence and presence of a spiritual world above mankind. This is indeed obvious, and has come into view as we looked at the life of Christ and of those who followed Him in a spiritual life. If the unbeliever is on true, safe ground, there is nothing that ought to rule the life except the material earth and its laws, the desires, chiefly the animal ones, and some few of the social principles. If the spiritual man is right, there is a higher world, beyond the laws of matter, desire, and society. The exercise of his reason, conscience, and affections has introduced him among a different set of realities, which themselves involve the existence of real personalities above man. He now acknowledges the laws of a moral universe—laws made to regulate thought, and therefore emanating from a being who has planned and thought. Sin itself, felt in his conscience, conducts down upon him the justice of the universe. When once God is admitted to be a reality, there is a system centering at His throne; let him for a moment, in thought, conceive of God as not existing, and the spiritual world among men becomes darkly and inexplicably incomplete. 5. If, now, there is such a world with God for its centre, it is the height of blindness not to see it. This is obvious from a great variety of considerations. If there is such a world, it must be of infinite importance compared with the world of matter; the interests of the soul are bound up with it, and to live as if they depended upon the earth must be self-ruin. 6. Such blindness needs to be overcome by a Divine act of opening the eyes. Men may well pray "Lord, open his eyes that he may see." And the unbeliever himself, if a glimmering of light falls on him, may well pray for help from the God of light. If there is such an entire contrast between the worlds of which we have spoken, it must needs be that old habits of thought, strengthened through an unspiritual life, must render spiritual apprehension exceedingly difficult. (*T. D. Woolsey.*) *The invisible things:—*

I. THE HEAVY PRESSURE OF OUTWARD AND VISIBLE THINGS UPON US WHO ARE STILL IN THE BODY. 1. There is the business of life. 2. There are the pleasures of life. 3. There are the trials of life. II. And yet the history before us is designed to show HOW VERY NEAR, ALL THE WHILE, LIES ANOTHER WORLD AND ANOTHER LIFE, ALTOGETHER OF SPIRIT, AND HEAVEN, AND GOD. III. WHAT, THEN, ARE THESE OTHER TRUTHS, THESE OTHER REALITIES, AS THE WORD OF GOD DISCLOSES THEM? 1. The revelation of God's providence. 2. But the thought of providence, and of that which goes to make it, has an aspect of fear as well as of joy. 3. Yet let us not speak of God, as if He were an Observer only, and not chiefly and, above all, the Friend of man. IV. A MAN PASSES OUT OF THE LIFE OF SIGHT INTO THE LIFE OF FAITH, BY THAT OPENING OF THE EYES OF WHICH THE TEXT TELLS. (*Dean Vaughan.*) *Our angelic allies:—*"I began life," says Mr. McNeill, "in the railway service, and it taught me all the best blessings

of my life." But, as he said at the recent "Welcome" meeting at Exeter Hall, "I always like to be connected with a big thing. I myself began life as a lad on the railway. I was only fifteen, and I worked at a wayside station, earning the magnificent salary of six shillings a week. I felt small enough in myself, but then I multiplied myself by the whole Company. I spoke of the number of trucks, the enormous traffic, the number of passengers we carried every year, the immense receipts of the Company." From this Mr. McNeill suggested the following lesson: "So I would say to the workers in little obscure missions where there are no big receptions like this, where even the churches know little of their work. Multiply yourself by the great armies, invisible, yet potent, who are fighting on your side. They that be with us are more than they that be with them. God could fill our streets at any moment with the squadrons and battalions of the redeemed. Rank upon rank they might rise before us, these invisible and mighty ones. Think of them when you walk the streets of London, and feel the insulting might of the world and the devil." *The opened eye*:—I am not here to lecture upon the human eye; but I may just remind you that it is naturally keen—keener than the eyes of many animals. Sharper than that of the dog, keener even than that of the fox; only the bright-eyed birds outdo us in this matter. They see as they fly what we sometimes fail to see even when we search for it. But oh what a difference there is in the powers of human perception. That is to say, two men, apparently much alike in other respects, will differ very greatly in this matter. One of them will take a journey round the world and see next to nothing; another man will stroll down a country lane and surprise himself and all whom he afterwards informs, with the things that he saw upon the ground, and in the hedgerow, and in the air above him. The Romans, so I hear, described a man who had not the faculty of perception thus proverbially: they said, "He goes through the forest and sees no fire." This does not mean that he cannot see. No, he is not really blind; his eyes are open, but the faculty of seeing, in the true sense of the word, appears to have been denied him. Was it not Dr. Johnson who said "that some men learn more on a Hampstead stage coach than others in a tour of Europe?" It is a great thing to have discriminating eyes—such as, for instance, the eyes of a naturalist. It has been well said that whenever you have learned to discriminate the birds, and animals, and things of a country, it is as though new eyes were granted to you; not outward eyes, but inward, for we open a new set of eyes directly we begin to comprehend the details of a thing. (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 19. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way.—*The guidance of life*:—The prophet went boldly into their midst, as Alfred went into the camp of the Danes, and to the confused men he said, "This is not the place, and this is not the city." He misdirected them, and led them to Samaria, exactly the place where they did not wish to be. Now, Elisha did all this with a generous purpose, and his action stands redeemed by the magnanimity that he cherished. But isn't it a picture of much of that misleading and misdirection that is perpetually befalling us in life? I. **MISTAKEN ROUTES!** "This is not the way, and this is not the city!" Isn't it true of thousands of men that they are under an illusion on that point? You know there must be the one path in life that is best for a man. There must be one path for a man through this world that is better than any other, a path that suits him better, in which he realises his personality, and in which he will render the best service to the community. There must be one path that is best. But is anything more clear than the fact that a great number of men in this world have never got into that path, and live without plan and without purpose? Isn't it true of multitudes of lives that they are altogether misdirected, aimless, purposeless? Mr. Seton, the great traveller, adverts in one place to the difficulty of keeping in a straight direction. There is a tendency in men always to turn imperceptibly to the right hand or to the left. So in Australia you will set out in the morning for some particular settlement in the distance. All day you travel along believing that you are in the right path. You are delighted, about sunset, to see the settlement, but when you arrive you find it is the place you left in the morning. You have taken a circuit, you have wandered. Isn't that a picture of multitudes of lives? They wander in the wilderness. There is a picture of wandering, drifting—an aimless, purposeless life! And I say it is a picture of the life that multitudes live. The last thing in their life that they think about is a programme—a progress. **Mistaken routes! II. TREACHEROUS**

GUIDES! How many men and women, at every street-corner, who are ready to attract you into pathways that lead to death. "This is not the way," they say—the way to the Sunday school—"this is not the city." What is then? "The racecourse," they tell you, "the theatre;" and so they lead you to Samaria. There was a case given in the papers, of a shipwreck on the coast of Australia, whilst under the direction of an able pilot. It was a most mysterious incident, but when they came to examine the pilot they found that he was blind. The ship had been under the direction of a blind pilot. They have established a rule now to examine the vision of pilots every few months. Blind pilots! There are plenty of them about. They are only too ready to give you the direction. Some of them would mislead you from ignorance, some from malice, a great many for the sake of interest. In our great cities we have blind pilots to steer you into the fogs of unbelief and pessimism and atheism; blind pilots to lead you into practices and pleasures which destroy the soul. Treacherous guides! blind guides! What else? Fatal goals. "And he led them into Samaria." They opened their eyes with astonishment to find themselves in Samaria. And a great many people open their eyes with astonishment, as they get further on in life, at the particular places at which they have arrived. They start life with design and with exalted hopes, but a few years afterwards how many find that instead of arriving at Jerusalem, they have arrived at Samaria. III. THE DIVINE GUIDANCE. Look at all nature to-day! It is a wonderful assistance to us on this point. Look at inanimate nature! Look at the great beautiful world! How is it that this world is such a vision of order and loveliness? Oh! you say, it is because every atom has its place, has its task, and the world at large is so magnificent, so superb, so musical, because the individual atoms on which it is built are properly adjusted and rightly ordered. The magnificence of the whole is the consequence of a just disposition of the atom. Scientists tell us that every atom has its characteristics, its place, its service, and the grandeur of the world is the result of the well-ordered atom. I had almost said that if an atom were out of its place, the balance of the world would be broken, nay the world itself would be broken. Do you think that every atom that makes this planet is justly disposed, and yet God takes no care of a man? Can you believe for a moment that there is a government over elections, and not a government over souls? It is not a question of theology. A man is shut up to it by the very science of our age, that there is nothing accidental but that a great law pervades all nature, directing and controlling, and shaping everything to a splendid consequence. And if you leave inanimate nature, and come to what I may call instinctive life, you see just the same. Look at birds—your migratory birds! Is there anything more astonishing than the way in which they understand their pathway, and their goal. That does not look like chaos. And it is almost more wonderful still with insects. A great French naturalist says that he sometimes takes insects in a dark box for miles and miles. They know nothing about the direction in which he is going. They have never been there before, and yet when he returns after releasing them he finds them there. How is it? Well, he says, it is because they have a topographical consciousness. "Topographical consciousness!" That explains it. And so they find their way back in that deft and astonishing manner. Almost more wonderful still is it with the butterfly. If there is a fantastic creature in the world it is the butterfly. It moves zigzag, arbitrarily here and there, and away yonder over the garden-wall. You say it is all arbitrary. No! it is not. Butterflies know their way about. They move in one given direction. Moths and butterflies are said to come from Southern France, and even from Central Africa; and these dainty delicate creatures find their way across seas, and continents. Doesn't it look as if, after all, there were a great Thinker at the back of things? Butterfly, bee, bird, all have a singular instinct of direction. Now what I want to say to you is this (and I always like to find a naturalistic basis for a spiritual doctrine)—do you think that there is a law to guide a bird from Africa through the veiled heavens; a law to guide an insect across a country; a law that pilots a moth for thousands of miles; and that there is no law that governs the individual life of humanity? You can't think it. Look up to God for guidance in all the questions of your creed. There are plenty of people to give you a creed, but no man gets the whole truth that way. Each man must go to God for himself, and the Spirit of God shall guide you into all truth. And in all earthly things seek that guidance. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Vers. 25-33. **And there was a great famine in Samaria.**—*Famine, a judgment of God*:—The language of truth, you perceive, formed the first portion of his words, and the language of despair the conclusion. I. **THAT WHATEVER EVIL IS SENT UPON A COUNTRY, IS SENT BY GOD.** This is confirmed by a passage in the prophet Amos (the third chapter and the sixth verse), in which the prophet says, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Here is a great king, with a mighty army, to beset a nation, nominally for his own purpose, after the designs of his own heart, without any reference to God at all; but in reality, simply and plainly accomplishing what God has commanded and declared beforehand should be done. Then you know the history of the plagues of Egypt, the manner in which the locusts were sent upon the land, and the way in which "there were lice in all their quarters." God sent them there; He having determined that evil should come upon the people. II. **THAT WHEREVER SIN ABOUNDS, JUDGMENT IS TO BE EXPECTED.** But God has positively declared that sin shall be punished. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." Men may use all their wisdom; but their wisdom is utter folly. III. **THAT NOTWITHSTANDING SIN IS TO BE FOLLOWED BY JUDGMENT, YET JUDGMENT IS GOD'S "strange work."** IV. **THAT DOUBTING GOD'S WILLINGNESS TO SHOW MERCY, PROVOKES THE LORD.** So that you perceive, the determination of God is, that men shall, sooner or later, acknowledge Him: while on the other hand, we know that belief honours Him. (*H. M. Villiers, M.A.*)

CHAPTER VII.

Vers. 1-17. **Then said Elisha, Hear ye the word of the Lord.**—*The famine in Samaria*:—The emphasis of the teaching of this account of the Samaritan famine should undoubtedly be placed upon the complete fulfilment of the word of God. The prophet specified the time when plenty would reign in the city. He named the price that would rule in the markets for breadstuffs. Elisha, the prophet of the Lord, since he left his twelfth yoke of oxen in the field to follow Elijah, had not watched carefully the prospects for a good crop in the valley of the Jordan. He could not have told the value of the freight arrived in Damascus by the last caravan from Persia. There were no bulletins that he had lately been consulting as to the outlook for a good harvest on the plain of Sharon or in the Nile valley. He had received no private advices of the number of cattle herding on the hills of Bashan. The ships that arrived at Tyre and Sidon with corn from Africa did not report their invoices to the herdsman's son in the beleaguered city. There was no private wire in the house of the man of God, that announced the arrival of rich convoys at the Red Sea ports, and which were now on their way to Samaria. Elisha was alone with the elders. The only messenger that came was one to take his life. Ignorant thus of the world outside, and yet undaunted, the prophet spake in the name of the Lord, telling the price of even the fine flour that only luxury could afford. On the morrow the humble workman could buy the barley for his frugal meal, and the high-born dame the necessities for a feast. "To-morrow about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." I. **THE FLIGHT OF THE SYRIANS.** The besiegers of Samaria did not deliberately gather their equipments and stores and return to their own country. They left everything, and that suddenly. The threatenings that came to them were such as to destroy all thoughts of anything but the safety of their own lives. Thus it was they left literally the spoil. The inhabitants of Samaria, if the enemy had slowly departed, might have gathered grain from other cities. This would have taken time, however, and the quantity that a country could furnish which an army had foraged over would have been small. The Syrians came for a siege, not simply as horsemen to make a wild foray and then retire. They were well equipped. Fine flour, that must else have been brought from far, or slowly ground from the corn, was already on hand for the perishing people. All this preparation, however natural it seems, was of God's planning. When the soldiers of Syria enlisted for a long campaign against Samaria, and the commissary trains gathered luxuries for a permanent encampment, the thing was under the eye of God. Emphasise the miraculous

as we will, we must not forget God's provision for all results that seem to us so strange. God has His hand on the springs of all action and the sources of supply. Long before the Syrians began to prepare for the siege of the city, God had laid His trains to oppose them. If we think of God as a Father and Provider for mankind at every step of life, we shall be helped in our faith in Him as one who can work miracles. Faith is not difficult when we daily mount upward on steps of Providence. II. THE CONDUCT OF THE LEPERS. 1. It was wise. There was only death if they returned within the city. There was one hope. They followed it. On a much greater question than that before the lepers, how many have decided so wisely as these outcasts? The teaching of this world and of men's hearts is that there is no salvation possible unless outside of self and mankind. The lepers seized their opportunity. It proved life for them. The future is not clear to any man, but it offers something real in Jesus Christ. Each of us has more to encourage us to accept Christ than the lepers had to go to the army of Syria. Let a man act on his best convictions instead of sinking down to die. He will find a boon more precious than that which the lepers found. 2. The conduct of the lepers was magnanimous. Men who are outcast from their fellows often feel, when good fortune comes, like retaliating upon those who have neglected or wronged them. A young man who has seen hardship in his early days is often tempted in the beginning of prosperity to show others that he can do without them. This bitter feeling because of neglect on the part of others often becomes a motive for effort towards success. It is ignoble for a man to cherish any of the wrongs he has endured. He ought to try and erase the scars that sorrow and hardship have wrought on his heart. The lepers were mindful of their duty to their fellow-men. They resolved to hasten back with the good tidings. No man, however poor or successful, neglected or exalted, but owes more to the world than he can repay. There is ever an unfailing obligation on every man to do all that lies in his power for the race Christ died to redeem. Learn of the lepers to be magnanimous. They showed they were still men with noble instincts that sorrow and neglect could not crush. There is always a temptation to keep the good to ourselves. We keep back the money, the kind words, the comfort that men need. If it is not done with malicious purpose, it is done in our stolidity, our indifference to others' necessities. III. THE BLASPHEMING LORD. Over against the hope just held out by the man of God, the courtier places his sneer at all Providence. How many hearts would sink at his words? The widow still hiding her son from death will now conquer her maternal instinct and sustain life on the horrible sacrifice. Those who have been roused to hope will go back to deeper despair. A single day adds multitudes to the victims of the plague or famine. The blood of children, of men, and of women is on the head of the scorner. That the words of the king's favourite had a terrible effect upon the distressed city, we may infer from the manner of his death. When plenty came, the maddened populace trod to the earth the blasphemer and destroyer of hope. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

Ver. 2. Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God. —*Rationalism*:—Around Samaria is drawn the fiery girth of Assyrian vindictiveness. Siege is laid to the city, and soon famine, most ghastly and horrible, appears. In the modern bombardment of a city, there is a grandeur mingled with the terror. The toss and burst of a bomb-shell kindles the eye of the artist, while the citizens perish. But there is no imagining the desolation of a city approached by an old-time siege, through years of starvation. The judgment-day only can reveal the anguish endured when Hannibal besieged Utica, and Titus Jerusalem. Alas, for Samaria! What a crowd of hollow-eyed and staggering wretches filled the streets, crying for bread. So great was the scarcity of food that an ass's head was sold for twenty-five dollars. Mothers cooked their children, and fought for the disgusting fragments. And still hunger pinched and drank up the life of the great city and lifted its wolfish howl in the market-place, and shovelled its victims into the grave. In the midst of all this, Elisha, in the name of God, said, "To-morrow the famine will be gone, and you will get a peck of flour for five shillings." A noblenan, who was the confidential friend of the king, stood by and laughed at the idea. He said, "If a window shutter could be opened in the sky, and a lot of corn pitched out, you might expect it. Ha! ha! you silly prophet; you cannot fool me!" The prophet replied to the taunt by saying, "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." Before we come to the more cheerful phase of the subject, let us attend the funeral of that scoffer who

was trod on in the gates. The obsequies shall be brief, for we have not much respect for him. I knew him well. You all knew him. He was an out-and-out Rationalist. Elisha, at God's command, had prophesied plenty of fine flour on the morrow. "Preposterous!" said the sceptical nobleman. "Where is it to come from? Why, every hole and corner of the city has been ransacked for flour. We have eaten up the horses. There is no prospect that the Assyrians will lift the siege; and yet, Elisha, you insult my common sense, and my reason, by telling me that to-morrow the market will be glutted with bread supplies. Away with your nonsense!" Yet, notwithstanding it seemed unreasonable, the fine flour came; and, because of his unbelief, the Rationalist of Samaria perished. At this point the great battle of Christianity is to be fought. The great foe of Christianity to-day is Rationalism, that comes out from our schools, and universities, and magazines, and newspapers, to scoff at Bible truth, and caricature the old religion of Jesus. It says, "Jesus is not God, for it is impossible to explain how He can be Divine and Human at the same time. The Bible is not inspired, for there are in it things that they don't like. Regeneration is a farce; there is good enough in us, and the only thing is to bring it out. Development is the word—development. What is still more alarming, is that Christian men dare not meet this ridicule. Christian men try to soften the Bible down to suit the sceptics. The sceptics sneer at the dividing of the Red Sea, and the Christian goes to explaining that the wind blew a hurricane from one direction a good while until all the water piled up; and, besides that, it was low water, anyhow, and so the Israelites went through without any trouble. Why not be frank, and say, "I believe the Lord God Almighty came to the brink of the Red Sea, and with His right arm swung back the billows on the right side, and with His left arm swung back the billows on the left side; and the abashed water stood up hundreds of feet high, while through their glassy walls the sea-monsters gazed with affrighted eyes on the passing Israelites?" "Oh," you say, "these Rationalists would laugh at me." Then let them laugh. The Samaritan sceptic laughed at Elisha; but when, under the rush of the people to get their bread, the unbeliever was trampled to death, whose turn was it to laugh then? The moment you begin to explain away the miraculous and supernatural, you surrender the Bible. Compromise nothing! Trim off nothing to please the sceptics. If you cannot stand the jeer of your business friends you are not worthy to be one of Christ's disciples. You can afford to wait. The tide will turn. God's Word will be vindicated; and though it may seem to be against the laws of nature and the rules of reason, to-morrow a measure of fine flour will be sold for a shekel; and then as the people rush out of the gates to get the bread, alas, for the Rationalist! he will be trodden under foot, and will go down to shame and everlasting contempt. You know that all the nations are famine struck by sin. They are dying for bread. Here comes through the gates a precious supply—not one loaf, but an abundance for all; pardon for all, strength for all, sympathy for all, comfort for all! Will you have this bread that came down from heaven and which, if a man eat, he shall never hunger? Glorious gospel! So wide in its provisions. Whosoever! Mark you that God stopped Samaria's famine, not with coarse meal, but, the text says, with fine flour. So the Bread of Life, with which God would appease our hunger, is made of the best material. Jesus was fine in His life, fine in His sympathies, fine in His promises. It means no coarse supply when Jesus offers Himself to the people saying, "I am the Bread of Life."—"Fine flour for a shekel." That day when the gates of Samaria were opened, why did they make such excitement about the flour? Why did they not bring in some figs, or pastry, or fragrant bouquets instead? The people would have run down the bouquets, and thrown away the figs, and trampled upon the pastry in the rush for bread. Effort has been made to feed those spiritually dying with the poesies or rhetoric, and the confectionary of sentimentalism. Our theology has been sweetened and sweetened until it is as sweet as ipecacuanha, and as nauseating to the regenerated soul. What the people need is bread, just as God mixes it—unsweetened, plain, homely, unpretending, yet life-sustaining bread. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Presumptuousness of unbelief.*—What surprises me, what frightens me, is to see a diminutive creature, a little ray of light glimmering through a few feeble organs, controvert a point with the Supreme Being; oppose the Intelligence that sitteth at the helm of the world; question what He affirms, dispute what He determines, appeal from His decisions, and, even after God has given evidence, reject all doctrines that are beyond his capacity! Enter into thy nothingness,

mortal creature ! What madness animates thee ? How dardest thou pretend, thou who art but a point, thou whose essence is but an atom, to measure thyself with the Supreme Being—with Him whom the heaven of heavens could not contain ? (*J. Saurin.*) *A Divine teacher and a haughty sceptic.*—Here are two objects not only to be looked at, but to be studied :—I. A DIVINE TEACHER. Two circumstances connected with this promise will apply to the Gospel. 1. It was a communication exactly suited to the condition of those to whom it was addressed. People were starving, and the one great necessity was food, and here it is promised. Mankind are morally lost, what they want is spiritual restoration, and the Gospel proclaims it. 2. It was a communication made on the authority of the Eternal. "Thus saith the Lord." That the Gospel is a Divine message is a truth too firmly established even to justify debate. II. A HAUGHTY SCEPTIC. Here is one of the most contemptible of all classes of men, a courtier, a sycophant in relation to his king, a haughty despot in regard to all beneath him. When he heard the prophet's deliverance, he, forsooth, was too great a man, and thought himself, no doubt, too great a philosopher to believe it. It was the man's self-importance that begot his incredulity, and this perhaps is the parent of all scepticism and unbelief. (*Homilist.*) *The sin of unbelief.*—One wise man may deliver a whole city ; one good man may be the means of safety to a thousand others. The holy ones are "the salt of the earth," the means of the preservation of the wicked. Without the godly as a conserve, the race would be utterly destroyed. In the city of Samaria there was one righteous man—Elisha, the servant of the Lord. Piety was altogether extinct in the court. The king was a sinner of the blackest dye, his iniquity was glaring and infamous. Jehoram walked in the ways of his father Ahab, and made unto himself false gods. The people of Samaria were fallen like their monarch. In this awful extremity the one holy man was the medium of salvation. The one grain of salt preserved the entire city ; the one warrior for God was the means of the deliverance of the whole beleaguered multitude. "To-morrow," would they shout, "to-morrow our hunger shall be over, and we shall feast to the full." However, the lord on whom the king leaned expressed his disbelief. We hear not that any of the common people, the plebeians, ever did so ; but an aristocrat did it. Strange it is, that God has seldom chosen the great men of this world. High places and faith in Christ do seldom well agree. This great man said, "Impossible !" and, with an insult to the prophet, he added, "If the Lord should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be." His sin lay in the fact that, after repeated seals of Elisha's ministry, he yet disbelieved the assurances uttered by the prophet on God's behalf. He had, doubtless, seen the marvellous defeat of Moab ; he had been startled at tidings of the resurrection of the Shunammite's son ; he knew that Elisha had revealed Benhadad's secrets and smitten his marauding hosts with blindness ; he had seen the bands of Syria decoyed into the heart of Samaria. I. THE SIN. His sin was unbelief. He doubted the promise of God. In this particular case unbelief took the form of a doubt of the Divine veracity, or a mistrust of God's power. Either he doubted whether God really meant what He said, or whether it was within the range of possibility that God should fulfil His promise. Unbelief hath more phases than the moon, and more colours than the chameleon. Common people say of the devil, that he is seen sometimes in one shape, and sometimes in another. I am sure this is true of Satan's firstborn child—unbelief, for its forms are legion. At one time I see unbelief dressed out as an angel of light. It calls itself humility, and it saith, "I would not be presumptuous ; I dare not think that God would pardon me ; I am too great a sinner." It is the devil dressed as an angel of light ; it is unbelief after all. A fearful form of unbelief is that doubt which keeps men from coming to Christ ; which leads the sinner to distrust the ability of Christ to save him, to doubt the willingness of Jesus to accept so great a transgressor. But the most hideous of all is the traitor, in its true colours, blaspheming God, and madly denying His existence. Infidelity, deism, and atheism are the ripe fruits of this pernicious tree ; they are the most terrific eruptions of the volcano of unbelief. Unbelief hath become of full stature, when quitting the mask and laying aside disguise, it profanely stalks the earth, uttering the rebellious cry, "No God," striving in vain to shake the throne of the divinity, by lifting up its arm against Jehovah. I am astonished, and I am sure you will be, when I tell you that there are some strange people in the world who do not believe that unbelief is a sin. Strange people I must call them, because they are sound in their faith in every other respect ; only, to make the articles of their creed consistent, as they imagine,

they deny that unbelief is sinful. 1. And first the sin of unbelief will appear to be extremely heinous when we remember that it is the parent of every other iniquity. There is no crime which unbelief will not beget. I think that the fall of man is very much owing to it. It was in this point that the devil tempted Eve. 2. Unbelief not only begets, but fosters sin. If man did but believe that the law is holy, that the commandments are holy, just, and good, how he would be shaken over hell's mouth; there would be no sitting and sleeping in God's house; no careless hearers; no going away and straightway forgetting what manner of men ye are. Oh! once get rid of unbelief, how would every ball from the batteries of the law fall upon the sinner, and the slain of the Lord would be many. Again, how is it that men can hear the wooings of the Cross of Calvary, and yet come not to Christ? What is the reason? Because there is unbelief between you and the Cross. If there were not that thick veil between you and the Saviour's eyes, His looks of love would melt you. But unbelief is the sin which keeps the power of the Gospel from working in the sinner: and it is not till the Holy Ghost strikes that unbelief out: it is not till the Holy Spirit rends away that infidelity and takes it altogether down, that we can find the sinner. 3. Unbelief disables a man for the performance of any good work. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin," is a great truth in more senses than one. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Faith fosters every virtue; unbelief murders every one. Thousands of prayers have been strangled in their infancy by unbelief. Unbelief has been guilty of infanticide; it has murdered many an infant petition; many a song of praise that would have swelled the chorus of the skies has been stifled by an unbelieving murmur; many a noble enterprise conceived in the heart has been blighted ere it could come forth, by unbelief. Many a man would have been a missionary; would have stood and preached his Master's Gospel boldly; but he had unbelief. Once make a giant unbelieving, and he becomes a dwarf. 4. Our next remark is—unbelief has been severely punished. Turn you to the Scriptures! I see a world all fair and beautiful; its mountains laughing in the sun, and the fields rejoicing in the golden light. I see maidens dancing, and young men singing. How fair the vision! But lo! a grave and reverend sire lifts up his hand, and cries, "A flood is coming to deluge the earth: the fountains of the great deep will be broken up, and all things will be covered. See yonder ark! One hundred and twenty years have I toiled with these my hands to build it; flee there, and you are safe." "Aha! old man; away with your empty predictions! Aha! let us be happy while we may! when the flood comes, then we will build an ark; but there is no flood coming; tell that to fools; we believe no such things." See the unbelievers pursue their merry dance. Hark! Unbeliever. Dost thou not hear that rumbling noise? Earth's bowels have begun to move, her rocky ribs are strained by dire convulsions from within; lo! they break with the enormous strain, and forth from between them torrents rush unknown since God concealed them in the bosom of our world. Heaven is split in sunder! it rains. Not drops, but clouds descend. A cataract, like that of old Niagara, rolls from heaven with mighty noise. Both firmaments, both deeps—the deep below and the deep above—do clasp their hands. Now, unbelievers, where are you now? There is your last remnant. A man—his wife clasping him round the waist—stands on the last summit that is above the water. See him there! The water is up to his loins even now. Hear his last shriek! He is floating—he is drowned. And as Noah looks from the ark he sees nothing. Nothing! It is a void profound. "Sea monsters whelp and stable in the palaces of kings." All is overthrown, covered, drowned. What hath done it? What brought the flood upon the earth? Unbelief. By faith Noah escaped from the flood. By unbelief the rest were drowned. 5. And now you will observe the heinous nature of unbelief in this—that it is the damning sin. There is one sin for which Christ never died; it is the sin against the Holy Ghost. There is one other sin for which Christ never made atonement. Mention every crime in the calendar of evil, and I will show you persons who have found forgiveness for it. But ask me whether the man who died in unbelief can be saved, and I reply there is no atonement for that man. II. CONCLUDE WITH THE PUNISHMENT. "Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." It is so often with God's own saints. When they are unbelieving, they see the mercy with their eyes, but do not eat it. Now, here is corn in this land of Egypt; but there are some of God's saints who come here on the Sabbath, and say, "I do not know whether the Lord will be with me or not." Some of them say, "Well, the Gospel is preached,

but I do not know whether it will be successful." They are always doubting and fearing. Listen to them when they get out. "Well, did you get a good meal this morning?" "Nothing for me." Of course not. Ye could see it with your eyes, but did not eat it, because you had no faith. If you had come up with faith, you would have had a morsel. But, let me apply this chiefly to the unconverted. They often see great works of God done with their eyes, but they do not eat thereof. A crowd of people have come here this morning to see with their eyes, but I doubt whether all of them eat. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Faith taunted*:—In this comparatively trifling event we see the end of the whole economy of nature as we know it. Tragical facts have overpowered us, have indeed almost blinded us as to the possibility of spiritual presences being in the universe, and we have said deliverance is impossible, and out of all this chaos God Himself could scarcely bring order. Looking upon the nations of the earth with their moral darkness, their barbarities, idolatries, cruelties, superstitions; observing how men hate one another, and delight in the shedding of blood; studying the whole map and plan of wickedness all but infinite, we have again and again said, though the Lord should open the windows of heaven—though the Lord should come in all His great might, yet surely this chaos could not be brought into order and peace even by the voice of Omnipotence. Looking upon the Cross of Jesus Christ as the medium of the salvation of the world, we have not wondered that men should account it foolishness. There seems to be no proportion between the cause and the effect, the means and the end. To the last, men passing by the cross shall wag their heads, and say to him who expires upon it, If Thou be the king or Saviour of the world, save Thyself, and come down. We are quite aware that the scoffer has an ample ground for mockery, if attention be limited by visible boundaries. It is not surprising that gibbers should taunt believers, and that the prophets of Baal should turn round upon the Elijahs of the world, and in their turn enjoy the use of ironical appeal, saying, Cry aloud to your Christ, for he is king of the Jews; cry mightily to his God in heaven, for he has espoused him as his father; pray on still,—perhaps if you are not answered in the morning, you may be answered at night; cry lustily with growing energy to the supposed God of the heavens, and let him come out in reply if he can. We must submit to the taunt for the present. In our impatience we desire a manifest and decisive answer, yet all things proceed calmly as they were from the beginning. But our faith has been sustained by a doctrine corresponding to the prophecy,—namely, the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness: for a thousand years are in his sight as one day, and one day as a thousand years. We are the victims of miscalculated time. We do not know the meaning of to-day or to-morrow: my soul, wait thou upon God; yea, wait patiently for Him, and comfort thyself with the truth that things are not what they seem: that immediately after human extremity there arises a light in heaven, and that in the midday of despair angels are sent with special messages from God. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 3-8. And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate.—*The men at the gate*:—The city of Samaria was in sad plight. Ben-hadad, the King of Syria, had gathered all his armies together with the determination to conquer Israel and make it a subject province. He brought all his force against Samaria and besieged the capital city. He cut off all their communication with the surrounding country and was slowly starving them to death. Now, while this was going on in the city of Samaria, four lepers, who lived in little shanties outside the gate, and were not allowed to come inside, talked the situation over with one another. They were starving to death and there was not much choice for them. It was certain death if they stayed where they were, and it was probable death if they went anywhere else. So they said to one another, "Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die." So in the early twilight they rose up and staggered along till they came to the camp of the Syrians. They saw no one as they drew near, no sentinels on guard, and no one about the doors of the tents. It seemed strange to them, and at first they thought everybody was asleep in the tents. Now the secret of this strange occurrence was that through the prayer of Elisha God had interposed to save Israel, and He had caused the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots and a noise of horses until they were sure that

a great army was coming to the relief of Israel, and the officers of Ben-hadad, King of Syria, deceived and confused by what they thought they heard, said one to another, "Lo, the King of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us." And they were so sure of it and so demoralised with fear that they arose and fled in the darkness and left their tents just as they were. These old stories are gold mines of spiritual truth where we shall not fail to find wealth if we search with humble and earnest hearts. Let us look at some of these nuggets of spiritual truth suggested to us in this theme. I. **THE MAN WHO FEELS HIS SIN THE KEENEST IS THE MOST LIKELY TO FIND SALVATION.** Of all the people of Israel these four leprous men were in the most pitiable condition. Ordinarily, when there was plenty, food was let down over the wall to them; but when food became scarce, it was easy to forget the lepers on the outside. They decided to take their chances because they felt so keenly the extremity of their condition. This illustrates what Jesus meant when He said to certain people in His day that the publicans and the harlots would go into the kingdom of heaven before themselves. II. **INACTION IS OFTEN AS BAD AS POSITIVE WRONG-DOING.** See in this case. These four lepers used good logic. They said one to another, "Why sit we here until we die?" They did not need to take poison in order to commit suicide; they did not need to do any violence on themselves in order to bring about death. They were far gone on the way of starvation. They could just stagger about a little. Let them only sit still a day or two more and there would not be any help for them, they would surely die. Their only hope was in immediate action, and if they were to act there was only one way open that had any promise of relief. So they decided to act in the one way open to them that had a chance of relief. I pray God that some of you who are without God and without hope in Christ may learn this great lesson. When you are wrong, when you are failing to do your duty, to sit still is to die. You do not have to do anything more in order to make sure that in the great judgment day you will be shut out of heaven and condemned. No, you have just to sit still to be lost. You do not need to get worse; you do not need that the stream of your evil thoughts or your wicked conduct shall grow wider and deeper and more soiled, as it undoubtedly will if you live longer unrepentant; you need only to sit still just as you are to have the gate of heaven closed before your sorrow-stricken eyes and to hear the awful words of doom from the tender lips of Jesus, "Depart from me, I never knew you." All you have to do is just to sit still, and in the very nature of things death must happen. But if you want to be saved, then you must awake, and arise, and act. III. **SALVATION CAN ONLY COME THROUGH DEFINITE DECISION.** These men considered what was open to them and decided that there was just one way that had a ray of hope. It was by no means bright; but, if followed, there was a possibility that it might mean food and life. They made up their minds to take the one chance, and they followed that chance to safety. How much better is the outlook for you when I invite you to forsake your sins and come to the feast of Divine love. You do not have to come following such a forlorn hope as did these poor men. IV. **THE SPIRITUAL FEAST IS ALREADY SPREAD.** The lepers found food in abundance in the Syrian tents. The Gospel feast is ready. The invitation is, "Come, for all things are now ready." (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *Deliverance from death:—*I. **THE LEPERS SOUGHT DELIVERANCE FROM DEATH.** "Why sit we here until we die?" (vers. 3, 4). 1. They sought deliverance under very solemn feelings. They were perishing of hunger, and so were their friends whom they might never see again. Unless the Syrian granted immediate relief, they would die. The hour was dark and solemn. Solemn too are the feelings of a sinner when fleeing from the city of destruction he cries, "Life, life, eternal life!" He looks at the law, and feels, "I have broken that"; he looks towards heaven, and feels, "I have forfeited that"; he looks towards hell, and feels, "I have deserved that." 2. They sought deliverance in the face of discouragements. They were the subjects of a disease the most repulsive. They had no promise of help. They knew that the Syrian was the avowed foe of Israel. What could have been more discouraging? Had they been sound in health, had they been going to a friend, or had they but one promise of relief, it would have been different. But notwithstanding all, they sought deliverance. Sinner, are your discouragements greater in relation to spiritual life than were those of the lepers in relation to temporal? What are your discouragements? Bring them forward. "I am defiled by sin"; but Jesus can cleanse you. "I am condemned by law"; but Jesus can justify you.

"I am outside the fold"; but Jesus is the good Shepherd, and He is come to restore you. II. THE LEPERS FOUND DELIVERANCE FROM DEATH. "And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver and gold," &c. (ver. 8). 1. They found a more abundant deliverance than they expected. What did they seek? Deliverance from famine. What did they find? Deliverance from famine, nakedness, and poverty. And such a deliverance! How great the surprise of the lepers to find the treasures of an army in their custody! How changed their condition now! Famine was now fled; poverty fled; fear fled; obscurity fled. So with the sinner when he comes for salvation to Jesus; he always finds more than he expected;—more mercy, more peace, more blessedness, and more glory. Bartimeus comes for bodily eyesight; he obtains that, and spiritual sight too. A paralytic is let down through a roof with the hope of receiving power to walk the ways of earth; and not only is that granted, but power also to walk the ways of heaven. 2. These men found a deliverance more divine than they expected (ver. 6). Whether this noise was in the air or in the imagination I know not. Evidently it was God that wrought this wonderful deliverance. Little did the lepers expect a deliverance so divine. So when a sinner is delivered from spiritual death he sees more of God in salvation than even he expected. If a man denies the divinity of the Christian redemption he only proves that he is a stranger to it. 3. These men found deliverance more easily than they expected. They counted on commending themselves to the favour of the Syrian by earnest appeals. They thought that, do what they might, possibly they could not awaken his compassion; they might, after all, be put to death. How great their mistake! Nothing was more necessary but to arise, go forth, and partake of the abundance which kind Providence had provided. When a man trusts in Jesus, he feels astonished that he should ever have made a difficulty of believing. "How strange," he feels, "that I could so long have closed my eyes to the truth." "By grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." III. THE LEPERS ANNOUNCED DELIVERANCE FROM DEATH. They went and announced the "good tidings" to the king's household, and through that household to the city. 1. They announced deliverance under a sense of duty (ver. 9). They felt that silence would brand them with the charge of heartlessness and expose them to the lightnings of justice. If these men felt it their duty to announce deliverance to a perishing city, how much more should Christians feel this to be their duty as it respects a perishing world? 2. They announced deliverance without delay. Feeling, as they did, that solemnly on them was flung the duty of saving Samaria, and that to delay, even till the sun again reddened the forehead of the eastern sky, was to sacrifice life, they lost no time in heralding "the good tidings." Oh, ye that are at ease in Zion, is it enough that you have been blest with the Bread of Life? Does not Heaven solemnly call on you to announce without delay "the good tidings" to others? "If you tarry till the morning, some mischief will come upon you." (*F. For Thomas.*) *The dying lepers*.—I. WHAT WAS THE STATE OF THE LEPERS, and what were their reflections? They were in a state of disease and want, perishing with hunger, and afflicted with a loathsome and grievous sickness. And what is our state by nature? The striking language of the prophet Isaiah well describes it: "The whole head is sick." Such are we naturally—we are spiritual lepers; and we have every reason to cry out, when we view ourselves in the glass of God's Holy Word, and see what we really are, "Unclean, unclean." But these lepers were not merely afflicted with this sore disease, and had no whole part in their body, but they were also perishing with hunger—disease and famine were their portion. Sad state, you may exclaim. But our spiritual state by nature is in no wise better. The wholesome food of God's Word, which is the support and nourishment of the soul, lies untasted by our lips; it is food for which we have no relish or appetite; and yet, if we eat it not, we must languish and die. But herein lies a difference between us and the lepers. They longed for food, but could not get it: we can get it freely, "without money and without price," but we do not long for it. Let us turn next to the reflection of these men—"Why sit we here until we die? Oh, would that sinners perishing by spiritual famine would reason thus!—calmly consider their case, and see that if they remain unmoved—seek not for succour and support from Him who is able to save them from death—that death beyond a doubt will overtake them. II. THE EFFORT OF THESE LEPERS AND THEIR SUCCESS. "Now, therefore, come," said they, "and let us fall unto

the host of the Syrians; if they save us alive, we shall live: and if they kill us, we shall but die." They resolved no longer to sit in misery and apathy beneath the comfortless and inhospitable walls of their beleaguered and impoverished city, but to go directly to the enemy's camp, and seek from their country's foes that which their own people could not give. And here, in a measure, is portrayed the course of the awakened sinner. He sees that if he remains as he is, death is certain, that his dwelling is the city of want and destruction. But oh, how different is the prospect and hope set before him! He is not fleeing to the camp of an enemy, but to the shelter of an Almighty Friend. He need not flee in doubt of welcome, or in fear of death; and though unbelief and sin may cause him to tremble lest he should be rejected, yet if his faith be true, there is no real ground of danger, and he may adopt the language of the prodigal, "I will arise and go to my Father"; and he will find that welcome which a Heavenly Father rejoices to bestow. These lepers had no reason to regret the step they took; they exchanged poverty and famine for wealth and abundance surpassing their utmost conception or desire. Just so it is with sinners who flee from the city of destruction, and "go forth unto Jesus without the camp, bearing His reproach." When once they have made the effort, and advanced to the foot of the cross, and cast the burden of their sins on Him "who bare them in His own body on the tree," how great the change! how wonderful the deliverance! They were sitting like these lepers in darkness and the shadow of death; but, as our blessed Lord Himself declares, they have "passed from death unto life" (John v. 24).

III. THE CONDUCT OF THE LEPERS AND ITS HAPPY RESULTS. Having feasted in abundance, and satisfied themselves with spoil, "then they said one to another, We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace; if we tarry till the morning light some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household." So they went and announced the happy and unexpected news which at first appeared too good to be true. And are not far happier results brought about by the knowledge of the Gospel, and from other and higher motives? Selfishness appears to have chiefly dictated the lepers in their discovery. It does not seem that sympathy for their suffering brethren, anxiety to carry relief to those perishing by hunger within the city, urged them so speedily to the work of mercy as the thought that if they tarried till the morning light some mischief would come upon them. But with the Christian it is altogether different. When he has had the burden of his sins removed, he is anxious to lead others to that Saviour he has found from the purest motives,—a zeal for the glory of God, a desire for the happiness of souls. (C. A. Maginn, M.A.)

The leprous men at the gate.—1. Fulfilment of the Divine Word in opposition to human appearances. 2. Illustration of strange instrumentalities which God uses to accomplish His purposes. Here lepers. In Elijah's case, ravens. "No restraint to save by many or few." 3. God's mercies must not be retained in a miserly or selfish spirit. 4. Unbelief will be confounded, while faith will be honoured. The case of these leprous men is, however, analogous to that of certain sinners. They are—

I. IN A POSITION OF PERIL. What was likely to prove a fatal disease: "Until we die." 1. Suffering from famine. Illustrate by Prodigal Son: "I perish with hunger." Soul needs feeding as well as the body: "My soul shall be satisfied," says the Psalmist. 2. Isolated from the city and its supplies. Sin has separated from God the soul's true satisfaction. 3. Pursuing a policy of inaction which rendered them more hopeless: Law of degeneration that is unerring; "Evil men shall wax worse and worse." Nothing so inimical to spiritual interests as inertia. Illustrate by death of Professor Nettleship on Alps—powerless to move. II. A GLIMMER OF HOPE (ver. 4). Two ways were closed. One seems open—if it fail there is nothing to lose. The men were brought to this by reflection. Look where you are. Certain ways of deliverance are hedged in: 1. Self cannot save self. 2. By bitter experience many of you have proved the world is vain. Pleasure, riches, passion, have increased famine. 3. Christ may save. He professes to do so. At least He makes great claims. Will you try Him? Our duty is to examine probabilities. In discoveries men have followed this course. So in religion, "Then shall we know if we follow on to know." Look at the circumstantial evidence, it may furnish a clue. You may be like a drowning man with the last chance of life. Hope multiplies the chance. III. THE UNEXPECTED SATISFACTION (vers. 5, 6, 7). Probable becomes possible, possible becomes actual. "Now none but Christ can satisfy." 1. God's way of deliverance is miraculous. "If He should make windows in heaven." 2. To the ven-

turing soul there are constant surprises of blessing. Faith is a venture, but is honoured. The curtain rises on new scenes; we pass from famine to banquet. IV. SONGS OF DELIVERANCE (ver. 9). 1. Gratitude prompted. 2. Despised instrumentality used to testify. 3. Testimony begets faith and action. It led the host to verification of the facts announced. Do we well to hold our peace? No. "I'll praise my Maker while I've breath." (*J. E. Wakerley.*) *Who found it out?*—The story of four leprous men inserted in the Book of the Kings of Israel: is it not singular? No; it is not singular for the Bible. If you were to take out of the Scriptures all the stories that have to do with poor, afflicted men and women, what a very small book the Bible would become, especially if together with the stories you removed all the psalms of the sorrowful, all the promises for the distressed, and all the passages which belong to the children of grief! This Book, indeed, for the most part is made up of the annals of the poor and despised.

I. A GREAT WORK OF GOD, WHICH WAS ENTIRELY UNKNOWN. 1. The siege was raised from around Samaria. Armed men had stood in their places and kept the way, so that none could go in or out; but they are all gone, not one of them is left. Yet in the city of Samaria they thought themselves cooped up, and set their warders on the wall because of fear in the night. They were as free as the harts of the wilderness had they known it: but their ignorance held them in durance vile.

2. The Lord had also defeated all their enemies. They had run for their lives; they had fled because of a noise in their ears as of horses and of chariots. He that could first get across the Jordan, and interpose that stream between him and his supposed pursuers was the happiest man. Without aid from Hittite or Ethiopian, the God of Israel had driven the whole host of Syria like chaff before the wind.

3. God has provided plenty for them. The wretched Samaritans drew the hunger-belt more closely about them, and each man hoped that he might sleep for many an hour, and forget his bitter pangs; yet within a stone's throw there was more fine flour and barley than they could possibly consume. Was not that a strange thing? A city besieged, and not besieged; girt with enemies, as they thought, and yet not an enemy left; starving, and yet near to a feast! See, what unbelief can do. They had been promised plenty right speedily, by God's own prophet; but they did not believe the promise, nor look out for its fulfilment. Had they been upon the watch, they might have seen the unusual movement in the Syrian camp, and noticed the absolute stillness which succeeded it. I know a sad parallel to this. The Lord Jesus Christ has come into the world, and has put away the sin of His people; and yet many of them are complaining that their sin can never be put away. The Lord Jesus Christ has routed all the enemies of His people, and yet they are afraid of innumerable evils. It is said that drowning men catch at straws: would you not have thought that famishing men might have caught at the word of Elisha? I grant you the promise did seem too great to be true: that lord who scoffed at it was not the only one who judged it to be impossible of fulfilment; and yet when men are brought so very low, they are apt to catch at any hope. How hardened was the unbelief which refused Jehovah's word! II. When you have realised the picture of the city abiding in sorrow, though its deliverance had already come, I want to remark upon A VERY SINGULAR BAND OF DISCOVERERS. A choice quaternion at last found out what the Lord had done, proved it for themselves, and made it known to their fellow-townsmen. Is it not remarkable that these discoverers were lepers? Ah, grace! it is thy wont to dwell in most unlikely places! You would have supposed that surely the king would have gone forth to see, or that yonder great lord who had ridiculed the prophet might have relented, and gone forth to observe. But no; there are last that shall be first, and the Lord in His providence and grace pitched upon lepers to be the discoverers of His marvellous miracle. Even thus the keenest observers of grace are those who have the deepest sense of sin. These men could not hope for a welcome from the Syrians, poor objects that they were, they would be hated as Israelites, and abhorred as lepers; yet they went, and in that camp they found all that they wanted, and much more than they expected. Am I not speaking to some who are saying, "For me to go to Christ would be all in vain: I can suppose His blessing my brother, or my friend, but He never will receive one so altogether unworthy as I am"? I speak to those of you who feel that you have no right to mercy: you are the very men who may come boldly for it; since it is not of right, but altogether of favour. You that have no claim to the mercy of God, you are the very people to come to Him through Jesus Christ; for where there is the least of anything that is good and meritorious, there there is the most room for generous gifts and gracious

pardons. 1. These discoverers of the Lord's work were a people who dared not have joined themselves to God's people. They were not allowed inside the city walls: their wretched hospital was without the gate. How often does it happen that those who are rejected of men are accepted of God! 2. To describe these discoverers yet more fully, they were men who at last were driven to give themselves up. They said, "We will fall unto the Syrians; and if they kill us we shall but die." Blessed is that man who has given himself up, not to the Syrians, but to the Lord! 3. These discoverers I would liken to Columbus, four times repeated; for they found out a new world for Samaria. These four lepers went to the Syrian camp, and saw for themselves: lepers as they were, they came, they saw, they conquered. I think I can see them in the dim twilight, stealing along until they come to the first tent, expecting to be challenged by a picket, and wondering that they are not. They heard no sound of human voice. The horses and mules were heard to stamp, and draw their chains up and down, but their riders were gone, and no noise of human foot was heard. "There are no men about," cried one of them, "nor signs of men! Let us go into this tent." They stepped in. A supper was ready. He who had spread that table will never taste it again. The hungry men needed no persuasion, but immediately began to carve for themselves. They took possession of the spoils of war left on the field. After they had feasted they said, "To whom does this gold and silver belong? The prey belongs to us, for our enemies have left the treasure behind them." They took as many of the valuables as they could carry, then went into another tent: still no living soul was seen. Where lately a host had rioted, not a soldier remained. There was no sound of revelry that night, nor tramp of guard, nor talk around the watch-fire. The lepers tasted more of the forsaken dainties, drained other goblets, and took more gold and silver. "There is more than we shall know what to do with," they said; so they dug a hole, and banked their gains after the Oriental fashion. Who can conceive the delirious joy of those four lepers in the midst of such abundance? Do you see what these men did? First, they went and saw for themselves, and then they took possession for themselves. The whole four of them did not own a penny before, and now they are rich beyond a miser's dream. They have enjoyed the feast, and they are filled to the full. They are fully qualified to go and tell the starving city of their discovery, because they are clear that they have made no mistake. They have satisfied their own hunger, gratified their own desire, and tasted and handled for themselves, and so they can speak as men who know and are sure. He knows the grace of God best who, in all his leprosy and defilement, in all his hunger, and faintness, and weariness, has come to Christ, and fed on the bread of heaven, and drank the water of life, and taken the blessings of the covenants, and made himself rich with hidden treasure. Such a man will speak convincingly, because he will bear a personal witness. The leper, fed and enriched, stands outside the city gate, and calls to the porter, and wakes him up at the dead of night, for he has news worth telling. The experienced believer speaks with the accent of conviction, and therein imitates his Master, who spake with authority. "Why," says the porter, "I used to speak to you over the city wall; are you the leper to whom I said that there was no more food for you? I have thrown you nothing for a week, and thought you were dead—are you the man?" He answers, "I am: I do want your wretched rations now; I am filled, and where I have fed there is enough for you all. Come out, and feast yourselves." "I should not know you!" says the porter. All four join in saying, "No, you would not know us; we are new men since we have been to the camp. Believe the story, and tell it to all in the city, for it is true. There is enough and to spare, if they will but come out and have it."

III. HOW THEY CAME TO MAKE THIS DISCOVERY. These four lepers, how did they come to find out the flight of Syria? First, I suppose, they made the discovery rather than anybody else because the famine was sorest with them. Let but some men feel the burden of sin, and they will never rest till they come to Jesus. John Bunyan says that he once thought hardly of Christ, but at last he came to such a pitch of misery that he felt he must come to Jesus anyhow; and he says that he verily believed that, if the Lord Jesus had stood before him with a drawn sword in His hand, he would have rushed upon the point of His sword rather than stay away from Him. These lepers were driven to go to make the discovery because they felt that they could not be any worse than they were. They said, "If we sit here we shall die; and if the Syrians kill us, we shall but die." That feeling has often driven souls to Christ. 1. These people saw that there was no

reason why they should not go, for they said one to the other—"Why sit we here until we die?" They could not find a justification for inaction. They could not say, "We sit here because the king commands us to stop where we are." He promises that He will receive you, and therefore He cries, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" 2. These lepers went to the camp of the Syrians because they were shut up to that one course—"If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also." Only one road was open. I am always glad when I am in that condition. If many courses are open to me I may make a mistake; but when I see only one road I know which way to go. It is a blessed thing to be shut up to faith in Christ—to be compelled to look to grace alone. IV. MAY NOT SOME SAD HEARTS IMITATE THESE LEPERS, and make the same discovery? "I am afraid to believe in Christ," says one, "for my sins, my many sins, prevent me." Look at the lepers, and see how much better the Lord was to them than their fears. It is twilight, and they steal into the camp trembling. One cries, "Softly there, Simeon! Your heavy tread will bring the guard upon us." Eleazar gently whispers to the other, "Make no noise. If they sleep, let us not arouse them." They might tread as heavily as they pleased, and talk as loudly as they wished, for there was no man there. Do you know it? If you believe in the Lord Jesus, your sins, which are many, are all forgiven—there is no sin left to accuse you. You are afraid they will ruin you? They have ceased to be: the depths have covered them; there is not one of them left. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Your sins were numbered on the scape-goat's head of old. Jesus bore your sins in His own body on the tree. If you come to Christ, confessing and believing, no sin shall destroy you, for it is blotted out. Perhaps these men feared when they were going into the tent—"A Syrian will meet us at the tent door, and cry, 'Back, what business have you here? Lepers, begone! Back to your dens and die!'" They entered into tent after tent: nobody forbade them: they had the entry of every pavilion. They were also possessors of all they saw. When I came to Christ, I could not believe that I might take the promises; but I did, and nobody said me nay. Perhaps the leper felt some little question when he saw a golden cup, or a silver flagon, or a well-fashioned cruet. What have lepers to do with golden cups? But he overcame his scruples. No law could hinder his sharing the leavings of a runaway enemy. Nobody was there to stop him, and the valuables were set before him, and therefore he took what was provided for him. The lepers grew more and more bold, till they carried off as much of the booty as they were able to hide away. I take up my parable, and without scruple invite you to deal thus with salvation. When I came to Jesus, I hardly dared to appropriate a promise; it looked like stealing. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Never say die* :—"Why sit we here until we die?" That is a plain question that these poor wretched people put to themselves, and after failing to find an answer, to confirm them in their sitting still, they rose up and went forward, and in doing so there came upon them abundant relief and blessing. I trust the vision I have had concerning some of you, whom I have invited to come to this Gospel service, has come to pass. My brother, my sister, I invited you to God's house, and you have come. You have not been in a place of worship for a long time, and I am glad to see you here. You have come in here in a sort of despairing mood. You can't say you have come here expecting to be blessed. You have said, something like the leprous men, "Well, well, my life has got more and more weary since I kept away from the churches and the preachers. Certainly since I became an outcast" (and you cast yourself out) "I have become darker and darker and more and more wretched." And when you got my invitation you said, "Well, I will go once more to the church, for it can't be worse for me." The grand thing is to get done with our sitting still. That is the killing thing—doing nothing. Young and old, rich and poor, let the days and months and years come and go, and sit still doing nothing for their souls. The grey hairs are gathering fast on some of you, and you are not a bit fruther forward; but a little older, and a little heavier, and a little more damned than you were some time ago. "Why sit we here until we die?" Why, there is power enough in that thought to begin a great revival of church-going and a great revival of salvation all over London, throughout its whole circumference. "Why sit we here until we die?" And no one of the four could get any better answer than that they had sat still long enough. Now the Gospel, the glad tidings coming out of this is, that when the soul begins to awaken out of its benumbed, dumb state of dark despair, and de-

plores its starving condition : when it says, " It is time I made a shift, for life is slipping away, and my leprosy is not diminishing, my death is getting more deadly every year I live," the true state and condition is realised, and the soul being convinced that there is no hope in sitting still, is determined to arise, to flee for refuge to the only hope in the Gospel. The lepers said, " We will go into the camp of the Syrians." They expected death, but when they came to the camp a wonderful thing had happened. I think I see these four wretched lepers approaching ; I see them arrive at the edge of the camp, expecting the challenge of the Syrian guard. But, lo ! no guard was there. Everything was most unnaturally quiet, and in they slipped, and as they moved in farther and farther and saw no one, their courage grew, and they realised that they were in a deserted camp, surrounded with food and plenty, the spoils of the departed host. Now, don't you see in this the Gospel story ? The sinner, when convinced of his lost, ruined, guilty state, has with this conviction a wrong idea and impression of God and salvation. He has the notion—the mistaken notion—that God is full of anger and wrath, and that in coming to Him he will be destroyed. Just like the lepers, they thought the Syrians would kill them. But, as it turned out to the lepers, instead of finding enemies and death, they found food, and all they needed ; so, instead of the sinner being smitten with God's justice, God's mercy is revealed to him ; and instead of death, he receives the gift of eternal life. That's the English of it ; the Gospel of it. These poor starving leprous men came to the Syrian camp, upon the provision of a hundred thousand men, shall I say ? Far more than that. So come to Christ, and there is more in Him, far more than you and I and a million of us could possibly need. " My grace is sufficient for you." Dear me ! Surely the great ocean is big enough for a sprat like you, isn't it ? And that " My grace " is sufficient for thee individually. Try—ay, trust ! And I am not minimising your sin or mine. But I am magnifying " the grace of God that bringeth salvation unto man." (*J. M'Neill.*)

The sinner's only alternative :—I SOME HAVE AN ALTERNATIVE PRESENTED TO YOUR CONSCIENCES. Time was when you were careless about eternal things. That time has passed. You can look back but a few weeks and remember when the Sabbath was to you a day of revelry, when the house of God was utterly neglected, when the Bible was a book which you would not have read if you had not been flogged to it, and when prayer was a duty which you utterly despised. But now your conscience has been somewhat awakened. Though not thoroughly, still partially, roused up, you begin to perceive that the Scripture is true, that we have gone astray like lost sheep, that our iniquities do prevail against us, and that our righteousnesses are filthy rags. Well, now, you perceive that you are in just this particular state, that you have a choice of two things before you ; you can sit still, but then you must perish ; you can go to Christ, and your fears tell you that you will perish then. This, however, at any rate, your conscience may say to you, " You can but die, whereas if you go not to Christ you must die." Even should you believe in Him, you think you might, after all, perish ; but if you do not believe in Him, then there is no hope. Should you repair now to Him in prayer your fears tell you that He may repel you, that He may say : " Get you gone ! You that once cursed Me, what right have you to expect My favour ? You who have scorned My grace a hundred times, and defied My law, what do you here on your knees seeking My mercy ? Begone, thou ungrateful wretch, and perish in thy sins." But still there is this presented to your mind, that if you perish there you do but perish, for it is quite certain that you must perish where you are. You believe—you must believe—even if you reject the Word of God, you must believe that God is just. If there be a God, He must punish men for sin. How can there exist a moral government if sin shall go unpunished, if virtue and vice shall bring the same end to men ? On the other hand, look at the other side of the alternative. There is, at least, some hope ; even your poor, trembling heart admits that there is some hope—that if you seek mercy you may obtain it. I know that there is not only hope, but certainty. Jesus casts out none that come to Him, and He is willing to receive the vilest of the vile. But I put the question now as your unbelief puts it ; it is not even to you an absolute certainty that Christ will reject you—is it ? It is not quite certain that if you pray to Him He will refuse to hear your prayer. At least, it does not admit of positive proof that if you were to trust the blood of Christ you would perish. Look at the question for a moment in another light. It is certain that if you perish as you now are, you will perish without pity and without mercy. The law under which you are convicted knows nothing about forgiveness. Condemned already

because you are under the law, the law provides no sacrifice for sin. But now, do you not feel that even if you could perish after coming to God through Christ, yet you would not perish without having some ray of pity? Would there not be at least this consolation for you—"I did what God counselled me; I did come to Him and ask for mercy; I did plead the precious blood of Christ, and yet He rejected me"; and do you not think that this would be a balm to you? Yet further, you ought to remember that all those who have continued in a state of nature have, without exception, perished. II. THE COGITATION OF THESE MEN ENDED IN ACTION. I wish the like were true of all of you. How many resolves have been strangled in this house of prayer! How many good thoughts have been murdered in those pews! Look, see, can you not find their blood upon your own skirts? Many a time that tear which betokens the first rising emotion has been wiped away, and the emotion with it. May it not be so to-night, but oh! may God grant that, like the lepers, we may put into action that which we shall think over, and accomplish that which, by the help of God the Holy Spirit, we shall be enabled to resolve upon. 1. Undoubtedly the action of the lepers was bold. Cowardice would have sat still. Cowardice would have said, "Well, it is true we shall perish if we sit here, but still we will not go just yet; we are very hungry, but we may bear it another hour," and thus only an extreme pinch would have driven them out. Now, it seems a very bold thing to you, my unknown but trembling hearer, to think of going to Christ by faith. "Why," say you, "I have not the impudence to do it: look at what I have been." 2. But while these lepers did a bold thing, I pass on to notice that they did it unanimously. It is not said that three of them went, but that the other said, "No, I will not go yet." It does not say that two said, "When we have a more convenient season we will go." It was a mercy for them that they were all hungry, for if they had not been they would not have gone. It was, probably, a great mercy for them that they were all lepers, or else they would not have been decided, and would never have dared to go. What a mercy it is for you, sinner, to know that you are a sinner! No, no; we sow much, but we reap little, compared with what our hearts desire. Where stands there the man or the woman here who intends to sit down and die? Well, if you do choose it, choose it deliberately. 3. Bear with me while I remind you again that the action of the lepers was also instantaneous. They said, "We will go," and at once they went. Many say, "I go, sir," but they go not. We can all of us remember times before our conversion to God when we have been impressed under solemn sermons, and some of you can recollect how you have made haste home, and have gone upstairs, and have shut the door and prayed; but idle conversation dissipated the serious impression. And how many more there are who, while their hearts have been searched under the Word, have said, "Please God to spare me another day, I'll think over those things." But where are you now? 4. How well they were all of them rewarded for what they did. Not one of them perished. They were all saved; not one came back empty-handed; they were all enriched. Nor shall one of you—my life for yours—not one of you seeking mercy through Christ shall be refused it. You shall all be blessed, all adopted, all saved, who are by the Spirit of God led to put your trust in Christ at this welcome moment. III. These lepers no sooner found what was good for themselves than they STRAIGHTWAY WENT OFF TO TELL IT TO OTHERS. And if you have found Christ, after you are sure you have received Him, and have rejoiced in Him for a little season, and fed upon Him, and enriched yourselves by Him as your hidden treasure, it behoves you to go and tell to others of His grace, and your joy. This Gospel is not to be stifled. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *To sit still is to die*.—Their case seemed hopeless. Yet they rightly judged that to remain inactive—to sit still—was the unwise thing they could do—left them not one chance of life. The same principle will hold good in every man's history. There are critical periods in his life when his whole future hangs on his personal decision as to his course. Various courses suggest themselves, and he is often in doubt and perplexity which to adopt. But decide he must, and decide he does, for weal or woe, in time and in eternity. To sit still and do nothing in these critical periods is suicidal. 1. It is so in the ordinary business affairs of this life. Thousands are ruined by inactivity—by lack of incisive, heroic resolution and effort in the crisis of their affairs. They "sit still" till the opportunity to retrieve themselves is lost; till the tide of irresistible fate sets in against them. 2. It is so in the formation of character. There are critical periods when to "sit still" and let things take their course, is to forfeit all self-control, to put yourself, soul and body,

at the mercy of evil associates, demoralising principles, and ruinous habits—in a word, to make shipwreck of character. 3. It is so with the awakened sinner. It is the most critical period of his life. Decide now he must the most momentous question that ever trembled on human lips. "What must I do to be saved?" He cannot evade it. He cannot postpone it, without infinite peril. 4. It is so with every sinner living under the Gospel. To "sit still" is certain death. To do nothing, absolutely nothing, in the way of inquiring after truth, repenting of sin, seeking Christ, obeying the Gospel, is to make our "damnation sure"! It is a great mistake which many fall into, that positive hostility and active resistance to the Gospel are necessary to ensure condemnation. The negative position and conduct is amply sufficient. Not to believe—not to accept Christ in the relations offered: not to possess the character and bear the fruit of the Christian life—is to render one's salvation impossible. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (*J. M. Sherwood.*) *Sitting still to die:*—Last night when I was thinking upon this subject, I had a half-waking dream, and I thought I stood along the Hudson River Railway track, and I saw a man sitting on that track. I went up to him, and said: "My friend, don't you know you are in peril? The Chicago express will be along in a few moments." I found he was deaf, and did not hear. I tried to pull him away from that peril, and he resisted me and said: "What do you mean by bothering me. I am doing nothing. Am I disturbing you? I am doing nothing at all. I am just sitting here." At that moment I heard in the distance the thunder of the express train. A moment afterwards I saw the head light of the locomotive flash around the corner. I held fast to the rocks that I might not be caught in the rush of the train. Like the horizontal thunder-bolt it hurled past. When the flagman came, five minutes after, with his lantern, there was not so much as a vestige left to show that a man had perished there. What had the victim been doing there? Nothing at all. He was only sitting still—sitting still to die. So I find men in my audience. I tell them the peril of living without God. They say, "I am not doing anything. I don't lie. I don't swear. I don't steal. I don't break the Sabbath. I am sitting here in my indifference, and what you say has no effect upon my soul at all. I am just sitting here." Meanwhile, the long train of eternal disaster is nearing the crossing, and the bridges groan, and the cinders fly, and the driving wheels speed on, and there is a blinding rush, and, in the twinkling of an eye they "perish from the way, when God's wrath is kindled but a little." (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*)

Vers. 9-11. Then they said one to another, We do not well.—*Public testimony: A debt to God and man:*—You are not surprised to find that, when those four lepers outside the gate of Samaria, had made the great discovery that the Syrian camp was deserted, they first satisfied their own hunger and thirst. And quite right too. Who would do otherwise? It is true that they were bound to go and tell other hungry ones; but they could do that with all the louder voice, and they were the more sure of the truth they had to tell, when they had first refreshed themselves. It might have been a delusion: they were prudent to test their discovery before they told it. Having refreshed and enriched themselves, they bethought them of going to tell the besieged and starving citizens. I would advise every soul that has found Christ to imitate the lepers in this matter. Make sure that you have found the Saviour. Eat and drink of him; enrich yourself with him; and then go and publish the glad tidings. Personal enjoyments of true godliness assist us in our testimony for truth and grace. But the point I desire to bring out is this: if those lepers had stopped in the camp all night, if they had remained lying on the Syrian couches, singing, "Our willing souls would stay in such a place as this"; and if they had never gone at all to their compatriots, shut up and starving within the city walls, their conduct would have been brutal and inhuman. I am afraid that some of my hearers have never yet confessed the work of God in their souls. It should not be a matter of one solemn occasion, but our whole life should be a witness to the power and grace which we have found in Christ. I. TO HIDE THE DISCOVERY OF DIVINE GRACE WOULD BE WRONG. 1. For, their silence would have been contrary to the Divine purpose in leading them to make the discovery. Why were these four lepers led into the camp that they might learn that the Lord of hosts had put the enemy to the rout? Why, mainly that they might go back, and tell the rest of their countrymen. 2. These people would not only have been false to the Divine purpose, but

they would have failed to do well. They said one to another, "We do not well." Did it ever strike some of you that it is a very serious charge to bring against yourselves, "We do not well?" "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." 3. Besides this, had those lepers held their tongues, they would actually have been doing evil. Suppose that they had kept their secret for four-and-twenty hours, many hundreds might have died of starvation within the walls of Samaria: had they so perished, would not the lepers have been guilty of their blood? 4. Again, these lepers, if they had held their tongues, would have acted most unseasonably. Note how they put it themselves: they say, "We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace." O, has Jesus washed your sins away, and are you silent about it? 5. One thing more: silence may be dangerous. What said these men? "If we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us." That morning light is very close to some of you. If you tarry till to-morrow morning before you have spoken about Christ, some mischief may come upon you. II. If we have made the blessed discovery of Christ's gracious work in routing our enemies, and providing for our needs, and if we have tasted of the fruit of that glorious victory ourselves, WE OUGHT TO MAKE A VERY EXPLICIT AVOWAL OF THAT DISCOVERY. It ought to be confessed very solemnly, and in the way which the Lord himself has appointed. 1. This ought to be done very decidedly, because our Lord requires it. 2. Next, if you have found Christ, the man who was the means of leading you to Christ has a claim upon you that he should know of it. 3. Next I think the church of God has a claim upon all of you who have discovered the great love of Jesus. Come and tell your fellow-Christians. Tell the good news to the King's household. The church of God is often greatly refreshed by the stories of new converts. 4. Besides that, a testimony decided for Christ is due to the world. If a man is a soldier of the cross, and does not show his colours, all his comrades are losers by his want of decision. III. THIS DECLARATION SHOULD BE CONTINUALLY MADE. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Missionary sermon to young men and women*:—On three grounds it is imperative upon us that we should carry that secret as far as we can, and as deep as we can, to hearts of our brother men. I. ON GROUNDS OF PRINCIPLE. "We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace." It is one of the obvious arguments for foreign missions that brotherhood and generosity, and the prodigality of the Great Message itself, all alike demand the widest proclamation of the Gospel. That is true, and can never be otherwise than true. There is a wealth of joy and of moral quickening in the good news of salvation, which it were an everlasting shame to limit by any miserable parochial barriers. Good news of this character is, in its very nature, expansive—universal. "We do not well," which being interpreted means, we are not acting honestly; we are revelling in sudden and incredible wealth. But it does not belong to us. It belongs to all; it is meant for all. There is no monopoly in the Gospel. Judaism is the historic example of the principle of religious monopoly at work, and Judaism measured swords with Christianity only to receive its death-blow. There are diversities of gifts; there are principles of election and selection at work undoubtedly; there are varieties of opportunity: but there is no diversity, no election, no variety, in regard to the destination of the Gospel. When the crass walls of Judaism fell before the outburst of the river of life the whole world was open to the hurrying stream, and thank God, could never more be severed or shut up from it again. There is no hint in all the Divine programme that an Englishman should make a better Christian than a Chinaman, or that wisdom might die with Western civilisation. The broad fact which the gospel bears upon its front, the fact to which Christ witnessed in so many suggestions and assertions, is this: that He comes to seek and to save the lost of all nations, that differences of race count nothing before the boundlessness of His compassion and power, and that nobody on earth can predict—only the great day will declare it—which race or language or colour may rise to the noble pre-eminence of revealing most perfectly the bloom and the fruitage of a divine life. Indeed, we do not well in holding our peace. The spirit of our faith demands that we be not silent, and if we are, do we not repeat in a more subtle, but not less deadly, form the sin of which every worldling is guilty? But there are other grounds on which we ought to have a greater zeal for this work, and I mention secondly—II. ON GROUNDS OF POLICY. If we tarry till the morning light, our iniquity will find us out. Of course it will. A fine philanthropy may often be stimulated, and not unworthily, by some stirring of the instinct of self-preservation. When their craven deed of the night came to

be known—and the morning would make it known inevitably—they would get but short shrift from those who at last came to their own; their wisdom lay in communicating the secret and sharing in the common lot of enrichment and of joy. And it seems to me that here there lies enshrined a warning of the gravest consequence to Christian people and Christian nations to-day. Expansion with concentration is the condition of a vigorous and worthy life. Concentration without expansion means sterility and death. III. ON GROUNDS OF PERSONAL OBLIGATION TO JESUS CHRIST. The parallel of our text may not carry us quite so far as I would go, yet it carries us a good way. "Let us go now and tell the king's household." There was clearly in the mind of the lepers some thought of loyalty to the king at this great crisis in national history, and for us Christians it is true that supreme above all other considerations, whether principle or policy, it is our personal obligation to Christ to see that His last words are obeyed to the letter. Our King's household is a great company—a multitude that no man can number. They are waiting in every country—among the jungle villages of India, under the sultry southern skies, amid the teeming millions of China, among the islands of the sea, waiting to have their heart-hunger appeased by the Word of Life; waiting for the one splendid disclosure that can make the whole world new. And you possess the secret. You do not well nor wisely to hold your peace. Run, cry about for joy in the ear of all nations, Christ is King, and His mercy endureth for ever. Now, when the time comes you will be saved from all mishaps, and from that hard which is worse than any mishap. There will be no sweeter words spoken by the lips of the Master in the great day than these: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did unto Me." (*A. Connell, M.A., D.D.*) *Christian privilege and duty*.—I. First, THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOSPEL TIMES. It is "a day of good tidings." Mark the goodness of the tidings which the Gospel brings. When these lepers drew near to the porter of the gate of Samaria, there was no doubt it was a gospel which they had to proclaim. Now, instead of famine, there should be abundance; instead of darkness, light; instead of terror, peace; instead of despair, hope. And is not this the very character of the tidings which your ministers bring to you from Sabbath to Sabbath—good tidings of great joy? If, then, Samaria was told that a mighty enemy had been affrighted, and that Samaria need no longer fear, so now I bring you the tidings that Satan, our great enemy, has had a fright. He has heard the approaching footsteps of One stronger than he, and now there is enough and to spare for all hungry and thirsty souls. Let me once more proclaim this Gospel to every one of you. I have good tidings for every soul in this assembly. Guilty spirit, listen! "The Blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Struggling spirit, listen! "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Bewildered spirit, listen! "All things work together for good to them that love God, and to them that are called according to His purpose." Tired, weary spirit, listen! "I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go I will come again, and receive you to Myself, that where I am ye may be also." These are the tidings I bring to you. Thus much for the goodness of these tidings; a word as to their newness. Why, even at this moment they are a new tidings to a very large portion of the inhabitants of our world. II. THE EVIL OF SELFISHLY ENJOYING THESE GOSPEL TIMES. "We do not well," these lepers said to one another; we do not well; "this day is a day of good tidings and we hold our peace." "We do not well; we show a want of common benevolence if we simply receive the Gospel and make no effort to diffuse it. There is a close tie between man and man. Reason and Scripture both tell us of a bond of brotherhood which unites me to every other individual of my race. I ought to abound in sympathy, to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep. The second commandment is not repealed by the Gospel, it is sanctioned, enforced, confirmed—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Now just suppose that these lepers had revelled down there at the bottom of the hill among the luxuries of the Syrian camp and sent no tidings into Samaria. Suppose that by some accident one of the Samaritans heard that there were these men revelling, and that there was enough and to spare, and they had sent no tidings into the city: how the selfishness of these men would be cursed! What a howl of indignation would ring through all the streets and homes of Samaria! We do not well, for there is a want of loving obedience in this. We do not well, for we rob ourselves of the highest enjoyment of the Gospel. There is nothing, that appears clearer to those of us who have got into middle age, and are getting on to the end

of life, than this. I never can be happy if I simply try to make myself happy. Selfishness always defeats itself. (*F. Tucker, B.A.*) *The lepers of Samaria*:—

I. THE TIMES IN WHICH WE LIVE. "This day is a day of good tidings." And is it not a day of good tidings? What are the peculiarities of the day in which we are called to live? There are these four peculiarities in it; the first of which I will now mention:—that Jesus Christ has obtained a complete conquest over all our enemies. And this is the great and especial truth which is published in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Moreover, "this is a day of good tidings," because Jesus Christ has procured an ample provision for all our necessities. The spoil is ours; the glory is his. The conquest was made by Himself, and through that conquest all the benefits of salvation are now amply provided and amply presented to our use. But there is another point connected with this good tidings, and that is this that Jesus Christ has led many of us who are present to participate in the provisions of his love. And this makes it "a day of good tidings" to us. The four leprous men exemplify our condition. Like them we were cast out of the congregation of the saints; like them we were loathsome in our own eyes: like them, we were infectious to our neighbours: like them, we were under the ban and curse of God; but, like these leprous men, He filled us with views of our own misery, made us discontented with the state in which we were, raised a spark of hope in our bosoms, that for us there might be hope, and that we might, as we could not be in a worse condition, be better, by application to His mercy and grace. But there is another point connected with the day in which we live—that Jesus Christ has opened channels for the publication of these good tidings to others. This day may be emphatically called, indeed, "a day of good tidings."

I. THE TEXT REPROVES OUR INDIFFERENCE TO THE MISERIES OF OTHERS. "We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings." Certainly, then, "we do not well."

1. For let it be remembered that while this disposition exists in the mind, we dishonour our character. What is our character? If we have believed in Christ, we are the sons of God; we are united to Christ, our Elder Brother, and we are under infinite obligations to his boundless love, inexpressible obligations to His gracious care and love to us. Now, all He asks us, in return for His love to us, is, to love Him in return—not to be ashamed of Him; to establish His kingdom, and to give ourselves up to His service.

2. But we not only dishonour our character, but we disobey Christ's command. Our prayers have been, "Lead me into Thy truth, and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation:" "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" has been our cry. Now this is His instruction: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, beginning at Jerusalem."

III. THE TEXT PRONOUNCES OUR PUNISHMENT IF WE DELAY. "If we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will befall us."

1. If we delay this work our eyes shall see the destruction of our kindred. When our beloved Lord had used all efforts to evangelise Jerusalem, by preaching, by miracles, by residing amongst them, by various conversations, and yet, after all their misery affected His heart; He could not look upon them without tears. Many times He wept in His prayers; but there are two scenes only recorded where He publicly wept; the one was at the grave of Lazarus, His dear friend; and the other was when He looked over Jerusalem, and saw the people perishing—people who had discarded the prophets that had been sent them. Now what should our grief, beloved, be, to see souls brought every hour to the brink of hell, and know that, if they die, they must fall therein, and to reflect that we have used no adequate means to succour and save their souls! There is however, another point to consider.

2. The evil that shall befall us shall be this—our souls shall want the joys of God's salvation.

3. Again: our conduct shall receive the condemnation of Christ. I refer now to the last day. That is so plainly spoken of, that it needs no illustration: "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me."

IV. The text would, in the last place, suggest the CONDUCT WHICH YOU OUGHT TO ADOPT UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. "Let us go," the text says, "and tell the king's household." And, brethren, let us go and carry the Gospel to our poor brethren and sisters in England that are perishing for lack of knowledge. It suggests that we should go and tell of these glad tidings, because success is certain. Success is certain. What though many of your dear missionaries, who toil night and day in the work, have not had extended encouragement of their heart's desire which you could wish—will you give up? Finally, let us furnish this gospel to our countrymen, for our opportunities are vanishing. Time is hastening on; health is inconstant; the fashion of the world passeth away. This, this is the only time we can use our

strength, and talents, and time, and money. (*J. Sherman.*) *The right and the prudent*:—I. **THE RIGHT.** The silver and the gold which they had discovered they had hidden away; and now, perhaps, conscience told them it was not right. It is not right for us to conceal the good we have discovered, or to appropriate it entirely to our own use, let us communicate it. The distribution of good is right. Every man should be ready to communicate. The monopoly of material good is a huge wrong, and the crying sin of the age. Monopolies in trade, in land, in power, political and ecclesiastical, must be broken up, the wants of society and the claims of eternal justice demand it. What is truly "glad tidings" to us we should proclaim to others. The rays of joy that fall over our own lives we should not retain, but reflect. II. **THE PRUDENT.** If these poor men felt it was right to communicate to others the tidings of the good they had received or not, they certainly felt it was prudent. Not to do the right thing must cause some "mischief," mischief not only to the body, but to the soul as well, to the entire man. There is no true prudence apart from rectitude. What is wrong in moral principle is mischievous in conduct. He who is in the right, however outvoted by his age, is always in the majority, for he has His vote, which carries all material universes and spiritual hierarchies with it. Right is infallible utilitarianism. (*Homilist.*) *Religion to be made known*:—Burnet, in his *History of our own Times*, quotes Lord Shaftesbury of the seventeenth century as saying: "People differ in their discourses and professions about theological matters, but men of sense are really of one religion." When asked "What is that religion?" the Earl rejoined, "That, men of sense never tell!" This may be the religion of the worldling and cynic, but the religion of the regenerated man cannot but utter itself. Its light shines—it cannot be hid. Life must out. Divine life is irrepressible.

Vers. 17-20. *And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken.*—*God's promise realised and His truth vindicated*:—We have here an instance of two things—
I. **GOD'S PROMISE REALISED.** In the first verse of this chapter Elisha had said, "Hear ye the word of the Lord, Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow, about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel." The morrow had come, and here is the fine flour and the barley selling in the gate of Samaria. Here is the Divine promise fulfilled to the letter. God is ever faithful Who hath promised.
II. **GOD'S TRUTH VINDICATED.** The haughty courtier said to the prophet yesterday, when he was told that a measure of fine flour would be sold for a shekel, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, then might this thing be." As if he had said, "Do not presume to impose on me, a man of my intelligence and importance. The intellectual rabble may believe in you, but I cannot." Whereupon the prophet replied, "Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." And so it became. Here are the flour and the barley, and there lies dead the haughty sceptic. Truth has ever vindicated itself, and will ever do so. Men's unbelief in facts does not either destroy or weaken facts, the facts remain. Though all the world deny the existence of a God, moral obligation and future retribution, the facts remain. (*Homilist.*) The people trode upon him in the gate, and he died.—*The fate of unbelief*:—1. We see that God will punish unbelief. There is an impression in the minds of many that the old dispensation was one of works, and that belief or faith in God is a doctrine only of the new. It is, however, the teaching of the entire Bible, and for all time, that in the eye of God the great sin of man is unbelief. The language is clear and unmistakable. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." He that cometh unto Him must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that seek Him. He must believe that when the necessities of His kingdom on earth, or the wants and salvation of His people demand it, no laws of nature can stand in the way of His giving relief.
2. We note that this man's final doom was pronounced at least one whole day before his death. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, and yet there is such a thing as a sin that shall never be forgiven. I believe this is oftener committed by what the world calls moral men than by the desperately wicked. I believe it consists in a deliberate and persistent rejection of God's truth with the heart, while that truth is clearly known with the head. It is a combination of light in the understanding and determined darkness in the will. This man had been privileged to walk with God's servant, but would not walk with God.
3. We note that this man perished in sight of blessing. It is possible to realise truth too late. It has been forcefully said, earth is the only place in God's universe where there is any infidelity. Hell itself is nothing but the truth believed too late.

The fabled Tantalus was placed in sight of water and food, yet left to die of thirst and starvation. Dives lifted up his eyes in torment and saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, and there is such a thing as rejecting the offers of Jesus and then being compelled to witness the delight of those who are foolish enough to believe God's promises and wise enough to accept them. (*W. H. McCaughey, D.D.*)

CHAPTER VIII.

Vers. 1-6. **Then spake Elisha unto the woman.**—*The potent influence of a good man*:—I. HIS COUNSEL IS VALUABLE, AND GRATEFULLY ACTED UPON. Here we see how the kindness shown by the Shunammite receives still further reward. There is nothing so fruitful in blessing as kindness. In the great dilemmas of life we seek counsel, not from the frivolous and wicked, but from the wise and good. A good man has the destiny of many lives in his hands; a word from him has great weight. II. HIS BENEFICENT ACTS ARE THE THEME OF POPULAR CONVERSATION (ver. 4). A good action cannot be hid. Sooner or later it will emerge from the obscurity in which it was first done, and become the talk of a nation, until it reaches even royal ears. All good actions do not attain such distinguished popularity. There were many good things that Elisha said and did of which history takes no notice. A good act may be remembered and applauded for generations, while the name of the actor is unknown. III. HIS HOLY AND UNSELFISH LIFE IS A TESTIMONY FOR JEHOVAH IN THE MIDST OF NATIONAL APOSTASY. In the darkest night of national apostasy, Israel was favoured with an Elisha, whose divinely-illuminated life threw a bright stream of light across the gloom. How deplorable the condition of that nation from which all moral worth is excluded! IV. HIS REPUTATION IS THE MEANS OF PROMOTING THE ENDS OF JUSTICE (vers. 5, 6). There was surely a Divine providence at work that brought the suppliant Shunammite into the presence of the king at the very moment when Gehazi was rehearsing the great works of Elisha. Justice triumphed; her land and all its produce for the seven years were restored to her. It requires power to enforce the claims of justice, and the highest kind of power is goodness. The arrangements of justice are more likely to be permanent when brought about by the influence of righteous principles, than when compelled by physical force. The presence of a holy character in society is a powerful check upon injustice and wrong. (*G. Barlow.*) *Beneficence of the Christian life*:—The other summer, says Dr. Abbott, while sailing along the shores of the Sound, I landed at a little cove; there was a lighthouse tower and a fog-bell, and the keeper showed us the fog-bell, and how the mechanism made it strike every few minutes in the darkness and in the night when the fog hung over the coast; and I said, "That is the preacher; there he stands, ringing out the message of warning, ringing out the message of instruction, ringing out the message of cheer; it is a great thing to be a preacher." We went up into the lighthouse tower. Here was a tower that never said anything and never did anything—it just stood still and shone—and I said, "That is the Christian. He may not have any word to utter, he may not be a prophet, he may not be a worker, he may achieve nothing, but he stands still and shines, in the darkness and in the storm, always, and every night." The fog-bell strikes only on occasion, but all the time and every night the light flashes out from the lighthouse; all the time and every night this light is flashing out from you if you are God's children. *Permanent effects of godliness*:—Sir Wilfred Laurier has recently given a very striking testimony to the powerful influence of the Puritan spirit. He was asked why he was absolutely, in the best sense of the word, an Imperialist. Sir Wilfred replied that when he was a boy he was brought up in the home of a God-fearing Scottish farmer, at whose family worship he was present every morning and night. He was struck by the catholicity of spirit of the farmer, but still more by the fact that the farmer took the affairs of his house, his neighbourhood, and all his country in the presence of the Almighty, and sought His blessing upon all. This experience implanted in Sir Wilfred's heart an abiding conviction that an empire based on such community of spirit was made by God to lead the world. Here is the influence of a humble family worship determining the destinies of an empire. The lowly farmer in Scotland little realised how

far-reaching the ministry of his family altar would be. Little did he know that while he was praying and worshipping in apparent obscurity he was moulding the thoughts and feelings of a great statesman, and so shaping the policy of states. What a dignity this gives to the home altar, and what solemnity surrounds the lowly acts of family worship! It can be said of these humble ministries that "their lines are gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." (*Hardley Aspen.*)

Ver. 4-6. And the King talked with Gehazi.—*The special providence of Jehovah illustrated.*—We approach, in this chapter, the end of Elisha's wondrous but most useful career. His days are now perceptibly numbered, and one more recorded event, and he passes from the scene of this world. The text presupposes that the reputation of Elisha was established as a great and holy man "Tell me all the great things that Elisha hath done." The question of the king is introductory to an interesting illustration of the working of Divine providence, in bringing together persons and things in a most unexpected manner, to the furtherance of the ends of justice and the promotion of honesty. We are here also recalled to an old acquaintance, of whom we have heard nothing in the prophet's history for some years, namely, the pious Shunammite; but, although we find no record of herself and family during this interval, it is clear that her acquaintance with Elisha had been kept up, and that he may have been her counsellor and guide in many a difficult position. A prolonged famine of seven years is approaching. Elisha knows it; for "the Lord had called for it" (ver. 1). A partial famine for a brief space had already been endured at the hands of man—the Syrian enemy during the siege of Samaria. It does not appear to have worked any good effect in humbling the nation. As the smaller judgment is unheeded, the Lord will send a greater. And let us not omit to observe how partial this visitation is to be. The good land, the most fruitful of all lands, is to be blasted with its desolating evidence, while, but a few score miles away, in the country of the Philistines, there is plenty. Surely "the Lord doth make a fruitful land barren, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein" (Ps. cvii. 34); and His providence can as easily give plenty here and want there, as the day succeeds the night and the night the day, even as He teaches by Amos (iv. 7). Thus it was here; for Elisha, summoning the Shunammite to his presence, forewarns and advises her concerning the coming straitness, "Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn" (ver. 1). And we can readily see what an advantage the foreknowledge of Elisha would have secured. It would enable the family to make a suitable disposition of property, while plenty was still in the land, and the coming famine hidden from the people at large: and thus she could take enough with her for their support in the land of the Philistines during that lengthened period. And thus we may again notice how the Lord repaid her faith and affection for His servant (Matt. x. 41). Well, time, that never stands still, pursued its course—and the seven years had passed. What happened during that period we do not learn. How her son had grown to man's estate, and was now probably her stay and comfort in the land of the stranger; "It came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land" (ver. 3). And now the remarkable providence of Jehovah meets our eyes. The king, we may charitably hope, had profited by the Divine visitation, and he who cared little for the Lord and his servants during comparative prosperity is anxious to hear about the great prophet in "the day of his distress." Or, if we would take the more unfavourable view of this proceeding, we may suppose that mere curiosity, in an idle moment, prompted the king to request of Gehazi the leper an account of "all the great things Elisha had done." And was Gehazi, though now a leper in body, a penitent in heart, and clean in soul? Had the fearful correction administered to his sin wrought a salutary end? It is an interesting thought that "the destruction of the flesh may have been the salvation of the spirit" (1 Cor. v. 5); but it can only be a thought, for the Scripture is silent. How manifest are the leadings of a special providence! that just at the moment when Jehoram is listening attentively to this surprising account from Gehazi's lips, and is perhaps wanting a confirmation of the wonder in his heart—just at this precise moment, when he was telling the king "how the prophet had restored a dead body to life" (ver. 5)—the Shunammite herself enters the Court: "Behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for

her land." There are two inquiries on which a few words may here be said:—

I. WAS IT A MATTER OF CHANCE? and I reply in the negative—It was not a matter of chance. No converted man would for an instant yield to such an imagination; but there are many nominal Christians who think and speak of such events as if they were but a lucky or unlucky combination of accidents, as the case may touch them. Why was it not a matter of chance? Because to cherish the supposition is to dethrone Jehovah from His supreme seat of absolute control over all things, as well as all creatures, living. If we calmly reflect awhile on the point, such an argument at once places all secondary causes, such as the elements, the seasons, the maladies, and other external movements affecting outwardly the human family, as well as the motives and influences bearing upon the internal economy of man, beyond the inclination of the almighty God over all. It is much the same in probability as if an individual were to argue that the works of a watch would go forward, and the wheels run their regular course, without any mainspring to set them in motion. As opposed to such a view, nothing that happens can possibly be a matter of chance in a believer's eye. His own experience would contradict the opinion, if he had not the word of Jesus to sustain it (Luke xii. 6, 7).

II. BUT WAS THIS UNEXPECTED MEETING AN EVENT IN ANY WISE IMPROBABLE AND UNWORTHY OF CREDIT? A brief examination of the narrative may anticipate such a thought, and prevent its entertainment. There are many here who have experienced, to say the least, occurrences quite as improbable as this. All the circumstances are natural and consistent. What more natural than the Shunammite, finding on her return to her own country that her "house and her land" had been appropriated by another, should at once seek the king's presence, and "cry unto him" for the restoration of her rights? and what more consistent than the fact of such a presence being sought, and such a petition being offered, at a time when, as we have seen, his majesty was probably holding a Court, and Gehazi was admitted for some like end? The result may be viewed as almost a necessary consequence. The king, arrested by the singular coincidence, and struck by this unexpected confirmation, is at once predisposed to lend a favourable ear to the Shunammite's prayer, and so, with the characteristic decision of a despotic judgment, commands an officer to see not only "her house and her land" restored, but even "all the fruits of the field since the day that she had left" (ver. 6). The decision was in accordance with the instructions given to Israel's judges: "Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy from out of the hand of the wicked (Ps. lxxxii. 3, 4). This happy result is calculated to strengthen the faith of all who can feel, with the apostle, that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness" (1 Cor. iii. 19). One who can grasp this fact in his inmost heart can indeed realise the persuasion of the Psalmist (xci. 1), "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." He feels that whatever seems to make against him is really working for him. Cherish such a trust in the living God. It will sanctify every event of your life; it will moderate its joys; it will mitigate its sorrows; it will quicken activity, while it will temper hastiness; it will arouse indolence, while it will moderate zeal; above all, it will ever impart contentment with results, whatever may be the disappointment by the way. But again: this happy end to the Shunammite will not, I fear, correct the error of those who are sceptical and incredulous of a special providence. The very circumstance of the means by which it was compassed being natural and probable will, strange to say, often have the effect of hardening the mind against better impressions. It is thus that extremes so frequently meet, and exhibit a character of most perplexing inconsistency. The incredulous in what is probable will be the most credulous in what is improbable; and the man who rejects the workings of Divine providence in natural and common events will be the foremost to receive, aye, and to contend for, those workings in unnatural and uncommon events. Thus, a heathen will, as Ezekiel describes, "use divination" "at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways," to know which to take; "he will make his arrows bright, he will consult his images, he will look in the liver" (Ezek. xxi. 21); and thus an ignorant and superstitious but nominal Christian will have recourse to the turning of a pack of cards, or the winding of tea-leaves round a teacup, or the lines in the hand, sagely pronounced upon by a mysterious operator, while they would openly scoff at, or in heart ridicule, the notion of immediate direction being given to man at a throne of grace in answer to effectual, fervent prayer. (G. L. Glyn.)

The defrauded widow ; or, coincidences in life :—God is always unwilling to allow us to suffer, and yet if He constantly checked suffering great evil would follow. If Israel had not been visited during the reign of Jehoram with famine, a worse evil would have befallen the nation ; it would have sunk into a deeper state of idolatry ; a plague of corruption and darkness would have stolen over the people and there would have been a famine of the Word. National calamities fell, but alas ! the innocent had to suffer with the guilty. The woman of Shunem had done what she could to honour God and His servants, and yet she was involved in the general distress. One thing she gained by her piety—a prophet's warning. He told her to go and sojourn in a strange land. Intense longing at length merges into actual movement. Her face is turned homewards. Her weary steps bring her at length within the walls. None salute her. A kinsman passes, and she hails him, but he, alas ! declares that he has not the pleasure of knowing her. To the very door of her own home she comes. In the spot from whence she had often given a welcome to the wayfarer she is questioned by a hireling and coldly met by another kinsman. To whom shall she go for redress ? She goes to the gateway, the place of justice, and seeks, after the manner of Boaz, to gather a jury to decide between her and the men who have appropriated her property. All refuse, for one and another had filched from her something. They are afraid they will have to disgorge. They are trembling at her reappearance. Let her go again to Philistia or starve in Shunem. Treatment such as this was, for the poor widow, harder to bear than famine. She could have borne it from strangers, but from relatives it is bitter indeed. To whom can she have recourse ? Who will execute judgment for the oppressed ? Were Elisha living she knew that he would help. Had he not once offered to speak for her to the king, or the captain of the host (2 Kings iv. 13) ? "Why should I not go direct to the king ?" is her sudden thought. She mentions it to her son. "He will not have time to listen to us, mother ; our cause will be such a trifling affair to a great king." "Ah, my son, you are right. We are doomed to poverty. Once I was an honoured woman in Shunem and could help others, now I can only crave help. Position or possessions are not for us again." Thus pondering, and perhaps murmuring, she comes into the presence of the king. She trembles, and is ready to turn back. Yet she knows Jehoram by his attire and his staff. He is talking with some aged man, doubtless on weighty matters of state. As she approaches, and glances again at the companion of the king, she fancies she recognises those features. Yes, it is Gehazi, the one who had been attendant on Elisha, the mighty prophet. Jehoram has just asked Gehazi to tell him something concerning the doings of Elisha, the man to whom he owed his success in the beginning of his reign. Through him he repulsed the Syrians. He wishes he had acted subsequently more in harmony with the prophet's principles. Hence he is wishful to know more of them. "Who is that ?" Gehazi gazes with astonishment. Can this be the very woman and son of whom he had been speaking ? Yes, but how changed, the woman, and aged. And that young man ? 'Tis the child of prophetic promise and miraculous restoration. 1. We have in this an illustration of certain coincidences that come to us in life, and which have oftentimes great effect in determining our future. Some men get into a certain course and then life runs on smoothly to the end, like a locomotive on a level line. Others are swept into a current and are turned hither and thither like the stream or torrent that is checked, narrowed and tossed by the rocky inequalities over which it has to flow or over which it has to leap. There are certain points in life where we turn completely for good or evil, for time and for eternity. We may not notice these points. There are moments when life appears to turn as on a pivot. The slightest action, most trifling event, may suffice to give the turn, the complexion, the change of direction to the life. I remember when in great mental perplexity on one of the most important doctrines of the New Testament, that I casually met, at Naples, Dr. Symington of Scotland, and in an after-dinner conversation, and during a stroll along under the castle of St. Elmo, words and thoughts were uttered that make me to-day a Christian worker instead of a mere agnostic. 2. God's hand should be traced in the minutiae of life. The mighty God of Israel cared for her—a poor lone, rejected, oppressed widow woman. Her houses and lands were speedily restored. The kin acted with alacrity. The unjust were rebuked. The removers of the ancient landmarks were punished. The land filchers were frustrated in their scheme. The woman of Shunem could only exclaim, "Truly there is a God that judgeth." "He is the father to the fatherless, and a husband to the widow." And all who are in any trouble, sorrow,

perplexity, or who have to suffer through the wrong-doing of others, may always be sure of access to the King of kings, and of the fact that there is an Advocate with the Father. The Bible is full of hints of the special working of God. The silver thread of Providence runs through the whole. Christ taught us that the very hairs of our head are numbered, and that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Divine notice. Since Christ's death all history shows that God has been working for the welfare of men and the advancement of His kingdom of goodness in all hearts. Men specially fitted for great works are born at different periods. All things shall converge towards His great end. Everything, even that which seems most adverse,—as with the Shunammite woman seeking her lands—shall coincide to the restoration to Christ of all the kingdoms of the world to Him. His right it is to reign. The usurpers shall not only have to give up their usurpation, but shall have to do homage to Him who hath brought in victory. 3. Now although we believe in the converging of circumstances under the direction of God, and although we urge upon all the need of looking for Divine direction and of following the indications of the providence, we would also utter a warning against always looking for coincidences to guide us in every circumstance. We might err and be only leaning on an arm of flesh. It is always best to do that which the heart suggests when acting under the consciousness of earnest prayer to God. We may not look for signs. We are to act as though all depended on ourselves, but, at the same time, rest in God's power by simple prayer. 4. Sometimes there is a convergence of misfortunes, a coincidence in sorrow. We have a familiar saying that misfortunes never come singly. There are periods that try faith severely. A man may lose his situation, fail in business, be called upon to pay some guarantee for one he trusted, and have at the same time wife ill, children stricken down with fever. Or he meets with some accident and is prostrate. Wave of trouble succeeds wave, until it seems as though there were no more to come, and he exclaims, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Well for him if at such times he, like the Shunammite, seeks help from the King, and lays hold of that mercy which is never withdrawn from the most erring, or fails the feeblest. (*F. Hastings.*)

Vers. 7-15. Elisha came to Damascus.—*Striking characters* :—We have here—**I. A DYING KING.** 1. This dying king was very anxious. "Shall I recover of this disease?" This was the question he wanted Elisha to answer. Not, you may be sure, in the negative. Knowing some of the wonders that Elisha had performed, he in all likelihood imagined he would exert his miraculous power on his behalf, and restore him to life. All men more or less fear death, kings perhaps more than others. If ungodly, they have more to lose and nothing to gain. Observe, 2. His anxiety prompted him to do strange things. (1) It was strange for him to ask a favour from the man whose death he had ravenously sought. What a change is this! Dying hours reverse our judgments, revolutionise our feelings, bring the lofty down. (2) It was strange for him to ask a favour of a man whose religion he hated. Ben-hadad was an idolater. (3) It was strange for him to make costly presents to a poor lonely man. What is the wealth, the grandeur, the crown, the sceptre of the mightiest monarch to him when he feels himself dying? He will barter all away for a few short hours of life. We have here—**II. A PATRIOTIC PROPHET.** "And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him (Ben-hadad), Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die." "There was no contradiction in this message. The first part was properly the answer to Ben-hadad's inquiry. The second part was intended for Hazael, who, like an artful and ambitious courtier, reported only as much of the prophet's statement as suited his own views." We have here—**III. A SELF-IGNORANT COURTIER.** "And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" The conduct of this man as here recorded suggests two general remarks. 1. The germs of evil may exist in the mind of a wicked man, of which he is utterly unconscious. 2. By the force of circumstances these germs become developed in all their enormity. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 10. Thou mayest certainly recover.—*Ignorance of the future* :—The subject which I propose to discuss is: the moral effect of ignorance of the future. **I. THE AVIDITY WITH WHICH MEN SEEK TO KNOW THE FUTURE.** People are almost always ready to believe that something unusually good is to befall them; that their lot is to be exceptional; that their future is somewhere to be discovered by divina-

tion, by the lines on their hands, by the courses of the heavenly bodies. Take your stand by the fortune-teller, to whom has betaken herself a young girl, who, in her ignorance and simplicity, wants to know what human lot is coming to her; whether she is to marry or not; whether her husband is to be rich or poor; what is his complexion, the colour of his hair and eyes, his occupation, and all those minutiae about him with which her teeming fancy busies itself. Recall the little simple devices, such as pulling in pieces a daisy as certain sentences are repeated, to which children and young folks resort; they all arise from a curiosity about the future, and an impression that lodged somewhere in the earth, or air, in daisy or constellation, is the secret that we wish to know. There is no doubt about the influence of good and evil supernatural agencies in our lives; there is no doubt, too, that the events of our lives are closely watched by the inhabitants of two worlds. If good spirits, why not bad? There are two ways in which a man may confront the future; one, looking into God's face, trusting in God's promises, asking the support of the Everlasting Arms; and the other, turning to invoke the spirits of darkness; making a league with the devil to get counsel and help from the infernal world. And I look upon all this desire to penetrate the veil of mystery which encompasses the future—except as we walk by faith with the Invisible One, as we believe in God and link our destiny with God by keeping His laws—as immoral and unchristian.

II. **IGNORANCE OF THE FUTURE, IF THAT FUTURE IS TO BE DISASTROUS, IS ALWAYS A BLESSING TO US; WHILE, IF IT IS TO BE ADVANTAGEOUS, IT IS AN INSPIRATION.** And it is between this possible disaster and advantage that men make all the progress, whether intellectual or spiritual. In all motion which is artificially produced, such as the movement of a carriage or land, or on rails, or the movement of a vessel through the water, there are always two elements; two forces acting and reacting. There is that which propels—the motive power; and that which resists it, and the result is motion. When the driving-wheels of a locomotive do not take hold of the rail—that is, when the rail is covered with frost or ice so that there is no resistance to their revolution—there can be no progress: the great iron sinewed horse is but a plaything, whirling his wheels like a top. These two elements are in the flight of the bird: the stroke of the wing and the resistance of the air. When inventors are making efforts to find some machine which will navigate the air, they seek first lightness. But it is the weight of the bird, as well as the stroke of the wing, that gives it power to make such beautiful evolutions in the air. The air is to the body of the bird what the water is to the hull of the vessel—a medium of resistance. As the wheels of the steamer, as the screw of the propeller, as the oar or the paddle of the rower is resisted by the water, progress is made. It is just so in human life. The patriarch Job says: "What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" It is encountering a mixture of good and evil that makes character. It is the contingency of good and evil; the uncertainty whether it shall be one or the other, that is the mainspring of human action. People ask, why did not God make man so that he could not sin? It is like asking why God did not make matter so that an object could move without meeting resistance; why God did not make the bird so that it could fly without breasting the powers of the air. Walking is only falling forward and regaining one's self. The regaining prevents the accident. The babe begins with the first motion, but is not yet competent to the second. And no man walks with God without finding a leverage for his soul in the evil that is in the world; only he wants none of it in him. In one sense we are forewarned respecting the future. We have general principles given us. These principles are often cast into the form of maxims. For example, we say that "Honesty is the best policy," with primary reference to business; that let a man make ever so much money by dishonest dealing, he is injuring his business all the time; he is only getting rope to hang himself. The young lad who is studying at school bears this; he does not think it applies to his relations to his teacher and his books, but it does. When, in after life, he confronts business questions or business interests, and finds he cannot solve queries which were solved by his neglected text-books, or his faithful teacher, he discovers it. It is no time to dismount and tighten the saddle-girth when the battle is on us. There is not one of us who would not have been a sadder man in life to know beforehand the calamities that came to him the last twelvemonths. Let him take up his cross daily, it is not to-morrow's cross that we can take up to-day, even if we would take it up. And what is called borrowing trouble is taking up to-morrow's cross—always an imaginary one—before to-morrow comes. The Saviour says, "Sufficient unto the

day is the evil thereof," meaning that if we manage to grapple with the evil of to-day and overcome that, it is all God expects of us ; it is victory. And then, on the other hand, the certainty of good fortune is always enervating. God helps the men who help themselves. They fall into the line of His purposes ; they see the tide which, taken at its flood, leads on to fortune. Tell a young man that at the age of forty he will be worth a million dollars, and you have done him an injury.

III. **IGNORANCE OF THE FUTURE IS A PROTECTION AGAINST TEMPTATION TO EMPLOY INDIRECT AND SINFUL METHODS OF SECURING WHAT WE HAVE BEEN ASSURED WILL TAKE PLACE.** Take this case of Hazael to illustrate the temptation that comes to a man who knows that he is to occupy a high position. You would say he would argue in this manner : Well, if I am to be King of Syria, let the God, whose prophet predicts it, make me king ; I will not lift a finger ; least of all will I try to find a short cut to the throne. This was the way Macbeth deliberated :—

"If chance will make me king, why chance may crown me,
Without my stir."

A man's aspirations and capacities are often prophecies of what God means to do by him. If he should say to himself, "I deserve such and such position, and it matters not how I get it" ; if then he should address himself to the work of supplanting such another occupant of the place, or aspirant for it, he may secure the position indeed, but he has introduced into his cup of life that which will embitter it for ever. There is no moral greatness in having place. Place without fitness for it ; place with the recollection of dishonour or misdirection in seeking it, is really a disgrace to a man. Hazael became King of Syria as Macbeth became King of Scotland, by attempting to accomplish by crime what was already written down in the future. But what was Hazael as King of Syria, what was Macbeth as King of Scotland, with the predecessor of each assassinated to make open the path to the throne ? The very night of Duncan's death, while he still lay there, the murder undiscovered, and there came some one knocking at the castle gate, Macbeth says :—

"Wake Duncan with thy knocking ;
I would thou could'st !"

For example : there is an achievement, a possession that I wish, I think I deserve it, have fitness for it, could honour my Maker if I were gratified in my desire, could benefit my fellow-men. Now comes the test of my character. If I am willing to fulfil the conditions of merit, to serve God where He has placed me, up to my best ability ; to wait His time for recognition and promotion ; if promotion should come, then it has sought me ; I have entered into no unholy alliances, I have not broken the golden rule. I have coveted no man's silver, gold, or place. If, on the other hand, I say to myself, God intended this for me, and I mean to have it, and I begin to clamber over the heads of people, as men sometimes try to get out of a crowd, I carry with me the sense of my own unworthiness.

IV. **IGNORANCE OF THE FUTURE ON OUR PART DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH GOD'S CERTAINTY RESPECTING IT.** It should bring us to confide in that certainty. Only certainty somewhere can bring us security. It is usual to put this in the other way, as though God's certainty respecting a future event might possibly prevent the exercise of our freedom when putting out our force to compass or defeat it. But in man's sphere, man is just as free as God is in His sphere. And without some certainty, what is the use of freedom ? Hazael is to be King of Syria. This should content him. But being an unscrupulous man, and the King of Syria being sick, and in that particular to him, his confidential servant, an easy victim, as Duncan came conveniently—the devil's opportunity—to the castle of Macbeth, Hazael spreads a wet cloth over the king's face, smothers him, and he dies, and the vacant throne is ready for himself. The certainty that he was to be King of Syria did not affect his conduct. Mark that. His knowledge of the certainty did. It tempted him to compass, by foul means, that which, if he had waited, would have happened so, as we express it. God is no less in the future events of this nation than he was in the future events of the Syrian kingdom, or the kingdom of Israel : Hazael was no more certain, historically certain, certain in the mind of God to succeed Ben-hadad than some man is to succeed the present President. But the certainty of God is on another plane from the contingency that is in the affairs of men. The storm of rain and sleet which encases the woods as with armour of silver, which makes every branch like a spear which the winds poise and tilt as though for

some encounter in knight-errantry, was predicted by the weather bureau twenty-four hours before it came; was fore-known and fore-recorded and published to the nation. But the certainty did not affect the action of the atmosphere combinations needful to produce the storm. The atmospheric forces north, south, east, west, were held in hand or let loose according as was needful to the result. Up in His own sphere God presides, insuring human freedom, touching the springs of action, carrying out His own plans, making all things work together for the good of His children and for His own glory. Our ignorance of the future does not disturb His affairs. God makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He restrains. He lets wicked men go just as far as they need to prove their freedom, and then He stops them and takes the advantage, not of what they thought to do, but of what they did. This is the most wonderful kind of alchemy. (*J. E. Rankin, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. *Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?—Self-deception.*—No doubt the Syrian was perfectly sincere in this question. He had seen the tears which rolled down the aged prophet's wrinkled face as he thought of the woes which, by the strong right hand of the rough soldier, would come to his beloved people. He had heard the startling announcement that he should go forth on a mission of destruction, swift, terrible, and unsparing, and his mind could not admit the idea that his heart could become thus ruthless, or his arm thus potent. He was but a captain of the Syrian host, living only on the favour of his master, and he could not understand how he could have the power to effect such wondrous deeds. He was not yet dead to the common feelings of humanity, and could not think that thus wantonly, thus brutally, thus recklessly, he could plant his iron heel on all most sacred and tender in human life. Yet he went away from the prophet straightway to enter on his career of ambition and blood. The next day saw him standing as an assassin by the bedside of the master who had loaded him with favours,—the next he was sitting as a proud usurper on the throne—and, step by step, he rushed on in that downward course of crime that had been sketched out for him, verifying every word that the man of God had uttered, and filling up the measure of those iniquities which drew down the stroke of judgment. Thus miserably was Hazael self-deceived. Probably he had never spent a solitary hour in studying his heart, and thus ignorant of himself, he cherished a confidence in himself and his own virtue, the utter folly of which was soon manifest. Was his case an exceptional one? Nothing is more common than such mistakes of men as to their own character, their special dangers, their power of resistance to evil. Men who have wonderful acquirements and extensive knowledge, who can discuss the problems of philosophy, and are familiar with all the discoveries of science, nay, who are great students of human character, and the influences by which it is formed; men who, in fact, pride themselves upon their acquaintance with human nature, display the most wretched ignorance, and fall into the most miserable errors in relation to themselves. There are none of us, perhaps, wholly exempt from the evil, though in the case of some it is more fully developed; but wherever it is, it must be a source of weakness to the soul. To believe we are strong where we are lamentably feeble,—to know nothing as to the sin which easily besets us, and to be unprepared to resist its attacks,—to cherish assurance of easy victory when we are laying ourselves open to certain defeat, is surely no slight injury to the soul. It exposes to dangers against which we ought ever to be on the watch. Of this self-deception, its causes and results, it is our purpose to speak here, hoping to draw from the case of Hazael lessons of solemn and impressive warning. I. *LET US MARK ITS CAUSES.* Men do not care to know themselves, and therefore do not study their own hearts. They want to know every thing and every one but themselves. They would fain tear away the veil of mystery, and learn the wonders of the spiritual, traverse the Universe, measure the Infinite, and understand the Eternal. But they care not for knowing that which concerns them most—the true character of their own souls. Self-examination is a duty which we are always able to put off. The results of negligence are not at once apparent to ourselves, while others are scarcely able to detect them at all, and thus it is too often postponed to what we deem the more urgent pressure of other calls. It shares the common fate of work that may be done at any time—no time is fixed for it at all. So long as all goes prosperously without, as there is no violent shock to disturb the too complacent estimate we are apt to form of ourselves and our own performances, or so long as we are occupied

in the active duties of the world or the Church, there is but little opportunity, and less disposition for us to turn the thoughts in upon ourselves with the view of ascertaining the true state of our own hearts. Very often does affliction thus become a blessing to our souls. It compels retirement,—it affords leisure for thought,—it shuts out from us a thousand influences that bewilder and mislead,—it disposes to careful searching of heart. Just in the same proportion are times of unbroken prosperity dangerous, from their inevitable tendency to hurry the spirit on in a whirl of perpetual excitement and pleasure,—to intoxicate it with high thoughts of its own capacities and achievements,—to induce a sense of security at the very hour that the danger may be most imminent, and the necessity for stern, manly resistance greatest. But we must not forget that with all our efforts to know ourselves,—however sincerely they may be commenced, and however diligently prosecuted—there are influences which will deceive and baffle our most careful scrutiny. We can scarcely conceal from ourselves the fact that circumstances often reveal to a man himself, and to others what he really is, and that in a good as well as bad sense. There are powers which sometimes lie undeveloped in the mind just because there have not been opportunities for their display, until some sudden circumstance arise to call them forth, and the man rises to the grandeur of the occasion. So, even in our own experience, we have often seen hours of affliction call forth heroic qualities of heart, which in brighter and happier days lay inactive. There are often depths of depravity in human hearts unsuspected and unrevealed till some temptation, perhaps more subtle or more powerful than ordinary, or coming possibly at a time of special weakness, serves to disclose the sad secret. The enemy has planned an assault with consummate craft, he comes in some unguarded hour, and then there start up, warmed into sudden life, passions that had lain utterly dormant, and men are drawn into sins from the very mention of which at other moments they would have recoiled with horror. Hazael might have passed through life with the reputation of a brave captain, a loyal subject, a faithful friend; others would never have dreamed of the fierce passions that were surging within his breast, and seeking some outlet, had not temptation assailed him, and revealed the cruelty, the ambition, the lust which converted him into a traitor, a murderer, a monster. So may it be with us. These hearts are both deceitful and desperately wicked, and their deceit is shown chiefly in hiding their wickedness. Ever are they blinding us to the existence of the evils we have most to dread, and persuading us that we possess some good which has no reality but in the fancies of our own deluded pride and self-confidence. They are like treacherous pools grown over with rich verdure, that conceals the dark deep waters of death that lie below. Experience is truly the sternest of teachers; there are no lessons so valuable as his; none, perhaps, that are so likely to be remembered. Yet here he is continually found powerless. Our hearts find a thousand excuses. Pride induces forgetfulness, and so we fall into the same error, to expiate it by the same penalty. It seems to require a thousand warnings to make us feel what Solomon teaches, himself having learned it only by a discipline the most humbling, “He that trusteth his own heart is a fool.” There is, too, a blinding influence in self-love, which aids the deception of which we speak. The standards by which, for the most part, we judge ourselves are very different from those which we apply to other men. To all this Satan ministers by the craft with which he ever seeks to work out his purposes. He is like a skilful general who does not at once unmask his batteries and attack the fortress in its strongest points, but, on the contrary, makes gradual approaches, accustoms his troops to victory, and depresses his foes by slight advantages gained at weak places in the lines of defence, meanwhile husbanding his resources and concealing his preparation, until the time comes to spring the mine and lay low the citadel. Rarely is it his policy to seduce at once to some heinous transgression. II. THE RESULT. It is here in the case of Hazael, and it has been seen in multitudes besides. Men, unconscious of their own feebleness, blind to the dangers which surround them, assured of their own security, and infatuated by that wretched self-love which makes them believe that they cannot sink to the same depths of sin as others, go on until they are betrayed into some act of wickedness which covers them with shame. It was thus with Peter. Little could he calculate the results of that self-dependence which he was nurturing within his breast; he could never lose his love or forfeit his loyalty to the Master to whom his heart was so strongly attached. The Lord warned him in common with others. Or take the case of Lot: a young man, full of life, energy, and spirit, he was about to part from his honoured uncle,

having chosen the fair city of Sodom for his residence. True, the people were very wicked, but the land was very rich. True, he must dwell in the midst of much that would vex his righteous soul. But what of that? there was money to be made—his herds would increase—he would be a great man, and that with him, as with too many still, was the grand, the deciding point—he need not be partaker in the sins of those among whom he dwelt; he worshipped God, and could worship Him in Sodom even as elsewhere. Is it not ever so? Tell that fierce, passionate, wayward youth, who will grow up to be the murderer: “Those unguarded lusts, to which thou art giving the reins, will drive thee to foulest crime, and involve thee in most terrible destruction—thou art sowing the wind, but shalt reap the whirlwind—thy heart will become the abode of every vile principle—thy life one dark catalogue of sins against God and man—thy death will be one of ignominy and shame.” Would not his answer be: “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?” Or he who is now railing against the truth of God, as if it were a lie. There was an hour when he dared not have spoken thus. Had you stood by him when first he listened to the demon voice that whispered in his ear the suggestions of doubt, or when he lisped forth in stammering accents his own first defiance of the Gospel; when first he joined in the laugh against the truth, fancying himself clever, and bold, and brave, because he had ventured to shock what he called the prejudices of some earnest servant of God, by holding up to contempt what he deemed most sacred—had you as an anxious friend given him then the faithful warning, “Beware; thou art taking the first step on a downward path; thou shalt go on and on to a contempt of all religion; thou shalt become a poor miserable sceptic, having no faith in thine own wretched creed, yet labouring to draw others to an acceptance of it”—he would have laughed you to scorn. “What! am I not to think for myself? must I walk in the old ruts, and receive the old dogmas, and utter the old shibboleth? because I am not a slave of prejudice am I become an infidel?” “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?” There is here to-day a young man just losing the early fervour of his profession—that first love which seemed once to be so intense that nothing would ever check or damp it. He is growing more careless; some wound to his self-love, or some idle fancy, has driven him from a post of Christian labour; he is just beginning to cast off restraints by which he has hitherto been held. Had you the gift of inspiration, could you hold him up before himself as he will be by and by, a cold, heartless, profitless professor, whose religion is to him little more than a burden, content with a formal attendance on a Sabbath morning at the house of God—would he not start back with horror from the vision, and exclaim, “Oh no! I cannot come to that state of wretched lukewarmness; I do not choose to be bound as others are; I like to take my own course, but I would not sink to such a level as that.” There is a man wholly wrapt up in the world. He never thinks, talks, works for anything else. He might as well, nay, far better, have no soul—he treats it with such utter indifference. Was he always thus? Ah, no! There was a time when he trembled—kindled with emotion—felt that one day or other he would be a Christian. He fancied he could pause at his own pleasure; he never thought it was possible for him to sink into the selfish unfeeling worldling that he now is. If this be the true account of human nature, if such be the weakness of our own heart, how manifest the folly and guilt of that pharisaic spirit in which so many indulge—justifying themselves and condemning their brethren. Then how does the whole show us the need of that great provision which God has made! Such being our hearts, thus wayward, thus deceitful, thus ignorant, what need for that Holy Ghost who alone can give wisdom, strength, holiness! (*J. G. Rogers, B.A.*)

Hazael: evil detected:—The first mention of Hazael is in the First Book of Kings (xix. 15), where we are told that Elijah after his return from Horeb anointed him to be a king. The next time he is spoken of it is as a Prime Minister to the King of Syria, and a messenger sent to the prophet. Strangely enough, Ben-hadad sends to make inquiry of one who is a servant of the God repudiated by his own nation. The king wishes to know whether he will recover from his illness. He sends a present by the hand of Hazael. Some selfish design was detected therein by the prophet. The prophet, in reply to the inquiry, says that Ben-hadad may, in the ordinary course of things, recover, but he soon sees that a fatal end is at hand; he suspects a sinister design in the messenger. Shuddering awe steals over the prophet. Tears begin to flow down the cheeks, but no word comes from the lips. A vision is before Elisha's eyes. Hazael waits. At length he asks, “Why weepeth my lord?” Then the prophet foretells what Hazael himself will do, desolating

lands and destroying the defenceless. Hazael exclaims, "Am I a dog, that I should do this great thing?"—meaning either that he was not so low down as to do such evil, or that he, a mere dog, could not accomplish so much. This in harmony with the revised rendering. The probable intention was to repudiate the opinion formed of him by the prophet as being evil and unworthy. He half suspected the tears had reference to the evil he would do, and yet he seems not to have acknowledged to himself how powerful were the germs of evil in him for working wrong to others, and especially how treacherous were his secret plottings against the king.

1. The wicked propensities in our hearts are oft hidden from us. We are ignorant of the capabilities for evil and for good that lie in us. Hazael knew not his own heart. He would not have acknowledged that he was so ambitious, unscrupulous, or murderous. We have all a realm of mystery within. There are many offshoots in the dark passages of the heart. Few dare to lift the thick veil that hangs over some of them. We have secret rooms, only revealed by the moving of sliding panels. The panels are sometimes not easily distinguishable. We are deceived in ourselves. We are not born utterly depraved, but our natures, like a silent machine, turn out incessantly sins of various shades and degrees of enormity. One piece of ploughed ground in winter appears as brown and free from weeds as another, but let the rains descend and the spring sunshine rest upon it, then up will come the weeds choking the young crop of grain. So with hearts. One man may be like another for a time, but soon circumstances will show what evil is hidden in the soul of one and goodness developed in the other. Both may be ignorant of what can be developed. Irwine the common-sense vicar said to his former pupil Donnithorne: "A man can never do anything at variance with his own nature. He carries within him the germs of his most exceptional action; and if we wise people make eminent fools of ourselves on any particular occasion, we must endure the legitimate conclusion that we carry a few grains of folly to our ounce of wisdom."

2. If certain evils existent in germs in our souls were revealed, we should possibly deny their presence. We are like Hazael, unwilling to have a poor or bad opinion of ourselves. We see our portrait reflected in the camera, but we go away and "straightway" forget what manner of men we are. That amiable-looking boy at school would repudiate the possibility of his ever breaking a mother's heart by his wildness and gambling. That proud bridegroom would repudiate the possibility of his ever speaking harshly or treating brutally that trusting, orange-blossom-crowned girl whose rounded arm rests on his, and whose full eyes reflect his love. The "I will cherish" becomes at times the "I have crushed." That cultured man, noble in mien and lofty in position, would repudiate the suggestion that his little weakness would one day bring him down to the level of the poor fellow, who with tattered garb and blotched face hangs round the corner public waiting to earn a copper by holding a horse. Circumstances are so powerful in developing changes of mind we little conceived. The evil course we enter upon is like getting on a trolley on the inclined plane; if we once lose power over it, we go rushing down to destruction at a rate constantly accelerated.

3. All the hidden sin of the soul can be revealed by God. Elisha was enabled to reveal Hazael to himself. God gave him the power. God's knowledge of us is not the result of observation and judgment, as man gains knowledge of his fellow, but is absolute knowledge. Christ when on earth needed not that any should testify of men, for He "knew what was in man." Without attempting to prove to men that they were sinners, He held up the torch of truth before the conscience, and made men convict themselves; as when Peter said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord"; or when the young ruler went away sadly because he had great possessions; or when accusers of a weak woman sunk away from Him who said, "He that is without sin let him cast the first stone at her." As a skilful musician can place his fingers on the keys and bring out sweetest music or reveal the defects of the instrument, so Christ touched the human soul and revealed its hidden truth or sounded its discordant notes. He shows us that to be sinful is bad enough, but that to be hardened and unabashed therein is frightful.

4. When the sinful state is revealed, alas! warning is not always taken. Hazael should have taken the words of the prophet as an intimation that he was to be merciful to others and to himself. But, however he may shake and shudder at the image of himself presented, he turns not away from the evil. The "means to do ill deed made ill deeds done." Every man has need to be watchful. The cable is not stronger than the weakest link, nor the character than the hidden meanness. The secret sin does not grow in a day, though it may germinate in a moment. A Scotch

preacher beautifully illustrated this by referring to the tiny seed dropped by the passing bird into a crevice of a rock, and which, sprouting, grew, and in process of years by its mighty roots moved the massive rock until it toppled over into the loch. So we must beware of the trifling thought of sin. We must search by the power of God's Spirit. Let us be sincere in the searching, and firm in the eviction of the hidden evil. Is it evil temper, cheating, backbiting, murdering character, sly tipping or open drunkenness, harshness and cruelty? Away with it, in God's strength! (*F. Hastings.*) "Is thy servant a dog?"—Hazeel came to the prophet to inquire whether his master would recover from his sickness. The answer is ambiguous. So far as the disease itself was concerned, he might recover. Yet his days were numbered; and the purpose to kill him was already being formed in the heart of his hitherto faithful servant. The prophet saw before him not only the king's enemy, but also the man who would one way inflict dire evils upon Israel. The thought of the horrors about to come to his people made the man of God weep. Hazeel asks the cause of his sorrow. Elisha tells him frankly, and in the plainest terms, what was in the no very distant future. Hazeel starts back with horror when he sees in this prophetic mirror the image of his own baseness. "Is thy servant a dog?" The prophet seems to evade the question; and yet in his reply we have the full and complete explanation, if not to Hazeel, at least to us, of all that occurred. "The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." Is this man, then, a base and guilty hypocrite? Is he a man who hides under the cloak of pretended affection for his master and reverence for humanity his fiendish designs? The answer we give to these questions will determine for us the use to be made of this portion of sacred history. I am willing to take the man's own estimate of himself as being, on the whole, the best and the truest. I believe for the moment he was really appalled at the description of his future life; and that when he uttered this exclamation, he was unable to realise it possible that he should ever be guilty of the deeds named by the prophet. How, then, you may say, are we to account for the fact that he actually did all that Elisha foretold, if he was not a hypocrite? There are some who think the subsequent murder an accident, so far as Hazeel was concerned. I fear this theory is destitute of proof. At all events, we have the record of his dealings with Israel fully corroborating the statements of the prophet. I. Hazeel failed to take into account THE INFLUENCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES UPON HUMAN CHARACTER. There is a doctrine of circumstances utterly at variance, not only with the teachings of Scripture, but also with the experience and deepest convictions of mankind—a doctrine which asserts, or appears to assert, that circumstances make men, and that the only difference between the noblest saint and the basest criminal is a difference simply in the structure of the brain, and the character of the surroundings. Some men teach this, but no man believes it, or acts upon it, either in his feelings respecting his own deeds, or his judgments of the moral character of the actions of his friend. But we must, while rejecting a doctrine so monstrous, yet remember that, in a very real sense, circumstances have a power over character and life. II. CIRCUMSTANCES BRING MEN INTO NEW TEMPTATIONS NEVER FELT BEFORE. Hazeel, King of Syria, or even with the throne within his reach, would be a very different person from Hazeel, the honoured servant of his master. Hazeel's language must not be regarded as hypocritical, but as the language of one who had not sounded the depths of his own character, and who knew nothing of the changes the altered circumstances would bring to him. III. My text seems to suggest that MUCH OF WHAT PASSES FOR VIRTUE AMONGST US MAY SIMPLY BE VICE NOT MANIFESTED BY CIRCUMSTANCES. How much do women who are sometimes boastful owe to the fact that the world is harder in its judgments on their sins than in the case of the other sex! How much to the fact that they are more protected by circumstances! Let conscience utter its voice! Not always because you were holier or truer to God than your brother; but because you were never exposed to his temptations, because in the providence of God you have been more protected from yourself or others. The rich man knows nothing of the temptations of the man hard pressed by circumstances, and hence his hard and unjust censures. The poor man, protected by his very poverty, knows not the temptations of those nursed in the lap of wealth; hence, when he hears of the sins of the other, he flatters himself on his superiority. He owes it not to his moral heroism, but to his surroundings. I have spoken much of the power of circumstances. Let no man think he is the creature of his surroundings. By God's grace he may rise above them and triumph over them, making his very passions

minister to his success, and making his enemies his benefactors. (*J. Fordyce.*) "*Is thy servant a dog?*"—In the theory of the people of those times, some of the gods could do some things, and other gods could do some other things. There were special gods, just as there are special physicians—physicians for the eye; physicians for the ear; physicians for nervous diseases; physicians for surgical operations; physicians for every separate department of healing. Though each may do something of everything, yet each has some specialty. And so it was with these gods. There were gods of hills, and gods of valleys, and gods of this nation, and gods of that nation, they thought. According to their notion there was a great variety in the talents and capacities of these gods. Therefore, when any man had any enterprise to accomplish, or any sickness to be cured, he naturally sought the aid of a particular sort of god, as we naturally seek a certain kind of practitioner when we are afflicted with a disease. It is not at all strange, therefore, when Ben-hadad lay sick, and heard that Elisha was there, that he should have said to himself, "I will try his God." "The king said unto Hazael" (who seems to have been his prime minister in general), "Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord, by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?" That was Oriental. Gifts were not then considered wrong, and whenever anybody wanted anything it was quite natural that he should take something with him and get it by purchase; but such things in modern times take on a different aspect. This venerable old prophet, well advanced in years, fixed his eyes upon this miscreant with such a piercing glance that the man's face became confused, and his colour went and came. It was the most penetrating speech possible. "And Hazael said, Why weepeth my Lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" It does not seem that the fact that he was to be the King of Syria disturbed him. Nor was it this that agitated the prophet. It was the sight of the great cruelty that would follow under his hand when he came to the throne. The prophet saw, rising in vision before him, wasted provinces; he saw blood flowing down like rivers of water; he saw rapine and cruelty most barbarous on every side of him. It was the sight of these terrific national disasters that brought tears to the eyes of the prophet; and it was the horror of such an administration as was pictured to him that seemed to strike Hazael with surprise and revolt. "So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldst surely recover." Well, it was almost true; but that which is almost true is a lie. He told the king a part of what Elisha had said, but he did not tell him the rest. He did not say, "The prophet declared that thou shalt surely die, although thou mayest recover." He did not tell him that the prophet said that he might recover—that there was nothing in the way of his recovery so far as his disease was concerned. His declaration was, plumply, "He says that thou shalt recover." The king was very sick; he was too feeble to help himself; and perhaps when he was in a slumber Hazael said within himself, "I won't kill him; I will just put a wet cloth over his face." So he dipped the cloth in water and laid it over the face of the king, who was unable in his extreme weakness to throw it off, and was suffocated. "It is such an easy way," Hazael might have said, "for him to die! I have not shed his blood, thank God. I did not even choke him. I might have done it; but I did not. I kept my hands off from the Lord's anointed. I only laid a wet cloth on his face; and if he could not breathe it was not my fault. Every man must look out for himself." He might have reasoned in this way; but it is not likely that he did, because he probably had not conscience enough to make it necessary. Having in this mild manner disposed of the king, he became the ruler in his place; and as to what his reign was we are not left in doubt. We know that he swept through the land, and carried his armies across Palestine, and clear into the territory of the Philistines. We know that he laid siege to Jerusalem, and was bought off from it by a present of all the golden vessels contained in the temple. We know that, in his despotic career, all his victories were stained with blood. We know that there was no end to the destruction of property which he caused. We know that not one-half of the wickedness which he performed was foretold by the prophet. We know that he destroyed men, women, and children without stint. And though we have not a complete history of the wrongs which he committed, we know that a monster

who would do what we are informed that he did do, would not leave anything undone, in the way of cruelty, which it was in his power to do. Now, you will take notice that at the time when Hazael came to the prophet, and this vision of his cruelty was made known to him, he must have had a genuine revulsion from it. It is probable that when the prophet told him what he saw it shocked him. I think it quite likely that when the prophet told him that he should reign instead of the king, he said within himself, "Yes, that is what I have been after; that is what I meant to do"; but when the prophet showed him what should be the character of his administration, I have no doubt that he said, believing what he said, "I am not capable of any such thing as that." He was not yet in power. He was still an under-officer. He had never been tested. He did not know what supremacy would work in him. He had not had the responsibility of a kingdom laid upon his shoulders. He did not know how he would be affected by the indulgence which would come with the control of unbounded wealth. He did not know what would be the growth of pride in him. He did not know what would be his appetite for praise. He did not know how his vanity would be wrought upon. He did not know what fury would be kindled in him by opposition. He did not know what despotic measures he might be compelled by circumstances to adopt. He doubtless felt as we often do in regard to things which we see others do, when it seems to us impossible that we should ever do them although we are made up of the same stuff that they are; and when his future was disclosed to him, when the veil was rent, and he saw himself as he was to be, at the various stages of his subsequent history, he shuddered at the sight of it: and he said, "Do you count me a dog?" and there was no other name so low as that in the Orient. "A dog," "A dead dog," "A dog's head," these seem to have been the terms that measured the utmost contumely and contempt; and he said, "Am I a dog, that you prophesy these things concerning me?" It was absolutely impossible that he should do them, it seemed to him; and yet he went on and did them. There may be a question as to whether the prophet was right in laying before Hazael a statement of the things which were to be fulfilled, that would be in the nature of yeast, and raise up in him ambitions which could make him faithless to his king; but it does not appear that the plan of destroying the monarch and occupying his throne was then for the first time in Hazael's mind. The prophet did not bring this plan to pass by tampering with his fidelity in holding out to him the prospect of the sceptre and the crown. The natural tendency of disclosing the prophet's vision to Hazael, if Hazael had been an honest man, instead of inducing him to such a career as lay before him, would have been to set him to watching himself, that he might prevent the fulfilment of so dishonouring a prophecy. This case is full of material for inspiration. One of the first points that I wish to make in connection with the brief history is, that no one can say beforehand what will be the effect on him of a given situation or a given temptation. A man may be able to say: "I shall not sin by avarice: I may be put in circumstances where I shall break down through self-indulgence; but I shall not break down through avarice. I may be overcome by various appetites; but avarice is not one of them." A man may know himself to be safe in that particular regard. Many a man can say: "Whatever may overcome me in the way of sinfulness, it is not going to be cruelty." Many a man is justified in saying: "I know that no circumstances will ever make me brutal, although there may be circumstances that will make me wicked." But, as a general thing, men know so little about themselves that it would not be safe for any man to say: "I can tell how I should act in any situation where I may be placed; I know that no temptations can get an entrance into my heart; I know how this, that, and the other influence would affect me; I know how I should act if I had power." As when men look forward into life they are ignorant of what they would do if they were in such and such situations, or if such and such things were given them; so when men look forward into life they can form no just estimate of what they would do in avoiding evil. One man says: "Nothing could ever make me a drunkard." Another man says: "I do not think anything in the world could make me a thief." Neither of them knows how he might be wrought upon until he has been under temptation and trial. Lord Clive, when he got back to England, and was thinking of his administration in India, and reflecting how, after having conquered the provinces, he went into the treasure-house of the rajahs, and saw gold without measure (there silver was counted as nothing; it was always at a discount), and beheld baskets full of rubies and diamonds, was reported to have said: "My God! I tremble when I think of the

temptation that I was under. I wonder that I came out honest." In looking back upon it, and thinking of it, he felt as though he would not like to go through the same experience again. He feared that it would not be safe to trust himself the second time under those circumstances. This is the testimony of a full-grown man in regard to an extreme instance of liability to temptation, and you cannot tell, until you have been tried, what you would do in a given situation. Men do not know what effect flattery will have on them. Here is a bank of snow that lies quietly and stubbornly over against the north wind, all through January, all through February, and during the fore part of March; and it says, "Do you suppose I would give way to the mild and weak influence of spring after having resisted the chilling blasts and pinching frosts of winter?" And yet the sun comes smiling, and laughing, and tickling, and flattering, little by little; and the bank changes its mind; and gradually it sinks, and sinks; and by and by it is all gone. A man might just as well undertake to say what he would do if he were overtaken by a plague, as to say what he would do if he were placed under such and such circumstances of life. How can a man standing on the cool mountains of Vermont tell what he would do if he had the yellow fever in New Orleans? No man can tell, judging from the present, what he will do if he is situated so and so in the untied future. But one thing we know: that in regard to all the more generous sentiments and feelings, pondering upon them, thinking about them, rather tends to enable us to attain them; and that, on the other hand, in regard to all the inflammatory sides of human nature—the appetites and passions—pondering them tends to strengthen them. The mere holding of illicit and unlawful things in a man's mind is itself a preparation for his bondage to them. It is not safe for a man to carry about mere thoughts of evil. It is not safe for a man to imagine what he would do if he had a chance to steal, and to turn the subject over in his mind. I have no doubt that Hazael thought a good deal about this matter of succession; and I have no doubt the moment there was a chance—especially the moment the prophet told him there was a chance—for him to become king he was prepared to execute the plan which beforehand he had revolved in his mind and held in suspense there. I have no doubt that he said to himself a good many times, "Why should Ben-hadad be on the throne any more than I? He is no better than I am. He is not so capable as I am. I do not know why a sick king should rule any more than a well general. It would not be a bad thing for me to put him out of the way and take his place. And if I did, what would happen? What would I do with his family? Not that I have any idea of doing any such thing; but in case I should do it what would be the outcome?" And when a man has thought of a thing in that way once, and twice, and many times, pursuing it day and night, then after a time it pursues him, and there is a preparation in him for the execution of such deeds as he has contemplated in case that exigencies arise which afford him the opportunity. And it is not safe for any man to ponder vice, crime, anything that corrupts the fibre, the integrity, the purity of his soul. No man knows what is the fermentation that will go on through his passions, when they are fired in the direction of evil—for there is a fermentation that goes on through the passions. I can describe it by no better name than that. We hear it spoken of in philosophy as a ruling idea—as a monomania. We see manifestations of them in many directions throughout life. Many men come under the influence of this fermentation, and it heats them; they think of it till they get hot under it. Many men in regard to the passions open a lurid imagination, and bring in torrid thoughts, and their soul reeks and ferments. Men are murderers, and adulterers, and thieves, and drunkards, and gluttons in the realm of the imagination. And so it is with men in regard to the warfare of life. They suppose that others are going to break down, but that they themselves are safe; they think that there is no danger so far as they are concerned; and yet a whole magazine which they are carrying about with them, being set on fire, explodes, and pours out upon them elements of destruction. Go to the gaol, and you will find there persons imprisoned for crime who in the beginning did not think that they should ever become culprits, and who, if the idea ever occurred to them, said, "I never shall become one." It is probable that there is not one in a hundred of those who are in gaol for crime, and whose life is smirched for ever, that, when young, looked forward to any such career as he has gone through. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *The devil's tinder-box*:—I. THE FACT THAT A MAN HAS A NATURAL ABHORRENCE OF A CERTAIN SIN IS NO GUARANTEE THAT HE WILL NOT COMMIT THAT VERY SIN. Hazael is true to human nature. Sin is insidious, and one sin is evolved out of

another sin. Sin sometimes is like a snowball that is rolled down hill where the snow is deep. It grows very fast. Beware of the beginnings of sin, for there is no tropical growth that can develop so rapidly as a sin which springs up in the hot-bed of a heart that is untrue to God. II. A GOOD DISPOSITION AND A GENERAL DESIRE TO DO RIGHT IS NO GUARANTEE THAT ONE WILL NOT END HIS CAREER IN OUTBREAKING SIN. Hazael was undoubtedly a suave, pleasant-humoured, amiable man. Ben-hadad had been a great king, and a very good judge of men, and Hazael's conduct had been such that his master put implicit trust in him. Hazael was politic and amiable and all things to all men, but no one suspected him of definite purpose to do an evil thing, and it is not probable that he had such purposes. III. DEFINITE PRINCIPLES OF RIGHTNESS ARE THE ONLY GUARANTEE THAT ONE WILL MAINTAIN A GOOD CAREER TO THE END. Lacking these, Hazael was overthrown. Lacking these, you will be overthrown. You are like a ship that has had an accident at sea and, uncontrolled, has been drifting about at the mercy of wind and wave; but some skilled engineer has gone down among the chaos of broken machinery and mended it, and the captain, with the wheel in his hands again, and with all the force of the great engines in the heart of the vessel answering his command, goes bravely forward in the teeth of the gale. The man or the woman with a genuine desire to be good, but with no definite committal, drifts about at the mercy of circumstances. But on the day when you give your heart to Christ, permit Him to come into your heart and take command, you begin a career that is steadily onward, doing right whatever the circumstances or the conditions that may surround you. IV. WE SHOULD BEWARE OF THE CHARACTER OF OUR SECRET MEDITATIONS. Beware of the things you think about when you are alone, when you are day-dreaming; the things you allow to come back into the mind and sun themselves in the warmth of your imagination and desire. Why should you be so careful as to the character of these things? Now that is a most important question, for I am sure it is a very insidious temptation to people who have many good desires and good impulses, people who would shrink from any open proposition to do evil, to assume that there is no harm in allowing the imagination and musing-room of the soul to harbour unlawful guests. Yet see what it did for Hazael. That prophecy was like a flash of lightning into the devil's tinder-box that was in Hazael's mind and heart. If his mind and heart had been pure and good he would never have dreamed of not waiting until God opened the way for him to be king. But his imagination and heart were all primed, and the devilish fuse was laid, and it needed only the lighted match to transform this man Hazael, whom everybody supposed, and who thought himself to be, an amiable good kind of a man, into a liar and a murderer. V. EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES OVER WHICH WE HAVE NO CONTROL ARE OFTEN A POTENT FACTOR IN OUR LIVES. The coming of Elisha to Damascus and his prophecy concerning Ben-hadad and Hazael, were factors which brought Hazael's career to a focus. Something may happen to-morrow which you know nothing about now, which may cause you to commit a sin which you would not to-night believe to be possible. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *On the character of Hazael:*—In this passage of history, an object is presented which deserves our serious attention. We behold a man who, in one state of life, could not look upon certain crimes without surprise and horror; who knew so little of himself, as to believe it impossible for him ever to be concerned in committing them; that same man, by a change of condition, transformed in all his sentiments, and, as he rose in greatness, rising also in guilt; till at last he completed that whole character of iniquity which he once detested. Hence the following observations naturally arise. I. SENTIMENTS OF ABHORRENCE AT GUILT ARE NATURAL TO THE HUMAN MIND. Hazael's reply to the prophet, shows how strongly he felt them. This is the voice of human nature, while it is not as yet hardened in iniquity. Some vices are indeed more odious to the mind than others. Providence has wisely pointed the sharpest edge of this natural aversion against the crimes which are of most pernicious and destructive nature; such as treachery, oppression, and cruelty. But, in general, the distinction between moral good and evil is so strongly marked, as to stamp almost every vice with the character of turpitude. Present to any man, even the most ignorant and untutored, an obvious instance of injustice, falsehood, or impiety; let him view it in a cool moment, when no passion blinds, and no interest warps him; and you will find that his mind immediately revolts against it, as shameful and base, nay, as deserving punishment. Hence, in reasoning on the characters of others, however men may mistake as to facts, yet they generally praise and blame according to the

principles of sound morality. With respect to their own character, a notorious partiality too generally misleads their judgment. But it is remarkable, that no sinner ever avows directly to himself, that he has been guilty of gross and downright iniquity. Such power the undeniable dignity of virtue, and the acknowledged turpitude of vice, possesses over every human heart. These sentiments are the remaining impressions of that law which was originally written on the mind of man. II. THAT SUCH IS MAN'S IGNORANCE OF HIS OWN CHARACTER, SUCH THE FRAILTY OF HIS NATURE, THAT HE MAY ONE DAY BECOME INFAMOUS FOR THOSE VERY CRIMES WHICH AT PRESENT HE HOLDS IN DETESTATION. This observation is too well verified by the history of Hazael; and a thousand other instances might be brought to confirm it. Though there is nothing which every person ought to know so thoroughly as his own heart, yet from the conduct of men it appears, that there is nothing with which they are less acquainted. Always more prone to flatter themselves than desirous to discover the truth, they trust to their being possessed of every virtue which has not been put to the trial; and reckon themselves secure against every vice to which they have not hitherto been tempted. As long as their duty hangs in speculation, it appears so plain, and so eligible, that they cannot doubt of performing it. The suspicion never enters their mind, that in the hour of speculation, and in the hour of practice, their sentiments may differ widely. Their present disposition they easily persuade themselves will ever continue the same; and yet that disposition is changing with circumstances every moment. The man who glows with the warm feelings of devotion imagines it impossible for him to lose that sense of the Divine goodness which at present melts his heart. He whom his friend had lately saved from ruin, is confident that, if some trying emergency shall put his gratitude to proof, he will rather die than abandon his benefactor. He who lives happy and contented in frugal industry, wonders how any man can give himself up to dissolute pleasure. Were any of those persons informed by a superior spirit, that the time was shortly to come when the one should prove an example of scandalous impiety, the other of treachery to his friend, and the third of all that extravagant luxury which disgraces a growing fortune; each of them would testify as much surprise and abhorrence as Hazael did, upon hearing the predictions of the Prophet. Sincere they might very possibly be in their expressions of indignation; for hypocrisy is not always to be charged on men whose conduct is inconsistent. Hazael was in earnest, when he resented with such ardour the imputation of cruelty. In such cases as I have described, what has become, it may be inquired, of those sentiments of abhorrence at guilt, which were once felt so strongly? Are they totally erased? or, if in any degree they remain, how do such persons contrive to satisfy themselves in acting a part which their minds condemn? Here, there is a mystery of iniquity which requires to be unfolded. Latent and secret is the progress of corruption within the soul; and the more latent, the more dangerous is its growth. No man becomes of a sudden completely wicked. Guilt never shows its whole deformity at once; but by gradual acquaintance reconciles us to its appearance, and imperceptibly diffuses its poison through all the powers of the mind. Every man has some darling passion, which generally affords the first introduction to vice. One vice brings in another to its aid. By a sort of natural affinity they connect and entwine themselves together; till their roots come to be spread wide and deep over all the soul. When guilt rises to be glaring, conscience endeavours to remonstrate. But conscience is a calm principle. Passion is loud and impetuous; and creates a tumult which drowns the voice of reason. It joins, besides, artifice to violence; and seduces at the same time, that it impels. For it employs the understanding to impose upon the conscience. It devises reasons and arguments to justify the corruptions of the heart. The common practice of the world is appealed to. Nice distinctions are made. Men are found to be circumstanced in so peculiar a manner, as to render certain actions excusable, if not blameless, which, in another situation, it is confessed, would have been criminal. By such a process as this, there is reason to believe, that a great part of mankind advance from step to step in sin, partly hurried by passion, and partly blinded by self-deceit, without any just sense of the degree of guilt which they contract. It is proper, however, to observe, that though our native sentiments of abhorrence at guilt may be so born down, or so eluded, as to lose their influence on conduct, yet those sentiments belonging originally to our frame, and being never totally eradicated from the soul, will still retain so much authority, as, if not to reform, at least, on some occasions, to chasten the sinner. It is only during a course of prosperity, that vice

is able to carry on its delusions without disturbance. But, amidst the dark and thoughtful situations of life, conscience regains its rights; and pours the whole bitterness of remorse on his heart, who has apostatised from his original principles. We may well believe that, before the end of his days, Hazael's first impressions would be made to return. III. THAT THE POWER WHICH CORRUPTION ACQUIRES TO PERVERT THE ORIGINAL PRINCIPLES OF MAN IS FREQUENTLY OWING TO A CHANGE OF THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONDITION IN THE WORLD. How different was Hazael the messenger of Benhadad, from Hazael the king; he who started at the mention of cruelty, from him who waded in blood! Of this sad and surprising revolution, the Prophet emphatically assigns the cause in these few words; The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria. That crown, that fatal crown, which is to be set upon thy head, shall shed a malignant influence over thy nature; and shall produce that change in thy character, which now thou canst not believe. Whose experience of the world is so narrow, as not to furnish him with instances similar to this, in much humbler conditions of life? So great is the influence of a new situation of external fortune; such a different turn it gives to our temper and affections, to our views and desires, that no man can foretell what his character would prove, should Providence either raise or depress his circumstances in a remarkable degree, or throw him into some sphere of action, widely different from that to which he has been accustomed in former life. The seeds of various qualities, good and bad, lie in all our hearts. But until proper occasions ripen and bring them forward, they lie there inactive and dead. They are covered up and concealed within the recesses of our nature; or, if they spring up at all, it is under such an appearance as is frequently mistaken, even by ourselves. This may, in one light, be accounted not so much an alteration of character produced by a change of circumstances, as a discovery brought forth of the real character which formerly lay concealed. Yet, at the same time, it is true that the man himself undergoes a change. For opportunity being given for certain dispositions, which had been dormant, to exert themselves without restraint, they of course gather strength. By means of the ascendancy which they gain, other parts of the temper are borne down; and thus an alteration is made in the whole structure and system of the soul. He is a truly wise and good man, who, through Divine assistance, remains superior to this influence of fortune on his character, who having once imbibed worthy sentiments, and established proper principles of action, continues constant to these, whatever his circumstances be; maintains, throughout all the changes of his life, one uniform and supported tenor of conduct; and what he abhorred as evil and wicked in the beginning of his days, continues to abhor to the end. The instance of Hazael's degeneracy leads us to reflect, in particular, on the dangers which arise from stations of power and greatness; especially when the elevation of men to these has been rapid and sudden. Few have the strength of mind which is requisite for bearing such a change with temperance and self-command. From the whole view which we have now taken of the subject, we may, in the first place, learn the reasons for which a variety of conditions and ranks was established by Providence among mankind. This life is obviously intended to be a state of probation and trial. No trial of characters is requisite with respect to God, who sees what is in every heart, and perfectly knows what part each man would act, in all the possible situations of fortune. But on account of men themselves, and of the world around them, it was necessary that trial should take place, and a discrimination of characters be made; in order that true virtue might be separated from false appearances of it, and the justice of Heaven be displayed in its final retributions; in order that the failings of men might be so discovered to themselves, as to afford them proper instruction, and promote their amendment; and in order that their characters might be shown to the world in every point of view, which could furnish either examples for imitation or admonitions of danger. In the second place, We learn, from what has been said, the importance of attending, with the utmost care, to the choice which we make of our employment and condition of life. It has been shown, that our external situation frequently operates powerfully on our moral character; and by consequence that it is strictly connected, not only with our temporal welfare, but with our everlasting happiness or misery. He who might have passed unblamed, and upright, through certain walks of life, by unhappily choosing a road where he meets with temptations too strong for his virtue, precipitates himself into shame here, and into endless ruin hereafter. In the third place, We learn from the history which has been illustrated, never to judge of true happiness,

merely from the degree of men's advancement in the world. Always betrayed by appearances, the multitude are caught by nothing so much as by the show and pomp of life. They think every one blest who is raised far above others in rank. (*H. Blair, D.D.*) *Benhadad and Hazael—Elisha in tears* :—The cure of Naaman the Syrian was long remembered in Damascus. It is not surprising, therefore, that Ben-hadad the king, although an idolater—finding himself in the grasp of a disease that threatened his life—should have been anxious to consult the prophet Elisha. The answer of the prophet was ambiguous. So far as the disease itself was concerned, the king might recover; but the purpose to kill him was already in the heart of his very commissioner. The man of God bursts into a flood of tears. The fairest lands and cities of Israel, Hazael would utterly destroy. The hope of Israel—her young men—would be ruthlessly slain. And there were other nameless and almost incredible barbarities. The courtier is rooted to the earth with horror. He repudiates the image of the prophetic mirror. At the thought of such crimes, he recoils from his own future self. "Is thy servant a dog?" he exclaims in indignation, "to commit such a mass of iniquities?" Elisha makes no reply, save this: he would be soon king of Syria, and then he left Hazael to infer the rest. 1. Let me remark, to a heart not wholly corrupted, such self-repudiation as this of Hazael is natural. Are we to look on this Syrian prince, as he stands in the presence of Elisha, merely as a hypocrite? I think not. I believe his recoil from his future guilt, as here narrated, was perfectly genuine. I believe that when he uttered the words, "Is thy servant a dog?" he was quite unable to realise that he could ever be the author of the crimes predicted. The story, therefore, is true to nature. Suppose Cain had been told he would one day lift his club against his brother and fell him to the ground, would he not have said, and said with quite as much passionate feeling as Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog?" Can we doubt that David would have uttered the same language, had any one predicted his conduct in the matter of Uriah? I believe the time was when Judas even would have started back, in deprecating protest and shuddering terror, asking in relation to the awful crime he afterwards committed, "Is thy servant a dog?" This is only the voice of human nature, not yet hardened in iniquity. When no passion blinds him and no interest warps the feelings of his heart, the most ignorant and untutored man will often revolt from sin and crime. 2. Although to a heart not wholly corrupted, such self-repudiation as this of Hazael is natural, man's ignorance of his own character is such that he may one day be guilty of the very sins which for the present he believes to be impossible. Elisha was right; Hazael was wrong. He did not know his own heart. "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." We know who said that. Christ knew Peter better than Peter knew himself. "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." Let us pause here and gather up a few solemn lessons for ourselves. (1) First of all, let us beware of what is evil in its first beginnings. That solid, fossilised rock is only the result of successive accretions of loose sand; and a character like Hazael's is only the result of the action and power of principles of evil permitted to grow up and develop in the soul, without hindrance or check. Life nowhere grows by freaks. That infant needs pure air and nourishing food. Even so with every malign influence and wicked way; feed them and they will grow. (2) Once again. Let us beware of what is evil in its propelling power. Hazael went quickly to ruin. It is the story of many a prodigal. I am willing, however, to admit that a change of circumstances and condition may, in a very real sense, have an important power over human character and life. I do not believe that man is the creature of circumstances, that it is circumstances that make men, and that the only difference between the noblest saint and the basest criminal is a difference simply in the structure of the brain, and the nature of their position in life. At the same time, circumstances have often a real influence on human character. Had Hazael never been flattered by Ben-hadad—for in the opinion of many he supplanted Naaman—had he never been brought within the circle of a court, the unsanctified ambition might never have possessed him to seize a crown; and had he not seized the crown—holding the royal stirrup, so to speak, the very moment he was grasping the royal sceptre—he would never have been the man of blood he afterwards became. Our experience of life must be narrow indeed, if we cannot recall kindred illustrations. Take Robert Burns:

Oh! had he stayed by bonnie Doon,

And learned to curb his passions wild,

We had not mourned his early fate,

Nor pity wept o'er Nature's child.

Southey, speaking of the first Napoleon, has this remark: "He had given indications of his military talents at Toulon; he had also shown a little of a remorseless nature at Paris in his earlier years; but the extent either of his ability or his wickedness was at this time known to none, and perhaps not even suspected by himself." New circumstances bring new temptations. That lad, brought up in the quiet of the country, enters on a city life. In a few years the old habits, in fact the very old ways of thinking and looking at things, are all changed. Be gentle in your judgments upon others; be severe, most severe, in your judgments upon yourself. (*H. T. Howat.*) *Hazael: a revealer of human nature*.—I. THE SENSE OF VIRTUE IN HUMAN NATURE. When the prophet with tears told Hazael the heartless cruelties he would perpetrate—he seemed to have such a sense of virtue within him that he was shocked at the monstrosity, and said, "What! is thy servant a dog?" We need not suppose that he feigned this astonishment, but that it was real, and that it now produced a revulsion at the cruelties he was told he would soon perpetrate. Every man has a sense of right within him; indeed, this sense is an essential element in our constitution, the moral substance of our manhood, the core of our nature, our moral ego; it is what we call conscience. II. THE EVIL POSSIBILITIES OF HUMAN NATURE. This man, who was shocked at the idea of perpetrating such enormities at first, actually enacted them a few hours afterwards. The elements of the devil are in every man, though he may not know it. The vulture eggs of evil are in all depraved hearts; it only requires a certain heat of the outward atmosphere to hatch them into life. The virtue of many men is only vice sleeping. The evil elements of the heart are like gunpowder, passive, until the spark of temptation falls on them. The greatest monsters in human history were at one time considered innocent and kind. "Many a man," says a modern author, "could he have a glimpse in innocent youth of what he would be twenty or thirty years after, would pray in anguish that he might be taken in youth before coming to that." What is the moral of this? The necessity of a change of heart. III. THE SELF-IGNORANCE OF HUMAN NATURE. How ignorant of himself and his heart was Hazael when he said, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" Men do not know what they are. Self-ignorance is the most common of all ignorance; the most culpable of all ignorance; the most ruinous of all ignorance. IV. THE RESILIENT VELOCITY OF HUMAN NATURE. To-day this man seemed in sympathy with the just and the good, to-morrow his whole nature is aflame with injustice and cruelty; to-day he soars up with the angels, to-morrow he revels with the torturing fiends. Souls can fall from virtue swiftly as the shooting stars. One hour they may blaze in the firmament the next lie deep in the mud. (*Homilist.*) *The progressive power of sin*.—Two meanings are possible to these words. They may indicate a horror of what the prophet had revealed, and a shrinking from such baseness; or, simply a feeling that such bloody deeds are possible only for a king, and that he was no king, but a dog, rather. Both interpretations have this in common, that a look into the future reveals surprising things. No man's life turns out exactly as he expects, often the reverse. The prophet's eyes were opened by God to behold the career of Hazael; he saw him murder his king, ascend the throne, and at the head of devastating armies overrun Israel, and give the land up to pillage and blood. Hazael starts back in surprise, if not in horror; he has not the power to do it, if he would; perhaps he means he would not if he could. But it all proved true, nevertheless; and Hazael's experience is, for substance, that of men in these days. No sinner knows what he may be left to do. The characters and destinies of men are surprises even to themselves. The least sin, if unchecked by repentance and amendment, will grow into the greatest. I. SEE HOW HABITS ARE FORMED. When one act is followed by another of the same sort, it is as when foot follows foot, and a path is beaten. A single drop, distilling from the mossy hillside, does not make a stream, but let drop follow drop, and the stream will flow, and gather force and volume, till it hollows the valleys, chisels the rocks, and feeds the ocean. So habits, strong as life, come from little acts following one another, drop by drop, "Every one is the son of his own works," says Cervantes, and Wordsworth, more beautifully still, "The child is father of the man." II. SEE HOW ONE SIN BEGETS ANOTHER. Just as the graces come, not alone—there were three of them, the ancients said, so one virtue leads another by the hand; and music lingers in the echo, which sometimes is softer than the parent voice. So, too, in the inverse kingdom of evil, one wrong necessitates another, to hide it, or accomplish its ends. It is a small thing to lie, when one has committed a crime which will not bear

the light; and a common thing to add to one crime another greater than itself. "Dead men tell no tales," and when the telling of tales cannot be prevented otherwise, the silence of the grave is invoked; and the man becomes a murderer, who before was only too cowardly to have a less sin known. Sin is like the letting out of waters, at first a trickling stream a finger might stop, at last a flying flood sweeping man and his works alike into ruin. Sin is a fire; at first a spark a drop might extinguish, at last a conflagration taking cities on its wings, and melting primeval rocks into dust. III. Consider, also, WHAT COMPLICATIONS GROW OUT OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD. If nothing new happened, a man might, in some measure, control his sin; but the new and unexpected is always taking place, and therefore the sinner must do something else, something he did not expect and did not wish to do, but the doing of which is necessitated by what has occurred; and failure in this is failure in all. Men do not leap at a bound into crime; they are pushed into it by a force from behind. They would often stop if they could—they even mean to—but they are launched into a current, which, without their aid, widens and deepens, and, peradventure, becomes a Niagara. There are two lessons to be learned: 1. Fear to sin. It is the fundamental lesson of life. "Stand in awe and sin not." Beware of doctrines, the practical effect of which is to make you think less of the evil of sin. Let Sinai and Calvary be your teachers. The laws of God in this world are terribly severe. Expect at least as much in the world to come. The love of God does not prevent an infinite amount of suffering in this life; it is presumption to believe it will in the next. The love of God is no indiscriminate indulgence; it is not less love for the law than for those who fall beneath its infraction. The world of to-day proves it; the world in all ages does. 2. Another lesson. Behold your eternal future in the moving present. As the oak is in the acorn, and the river in the fountain, so the man is in the child, and so eternity is in time. So eternal destinies are ripening as fruits of time. (*W. J. Buddington, D.D.*) *The prophet's tears*:—What wonder that Elisha wept? Who would not weep if he could see what is coming upon his country? Whose heart would not pour out itself in blood to know what is yet to be done in the land of his birth or the country of his adoption? If the men of long ago could have seen how civilisation would be turned into an engine of oppression, how the whole land would groan under the burden of drunkeries and breweries, and houses of hell of every name; if they could have seen how the truth would be sold in the market-place, and how there would be no further need of martyrdom, surely they would have died the violent death of grief. The heart can only be read in the sanctuary. You cannot read it through journalism, or criticism, or political comment, or combinations of any kind which exclude the Divine element; to know what Hazael will do, let Elisha read him. The journalist never could have read him; he might have called him long-headed, intrepid, sagacious, a statesman; but the prophet said, "Their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child;" thy course is a course of havoc. It is only in the sanctuary that we know what things really are. When the pulpit becomes a very tower of God, a very fort of heaven, then the preacher will be able to say, as no other man can say, what the heart is, and what the heart will do under circumstances yet to be revealed. But whence has the preacher this power? He has it as a Divine gift. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Startling*:—My subject, as suggested by the words before us, is the common and too often fatal ignorance of men as to the wickedness of their own hearts. I. LET US EXPOSE AND EXPOUND THIS IGNORANCE. Our ignorance of the depravity of our own hearts is a startling fact, Hazael did not believe that he was bad enough to do any of the things here anticipated. "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" He might have been conscious enough that his heart was not so pure but it might consent to do many an evil thing; yet crimes so flagrant as those the prophet had foretold of him, he thought himself quite incapable of committing. Ah, the ignorance of Hazael is ours to a greater or less degree! God only knows the vileness of the human heart. There is a depth beneath, a hidden spring, into which we cannot pry. In that lower depth, there is a still deeper abyss of positive corruption which we need not wish to fathom. God grant that we may know enough of this to humble us, and keep us ever low before Him! II. But now I turn to THE PRACTICAL USE OF OUR SUBJECT, looking at it in two ways.—WHAT IT FORBIDS AND WHAT IT SUGGESTS. The depravity of our nature forbids, first of all, a venturing or presuming to play and toy with temptation. When a Christian asks,

"May I go into such a place?"—should he parley thus with himself? "True, temptation is very strong there, but I shall not yield. It would be dangerous to another man, but it is safe to me. If I were younger, or less prudent and circumspect, I might be in jeopardy; but I have passed the days of youthful passion. I have learned by experience to be more expert; I think, therefore, that I may venture to plunge, and hope to swim where younger men have been carried away by the tide, and less stable ones have been drowned." All such talking as this cometh of evil, and gendereth evil. Proud flesh vaunteth its purity, and becomes a prey to every vice. Let those who feel themselves to be of a peculiarly sensitive constitution not venture into a place where disease is rife. If I knew my lungs to be weak, and liable to congestion, I should shrink from foul air, and any vicious atmosphere. If you know that your heart has certain proclivities to sin, why go and tempt the devil to take advantage of you? But, again, knowing how vile we are by nature, knowing indeed that we are bad enough for anything, let us take another caution. Boast not, neither in any wise vaunt yourselves. Presume not to say, "I shall never do this; I shall never do that." Never venture to ask, with Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" My experience has furnished me with many proofs that the braggart in morality is not the man to be bound for. Above all, avoid those men who think themselves immaculate, and never fear a fall. If there be a ship on God's sea the captain of which declares that nothing can ever sink her, stand clear, get into the first leaky boat to escape from her, for she will surely founder. Give a ship the flag of humility, and it is well; but they that spread out the red flag of pride, and boast that they are staunch and trim, and shall never sink, will either strike upon a rock or founder in the open sea. III. And let this fact, that we do not know our own baseness, teach us not to be harsh, or too severe, with those of God's people who have inadvertently fallen into sin. Be severe with their sin; never countenance it; let your actions and your conduct prove that you hate the garment spotted with the flesh, that you abhor the transgression, cannot endure it, and must away with it. Yet ever distinguish between the transgressor and the transgression. Think not that his soul is lost because his feet have slipped. Imagine not that, because he has gone astray, he cannot be restored. If there must be a church censure passed upon him, yet take care that thou dost so act that he, in penitence of spirit, may joyously return. Be thou as John was to Peter. IV. Leaving now this point of caution, let us consider, by way of counsel, what positive suggestions may arise. If we be thus depraved, and know not the full extent of our depravity what then should we do? Surely, we should daily mourn before God because of this great sinfulness. Full of sin we are, so let us constantly renew our grief. We have not repented of sin to the full extent, unless we repent of the disposition to sin as well as the actual commission of sin. We should deplore before God, not only what we have done, but that depravity which made us do it. V. And when thou hast done, take heed that thou walkest every day very near to God, seeking daily supplies of His grace. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 17-24. *Jehoram—began to reign.—Lessons from the life of Jehoram:—* This is a short fragment of a king's history, the history of Jehoram. Brief as it is, it contains many practical truths. I. THAT PIETY IS NOT NECESSARILY HEREDITARY. Parents, as a rule, transmit their physical and intellectual qualities to their children, but not their moral characters. Jehoram was a bad man and a wicked king, but he was the son of Jehoshaphat, who was a man of distinguished piety, and reigned wisely and beneficently over Israel for twenty-five years. Of him it was said that "the more his riches and honour increased the more his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord" (2 Chron. xvii. 5, 6). But how different was his son! One of the first acts of his government was to put to death his six brothers, and several of the leading men of the empire. But whilst piety is not necessarily hereditary, because children are moral agents: what then? Are parents to do nothing to impart all that is good in their character to their children? Undoubtedly no! They are commanded to "train up a child in the way it should go when it is young." Where the children of godly parents turn out to be profligate and corrupt, as a rule some defect may be traced to parental conduct. Even in the life of Jehoshaphat, we detect at least two parental defects. 1. In permitting his son to form unholy alliances. 2. In granting his son too great an indulgence. He raised him to the throne during his own lifetime. He took him into royal partnership too soon, and thus supplied him with abundant means to

foster his vanity and ambition. II. THAT IMMORAL KINGS ARE NATIONAL CURSES. What evils this man brought upon his country! Through him the kingdom of Judah lost Edom (which had been its tributary for one hundred and fifty years), which "revolted" and became the determined enemy of Judah ever afterwards (Ps. cxxxvii. 7). Libnah, too, "revolted at the same time." This was a city in the south-western part of Judah assigned to the priests, and a city of refuge. It has always been so. Wicked kings, in all ages, have been the greatest curses that have afflicted the race. Another practical truth is—III. THAT DEATH IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS. 1. Death does not respect a man's position, however high. 2. Death does not respect a man's character however vile. Jehoram was a bad man, and utterly unfit to die: but death waits not for moral preparation. (*David Thomas, D.D.*) *Baneiful influence of a wicked wife*:—Jehoram, the son of good Jehoshaphat, walked in the evil ways of the kings of Israel, and he wrought that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. For—mark the reason given by the inspired historian—Jehoram did that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord, for "He had the daughter of Ahab to wife!" What secrets were indicated by that one reason! What a whole volume of tragedy is wrapped up in that brief sentence! The responsibility seems to a large extent transferred from him and placed upon his wife, who was a subtler thinker, a more desperate character, with a larger brain and a firmer will, with more accent and force of personality. "Be not unequally yoked together:" do not look upon marriage lightly; do not suppose that it is a game for the passing day, a flash and gone, a hilarious excitement, a wine-bibbing, a passing round of kind salutations, then dying away like a trembling echo. Beware what connections you form, and do not suppose that the laws of God can be set aside with impunity. Our family life explains our public attitude and influence. What we are at home we are really abroad. Wives, do not destroy your husbands: when they would do good, help them; when they propose to give to the cause of charity, suggest that the donation be doubled, not divided; when they would help in any good and noble work, give them sympathy, and prayer, and blessing. We never knew a man yet of any enduring public power that was not made by his wife, and we never knew a public yet that fully appreciated the value of that ministry. It is secret; it is at home; it does not show, it is not chalked on a black-board, it is not gilded on a high ceiling, it is silent—but vital. We have seen a man go down in his church life, and we have wondered why, and it was his wife, the daughter of Ahab, who was degrading him, narrowing him and dwarfing him in his thinking and sympathy. We have seen a man go up in his public influence, and we have found that it was his wife who was encouraging him, helping him, telling him that he was on the right way, and wishing him good luck in the name of the Lord. See to it that your home is right: have a beautiful home—morally and religiously; a sacred house, a sanctuary where joy is the singing angel, and then, when you come abroad into the market-place, into the pulpit or into parliament, or into trading and commerce, or into any of the social relations of life, you will bring with you all the inspiration that comes from a home that blooms like a garden or glows like a summer sun. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 25-29. In the twelfth year of Joram.—*Kinghood: the conventional and the true*:—Looking at King Ahaziah, as here sketched, two points strike our attention. I. A KING BY PHYSICAL HEREDITY. This man came from the lineage of kings. 1. This arrangement is not Divine. All that can be said is that God permitted, not ordained their existence. 2. This arrangement is absurd. That a man should become a ruler because of his birth is an outrage on common sense. They only will be future kings who are royal in character, in intelligence, and philanthropy. The greatest man of the community will become its king. What is called loyalty is a debased and selfish flunkeyism, not a devout homage for the good. Are we not commanded to "honour the king"? Yes, but it is implied that he is honour-worthy. Are we to honour such men as Henry VIII., Charles II., and other such monarchical monsters, which, alas! abound in history? No; denounce them, hurl them from their thrones. II. A MONSTER BY MORAL DESCENT. He was the descendant of one of the most ruthless and most corrupt of that Hebrew people who were fast "filling up the measure of their iniquities." This man, like the offspring of all wicked parents, would inherit the spirit, imbibe the principles, and imitate the example of his parents. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

CHAPTER IX.

VERS. 2-37. Look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat.—*The history of Jehu* :—Jehu was the son of Nimshi and the grandson of Jehoshaphat. He was one of the monsters of history. The leading facts of his revolting life will be found in this and the preceding chapter. I. A REVOLTING EXHIBITION OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY. He was ruthlessly and craftily cruel. He shot Jehoram dead in his chariot. He commanded Jezebel, who was looking out of a window as he passed by, to be thrown down, and in her fall she was smashed to destruction (ix. 30.) He then proceeded to exterminate the family of Ahab. II. A DISTRESSING MYSTERY IN THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD. That the merciful Father should permit men to be murderers one of another confounds us with amazement. III. A MIGHTY ARGUMENT FOR FUTURE RETRIBUTION. Were we to believe that this state of things is to continue for ever, religion, which is supreme love to God, would be out of the question. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." IV. A PROOF OF THE SUPREME NEED OF A MORAL REGENERATOR. What can alter the character of such men as this Jehu, and put an end to all the cruelties, tyrannies, frauds, and violence, that turn the world into a pandemonium? Philosophy, literature, civilisation, legislative enactments, ceremonial religions? No, nothing short of a Power which can change the moral heart. The Gospel is this regenerating power. Thank God One has come into this world who will "create a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." (*David Thomas, D.D.*) *Jehu* :—The time had now fully come that the wrath of God was to be poured out upon the house of Ahab. The chapters we have selected for consideration bring this subject before us. The anointed of the Lord for the execution of this work was Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat. The first to fall under judgment was Jehoram the king. After him came Ahaziah and Jezebel; then the sons and grandsons of Ahab and the brethren of Ahaziah. After the royal family came the prophets, the priests, and the worshippers of Baal. These were all swept away at one stroke. Next followed the images of Baal and his house. These were devoted to utter destruction. So completely were the judgments of God executed upon apostate Israel and Judah that it is recorded "thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel." The narrative, however, has a spiritual aspect. Jehu's anointing was to a destruction with carnal weapons. The child of God now is anointed for a destruction of spiritual foes with spiritual weapons. 1. In these words we are presented with a picture of the way in which the Lord acts when He is about to call His servants to do His work. In the first place, there is the "anointing"—the Holy Spirit. Elisha commands the "box of oil" to be taken. Nothing can be done without this. In all true consecration to God's service the work must be, from beginning to end, the work of the Holy Spirit. Jehu can have no commission without the "oil." He can put no energy to work till the "oil" is "poured" upon him. It is this "anointing" that gives him his authority, his power, his perseverance, and his success. So it must be with the one who is devoted to the Lord's service. 2. In the next place, Jehu is made to "rise up from among his brethren." Here is separation. The work of God the Holy Ghost at once separates a man from everything around him. It is a personal call, an individual work. It is the direct action of that Holy Spirit on a man's own soul. He is drawn from every association and influence, and brought into "an inner chamber"—alone with God. There he is taught of God and trained for His work. There he obtains strength to fulfil it. Thus it is with all God's chosen ones. The more of this personal dealing of the Holy Spirit there is with the soul, the more of this work of the "inner chamber" going on, the more effectual will be the work we undertake for God. One marvels to see what one man could do! All the royal family, the prophets and priests, the worshippers and the idols—all fell down before this man at one stroke! What was the cause, what the secret source of this mighty energy and strength and success? It was the "oil," the "separation," and the "inner chamber." 3. How little the world can understand or appreciate this Divine work is seen here. The messenger of the Lord is looked upon as a "mad fellow." This anointing is a secret into which none can enter but those who are subjects of it. Nor can he who is the subject ever sacrifice truth for the sake of peace. Three times the question is put to Jehu, "Is it peace?" But what peace can there be while God is dishonoured, sin loved and cherished, and the truth of God

trampled in the dust! First purity, then peace—this is God's order. Peace at any price—this is man's. The world cries out for peace, and there is ready for it "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." But this peace springs from "the sword" which, first piercing man's heart for sin, breaks him from sin. Then follows the peace of God. There could be no peace to Joram, King of Israel, so long as God's truth was despised and set at nought. Put the sin away, every jot of it, then you can have God's peace in your soul! But who will maintain this standard? Who will carry it out at all seasons and under all circumstances? Only the consecrated Christian. Such high ground must entail the cross at every step, and none but a consecrated Christian can bear the cross "in season and out of season." None will take this ground unless there has been much of the "oil," the "separation," and the "inner chamber." 4. And mark the clear and unhesitating way in which every spiritual foe must be met, everything that stands between the soul and God dealt with. Jehu says, with regard to Ahaziah and Jezebel, "Smite him also," "throw her down"; with regard to Ahab's seventy sons, "Take ye the heads of the men, and bring them to me to Jezreel by to-morrow"; with regard to the brethren of Ahaziah, "Take them alive"; with regard to the prophets, and priests, and worshippers, he says, "If any of the men escape, he that letteth him go his life shall be for the life of him." What uncompromising faithfulness! What an unreserved cutting-off of every evil one! Kings, nor queens, nor worshippers, are spared! All are swept away without a moment's hesitation! Ah, this is "faithfulness unto death!" This is consecration to God. This is what St. Paul meant when he said—"I am determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified"; "to me to live is Christ." It is clear from all I have said, that the difference between a just-saved Christian and one who is thus consecrated, is almost as great as between the former and an unbeliever. And this is the reason there is among Christians so little of the joy of the Lord. 5. Mark the hindrances, and the taunts and sneers such devotion to God has to endure: "Wherefore came this mad fellow," said one; "Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" was the bitter taunt of Ahab's queen; "we are exceedingly afraid," was the cowardly reply of the rulers of Jezreel. To all these taunts and sneers Jehu has but one reply, "Who is on my side?" "Is thine heart right with my heart?" His was an eye looking right on, an arm ever uplifted, a course that saw nothing before him but the carrying out of God's word. Here the faithful one is crowned. Glory rests upon him and, through him, on his descendants. "I will give thee a crown of life"; "Him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne." See the glory that awaits the consecrated life! Is this life thine? Art thou aiming at it, wrestling in prayer for it, keeping it ever before thee? Christian, nothing but this will bring joy and gladness to thy heart now, and "a crown of glory" hereafter. This is life—the life of God. This is testimony—testimony to Christ. This is heaven enjoyed on earth—but only enjoyed through the Cross. Christian, again I ask, Is this life thine? 6. But here the curtain falls. A dark shadow crosses our path. Jehu falls. Thank God for the spiritual picture we have been enabled to draw from his life of what a Christian should be. Thank God for the warning his life presents in its fall. "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin." Draw the picture of every earthly servant of God as bright as we may, there is a shadow somewhere. It is well. The eye should fix itself only on Him. "Looking off unto Jesus." Jehu falls. Let us mark how he fell, and the solemn warning that fall presents. 1. I have been describing the whole-heartedness which characterises every consecrated Christian. But to be whole-hearted, and to maintain it from day to day, amid influences on every side destructive of it, needs that we "take heed." Jehu "took no heed." Here is our first warning. 2. Secondly, "to walk." This is where the "heed" is to be directed. Talk there is, plenty, and "the talk of the lips tendeth to penury." Profession there is—it is the garment of the many. Just-saved ones there are—the Church has multitudes of them. What we need is "to walk"—"walk in the light," "walk before Me," "walk as becometh saints." This is where we have to "take heed." "Jehu took no heed to walk." 3. Thirdly, "to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel." It is to walk in the truth, to "have His commandments and keep them," to ask at every step, "What would the Lord have me to do?" It is to "set the Lord always before me." This is

"to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel." This Jehu "took no heed" to do. 4. And lastly, "to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart." Here is whole-heartedness, consecration to God. Some Christians give half a heart. Others give their heart just when it is convenient—just when the Lord's claims involve no sacrifice. Jehu fell just here. Christians all around fall just here. The Church of Christ is full of fallen Jehus! Fallen Jehus, on whose brows will rest a deep brand of shame when the Lord comes! Fallen Jehus, the heavy drags on the wheels of every chariot that would run a faster race to heaven! (F. Whitefield, M.A.) *Jehu's ready obedience*:—We cannot but be struck by the obedience of Jehu to the heavenly call. There was no hesitation. We show ourselves to be yet under bondage when we hesitate regarding the calls which God addresses to us. We linger, we wish to return and bid those farewell who are in our father's house; we have sundry things to adjust and determine before we can go, we secretly hope that in the meantime occurrences may transpire which will change the line of our destiny; by all this we mar the simplicity and purity of obedience, and discover a spirit that is not fit to be trusted with great functions and responsibilities in the Divine economy. (J. Parker, D.D.) *Value of Jehu's work*:—"Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel" (ver. 28). But the way was wrong. Perhaps for the period within which the destruction took place it was the only ministry that was possible. The incident, however, must stand in historical isolation, being utterly useless as a lesson or guide for our imitation. We are called upon to destroy Baal out of Israel, but not with sword, or staff, or implement of war. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds of Satan." Jehu did his rough-and-ready work, a work, as we have said, adapted to the barbaric conditions under which he reigned, but there must be no Jehu in the Christian Church, except in point of energy, decision, obedience, and single-mindedness of purpose. A Christian persecution is a contradiction in terms. When Christians see evil, they are not to assail it with weapons of war; they are to preach against it, argue against it, pray about it, bring all possible moral force to bear upon it, but in no case is physical persecution to accompany the propagation of Christianity. Not only so: any destruction that is accomplished by physical means is a merely temporary destruction. There is in reality nothing in it. When progress of a Christian kind is reported it must not be tainted by the presence of physical severity. We cannot silence evil speakers by merely closing their mouths; so long as we can hold those mouths there may indeed be silence, but not until the spirit has been changed, not until the very heart has been converted and born again, can the evil-doer be silenced, and his mouth be dispossessed of wicked speeches and filled with words of honesty and pureness. (*Ibid.*) *Incomplete obedience*:—Visibility and universality are Popish marks of a true Church, and Protestant marks of a true Christian. An hypocritical Jehu will do "some things"; a murderous Herod will do "many things"; but an upright Paul is "in all things willing to live honestly." A ship that is not of the right make cannot sail trim, and a clock whose spring is faulty will not always go true; so a person of unsound principles cannot be constant and even in his practices. The religion of those that are inwardly rotten, is like a fire in some cold climates, which almost fries a man before, when at the same time he is freezing behind; they are zealous in some things, as holy duties, which are cheap, and cold in other things, especially when they cross their profit or credit; as Mount Hecla is covered with snow on one side, when it burns and casts out cinders on the other; but the holiness of them that are sound at heart is like the natural heat,—though it resorts most to the vitals of sacred performances, yet, as need is, it warms and has an influence upon all the outward parts of civil transactions. It may be said of true sanctity, as of the sun, "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." (G. Swinmock.)

Ver. 11. Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?—*The reproach of true religion*:—The man who was spoken of in this contemptuous manner was a prophet of God, sent by another prophet to a fellow-subject, with the present of a kingdom in his hand. Before night (so it appears) that kingdom had been secured; two confederate kings had been swept out of the way; and a queen-mother, stronger than either, had been literally cast to the dogs. Such was the brief history of this message from heaven. No one called the prophet a madman at the close of that day. Many another true message from heaven has had a similar fate; and

all such messages may expect it. They may expect a similar reproach in the first instance; and a similar vindication in the end. I. CONCERNING THE REPROACH. God hath spoken at "sundry times and in divers manners" to the world; but the messengers by whom He has spoken have seldom been recognised as such at the first. From the days of Noah to those of St. Paul, experience testifies this. Wherever God sends a special message to men, it clearly must be because a special message is required; in other words, because the knowledge and wisdom of man are not sufficient in his then existing circumstances to guide him. God sends him counsel because his own counsel is worthless, or worse. But this is just the thing which man's pride is unwilling to allow. Again, God's counsel, like Himself, is certain to be holy; and man's natural purposes, on the other hand, are sure to be ungodly and sinful. Further yet, God's wisdom is sure to be far-sighted and profound, while the faculties which attempt to scan it are always short-sighted and shallow. On all these grounds, therefore, the message, when it comes, will be something unwelcome and perplexing at the first. Its pretensions will be humiliating to man's pride; its tendency will be offensive to his nature; its contents will be confounding to his mind. "I know you that ye have not the love of God in you." It is an aggravated illustration of the same principle which causes frivolity to despise enthusiasm; selfishness, generosity; the savage, mercy and truth; and the clown, the highest efforts of literature, science, and art. Men hate to believe in anything superior to themselves. II. CONCERNING THE VINDICATION. "Wisdom is justified of all her children." Where a message is really from God, it compels belief at the last. This may be easily seen in all the cases already referred to. The flood of waters justified Noah; the fire from heaven justified Lot; the Exodus justified Moses; and the victory over the Philistines justified David. Exactly in proportion to the original contempt was the final honour in each case. It was the same with the apparently habitual scorn of all true prophecy in old days; true prophecy has long been fully revenged. Similar justice, also, has long been measured out to the once despised evangelists and apostles, and to that equally despised Master whom they obeyed. In proof of this you have only to consider that no greater praise can now be given to any man, than to say his conduct is truly apostolical, or his character really Christian. It is nothing that, in short, but the old proverb, "*Magna est veritas, et prævalebunt.*" A true message from heaven has heavenly resources behind it. It is like a bank with very large liabilities, but with assets much larger still. Consequently, whatever it dares, it can do; whatever the doubts, and surmises, and panic, it can meet them all with a smile. We may apply this as an excellent test of the various religions of the world. There are some that make no pretensions, that do not oppose men's desires, nor perplex their minds, nor offend their prejudices. That is condemnation enough by itself. God would hardly have sent us a message which we could have devised for ourselves. There are other religions which are all pretensions; which go on shouting for centuries that the Diana they worship is very great; and which are perpetually singing in chorus, We are right, and you are wrong, we are saved, and you are lost; but without any real proof of it all. Such religions offer no reason, and so require no reply. They are simply gigantic systems of self-praise; and it is no recommendation to them. These are not the marks of the true message—"If I honour myself, my honour is nothing." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 20. The driving is like the driving of Jehu.—*Religious fanaticism*:—Jehu was a religious fanatic; his whole nature was on fire with indignation against the idolatry in his country under the reign of King Joram. We may take this man's history to illustrate some of the worst features of fanaticism. I. IT "DRIVETH FURIOUSLY," WITH A HEARTLESS DISREGARD TO THE LIVES OF ALL WHO DIFFER FROM IT. What cared Jehu for the lives of those who differed from him in religious opinion? Nothing. What do your religious fanatics, who often assemble in thousands to hoot out their impious crudities, care for the bodily interests, health, or life of those who differ from them? Religious fanaticism is essentially cruel. II. IT "DRIVETH FURIOUSLY," WITH AN OSTENTATIOUS SPIRIT. "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord" (x. 16). Jehu really did not care "for the Lord" or for true theology. He cared only for himself—self-display, self-glory. Fanaticism is essentially ostentatious. It creates a morbid hunger for the applause of men. It will itinerate the country, have preachments every day of the week, prayer-meetings all the day, and drive "furiously" on; but it will take good care to have the whole set forth in puffing advertisements and

paraded in all the prints of the so-called "Christian world." "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord." How unlike the true ministry of heaven, which does not cause its voice to be heard in the street, which does its work silently as the sunbeam. III. IT "DRIVETH FURIOUSLY" UNDER THE COVER OF PRETENCE. This Jehu resolved to destroy all the worshippers of Baal; but how did he set to work in order to accomplish this end? Not in a straightforward way. Inspiration tells us, "Jehu did it in subtilty." There is a somewhat popular impression, that fanaticism is always sincere. This is a mistake; as a rule, it is a lying thing. As it works by falsehood, so it works under its cover. "Fanaticism," says Professor Lange, "dissolves all the bonds of life and love, but imputes the blame of it to faith. It leads a man to acts of betrayal, of rebellion, and of murder, while he imagines that he is offering sacrifices acceptable to God. It institutes a community of hatred, in opposition to the community of love, and treats the fire of hell as if it were sacred. It appears in the guise of religion, but for the purpose of banishing Christ and His Gospel from the earth." Conclusion:—Infer not that because a minister, a community, or a Church are driving furiously in religious work, that they are religious. Genuine religion is a life, not a passion; it is a river, silent and constant as the stars, not a flood rushing and roaring for the hour. (*Homilist*) *Going ahead*:—Jehu has been dead many a long century now, but he has always had his successors; and probably they are more numerous to-day than ever. Among the young men of our day this "go-ahead" character is very common. Nor do I feel disposed to check it. Our times demand it. We are living in an age of lightning. It teems with revolutions every hour. Art, science, and commercial enterprises advance with inconceivable velocity. What was, not long since, the dreary journey of a week, is now a delightful excursion of a few hours; and young men feel that if they are to keep pace with the times, they must possess the go-ahead spirit of Jehu. This I do not condemn. Idleness leads to the greatest prodigality. But what I wish to do to-night is this—exhort you to mind that your zeal is guided by wisdom and prudence. You are zealous; but is your zeal directed to right ends? A misdirected zeal is like a sword in a madman's hand. There are numbers, who, with their go-ahead spirit, have found themselves in our gaols, or lying in our hospitals, with the wasting hand of disease inflicting upon them its awful torments. And, alas, they themselves are not the only sufferers. Look on those who wait on their footsteps, with muffled faces and sable garments. That is a father, and that is a mother, whose grey hairs are coming with sorrow to the grave. To all furious drivers I would say—I. FIRST, PULL UP. I have read somewhere, of a horse rushing down a country village, with nostrils distended, and with fire flashing from his heels, yet without driver or hand to guide him. He was dragging behind him a cart, in which was a child, who clung to its side in pale terror. A woman, as it passed, shot from her doorway, like an arrow from its bowstring, and followed in full pursuit, crying, "Save that child! save that child!" Why did she run and cry thus? Oh, you say, "It was her child." No, it was not. She had left her own little ones all safe around her hearth; but she had a heart above that selfishness which would care only for its own. That child had a mother, but she was not there, the good woman would take her place—one of her children might want help some day. Imbued, I trust, with the unselfish spirit of this woman, we seek to-night to check the speed of those fiery passions which are dragging some of you to death. You are probably unknown to us; but have you not a mother who loves you, a mother who prays for you? You have been going ahead bravely of late, you think. You rightly judge life to be short, and you feel that if you are to enjoy life, you had better be quick about it; if you are to get a fortune you had better keep a sharp lookout. Yes, this is all very well, but where will this pleasure-seeking lead you? It may be, in your haste to get money, you do not scruple to be a little dishonest. "Anyhow, by hook or by crook," you say, "I mean to go ahead." Yes, but where will this furious driving lead you? Perhaps you have never thought of this. You don't know where you are going. I believe more young men are ruined for the want of thought, than aught else. II. NOW I WANT YOU TO TURN ROUND. You feel to-night you have been going ahead on the wrong road. You have determined, as God shall help you, to pull up. But remember, pulling up is only part of the business. You have been on the wrong road; you now want the right. The first thing you need is a new heart. You need the power of the Holy Spirit to convert you. I shall have no faith in your fine resolutions to give up evil habits, evil companions, and pleasure-seeking, unless

you have implanted within you new principles. Wind and tide will be against you. In your own strength you may pull until your veins stand like whipcord upon your brow, and you will go down the stream still. And even suppose you should be able to give up the grosser forms of sin, yet, without religion, you must feel when you come to die that, after all, your life has been a failure. Let me urge you, therefore, to seek salvation through Christ. III. NOW, GO AHEAD. I must now assume that you have decided for Christ, united yourself with Christian companions and a Christian Church. At any rate, many young men here have done that; so that the advice I am about to give cannot be deemed impracticable. In common sense, Christian young men, this go-ahead spirit is very desirable; desirable even from a business point of view. We are commanded to "be diligent in business." If you are in business for yourself, seek, in every true and honest way, to augment your income. In doing so, you will have God's blessing upon you. Do not be miserly, do not be covetous; but do seek, by dint of plodding perseverance, and constant attention to business, to rise in the world. (*W. Williams.*) *Scorchers*:—"The "scorcher," as he is commonly understood in bicycle parlance, is a rider who is determined to have his own way and his own good time on the road, though he endanger the happiness and even life and limb of hundreds of other riders. He is certainly a nuisance and a despicable character. Alas! there are scorchers in other departments of life than bicycle riding. The scorcher in business or social or religious circles is just as mean and dangerous a character as when going at breakneck speed down the road on his wheel. The scorcher is such because of his selfishness. It is the work of Christianity to eliminate the scorcher, and bring in the "brother" in his place. The proverb of the scorcher is, "Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost." The law of the brother is, "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*)

Ver. 22. Is it peace?—*No peace out of Christ*:—"The sovereignty of God is apparent in all His dealings with the children of men. He putteth down one and setteth up another. He killeth and maketh alive. He doeth what He pleases in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. He giveth no account of any of His ways, nor may any one inquire, What doest thou? Still, "justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne," and we are sure that in all His dispensations, however mysterious to us, "the Judge of all the earth will do right." It is "by Him kings reign and princes decree justice." All this is evidenced in the case of Jehu, whose exaltation to the throne of Israel is described in the former part of this interesting chapter (vers. 1-10). 1. THAT THERE IS NO PEACE TO BE FOUND IN THE WAYS OF SIN. In prosecution of the inquiry in our text, ask—1. The open sinner. Sinner, hast thou peace? Ask Adam and Eve, when they had eaten of the forbidden fruit. Look at Achan who saw among the spoils of the enemy a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels' weight, and coveted them, and took them, and hid them in the earth in the midst of his tent and the silver under it. "Is it peace, Achan?" When Zimri slew Elah the son of Baasha, King of Israel, and usurped his throne, had Zimri "peace" who slew this master? (1 Kings xvi. 10). Look at Belshazzar at his impious feast (Dan. v. 9); here was the very height of human enjoyment; but a guilty conscience spoiled all. Look at Saul, King of Israel; hear his bitter cry, "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more" (1 Sam. xxviii. 16). Had he peace? Peace had fled from him. 2. Ask the formalist—resting in a round of duties, having the form of godliness, but destitute of its power. There may be a pharisaical spirit—a self-satisfaction—"God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men" (Luke xviii. 11), but "is it peace?" 3. Ask the unconverted, under his most favourable circumstances; and though we do not deny that there may be a momentary gratification,—what are termed by the apostle, "The pleasures of sin for a season," "Is there peace?" Some, indeed, have a false peace, are "at ease in their sins"—but this is carelessness and indifference rather than "peace." 4. But this question may be asked of many, who have even sought peace for their souls, but sought it in the wrong way, by unhallowed means. Many are the ingenious devices of Satan, for blinding the minds of his captives, and keeping his goods "in peace." Hence his ministers are said to "daub with untempered mortar," and to "cry, Peace, peace: when there is no peace" (Jer. vi. 14; Ezek. xiii. 10). Is peace then banished

from the earth? far from it; the Holy Scriptures make known unto us "the way of peace," which unconverted men have never known (Rom. viii. 17). "Christ is our peace" (Mic. v. 5; Eph. ii; Isa. ix. 6). And though peace is only to be found in Him, here is solid, abiding, soul-satisfying peace. And this leads me to II. SHOW THAT TRUE, PERMANENT PEACE is to be obtained only through an experimental knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, through the Spirit, "Preaching peace by Jesus Christ," who is described in the Word of inspiration as "the Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 6). And here we may remark, that the believer has—1. Peace with God. 2. The believer has peace of conscience—peace of mind,—rest for his soul. 3. He enjoys peace with others, for when a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even His enemies to be at peace with Him. And what are the properties of this peace? Let the Scriptures declare (Rom. xiv. 17, 18). "A peace of God, which passeth all understanding," which "the world can neither give, nor take away"; which is perfectly independent of all the vicissitudes of this changing world. And this peace is enjoyed through faith in the Redeemer. It is peace and joy "in believing." Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee" (Isa. xxvi. 3). Peace under all circumstances;—"Say ye to the righteous it shall be well with him" (Isa. iii. 16), in sickness and health; in prosperity and adversity; in poverty and riches; in life, in death, and through all eternity. (R. Simpson, M.A.)

Ver. 24. And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength.—*Aimlessness*:—The frivolous, purposeless lives of this world are like ships at the mercy of the wind and tide. Hail one of them, and ask, "Whither are you bound?" and the answer will be, "I don't know." "What cargo do you carry?" "Nothing." "Well, what are you doing out here on the ocean of life?" "Only drifting." "Ah! but you don't know what a sorry spectacle you make—only drifting when there is so much to be done." It is said that Carlyle, on one of his daily walks, met a young man, and, falling into conversation with him, inquired about his purpose in life. "I haven't any particular purpose," came the reply. "Then get one," exclaimed the stern old man, striking his cane on the pavement—"get one quick." (*Homiletic Review*.)

Ver. 31. Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?—*Divine purposes and human agencies*:—These are not the words of the Spirit of God, but of that wicked witch Jezebel, wife of the idolatrous Ahab. Nevertheless, there is a truth implied in them which it shall be our present business to expound and illustrate. "Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" What did she mean by this? The answer is in the story of Zimri told in the sixteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings. Elah, son of Baasha, has reigned over Israel but two years, when in a drunken revel, in the house of his steward, he is slain by Zimri, captain of half his chariots, and his throne usurped by the traitor who had thus shed his blood. But for Zimri there is indeed no peace; the seven days of his reign are days of terror and of blood. Tirzah is speedily besieged by the army under Omri which hastens from Gibbethon; and when Zimri sees that his usurped power is gone, he betakes himself to the palace, where, kindling a fire around him, he perishes in the midst of the flames. That Divine purposes are sometimes accomplished by wicked agents; but that this in nowise excuses the agents themselves, or shields them from merited punishment. I. BY MANY FACTS IN HUMAN HISTORY. 1. Look at facts in the history of nations. 2. Look at facts in the history of individuals. There is Jacob concerning whose relation to Esau the prophecy stands that "the elder shall serve the younger"; yet how utterly detestable the means;—the lies, the trickery, the fraud, by which the end is attained. For the purposes of God I have respect, and I know that they shall stand, but for the means used by Jacob and his mother, I have the utmost abhorrence and contempt. II. IN THE GREAT CENTRAL FACT OF CHRISTIANITY. I mean the Crucifixion of the Lord. Here, the divinest purpose works itself out by the most satanic agency. The noblest deed of love ever wrought by the great God of love Himself, combines with the meanest, foulest, deed of hatred, ever wrought by man, in the great agony of the Cross! "Him," says Peter, "being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by wicked hands have crucified and slain." And yet one step further—"I wot that through ignorance ye did it." So that here the chosen channels through which Divine wisdom and Divine love pour themselves upon us are human ignorance and wickedness! "O the depth of the riches," &c. And here, I merely

remark, that to the sentence which states the principle we are discussing, I might add another member:—namely, That if those wicked agents who, consciously or unconsciously carry out Divine purposes, repent of their sin, they are not excluded from participation in the good they have been instrumentally, and sinfully, accomplishing. III. IN THE DISSEMINATION OF THE GOSPEL. Means in themselves inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel, are in the order of Divine providence, indirectly employed. (*J. W. Lance.*)

Ver. 37. And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field.—*The fruits of perfect sin*:—1. Jezebel's is the character of one complete in evil. She enters the stage of human events in the fulness of her wickedness. She does not come before our notice till she has passed through all the stages of early conviction, strife with conscience, and sometimes of the warnings of a better nature. She is one whom savages would pronounce wicked, and from whom they would start as a dangerous member of even their social body. There are some who are brought before us in this way in life, as if the curtain were suddenly drawn up, and they were presented to the eye for the first time in their full development. We have been allowed to see none of the inward workings, none of the early struggle and strife. All this has gone on between themselves and God alone. His eye only has noticed, and His hand recorded the gages, challenges, and contests between the tempter and the sinner. We see but the end of the conflict. We perceive only the conqueror standing forward flushed with his success, and the ranks of the vanquished receding into the far distance on either side, like the forms of beautiful dreams scared by the breaking in of morning light. In the great portrait gallery of Holy Scripture no one is found exactly like her. She stands individually distinctive and terrible. 2. Here is her history. Ahab is mentioned as coming to the throne of Samaria nine hundred and eighteen years before Christ. The marriage with Jezebel is mentioned as a decided step in evil in Ahab, and is clearly connected with his idolatry. The next mention of her is her desire and effort to kill all the prophets of the Lord, and Obadiah's success in saving them. Then came the denunciation of God upon Jezebel, and the prophecy of her being eaten of dogs in the portion of Jezreel. There is a pause in her history, and we hear no more of the queen-mother during the reign of Ahab's successor. The wicked king had sunk to his doomed grave. But she, the author and abettor of his sinfulness, lived on. Her end is the next and last circumstance of her life; very terrible. She comes out again with her old characteristic. The long pause in which she has been withdrawn from observation has made no change in her character save to stereotype all old failings, and gnarl into her form the sins of her earlier days. Shameless and barefaced in her iniquity, she looked out for admiration from the very man who was returning as a conqueror over her husband's race. 3. There are certain features which belong to the thoroughly wicked person, and the approach to those characteristics may always excite alarm and anxiety. The principal points about Jezebel are these. A woman holding an evil influence over her husband, and turning her pertinacity and vigour of practical energy and power into the pursuit of the line in which the man hesitated. The wicked woman has an energy of evil which makes her far worse than the man. Her persecution of God and good men. Her casting in her lot with the wicked and the profligate. Her unflinching and unhesitating profligacy in the destruction of Naboth. Her railery of the king. Her vanity overcoming in the end of life all other feelings, natural or not. (1) I mentioned the first which was visible in Jezebel. Her decided and unhesitating influence over Ahab. A firm grasp over the conduct of another shows a finish in the character of the person who uses it; still more so when it is complete in evil. No one can take a very decided course unless he have an unwavering trust in his own opinions, or have given himself over to utter indifference. Either a man must have a conscience void of offence, or no conscience at all, to proceed in a very vigorous manner to the attainment of a certain end. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." Most men are to a certain degree hesitating. An indecision with regard to faith in some one article or detail: an undetermined mind as to serving God or no; a state of sin or indulged infirmity still hindering the moral advances; all these make men oscillate in as many degrees and with as many variations as there are shades of character and distinctions between dispositions. Now he that can guide another fairly must necessarily have a firm and steady line himself. It is harder to gain this entire ascendancy over another individual mind, than it is to have it over the

aim or end of a long course of action. The hesitating eye looks up to the guide either for good or evil. If it see a single swerve discouragements at once ensue : if it meet a firm, steady, unwavering gaze, reassurance comes, and a steady step is the consequence. It is a fearful thing to settle the swerving mind when that swerve is on the sand-bar which crosses the entrance to the harbour, and when the settled action given is to drive the vessel out again into the wide though easy deep. Better be among the rocks than float for ever away from shore and harbour. It is a tremendous thing for any one to influence another's will, so that when he hesitates as to a doubtful step, the other with a cheering cry induces him to take it ; it is a fearful thing to bid the poor trembler, who shuddered on the edge of the leap, to rush on, and to spring oneself across the chasm to give him encouragement. Fearful is it at any time, but far more so when the steady gaze is only assumed, when the firm tone of voice belies the condemning conscience, and when the daring act of final decision is even to him who takes the step taken in the dark. And yet how common a case, how common a character ? The very fact of encouraging or urging on another tends to urge on self, and the voice which cheers on a companion in an evil way, or to take a false step, too often hushes the inward whisper of our own remonstrating conscience. We gain firmness by making others firm, and become determined moral speculators by the mere fact of endorsing another's speculation. Few signs are more certain of far advance in evil than when a man commits himself to urge on another to a doubtful, sinful, or an uncertain course of moral action. (2) But, again, Jezebel openly persecuted the good, killed the prophets of the Lord, and strove to get Elijah within her grasp. This, too, is a sign of advance in evil. Men do not persecute boldly till they have gone on far in their own sinful course. Persecution infers in the persecutor not so much the love of vengeance and the wish to inflict pain, as the desire to get rid if possible of the testimony and witness of the good. The object of the wicked is to suppress good ; to show it to be an unreality, an imposition, a sham ; to proclaim it false to its professed principles ; to discover some flaw in the motive, or some failure in the act. "He hath a devil, and is mad." "He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils." This is the persecutor's aim. Not so much revenge and simple hate for its own sake. The foundation of this feeling is the deep conviction in the persecutor himself, that he has no ground to stand on, save one of sin ; has nothing in common with the good, and comes not into the congregation of the righteous. Yet he feels the truth of that ground, its power, its reality. He acknowledges its reality, but he dare not occupy it. He has forfeited his standing. Consequently, the more wicked a man is, the more he longs to drive the good from his ground and the more he persecutes. (3) But more than this, Jezebel made the wicked her companions ; the Baal prophets ate at her table. There is ever a step between persecuting the good and fraternising with the wicked. The latter is a step further in advance. It is positive, the other negative. To love wickedness is in one sense worse than to hate goodness. It is a harder transition for hate to blend into love, than for love to melt off into hate. We often see men not good, not holy, living without God, still hating sin and despising the wicked when brought before them, shrinking from what is mean and vile, shunning the false motive, yet not themselves holy. Positive goodness is a step further than the negative evil. (4) But the next feature of Jezebel's character is that of intrigue and calumny for the purpose of gaining her designs. No man ever stands still in the path of his moral nature. He advances or recedes, but he is in motion. When once the mind is steadily fixed upon evil, the next condition is sure to be one of tact, intrigue, and management to obtain the guilty object. Lies, untruthfulness, slander, meanness, and every kind of duplicity, crowd in and fill up the vacuum between the settled intention to do wrong, and the sinful object itself. (5) Her end is significant. A long interval elapses in which we hear but one thing of her, that her whoredoms were many ; and we are led up to that moment to imagine that either in seclusion she had become penitent, or that the sinful heart had exhausted its fire, and the inward volcano become extinct. But she appears again the very wreck of what she had been—an old woman, painted on the face and tired in the hair, leaning from the upper window to gaze down upon and attract the notice of the returning conqueror, whose sword was yet red with the blood of her husband's family. What a picture ! Lost to every sense and touch of even natural feeling, the wretch is wrapped up in self ; without God, and without an ultimate object. But such is the symptom of finished sin, it quenches the last spark of even natural feeling ; it gnaws downwards from the bloom and stem of

religion and morality, and eats away the very root of the original creation. It is a symptom of finished evil when surrounded by desolating calamity, brought on by their own wickedness, men compelled to withdraw for a little while from the stage of human action peer forth again from time to time spectral anatomies of what they were, and caricatures of even the monstrous features they originally presented. Such was Jezebel, and the incidents of her life suggest no insignificant tests of a character that is rapidly approximating to a condition of finished and hopeless iniquity. (*E. Monro.*)

CHAPTER X.

VERS. 1-17. Jehu wrote letters and sent to Samaria.—Jehu :—Jehu. He did not rest until he had destroyed the house of Ahab and the worship of Baal. There are many Jehus to-day and there is much Jehuism : religion that goes a long way, and is very earnest and zealous—only there is a fatal but in it. **I. JEHU SPENDS ALL HIS TIME IN HACKING AT OTHER PEOPLE'S SINS.** Perhaps it is too much to expect a man to do more than one thing well, but somehow one does expect that when a man is so tremendously in earnest against other people's sins he should occasionally see to his own. Have we not often met the man ? Have we not heard him denouncing the dreadful heresy of other people : storming them with hard words—papist, heretic, infidel—and then he goes down to his Bethel ? “ See my zeal for orthodoxy.” Yet he goes hard, loveless, unbrotherly, the day through. And Jehu is not always in a carriage driving furiously. I have met him sometimes with shuffling steps, whining and whimpering about other people's dreadful doings, holding up hands of pious horror and shaking the head sternly in an agony of concern as to what will become of them ! And yet he too has his calves at Bethel. My dear sir, what will become of you ? Your Jehu comforts himself that his zeal against Baal will be set over against the little matter of Bethel and the golden calves, as if the Almighty kept a debit and credit account, and that the balance will come out on the right side. Never, Jehu—never. You are not only omitting some trifling detail of religion,—it is the undoing of it all. And look again. There was a terrible danger that Jehu should be satisfied with what he had done. If anybody spoke to him about the calves at Bethel, he would take refuge at once, “ But see what I did to Baal.” If any one called him an idolater he would say, “ See how I served God in the matter of Ahab.” Ah, it is a terrible thing to cheat even ourselves thus. **II. JEHU SERVED GOD JUST SO FAR AS HE COULD SERVE HIMSELF, AND NO FURTHER.** If Jehu was going to be king, then of course he must get rid of Joram : and if he meant to keep the throne, then his safety will be to get rid of the whole house of Ahab ; for so long as one was left there would be a centre for disturbance and plots. His safety depended upon the clean sweep that he made. And the priests of Baal would be another source of mischief. So Jehu cried, “ Come, see my zeal for the Lord.” And the whip cracks and the horses gallop and not a prince of Ahab's house or a priest of Baal is left. Then Jehu goes down and worships the calves at Bethel, and worships them for the same reason—that it served his purpose. Yes, Jehu, we have seen thy zeal—thy zeal for thyself. The calves at Bethel were put up at the first as a matter of policy. When the two kingdoms were rent in twain, by possessing Jerusalem Judah had the advantage of the temple and its holy associations. So the king of Israel said, “ It will never do to let my people acknowledge the supremacy of Judah by going up to worship. To expose them to this temptation to return to Judah is too much.” So he set up the calves at Bethel and at Dan, and cried, “ These be thy gods, O Israel.” Now the same policy that prompted Jeroboam to put them up, prompted Jehu to keep them up. I know that he could explain it all and satisfy everybody—except those that were stupidly particular, you know, and quite ignorant of the ways of the world. “ You see I did not set them up ; I would not have done such a thing on any account, and I cannot but wish that they never had been set up. Of course Jeroboam is to blame, very much to blame. But now that they are set up and the people are accustomed to them, it would never do for me to interfere. They would not understand it. Really, it may seem otherwise to you, but a man in my position has to be very careful—

very." It is an utterly mean and despicable kind of religion this, serving God just as far as it serves our own purpose. To be religious, chiefly on Sundays, not because sin is hateful, but because it is the proper thing;—religious not from many love to holiness, but because it may be expedient in the long run. True religion may have its source in selfish motives, as great rivers may have their rise in marshy swamps—but Jehuism ends there. It is all through a subtle self-service. What suits me and my interests, that decides the whole duty of man. III. THEN AGAIN, JEHU GOES SO FAR IN SERVING GOD AS IT SUITS HIS TASTES. He liked furious driving and fierce excitements. Set him up behind a pair of wild horses and he was in his element. He was a soldier, and such cruel and bloody horrors were what his nature and his calling inclined him to. But when Ahab's household was slain, and Jezebel was dead, and the worshippers of Baal murdered, and the image burned, and the temple of their foul idolatry left for ever defiled—then it was quite a different thing for him to go troubling himself about pleasing God in the thousand little matters of everyday life. Some people will be religious so far as it suits their tastes. "I like it" settles everything. We cannot help our tastes and preferences—they are gifts of God like our instincts, of which they are indeed part. But the danger is when we exalt our tastes into that which regulates our duty. Many a course has for its only reason and its bit of poor defence, this—I like it. Now if religion mean anything at all, it means that I am bound to consider first and foremost in everything what God likes, and to serve Him: and I am bound to consider my likes in reference to my brother and see that I offend him not; to consider his preferences and his claims; to stay myself in my furious driving and fierce destruction, lest I should ride over him. Religion is not a system provided only to quiet my uneasy fears, and to put into me happy feelings, and to tell me not to worry myself—a ministry to our selfishness and indolence—vices that no religion need fatten, they know how to take care of themselves, and failings that no religion can satisfy. If religion mean anything it means this, and if it have any reality in it, it will show itself thus—I am bound to deny myself wherever I can really help any man in God's world. And to us workers in the Church is there not here a word of warning? All that Jehu did was done by him as the servant of the Lord—yet the very bustle and energy of the service shut out the times of meditation and waiting upon God by which he was to learn what he had to do and to find the fitness for doing it. The work, however well done, is but very ill done which steals from us the time of quiet communion with God. The reason of Jehu's failure is not far to seek. He walked not in the way of the Lord with all his heart, because his heart was not in it. There is the secret. Let Jehu be handling the reins, or in the excitement of the battle, and there all the man appeared. No task was too difficult for this determined man; no position was too exposed for his courage; nothing was too much to expect of him. But when it was to do the will of God in other things, then Jehu had excuses and hindrances ready by the score. Then the strong man was really so weak and helpless. Ah, so it is that to-day there are many Jehus—men who have a whole heart for anything, everything, but the service of God. Here is a man of business—how he can stick at it, grudging no labour, sticking at it day and night in the hope of increasing his returns—"a smart fellow," men say, "and very clever." But for the Lord this man can only sigh. Here this earnest man can content himself with excuses. Once more Jehu's name is mentioned—And Jehu slept with his fathers. The restless energetic life was over. The furious driver could not escape the old enemy. He lies and looks back upon his course, and looks forward into that dread world which is opening before him. The coveted crown is passing to another head; the sceptre is falling from the trembling grasp. (*M. G. Pearse.*) *The scavenger of God*:—By the philosopher, and still more by the philosopher who believes in the Divine guidance of human affairs, the true relation of Napoleon to the world's history will be reduced to a very simple conception: that he was launched into the world as a great natural or supernatural force, as a scourge and a scavenger, to effect a vast operation, partly positive, but mainly negative; and that when he has accomplished that work he is withdrawn as swiftly as he came. Cæsar, Attila, Tamerlane, and Mahomet are forces of this kind; the last a much more potent and abiding factor in the universe than Napoleon; another proof, if proof were needed, of how small is the permanent effect of warfare alone on the history of mankind. These men make great epochs; they embody vast transitions; they perplex and appal their contemporaries; but when viewed at a distance they are seen to be periodical and necessary incidents of the world's move-

ment. The details of their career, their morals, their methods, are then judged, interesting though they may be, to be merely subordinate details. Scavenger is a coarse word, yet it accurately represents Napoleon's first function as ruler. The volcano of the French Revolution had burned itself out. He had to clear away the cold lava; the rubbish of past destruction; the cinders and the scoræ; the fungus of corruption which had overgrown all, and was for the moment the only visible result. . . . Then he is a scourge. He purges the floor of Europe with fire. (*Lord Rosebery.*)

Ver. 9. *Who slew all these?—The wholesale slaughter* :—I see a long row of baskets coming up towards the palace of king Jehu. I am somewhat inquisitive to find out what is in the baskets. I look in and I find the gory heads of seventy slain princes. As the baskets arrive at the gate of the palace, the heads are thrown into two heaps, one on either side the gate. In the morning, the king comes out, and he looks upon the bleeding, ghastly heads of the massacred princes. Looking on either side the gate, he cries out with a ringing emphasis: "Who slew all these?" There is no use of my taking up your time in trying to give you statistics about the devastation, and the ruin, and the death which strong drink has wrought in this country. When I look upon the desolation I am almost frantic with the scene, while I cry out: "Who slew all these?" I can answer that question in half a minute. The ministers of Christ who have given no warning; the courts of law that have offered the licensure; the women who give strong drink on New Year's Day; the fathers and mothers who have rum on the sideboard; the hundreds of thousands of Christian men and women in the land who are staled in their indifference on this subject—they slew all these! I am now going to tell you what I think are the sorrows and the doom of the drunkard, so that you to whom I speak may not come to the place of torment. 1. The first suffering of the drunkard is in the loss of his good name. God has so arranged it, that no man ever loses his good name except through his own act. All the hatred of men and all the assaults of devils cannot destroy a man's good name, if he really maintains his integrity. If a man is honest, and pure, and Christian, God looks after him. 2. Another loss which the inebriate suffers is that of self-respect. Just as soon as a man wakes up and finds that he is the captive of strong drink, he feels demeaned. 3. I go further, and say that the inebriate suffers from the loss of his usefulness. Do you not recognise the fact that many of those who are now captives of strong drink, only a little while ago were foremost in the churches and in reformatory institutions? 4. I go on, and say that the inebriate suffers from the loss of physical health. 5. Again: the inebriate suffers through the loss of his home. I do not care how much he loves his wife and children, if this passion for strong drink has mastered him, he will do the most outrageous things, and if he could not get drink in any other way, he would sell his family into eternal bondage. How many homes in our city have been broken up in that way, no one but God knows. 6. But my subject takes a deeper tone, and that is, that the inebriate suffers from the loss of the soul. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. *Is thine heart right.—The right state of the heart* :—For the sake of order I bring the subject before you under four general heads of discourse. If our hearts be right, they will be right. I. IF THE STATE OF OUR HEARTS BE RIGHT, THEN WILL THEY BE RIGHT WITH GOD. A heart truly right with God implies, 1. That we venerate Him. 2. That we entirely submit ourselves to Him. 3. That by the cultivation of a devotional spirit, we maintain a sacred intercourse with Him. We ask, then, Is thine heart right with God? Does it venerate Him? submit to Him? aspire after Him? You know the state of your own heart: Answer these inquiries as before God. II. IF OUR HEARTS BE RIGHT, THEY ARE RIGHT WITH CHRIST. Till this be the case, the heart cannot ever be right with God. 1. When it accepts His sacrifice as the only ground on which to claim the remission of sins. 2. The heart is not right with Christ unless it loves Him. 3. When the heart is right with Christ, there is an habitual confidence in His intercession. Is thine heart thus right with Christ? Dost thou thus believe in Him? thus love Him? thus habitually confide in Him? III. IF OUR HEARTS BE RIGHT, THEY ARE RIGHT WITH THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. I mean, by this expression, the whole company of his militant and professing people here on earth; the spiritual Israel of God. Now, when the heart is in a right state, 1. The Church is avowed. 2. Its members are loved. 3. When our heart is right with

the Church, we feel that we are identified with it. Here, too, let me ask, "Is thine heart right?" Dost thou avow thyself a member of Christ's church? love its members? identify thyself with its interests? and labour to promote them? IV. IF THE HEART BE RIGHT, IT WILL BE RIGHT WITH ITSELF. There are strange oppositions and divisions in the heart; and this cannot be a right state of it. There is opposition between conviction and choice. Many know the good, who choose it not, who make no effort for its attainment. There is opposition between will and power. To will is indeed present with them, but how to perform they find not. There is the struggle between the flesh and the spirit; the counteraction of graces by opposite evils. There is the stunted growth. The seed is at least so far choked, that there is no fruit unto perfection. When it is thus with us, the heart is manifestly wrong. When it is right, it exerts an enlightened sway over the whole man: All its powers are in obedient order, all its graces fruitful and abundant. We therefore again ask, Is thine heart right with itself? Is it divided, and therefore faulty? or has God united it, that it may fear His name? 1. Perhaps our heart is wrong. 2. Perhaps it is in part right. 3. Know and use the means by which this may be accomplished. Exercise faith in the Saviour, live in habitual watchfulness and self-denial, "keeping the heart with all diligence, for that out of it are the issues of life." (R. Watson.) *Is thine heart right?*—These were the proud words of one, who little knew what was in his own heart. But they contain an inquiry, of no small importance to every fallen child of Adam. "Is thine heart right?"—I. IN ITS VIEWS OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH? Has it formed a right judgment concerning thy natural condition, as a sinner against God; and respecting the way of bettering that condition? I am aware that many regard this as the proper business of the understanding, rather than of the heart. Hence they excuse their erroneous views in religion, by pleading want of ability to discover the truth. Hence the poor think it enough to say, "I am no scholar!" And persons, far wiser than they in worldly wisdom, have pretended, "that a man is not responsible for what he believes, and that it is not his fault if he be mistaken." On the one hand we are informed, that "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." II. IN ITS DEPENDANCE? On what is it actually resting, as the ground of its hopes for eternity? "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." III. IN ITS CHOICE? In what does it delight? what does it esteem to be the chief good? IV. IN ITS INTENTIONS AND PURPOSES? Having discovered the truth—rested on Christ—chosen the Lord for your welcome portion—what is now your object in life? V. IN ITS ACTUAL INFLUENCE ON THY CONDUCT? Many, alas, woe-fully deceive themselves, by forming excellent resolutions—never to be put in practice. In such a case, let self-flattery pretend what it may, the heart must be wrong. Remember, in conclusion, that if the heart be not right, nothing else is right. Even the better parts of your conduct, for want of this, will still be offensive in the sight of that God, who "seeth not as man seeth." If you be conscious that your heart is not right, then remember that "God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things." It may be safe from human scrutiny—but not from his eye. If you would have your heart set right, bring it to God in faith and prayer. He will give you a "new" one—a "clean" one—a "perfect" one. (J. Jowett, M.A.) *A right heart:*—The first theory of the Gospel is, that the heart of man is all wrong. God said to Noah, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. viii. 21). David says, "They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy." Jeremiah says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Christ gives some terrible pictures of the human heart; He likened it to a sepulchre full of corruption. I. A HEART THAT IS RIGHT IS A TRUSTFUL HEART. The Christian life begins with faith in Christ, and is all through sustained by faith in Christ. Faith in Christ leads the anxious, inquiring heart into rest. A triple foundation: the promises of God, the witness of the Spirit, and the testimony of experience. II. A HEART THAT IS RIGHT IS A CONSECRATED HEART. A heart that is not wholly Christ's cannot be right. Consecration is the way to purity. It is the full surrender of ourselves to God. The giving up of everything that would hinder the Divine life in the soul. Many Christians are not happy because there is something they keep back from God. There must be a giving up of self. The whole question is, self or Christ. There is a voice coming from Calvary's Cross, which tells us we must not live unto ourselves, but unto Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us. III. A HEART THAT IS RIGHT IS A PURE HEART. The Saviour's teaching was always

toward the heart. Out of the heart are the issues of life. He said little about the intellect; but a great deal about the heart. IV. A HEART THAT IS RIGHT IS AT REST. That which the soul needs is rest; it needs to feel that it is God's, and that God is its possession. (*C. E. Crosthwaite.*) *The evil heart*:—Samuel Marsden, the New Zealand missionary, well known for his piety and humility, when told one day by a friend how he was slandered, exclaimed: "Sir, these men do not know the worst. Why, sir, if I were to walk through the streets with my heart laid bare, the very boys would pelt me!" *Heart right*:—"When Sir Walter Raleigh had laid his head upon the block," says an eloquent divine, "he was asked by the executioner whether it lay aright. Whereupon, with the calmness of a hero and the faith of a Christian, he returned an answer, the power of which we all shall feel when our head is tossing and turning on death's uneasy pillow,—'It matters little, my friend, how the head lies providing the heart be right.'"
(R. Steele.) *Purity of heart*:—It does not consist in the external exercise of religion; the heart does not always write itself upon the outward actions. These may shine and glisten, while that in the meantime may be noisome and impure. In a pool you may see the uppermost water clear, but if you cast your eye to the bottom, you shall see that to be dirt and mud. To rate a man's internals by his externals, and what works in his breast by what appears in his face, is a rule very fallible. For we often see specious practices spread over vile and base principles; as a rotten, unwholesome body may be clothed with the finest silks. There are often many leagues' distance between a man's behaviour and his heart. (*R. South.*) *Acquaintance with our own heart*:—I remember once holding on by the ground on the top of Vesuvius, and looking full into the crater all swirling with sulphurous flames. Have you ever looked into your hearts like that, and seen the wreathing smoke and the flashing fire that are there? (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Give me thine hand*.—*Christian hand-shaking*:—Jehu had been making an exterminating assault upon the idolatry of his day, and Jehonadab comes out to offer him congratulation. They meet half-way: and one exclaims to the other, in all the ardour of friendly recognition, "Give me thy hand!" The mode of salutation is different in different countries. In some lands they kneel before the visitor. In some, fall on their faces; in others they stand upright and give a slight bend to the neck. But when two persons, believing in the same thing, and working for the same object, and trusting in the same God, and hoping for the same heaven, come face to face, look each other in the eye, and cross palms with a tight grip, and shake hands, that is human equality and Christian brotherhood. I fall down before no man in obeisance: I gaze down upon no man in arrogance; but, looking into the face of friend and foe, I am ready to exclaim in the words of Jehu to Jehonadab, "Give me thy hand!" Come, now, and let us get near to each other in a plain, loving, Christian talk. My brother! my sister! my child! I. LET US JOIN HANDS IN CHRISTIAN WELCOME. II. AGAIN: LET US CROSS HANDS IN CONGRATULATION. III. AGAIN: LET US JOIN HANDS OF CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY. IV. AGAIN: LET US JOIN HANDS IN A BARGAIN. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *The hand-grip of loyalty*:—On drove Jehu, determined to get the lines of government into his hands and make sure of his standing ground. On his way to Samaria, the true capital of Israel (for Jezreel was the seat of the summer palace only), he met Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, on the highway. Now Jehonadab was a respectable, conservative sort of a citizen, with a good name for quiet steady purpose, the kind of man who would be of the greatest help to Jehu if only he were thoroughly committed to him and could be counted upon for loyal support. Jehu did not purpose to be in any doubt as to where people stood. He must know whether they were for him or against him. One cannot help but admire that in Jehu. There was no neutral ground in him, and he would not endure it in others. So when he met Jehonadab he stopped his horses and saluted him, and said, "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" And Jehonadab looked straight back into his eyes and said, "It is." Jehu said, "If it be, give me thine hand." And as Jehonadab reached out his hand Jehu took it with a warm, strong grip that lifted him right up into his chariot beside him, and they drove on together in the young king's chariot to Samaria. From this story of Jehu there are some pertinent and helpful lessons to be drawn. 1. God's call is personal. When the young prophet came to Jehu, and standing before the group of captains said he had a message for one of them, and Jehu asked which one, the prophet answered, "To thee, O captain." It was a personal message, and when Jehu followed him away he knew nothing except that he was

following the prophet of the Lord God to receive a message from God, and thus he was called to His kingdom. So God sends personal messages to every one of us. The call to salvation is personal to you. God has made us as individuals. Each has his own personal mind and heart, his own personal needs, his individual requirements. Each of us has ability and talent that are peculiar to ourselves. 2. There is no peace save in goodness. When King Joram came out to meet Jehu he was very anxious to have peace, but Jehu could still feel the oil of God upon his head and hear the words of the prophet in his ears commanding him to stamp out the wickedness that had devastated the land. So Jehu answered that there could be no peace while Jezebel with her witchcrafts and her wickedness lived. 3. Only by giving our whole selves to God and throwing our full force on the Lord's side can we please Him. See Jehu as the wicked king turns to fly. A weak turning back now will mean failure and overthrow. He has been called upon for serious and solemn work, and he must not hesitate. Many of our attacks on evil are of no avail, and the arrows fall harmless against the enemies of God and man, because we pull with a faint heart and a weak hand. 4. We must choose sides for or against Jesus. We cannot be neutral. When Jehu stood under the window of the summer palace in Jezreel, with painted Jezebel leaning out in accusation, he cried aloud, so that all the officers of the palace could hear, "Who is on my side? Who?" There could be no neutrality after that. They had to choose between Jezebel and Jehu, and it did not take them long to make the choice. They cast out that old painted viper who had brought such sorrow on the land. So our King Jesus, who has the right to be your King, is saying to you, "Who is on My side? Who?" You must choose between your sins and Jesus. 5. It is loyal hearts that Christ wants. Everything else is secondary. "Are you loyal to Me?" that is the question of Jesus. When Jehu met Jehonadab he said to himself, "Ah, there is Jehonadab. A very nice kind of a man. He could be worth a great deal to me. But it all depends on whether he is loyal or not. If his heart is with me, he is worth more than a regiment of soldiers; but if he is not for me, loyally, he might do me a great deal of damage." So when he is close enough to Jehonadab he stops and calls to him, saying, "Jehonadab, is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" And Jehonadab looks back with honest eyes and says, "It is." And Jehu answers, "If it be, give me thine hand." And out comes the hand of the other man, and Jehu takes it in a great strong grip, and not only by the strength of his grasp, but by the look in his eyes, he makes Jehonadab know what he means. And he steps right up in the chariot, and rides on with the king in honour and peace. What a suggestive illustration is this of what Jesus Christ is saying to every one of you who have not yet given Him assurance of your earnest loyalty. He is knocking at the door of your heart. It is your heart He wants; your loyal and loving service. And He is saying to you, "If you will but make up your mind, if you will but open your heart to Me, if you will but give Me your loyal hand-grip, then we shall go on the way together." Jehonadab was safe in the king's chariot. You shall be safe when the King's loving strong hand lifts you up in the chariot beside Himself and you ride onward in peace and honour towards heaven. (L. A. Banks, D.D.).

Ver. 16. Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.—*The nature of Christian zeal*:—Truly it is delightful and instructive to see any creature exhibiting the proofs of an ardent zeal for the glory of the great Creator, and directing the energies of his nature to this one object as the chief end of existence. Then, and then only, may it be said that he fills and adorns the station allotted to him in the scale of being; and he becomes sublimely associated with Deity when every selfish consideration is absorbed by an intense desire that God may be all in all. Such character and conduct Jehu affected to exhibit in this history. And in the person of Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, he found a witness of his deeds the most suitable he could have desired. Our object in selecting the passage is not to hold out an example, but a caution. The light of sound instruction is to be found here. Let us reflect on the indications of a zeal essentially defective, and on those of one permanently influential. I. THE INDICATIONS OF A ZEAL ESSENTIALLY DEFECTIVE. It will be proper here to notice—1. The motives which usually prevail. They are such as are accordant with the reign of selfishness. Of course, it is not intended to enter into a minute and extended investigation of the various motives which may be brought into play, in connection with the exhibitions of religious zeal. A few may suffice which are known to have an

influence on the minds of men with regard to missionary operations. For instance, natural compassion for the temporal miseries of our species. Far be it from us to speak in terms of disparagement of such a feeling, it is excellent, so far as it goes; as on its influence, in a great measure, depends the preservation of the general framework of society. It need scarcely to be remarked, that, however excellent this feeling of compassion may be, it may exist, and in a strong degree, apart from any concern for the glory of God or the welfare of men's souls. A desire to propagate our own opinions and practices in matters of religion has often produced considerable effect on the minds of men. The vanity to be esteemed benevolent may also prove a powerful motive to exertion. 2. The degree of excitement produced by an appeal to such motives may be as strong as any of which nature is capable. Such as we have referred to evidently animated the Arabs in the infancy of the Moslem faith, and filled them with a vigour and a daring that scorned all opposition and difficulty, and that resulted in wonderful success. And were not these the motives to which appeal was made, when by the preachings of Peter the Hermit, and of the Pope, the indignation of Europe was roused; and when her potent states vied with each other in pouring forth their armed multitudes to meet the Saracens in the Holy Land—when the victorious soldiers waded through the blood of their foes to sing praises to Christ at His altar, as if in defiance of the precept which He had enjoined on His followers—"Bless them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you"? 3. There are certain limitations, by which such motives will be necessarily restrained. The coincidence of the gratification of self-love with the claims of philanthropy will ever determine the extent of activity. And this coincidence we cannot expect to be of long continuance. Some novel and therefore more popular cause will divert the attention. 4. The improbability of enjoying the Divine blessing while actuated by such motives. That God may bless, notwithstanding their influence, we are not inclined to doubt, but certainly we are not warranted to expect a blessing, unless taught to act on higher principles. Let us therefore seriously examine ourselves with regard to our real motives.

II. THE INDICATIONS OF A ZEAL PERMANENTLY INFLUENTIAL; of which it may be predicted at the outset of its career that it will prove co-extensive with the energies of life. 1. Such zeal must arise, we apprehend, from the effectual application of the Gospel to the heart. Without this, we cannot conceive how a man can really desire the increase of true religion, as he can have no just idea of its nature. 2. Motives corresponding with this experience will incline the believer to seek the conversion of sinners in the heathen world. Such we conceive the following to be. A desire to promote the glory of God, whose character is dishonoured by the practices of idolatry. 3. Universality and permanence of zeal are thus secured. Selfish zeal is partial; in the case of Jehu, the idolatry of Baalim is overthrown; but an idolatry equally offensive is countenanced at Bethel and Dan. He who acts under the influence of the motives peculiar to a renewed mind, is likely to aim at universality of obedience to Divine directions; and as He who has begun a good work in him, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ; his zeal, allowing for some variations of intensity and modes of exercise, will continue till time is exchanged for eternity. 4. Some important illustrations of the zeal which springs from the power of religion within. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave a perfect exemplification of this zeal. Of course His zeal was displayed under very different circumstances from ours, and was free from the internal counteraction that we too often feel; but in this leading feature, we observe the general analogy; His zeal proceeded from the purity of His character, it was the index of His religious feeling, of His regard for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls. 5. The intensity of our zeal will depend on that of our religion: the one cannot languish without the other. Hence our real prosperity may be more deeply involved in the vigour of our zeal for the Lord than we have perhaps suspected: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee" (Psalm cxxii. 6). The health of a tree is promoted, rather than injured, in bearing fruit. (*J. Jones.*) *Zeal illustrated by the character of Jehu*:—In regions where civilisation has made but feeble advances, opinions grossly erroneous prevail concerning some of the most valuable productions of the earth. Substances which, among nations enlightened by science, are daily introduced with signal utility in medicine, in manufactures, in various arts which embellish the paths of life, are indiscriminately neglected and despised; or, in consequence of mischievous effects produced by a rash and unskilful applica-

tion of them, or by heterogeneous mixtures with which they are debased, become objects of aversion and of dread. Or having been found, in casual trials, to be endued with beneficial powers; they are extolled as invested with a kind of magical influence, and are blindly employed as possessed of universal efficacy. Similar misconceptions not unfrequently predominate even among ourselves concerning highly estimable endowments of the mind; and predominate from similar causes, a very inaccurate insight into the nature of those endowments, and a hasty and unwarrantable use and appropriation of them. Thus by some genius is admired as an all-powerful talent, grasping without an effort the treasures of Taste and Knowledge; while by others it is depreciated as unfitting the intellect for patient research, and terminating in tinsel and superficial attainments. And thus it is that industry at one time is dignified as nearly superseding the necessity of penetration and invention; at another is degraded as cold, plodding, servile, insensible to refinement, the associate of pedantry and dulness. Among mental qualities there is scarcely, perhaps, one more commonly misunderstood and less accurately appreciated than zeal. One class of men, surveying with indignation the timidity and selfishness of the lukewarm, applaud that conduct in themselves as unsophisticated zeal, which is deeply tinged with indiscretion, insubordination, and unchristian vehemence. An opposite class, deeming zeal but another name for fiery intolerance and enthusiastic wildness, abhor it as restless, sanguinary, and fanatical; and look with suspicion on moderation itself, until it has subsided so low as scarcely to be distinguishable from apathy.

1. The undertaking in which Jehu was engaged was the extermination of the family of Ahab. By the murder of Naboth, and by habitual idolatry, Ahab stood condemned to death under the impartial justice of the Divine law. The sentence was denounced. It is not however by a single characteristic that genuine zeal is ascertained. In colour the counter may exhibit a perfect resemblance of the unadulterated gold. But how stands the comparison as to weight, as to solidity, as to ductility? Let us bring the zeal of Jehu to the test of additional criterions. 2. In the prosecution of his object Jehu speedily displayed a ferocious and cruel spirit. 3. Zeal necessarily bears a character of publicity. It manifests itself in action; and, when directed to objects of extensive importance, is constrained to labour before the eyes and amidst the concurrence of men. Genuine zeal for religion, thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Christian humility, though it cannot retire from notice, courts not popular observation. Steadfast, yet unobtrusive, it submits to the general gaze, to the general noise of tongues, which, without relinquishing its appointed office, it cannot avoid; but pushes not forward vain-glorious pretensions, delights not to become the spectacle of wonder, the theme of applause. 4. The zeal that is from above is, first, pure. However ardent in the prosecution of its object, it resorts not to means which are unjustifiable. It abominates craft and duplicity. It abhors the suggestions of that worldly wisdom, which teaches to do evil that good may come. 5. Genuine zeal for religion is, in the strictest import of the terms, zeal for the Lord. Its prime object is the glory of Jehovah, the honour of His name, the purity of His worship, the influence of His law. Is such the zeal of Jehu? Are his cruelty, his ostentation, his falsehood, no more than heterogeneous mixtures, stupendous indeed in collective magnitude, yet no more than extraneous impurities, unnaturally adhering to a latent yet actual zeal for religion; clouding and debasing the living flame, yet without extinguishing or superseding it? (*T. Gisborne, M.A.*)

Religious zeal.—It has been remarked, that were the history of any private family faithfully recorded it would prove as useful and interesting as that of the most renowned nation. Perhaps I may add, with equal truth, that were the intricacies of any human character fairly developed, it would afford a study no less instructive than either; and I would further remark that the only very close details of individual character which are to be found are in the writings of the Old Testament; for, whilst ordinary biographers treat their subjects with a bias of favouritism or dislike, the inspired penmen of Scripture equally disclose both faults and virtues, and show that mixture of good and evil, which, but for our self-love, we should recognise in ourselves; and, but for our shortsighted prejudice, we should see in others. There is no human character without its light and shade. Now, Jehu is a remarkable instance of what I have said, concerning both the fidelity of the sacred writers and the universal mixture of good and evil in human nature. "Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel;" and, in consequence of his doing this and of his executing

God's judgments against the house of Ahab, a blessing was pronounced upon his family, and the throne was secured to them to the fourth generation. But here the righteous course of Jehu stopped short; when all the excitement attending his bloody enterprises died away, his zeal for the Lord fled with it; ordinary circumstances and ordinary temptations resumed their influence and empire over his carnal nature; he took no further heed to walk in God's law but fell into idolatry. Now, abstractedly one would imagine that such changes of sentiment and irresolution of conduct could only arise in a feeble and capricious character; but Jehu did not belong to this class. I think, my brethren, that this history affords a striking lesson to every Christian, which on the one hand should teach him to distrust in himself a religious zeal produced by merely temporary external causes; and on the other to rest satisfied with nothing short of an abiding principle of faith, silently operating on the heart. We must remember that zeal is in itself but a neutral passion, and only good or bad according to the object about which it is concerned; and when engaged in what is absolutely good, being liable to discouragement through the coldness and indifference of others, it is a passion which subjects men to many trials and to much mortification. Hence it often comes to pass that ardent resolutions and sanguine aspirations, for lack of sympathy, fall back with disgust upon the heart which conceived them, and never revive again for the same worthy purpose. How many have started schemes of the noblest charity, which, failing to elicit co-operation, the feelings which originated them have become permanently embittered! Now in nothing, I apprehend, so much as in religion is zeal liable to carry us beyond the strict line of sincerity and stability; and this principally arises from religious motives affecting us so much more deeply than any other. When you can induce the mind to receive with entire credit that there are such places as heaven and hell—eternal torture and never-ending peace—then you reach depths of feeling which cannot be touched by any other argument. Those signal blessings or severe trials, with which Providence is apt to visit us for our improvement, are often the immediate cause of high resolutions. Other lighter causes operate in the same manner: the admonitions of a friend—the awakening eloquence of a severe sermon—will occasionally flash before the soul the awfulness of eternity, and kindle the holiest determinations; but the friend departs—the sermon ends—and we are again entangled with the world. Sometimes we pursue the ordinances of religion so strictly that we persuade ourselves we are doing God extraordinary service thereby; but from this delusion we also awake. Indeed, these and similar external appeals, meant as they undoubtedly are to provoke us to zeal, must be received with caution—they must not be presumed upon—we must take care that their effect upon us be not merely an imaginative sentiment, but rather a deep conviction, so grounded in the heart as to produce steady and uniform obedience, even when the exciting cause has passed away! “Come, see my zeal for the Lord!” is the Pharisaical challenge of some ardent believer. To him the ordinary piety of more modest Christians is not worth the name of religion: his own prayers, his own labours, his own conduct, are the only standard of service which the Lord will accept: whatever falls short of these is but husks and vanity; and so he rashly arrogates his pretensions until a change of circumstances shows him his own weakness. 1. It will be my endeavour to show you how to acquire this assurance; and, first of all, avoid religious excitement—avoid the cultivation of feelings which, however sincerely entertained at the time, have to confess their hollowness in the searching privacies of the chamber. We are told, remember, to “pray in secret”—“not to let our right hand know what our left doeth”—“to commune with our own heart, and to be still”; we are to ask God to try and prove our sincerity, as being able to accomplish what is not in the power of either ourselves or of the world. Until, therefore, we are assured, by secret self-examinations, that these rules and descriptions are practically exemplified in our own lives, we should avoid obtaining, by public excitation, a character for religious zeal to which conscience in private gives the lie. When once a man feels that he has a character for religion to sustain before the world, which he cannot support satisfactorily when alone—when to men he must appear one thing, and he involuntarily knows that to himself he is another—he has made the first step towards hypocrisy, and hypocrites God always deserts! 2. Let me tell you another way of both increasing and proving your zeal, which is this—be fervent in prayer. You will often find—the very best of you, I fear—that when your prayers are ended your thoughts have throughout been wandering, and

that scarcely a petition which fell from your lips had any real sense attached to it: other things were in your mind, interesting and absorbing it. (*A. Gatty, M.A.*) *Jehu's false zeal*:—It is the son of Rechab, the founder of a monastic sect which, amid prevailing idolatry, is still true to Jehovah. He gives, doubtless, a priestly benediction, or approving word, for the sanguinary work already done. It invites the quick reply. "If our hearts are at one in this,—you, man of peace and I, of war,—then let us strike hands in ratification." The clasp is strong, and the stern ascetic is drawn up into the chariot, to have breathed in his ear, the still more horrible secret which the avenger is hasting to execute. Here we get our first lesson. **I. BAD MEN ARE GLAD OF THE APPROVAL OF RELIGIOUS TEACHERS IN THEIR SCHEMES.** The multitudes exhibit the deep and unshaken belief that there is an impartial and omniscient Power, who maintains a perfect government in His universe. Spite of all denial, infidelity, and bravado, the wicked have the stubborn conviction that God will visit for their sins. At the same time, the desire is strangely parent of the hope, that He can be persuaded to mitigate the judgment, or consent to their malign plans. His representatives are regarded as clothed with a certain authority which may be helpful or prejudicial. If their sanction can be obtained, the evil-doer often fancies the Lord is thereby committed. The anathemas of Pope Gregory brought the haughty Henry IV. to his feet in abject entreaty, while the tormenting conscience of Charles IX. was quieted, for a little, at the news of the "Te Deums" sung in Rome over the massacre of the Huguenots. The Divine will was thought, in both cases, to accord with the act of His viceregents. It seems to be forgotten, that, if any servant is false, his Lord is not therefore untrue; if he is mistaken, his liege is not also; if he gives permit to wrong, the "God without iniquity, just and right," does not. The statutes of Christian states may allow and protect slavery, prostitution, dram-selling, easy divorce, but he who thinks therefore to have secured the approval of his Maker in such practices is utterly deceived. The wink of devils ought to bring even a slender saint to his senses. The smile and applause of the wolf ought to create suspicion in his unwary partner. While the world endures, he will try to secure the alliance of the shepherd. Returning to the pair, of such contrasted presence, hurrying on towards Samaria, we catch another sentence from the excited soldier's lips, "Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord." At once we bethink ourselves that—**II. TRUE PIETY IS NEVER BOASTFUL.** Jehu verily thought that he cared much for Jehovah, as he gloated in imagination over the complete destruction of the worshippers of Baal. Idolatry had proved the weakness of the nation and undermined the throne. He was king, and would sit secure only when these perfidious, irreligious subjects were slain. He found that, to rid the earth of them, was to exalt his own name and prestige. The "stroke of policy" was a stroke of piety. He and the Lord were fighting together. He, at any rate, would get great glory out of it. "My zeal" must advertise itself—can never survive unless it does. Holy ardour, on the contrary, is never aware of its own exhibition. The scourge in the hands of the Christ was the token of his zeal for the honour and purity of His Father's house. It was a ready means to a worthy end—aimed at effect indeed, but not display. John the Baptist, of fiery purpose, was content to be only "a voice," that the Messiah might be seen. Mary's box of ointment has shed its sweet perfume of loving unworthiness through the centuries, but she never dreamed of its mention as a costly offering. All the really great things which the disciples of Christ have performed have been without ostentation or consciousness of their superiority. It is a Hindu saying that, "Lowliness excites no man's envy," but it does inspire the like grace in a sincere heart. Well had it been for this hero of Israel, if he could have heard the later word of one, every whit his equal in false zeal, but who had learned in the white light of Divine rebuke, that "the things which are despised hath God chosen, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." We watch now for the illustration of the single-hearted soldier's zeal, and witnessing the trap set and sprung, and the revolting butchery, are forced to conclude—**III. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS ARE LIKELY TO REGARD THE SUGGESTIONS OF THEIR PASSIONS, AS THE DIVINE COMMAND.** It was a momentous order which Jehu received from the prophet, to destroy the whole reigning family. It came to a ready spirit. By the solemn law of the nation the unfaithful king and all related to him had forfeited their claim upon life. It was a fatal transgression to depart from the Living God. The executioner might be pestilence, or flames leaping

from the clouds, or an invading host, or some mighty man armed for the work. Right thoroughly it had been done. The ghastly pile of seventy head of princes, laid on either side of the gate of Jezreel, had witnessed to this servant's energy and fidelity. The taste of blood had created, as in the tiger, an imperious thirst. A wild glare was in his eye as the Rechabite tried to read its secret. Interpreting his orders that not only the dynasty of Ahab, but that of Baal too, must fall by the sword, he set about it in terrible earnest. Craft and cruelty combined against priest and devotee. All who had come up to the solemn festival came, instead, to the shambles, and not one escaped. So Mahomet-Ali conquered the Mamelukes; so Amalric stamped out heresy in Languedoc, bidding, "Kill them all. The Lord will know who are His." It was the complete and final overthrow of the accursed system of Baal worship. Was it not, like the hangman's act, a dread necessity? We cannot answer; but, till we find precise instructions for such wholesale slaughter, we shall presume he exceeded his commission. So have men ever since been construing their low inclinations, as being also the good pleasure of their Creator. Every form of sin has had such apology. Divinities have been invented to favour and further the most depraved appetites, while, to-day, not a few are trying to believe that God is "altogether such an one as" themselves. To make our own moral standards, is to antagonise the eternal laws. The closing scene of the tragedy passes before us. It is evident from it, that—IV. TO DESTROY ONE FORM OF SIN IS NOT TO ABOLISH ALL. We see this zealous soul going straightway to offer sacrifice at the shrine of the golden calves, after the fashion of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin. Even if Jehu had been familiar from youth with this corrupted religious system, he did know that at Jerusalem the true God was worshipped, not in the likeness of living things. His besom could have swept away the altars and images of the one form of idolatry as well as the other. Not seeing nor embracing his opportunity, he gave the lie to all professions of love and jealousy for the Lord. "His zeal for righteousness did not turn inwards and burn up his own sins." The popular faith answered well enough for him. He would be as good as the average. What a pattern of the modern saint! Hot in indignation toward that which affects him not; very careful where his seeming interests are involved, the old couplet fits him well, as all who—

Compound for sins they are inclined to,
Condemning those they have no mind to.

Such easy terms do men make with God! Such choices are they ready for, and pride themselves in! Making a merit of temperance, they indulge in lust; lavish with their wealth, they are vindictive toward one who has wronged them; harping much on philanthropy, they are untrustworthy. One sin cherished is enough to keep the soul for ever under condemnation. A slight flaw in the diamond renders it unfit to be set in the crown. Heaven is lost by withholding the whole heart. This career, so startling and dramatic, terminated sadly. Reward was given for his grim but appointed service. Judgment was visited for his profane worship. His strong arm lost its terror. His last days were clouded by the denial of his ambition, that his name might abide in the rulers of the future. Furious driving is sure to end in wreck, unless the omnipotent hand is also upon the reins, guiding the impassioned soul along the King's highway. That he spurned it is plain, as we read in Hosea: "And I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and I will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel." (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Zeal without consistency*:—Jehu is not in any sense an interesting person. An energetic and bold man; prompt in action, determined and thoroughgoing, unfeeling and unscrupulous; well fitted for his particular work, a work of judgment upon those who had sinned beyond mercy. He had a Divine commission, and executed it faithfully. In softer days we read impatiently of acts of severity, even when done in God's behalf or by God's command. We do not feel sin as we ought, and therefore we often cherish a kind of morbid sympathy with the sinner. Such was Jehu's office, and he discharged it well. He could say with truth, as he says in the former part of the text, "Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord." It was not here that he failed. His zeal for God was thorough in act, and perhaps sincere in intention. The fault was that, while he had a real zeal, he had no true obedience. He could enforce God's law upon others, but he could not obey it himself. He maintained that political expedient of symbols of worship placed

in his frontier cities by which the first king of the ten tribes had sought to keep his people from being attracted back to the house of David in Jerusalem; he continued the worship of the golden calves that were in Bethel and that were in Dan, though he had broken down the image of Baal and the temple of Baal, and destroyed his worshippers in Samaria. And therefore in those days, even in the reign of him who had done such good service to the cause of God in his earlier years, "the Lord began to cut Israel short"; and Jehu himself is handed down to us not as an example, but rather as a warning, while upon his tomb we read the condemning inscription: "Zeal without consistency; zeal without obedience; zeal without love." 1. Zeal is the same word as fervour. In its forcible original meaning, it is the bubbling up of the boiling spirit; the opposite of an impassive, cold-hearted indifference; the outburst of that generous indignation which cannot endure to see right trampled underfoot by might; the overflowing of that gratitude, devotion, love towards God, which counts no toil irksome and no suffering intolerable if it may express its own sense of His greatness, of His goodness, of His long-suffering of Christ, and draws others by its example to know and to speak good of His name; the glowing warmth of that Divine humanity which would willingly spend, and be spent, in snatching but one or two brands from the burning. This is what we mean by zeal. The zeal of Jehu was of a lower order than this. Yet even Jehu may reprove. Would that there were more of us—must I say, that there were any of us?—who could say in any true sense, like Jehu, "Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord!" Any zeal for God, even an ignorant, a mistaken, a rash zeal, were better far for us than none. Instead of it what have we? We show our zeal for God—if that sacred name can thus be parodied—chiefly by the infliction of arbitrary and most disproportionate punishment upon offenders, not against the moral law of God but against the moral law of the world. Where God has spoken, man may sin and scarcely suffer; where the world has spoken, no sorrow and no suffering, no lapse of time, no sincerity of repentance, and no consistency of amendment, is allowed to replace the erring man or woman within the pale of a human sympathy, or even of a Christian charity. Such is zeal for God, when debased and disfigured by the modifying hand of man. 2. And this brings us to apply to ourselves, in the way of counsel and warning, the unfavourable part of the character before us. Jehu had a zeal for God, but Jehu nevertheless took no heed to walk in God's law with all his heart. (1) There is great force in that word, "took no heed"—observed not, as the margin renders it—to walk in God's way. We all know what heedlessness is in a child. In the things of religion, in the ways of God and of the soul, we are all too much children. To the heedlessness of human nature most of our sins may be traced up. "Wherewithal shall a man cleanse his way?" &c. (Ps. cxix. 9). (2) Jehu took no heed to walk in God's law "with all his heart." Is not this the fault in our service, the cause of our heedlessness, that the heart is not right with God? Therefore it was that Jehu gave zeal, but could not give obedience; gave zeal, but could not give consistency; gave zeal, but could not give love. And therefore it is that we too often give neither zeal nor obedience, neither zeal nor love. Christian zeal, like Christian faith, worketh by love. If you are tender to the suffering, if you are plain with the sinful—yet both alike in humility and in all kindness—then you may hope that your zeal has something in it of Christ. But, most of all, look within. Look to the heart. See whether there is any love of God there. (*The Dean of Llandaff.*) **Religious zeal:**—I. OUR ZEAL SHOULD BE A LASTING AND INCREASING PRINCIPLE. Not like light from the thunder-cloud, the evanescent result of passing circumstances, but rather like the great luminary of heaven, steadily beaming on our path, cheering us in every situation, and gliding with hope the dark prospect of the grave. II. TO ACQUIRE THIS ASSURANCE, AVOID RELIGIOUS EXCITEMENT. We are told to "pray in secret"—"not to let our right hand know what our left doeth." We are to ask God to prove our sincerity; the recesses of the soul are His dwelling-place. Until we are assured, by self-examination, that these descriptions are exemplified in our own lives, let us avoid obtaining, by religious public excitation, a character for religious zeal to which conscience in private gives the lie. III. GENUINE ZEAL FOR GOD IS FOUNDED AND MATURED IN THE HEART AND CHARACTER BY THE COUNSELS OF THE SPIRIT. After Paul's conversion, three days of blindness and fasting were necessary for the conviction of his error and the growth of a counter resolution. His subsequent zeal in the ministry shows that the principles must be established by

an inward conviction, and not be moved by mere outward impressions (1 Cor. ix. 26, 27). IV. INSTEAD OF CONGRATULATING OURSELVES THEN, THAT WE KNOW NOTHING OF THESE FEELINGS, LET US BE HUMBLER THAT WE ARE DEVOID OF THEM. In wanting them altogether, we want that without which religion is an empty profession. V. WHEREVER THERE IS A TRUE FAITH, THERE WILL BE A ZEAL WHICH WILL THINK NOTHING TOO GOOD TO GIVE UP FOR (Gal. ii. 20). Pray for (Rom. x. 2), which manifests itself in a holy love, and consistent obedience. Such a zeal had Daniel, Shadrach, &c.; Paul (Acts xxi. 13); David (Ps. lxxiii. 24, 25). Such a zeal may not, at present, obtain the applause of men; but it will not be forgotten when (Luke xii. 8), and when every act flowing from love to God in Christ shall be recorded before assembled worlds. (*H. Blunt.*) *Zeal for the Lord*:—Zeal for the Lord, His truth, cause, service, glory, a needful, and ought to be a visible, prominent feature in every true believer, even as His love for us has rendered visible and prominent in Him an earnest zeal for us men and for our salvation. There may, however, be false zeal—zeal which, so far as we are personally concerned, will bring no glory to Him, no benefit, no blessing to ourselves; and there may be a true zeal, bringing much glory to God and a rich harvest of blessing to our own souls. I. FALSE ZEAL. Jehu is an instance of this. Proceeding from—1. Natural energy of character (ix. 20, 24, &c.). 2. Sense of being appointed and qualified for some particular service (ix. 1-7). 3. Seeking praise of men (text). The heart may nevertheless be not right with God—may be going after its idols (x. 29, 31). II. TRUE ZEAL. St. Paul is an instance of this. In him zeal for the Lord was visible, prominent, as in Jehu; but with this difference: in Jehu it resembles the fitful flashes of a thunderstorm, sudden and vivid, contrasting with, yet not dissipating, the darkness out of which it springs. In St. Paul it ever burns with clear and steady light, illuminating the entire course of his life, and shedding a halo of glory around his martyr death. We see its commencement (Acts ix. 6); its continuance (1 Cor. ix. 26, 27; Gal. ii. 20; Phil. iii. 13, 14); its close (2 Tim. iv. 6-8). Whence this difference? St. Paul was naturally an idolater no less than Jehu. His idols were self-righteousness, Judaism, Pharisaism—zeal very similar to that of Jehu (Phil. iii. 4-6). These, however, were overthrown when Jesus was revealed to him as his Redeemer, convincing him of, and cleansing him from, sin; making known to him the true character of God. Thenceforward his motto was, "God, whose I am, and whom I serve" (Acts xxvii. 23). III. LESSON FOR US. No true zeal for God until and unless we know Him as the "only true God and Jesus Christ," &c. (John xvii. 3). No true zeal for Him until we have personally realised His loving, self-sacrificing zeal for us in our salvation through Christ Jesus. (*R. Chester, B.A.*) *The good and evil in Jehu*:—1. Jehu had great executive ability. His fast driving was characteristic. He was impetuous but not reckless. Having formed a purpose, he rushed to its realisation. He brought things to pass. He combined energy with tenacity, and was capable of rapid decision. He was not so dominated by fixed notions that he could not speedily and silently retrace his steps when he found himself on the wrong path. Like Napoleon at Austerlitz, he knew the value of five minutes. He had a strong personal magnetism that coerced his associates into willing and even eager subservience. A true descendant of Jacob, he was versed in the science of dissimulation. He had the claws of a tiger, but they were muffled in velvet. His step was quick, but stealthy. He was not only rapid, but persistent. He never tired. His speedy pace was ceaseless, on and on. His deadly work did not stop half-way, but utterly extirpated the dynasty of Ahab and the worship of Baal. 2. But Jehu's character was stained by vindictiveness. The bloody rôle assigned to him by the Omnipotent was congenial to his nature. He was ready enough to obey God so long as the Divine command fell in with his own ambitious and bloodthirsty passions. A man who wished the stones cleared away from a little plot of ground once called together the boys of the neighbourhood, and setting up a mark outside of his ground, proposed that all should throw stones at it. The stones were soon removed. How ready we are to do God's will when it happens to coincide with our own feelings! "We seize eagerly," says Goethe, "upon a law that will serve as a weapon to our passions." 3. Jehu was a kind of human tiger, and only too glad to have God use him as such. He had, indeed, a sense of destiny, like Napoleon or Stanley; but this destiny impelled him along the grooves of his own lust for rule and thirst for blood. His personal enemies,—the family of Ahab, which stood between him and the throne, the worshippers of Baal, who

might cause his royal head to rest uneasy.—he went at them as if armed with a firman from the Almighty. He was like an executioner hacking his victim to pieces with fierce glee. It was as if a Christian, moved by Scripture precepts drawn from a far-away age and from a legal dispensation, should beat his child in anger. How different the spirit of a father whom I knew! After using the rod prayerfully, reluctantly, and even tenderly, he broke it up and threw it into the fire. Jehu was like some of the old divines, who seemed to preach hell with a gusto. Jehu is like a minister secretly rejoicing over the heresy of a successful rival and suddenly becoming valiant for the very phase of truth which his erring brother has slighted. (*E. Judson, D.D.*) *Zeal*:—John Foster says that this element will combine with any active principle in man, inspire any pursuit, “profane itself to the lowest, be the glory of the highest, like fire that will smoulder in garbage and will lighten in the heavens.” There is a zeal not according to knowledge, usually made up, says Colton, “more of pride and love of victory than of truth.” Cecil says, on the other hand, “a warm, blundering man does more for the world than a frigid wise man. One who gets into the habit of inquiring about proprieties, expediences, and occasions, often spends his whole life without doing anything to purpose. *Ignorant zeal*:—St. Paul, in Romans x. 2, finds fault with the zeal of the Jews because it is “not according to knowledge.” There is a great deal of this kind of zeal in our day. The less people know the more zealous they are often. It is easier to agitate a shallow pool than a deep lake. It is easier to kindle a pile of shavings than a ton of coal. And so it is with men and women. And hence it comes to pass that the one-idea folks are the most enthusiastic. Their single lonely notion of reform stirs them up as a strong wind sweeps the forest leaves, or gathers clouds of dust in the open roadway. It is all surface agitation. It is noise and bluster, fuss and fury, but makes no permanent impression. Alas, how the world has been excited, and still is, by zeal that is not according to knowledge! Men catch a fraction of some great truth; they rush into print or on the platform; they think they know all that the world needs to know; they imagine they have the panacea for all its ills; they agitate; they organise; they denounce everybody who does not believe that their fraction is “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Another party gets hold of another fraction, and is equally zealous for their panacea; and the war goes on like that of boys who splash each other from the opposite sides of a narrow pool.

Ver. 31. Jehu took no heed to walk in law of the Lord.—*Ruin wrought by neglect*:—I remember once seeing a bit of an old Roman road; the lava blocks were there, but for want of care, here a young sapling had grown up between two of them and had driven them apart; there they were split by the frost; here was a great ugly gap full of mud; and the whole thing ended in a jungle. How shall a man keep the road in repair? “By taking heed thereto.” Things that are left to go anyhow in this world have a strange knack of going one “how.” You do not need anything else than negligence to ensure that thing will come to grief. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Heedlessness perilous*:—There is no need that the man in a skiff amid Niagara’s rapids should row toward the cataract; resting on his oars is quite enough to send him over the awful verge. It is the neglected wheel that capsizes the vehicle and maims for life the passengers. It is the neglected leak that sinks the ship. It is the neglected field that yields briars instead of bread. It is the neglected spark near the magazine whose tremendous explosion sends its hundreds of mangled wretches into eternity. The neglect of an officer to throw up a rocket on a certain night caused the fall of Antwerp, and postponed the deliverance of Holland for twenty or more years. The neglect of a sentinel to give an alarm hindered the fall of Sebastopol, and resulted in the loss of many thousand lives.

CHAPTER XI.

VERS. 1-21. And when Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead.—*The history of Athaliah*:—The blackest names in the long roll of the world’s infamy are those of kings and queens, and amongst them Athaliah is not the

least abhorrent. In this woman's life, as here sketched, we have—I. HEREDITARY DEPRAVITY. We find in this woman, Athaliah, the infernal tendencies of her father and her mother, Ahab and Jezebel. Though they had been swept as monsters from the earth, their hellish spirit lived and worked in this their daughter. We have an immortality in others, as well as in ourselves. In this fact we are reminded—1. That the moral qualities of parents may become physical tendencies in the children. The man who voluntarily contracts habits of falsehood, dishonesty, profanity, incontinence, drunkenness, and general intemperance, transmits these to his children as physical tendencies. 2. That the evil moral qualities of parents, reappearing in their children in the form of physical tendencies, is no complete justification for the children's wickedness. This is clear (1) From the fact that God has endowed all with sufficient force to control all physical tendencies. (2) From the personal consciousness of every sinner. (3) From the Divine Word as found in the Scriptures. "Whatsoever good thing any man doeth the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." "He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." The fact of hereditary depravity reminds us—3. That the way to raise the human race is to improve their moral qualities. In this woman's life we see—II. OUTWITTED WICKEDNESS. No doubt this woman, who thought she had destroyed all the "seed royal," considered she had made her way to the throne clear and secure. For six long years she had no conception that one had escaped her bloody purpose. Now it was revealed to her, and her disappointment maddens her with vengeance, and excites the desperate cry, "Treason, treason!" It is ever so. "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty." History abounds with the examples of the bafflement of wrong. The conduct of Joseph's brethren, Ahithophel, Sanballat, Haman, and the Jewish Sanhedrim in relation to Christ, are instances. Craftiness uses lies as concealment and defence, but the eternal law of Providence makes them snares. In this woman's life we see—III. JUST RETRIBUTION. Those who plot the destruction of others often fall themselves. Here is (1) A terrible retribution. (2) A prompt retribution. It came on her there before she passed into the other world. Retribution is going on now and here. There is (3) A retribution administered by wicked men. God punishes the wicked by the wicked. The whole history of the world is an illustration of this. Truly "the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment. Though his excellency mount up to the heavens and his head reach unto the clouds, yet he shall perish for ever. . . . Yea he shall be chased away as a vision of the night." (*David Thomas, D.D.*) *Malign succession* :—A wicked mother left behind her a wicked daughter. What else could be expected but that the demoniac Jezebel should be reflected and repeated, so far as character and conduct were concerned, in her daughter Athaliah? How very often such a malignant succession is seen! Henry VIII. was terribly given to executing any of his subjects who opposed him. His elder daughter, Queen Mary, led the awful persecution against Protestants in which so many martyrs were burned, including Bishops Ridley, Hooper, Latimer, and Archbishop Cranmer. Had she had a gentler father her disposition might have been more merciful. (*Christian Commonwealth.*) *Athaliah* :—Observe a very strong peculiarity in human nature, as shown in the conduct of Athaliah. She went into the temple and saw the young Joash with a crown upon his head, and she shrieked out, "Treason, treason!" Poor innocent Athaliah! Who would not pity so gentle a dove, with a breast of feathers and a cruel dart rankling in it. Sweet woman, gentle loving creature, injured queen—her hands were perfectly clean; she was the victim of a cruel stratagem; she was outwitted by heads longer than hers; she, poor unsuspecting soul, had been brought into this condition, and all she could do was to cry in injured helplessness, "Treason, treason!" How moral we become under some circumstances! How very righteous we stand up to be under certain provocations! Who could but pity poor Athaliah, who had nursed her grandchildren with a wolf's care? We do this very self-same thing very often in our own lives. Where is the man who does not suppose that he has a right to do wrong? But let other people do wrong, and then hear him. Given a religious sect of any name whatsoever, that has the domination of any neighbourhood, and the probability is that that religious sect will use its supremacy somewhat mischievously in certain circumstances. It will not let anybody who opposes its tenets have an acre of ground in that neighbourhood, nor will it allow any sect that opposes its principles to build a church there. No, it takes a righteous view of the circumstances; it will not trifle with

its responsibilities; it can allow no encroachment; it is charged with the spirit of stewardship, and must be faithful to its sacred obligations. So it cants and whines, whatever its name be: if it be the name we bear religiously so much the worse. We speak of no particular sect, or of any sect that may be placed in such peculiar circumstances as to claim the domination and supremacy in any neighbourhood. Now let any member of that sect leave that particular locality and go to live under a different set of circumstances, and apply for a furlong of ground, or for a house that he may occupy as tenant; then let it be found that his religious convictions are a bar to his entrance upon the enjoyment of local properties and liberties, he will call "Persecution, persecution!" How well it befits his lips. The very man who in one district persecuted to the death those who opposed him removes to another locality where a screw is applied to his own joints, and he cries out, "Persecution—persecution!" It is Athaliah's old trick, and will have Athaliah's poor reward. See how the cry of the wicked is unheeded. She was a woman, and by so much had a claim upon the sympathy of the strong. No man's heart went out towards her in loyal reverence. With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged. With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again. "As I have done," said a sufferer of old, "to others, so the Lord hath requited me." Though hand join in hand, yet the wicked shall not go unpunished. If you are treating any of your family, your wife or husband or child, with base cruelty, it will surely come home to you some other day. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Vers. 2, 3. Jehosheba . . . took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain.—*Stolen from death*:—Grandmothers are more lenient with their children's children than they were with their own. At forty years of age, if discipline be necessary, chastisement is used; but at seventy, the grandmother, looking upon the misbehaviour of the grandchild, is apologetic, and disposed to substitute confectionery for whip. There is nothing more beautiful than this mellowing of old age toward childhood. But here we have a grandmother of a different hue. It is old Athaliah, the queenly murderess. She ought to have been honourable. Her father was a king. Her husband was a king. Her son was a king. And yet we find her plotting for the extermination of the entire royal family, including her own grandchildren. But the six years expire, and it is time for young Joash to come forth and take the throne, and to push back into disgrace and death old Athaliah. The arrangements are all made for political revolution. The military come and take possession of the temple, swear loyalty to the boy Joash, and stand around for his defence. I. The first thought from this subject is, THAT THE EXTERMINATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS AN IMPOSSIBILITY. Superstition rises up and says: "I will just put an end to pure religion." Domitian slew forty thousand Christians, Diocletian slew eight hundred and forty-four thousand Christians. And the scythe of persecution has been swung through all the ages, and the flames hissed, and the *auto da fe* rattled, and the guillotine chopped, and the Bastille groaned; but did the foes of Christianity exterminate it? Did they exterminate Alban, the first British sacrifice; or Zuinglius, the Swiss reformer; or John Oldcastle, the Christian nobleman; or Abdallah, the Arabian martyr; or Anne Askew, or Sanders, or Cranmer? Great work of extermination they made of it. Just at the time when they thought they had slain all the royal family of Jesus, some Joash would spring up and out, and take the throne of power, and wield a very sceptre of Christian dominion. Infidelity says: "I'll just exterminate the Bible," and the Scriptures were thrown into the street for the mob to trample on, and they were piled up in the public squares and set on fire, and mountains of indignant contempt were hurled on them, and learned universities decreed the Bible out of existence. "In my *Age of Reason* I have annihilated the Scriptures," said Thomas Paine. "Your Washington is a pusillanimous Christian, but I am the foe of Bibles and of churches." O, how many assaults upon that Word. Said one man, in his infidel desperation, to his wife: "You must not be reading that Bible," and he snatched it away from her. And though in that Bible was a lock of hair of the dead child—the only child that God had ever given them—he pitched the book with its contents into the fire, and stirred it with the tongs, and spat on it, and cursed it, and said: "Susan, never have any more of that stuff here!" How many individual and organised attempts have been made to exterminate that Bible. Have they done it? Have they exterminated the Bible Society? Have they exterminated the thousands of Christian institutions whose only object it is to multiply copies of

the Scriptures, and throw them broadcast around the world? Yea, if there should come a time of persecution in which all the known Bibles of the earth should be destroyed, all these lamps of life that blaze in our pulpits and in our families extinguished—in the very day that infidelity and sin should be holding jubilee over the universal extinction there would be in some closet of a backwoods church a secreted copy of the Bible, and this Joash of eternal literature would come out and come up and take the throne, and the Athaliah of infidelity and persecution would fly out the back door of the palace, and drop her miserable carcass under the hoofs of the horses of the king's stables. You cannot exterminate Christianity! You cannot kill Joash! II. The second thought from my subject is, **THAT THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES IN WHICH WE MAY SAVE ROYAL LIFE.** You know that profane history is replete with stories of strangled monarchs and of young princes who have been put out of the way. Here is the story of a young king saved. But why should we spend our time in praising this bravery of expedition when God asks the same thing of you and me? all around us are the imperilled children of a great king. They are born of Almighty parentage, and will come to a throne or a crown, if permitted. But sin, the old Athaliah, goes forth to the massacre. Murderous temptations are out for the assassination. But sin is more terrific in its denunciation. It matters not how you spell your name, you come under its knife, under its sword, under its doom, unless there be some omnipotent relief brought to the rescue. But blessed be God, there is such a thing as delivering a royal soul. Who will snatch away Joash? This afternoon, in your Sabbath-school class, there will be a prince of God—some Cromwell to dissolve a Parliament, some Beethoven to touch the world's harp-strings, some John Howard to pour fresh air into the lazaretto, some Florence Nightingale to bandage the battle wounds, some Miss Dix to soothe the crazed brain, some John Frederick Oberlin to educate the besotted, some David Brainerd to change the Indian's war-whoop to a Sabbath song, some John Wesley to marshal three-fourths of Christendom, some John Knox to make queens turn pale, some Joash to demolish idolatry and strike for the kingdom of heaven. There are sleeping in your cradles by night, there are playing in your nurseries by day, imperial souls waiting for dominion, and whichever side the cradle they get out will decide the destiny of empires. III. The third thought from my text is, **THAT THE CHURCH OF GOD IS A GOOD HIDING-PLACE.** When Jehosheba rushes into the nursery of the king and picks up Joash, what shall she do with him? Shall she take him to some room in the palace? No; for the official desperadoes will hunt through every nook and corner of that building. Would God that we were all as wise as Jehosheba, and knew that the Church of God is the best hiding-place. O, men of the world, outside there, betrayed, caricatured, and cheated of the world, why do you not come in through the broad, wide open door of Christian communion? I wish I could act the part of Jehosheba to-day, and steal you away from your perils and hide you in the temple. How few of us appreciate the fact that the Church of God is a hiding-place. More than that, you yourself will want the Church for a hiding-place when the mortgage is foreclosed; when your daughter, just blooming into womanhood, suddenly clasps her hands in a slumber that knows no waking; when gaunt trouble walks through the parlour, and the sitting-room, and the dining-hall, and the nursery, you will want some shelter from the tempest. Ah, some of you have been run upon by misfortune, and trial; why do you not come into the shelter? I said to a widowed mother after she had buried her only son—months after I said to her: "How do you get along now-a-days?" "Oh," she replied, "I get along tolerably well, except when the sun shines." I said: "What do you mean by that?" when she said: "I can't bear to see the sun shine; my heart is so dark that all the brightness of the natural world seems a mockery to me." Oh, darkened soul, oh, broken-hearted man, broken-hearted woman, why do you not come into the shelter? I swing the door wide open. I swing it from wall to wall. Come in! Come in! You want a place where your troubles shall be interpreted, where your burdens shall be unstrapped, where your tears shall be wiped away. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *The fallacy of evil:*—The transaction with which the text is connected belongs to that series of bloody events which were involved with the destruction of the house of Ahab. Among those who were slain in the fierce onslaught of Jehu, was Ahaziah, King of Judah. Hearing of his death, his mother Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel—her daughter in disposition as well as by birth—resolved to secure the kingdom of Judah for herself; and to that end, she put to death, as she supposed, the entire brood of her

own grandchildren ; and having perpetrated this unnatural slaughter, she ascended the vacant throne. But the text informs us that to this wholesale murder there was one exception. Joash, the infant heir of Ahaziah, was by his aunt, Jehoshoba, wife of Jehoiada the high priest, snatched from the fury of the usurping queen, and concealed in the temple. Athaliah maintained her guilty reign for six years. It was a cruel, oppressive, and idolatrous reign, sternly calculated to foment the opposition of all who were loyal to the legitimate government and the ancient religion, and to cement their union. At length Jehoiada, under oath, disclosed his secret to some of the chief men of the Jewish nation, and, having secured the alliance of the military and the priesthood, broke out with a successful revolution. Upon a day appointed, the guard and the people having assembled in the temple, Jehoiada brought the young Joash out before them. Having anointed and crowned him, the people clapped their hands, shouting, "God save the king!" This entire transaction suggests the fallacy of evil, the falsehood of sin. And so this incident of a very ancient time is applicable to all time. To some it may appear a very superfluous task to urge an argument against evil in itself. Up to this point it may seem that all argument is foreclosed. It may be thought that the very term "evil" suggests all the argument that is necessary. The moral sense of every man repudiates it. Nevertheless, evil prevails; not often, it is to be hoped, in such shapes of conspicuous and revolting wickedness as in the case of the Jewish queen, but in countless other shapes, both in public and in private.

I. THE INSECURITY OF EVIL. This is very clearly illustrated in the incident before us. Athaliah's scheme was a sweeping one. It was summary in its execution. The argument which she employed was the sword; and it seemed as though all obstacles had gone down before it. But one point was left exposed, and through that point entered destruction. And it is wonderful how common such mistakes are, even in the most cunningly planned iniquity. When the evil-doer has arranged all his devices, and they seem to be turning out just as he would have them turn out, very often he seems smitten by judicial blindness, and he leaves some clew by him unperceived. Or we may say Providence gathers up some witness in its concealing folds, and lo! all at once it leaps out upon him. Take some of the grosser instances of iniquity. The thief, as he supposes, clears away every thread of detection; but, in the most unthought of way, the keen eye of justice picks out some slender filament of guilt, and presently the entire web is dragged into the light. The calumniator constructs his charge so plausibly, that as it seems his victim can find no flaw for escape, when accidentally some minute test of truth is applied, and the lie shrivels, and shows all its blackness. The murderer drops some bloody hint of his deed. He makes a footmark in the leaves, or babbles his secret in the revelations of a dream. But let us proceed to the consideration of less conspicuous instances. A man conducts business on a system of petty frauds. For a while they glide quite smoothly, and he secretly chuckles at his own practical demonstration that dishonesty is the best policy. But in time his meanness gets wind: custom drops off, and he sinks in credit. Or his good fortune, if good fortune he has, is tainted by his reputation. Men will worship a golden calf for the sake of the gold; but there is apt to be a polite sniffing at gilded carrion. Another finds it convenient, now and then, to oil the hinges of opportunity with a little lying. Quite likely he does so with very slight compunction or thought. It may serve his purpose. And yet it is just as possible that he will find a nest of trouble in it. Perhaps, in some unlucky moment, the truth strikes him flat in the face, and brings him to open shame. Or he has to fabricate a series of lies to support the first, until the chain breaks of its own weight, or tangles and trips him; and it turns out that it costs more to keep a set of lies in tune than it would to have told the truth in the outset. A man who cannot afford to lose money by speaking the truth, and who has enthroned himself on lies, is always likely to encounter some uncomfortable Joash that will bring him down. Then, again, there are some evil devices that one cannot carry out alone—they must be helped by other people; and this creates the insecurity of participated council. The confederate may be bribed to treachery, or become conscience-stricken. At least we may be quite sure that one who will connive at fraud or mischief can have but slight anchorage in principle; and no seal of "honour" so-called, or even of interest, is strong enough to assure the wrong-doer that he is not plotting with a town tattler or a State's evidence. The doctrine of consequences is a doctrine of secondary considerations, which a good man does not want, and which a bad man means to dodge. And that is a very ungodly sorrow which is only sorry for the exposure.

Nevertheless this is one argument against evil : its methods and its instruments are insecure. Good men will make mistakes. Good men will commit oversights. Perhaps they are more likely to do so than those of the other class. Trusting simply to the right, they may not keep their wits so keenly on the alert. Men who undertake to engineer a bad enterprise are very apt to be what are called " smart men." There are not many downright wicked fools. It is quite possible, that, for a time, the knaves will foil mere righteousness ; and, where cleverness is the only point in consideration, they may show themselves superior to those who are simple enough to trust in honesty. And throughout every department of human action, there is this essential difference between fraud and truth, treachery and loyalty—whatever exposure may take place, the good man has no reason to fear. The exposure may demonstrate that he was weak in judgment, or unskilful in execution ; but the right motive will redeem his work. But the least slip may ruin the knave and unfrock the hypocrite. The short-sightedness of the right intention is an honest mistake ; the oversight of the base purpose is a fatal error. Therefore, in the first instance insecurity means a very different thing from what it does in the last. Yes, life is an uncertain sea, and the good as well as the bad may suffer the shipwreck of their hopes. But the one has done the best he could. He has laid a well-intended course, studying his chart, and observing heaven. The other of his own accord has run his ship among quicksands and breakers. Both are liable to mistakes ; but, I say once more, the insecurity of the good is not like the insecurity of the bad. II. There is another argument against evil in the fact, that in any wrong course there is an *INTRINSIC INCONGRUITY*. This truth, perhaps, is easier felt than expressed. But I may be able to convey some idea of my meaning by saying that evil does not tally with truth. It cannot profoundly and completely simulate the good. In one word, it is contrary to God. Now, I have already admitted that evil methods do sometimes—indeed, I must say so frequently—succeed. Nevertheless, I do not admit that this triumph is a final triumph. Very likely it will turn out that the consummated guilt does not set well. It wears a doubtful aspect. Suspicion warps it, although detection may not lay it open. It does not fit snug into the general order. I have spoken of a tainted reputation. And I ask, does not a bad man find it somewhat difficult to hide his real character ? The process is apt to develop undue clumsiness, or extra facility, too little heat, or too much zeal. The painting is over-coloured ; or else it is quite evident that the face is wax and the eyes are glass. Some time since, I was examining a sample of ore that looked very much like gold : I was informed that the material has often been taken for gold. Perhaps in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand it would pass for gold. Is there, then, no test by which it may be distinguished from the nobler metal ? Yes : it does not weigh quite so much as gold. So base-metal acts, that look like shining gold, may sometimes get weighed. So do the elements of sin sometimes burst their glittering disguises ; guilty passion glares through all the proprieties ; and in the witnessing presence of God's own universe the intrinsic incongruity of evil appears. Besides this, we must remember also that wrong always occupies the place of some right. It exists by repressing that right. Therefore it is exposed to the re-action of that right. Referring to instances that are important enough to remain visible above the horizon of time, we find, that, as the world moves, there goes on a rectifying process. Justice sifts and sifts, until the verdict abides with the right, even though " canonised bones " are stirred in their cements, and the graves give up their dead. As we retreat from the past, the eternal disc of truth emerges from temporary obscurations, while on the great ecliptic of history everything falls into its proper posture. The schemes of wicked policy, and the idols of a deluded veneration, lie crushed and exposed. The memory of the tyrant blackens, and the martyr has his palm. No wrong can go down secure and compact through the ages. It does not assimilate with God's order, and it bears no fertility of blessedness in its bosom. The celestial movements may seem slow and wearisome : nevertheless, " the stars in their courses fight against Sisera." There is no peace for the wicked, though robed in the most splendid success. There is no security for the wrong, however sealed and established. Evil may seem to be as well as the good. But it is not as well. Like that guilty Jewish queen, it falsely occupies the throne ; and sooner or later justice comes, like the lawful heir, and claims the birthright. III. But, after all, the great argument against evil is *THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF EVIL*. Suppose Athaliah, instead of being overtaken by that signal punishment, had kept the throne, and died in ripe old age, a crowned and successful

sovereign. Would anyone really envy Athaliah's career? Would her position have been a desirable one? Would it have been really a success and a blessing? No. The essential evil in her case appears in what the guilty woman was in herself. Here, then, is the actual point. We must reject evil for what it is in itself; and, in this, all its sophistries are exposed. Surely there is no instance in which a man deliberately elects wickedness for itself alone, and as the final cause of his action. No man who employs fraud or falsehood maintains that his chief good is in the fraud or falsehood. They are his instruments. Hence, he defends them, or acquiesces in the use of them. Thus he lies and cheats, not for the heartfelt satisfaction of lying and cheating, but for the purposes of a worldly policy. He spins some dishonest scheme, because he thinks this the best way to secure his end. He would just as soon use the morality of the Ten Commandments if he thought the stock was as available. But, agreeably to his experience, falsehood makes the money stick to his fingers a little closer than clean-handed honesty will. And that is why he uses falsehood. But now here arises the consideration that evil does become an end, remains an end, when the object sought for has failed or vanished. The gains of the unscrupulous seeker may crumble, his pleasure may taste upon his lips like the lees of dead wine, and in the end of his ambition he may find only the arrows of calumny or the scoffings of popular change. But the evil itself does not desert him. The agent which he has cherished and used—the falsehood and the baseness—stick and abide in his soul, which he may have forgotten, but upon which at some time he must fall back. There, within,—in the elements of his own personality,—what meanness and accusation, what woe and ruin! All the capital that the guilty man possesses is this perishable stuff without, and within a world whose dark recesses he dares not fathom, in which lurk ugly memories and fearful thoughts, and where conscience rolls its low, deep thunder. (*E. H. Chapin.*)

Ver. 10. *King David's spears and shields, that were in the temple of the Lord.*—*New uses for old trophies*:—When David had fought with an adversary, and overcome him, he took away his armour and his weapons, and as other victorious heroes were wont to do, he bore them home as mementoes of his prowess, the trophies of the battle. These were placed in the house of the Lord. Perhaps David at the same time dedicated in like manner the shield and the sword which he had himself used in battle. After Solomon had built the temple, these trophies, which seem to have been very numerous, were hung up there. So they adorned the walls. So they illustrated the valour of noble sires. So they served to kindle emulation, I doubt not, in the breasts of true-hearted sons. Thus it was while generations sprung up and passed away; till at length other days dawned, darker scenes transpired, and sadder things filled up the chronicles of the nation. I. IT IS WELL FOR US TO HANG ALL OUR TROPHIES IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD. We, too, are warriors. Every genuine Christian has to fight. Every inch of the way between here and heaven we shall have to fight, for as hitherto every single step of our pilgrimage has been one prolonged conflict. Sometimes we have victories, a presage of that final victory, that perfect triumph we shall enjoy with our Great Captain for ever. When we have these victories it behoves us to be especially careful that in all good conscience we hang up the trophies thereof in the house of the Lord. The reason for this lies here: it is to the Lord that we owe any success we have ever achieved. We have been defeated when we have gone in our own strength; but when we have been victorious it has always been because the strength of the Lord was put forth for our deliverance. You never fought with a sin, with a temptation, or with a doubt, and overthrew it, except by the Spirit's aid. This will save us from pride and self-sufficiency. Scarcely can God trust us with a victory, lest we begin fingering it with our own hands, as if our own ingenuity, our own wisdom, or our own strength had done marvels. II. THESE TROPHIES MAY COME IN USEFUL AT SUCH TIMES AS WE CANNOT FORESEE, AND UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES AS WE WOT NOT OF. Little could David have thought when he gave Abiathar the sword of Goliath, that he would ever go to the priests of Gad and ask them to lend him a sword, and that they should say, We have no sword here, save the sword of Goliath, the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the Valley of Elah, behold it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. He gave it to God, but he did not think that he would ever have it back again with a priestly blessing on it, so that he should be able to say, "There is none like that: give it me." And when, in after years, he hung up the swords and shields which he had taken away

from Philistine heroes, he did not surmise that one of his descendants, of the seed royal, would find the need to employ his own, his grandsire's, or, further back, from himself—his forefathers' trophies—in order to establish himself on the throne. We never know, when we praise God for mercies, but what the very praises might come back into our bosoms, and the offerings we make to God in the way of thankfulness may be our own enrichment in the days to come. Did you ever have a personal, mental, moral conflict with some great dragon of besetting sin? If so be you have been enabled to smite it valiantly, and slay it utterly, I know you have gained trophies to hang up in the house of God. To do so will be of no small advantage to yourselves, because you can take them down and use them in future; and you will find they are footholds of your strength to fight with the next sin that comes upon you. The strength which God has educated and fostered in the last struggle will greatly assist you in the next. The man who gives way to one sin will very readily give way to another, but a man who through God's grace has won a very high vantage ground by mastering one sin, will be very likely to win another. The spoils taken from the last Philistine will help us to go forth and win more, and in the name of God we shall get the victory. Now it is a fine, a noble thing, when you have had a conflict in your own soul with some plausible heresy, some seductive perversion of the truth, and have put it to flight with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; it is a noble feat, I say, to capture the arms of your assailant and to use the very weapons of the adversary against him. You have detected his sophistry, you have found out his devices, and now for the future you will not be so readily carried away with every wind of doctrine. This time you are too old to be taken with his chaff. You were deceived once, but by God's grace you are not willing any longer to lend a ready ear to the fair speech which casts a mist over plain facts, but you henceforth resolve to prove the spirits whether they be of God. So from the spoils of past conflicts you are made strong to win present victories.

III. **ANCIENT WEAPONS ARE GOOD FOR PRESENT USE.** I should like to show you this by taking you on to a battle-field. We will go to it. It is not Sadowa or Sedan, it is a grander arena far—the old seventy-seventh. Turn to the seventy-seventh Psalm, and you have a battle-field there. Should you ever have to fight the same battle, by looking through this Psalm, you will see David's shields and spears, and you will soon learn how to screen yourself with the one, and how to do exploits with the other. Here is David fighting with despondency. I daresay some of you are afflicted with it. But observe how he fought with it. The first weapon he drew out of the scabbard was the weapon of all-prayer. And how grandly he used it! "I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice." Despondency soon flies when a man knows how to ply this all-conquering and ever-useful weapon of petition to the Most High. Then note how he used this weapon continually. "My hand was stretched out all night," saith he, according to the marginal reading of the second verse. If the first prayer did not help him, he prayed again. When he had used the weapon of prayer, what did he do next? He took out another spear. It was that of remembering God. He had long enough pored in thought over himself and his present sinfulness and weakness, and now he remembered God's mercy, God's faithfulness, God's loving kindness, God's power, God's covenant, God in the person of Christ. Oh! this is indeed to prepare a salvo against the enemy, and to fortify one's own position with fresh succours. He can win the battle that knows how to use this artillery of remembering God. Going on with the strategy of war, what next? Why, in the fifth verse we read how he maintained his courage and his constancy—"I considered the days of old." He enquired of hoary fathers, and looked back upon the inspired traditions, if I may be allowed the expression, of the early Church. He turned to see whether God ever did forsake any of His people. But now he used another weapon. He looked to his own experience—see the sixth verse. "I called to remembrance my song in the night." Past experience acknowledged gratefully, and taken as the index of what the future will be—this is another of David's shields and spears.

IV. **DID NOT DAVID HEREIN PREFIGURE HIM THAT WAS TO COME—DAVID'S SON AND DAVID'S LORD?** Jesus Christ, our King, has hung up many shields and spears in the house of the Lord. Sin—Christ has borne it in himself, endured its penalty and overcome it; He has hung up the handwriting of ordinances that was against us as a trophy in the house of the Lord. He has nailed it to the cross. Satan—our great foe—He met him foot to foot in the wilderness and discomfited him—met him in the garden—overcame him on

the cross. Now hell, too, is vanquished—Christ is Lord. The prince of the power of the air is but his serf. The King of kings hath led captivity captive, and all the crowns of this prince of the power of the air are hung up as trophies. Broken are their spears: their shields all battered and vilely cast away, hang up as memorials of what Christ has done. Death, too, the last enemy, Christ hath taken spoils from him when He rose again himself from His prison house, and ascended on high, leading captivity captive. And the enmity of the human heart. When we look round the temple and see the shields and spears hung up, we say "Who did those shields and spears belong to?" One says, "Why, that is the shield and spear of John Newton, the old blasphemer!" Glory be to God, Christ conquered him. Whose shield and spears are those? Why, that is the shield and spear of John Bunyan, the blasphemer on the village green. God's mercy conquered him. What will heaven be when all of us shall be trophies of His power to save, and when our bodies shall be there as well as our souls! "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"—when not only souls, but bodies shall be in heaven too, all trophies of what Christ has done when He plucked His people from the jaws of the grave and delivered them from the grasp of the sepulchra. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

CHAPTER XII.

VER. 2. And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.—

Influence :—For the right understanding of the character and reign of Jehoash we should consult not only the account given in the present chapter, but also that in the parallel chapter in the book of Chronicles; the narrative in the book of Kings being more full of matters pertaining to the early piety of the monarch, while that of the Chronicles details with more minuteness the causes that led to his declension, and the occasion of his shameful fall. During the minority of Jehoash the affairs of the kingdom went on comparatively well. His beginnings were full of promise, and even for several years after he was of full age the young king seemed chiefly anxious to carry out the plans and projects of Jehoiada; not only on account of the comfort he would naturally feel in leaning on a stronger arm, but in some degree, no doubt, from gratitude to one to whom he felt he was indebted both for his life and his throne. So that, as both histories inform us, "All the days of Jehoiada, Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." But while the king was yet in his prime, his faithful adviser died, and very soon other and far different counsels were in the ascendant. The princes of Judah, knowing that a want of self-reliance was a great infirmity of the king's character, seeing that his prop was gone, and persuaded that he was as much dependant upon that prop for his religion as upon anything else, plied him with audacious proposals to forsake the temple of God, and to transfer his worship to the idols of the grove. "And he hearkened to them." From this time his fall was rapid. The moral of it, the point which stands out from all others, is the evil of a religion which is based upon the influence of another mind; which has no root in itself, but which, being unstable as water, and flexible as a reed shaken with the wind, will neither bear fruit unto holiness, nor have its end in everlasting life. 1. And, first, let us advert to the habit of mind itself against which we are cautioned, in order that we may detach from it for separate consideration so much as may be due to a constitutional weakness of character—to a natural diffidence and dread of having to go alone, which, as not coming within the scope of our moral powers entirely to eradicate, we must believe either the mercy of God will pardon, or His grace will rectify and render harmless. We cannot doubt that the existence of this is a common form of mental infirmity, which allies itself to intellects of the highest reach, and to souls of the most indomitable and commanding power. That tyrant, who at the beginning of the present century made more than half the nations of Europe tremble, had as little of the self-reliant element in his nature as the lowest subaltern he ever ordered to the field. True, when he had resolved upon a step, neither difficulty nor danger moved him; but to make him resolve upon it he must have the consents of some trusted and approving mind; in private life, being as much influenced by his empress, as in

public matters, he leaned on the counsels of Talleyrand. If this practical subjugation to the will and counsel of another, this tendency to hang on, and hold on by what is felt to be a stronger judgment, be found among the higher and more towering spirits of our race, how much more shall we look for it in the humbler and more dependant ranks. Some men are born into the world with a soft, pliant, treacherous debility of will. They must have somebody to think after, and speak after, and act after. They hold their wills, as it were, by feudal tenure under other people's will, changing both Lord and service, if need be, seven times a day. Such persons appear, at first sight, to be a good deal at the mercy of their providential lot, in the power of those accidents and associations which shall bring them under the permanent ascendant of a better or of a more corrupt mind; of a Jehoiada who will lead them in the good and the right way, or of the dissolute princes of Judah who will be as oracles to mislead, and as guides to destroy. But we allow not that our soul's life can be suspended on any such precarious issues. we must not make a god of temperament, nor a god of circumstances; but we must believe of original tendencies of character as of any other cause which may be injurious to our moral steadfastness, that there is provided for us, in the economy of grace, a way of escape, an ordained antidote to our nature's evil, whereby God may get honour upon our infirmities, and out of weakness make us strong. But passing from the case of any constitutional liability to be influenced by other minds, let us address ourselves to the evil of the habit itself, when it allows others to think and act for us in the great concerns of personal religion. And proceeding upon the example furnished by our text, we ought to take a case where the influencing or ascendant mind is, according to our common human estimates, a strong mind, a good mind, a mind formed to lead, and honestly and earnestly bent on leading right. In many cases, no doubt, this may be a great advantage. It is a happy thing for young people setting out in life to be under the instruction and control of one whose desire is always to lead them in the good and the right way. And yet we ought to show that if our religion stands only in the power which this mental control wields over us, and goes no lower down to the depths of our moral being than that example can reach, or that influence can minister to, such a religion will be vain, will never become more than a surface religion, will not keep itself fixed and fastened in the roots of our moral nature, and consequently in time of temptation we shall fall away. The relation out of which this subordinating influence arises, makes no difference in the evil and danger of becoming enslaved to it. It may be that of a parent exercising a control over the filial conscience which belongs to him by the eternal prescription of heaven; or that of a husband drawing the wife into assimilations of thought and feeling, almost before she is aware of it—affection promoting the influence, and the marriage sanctities giving to it the force of law. Or it may be that of a pastor, having begotten us, in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. You will ask me why? I answer, first, because such a religion is essentially false and defective in principle. It originates neither in love to God, nor gratitude to Christ, nor deep views of sin, nor in delight in holy service, nor in aspirations after the sanctity and bliss of heaven; but chiefly in a desire to approve itself to some dominant and controlling influence. Water cannot rise above its level; and as Jehoiada, whether from temperament or policy, had done nothing to remove the high places of sacrifice, though confessedly a reproach to the temple service, Jehoash would do nothing either; and so the eulogium, even of his early goodness, has to be qualified by the remark, "But the high places were not taken away." The examples are rare where, in the race of goodness, the disciple outstrips his chosen guide; and if he does so, it is because a better guide has taken him in hand, and the master influence has become merged in the mightier power of the Spirit of God. But, as a rule, the subject mind will keep below the religious standards and measures of its superior. All its goodness is derived goodness, and it shines only in a borrowed light. And as the standard of piety is low, so the acts of which it specially consists are prompted, often by a feeble sentimentality, or perhaps with a view to the praise of men. Conspicuous among the pious acts of Jehoash was his zeal in setting about the repairs of the temple, injured less by the hand of time than by the sacrilegious spoiliations of idolaters. It were easy to account for this zeal on other grounds than those of personal goodness. That temple was, very dear to him. How natural to address himself vigorously to a work so gratifying to Jehoiada, so easily mistaken by himself for the dictate of pious emotion, and so calculated to gain him favour with his subjects for a loving attachment to the truth of God.

And so, also, it may be with us, while our religion is in other's keeping. We may love the temple, have joy in ordinances, feel a thrill of sacred pleasure under the power of the Word, and for the largeness of our alms be called "the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the path to dwell in," while of any principle of vital godliness we may be as destitute as Jehoshaphat was. Rooted and grounded in the depths of the carnal heart may be hidden the seeds of an unsuspected idolatry, which wait but the scorching sun of temptation to develop into pernicious fruit, to turn the repairer of the temple into a worshipper of the grove, and lead a lover of faithful teaching to slay between the temple and the altar a servant of the living God.

2. But, secondly, we say of a religion that owes its being to any merely mental deferences, that it will always be feeble and languid, and inefficient in itself, that it will leave its possessor unprepared for the struggles, and temptations, and rough discipline of life, a prey to the first evil influence that shall try to make a captive of him, and to be overcome by the first afflictive trial which shall send him to the foundation of his trusts. So weak was the hold which the religion of Jehoshaphat had upon his conscience, that he yielded to the most visible and transparent lure ever man's soul was taken withal, namely, the fawning sycophancy of a few unprincipled courtiers, asking as the boon price of their service, that he should cast off the worship of his fathers, violate the covenant of his God, and bow the knee only before the divinities of the grove. "And the king hearkened to them." Yes, for why should he not? His religion had all along been the creature of influence, and therefore, must change as often as the ascendant influence changed. Strength of its own, such religion has none, either to resist or attack. It is impotent as the autumn leaf, now lifted up in circling eddies by the blast, now waiting in passive helplessness the first footstep that shall crush it to the earth. And hence, I say in all this religion obtained at second hand, this derived Christianity of another mind, there will generally be found a sickly irresolution of purpose, a sort of letting out of one's moral powers to the highest and most powerful bidder. The man who trusts in it is not his own master; he is the property of the first strong will that shall think the appendage worth having. But true religion, that which is rooted in a Divine principle and a Divine influence, is a hardy thing, a manly thing. It is furnished for the cloudy and dark day, and expects its coming. Deep in the springs of its unseen life is an element of strength which gives dignity to the character, composure to the spirit, a settledness and perseverance to the once-formed resolve which nothing can bend, nothing can turn aside.

3. But the text suggests a third reason for predicting the inevitable miscarriage of a religion which is dependant for its life on surrounding influences, namely, that the very friends that helped to make us as good as we are, may, in the providence of God be taken away. "Jehoshaphat did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him." But Jehoiada died; and what did he do then? Why, evil, and evil only. The morning cloud disperseth not sooner, nor the early dew when it passeth away, than did that fabric of gossamer and unsubstantial goodness, which a breath was to destroy even as a breath had made. And it seems to be in obedience to a law, as if it was a Nemesis of God on the mind that leans on human trusts, that Jehoshaphat became more impious and profane for having known something of the semblance of piety before. Just as the emperor Nero, conspicuous for humanity and virtue while he had the counsels of Seneca to guide him, went down to the grave a monster with the execration of posterity upon his head. Some lessons arise from this aspect of our subject brethren, whether as applied to those who consciously and of purpose have joined themselves to the train of a superior mind, and, only to please him, kept up a show of goodness, or to those who, having a loving and leaning confidence in another's wisdom and piety, have been content to draw from him all their soul's life and strength, and, unconsciously to themselves, to let him be to them instead of God. To the former Jehoshaphat leaves the lesson that it would have been better for them never to have known good things at all. They are fretting under a yoke for a season, only to indulge in more unrestrained licence as soon as it shall be taken off. The instant the weight is lifted off, the bent bow will fly back with more violent rebound. There may be love for a season, zeal for a season, concern for holy things for a season, but when Jehoiada is dead, the long pent-up energies of evil will burst forth, and like the heir long kept out of the expected inheritance, the heart plunges into the thick of its carnal thoughts, and as if to take revenge on itself for its forced early goodness, the man endeavours to crowd as much iniquity as he can into the remainder of his days. But there is a lesson also to those who

do not fret under their mental subjection, who, in heart love their Jehoiada, and indeed, whose chief danger is that they love him too much, and who, therefore, think within themselves, "If he should be taken away what good will our lives be to us, or what power shall keep us faithful unto our pious work?" So may reason the son, who, breathing from his youth the pure atmosphere of domestic piety, has seen in the life of his parents all that could ennoble godliness, and all that could make virtue loved. But I must conclude with a few practical counsels, as helpful to guide us from the danger of which this history warns us. (1) And first, I would say, have a care of being deceived as to your spiritual state, by what may be called the amiabilities of religion. Cradled in the sanctuary, nursed by a pious aunt, his early years watched over by a faithful servant of God, it had been a wonder if the early outward life of Jehoash had not been full of grace and promise. (2) A second counsel I would offer, is, see to it that there be no holding an undecided course in your religion. Jehoash does not seem to have actually joined the princes of Judah. But, "he hearkened to them," and from that they knew his mind. "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea," saith St. James, "driven of the wind and tossed"—an unsettled, divided heart, the absence of all serenity and repose, and an acute sensitiveness to every disturbing influence, a never continuing in one stay. Lastly, as ye would have a goodness that shall stand with us in time, and shall abide the ordeal of that fire which is to try every man's work of what sort it is, see that ye have an inward experience of the vital realities of religion—the regenerate will, the renewed mind, the revival of that spiritual image upon the conscience which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. You cannot be too severe, too searching in ascertaining your personal participation in these essentials of the spiritual character. (*D. Moore, M.A.*) *The fruit of wise guardianship seen in later life*:—At Frogmore, on the 16th of March 1861, the Duchess of Kent, mother of our beloved Queen, passed tranquilly into eternity at the ripe age of seventy-five. Her husband, the Duke of Kent, died six days before his father, George III., leaving the presumptive heir to England's crown in charge of the Duchess, his wife. "I do nominate, constitute, and appoint my beloved wife Victoria, Duchess of Kent," said the Duke in his will, "to be sole guardian of our dear child, Princess Alexandra Victoria, to all intents and for all purposes whatsoever." During the seventeen years which elapsed between her husband's death and the accession of her daughter, the Duchess devoted heart and soul to the responsible but honourable task committed to her, and she lived to see the blessed results of her labour of love. It is to the wise, virtuous, and self-sacrificing discharge of her maternal duties, under the blessing of God, that this country is largely indebted for possessing a Queen whose life illustrates all that we most love in woman, and whose reign exemplifies all that we most respect in a Sovereign. (*William Francis.*) *A lean-to religion*:—"Many men owe their religion, not to grace, but to the favour of the times; they follow it because it is in fashion, and they can profess it at a cheap rate, because none contradict it. They do not build upon the rock, but set up a shed leaning to another man's house, which costs them nothing." The idea of a lean-to religion is somewhat rough, but eminently suggestive. Weak characters cannot stand alone, like mansions; but must needs lean on others, like the miserable shops which nestle under certain Continental cathedrals. Under the eaves of old customs many build their plaster-nests, like swallows. Such are good, if good at all, because their patrons made virtue the price of their patronage. They love honesty because it proves to be the best policy, and piety because it serves as an introduction to trade with saints. Their religion is little more than courtesy to other men's opinions, civility to godliness. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 4-15. And Jehoash said to the priests.—*The temple repaired*:—1. The house of God is apt to show a decline of religion, and should share the blessings of a reformation. The tabernacle, and the temple which replaced it, were constructed with the utmost care. They were designed to resist wear and decay; but because the most durable materials are perishable, provision was made for the care of these sacred buildings. Moses, under Divine direction, created a temple fund, which was sustained by a uniform tax of half a shekel upon every member of the congregation of twenty years old and upward. In the troubled times which preceded the succession of Joash to the throne, this fund had not been collected; and in the general decline into irreligion, the temple and its furniture had been neglected, plundered, and wasted. One of the conspicuous signs of the religious

condition of the nation was this house. By viewing it one could see at a glance that the service of God had been exchanged for idolatry. It is a pretty safe rule that we may judge of the state of religion in a town by the condition of the churches; if these are in good repair, without and within, the inference is,—it will not always hold, but it is the rule—that the religious institutions are flourishing. God is honoured, and His blessings are with His faithful people. 2. One reason why the temple had been neglected was that the people worshipped in the high places. We have references to these places in all the Jewish history. They were not necessarily places of idol worship. God was worshipped in them. Devout Jews, who worshipped in the temple, worshipped also at private or local altars, the high places. But, as religion declined, the tendency was to prefer the high places to the temple, and to corrupt the purer worship of these shrines by idolatries. The high places became rivals of the temple. 3. The king thought of the temple before Jehoiada, though the great priest was the reformer of his age. This seems strange. The position of Jehoiada throughout the work was strange; he seems never to have fully appreciated the importance of the repair of the temple. Probably the reason was that he was absorbed in other parts of the mighty task to which he had devoted himself. It has not been uncommon for reformers to be guilty of extraordinary oversight, their very zeal preventing their viewing their work in its true proportions. But while this was the case, the training of Jehoiada appears in the devotion of the king. 4. The first plan adopted for raising money for the repair was excellent. The priests were directed to set apart the regular income of the temple, and also to go through the country, among their acquaintances, and raise a general subscription. Each priest was to present the case to his personal friends. There could be no better plan. This is the simple scriptural method by which religion is extended. Every Christian is to go among his friends and acquaintances, and enlist them one by one. 5. The most excellent plans may fail. The plan of Jehoash failed. The failure lay immediately at the door of the priests. These good men seem to have shared the want of interest of Jehoiada in the work. They failed to collect the popular tax. And instead of using the collections which they made for the purpose for which they were raised, they expended them for current needs, and for furniture which needed to be replaced, candlesticks, tongs, and spoons. 6. A new and poor plan succeeded. His patience at length worn out, the king called a conference, discovered how things had been mismanaged, and changed his course. He learned that, notwithstanding his order, the temple tax, the half-shekel, had not been collected. With the counsel of Jehoiada, he had a collection chest placed at the gate of the temple; he stopped the private subscriptions, and had a proclamation issued, calling upon the people throughout the nation to pay the ancient tax of Moses. Simply the uniform sum fixed by Moses was required from all. The princes were not permitted to pay more; the poorest man might not pay less. The confidence of the king in the people was justified. The chest rapidly filled, and, when it was emptied, was refilled again and again. The plan was a very poor one: one of the very poorest which man has ever devised, this of a box at the church door. It succeeded because the people were interested to get the work done. It is of interest to note that, when the repair was completed, enough money was left to refurnish the temple throughout with vessels of silver and gold. 7. The depth of the reformation in the nation is shown in what is said of the honesty of Joash's master-workmen. The taxes, as they were taken from the chest at the gate of the temple, were put into the hands of these men to pay out in wages, and, moreover, they reckoned not for materials with the men into whose hands they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen; for they dealt faithfully. This is most extraordinary. This was one of the times when Israel had a dim realisation of the coming millennium, when Holiness should be written on the bells of the horses, when public money could be trusted to officials, high and low, with such confidence that they would deal faithfully that they were not required to give any account. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *The history of Jehoash:*—The whole story of Joash is soon told. He was a son of Ahaziah, and the only one of his children who escaped the murderous policy of Athaliah. I. THE DILAPIDATING INFLUENCE OF TIME UPON THE BEST MATERIAL PRODUCTIONS OF MANKIND. The temple had not been built more than about one hundred and sixty years, had got into a state of dilapidation, there were breaches in it; where the breaches were we are not told, whether in the roof, the floor, the walls, or in the ceiling. The crumbling hand of time had touched it. No human superstructure,

perhaps, ever appeared on the earth built of better materials, or in a better way, than the temple of Solomon. It was the wonder of ages. Notwithstanding this, it was subject to the invincible law of decay. The law of dilapidation seems universal throughout organic nature; the trees of the forest, the flowers of the field, and the countless tribes of sentient life that crowd the ocean, earth, and air, all fall into decay; and so, also, with the material productions of feeble man. Throughout the civilised world we see mansions, churches, cathedrals, palaces, villages, towns, and cities, in ruins. All compound bodies tend to dissolution, there is nothing enduring but primitive elements or substances. This being so, how astoundingly preposterous is man's effort to perpetuate his memory in material monuments. The only productions of men that defy the touch of time and that are enduring are true thoughts, pure sympathies, and noble deeds.

II. THE INCONGRUITY OF WORLDLY RULERS BUSYING THEMSELVES IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS. Jehosah was no saint, the root of the matter was not in him; he had no vital and ruling sympathy with the Supreme Being, yet he seemed zealous in the work of repairing the temple. III. THE VALUE OF THE CO-OPERATIVE PRINCIPLE IN THE ENTERPRISES OF MANKIND. It would seem that the work of repairing the temple was so great that no one man could have accomplished it. Hence the king called earnestly for the co-operation of all. They obeyed his voice. The people gave the money, and all set to work. Two remarks concerning the principle of co-operation. 1. It is a principle that should govern all men in the undertakings of life. It was never the purpose of the Almighty that man should act alone for himself, should pursue alone his own individual interests. Men are all members of one great body, and was ever member made to work alone? No. But for the good of the whole, the common weal. 2. It is a principle that has done and is doing wonders in the undertakings of life. This principle, however, has its limits. In spiritual matters it must not infringe the realm of individual responsibility. There is no partnership in moral responsibility. Each man must think, repent, and believe for himself. "Every man must bear his own burden." The narrative reminds us of—IV. THE POTENCY OF THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENT IN EVEN DEPRAVED MEN. At this time Israel was morally as corrupt as the heathen nations. Notwithstanding this, the religious sentiment was in them, as in all men, a constituent part of their natures, and this sentiment is here appealed to, and roused into excitement, and being excited men poured forth their treasures and employed their energies for the repairing of the temple. This element in man often sleeps under the influence of depravity, but mountains of depravity cannot crush it, it lies in human nature as the mightiest latent force. Peter the Hermit, Savonarola the Priest, Wesley the Methodist, and others, in every age have roused it into mighty action even amongst the most ignorant and depraved of the race. V. THE POWER OF MONEY TO SUBDUCE ENEMIES. Here is a man, a proud, daring monarch, who was determined to invade Judea, and to take possession of Jerusalem. Relinquishing his designs, what was the force that broke his purpose? Money. It is said that Jehoash sent gold to Hazael, "and he went away from Jerusalem." Truly money answereth all things. Money can arrest the march of armies and terminate the fiercest campaigns. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. And Jehoiada the priest took a chest.—*The first contribution-box* :—This chapter takes us away from those confusions up in northern Palestine, which seemed to be getting a little overcrowded with murder and warfare and theft. There is a deep spiritual apathy in the city and the land everywhere. The people have still idolatrous practices; around on some of the hills there are altars and groves where decorous men and women would think it not nice to go. The worst of this terrible ungodliness is found in the greediness of the priests. Evidently they are self-seekers of the vile sort. They exhaust all the income of the sanctuary, slender as it is, in their own emoluments and perquisites. The king is inefficient, as should be expected; what could a little boy do? The temple is all out of repair; there are breaches in many parts of the building. A dull period of sixteen years has been slowly drifting along. The picture is not encouraging; but let us turn ourselves to the instruction it offers for us in these modern times. The force of the story will come out in a series of observations. I. SOMETIMES RELIGIOUS DEPRESSION SHOWS ITSELF IN MATERIAL DILAPIDATIONS. Everything is running behindhand in the public spirit of the town, the city, or the congregation. 1. It is a bad sign when the church edifice is going into ruinous condition. Can it be

said that the zeal of the Lord is eating any one up there ? 2. It is a worse sign when the income of any congregation has begun to fail. In the story here, somebody must have pushed up that little seven-year-old king Jehoash to try to collect some money, for he issued a call almost at once for help to put the temple under repair. But it all came to nothing ; the house of the Lord continued to discourage and chill the devotions far more than to awake them, because it was so forlorn and unclean. 3. It is a worse sign still when the minister and the employees exhaust the funds in their own uses and luxuries. That was the trouble during those sad sixteen years of Jehoash's infancy. Money went in, but the priests swallowed it up. 4. It is the worst sign of all when the people's heart is unmoved ; when everybody knows and nobody cares about the cheerlessness of the facts or the prospects. II. SOMETIMES THE SPEEDIEST RELIEF IS FOUND IN THE PEOPLE'S TAKING THE REFORM WHOLLY INTO THEIR OWN HANDS. 1. In this case, it was the young king and the people who did the work, though the high-priest organised the new movement, under royal direction. Let us look into the whole facts and philosophy of this uprising of the community there in Jerusalem. The religious and ordained officers in the congregation of the temple cheerfully arose to say, " Let anybody do this great and needed thing that can do it better than we can." They consented to receive none of the money, and they withdrew from ordering the repairs. In that historic hour there came first to light the earliest contribution-box used in the service of God. Was there ever anything imagined so rude or inartistic as an instrument of devotion ? 2. But before you smile at the prosaic expedient, pause a moment to do simple justice to one of God's instruments of good. From that day the contribution-box has been an institution for the Church under the Old Testament and the New, probably as well known as any other in the range of our experience. It deserves now and then a decent eulogy. Its record is honourable and fair. (1) The contribution-box exhibits the wide reach of religious obligation. This one stood beside the altar. (2) The contribution-box kindles the fires of love and hope in the believer's heart. For it seems to say, " All are at work now, and all together ; what are you doing for your Lord ? " (3) The contribution-box keeps good and true men up to the exact end in view. (4) The contribution-box develops and commissions the most capable workers in the Lord's cause. When men have given hopeful hearts and open hands alike to the service of the Master, it is not necessary to guard them ; they will surely deal faithfully. III. SOMETIMES PIETY IS BROUGHT BACK TO ITS LEVEL UNDER A FRESH IMPULSE OF MATERIAL PROSPERITY. This is a reflection also that we might expect to be suggested by the history here. 1. The philosophy underlying such a conclusion is simple. We are all creatures of human build and constitutional weakness in relation to the practical world we live in. When the church is repulsive and the services dull, when the carpets are soiled with long using, when the prayer-circle is languishing ; then, good friends, it is almost hopeless for even the best of saints to try and keep up his spirits. 2. The relief is close at hand. 3. The facts, which might be offered in illustration, are without limit. (C. S. Robinson, D.D.)

CHAPTER XIII.

VERS. 2-13. He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.—Defection :—Just as two roads that diverge from each other at a very sharp angle, get the wider apart the further they go, till at last half a continent may be held betwixt them—the little deflection from the narrow line of Christian duty and simple faithfulness, it is only God's mercy that will prevent it from leading thee away out, out, out into the waste plains and doleful wildernesses, where all sinful, and dark, and foul things dwell for ever.

Ver. 8. The rest of the acts of Jehoahaz.—Records of life :—How very little we know even of the men whose lives are written : " The rest of the acts of Jehoahaz and all that he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel ? " No ! Another hand there indeed endeavours to sketch the life, but how much is left out ! No human chronicler can put down all things

concerning the subject which he has undertaken to depict. But the rest of our lives is written. A diary is kept in heaven; the journal is not published for the perusal of others; but the whole life, day by day, is put down in the book of remembrance; and we shall be able to recognise the writing, and to confirm the accuracy of the minute. We cannot get away from it, there is the writing, and it abides—a perpetual witness for us or against us. What is the Divine scribe now writing? The pen is going. We are obliged to use such figures to represent the spiritual reality. The writing is now proceeding: every thought registered, every deed chronicled, every day's work added up and carried over to the next page. It is a solemn thing to live! We are stewards, trustees, servants sent on messages, and entrusted with specified duties, and we are expected back with a definite answer and a complete report of our lives. (*J. Parker.*)

Vers. 14-21. Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died.—*The death of Elisha*:—I. A GREAT MAN DYING. II. A WICKED MAN REGRETTING THE EVENT. III. A GOOD MAN LEAVING THE WORLD INTERESTED IN POSTERITY. Elisha, though dying, was excited to some interest in the future of his country (vers. 15-19). IV. A DEAD MAN EXERTING A WONDERFUL INFLUENCE. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Vers. 15-19. And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows.—*The king's arrows*:—Elisha was lying ill on his deathbed. His long career of usefulness and blessing was drawing to a close. He was held in great honour, not only by the people but by the king, and when it was known that he was coming to the end of his career King Joash came to see him, and when he came into the room, and saw the prophet lying there, looking so frail and weak, the young king was greatly affected. He burst into tears, and cried aloud, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." Now Joash was neither a good nor a great man, but he was still young and not yet hardened, and he had no doubt a sudden vision of something of the meaning of the great value of Elisha to the kingdom. Elisha was a man of deeds, and he called the young man to his composure by saying to him, "Take bow and arrows." For a moment Elisha is king, and the king is his servant, and the king turns and takes up a bow and arrows.

1. God's hand on ours is our only guarantee of success. When Elisha had young King Joash take up the bow and arrows and place the arrow on the string and make ready to shoot, he put his own hands over the hands of the king to illustrate and impress upon the mind of this young ruler that if he gave himself to earnest, resolute attack upon the enemies of God and of His people the hand of God should be with him as a guarantee of victory. The lesson is as important for us as it was for Joash. God calls every one of us to fight His enemies and the enemies of mankind. And there is that other warfare in our own hearts, that campaign against our personal besetting sins. God's hand must be on our hand if the arrow shall find its mark and do its execution. 2. We are to smite sin utterly. God seeks to deliver us entirely from sin, but we may limit the deliverance of God by our own conduct. When the prophet told the young king to shoot his arrow eastward towards his Syrian enemy, he exclaimed, "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance." But when, to test the young king, he told him to take up the arrows and smite on the ground with them, his heart was heavy and his soul indignant as he noticed that he struck half-heartedly and that after only three strokes he turned about in a lifeless sort of way as if looking for further directions. Let us not fail of this great lesson. God seeks our complete deliverance from sin. He desires that every enemy which troubles us and hinders us from working out the great purposes to which we are called of Jesus Christ shall be consumed and destroyed. But let us never forget that whether or not this is accomplished depends at the last upon us. It is a solemn thing that we, by our nerveless will, by our flabby lack of purpose, by our mushy indecision may thwart the purpose of Almighty God and continue to live lives far beneath our privilege. Let us smite, and smite, and smite, and yet again, smite, until every wicked passion, until every evil appetite, until every besetting sin shall be smitten to the death in our hearts and Jesus shall be crowned Lord over all. 3. There is no greater danger to the Christian than lack of persistence. Over and over again is this urged upon us in the Bible. Joash failed for lack of persistence. Many a Christian in these later centuries has failed because he gave up in despair by the way. 4. We are in great danger of being too easily satisfied. It may be that King Joash thought that three

victories over Syria would be enough. It was not in him to rise up to a high ideal of his mission or to grasp the fulness of God's willingness to make him not only the great King of Israel but the great king of all the world. Because he was easily satisfied his career was short and disgraceful. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *Poverty of faith ensures but partial success*:—We may take this closing incident in the life of Elisha, as an illustration of the warfare between the soul and its enemies, and the conditions upon which complete victory is achieved. 1. Israel. Redeemed out of Egypt, in Canaan, where they might have lived in the enjoyment of triumph over all foes. Not in absolute exemption from conflict, but trusting in God and obeying Him, they would never have known defeat. They disbelieved, disobeyed, and, as a consequence, there was failure and defeat. Type of a soul which has "passed out of death (Egypt) into life (Canaan)." But it has left its "first love," in which it might have abode in the joys of continuous victory. 2. Israel's enemies. Syria in particular. We find ourselves attacked from different quarters at the same time. 3. Promised deliverance. (a) A definite deliverance—"from Syria." (b) A Divine deliverance—"The Lord's deliverance." Spiritual deliverance is promised us. Definite promises of deliverance from the dominion, love and pollution of sin. 4. The king's error. He erred in not resolving on, and expecting, complete success. "He smote thrice, and stayed." He, as it were, "limited the Holy One of Israel." He certainly manifested a lack of faith and of courage. In the spiritual life we should aim at, and expect, complete success. Be satisfied with nothing short of this. Not to rest while a single foe has a footing in the territory which belongs to God. We are to be "more than conquerors." 5. The king's partial success. Elisha would not have been "wrath" had there not been good cause. Elisha was God's messenger. As when he declared that there should be plenty in Samaria within a given time, and the lord of the court was held guilty for not believing the message, so here. On account of weak faith, we are often only partially successful against our spiritual enemies. Would Naaman have been cured of his leprosy had he dipped in Jordan but thrice, and then stayed? 6. The king's loss through unbelief. He was not aware, possibly, of the grandeur of the opportunity. Perhaps he treated the prophet's simple message with contempt—obeying him merely to indulge the whim of an old and dying man—failing to look beyond the prophet to God who sent him. Perhaps we stumble sometimes at the message because we look no farther or higher than the messenger. He is not talented, famous, but coarse, &c. The king suffered. So do we when this spirit is indulged. (*J. E. Robinson.*) *Spiritual archery*:—There are two acts in this wonderful event. The first concerns the shooting of the arrow of deliverance, a symbolic and prophetic act; the second concerns the smiting on the ground with arrows, also symbolical, but providing as well a test of the character, of the zeal, and of the faith of the King of Israel. Now concerning these two acts and the several scenes in them let us speak as God may guide us. I SHOOTING THE ARROW OF DELIVERANCE. Notice, 1. A call to action. "Take bow and arrows," said the dying prophet. There is a deal of meaning wrapped up in this apparently simple suggestion. Elisha had come to a full end, and like a shock of corn that was fully ripe he was now bending towards the sharpened sickle. The king, who was not remarkable all the years of his life for his devotion to God or to His prophets, is now found trembling and weeping by the side of the sick servant of Jehovah. Then it is that the dying prophet, with more faith and hope and vigour in him even at the last article than the sinful king in his prime and power, exclaims as it were, "Weep not, tremble not, faint not, fear not; I am going, but God is with you. God buries His workmen, but He carries on His work. I die, but God will surely visit you. Do not let this sad event unduly depress you. I must die, for my time has come; but so long as you live, live to purpose, take bow and arrows, let not your hands hang down. Go forth to the battle yet again, and believe in the God to whom I have so long, though vainly, pointed you; for He is the Lord God of Hosts, the God of battles still. Dry up your tears; forsake your grief; take bow and arrows; arm yourself; go forth into the fight, and the Lord my God shall be with you." 2. I notice next that Elisha gives to the king several strict injunctions; indeed, the detail to which he condescends is most remarkable. All through these verses we find a long list of instructions and commands. "Take bow and arrows." "Put thine hand upon the bow." "Open the window eastward." "Shoot." "Take the arrows." "Smite upon the ground." The dying prophet instructs the king in all the minutiae of his immediate duty. The

wisest of us need to be divinely directed. 3. Then followed on the king's part implicit obedience. "Take," said the prophet; "and he took." So it is throughout. "Put thine hand upon the bow;" "and he put his hand upon it." "Open the window;" "and he opened it." "Shoot;" "and he shot." "Smite;" "and he smote." All through there is a corresponding obedience on the king's part to the arrangement and suggestion of the prophet. So should it ever be with us and God. Let His imperative be answered by obedient indicative on our part. 4. There follows a hint as to the necessity for personal interest and effort. Read the 16th verse. 5. There was Divine co-operation, for we read "Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands." 6. Notice next that the window had to be opened. He said, "Open the window eastward. And he opened it." In other words, every obstruction and possible hindrance has to be got rid of. You see the importance of this. 7. Then at last they come to the decisive action. All the rest has been preliminary and preparatory. II. THE SECOND ACT, THE SMITING WITH THE OTHER ARROWS. This was a symbolical act, as was the first. The flight of the single arrow through the open lattice must have been readily understood by the king, for it was the custom there and then, as in other lands and times, to throw down the gage of battle, or to hurl a dart, the signal of the war. God has shot out of every window of this Tabernacle arrows of deliverance, if I may so speak; but with this purpose, that we ourselves shall follow up those tokens, and hope and believe that they were prophecies and promises with meaning which must meet with further fulfilment. It remains for us to shoot the other arrows, for we have a quiver full of them. The command was to smite with them on the ground. You see the meaning of that. It is as though Elisha said, "The arrow of God's deliverance has gone forth; it has already found its mark and done its work. You have now, if you will but believe it, these Syrians crouching at your very feet. God has already humbled them, and they are now at your mercy. Smite upon the ground. They are already at your feet. God has delivered them into your hands. Smite! Smite!" The king obeys, but with too little zeal. (*T. Spurgeon.*) *The arrow of the Lord's deliverance* :—How the spiritual drama repeats itself year after year! Again and again we see young people come up full of enthusiasm, full of the memory of the great things that noble lives have done, lamenting the glory that has departed from the earth, feeling a sudden impulse, which like an arrow is shot forth from the soul, essaying to do some great and noble work; and in that moment the prophetic voice is heard saying, *The arrow of the Lord's deliverance*; there lies the work of your life. This sudden impulse that takes possession of you in your youth, and causes you to shoot forth the arrows of the aspirations of your soul,—these are the things, that show you the way of the Lord. It is God's purpose that you should be the deliverer of His people in the particular path that He has opened before you. How that is going on every day! How every day at college men are lifting up their hearts, and setting open the windows of their souls, and looking out, shooting forth the thoughts and hopes and desires of their soul into this great unknown world! And then what? Then says the prophetic voice again, *Smite upon the ground*. Take these arrows and bind them together, and in a Divine frenzy devote yourself, soul and body, to the work that God has revealed to you to do. Then comes the critical moment in a man's life. He smites thrice, and stays. He says to himself, I need not do my best; I can do about as well as other men and not be wearied by my work; I have gifts that will enable me to live, and enable me to attain, perchance, a fortune, and yet I need not give up the things that make life pleasant; I need not turn aside from my self-indulgence; I will smite thrice, and stay. So it comes to pass that this great multitude, surging out into the life of the world year after year, equipped, crowned as kings for the work of life, smite the Syrians but thrice. The work of life is but half done. They remain failures, when they might have triumphed gloriously. Or take another illustration of the same thing. Here is a woman who has given herself up to a life of frivolity and vanity. Perhaps she is not to blame for that; perhaps she has had no ideal of noble things set before her. But some day the casement is thrown open, and she sees a new life before her,—a life which shall be devoted to husband and children and home, a life which shall for the first time remember the great forgotten who dwell among us. The hand of the prophet is on that woman, and her soul shoots forth the arrow of a new desire. And the voice says, *It is the arrow of the Lord's deliverance*; there lie the glory, and splendour, and nobility of your life; there is the path on which God would have you walk, and you may

deliver yourself and deliver those who live about you from the slavery and misery of the false ideals that thus far have dominated them. Smite, says the voice of the prophet. Devote yourself, soul and body, instantly, to the new work that has been revealed to you. And she smites thrice. She goes to see some poor stricken soul, and she finds it tiresome; she turns aside from some gathering of frivolity, and her soul is parched. She undertakes some noble work of self-denial, and she is tired. She smites thrice, and stays, and goes down with the great multitude, worthless, useless, bringing no fruit to perfection. Listen to one more example of the same thing. Here is a man or woman who has come on through life, and suddenly awakes to the consciousness of his ignorance of the Divine revelation in Jesus Christ. It smites upon him. Sometimes for one cause, and sometimes for another, it comes to pass that men and women living here in this city suddenly for the first time have a revelation of the glory and beauty and power of the life of Jesus Christ. And they say to themselves, Is the thing a myth? How has it come to pass that people have dreamed of such a life? How is it that men and women gather week after week, and day after day, to hear of the Lord Jesus Christ, and desire to serve Him? That man shoots forth the arrow of his desire for knowledge, and the voice says, It is the arrow of the Lord's deliverance. There lies the path by which you shall walk into the kingdom of truth and be saved from your enemies. And he begins to read. He reads a little, and he talks a little, and he thinks a little. But he learns before long that there is opening up before him a great and tremendous work, and the scepticism of the time finds voice, and whispers, Why waste your energies to learn that which cannot be known? Devote the energy of life to something that is practical; turn aside from vain dreams. So he, like the others, smites thrice and stays, and enters the great company of sceptics,—or, as they like to be called to-day, agnostics,—ignorant of God's eternal truth. (*Leighton Parks.*) *The Lord's arrow of victory*:—You see then the full measure of victory which God wants us to enjoy. "Thou shalt smite the Syrians till thou have consumed them." You see, too, the limited measure of victory which most Christians experience. "He smote thrice and stayed." Three big blessings and we think we have had all. Three successes over the enemy and we think we have done wonders. But the Saviour marvels that after all He went through for us, we should be content with such half measures. We glean from it four rules for complete victory in the Christian life.

1. Declare war against sin. Elisha breaks in upon the king's lamentations with the emphatic words, "Take bow and arrows." It is time not for weeping but for warring. The genius of the gospel is not peace at any price, but truth at all costs.
2. Union is strength. This is the meaning of the second act in this significant drama. "The prophet laid his hands upon the king's hands." Like the officer who sallied forth to capture one of the enemy's forts, after two unsuccessful attempts had been made, asking first of all from his general a grasp of his conquering right hand, so we must know what it is for our weakness to be encompassed in Christ's strength.
3. Claim a complete deliverance. This is the meaning of the next step. The window was opened eastward and through the open window was shot forth the Lord's arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Syria.
4. Then came the fourth act with its momentous lesson, "Fulfil the obedience of faith," and the king failed at this point so that the man of God was angry with him. How slow we are to learn this lesson. It is what we are in secret before God that fixes the amount of victory and blessing we enjoy in our walk and service amongst men. If only Joash had emptied the quiver he would have consumed the Syrians. If only we will be whole-hearted before God, yielding our will wholly and trusting God's promises absolutely, we too shall be completely victorious against the world, the flesh, and the devil. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*)

The challenge arrow:—History gives us the explanation of this symbolic narrative. It appears that in former times war was often proclaimed or renewed by the despatch of an arrow into the enemy's lines. Elisha meant to teach the king that, although he was weak and dying, yet Israel's cause was not going to die with him; and that the same power that made Israel strong in the past would follow the king in his new campaign against the Syrian oppressor. Let us learn the following lessons from the laying of those old emaciated hands of the prophet upon the young strong hands of the king. We see there a picture of—I. THE PAST DIRECTING THE PRESENT. When we crossed the threshold of the year we did not get rid of the old; for the past is always stretching out its vanishing hands to direct and influence the present. The white-bearded face of Elisha well represents

the past, which is ever behind us, overlooking our work. The actions, associations, and habits of the past are still with us. We may turn over a new leaf, but we cannot unlearn at once the irregularities of the defective writing on the previous page. We may point the arrow afresh, but the old hands are inevitably influencing the sweep it takes from the bow. This influence is exerted by the past, whether it is good or evil. Virtue and piety reap their immediate, as well as ultimate, harvests. The good deeds of the past are ever stretching forth their gentle hands to guide and bless not only ourselves, but others as well. Who can tell the influence of a mother's prayers uttered by lips long since sealed in death? In the critical moment of her boy's career, it would seem as if a straw would have turned the scale of destiny this way or that. The young impulsive nature is guided and restrained by the mother's prayers answered, the mother's words remembered, the mother's influence exerted; and these have saved him in the hour of danger.

II. THE DIVINE CONTROLLING THE HUMAN. "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance" had power in it, not because of the strong hand of Joash who pulled the bow, but mainly because of the prophetic hands that were laid upon him as he did so. Mere human effort is fruitless unless a higher power directs and controls the course and goal of the arrow's flight. We may spread the sails, but they must be filled with heaven-sent breezes. We may sow the seed, but God gives the increase. "Man proposes, but God disposes." We form plans and projects, we bend the bow, and throw all our power into the work lying before us, but unless a higher power is with us, all the determination and foresight we may command are valueless. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." If this is true in regard to temporal concerns, how much more should we recognise its truth in the spiritual sphere. Too long has the enemy oppressed and held dominion over our hearts and our lives. Let us look to the ground we would reconquer and reclaim for the King of kings. Let us resolve that this slavery of our souls to sin shall cease. And as we do so, let us pray for the presence and power of the "hands of the mighty God of Jacob" to strengthen our weakness and give us the victory. But while thus trusting in Divine help, notice that it was the young king who drew the bow. Human effort is as essential as Divine direction. God's promise to help does not warrant idleness. The sense of God's helping us should not paralyse, but should rather stimulate to doing and daring greater things than we have ever hitherto attempted. The narrative suggests that effort must be sustained to be successful. One blow never won a battle. The king stayed his hand after he had discharged three arrows, and the man of God was wrath, and said he should have smitten the ground oftener, and then he would have utterly consumed the foe. So long as God bids us "fight the good fight" we must not cease our warring. So long as His hand is urging us we must smite again and again. Let us not desist, as Joash may have done, from a feeling of tenderness towards the enemy, nor from unbelief in the efficacy of the means ordained of God for our deliverance. Both motives have hindered and crippled the efforts of many a hopeful life. Finally, let us ask ourselves, has "the arrow of the Lord's deliverance" been discharged from our bow at all? Have we declared war against sin and Satan? If not, let us do so before another day closes. Look up and see God's hands held out, waiting, and able to help and to save you, and to rid from the guilt and bondage and pollution of sin. Fight for your life, and the lives of those around you, and all your arrows shall bring help and joy and peace to you and yours. (*David A. Taylor.*) *Three arrows, or six?*—It is a very difficult task to show the meeting-place of the purpose of God and the free agency of man. One thing is quite clear, we ought not to deny either of them, for they are both facts. It is a fact that God has purposed all things both great and little; neither will anything happen but according to His eternal purpose and decree. It is also a sure and certain fact that, oftentimes, events hang upon the choice of men. Their will has a singular potency. In the case before us, the arrows are in the hands of the King of Israel; and according to whether he shall shoot once, twice, thrice, or five or six times, so will the nation's history be affected. Now, how these two things can both be true, I cannot tell you; neither, probably, after long debate, could the wisest men in heaven tell you, not even with the assistance of cherubim and seraphim. If they could tell you, what would you know, and in what way would you be benefited if you could find out this secret? But sometimes a practical question about these two points does arise. It is correct to say, speaking after the manner of men, "If men are earnest, if men are believing, if men are prayerful, such and such a blessing will

come"; and that the blessing does not come, may be rightly traced to the fact that they were not as prayerful and as believing as they ought to have been. Next, reflect what great things may lie in a man's hand. There stood Joash, an unworthy king; and yet in his hands lay, measurably, the destiny of his people. If he will take those arrows, and will shoot five or six times, their great enemy will be broken in pieces. If he will be dilatory, and will only shoot three times, he will get only a measure of victory; and poor Israel will ultimately have to suffer again from this enemy, who has been only scotched, and not killed. You do not know, dear friends, what responsibility lies upon you. You are the father of a family; what blessings may come to your household, or may be missed by your children, through your conduct! Once more, notice what great results may come from very little acts. It was a very trifling thing, was it not, to shoot an arrow from a bow? Your child has done it many times in his holidays. He has taken his bow, and shot his little home-made shaft into the air. This is what the King of Israel is required to do, to perform this very slight and common feat of archery, to shoot from an open window, and to drive his arrows into the ground beneath; and yet upon the shooting of these arrows will hang victory or defeat for Israel. So there be some who think that hearing the Gospel is a little thing. Life, death, and hell, and worlds unknown, may hang upon the preaching and hearing of a sermon. I. LET ME SPEAK OF SOME MATTERS IN WHICH MANY MEN TOO SOON PAUSE. There are some who, having great opportunities,—and we all have them more or less,—shoot only three times when they ought to shoot five or six times. 1. One of these matters is in the warfare with the evil within. Some, as soon as they begin their Christian life, fit an arrow to the string, and shoot down big sins, such as swearing, or drunkenness, or open uncleanness. When they have shot these three times, they seem to think that the other enemies within them may be tolerated. My brother, thou shouldst have shot five or six times. 2. There are some who shoot three times, and then leave off, with regard to Christian knowledge. They know the simple truth of justification by faith; but they do not want to know much about sanctification by the Spirit of God. Why not, my brother? Canst thou be saved unless thou art sanctified? Some are perfectly satisfied with laying again the first principles, always going over those; but they want to know no more. I beseech you, strive to be educated in the things of God. 3. Some, again, sin in this way with regard to Christian attainments. They have little faith, and they say, "Faith like a grain of mustard-seed will save you." That is true. But are you always to be a little one? A grain of mustard-seed is not worth anything if it does not grow; it is meant to grow till it comes to be a tree, and birds lodge in its boughs. Come, my dear friend, if thou hast little faith, do not rest till thou hast great faith, till thou hast full assurance, till thou hast the full assurance of understanding. 4. Others, again, seem satisfied with little usefulness. You brought a soul to Christ, did you? Oh, that you would long to bring another! Do you not remember what the general said, in the war, when one rode up to him, and cried out, "We have taken a gun from the enemy"? "Take another," said the general. If you have brought one soul to Christ, it should make you hunger and thirst to bring another. 5. And this spirit comes out very vividly in prayer. You do pray; else were you not the living children of God at all; but oh, for more power in prayer! You have asked for a blessing; why not ask for a far greater one? 6. The Church of God, as a whole, is guilty here, as to her plans for God's glory. She is doing much more now than she used to do; but even now, though she smites three times, we may say to her, "Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times." Oh, that the Church of Christ had a boundless ambition to conquer the world for her Lord! II. But now, secondly, let me speak of THE REASONS FOR THIS PAUSING. Why do men come to a dead halt so soon? 1. Some of them say that they are afraid of being presumptuous. You are afraid of being too holy, are you? Dismiss your fear. You are afraid of asking for too much grace; be afraid of having too little. You are afraid of conquering sin; tremble for fear of an unconquered sin. There is no presumption in taking the largest promise of God, and pleading it, and expecting to have it fulfilled. 2. Perhaps one says, "I have not the natural ability to be doing more, or enjoying more." What has natural ability to do with it? When all thy natural abilities are in the grave, and thou lookest only to the spiritual strength of God, then thou shalt see greater things than these. 3. Shall I tell you the real reasons why men pause in their work? With some, it is because they are too dependent upon their fellow-men. This King Joash could shoot when Elisha put his hand on his hand;

probably Elisha only did that once, and then left him to himself, and said, "Now, you shoot." Then he only shot three times. There are many Christian people who are a great deal too dependent upon their ministers, or upon some elderly Christian person who has helped them onward. 4. Another reason why some pause is, that they are too soon contented. Joash thought that he had done very well when he had shot three times, and that Elisha would pat him on the back, and say, "How well you have done!" That kind of feeling creeps over many workers for the Lord. 5. Joash, too, I dare say, gave up shooting because he was unbelieving. He could not see how shooting the arrows could affect the Syrians; and he wanted to see. 6. I should not wonder, also, if Joash was too indolent to shoot five or six times. He did not feel in a shooting humour. Now, whenever you do not feel in a humour for prayer, then is the time when you ought to pray twice as much. 7. Joash also probably had too little zeal. He was not wide awake, he was not thoroughly aroused, he did not care for the glory of God. If he could beat the Syrians three times, that would be quite enough for him. III. But now, thirdly, notice THE LAMENTABLE RESULT OF THIS PAUSING. 1. When Joash had shot three times, he paused; and therefore the blessing paused. Three times he shot, and three times God gave him victory. Do you see what you are doing by pausing? You are stopping the conduit-pipe by which the river of blessing will flow to you. Do not do that; to impoverish yourself must certainly be a needless operation. 2. You will suffer in consequence, as this king did; for, after the three victories, the rival power came to the front again. 3. Others will also suffer with you. 4. Meanwhile, the enemy triumphed. 5. What was even worse, Jehovah Himself was dishonoured. 6. Yet again, glorious possibilities were lost. IV. THE CURE FOR THIS PAUSING. 1. If we pause in our holy service, or in getting near to God, or in sucking the marrow out of the promises, remember that the enemy will not pause. 2. A cure for this stopping lies in the reflection that in other things we are generally eager. 3. And lastly, this question ought to prevent us from ever pausing. Can we ever do enough for our Saviour? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The small gains of the irresolute*:—We have here a more than commonly graphic page of Holy Scripture. A young king grieving over the death-bed of an often neglected prophet; the feeble hands of the old saint laid on the vigorous hands of his sovereign, as they held the familiar arrows and bow; the swift course of one arrow shot by Divine direction towards the land of a dangerous enemy; the handful of arrows struck a scanty number of times on the ground by the unbelieving youth; and the wrath of the patriotic prophet (compare the anger of Christ, of whom Elisha may have been a type, Mark iii. 5), who longed for a widespread deliverance throughout the Holy Land. It is a picturesque story, but more than picturesque. It may be reckoned a parable as well as a tale. For—I. THERE WAS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY. Though Joash was undeserving (ver. 11, "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord") God was graciously ready to grant him complete escape from impending evil (the arrow of the Lord's deliverance, ver. 17); even as helpless sinners have offered to them, through Divine mercy, present pardon and holiness here, the earnest of complete salvation hereafter. II. THE IMPROVEMENT OF THAT OPPORTUNITY REQUIRED A PERSONAL EFFORT. And Joash was experiencing a measure of religious revival. His visit to the old prophet woke up stirring associations (tears rolled down his cheeks as he cried, "My father," &c., ver. 14). Much as the anniversary of a confirmation vow, a return after absence to a religious home, or the voice of a forgotten counsellor once more heard, may touch affectingly the conscience of a backslider. But—III. THE INADEQUATE EFFORT OF LITTLE FAITH HAD A CORRESPONDINGLY SLIGHT RESULT. Perhaps Joash thought the striking of arrows on the ground too trivial an action for very frequent repetition; perhaps he did not wish his companions to suppose him very obedient to a religious teacher; perhaps he was languid from the mere habit of attending to all sacred duties listlessly; perhaps he was in a hurry to be gone to some other occupation. But want of trust in the Divine revelation must have been the main cause of his curtailed exertion. And the measure of his receiving was proportioned to the small measure of his seeking. God faithfully gave him three victories, after his three strokes, but only three (ver. 25). Too many have in like manner lessened the measure of their peace, holiness, and hope, by not perseveringly using means of grace which might be vastly profitable. (*D. D. Stewart, M.A.*) *The story of a bad stopping*:—Is not the lesson evident?

Smiting but thrice and staying—only half-doing, not pushing to the finishing in grand faith and unrelaxing purpose—is not that the trouble with multitudes of men? Here, then, is our story of a bad stopping. 1. In the direction of success in the daily life men often make a bad stopping. They smite but thrice and stay. Success is duty. The difference between men as to making the most of themselves is due, oftener than we are apt to think, to this simply, whether they smite but thrice and stay, or whether they not only smite thrice but—go on smiting. “But it is hard,” men say. Yes; but everything that gets up in this world must struggle up. One relates how Arago, the French astronomer, tells, in his autobiography, that in his youth he one day became puzzled and discouraged over his mathematics, and almost resolved to give up the study. He held his paper-bound text-book in his hand. Impelled by an indefinable curiosity, he damped the cover of the book, and carefully unrolled the leaf to see what was on the other side. It turned out to be a brief letter from D’Alembert to a young man like himself, disheartened by the difficulties of mathematical study, who had written to him for counsel. This was the letter: “Go on, sir, go on. The difficulties you meet will resolve themselves as you advance. Proceed, and light will dawn and shine with increasing clearness upon your path.” Arago went on, and became the first astronomical mathematician of his time. “But I am too old,” men say. But use is the law of growth; and the quickest way to bring upon one’s self the worst sort of senility is to withdraw from life and the interests and duties of it. “But I would be humble,” men say. Yes; but if you do not amount to much, there is all the more reason you should make the most of yourself. And a true humility is never a withdrawing from service, but is always a readiness to set one’s self to even the lowliest service for the love of God and fellow-men. 2. In the direction of overcoming evil habits men often make a bad stopping. They smite but thrice and stay. As some one says, such men are like a man who, attempting to jump a ditch, will never really jump, but will for ever stop and return for a fresh run. 3. In the direction of resisting temptation men often make this bad stopping. They resist thrice, but at the fourth assault they yield. 4. In the direction of advance in the Christian life men often make this bad stopping. Plenty of Christians through a long life do not get much beyond the initial stage of justification. 5. In the direction of becoming Christian, men often make this bad stopping. They smite in the way of at least a partial and outward change of life, &c., but when it comes to a total and irreversible surrender of the self to the Lord Jesus, they stay. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) *God’s purpose and man’s response*:—A beautiful verse higher up the chapter tells us that “the Lord gave Israel a saviour” in answer to a repentant king’s prayer. A study of the history reveals the fact that the deliverer was the grandson of the praying man. The text explains why the Divine mercy skipped a generation. The son of the royal penitent was tried and found wanting; therefore deliverance had to wait until his son, in turn, sat on the throne. I. THE DIVINE PURPOSE SYMBOLISED. The shooting of an arrow, or the flinging of a dart into an enemy’s country was anciently a declaration of war. It signified that the archer and those he represented claimed the territory into which the missile was flung, and unless their challenge was successfully resisted would occupy it. Now eastwards from Samaria, the scene of this interview, was the district which the Syrians had taken from Israel. It was the direction from which their predatory bands came. To the north-east lay Syria itself. The shooting of the arrow was plainly a declaration of war against Syria. That the prophet’s hands were upon the monarch’s when it was discharged, signified that it was God who flung down the challenge. Now a challenge to combat by the Almighty is, of course, a prophecy of victory for Him. Here then, by vivid symbolism, we have the Divine purpose to deliver Israel from Syrian oppression declared. God’s purposes in the spiritual realm are revealed with equal clearness to us. It is His will that the world shall be evangelised and every Christian perfected. He has shot His arrow over the world. The incubus of devilry that now oppresses it is to be annihilated. The shadow of the Cross is upon every land. Every Christian, too, is to be perfected. We are saved from hell: we are to be saved from sin. Our spirits are the Lord’s: our bodies and minds are to become His also. All our spiritual enemies are to be conquered, and each wandering thought brought “into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” Over the entire life of the believer the Saviour’s arrow has been discharged. But these glorious purposes are to be accomplished through human instrumentality. Although the prophet’s hands were upon his, it was King Joash

who shot the arrow. God intends to conquer the world and our own bad hearts by our agency. In His might, we are to take possession of the world for our Redeemer. Further, as God's agents we should use the wisest means to fulfil His purposes. Joash had to take and use bow and arrow. One might say that only a bow and arrow were used that all the glory might be given to God! But that would be a wrong inference. Bows and arrows in the hands of Chinese troops to-day excite the derision of Europeans. But in the days of Joash, they comprised the most formidable artillery that could be employed in warfare. The symbolic lesson was that Joash was to use the wisest means—to employ all his military might—to effect the deliverance God had planned. We, also, are to do our best for God. We are to plan wisely: we are to labour diligently. We are to make the most of ourselves. Our powers should be trained to their utmost degree of efficiency. Not only for winning others, but also for saving our own souls we should use the best means. II. A HUMAN RESPONSE INVITED. The King of Israel has been, as it were, in the council-chamber of the Eternal. He has been shown, figuratively but clearly, the Divine will. He is now taken back to the region of practical, everyday life. That is God's purpose, says his mentor. Now show your acceptance of it and responsiveness to it. Take the remaining arrows. "And he took them." "Smite upon the ground"—that is, Smite the ground with the arrows; in other words, Shoot them into the earth. "And he smote"—or shot—"thrice, and stayed." Now here is a mystery. In the seventeenth verse we read, "Thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them": here, "Thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." In the one place we have the Divine purpose: in the other, that purpose as limited by the degree of human responsiveness to it. We are surely taught that God's plans depend for their fulfilment upon our acceptance of them and co-operation in them. This I say, is a mystery. Nothing happens apart from God. His will is surely done. That is most certain. Yet we may refuse to co-operate with Him, and so hinder, if not frustrate, His purpose. That also is undeniable. God's elect will be saved, yet the blood of souls may cling to the skirts of a faithless watchman. God's will shall be done, but we may be condemned for hindering it. God's sovereignty does not lessen our responsibility. How to harmonise these apparently incongruous truths, we do not know. Let us be content to accept them both, although for the present we do not see the relation between them. Joash is an example of low content. He had no ambition to be a David or a Solomon. A comfortable, easy-going life was all he desired. He wanted to be free from the yoke of Syria, but did not aspire to play the rôle of national hero. We are all too like him in his ignoble satisfaction. In the world we are ambitious. We long for wealth; we thirst for fame. The higher we can climb, and the sooner we can attain, the better we are pleased. But we have no sacred ambition to dare and to do greatly for God. How few pant after holiness or burn with desire to see the world won for Christ! And therefore we shoot but three arrows, when we ought to shoot five or six times. God forgive us our low content, and inspire us with loftier ideals! Let us not be satisfied with what may reasonably be considered all that could be expected—with the formal discharge of recognised duties. Let us form a high conception of what God expects from us, and dare greatly in the attempt to achieve it. Perhaps Joash was indolent. He lacked energy and perseverance. He had no tenacity of purpose, nor measure of continuance in well-doing. Certainly that is the fault of most of us. We serve God by fits and starts. There are times when we live near Him, and give the devil trouble. We grow rapidly in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Oh, if we could only keep on that level, we should soon become holy! But we do not. Lassitude creeps over us. Reaction sets in. We relapse into indifference. But the real secret of Joash's remissness was, in all probability, unbelief. The Syrians were a powerful nation. Israel was weak through long oppression. And whether we acknowledge it or not, it is unbelief that stays our hands also. The cold fingers of unbelief, laid upon the arm that draws the bowstring, cause it to fall paralysed to the side. The world, the flesh, and the devil are so real and powerful. There they were, rioting and ravaging, in the days of our fathers. There they are, ruining souls to-day. And there, surely, they will be to the end of the chapter! Is it conceivable that sin can lose its fascination for us, that all our inclinations towards it can be stamped out, and we, old sinners, be changed into the radiant image of the Christ of God? Is it credible that in the outside world drunkenness

will be abolished, impurity exterminated, wars ended, and the world, hoary in wickedness, "bound by gold chains about the feet of God"? Hardly! So the arms that are stretched to shoot are palsied. We smite only two or three times. According to our faith is our effort—and our success. All possibilities are in God. To convert them into actualities, we must believe and endeavour and persevere. We have the objective promise. There must now be the subjective appropriation of it. These two things together spell success. Man without God is impotent. God without man does not choose to work. "God and one man are a majority against the world." III. A HUMAN FAILURE DEPLORED. "He smote thrice, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him." For Joash, by his want of faith and energy, had lost for ever the honour that might have been his. God's will will undoubtedly be done, but if we fail to rise to it and work for it, it will fling us from its triumphant path, and summon others to its side, while we are left to suffer incalculable and eternal loss. No doubt we shall become perfect in heaven, but eternity itself will not compensate for the lack of holy culture here. Christ will win, but we may be denied a place beside Him when, in His chariot of victory, He passes through the eternal gates and the everlasting doors. Erasmus might have been the leader of the reformation of the sixteenth century. He published the Greek New Testament, and also a Latin translation of it. He taught the importance of knowledge of the Scriptures. He gave the initial impulse to the mighty movement which resulted in Protestantism. But when he saw how great a matter a little fire was kindling, Erasmus, timid and fearful, shrank back. Luther and others stepped forward and covered themselves with immortal glory, while Erasmus left a name which is pronounced half with honour and half with contempt, as that of a learned man who proved a moral weakling, one who saw the light but feared to walk in it. Let us have a holy ambition to excel in the kingdom of God. Let us patiently continue in well-doing, shooting not three arrows, but five or six. Through Joash's failure, too, Israel suffered. The bondage to Syria continued. Oppression by the foreign invader went drearily on. How far the Christian Church is responsible for the fact that on the eve of the twentieth century the world is so far from God, we cannot tell. It is a question which one shudders to face. Still, it is undoubtedly true that the poverty of our response hinders the completion of God's gracious purposes. God was dishonoured by the monarch's laxity. The Syrians, who blasphemed His name, continued to rule in His land. And by our unspiritual lives and lax efforts God is dishonoured to-day. If we only rose to His purposes and became holy men and women and earnest and successful workers, how greatly He would be glorified! As it is, we don't remain at concert-pitch long enough for the music to rise to His praise. We so soon give in that we bring contempt on the power we profess to work by. Let us rouse ourselves from spiritual sluggishness. Let us shoot, not three arrows, but five or six, or a dozen. (*B. J. Gibbon.*)

Ver. 16. And Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands.—*The spirit of power*:—This is part of one of the strangest narratives in the Old Testament. Elisha is on his death-bed, "sick of the sickness" wherewith he "should die." A very different scene that close sick chamber from the open plain beyond Jordan, from which Elijah had gone up; a very different way of passing from life by fiery chariot than by wasting sickness! But God is as near His servant in the one place as in the other, and the slow wasting away is as much His messenger as the sudden apocalypse of the horsemen of fire. Here is a prophet dying; and his last words are not edifying moral and religious reflections, nor does he seem to be much concerned to leave with the king his final protest against Israel's sin, but his thoughts are all of warfare, and his last effort is to stir up the sluggish young monarch to some of his own enthusiasm in the conflict with the enemy. It does not sound like an edifying death-bed. People might have said, "Ah, secular and political affairs should be all out of a man's mind when he comes to his last moments." But this man thought that to stick to his life's work till the last breath was out of him, and to devote the last breath to stimulating successors who might catch up the torch that dropped from his failing hands, was no unworthy end of a prophet's life. I. HERE WE HAVE POWER COMMUNICATED. We, too, if we are Christian men and women, have a Gospel of which the very kernel is that there is to us a communication of power. And the very name of that Divine Spirit whom it is Christ's greatest work to send flashing and flaming through the world, is the Spirit of

Power. And so the old promise that ye shall be clothed with strength from on high is the standing prerogative of the Christian Church. There is not merely some partial communication, as when hand touched hand, but every organ is vitalised and quickened; as in the case of the other miracle of this prophet, when he stretched himself on the dead child, eye to eye, and mouth to mouth, and hand to hand; and each part received the vitalising influence. We have, if we are Christian people, a Spirit given to us, and are "strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man." Then, further, let me remind you that this power, which is bestowed on condition of contact, is given before duties are commanded. Further, this strength communicated is realised in the effort to obey Christ's great commands. Joash felt nothing when the hands were laid upon him, but, perhaps, some tingling. But when he got the bow in his hand, and drew the arrow to its head, the infused power stiffened his muscles and strengthened him to pull; and though he could not distinguish between his own natural corporeal ability and that which had been thus imparted to him, the two co-operated in the one act, and it was when he drew his bow that he felt the strength. II. AND NOW, LOOK AT THE PERFECTED VICTORY THAT IS POSSIBLE. When the arrows, by God's strength operating through Joash's arm, had been shot, the prophet says, "The arrow of the Lord's victory . . . thou shalt smite . . . till thou have consumed." Yes, of course, if the arrow is the Lord's arrow, and the strength is His strength, then the only issue corresponding to the power is perfect victory. There is no reason as from any defect of the Divine gift to the weakest of us why our Christian lives should have ups and downs, why there should be interruptions in our devotion, fallings short in our consecration, contradictions in our conduct, slidings backward in our progress. There is no reason why, in our Christian year, there should be summer and winter; but according to the symbolical saying of one of the old prophets, "The ploughman may overtake the reaper, and he that treadeth out the grapes him that soweth the seed." In so far as our Christian life is concerned, the perfection of the power that is granted to us involves the possibility of perfection in the recipient. And the same thing is true in reference to a Christian man's work in the world; God's Church has ample resources to overcome the evil of the world. The fire is tremendous, but the Christian Church has possession of the floods that can extinguish the fire. III. THE PARTIAL VICTORY THAT IS ACTUALLY WON. "Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten the Syrians till they were consumed. But now thou shalt conquer but thrice." All God's promises and prophecies are conditional. There is no such thing as an unconditional promise of victory or of defeat; there is always an "if." There is always man's freedom as a factor. It is strange; I suppose no thinking, metaphysical or theological, ever has solved, or ever will, that great paradox of the power of a finite will to lift itself up in the face of, and antagonism to, an infinite will backed by infinite power, and to thwart its purposes. "How often would I have gathered . . . and ye would not." Here is all the power for a perfect victory, and the man that has it has to be contented with a very partial one. A low expectation limits the power. This man did not believe, did not expect that he would conquer utterly, and so he did not. You believe that you can do a thing, and in nine cases out of ten that goes nine-tenths of the way towards doing it. Small desires block the power. Where there is an iron-bound coast running in one straight line, the whole ocean may dash itself on the cliffs at the base, but it enters not into the land; but where the shore opens itself out into some deep gulf far inland, and broad across at the entrance, then the glad water rushes in and fills it all. Make room for God in your lives by your desires, and you will get him in the fulness of His power. The use of our power increases our power. Joash had an unused quiver full of arrows, and he only smote thrice. (*A. Mac-laren, D.D.*)

Vers. 20, 21. And Elisha died, and they buried him.—*The resurrection of a man in the tomb of Elisha; life derived from the holy dead*.—Death is no respecter of persons; the most illustrious, as well as the most obscure, must bow before his cold sceptre, and depart from the scene of life. This miraculous incident was designed and calculated to make a wholesome moral impression on the mind of the age. It had a tendency to (1) Demonstrate to all, the divinity of the prophet's mission. (2) To show the honour with which the Eternal treats the holy dead. (3) To prove the existence of a power superior to death. And (4) To foreshadow a future state. I. WHAT ARE THE SPIRITUAL REMAINS OF THE HOLY DEAD WHICH HAVE A QUICKEN-

ING POWER? What are those remains of the holy dead, which, like the bones of the old prophet, have a power to quicken the dead? The answer may be comprised in one sentence—Gospel thoughts, and Gospel virtues. Such thoughts have a life-giving force. They are the voice that calls up the soul from its grave of sensuality and sin; they fall upon the dead spirit like the quickening rays and refreshing showers of heaven upon the seed that is buried in the soil. What effect they had when uttered by the apostles! By them they woke the slumbering mind of their age, and turned the world upside down; and from the days of the apostles to this hour, whenever they have been brought into direct contact with soul, there has been the touch of life. Who has not felt their power? How often, as they have fallen from the lips of a Christ-inspired minister, have they passed like an electric fire through the audience, startling them with new and strange emotions. Every Gospel thought is charged with a life-giving power. But we say Gospel virtues as well as thoughts. Gospel virtues are but Gospel thoughts in feeling and in action; they are thoughts in their fullest development, and strongest power. It is the Gospel incarnate, made flesh, dwelling and working amongst men.

II. WHERE ARE THE SPIRITUAL REMAINS OF THE HOLY DEAD WHICH HAVE A QUICKENING POWER? Where are they to be found? 1. In the memory of men. It is a solemnising thought, that the spirits of living men are the resting-places of the thoughts and virtues of men that are gone. 2. In sacred literature. Books are filled with the spiritual remains of the holy dead. They are valuable chiefly on this account.

III. HOW ARE THE SPIRITUAL REMAINS OF THE HOLY DEAD WHICH HAVE A QUICKENING POWER TO EXERT THEIR QUICKENING POWER? It was by contact with the bones of Elisha that life came to this dead man; and it is by contact with these Gospel thoughts and virtues, that spiritual life is to be produced. The life of a grain of corn, which contains the germs of future harvests, depends upon contact with certain elements. The energy of explosive matter depends upon contact with fire. A piled mountain of powder is powerless until it is brought into contact with the spark. It is even so in this case; unless we bring our spirits in conscious contact with these remains they will avail us nothing. How is this contact to be obtained? By devout reflection. The most sacred things and the most powerful elements of truth may be deposited in the memory, yet, unless we prayerfully reflect upon them, they will be foreign to our hearts; we shall never feel their quickening touch.

1. That every age is increasing in responsibility. As good men depart, the world grows richer in the means of spiritual improvement: every soul that lived a holy life here, left behind it elements of life. 2. We must not judge of men's usefulness by the results of their lifetime. 3. That wonderful revelations may be anticipated on the Day of Judgment. (*Homilist.*)

The power and purpose of the posthumous life:—Death is not the great termination; it is only the great interruption. We are endowed with a being which yearns for endless existence. We have a profound feeling that only eternal existence would justify the Creator in our making. All over the world, especially as men advance in power of reflection, the more fully do they become convinced that the original instinct of the human heart is a Divine implantation, and that man shall measure his duration with the duration of eternity. But when we have said this, we have not said all; when we talk of the boundary, death, being an interruption, we are not thinking mainly of eternal existence in the unseen. There is an impression prevalent among us that, when we come to that boundary stone of our being, we are for ever done with this planet; that we have completed our course, and that there is nothing more to be said; the places that knew us will know us no more; our career is finished; the world henceforth must lack interest and charm for us; we have no more place among the dwellings of men. But that is just the thought I desire to dispute, and I wish to remind you that the interruption which we call death does not deliver even from this world. It only changes the mode of our activity and influence in this world. For there is a life even after the body has perished, and the voice has gone dumb for ever—there is a voice, there is a life that continues among the children of men. And it is to this our attention is drawn by the peculiar narrative read in your hearing. It is not surprising, that the bones of a prophet should make a man alive, nor that the voice of an Abel should sound with strange force down through the generations. When we come to think of the great duties of life, while, of course, we will consult the living, are we not nearly always directed to the dead? A young man has to go out from England, and he knows not whither he is going; his mother admonishes him to take Abraham as his guide, who also went out into

Ur of the Chaldees, but who took God with him. A young man is going into a great city, he is to be tempted and tried, and his minister admonishes him to read Daniel, who, in the midst of Babylon, kept his windows open towards Jerusalem, and held communion with the Highest. Another lad is bound to enter upon the great responsibilities of life, and Paul summons to him the admonitions of a Timothy, or some other servant of God whose influence still continues. And when the conscience is burdened with guilt, and the soul burns for peace, it is not to some living minister, to some living Church, to some living power, but it is rather to the death of Jesus Christ, and through that death up to His throne, that the inquiring soul is pointed. And just here we touch on the historic marvel of the ages—Jesus Christ. He illustrates transcendently my thesis. We are fascinated by His earthly career—its purity, simplicity, graciousness, beauty—all attract us. And yet, after all allowances are made for the sick healed, the dead raised, and the outcasts reclaimed, how immeasurably greater has been His posthumous influence than was His brief, humble life! So palpable is this that some theological schools maintain that this surviving influence is what He meant when He promised the mission of the Holy Ghost. It is claimed that just as we feel the spirit of Browning, or of Morris, or of Ruskin, when we meditate on their works, so, whenever we think of religion, the spiritual effluence of our Lord's life is deeply realised. I am not persuaded that this restriction of His promise is warranted; but still we must all admit that the Christ of to-day is more potent than was the Christ of Nazareth, and that, as the ages roll, He becomes an ever-increasing power on the thought, conscience, and conduct of the individual, and on the movements and development of society as a whole. So that, turn as we may, we find that patriarchs and apostles, and fathers and mothers, and poets and school teachers, and enthusiasts and men of letters, and politicians and statesmen, and pre-eminently the Christ, all these from out the unseen, are moulding us and shaping us. But wherein lies their peculiar power, because certainly this posthumous life is a most potent life? How are you to explain it? I suppose one reason why it has such influence with us is, that it is the most independent life. The dead respect no one. We are frail, fallible, liable to change; but when the curtain falls, the work is ended. If it is an incomplete thing, like the statue of Moses, it must for ever remain unfinished. No tears can change it, no regrets revolutionise it. There it abides. "What is written is written." Moreover, this is an enlarged life. It becomes universal. We are all more or less provincial. We are hedged in by our narrow, local limitations. It is difficult for us to rise above them. But when we die, that is all cast aside. Do you suppose when I read Thomas à Kempis I think of him as a Roman Catholic? Not at all. I read his noble words as universal truths; he has ceased to be aught but a Christian. Very well; when death has emancipated us, and we are free of our limitations, then the posthumous life surges onward, influencing and controlling men. And we never really think of Jesus Christ as a Jew when we pray to Him, and carry to Him our burdens and our guilt. The world has lost sight of the localisms of His ministry. To us He is neither Jew, Greek, nor Barbarian. He is quite beyond all racial distinctions. He is the "Son of Man"—the representative of humanity. When He lived He may have been to His followers provincial—but now He has lost the complexion of the old Hebrew race, and has become world-wide, cosmopolite, universal. Moreover, I suppose this power is to be traced to its continuity, to—its indestructibility. There is a charm in that which lasts. The purpose of the posthumous life. I have tried to analyse the power, and what is the purpose? Why is it that God permits us all to share in this posthumous life? And why is it that God reminds you through me of our posthumous life? It is to impart a higher sense of responsibility. It is to teach you in your little day, it is to assure you that your influence will not die with you, however humble you may be. You are starting currents that will flow into the sea of existence beyond your day. You are throwing a stone into the mighty sea of being, and the waves will extend in ever-widening circles until they beat on the shores of eternity. Great is it for a man to live; awful the responsibility. It is likewise the purpose to add new dignity to humanity. For it is responsibility that makes dignity. You are engaged in a work that is marvellous in its power and in its range. Try to understand it, and you will be anxious to be fully equipped, you will be anxious to realise fully what is the meaning of God's Word, when it talks to you about a judgment to come. Nor do I think I am far wrong in asserting that we have in this posthumous life a suggestion of what the scientists call the survival of the fittest. True it is "the

evil that men do lives after them," and it is not true that the "good is interred with their bones." There is a famous picture of the battle with the Huns which decided the fate of Europe. It presents the field at night covered with the slain, but over and above the wounded and the dying the ghosts of both armies are seen in deadly conflict. Though dead, they yet fight. So it is with truth and error, right and wrong, virtue and vice, and with the hosts of those who in former ages were arrayed on the side either of light or darkness. The conflict continues, and ultimate victory must rest with the cause of justice and honour. (*G. C. Lorimer, D.D.*)

Elisha's last miracle:—1. The Jews thought this the crowning miracle of Elisha. Certainly it is unique in the pages of Holy Scripture, and it has also the distinction of being "peculiarly offensive to modern thought." The author of Ecclesiasticus sums up his praise of Eliseus, "After his death his body prophesied. He did wonders in his life, and at his death were his works marvellous" (Ecclus. xlviii. 13, 14). 2. Let us look at the circumstances. Elisha was dead and buried. His funeral, according to Josephus, had great pomp. The Moabites were still unsubdued, and infested the land of Israel. Some men were bearing a corpse to burial, when they suddenly "spied a band of men," and, in their eagerness to escape, thrust the corpse into the open tomb of the prophet, and, upon contact with the sacred body of Elisha, the man "revived, and stood up on his feet." 3. That the men did this with any idea of restoring the man to life seems scarcely worth discussion. Their intention is manifest in the text. The Israelites did not believe that the dead could raise the dead, though Elisha had raised the dead, when alive, by means of prayers and actions; nor would they have willingly deposited the body of a sinner in the resting-place of the holy prophet. Fear in the emergency led to this action, and accounts for it, God overruling it to His own purposes.

I. THE MIRACLE. 1. I should like to notice at the outset what a very short and unadorned account we have of this marvel. It is related within the limits of a single verse. How calm and restrained is the narrative! It gives the simple fact, without any embellishment or note of admiration. This in itself betokens an inspired writer. A similar instance of consciousness and composure may be found in St. Mark's account of our Lord's ascension and session to the right hand of the Father: "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark xvi. 19). 2. This is the record of a miracle, and the credibility of miracles is admitted to be a common point of assault in the present day. Perhaps, this arises from looking too much at the miraculous from the lower rather than the higher side. In other words, to fasten our thoughts upon it as an infringement of natural law rather than to regard it as a Divine work, wrought for a moral purpose. The overruling of a lower law by a higher cannot be accurately described as an "infringement," for it is a part of universal law. A miracle is an exceptional occurrence, to awaken man to a sense of the Divine presence and power. 3. But this miracle is especially "offensive" to the sceptic, because of the instrument which God employed in effecting it—a dead body. When there is a living agent who operates, whether prophet or apostle, the wonder-working is not so far removed from human experience. The spiritualist resents the idea that there can be sanctity and "virtue" in human remains. And yet, as it has been often shown, there are other miracles in the Bible of a kindred nature, as, for instance, the cures wrought through the touch of the hem of Christ's garment (Mark v. 28, 29), through the "handkerchiefs and aprons" of St. Paul (Acts xix. 12), and the shadow of St. Peter (Acts v. 15). 4. It may be admitted that miracles wrought through material objects seem more in keeping with the New Testament than the Old; for now God's Son has entered into relations with matter through the Incarnation, thereby elevating it, and imparting to it new qualities. But God uses what instrument He wills, and when He wills, for the accomplishment of His purposes; and, as we shall see, the miracle in the Old Testament may be a type and picture of future truth—a dramatic representation, so to speak, of Christian mystery.

II. WHAT IT TEACHES. 1. The sanctity of Elisha. This event seems to be in his history a sort of counterpoise to the rapture of Elijah. Both were victories over death—the one, by his passage up to heaven without subjection to the "last enemy" (1 Cor. xii. 26); the other overcame death after he was dead and buried. 2. The power of God. 3. As the miracle was calculated to invest the memory of Elisha with a fresh halo of reverence, and to exhibit the Almighty power of God, so was it designed to breathe hope into the hearts of the depressed Israelites at a period in their history when they needed something to encourage them, and to

revive their confidence. 4. Beyond, however, the temporal purpose, there was, we believe, a typical and prophetic significance in this wonder. Does it not point to Christ's death as the means of bringing back life to man? Although all His acts were redemptive, His death was the principal. "We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. v. 10). He "by His death hath destroyed death" (Proper Preface, Easter). Our reconciliation was effected "in the body of His flesh through death" (Col. i. 22). But the miracle not only pictures the efficacy of Christ's death; it teaches also that to know its quickening power we must be in union with Him. It was when the man "touched the bones of Elisha, he revived." There was contact before there was life. So there must be union with Christ, sacramental, moral, spiritual, if we would be restored; for only "if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death" shall we be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. vi. 5). But the union must be moral as well as sacramental—the one the outcome of the other—for "he that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked" (1 John ii. 6); that is, the life which God has given within must be, is bound to be, shown forth in the outward imitation of Christ's life. And this union must be spiritual, the spirit of man corresponding with the guidance of the Holy Spirit—an obedience of love. 5. The text, too, is a type of bodily resurrection, though a return to mortal life. III. LESSONS. 1. Let us be careful, in our view of nature and of the fixity of natural law, that we do not make God into a "mechanical Deity" (Mozley). The soul, made in the image of God, is "conscious of will" in itself, and therefore "declares for a Deity with will"; upon which the power of miracle follows. 2. God can use what may seem to be the most unlikely instruments for the fulfilment of His designs, inert matter to be the vehicle of life and grace. 3. Observe how God loves to honour His saints, and thereby to make His power to be known (1 Sam. ii. 30). 4. Lastly, let us be mindful of the truth that the death of Christ is the meritorious cause of all our gifts and graces, and that through union with Him alone have we spiritual life—"The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live" (John v. 25)—the life of grace in the soul here, the life of glory in the body also hereafter. (*Canon Hutchings.*) *The Resurrection at the tomb of Elisha*:—Several views have been taken of this incident. By some it has been regarded as a mere Hebrew myth; others have supposed that there was an inherent virtue, or life-giving power, in the bones of Elisha, and that the same power exists in the bones of all men of extraordinary goodness. From this point of view it has become a corner-stone of the doctrine of the efficacy of relics. With regard to the first, the occurrence is related as a historic fact as much as any other in the Old Testament, or as much as the raising of the daughter of Jairus in the New Testament. If it is to be rejected because it is a marvel, almost all the historical books of the Bible may be set aside for the same reason. As to the second view, experience contradicts it. We will therefore accept the fact as it stands, assuming that "it was not the prophet's bones which brought the dead to life, but the living God." Notice therefore—I. THAT THE RESURRECTION OF A DEAD MAN THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF THE BONES OF ANOTHER MAN IS NEITHER CONTRARY TO REASON NOR TO THE TEACHING OF OTHER PARTS OF SCRIPTURE. If God gave life to man at first, it is surely in His power to restore it by any means, or without any visible means, and it is not more extraordinary than the clothing of the rod of Aaron with beauty and fruitfulness, or the dividing of the Red Sea at the outstretching of the rod of Moses. The rod was the medium, but God gave the power; the prophet's bones were the medium, the life-giving power was God's. II. THAT SUCH A MIRACLE WAS IN KEEPING WITH THE WONDERFUL LIFE OF THE PROPHET ELISHA. He was a man raised up by God to do a special work. The whole of his public life was marked by miracles. As his predecessor, Elijah, had been honoured by a miraculous exodus from the earth, so it seems fitting that some similar mark of honour should be given to Elisha, either at the time of his death, or after it. III. THE PROBABLE INTENTION OF THE MIRACLE. It was probably intended to revive, in the mind of Israel, hope in God as to the future of the nation. Elisha, on his dying bed, had foretold the deliverance of Israel from the yoke of Syria: their present sufferings from the Moabites would naturally discourage the heart of the people, and lead them to forget the promise, which was not yet, it may be presumed, completely fulfilled. This resurrection by means of Elisha's dead body would be the means of a resurrection of hope in Elisha's God. Suggestions: 1. God would have the dust of departed saints remind us of their holy lives. 2. The dust of the godly dead may bear witness that they are still

living. Its very contrast to the body when it was animated by the living soul, seems to testify to the fact that they must still be living. We speak of the body as theirs, thereby recognising the fact of their existence. The bones are here called Elisha's bones, suggesting, at least, his continued existence although dis-united from his human body. 3. God retains His relationship with His children, even with their bodies, after they have left the world. The miracle here recorded is a proof that God was still the God of Elisha. (*Outlines from Sermons by a London Minister.*) *A dead man's power* :—Elijah was carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire. Elisha died in his bed like other men. Josephus tells us that he had a great funeral. With the death of Elisha there was a distinct letting down in the position of Israel among the peoples round about them, and it was not long before outlying tribes that had been respectful and friendly became arrogant and dangerous. The Moabites soon began to invade the land, not with any large army, but with plundering bands that were very aggravating and very mischievous. It was the occasion of one of these raids by the Moabites that furnished the opportunity for this miracle. Elisha had been buried, according to the custom of the people at the time, in a cave in the side of a hill, excavated out of the rock. A while after his death there was another death in the community, and the neighbours were carrying the dead man to his burial. The Jews of that time did not use coffins, and the body was bandaged and wrapped instead. As these people were carrying the remains of their friend to some tomb in the vicinity of the tomb of Elisha, they suddenly discovered, not far away, a company of armed Moabites, and saw that they had not time to go to the place they had intended for burial. The tomb of Elisha was nearest, and they rolled back the heavy stone from the door and put the dead body into the cave with that of the body of the prophet. But no sooner had the body which they carried touched the bones of Elisha than the life came back to it, and the man revived and no doubt returned home with his friends. We may find a probable motive for this miracle in the fact that it called world-wide attention, so far as world-wide went in those days, to Elisha. It gave him great prestige among his own people. They said about him that he was the prophet "whose dead body prophesied," and the memory of Elisha's faith in God, his devout and prayerful life, his pure and noble career, meant more to the people than it could have meant before. This would seem a sufficient reason for the exercise of the Divine power in thus honouring the dead body of the prophet. It is for us to find the spiritual significance of the miracle for teaching to our own souls. 1. We may learn from this incident that the influence of a good man or a good woman does not terminate with life on earth. How true that is in our national life. Who would for a moment contend that the influence of George Washington ceased with the citizens of the American Republic when his body was buried at Mount Vernon? His influence is greater to-day, perhaps, than ever before. And if we turn from these great historic illustrations and come into the narrower but tenderer sphere of our own life horizon, how true it is. How true it has been with us that some of the most important influences in making up the people we are to-day have come from those whose bodies have long slept in the grave. 2. It is certainly a serious and important question for us to ask ourselves, whether the life we are now living is of such a character that after we are dead men will be influenced by it for good. There are those who hear me who can bear witness that they are even now under the curse of dead men. The influence of people who have gone to their account still comes back to them, and affects them, and makes it harder for them to be good and easier for them to do wrong. I can imagine nothing more terrible than that. No doubt Dives remembered that during his lifelong association with his brothers all his influence over them had been evil. He had sneered at goodness; he had mocked at conscience; he had recklessly disobeyed God, and he felt that hell would be more bearable if he did not have it upon him to remember that he had brought his five brothers to hell with him through his influence. 3. If we are to be such vital personalities for goodness that our influence while we live and after we are gone from the earth shall be a revivifying power to awaken goodness in other souls, we ourselves must come into personal touch with Jesus Christ, who alone can bring to life and power all possible goodness in our hearts. The man who was buried in the grave of Elisha was not revived until his body came in personal contact with the bones of the prophet. So we, though we be dead in trespasses and in sins, shall be revived to righteousness and spiritual living when we are brought into personal contact with the spiritual body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was buried in

the tomb of Joseph nearly nineteen hundred years ago, but He arose from the dead, and He ever liveth at the right hand of God to make intercession for us. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *Death of Elisha*:—I. **GOOD MEN NEVER OUTLIVE THEIR USEFULNESS.** Elisha had pursued a brilliant career, after the mantle of Elijah fell upon him, for a series of years; then for more than forty years his name is not mentioned in the national annals. It is not certain that God has nothing more for men to do because they are permitted for a period to remain in obscurity after having been prominent. It would have been sadly to misinterpret Providence, if, when quietly caring for the schools of the prophets and contrasting those days of more humble service with his former days of miracle-working and eminence, he had grown fretful and been disposed to question whether life were worth the living unless it could be a grand life. When Luther's voice was confined within the walls of the castle of Wartburg, and his soul was alternately chafed and bowed down with despondency under confinement which secluded him from what he supposed to be his great work, he was not released from further duty. He did not read on those gloomy walls God's declaration that there was no more for him to do. No, he was being trained in his imprisonment for still greater service; and he went forth at last more powerfully to struggle because kept in durance so long. When obstacles rise in our path which we feel ourselves too weak to remove, or heights are before us which we cannot scale, or duties demand vigour and perseverance which we cannot manifest, we may not declare that we are no longer called to serve. God will furnish some station for every watchman, some field for every worker. Every part of a Christian's life has its bearing on the whole, and no part is useless, even to the end, unless we so determine. God had this brilliance of old-age service in view throughout Elisha's long years of faithful quiet devotion to his trust, and in not one year was the Master unmindful of the servant or the servant toiling in vain. II. **A GOOD MAN WILL BE ANXIOUS, EVEN TO THE END, RESPECTING THE CAUSE OF GOD.** The king seems to have come to the prophet's house only to express his sympathy and respect. Convinced that he could not live, he wept over the face of the man of God, and called to mind his own exclamation when he saw Elijah parting the heavens in his ascent: "O my father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" With a kind of abrupt eagerness, as though he felt that he had little time, Elisha called for the bow and arrows—which but for his purpose would be much out of place in such a scene—and by two forms of illustration which were appropriate, he summoned the king's attention to what he knew to be most important for him. The thought prominently in his mind was twofold: that the king and the people must feel that deliverance from their fears could come only from God, and that the extent of this deliverance would depend on both their faith and effort. If he could not merely say this, but impress it on the king, his high office as prophet would again be magnified, and Israel would again be saved by his agency. The opportunity to do this caused the duty of life to be superior to the possible experiences of the final hour. Heaven was, for the moment, eclipsed by the earth, and the welfare of his people was of more value than his own. The great need of the Church is such complete consecration to God and identification with His cause in purpose and life. Individual comfort, money, position, are little; the glory of God, the kingdom of Christ, are everything. Men change, but God will abide; men die, but God will live. The venerable Eli heard the messenger from the camp of Israel say that his people had suffered loss in battle, with only ordinary signs of sorrow; that his own sons had been killed, with only the tears which the father could not restrain; but when he said that the ark of God had been taken by the enemy, the aged priest fell back from his seat and died, "for he was troubled for the ark of the Lord." Joshua after the defeat at Ai must have felt the dishonour that would come on himself—must have been distressed on account of the loss of Israel; but he was unable to express his feelings as he thought of the reproach the Canaanites would heap on their God, and could only exclaim, "What wilt thou do unto thy great name?" Many other instances might be quoted. They all make known the same spirit—a spirit that regarded the highest interests at the cost of any lower—that could bear anything but the overthrow of what they prayed might abide. It has been the same in all ages, and had supreme exhibition in the Lord Jesus Himself. This was the language of His mission and life and death. "Father, glorify Thy name," was His perpetual prayer; and He and His Father were one in purpose and act as everything personal was lost in the object for which He came. III. **THE GOOD MAN'S INFLUENCE LIVES AFTER HIS BODY DIES.** Our

posthumous influence does not receive enough of our thought. A man may be forgotten, his name may be unknown, and strangers may tread upon his grave or disturb his ashes to make room for their own dead, but the works he made in life will be seen and the power he possessed will be felt by those who follow him. How often does the form of some friend of other days come back in our thoughtful hours to cheer our sadness or excite our tears! How often do the words of wisdom or folly uttered long since by him awaken echoes in the cells of memory, and his example come up before us now! Whether connected with scenes of wickedness or with the hallowed exercises of devotion, all these affect our character, modify our influence on others, and, insensibly perhaps, but really, change our life. Our graves, in a sense, have a power as had Elisha's. This is the natural consequence of our social relations, for even existence with another affects both that other and ourself. "No man liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself," is a law of our moral nature; and character in its very elements is immortal. We feel to-day the influence of men in the earliest times. The vibrations of that subtle medium of communication between soul and soul through which are conveyed the thoughts and feelings of men over the whole world shall never cease, and from age to age they bear their burden to affect the thoughts and feelings of all within their range. So, on the other hand, the labourer in the cause of evil has a power equally endless. We must not measure the curse to mankind of a wicked life by its immediate effects. Paine, that man for whose infamy apologists and defenders have sprung up in our day seeking to hide his deformity, has gone to judgment, but his works and his sins remain to wither and blight wherever they reach, accumulating power as they stretch on. (*J. Ellis, D.D.*) *The bones of Elisha*:—I. We have in this incident a striking illustration of THE POSTHUMOUS INFLUENCE OF GOOD MEN. Nothing in the material world is lost. A grain of sand, however long you crush it, can never be destroyed. You may change its form,—crush it into yet smaller particles,—cause it to enter into new combinations, but you can do no more. The water that is absorbed from the sea is not destroyed; it descends again in showers to enrich the earth. In like manner, human character and influence last for ever. Every man has an influence; in this sense, no man liveth to himself. There is about us all an unconscious influence, what may be termed our personal atmosphere; and there is our conscious influence. The least action or word, even a look,—all make their impression; and issue in results, long after their time. The motion of your hand, or the sound of your voice, produces a succession of pulsations which, like Tennyson's "Brook," "go on for ever." As we thus influence the natural world, so we influence the moral and spiritual world. This unseen yet mighty power, which we all possess, and of which we cannot divest ourselves—which lives in us, and works through us every moment, clothes our lives with a terrible solemnity. Not only is our influence felt during life, it is even felt after we are dead. Our usefulness, or hurtfulness in life, remains in active operation after we are gone. "It may be swallowed up in the great social aggregate, like the rivulet in the river, or absorbed like the dew in the mists and vapours; but it does not, it cannot perish. It survives all the personal fortunes of the individual from whom it emanates on earth; it outlasts the monument, however enduring, that is raised over his dust." Founders of empires, legislators, patriots, philosophers, inventors, reformers, Christian teachers,—all these live through all ages—

Their speaking dust
Has more of life than half its breathing moulds.

Bad men, as well as good, leave their mark behind them; and perpetuate their influence long after they are dead. Hundreds of years after Jeroboam's death, we find the people of Israel over whom he reigned walking in his footsteps, committing "the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin." The writings of Voltaire and Paine and Hume and Byron are a curse to humanity to this day. Thank God! the evil shall be stamped out; while the good shall bear fruit for ever. "The memory of the wicked shall rot; but the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance." II. GOOD MEN LIVE AFTER DEATH IN THE RESULTS OF THEIR ACTIONS. Their conduct centuries, and even millenniums ago, tells on mankind to-day. Abraham's obedience to God's command; the legislation of Moses; Paul's acceptance of the Christian faith; Wickliffe's translation of the Bible into the English tongue; Luther's renunciation of popery; all these mark great epochs in the history of mankind, and are felt in the national life and social

manners and religious progress of this nineteenth century of the Christian era. It would be easy to instance men of our own time, whose influence will reach on for good through all future generations. William Carey, John Williams, David Livingstone, Michael Faraday, Abraham Lincoln—these and others whom I might name—who shall attempt to calculate the blessings accruing from their character and work? Sometimes, those actions which seem to us the least noteworthy, are most fruitful, and live with mightiest power. The poor widow, when casting her two mites into the temple treasury, was wholly ignorant of the fact that Christ saw her, and would so signalise her self-sacrifice as to make it a pattern for universal imitation. So with ourselves, passages in our lives which awaken no interest in us at the time, or which, if of interest to ourselves, we may not for a moment think of identifying with others, may prove pregnant with great and lasting issues. Sometimes a man's name may be forgotten, yet his works remain. We know not who invented the plough, his name has perished; but the instrument remains one of the most useful inventions, and indispensable to civilisation. History has not preserved the names of the men who first crossed the sea to preach the Gospel to our forefathers here in Britain; but what wondrous results have followed their apostolic mission! Our own country has been raised thereby to the highest point of greatness, and sits queen among the nations; while from us the Gospel has sounded forth to the ends of the earth. We must die, and after a few years our names may be forgotten; but some action of our life, of which at the time no heed is taken, may become fruitful, even to the distant future, with richest good.

III. GOOD MEN LIVE AFTER DEATH, IN THEIR WRITINGS. A man embalms his thoughts and feelings, the best part of his nature, in his books. "Books," says John Milton, "contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are. A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose, to a life beyond life." There is such a quickening power in some books that the dullest and dearest minds that come into contact with them are quickened by their inspiration. The books of Moses, the Psalms of David, the proverbs of Solomon, the predictions of the Hebrew prophets, the four Gospels, the apostolic letters, the visions of John, are among the supreme powers that govern and guide the world. Confucius and Plato and Aristotle still sway their sceptre over human souls. Bacon and Shakespeare fashion men with plastic power. Who shall reckon and tabulate the results of Augustine's *City of God*, of Paley's *Benefit of Christ's Death*, of the *Imitation of Christ*, of Calvin's *Institutes*, of Luther's *Commentary on the Galatians*, of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, of Baxter's *Saints' Rest*? Who shall the influence measure of the hymns of Gerhardt and the Wesleys and Watts and Cowper and Doddridge? Dead souls have been born again through them; dark souls enlightened; weak souls made strong; sorrowful souls inspired with gladness and joy. Their

Distant voices echo
Through the corridors of time,

and make the Church of God resonant with praise. The influence of Christian writers is seen in an interesting light, in the way in which one book becomes the parent of another through successive generations. About the close of Queen Elizabeth's reign, a Puritan minister, called Edmund Bunny, met with a book written by a Jesuit priest, named Parsons; and, excluding the Popery, he recast the book and published it with a new title. A copy came into the hands of Richard Baxter, then a boy in Shropshire; and its earnest appeals led to his conversion. He grew to manhood, became a laborious preacher of the Gospel, and a voluminous writer. Among other books, he wrote the *Call to the Unconverted*, twenty thousand copies of which are said to have been sold in a single year. Twenty-five years after Baxter's death a copy of this book fell in the way of Philip Doddridge, a youth at St. Alban's, and brought him to God. He became a Christian minister and author, writing, in addition to other works, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, which has been translated into several languages, and made useful to many souls. Thirty-three years after the death of Doddridge, William Wilberforce was setting out on a journey to the South of France, and, at the suggestion of a friend, took a copy of this book to read on the journey. The perusal of it led to his consecration to Christ. He found time, amid all his political and philanthropic duties, to write his *Practical View of Christianity*, a work which has passed through more than one hundred editions, and which, among the upper classes of society especially, has been a powerful leaven of righteousness. When

Legh Richmond was a young curate in the Isle of Wight, still ignorant of the Gospel, a college friend sent him a copy of Wilberforce's book. He began to read it, and could not leave off till he came to the end. The result he thus describes: "To the unsought and unexpected introduction of Mr. Wilberforce's book, I owe, through God's mercy, the first sacred impression which I ever received as to the spiritual nature of the Gospel system." Another copy of the same work taught Dr. Chalmers the way of salvation, and made him such a distinguished preacher of Christ's Gospel. Legh Richmond, as you know, afterwards wrote the touching story of *The Dairyman's Daughter*; and Dr. Chalmers preached and published some of the ablest and most effective sermons of the age. Who knows how this genealogy may lengthen as time goes on; and what other books may trace back their ancestry to the copy of *Bunny's Resolution*, lent to Richard Baxter's father.

IV. GOOD MEN LIVE AFTER DEATH, IN THEIR SPOKEN WORDS. In this way, a faithful preacher of the Gospel in a town or district will make a mark that remains for ages. Take such cases as Fletcher of Madeley, Jay of Bath, Hall of Bristol, Raffles of Liverpool, Parsons of York, M'Cheyne of Dundee. The places where these men lived and laboured must be impregnated with their speech of past years, as with salt. In the same manner, the words of men of greater note and influence live on a larger scale.

V. ONCE MORE, GOOD MEN LIVE AFTER DEATH, IN THE MEMORY AND EXPERIENCE OF SURVIVORS. "The immortal dead," says George Eliot, "live again in minds made better by their presence." We remember and copy their example. In our recollection of their excellences, we forget their faults, if faults they had. (*W. Walters.*) *Elisha prefiguring Christ*:—1. In the facts and incidents of his early history we may find Elisha prefiguring Christ. He came from Jordan, gifted by the hand of Elijah with the power of the Spirit; and surely there is some resemblance here between him and our Blessed Lord, baptized by John in the same river of Jordan, when the Holy Spirit like a dove abode upon Him. Nor can I forget the eminently religious home in which Elisha was brought up at Abelmeholah, "the meadow of the dance,"—reminding me of another home in Nazareth, where even a child understood what it was to be about "His Father's business." Is there nothing, also, in the fact that Elisha was called from the plough to be a prophet, and that up to the period when He began His public ministry, the Master, with the sweat standing in bead-drops on His lofty brow, stooped low and worked hard at a carpenter's bench.

2. In close connection and intercourse with matters of this world, we may find Elisha prefiguring Christ. Like John the Baptist, Elijah to a large extent lived out of the world—away from and above it, in stern sublimity. Elisha, on the other hand, as we have seen all through the course of these lectures, was a citizen of the world, and mingled—as we would say in present day language—in all the great national and political movements and events of his time. In like manner, one of the chief complaints against the Divine Author of Christianity was this: His publicity—"The Son of man came eating and drinking"—and His apparent insurrection against constituted authority. The first was true, for "He could not be hid"; the second was false, for His kingdom was not of this world, else would His servants fight. The Elijah-like type of character—the hermit, the recluse, the solitary—was not reproduced in Jesus Christ. Such a type of character, in fact, was essentially unfitted for a religion that was to conquer the world. Christianity was to be a religion for common life.

3. In his intimate communion with the other world, we find another important and apt-to-be-forgotten element in Elisha prefiguring Christ. Elijah and John the Baptist had little or nothing of this. True, Elijah was fed by the ravens, and miraculously sustained by an angel under the juniper tree; yet he had no such revelations and glimpses of the unseen world—beyond "the still small voice"—as were vouchsafed to Elisha. "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw: and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." "I, even I only, am left," was the wail of Elijah: to Elisha, on the other hand, was given, in a manner the most extraordinary, the anticipation by hundreds of years of the great Christian doctrine of the Communion of Saints. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." 4. In what I shall term the discerning of spirits, and the reading of the thoughts and intents of the heart, we have another line of parallel in Elisha prefiguring Christ. "Went not mine heart with thee," said the prophet to Gehazi. When Jehoram,

at the siege of Samaria, sent the executioner to take the prophet's life, "See ye," said the man of God, "how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head." Now how innumerable are the illustrations in the life of Christ of Divine prescience and discerning of spirits, as furnished in the four Gospels, I need not stay to tell. "He knew what was in man." And it is by bringing things to the Master's test that we, as by a new and subtle sense, can detect insidious unbelief, and transmit the faith of the Gospel pure and inviolate, as the beloved disciple assures us in a passage which is full of much solemn truth. "The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you; and ye need not that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." The one infallibility in the universe is in Christ, because Christ is God. There is another side to this thought. If Christ knows what is in man, He is just the Saviour for us, "the sympathising Jesus." 5. In moral magnetism of character we see Elisha—in an infinitely lower, I admit, but still a sufficiently important and admissible sense—in his work and ministry prefiguring Christ. The attractiveness of Elisha's character we have had ample occasion during these lectures to see. I think our great painters have seldom been less successful than in painting pictures of Christ. I have seen scores of them; but the face has either been too effeminate, or too colourless and uncharacteristic, and sometimes even too despotic—of all things in the world—to satisfy the portrait of the Bible, or the unpainted portrait of the heart. The best life of Christ is in the four Gospels, and the best pictures of Christ are there also. (*H. T. Howat.*) *Posthumous influence*:—It was a touching memorial to their comrade, the warrior of Breton birth, La Tour d'Auvergne, the First Grenadier of France, as he was called, when, after his death, his comrades insisted that, though dead, his name should not be removed from the rolls. It was still regularly called, and one of the survivors regularly answered for the departed soldier, "Dead on the field." The eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is such a roll-call of the dead. It is the register of a regiment, which will not allow death to blot names from its pages, but records the soldiers who have, in its ranks, won honourable graves and long abiding victories. *Power of the dead*:—A dead man, if he happen to have made a will, disposes of wealth no longer his; or if he die intestate, it is distributed in accordance with the notions of men much longer dead than he. A dead man sits on all our judgment-seats, and living judges do but search out and repeat his decisions. We read in dead men's books, we laugh at dead men's jokes, and cry at dead men's pathos! We are sick of dead men's diseases, physical and moral, and die of the same remedies with which dead doctors killed their patients! We worship the living Deity according to dead men's forms and creeds! Whatever we seek to do, of our own free notion, a dead man's icy hand obstructs us! Turn our eyes to what point we may, a dead man's white immitigable face encounters them and freezes our very heart! And we must be dead ourselves before we can begin to have our proper influence on our world which will then be no longer our world, but the world of another generation, with which we shall have no shadow of a right to interfere. (*N. Hawthorne.*) *Resurrection not unreasonable*:—This incident comes to us from the workshop of the great chemist Faraday. One day when Faraday was out, a workman accidentally knocked into a jar of acid a silver cup. It disappeared, and was eaten up by the acid, and could not be found. The acid held it in solution. The workman was in great distress and perplexity. It was an utter mystery to him where the cup had gone. When the great chemist came in and heard the story, he threw some chemicals into the jar, and in a moment every particle of silver was precipitated to the bottom. He then lifted out the silver nugget and sent it to the smith, where it was recast into a beautiful cup. If a finite chemist can handle the particles of a silver cup in this way, what cannot the infinite Chemist do with the particles of a human body, when dissolved in the great jar of the universe. He can handle the universe as easily as Faraday can handle an acid jar, and can control it at will. Whatever the particles of the resurrected body may be, Paul says it is going to be changed so as to become a spiritual body. (*Christian Age.*) *Christianity's power to raise the dead*:—A great fable sometimes encloses a great truth. It is an old story of the Empress Helena, how she went to the Holy Land to find the Cross. Excavations were made, and they found three crosses; but how were they to know which was the true one? So they took a corpse, and put it upon one and another; and, as soon as the corpse touched the Saviour's Cross, it started into life. Now, you are

demonstrating the divinity of Christianity, and that is how you test it—it makes these dead men live.

CHAPTER XIV.

VERS. 1, 2. In the second year of Joash . . . And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.—*Amaziah*.—This is, in few but comprehensive words, the character of Amaziah, king of Judah. The commendatory part of it is with the sacred chroniclers a sort of general expression for the obedience of Jewish princes, to the laws of God by Moses, especially to the preservation of the Jewish worship, and the proscription of idolatry in their dominions; and governing their kingdom by these laws, was doing right in His sight. Some monarchs have this commendation, qualified, or with a notice added, that it must be in their case understood with some considerable limitation or restriction. Thus it is said of King Jehoash, that he did that which was right before the Lord, while he remained under the direction of Jehoiada. Thus again, of Amaziah in our text, that he did that which was right, yet not like David his progenitor; or not with a perfect heart, with true sincerity and unreservedness of purpose. He was, at the best, of a mixed character; unsound in principle, and thus unstable in well-doing. It was the exhortation of Jehovah to the Jewish patriarchs, that he should walk before Him and be perfect; or, as the word means, unfeigned and upright, in obedience to His commandments. Hezekiah pleads it in the extremity of his affliction, that he walked before Him with a perfect heart. And Asa's heart is said to have been perfect with Him, or devoted to Him, while he sat upon the throne of Judah. A deficiency, therefore, in soundness of religious principle and feeling is denoted by a heart not perfect with Him. It is so denoted in the case of Solomon, upon his falling off to idol worship; as, in this place, of that unfaithfulness of Amaziah which was manifest by his inconstancy of life. 1. The first thing which requires notice in the history of Amaziah, is his conduct in the punishment of those who slew his father, Joash. Amaziah's conduct in this instance received unqualified approval. He discharged with fortitude the duty of a prince, in bringing the criminals to justice; and as they were men of power and credit in the realm, it was attended with some danger; but he avoided all indulgence of revenge, and was content with punishing the murderers alone, although, according to the practice of those times he might have sacrificed their children also to his vengeance; and in this he had respect, we are informed, to the provision of that law of God, a law in those days greatly disregarded, which forbids that children should be punished for the crimes of their parents. It may always be considered a hopeful sign, when a regard is felt and manifested for the precepts of the word of God as opposed to common practice; and it is still more hopeful, if, in such a case, the influence of strong passions is on the side of custom, and prompts to the breach of God's commandments. The moderation of this young prince, on religious grounds, was a presumptive evidence that he was partly sincere, although but partly, as appeared soon after. And thus many who prove afterwards unsound, have, in early years and in important instances, perhaps given proof of some hopeful principles, and promises of a life of piety and true obedience to God. And the conclusion to be drawn from this fact is, that the promise thus held out by favourable beginnings, or on some particular occasion, is not to be too confidently trusted. The more mixed and chequered any character is found to be, the more doubtful the evidence of its Christian integrity. 2. The next incident on record of the conduct of this prince is one in which we have a glimpse of a wrong disposition even while he in act obeyed the command of God, and this is a point of some importance. Being engaged in a war against the Edomites, and having raised three hundred thousand men of his own kingdom for this purpose, he proceeded further to augment his force by hiring a large army of Israelites. That people, being at this time idolaters, lay under the displeasure of God; and on this ground, when the expedition was about to march, a command was sent from Jehovah by a prophet to the king, enjoining him, as he expected the Divine protection, to dismiss these hired legions: for the Lord, said the messenger, is not among them. "But, if thou wilt go, do it, and be strong for battle: God shall make thee fall before

the enemy." And here it was that feelings were betrayed which indicated Amaziah's weakness. A considerable sum was given in part of payment of these hired troops; and the first thought in his mind upon receiving such a message was the great loss to which his obedience would expose him. A mind truly devoted to the service of God would not have harboured such a thought; and much less would it have dared to urge such an objection in reply to the Divine command. This showed that worldly motives were of weight with him against religious principle: a disposition was evinced to weigh the loss or inconvenience with the clear duty of obeying. There was not that prompt decisive resolution which a heart upright before God would have conceived and taken on these circumstances. And although he did at length comply on being promised compensation, yet his hesitation in complying was at least an unfavourable symptom. He thus manifested that defect as well of soundness as of firmness of religious principle which led afterward to fatal errors. It will happen frequently that men who are but half sincere, give certain indications of this state of mind before they yield to temptation. There is inclination shewn, as in the instance now before us, to raise difficulties and to make objections; to indulge complaints and murmurings perhaps, rather than yield at once, and with the singleness of a devoted and an upright heart, to the authority of God in His commandments. "What will the consequences then be if I obey? Am I to lose the pains and cost I have been at in forming such a project; or some plan, suppose for profit, pleasure, or ambition, which must not be carried further? How is such and such a detriment to be repaired: or such and such an inconvenience to be avoided. How am I to be set free from the connections, or get rid of the engagements, I unhappily have formed for purposes which I am called on to abandon? On what plea, or with what credit, can I now recede, being committed as I am, in such a matter? How, in short, shall I escape embarrassing vexation, if I yield to God and to my conscience?" Such are frequently the feelings with which His precepts are obeyed by persons of the character before us. Nay, at last, perhaps, it is fear only which inclines the scale upon the side of duty. Amaziah, we are told, was threatened with defeat if he persisted in his project. Fear of the wrath of God will, indeed, very commonly remain when every trace of apparent love and obedience to Him has long ceased to be visible. They may, indeed, in a sense, do what is right as to the outward action; but not doing it from a real desire to conform to the will of God, their doing wrong may be expected speedily, nay, is but one step further in declension. 3. The next thing, accordingly, which stands on record of this prince is, that he sinned wantonly and greatly against God, by the introduction of idolatry among his subjects. It had pleased God to give him great success in an expedition into Edom. He had ample compensation for his hundred talents by his acquisition both of honour and of treasure in the contest. But instead of feeling so much the more obliged to serve and honour the great Power who gave him victory on this occasion, and pouring contempt upon those idols which were unable to protect their votaries, he adopted them for his gods, and put contempt upon Jehovah. For he brought the gods of Seir, says the inspired historian, and set them up as his gods; he bowed down before them and burnt incense to them, and built altars for them in his realms, as though it were to them, and not to the Almighty, that he owed his splendid triumphs. The offence was also the more daring on his part, because the king his father had fallen into this very transgression, and was punished for it. But his heart was by these circumstances "lifted up within him." He was now set free from all restraint. He felt himself above religious fears, and was resolved to do not that which was right in the sight of God, but that which was so in his own eyes. It is here to be observed how very easily a fatal turn of character takes place, when minds are in that doubtful undecided state which we have seen was that of Amaziah. But a little increase in the strength of his temptations; or a little more excitement of his passions; or a little wider opening of the door to sin; or but a little more encouragement from bad example; or a little stronger feeling of security, or ground for a presumption of impunity in sinning; and then those who had at the least till now been cautious; who had shewn some reverence for religion and for God, and been unwilling utterly to disregard his word, or to expose themselves to the certainty of his displeasure, may soon become the open violators of the laws: nay, the contemners both of His authority and honour. It is thus that some, on entering the world, are found to break at once through the restraining influences of a moral and religious educa-

tion. It is thus that others, having set out decently, and for a time maintained some appearance of godliness, are observed upon some prosperous change of circumstances, to reverse their life and habits, to neglect religious duties which they were once careful in discharging, to forsake the sanctuary and profane the Sabbath; to break off the intercourse with pious men, and to make light of sacred things; to indulge openly in sinful pleasures, to adopt without scruple the vices and maxims of the world, which are subversive of religion; and to show in these and many other ways, that they have utterly cast off their fear of God and their regard to His commandments. Cases like these are very different from those in which good men are, by the violence, or the surprise, or importunity of a temptation, seen to fall occasionally into open sin against their honest and decided resolutions. There the cause is inadvertence, or supineness, or an infirmity, as St. Paul calls it, of the flesh; or a defeat perhaps, such as the best men have sustained, after long struggling with temptation. Then, moreover, we see speedy recollection and repentance, and no settled change of life and habits such as this under consideration. But in this the heart is secretly disposed to all the sin which follows. There is no strong feeling or resolve against it. 4. There was one step more and only one, which could aggravate the offences of this monarch. He had not yet openly defied the power of God, when by His prophet He remonstrated against false gods. But the next thing which we find in his unhappy history is, that he at length became so daring in impiety, as to insult and even threaten one of the prophets who was sent to him upon this very errand. "Why hast thou sought after the gods of Seir?" was the awakening demand on this occasion. And it might have been conceived that recollection of the past, and a consciousness of his extreme offence, would have produced some feelings of compunction in a mind which once appeared open to the influences of religion. But the answer was, "Art thou of the king's council?" Are affairs of state any concern of thine? or wilt thou prescribe what gods the king shall adore, or shall set up for worship in his realms? Be prudent and forbear. Why shouldst thou be smitten? which thou wilt be certainly, as he evidently designed to imply, if thou persistest to speak further of the matter. We see here how thoroughly all fear of God was conquered in the mind of Amaziah, and what hardness and insensibility may be induced by habits of sin, even where there were once hopeful appearances of piety. And was this the man who, in his early life, had been so scrupulous in the observance of God's statutes? To despise the message and insult the messengers of Heaven is an excess, on which many who still are great offenders might not venture. Many retain even in their worst wickedness such a degree of at least servile awe for religion as restrains them from such direct and positive affronts to it and its great Author. Though they are not conscientious in obeying His commands, they do not choose to brave His anger. Yet to such a fearful length may sinners go, even though once fearful of offending; nay, disposed to suffer loss rather than wilfully disobey Him. Let us then learn the danger of a heart "not perfect," not truly subdued to the faith of Christ and obedience to God. (*Christian Observer.*) *Significant facts in God's government:*—In this chapter we have a sketch of a succession of kings both of Judah and Israel. Here are two kings of Judah, Amaziah and Azariah, and Joash, Jeroboam, and his son Zachariah, kings of Israel. The whole chapter suggests certain significant facts in God's government of mankind. The first fact which strikes us is—**I. THE ENORMOUS FREEDOM OF ACTION WHICH HE ALLOWS WICKED MEN.** Here we learn—1. That God allows wicked men to form wrong conceptions of Himself. All these kings, although descendants of Abraham, who was a monotheist, became idolaters. "The high places were not taken away, as yet the people did sacrifice, and burnt incense on the high places." Golden calves, symbols of Egyptian worship, were erected at Dan and Bethel at the extremities of the dominions. Terribly strange it seems to us that the Almighty Author of the human mind should permit it to think of Him as some material object in nature, or as some production of the human hand. What human father, had he the power, would permit his children to form not only wrong but wicked impressions of himself? For what reason this is permitted I know not. Albeit it shows His practical respect for that freedom of action with which He has endowed us. Here we learn—2. That God allows wicked men to obtain despotic dominion over others. All these kings were wicked, Amaziah, Joash, Jeroboam, and Zachariah, and yet they obtained an autocratic dominion over the rights, possession, and lives of

millions. It is said of Jeroboam, who reigned forty-one years, that he "did evil in the sight of the Lord and departed not from the sins of his father." Antecedently one might have concluded that if a wicked man was allowed to live amongst his fellows, he should be doomed to obscurity and to social and political impotence, but it is not so, Why? Who shall answer? Another fact is—**II. GOD PUNISHES WICKED MEN BY THEIR OWN WICKEDNESS.** 1. A wicked man is punished by his own wickedness. Amaziah's conduct is an example. Elated with his triumph over the Edomites, he sought occasion of war with the King of Israel. He sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, King of Israel, saying, "Come, let us look one another in the face," &c. (vers. 8-14). About fifteen years after his defeat he fled from Jerusalem to Lachish to escape assassination, but the assassin pursued him and struck him dead. It is ever so. Wickedness is its own punishment. The wicked passions of a corrupt man are his tormenting devils. Sin is suicidal. 2. A wicked man is punished by the wickedness of others. The thousands of these despotic kings reduced to anguish, destitution, and death, were idolators and rebels against Heaven, and by the hand of wicked men they were punished. Thus it ever is: devils are their own tormentors. Sin converts a community of men into tormenting fiends, man becomes the Satan of man. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. Come, let us look one another in the face.—*Looking in the face*:—"Let us look one another in the face." Such was the message of a king to a king. The whole transaction was hypocritical, and we cannot read of it without loathing. Separate the words from the original surroundings, however, and they contain most excellent advice. We may give them a practical and seasonable turn. **I. LOOK GOD IN THE FACE.** Behold Him as He is. It is, alas, so easy to get wrong conceptions of the Most High, and much enmity to Him has its beginning thus. "They hated me without a cause." If men knew God better, they would dread Him less and trust Him more. "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord." Concerning what? Why, the very point of which we have been speaking: false notions of the Lord. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." You fancy Me to be harsh and hard: get rid of that thought; I delight in mercy. To look God in the face is no difficult matter now that Christ has come. He is "the image of the invisible God." See the one, and you see the other. The tenderness which said to a desolate widow in Nain, "Don't cry; I will raise your son"; the power which subdued the crested waves and hushed the roaring winds by a single word; the holiness which took no taint from contact with publicans and sinners—reveal the attributes of Jehovah. Agnosticism erects again the ancient Athenian altar, and writes on it, "To the Unknown God"; but Paul still cries, "Whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." **II. LOOK YOURSELF IN THE FACE.** "If any be a hearer of the word, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass." By the light of Scripture we may see our own characters; and this self-scrutiny is eminently important. Socrates said: "We should not live a life which is not subject to examination." For lack of this, some are astoundingly ignorant of their true condition. What they say to others might well be spoken of and by themselves. "I have not the pleasure of knowing you." Nathan proved this in respect of David, and the very church which thought that it had "need of nothing" was pronounced by Christ "poor and miserable, and blind, and naked." As it is in the literary, so it is in the moral world: authors are often bad judges of their own productions. John Foster wished that he could write like Johnson or Young, but the fact is that he wrote better than either. Sir Walter Scott published the *Waverley Novels* anonymously, lest they should injure his fame as a poet; but posterity thinks more of his stories than his verses. Something like this holds good of us: we may be ludicrously mistaken regarding ourselves. To avoid such blunders, let us use "the balances of the sanctuary." We should employ the scales and weights which God has provided. Paul told the Corinthians that they were "not wise," because they measured themselves by themselves, and compared themselves with themselves. **III. LOOK MAN IN THE FACE.** A needless counsel, some may complain. Don't we do it? Nothing is so common as the wish to see people's faces. We all believe in the *vis-à-vis* position. The pen is not enough; we want the countenance also. If you hear of a great writer or preacher, you at once want to see him. When we visit friends we call it "going

to see them." Nevertheless there is need of the advice: see men. We are much too isolated. English folk are what Matthew Arnold calls insular. If the various classes of society had more intercourse with each other, it would be better for us all round. Were the cultured and intellectual to mingle with Philistines rather oftener, the latter would get a little of their refinement. Communion between the rich and the poor would hardly fail in producing sympathy on the part of the one and confidence on the part of the other. Christians might learn a lesson here. They keep too much apart. Only lately it was asked at a metropolitan meeting of our denomination—Where now is the continuing in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship of which we read in the early Church? One other thought. How many misunderstandings in social life might be prevented or removed, if we looked each other in the face! You think that a friend is cooler in his manner than of yore, or he has done something which you interpret as hostile to you. Don't brood over it. If you do, your suspicions and imagination will blow the spark into a flame which will consume your comfort. Visit him. Be candid. "Have it out," as we say, and the probability is that a few minutes' plain dealing on both sides will put the whole business right. (*T. R. Stevenson.*) *Challenge to combat couched in terms of peace*:—These are sweet words. What can they mean? Surely but one thing only. Giving them transliteration and broadest meaning, they will sound thus: We have been a long time estranged; let us burn down the barriers of separation: we have hidden ourselves from one another when we ought to have stood face to face, each beaming with complacency upon the other; come, let us make an end of this alienation, and fraternally and trustfully look one another in the face. Was that the real meaning of the message? Not a whit! These beautiful words were the velvet which hid the sword. These terms of supposed approach and trustfulness are really a challenge. The right reading would be: "Come, let us fight; let us see which is the stronger man." Here again we keep upon the same line as in the former instance—the line which points to the right use of language. There is a morality of words. Men are not at liberty to put words into any shape they please; they must consider whether in putting words together they are building a pillar, plumed by the Eternal Righteousness, and going, so far as they do go, straight up to heaven. But if this were the rule, society would be dissolved. Who can speak truth with his neighbour—except in some broad and general sense? Who can let his Yea be yea, and his Nay, nay? When the Saviour delivered that injunction we thought it was elementary; in reality it is ultimate; there is nothing beyond it. When Yea means yea, and Nay nay, the millennium has come: men will not tell lies, nor will they act them; they will not allow wrong impressions to be made upon the mind; there will be no grammatical torture, no mental reservation, no putting out of words in the sense of putting out a "feeler": every heart transparent, every motive pure and generous, human speech a human religion, and the human religion sanctified and cleansed by the blood of Christ. But we live in lies; we tell them, we act them, we look them, we suggest them. When David is reported in English to say, "All men are liars," he is misreported; the right reading is, "all men are a lie,"—a grander speech; not a stone thrown at individuals, but an impeachment made upon human nature. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 9-10. *The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar.*—*The parable of Jehoshaphat*.—I. THREE THINGS LED TO THE UTTERANCE OF THIS SHORT PARABLE. 1. A relative success. 2. An under-estimate of a superior. 3. An insolent challenge. (1) Success is a relative term, and must be estimated with reference to the circumstances accompanying it. A man who guides his vessel safely across the English Channel achieves a certain success. But this is a short and comparatively easy voyage, and is not to be placed by the side of a successful crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, in rough and stormy weather. The captain who can bring his vessel safely through the dangers to be encountered in such a voyage, has fairly earned the right to be called successful. It by no means follows that the man who could execute the first would be equal to the second, nor does it follow that a military commander who could defeat the tribes of Africa in battle would be able to gain a victory over the armies of Europe. But this was the conclusion at which Amaziah, King of Judah, had arrived. He had subdued the Edomites and slain ten thousand men, and he therefore concluded that he should be equally successful against the king and armies of Israel, who were much more formidable

foes. This conclusion arose from—(2) An under-estimate of his superiors in the art of war. The man who undertakes to swim a river ought to be well acquainted with the strength of the current in comparison with his own bodily strength. A mistake on these points may be fatal. It is plain that Amaziah undervalued the military strength and capacity of his opponent; for when they did meet, "Judah was put to the worse before Israel, and they fled every man to their tents" (ver. 12). This undervalue of a man who was a greater warrior than himself led to (3) an insolent challenge. "Come, let us look one another in the face" (ver. 8). Success in an undertaking sometimes fills an ignorant man with such an insolent pride, that he thinks nothing can stand before him. Amaziah was such a man, because he had defeated the Edomites, he thought that the army of Israel would be but as chaff before him. Hence his invitation to Jehoash. II. THE PARABLE BY WHICH JEHOASH REPROVED HIM CONVEYS THAT KING'S SENSE OF HIS SUPERIORITY BY A SIMILITUDE DRAWN FROM NATURE. The contrast between the cedar standing in all its glory upon the mountain of Lebanon and the worthless thistle which has sprung up at its foot is very great, and conveys the King of Israel's contempt for his rival in forcible terms. The cedar of a thousand years could not be uprooted or removed by the strongest earthly power, while the thistle of yesterday was at the mercy of the first beast of the forest who passed by that way. There is also a reference to Oriental custom. The man who asked the daughter of another in marriage was expected to be his equal in rank, otherwise the request was regarded as an insult. Therefore the proposal of the thistle to the cedar is a declaration of supposed equality, and is placed by Jehoash on a level with Ahaziah's challenge to himself. The fate of the thistle sets forth what would be the result of the self-esteem of the King of Judah if he did not take the advice which is the application of the whole. "Tarry at home, for why shouldest thou meddle to thine hurt" (ver. 10). III. NOTE THE SUCCESS AND THE NON-SUCCESS OF THE PARABLE. It was a success inasmuch as it was a true picture of the character of the man whom it was intended to represent. If those who can give a correct outline of the face upon canvas are regarded as successful artists, those whose word-painting can show us the features of the soul are at least as successful. But it failed in producing a beneficial effect upon the person to whom it was addressed. Amaziah did not wish to see his own likeness. Those who are deformed do not derive pleasure from seeing themselves reflected in a faithful mirror. The parables of Christ often failed to gain the approbation of His hearers on this account. LESSONS: 1. One proud man may become, in the providence of God, the means of humiliation to another. There was much arrogance in the man who compared himself to a cedar, as well as in him whom he reproved. 2. Men who are prone to seek quarrels will find that, in so doing, they have sought their own ruin. Nations and rulers who enter into war from ambitious motives, will but hasten their own destruction. "With what measure ye meet, it shall be measured unto you again." 3. He that has achieved a fair measure of success by the exercise of a fair measure of ability may lose what he has gained by attempting a task beyond his capabilities. A gambler who has won a fortune in a contest with a man no more clever than himself, will most likely lose it all if he attempts to play with a much more skilful gamester. It would have been Amaziah's wisdom to have been content with his conquest of Edom; he would then have been spared the humiliation of a defeat at the hands of the King of Israel. 4. Those who become proud and insolent by prosperity turn a blessing into a curse, and thus defeat the Divine intention. Success in our undertakings is intended to produce gratitude and humility; the fault is in us if these effects are not produced. 5. The great lesson of the history is: that "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. xvi. 18). (*Outlines from Sermons by a London Minister.*)

Vers. 28. Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam.—*Life—Re-lived*.—There is a moment when a man's life is re-lived on earth. It is in that hour in which the coffin lid is shut down, just before the funeral, when earth has seen the last of him for ever. Then the whole life is, as it were, lived over again in the conversation which turns upon the memory of the departed. The history of three-score years and ten is soon recapitulated; not, of course, the innumerable incidents and acts which they contained, but the central governing principle of the whole. (*F. W. Robertson.*) *Record of sin*.—It is said that the Bank of France has an invisible studio in a gallery behind the cashiers, so that at a signal from one of

them a suspected customer can instantly have his picture taken without his own knowledge. So our sins and evil deeds may be registered against us, and we ourselves altogether unconscious of the fact.

CHAPTER XV.

VER. 5. And the Lord smote the King.—*Familiarity with religious things* :—

1. The character and conduct of King Uzziah are very full of instruction. His life was marked by one fault, and by one signal act of punishment from God. His fault was the offering sacrifice, that which only the priest might do; and his punishment a leprosy, inflicted on him by the word of a priest on his persevering in his fault. This is the more remarkable as he is on the whole described as a good character. One notable circumstance is, that in the Book of Kings he goes by the name of Azariah, and is there also described as a good king, and all that we are told is that he died a leper, having dwelt in a several house until the day of his death. He made constant reference to Zachariah the prophet, and we are told, as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper. He made war on Philistia, and prospered. Again, we are told that God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabians. Having come back, he built towers in the desert, and he had much cattle. It appears that in his campaigns he won a high name for courage. He transgressed against God by going into the temple and offering incense on the altar. The priest went in after him with fourscore other priests—all valiant men; and they withstood Uzziah, saying, "It appertaineth not to thee. O Uzziah, to burn it." Uzziah, having a censer in his hand, was wroth; and while angry, holding the censer in his hand, the leprosy rose up into his forehead, and the priests thrust him forcibly out; and he himself hastened to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. 2. It seems clear that Uzziah was a man whose life throughout, until the finishing act of it, was in conformity to God's will, and blessed with God's mercy. That crowning act of his life—the offering the incense, we are told, was the result of a presumptuous spirit brought on by the success of his life. But while this cause is assigned for the fault, and the fault is mentioned to explain the punishment in the Book of Chronicles, in the Book of Kings the punishment only is mentioned; and we are simply told that the Lord smote the king till he was a leper; and that he dwelt in a several house; so that any one reading the account in this book, without referring to Chronicles, would be in the dark as to the motive of the Almighty in afflicting the king. We must refer to one portion of God's counsels to understand the other. The light shed from one page of His will, will irradiate and explain that which hitherto may have appeared to be obscure; and how often is this the case in daily life! 3. And this leads us to consider that particular form of sin in King Uzziah which called out the vengeance of God, and which developed itself into so singular an act, and one, at first sight, so little in keeping with the former portions of his life. His early career was one of a good and religious man, blessed by God with prosperity on that account. Trusting to his success as a sign not only of God's favour, but of his own moral security, he became inflated with pride and self-sufficiency, and his temptation was to fall into that very sin, so natural to those who, having once been earnest or sincere in their religion, have by degrees familiarised themselves with it; so that they think they may play with it as a bauble, or use its influence to serve their own ends, and, like Uzziah, thrust themselves into the very office of the priest, by a profane and irreverent handling of holy things. This familiarity with the things of religion is the natural result of that precocity of spiritual knowledge which belongs to many. It ends in more than one false condition of mind. Familiarity itself quickly shades off into irreverence, pride and self-sufficiency, and independence of those means of grace and elevated helps to the religious life which are so inseparably mixed up with the life of the earnest Christian. Into these faults Uzziah fell. A disposition of independence, which his seems to have been, would naturally lead him to think very much for himself in things religious; and thinking for himself would naturally lead him to too subjective a view of religion generally. 4. There are many forms which this particular error takes that come before our eye—familiarity with holy things and holy names, which

look upon reserve with the same eye as they look on hypocrisy, and on reverence with the same feeling with which they regard superstition. Many sad conditions result from this so great a familiarity of treatment of the external objects of religion, that, by degrees, such men lose sight of objective religion altogether, and blend it into themselves. In the realms of faith, where the shadowy forms which pass before the mind's eye are matters of apprehension more to the mind than to the sense, there is ever a danger of our ignoring the separate existence of those forms, making them after all but the idols of our own creation. The attitude necessary towards those objects is one of reverence and reserved delicacy. The forms of the unseen world are in themselves to our eye infinitely fine; the rude touch, the over-curious gaze, may dissipate them as far as our perception of them goes. So that some have dealt with the Second blessed Person of the Trinity, till they have denied His Divinity, and with the Holy Spirit until they have denied His Personality. With an unauthorised touch they have entered the holiest place, and dared to intrude upon scenes for which they have neither warrant nor commission. Another end in which this kind of spirit results is, very naturally, pride and self-sufficiency. In proportion as we melt off the outlines of the objects of our creed, we lower our estimation of them; and in proportion as they are made parts only of our own interior self, we by degrees find nothing on which we can place reliance, save on our own opinion or personal energy. It is to this condition of mind that our familiarity with religious subjects will judiciously bring us, and those whose intentions were best, may in this life have to bewail Uzziah's end. (*E. Monro.*)

Ver. 29.—And carried them captive to Assyria.—*Captivity*:—A very humbling expression! But this is an aspect of providence we cannot afford, if we be wise men, to ignore. Tiglath-pileser, King of Assyria, came and carried away all these people captive to Assyria—simply “carried” them. When men have lost their soul, their spirit, their fire, they are simply carted away like so many hundredweights and tons of dead matter. We are not men if we have lost manliness—in other words, if we have lost the indwelling Spirit of God, the force eternal, the seal Divine; we are not then conquered, because to be “conquered” would imply some measure of calculated and rational resistance—we are simply carried away, borne off, as men might carry dead matter. This is the lot of all nations that forget God: this is the lot of every man whose heart ceases to be the sanctuary of the living Spirit: he is but so much bulk; name him in pounds avoirdupois, report him in so many inches and feet of stature and girth;—he has grieved the Spirit; he has quenched the Spirit; henceforth he is to be driven as one of a herd of dumb cattle; he is to be carried as if he were but so much flesh. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XVI.

VERS. 1–20. In the seventeenth year of Pekah.—*A people's king and priest, or kingdom and priesthood*:—I. THE KINGHOOD. 1. The de-humanising force of false religion. Ahaz was an idolator. 2. The national curse of a corrupt kingdom. 3. The mischievous issues of a temporary expediency. Ahaz, in order to extricate himself from the difficulties and trials which Rezin and Pekah had brought on his country, applies to the King of Assyria. (1) He degraded himself. He sold himself as a slave to the king whose help he invoked. He loses his self-respect, which is the very essence of true manhood. Another mischief of his temporary expediency was—(2) He impoverished his people. This silver and gold belonged to the nation. It was public property. What right had he to dispose of a fraction? II. THE PRIESTHOOD. Urijah is the priest. There seems to have been more than one of this name, and nothing is known of him more than what is recorded in this chapter. He was a priest, who at this time presided in the temple of Jerusalem. He seems to have been influential in the State, and, although a professed monotheist, was in somewhat close connection with Ahaz the idolatrous king. Two things are worthy of note concerning him. 1. An obsequious obedience to the royal will. The Assyrian king having taken Damascus, is followed by Ahaz to the city; in order, no doubt, to congratulate him on his triumphs. While at Damascus, Ahaz is struck with the beauty of an altar. He

seems to have been so charmed with it that he commands Urijah, his priest, to make one exactly like it. 2. An obsequious silence to the royal profanation. See what the king did, no doubt, in the presence of the priest. This fawning, sacerdotal sycophant not only "did according to all King Ahaz commanded," but he stood by silently and witnessed without a word of protest this spoliation of the holy temple. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Vers. 10-15. And King Ahaz went to Damascus . . . and saw an altar.—
The cosmopolitan in religion :—This is an incident familiar to all Bible students. You know that King Ahaz, and it is saying a great deal, was about the most foolish and weak king that ever sat upon the throne of Judah. After the time of Solomon the kingdom was threatened by the neighbouring kingdom of Israel, which had made a league with the King of Syria, whose centre was in Damascus. They had already besieged Jerusalem ineffectually. It was the time when Isaiah the prophet was carrying on his ministry in the holy city. He advised this weak and foolish young man to have no fear whatever of the two powers that were leagued against him. He described them in that uncomplimentary phrase of two "smoking stumps of firebrands"—what you would describe as spent forces—and advised the young king to be quiet, and trust in God. But trust in God was not original or clever enough for Ahaz. He was one of the men who thought that you might trust in God when you had exhausted every other resource. So, instead of trusting in God, he proceeded to do the very opposite thing—to strip the temple of Jehovah of its vessels of gold and silver, to strip its walls of the platings of gold, and to send this gold, with some treasures from his own house, as a present to Tiglath-pileser, the King of Assyria—the Roman Empire of that day, threatening and menacing every other power—and he said: "I am thy son and thy servant; come and save me out of the hands of the King of Israel and the King of Syria." And the device succeeded; the glittering gold secured the strong arm of the Assyrian king. Tiglath-pileser conquered Syria, led away the king of it captive, established some sort of a seat at Damascus; and Ahaz went up to visit him, and while there turned things over in his own mind, and, thinking that religion was very useful to a politician, he came across a heathen altar—an elaborate and æsthetic altar—and it occurred to him that it would be another original thing to enlarge the original scope of the temple at Jerusalem, and to bring something of an ornate character into its service, by erecting there an altar of the exact pattern of the thing he had seen at Damascus. Having unfortunately a creature who was supple and obedient, in Urijah the priest—the very opposite of Isaiah the prophet—having sent an exact pattern of the altar by special messenger to Jerusalem, his assiduous and time-serving priest had it all ready by the time of his return. It was put in the centre of the sanctuary, and now said King Ahaz to his supple and accommodating religious functionary, "I am not going to desert the old altar, it is to be kept on the premises, it is to be moved a little to the north; the great altar is to take the central position, the altar with the heathen embellishments upon it, with heathen and corrupt associations connected with it, is to have the centre; but I am not going over to heathenism—God forbid!—I have a very tender place in my heart for the old altar, and in the day when trouble comes, and when perhaps this brilliant experiment in religion has failed, in the day when darkness falls, the old altar will do for me to inquire by." He did not know that he was mocking God when he did that. 1. Have you met this man Ahaz? I have seen him. He is a type, and the type is not extinct. He is like a man who has gone away from the Church that gave him all that he was ever worth, and he says that he has not gone away from it. The old altar is not put away, it is only in practice that he has gone over to another Church—for family reasons, and for æsthetic considerations. I think you have met the man, and know the type. The cosmopolitan in matters of religion, the man who comes to you and raves about the wonders of Buddhism; and he asks you if you have read the Vedas and the Zendavesta, and if you are acquainted with Confucian philosophy, and if you know that there is really a great deal of truth and merit in heathen religion. Now nobody would deny that this man had made some sort of a discovery, as Ahaz did; but nobody sensible has ever thought of denying that there is a certain element of truth in heathen religions. God has not left Himself without witness; He has not been doing nothing in the great heathen countries through all the ages; He has spoken here and there; and there may be enough truth in a system to hold it together for centuries. But you may be sure that the man who talks in this way

has not on the spot considered the product of heathen religion, and when he talks of the picturesqueness of many heathen customs, he has forgotten the degradation and the uncleanness and the shameful superstition and the unutterable cruelty and lies that are connected with the religions that he praises. Either the Christian religion was designed and destined to supersede and supplant all others, or it was not, and we must make up our minds. Study comparative religions if you will, but the man who studies the Christian religion, and digs deeply into its contents, will find a glory that takes to itself every scattered ray of glory that is in every other religion, and repels all that is base and degrading and unworthy. If the Christian religion is not intended to supersede and supplant all others, if the faiths of the world were sufficient by themselves to save the world, even the faith of Judah, with its doctrine of one righteous and holy God, then the Incarnation was a superfluity, and the cross and bitter passion of our Lord were altogether unnecessary. The cosmopolitan in religion does not dig deeply enough into the glory that excels, to see that it does excel all other light. 2. But I go on to speak, in the next place, of this man as the type of a man who will do anything, right or wrong, in order to succeed. Why did he erect the Assyrian altar, or a pattern of it, in the temple at Jerusalem? Not because it was false, or because it was true; the man did not understand religion a bit; it was a kind of penny-in-the-slot business; there was magic in it; you did something, and something came out of it, and he knew nothing better than that. But he knew that this altar was the altar of a powerful nation, and that the men who worshipped at it were succeeding, and there is where we make the mistake to-day. We are worshipping success, right or wrong. Of course you want to succeed; it would be exceedingly foolish on my part, and useless to suggest to any man before me that he should not desire passionately the success of anything with which he is connected. There is a danger of worshipping success in the Christian Church, of sacrificing inward things for numbers and wealth in the character of the Church. Naturally, I want my business to succeed, but I want to know how the dividends are earned. That is a question that every Christian man should ask. Naturally I want my party to succeed, but the party had better journey in the wilderness for fifty years than sacrifice any of its sincerity and its views for the sake of office. I would say in all earnestness that my ambition to succeed, and yours, must in all things be strictly subordinated to our ambition and purpose to do the will of God everywhere, and when we stand upon the threshold of an enterprise we must not admit anything into it, if we know it, that will clash with the will of God, and that will not be in accordance with our conscience. What is religion? What do some people think it to be? Is it a series of ecclesiastical and ceremonial operations, which God will accept as an equivalent or a substitute for a man's heart obedience? Is it an endeavour to get the Most High over to your side, right or wrong? Is it not a feeling after God, and finding Him, and then submitting the whole life, with all its possibilities of success or failure to the absolute and undisputed authority and will of God? 3. I think I can see a little bit of a parable in this sad history. There is a temple of God in the heart of every man here to-day which should be kept inviolate for Him, and the golden vessels in it are the convictions that God has created in your heart; and you must say, in the sight of God, "I will not sacrifice one of these to ward off any impending danger, to buy over any strong thing to my side; here I stand, I can no other: where God has placed me, whatever comes." I know what it means, I have graduated in business, and I know it—how you are tempted to stretch a point here and there in the presence of new combinations, in the presence of new competition and anti-Christian customs. There is a crisis coming on, and they tell you that if you will not bribe people and drink with people, and do this, that, and the other, you will not succeed; and you say, "I know it is abominable." Will you whittle away the abominableness of it until you make it fit for you to do it? Or will you say, "I can fail, but I can't stifle my conscience, and I cannot stifle the voice of God in my soul, I cannot do evil that good may come." Whenever you are tempted to do it, remember the apostle's words about the people who do it—it is a strong word, not a bit too strong—"whose damnation is just." 4. This is a man who, like many people to-day, tries to do an impossible thing—to serve two masters—and he fails. He is going to keep in touch with the true religion, and he is going to give the central place in life to the religion that has only a grain of truth in it at best. He did not want to cut himself adrift from the old religion; he had a great respect for it, and he wanted to keep it on the premises, just as a man keeps a Bible on the

premises. He is going to resort to it in time of trouble ; it is as great a comfort to him as it is for him to know that there is a doctor somewhere in the vicinity if illness should come. It would be too shocking to give up religion. Yes, but you can relegate religion to the north side of the altar, and give it a subordinate place, or you think you can, and you fail to see that you are mocking it. A great many people say, "I like religion all very well in its place." Where is the place of religion ? Some people think the proper place for religion is in the pew, and it is to be left there with the hymn-book on Sundays, and returned to when Sunday comes back again. We do not understand the heart of religion until we understand that there is no place for religion in a man's life unless it has the first place, because the Lord Jesus Christ will not be one in a Pantheon of many deities ; it must be all or nothing. Not the main altar for business and pleasure and fame, and a little corner on the north side for Jesus Christ ; but the supreme altar for Him, and He must govern your pleasures and your business. Until we can say, "For me to live is Christ," we have not come to the heart of the Christian life. (*C. Brown.*) *The altar "to inquire by"* :—I call special attention to the last words—"and the brazen altar shall be for me to inquire by." Ahaz directed first of all that his own offerings should be offered upon this new altar. He then commanded that the offerings of the people, the morning and evening sacrifices as well as special offerings, should be offered upon it. Nor did Ahaz stop here ; for this is an illustration of the fact that when we begin to interfere with God's plan, and to introduce into the divine economy of things our own improvements, we are only beginning a course of action which will become more daring and irreverent as time passes by. 1. Now I want you to observe how when once a man dares to interfere with Divine ordinances, there is no telling where such a course will end. The history of retrogression in this direction is a very striking one. Even Ahaz would not have dared to do all he did at once ; but having once erected a heathen altar in the sanctuary of the God of Israel, the other things naturally followed. The first step was the one which prepared the way for every other step. Ahaz had not been in sympathy with the worship of God from his earliest days. He had entered more and more into alliance with heathen powers. He had become a diplomatist in everything ; even his religion had become a thing of diplomacy. The result was that the great brazen altar upon which the nation had offered its sacrifices for centuries was at length removed by him out of the way, and an altar of his own making was made to take its place. But even now, what did Ahaz say with regard to the old altar ? Should it be removed right out of the temple ? No, the man was diplomatic still. "The brazen altar shall be for me to inquire by." Now this word is ambiguous, as ambiguous in the Hebrew as it is in the English. (1) Ahaz may have meant to say, "Put that brazen altar on one side for the time being ; I will think about it, and see what I shall do with it ; I will not yet put it outside altogether. I will consider the matter, and see what can be done." Or, what I think is far more probable : (2) Ahaz, while he was prepared to offer all the sacrifices upon his own altar only, was not prepared to lose sight of the old altar, but intended to consult it whenever he got into difficulty. He thus practically said, "Put this old altar on one side, so that I may inquire by it when I find it necessary to do so." Now that is a very striking course to take, and yet not very exceptional in one sense. 2. This conduct on the part of Ahaz in cautiously postponing the final decision what he would do with the altar he readily thrust aside, exactly illustrates what some men and women have done many a time. There are some here to-night who remember their earliest days with strange and conflicting feelings. Their earliest recollections ought to be to them exceedingly sacred. They remember the hallowing influences which surrounded them in their early homes, when simple piety reigned in that family. But possibly some of you have since then gone out into the world, and have done what Ahaz did. You have formed friendships with other men than those with whom your father would have fraternised ; but then you have known more of life, as you say, and you have prospered more than your father ever did. As men of the world you laugh at the simplicities of your ancestors, and smile at the little they knew of the competitions of life, and how unequal they would be for the fight of to-day. Your father, you freely admit, was a good man. There can be no doubt about that ; no one ever doubted his sincerity, his faith, for he was so childlike and simple ; but, poor man, so you think, he did not know as much as you do ; and then, after all, good as he was, he was very narrow and bigoted in his views. On the contrary, you have learned, you think, to realise that there is good in everything. You favour all that because you say it is ex-

pansive, and shows broad thought and profound sympathies; and just as Ahaz never thought for a moment that he was worshipping other gods by his innovation, so you, with your broad charity and expansive views, are bringing into the religion of Jesus Christ what He never ordained, and after all think that the Spirit which inspired the apostles is going on inspiring you, but that very much more is taught you in this enlightened age than was ever taught them. Meanwhile, you have your cultured view of the Cross. You will not thrust it away as a useless thing, but you readily place it on one side. It is no longer the central fact of the Gospel. Christ died for an example; He revealed His unselfishness. Yes, the old altar must be put aside somewhere, somewhere on the north or the cold side, and you will erect your altar from Damascus where the old altar used to be. But in all this you do not want to commit yourselves finally. The thoughtful man, so you think, is the man who always delays decision. Ahaz thought so too, if we accept the first possible rendering of the words, for he practically said, "The brazen altar shall be for me to think about. I will see where I will finally put it. I am not quite sure that even now I have put it in its right place." So you say, "I do not think that even now the sacrifice of Christ and the story of Calvary occupy just the proper niche." They come in somewhere; but where, you think it very difficult to decide. Meanwhile, to make sure, you will thrust it aside and yet keep it within view; by and by you may see your way to have it right outside the temple.

3. Perhaps you have done something else. It has not been to you a question of opinion. You do not belong to these would-be clever and critical people, but still you are a practical man of the world. You cannot enter into the meaning of what they call higher criticism: you know nothing about it save that you have seen a flippant leader in the daily press; and you are not concerned about the discussion: you are business men, and cannot give time to all that. The Bible may be all that your dear old father thought it was, for all that you know; but then the world has its claims, you say, and you find that it will not do in the interests of your trade or your profession to have the old Cross placed too prominently, and the principles of the Cross observed too faithfully in your daily life, and so you must thrust that a little aside and have another altar that will be more respectable—one of the non-descript altars of Damascus. It was just so with Ahaz. He had to think of the King of Assyria. Suppose the King of Assyria paid him a visit: how very pained he would be to find there was no altar there like his own; or, even if there was, that there was another altar between it and the holy place, and thus precedence was given to that other altar! Thus Ahaz had to consider matters as a practical man. He was a man full of diplomatic wisdom. He knew that as long as he could keep in with the King of Assyria things would probably be right. Why, then, should he sacrifice all his prospects just for the sake of keeping that old altar in its right place? Thus, off it had to go to the northern side.

4. But you tell me you cannot be a Christian and get on. Well, what then? You reply that you must get on, that this is the highest necessity of living. Is it? If you cannot be a Christian and succeed, then let success go. Ah, but you reply that you must succeed. Very well, you follow just the track of Ahaz. You must get on, must you? To that end you must get into alliance with the world, and the spirit of the world, and ignore God and His altar. Face the fact. You go into life and come into contact with men who sacrifice principle upon the altar of gain in the profession or trade in which you are engaged. And you say, "Other men do that, and I must do it in self-defence. I must build this new altar, I must burn incense, not to God always, but burn incense upon the altar of prosperity and worldly advancement. It pays others exceedingly well to do this, and it should pay me." This was precisely what Ahaz said with regard to the kings of Syria (2 Chron. xxviii. 23) — "Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me." I know that all this description may seem to many of you to be exaggerated. Those of us who know something of the spiritual condition of men and women know that there is nothing more common than this. Think of it; look back over your conduct, and ask yourselves what you have done that is distinctly a service to the Saviour. What have you ever said or done in your life that would mark you out as a follower of Jesus Christ? How many a man thinks of coming by and by to inquire by that altar upon which he has offered no sacrifice! What is the altar upon which you offer your sacrifices? If it is the altar of worldly success; then inquire of it. Be true to your convictions and to your life. Do not be mean, and only turn your back upon worldly pleasure when it has turned its back upon you. Do not look to the world as long as the

world can further your purposes, always retaining a thought of God as a convenience for a dark day or a troublous hour. That is the meanest and most degrading motive that can take possession of the human heart. (*D. Davies.*) *Using God for emergencies* :—There is a blunt frankness about the transaction, almost amounting to facetiousness, that interests one. The cool way in which the old heathen altar is put in the front of the temple, while the brasen altar is ordered on one side, yet not put out of sight, but reserved for special exigencies, when the Damascus altar will not do, is very striking. Some men, having determined to have the Assyrian altar in the place of Jehovah's, would have commanded its destruction as a thing whose use was past, and which it were well to put out of sight. Not so Ahaz. He did not consider its use all gone. There might come a time—very probably there would come a time—when the brasen altar would be of essential service. Jehovah had many a time, through His prophets, come to the help of His people, and had instructed them through His priests, and it were a wise and good thing to keep the altar where, when occasion might demand it, he could go and get the direction and the help that might not be obtained from the Damascus altar's service. It was a wise forecast, but a very base and wicked one,—so base and wicked that such a man even as Ahaz was ought to have been ashamed of it. (*W. Aikman, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XVII.

VERS. 1-8. In the twelfth year of Ahaz King of Judah began Hoshea.—*Aspects of a corrupt nation* :—Hoshea, the king here mentioned, was the nineteenth and last king of Israel. He lived about 720 years or more B.C. After a reign of nine years his subjects were carried away captive to Assyria, and the kingdom of Israel came to an end. I. **AS AN UNFORTUNATE INHERITOR OF WRONG.**—Upon Hoshea and his age there came down the corrupting influence of no less than nineteen princes, all of whom were steeped in wickedness and fanatical idolatry. The whole nation had become completely immoral and idolatrous. It is one of not only the commonest but the most perplexing facts in history that one generation comes to inherit, to a great extent, the character of its predecessor. Though the bodies of our predecessors are mouldering in the dust they are still here in their thought and influences. This is an undoubted fact. It serves to explain three things—1. The vital connection between all the members of the race. Though men are countless in number, and ever multiplying, humanity is one. 2. The immense difficulty in improving the moral condition of the race. There have been men in every age and land who have “striven even unto blood” to improve the race. Those of us who have lived longest in the world, looked deepest into its moral heart, and laboured most zealously and persistently for its improvement, feel like Sisyphus, in ancient fable, struggling to roll a large stone to the top of a mountain, which, as soon as we think some progress has been made, rolls back to its old position, and that with greater impetuosity. 3. The absolute need of superhuman agency spiritually to redeem the race. Philosophy shows that a bad world cannot improve itself, cannot make itself good. Bad men can neither help themselves, morally, or help others. If the world is to be improved, thoughts and influences from superhuman regions must be injected into its heart. II. **AS A GUILTY WORKER OF WRONG.**—Hoshea and his people were not only the inheritors of the corruptions of past generations, but they themselves became agents in propagating and perpetuating the wickedness. So that while they were the inheritors of a corrupt past, they were at the same time guilty agents in a wicked present. Strong as is the influence of the past upon us, it is not strong enough to coerce us into wrong. III. **AS A TERRIBLE VICTIM OF WRONG.** What was the judicial outcome of all this wickedness? Retribution came, stern, rigorous, and crushing. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Vers. 6-8. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria.—*Captivity of Israel* :—The seeds of Israel's captivity were sown by Solomon. The introduction of foreign wives into the royal family was the first step toward Israel's fall. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, cuts the die that stamps the face of all the subsequent religious history of Israel. With the fourth dynasty, that of Omri, a new

religious period begins. Omri's greatness and foreign popularity secured for his son Ahab alliance with the royal house of Zidon. With all the energy and fire of her strong character, Jezebel persecuted and destroyed the prophets of Jehovah, and transplanted into Israel the sensual worship of Baal and the Asherah. But the rise of the dynasty of Jehu was the fall not only of Omri's house, but of Phœnician Baal-worship also. From a political point of view, Israel had seen some prosperous times. Omri had secured a large domain, and probably a rich revenue. Ahab was less fortunate in his political relations. An invasion of the great Assyrian army forced a coalition of all the petty western nations for self-defence. In an inscription of Shalmanezar II. is an account of a battle between him and these peoples, which took place near the ancient city of Karkar. Among the enemies vanquished we find "twelve hundred chariots, twelve hundred horsemen, twenty thousand men of Hadadezer of Damascus; two thousand chariots, ten thousand men, of Ahab of Israel." In another inscription of the same monarch there is mention of "Jehu, the son of Omri!" as one of his tributaries. Here Omri appears as the ancestor of Jehu. The anarchy that cursed Israel during its later history seems to have been instigated largely by the monarchs of the East. In one of Tiglath-pileser's inscriptions, where he gives an account of his subjection of the land of Omri, he says: "Pekah their king I put to death, and I appointed Hoshea to the sovereignty over them." The Bible record, 2 Kings xv. 30, simply mentions the conspirator, murderer, and successor. The inscriptions tell us who stood behind, shifted the scenes, and directed the actors. Tiglath-pileser was absolute ruler of Palestine. Israel's power was broken, its army reduced, its land partially depopulated.

I. THE CAPTURE OF SAMARIA. Hoshea seems to have been faithful to his Assyrian lord as long as the latter lived. But at the death of Tiglath-pileser and the accession of his successor, Shalmanezar IV., there was probably, as whenever rulers changed at Nineveh, a widespread revolt among their tributaries in the distant provinces. Hoshea, though religiously superior to his predecessors, despaired of the situation under the tyrants of the East, and appeals to So (Sabako), of Egypt, for relief. He withholds his accustomed tribute, thus openly defying the armies of the great king. His appeal to Egypt seems to have won for him only the enmity of the new king of Assyria. Shalmanezar then "came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it three years." He threshed the land right and left, taking captive and devastating, until he had driven the unsubmitive within the walls of Samaria.

II. CAUSES OF THE CAPTIVITY OF ISRAEL. After narrating the catastrophe of Samaria and the disposition of its population, the writer enumerates the causes of the same. The Israelites practised secretly the idolatry of their neighbours, building high places throughout the land, upon which they burnt incense to Canaanitish deities. Obelisks of Baal and the Asherim were set on every high hill and under every green tree. These Phœnician deities were symbols of the generative powers of Nature. They were the objects of the most degrading and licentious forms of worship. They appealed directly to the sensual impulses, and thus easily corrupted and led astray Israel.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CAPTIVITY. The ten tribes revolted against Solomon's successor in order to avoid political oppression. But their anarchistic method of choosing rulers made them for a hundred and fifty years the victims of the most arbitrary kings. By their disregard of political obligations and treachery toward their conquerors, these self-willed monarchs ultimately brought upon their people the just rewards of national rebellion—captivity and servitude. Jehovah had permitted them to exist as a part of his chosen people, but they were under the same conditions as Judah; their continuance depended on their faithfulness to his commands. When all law and testimony were ignored, and Jehovah was insulted and defied, then mercy gave place to justice, prosperity to disaster, blessings to cursings, and peace to captivity. This catastrophe is the strongest kind of corroboration to the truth of the warnings of the prophets. They besought and entreated Israel to turn from all evil ways. They warned and threatened, they accused and condemned them by the word of Jehovah. The threatened fate at length came to pass. With steadfast purpose, Jehovah brought upon his enemies the just fruits of their evil deeds. God is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Disregard of His words, commands, warnings, and threats is just as blameworthy in His sight to-day as two thousand five hundred years ago. Godless living is still the bane of national life. Let each one of us, by the grace of God, so live that the golden text of the lesson may never be true of us,—“Because you have forsaken Jehovah, He hath also forsaken you.” (*Ira M. Price.*)

Vers. 7-25. For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned.—*A great privilege, wickedness, and ruin* :—I. A GREAT NATIONAL PRIVILEGE. We learn herefrom that the Infinite Governor of the world had given them at least three great advantages, political freedom, right to the land, and the highest spiritual teaching. He had given them. 1. Political freedom. For ages they had been in political bondage, the mere slaves of despots; but here we are told that God had "brought them out of the land of Egypt." Political freedom is the inalienable right of all men, is one of the greatest blessings of a people, but one which in every age has been outraged by despots. The millions are groaning in every land still under political disabilities. He had given them—2. A right to the land. Canaan was the common right of all; true, it was divided amongst the ten tribes, but this not for the private interests of any, but for the good of all. 3. The highest spiritual teaching. II. A GREAT NATIONAL WICKEDNESS. Possessing all these privileges, how acted these people—not merely the people of Israel, but the people of Judah as well? Was the sentiment of worship and justice regnant within them? Were they loyal to all that is beautiful, true, and good? Nay. 1. They rejected God. 2. They adopted idols. Mark (1) the earnestness of their idolatry. With what unrelenting zeal they promoted the cause of idolatry. Mark (2) the cruelty of their idolatry. "And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire." III. GREAT NATIONAL RUIN. 1. Their ruin involved the entire loss of their country (ver. 23). 2. Their ruin involved the loss of their national existence (ver. 18). The ten tribes are gone, and no one knows whether they are now worth looking after, for they were a miserable type of humanity. 3. Their ruin involved the retributive agency of Heaven. (*David Thomas, D.D.*) *The need of obedience to God's laws* :—Charles M. Sheldon says he was once called upon unexpectedly to preach at an insane asylum. He asked the superintendent what subject he would advise him to take. "Preach on the great need of obedience," was the prompt reply. After the service, in response to Mr. Sheldon's inquiry as to how much of the sermon was probably understood, the superintendent said: "They understood nearly all of it. Besides, you must remember that there were more than fifty of us, counting doctors and attendants, who are sane, and I don't know but what we need the doctrine of obedience preached into us just as much as the other people. I know that disobedience to God's laws has brought most of these people into this asylum, and the rest of us are in danger of the same end if we do not learn to obey the commands of God." *Following others in sin* :—Mr. Romanes, who has specially studied the minds of animals, says that we may infer intelligence in an animal whenever we see it able to profit by its own experience. But is it not the sign of a higher intelligence, that we are able to profit by the experience of others. This is the reason why history is written with so much elaboration, and studied with so much solicitude. But men, on a wide scale, disregard this history and refuse the solemn lessons. Men follow one another in sin as they do in nothing else. Baxter tells how he once saw a man driving a flock of lambs, and something meeting and hindering them, one of the lambs leaped on the wall of a bridge and fell over into the river; whereupon the rest of the flock, one by one leaped after it, and were nearly all drowned. Thus we men often act, blindly, madly, smitten by a profound infatuation we wildly follow one another, leaping into the gulf. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Confirmed sinners learn not from the past* :—"The burnt child dreads the fire;" it boldly trifles with sticks and papers until it is burnt or scalded, and henceforth keeps a respectful distance from the bars. This is equally true of men in their business life. Let a man speculate in some concern or other that turns out badly, people say, "Ah! he has burnt his fingers." Now, when a man has done that, beware how you approach him with your rosy prospectuses. He has lost his money with a farm, or a bank, or a mine, or a mill; do not go to him with a farm, even were it in the land of Goshen, or a mill, even were it the mint, or a bank even were it the Bank of England. He will show you his blisters, and send you away with scant courtesy. As the Oriental says, "He who has suffered from a fire-brand is afraid of a firefly;" "He who has been bitten by a serpent is afraid of a rope," a victim is afraid of anything that bears the most distant likeness to that from which he has suffered. This is rational—if a man acts otherwise it is because he is a fool. But men are not thus cautious in regard to the moral life. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Ver. 9. And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right.—*Infatuation of sin* :—Again we come upon this report which we have had

as it were a thousand times in identical terms. What is the wonderful charm of evil? Surely the philosophers have not answered that inquiry completely. There must be some peculiar inexpressible charm in evil, or men would not do it, and do it with both hands earnestly, and live in the doing of it, and reap in its execution some kind of harvest of contentment and gladness. What is this charm? Men repeat the evil even whilst denominating it iniquity and marking it as vile. In this matter we are curiously and wondrously made. We go back to the evil. The devil seems to be more attractive than God. One would have thought that one vision of truth, beauty, heaven's own light, would have for ever fascinated us, and made us incapable of meanness, wrong-doing, untruthfulness, or any form or colour of iniquity. But it is not so. The devil is most charming! We know he tells lies, but he tells them eloquently. We are aware that he cannot keep any promise that he ever made, yet when he puts out his black hand to us we grope for it in the dark, and think the fellowship not without advantage! Who can explain this? Is the explanation in the heart? "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. They followed vanity and became vain.—*Vanity a deadly sin*.—May I begin by explaining that these words are used as a summary of the reason why the people of Israel were broken to pieces by the attacks of Shalmaneser, the King of Assyria, and how it came to pass that their glory was destroyed, their prestige was shattered, and they were humbled to a life of captivity and slavery. As a nation they became vain, they followed vanity. That is all the explanation that he offers. Vanity led on to a number of idolatries, and the empty inflated life which, when it was pricked by the sword of Shalmaneser, proved to be a mere bubble; and because there was no enduring foundation the whole edifice crumbled and decayed. Because a nation is prosperous, because its life is inflated, because it is pursuing a vainglorious course, it does not follow that the blessing of God is upon it, and it does follow that if that is its life, when first the keen, sharp edge of trial comes it will be shown to be what it is. And what applies to nations applies with equal power to individuals. There are some people who quarrel with my title. "Vanity," they say, by all means, but not "a deadly sin." Vanity is one of the most harmless of our amusements. Vanity is the kind of thing that the schoolboy talks genially about as "side," and that the man in the street refers to equally genially as "swelled head." Nobody thinks very much about it, and in point of fact a sort of superficial vanity often covers, as we know, substantial and admirable qualities of character. I do not want in denouncing one vice to fall into another, and be guilty of intolerance. I do not want to speak of it in any other way than I think God Himself speaks of it in the pages of Revelation. Everybody knows that this is a vice that has perhaps been more successful than any other in making its way into sacred places. "Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition; by that sin fell the angels," was what Shakespeare said, anticipating that argument of Milton that pride wrought division, havoc, and ruin even in a celestial world. You know as well as I do that this has been the vice of the ecclesiastic in all ages, the vice of arrogance, the vice of vanity, the vice of pride. All the resolutions of Convocation, all the seals of your bishops and archbishops can do nothing against this sin. Therefore, if any one here rises up to say this is not a deadly sin I quarrel with him on that ground, that it has attacked what has been most sacred, and ought to be most influential for righteousness in the world. Vanity is the vice of the minister in all ages and in all forms. He need not clothe himself in a mitre with all the pomp and circumstance of ritual, he need not sit upon a throne. Vanity has invaded the Free Church pulpit just as much as it has invaded the home of the higher ecclesiasticism. And when I have said that about the ministry and the temptations inevitable to the ministry, I want to say that so far as I am aware it is also a sin to which young Christians are more particularly susceptible. I say that that affectation of religious superiority is something that makes the sinner outside to scoff, and the saint inside to shudder. And now let me turn from the Church to the outside world. Let me put my question straightly to those who perhaps pride themselves on having nothing to do with the churches. Do you mean that any of you would rise up and tell me that in speaking of the sin of vanity I am not indicating one of the sins of the present day? I do not like to rail against my rago, but is there any one who will not say that I am strictly within the truth when I speak of our present age as pushing, an advertising age, a

forward age. Is it or is it not a fact that life all through is being made vicious by this particular sin, that we are victims to-day of the man who is self-opinionated and self-assured, that the man with the loudest tongue and the most brazen front is the man who seems to have the most and the best chances of making his way successfully in the world? Is it or is it not a fact that it is an external age, an age when the outside show counts for more than the internal worth? And is it not a fact that this all springs from certain venomous roots of vanity, that in attacking the immodesty of the age we are putting our finger upon one of its chiefest faults, that this desire for external and outside show is more than something that can be treated as artificial and casual and transient and that will pass away? Now, if I were to say, as I should not hesitate to do, that the greatest of all the apostles felt the insidious character of this vice the most, I believe I should be saying nothing that Paul himself would not have consented to. Read his letters; see how there he implores himself and others never to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think; how he applies the cross of Jesus Christ to his own life; how he presents himself to people, lest they should begin to flatter him, as the chief of sinners. And if I found there were any of you here, as I should not imagine you would be, adamantine against the reproaches and warnings of the Apostle Paul, then I should say to you there are two other literatures into which I ask you to look. I ask you to take down from your shelves your *Pilgrim's Progress*, to read over line by line that magnificent description, unparalleled in literature, the description of Vanity Fair, and there let Bunyan tell you the truth. The truth about his age is the truth about yours—Vanity Fair, the place where all merchandise was sold: places, honours, preferments, titles, countries, kingdoms, husbands, wives, lives, blood, bodies, souls—all marketable in Vanity Fair. If you could resist that and say, "these religious books do not appeal to me," then I should have to ask you to take your Thackeray and read his description of Vanity Fair, and when you had read that, if you had read it in the right spirit, you would know that every word that Bunyan said was true, and you would know that every word that Paul said was true. And the spirit of that modern Vanity Fair which Thackeray drew is the spirit of the Vanity Fair that prevails to-day. You can keep your decalogue and be a proud man, but you cannot begin to be a Christian and be a proud man. And do you know why? Do you know why Jesus Christ put humility as the foundation of all the virtues? Because, unless it is there, you will not keep any of the virtues. Let me put it to you as strongly as that, virtue cannot embrace vanity and remain virtue. There is nothing of which people so easily become vain as their virtues. I want to put it to you that in the thought of Christ a proud man is further from God, may be further from God, shall I say, than the thief, than the man who has broken the Ten Commandments. Now let me be a little more practical and personal by way of the application of what I am trying to say. I suppose we shall all agree that modern life is the opportunity of the vain man, the democratic life lends itself so easily to positions of prominence. Your modest, retiring man is a man very difficult to persuade to occupy a public position, and indeed only a stern sense of duty, as a rule, will drive him there. But there is the place—places that are multiplied to-day—beckoning and calling to the vain man, the man who believes in himself and always lets you know it. It succeeds, it gets to the top, it occupies the conspicuous position, and therefore I find that young men and young women are quite willing to overlook the voice as being superficial, and to credit virtue which very often does not exist. And even when these ambitions are humbled in our midst, I do not find that with the vain man the humbling goes very deep, because he has always got his vanity to fall back upon. He always says virtue must always suffer. Is there anything more, perhaps, offensive to most people than the intellectually superior person, the person who prides himself upon his intellectual powers? It is so easy to-day to get a reputation of this kind, because this is the day of the little knowledge, and the day of little knowledge is always the day of vanity. Let me take just one further illustration of the pernicious character of this vice in the age in which we live. Some people say that a vain woman is a sad spectacle, but that a vain man is a sadder. I think they are right, but I think also that, perhaps, a vain child is the saddest spectacle of all. And yet how often we find parents misguided enough to encourage and cultivate in their children this particular vice. They repeat the clever and charming sayings of their children before their children's faces, until in a very little while their children come to hold by the creed that probably they

are the cleverest children that the world contains. I should like to put in to-night a very simple, humble plea for the encouragement of the simplicity and humility of childhood. It was not for nothing, surely, that our Lord took a little child, and set him in the midst of his quarrelsome, ambitious, avaricious disciples. I have got to pray you, that you will accompany me and let me take you to where Paul went that he might get back to the foundation of Christian virtue, and I have got to ask you whether you dwell enough in the presence of that cross of Jesus Christ. For mark—if that doesn't break your pride nothing will. If you can turn your back upon that cross, and go away a vain man, the disease is incurable. God set that cross in the centre of the universe to humble men. Oh, men and women, to whom the world appeals in its worldly way to-day, in its loud, aggressive, self-assertive spirit, to join its side, and to take up the spirit of vanity, and to resolve that you will make your way as other people do by self-assertion, I want to plead with you. I know the temptation may be a strong one, but I want to ask you to believe with me that the Lord Christ knows better, and that that which is worth while is the humble and the contrite heart. (*C. S. Horne, M.A.*)

Ver. 21. And Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord.—*Jeroboam* :—**I. THE CHARACTER OF JEROBOAM BEFORE HE WAS KING.** He early discovered some of those distinguishing natural and moral qualities, which formed him for the extraordinary part which he finally acted on the stage of life. His natural genius was sprightly, bold, and enterprising, which he evidently cultivated, notwithstanding the peculiar disadvantages and embarrassments which attended his education. Though he lost his father in his youth, and was left to the care of his mother, who was a widow, yet by the mere dint of his brilliant talents and close application, he recommended himself to the notice and patronage of his wise and sagacious sovereign. We read, "*Jeroboam was the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruiah, a widow woman.*" And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph." His appointment to such an office, by such a penetrating prince, is an infallible evidence of his popular talents and pleasing address. These excellent and amiable accomplishments, had they been properly directed to the public good, would have rendered him a great blessing to the nation. But it appears from his history that a base, turbulent, ambitious spirit led him to prostitute his fine abilities to the vilest purposes. **II. TO REPRESENT THE STATE OF THE NATION, WHEN A BASE AND UNPRINCIPLED MAJORITY RAISED HIM TO A SUPREME POWER.** His two immediate predecessors were great and illustrious princes, who reigned long and prosperously. **III. HOW IT CAME TO PASS THAT TEN TRIBES OUT OF TWELVE SHOULD RAISE SUCH AN IMPIOUS AND DANGEROUS MAN TO ROYAL DIGNITY.** Jeroboam had not the least claim to the crown, either by birth or by merit. How then should it ever enter the minds of the nation to make choice of the son of Solomon's servant to reign over them? The answer to this is easy. Jeroboam the son of Nebat had long been a man of intrigue. He had secretly employed every artifice to prejudice the people against the former administration of government, and had openly presumed to lift up his hand against the king. All this he had done before he fled into Egypt; and it is extremely probable that during his residence there he kept up a secret and traitorous correspondence with the disaffected in Israel, and only waited for the death of Solomon to return and seize his throne. It is certain, however, that as soon as Solomon expired, his disaffected subjects immediately sent to Egypt for Jeroboam the son of Nabat, and set him up as the rival of Rehoboam, the proper heir to the crown. **IV. WHAT METHODS JEROBOAM THE SON OF REBAT EMPLOYED TO CORRUPT AND DESTROY THE PEOPLE WHO HAD GIVEN HIM HIS POWER.** It is a melancholy truth that he did "drive Israel from following the Lord," and involve them in a series of calamities, until they were dispersed and lost among the nations of the earth. There is something so extraordinary and so instructive in this part of Jeroboam's conduct, that it deserves the deep attention of both rulers and subjects. The question now is, what methods did he employ to "drive Israel from following the Lord"? His character and conduct before he came to the throne will not admit of the supposition of his acting ignorantly or inadvertently. And it appears from his history that he exerted all his talents to devise the most effectual means of extinguishing every spark of true religion

and virtue in the minds of his subjects. Here, then, it may be observed—1. That he prohibited the worship of the true God, by substituting in the place of it the worship of graven images. The inspired historian gives us a particular account of this bold and impious method to banish all true religion and morality from his kingdom. 2. He appointed new times as well as new places of public worship. These two measures were intimately connected, and calculated to render each other the more effectual. To change the day as well as the places of religious worship, had a direct tendency to distinguish Israel from Judah, and to draw a lasting line of separation between the two kingdoms. His policy clearly appears in what the sacred historian says concerning his appointment of new holy days. 3. To make new appointments to office. As his darling object was to corrupt and destroy the true religion, so he discarded the regular and faithful priests of the Lord, and appointed others to supply their place who were attached to his person and cause, though of the vilest character and of the meanest condition. 4. That he enforced these measures by all the weight and influence of his own example. It appears from his character and conduct in early life that he possessed, in a high degree, the art of captivating and corrupting all sorts of people with whom he conversed. And when he was clothed with the ensigns of royalty his power and opportunity of corrupting his subjects greatly increased. He became the standard of taste, and the model of imitation. His sentiments and manners became a living law to his subjects. In his familiar intercourse with all around him he undoubtedly seized those soft moments, which were the most favourable to his malignant design of seduction. This he could do without departing from the dignity of his station; but it appears that he did more than this, and even stooped to mingle with the priests, and “to burn incense upon the altars of the golden gods of his own making.” Improvement: (1) The character and conduct of Jeroboam may lead us to form a just estimate of good rulers. Everything appears in the truest light by the way of contrast. Folly is a foil to wisdom; vice is a foil to virtue; false religion is a foil to that which is true; and wicked rulers are a foil to those who are wise and faithful. These, however, are often despised and reproached, when they deserve to be esteemed and admired. (2) The character and conduct of Jeroboam plainly teach us what a dreadful scourge wicked rulers may be to their subjects. We can nowhere find the character of a hypocritical and unprincipled sovereign so fully delineated as in the history of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. (3) It appears from the intriguing character described in this discourse, how easily any people may be led into civil and religious delusion by artful and designing politicians. The people of God, one would have supposed, were proof against every species of delusion, especially in the days of Solomon, who instructed as well as governed them with superior wisdom and integrity. (4) It appears from the character and conduct of Jeroboam, that corrupt rulers will always aim to corrupt the faithful ministers of religion. (5) We learn from the character, conduct, and history of Jeroboam, that it is the duty of the public teachers of religion to bear public testimony against all attempts of those in authority to destroy the religion and morals of the people. (6) The nature and effects of Jeroboam's conduct show us what we have to fear, should our civil rulers embrace and propagate the principles of infidelity. We have not so far lost our virtuous and religious habits but that wise and virtuous rulers might, under Providence, restrain us from total declension and apostacy. (7) It appears from what has been said in this discourse that civil and religious delusions are the great evils which more especially call for our humiliation and mourning this day. Though we have been uncommonly happy and prosperous under the late administration of government, yet the people have loudly complained of public men and public measures, and by a majority of suffrages, placed the supreme power in different hands. (8) This subject teaches us the propriety and importance of praying for a general effusion of the divine Spirit. Without this, we have no ground to expect to be reclaimed from our deep declension. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *People who discourage others:—* It was a current saying concerning Lord Eldon that “he prevented more good than any other man ever did.” God save us from being mere obstructives, wet blankets, dampers, and discouragers! If we cannot help, may we never hinder! *Hindering and helping:—* We were struck by a thought of Elihu Burritt's, that thousands of our fellow-creatures will yearly enter eternity with characters differing from those they might have carried thither had we never lived. “The sunlight of the world,” says he, “will reveal my finger-marks in their primary forma-

tions, and in their successive strata of life and thought." A party of seamen believed they had gained sixty miles in one day in their course, but it was proved by observation they had lost more than thirty; the ship had been urged forward by the wind, but driven back by an undercurrent. How many undercurrents of trivial actions, or even looks and manners, influences scarcely heeded, may be hindering the Christian progress of others! But, on the other hand, how many an example that deems itself unnoticed has been honoured by the Master as the means of doing immortal work for Him! Our concern must be constant fidelity to God, leaving all consequences with Him. *Causing others to sin*:—They tell me there is a public-house in Glasgow where there is a showcase that is a great cause of sport and laughter and joking to the tipplers who frequent the place. In the case there is a shelf, and on the shelf a heap of blue ribbons. Some of them are faded and have been worn a considerable time; some of them, alas, are glistening new—they tell that a few days was all the length of time they were worn. There are remnants of the old Blue Ribbon temperance crusade in this city, when the blue ribbon was put upon the breasts of thousands in the enthusiasm of temperance reform. And this publican boasts of how many trophies he has in that case. He gets his blear-eyed customers to look there. "There are the blue ribbons: that is what I do with them." He looks at them the same way as an Indian would look at his horrible scalps that he has plucked from his victims. To tempt a weak soul, to set himself with all the infernal machinery of the devil to drag poor souls down, what else can be his fate? The tempter will be judged by God the most severely. (*J. Robertson.*)

Vers. 24-41. *And the King of Assyria brought men from Babylon.*—*Subjects worth thinking about*:—This fragment of Israelitish history brings under our notice four subjects which run through all human history, and which find their illustration in the events of modern as well as ancient life. I. *THE TYRANNY OF MAN*. Here we find the Assyrians committing two great enormities on the men of Israel, driving them out of their own land into Assyria, and taking possession of their own country and home. II. *THE RETRIBUTIONS OF LIFE*. Probably the lions had been in the land of Samaria before the settlement of the Assyrian colonists, but after their settlement these furious beasts of prey seem to have multiplied. The law of retribution is ever at work in human history, not only in the lives of nations but in the lives of individuals. No man can do a wrong thing without suffering for it in some form or other. Nemesis surely, though silently, treads on the heels of wrong. The lions of retribution track our steps as sinners stealthily, and are ready to spring at any moment. We are far enough from saying that retribution here is adequate and complete, hence there is within all a "fearful looking for" of some future judgment. III. *THE PROSTITUTION OF RELIGION*. The Assyrian king, it would seem, in answer to the alarm which his people, whom he had settled in Samaria, felt concerning the lions, conceived the plan of adopting religion as the remedy. Here you have one of the million examples of that religion of policy that has abounded in all lands and times. In every page in history, nay, in every scene of life, we find religion taken up as a means to an end, rather than as the grand end of being. IV. *THE THEISTIC HUNGER OF SOULS*. All these men, both the colonists and the Israelites, would have their gods; a god seemed to them as necessary almost as their life. (*David Thomas, D.D.*) *Christians condemned by men of the world*:—The King of Assyria intended here is not Shalmaneser or Esar-haddon, as is generally supposed, but Sargon. It is not doubted that Esar-haddon sent colonists into the country, from whom the new Samaritans were, at least in part, descended. It is believed that there was a previous colonisation by the conqueror of the country. We must regard these men as strangers; and so regarding them, their judgment upon the religious condition of the people is the more remarkable. They noticed, for example, that at the beginning of their dwelling in the country, the people "feared not the Lord." It should be a rule with us in life to know that even those who do not share our own religious sentiments may yet be observing how those sentiments affect our personal conduct. Probably there is hardly a deeper humiliation than that the people of God, at least nominally so regarded, should have been judged as impious by men who came from a far-off land and who professed only a heathenish religion. It is noticeable that one of the very first things observed by the Assyrians was that the people were not faithful to their religion. There is evidently something deeper than a mere form of religious faith; other-

wise the Assyrians could not have noticed a discrepancy between doctrine and practice: the nominal people of God had so far descended into corruption and licentiousness as to care absolutely nothing for the opinion of heathen critics. Their piety had been displaced not only by impiety, as representing a negative condition of mind, but by absolute contempt and defiance. It is not to be supposed because our life-work lies amongst men who do not profess religion, that therefore we can afford to dispense with our own religion and not incur the disapprobation of observers. There is an honesty even apart from spiritual religion; that is to say, there is a spirit in man which instinctively revolts at inconsistency, treachery, and all forms of practical lying in reference to high religious obligations. This should be noticed by men who enjoy spiritual emoluments and advantages which they have not earned by merit or by honest labour. All kinds of religious promotion should be jealously regarded as being under the criticism of men of the world. We might so far become victims of infatuation as to suppose that men of the world would rather applaud us for so using ecclesiastical position and privilege as to consolidate our financial and social position. Men of the world, however, do nothing of the kind; although they do not profess to be pious, they yet have clear ideas as to honesty and integrity. To be condemned by men of the world for want of faithfulness to our religious convictions is one of the severest judgments which can befall our religious life. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 33. *They feared the Lord, and served their own gods.*—*The inconsistent worship*.—I. The first thought which I think suggests itself to our mind, is of **THE CURIOUS INCONSISTENCY OF THEIR CONDUCT**. They worshipped the true God; and, along with Him, they worshipped various false gods. Now, this seems strange to us. We cannot imagine a man being at once a Christian, a Mohammedan, a Jew, a heathen, and an atheist. You must make your choice what religion you will profess: you cannot profess several inconsistent religions together. But it is just because Christianity has so thoroughly leavened our ways of thinking, that there appears to us anything strange in the conduct of these inhabitants of Samaria. For Christianity, we all know, is an exclusive religion. It not merely calls men to believe in itself, but to reject every other faith. It not merely claims to be right and true: but it boldly says that every other faith is wrong and false. The God of the Bible not merely commands us to worship Him: He commands us to worship no one else. This is their great characteristic as compared with all other religions. Christianity is a faith which admits no rivals, no competitors: it demands to stand alone. And the true God is not the God of this land or that land: He is the God of all the earth: He tolerates no brother near His throne. But it was not so at all with the gods of false religions: with the gods whom these poor Samaritans worshipped; no, nor with the gods and goddesses who were worshipped by the polished nations of Greece and Rome. It did not follow that because you held Jupiter to be a true god, you held Mercury or Apollo to be false gods. It did not follow because you worshipped Dagon, that you failed to worship Moloch. It did not follow that Beelzebub would feel himself slighted, because you offered a sacrifice to Rimmon. Each false god had his own province, and he held by that. And so you can see that these ignorant Samaritans, when they “feared the Lord, and served their own gods,” had no sense at all of the inconsistency,—of the self-contradiction,—of what they did, such as that which we might feel. II. A second thing worthy of notice in their conduct is this: **THE MOTIVE WHICH LED THEM TO OFFER WORSHIP TO THE TRUE GOD**. You observe, that motive was pure and simple fear. They worshipped God, because they were afraid of Him. They worshipped Him, because they thought He had done them much mischief already; and because they thought that unless they did something to conciliate Him, He might do them more mischief yet. Good might have come, in any measure; and they would never have seen God in that. But when evil befell them, such was their conception of the Divine nature, they said, Now, here is the finger of God. The lions came prowling about their fields and dwellings; and this neighbour and the other was devoured by them: and then at once their thoughts ran up to a God as the sender of mischief: that was all they knew about Him: and they determined to worship Him, not because He was good and kind and deserving of all worship; but because, unless they affected some measure of regard and respect for Him, He might send them something worse than even the lions who had already come. III. It is evident from the entire account of them, that the **WORSHIP WHICH THEY PAID TO THE**

TRUE GOD, WAS NOT REALLY SO HEARTY AND REAL A THING AS THAT WHICH THEY PAID TO THEIR OLD IDOLS. "They feared the Lord": they stood in a vague terror of Him, which prompted them to offer Him a sacrifice now and then; to meet for His worship now and then: but "they served their own gods":—they lived day by day in mind of them: they were not merely the worshippers, at long intervals, of these false gods: they were the servants of these false gods,—obeying them, working for them, from hour to hour. When the two things came together: the worship of a Being from whom they simply feared evil, and the worship of beings from whom they expected good: you can easily see which of the two would have the predominance. There is many a man who has that degree of superstitious fear of what God may do to him, that he dare not cast off God's fear altogether; while yet the love of money, or the love of pleasure, or the love of eminence and honour, really sits upon the throne of his heart! He "fears the Lord": and at the same time he thinks to "serve his own gods,"—wealth, pleasure, or ambition. The fraudulent trader who adulterates his wares, and yet is never out of church on a Sunday: the greedy farmer, who will tell many lies to get a sound price for a lame horse, yet who would not on any consideration be absent from a sacrament: and I say it with sorrow, brethren, I have known several such: what are such men doing but what the Samaritans did: "fearing the Lord, and serving their own gods!" (*A. K. H. Boyd.*)

On indecision of character:—The first source of obligation under which man is laid to constant obedience, is the absolute supremacy and dominion of God. Because He is the author of all things, therefore is He the end of all things. We can assign no reason for the creation of the world, but the pleasure of its Creator: and can conceive of no motive to prompt Him to create, but the display of His own glory. As the glory of God is His object, so it ought to be the aim of every intelligent creature. The moment that man departs from the service of God, he becomes a rebel against his rightful Sovereign; nor can he possibly be restored to the Divine favour, till, feeling his guilt, and acknowledging the rights of the Divine government, he submits all his powers to the governance of God. There is something like a consciousness of this implanted in the mind of man, which forces him to pay some kind of regard to the commands of God, from a slavish fear of His anger, or a desire to be on good terms with so powerful a Being. A striking instance of this is now before us. The people whom the King of Assyria had removed to the land of the Israelites, being plagued by lions, looked upon it as a judgment for not worshipping "the God of the land"; which they could not do, because they knew not how (ver. 27, 28). The King of Assyria took care to have them instructed in the worship of this powerful God, not from any regard to Him, but to save the people from destruction. So a priest came among them, and taught them how they should fear the Lord: and now they unite the worship of Jehovah with that of their own idols. These they loved, but Him they feared. Affection bound them to the service of their gods, while a dread of the God of Israel constrained them to pay some attention to His worship. Now, allowing for the different state of society, how many may be found among us influenced by the same spirit, and adopting the same conduct as these Assyrians: "they fear the Lord, but serve their own gods." They attend the house of God, and hear with some degree of pleasure the preaching of His Word; they are to a certain extent religious; but they are far from serving God with their whole heart. Their religion amounts to a general commendation of what is excellent; and a compliance with those precepts of God's Word which cost them little trouble and self-denial.

I. THE UNHAPPINESS OF SUCH A STATE OF INDECISION. While you thus endeavour to unite the service of God with the service of the world, there are two forces, of directly opposite tendency, operating upon you, so that the effect of each is obstructed, and you are perpetually disquieted, and receive no real pleasure from anything you do. What can be more wretched than to have a conscience disapproving your conduct, and admonishing you to duties for which you have no inclination? Instead of cheering you with the assurance that the God whom you serve will always be your defence and comfort, it upbraids you with your duplicity and indecision. It speaks so that you would rather stifle, than hear, its voice; and rather run the dreadful risk of eternal misery, than look into your real condition, and enter upon serious reflection concerning your final state. Nor is such a state less unfruitful than it is unpleasant. What advancement in religion do those make who are unfaithful to the light which has been communicated to them? Let me appeal to such. Is it not true, that there has been no improvement, perhaps for years together?

What progress have you made in your religious course? Is it not true, that even the light which you once had is darkened? the feelings which were excited, benumbed? and the religion of Christ stripped of much of that glory in which it at first appeared to you? The Gospel, where it is truly received, purifies, but you remain the same: it consoles, but you know nothing of its comfort and joy. Do you ask, What you are to do? If you would enjoy the pleasures of the world as others do, you must serve their gods entirely, and cast off all fear of God, and all thoughts of eternity. If you would be happy in the favour of God, and the enjoyment of true religion, you must serve Him alone, and put away your own gods: for as He is worthy of the whole heart, He will not dwell in any heart that is divided with mammon. And now make the choice; but be determined to count the costs. II. Such a state of indecision is a STATE OF INCONCEIVABLE DANGER. It strengthens the sinful propensities of the heart;—it deprives the means of grace of their proper efficacy;—and it restrains, and if persisted in, banishes, the Holy Spirit's influences. 1. Be decided. While you halt between two opinions you have the disgrace and disadvantages of both; the supports and joys of neither. 2. Be consistent. Let your conduct prove that your whole soul is engaged in the service of God. Thus will your course through this world be most productive of glory to God, comfort to yourself, and benefit to your fellow-creatures. 3. Be active. Our whole life is but one short day; and too much of that day has been spent in vanity and sin. Let not the zeal with which we now serve God be surpassed by the ardour with which we have served the world. (*Essex Remembrancer.*) *Double-dealing*:—The people who inhabited Israel were double-minded. They felt it was right to worship the Lord God, because if they did not they feared He would send lions amongst them; had there been no lions, they would not have troubled themselves about Him. They feared the Lord, but served, that is loved, their own gods. Is this not the case with many of us at the present day? You know the picture of the old cavalier sitting on a bench between two ladies, and sighing,

How happy could I be with either,
Were t'other sweet charmer away.

It is so with many men and women. They say, "How truly could I serve God, if there were no sin"; adding, "and how delighted I should be to sin, if I knew there were no God." I feel persuaded you can see the inconsistency of having two conflicting opinions which divide your heart, and make your life as unstable as water. Let us, therefore, pray the Lord to give us grace to be decided for Him; that we may take His principles for better or for worse, in sickness or health; and whatever may happen, to be the Lord's faithful people. Let us pray that we may have grace to resolve thus, and power to carry the resolution out, so that when we have lived our allotted time and finished our work, the Lord shall be able to say, "After all, I did not create that soul in vain." May I give you one or two reasons why there is so much double-dealing? I mean, that while men feel persuaded it is right to worship the Lord and do His will, yet they devote the chief portion of their lives to the service of their own gods. I. One reason is, that we get into the way of PRESUMING ON THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF GOD. Some of the preaching of the last hundred years has done harm. While I hold as firmly as any man can the doctrine of the power of the atonement of Jesus, yet, at the same time, I also hold that the atonement of Jesus is a means to an end; that is to say, Jesus laid down His life for the purpose of making us pure and unselfish. If a man says he believes in Christ, and yet does not act rightly, he does not live the truth, whether he knows it or not; he is no more a Christian than he was before he joined the church. "Conversion" is repentance, that is, giving up things that are bad, and doing only those which are good. Unless our faith lead us to act rightly, and to deny ourselves for the benefit of others, we do not know Christianity, nor have we rightly read the life of Christ. Christianity is, acting purely in every action and at all times, and denying ourselves for the benefit of mankind. A higher religion than this it is impossible to conceive; one more powerful to bless the world cannot be imagined. But it is needful for us to understand it truly. If we say we believe and yet we do not act cheerfully, purely, and honestly, depend upon it we are mistaken. Believing in Christ is trying with our whole heart and mind and strength to do the will of our Heavenly Father as revealed in the spirit of the Gospel. What is "conversion"? Some people imagine that conversion is like a fortune being left us—that we have no more work to do, and

have only to enjoy ourselves with the money. But conversion is like being an apprentice on board a ship, where one has to bear hardship and work for many weary years. Conversion is beginning an apprenticeship to eternal life, and serving our time on earth for the enjoyment and employment of angelhood in heaven. Conversion means literally "turning round," changing from a wicked to a holy life; and such a change cannot be effected instantaneously. Of course there is a moment when the turning-point begins, but it takes a long, long time for the conversion to be completed. The work of conversion goes on every hour and minute of our waking life. It is a battle with unseen foes—a man's worst foes being those of his own house, that is, his own nature. The life of every Christian is one long battle, and as a "devout soldier," the qualities he will need in his spiritual warfare are those which elicit our admiration in a British soldier, namely, order, self-sacrifice, and obedience. II. Another reason why we have this divided heart, which, while thinking it right to serve the Lord, yet permits us to follow our own gods, is BECAUSE WE DISTRUST GOD'S LOVING CARE. It is a sin to presume on God's love; but is it not also a sin to despair of His care? So the troubles and buffetings of daily life, and the turmoil and storm which assail us, will prove a blessing in the end. The discipline is painful, as all chastisement is; but, my friend, these light afflictions which oppress you to-day are working out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. We may be sure that what we have to undergo is for our good. III. Having shown the reasons why we get into the way of serving our own gods, let me now urge you to follow the steps of Jesus, and to make CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLE YOUR RULE OF LIFE. I have often wondered what made the Apostle John picture the streets of the new Jerusalem as being made of pure gold, as if they were "transparent glass." I think it was because he had seen so much double-dealing that he, in singleness of heart, felt that heaven must be so pure that the very floor is transparent. You can actually see through its pavement; what on earth is dense is in God's home clear as crystal. And if the streets are like transparent glass, what must the people be? The lesson is that we must get rid of our double-dealing and duplicity here, for there is nothing but openness and sincerity in heaven. If we are sincere, transparent Christians, our lives shall glorify God, and men shall thereby be attracted to serve their Heavenly Father. Do not fear to act on Christian principles. Perfect love to God casteth out fear. Follow Christ, and give up your life rather than act contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. Dare even to die for Christ. Act up to your convictions. Dare to act as Christ would act. Never mind though the entire world be against you if God be with you. If Christ say "Amen" to your life, dare to live it, whatever men may say. Let your heart and mind be of one aim, that one aim being to follow Christ. (*W. Birch.*) *True and false fear* :—"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"—"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," are two of Solomon's most pregnant maxims (Prov. i. 7; ix. 10); or rather two forms of the same, which is again repeated in the Book of Psalms (cxi. 10). The word "beginning" in all these cases, may be strictly understood as having reference to time. This is the point from which all successful students of true wisdom must set out. Their first lesson is to fear the Lord. "The fear of the Lord," which is thus both the Alpha and Omega of the spiritual alphabet, may be taken either in a generic or a specific sense. The former is, in fact, co-extensive with the general idea of religion or true piety, including, either directly or by necessary inference, every right disposition and affection on the part of man, as a dependent and unworthy creature, towards the infinitely great and holy God. All such affections may be readily deduced from fear, in its specific sense, as signifying not a slavish but a filial feeling, not mere dread or terror, which, from its very nature, must be always tinged with hate, or at least with repugnance, but a reverence impregnated with love. This genuine and spurious fear of God, unlike as they may seem, and as they are, have often been confounded, on account of their having something really in common, to wit, a sense of God's power, and an apprehension of His wrath as awaiting all transgressors of His will. But this common element, which justifies the use of the word fear in reference to both these dispositions, is blended in the one case with a consciousness of alienation and hostility, while in the other it is lost, as it were, in the feeling of attachment, confidence, and common interest. The varying proportion, in which these distinctive qualities are blended with the fundamental property of fear, determines the facility with which a filial awe may be confounded with a slavish dread. To discriminate between the two might sometimes be impossible, but for a practical

criterion or test which the Word of God has laid down, in accordance with our Saviour's fundamental rule of moral diagnosis, "By their fruits ye shall know them." This intimate connection between genuine fear and obedience is recognised in the law itself, when Moses warns Israel "to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear the glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God" (Deut. xxviii. 58). The negative aspect of the same truth is exhibited by Job, when he winds up his sublime inquiry after wisdom with the solemn declaration, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job xxviii. 28). Here, then, is the touchstone of a genuine and a spurious fear of God. The one disposes us to do His will, from a sincere complacency and acquiescence in it. The other prompts us rather to resist it, except so far as our compliance may seem necessary to escape His wrath, which is the only real object of this slavish dread. The one is a fear of punishment as the consequence of sin; the other a fear of sin itself, as intrinsically evil, or, which amounts to the same thing, as opposed to the will of God, and to His very nature, which is thus assumed as the ultimate criterion of right and wrong, of good and evil. Only a filial fear disposes men to serve God. Selfish and slavish fear disposes them to flee from Him. This distinction, however obvious as it is in Scripture and familiar in experience, is not practically recognised by all men. There seems to be a natural propensity to look upon fear, blank fear, as the essence of devotion, as the whole of what is due to God, the rendering of which absolves from all obligation to believe, to trust, to love, or to obey. Among the heathen this idea of religion is perhaps predominant, or certainly far more prevalent than we frequently imagine. It may well be questioned whether their deities are ever the objects of their love, excepting in those cases where the god is but a personification of some darling lust. Beyond this homage rendered to the unchecked sway of their own appetites and passions, there is strong reason for believing that their devotion is nothing but the tribute of their fears to a superior power which they hate, and which they look upon as hating them. The service rendered under the influence of such a motive is in no case more than they regard as absolutely necessary to secure them from the wrath of the offended godhead. But this universal and unconquerable sense of guilt may co-exist with an indefinite variety of notions as to the means of propitiation, and the extent to which those means must be applied. Some men may feel it to be necessary to expend their whole time in appeasing the Divine wrath; but by far the greater number, under every known form of idolatry, consider less than this sufficient, and rejoice to appropriate the residue to self-indulgence. They give no more than is extorted by their fears, and have no conception of religious service as a voluntary, cheerful, joyous consecration of the whole man to an object which he venerates and loves, and in the doing of whose will he finds his highest happiness. The only service of this free, spontaneous, and absorbing nature that the heathen devotee pays, is the service rendered to himself, in the indulgence of his own corrupt desires. He gives even to his chosen idol only what he is unable to withhold, his fears; and by so doing proves himself a stranger to all genuine religious fear, which cannot be divorced from the willing and devoted service of its object. An apt illustration of this general truth is afforded by a singular and interesting passage of the sacred history. The King of Assyria had carried into exile the ten tribes of Israel, and supplied their place with settlers from his own dominions. These were heathen, and brought with them their own idols and idolatrous rites. Having no knowledge of Jehovah, whom their predecessors had professed to worship, even under the forbidden form of golden calves, they had, of course, no fear of His displeasure, till He sent wild beasts among them, and slew some of them. Regarding this correctly as a penal visitation from the God of the land, they procured from their own sovereign the assistance of an Israelitish priest to teach them how to worship Him. He accordingly taught them, as the narrative expresses it, "how they should fear the Lord," and they acted promptly upon his instructions. They took care, however, to provide gods of their own, each tribe or nation for itself, while at the same time they offered to Jehovah a worship of fear prompted more by the recollection of lions than by faith or reason. "So they feared the Lord, and served their own gods." How far the sacred writer was from recognising this as any genuine religious fear at all, we learn from his saying, in the very next sentence, "unto this day they do after the former manners; they fear not the Lord." Why? Because "they feared the Lord, and served their own gods." We may be disposed to smile with some contempt at the absurd and inconsistent

conduct of these wretched pagans. But wherein did their folly and their sin consist? Certainly not in being afraid of the displeasure of Jehovah and in seeking to avert it; for in this they acted wisely. But it lay in their imagining that forms of worship, extorted from them by their selfish fears, would be sufficient to propitiate the Most High and secure them from His vengeance; while their voluntary service, their cordial and habitual devotion, was expended on His enemies and rivals. If this is the absurdity which we condemn, our judgment is a just one; but let us impartially condemn it wherever we may find it, whether in ancient or in modern times, whether in Eastern or in Western climes, whether in heathendom or Christendom, whether in our neighbours or ourselves. To make the transition easier from the heathen to the Christian world, we may begin with our own heathen, the heathen at our own doors, in our own streets; I mean those who approach nearest to the heathen both in the positive and negative circumstances of their spiritual state, their ignorance of truth, and their enslavement to sin. Look at the worst part of your population, as it pours its turbid streams along in times of more than usual excitement; hear its muttered or vociferated curses; mark the bestial character of its propensities and habits. All this you have seen, and as you saw it, you have been disposed perhaps to say that here, at least, there is no divided worship or allegiance; here, at least, are men who serve their own gods, but who do not, even in profession, fear the Lord. No, in profession, certainly not; in form, in purpose, not at all; but do you think they never fear Him, that is, feel afraid of Him? Be not precipitate in drawing such conclusions. In the vast mixed multitude of those whom you regard as the most ignorant, and reckless, and besotted of your countrymen, observe, on some occasion of extraordinary concourse, how many haggard faces, and contracted brows, and strangely gleaming eyes encounter yours. Do you believe all this expression of anxiety and dread to be the fruit of poverty, or sickness, or domestic cares? If so, you are mistaken; for the same expression may be seen in those who are not poor, who are not sick, or outwardly distressed at all; and on the other hand, its absence may be marked in thousands who are poorer, and who suffer more from care and sickness than do any of those whom you are observing. There is something back of all these causes to produce this uniformity of countenance, and I will tell you what it is—it is fear. You fear the Lord; you are unwilling to provoke His anger; you acknowledge your obligation to serve Him, and you discharge that obligation by attending on His worship; but is He the master that you daily serve? Where is your treasure and your heart? By whose will do you regulate your life? A man may so far fear the Lord as to frequent His house, and join in the external acts of worship there; but what if he has other gods at home, and there bows down to Mammon or to Belial? What if the world is in his heart, and the prince of this world on the throne of his affections? Will the stain of these habitual idolatries be washed out by patiently enduring the penance of a Sabbath service? Will the Lord, who is thus feared with a slavish dread of His displeasure, be contented, for the sake of this, to pass by all the rest—all that is done, or all that is not done, in defiance of His absolute authority and positive command? The charge which is here brought is not one of hypocrisy. It is one of delusion. I do not say that those of whom I speak pretend to fear the Lord when they know they fear Him not. I say that they believe they fear Him, when in fact they fear Him not. Or rather, which is really the same thing in another form, they do fear Him; but it is not with a fear which honours, or conciliates, or pleases Him, as they imagine; and here, just here, is their delusion. They are sincere enough in thinking that they fear God; but they are terribly mistaken in supposing that they fear Him as they ought. This is a painful truth to those of us whom it concerns; but it is one which, sooner or later, must be told. And it requires not many words to tell it. It may be summed up in this short sentence: If you do not serve the Lord, you do not fear Him. You may attend upon His worship, you may respect religion, you may believe the Bible to be true, you may hope to be saved through Christ, you may expect to die the death of the righteous. (*F. Addison Alexander, D.D.*)

Mongrel religion.—"So do they unto this day," said the writer of the Book of Kings, who has long since passed away unto his fathers. Were he alive now he might say concerning the spiritual descendants of these Samaritans, "So do they unto this day." This base union of fearing God and serving other gods is by no means obsolete. Alas, it is too common everywhere, and to be met with where you might least expect it. I. I shall first call your attention to THE NATURE OF THIS MONGREL RELIGION. It had its good and bad points, for it wore a double

face. 1. These people were not infidels. Far from it: "they feared the Lord." They did not deny the existence, or the power, or the rights of the great God of Israel, whose name is Jehovah. They had faith, though only enough to produce fear. They knew that there was a God; they feared His wrath, and they tried to appease it. So far they were hopeful persons, and under the influence of a feeling which has often led up to better things. It was better to dread God than to despise Him; better slavishly to fear than stupidly to forget. 2. Another good point about these mixed religionists was that they were willing to be taught. As soon as they found that they were not acting rightly towards the God of the land, they sent a petition to their supreme ruler, the King of Assyria, setting forth their spiritual destitution. They were quite willing to be taught the manner of the God of the land, and so they installed this priest at Bethel, and gathered about him to know what they should do. We have people around us unto this day who are glad to hear the Gospel, and sit with pleasure under our ministry, and if the Word be faithfully preached they commend the preacher and give a gratified attention to the things that proceed out of his mouth; and yet they are living in known sin. 3. Though these strangers feared Jehovah, and were willing to learn the way of His worship, yet they stuck to their old gods. "Ah," said the Babylonian, "I listen respectfully to what you have to say of this God of the land; but Succoth-benoth for me; when I go home I shall offer sacrifice to him." The men of Cuthah said, "Verily this is good doctrine concerning the God of Israel; but the god of our fathers was Nergal, and to him will we cleave"; and the Sepharvites, though they wished to hear of the pure and holy Jehovah, and therefore learned from His law the command, "Thou shalt not kill," yet still they passed their children through the fire to Moloch, and did not cease from that most cruel of all religious rites. Thus you see that this mingle-mangle religion left the people practically where they were: whatever their fear might be, their customs and practices remained the same. Have you never met with persons of the same mongrel kind? If you have never done so, your class of acquaintances must be superior to mine. Persons are to be found, without a lantern and candle, who earn their money by ministering at the altars of Belial, and then offer a part of it to the Lord of hosts. Can they come from the place of revelling to the chamber of communion? II. Let us now consider THE MANNER OF ITS GROWTH. However came such a monstrous compound into this world? Here is the history of it. 1. These people came to live where the people of God had lived. The Israelites were most unworthy worshippers of Jehovah; but, still, they were known to others as His people, and their land was Jehovah's land. If the Sepharvites had stopped at Sepharvaim they would never have thought of fearing Jehovah; if the men of Babylon had continued to live in Babylon they would have been perfectly satisfied with Bel, or Succoth-benoth, or whatever the name of their precious god might be: but when they were fetched out from their old haunts, and brought into Canaan, they came under a different influence, and a new order of things. Something else happened to these Assyrian immigrants which had a stronger influence still. 2. At first they did not fear God, but the Lord sent lions among them. Matthew Henry says, "God can serve His own purposes by which He pleaseth, little or big, lice or lions." By the smaller means he plagued the Egyptians, and by the greater these invaders of His land. 3. But notice, that the root of this religion is fear. There is no love on the right side; that affection is in the opposite scale. Their hearts go after their idols, but to Jehovah they yield nothing but dread. 4. One reason why they dropped into this self-contradictory religion was that they had a trimming teacher. The King of Assyria sent them a priest: he could not have sent them a prophet, but that was what they really wanted. He sent them a Bethelite, not a genuine servant of Jehovah, but one who worshipped God by means of symbols; and this the Lord had expressly forbidden. III. Thirdly, let us estimate THE VALUE OF THIS RELIGION. What is it worth? 1. It must evidently be feeble on both sides, because the man who serves Succoth-benoth cannot do it thoroughly if all the while he fears Jehovah; and he who fears Jehovah cannot be sincere if he is worshipping Moloch. 2. At first I should think that the mixture of the true with the false at Samaria looked like an improvement. 3. These Samaritans in after years became the bitterest foes of God's people. Read the Book of Nehemiah, and you will see that the most bitter opponents of that godly man were those mongrels. 4. How provoking this adulterated religion must be to God! It is even provoking to God's minister to be pestered with men whose hypocrisies weaken the force of his testimony. IV. THE

CONTINUANCE OF THIS EVIL: for the text says, "As did their fathers, so do they, unto this day." I believe in the final perseverance of the saints: I am almost obliged to believe in the final perseverance of hypocrites; for, really, when a man once screws himself up to play the double, and both to fear God and serve other gods, he is very apt to stick there. One reason why it can be said of most men—"so do they unto this day," is because it yields them a sort of comfort; at any rate it keeps off the lions. V. I shall now close by saying a few words BY WAY OF CURB OF THIS DREADFUL EVIL OF MONGRELISM; this fearing the Lord, and serving other gods. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Alloy in the Church*:—In the days of Queen Mary and preceding sovereigns, a vast quantity of coin had been forced into circulation in which there was far more alloy than pure silver. Though it answered its purpose for a time, in the end it disturbed the commerce of the whole country, and threatened to bring about the ruin of all trade and business, until it was withdrawn in the days of Elizabeth. There was increasing evil, and it was one of the wisest acts of her reign to restore the currency to its former value. Ah, what vast quantities of alloy are found in Christ's Church! There are men of double mind—half for the world and half for God. There are those who keep up the forms of religion, but are total strangers to its power. (*R. Venting.*) *No possible compromise*:—Now, most people think, if they keep all the best rooms in their hearts swept and garnished for Christ, that they may keep a little chamber in their heart's wall for Belial on his occasional visits; or a three-legged stool for him in the heart's counting-house; or a corner for him in the heart's scullery, where he may lick the dishes. It won't do! You must cleanse the house of him, as you would of the plague, to the last spot. You must be resolved that as all you have shall be God's, so all you are shall be God's. (*John Ruskin.*) *Inconsistency*:—Rev. C. H. Spurgeon in one of his works remarks: "The shops in the square of San Marco were all religiously closed, for the day was a high festival. We were much disappointed, for it was our last day, and we desired to take away with us some souvenirs of lovely Venice; but our regret soon vanished, for on looking at the shop we meant to patronise, we readily discovered signs of traffic within. We stepped to the side door, and found when one or two other customers had been served that we might purchase to our heart's content, saint or no saint. After this fashion too many keep the laws of God to the eye, but violate them in the heart. The shutters are up as if the man no more dealt with sin and Satan: but a brisk commerce is going on behind the scenes. From such deceit may the Spirit of truth preserve us continually." *An altar in reserve*:—When Redwald, King of Kent, embraced Christianity, he was not fully persuaded that Christ would prove stronger than the heathen gods, so he kept two altars in his temple, the larger one dedicated to Christ and the small one in the corner dedicated to the heathen gods. He thought that if Christ should ever be overthrown he might still claim the protection of the heathen deity, because of his faithfulness. How many nominal Christians have an altar in reserve!

Blest too is he who can divine
Where real right doth lie,
And dares to take the side that seems
Wrong to man's blindfold eye.

Then learn to scorn the praise of men,
And learn to lose with God:
For Jesus won the world through shame,
And beckons thee His road.

Christ's religion requires thoroughness:—The Rev. J. Bachus writes from Ceylon: "One of our converts, who was employed on an estate managed by a heathen, was known to be a Christian among his comrades. When the manager insisted one day on his going, with other coolies, to the neighbouring heathen temple, the poor man said, 'No, sir, I will not go to worship an idol. I am a Christian, and I worship the only true God.' When the manager threatened to turn him off the estate, he boldly said, 'I would rather beg than worship idols. My bread is not in your hands, but in the hands of Him whom I worship. Although you turn me out, He will never forsake me.' He was immediately turned out, and is now a small trader."

CHAPTER XVIII.

VERS. 1-37. Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea.—*A striking reformation, a ruthless despotism, and an unprincipled diplomacy*:—I. A STRIKING REFORMATION (vers. 3-8). 1. The perverting tendency of sin. The brazen serpent was a beneficent ordinance of God to heal those in the wilderness who had been bitten by the fiery serpent. But this Divine ordinance, designed for a good purpose, and which had accomplished good, was now, through the forces of human depravity, become a great evil. See how this perverting power acts in relation to such Divine blessings, as (1) health; (2) riches; (3) genius; (4) knowledge; (5) governments; and (6) religious institutions. 2. The true attributes of a reformer. Here we observe (1) Spiritual insight. Hezekiah saw in this serpent which appeared like a God to the people, nothing but a piece of brass—"Nehushtan." (2) Invincible honesty. He not only saw that it was brass, but said so,—thundered it into the ears of the people. (3) Practical courage. "He brake in pieces the brazen serpent." 3. The true soul of a reformer. What is that which gave him the true insight and attributes of a reformer, which in truth was the soul of the whole? (1) Entire consecration to the right. (2) Invincible antagonism to the wrong. II. A RUTHLESS DESPOTISM. There are two despots mentioned in this chapter—Shalmaneser and Sennacherib, both kings of Assyria. 1. He had already invaded a country in which he had no right. 2. He had received from the king most humble submission and large contributions to leave his country alone. Mark his humiliating appeal. III. AN UNPRINCIPLED DIPLOMACY. 1. He represents his master, the King of Assyria, to be far greater than he is. 2. He seeks to terrify them with a sense of their utter inability to resist the invading army. (*David Thomas, D.D.*) *Hezekiah's good reign*:—The history of God's ancient people is full of surprises. The whole course of their national life was marked by wonderful Divine interpositions. All public records, when carefully studied, disclose the fact that God, through His providence, is acting as master of affairs, and though statesmen and political economists refer the shifting events of national career to natural causes, it is evident to the clear thinker that God is an uncalculated factor, the explanation is meagre and faulty. But in the history of the elect people, the Divine element was unmistakably prominent. In these particulars the history of the Jews was unique, and sublime above that of any other nation. And yet the behaviour of the people was quite as surprising. With only the thinnest of veils separating them from God—their daily experience august with the manifestations of His presence—the penalties of sin and the rewards of righteousness, things tangible and perceptible, they went on in a mad career of impiety and wickedness as recklessly as though they had never heard of Jehovah. But there are lights as well as shadows to the picture. Now and then a man in authority rose to the level of his responsibility and ruled in the fear of God, and the nation, as nations commonly do, catching inspiration from their leader, entered upon an era of prosperity. Notable among these faithful few was Hezekiah, King of Judah. 1. Hezekiah "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." His theory of government was a simple one; to make it as far as possible a transcript of the Divine government. Statesmanship, in his conception of it, was no familiarity with human precedents, a mastery of the wiles and contrivances by which men in power manage to make all events subserve their purpose, a skilful sword-play in which some trick of fence is more highly esteemed than truth and righteousness. With that one purpose sovereign and constant, all details of administration grouped themselves about it, and in harmony with it, as the atoms of the gem aggregate themselves about the centre of crystallisation, the value and lustre of the jewel, due to its unity. No government of contradictions this, whose worth was to be ascertained by averaging its failings and its merits, but an honest attempt on the part of the king to make his rule an answer to the prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." It is the fatal defect in most forms of government that this overrule of God is ignored. Men are dull scholars, slow to learn that to do right is to do well, in public affairs as well as in private conduct. To do "that which is right in the sight of the Lord" is the fundamental and unalterable principle in all policies of government that vindicate themselves in history. Treasuries and armies and the intrigues of cabinets may win temporary successes; but they are short-lived. 2. Hezekiah "trusted in the Lord God of Israel." That gave him confidence and made him

uncompromising in all his measures. He was no cautious strategist, trying experiments, uncertain of their issue, advancing so slowly that there would be opportunity to retrace his steps if the event seemed likely to disappoint his expectations. He did not trust in his own shrewdness and far-sightedness. He was not anxious about the signs of the times, a calculator of popular weather probabilities. No one more well aware than he of the unreliability of the tone and temper of public moods. He trusted in God, the eternal and the unchanging, a personal God, the Lord God of Israel, "doing His pleasure in the armies of heaven and among the children of men." So he had no responsibility except for duty; consequences were in higher and wiser hands than his. Like a soldier under command, he had only to obey orders. And withal he had a serene and satisfying assurance that he should be contented with last results. The Divine wishes could not be thwarted, and whatever pleased God would please him. When the first Napoleon came to the throne, and saw how unbelief was destroying both the faith and the conscience of the French nation, he said to his advisers, "If there is no God, we must create one." No man can prosperously direct the affairs of a great people without personal faith in God. There are crises in affairs when he loses heart and hope unless he "endures as seeing Him who is invisible." There are hours when the policy of strict righteousness threatens immediate disaster, and the temptation to slight concessions for large apparent good is strong, and how can king or president resist it unless they are able to look up through the obscurity and confidently say, "Clouds and darkness are round about Him, but judgment and justice are the habitation of His throne?" Religion is too often depreciated as the superstition of the cloister and the Church, but all history shows that it has been the most practical and powerful force in the administration of government. 3. Hezekiah "clave to the Lord and departed not from following Him." This religious faith was something more than an intellectual assent to certain general truths, more even than the recognition that Divine Providence is the operative factor in human history. His convictions had a personal force, and caused him to see that he ought to be, and led him to endeavour to be, himself a good man. Behind all the righteous measures he proposed, there was the weight and push of a righteous character. It was not enough that the service due to God had mention in public documents and on state occasions; he himself must render that service in his private capacity. The people must see, in his individual behaviour, the recognition of the sovereignty of those principles that were embedded in the statutes, and gave shape and colour to the national policy. Other things being equal, the better the character of king and governor and legislator, the stronger the presumption that their administration of affairs will be judicious, sound, and strong. The man who governs himself rightly has taken the first step towards knowing how to govern others for their good. 4. "And the Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went." This is the brief but significant summing up of the history of Hezekiah's reign. The account is notable for its omissions. There is no record of new territory added to the kingdom, of armies organised, of treasures filled, of advance in industrial enterprise and business prosperity, the specifications that figure so largely in the common description of national growth. In the thought of the inspired writer, the enumeration of items like these was of small importance in comparison with the great overshadowing fact that the Divine presence was visible, and the Divine favour evident, in the whole course of the people's history. That of itself was sufficient to ensure success and renown. Since God was for them, who or what could be against them? (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Hezekiah's good reign*. :—Hereditry is fickle, or wicked Ahaz would not have had a son like Hezekiah. The piety of the father does not necessarily involve the godliness of the son, nor does the iniquity of the parent make virtue impossible in his posterity. Judah had no worse king than Ahaz, and no better than Hezekiah. There are surprises of goodness in bad families, and of wickedness in families which bear an honoured name. There is also a sweet word of hope for the offspring of bad people. Hezekiah and Josiah were sons of such evil monsters as Ahaz and Amon. The surroundings and character of Hezekiah supply useful lessons. I. AN EVIL ENVIRONMENT. Hezekiah's life boldly challenged and denied the supremacy of circumstances, and emphasised the truth that real manhood rules circumstances, and is not ruled by them. 1. Evil in the home. Ahaz contributed in the fullest measure possible, both by precept and example, to the moral ruin of his family. Every form of heathenism he found in the land he strenuously supported, and introduced new varieties of sin from other lands. There is not a

single virtuous thing recorded of him during his whole life. The kindest thing he ever did was to die, and even that service was performed involuntarily. 2. A corrupt nation. Evil was popular. The flowing tide of public sentiment was with Ahaz, idolatry, and vice. The nation had lost its conscience. The last restraints of decency and custom had been removed. There was not an institution in all the land for the protection of youth, and the young prince, and any other virtuous youth, might say with literal truth, "No man careth for my soul." II. A SPLENDID CHARACTER. Untoward circumstances develop brave men. Battles and storms make heroes possible. 1. Unwavering decision. "In the first month of the first year of his reign," he set about the work of reform (2 Chron. xxix. 3). He was only twenty-five years of age. But his youth had been wisely spent, and when opportunity of great usefulness came, he was ready. 2. Religious enthusiasm. He restored the purity and dignity of Divine worship (vers. 4-6). He went back to first principles; he dug down to the only sure foundation of national strength. No nation can be strong whose temple doors are closed. 3. Widespread success. His achievements were so great and complete, that he eclipsed all the kings who preceded and succeeded him (ver. 5). His trust was in the Lord (ver. 5), and his faith was honoured of God (vers. 7, 8). Truly character is above circumstances, and the history of this Jewish prince is a lesson of hope for the young people of to-day. (R. W. Keighley.) *A just ruler a type of God*:—John Ruskin, in *Stones of Venice*, calls attention to the pleasing fact that in the year 813 the Doge of Venice devoted himself to putting up two great buildings—St. Mark's, for the worship of God, and a palace for the administration of justice to man. Have you ever realised how much God has honoured law in the fact that all up and down the Bible He makes the Judge a type of Himself, and employs the scene of a court-room to set forth the grandeurs of the great judgment day? Book of Genesis: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Book of Deuteronomy: "The Lord shall judge His people." Book of Psalms: "God is Judge Himself." Book of the Acts: "Judge of quick and dead." Book of Timothy: "The Lord the righteous Judge." Never will it be understood how God honours judges and court-rooms until the thunderbolt of the last day shall sound the opening of the great assize—the day of trial, the day of clearance, the day of doom, the day of judgment. (T. De Witt Talmage.) *The spiritual scores successes*:—Remember that flesh dies and spirit lives: in the long run, it is the spiritual that is mighty. Think of that insignificant-looking little black-eyed Jew clanking his chains in Rome, and writing to "the saints that are in Ephesus." Think of Athanasius calmly facing the Arian rabble. Think of Leo the Great consolidating a spiritual empire when the old Roman civilisation was shattered and falling in ruins. Think of Augustine writing the *City of God* in 410 when the world was thrilled with dismay because Rome had been stormed by Alaric the Goth. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." To be spiritual is to be already victorious. *The religious—the greatest of reforms*:—In his *History of the Eighteenth Century*, Mr. Lecky said: "Although the career of the elder Pitt and the splendid victories by land and sea that were won during his ministry formed unquestionably the most dazzling episodes in the reign of George II., they must yield in real importance to that religious revolution which shortly before had begun in England by the preaching of the Wesleys and Whitefield." Methodism was the least result of Wesley's efforts, for, as Green the historian had said, "the noblest result of the religious revival was the steady attempt which had never ceased from that day to this to remedy the guilt, the ignorance, the physical suffering, and the social degradations of the profligate and the poor." Wesley preached and taught in his class-meetings and in his journals the true application of the great saying of Burke, that "whatever is morally wrong can never be politically right."

Vers. 3-7. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.—*Goodness and prosperity*:—It is impossible to read these words without some surprise. First of all, we are surprised at the fact of a good king reigning over either of the kingdoms of the Israelites, and secondly we are surprised at the assertion made in the latter part of this verse, when the conclusion of the chapter appears to give it a direct and absolute contradiction. So far from Hezekiah prospering whithersoever he went, he is described as being assailed most bitterly by his enemies, insulted and besieged, and, in fact, all but utterly destroyed. We may, however, reconcile the statement with the recorded facts by remembering that, after all, the Almighty

did not allow him to be utterly destroyed or entirely cast down. And not only so—the afflictions which came upon him and the straits into which he was led were really the results of his own folly, and only came to him when he forgot to trust in the Lord his God, and relied on his own strength. And these thoughts lead us back again to the fact brought before us in the text. We are taught thereby—I. THAT THERE IS AN INTIMATE CONNECTION BETWEEN GOODNESS AND PROSPERITY. When Hezekiah served God he prospered, when he leaned on his own strength he did not. Real prosperity is only to be obtained in the service of God. A false tinsel may, for a moment, gild the course of the sinful. A momentary glamour of unholy light may flicker on their actions, but it soon will fade away. True stable advantage is only for the righteous. This is shown us—1. In history. What has become of the long list of mighty kings and conquerors who have held the world in unrighteous sway? Their bodies have faded and the kingdoms crumbled to dust. But those who have been servants of God are now reigning in kingdoms of a brightness far exceeding any worldly kingdom. This is shown us—2. In the lessons and examples of Scripture. So numerous are these that they will occur to all. Joseph is a striking instance of good, Ahab of evil. In the history of the kings we find that whenever any king turned away from his evil courses the kingdom prospered, to sink again to his lowest ebb when an evil ruler ascended the throne. David is ever repeating the same important truth. Our Lord tells us the same. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” This is shown us—3. By our own personal experience. What does David say? “I have been young and now am old, yet saw I the righteous never forsaken or his seed begging bread.” The longer we live the more we may discover that those who love God are no losers even in a worldly point of view. They not only have the promise of good things to come, but also have the blessings of the life that now is, far more often than is generally supposed. II. THAT THIS CONNECTION BETWEEN GOOD AND PROSPERITY IS OWING TO THE PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE OF GOD. God was with Hezekiah, and it was God who made him to prosper in all that he did. We shall see the reasonableness of this fact if we remember—1. That God is the only source of prosperity. He maketh rich and He alone. The cattle upon a thousand hills are His. All the gold and silver in the world are His. He can and will bestow them upon whom He will. 2. That God is the only source of protection. His knowledge and power and resources can and will be bestowed by Him in the protection of His people. It was so in the case of Hezekiah. How powerless were all the mighty hosts of his enemies to injure even a hair of his head so long as the shield of the Almighty was his protection! 3. That God is the only source of happiness. Even prosperity does not always bring happiness. It may if it is sanctified. It is God alone who can sanctify. And He can give happiness in this world and joy in the next. Thus, as God Himself is good, He bestows rewards upon those who partake of His nature. Righteousness itself is the highest form of prosperity, and the noblest attainment of human nature, because it enlists infinite power on our behalf. Conclusion.—What a blessed lot is that of him who has the Lord for his God through Jesus Christ our Saviour! May we all strive to do that which is right in His sight, and so we shall reap the promised reward. (*Homilist.*) *The good son of a bad father*:—Ahaz, King of Judah, is dead. At his death no tear was shed, except some down-trodden one wept for joy that the king was gone. Destitute of true courage, of piety, of noble or elevating thoughts, he has fallen all covered with shame and irreligion. I. THE WORST OF FATHERS HAVE SOMETIMES LEFT BEHIND THEM THE BEST OF SONS. It was so with Ahaz. But no thanks are due to him. His influence, example, and life were all such as seemed likely to fill the mind of his son with that which was not good. Yet the son was one of the best of kings, and a good man. II. THE SONS OF BAD FATHERS SUFFER SOME LOSS THROUGH PATERNAL WICKEDNESS AND FOLLY. This does not need much illustration, for, unfortunately, we have too many instances before our eyes almost daily. It is patent to us all that the iniquity of the father is visited upon the children. This is true both in body, estate, and character. We suffer for what our parents were and did, and can't help it. I dare say many of you have lived long enough to believe that many of your weaknesses and much of your poverty are the result, not of your own profligacy and extravagance, but of those who have preceded you. Few of you will question the soundness of my conclusions on these two. You may be disposed to do a little when I say that the son suffers in character because of the bad father. III. IN THE CASE OF AHAZ, WE SEE HOW GOD SOMETIMES SETS ASIDE THE NOTIONS OF MEN AND SELECTS FROM UNLIKELY SCHOOLS

THE INSTRUMENTS WITH WHICH HE WILL ACCOMPLISH GREAT REFORMS AND BRING GREAT BLESSINGS. Hezekiah, reared in the house of Ahaz, became a reformer of the abuses of his nation, restored prosperity to it, and brought the people back to the neglected Temple and the all but forgotten God. The son of an idolatrous king, he became the champion of true religion. Here we get a principle of widest application and illustration. The Bible abounds with it, and our experience too.

IV. I NOTICE THAT HERE WE HAVE A LESSON OF THE MOTHER'S INFLUENCE. Did you notice with what care the sacred writer tells us the name of the mother of Hezekiah, and whose daughter she was? "Abi," or Abijah, "the daughter of Zachariah." It is not often you find it so stated in the Scriptures. Are we to conclude that Hezekiah was the good son mainly because he was the son of a good woman? Be that as it may in this case, the mother's influence is unbounded. It begins with the babe, and never ends. Beecher said, "A babe is a mother's anchor. She cannot swing far from her moorings." And, we may add, the babe cannot swing far from its mother. Her heart is a schoolroom. (*C. Leach, D.D.*)

Hezekiah :—After a long journey underground we seem to have come suddenly upon a sweet garden, and the sight of it is as heaven. The charm is always in the contrast. If things are not quite so good as we supposed them to be, they are all the better by reason of circumstances through which we have passed, which have made us ill at ease, and have impoverished or disheartened us; then very little of the other kind goes a long way. A man comes up out of the underground railway and says when he emerges into the light, How fresh the air is here! What a healthy locality! How well to live in this neighbourhood! Why does he speak so kindly of his surroundings? Not because of those surroundings intrinsically, but because of the contrast which they present to the circumstances through which he has just passed. Hezekiah was no perfect man. We shall see how noble he was, and how rich in many high qualities, yet how now and again we see the crutch of the cripple under the purple of the king. It is well for us that he was occasionally and temporarily weak, or he would have been like a star we cannot touch, and at which we cannot light our own torch. Perhaps it is well for him that we approach his case after such an experience. He thus gets advantages which otherwise might not have been accorded to him: he looks the higher for the dwarfs that are round about him, the whiter because of the black population amidst which he stands, at once a contrast and a rebuke. But from Hezekiah's point of view the case was different. Behind him were traditions of the corruptest sort. He was as a speckled bird in the line of his own family. It is hard to be good amidst so much that is really bad. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. He removed the high places, and brake the images.—*Iconoclast* :—The First Commandment instructs us that there is but one God, who alone is to be worshipped; and the Second Commandment teaches that no attempt is to be made to represent the Lord, neither are we to bow down before any form of sacred similitude. The two commandments thus make a full sweep of idolatry. I. WE HAVE MUCH IDOL-BREAKING FOR CHRISTIANS TO DO. There is much to be done in the Church of God, there is much more to be done in our own hearts. 1. There is much idol-breaking to be done in the Church of God. When God gives a man to the Church, fitted for her enlargement, for her establishment, and her confirmation, he gives to her one of the richest blessings of the covenant of grace; but the danger is lest we place the man in the wrong position, and look to him not only with the respect which is due to him as God's ambassador, but with some degree of—I must call it so—superstitious reliance upon his authority and ability. In the Christian Church there is, I am afraid, at this moment too much exaltation of talent and dependence upon education, I mean especially in reference to ministers. Just the same also may be said of human eloquence. Continuing still our remarks with regard to the Christian Church, I will further remark that much superstition may require to be broken down amongst us in reference to a rigid adherence to certain modes of Christian service. We have tried to propagate the truth in a certain way, and the Lord has blessed us in it, and therefore we venerate the mode and the plan, and forget that the Holy Spirit is a free Spirit. There are persons in our churches who object very seriously to any attempt to do good in a way which they have not seen tried before. 2. Now let us turn to the temple of our own hearts, and we shall find much work to be done there. II. THOSE WHO ARE SEEKERS OF JESUS. There is some idol-breaking to be done for them. I pray God the Holy Spirit to do it. The way of salvation lies in coming to Christ, in

trusting in Jesus Christ alone. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Religious reform*:—Hezekiah will now go to work and prove himself to be an energetic reformer. He must have been a strong man. He had no colleague, no ally; no one to say to him, Be brave, be true. He went straight against the hardest wall that ever was built by the stubbornness and perversity of man. It is not easy to begin life by a destructive process of reformation. Who would not rather plant a tree than throw down a wall? Who would not rather plant flowers, and enjoy their beauty and fragrance, than give himself the severe toil, the incessant trouble, of destroying corrupt and evil institutions? Whoever attempts this kind of destructive work, or even a constructive work which involves preliminary destructiveness, will have a hard time of it: criticism will be very sharp, selfishness will be developed in an extraordinary degree. If a man be more than politician—if he be a real born statesman, looking at whole empires at once and not at mere parishes, and if in his thought and purpose he should base his whole policy upon fundamental right, he will not have an easy life of it even in a Christian country. In proportion as he bases his whole policy on righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, he will be pelted with hard names and struck at with unfriendly hands. This holds good in all departments of life, in all great reformations, in all assaults made upon ignorance, selfishness, tyranny, and wrong of every name. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

A Jewish Iconoclast:—Hezekiah was a very Iconoclast—a breaker of images. And in this respect he develops three rare qualities that lift him a great distance above his time and nation. He was clear-sighted—outspoken—prompt in action. He saw it was nothing but a piece of brass, he said it was brass, and he brake it in pieces.

I. THEN HEZEKIAH HAD THE SEEING EYE. Let us mark that as a primary quality, essential both to Hezekiah and all else who seek to free the people from slavish or debasing customs. He saw clearly that what they accounted a god, and worshipped as such, was only a lifeless, senseless piece of brass—that, and nothing more. This quality lifted the king an immeasurable distance above the people. They did more than treasure it as a precious relic, a memento of Divine compassion in a case of pressing need, or hand it down from sire to son as an heirloom of priceless worth because of its associations and teaching—"they burned incense to it." So to-day, if a man would be a reformer, and stand out as a hero for the truth, he must have this essential quality—broad and sweeping vision. He must be able to see things in their true nature and tendency, to see correctly and beneath the surface of things. Men look at things in different ways, and many from peculiar standpoints. Some, for instance, never bring the object of vision near, but contemplate it as through an inverted telescope, while others look at things through tinted mediums, and all appear of uniform colour; some, again, never see only through another's eye, and are incapable of independent vision; a few are cross-eyed, and all things appear to them in an oblique form; many are purblind, and men appear as trees walking; whilst a few will persist in looking at all things through some distorted medium, which always gives the wrong size, and a false shade of colouring; and others are stone blind to the weightiest things in life, and can see nothing that needs touching, helping, renewing, or reforming. Such men can never be heroes, and do noble work in the people's cause. Others again, from motives of personal interest, love of ease, prejudice, ambition, or blind adherence to party, will wilfully close their eyes; they will not see. And some, though they see clearly enough, yet are so politic, or quiescent, or have become such slaves to popular opinion and usage, that they will not, or, what is worse, dare not, declare the vision. See the next rare quality Hezekiah displayed in this transaction.

II. HE WAS OUTSPOKEN.

"NEHUSHTAN"—A PIECE OF BRASS. What a hard name to give to a god! and what a frank and fearless honesty is here displayed! Might he not have toned it down a little, and led them to the truth by degrees? "Nehushtan" tells it all, fully, clearly, so at that it must stand. There were some very polite people in that day who felt themselves shocked, and their feelings outraged by hearing their darling god called a name so base. To-day, in some of the high places of the land, when men venture upon what has come to be regarded as an unfashionable and undesirable thing—calling things by their right names—what pious horror! And what bitter invectives and scathing denunciations are hurled against the poor delinquent who dares to use such speech! And yet, for all this, we might not have far to seek to-day, and in the Church even, for things quite as senseless as this serpent of brass—nay, worse, because devoid of its precious memories and suggestive teachings, and yet held with as firm a faith and regarded with as profound a reverence. Two or three thoughts are suggested by this plain speaking of

Hezekiah we shall do well to observe. 1. Here is honest candour. You will remember some passages in the life of Luther not unlike the one under consideration. Take that historic circumstance of the hawking through Germany of the famous certificate of indulgence by Tetzel. Very wide and expressive that indulgence, promising to remit the pains and penalties of purgatory, and grant to the purchaser an easy access to paradise; an indulgence, too, that not only atoned for the past, but provided for the future, by shifting from the culprit all the penal consequences of sin, and granting a paradise to the most depraved—if only money enough should be handed over for the sacred paper. All this the Pope guaranteed in the parchment, in virtue of the power given to him as God's vicegerent on earth. How Luther met this infamous pretence all the world knows. As Hezekiah looked upon the serpent-god, and found for it a name, so Luther at once saw through the whole trick of this monstrous paper, and, holding it up before the world, brands it as the "Pope's emparchemented lie." 2. That this announcement of Hezekiah's assailed an established article of Jewish faith, and overturned an ancient rite. That serpent-god was blended with their religious life. Their fathers had worshipped it down through the ages, and for seven centuries it had held a conspicuous place in their services. Was it not now late in the day to call its divinity in question? To a less bold and energetic man, these considerations would have had weight and influence, but not so here. Now it is just here where the work of a reformer becomes most stubborn, and where his valour will be tested most severely. It is not nearly so difficult to set up a new god as to throw down an old one. People are tenacious of old customs. The established order of things is difficult to move, and in time comes to be regarded as existing by Divine right. There is nothing that men are more sensitive about than of matters touching religious usages. 3. This would provoke murmurs and secret opposition, if not open dissent, and render him for the time unpopular among many. His "Nehushtan" would ring in their ears as a most unpleasant sound; the word was very unpalatable, and altogether too degrading. "What a thing to say of so good a god! Only a piece of brass! Why, we and our fathers have burned incense to it all these years, and we have had wise and good men among us who never disputed its claims as a god! Brass only! it cannot be, it is a god notwithstanding his statement!" But Hezekiah is unmoved, nothing daunts or turns him aside from his purpose, it is Nehushtan still, just that, and nothing more. Let them murmur, oppose, reproach; let his popularity be jeopardised by throwing him into conflict with priest and leader, all is nothing to him compared with the truth; and here is a truth touching the people's highest interests; it will help to lift them to freer, purer regions, and the people must have it at any cost. III. PROMPT AND ENERGETIC ACTION. He "brake it in pieces." What a thoroughness there is in this determined encounter with popular error. Many can see, and do not hesitate to give things their right names, but stop short of this third and grander step—they raise no smiting hand to break in pieces and destroy. 1. An act of determined prowess. He brake it. How short the history of the transaction, but how eloquent of meaning! What a wide field of human interest it covers, and how complete is the act! Like a true and trusty knight of lordly chivalry, he smites with unerring aim, and the well-struck blow shivers to atoms the brassen god. He brake it in pieces. Let us mark that. He did not bury it, nor have it removed to some secluded spot, nor content himself by passing a law forbidding the people under pains and penalties to worship it. 2. This was an act of prompt decision. No waiting, or parleying with the enemy; no deferring of the matter to a more opportune time, when the deed might be done with less risk, or with greater ease. 3. Hezekiah had strong faith. Faith in what? Faith in God, faith in the revelation, and faith in the truth. Doubt would have paralysed; faith made him heroic. May the God of Hezekiah anoint our eyes that we may see clearly, and inspire us with a holy courage to speak the vision, and to strike boldly for truth and freedom. One question of supreme importance presses upon us. 1. To what are we burning incense? 2. The subject suggests an admonition. The blessings of the Divine Father should be used, and not abused by us. (*J. T. Higgins.*) *Destroying idols by royal command*:—The last of the persecuting monarchs of Madagascar, Queen Ranavalona I., died on 16th July 1861, to the very last breathing out threatenings and slaughter in her bitter hatred of the Christians. She was succeeded by a king and a queen, both of whom, during their short reigns, allowed their subjects perfect liberty of conscience in religious matters. After the death of these monarchs, Queen Ranavalona II. ascended the throne, the public recogni-

tion of her sovereignty taking place on 3rd September 1868. As she took her seat on that memorable occasion, there were two tables placed before her—on the one was the crown of Madagascar, and on the other the Bible which had been sent to her predecessor by the British and Foreign Bible Society. She had resolved to wear the crown in accordance with the teaching of the Bible. In the following year the queen resolved that all the remaining idols should be destroyed. Accordingly, she despatched officers on horseback to the sacred village where was the great national idol, Kelimalaza. Great though he was, he was nothing more than a wooden insect wrapped about with red cloth. As the officers rode up to the temple where the idol was, the priests became greatly concerned, and their consternation was unbounded when these officers demanded to see the idol. They demurred. "Is it yours or the queen's?" asked the officers. To this the only true answer was that it was the queen's. "Very well," said the officers, "the queen has determined to make a bonfire of it." The priests insisted that it would not burn, but the officers showed a determination to try the experiment. The priests then said they possessed charms which would render the idol invisible, so that it could not be found. Kelimalaza carried a scarlet umbrella in token of his rank, which alone would have betrayed him. The officers, proof against the priests' professed charms, went in, seized the god, with all its silver chains and trappings, and submitted him to the fiery ordeal, which he never survived. Immediately orders were issued that all idols in every temple throughout the island should be destroyed. In every village and town idols were burned. Superstition received a shock, for none of the feared disasters overtook the people, who after a while rejoiced in being freed from baseless fears, such as they and their forefathers for centuries back had been subject to. And he called it *Nehushtan*.—*Nehushtan*:—"Nehushtan"—a mere "piece of brass"; thus Hezekiah named the brassen serpent. What! this sacred relic of bygone times, the very sight of which once saved so many from death; this image made by Moses at the bidding of Jehovah Himself; this to be broken in pieces! this to be called a mere "thing of brass"! Did it not rather become a pious king to preserve such an heirloom amongst the treasures of the nation, as an abiding remembrancer of God's care for Israel in the olden time? Not so thought King Hezekiah. He was bent on the work of national reformation. He saw that incense was being burnt to this brassen serpent: that was enough for him. Whatever it may have been in the past, it was clearly a curse to the people now. I. THAT A BLIND VENERATION FOR THE PAST IS ALWAYS AN OBSTACLE IN THE PATH OF PROGRESS. An intelligent regard for the past is, of course, a help and not a hindrance in the direction of all true advance. But a clinging to customs, institutions, modes of thought and worship, and a refusal to surrender them for no other reason than that they have existed for centuries—this is an unintelligent attachment to the past, and has often obstructed progress. Right across the path of Hezekiah, in his endeavours to purify the religious life of his people, stood this blind veneration for the brassen serpent. They could have given no intelligent account of their burning incense to this image; only, it had long ago been a medium of healing influence; and as, doubtless, their fathers had burnt incense to it, why should not they? But Hezekiah rose above the superstition which blinded his countrymen. A similar attitude was taken up by Oliver Cromwell against the blind veneration which existed in his day for the institution of monarchy. The doctrine of "the divine right of kings" was then imperilling the liberties of England. We may not, perhaps, justify the execution of Charles; and yet we may feel that the time had come when it was necessary to strike a decisive blow at the root of this superstitious doctrine. Sacred associations might surround the person of the "Lord's anointed"; it might be reckoned "sacrilege" to touch a hair of his head; but Cromwell's resolve was taken, that the liberties of the country should not be sacrificed on the altar of this king-worship; he was sure that (all sacred associations notwithstanding) the king was, after all, just a man like other men. Cromwell had the courage to say "Nehushtan." II. EVEN THAT WHICH HAS BEEN ORDAINED BY GOD HIMSELF FOR A BLESSING, MAY BE SO MISUSED AS TO BECOME A CURSE. This brassen serpent was not merely a relic of antiquity. It had originally been made by Divine appointment. By Divine appointment also it had once been the means of saving many lives. And yet this very thing which had been so great a blessing when used as Jehovah had directed, became a curse when it was misused. It is thus that even a God-ordained help may be perverted into a hindrance. Many similar illustrations might be given of this misuse of things Divinely ordained. Art and science, for example, are in-

tended by God to be handmaids of true progress; but the worship of science tends only to materialism, and the worship of beauty tends ultimately to sensuality. The weekly day of rest: that, too, is a gift of God, and fitted to be a source of blessing. But it may be so misused as to become a hindrance rather than a help. It may be spent in an idleness or debauchery, which turns it into a source of weariness or exhaustion. But it may also be misused by being idolised. See how the Pharisees burnt incense to the Sabbath! And this is only a typical instance of the manner in which the Pharisees misused the whole law. That law was appointed by God as a blessing; but by their worship of the mere letter they changed it into a hindrance. The Bible, again;—what a blessed boon it is—containing, as it does, a revelation of the character and will of God. But the Bible will not bring us all the good which it is fitted to impart, if we begin to worship itself instead of Him whom it reveals. The Bible is to be used—not worshipped.

III. EVERY SYMBOL LOSES ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE, IN PROPORTION AS IT IS CONVERTED INTO AN IDOL. The significance of a symbol lies in its pointing to something more precious than itself, which it expresses or enshrines. And the practical value of any symbol depends, not only on the importance of that which it symbolises, but also on the extent to which its significance is apprehended and realised. Now, the brasen serpent, when it was lifted up in the wilderness, was not only the means of bodily healing, but also a symbol of spiritual facts. It was a material token of the pitying mercy of God.

1. Every creed is a symbol. It is an attempt to express the truth of God in the words of man. Such words are valuable, only as pointing to that which is more precious than themselves. And a creed or confession of faith—thus regarded and thus used—may prove most helpful to the student of theology. It may put him on his guard against many an error; it may often serve as a finger-post, directing him in the way of truth. But the moment a creed begins to be worshipped, that moment its value is diminished.

2. The sacraments are also symbols. Our simple Christian feast of the Supper is a most expressive emblem of the nourishment and enjoyment which are to be found in our communion with Christ, and with one another in Christ. And the sacrament of Baptism—symbolical of the cleansing power of the Gospel—is a most fitting initiatory rite of the “new covenant.” Using these simply as symbols—and looking through them to those spiritual facts to which they point—our faith is strengthened and our spiritual life deepened. But, whenever the sacraments begin to be in any way idolised, they lose much of their significance and value.

3. Finally: the cross is the grandest symbol in all history. Jesus Christ suffering and dying on Calvary: here is an actual event of the past which, by an exercise of the imagination, we can bring before “the mind’s eye.” But it is not intended that we should rest in the outward circumstances of the Crucifixion. It is God’s purpose that we should use the cross as a symbol, not worship it as an idol. (*T. C. Finlayson.*)

The fiery serpents and the serpent of brass:—I. FIRST OF ALL, CONSIDER THIS SERPENT OF BRASS AS MADE BY MOSES. II. CONSIDER THIS SERPENT OF BRASS AS WORSHIPPED BY THE JEWS. We have no mention of it, after the circumstances at which we have briefly glanced, for nearly eight hundred years. We then come upon this passage, in the record of the life of King Hezekiah: “He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.” Though no mention is made of the fact, yet it is evident that the Israelites treasured up this brasen serpent as a sacred memorial or relic, kept it, perhaps, as a monument of God’s goodness, to awaken their gratitude, and help them in future troubles to remember His Name. They carried it with them during their subsequent journeyings in the wilderness; and in after times, when they became a settled and great nation, it appears to have been preserved with other memorials of historical and national interest in Jerusalem. The fact that this serpent of brass became an object of worship to the Jews is instructive in two or three ways. It suggests to us the danger attendant on going beyond the Divine command in religious duty. God ordered the serpent to be made, and to be used for the purpose and in the way He named; but, so far as we have any record, He gave no command for its preservation. As it was, the temptation was ever present; and in due time it brought forth sin. Other memorials were preserved—“the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant”—but these were preserved by Divine command. In all religious observances and duties it is wise and safe to keep close to the Word of God. This serpent-worship of the Jews shows us how forms may be abused. In

its proper place, and for its proper use, the place and use assigned it by God, this symbol was useful. But when the invention of man stepped in, and began to employ it for another purpose, it became hurtful. In all ages of the Christian Church we see illustrations of the use and misuse, the helpfulness and mischief of forms. The conduct of the Jews in relation to this brazen serpent is also an illustration of the growth and development of evil. Possibly the persons who first began to worship the relic reasoned thus: "Here we have an object made by Divine command. Our fathers were delivered by it from a sore trouble. It represents to us the power and the goodness of our God. Surely we may offer incense to it as the representative of the unseen power and goodness." This, perhaps, was the modified form which their idolatry took in the first instance, before at a later stage it became more gross and positive. This worship of the brazen serpent teaches us yet another lesson we shall do well to remember; that is, the corrupting influence of sinful associations and example. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." "Evil communications corrupt good manners." In the conduct of the Jews we see the influence of their neighbouring nations, the Egyptians and Phœnicians. They were continually imitating the heathen around them, and importing into their midst the various forms of surrounding idolatry.

III. LET US NOW MARK THE DESTRUCTION OF THIS SERPENT OF BRASS BY HEZEKIAH. No sooner was this monarch established on the throne of Judah than he began a great work of national reformation. Idolatry covered the land. Ahaz, his father, was one of the worst kings that had sat upon the throne, and, under his influence, the nation had become utterly corrupt. Hezekiah knew the history of this serpent—how it was made at first by Divine command, and for a most beneficent purpose; and he, no doubt, could appreciate all proper feelings of veneration for so sacred a relic. But he saw the evil use to which the idolatrous tendencies of the nation had put it; and, therefore, without any hesitation, he determined on its destruction. The monarch's conduct furnishes us with an example worthy of imitation. Its principles should be our law in relation to the evils of social and national life. We are surrounded by crying iniquities—iniquities that affect not only individuals, but the life and interests of the nation at large. Instead of sitting down in a spirit of indifference as to the existence and tendencies of prevailing vices, we should resolve, in the strength of God, to seek their destruction.

IV. WE COME, IN THE LAST PLACE, TO CONSIDER THE BRASEN SERPENT AS EMPLOYED IN THE MINISTRY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Nearly fifteen hundred years after it was made by Moses, and seven hundred after it was destroyed by Hezekiah, Christ used it as a theme of instruction. Our Lord here recognises the sinful and lost state of mankind. It was the poisonous bite of the fiery serpent that made the brazen serpent necessary; so it was the ruined character and condition of men that constrained God to appoint Jesus Christ as their Saviour. (*W. Walters.*) *Nehushtan; or the idols of the Church*.—Seven centuries and a quarter—as long an interval, save a hundred years, as that between our time and the time of the Norman Conquest—have passed since the serpent was made and used for the healing of the people; and now incense is burned to it, and has been for a long time; how long we cannot tell. Who first put that piece of brass away as a curiosity or an object of reverence we do not know; Eleazar, I should think, or one of his family. It was quite a natural and inoffensive thing to do. And so, we may suppose, it passed into the possession of the High Priest's family, and was retained among their vestments and sacred vessels. In their keeping it performed all the wilderness journey; crossed the Jordan; located itself at Shiloh; was kept safe through the troubled times of the Judges; escaped capture when the ark went down into Philistia; remained untouched during the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon; was secure when the kingdom was rent in twain in the time of Rehoboam, and right on through confusions and wars until Hezekiah determined to break it in pieces. How long the piece of rubbish lasted! How safe oftentimes is the thing that a man and a nation could best part with! Perhaps when Eleazar stowed it away in his chest, if he did it, he thought very feelingly of "the much people" who had turned eagerly to it for relief from pain and deliverance from death, and thought that it was a pity to break it up. He had done better if he had remembered the golden calf and the mischief which it had wrought among the people. When the brazen serpent was put away, it was probably preserved with an idea that it might prove useful on some future occasion; for the journey was long, and there might be fresh plagues of a kind similar to the present one. A wonderful power is there to some persons

in the economical aspect of life. They heap up old things until they have a very museum about them ; but there is no life in it all, no fitness for present times and circumstances. These people can see what has been done, and are great on old methods and ways, but have no perception of present needs, nor of how God's wisdom, power, and love can as easily meet them as they met the needs of earlier times. But whoever put away the brazen serpent, and preserved it, and for whatever reason, it had grown to be a snare ; "the children of Israel did burn incense to it." A curious interest, a kindly affection, a forecasting care had become perverted, corrupted into a superstitious reverence and an unholy trust. Reasoning and threatening and promising would do nothing ; the short sharp remedy was to destroy a thing which had once and for ever done its work, and since then had been a too strong temptation. To call and to treat things as they deserve is the safest way to set all judgments right about them. To have called the serpent a "piece of brass," just like any other piece of brass, would have done no good had Hezekiah allowed it to remain ; for then it would have appeared as if he retained some lurking respect for it, or feared to stand by his judgment in the teeth of the prevailing feeling. Nor would it have been a complete rebuke had he broken the serpent and added no reason for doing so. The true epithet applied to things will often complete our labours. A folly or a superstition can often be destroyed with a word when all our serious efforts against it have failed. And yet the word would be only our own reproach, if we did not link it with corresponding action. "'Tis a piece of brass," said the king, as he broke the serpent in pieces ; and when it could not resent the sacrilege, if sacrilege it was, the people could not but allow that he was right. Among things that are outgrown by men, or that, having served one or two generations well, fail to be of any further use, nothing is more curious and instructive than the popularity and the decline of books. To one age they are like the brazen serpent—channels of life ; to another they become almost sacred, and to succeeding ages they are no more than a piece of common brass. In the history of the religious life it is instructive to notice how institutions, missions, and agencies of one kind and another spring up, do their work, die, and pass away. Institutions are created to meet a contemporary need, and as long as the need lasts they should last, but when it is gone they too should go. It is enough either for a man or a thing to serve its own generation ; to do that is to do well. But you sometimes see an unwise and unhealthy attempt to prolong the existence and operations of an agency which, having done its work, only serves now to cumber the ground. The important matter is that we should intelligently understand that the Church is a living body ; that its forms should suit its life at every stage of development ; and that its agencies should be adapted by it to the work it has to do. It is the life that must be held sacred, and not the forms through which it expresses itself and the agencies by which it operates upon the world around. (*J. P. Gledstone.*) *Nehushtan* :—I. LOOK AT THINGS IN THEIR RIGHT LIGHT. Thus the king acted. He regarded "the brazen serpent" from the true standpoint. Others beheld in it a god ; he recognised nothing but brass. To them it was supernatural ; to him idolatrous. How true it is that what we are we behold. The scene is in the seer. To no small extent the spectacle is in the spectator. Nothing can be more accurate than the lines of the Poet Laureate—

But any man that walks the mead,
In bud, or blade, or bloom may find,
According as his humours lead,
A meaning suited to his mind.

Cowper puts the same thought in another aspect—

And as the mind is pitch'd, the ear is pleased
With melting airs or martial, brisk or grave ;
Some chord in unison with what we hear
Is touched within us.

A blacksmith hammers a piece of iron on his anvil "with measured beat and slow." Ordinary people hear in it only an ordinary sound. Not so the great Handel. He listens, and it inspires him with one of the sweetest tunes in existence. The sun is setting, and as it sinks the whole western horizon is irradiated. Let three different men be called to witness it, and what diversified effects it will have on them ! The meteorologist sees in those clouds before him signs of the weather,

and confirmations of his theories touching certain natural laws. The agriculturist sees in them the promise of a good harvest or warning of a poor one. But the artist sees in them gorgeous tints and graceful forms, which he seeks to impress on his memory that he may reproduce them on the glowing canvas. II. CALL THINGS BY THEIR RIGHT NAMES. Hezekiah did so. He "called it Nehushtan," which means brass. Brass it was, and brass he called it. He spoke of it as he found it. A rare virtue! Thorough honesty of speech is not by any means too common. Dr. South preached four fine discourses on "The Fatal Imposture and Force of Words." The title is a sermon in itself. There is, indeed, a "fatal imposture" in some words. They are used to disguise sin and conceal the truth. No wonder that the inspired seer should exclaim, "Woe unto them that call darkness light, and light darkness; that put good for evil, and evil for good." The practice is still a popular one. A prodigal is spoken of as "gay" or "fast." A drunkard is "the worse for liquor." A dishonest tradesman is "unable to meet his engagements." The bad-tempered have "nervous irritability." Notorious gambling is "financiering." An army that lays hold of all that it can pilfer is said to "requisition." An aggressive war is termed the "rectification of frontier." A rude and inquisitive intrusion on the privacy of a distinguished man is "interviewing" him. A silly and wicked duel is "an affair of honour." Slavery is alluded to as "a domestic institution." We repeat it, therefore—call things by their right names. The common, colloquial caution is one which we may well lay to heart. "Mind what you say." It is wise to ask, "Let the words of my mouth be acceptable in Thy sight." III. GIVE THINGS THEIR RIGHT TREATMENT. When John Knox was remonstrated with for sanctioning the abolition of the monasteries he said, "While the rookeries stand the rooks will return." Hezekiah was evidently of the same opinion. He was not content with condemning "the brazen serpent." He first denounced, then destroyed it. He "brake in pieces." While the idol remained there was danger of a relapse into idolatry. Its preservation could not be beneficial, and might be extremely injurious, therefore he demolished it. His conduct is the more justifiable when we recollect a certain fact. Serpent-worship has, from early times, been a favourite practice in the East. Both Africa and Asia bear witness to it. Whence this singular custom arose it is not altogether easy to say. It is contrary to what might have been antecedently expected. Possibly it grew out of the well-known tendency in human nature to propitiate and coax a power which is felt to be dangerous. Men often fawn on what they fear. Whatever the correct explanation may be, however, there is the indisputable fact of serpent-worship. The writer has himself seen Buddhists present their offerings of money before a hideous image of a cobra di capello, the most poisonous snake in India and Ceylon. The application of Hezekiah's conduct to ourselves is clear enough. We also must be iconoclasts. No idol is to be tolerated by us. What is your idol? To which of the many false gods are you tempted to do homage? Break it in pieces, as the king did the serpent. Let not any person, pursuit, or pleasure come between you and your Maker. Whether your "brassen serpent" be Mammon or friendship, or influence whatsoever it be, banish it from the temple of the soul, "and the King of Glory, shall come in." (*T. R. Stevenson.*) *Nehushtan; or means and ends in our spiritual life* :—The temple at Jerusalem was the national museum of the Jews. It was fitting that it should be so, for the treasures of that God-governed nation were all of a sacred kind. Among the most prized of all the objects contained in that great sanctuary, there was the brazen serpent, that image which belonged to the pilgrim-passage of their history, and which was connected with a very striking incident in the experience of their fathers. The fact that it was so long preserved, proves of itself that no slight feeling was entertained about it. One generation handed it down to another through several centuries. It might well have served the people of God as a kindly beacon, warning them against rebellious murmurings, and also as a friendly token, attesting the readiness and power of Jehovah to redeem them in the time of their calamity and distress. But between what might have been and what was, how wide and deep the gulf! That image of brass, instead of rendering an important spiritual service, became the occasion of idolatrous homage. Instead of leading the thoughts of men's minds to God, it drew them from Him; and instead of reverencing Him, they worshipped it. So the brave and wise king brake it up before the eyes of the people, and, in the act of destruction, called it "Nehushtan," i.e. a bit of brass. The principle which lies at the root of this somewhat daring and very decisive act, is this—that no good thing, however good it be, must be allowed to come between our souls and God,

to rob Him of His service; that, if anything does so come, a strong hand must be used—if need be, a destructive one—to take it away: or, to put the truth in a more positive form, that whatever means we use for worship or instruction, must not be turned into an end, but must be resolutely and determinedly employed as a means to bring the mind into the presence of God's truth and the heart into communion with Himself. Let us apply our principle to—I. OUR TREATMENT OF THE BIBLE. Wherein resides its virtue? There is nothing in the words which are employed more sacred than in those which are found in any book of devotion. There is no virtue or charm in the mere sound of the sentences which it contains. If we suppose that we are any better for having a Bible on our shelves, or on our tables, or in our hands, apart from the use we make of it; or if we think that we are any better before God because we go regularly and perhaps slavishly through an allotted portion of it, casting our eyes over it, or uttering in regular sequence the sounds for which the letters stand, whether or not we take its truth into our minds, then are we making the same kind of mistake which the children of Israel made in burning incense to the brazen serpent: we are making an end of that which is only valuable as a means. We are putting our trust in an outward observance, we are "having confidence in the flesh," we are assuring our hearts vainly, mistakenly, dangerously. This principle will apply to—II. THE EMPLOYMENT OF APPROVED EVANGELICAL PHRASEOLOGY. Much might be said of—III. OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL. Open to a like abuse is—IV. OUR PROFESSION OF PERSONAL PIETY. Only too often is this regarded as the attainment of an end, rather than the employment of a means of good. Men are apt, having reached that stage, to settle down into a slumberous state of spiritual complacency, instead of feeling that, by taking this step, they have entered into a wider realm of privilege and opportunity, where their noblest powers may engage in fullest exercise. It becomes a haven of indolent and treacherous security, instead of a sanctuary for intelligent devotion, a field for active Christian work, and thus it is perverted from a blessing to a bane. (*W. Clarkson, B.A.*)

Nehushtan:—We shall look at this instance of Hezekiah's strict regard to principle as one of those fine lessons which are continually found in the exhaustless word of God; and shall remark—I. THAT THE REVERENCE AND AFFECTIONS OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE TOWARDS THE OLD BRASEN SERPENT IS VERY EASILY ACCOUNTED FOR. In those days the people had few instructors, and fewer books. As a nation the Jews were in a state of childhood, scarcely capable of furnishing any materials for history. In such states of society there is a natural and strong clinging to the past. So there was this serpent of brass, which had been preserved from the days of Moses. II. THAT THE BURNING INCENSE TO THIS SERPENT OF BRASS WAS AN INDICATION OF THE PEOPLE'S FORGETFULNESS OF GOD'S PURPOSE IN ITS PRESERVATION. III. THAT THIS DESTRUCTION OF THE BRASEN SERPENT DERIVES MUCH OF ITS SIGNIFICANCE FROM THE FACT THAT IT WAS DONE BY HEZEKIAH IN HIS YOUTH. Hezekiah came to the throne at the age of twenty-five; and this appears to have been one of the first acts of his reign. Lessons herein for young men. 1. None but young men know how hard it is to be religious. The other sex are mercifully spared many of man's perils, difficulties, and temptations. 2. On many things young men when they become religious will have to write "*Nehushtan*": on bad books; bad company; frivolous pursuits; and old associations of evil. 3. Only a high order of principle will enable young men thus to act independently of the world's suffrage. 4. Only the resources of Almighty love and power will carry a religious young man through the perils and temptations of his career. God will always tell young men what *Nehushtan* to break in pieces, and He will give them strength to do it. (*W. G. Barrett.*)

Truth's old clothes:—I. TRUTH ITSELF NEVER WEARS OUT; BUT ITS DRESS DOES. Carlyle, in his never-to-be-forgotten *Sartor Resartus*, has shown us how all truth takes to itself some form, or dress, or skin. Life craves manifestation. Truth without a body is powerless. Facts need words to describe them, and make them live and act. It is through the words, or the expression, or the dress or body, that we come to get our ideas of the truth or life these contain. The world itself is but God's thought put into form; the movements of the stars are the expressions of God's delight in the orderly; the flowers. His thoughts of beauty; the waves, the expression of His might and gentleness; music, one of love's voices, the expression of the affections and emotions, as words express reasoning and intellectual processes. Christ Himself is the completest expression in form of the invisible and otherwise unknowable. Truth, thought, spirit, deity we cannot know apart from

form. All must clothe themselves before we can recognise them and make them our friends and helpers. The Incarnation of Christ is only the highest expression of a universal series of similar experiences. This being so, it is easy to see how important form, clothing, may be. Mr. Ruskin, in the *Ethics*, boldly says: "You can always stand by form against force. The philosophers say there is as much heat, motion, or energy in a tea-kettle as in a pier-eagle. Very good; it is so. It requires just as much heat as will boil the kettle to take the eagle up to his nest. The kettle has a spout, the eagle a beak. The kettle a lid, and the eagle wings. But the kettle cannot but choose sit on the hob, whilst the eagle can choose to recline on the air, sail over the highest cliffs, and stare with undimmed eye at the full glory of the sun." The eagle's glory is her form; the steam kettle's its force. Here we see the beauty and use of form. The truth to be remembered about form is—that it dies, that it is often defective at the best, and that as it grows old it loses its force. The body of the old eagle is not equal to the flights of its youth. Words which are truth's body are at best often a poor body, an inadequate garment; and words grow old and lose their force. II. AT TIMES WE NEED GIVE TRUTH A NEW DRESS. The very beauty of some forms is their danger. We love them so much we keep on using them, until familiarity robs them of their full force, and we treat them as we should not—that is, with much less respect and attention than we treat stranger sounds and forms. Splendid words, like grace, glory, blessing, mercy, faith, pardon, come to be tripped so lightly with the tongue, and so often, that hundreds never get to know their real meaning at all. Hence it is that dear old tunes and texts may become idols. When we use words in song or in prayer, and only use them because they have been so often used, and are the correct thing, or were the correct thing, to say, then our worship is a farce and a delusion, and the time for a change has come. It is impossible not to know that we all often ask for blessing and grace with no clear definite thought or purpose of what blessing and grace mean or involve; and when we do so, then the words grace and blessing are become as the serpent of brass—a delusion and danger, a mere Nehushtan. God Himself has had regard to this very need in man; and for man's sake He has condescended to use variety in giving and expressing truth. III. This need of realness leads me to observe THAT WE ARE PRONE TO SET AN UNDUE VALUE ON THE OLD, AND WE MUST GUARD AGAINST THAT DANGER. What a history is the history of the conflict which has raged ever when change has had to be made! If Galileo said the world was not a flat surface; if Walton said the Hebrew vowel points were not inspired; if geology said the world was not made in six times twenty-four hours; if ever a new view of the method of inspiration were suggested—nay, if the Church itself undertook to revise the Bible translation—what a Babel of contention and conflict arises; what gloomy prophecies of ruin and disaster are indulged in! IV. This brings me to notice our duty—THAT IT MAY BE WISE AND RIGHT SOMETIMES TO SACRIFICE THE CLOTHING FOR THE TRUTH'S SAKE. The Bible, specially the New Testament, is a wonderful example of this duty. It is said that there is only one spot in all Palestine of which we can say, with absolute confidence, "It was on this very spot Christ must have been" (so carefully have the New Testament writers guarded against the worship of localities); except in the solitary case of Jacob's well. V. Our last point is this—IN CHRIST ALONE (THE TRUTH) THE CLOTHING NEVER WEARS OUT. That is a marvellous statement about Christ—that "He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He never needs revise His truth; He never has more experience or wisdom. We should not think it a compliment to a man to say he thought at sixty just what he did at thirty. We expect riper experience, larger views, and sounder judgments. But Christ never needs thus grow; He is for ever perfect in form and spirit. The Gospel is a wonderful illustration—in fact, the whole Bible is a wonderful illustration—of this truth. The Book never grows old; it is always young and in the front of life's race and battle. (R. H. Lovell.) *Obsolete ceremonies* :—Ceremonies stand long after the thought which they express has fled, as a dead king may sit on his throne stiff and stark in his golden mantle, and no one come near enough to see that the light is gone out of his eyes, and the will departed from the hand that still clutches the sceptre. (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

Vers. 5, 6. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel.—*Three stages in the devout life* :—This is the writer's summing up of the character of Hezekiah, before he enters on the details of his reign. It is a lofty and unconditioned eulogium, making no reference to faults. There are no shadows in the picture, and, of

course, in so far it may be taken to be a too favourable likeness. But that is the way that God judges about men, by the general drift of their lives, and He does not grudge to praise them. 1. He "TRUSTED in the Lord." Now, people sometimes say that there is nothing about faith in the Old Testament, and that it is only in the New that we find such strong emphasis laid upon it, as the root and measure of all kinds of goodness. But that is a pure delusion. There never has been but one way to God, and the man that wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, whoever he was, had seen a great deal deeper into the genius of the Old Testament religion than some very wise men of modern times, when he had not the smallest hesitation in pointing his finger to all that army of witnesses in the past and saying, "These all died in faith." One other remark may be made about this "trust," which is the basement story of Hezekiah's character, and that is that the word which is here employed, like all the Old Testament expressions for spiritual and mental acts and things, has a very distinct material signification, and is in itself a lesson and a picture. For the word employed, and rightly employed here, for trusting in the Lord means, literally, leaning upon something, as one might do upon a strong stay. We may also note that the Old Testament sometimes speaks of trusting to, sometimes of trusting on, sometimes of trusting in, the Lord, and sometimes simply of trusting the Lord, just as the New has a similar variety of expression in reference to the act of faith. These variations indicate varying aspects of that act, considered as a going forth of heart and will towards their object, or a repose of heart and will upon, or an abiding of heart and will in, God or Christ, which would prove profitable to dwell upon, but which I can only indicate here. If you will duly ponder the metaphor which is inherent in the word of some feeble or lame man leaning upon a strong staff, or some tottering one leaning his hand upon a rock, and resting all his weight upon that, I think you will understand a great deal more about faith, and what it means, than if you had read a whole library of theological discussion. It is not believing, but it is the act of leaning on what we believe in. It is not your head but your heart and your will that trust. There must be, of course, knowledge before there can be faith, but there was never a greater or more disastrous mistake in Christendom than that which says that the essential part of Christian faith is correct belief. That is the beginning of it no doubt, but there may be plenty of incorrectness in the belief, and yet if there is the earnest reality in the leaning then that trust is right. Only lean hard. A lame man does not lay a light arm on his crutch. You are weak enough to need a very strong support. Let us learn from Hezekiah when it is the time to lean hardest. When Sennacherib's insulting letter came to him he was sore troubled, but he did not content himself with unavailing sorrow. He turned to his counsellors, but he did not content himself with bespeaking human advice and human help. He had built the walls of Jerusalem anew, and made extensive and wise arrangements in prospect of a siege, but he did not rely on these things. What did he do with the letter? He went and spread it before the Lord. Is that what you do with the disagreeable letters that come to you, with the difficulties and annoyances, great or small, with the perplexities and the burdens, whether they be burdens of sorrow or of work that come to you? Take them into God's house, and spread them out before Him. Sennacherib's letter does not look half so bad when it is spread out before the cherubim as it does when we read it in some corner away from God. If a man will lean on God, the unseen Helper, he must make up his mind to have plenty of scoffs and ridicule from people that have no notion of a Helper that is not visible and material. Do you remember how the messenger of the King of Assyria came to Hezekiah, or, rather, to his servants, and taunted them with the very fact that they were trusting? "Speak ye now to Hezekiah, thus saith the great King, the King of Assyria. What confidence is this wherein thou trustest. . . . On whom dost thou trust that thou rebellest against me? Now, behold! thou trustest on the staff of this bruised reed. . . . but if ye say to me, We trust in the Lord our God . . . hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the King of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath?" and so on, and so on. Yes; and then "it came to pass that night that the angel of the Lord went out . . . and when they arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses." So was vindicated the faith that looked so foolish, so presumptuous, with so little to build upon, and so little to warrant it. Did you ever notice the contrast between what came to Hezekiah when he prayed in the house of his God, and what came to Sennacherib when he prayed

in the house of his God? "Hezekiah spread the letter before the Lord," and he received the triumphant answer from Isaiah's lips which was the flash of the lightning, followed by the roll of the thunder in the death of the host. That was what faith got when it prayed in the house of the Lord. What did the other man get when he prayed in the house of his God? "It came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, smote him with the sword." That is what the man gets that bows down to idols, and puts his trust in a refuge of lies. 2. "He clave unto the Lord;" that is the stage that follows on faith. Now, that is another picturesque expression. Let me just run over in a sentence or two, three connections in which it is employed in Scripture in order that you may see what it means. It is the same word which is used to express the adherence of the bone to the skin, or to express the way in which a tightly-braced girdle sticks to the loins of a man, or to express the way in which, when one is burning with thirst, the tongue adheres to the roof of the mouth. And when you come into the region of its reference to men's relation to men, it is the word which is used for the closest, sweetest, sacreddest of all human relationships. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." It is the word that is employed to express the loyalty of obedient subjects to their king. It is the word which is used in that tenderest of all stories to contrast the clinging love of the one daughter-in-law with the less self-abandoning affection of the other. "Orpah kissed her . . . Ruth clave unto her." Now, that is what faith should lead us to do. Loyalty as of subjects to a king; love as of husband and wife; as of Ruth and Naomi, the close adherence as of the girdle braced round the loins of a man. For in the words there lie, not only these thoughts of close adhesion by mind and will and heart, but also the thought of a vigorous resistance to all the separating agencies, which are so busy in the lives of every one of us, and find their allies in the hearts of us all. Now, lastly, the top-stone of the whole fabric is obedience, which will follow upon such close communion with, and trust in, God. There are two great corruptions of Christianity; the one which attaches all importance to the initial act of trust, and to the inward experience of the devout soul, is strong in spiritual emotions and very weak in daily righteousness. There is a strange connection between fervent emotion of a spiritual kind and a shady life in regard to common virtues. So do you take care to avoid a Christianity which is all faith and fellowship, and not obedience. And, on the other hand, do not try to begin at the roof of the house, and build garrets and top-floor first—to have a righteous life without the substratum, the faith which is the basement and the fellowship with God which comes between faith and obedience. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Trust in God*:—1. Hezekiah was one of Judah's best kings. He is classed with David and Josiah. "All, except David and Ezekias and Josias, were defective" (*Eccles. xlix. 4*). In his zeal for God he "brake in pieces the brassen serpent" which had become an object of superstition, and sought to carry into effect the Mosaic prohibition of heathen sanctuaries (*Exod. xxxiii. 24, xxxiv. 13*). Moreover, "he removed the high places," thus showing the sweeping nature of his reformation. These "high places" were "local sanctuaries," which some good kings had tolerated, contenting themselves with uprooting the worship of false gods; for at these local shrines there was, it is supposed, some sort of worship of Jehovah carried on, which was to satisfy the religious instinct without going up to Jerusalem. It shows Hezekiah's thoroughness and determination. 2. But Hezekiah's greatness shines out still more vividly in the hour of trial. Jerusalem was threatened by Assyrian forces. Their generals were at the gates, demanding submission. He stood alone, and yet not alone, for God was his "Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble"; "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel," and he did not trust in vain. Let us first note some of the grounds upon which this confidence in God is based; and, secondly, mark some of its features. I. SOME GROUNDS UPON WHICH TRUST IN GOD IS BASED. 1. The first is the goodness of God. Thus moral theology places trust in God in connection with hope, and not directly with faith. 2. Another ground of trust in God is His faithfulness to His promises. "He is faithful that promised" (*Heb. x. 23*). In order to impress upon us this truth, God confirmed His word "by an oath," as men when they bind themselves more strictly to a compact (*Heb. vi.*). Goodness, when combined with almightiness and fidelity, affords a triple basis upon which to rest. 3. Experience may be added to the former. Thus David, when he drew near to the giant, recollected past deliver-

ances. "The Lord," he said, "that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear," &c. (1 Sam. xvii. 37). II. SOME FEATURES OF THIS CONFIDENCE MUST NOW BE NOTED. 1. To have confidence in God, it must be entire. In foul weather as well as fair, in the storm when Christ is asleep, as well as on the land when He is awake. Christ tested this confidence in the case of His disciples, and He does so still. It must extend both to temporal as well as spiritual things, as we are reminded in to-day's Gospel—to the necessities of life, as well as to graces and gifts from heaven. This was laid down clearly in the definition of "trust" at the beginning. Such trust, it need hardly be said, must not be a cause of idleness, but a stimulant of effort: "God helps those who help themselves." Hezekiah knew that; and so went into the house of the Lord, and spread "the letter before the Lord" which the Assyrian foe had sent him, and prayed earnestly to the Lord. 2. Trust, too, must be prompt. To ask for Divine help when all things have been tried in vain, savours rather of despair than of confidence. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," in point of time as well as order, and turn to all else as means which are only of avail when they have the Divine blessing. III. LESSONS. 1. The whole subject is so eminently practical that the lessons are obvious. All must have some object in which to confide. Our trust must be, not in self, not in others, but in God. It was to Him Hezekiah at once turned in his terrible need. 2. To kindle this spirit of confidence, let us meditate upon the Divine goodness, the fidelity of God to His promises, and call up remembrances of His past mercies. 3. Finally, let this trust extend to all circumstances and difficulties whether of soul or body; and we shall find, like the good king, that "the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord," and "He is their strength in the time of trouble" (Ps. xxxvii. 39). IV. LESSONS. 1. To grasp still more firmly the fundamental truth of Christianity—the union of the human nature with the Divine nature in the One person of the Word, or Son of God, who for our sakes "became poor." 2. To learn the lesson of detachment from all external possessions, after the pattern of His life on earth. 3. To seek by every means in our power to obtain the "true riches" which Christ, "through His poverty," has purchased for us. 4. So to use "the mammon of unrighteousness," if we have it, as to lay up "treasure in heaven"; for "where your treasure is there will your heart be also" (Matt. vii. 20, 21). (*W. H. Hutchings, M.A.*) *The foundation of a true life*.—The reign of Hezekiah was a halo of sacred glory to relieve the gloom of the darkest period in Jewish history. So estimable a character was Hezekiah's that the sacred penman assigns to him the highest place among the worthies of the covenant, "so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him." Of such a character we ask, What was the secret of its power? What was the basis of its operation? Is such a character possible to us? Our text is the answer: "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel." Herein is the foundation; everything noble in life springs from trust in God. This, we observe, is the source of all virtue, the correct inspiration of every act, the unerring guide in moments of perplexity, and the only satisfactory finality to human life. I. TRUST IN GOD IS THE VIRTUOUS SOURCE OF CHARACTER. A character of such sterling worth and paramount influence, which, after the lapse of ages, is so immortal, drew its vital force from the Divine source. The first trait in his life, and one which claims the pre-eminence, is virtue. It is the undying element which gave stability, vitality, and nobility to his deportment. Moral purity can only flow from one source—trust in God. The language of that trust is, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." His thoughts, his motives, his desires, and his acts were pure, because he communed with God. You cannot build a character without virtue, and virtue is impossible without faith. The brightest intellect without virtue is only a meteor that will be lost in the darkness of its own sin-clouds. The most loving heart without virtue is only an electric spark which kills where it intended to give life. The highest endowments of life—birth, education, society, wealth, and friends—like the branches of a tree, will soon wither if the worm of impurity is at the root. Lives, otherwise noble, have come to the ground with a crash because there was no holiness in thought. The first act of trust is to give our own hearts to God, to be washed from sin. The experience which arises from this act leads us to seek, not a momentary discharge from guilt, but a life of perpetual purity. The only character worth having is that built on God. II. TRUST IN GOD IS THE TRUE INSPIRATION OF CHARACTER. When Hezekiah came to the throne the people had no fixed religious views. Their hold upon the land was precarious, for they owed

a stricter allegiance to a foreign king than to their own. The court was disorganised, the priesthood was neglected, and the people were intellectually and morally degraded. Reform was difficult; to bring back the hearts of the people to the God of their fathers was a great task. Trust in God as a source of action is the universal experience of the Church. That faith is a receptive medium of grace and power is evident, but it is power to be set forth in action. As rest resuscitates the strength of the body, so faith derives fresh supplies of grace from Christ Jesus. This state of comparative passivity, however, is but a link which unites the inner energies of the spiritual life to the corresponding outward activities. Soul-refreshing meditation and prayer result in wisdom and power; those who trust in God are partakers of the Divine nature. Faith lifts them up into participation of infinite wisdom and strength. III. TRUST IN GOD IS THE SOUL'S STAY IN TRIAL. Trials bear either directly on our persons or on our circumstances. IV. TRUST IN GOD IS THE FINALITY OF CHARACTER. Hezekiah slept with his fathers after he had fulfilled his mission and finished the work the Lord had given him to do. His life, like a graceful sentence, ended with a full stop. On what foundation are you building? The best materials will not make a safe building if built on the sand; your most sincere desires and efforts will not stand unless built on the Rock. The rock is Christ. Character is everything, and Christ is everything to character. Trust in God. (*T. Davies, M.A.*) *Trust in God*:—The late Rev. Hugh Stowell Brown of Manchester, at a public meeting, related an incident which very touchingly illustrates this hymn of Cowper's: "God moves in a mysterious way." One of the Lancashire mill-owners, who had struggled to keep his hands employed during the cotton famine, arising from the American war in 1865, at last found it impossible to proceed; and calling his workpeople together, told them he would be compelled, after the usual notice, to close his mills. The news was received with sadness and sympathy. To them it meant privation and suffering, to him it might be ruin. None cared to speak in reply; when suddenly rose the voice of song from one of the girls, who was a Sunday school teacher, and who, feeling it to be an occasion requiring Divine help and guidance, gave out the verse of Cowper's hymn:

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

All the mill hands joined in singing the verse, amidst deep emotion. *The secret of a successful life*:—Matthew Arnold's description of God used to be "A power not ourselves which makes for righteousness." We need not have so vague a thought of God as that, but God is a Power, not ourselves, making for righteousness; and he who heartily thrusts himself into the sweep of this current will be surely borne on by it, as a river bears a ship, into the success of righteousness. I. HEZEKIAH AVALIED HIMSELF OF THE FORCE OF THE DIVINE RIGHTEOUSNESS WORKING IN THE WORLD, AND SO STRUCK THE SECRET OF A SUCCESSFUL LIFE, BY A DISTINCT CHOICE OF GOD. "But he clave unto the Lord." And he did it notwithstanding all sorts of oppositions. His father, Ahaz, was one of the worst kings who ever sat upon the throne of Judah. Hezekiah's heredity was against him. Oriental and degrading idolatry was the atmosphere enwrapping his earlier years. His father's court was abominably corrupt. But "he clave unto the Lord." The first step in a genuinely successful life is Hezekiah's step—a distinct, self-surrendering, irreversible choice of God in the face of whatever oppositions. II. HEZEKIAH CARRIED OUT HIS DECISION. Having decided to cleave to the Lord, he kept cleaving to Him by constant action according to his decision (2 Chron. xxix., xxx.). Having come to the throne, he immediately begins to rule in the fashion a man cleaving to the Lord should. In every way he ranged his influence on the Lord's side. There was no waiting in Hezekiah; no putting off to a more politic or convenient season. What action his decision for God called for, that action got quickly begun. III. HEZEKIAH MAINTAINED UNWAVERING TRUST IN THE LORD TO WHOM HE CLAVE. Read the account of Hezekiah's trust in the crisis of the Sennacherib invasion (Isa. xxxvi., xxxvii.). And the Lord to whom he claved honoured his trust. To be sure Hezekiah made some slips. But it is no wonder the Lord to whom he claved brought him to such shiningly successful end as this. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) *Cleave unto the Lord*:—We may follow out the metaphor of the word in many illustra-

tions. For instance, here is a strong prop, and here is the trailing, litho feebleness of the vine. Gather up the leaves that are creeping all along the ground, and coil them around that support, and up they go straight towards the heavens. Here is a limpet, in some pond or other, left by the tide, and it has relaxed its grasp a little. Touch it with your finger, and it grips fast to the rock, and you will want a hammer before you can dislodge it. There is a traveller groping along some narrow, broken path, where the chamois would tread cautiously, his guide in front of him. His head reels, and his limbs tremble, and he is all but over, but he grasps the strong hand of the man in front of him, or lashes himself to him by the rope, and he can walk steadily. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Adhesiveness*.—I have seen a heavy piece of solid iron hanging on another not welded, not linked, not glued to the spot; and yet it cleaved with such tenacity as to bear not only its own weight, but mine, too, if I chose to seize and hang upon it. A wire charged with an electric current is in contact with its mass, and hence its adhesion. But cut that wire through, or remove it by a hair's-breadth, and the piece drops dead to the ground, like any other unsupported weight. A stream of life from the Lord, brought into contact with a human spirit, keeps the spirit cleaving to the Lord so firmly, that no power on earth or hell can wrench the two asunder. From Christ the mysterious life-stream flows, through the being of a disciple it spreads, and to the Lord it returns again. In that circle the feeblest Christian is held safely; but if the circle be broken the dependent spirit instantly drops off. (*W. Arnot.*) *Weakness linked to power*.—The Rev. F. B. Meyer remarked that he wanted to be merely their bigger brother—no shadow of "D.D.'s" between—only a little older, for he was within a week of his 57th year. He continued: "We who live in this part of London are very proud of our electric tramcars. They run heavily and swiftly. When in my own massive church (Christ Church, Westminster) I feel a tremor as they pass. I was riding in one with great composure the other day. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and, looking out, I noticed on the left-hand side a young working-man, evidently on his way back from his day's toil, his kit on his shoulder, riding on a bicycle of a very antiquated character, without tyres, and wobbling backwards and forwards. Presently the ticket-collector went on top, and the young fellow saw his chance. He sidled his bicycle against the swift, steady tram, caught the iron rail, and at once began to move along with a velocity and smoothness that startled the bicycle itself. It was beautiful to see how the massive strength of that huge train was connected with the bicycle by a touch. Presently we came to a curve and the man swept with it. As the tram went round the curve the bicycle went too. And I said in my heart, to Christ, 'Lord, I have had a good deal of the wobbling motion about my life, but from to-day I want to link myself for evermore with Thy mighty redemptive movement, that Thou and I may sweep on together.'" *Nearness produces resemblance*.—The eye by gazing into the day becomes more recipient of more light; the spirit cleaves closer to a Christ, more fully apprehended and more deeply loved; the whole being, like a plant reaching up to the sunlight, grows by its yearning towards the light, and by the light towards which it strains—lifts a stronger stem, and spreads a broader leaf, and opens into immortal flowers, tinted by the sunlight with its own colours. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. The Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went.—*The secret of well-being*.—That is a grand summing-up of a life. It is Hezekiah's experience which is thus gathered together in a couple of clauses. It may be ours if we like. Hezekiah fought his way to it, for his father was one of the worst kings that ever sat on the throne of Judah; and he himself began to reign at a time of national decadence and degradation. He struggled up from darkness that covered the people into the clear light of fellowship with God. So may we. I. THE DIVINE COMPANIONSHIP. "The Lord was with him." Of course, He is not far from any of us; for "in Him we live and move and have our being," as said Paul. But two people may be very near each other and yet be infinitely far from one another. And it is possible—and, alas! it is the experience of hosts of us—to be in fact all compassed about, like a frond of seaweed in the sea, with that ocean of the Divine presence, and yet to be at an infinite distance from God. His presence with us does not depend upon our consciousness of it, thank Him for that; but the blessing of His presence does depend on our being aware of it. But how many of us go through life, day in and day out, and never feel that He stands by our side. God's presence is not interrupted by any secularities of our vocation; but our consciousness of it is interrupted by the secularisation

of our spirits. He may be with us in all daily duty. II. WHAT BRINGS GOD. I have remarked that my text, by the "and" at the beginning of it, is hooked on, as being their consequence, to the previous words. These are very instructive if we note their sequence as analysing for us the steps in what the mystical teachers call the "practice of the presence of God." They give three stages. First comes "he trusted"—faith brings God. Then follows "he clave" to Him—persistent adherence and desire bring God. Nature abhors a vacuum; God abhors it more. When a man opens his heart, God rushes in to fill it, as surely as when you dip an empty pitcher into the sea you bring it up filled with water; whereas, if you put a bit of bladder over it you might dip it in a million times, and bring it up as empty as when you let it down. Desire brings God. Last of all, and consequences of the faith and persistent adherence, comes "he obeyed."

III. WHAT THE PRESENCE OF THE DIVINE COMPANION BRINGS. "And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went." Christianity, real religion, which is nothing more than this continuous consciousness of the Divine Presence, has a direct tendency to promote even the lower kinds of prosperity which the world seeks after. It is better, on the lowest grounds, to be good than to be bad. It is better, on the lowest grounds, to carry the thought of God into life than to live ungodly amidst the whirl of external events and duties. And we all know that, though with many exceptions, as necessary for our discipline, still, on the whole, the dispositions which are cultivated in the man who is ever aware of God with him, are such as in the main, and on the general, and in the long run, do contribute to the material well-being of individuals and of nations. But, as we have to get rid of mere sensuous ideas when we talk about God being with us, so we have to get rid of mere sensuous ideas when we talk about the prosperity that comes from His Presence. Hezekiah had his own share of what people call disasters. He was not always prosperous. There was once the Assyrian camp outside the walls of Jerusalem, and he was reduced almost to desperation. He had that great sickness, where he behaved in a very cowardly and effeminate and selfish fashion. And yet, on the whole, "God was with him, and he prospered!" Yes; for the invasion drove him nearer to God, and he then felt more of the Divine Presence. If we have God on board, and let Him take the helm into His own hands, depend upon it, adverse winds will bear us to our haven. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. At the end of three years they took it.—*The gains of perseverance* :—I do admire the perseverance of Shalmaneser and his successor. For three years they battered at its doors and waited patiently for success. Preaching the other night at Portsmouth, an unknown Christian came up to me after the service with sad face and tearful eye and said, "I wanted a word with you, Mr. Spurgeon. I have been working for two years in the London lodging-houses and I have seen no result." The people were crowding around me; I wanted to have a word with this one and the other, and yet others were pressing for a handshake, so I could not say much, but I hope that the message that was so casually delivered somewhat encouraged him. "For two years," I said, "you have been working and seen no result! Well, it does seem discouraging, but you must keep on." "But," he said, "there is not a solitary sign." "Well," said I in parting with him, "perhaps they will all come in a lump." Well, that was just an off-hand and unpremeditated way of answering him, but I think I saw a sparkle in his eye, and I hope he went away encouraged to believe that God was saving up a blessing for him, and that when it did rain it would pour. God grant it may be so here. "At the end of three years they took it." If I had thought of this text when the friend greeted me at Portsmouth, I think I should have spoken it. "'At the end of three years they took it.' You have only been labouring two; go on for at least another twelve months and then, if not before, the hard hearts of men will open and the brazen gates may yield." (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 13-16. Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah.—*The folly of defying God* :—As you stood some stormy day upon a sea-cliff, and marked the giant billow rise from the deep, to rush on with foaming crest, and throw itself thundering on the trembling shore, did you ever fancy that you could stay its course, and hurl it back to the depths of ocean? Did you ever stand beneath the laden, lowering cloud, and mark the lightning's leap, as it shot and flashed dazzling athwart the gloom, and think that you could grasp the bolt and change

its path! Still more foolish and vain his thought who fancies that he can arrest or turn aside the purpose of God, saying: "What is the Almighty that we should serve Him? Let us break His bands asunder, and cast away His cords from us!" Break His bands asunder! How He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh! (*Guthrie.*)

CHAPTER XIX.

VER. 1-37. And it came to pass when King Hezekiah heard it, he rent his clothes.—*A nation's calamities, counsellor, and God:—*I. THE EXPOSURE OF A NATION TO AN OVERWHELMING CALAMITY. 1. The nature of the threatened calamity. It was the invasion of the king of Assyria. This was announced in startling terms and in a haughty and ruthless spirit by Rab-shakeh. 2. The influence of the threatened calamity. (1) It struck the kingdom with a crushing terror. (2) It struck the kingdom with a helpless feebleness. II. THE BLESSING TO A NATION OF A RULER WHO LOOKS TO HEAVEN FOR HELP. What, in the wretched condition of his country, does King Hezekiah do? He invokes the merciful interposition of heaven. In this wonderful prayer (1) He adores the God whom Sennacherib had blasphemed. (2) He implores the Almighty for His own sake to deliver the country. III. THE ADVANTAGE TO A NATION OF A TRULY WISE COUNSELLOR. Whether Isaiah was a Divinely inspired man, and had a right in any especial sense to say, "Thus saith the Lord," or not, he may be fairly taken in this case as the representative of a wise counsellor, and that for two reasons:—1. He looked to heaven rather than to earth for his wisdom. 2. What he received from heaven he communicated to men. In the communication (1) Sennacherib is apostrophised in a highly poetic strain admirably descriptive of the turgid vanity, haughty pretensions, and heartless impiety of this despot. (2) Hezekiah himself is personally addressed, and a sign given him of coming deliverance. (3) The issue of Sennacherib's invasion is announced. Such was the communication which in language passionate, poetic, and powerful, Isaiah made to this perplexed and terrified nation. It involves two things: The deliverance of his country; the ruin of the despot. IV. THE STRENGTH OF A NATION THAT HAS GOD ON ITS SIDE. Who delivered the imperilled nation? Who overwhelmed the despot? "The zeal of the Lord of hosts." 1. How swiftly was the deliverance effected. "That night." 2. How terrible the ruin which that deliverance effected—"An hundred fourscore and five thousand men" destroyed. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers.—*The history of a letter:—*How easy to say, "the letter"; and yet, how much the words may mean! The postman, as he goes his rounds, would become the most melancholy of men if he thought much upon the budget he carries. To some houses joy, to others misery,—nay, to the same house joy treads on the heels of sorrow. We don't know what to-morrow may bring us; the postman's knock may be the knell of doom or the signal for peals of joyous laughter. What a letter was that which Hezekiah received! In form it would be very different to our ideas of a letter. The Assyrians did not use paper, or even skins, but did their writing on clay. You may see, in the British Museum, a conveyance of land, written, not on parchment, but on clay, and then baked hard. So it is very likely that the letter was a tablet of terra cotta. It has been thought by some that Rab-shakeh was the writer of these railing letters. This was trouble, but it was trouble that might have been prevented. Hezekiah ought never to have paid tribute to Sennacherib. When first the demand was made, he should have called on the name of the Lord. Let us learn to never submit to the claims of sin. We can never satisfy it. Much will have more. Sin, like Sennacherib, will take all you will give, and then come for more, and when it has got all it will come for you. The devil has no right to a penny of our money, or a moment of our time. I. WHAT DID HEZEKIAH DO WITH THE LETTER? He did not send a hasty answer. Many a quarrel might have been prevented if men would spread disagreeable letters before the Lord. Many a family feud would never have been brought about but for the want of this. If you get letters that give you pain, before you pen a reply send a message to God, and He will teach you to indite what may

turn away wrath. He did not send to Egypt; he was cured of that now. If some one who reads this is in trouble, let me counsel you to remember what is a command as well as a promise, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble." Far too many of us treat God as though He had no existence. We try everybody else before going to the Lord. "He went up into the house of the Lord." Where was he so likely to find God as in His house? There is much force in the promise, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not." It is a model prayer; not like many, which must try the patience of God, going all round the world, instead of fastening upon the thing needed, and asking for that. If our prayers were more like telegrams we should have speedier answers. The prayer of the pious king appealed to God for the sake of His honour—"that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the Lord God." How the Almighty is touched by an appeal of this sort. If we thought more of God's honour in our prayers, we should be more often answered.

II. WAS THE LETTER EVER ANSWERED? Yes, for Jehovah answered it Himself. He did not trouble Hezekiah to do it; and the answer is worthy of the Lord. There is a postscript to God's answer (see ver. 35). "It came to pass that night—they were all dead corpses"! Fancy if you saw in the newspaper to-morrow "Sudden death of 185,000 soldiers!" What a stir it would make! What a sight the camp must have been next morning. There has been much discussion as to how it happened. There is no mention of it in the Assyrian record. They were ready enough to boast, but when Sennacherib crept back to his palace, he did not instruct the historian to chronicle his disgrace. Herodotus tells us that the Egyptians, against whom Sennacherib was then at war, ascribed the destruction of their foes to the power of their gods. There has been considerable discussion amongst the learned as to the cause of the destruction of so large an army, and it is generally understood now to have been the simoon. Cambyses, king of the Medes, lost 50,000 men by one of these dreadful winds. But whether the wind was the messenger, or whether an angel had the wind in his power, it matters not; we read of "stormy wind fulfilling His word." God willed it, and nature hastened to do His bidding. (*T. Champness.*)

Vers. 15-19. And Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord.—*What to do when trouble comes*.—Hezekiah the King of Judah was in very great trouble. For some time the forces of the Assyrian had overcome the land and had taken the fenced cities: Jerusalem had been spared only on payment of a ransom that had greatly impoverished it. But that sufficed for a time only; and now the hosts of the enemy had gathered again and demanded its surrender. The city of Samaria had fallen and all the land was possessed by Assyria. It was an insult to the proud conqueror that Jerusalem alone should defy him. Round about the walls gathered their forces, and Rab-shakeh the commander had come near to the city and cried aloud in the ears of all the people his threats against them and his summons to surrender. To his blasphemies Hezekiah had given no answer. Leaving forces enough behind him to sustain the siege Rab-shakeh had marched off then to join his royal master elsewhere. But now Egypt was marching up to fight the Assyrian. Of that Jerusalem could know nothing; but Rab-shakeh was anxious to withdraw the army from Jerusalem in order to strengthen his own forces; and he wrote a letter, impudent and blasphemous, thinking to frighten Hezekiah into surrender.

1. The first thing for us to look at is this,—A king in trouble. Troubled soul, do not think within yourself that your case is peculiar,—all men have their troubles. Do not go envying any man, for no position will bring escape from trouble. But further, here is a good man in trouble. Turn to the beginning of the previous chapter and read the record of this man. The worst thing that could befall us in this world would be for us to have in anything our own way.

3. Again, here was a very great trouble. Not for himself was it that Hezekiah thought only or even mostly, though this was quite enough to think about. A crown and throne and all the proud position of king is quite enough to lose at one blow. But that was swallowed up in his concern about his people and the perils that beset them.

4. And it was a trouble for which there seemed to be no help. Samaria had fallen, and they looked in vain towards the north. (*M. G. Pearse.*) *Prayer in emergencies*.—The Christian believes in a revelation from God. Revelation unfolds many things which we could not discover for ourselves, explains or accounts for many actions or events which are puzzling without it. It takes us beyond second causes to the fountain head of all plans and transactions; it deals with

what we see not as merely hard dry facts, but facts with a meaning and purpose ; it tells of a higher, nobler, state of being belonging to us ; and of spiritual powers which have influence over us ; it speaks to us of Him " in Whom we live, and move, and have our being." What is prayer ? It is the means of holding communication with the unseen world—all worship may be called prayer, for it is the approach of man to God—the setting on foot a line of connection with our great Invisible Ruler. If we at all understand our real complex nature, the union of an invisible spirit with our outward bodies, we must see that our intercourse with the invisible world is all important, and that an acknowledgment of our dependence upon the Supreme Invisible Ruler is indispensable to our true and complete character. Prayer is a sign of weakness, but an instrument of strength ; it is a confession of our own inability, but a laying our grasp upon the strong and mighty One, able to do all things. We pray because we feel weak, but by prayer we feel strong. It is not for God's information, but for our security—not to persuade Him, but to prove our trust in Him—that we pray. It is of use because it thus brings us consciously within the circle of His willing influence. It is of obligation, because it is commanded by Him. Some men object to prayer as if it were useless. They say, " God has laid down certain rules for the government of the world—certain clear laws—and it is not to be expected that He should alter these laws for us, when we choose to ask Him to do so." But this surely is to make Almighty God a slave of His own creatures. The Lawgiver has always power and the right to suspend His laws if He will, and in this case the Lawgiver is such that it were an insult to Him to suppose Him unable to suspend the action of His laws in a particular instance without disarranging the whole machinery of the world, and putting it out of gear. Besides, His laws are framed not blindly but with that infinite foresight which would enable Him to foresee all prayers, all claims or entreaties for exemption from the working of His laws. In the case of men we might reasonably think that laws would be inoperative if exemptions were made at every turn, but in the case of Almighty God this conclusion would not hold. He may maintain the principles on which His laws are based, even while He suspends their action in special cases. Infinite Wisdom must needs be allowed elasticity in the observance of His own laws, and He may surely with all justice and consistency make His laws contingent upon man's actions ; and after all, the Supreme Lord keeps in His own Hands the continuance of any laws He makes, He gives force to His laws, His will is the motive power ; therefore, if He will, the law must become inoperative, if He will to listen to man's prayer, the answer must come. Now, prayer is generally to be regarded as a habit. But there is another kind of prayer—prayer in emergencies. Though our life is on the whole monotonous, *i.e.*, the same things happen day after day, the same needs come, and therefore the same prayers are needed, yet occasional occurrences intervene, requiring special attention and immediate thought and help. Then we must seek instant succour. To delay may be fatal ; to wait for our morning or evening prayer must be to wait till the special danger has gone by, or has fallen upon us. It becomes us, the moment the peril is recognised, to fall on our knees and call in the intervention of God Almighty. We have in the case of Hezekiah an admirable instance of the power and efficacy of prayer. But supposing the Assyrians had not been destroyed, but had carried on the siege and triumphed, would Hezekiah's prayer have received no answer ? God graciously sent a complete answer for the encouragement of His people, and for the discomfiture of the vaunting Assyrians ; but even if so direct an answer had not been given, the prayer of faith would not have been in vain. All that God promises is to answer—not to answer exactly as we wish. Suppose a danger imminent : sickness nigh unto death ; a shipwreck ; a fire ; an invasion of our country ; you would fain extricate yourself from the peril. There may be plenty to volunteer advice : first one and then another specific is suggested ; various lines of policy, all conflicting, all perhaps hopeless to all appearance. Yet there is another resource : take your anxieties and spread them before the Lord, take them especially into the house of the Lord. Another form of perplexity arises from mental or spiritual difficulties : you fail to see the truth of some Christian doctrine ; or you cannot discover what truth is ; opposite opinions present themselves, and there is a temptation to cast off all belief because you cannot come to a decision in your own mind as to which is the true doctrine ; some minds, for instance, have a difficulty in accepting the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, because it seems to be inconsistent with common sense that three should in any view be one—remember it is only above, not contrary to,

reason. Take the matter quietly before your God, kneel before Him in secrecy, and in faith ask His guidance, and then spread out the conflicting passages before the light of His mercy-seat, and be assured that somehow you will find light to direct you, for "the meek shall He guide in judgment." (*G. F. Prescott, M.A.*)

Hezekiah, or prayer in trouble.—I. THAT PRAYER IS THE BELIEVER'S PRIVILEGE. Viewing the children of God as participating in the troubles of life in common with others, it is indeed a most important privilege. Prayer has been called "the outlet of trouble, and the inlet of comfort"; it serves as the open window to a heated room, to remove what is oppressive, and admit what is refreshing. Prayer is a duty—not a mere duty, however, but a precious privilege; indeed all duties are privileges and blessings if rightly understood; God never assigns or commands anything which is not for the good of those on whom it is enjoined. Prayer is the choicest privilege of earth; it is the intercourse with heaven—the speaking to God as to a Father and a Friend; it is not only conformity to Christ's Spirit, but the joining in very act with Son and Spirit, at the very time and for the very object in which they are engaged. Christ not only prayed on earth, but is gone to pray in heaven, and has sent His Spirit to take His place below. Oh! let us look at Son and Spirit pleading; would they ever have assumed the office, but that they saw the helpless state of man, and volunteered to plead in and for him? They pray for man; it is their pleasure; and if man be permitted to conjoin with them in prayer, is it not a blessed privilege that he may so do? II. LET US CONSIDER HEZEKIAH'S CONDUCT AND PRAYER AS A TEST OF THE REAL STATE OF THE HEART. We are told, in verse 1, what was his great resource. Prayer was his habit; not the mere exclamation, nor sudden feeling when danger threatened, which men have by instinct, no! we are told "Hezekiah trusted in the Lord," "he clave to the Lord"; such expressions imply the habit of prayer; when trouble came he had not to commence an acquaintance with God. III. Let us consider Hezekiah's prayer as AN EXAMPLE OF THE MANNER OF PRAYER. But let us take Hezekiah as a model for our imitation. How did he particularise? "he spreads the letter before the Lord"; he takes each part, and reasons on it; and if we compare the particulars of the letter with what is specified in the prayer, we shall see the meaning of his spreading the letter before the Lord. His was not a general prayer for deliverance, but a specifying of particulars; thus had he abundant matter for his petitions, thus by opening all his case, he disburdened his own heart, thus he put God in remembrance, and involved His glory with His people's safety. Such should be the manner of prayer, then there will not be wandering or coldness. (*B. Jacob, A.M.*)

Hezekiah in trouble.—I. First, A SPECIMEN OF THREATENING COMMUNICATION is alluded to in my text, and recorded in the verses immediately preceding it. In introducing it to your notice, I admonish you, first, that the historical parts of the Scriptures are the records of God's dealings with His Church mainly, conveying only so much generally of the history of the world, as is needful to illustrate these dealings with the Church; and consequently that every event is to be viewed in accordance with this plan; otherwise we become bewildered and lost in reading the narrative of Holy Scripture, and we lose the object for which that narrative is perpetuated and recorded. If you look into the threatening letter of the haughty Assyrian, you will find it remarkable, as containing three of the topics, which are commonly dwelt upon by persecutors, when they desire to trouble the Church and people of God. The first of these three topics is the mockery of Hezekiah's faith, as mere fancy. A second particular in the letter is this: here is an attempt to work upon Hezekiah's fears. For the world, like faithful servants of the wicked one, will try, and do try, experiment after experiment, for the injury of the Lord's people; if ridicule will not prevail, terror will be used. Here is, further and thirdly, an attempt to confound the true religion with the superstitions of men, and the Lord Jehovah with the idols of the heathen: that so the visitations of judgment, with which the enemies of God are often permitted to vex and destroy each other, might be held forth as an additional discouragement from the exercise of faith in those who are "joined to the Lord." II. In the second place, my text affords us A SPECIMEN OF WISE DEMEANOUR IN THE PEOPLE OF GOD, WHEN THEY ARE ASSAILED BY PERSECUTIONS OR THREATENINGS FROM THE WORLD. No business whatever will detain us from the house and ordinances of God, if we have the fear and love of God in our hearts; because we need His blessing in all our transactions. And if at all other times, then especially we need it in seasons of affliction. III. In the third place, A SPECIMEN OF SIMPLE FAITH IS ALSO HERE PRESENTED; to which the spiritually-

minded among you will do well to take heed, as to that plan whereby we may most effectually remove our anxious cares off our own shoulders, and honour that word of grace and truth, given to every adopted child of God: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee" (Ps. lv. 22). That phraseology is very remarkable, in the superabundance of the promise above the matter involved in the exhortation—"Cast thy burden upon the Lord"; the answer to that would be—"And He shall sustain it, He will bear it for thee"; but the answer is more—"He shall sustain thee," thee and thy burden too. 1. Simplicity of faith is shown in the act under contemplation. It is left on record for the instruction of those who in after ages would glorify God in a troublesome world. 2. Faith suggests the efficacy of prayer. The Lord's people are thereby enabled to judge "Him faithful, who hath promised." 3. Finally, this faith may be exercised, and prayer presented, and that with good success, in the most apparently perilous circumstances. (*W. Borrow, M.A.*) *A king in prayer*:—Prayers have their histories. Their ancestry is trouble, struggle with circumstances, and helplessness. They mark epochs in our lives. They are born in those hours which leave an indelible impression upon us. The sublimest strains which men have uttered have been towards God in moments of agony. I. HEZEKIAH PRAYED TO JEHOVAH AS THE GOD OF HIS NATION. "O Lord God of Israel." 1. The nation bore the name of one of its progenitors that "as a prince had prevailed with God." Names and events around which cluster Divine deliverances may encourage us in prayer. Past manifestations of God's power may enlarge our faith. What God has been to our forefathers, our churches, our nations in times of trouble, He will be to us amid the perils of our day. History is a handmaid in the service of Faith. 2. His nation was Jehovah's peculiar dwelling-place—"which dwellest between the cherubims." The *Ske'inah*, the holy light, as a symbol of the Divine presence, ever shone forth from between those weird and colossal figures which Solomon had carved and placed on either side of the mercy-seat. God will protect where He dwells. While He remains, there is perfect safety. When He departs, there is ruin. (1) God dwelling in a nation saves it. God now manifests Himself, not by a material brightness, but by righteousness, purity, and truth. (2) God dwelling in a man saves him. Every Christian is a temple of God. The true cherubim and Shekinah are in the soul. (3) God dwelling in a Church saves it. No enemies can overthrow a Church that has the Divine glory shining in the midst of it. (4) We can appeal to the manifestations of the Divine presence to increase our confidence in God in times of danger. II. HEZEKIAH RECOGNISES, IN HIS PRAYER, THE SOLE SUPREMACY OF JEHOVAH. "Thou art the God," &c.; "and have cast their gods into the fire," &c. Each nation had its gods. Polytheistic ideas and customs prevailed in the nations surrounding Jordan. The gods were often destroyed when the nations fell which they were supposed to protect. The Jews alone asserted the existence of one supreme God. 1. Hezekiah asserted that Jehovah was the only true God. Polytheism was a foolish delusion. It probably arose from men's innate propensity to materialise spiritual things, from the worship of natural objects as the manifestation of the Divine power, from the sinful and insatiate imagination of men's hearts, from the deification of departed heroes, or from the attempt to give visible shape to applauded virtues. But there can be but one infinite and eternal God. 2. That He exercised supreme control over all the kingdoms of the earth. He was not only the God of Israel, but of all nations. III. HE APPEALED TO JEHOVAH AS THE MAKER OF "HEAVEN AND EARTH." Heaven and earth to the Jewish mind included all things. In this sublime idea of God is involved—1. That He is eternal. He existed before all things; delighting in the glory of His own nature before the worlds were made; no material form nor spiritual existence sharing that eternity with Him. 2. That He is separate from His works. The universe is not He, as the ancient pantheists taught, and as some teach now. He is immanent in all His creations, but independent of them. The maker is not His work. God transcends all beings and worlds. 3. That He is omnipotent. He who made the universe must be Almighty. Its greatness is inconceivable, and the power that produced it must be infinite. 4. That He has an absolute right to control all things. The maker has indefeasible rights in His productions. 5. That He has all things under His direct control. As He has created all forces, all laws, all agencies, all worlds, all angels, all men, He has them under His immediate direction, and can turn them "whithersoever He will." This conception of God afforded solid ground for Hezekiah's faith. IV. HEZEKIAH PRAYED WITH GREAT EARNESTNESS. Earnestness is

needed, not to lead God to observe our condition, or to create a disposition in Him to help us, but—1. That the strength of our desires may be revealed. 2. That we may be raised from the low condition of formal devotion. 3. That we may have all the spiritual culture which the outeries of real need may impart. 4. That we may be prepared to receive Divine deliverances thankfully. Hezekiah was stirred with the most powerful emotions as he prayed. His trouble heated his soul as a fire. V. HEZEKIAH RECOGNISED THE GREATNESS OF THE DELIVERANCE WHICH HE SOUGHT. "Of a truth, Lord," etc. To recognise the greatness of the deliverance we need will—1. Deepen our sense of helplessness in ourselves. 2. Stimulate the exercise of great faith. 3. Prepare us for the manifestation of God's great delivering hand. VI. HEZEKIAH ASSOCIATED THE GLORY OF JEHOVAH WITH THE DELIVERANCE WHICH HE SOUGHT. The reproaches which had been cast upon him had been cast upon God. But it was God's delivering arm put forth in answer to Hezekiah's faith and prayer—(1) that His people might learn to put their trust in Him, and (2) that all the earth might know that none could defy His power and prosper. (*Homiletic Quarterly.*) *Spiritual-mindedness a protection*:—Much constant communion will surround us with an atmosphere through which none of the many influences which threaten our Christian life and our Christian work can penetrate. As the diver in his bell sits dry at the bottom of the sea, and draws a pure air from the free heavens far above him, and is parted from that murderous waste of green death that clings so closely round the translucent crystal walls which keep him safe; so we, enclosed in God, shall repel from ourselves all that would overflow to destroy us and our work, and may by His grace lay deeper than the waters some courses in the great building that shall one day rise, stately and many-mansioned, from out of the conquered waves. (*A. MacLaren, D.D.*) *Laying down the burden*:—Dr. H. Clay Trumbull, the well-known religious leader of America who passed away the other day, related a story about one of his little daughters. "She brought to me a while ago," he says, "a geography book, having on its cover a picture of fabled Atlas, bearing the globe on his shoulders. Pointing to the overburdened man, with his bowed head, upstrained shoulders, and distended muscles, staggering under the weight that seemed just ready to crush him, she said: 'Papa! Why don't that man lay that thing down?' 'Well, my dear,' I answered, 'it would be a great deal better if he did. But that man has the idea that he must carry the world on his shoulders. There are a good many men of that sort, as you will find when you are older.' That child's question is a pertinent one to any of you who are struggling under oppressive burden of personal anxiety of any nature whatsoever. 'Why don't you lay that thing down?' 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.'"

Ver. 35. And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out.—*The destruction of Sennacherib's army*:—1. THAT THIS DELIVERANCE WAS MIRACULOUS, because—1. It was foretold with absolute certainty (vers. 22, 23). Certainty is not an element in human plans. "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow" (Jas. iv. 14). 2. It is described as having been wrought by direct superhuman agency. II. THAT THE DELIVERANCE WAS WROUGHT BECAUSE OF THE CHARACTERS OF THREE MEN. 1. The character of Hezekiah. 2. The character of David (ver. 34). So that David's character had an influence in saving Jerusalem at this time. 3. The character of Sennacherib. From his words here recorded, his pride, his daring opposition to Jehovah are revealed. Therefore the narrative most impressively bears witness—1. To the fact that God is influenced by human character in His government of the world. A God who would deal with His creatures without regard to their moral character would not command our reverence and love. What would be thought of a human ruler or father who acted thus? 2. That the administration of just punishment is compatible with, is indeed a necessary phase of, the purest benevolence. The angels of God are the most benevolent, because the most perfect, of God's creatures. But they can smite the transgressor as well as succour the afflicted. The removal of the instruments of tyranny from the earth is an act of pure benevolence. 3. That those who live morally above their age, will live beyond their age. David, although an imperfect man, lived upon a higher level of goodness than most of his contemporaries, therefore he has a part in the salvation of his much-loved city long after he ceased to reign in it. 4. He alone can turn the afflictions of life into blessings who has learned to pray. Hezekiah's prayer had much to do with averting the catastrophe which threatened his people.

The message to him from God was, "that which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, I have heard." (*Outlines from Sermons by a London Minister.*) *The destroying angel*:—The ministry of angels, for good or evil, has always been a subject of mystery and of interest to the human mind. Throughout all the creeds of the Eastern world a belief in the active and frequent interference of the angelic host is generally held. The subject of angels occupies no inconsiderable portion of the Koran. Angels good or ill form the Suras of the Persians and the Rakshusas of the Hindoos. In the Old Testament of the Jews, in the New Testament of the Christians, angels are not uncommonly introduced. That God does make His angels ministering spirits, we have the authority of Scripture for asserting; but in what way they act, what appearances they present, what divisions they consist of amidst the varied orders of "thrones, dominions, principedoms, powers," we know not. Lessons to be learnt: I. THAT ANGER IS AT TIMES COMMENDABLE. We find the Deity moved to hot anger against the Assyrian host, taking vengeance upon the multitude that formed the Assyrian army. It is true, that to say, God is angry, or jealous, is but to speak after the manner of men, is but to attribute human motives to the Godhead. Yet, if we could imagine anger to possess the Deity, even in the sense in which we use the word anger, it would be no diminution of His Divine perfections. Strife against sin, against wrong-doing, against injustice, against the oppression of the weak, against falsehood, against hypocrisy, this was implanted in us for the noblest purposes, this, in fact, is a virtue, and not a vice. II. THAT WE SHOULD SEE GOD'S HAND IN ALL THE REVOLUTIONS OF HISTORY. III. THAT A HAUGHTY SPIRIT OFTENTIMES PRECEDES A FALL. Pride, in its egotistical wilfulness, vanity, in its ridiculous pretensions, must be rooted out of the character before any good Christian seed can be developed. Every one that exalteth himself, whether in a spirit of godless self-sufficiency like Sennacherib, or of religious self-complacency like the Pharisees of old, shall be abased; and every one that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Before honour is humility. IV. THAT THE DISPENSATIONS OF PROVIDENCE ARE SOMETIMES VERY SUDDEN IN THEIR ACTION. On the very night that Sennacherib encamped, filled doubtless with an idea of his own grandeur, and with a belief that he was about to add to his glory and power by a decisive victory on the morrow, in "that night" the angel of the Lord smote his mighty strength to the ground. "The only thing to be looked for in the conduct of the French on any occasion," says a cynical observer, "is the unexpected." Might not the same statement, in a greater or less degree, be made about all nationalities and about all individuals? V. THAT WE SHOULD LAY ALL OUR TROUBLES AND WEAKNESSES BEFORE GOD IN PRAYER. (*R. Young, M.A.*) *The destruction of Sennacherib*:—I. THE EVENTS OF THIS NIGHT DEVELOP THE FORCE OF WICKEDNESS. How rampant was wickedness this night. Wickedness has ever had great power in this world. Wealth, dominion, and numbers, have ever been at its command. Ever since the Fall, it has been, and still is, the power whose reign is the most extensive. Like the Assyrian hosts, it invades the most sacred scenes, and carries alarm into the most sainted spirits. The fact that wickedness is allowed such power on this earth shows: 1. The regard which God has for the free agency of the human mind. At first He was pleased to endow man with a power of free action and the attributes of responsibility, and although he has sinned and abused this power, the Almighty does not check its operations. He sets before man the good and the evil, and leaves him to make his choice. If he chooses the evil, and is determined to give himself up to it, He allows him oftentimes to run such lengths, that he becomes a Pharaoh, a Sennacherib, a Nebuchadnezzar, a Herod, or a Napoleon. The fact that wickedness is allowed such power on this earth shows: 2. The wonderful forbearance of God. How wonderful it is that He, who could with a word annihilate every rebel in His universe, should allow His intelligent creatures to live in hostility to Him and His universe. How great His forbearance! How great His forbearance with the Pharaohs who continued to oppress His chosen people for so many generations; with the antediluvian world; with the Jewish nation, &c. &c. Why does He not crush the sinner at once with the first sin? Why does He allow him to go on for years transgressing His laws? The answer is, "He waiteth to be gracious." "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count," &c. The fact that wickedness is allowed such power on this earth, shows: 3. The certainty of a future retribution. It will not always be thus. II. THE

EVENTS OF THIS NIGHT DEVELOP THE FORCE OF JUSTICE. "The angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians." 1. Justice will not always sleep. Indeed, it never sleeps; it only seems to. 2. Justice, when roused, does its work with ease. One angel or agent now destroyed these one hundred and eighty-five thousand armed men. 3. The work of justice involves ruin to the wicked, but salvation to the good. The waters that destroyed the old world bore in safety in its bosom righteous Noah and his family. The sea that engulfed Pharaoh and his host made a highway for the ransomed to pass through; and now the blow that crushed one hundred and eighty-five thousand men, delivered Jerusalem from destruction. III. THE EVENTS OF THIS NIGHT DEVELOP THE FORCE OF PRAYER. We learn from the preceding verses of this chapter, that when pious Hezekiah the king received haughty and blasphemous threats of his country's destruction from Rabshakeh, the minister of Sennacherib, that he took the letter which contained it, read it, and went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before God (ver. 14). 1. Observe Hezekiah's prayer (vers. 15-19). 2. Observe the answer (vers. 32-34). "Therefore, thus saith the Lord, concerning the King of Assyria," &c. From this subject we learn two things: 1. That wickedness, however triumphant, must end in ruin. 2. That goodness, however threatened, shall end in a glorious deliverance. "What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they? These are they which came out of great tribulation." (*Homilist.*) *God's method with hostile evil*:—As two carbon points when the electric stream is poured upon them are gnawed to nothingness by the fierce heat, and you can see them wasting before your eyes, so the concentrated ardour of the breath of God falls upon the hostile evil, and lo! it is not. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 37. His sons smote him with the sword.—*The death of Sennacherib*:—Why are we told of this fact? Holy Scripture, as a general rule, passes over the lives and deaths and exploits of the mere great men of the world in a most cursory way. Only one incident, for example, is mentioned in the life of Herod the Great. Nothing is told us of the Roman Emperor, Augustus, except his office and name; and not so much even as that of his successor, Tiberius. Why then have we related to us so particularly the death of this king, taking place, as it did, so far to one side of the usual path of God's word? The answer will be found by a reference to the past. If we consider, I. THE CHARACTER OF HIS LIFE. Two things had distinguished it towards man—excessive violence and much pride. You have seen pictures from those Assyrian palaces brought to light again of late years. A favourite subject in most is the victorious king, commanding his captives to be slain, or himself blinding them perhaps with his spear. These pictures, we may be quite certain, are only too correct. What the artist portrayed with such vigour had frequently been in his sight. That almost brutal bodily strength, those stiff and barbarous adornments, those merciless and unrelenting features, were observable, in that ferocious dynasty, to the life. And this Sennacherib, perhaps, of all these sovereigns, was the most successful, and so, the worst. II. THE CHARACTER OF SENNACHERIB'S DEATH. 1. We have seen the nature of his challenge. We have now to notice the reply. God replied, first, to his pride. Who can stand, the king had said, before me? God answered him, not in battle, not by spoken rebuke, but, as it was prophesied, by a "blast." 2. God replied, next, to his violence and bloodshed. "With what measure ye mete," &c. (*Matt. vii. 2*; see also *Judges i. 7*; *1 Sam. xv. 13*; *Matt. xxvi. 52*). The same kind of rule seems to have been observed in this case. After the king had returned to his own kingdom and city, the weapon he had so often employed was employed on himself. 3. Jehovah answered the man's blasphemy and profaneness. The challenge had been delivered, if not within hearing, certainly within sight, of God's house, in the ears and language of the people who sat on the wall. No answer came at the time. God, who sometimes waits to be gracious, often delays to destroy. (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER XX.

VERS. 1-19. In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death.—*The blessing of sickness*:—A Christian man of intense business enterprise and activity was laid aside by sickness. He who never would intermit his labours was compelled to a dead halt. His restless limbs were stretched motionless on the bed. He was so weak that he could scarcely lift his hand. Speaking to a friend of the contrast between his condition now and when he had been driving his immense business he said, "Now I am growing. I have been running my soul thin by my activity. Now I am growing in the knowledge of myself and of some things which most intimately concern me." Blessed, then, is sickness, or sorrow, or any experience that compels us to stop, that takes the work out of our hands for a little season, that empties our hearts of their thousand cares, and turns them toward God to be taught of Him.

Death:—The account leads us to consider death in three aspects. I. AS CONSCIOUSLY APPROACHING. Mark here three things—1. When he became conscious of its approach. 2. How he became conscious of its approach. It needs no Isaiah, or any other prophet, to deliver this message to man. It comes to him from all history, from every graveyard, from every funeral procession, as well as from the inexorable law of decay working ever in his constitution. (1) Men have much to do in this life. The "house" is out of order. (2) Unless the work is done here it will not be done yonder. 3. How he felt in the consciousness of its approach. (1) He seems to have been overwhelmingly distressed. "He wept sore." (2) He cried earnestly to heaven. In his prayer we note the cry of nature. All men, even those who are atheistic in theory, are urged by the law of their spiritual nature to cry to heaven in great and conscious danger. In his prayer, we also note the breath of self-righteousness. II. AS TEMPORARILY ARRESTED. Five things are to be observed here—1. The primary Author of its arrest. 2. The secondary means of its arrest. 3. The extraordinary sign of its arrest. 4. The exact extension of its arrest. 5. The mental inefficiency of its arrest. What spiritual good did these additional fifteen years accomplish for the king? They might have done much, they ought to have done much. III. AS ULTIMATELY TRIUMPHANT. "And Hezekiah slept with his fathers." The end of the fifteen years came, and he meets with the common destiny of all. The unconquered conqueror is not to be defrauded of his prey, however long delayed. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Hezekiah's prayer answered:—The prayer of Hezekiah thus signally answered gives us instruction upon several points, of which this is—1. TO LOVE LIFE IS A DUTY. Of course, Hezekiah's anxiety to live does not prove this. Good men are not so good that we can be sure of the rectitude of all their desires. They may be over-anxious to live, as they may be too ready to die. Luther and Whitefield erred upon the side of over-willingness to die. But the fact that God respected Hezekiah's wish to live proves that his wish was dutiful and right. His love of life was not weakness; it was not self-will; it was not the mere wish for a longer experience of accustomed pleasure. Had it been any of these, his prayer would have been unheard. He sought for life because life was worth living; he had a motive for life. It was for him a great opportunity. Nothing in the New Testament reverses or modifies the teaching of the Old Testament, that long life is a blessing, a gift of God, a mark of Divine favour. It is said of the godly man: "Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation." When queenly Wisdom stretches forth her hands to give rewards to her loving and loyal subjects, "Length of days is in her right hand," as her most excellent gift. There is in the Bible no pessimistic philosophy of life. It is true that the Bible dwells much upon the shortness of life. Death is a fact which it will not let us forget. But Scriptural reflections upon the littleness of life and the nearness of its end are not intended to lessen our love of life, or to make us look upon it as unimportant. Their purpose is to counteract such views. They teach us to "number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Long life is not too long for the full accomplishment of life's great end. There is nothing in the approach of age which ought to lessen the love of life, if life's powers remain. The good workman glances now and then at the sun sinking in the west as day declines, only that he may set a higher value upon the remaining minutes, because they are few. He wishes for a full day, and the lengthening shadows set him the more zealously

about remaining tasks. The biographers of Lyman Beecher have said of him : " He was so hungry to do the work of Him that sent him that he really seemed sometimes to have little appetite for heaven. Thus, after he was seventy years old, one of his children congratulated him that his labours were nearly over, and that he would soon be at rest. To his son's surprise the old man replied quickly, ' I don't thank my children for sending me to heaven till God does.' " In the lecture-room of Plymouth Church, when very near the end of his life, he said, " If God should tell me that I might choose . . . that is, if God said it was His will that I should choose, whether to die and go to heaven, or to begin my life over again, I would enlist again in a minute." We are not called upon to love life less because power fails, and we must lay aside accustomed tasks. Let us not measure life by the strength with which we pursue an earthly career. The refining of character may go on better when life's active powers decline. As we ponder the prayer of Hezekiah, a second thought arises : II. SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD IN REGARD TO THE TERM OF LIFE IS A MODERATE WISH TO LIVE AS LONG AS WE CAN. It is easy to mistake the true nature of resignation, and to give it a meaning which it should not have. Submission to God's will is not the suspension of personal will-power. It is not the absence of choice or preference. Holiness is not passivity. Richard Baxter once wrote :—

Lord it belongs not to my care
Whether I live or die.

Perhaps an utterance which is poetic, or at least metrical, ought not to be judged by prosaic rules ; but as an unguarded statement its sentiment is false. It ought to have been a part of his care to live long and well. In so doing he would have been submissive to the will of God. There are means to be used to keep life and health. We ought to use them not unconcernedly, but with a strong wish to live. This is resignation to God's will. In " desiring life, and loving many days that he might see good," Hezekiah did not feel that he was disobedient or un-submissive. III. Hezekiah's plea that he had lived a good life WAS AN ARGUMENT THAT PREVAILED WITH GOD. It is worthy of remark that the prayers recorded in the Old Testament are full of argument. Men approach God with reasons. They tell Him why He should grant their requests. Evidently they think Divine wisdom "easy to be entreated." They recount mercies past as a reason for expecting renewed favours. They speak of His goodness. Of their great needs they make a plea. By the littleness and brevity of life they lay claim to mercy. So Hezekiah did not hesitate to find in his past life reasons for its continuance. Evidently he did not think that goodness makes the term of life shorter, or more uncertain. " Whom the gods love die young," is not a Christian proverb, but its sentiment is to be found in many sayings current among us. Now there are saintly souls living upon the earth " of whom the world " is " not worthy." But so much the greater the world's need of their saintly lives. And God has great consideration for the world's need. The answer to Hezekiah's prayer suggests a fourth consideration : IV. THE GOOD PHYSICIAN HAS NO CONTROVERSY WITH THE EARTHLY PHYSICIAN IN THE WISE USE OF MEANS. Isaiah practised the art of healing. He followed the best medical knowledge of his time. He caused the attendants to take a lump of figs and place it upon the sore, and Hezekiah recovered. He applied a well-known and useful remedy. No doubt there are persons who would be better satisfied with the record of this case of healing if the lump of figs had been left out. They fear that every case of healing claimed by science must be surrendered by religion, and that, when other means are efficacious, prayer is obviously of no avail. They make haste to conclude that, if the lump of figs healed Hezekiah, then God did not. The inspired record is not solicitous about entrenching religion against the attacks of science. If religion should say that prayer worked the healing, and that means were of no use : and if science should say that the lump of figs wrought the cure, and that prayer was of no avail—both would be right in what they asserted, and no less would both be wrong in what they refused to admit. Had Isaiah known that the remedy would have cured without prayer, his delay in using it would have been inexcusable. Had he known that prayer would have been as efficacious without the remedy, he had no sufficient reason for making use of the lump of figs at last. The healing was wrought by the Lord of Life ; and not less by Him that He chose to work through the ordinary appointed means. V. THE BEST RESULTS OF HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER ARE UNRECORDED. We find a hint of

them in the broken sentences of Isaiah's page. "What shall I say: He hath both spoken unto me and Himself hath done it. I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. The Lord was ready to save me; therefore will we sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord." He walked before the Lord in solemn gladness. In those remaining years God was nearer to him than before. He knew the tenderness of God, who had heard his prayers and had seen his tears. He knew the grace of God, for by His favour he walked in newness of life. He knew the power of God, whose high prerogative it was to turn backward or forward at His will the dial of his life. How great the power of prayer, which still appeals to the heart of God and persuades Him to make known His way "upon earth," His "saving health among all nations." And how infinite the grace of God, who in time past for this chosen servant turned backward for an hour the shadow of the sun, but who, in these last days, has set for ever in the spiritual heavens, above the horizon and within the field of vision for those who look in faith, the blessed "sign of the Son of Man." (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Attachment to life*:—The young man, till thirty, never feels practically that he is mortal. He knows it, indeed, and, if need were, he could preach a homily on the fragility of life; but he brings it not home to himself, any more than in a hot June we can appropriate to our imagination the freezing days of December. But now, shall I confess a truth? I feel these audits but too powerfully; I begin to count the probabilities of my duration, and to grudge at the expenditure of moments and shortest periods like miser's farthings. In proportion as the years both lessen and shorten I set more count upon their periods, and would fain lay my ineffectual finger upon the spoke of the great wheel. I am not content to pass away "like a weaver's shuttle." Those metaphors solace me not, nor sweeten the unpalatable draught of mortality. I care not to be carried with the tide that smoothly bears human life to eternity, and rebel at the inevitable course of destiny. I am in love with this green earth, the face of town and country, the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacle here; I am content to stand still at the age to which I am arrived, to be no younger, no richer, no handsomer. I do not want to be weaned by age, or drop, like mellow fruit, as they say, into the grave! Any alteration on this earth of mine, in diet or in lodging, puzzles and discomposes me. My household goods plant a terribly fixed foot, and are not rooted up without blood. They do not willingly seek Lavinian shores. A new state of being staggers me; sun and sky, and breezes and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the juices of meats and fishes, and society, and the cheerful glass, and candlelight, and firelight conversations, and jests and irony—do not these things go out with life? Can a ghost laugh, or shake his gaunt sides when you are pleasant with him? (*Charles Lamb.*) Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.—*A house and a soul compared: or, the Christian's preparation for death*:—Hezekiah was in the meridian of life, and probably as yet had made no arrangement in regard to the succession to the throne. This message was to this effect—"Give charge concerning thine house. If you have any direction to give in regard to the succession to the crown, or in regard to domestic and private arrangements, let it be done soon." I shall, however, take this message in the secondary or more important sense, and then, I need not remind you, that by the expression "thine house" we are to understand his inner man—the state of his soul before God. I think that this object is most likely to be attained by drawing the analogy. I. I would observe that IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF A HOUSE, THAT IT BE BUILT UPON A GOOD FOUNDATION, and not upon a sandy soil; so is it equally necessary that the foundation upon which the believer places the eternal interest of his soul be built upon the best of all foundations, even Jesus Christ; "for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Consider what it is to build upon Him. To have our foundation on Jesus Christ is not to hope that we may attain heaven and happiness by a partial conformity with the will of the Saviour, whilst we are at the same time devoting ourselves to the pleasures of the world; it is to feel that we are vile, worthless, and polluted creatures of the earth, whose very best action in itself has the nature of sin; it is to be so assured that our works can have no part in obtaining salvation as to strip us of all self-confidence and conceit, and lead us to place our whole dependence on the finished work, and the all-sufficient righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. II. But I observe, THAT AFTER A HOUSE IS ERECTED, HOWEVER WELL AND COSTLY IT

MAY BE BUILT, IT REQUIRES TO BE KEPT IN GOOD ORDER, AND IN CONSTANT REPAIR. So it is with the soul, wonderful in its origin, for it was made by God; and majestic even in its ruins, through the fall of man: "redeemed not with corruptible things, such as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the adorable Saviour." III. I observe, THAT LIGHT IS ESSENTIAL TO A HOUSE. The clearer the glass of which the windows are composed, and the less obstruction there is, the sooner will be discovered the slightest particle of dust, and every flaw in the dwelling. So it is with the soul; the clearer the light of the Holy Spirit shines into the conscience the more accurately will sin be detected; that which was thought a trifling and innocent thing before, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit will appear in its true light, as defiled and destructive. IV. NO HABITATION WOULD BE COMPLETE UNLESS SUPPLIED WITH WATER; TO CLEANSE AND PURIFY IT, as also to refresh its inhabitants, and to administer to their comforts. And how can the soul thirsting after the water of life be satisfied without a fresh and daily supply from the Fountain of living waters, even that water which Christ has given him—a well springing up unto everlasting life. V. I would observe THAT MUCH OF THE COMFORT OF A HOUSEHOLD DEPENDS ON EVERYTHING BEING REGULATED BY JUDICIOUS AND CAREFUL MANAGEMENT. So it is with the soul. "Let everything be done decently and in order," is the apostle's injunction; and of how much more importance is it, that the spiritual exercises of the child of God should be under the control of a wise and well directed judgment. VI. I would observe THAT IN THE ANCIENT MANSIONS OF THE GREAT, THE HALL WAS APPROPRIATED TO THE ARMOURY, which was kept clean, bright, and ready for the master's use. This reminds us of the Christian's armour: his weapons are not carnal, but spiritual; not weak, but mighty through God to the pulling down the strongholds of Satan; nevertheless, they must not only be kept bright, but constantly worn. VII. I would remark THAT IN A HOUSE THERE IS A NECESSITY FOR FIRE. In the same manner in the soul there ought to be a flame of holy love, a zeal for God's truth. (*J. R. Starey.*) *Set thy house in order—A New Year's sermon.*—There are two points which it is here proper to consider. 1. What views and FEELINGS NATURALLY POSSESS A MAN WHO IS CONSCIOUS THAT HIS END IS NEAR. If his mind has an ordinary share of sensibility, he will dismiss his worldly cares and turn his thoughts to the contemplation of eternity. He is no longer interested in a world he is so soon to leave. The calculations and pursuits of men, their joys, their griefs, their disappointments, their success, their hurry, their hopes, their fears, all appear as idle as the sports of children. The world is lighter to him than a feather. Neither losses nor disappointments nor prosperity has power to affect him. You see him not pressing from business to business in a rage to be rich. You see him not stretching after preferment. His pride is reduced. You see him no longer assuming haughty airs, no longer fretted at every supposed neglect. Meekness and gentleness mark his deportment. No longer can unbelief or the world hide a prospect of death, or seduce his thoughts from God. He looks death in the face. He turns his anxious eye to explore eternal objects. He raises an earnest look to heaven. He ardently betakes himself to prayer and to reading his Bible. All his anxiety is to prepare for his approaching fate. You all perceive that these are rational exercises for a dying man; why then not for you? It is to dying men that I am speaking. I can say to you all, "As the Lord liveth, and as" your "soul liveth, there is but a step between" you "and death." II. Let us consider WHAT MEASURES A MAN WILL NATURALLY TAKE TO SET HIS HOUSE IN ORDER, who, with proper views, is conscious that his end is near. 1. It would be natural for him, as an honest man, to wish to settle all his accounts. This might be necessary to secure his creditors and to prevent insolvency. 2. A dying man, in setting his house in order, would be desirous to dispatch all important, unfinished business, which could not be accomplished by others after his death. So do you. 3. It is common for dying Christians to call their families around them and impart to them their final counsel. Thus do ye. 4. It is customary for men, when setting their house in order, to make their wills. I have no advice to give as to the disposition of your worldly estate. But I solemnly charge you to bequeath to God your immortal souls with all their faculties, and your bodies, to sleep in His arms, in expectation of a joyful resurrection. 5. It is not uncommon for people, when they view their end approaching, to prepare their shroud, and make every provision for their funeral obsequies, that nothing may be left to be done in the distress and confusion of the mournful day. (*E. D. Griffin, D.D.*) *The*

house in order :—I would like to know that your Christian work is in order, that you would leave things so that others could carry them on. Have I ever told you about the obituary notice—though it was only a sort of passing paragraph in the newspaper—of a fisherman on the New Zealand coast? They told of how his body had been found in the bush; how his boat, drawn up to the shore, was near to him. This significant sentence followed, "His nets were set." I remember the thrill that went through me when I read it first. "His nets were set." He had gone out to his daily duty, put his nets in order—not left them in a tangled heap on the shore, needing washing or mending or both. They were set, and his successor had but to draw them in presently and secure the spoil of the sea. Are your nets set? If you were to pass away during this week, would it be your fault that the work could not be continued? Do your duty to the last. Do it thoroughly, do it patiently, do it perfectly, that it may be said of you, as of Whitefield, Wesley, M'Cheyne, and a thousand others, that you virtually died in harness.

All that remains for me
Is but to love and sing,
And wait until the angels come
To bear me to their King.

I want your house to be in order, your business to be in order, your church and Christian work to be in order, and I want most of all for all my hearers that their hearts shall be in order. (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 11. **He brought the shadow ten degrees backward.**—*The sundial of Ahaz* :—Here is the first timepiece of which the world has any knowledge. But it was a watch that did not tick and a clock that did not strike. It was a sundial. Ahaz the king invented it. Between the hours given to statecraft and the cares of office he invented something by which he could tell the time of day. This sundial may have been a great column, and when the shadow of that column reached one point it was nine o'clock a.m., and when it reached another point it was three o'clock p.m., and all the hours and half-hours were so measured. Or it may have been a flight of stairs such as may now be found in Hindustan and other old countries, and when the shadow reached one step it was ten o'clock a.m., or another step it was four o'clock p.m., and likewise other hours may have been indicated. We are told that Hezekiah the king was dying of a boil. It must have been one of the worst kind of carbuncles, a boil without any central core and sometimes deathful. A fig was put upon it as a poultice. Hezekiah did not want to die then. His son, who was to take the kingdom, had not yet been born, and Hezekiah's death would have been the death of the nation. So he prays for recovery, and is told he will get well. But he wants some miraculous sign to make him sure of it. He has the choice of having the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz advance or retreat. He replied it would not be so wonderful to have the sun go down, for it always does go down sooner or later. He asks that it go backward. In other words, let the day, instead of going on toward sundown, turn and go toward sunrise. While looking at the sundial of Hezekiah, and we find the shadow retreating, we ought to learn that God controls the shadows. We are all ready to acknowledge His management of the sunshine. We stand in the glow of a bright morning and we say in our feelings, if not with so many words, "This life is from God, this warmth is from God." But suppose the day is dark? You have to light the gas at noon. The sun does not show himself all day long. There is nothing but shadow. How slow we are to realise that the storm is from God and the darkness from God and the chill from God. I cannot look for one moment on that retrograde shadow on Ahaz's dial without learning that God controls the shadows, and that lesson we need all to learn. But I want to show you how the shadows might be turned back. 1. First, by going much among the young people. Remain young. Better than arnica for your stiff joints and catnip tea for your sleepless nights will be a large dose of youthful companionship. Set back the clock of human life. Make the shadow of the sundial of Ahaz retreat ten degrees. People make themselves old by always talking about being old and wishing for the good old days, which were never as good as these days. 2. Set back your clocks also by entering on new and absorbing Christian work. In our desire to inspire the young we have in our essays had much to say about what has been accom-

plished by the young : of Romulus, who founded Rome when he was twenty years of age ; of Cortes, who had conquered Mexico at thirty years ; of Pitt, who was Prime Minister of England at twenty-four years ; of Raphael, who died at thirty-seven years ; of Calvin, who wrote his *Institutes* at twenty-six ; of Melancthon, who took a learned professor's chair at twenty-one years ; of Luther, who had conquered Germany for the Reformation by the time he was thirty-five years. And it is all very well for us to show how early in life one can do very great things for God and the welfare of the world, but some of the mightiest work for God has been done by septuagenarians and octogenarians and nonagenarians. Indeed, there is work which none but such can do. They preserve the equipoise of Senates, of religious denominations, of reformatory movements. Young men for action, old men for counsel. Instead of any of you beginning to fold up your energies, arouse anew your energies. 3. But while looking at this sundial of Ahaz, and I see the shadow of it move, I notice that it went back toward the sunrise instead of forward toward the sunset—toward the morning instead of toward the night. I have seen day break over Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn, over the heights of Lebanon, over Mount Washington, over the Sierra Nevadas, and mid-Atlantic, the morning after a departed storm when the billows were liquid Alps and liquid Sierra Nevadas, but the sunrise of the soul is more effulgent and more transporting. It bathes all the heights of the soul and illumines all the depths of the soul and whelms all the faculties, all the aspirations, all the ambitions, all the hopes with a light that sickness cannot eclipse or death extinguish or eternity do anything but augment and magnify. I preach the sunrise. As I look at that retrograde movement of the shadow on Ahaz's dial, I remember that it was a sign that Hezekiah was going to get well, and he got well. So I have to tell all you who are, by the grace of God, having your day turned from decline toward night to ascend toward morning, that you are going to get well, well of all your sins, well of all your sorrows, well of all your earthly distresses. Sunrise ! Sunrise ! But not like one of those mornings after you have gone to bed late, or did not sleep well, and you get up chilled and yawning, and the morning bath is a repulsion, and you feel like saying to the morning sun shining into your window : " I do not see what you find to smile about ; your brightness is to me a mockery." But the inrush of the next world will be a morning after a sound sleep, a sleep that nothing can disturb, and you will rise, the sunshine in your faces, and in your first morning in heaven you will wade down into the sea of glass mingled with fire, the foam on fire with a splendour you never saw on earth, and the rolling waves are doxologies, and the rocks of that shore are golden and the pebbles of that beach are pearl, and the skies that arch the scene are a commingling of all the colours that St. John saw on the wall of heaven, the crimson and the blue and the saffron and the orange and the purple and the gold and the green wrought on those skies in shape of garlands, of banners, of ladders, of chariots, of crowns, of thrones. What a sunrise ! Do you not feel its warmth on your faces ? Scoville McCollum, the dying boy of our Sunday school, uttered what shall be the peroration of this sermon, " Throw back the shutters and let the sun in ! " And so the shadow of Ahaz's sundial turns from sunset to sunrise. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Fifteen years extension of life* :—In the autumn of 1799, when the well-known Rev. T. Charles, of Bala, was dangerously ill, and his life was despaired of, very earnest prayers for his recovery were offered up in his chapel. Several members prayed on the occasion ; and one member was much noticed at the time for the very urgent and importunate manner with which he prayed. Alluding to the fifteen years added to Hezekiah's life, he, with unusual fervency, entreated the Almighty to spare his pastor's life for at least fifteen years. He several times repeated the following words, with such melting importunity that all present were greatly affected :—" Fifteen years more, O Lord ; we beseech Thee to add fifteen years more to the life of Thy servant. And wilt Thou not, O our God, give fifteen years more for the sake of Thy Church and Thy cause ? " Mr. Charles was restored to health. He heard of this prayer, and it made a deep impression on his mind. He was more than ever industrious in every good work, establishing Sabbath schools, originating the Bible Society, and doing great good, not only in Wales, but in Scotland and Ireland as well. The last time he was in South Wales he was asked when he would be back again. His answer was, " Probably never. My fifteen years are nearly up." And it is remarkable that his death occurred just at the termination of the fifteen years. *Making more of life* :—If you have a bar of

gold and want to double its value, you may do so, no doubt, by doubling its length, but you may also do so by doubling its thickness, and in certain circumstances this may be more serviceable. Now life, in the same way, may be increased in value, not by being prolonged, but by being deepened. If two men live a year, but one of them puts into every day twice as much work and enjoyment and usefulness as the other, his life is of course far more valuable than the other. This is what Christ does. He deepens our lives. I well remember a friend of my own who had gone a great length, living what is called a fast life, and exploring, as he thought at the time, all the heights and depths of existence, but on whom God had mercy. I remember him saying to me with great earnestness, on one occasion, that he would not give one day of his changed life for all the years of pleasure that he had previously enjoyed. And that is the tone in which all true Christians are disposed to talk when they are contrasting their old lives with the new. Among men of the world it is a common enough question whether life is worth living, but among true and hearty Christians there is no such question possible. God makes their life golden, He deepens it, and that is what He means when in our text He says, "I am come to give life, and to give more abundantly." (*Stalker.*)

Vers. 12, 13. *Berodach-baladan . . . sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah. —Hezekiah and the ambassadors, or vainglory rebuked:—*Who among us would not have shown the strangers over our house, and our garden, and our library, and have pointed out to them any little treasures and curiosities which we might happen to possess? And what if Hezekiah was somewhat proud of his wealth? Was it not a most natural pride that he who was a monarch of so small a territory should nevertheless be able, by economy and good government, to accumulate so large and varied a treasure? Did it not show that he was prudent and thrifty; and might he not commend himself as an example to the Babylonian ambassadors, as showing what these virtues had done for him? Exactly so; this is just as man seeth; but God seeth after another sort: "Man looketh at the outward appearance, but God looketh at the heart." Things are not to God as they seem to us. Actions which apparently and upon the surface, and even, so far as human judgment can go, may appear to be either indifferent or even laudable, may seem to God to be so hateful that His anger may burn against them. We look upon a needle, and to our naked eye it is as smooth as glass, but when we put it under the microscope it appears at once to be as rough as an unmanufactured bar of iron. It is much after this manner with our actions. Yet another reflection which strikes one at the very first blush of this affair, namely, that God has a different rule for judging His children's doings from that which He applies to the actions of strangers. I can believe that if Hezekiah had sent his ambassadors to Berodach-baladan, that heathen monarch might have shown the Jewish ambassadors over all his treasures without any sort of sin; God would not have been provoked to anger, nor would a prophet have uttered so much as a word of remonstrance or of threatening: but Hezekiah is not like Berodach-baladan, and must not do as the Babylonians may do. Baladan is but a serf in God's kingdom, and Hezekiah is a prince; the one is an alien, and the other is a dear and much-cherished child. We have all different modes of dealing with men according to their relation to us. If a stranger should speak against you in the street you would not feel it, you would scarce be angry even though the statement might be libellous; but if it were the wife of your bosom it would sting you to the heart, or if your child should slander you it would cut you to the quick. We remark then that the act of Hezekiah here recorded is not upon the surface a sinful one, but that the sin is to be found, not so much in the action itself as in his motives, of which we cannot be judges, but which God very accurately judged, and very strictly condemned: and, again, we remark that this sin of Hezekiah might not have been sin in others at all, that even with the same motive if done by others it might not have so provoked God; but seeing that Hezekiah, above even most of the scriptural saints, was favoured with singular interpositions of providence, and distinguished honours from God's hand, he should have been more careful. His sin, if little in others, became great in him, because of his being so beloved of God. I. In order to bring out what Hezekiah's offence was, it will be best for me to begin by describing his CIRCUMSTANCES and STATE AT THE TIME OF THE TRANSACTION. 1. We may remark that he had received very singular favours. Sennacherib had invaded the land with a host reckoned to be invincible, and probably it was invincible by all the known means of warfare of that age: but when he came near Jerusalem

he was not able even so much as to cast a mound against it. This was a memorable deliverance from a foe so gigantic as to be compared to Leviathan, into whose jaw the Lord thrust a hook, and led him back to the place from whence he came. Beside this, the king had been restored from a sickness pronounced to be mortal. 2. In addition to all this the Lord gave Hezekiah an unusual run of prosperity. Hezekiah was in all respects a prosperous monarch; the man whom the King of kings delighted to honour. This great prosperity was a great temptation, far more difficult to endure than Rabshakeh's letter, and all the ills which invasion brought upon the land. Many serpents lurk among the flowers of prosperity; high places are dangerous places; it is not easy to carry a full cup with a steady hand. 3. We must not forget that Hezekiah, at this time, had become singularly conspicuous. To be favoured as he was might have been endurable, if he could have lived in retirement; but he was set as upon a pinnacle, since all the nations round about must have heard of the destruction of Sennacherib's host. 4. Hezekiah had remarkable opportunities for usefulness. How much he might have done to honour the God of Israel! He ought to have made the courts of princes ring with the name of Jehovah. He should have placed himself in the rear of the picture, and have filled the earth with his testimony to the glory of his God. How well he might have exclaimed, in the language of triumphant exultation, "Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?" Which of these delivered the nations from Sennacherib? Which of these could raise up their votaries from mortal sickness? Which of these could say to the sun's shadow, Go thou back upon the dial of Ahaz? But Jehovah ruleth over all; He is King in heaven above, and in the earth beneath. 5. He, above all men, was under obligation to have loved his God and to have devoted himself wholly to Him. All life is sacred to the Giver of Life, and should be devoted to Him; but life supernaturally prolonged should have been in an especial manner dedicated to God. We must not too hastily condemn Hezekiah. It is for God to condemn but not for us, for I am persuaded had we been in Hezekiah's place we should have done the same. Observe now wherein his loftiness would find food. Here he might have said to himself, "Within my dominions the greatest of armies has been destroyed and the mightiest of princes has been humbled. He whose name was a sound of terror in every land came into my country, and he melted away like the snow before the sun. Great art thou, O Hezekiah! great is thy land, for thy land has devoured Sennacherib, and put an end to the havoc of the destroyer." Remember also that he had this to try him above everything else—he had the certainty of living fifteen years. I have already given you a hint of the danger of such certainty. Mortals as we are, in danger of dying at any moment, yet we grow secure; but give us fifteen years certain, and I know not that heaven above would be high enough for our heads, or whether the whole world would be large enough to contain the swellings of our pride. We should be sure to grow vaingloriously great if the check of constant mortality were removed. Then when Hezekiah surveyed his stores, he would see much to puff him up, for worldly possessions are to men what gas is to a balloon. Ah, those who know anything about possessions, about broad acres, gold and silver, and works of art, and precious things, and so on, know what a tendency there is to puff up the owners thereof. 6. To complete our description of the circumstances, it appears that at this time God left His servant in a measure, to try him. "Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart." II. We must now turn to consider THE OCCURRENCE ITSELF AND THE SIN WHICH AROSE OUT OF IT. Babylon, a province of Assyria, had thrown off the Assyrian yoke, and Berodach-baladan was naturally anxious to obtain allies in order that his little kingdom might grow strong enough to preserve itself from the Assyrians. He had seen with great pleasure that the Assyrian army had been destroyed in Hezekiah's country, and very probably, not recognising the miracle, he thought that Hezekiah had defeated the host, and so he sent his ambassadors with a view to make a treaty of alliance with so great a prince. The ambassadors arrived. Now in this case the duty of Hezekiah was very clear. He ought to have received the ambassadors with due courtesy as becomes their office, and he should have regarded their coming as an opportunity to bear testimony to the idolatrous Babylonians of the true God of Israel. He should have explained to them that the wonders which had been wrought were wrought by

the only living and true God, and then he might have said, in answer to Isaiah's question, "What have they seen in thine house?" "I have told them of the mighty acts of Jehovah. I have published abroad His great fame, and I have sent them back to their country to tell abroad that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." He should have been very cautious with these men. They were idolaters, and therefore not fit company for the worshippers of Jehovah. We may perceive wherein his sin was found. I think it lay in five particulars. 1. It is evident from the passage in Isaiah xxxix. that he was greatly delighted with their company. It is said, "Hezekiah was glad of them." In this chapter it is said, "He hearkened unto them." He was very pleased to see them. It is an ill sign when a Christian takes great solace in the company of the worldling, more especially when that worldling is profane. The Babylonians were wicked idolaters, it was ill for the lover of Jehovah to press them to his bosom. He should have felt towards them, "As for your gods, I loathe them, for I worship the God that made heaven and earth, neither can I receive you into close familiarity, because you are no lovers of the Lord my God." Courtesy is due from the Christian to all men, but the unholy intimacy which allows a believer to receive an unregenerate person as his bosom friend is a sin. 2. The next sin which he committed was that he evidently leaned to their alliance. Now Hezekiah was the king of a little territory, almost as insignificant as a German principality, and his true strength would have been to have leaned upon his God, and to have made no show whatever of military power. It was by God that he had been defended, why should not he still rest upon the invisible Jehovah? But no, he thinks, "If I could associate with the Babylonians, they are a rising people, it will be well for me." Mark this—God takes it hard of His people when they leave His arm for an arm of flesh. 3. His next sin was, his unholy silence concerning his God. He does not appear to have said a word to them about Jehovah. Would it have been polite? Etiquette, nowadays, often demands of a Christian that he should not intrude his religion upon company. Out on such etiquette! But nowadays, if one cares about fashion, one must be gagged in all companies. You must not intrude, nor be positive in your opinions, if you would have the good word of fashionable people. Meanwhile, mark that Hezekiah sadly made up for his silence about his God by loudly boasting about himself. If he had little to say of his God, he had much to say about his spices, his armour, and his gold and silver; and I dare say he took them to see the conduit and the pool which he had made, and the various other wonders of engineering which he had carried out. Ah, etiquette lets us talk of men, but about our God we must be silent. 4. Surely also his sin lay in his putting himself on a level with these Babylonians. Suppose he had gone to see them, what would they have shown him? Why, they would have shown him their spicery, their armoury, their gold and their silver. Now, they come to see him, and he is a worshipper of the invisible God, and he glories in just the same treasures as those in which they also trusted. May you and I shun this sin of Hezekiah, and not try to match ourselves with sinners as to the joys of this present life. If they say, "Here are my treasures," let us tell them about the "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God," and say, "Our treasure is above." Let us imitate the noble Roman lady who, when her friend showed her all her trinkets, waited till her two fair boys came home from school, and then pointed to them, and said, "These are my jewels." Do you, when you hear the worldling vaunting his happiness, drop in a gentle word, and say, "I too have my earthly comforts, for which I am grateful; but my best delights are not here; they spring neither from corn, nor wine, nor oil; nor could spices, and gold, and music render them to be. My heart is in heaven, my heart is not here; I have set my soul upon things above; Jesus is my joy, and His love is my delight. You tell me of what you love; permit me to tell you of what I love." The Lord takes it hard on the part of His people if they are ashamed of the blessings which He gives them, and if they never boast in the Cross of Christ they have good cause to be ashamed of themselves. III. The third matter, THE PUNISHMENT AND THE PARDON. We may generally find a man's sin written in his punishment. We sow the thorns, and then God flogs us with them. Our sins are the mothers of our sorrows. Judgments being therefore threatened, Hezekiah and the people humbled themselves. If you and I would escape chastisement, we must humble ourselves. Yet although God removed the punishment as far as Hezekiah was concerned, He did not remove the consequences. You see the consequences of showing the Babylonians the treasures were just these: they

would be sure to go back and tell their king, "That little prince has a vast store of spice and armour, and all sorts of precious things; we must before long pick a quarrel with him, and despoil his rich hive. We must bring these choice treasures to Babylon; they will repay us for the toils of war." That was the certain result of Hezekiah's folly; and though God did forget the sin and promise to remove the punishment from Hezekiah, yet He did not avert the consequences from another generation. So with us. Many a sin which the believer has committed God has pardoned, but the consequences come all the same. You may have the guilt forgiven, but you cannot undo the sin; there it remains, and our children and our children's children may have to smart for sins which God has forgiven to us. A spendthrift may be forgiven for his profligacy, but he sends a stream of poverty down to the next generation. IV. GATHER UP THE LESSONS OF THIS NARRATIVE. The lessons which come uppermost are just these. 1. See, then, what is in every man's heart. O God, teach us to know our hearts, and help us, while we remember how black they are, never to be proud. 2. In the next place, tremble at anything that is likely to bring out this evil of your heart. Riches and worldly company are the two cankers that eat out the very life of godliness. Christian, be aware of them! 3. Should we not be taught by this narrative to cry out every day against vainglory? Ah, it is not those standing in prominent spheres who are alone in danger of it, but all others. 4. And then supposing that you should have given way to it, see the sorrow which it will bring you; and if you would escape that sorrow, imitate Hezekiah, and humble yourself. 5. Lastly, let us cry to God never to leave us. "Lord, take not Thy Holy Spirit from us! withdraw not from us Thy restraining grace!" (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Royal congratulations and national ostentation*.—Hezekiah at one time had trouble on trouble. In the days when his capital was besieged he was stricken down, not by the weapons of the enemy, but by the hand of disease. He felt it a great denial to be unable to go forth and lead his people. The prophet told him that he would have to die. Life was sweet. Usefulness was sweeter still. He prayed and wept. His prayer was heard. As an assurance of the Divine working a sign was given; time was recalled, and the shadow of the dial was put back. Hezekiah recovered. The Assyrian army raised the siege. The king went up to the temple to show his gratitude, and then life went on smoothly until we hear of a royal congratulating embassy being sent to him from Berodach-baladan. Those of kingly rank often show a ceremonial courtesy when there is little real kindness. It looks well before the people. Still, courtesy helps to smooth the wheels of state as well as of life. Unmeaning courtesy should not obtain among Christians. A warm recognition after a service will often deepen the impression of a sermon, but a cold and off-hand salute can easily help to erase it. In some circles the repressive is exercised with such effect that it would need the force of a Vesuvius to break through it. In such circles the minutiae of etiquette will be watched, but the loving and hearty confidence will be wanting. Berodach-baladan sent a present to back up kingly congratulations. This was in conformity with the practice of the East. The King of Babylon wished really to bribe Hezekiah into forming an alliance with him. He wanted to strengthen himself against Sargon, the Assyrian king. He did not despise the help which a small kingdom and insignificant army could give in case of the breaking out of hostilities. Judah had been as a bulwark to check the advance of Sennacherib, and might serve the same purpose against his successor. Judah was a sort of Switzerland in Asia Minor. Moreover, Judah was evidently under the protection of the God of heaven. In all this Berodach-baladan may have been honestly desirous to testify his regard; and although after events showed that Babylon was not to be trusted, it was under another king, who arose and knew not the man whom his predecessor had honoured. The embassy sent was one that must have cost Babylon a considerable amount, but it was able to accomplish its purpose. It might have been repulsed by the king of these strange people who sought to keep themselves from association with other nations; but, instead, the special embassy was welcomed. Hezekiah welcomed the men from Chaldea. He was delighted that a king who was accounted as one of the mightiest of the Gentile monarchs had recognised him. Moreover, he saw himself growing in importance. He was gaining prestige, and that is close akin to power. His little nation was beginning to rank with extensive empires. When vanity is appealed to, we are easily led away in a wrong direction. Men are more easily led wrong by those whom they suppose to be above them in rank. The proud lead to pride. 1. See how flattered vanity

betrayed a man into foolish openness and ostentation. Hezekiah showed the ambassadors "all his treasures." He had little to show immediately after the tribute levied by the Assyrian king had been paid, but somehow he had great treasures to exhibit to the Babylonians. His regalia, his armoury, his magazine, his stables, his treasures of gold in safe keeping, his spicery and unguents for luxury, everything he laid open. Had he had a great army or fleet he would have had a grand review. He only showed his treasures. Eyes feasted. Minds meditated. Greed was fostered. Folly was sneered at. Glances full of meaning must have passed from prince to prince. Interpret those glances. They mean: How well these things would look in Babylon; how they would help to swell the revenues of our master; how they would pay the cost of some war. Into what evil will pride betray us! It is a "spring-board at one time and a stumbling-block at another." We are all subject to its assaults. Our possessions, our powers, our position, our acquirements, our friends, our nationality, may all lead to pride. We must be watchful. We must not be ostentatious. At the same time, we are not to withhold showing friends that which may interest them, or which may help to cultivate in them a love of the beautiful, or gratify an exquisite taste. If we have pictures or albums, coins and curios, we may show them, but to display and point out evidences of wealth is as despicable as it is foolish. In much ostentation there is a hidden contempt for those who cannot succeed in gaining that which we have acquired. We worship our own skill and power. We forget that "time and chance happeneth to all." Pride makes us idolaters of self on the one hand, and despisers of our fellows on the other. The proudest of the proud are often those who have least to be proud of, but who are the "accident of an accident."

2. Further, we see that pride led Hezekiah to miss a grand opportunity of glorifying God. Here were heathens in his presence. He might have spoken of what wonders God had wrought for him: of the deliverance effected, of the health restored. He might have led them up to the temple to see the purity of the Divine worship. He might have told them of the laws of Moses and of their beneficent tendencies; of the traditions, history, and sacred proverbs his scribes had copied out. Nothing of the kind did he. He let slip a chance that came but seldom, and thus neglected to glorify his God. Alas! many have imitated him.

3. Searching questions as to proud action were soon put. The prophet comes. With what authority he speaks. How faithfully he probes the king's conscience. The royal sinner winces. He is not pleased at the prophet's interference in state affairs. What could Isaiah know of state and diplomatic reasons? Those who carry on all sorts of subtle arrangements and negotiations are not always pleased to have to "place the papers on the table," or to submit the results and the processes to the critical eye of the public. Isaiah was one of the public. He represented the public and God. He questioned boldly the king. He has no fear to check him, and he has no favour to ask. Noble Isaiah! Well is it for the king that he has thee to speak boldly to him, to lead him back to God and right principles when most in danger of wandering therefrom! Thou wert a greater treasure than all he had exhibited to his Babylonish visitors, but he had not brought thee forth to view.

4. Retribution was threatened. A Nemesis must follow pride. We are sure to have vexation from that through which the heart has been unduly lifted up. The very nation with which Judah, in the person of its king, had been dallying would be the cause of its overthrow. Babylon must always ruin those who bask in the delights of Babylon. The love of the world must bring bitter regret to those who neglect God. Years go over. Another king is reigning. There is terror on the walls, in the streets, and houses of Jerusalem. The tents of an enemy were whitening the hills around. Babylonian battering-rams were drawing near to the walls. Fires were being made at the gates to destroy them. Hosts like locusts were swarming all over the surrounding country. The land could not bear them. Famine stared the people in the face. They looked around for help. None came. Egypt was a "broken reed piercing the hand." Weeks dragged slowly by, and the sufferings of the besieged were daily intensified. At length a breach was made in the wall. Armed men innumerable rushed through. The people were butchered. The king was taken. His sons were seized and slain before his eyes. Then his own organs of vision were wantonly put out. The temple was desecrated and the palaces destroyed. Sacred vessels were piled in heaps and then fastened on camels and horses for transit to Babylon. The weapons in which he had trusted were broken up, and the objects of his pride were made the sign of his humiliation.

The prophet foretold all this. Hezekiah shuddered, but was compelled to confess the justice of his retribution. He could only say, "Good is the word which the Lord hath spoken." God's justice must be praised as well as His mercy. Hezekiah did not imagine retribution would come so surely and swiftly. Individuals make up the nation, therefore let us watch against pride—the pride that drove our first parents from Paradise, that drove a Pharaoh to be engulfed by the waves of the sea, that drove a Saul from his kingdom. (*F. Hastings.*) *Dangerous love of display*:—A visitor to London during the Queen's Jubilee testified that the diamonds worn by the women of the American colonies outblazed those of the royal family and the wealthiest of the English nobility. This growing love of display is one of the danger-signals of our time. To provide these women with such diamonds many a man stakes his soul in desperate gambling transactions in and out of Wall Street. The feverish desire which men often show for great and sudden riches is not infrequently at the bottom of the desire of some foolish women to outshine other women. If he succeeds, she wears the diamonds; if he fails, there is another account of a suicide in the morning paper. (*L. A. Banks.*)

Vers. 19, 20. Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken.—*The peace*:—The text is susceptible of two propositions. First, that peace is a blessing only on a basis of truth: "He said, Is it not good if peace and truth be in my days?" Secondly, that the godliest celebration of peace is to resume the social and religious benefactions interrupted by war. Hezekiah's "might" was diverted to the construction of "the pool and the conduit of water" for the relief of his people. I. THAT PEACE WITHOUT TRUTH IS NOT THE PEACE OF GOD IS CAPABLE OF ABUNDANT EVIDENCE AND ILLUSTRATION. As in a religious sense there may be "a cry of Peace, peace, where there is no peace," except the unnatural stillness of a moral stupefaction, a stifling of the voice of conscience, and a compromise of principle with "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience," and under whose influence, when the "strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace," such as it is—but it is at the best only the torpor of sordid subjection to spiritual bondage, the tranquillity of a dungeon, or the quiescence of a corpse, dead in its trespasses and sins—so in the political moralities of nations there may be a peace that has no truth in it, neither in the reality of its foundation, the assurance of its continuance, nor the uprightness of its conditions. That is a peace at the expense of truth which is not true to the eternal and inalienable principles of international rights—which is bought by the ignoble subsidy of subjection to wrong and injustice, or which consents to spare itself the possible cost and sacrifice of a generous intervention on behalf of the weak against the strong—which ignores the great plea of national brotherhoods, and asks with the first fratricide, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and which entails upon itself the malediction written against those who were "not grieved with the afflictions of Joseph." That is a peace without truth which "looks every man to his own things, and not every man to the things of others also"; and if this maxim be a canon binding on any one man in reference to any other man, it is equally binding on any one nation in reference to any other nation. II. Our second deduction from the text is, THAT THE GODLIEST CELEBRATION OF PEACE IS TO RESUME THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS BENEFLECTIONS INTERRUPTED BY THE WAR. Hezekiah so improved even a period of respite. "He made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city." If God condescended to put twice on record the mere municipal zeal of this pious prince; if the pool, the conduit and the water are counted worthy of a place in the compendious annals of Inspiration, we may be sure the activities of Christian benevolence in the same direction will meet with His gracious approval. It is a miserable mistake to suppose, that Christianity has nothing to do with the common tenements, the daily vulgar wants and homespun miseries of our fellow-men. It stirs our sympathy to listen to the recital of the far-off dark places of the earth and their habitations of cruelty; but it is not so easy to extort a sigh over the dark back lanes and more noisome and cruel abodes in the next street behind us. There are no Hezekiah's pools, except in fever-brewing abominations of the cesspool, nor other conduit except the constant exhalations of disease and death from the sluggish gutter, nor better homes than the vile hovels where in guilt and penury alike seek a covert to sin, and suffer and die. If the bitter mass of gratuitous suffering and mortality arising from a defective commissariat in the Crimea should drag into reluctant notice the amount of misery daily endured from a similar neglect of sanitary provisions in the crowded courts and alleys of the metropolis,

the poor battalions will not have perished in vain. They will have incidentally achieved an involuntary victory on behalf of their fellow-citizens, attended perhaps with more comfort than glory, but none the less precious for the public welfare. Oh! there is more hope of the Gospel gaining audience of the wild Indian in the cheerful freedom of his native forests, than of its penetrating the gross darkness of the denizens alongside the Thames, or the purlieus of the city. If we would speak with any hope of evangelising effect of "the pool of Siloam," and of "the Fountain of living waters," we must first tread in Hezekiah's footsteps, provide the pool and the conduit of sanitary necessities, the possibilities of popular decency and comfort, the practicableness of a family hearth and home, the humble means of health and cleanliness, of light and air and water, freely as God bestows them, and fully as a seasonable adoption of remedial agents would supply them. Such a celebration of the peace abroad would afford the happiest prospect of more peace at home, and co-operate with city missionaries and ministers of religion with the most hopeful pledges of success, in their more directly spiritual efforts for the evangelisation of our fellow-citizens. (*J. B. Owen, M.A.*) *Submission* :—"Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him: therefore there was wrath upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem." The prophet was sent to say to him, "Behold the days come that all that is in thy house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons which shall issue from thee—shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." This was the humiliating and distressing message to which the penitent king made the reply in our text, "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken." Shall I call your attention to the holiness and happiness of such a temper, and to the universal obligation on mankind to offer this homage to their God and King? In doing this I will, I. **EXPLAIN PRECISELY WHAT THE TEMPER IS.** It is a temper of universal and absolute submission to the will of God. There is a forced submission—a yielding because we cannot help it; but this is not the thing required. There is an acquiescence in the will of God when that will sends prosperity; but this is only a consenting that another should make us happy. The only true submission is that hearty acquiescence in the will of God which arises from supreme love to him. The reason why the wicked do not submit, is that they love themselves and their own enjoyments most. While such a temper continues, they must of course value their own gratification more than the Divine pleasure, and approve of the will of God only so far as that will is tributary to them. This selfishness is the root and core of all rebellion. When our own wishes and interests are less dear to us than that universal interest which is wrapt up in the Divine will, what can tempt us to unsubmission? what is there for us to oppose to that will? what interest have we to maintain against the wishes of God? But so certain as we love another interest better than that which the Divine will protects, we shall set up that interest against God, and resist whenever he lays his finger upon it. True submission then is the necessary effect of supreme love to God, and can arise from no other principle. This submission is to be distinguished from that morbid inactivity and aversion to care which, retiring from exertion, leaves God to be the only agent in the universe—which puts off burdens upon Him just as the indolent shift them off upon each other—which, instead of exerting a dependent agency with an eye fixed upon an overruling providence, leaves God to perform both His part and ours. That may be called submission to a providential dispensation, which really is indolence shrinking from an effort to change the posture of affairs. It is an essential part of God's plan, and for His glory, that creatures should obtain good by their own activity; otherwise there would be no use for their immortal powers. This activity He has therefore enjoined. "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," is the Christian's motto. II. **I AM TO DWELL A LITTLE ON THE HOLINESS AND HAPPINESS OF SUCH A TEMPER,** and the universal obligation on mankind to exercise it. To love the righteous will of God, in which are balanced all the interests of the universe—which is perfectly wise and benevolent and right—to love that will better than our own interests, and to subject our interests and wishes to that; must be holy if any thing is holy—must be pure and sublime benevolence. How generous and noble is the temper. How infinitely superior to the littleness and meanness of a selfish spirit. And it is precisely what God commands. If then holiness consists in obeying God, it consists in rendering him that supreme love which will produce the submission in question. What can be holiness, what can be goodness, if it is

not subjection to the will of eternal wisdom and benevolence? This submission to the will of God, so far as it operates, necessarily excludes all evil passions and conduct. For instance, it excludes all discontent. For one who knows that the providence of God is universal, and extends to the most minute events, and who is willing that the will of the Lord in all things should be done, and delights in that will more than in anything which that will can take away; what ground can there be for discontentment? If events are crossing to his feelings, still His supreme desire is gratified, for the will of the Lord is done; and though He may suffer he would by no means change a single circumstance about which the Divine will has been clearly expressed. But when the pleasure of God is known, a particle of discontentment evinces a want of submission. With proper resignation, we shall feel, under any cross event, that we have nothing to do, in mind or body, but to use the means which God has appointed to remove or support the evil. In looking forward into the wide expanse of futurity, or in contemplating the issue of any particular event, the Christian knows that nothing can happen but what the will of God appoints. While that will engages his supreme regard, how can he be anxious? It follows of course that submission will exclude every complaining word, every angry or bitter word, every impatient word. Submission will cure every inordinate desire after wealth, honour, pleasure, friends, ease, or whatever else we regard. An inordinate desire is an unsubmitive desire. Submission is an effectual cure of all envious feelings towards our neighbour. It follows of course that submission will exclude every falsehood, and I may add, every transgression. The temptation to transgress is a desire for some object which we cannot obtain without going counter to a Divine precept. Where the object is placed in this predicament by the providence of God, it is plain that submission to providence will take away all motives to transgress. I add finally, that submission, so far as it extends, must quench every evil passion, and thus extinguish the inward fire from which all outward eruptions proceed. If it suppresses every inordinate desire, every feeling of discontent, all distrust of God, every motion of impatience. Thus the holiness of this temper appears. And its happiness is no less evident. Submission to God, as we have seen, excludes all those uncomfortable passions which make the wicked like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. It clears away everything that can agitate or corrode the mind. And as its very life-blood consists in supreme delight in the will of God, it has always the happiness of knowing that its dearest object is safe—that the ground of its highest exultation and joy is secure—that the will of infinite wisdom and benevolence will in all things be done. And in respect to the universal obligation, who can doubt that this is precisely the temper in which all moral agents ought to unite? The very definition of moral agents is, that they are under obligation to feel and do right and to avoid wrong. But in the temper under consideration, all the right feelings in the universe are involved, and by it all the wrong feelings in the universe are excluded. If you revolt from these conclusions, you must go back to the full admission that all men are under indispensable obligations to yield unlimited submission to God. Is he not our rightful King, and are we not His subjects? Is not His will perfect? Has not the Creator and Proprietor of all things a right to govern His own world according to His own pleasure? This is the religion of the Old Testament and the New. Under the severest trials this resignation has all along been exemplified in the history of the Church. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," said Job when all his children and possessions were destroyed. "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" was his language when covered with one tormenting ulcer from head to foot. In more general and common matters, the same acknowledgment of God and the same resignation to His will have all along been exemplified. A general acquiescence and joy in His government have always distinguished His true servants. All down the ages they have sung, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof." (*E. D. Griffin, D.D.*) *Resignation in affliction*:—The *Fram*, which went in search of the North Pole, escaped many of the perils that injured other expeditionary vessels, because her commander built her wide at the decks and narrowing her down to the keel, so that she did not withstand the ice, but yielded to its pressure. The cruel masses could not get a grip of the wisely constructed craft. The pressure, so far from crushing her, lifted her clean out of the ice, and she rode triumphantly on the floes. How many of our life troubles which if faced resentfully, sullenly, proudly, threaten to grind us to powder; but meet

them meekly, resignedly, recognising in them God's wiser will for us than we for ourselves, and they will in the end lift us upward and bear us onward towards the Eternal Light. (*H. O. Mackey.*) *Unshaken faith*.—The Rev. Dr. Campbell Morgan tells the following pathetic story concerning Commander Booth-Tucker, who lost his wife in a railway accident last autumn. "A few weeks ago," he says, "in a city of Nebraska, I was holding meetings. There came to that city my dear friend Commander Booth-Tucker. It was the city of Omaha. I shall never forget my talk with him there. I said to him, 'Commander, the passing of your beloved wife was one of the things that I freely confess I cannot understand.' He looked at me across the breakfast table, his eyes wet with tears, and yet his face radiant with that light which never shone on sea or land, and he said to me, 'Dear man, do you not know that the Cross can only be preached by tragedy?' Then he told me this incident: 'When I and my wife were last in Chicago I was trying to lead a sceptic to Christ in a meeting. At last the sceptic said, with a cold glittering eye and a sarcastic voice, "It is all very well. You mean well; but I lost my faith in God when my wife was taken out of my home. It is all very well; but if that beautiful woman at your side lay dead and cold by you, how would you believe in God?"' Within one month she had been taken through the awful tragedy of a railway accident, and the Commander went back to Chicago, and, in the hearing of a vast multitude, said, 'Here, in the midst of the crowd, standing by the side of my dead wife as I take her to burial, I want to say that I still believe in Him, and love Him, and know Him.' " (*C. L. McCleery.*)

CHAPTER XXII

VERS. 1-16. Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign.—*Manasseh*.—The narratives of the Old Testament are not to be read as mere matters of history, but as records of the providential dispensations of God in the concerns of mankind, and as fraught with lessons of the most valuable moral and religious instruction. In this light we are to consider the account handed down to us of Manasseh, King of Judah. An uninspired historian could only have informed us of his evil life, his affliction, his repentance, his restoration to prosperity, and his subsequent good conduct; but the sacred writer exhibits to us the manner in which the hand of God was visible throughout these events. It was not a matter of chance that Manasseh fell into adversity; for it was a scourge expressly sent upon him for his transgressions: nor was it by chance that he was restored to his kingdom, but by the unseen interposition of the all-wise Disposer of events, and in consequence of his deep humiliation and humble prayer. It is thus that the Scriptures teach us maxims of heavenly wisdom, not only in their direct exhortations and promises, but in the narratives which they record, all being written so as to display the conduct of God towards His creatures; His wisdom and righteousness, His justice and His mercy, His anger against the transgressor, His favour to the humble penitent, His infinite patience and forbearance towards all. We see embodied in actual facts our own circumstances, our sins and our mercies; what we have to hope or to fear; what our Creator requires of us; how He will act towards us. The chief particulars are the aggravated transgressions of Manasseh; the consequent affliction which befell him; his repentance in his affliction; his deliverance from it, and his future obedience to God. 1. The chapter before us details the transgressions of Manasseh. His sins were of a very heinous character, and were committed under circumstances which greatly aggravated their enormity. The narrative mentions several particulars, which show the fearful extent of his offences. (1) He sinned immediately against God. Every sin is indeed a transgression of the commands of our Creator; but some sins seem as it were to show a more than ordinary contempt for His Infinite Majesty: they imply a direct denial of His presence; they urge him to vindicate the honour of his name; they practically speak the language of the fool who says in his heart, "There is no God." Of this kind was the sin of idolatry which Manasseh so flagrantly committed: for he reared up altars for an idol or false god, called Baalim; and made groves for the cruel and licentious rites of heathen superstition: he worshipped the host of heaven, the sun, the moon, and the stars, and served them; instead of

serving Him who made them, and rules them in their courses. He even carried his profaneness and provocation against God to so great an extent, that he built altars for these pagan idols in the courts of the house of the Lord, and set up for worship a carved image in the temple itself, of "which God had said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house will I put my name for ever." (2) But not only did Manasseh "work much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger," but his sins against God were followed by sins against his neighbour. Having cast off the fear of his Creator, he became dangerous to all around him. His heart was so greatly hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, that it is said, "he shed innocent blood very much till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another"; and he even caused his own children to pass through the fire, in the valley of the son of Hinnom. (3) To aggravate still more his offences, he not only sinned himself, but he delighted in causing others to sin also; for it is said that "he made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen." The ungodly add fearfully to their own offences, by seducing others to offend. "If a ruler hearken to lies," says Solomon, "all his servants are wicked;" and even in the most humble sphere of life "evil communications" in like manner "corrupt good manners"; and this not only by the natural effect of bad example, but by the positive efforts which sinners employ to lead others into temptation. (4) Another aggravation of the sinful conduct of Manasseh was, his ingratitude for the benefits which he had received from that all-merciful Being whom he so daringly offended. This is particularly mentioned in the chapter before us; where, in the account given of his sinfulness in introducing idolatry into the city and temple of Jerusalem, mention is made of the special favours which Jehovah had bestowed upon the people of Israel, and his promise not to remove them out of the land which he had appointed for their fathers, provided they would take heed to do all that he had commanded them. (5) To mention but one aggravation more, of the sins of Manasseh, and that which greatly added to their enormity, they were committed deliberately against knowledge and warning, against the secret checks of conscience, and against the early instructions of a pious education. For Manasseh was the son of King Hezekiah, of whom it is recorded that "throughout all Judah," and more especially doubtless in his own family, "he wrought that which was good, and right, and truth before the Lord his God." And though, unhappily for Manasseh, he died when that prince was but twelve years old, he doubtless both instructed him himself in the ways of God, as long as he lived, and appointed others to assist his endeavours and to perpetuate them after his decease. Under all these circumstances, highly aggravated was his guilt; and equally aggravated and eternal would have been his punishment, had not the subsequent part of his history presented a very different aspect to that which we have been contemplating. The succeeding stages of his life remain to be briefly noticed. 2. To consider the affliction which in consequence befell him. Happy was it for him that he was not suffered to proceed in his iniquities unchecked. Sorrow, we are told, springs not out of the ground: it does not occur by chance, or without meaning. All affliction is the consequence of sin; and it is well when our troubles in this life are made the instruments of leading us to God, that we may not suffer that eternal punishment which our iniquities merit in the world to come. In the case of Manasseh, the hand of God was clearly visible in His punishment. It is said that the Lord brought upon him and his people—for both he and his people had sinned—the host of the king of Assyria, and they took Manasseh, among the thorns; that is, in some thicket to which he had retreated for safety; and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. A greater temporal calamity than this could scarcely befall a man like Manasseh. 3. Our text notices his repentance in his affliction. His captivity gave him leisure for serious reflection; and by the blessing of God he was led to avail himself of it. Multitudes of persons never begin to think of their sins, or their need of salvation, till the hour of pain or sickness, of bereavement or death. Thus Manasseh in his prosperity had forgotten his Creator; but in his adversity he could find no other refuge. His false gods could not assist him; and therefore, like the prodigal son, his only refuge was to turn to the merciful Father whom he had forsaken. 4. We are told of his deliverance from his affliction. The Lord, it is said, heard his supplication, and brought him back again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. The following verses allude to his future prosperity; for, by the dispensation under which Manasseh lived, it pleased the Almighty often to bestow temporal blessings as a mark of his special mercy; and as the afflictions which first led Manasseh to

repentance and prayer had been of a worldly kind, so, when it pleased God to restore him to his favour, he gave him also worldly blessings, life and liberty, and a successful issue in the affairs of his kingdom. But far above all these outward blessings was the forgiveness of his sins. Worldly prosperity may be either a benefit or a curse to its possessor; but to be pardoned and justified—this is indeed a blessing of unspeakable value, and should constrain us with earnest gratitude to devote ourselves to the service of our God and Saviour. This leads us to remark, 5. The subsequent obedience of Manasseh. The narrative is brief; but it particularly mentions his future obedience to God, and his zeal for his glory. His heart being renewed, his course of life changed with it. It is said, that he now “knew that the Lord He was God.” He had discovered this both in His power to afflict him and in His power to restore him; and now, knowing Him to be the only true God, he resolved to worship Him as such. He had repented, and he brought forth fruits meet for repentance. Much was forgiven him, and he loved much. First, he turned from his former sins; for “he took away the strange gods and the idol out of the house of the Lord”: not only this, but he began to practise his long neglected duties; “he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace-offerings and thank-offerings, and commanded his people to serve the Lord God of Israel.” As his transgressions had been public, he wished his contrition for them to be equally so; and as he had led others astray by his authority and example, he was now urgent to bring them back to the right path. To follow his example in this respect is the most important application which we can make. We have not indeed shed blood, or literally sacrificed to idols, as he did; neither have we had any inducement to do so, or the opportunity of doing so. But, on the other hand, we have not been exposed to the temptations which he must have met with, left defenceless at the early age of twelve years, amidst the seductions of the world, as a sovereign prince, with every facility for the indulgence of his will and his passions, and meeting perhaps with few to control, and many to foster his evil propensities. But shall we therefore say that, according to our circumstances and temptations, we have not also grievously offended God? Let us then earnestly seek this inestimable blessing; let us neither slight it on the one hand nor despair of obtaining it on the other. It is to be obtained, if only we seek it, and seek it aright, and seek it before the opportunity for procuring it is for ever lost. (*Christian Observer*.) *Saints made only of unfavourable material*:—At a crowded meeting in Edinburgh, one Sunday night, Professor Drummond stood on the platform with a letter in his hand. That letter, he said, had come to him from a young man then in the meeting, who, knowing Drummond was to speak that night, had written his history in the hope that some word of Christian counsel might be spoken which would give him hope. The letter was from a medical student who had been piously trained, but had been drawn down to drunkenness and vice. He feared he had fallen too low ever to rise. Did Professor Drummond think there was any hope for such a man? For answer the professor said, “As I walked through the city this morning I noticed a cloud like a pure white bank of snow resting over the slums. Whence came it? The great sun had sent down its beams into the city slums, and the beams had gone among the puddles and drawn out of them what they sought, and had taken it aloft and purified it; and there it was resting above the city, a cloud as white as snow. And God can make His saints out of material equally unfavourable. He can make a white cloud out of a puddle. What Christ did for Mary Magdalene He could and would do for any one who went to Him for help now.”

Vers. 19-26. Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign.—*Amon*:—The brief reign of Amon is only a sort of unimportant and miserable annex to that of his father. As he was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, he must have witnessed the repentance and reforming zeal of his father, if, in spite of all difficulties, we assume that narrative to be historical. In that case, however, the young man was wholly untouched by the latter phase of Manasseh's life, and flung himself headlong into the career of the king's earlier idolatries. “He walked in all the ways that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them”—which was the more extraordinary if Manasseh's last acts had been to dethrone and destroy these strange gods. He even “multiplied trespass,” so that in his son's reign we find every form of abomination as triumphant as though Manasseh had never attempted to check the tide of evil. We know nothing more of Amon. Apparently he only

reigned two years. He is the only Jewish king who bears the name of a foreign—an Egyptian—deity. For pictures of the state of things in this reign we may look to the prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah, and they are forced to use the darkest colours. (*Dean Farrar.*)

CHAPTER XXII.

VERS. 1-20. Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign.—*A monarch of rare virtue, and a God of retributive justice*.—I. A MONARCH OF RARE VIRTUE. "Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign." In this monarch we discover four distinguished merits. 1. Religiousness of action. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." We discover in Josiah—2. Docility of mind. "It came to pass when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes." In Josiah we see—3. Tenderness of heart. See how the discovery of the book affected him. "He rent his clothes." 4. Actualisation of conviction. When this discovered document came under Josiah's attention, and its import was realised, he was seized with a conviction that he, his fathers, and his people, had disregarded, and even outraged, the written precepts of heaven. II. A GOD OF RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE. Such a God the prophetess here reveals. "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to Me, thus saith the Lord, Behold I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read." The government over us, and to which we are bound with chains stronger than adamant, is retributive, it never allows evil to go unpunished. It links in indissoluble bonds sufferings to sin. Sorrows follow sin by a law as immutable and resistless as the waves follow the moon. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." In this retribution (1) The wicked are treated with severity, and (2) the good are treated with favour. (*David Thomas, D.D.*) *Josiah and the Book of the Law*.—This lesson gives us the account of a remarkable revival of religion which took place something over six hundred years before the Christian era, under the good reign of the boy-king Josiah. The history of the progress of the kingdom of God on earth is the history of revivals. Like the ebb and flow of the tides has his kingdom apparently advanced and receded, but with this difference, that each spiritual flood-tide has marked a substantial advance upon any previous flood-tide. Every revival has left the Church mightier than it ever was before, and has been a prophecy to the world of the time when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." In matters of religion it had been a period of ebb-tide for many years before our lesson opens. I. WE LEARN THAT THE AGENCY GOD USES IN A REVIVAL OF RELIGION IS THE AGENCY OF MEN, AND OFTEN OF A SINGLE MAN. Some one torch must first be kindled. Some one soul must be quickened. In some one closet the voice of prevailing prayer must be heard. There was but one voice crying in the wilderness, but it inaugurated the first Christian revival. There was but one Jonathan Edwards in America, and one John Wesley in England, when the great revivals in which they were instrumental began; but thousands were warmed at their fires, and lighted by their torches. Nor is it always a great man intellectually, or one who wields a wide influence, whom God uses to inaugurate the revival: it may be some praying mother, some unknown Christian, some uninfluential brother. As the majestic river rolls onward to the sea, we do not think much of its source, but only of the broad meadows which it waters, and the whirling factories which it has set in motion, and the bustling cities to which it bears the white wings of commerce; but, after all, away back in the hills is a little rivulet which is its source, and back of the rivulet perhaps a hidden spring on the mountain-side, which no eye has ever seen. Back of every revival is some hidden spring which has made it possible; and that spring, as likely as not, is in the chamber of some very humble Christian. That God uses such instrumentalities, our lesson plainly tells us, for Josiah was but a boy of sixteen when this revival began. He might well have objected that he was too young and inexperienced to be the leader in such a reformation. Very likely he had many struggles and misgivings which are not recorded, but it was God's way to

revive his work under the leadership of a boy. What, now, let us ask, are the characteristics of a true revival? We must take the parallel account of this revival which is given in Second Chronicles, as well as the one given in Kings, into consideration. 1. Taking the two stories together, we learn that one remarkable characteristic was the destruction of idolatry. When the king was twenty years old, four years after he "began to seek after God," we read that "he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images." Idols of all descriptions were cut down and ground to dust, and strewn upon the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. This work of destruction must be well done before the work of construction can be begun. So, very often, is it in the Church and the individual heart, before the reviving work of the Holy Spirit can be accomplished. There are false gods which must be deposed; there are sins of long standing, with deep roots and wide-spreading branches, which must be cut down. There we have a suggestion of the reason why in many a heart and many a church the revival work is only partial and incomplete. The uglier idols are cut down, the grosser sins are abandoned, nevertheless there is some high place especially dear which is not removed—nevertheless there is a pet sin of envy, jealousy or ill-will, or self-indulgence, which is spared; and because no thorough work of reform is accomplished, because the account must needs be qualified by a "nevertheless," the soul remains unsaved, the revival fails to come. 2. Another characteristic of this ancient revival and of every true revival was liberality on the part of the people. There was evidently a large sum of silver collected for the repair of the temple, for large repairs were needed. True liberality is both a cause and an effect of a true revival. The beginning of this century was a time of dearth and languishing in the churches. Infidelity was rampant, and threatened to sweep everything before it. But, at the same time, the cause of missions, home and foreign, began to assume proportions they had never known before; the purse-strings of Christian people were loosened; a revival of charity and money-giving spread over the land, and revivals of religion, pure and undefiled, followed in quick and glorious succession. "Is his purse converted?" was frequently a question of one of John Wesley's co-labourers when he heard of a rich man who had become a Christian. It is a question which might be appropriately asked in every revival season—"Have the purses been converted?" 3. Another characteristic of this ancient revival in Judah seems to have been the honesty and faithfulness of the people, which extended even to the small details of life. Money was given, we are told, to the carpenters and builders and masons; "howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was put into their hand, because they dealt faithfully." That is the legitimate effect, always and everywhere, of a revival of religion; and every revival is spurious that does not tend to produce this result. The merchant feels it as he measures every yard of cloth, and weighs every pound of sugar. The carpenter feels its influence as he drives his plane, the housewife as she wields her broom, the banker as he counts his money, the schoolboy as he studies his lesson. "Is such and such a man a Christian?"—"I don't know: go home and ask his wife," used to be the answer of a famous religious teacher. 4. Another characteristic of this old revival about which we are studying to-day was honour for the house of God. Every true revival has just this characteristic—reverence, honour for the house of God. 5. Once more: the most striking characteristic of this revival of Josiah's reign was honour for the word of God. It hardly seems possible that the "Book of the Law" could have been utterly lost for years, and that the very remembrance of it should have become a dim tradition. Then the king gathers together all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and reads in their ears all the words which have so awakened him. He renews his covenant with God; he carries out more completely the work of reformation which he had begun, destroying every idol, and restoring the worship of the true God in every part of his domain. It was a wonderful revival; and no characteristic is so striking as the king's reverence for, and ready obedience to, the word of God. But King Josiah is not the only one who has lost the word of God, not the only one from whom it is buried out of sight, under the dust of years. Though copies of the law are dropping from the printing press by the million every year, though it lies in all our houses and is read in all our churches, it is a lost book to-day to thousands, as it was in Josiah's time. Our very familiarity with it hides it from our eyes as effectually as the rubbish of the temple hid it from the Jews; and

only a powerful revival of religion can bring it from its hiding-place, and put it in our hands and in our hearts. (*Sermons by Monday Club.*) *Josiah's reformation*:—Josiah was only twenty years of age when he set about a national reformation of religion as radical and as complete as anything that Martin Luther or John Knox themselves ever undertook. But with this immense difference. Both Luther and Knox had the whole Word of God in their hands both to inspire them and to guide them and to sustain them and to support them in their tremendous task. But Josiah had not one single book or chapter or verse even of the Word of God in his heathen day. The five Books of Moses were as completely lost out of the whole land long before Josiah's day as much so as if Moses had never lifted a pen. And thus it was that Josiah's reformation had a creativeness about it: an originality, an enterprise, and a boldness about it, such that in all these respects it has completely eclipsed all subsequent reformations and revivals—the greatest and the best. The truth is, the whole of that immense movement that resulted in the religious regeneration of Jerusalem and Judah in Josiah's day, it all sprang originally and immediately out of nothing else but Josiah's extraordinary tenderness of heart. The Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world shone with extraordinary clearness in Josiah's tender heart and open mind. And Josiah walked in that light and obeyed it, till it became within him an overmastering sense of Divine duty and an irresistible direction and drawing of the Divine hand. And till he performed a work for God and for Israel second to no work that has ever been performed under the greatest and the best of the prophets and kings of Israel combined. It is a very noble spectacle. (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.—*Josiah an example for young men*:—Of the young king, whose piety is thus described, it is also said in another place (2 Kings xxiii. 25), "And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." I. THE PIETY OF JOSIAH AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE POWER OF A GOOD EXAMPLE. "He walked in all the ways of David his father." Few influences are more powerful than that of example. The child imitates his parent; the schoolboy his classmate; the youth his playfellows; and so on through every stage of life. Note in what recorded actions of Josiah there were marks of an imitation of David's example. 1. The first of these in order of time was his attachment to God's house, and his devotion to God's service. 2. His love to the Word of God. Turn to the narrative in 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14–21. David said of the man who is blessed, that "his delight is in the law of the Lord." There is no book more valuable to the young. 3. His reverence for godly men (chap. xxiii. 15–18). We know enough of David's life to recognise in this respect for a man of God an imitation of his example. The servants are to be revered; to be "esteemed very highly for their works' sake." Goodness is always worthy of regard; and he who does not respect it tells us that he has no goodness in himself to be respected. II. THE PIETY OF JOSIAH AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE STRICT INTEGRITY OF GODLINESS. "He turned not aside to the right hand, nor to the left." The man of the world may turn his creed and shape his course "according to the fashion of the varying hour"; but not the Christian. He must bear in mind the words of wisdom: "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee." 1. Josiah was not influenced by the force of ancient custom, when that custom ran counter to the course pointed out by conscience. 2. He was not influenced by any feeling of false shame. When the book of the law was found and read before him, he rent his clothes, feeling that he was a sinner. III. THE PIETY OF JOSIAH ILLUSTRATES THE COURSE OF LIFE THAT ENSURES DIVINE APPROVAL. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." It is comparatively easy to pursue a course that seems right to ourselves, or that may secure the applause of the world. It is a widely different matter so to live as to ensure the approval and commendation of God. 1. By far the greater part of men seem to live for self. They have no care or consideration for others. Selfishness is the vilest principle that ever spread in this world. 2. Others care most about the approval of the world. These are selfish too. It is because that applause is gratifying to their selfish vanity. The man who would lick the dust to secure the favour of a fellow-mortal would sacrifice his dearest friend for gain. 3. They only are godlike who do and love that which is holy and

true; who live not for themselves, but for others and for God. Application—Have an object in life! Live! Do not be content with mere existence. Remember, there is but one unfailing condition of true greatness and that is goodness. (*Frederic Wagstaff.*) *Example for Royalty* :—There is at the top of the Queen's staircase in Windsor Castle a statue from the studio of Baron Triqueti, of Edward vi. marking with his sceptre a passage in the Bible, which he holds in his left hand, and upon which he earnestly looks. The passage is that concerning Josiah: "Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left." The statue was erected by the will of the late prince, who intended it to convey to his son the Divine principles by which the future governor of England should mould his life and reign on the throne of Great Britain. (*T. Hughes.*) *Traits of youthful religion* :—1. Josiah began to reign when he was eight years old, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. He ascended the throne when vice had taken deep root in the people, and national faults had become stereotyped in the Jewish character. His character and his conduct are exactly those which, judging from reason or historical experience, we should expect from the freshness and energy of a religious boy. That character is thus briefly summed up by Huldah the prophetess: His heart was tender, his humility was great, he had given a quick and childlike credit to God's threats against the sins of the people, and had yielded a ready sympathy with penitential acts for sins in which he had taken no part, for under God's threats he had shed tears, and rent his garments and done his utmost to avert Divine anger. The acts which illustrate this character are seven in number, and inasmuch as they have a natural coherence and agreement with each other, I will sum them up. His first work was to repair the temple, his second to read attentively the newly discovered Scriptures, till alarmed at the threats against sin, he, thirdly, abased himself openly. He then commanded the destruction of the idols and priests of Baal, and the professed profligates of the land. He, fifthly, ordered the public reading of the Scriptures, he brought out to public notice the remains of God's saints, and lastly, proclaimed a public celebration of the Passover. Now these are just the acts of a fresh and simple mind, and while many of them are the features of the early days of religion, which we would fain frequently copy, they are at the same time marks of the earlier stages of religion, and cannot be expected to exist in its later day. But while this is the case with regard to the individual character, these will be signs of the early days of a great religious revival, and will speak as much of the zeal of the social body as they do of the individual. 2. To reduce these reflections to some practical bearing, the following character is not uncommon amongst us. A child, a boy, a youth at home, at school, or the university is under the influence of religious principles; he studies attentively the Scriptures of God as they are presented to him through the received translations and interpretations of his day; he follows with earnestness and alacrity a pathway which he strikes out himself in which he has received his impetus from the wonderful coincidences of prophecy or the theological questions raised on the subject of faith and works; he is startled by the mention of the Judgment, and is so keenly sensitive to the subject, that the sublime awfulness of a thunderstorm, or the congregational singing of a hymn about the "day of wonders" will awaken the most sensible alarm in his mind, deter him from a fault, or drive him to an act of devotion and holiness; he will be so anxious lest he should be guilty of mixing too indiscriminately with the wicked and those that know not God that he will be inclined to draw far too rigidly the limits between good and evil, and will be inclined to decide on certain shibboleths of the world and the worldly minded, which will neither stand the tests of reason, scripture, or experience. Certain modes of amusement will be rapidly denounced as sinful which are merely made so by the unguarded or ungracious mind of him who uses them; and certain places and people are placed under bar and ban, which have in them no essential evil whatever. In proportion as the mind of such a youth is fresh in his religious career, he will be painfully conscious of the weight of a committed sin, and will find the flow of penitential tears spontaneous and natural. Such will be the features of youthful religion, and such are the features of the religion of Josiah. There are points in the earlier religion of the child which are ever to be kept in view through after life; lovely echoes of the sweet voice associated with the first call of God still sounding round us; as fresh water

drops sprinkled with the kindly hand over the dim and dusty picture of the past ; dreams of fresh and happy childhood rousing us to renewed vigour when we wake to the daily strife of life. (1) And first, a quick and sensitive mind and conscience is to be valued and loved ; if we have lost it, we must strive by all means to rekindle it ; if we see it still existing in another we should do everything to retain, encourage, and preserve it. (2) The second feature belonging to Josiah in common with youthful religious characters, is that which I called a deep and sometimes overwrought regard for the Scriptures of God according to their received translations and interpretations. It is natural that the young mind should rest with an exclusive attention on those means of ascertaining the knowledge of its own subject-matter which fall most objectively before its eye, and least dependently on experience and deeper philosophic reflection ; consequently that means of knowing God's will, the written Word, is the one to which it will pay the most unswerving attention ; so much so, as at last to form into a certain idolatry its regard for it ; while to the mind of the advancing man the analogy of God's providence, the experience of passing life, the claims of the Church and human authority, the study of physical nature, and the lives of holy men gone by will afford at least equivalent grounds of satisfaction, if not deeper than that afforded by the written Word of God. (3) But another feature of youthful religion which it is well that we should truly estimate and not allow to overstep its limits, is the drawing rigid lines between good and evil men, with a view to radically extirpating the tares from the wheat. One important practical lesson that we learn in studying such a character as Josiah's is that we should look out for and admire certain graces in youth wherever we see them, but should be by no means discouraged if we find a comparative lack of them in ourselves. Each age has its own peculiar graces, and what is lovely and true in the child may become transcendental in the youth, and unreal in the man. In short, the features of religion are different in different ages. To one the characteristics belong which I have just described as existing in Josiah. In another we shall find others, a trust in close self-examination, a watchful eye on the course of God's dealing with the soul, and observation of His providential care and guidance, and of those deep inward visitations and communings which are so full of encouragement and comfort. In another we shall see the satisfaction arising from the study of holy men, their lives, their struggles, and their victories. In another, the strong dependence on the internal proofs of religion in the analogy of God's Providence and the power and force of the moral sense of man. The features of religion will be different in each, and we must neither force the existence or expression of feelings which, natural to another age, do not belong to ours, nor on the other hand must we despond if we do not see in ourselves many of the features which we admire in another. (*E. Monro.*)

Early piety :—King Josiah, it is said, at eight years feared the Lord. Polycarp, martyred at the age of ninety-five, declared that he had served God eighty-six years, showing that he was converted at nine years. It is commonly held that Jeremiah and John the Baptist, who are spoken of in Scripture as sanctified from their birth, were early children of grace. Coming down to more modern times it is easy to name many eminent servants of God who began to serve him in childhood, as Baxter, for instance, who said he did not remember the time when he did not love God and all that was good. Matthew Henry was converted before eleven. Mrs. Isabel Graham at ten. President Edwards probably at seven. Dr. Watts at nine. Bishop Hall and Robert Hall at eleven or twelve. (*H. C. Fish.*)

Ver. 8. *I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord.*—*The finding of the book* :—Following two of the most notoriously wicked rulers, Josiah, the boy king of Judah, was a remarkable instance of independence of character and the differentiating influence of the grace of God. His individuality made a deep and lasting impress upon the history of the nation. One of the chief tasks he set himself was the repair of the temple—not done since the time of Joash, two hundred and fifty years before. It was during the progress of this work that the Book of the Law was discovered, a circumstance which was so powerfully to affect the action of the king and the future of his people. I. THE FINDING OF THE BOOK CONSTITUTED IN ITSELF A LITERARY RESURRECTION OF THE MOST REMARKABLE DESCRIPTION. There has been no lack of dogmatic opinions as to what the book was which was thus found. In the passages referred to above it is simply styled

"a book," and "the book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses"; language perfectly consistent with the theory that it was the survivor of several, it may be many, previously existing copies. But one doughty champion of the Reformation does not hesitate to identify it with the copy of the law that was preserved in the Ark of the Covenant, and others, as, for instance, the Fathers, and Wellhausen and his Scottish disciple, Robertson Smith, hold that it was none other than the Book of Deuteronomy. How significant the circumstances of this discovery! Are we to pronounce it a "happy accident"? or to refer it to some "Intelligent Cause"? We can recall similar incidents in the history of non-religious or (so-called) profane literature. The Nicomachean Ethics are said to have lain in the cellars of Scepsis, the king of Pergamos, for nearly two centuries after Aristotle had ceased to teach, when, rediscovered by men who loved philosophy, they were conveyed to Athens and then to Rome in the days of Cicero. Their publication stirred afresh the dormant spirit of the schools, and broke like a new morning upon the intellectual life of Europe. I have read, too, an even more romantic tale concerning a book of modern poetry familiar to most of us. Its author had occasionally quoted stanzas in the hearing of his friends, which he said belonged to poems he once had written, but never intended to publish. At last they prevailed upon him to divulge their secret. Years before he had lost the wife of his youth, in whose praise they had been written, and he had vowed that they should be buried with her. Searching in her coffin they found the MS. pillowing her head, the golden tresses of which were so intertwined with its leaves that it was with the greatest difficulty they were separated and restored to a condition that admitted of their being printed. Instances of a similar character might be multiplied, and it may be asserted that the problem is essentially the same in any case; that the intrinsic character of the writings can have no bearing upon the interpretation to be put upon their rescue from oblivion. But surely the respective circumstances must be taken into account, and the relation of the writings to the spiritual life of mankind? The loss of the "Ethics" would have been a great loss, in some respects an irretrievable one; and had Rossetti's *House of Life* still lain beneath the ceremonies of the tomb, English literature to-day would have been distinctly poorer, and the development of our poetry less perfect than it has been. But who will say that such works as these are essential to the higher life, the spiritual progress of humanity? Apart from its own solemn claim to immortality, the Word of the Lord is too closely and causatively associated with the future of the race, and it has outlived too many antagonistic influences, too many ages of unbelief and indifference, for us to conclude hastily that its presence amongst us now is but a lucky survival, to be accounted for by a theory of chances.

II. THE DISCOVERY WAS CONNECTED WITH A GREAT AWAKENING OF RELIGIOUS LIFE. The story of its reception by the young king and his subjects, simply as it is told, thrills us as we read it. The great high-priestly penitence of the one for the general sin and the heroic resolution of the others as they "stood by the covenant" have in them not a little of the "moral sublime." But we must not fail to lay to heart the enduring lessons it teaches us.

1. Look at the light which it throws upon the question of a "book-religion." The history of that age illustrated the difference there is between being with a Bible and being without one. Of course it is allowed that the sense the expression "book-religion" often bears is false and mischievous enough. When Chillingworth shouted that "the Bible, and the Bible alone, was the religion of Protestants," he probably attached a very different significance to "religion" than the term generally conveys; if he did not his error was not much less than that which he sought to overturn. Religion is of the heart—an inward and spiritual influence—a communion with God. But it is not independent of external standards, nor does it spring into existence unprovoked or unassisted. This, at any rate, is the teaching of history and of individual experience. Without the authoritative medium of Scripture Judah failed to advance upon the religion of the Fathers, in fact, fell further and further behind it. The beliefs of the people wanted fixity; their pious emotions were without definiteness or moral force; and they became a prey to the plausible falsehoods of heathenism. With the reappearance of the Book of the Law the religious spirit of the nation recovered itself, and the forward movement towards the great fulfilment was resumed. But it would be a mistake to suppose that a truth, even an important truth, is as such immortal. As John Stuart Mill has remarked, there are too many instances to the contrary for us to entertain such a comfortable belief. Not once only, but many times, have great religious or moral movements perished

untimely for lack of a Scripture that could give their principles authoritative expression and permanence. On the other hand, the "book-religions" of the world have been the only persistent or widely influential ones, as witness the faiths of China, India, Persia, or Palestine. Once fixed in literary form, the creed of a people is open to general reference, becomes a public standard of opinion and of conduct, and in conjunction with the spiritual experience to which it is related, it of necessity advances and refines upon itself. In Fetichism alone have we a religion (if religion it can be called) without a book, which at the same time continues and reproduces itself! Proteus-like it springs up, a rank but stunted growth of diseased imaginations, wild vagaries, and sexual excesses. Yes, in the superstition that haunts the dark places of the earth, that either opposes morality or lies wholly outside of it, and that brands with such unmistakable inferiority its devotees, we have, *par excellence*, the religion without a book! 2. How independent Divine revelation is of the moral and intellectual conditions amidst which it appears. It is impossible for any candid inquirer to suppose that the dust-covered MS. so seasonably brought forth from its age-long rest was the product of forgery. Apart from the transparent self-contradiction of such a conception, there was no man of that day who could have achieved such a *tour de force* in literature or morals. How is the problem to be explained, that in an epoch of decadence and apostasy, there should have appeared at once so marvellous a transformation in public and private conduct? Evolution, however it may be manipulated, cannot solve the difficulty. Revelation, that glorious "anticipation of reason," as Lessing conceived it to be, was in that instance, at any rate, no child of the *Zeit-geist*. The truth that could so regenerate a people must have had its origin in the supernatural and Divine. 3. Vital contact with Holy Scripture is essential to the enjoyment of its advantages. So commonplace are our notions of God's ways that we are startled at the thought of His permitting such an utter and appalling ignorance of Divine things. It is a great mystery; yet we can see certain disciplinary reasons for it. To have a Bible is of little use if we do not read it; to read it, if it be not laid to heart. Of how many might it still be said, "The word of hearing did not profit them, because they were not united by faith with them that heard." Only when in penitence and faith we "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the teachings of the Bible, can it become a means of grace, a source of spiritual life and power. (*A. F. Muir, M.A.*) *The book that finds me*:—The striking fact in the incident is the reversal of the statement, is the deeper truth: the book found them. This stamped it as Divine. This is always the great fact concerning the Bible—it finds me. I. IN MY DEEPEST THOUGHT—to KNOW God. The questions of sin and destiny and immortality, &c. The greatest minds have here found the answer. The ordinary man can know for himself. Every man can know for himself whether the Bible is the revelation of God. Give it his best thought. II. IN MY DEEPEST DESIRE—to SERVE God, to do His will. "If any man wills to do my will he shall know truth"—must be lived to be realised. It costs something to live it. Obedience is the pathway to knowledge. III. IN MY DEEPEST NEED—to HAVE God—my God—my Father. His love and mercy and care. Experience is the great teacher. Sorrows test. So personal—every line for each man. Reality of promises. (*C. Meyers, D.D.*) *Preservation of the Word of God*:—Wondrously has the Spirit of God watched over and preserved the Scriptures. The original copy of Magna Charta, on which hung all the greatest liberties of the British people, was once nearly destroyed. Sir Richard Cotton was in a tailor's shop, and the great scissors were opened to cut it in pieces. The man into whose hands it had fallen knew nothing either of its nature or value. But it was rescued and remains to-day in the nation's keeping as the priceless charter of its liberty. The Bible is the charter of the soul's freedom, and many and many a time its enemies have sought to exterminate it, but God has watched over it, preserved it by many a miracle, and to-day it is declaring liberty to spiritual captives all over the world. (*H. O. Mackey.*) *The reviving word*:—John Stuart Mill tells how that at one time he had lost all interest in life, every blossom of joy and hope withered, but the charm and thrill of life were restored to him by the reading of Wordsworth's poems. The gifted singer revived the weary, despondent philosopher. How much more shall the words of God which are "spirit and life" revive and gladden our souls! (*Helps for Speakers.*) *Discovery of truth*:—To take an old diamond out of the casket in which it has lain forgotten, is as good as to find a new diamond. So with truth. To strike men's eyes with an old maxim, is as good as to think out a fresh one—nay, better; for

the best truths are old. (*Charles Buxton.*) *Preservation of the Book* :—Just as Dr. Judson had finished translating the New Testament into Burmese he was cast into prison. His wife took the precious manuscript and buried it in the ground. But if left there it would soon decay, while to reveal its existence to its foes would surely lead to its destruction. So it was arranged that she should put it within a roll of cotton and bring it to him in the form of a pillow, so hard and poor that even the keeper of the prison did not discover it. After seven months this pillow, so uninviting externally, so precious to him, was taken away, and then his wife redeemed it by giving a better one in exchange. Some time after that he was hurried off to another prison, leaving everything behind him, and his old pillow was thrown into the prison yard, to be trodden underfoot as worthless cotton; but after a few hours one of the native Christians discovered the roll and took it home as a relic of the prisoner, and there, long afterwards, the manuscript was found within the cotton, complete and uninjured. Surely the hand of the Lord was interposed to save from destruction the fruit of years of toil, so important for those who were to read the Burmese Bible. *Chance literature* :—Many of the greatest discoveries in the era of the revival of learning were characterised by the merest chance. Cicero's important treatise, *De Republica*, was discovered concealed beneath some monastic writing. Part of Livy was found between the leaves of a Bible, and a missing page in a battledore. Quintilian was picked out of an old coffer full of rubbish. The one copy of Tacitus which survived the general destruction of Roman libraries was found in a Westphalian monastery. An original *Magna Charta*, with all its seals and signatures was found by Cotton about to be cut up by a tailor into measures. Thurlow's State papers fell out of a ceiling in Lincoln's Inn. Many of Lady Montague's letters were discovered by Disraeli in the office of an attorney, where they might have remained till this day but for the chance visit of the great bibliophile. And undoubtedly many hundreds of rare books and manuscripts and papers lie hidden away in the presses and cupboards of old manor houses, whence gradually they may be dragged into the light of day, to be destroyed, or to awaken universal interest. *Finding the Sinaitic manuscript* :—Dr. Tischendorf describes as follows the finding of the remarkable manuscript on Mount Sinai : "On the afternoon of the 4th February 1859, I was taking a walk with the steward of the convent in the neighbourhood, and as we returned, towards sunset, he begged me to take some refreshment with him in his cell. Scarcely had we entered the room, when he said : "And I, too, have read a Septuagint"—that is, a copy of the Greek translation made by the Seventy. And so saying, he took down from the corner of the room a bulky kind of volume, wrapped up in red cloth, and laid it before me. I unrolled the cover, and discovered, to my great surprise, not only those very fragments which fifteen years before I had taken out of the basket, but also other parts of the Old Testament, the New Testament complete, and, in addition, the Epistle of Barnabas, and a part of the Pastor of Hermas. Full of joy which this time I had the self-command to conceal from the steward, I asked, as if in a careless way, for permission to take the manuscript into my sleeping-chamber, to look over it more at leisure. There by myself I could give way to the transport of joy which I felt. I knew that I held in my hand the most precious Biblical treasure in existence, a document whose age and importance exceeded that of all the manuscripts which I had ever examined during twenty years' study of the subject. I cannot now, I confess, recall all the emotions which I felt in that exciting moment with such a diamond in my possession. Though my lamp was dim, and the night was cold, I sat down at once to transcribe the Epistle of Barnabas."

Ver. 19. Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord.—*The tender heart* :—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH SUCH A CHARACTER MAY BE PLACED AND TRIED. 1. It may often have to contend with great difficulties. Observe the illustration of this in the history before us. 2. It may sometimes be surrounded by external difficulties. 3. A tender heart may sometimes misunderstand, and therefore misinterpret, the follies and frailties of other Christians. There must be the knowledge of evil as well as of good in the Christian as in the common life. Stumbling-blocks will be found, though deeply to be deplored, in every section of the Christian Church. II. SOME OF THE INDICATIONS OF A TENDER HEART. All life reveals itself. The tiniest herb or flower that drinks the morning dew reveals itself. Life cannot be hid, and that because it is life. Not always in the same manner, but always in some manner; for as

external life is full of variety, from the "cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that groweth on the wall," so inward religious life has its manifold phases, full of variety, full of beauty, and all significant of their Divine origin. Let us notice some—

1. There will be thoughtful interest in religious truth. We cannot conceive of the commencement, much less of the continuation, of a religious life in connection with thoughtlessness.
2. There will be practical co-operation in works of religious activity. Religious life has ever holy work to do, as holy words to say. The commencement of this new life starts with the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"
3. There will be devout interest in religious assemblies. The object of Christian assemblies is one—the worship of God and the edification of the Church. In proportion as our heart is penetrated with the ideas proper to, and regulated by the principles of, the Christian life, there will not only be the desire but the determination to avail ourselves of seasons of religious worship for purposes of spiritual improvement.
4. There will be also personal determination to secure religious progress. First the blade, but afterwards, if the blade is healthy, there will be the ear: lovely is the blade in all its tenderness and vigour, so in its season is the maturing ear, that gives promise of the fully ripened and perfectly developed corn in the ear.

III. THE BLESSEDNESS OF HAVING A TENDER HEART. Because,

1. It is the disposition produced by the influences of God's Spirit. It is God "who worketh in us both to will and to do." "Every good and perfect gift cometh down from above."
2. Because it will prevent great irregularity if not sinfulness of life. Religion subtracts nothing from the real enjoyment of life. The happiest transaction of life is the hour of consecration to God.
3. Because a tender heart is the sure sign of a regenerate one. "And whom He did," &c. (Rom. viii. 29.) (W. G. Barrett.)

Humility the grace of graces.—"I was always exceedingly pleased with that saying of Chrysostom," says Calvin, "'The foundation of our philosophy is humility.' And yet more pleased with that of Augustine. 'As,' says he, 'the rhetorician being asked was what the first thing in the rules of eloquence, he answered, Pronunciation. What was the second, Pronunciation. What was the third, still he answered, Pronunciation. So if you ask me concerning the graces of the Christian character, I would answer, firstly, secondly, and thirdly, and for ever, humility.'" And thus it is that God sets open His school for teaching us humility every day. Humility is the grace of graces for us sinners to learn. There is nothing again like it, and we must have a continual training and exercise in it. You learn to pronounce by your clients complaining that they cannot hear you, and that they must carry their cases to another advocate unless you learn to speak better. And, as you must either please your patrons or die of starvation, you put pebbles in your mouth and you go out to recite by yourself by the riverside till your rhetoric is fit for a Greek judge and jury to sit and hear. And so with humility, which is harder to learn than the best Greek accent. You must go to all the schools, and put yourself under all the disciplines that the great experts practise, if you would put on this humility. And the schools of God to which He puts His great saints are such as these. You will be set second to other men every day. Other men will be put over your head every day. Rude men will ride roughshod over your head every day. God will set His rudest men, of whom He has whole armies, upon you every day to judge you, and to find fault with you, and to correct you, and to blame you, and to take their business away from you to a better—to a better than you can ever be with all the pebbles that ever river rolled. Ay, He will take you in hand Himself, and He will set you and will keep you in a low place. (Alex. Whyte, D.D.)

Humbleness the work of true Christian.—John Newton wrote a book about grace in the blade, and grace in the ear, and grace in the full corn in the ear. A very talkative body said to him, "I have been reading your valuable book, Mr. Newton; it is a splendid work; and when I came to that part, 'the full corn in the ear' I thought how wonderfully you had described me." "Oh," replied Mr. Newton, "but you could not have read the book rightly, for it is one of the marks of the full corn in the ear, that it hangs its head very low." (C. H. Spurgeon.)

CHAPTER XXIII.

VERS. 1-28. And the King sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem.—*Good aims and bad methods* :—The verses I have selected record and illustrate good aims and bad methods. I. GOOD AIMS. Josiah's aims, as here presented, were confessedly high, noble, and good. 1. To reduce his people to a loyal obedience to heaven. 2. Generated within him by the discovery of the Divine will. II. BAD METHODS. How did Josiah now seek to realise his purpose, to sweep idolatry from the face of his country? Not by argument, suasion, and moral influence, but by brute force and violence (vers. 4-28). I offer two remarks concerning his method. 1. It was unphilosophic. Morals evil cannot be put down by force; coercion cannot travel to a man's soul. 2. It was mischievous. The evil was not extinguished; it burnt with fiercer flame. Persecution has always propagated the errors it has sought to crush. "He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword." (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

A revival of religion :—A young and active king now sits on Judah's throne. Our text finds him at the age of six-and-twenty, in the midst of reforms which might have appalled many a man of twice his age. The earlier years of his reign he has occupied in many and various reforms. Now we find him in the midst of a revival of religion, the like of which the world has but seldom seen. The king, the court, the elders, the rulers, and the people all felt its power. Beginning at the house of God, it thrilled through all classes, and changed the whole religious life and thought of the land. And it is this revival of religion that I desire now to consider. I. THIS REVIVAL BEGAN AT THE HOUSE OF GOD. And surely that was the best place. In God's house, in God's presence, we are to assemble and look for Him. It is there we may expect the Shekinah fire, no longer visible over the ark between the cherubim, but felt in force and power in human hearts. It is there we must seek for renewed vigour and Divine influence. It is there we must look for the Lord Himself, and pray Him to strengthen and quicken us. It is there we must come for the deepening of our faith in the Eternal, enlarging of our courage and zeal, and the expansion of our Christian hope. It is there all revival must begin. If, then, we are to have a revival, it must begin at God's house. Votes of the House of Commons cannot do it. Acts of Parliament will never make men religious. Decrees of State will not fill empty churches with men and women full of the Holy Ghost and fire. All this has been tried. Some two or three hundred years ago soldiers were stationed at the doors of the parish churches, not so much to see who attended as to note who was absent. Fine, imprisonment, exile and worse, fell to the lot of those who did not fill their places. These things did not succeed. They never can. Fine, sword, fire, and persecution failed, and always will. They are the instruments of a past and barbarous age. But if we are to have a revival in which the people shall flock to God's house, God's house itself must be revived. There must be live men in the Church, if it is to save men alive. A cold Church but seldom warms cold hearts. II. IN THIS REVIVAL MEN CAME BACK TO THE WORD OF GOD. The long-lost book was found. The Word of the Lord hid, slighted, neglected, lost, was discovered and brought to the young king. What a discovery Hilkiah made when he found the Bible! What a treasure he dug up! What a mine of precious ore! What a valuable find! The young king was quick to see its importance, value, and worth. It was read; its warnings heeded, its promises believed. And it was read to all the people. What an effect that book produced. Even so. I have no faith in any revival without the Word of God. Read the history of the great revivals in the Church, and you will find the Word of God in it all. Beginning with the Bereans right down to our day you will find it so. John Wycliffe was a great power in his day. He is rightly called the Morning Star of the Reformation. He sent his Lollard preachers through the land to tell the story of God's love. As he translated the Bible into the language of the people, his preachers went and read it and preached it to common folk. Read the history of the Reformation, and what will you find there? Martin Luther is its hero. That marvellous man, like his Lord and Master, was a son of the people, and began life in a poor and comfortless home. Reared in the faith and practice of the Romish Church, he came to know it well, and early saw its weakness. What was it made him take his reforming action? Have we not read that he found a copy of the Scriptures—the neglected, deserted, forsaken Bible? He read it. It did its work. It was the Bible made him the great reformer. It was the Bible which

the reformers accepted as a sufficient rule of faith and life. We, too, need to pay more attention to the living Word of God. We are apt to look for and depend upon the word of man. If that is not eloquent, if that is not such as to tickle our fancy, we often return from God's house displeased, dissatisfied, and unblest. What a mistake! Let us look for the God-sent message; let us hearken for the voice of the living God; let us hear what He has to say to us. III. A REVIVED CHURCH WILL MAKE ITSELF FELT IN THE WORLD. This assembling at the house of God, and the solemn and reverent reading of the Bible, made a deep impression upon the people. The king dedicated himself to God. And surely that is the right thing for a king to do. The king should lead in all good things. All the people felt the influence, and there was a national movement. Public life was affected, the power of God was felt, men put away their idols, and came back to the faith of their fathers. The Church, the Temple, religion became a greater force in the national life. (*C. Leach, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. And the King went up into the house of the Lord.—*Spiritual idolatry*:—Why should there be such a gathering as this? why should all the mighty, all the good, and all the wise, all the great with all the small, make such a point of going into the house of the Lord on this occasion? Why should they make such a public display about an ordinary duty, such as assembling in the house of the Lord? For two reasons. (1) Because that duty had become an extraordinary one, through the long neglect of it. 2. And the other reason was, because they were desirous to hear the Word of the Lord. These were indeed two good reasons for this solemn assembly of all the people in the Lord's house. But what a terrible lesson does it read to us! We read of a wonderful deliverance of His people by Almighty God out of the hands of their enemies, when to the eye of man their situation was utterly hopeless. We should expect that this would have awakened them, especially as God had performed it on their turning back, under the pious Hezekiah, from their false gods to the true and living God; yet here, in the third generation from that time, we find the altars and temples of the false gods up again, and the Word of God lost, not only out of the hearts, but of the very sight and ears of the people. Once again, however, and, alas! for the last time, both the temple and that Word were restored under the care of the pious Josiah; and the people of God once again, and for the last time, showed themselves as the people of God. Such is the example before us; the example of a people, too, in whose place we are standing, being grafted in as a wild olive, in place of the branches which had been broken off because of unbelief. And their example is our example, as we have been told by St. Paul. Let us review, then, some of the plainest applications of this example. (1) St. Paul warns us, saying, "Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them" (1 Cor. x. 7). But it may be said that we are not in the least danger of being idolaters. We are thoroughly convinced of its besotted folly and desperate wickedness. But then, there are always two things to all our dealings with God,—there is the spirit, and there is the deed; and the deed depends upon the spirit for its quality, as the fruit depends upon the nature of the tree for its kind. Although, therefore, we bow not down before the work of our own hands, putting it in the place of God, we may bow down before the work of our own hearts, and put that in the place of God. And this idolatry may go on while the other is scorned and mocked at. For what is the worship of God? Is it not in lifting up the thoughts and affections of the heart unto God on His throne in heaven, and acknowledging Him as our maker and continual keeper? Thus God is the first and last object of the heart; but an idol is a thing of this world, put in the place of God. Oh how is the heart in its devotion to the things of this world full of images, which it worships, in the place of the Maker of this world and all therein, with the kiss of affection, with the bowing of the spirit, with the adoration of the soul! But of one image only will God allow in the heart for worship, and not reckon it idolatry; in one image will He allow Himself to be honoured, and in one only; and what is that? It is the image of Himself. But how shall we possibly have the image of God, whom no man hath seen, neither can see, in our hearts? He hath given us this image of Himself in our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom St. Paul says, "that He is the image of the invisible God" (Col. i. 15); "the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person" (Heb. i. 3); and who says concerning Himself, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John xiv. 9); if, therefore, He shall be dwelling in our hearts by faith, then we have there the image of God, and we are worshipping Him in spirit and in truth. And this, therefore, is necessary

to our worship, the keeping His image there, not letting the things of this world to take its place, but looking upon Him crucified by crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts; looking upon Him dead, by our death unto sin; looking upon Him as risen again, by our new life unto righteousness; looking upon Him ascended into heaven, by setting the affections on things above; looking on Him as coming again, through the denial of all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and in the blessed hope of His glorious appearing. To this worship we have all been called, and to this all must turn from the vain idols of worldly desires. (2) That the Word of God should be lost out of the hands and hearts of idolaters, who can wonder? It expressly forbids idolatry of every kind, both within and without the heart: it says, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve"; and it is full from beginning to end of severe rebuke and awful threats against all that are holding the truth in unrighteousness, knowing that the Lord God is a jealous God, that will not share His honour with another, and yet preferring to his worship and service the devotion to the world, and the service of the flesh. And the first token of sincere repentance is now, as it was in the days of Josiah: men go up to the house of the Lord to hear the Word of God; they go to His house in the place of the public assembly of His people; they go to His house in the inner chamber of their hearts; for then being bent on amendment, they desire reproof, they wish to forsake the wrong way for the right, they long to understand the will of God that they may do it; to hear His sentence upon sin, that they may justly dread and abhor it; to listen to His promise of pardon, that they may lay fast hold of it; to hear the call to repentance, that they may instantly and sincerely obey it; thus the Word which was before full only of rebuke, now abounds to them with consolation; that which smote their consciences now soothes them. (*R. W. Evans, B.D.*)

Ver. 11. And Josiah took away the horses that the Kings of Judah had given to the sun.—*The imagination in sin*:—Josiah sought to purify Israel from the idolatry that had been established by his predecessors, and in the course of this reformation occurs the incident recorded in the text. He "took away the horses that the Kings of Judah had given to the sun . . . and burned the chariots of the sun with fire." You ask, What has this to do with the modern world and with modern men? This I wish to show. For it seems to me that there is in the text a twofold lesson which all generations ought to lay to heart. We are taught here—I. THE PRETENTIOUSNESS OF SIN. "The horses of the sun . . . the chariots of the sun." Very large and magnificent indeed! There is wonderful exaggeration about all idolatry. The idol without eyes was known as the God of light; without breath, it was worshipped as the God of life; it could not stand unless it were nailed down or shored up, but it was proclaimed the Thunderer, or distinguished by some other august title. "We know that an idol is nothing in the world," but these nothings have received the highest names and titles, and through the superstition of their worshippers have been invested with the grandest attributes. And as it was with the gods of the Pantheon, so it is with the rabble of the vices; they are full of pretentiousness, they steal supreme names, they make impossible promises. The world of iniquity is a world of dazzling colours, false magnitudes, lurid lights. 1. How brilliant is the world of diseased imagination when compared with the world of sober reality in which God has placed us to work out our life! To-day we are all readers. What are we reading? History, science, philosophy, theology? Are we bent on finding out the great meanings of sober life and real life? You know better. The main part of our leisure hours is taken up with tales of mystery and imagination. Now, I do not wish to stigmatise all the literature of imagination, but I venture to say that, even when such literature is pure, we may easily have too much of it. It is not well to live long with unthinkable people and impossible situations in an ideal and fantastic universe; it puts our eye out for the actual world in which our serious business lies. Multitudes who would not for a moment in actual life touch the vices gilded by literary art will spend their leisure hours in contemplating these lawless things projected into visionary realms. And what is the secret of this ambiguous conduct? The fact is, actual life seems narrow and prosaic, dull and dreary, and so we steal away in the solar phæton. How dim and insipid is the world of sober virtue by the side of lawlessness, excused by sophistry and glorified by imagination! In fiction the grey world becomes kaleidoscopic, and the evil world is etherealised into coloured vapours whose fantastic movements stir our curiosity

and wonder. So, despising the modest vehicles which God appoints for the pilgrimage of human life, we seat ourselves in the flaming car of imagination, and, drawn by fiery steeds of passion, with Zola for a charioteer, make the dizzy, intoxicating, yet terribly dangerous circuit of the sun. 2. Again, the same truth comes out as we compare the victories of war with the victories of peace. War is sometimes inevitable, things being as they are. The scientist holds that in nature a lesser evil is permitted to prevent a greater. Just war is a lesser evil to prevent a greater. There is something better than life, and that is right, equality, liberty; and war is the desperate resort of men crushed by tyranny. Still, war is an evil, a terrible evil. We must never fail to remember that; we must ever pray and work for the golden year when men shall learn war no more. And yet what a glamour there is about the red spectre! The poet may well write of "the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war." But no crowd turns out in the morning to greet the colliers going to their work, or in the evening to cheer the factory hands returning from the mill. There is no glittering romance about industry, no poetry about the toil which creates the wealth of nations. Industry is yoked to a coster's barrow, whilst the powder-cart is the dazzling chariot of the sun. 3. We find another illustration of our point if we compare the career of unlawful speculation with the life of honest gain. How large, glowing, bewitching, is the former compared with the level course of the latter! Look at the titanic speculator. In a few years he emerges out of obscurity into national notoriety. It is all outside the legitimate, but it is dramatic, full of sensation and surprise. Squalid huckstering is transfigured into romance. How different the course of the little shopkeeper, with his "small profits and quick returns!" No song or story this time; no scent of poetry about the ledger, unless it sometimes reminds the shopkeeper of "Paradise Lost." The daring adventurer shoots towards the golden goal in an electric car, whilst the humble trader is a wayfaring man. 4. And, finally, the same truth is evident when we compare the course of sensual pleasure with the simple pleasantness of a blameless life. How violent are the delights of sensualism! How tame the entertainments of the fireside! They are ridiculous compared with the fiery delights of the dram-shop. So it is throughout. The illegitimate and destructive, the things seriously wanting in reason and godliness, appeal most to the imagination; they have a glory and garishness which bewitch and lure into false ways. II. THE PREPOSTEROUSNESS OF SIN. "And Josiah burned the chariots of the sun with fire." Throughout the whole of the reformation that he effected Josiah manifested his deep contempt of the idolatry that had wrought such mischief in Israel. With cutting irony he abolished first one evil thing and then another. "He burned the chariots of the sun with fire." To cremate the chariots of the sun was the grimmest humour. The sun is said to be fifteen times hotter than the hottest thing upon the earth, so that if an incombustible car is wanted anywhere it is required for the insufferable solar majesty; and to cremate the car set apart for the fiery god was to convict it of fraud and to doom it to infinite contempt. To make a bonfire of the chariots of the sun was as ridiculous as if Noah's ark had suffered shipwreck in a fish-pond. All Israel smiled scornfully at the pretentious things blazed in the flame and darkened into the ashes. Here is the truth that I wish to enforce—namely, that, despite all paint and spangles, all its exaggerations and splendours, sin is a miserable sham utterly unworthy of rational men. Wickedness is a screaming farce, as it is also the supreme tragedy. Notwithstanding its theatrical rhetoric, it is a hollow lie doomed to detection and contempt. Have nothing to do with things that cannot bear the test of thought. Thought strips away the cunning disguises of sin; it is the searchlight that makes clear the fact. In the hour of reflection our reason gives the lie to passion; our instincts rebuke our fancies; our conscience scorns the sophistries of imagination. Have nothing to do with that which will not bear the test of experience. Recall the principles and teachings which have been tried and attested by many generations. The devil has an arithmetic of his own which shows how large and splendid are the wages of unrighteousness; but in actual life his specious arithmetic works into bankruptcy and beggary of every kind. Fancy figures out the couriers and chariots of the sun as the dazzling and delightful equipages of the wicked, but a ray of daylight reduces them to the monstrous forms of the policeman's stretcher, the workhouse omnibus, the prison van, the scaffold, the hearse that bears to the grave ere men have lived out half their days. Have nothing to do with that which will not bear the test of time. Things that are seductive in certain hours and moods of temptation look mean and deadly enough if you wait awhile. Time

tries all things and detects the plausibleness which might deceive the elect. There is an illuminating power in time, and it shows up sin as vain, absurd, and contemptible. We wonder that we could ever thus have played the fool. Christ alone can strengthen us to live such a life. He knows what "the chariots of the sun" mean. He was tempted by the vision of the kingdoms and the glory of them. He saw and felt the power of the realm of illusion. The arch-sorcerer worked all his spells on the Son of Man. He refused "the chariot of the sun," and followed the call of duty, the path of the Passion. In the strength of the Master take up your cross and follow Him, and you shall find the realities of power, greatness, and everlasting joy. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Ver. 22. Surely there was not holden such a Passover.—*Sincerity of repentance*.—There is something very striking and melancholy in these words. The children of Israel celebrated their last Passover, all being together, and in such a manner as had not been known since the earlier and better days of their possession of the promised land. It was, in fact, the last repentance of God's people, and a lively repentance it seems to have been, to judge from outward tokens. But, alas! it did not continue. Three times already before this, God's people had publicly repented, under the direction of pious princes, which were Jehoshaphat, Jehoash, Hezekiah. But now the appointed punisher of their sins was openly manifested to their sight in the terrible King of Babylon. And like the sick man with death before his eyes, they made earnest protestations of repentance and amendment if God would spare them, and sealed them with the celebration of the Sacrament of the Paschal Supper. Here, then, is before us the example of a fourth publicly professed repentance, and as ineffectual as the three that went before. Should it not lead us to take very close and scrutinising views of repentance, and to conclude that there must be something in it besides the present feeling of shame and sorrow, however sharp and lively that may be? There must be some abiding feeling in it, which shame and sorrow naturally are not. For the very sense of them drives us to rid ourselves of them by all means. What then can that be? What does God demand beyond the broken heart? Nothing, if it be indeed broken in His name. But here lies the question. Which does the man think most of, his own personal danger, or God's damaged glory? Which does he lament most, his own loss, or God's rejected love? Has he renounced the sinful selfishness of his nature? A man may keep this, and yet be overwhelmed with shame and sorrow; he may retain this, and yet manifest the most lively outward marks of repentance. So did Israel; and was led by it into his sins again, and they led him to the final judgment which came upon his head. Here is the cause of so many apparent repentances in the course of a man's life. Selfish sorrow, selfish shame have wrung his heart, and terrified his conscience. But he has not gone beyond self. He has seen, indeed, the miserable disorder which his sins have wrought in himself in body and in mind. But has he looked out and up to see the miserable disorder which they have also wrought in God's work of love; how they have obscured the brightness of His glory, how they have shaken the faith of His Church, as far as His sphere extends; and who shall tell how far it extends? Here is the principle that is so commonly wanting; here is that which Israel lacked, the heavenly spirit, and not the earthly drags only. When the heart has thus been lifted out of itself, divested of its earthliness and carnality, and has risen into heaven to see the majesty which it has affronted, the love which it has rejected, the glory which it has blasphemed, and thence also looks down again upon the scenes of its sin and mischief amongst God's works and people, and sees them with a clear and sharp eye, and lively and enlightened conscience, as becomes a look from above—then, and not until then, a real repentance has taken place. Such repentance will abide in its effects. In such the heart of the man is changed, so that he has foregone his old appetites, and, therefore, is out of the way of temptation from his old sins. Even though it should force itself upon his sight, he will not allow it to gain his attention, but turn away from it with a stern watchfulness against its ensnaring deceitfulness. He sees in it the art of the enemy of the God whom he serves, of the Redeemer whom he loves, of the Holy Spirit whose guidance he follows. And such repentance, therefore, is both the first and the last. But Israel, we see, made at least four several professions of repentance; and so have many done since. The more frequent they have been, of course the less sincere they have been. And such repentances are more a proof of the folly and selfishness of the man, than of any right and spiritual feeling. They are but the sorrow for having come in for the penalty

of his sin at last. And, as soon as the infliction shall have been removed, he is ready to sin again. And, indeed, after each successive fit, he is but the more ready, because he wishes to drown the voice of conscience, which exclaims against his yielding again to the old temptation; and it is drowned amid his shouts of enjoyment, until the hour of penalty comes round again; then the note is that of lamentation again. Why, what affronting of the majesty of God Almighty is here! So little can the penitent himself depend upon a repentance which does not begin until God's judgment is at hand. How can a heart which he has taught to cheat him continually, and which, at all events, has never been diligently schooled in spiritual discernment; how shall this, at a moment, too, of such confusion, at a time, too, when it is so deeply interested in coming to the more joyful conclusion; how can it, with any certainty, distinguish the sorrow and fear which arose from the love of self, now that he is in such danger, from the love of God, now that He is resorted to after long forgetfulness? Will it not be too glad to mistake the fear for the love? Will not, indeed, the fear most certainly be there? All this tells us, what a broken reed men lean upon who trust in a last sickness to any feeling of repentance which they have not felt and cherished in the time of their health. Then judgment was far off, and God was sought therefore from love rather than from fear. Health is the time of strength, for the spirit no less than for the body. Let health, then, be the season of true repentance, and sickness will be the season of comfort, and the hour of death the season of well-founded hope. (*R. W. Evans, B.D.*)

Vers. 25-37. And like unto him there was no king before him.—Josiah's reformation. :—This and the previous chapter show us the influence of a godly sovereign. This prince at the age of twenty-six begins to repair the house of God. This leads to the discovery of the long-lost book of the law. At once Josiah obeys its teaching. He consults Huldah, and receives the Lord's message. Finding himself exempted from vengeance on account of his repentance, he endeavours to lead his people to obtain the same exemption, and for this purpose institutes a thorough national reformation. This, we read, consisted of (1) purifying the temple of idolatrous vessels; (2) putting down all idolatrous teachers; (3) defiling all idol altars throughout the land; (4) keeping the Passover in a solemn manner. From this we may learn—I. **THAT PERSONAL REFORMATION SPRINGS FROM A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WORD APPLIED TO THE HEART BY FAITH.** It was this that influenced Josiah (*Ps. cxix. 130*). "The entrance of Thy word giveth light" (*Acts xvii. 11, 12*). "Therefore many believed." II. **THAT TRUE PERSONAL REFORMATION CONSISTS OF DOING AND UNDOING.** 1. Undoing old associations, by—(1) Looking sin in the face, and comparing ourselves with our pattern, by the light of God's written Word (*Phil. ii. 5, &c.*). (2) Cleansing the temple of God (*2 Cor. vi. 16*) of all that defiles. (3) Giving up all people, practices, and places which tempt to sin; *e.g.* cards, novels, balls, &c.: let each conscience decide for itself. 2. Doing, by—(1) Entering into a solemn covenant with God to obey Him, &c.; confirmation. (2) Publicly, as well as privately, keeping His commandments and wishes; Holy Communion. III. **THAT PERSONAL REFORMATION HAS RESULTS:** 1. Comfort and peace to those who carry it out. For thirty years Josiah's reign was a peaceful and happy one to himself. So soul-reformation brings peace to the believer. 2. A blessing, though it may be only a temporary one, to those who, even outwardly, take part in it. The punishment pronounced upon the land was deferred (*xxii. 20*) till after Josiah's death, and a believer brings blessings on those around him. 3. The fulfilment of God's word (*ver. 16* and *Isa. v. 11*). The Christian rejoices in the fulfilment of *Matt. xi. 28-30*. But notice two warnings: 1. No personal reformation can be effected without the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit (*John xvi. 8, &c.; Zech. iv. 6*). 2. Personal piety cannot stop national punishment (*cf. Zech. iii. 2*). Josiah has a grand epitaph written over him (*ver. 25*) by the finger of God. May such be ours! (*J. W. Mills, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XXIV.

VERS. 1-16. In his days Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came up.—*Wickedness, retribution, and Divine control, as revealed in Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah*.—In glancing through these chapters there are two objects that press on our attention. (1) A national crisis. The peace, the dignity, the wealth, the religious privileges of Judah are converging to a close. Israel has already been carried away by a despot to a foreign land, and now Judah is meeting its fate. All nations have their crises—they have their rise, their fall, their dissolution. (2) A terrible despot. The name of Nebuchadnezzar comes for the first time under our attention. I. **THE WICKEDNESS OF MAN.** The wickedness here displayed is marked—1. By inveteracy. It is here said of Jehoiachin, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done." In verse 18 the same is also said of Zedekiah, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiachin had done." The wickedness here displayed is marked—2. By tyranny. "At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it." What right had Nebuchadnezzar to leave his own country, invade Judah, plunder it of its wealth, and bear away by violence its population? The wickedness here displayed is marked—3. By inhumanity. "And the King of Babylon . . . he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon King of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land." The wickedness here displayed is marked—4. By profanity. "He hurled the house of the Lord," &c. Thus this ruthless despot desecrated the most holy things in the city of Jerusalem and in the memory of millions. II. **THE RETRIBUTION OF HEAVEN.** In the retribution here displayed we are reminded of two facts: That the sins of one man may bring misery on millions. "Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of His sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not pardon." All the misery here recorded comes to the people "for the sins of Manasseh." Here is the hereditary principle of Divine government. Will not the following facts anyhow modify the severity of the complaint? (1) That no man is made to suffer more than he actually deserves on account of his own personal sin. (2) That the evils which thus descend to us from our ancestors are not to be compared with those we produce ourselves. (3) That whilst the hereditary principle of the Divine government entails evils, it also entails good. Great as are the evils that have come down to us from posterity, great also is the good. (4) This hereditary principle tends to restrain vice and stimulate virtue. The parent knowing, as all parents must know, the immense influence he exerts upon his offspring, and having the common natural affection, will be set more or less on his guard; he will restrain evil passions which otherwise he would allow to sport with uncontrolled power, and prosecute efforts of a virtuous tendency, which otherwise he would entirely neglect. 2. The pernicious influence of a man's sin in the world may continue after his conversion. Manasseh repented of the sins he had committed, and received the favours of his God. Notwithstanding we find men here suffering on account of the sins he had committed. 3. That retribution, though it may move slowly, yet will move surely. A hundred years had well-nigh passed away, and several generations had come and gone since Manasseh had gone to his grave. Yet avenging justice appears at last, and wreaks upon others the terrible effects of his crimes. The tardy march of retribution men have made the occasion and the reason of continued depravity, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily," &c. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XXV.

VERS. 1-21. And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign.—*Captivity of Judah*:—We have two prominent characters in this lesson—Zedekiah King of Judah, and Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon. The latter was one of the remarkable men of the world, not only as a military conqueror, but as a ruler of great genius and executive power. Zedekiah was the youngest son of Josiah, and was placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar at the age of twenty-one. He reigned eleven years in Jerusalem, and “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings xxiv. 19). At length he revolted against the King of Babylon, and this revolt was the beginning of the end, which was the captivity of Judah. It was in the year 589 B.C., in the month of January, that the siege of Jerusalem commenced, and it lasted one year five months and twenty-seven days. During this time the besieging army, or a part of it, marched to meet the Egyptians, who were coming to the help of the Jews, and with the retreat of the Egyptians the siege was continued even more rigorously. As the Jews were accustomed to observe the anniversary of national disasters with fastings, the dates of such disasters were preserved accurately. (See Zech. vii. 3-5, viii. 19.) By turning to Jer. xxxiv. 7 we learn that the army of Nebuchadnezzar also besieged the cities of Lachish and Azekah, which were the only strongholds remaining to the Jews, so that with their capture the victory was complete and the humiliation of God’s people perfected (vers. 1-3). It is interesting to study the life of Jeremiah in connection with the events of this lesson (Jer. chaps. xxxvii., xxxviii.), for it was he who prevented for some time the revolt of the king against the yoke of Babylon by counselling submission and patience, and after the siege he urged Zedekiah to surrender to the enemy, assuring him, by the word of the Lord, that there was nothing to be gained by resistance, and that the end would be the burning of the city and the king’s capture and death. And now commenced the afflictions of Zedekiah—afflictions which were the fulfilment of Divine prophecy, in which fulfilment the King of Babylon was unconsciously the instrument in God’s hand in the punishment of this wicked monarch of Judah. And notice how terrible the punishment was. In the first place, his sons were put to death before his eyes, the purpose being to put an end to the dynasty. Then we learn from Jer. xli. 10 that his daughters were carried into captivity. In addition to this, Zedekiah himself was bound in chains, “fettters of brass,” and double fetters too, so that he was bound hand and foot, making escape impossible. His trial took place in the royal camp at Riblah, but we may suppose that it was a mere form, since the guilt of Zedekiah in breaking his oath of allegiance to the King of Babylon was known to all. Now let us consider what sins Zedekiah had committed, which brought down upon him and his family and the people of God this terrible punishment. 1. We know from 2 Kings xxiv. 19 that he did not seek the glory of God in his reign. “He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all which Jehoiakim had done.” By studying the history of the reign of his brother Jehoiakim we know that this “evil” consisted in the fact that he did not oppose and overthrow idolatry in the kingdom. We have no evidence that Zedekiah was himself an idolater, but we are responsible to God not only for what we say and do, but for our influence over others. 2. Another sin of Zedekiah’s was his revolt from the King of Babylon, and we learn from the punishment visited upon Judah’s king the sacredness of an oath in God’s sight. 3. Zedekiah broke a solemn covenant which he had made with the people, that all Jews held in bondage should be set free. In accordance with the king’s command, this degree of emancipation was carried out, and no Jew throughout Judah was a slave. But when it was known that the Egyptian army was coming to help them, then Zedekiah thought that he would not need the assistance of these freedmen in the battle with the enemy, and so the order of emancipation was revoked, and slavery was re-established in the land (Jer. xxxiv. 16, 17). 4. Zedekiah’s treatment of the prophet was another cause which led to his overthrow. Although in the beginning of the national peril he had sent to Jeremiah with the urgent message, “Pray now unto the Lord our God for us,” yet we read (Jer. xxxvii. 2), “Neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of the Lord, which he spake by the prophet Jeremiah.” And not only did he refuse to follow the prophet’s advice, but he yielded to the enemies of this fearless man of God, and suffered them to imprison and maltreat him. There are some very

solemn lessons which we learn from the sad life and tragic end of this last king of Judah. They are—1. The first and indispensable requisite to success is for one to gain the victory over his own lower nature. So long as we are slaves to sin, we cannot be great in any path of life, but he who keeps self under, who has conquered passions and appetites for the sake of God and His cause, is sure to live a royal life, though he may never sit on a throne. 2. The fact that any one is our enemy does not relieve us from the obligation to keep faith with him (Josh. ix. 19). Perjury is always a terrible sin. 3. If our trust is in God, we need never fear what our enemies may do, for with God on our side all must be well. Zedekiah feared his nobles because he had no faith in God. 4. The Christian is the only one who can be absolutely fearless of the future, for around him are the everlasting arms. Zedekiah put his trust in the fortifications around Jerusalem; if he had trusted in Jehovah and believed the words of Jeremiah, his life would have been safe and his kingdom would have been preserved. David sang: "In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength and my refuge is in God." 5. We never gain by doing wrong. When we do evil that good may come, we are always disappointed. 6. God is not mocked. If He determines to punish, no walls or weapons can defeat His purpose. When He says to us that all other paths but the one which he has marked out lead to destruction, we may be sure that our disobedience will in the end prove His words to be true (Jer. ii. 17; Hos. xiii. 9). (*A. E. Kitteridge, D.D.*) *The captivity of Judah*:—The destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and the removal of the Jews into the Babylonish captivity, were a Divine judgment. Nebuchadnezzar was an unconscious agent of God in destroying, as Cyrus was in rebuilding and restoring. This judgment was not final. Terrible as it was, it was a chastisement rather than a punishment. As such it illustrates some features of the Divine method in disciplinary judgment. I. IT IS A DIVINE METHOD TO DELAY JUDGMENT, not only final, but also partial judgment. The instructions of Moses had been clear. His warnings had been full and explicit. He had gathered in the Book of Deuteronomy a complete presentation of the conditions upon which his people would alone be blessed; failing to comply with which they would be afflicted and cursed. When the people began to transgress, God began to afflict them; first, however, reviewing the warning of Moses by His prophetic messengers. He was prompt to chide them. As a father He chastised them. II. THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS ARE CERTAIN. We do not know the time of them, but God does. It is delayed, but it is not indefinite. It is fixed. There are many hints in the Scripture at the exact timing of events in God's government. The Saviour began early to speak of His hour. At times He said it was not yet come. The night was coming, but it had not come. Then the fateful announcement fell from His lips in a prayer: "Father, the hour is come!" One chapter in Ezekiel, pointing to the culmination of judgment upon Judah, has for its awful refrain, It is come. The notes of time in the history grow definite. Nebuchadnezzar came in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month. In the eleventh year, the fourth month, the ninth day, the supply of food gave out, and famine prevailed. In the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, in the fifth month, in the seventh day of the month, the city was destroyed. The very hour when the Chaldeans broke into the city is recorded. So certain are the delayed judgments of God, if men do not repent. They impend. They are withheld. They may be withdrawn. God would withdraw them. It grieves Him to inflict them. But when a certain definite hour is reached, and His people is still incorrigible, they must fall. A thousand years may pass. Men may grow bold, and say, "Since the fathers fell asleep, all things remain as they were from the beginning." But not when the hour strikes. Then, punctually, the fire falls upon the cities of the plain, and the floods of the deluge are poured out, and Shiloh falls, and Samaria falls, and Jerusalem falls. Here is a lesson for all nations, all families, all individuals, under the Divine government. To remain unsubmitive under the government of God is to expose ourselves to His judgments. These may be delayed. Not so, they will be delayed. But their time is not indefinite: it is fixed. When the hour is reached the blow will fall. It may be a trial; it may be an affliction; it may be a tragedy. It may be all these three, for disciplinary judgments are cumulative. III. THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD ARE THOROUGH. It is true of those that are final, it is true also of those that are partial. When Nebuchadnezzar came, he had a force equal to his needs. He came in person with "all his host." Jeremiah says more explicitly, "All his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth of his dominion, and all

the people." This immense host was the Lord's messenger. "It seemed," says Stanley, "to those who witnessed it, like the rising of a mighty eagle, spreading out its vast wings, feathering with the innumerable colours of the variegated masses which composed the Chaldean host, sweeping over the different countries, and striking fear in his rapid flight." If this array had not been sufficient for the conquest, God would have brought new levies; for the day was come. The siege was thorough. The city was surrounded. It was assailed from huge mounds and towers built up for the purpose. For a year and a half it held out. Then its store of provisions failed. Fathers devoured the flesh of their own sons and daughters. The hands even of pitiful mothers have sodden their own children, the mere infants just born. When the city still stubbornly held out, the siege was pressed more fiercely. At last the wall was pierced. At midnight the breach was made. The Chaldeans swarmed in. The destruction was complete. The ark now disappeared, to be seen no more. Tradition says that Jeremiah buried it. Probably the fire destroyed it. It could not have been taken to Babylon with the spoil of the temple, the pillars of Solomon, and the molten sea, whose loss Jeremiah so bitterly bewailed; for otherwise it would have been returned with the other temple furniture by Cyrus. It was not needed longer. Religion had not disappeared from the nation. It is of much consequence to observe, in the light of this history, that a certain proportion of religious life is necessary to save a nation or an individual. There were individuals like Jeremiah and Baruch and their friends. There were youths like Daniel and his companions. There were others, perhaps even numerous, who cherished the law so recently discovered by Josiah, and whose recovery was so joyfully regarded as an event of national importance. But it was not enough to save the nation that there were good men and women in it, or that it had the Bible. IV. THE PURPOSE OF A DISCIPLINARY JUDGMENT IS KEPT EVER IN VIEW. Though the judgment of Judah was terribly thorough it was not final. Its aim was to save the nation, if possible, and as many of its individual citizens as possible. A considerable remnant of the poorer classes was left on the land to keep it in tillage. Those taken into captivity were told that it should only be of limited duration. After seventy years they should return. They were permitted to have prophets and religious teachers with them in Babylon and in Judah. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Captivity of Judah*.—If we come to the fall of Jerusalem with the desire to see not merely a special judgment of God, but to gain lessons from the operation of what are commonly called natural causes, we shall discover three facts to which it was largely due. 1. Bad economic conditions. Judah fell into the hands of the Babylonians because her kings had wasted her resources. David gave a united nation to Solomon, who in turn passed it, still entire, to Rehoboam. Under this its fourth king the nation was broken into two hostile kingdoms. The narrative gives the cause explicitly,—unendurable taxation. The glory of Solomon, his navy and palaces and harem and chariots, had been purchased at the price of great suffering on the part of the people. Had Rehoboam followed the advice of his older counsellors and lightened taxation, Jeroboam would never have become his rival, and the confederation of the twelve tribes, none too strong at best, would not have wasted its strength in civil war. 2. Moral degeneracy. But back of the bad financial policy of the nation lay its moral weakness. For a nation whose God was Jehovah, the Jews were wonderfully prone to idolatry. If we except a few years of David's reign, there was not a moment, from the Call to the Return, when Israel was not itching to run after strange gods. Solomon was a typical eclectic in religion, permitting heathen divinities to be worshipped by the side of his great temple. The reforms of such kings as Hezekiah and Josiah were short-lived, and served but to set in strange contrast the popular worship in the high places and the groves. 3. Disregard of religious teachers. Nothing is more dramatic than the struggle between the prophets and the kings of Israel. Samuel with the gigantic Saul cowering at his feet; Elijah defying Ahab, slaying the prophets of Baal, and running from Jezebel; Elisha travelling up and down a half-converted land; Isaiah outspoken and dying a martyr's death; Jeremiah deep in the filth of his prison,—are but leaders in the noble army of prophets whom God sent to guide Israel through the paths of national success, in the face of the bitterest opposition. Each of them was faithful and spoke his message; but his words passed unheeded, or only excited anger and persecution. Neither people nor king cared to follow the stern words of their religious teachers, except as they were threatened by some overwhelming disaster. Then, perhaps,

for a few days or months, the worship of Jehovah was reinstated in its proper place, and the prophetic office was again honoured. Judah is the type of the world. Had its king listened to God's servants, the nation would have weathered its financial distress and been cured of its wickedness. In their words lay the only hope: and Judah laughed at them and stoned them. Jerusalem, the Zion of David, became the execution city of the prophets. Judah fell, just as any nation will fall that fails to apply religion to national problems. The one great lesson of the captivity of Judah is this: the fearless application of Christianity to living questions is the duty of both clergy and laymen, and the hope of the state. (*S. Matthews.*)

Ver. 18. *And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest. — Unconscious heroism.*—1. Most of us, I daresay, are familiar with the story of the faithful sentinel at Pompeii. It is told for us by Miss Yonge, in her little book of golden deeds. The man was an ordinary soldier, set to guard the city gate. It was the time of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, and from the position assigned to him he was able to watch the stream of molten lava, like a cruel crawling hungry tide, setting in the direction of Pompeii: on and on it came: nearer and nearer with its blinding light and burning flame it advanced towards him: but the sentinel never stirred from his post; he stood where he had been ordered to stand: and when after more than a thousand years the buried city was, as it were, disinterred from her sepulchre, the good soldier's bones, still girt about with breast-plate and helmet, and with the hand still raised to keep the dust from his mouth, remained to tell all future generations how a Roman soldier, rather than leave the post of duty, was not unwilling to die. The story is not without modern parallels. Lord Wolseley pays a tribute of respectful admiration to the chivalrous faithfulness which was shown by one of the English sentinels at the battle of Inkermann. In the blinding mist of the November morning, the Russian soldiers crept within our lines. Through what some call chance, but what we would rather call the providence of God, the enemy in their progress failed to come across one of our sentries: all day long, with enemies before him and enemies behind him, that man remained where he had been placed; and when, in the evening of the day, the thin red line of our troops drove back their opponents into their entrenchments, Lord Wolseley found this sentinel, still holding his ground, at his post, doing his duty. I have referred to these two incidents, not merely because they are golden deeds, but because they help, I think, to illustrate the act of unconscious heroism which our text describes. In this last chapter of the Second Book of Kings we read the story of the abolition of the Jewish monarchy and of the leading away into captivity of the Jewish people. From the throne on which had once reigned David and Solomon and Hezekiah, the last occupant passed forth a blind and childless man, to the ignominy of a Babylonish prison: by command of King Nebuchadnezzar, the wall and the palaces of the city, once the joy of the whole earth, were levelled to the ground: and the holy and beautiful temple, fragrant with cedar wood and bright with gold, where in happier days the shining cloud of God's presence had rested upon the mercy seat, was turned into a charred and dilapidated ruin. Verily the weeping captives as they went forth to their exile in the land of the enemy must have learned at last the lesson which is taught so plainly on every page of history, and by the experience of every life, "be sure your sin will find you out." But just as some gleams of pleasant sunshine will often come to cheer us at the end of a cloudy and dark day, so this dark and terrible national catastrophe seems to have been lit up by at least one deed of noble unconscious heroism. When the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar forced themselves at last into the very precincts of the temple, the great crowd of worshippers, who habitually were present there, had gone; the many attendant priests and Levites, who habitually assisted at the services, had also gone; but Seraiah the chief priest was there; and Zephaniah the second priest was there; and there were also present three men whose names are not so much as told us, three men of whom the historian apparently knows nothing, three men who were faithful but not famous; they were only keepers of the door, but faithful among the faithless, they were ready to sacrifice their lives rather than desert their posts. "The captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the second priest and the three keepers of the door, and the king of Babylon smote them and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath." What epitaph shall we write on the grave of these unconscious heroes? "Be thou faithful unto

death and I will give thee a crown of life." It is the peculiar glory of the Christian religion that it has sowed the world broadcast with unconscious heroes. By their love of God, by their devotion to duty, by the unselfishness of their lives, by their repression of themselves, by their enthusiasm for humanity you may know them; they are to be met with almost everywhere; in cottages, in palaces; in towns and villages; in busy workshops, in great seats of learning; in the silence of the sick-room, among those who go down to the sea in ships, in the darkness of the underground mine. They are of all ages; some are schoolboys and schoolgirls; some are young men and maidens; some are old and grey-headed, weary with the burden of three score years and ten, holding the staff in the hand for very age. Yes, "who can count the dust of Jacob or the number of the fourth part of Israel?" Thanks to the example which our Lord set, thanks to the teaching which our Lord gave, thanks to the Holy Spirit which our Lord sends, unconscious Christian heroes have been as the stars in heaven for multitude and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable. Quite impossible is it for human mind to measure the widespread fruitfulness of any single life, however humble, thus given unreservedly to the service of God. As God's word expressly teaches us, as Church History continually reminds us, as our own experience of life shows us, it is, as a rule, Almighty God's way to work great results by apparently insufficient means. By little grains of sand the proud waters of the sea are held within their limits; by little drops of rain the earth is made to give seed to the sower and bread to the eater. When our Lord Jesus Christ came to save the world He chose the humiliations of poverty and the ignominy of a death upon a cross. Not so much by the pre-eminent holiness of great saints as by the unconscious heroism of numberless Christian lives has the faith, which was once committed to the saints, won its way throughout the world. Sometimes it is given to us to know how fruitful a humble Christian life can be. In our own time a single Christian nobleman has been allowed to lift hundreds and thousands of his fellow-countrymen out of abysses of ignorance and oppression, and in many cases to guide their feet into the way of peace. But whence did Lord Shaftesbury acquire his enthusiasm for humanity and his desire to serve God? He did not learn it from his father or mother; he did not learn it from his schoolmasters at Harrow or elsewhere; but he learned it, as he tells us, from that unlettered, faithful nurse who had the courage to lift up her voice for God, who spoke to him about our Lord Jesus Christ, and taught him to pray, who prayed with him and prayed for him, and who unconsciously sowed a seed in a kindly soil, which brought forth fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold, hundredfold. 3. And here we stop and ask how is it possible to attain to that state of grace which produces as its natural fruit a life of unconscious Christian heroism? I answer you by referring you to a text of Scripture. We read that when Moses after forty days came down from the clouds and darkness that wreathed and settled on the top of Sinai, "he wist not," so the Revised Version has it, "that the skin of his face shone by reason of his speaking with God." For forty days without weariness and without cessation he had lived in the light of the presence of God; during that time there had been revealed to him, as before time to no other, thoughts from the mind of God; and when at last he turned to go back to the camp of Israel, lo, just as the moon with its surface of extinct volcanoes gets illuminated by the beams of the sun, till it is beautiful with silver light, so the earthly features of the countenance of Moses were radiant with more than human brightness, and the Israelites could not bear to look upon him because he reflected the glory of God. Yet Moses wist not that his countenance did shine because of his speaking with God. Surely it is not difficult to guess the secret of the faithfulness to duty of those three keepers of the door in the house of the Lord. Do you ask how it was that when they heard the tramp of the army of the enemy they did not make haste to escape? How it was that when priest and Levite, and chorister, and worshipper were seeking safety they choose to remain at their post? Was it not because they were men worthy of their office? They preferred to be doorkeepers in the house of the Lord rather than dwell in the tents of ungodliness; their hearts rejoiced within them when they said one to another, day by day, "Let us go into the house of the Lord." They loved worship; they loved duty; they loved God; and so when the hour of their trial came they cast in their lot with Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the second priest, being all the time as unconscious of their heroism as Moses was of his glory, when he wist not that the skin of his face shone by reason of his speaking with God. And not otherwise has it been with all the bright and shining lives which have

made the pages of Church history, and the homes of pious Christians flash and glitter like a milky way. They were by nature men of like passions with ourselves, they were compassed like us with manifold infirmities; they found, as we do, a law in their members warring against the law of their minds; but over and over again, morning, noon, and night, they prayed God that for Jesus Christ's sake Satan might not have dominion over them, and so, out of weakness they were made strong, "and in the darkness o'er their fallen heads perceived the waving of the hands that bless." (*W. T. Harrison, D.D.*) *Heroism instructive*:—Heroism is not heroism until it is ingrained in the character. No one can become an hero in an instant. Like the flower of the century plant, heroism is the sudden blossoming of what has been years in preparation. It is not premeditated, it is instinctive, because nobility has grown into a habit, and grandeur has become the life-blood, and self-sacrifice the very fibre of the nerves. So we may parody Milton's famous saying, "If you would write an epic, your whole life must be an heroic poem," and assert, "If you would do a deed of heroism at any time in the future, you must begin to be a hero now." (*Amos R. Wells.*)

Vers. 27-30. And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin.—*Jehoiachin as a victim of tyrannic despotism and as an object of delivering mercy*:—The incident here recorded presents Jehoiachin—I. AS A VICTIM OF TYRANNIC DESPOTISM. He had been in prison for thirty-seven years and was fifty-five years of age. It was Nebuchadnezzar, the tyrannic King of Babylon, who stripped this man of liberty and freedom, and shut him up in a dungeon for this very long period of time. Such despotism has prevailed in all ages and lands. To the eternal dishonour of England, it has existed here for centuries, and is rampant even now. Look at this man—II. AS AN OBJECT OF DELIVERING MERCY. We are told that as soon as "Evil-Morodach" came to the throne on the death of his father Nebuchadnezzar, mercy stirred his heart and he relieved this poor victim of tyranny. Corrupt as this world is, the element of mercy is not entirely extinct. This mercy gave honour and liberty to the men who had been so long in confinement and disgrace. Let not the victims of tyranny—and they abound everywhere—despair. Mercy will ere long sound the trump of jubilee over all the land. "The spirit of the Lord," said the great Redeemer of the race, "is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor, He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

END OF SECOND KINGS.