

THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.

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THE
BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

(Continued).

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, who can answer all thy questions? Thou hast hedged us round about with mystery. Dost thou taunt us with thine inquiries that we may know how small we are? or dost thou seek to lure us to nobler subjects that we may cultivate the whole inheritance of our mind? Thou dost take us into far-away places and plunge us into immeasurable shades, and we hear thy questions and cannot answer them; when we think we know something, thou dost overwhelm and confound us with some new question; we are dazed and blinded and lost. We are glad of this, for things are larger than they look; every stone has a temple in it, every shadow veils its own little mystery; all things have voices, though we have not yet given them opportunity to pour upon our attention their sweet music. It is a great world, it is a wondrous life; sometimes we want the word Immortality to eke out our speech, for this is more than life, it is rapture, it is agony, it is joy supreme, it is a quivering weakness that indicates inexhaustible strength. We bless thee for all these contradictions and mysteries, these cross-lights and vexing shadows; they humble us, and bring us to the right attitude, and call upon us to cry out unto the living God, What art thou, and where? and, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Is it always to be this living under the shadow of a stone wall? are we to be hemmed in always by this granite? We want the horizon, radiant and yielding, going back as we go forward to charm us into more solemn solitudes. Heighten all our thoughts, deliver us from all littleness, from all envy, bitterness, uncharitableness, and monotony, and lift us up into those high exercises of contemplation and homage that shall bring us back to the world more industrious and more earnest after the things of God. We are now following the call of Jesus: Greater things than these shall ye do, said he, when he pointed to all his miracles. The Spirit of God was promised by the Saviour of the world to abide with us. What can we do on one short visit? what can we see by one transient glance? We want a teacher to abide with us, and thus destroy all time by giving us to feel that we are lost in

God's eternity. Pity us one and all, save us from our distresses, and when thy waves and thy billows come over us, may we not call them billows and waves, but thy billows and thy waves; then they shall be like summer dreams. Be in the house that everybody else has forsaken: charm the solitude that no human friendship breaks: help those who are heavy-laden to carry their burdens, and upon eyes that are weary with watching send some refreshing slumber. O Man of the Cross, Christ of Calvary, turn our prayers into great answers! Amen.

Chapter xx. 10-18.

"For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten. But, O Lord of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause. Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord: for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers. Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide; because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?"

PATHETIC EXPERIENCES.

IN these verses we have two distinct aspects of human experience. Even supposing, as some critics do, that there is some dislocation as to their exact sequence, still we have a disparity which we ourselves can attest as being real and not imaginary. Within this brief section Jeremiah is on the hill-top and in the deepest valley of spiritual dejection. It may be that verse 14 and onward should have come in connection with the previous paragraph, should have continued or gone before verse 7. But that does not touch the reality of the case; we are not now dealing with literal criticism, but with a very tragical and solemn experience.

How much depends upon circumstances for man's estimate of

life! That estimate varies with climate, with incidents of a very trivial nature, and with much that is only superficial and transitory. A man's health will affect his whole view of life, will give him a new philosophy of things, will bring down the brightest mind to fear, doubt, dejection, almost despair. Find a man who is well, robust, quite ardent in health, and ask him what life is: and it is a lofty sky, a green landscape, a daily prosperity, a continual victory—to live is to be blessed. Ask a man who is very ill, who has no physical energy, pith, or confidence, and his view of life is that this is a vale of tears, that there is more darkness than light in life, and more misery than joy in the world. He does not speak from his higher faculties; he speaks from a basis of circumstances which may change to-morrow, and then his whole philosophy and his whole theology will change along with it. Life is one thing to the successful man, and another to the man whose life is one continual series of defeats and disappointments. It is well, therefore, that all men should have a touch of failure, and spend a night or two now and then in deepest darkness that cannot be relieved: such experience teaches sympathy, develops the noblest faculties, brings into beneficent exercise many generous emotions, and in the morning, after a long night's struggle with doubt, there may be tears in the eyes; but those tears denote the end of weakness and the beginning of strength. The sun has much to do with our theology, and can cause us to fall into dejection or rise into triumph. The sun changes our civilisation, tells us what we shall wear and what we shall not wear, and will always have his own way. Reasoning goes no distance with the sun. Summer comes with its philosophy of life, and turns upside down all the counsels of winter; and winter in its turn comes and puts to confusion all the mellow, genial, happy, songful views and experiences of summer. The year is not one season, but four, and we must pass through all the four before we can know what the year is. So with life: we must be with Jeremiah on the mountain-top, or with him in the deep valley; we must join his song, and fall into the solemn utterance of his sorrow, before we can know what the whole gamut of life is. They are little, narrow, selfish, and wholly insufficient, who have only lived on one side of the hill.

How religiously triumphant is Jeremiah in verse 11 :—

“But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one : therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail : they shall be greatly ashamed ; for they shall not prosper : their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten.”

How bravely he speaks ! how rapid his utterance ! how urgent his tone of triumph and confidence ! He can never be sad again. We have had such religious rapture, and we have said to one another :—

If our fellowship below
With Jesus be so sweet,
What heights of rapture shall we know
When round his throne we meet !

We have wanted a whole revolution in our hymnody ; we would expel from the hymnal every verse that had in it one shade of melancholy, one tone of dejection ; we looked with compassion, somewhat dashed with contempt, upon those who bowed down their heads and said the way was long and weary ; now hot, now cold, but altogether difficult, and almost impassable. We said they had themselves largely to blame, for as for our own soul, there was no harp sweet enough through which to utter the praises of its gratitude. How impossible it is to realise all the conflicting experiences at once, and to be wise. There is an abundance of information, there is a plentifulness of criticism that is detestable ; but wisdom—large, generous, motherly wisdom, that understands every man's case, and has an answer to every man's necessity—oh, whither has that angel-mother fled ? We need now and again to come into contact with those who know us altogether, and who can speak the word of cheer when we are cheerless, and the word of chastening when our rapture becomes riotous.

Then how profoundly despondent this same man is in verses 14, 15 :—

“Cursed be the day wherein I was born : let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee ; making him very glad.”

This cannot be the same voice. We should doubt it if we had not experience of a kindred scope and quality ourselves. The same fountain can send forth praises and curses ; the same

heart marvellously expresses the consistency of its feeling in its very variety. We may sometimes doubt the piety that is monotonous: may it not be monotonous because it is mechanical? All the wheels move regularly; they are all lubricated at certain times, and the whole motion is fluent, noiseless. In such circumstances it may not be unlawful to doubt the vitality of the piety. Machinery does not suffer consciously. Life is suffering, life is death, and death is birth. How seldom we find any man who can understand any other two men when those two men express a total difference of experience. Each man has his own foot-rule by which he measures the case that comes before him; each man has his ready calculator to which he turns to see what one sum multiplied by another sum comes to. But how difficult to distinguish minute differences! How easy to discriminate broadly, but how difficult to come to close quarters, to microscopic ministries, to fibrous examinations, to all the finest analyses of thought and feeling and condition, so that each shall have a portion of meat in due season, and each shall feel that the table was spread for him. Here we have a man in two absolutely contrary states of experience. He is not the only man who represented contrariety in moral and spiritual feeling and condition. We must not be cast down with sorrow overmuch. Some who are melancholy are not forsaken of God; there is something physically wrong with them. Some who suppose they have committed the unpardonable sin may only have committed some sin against what are called the laws of nature or the laws of health, or they may be suffering in a physical hell which has been created for them by thoughtless or vicious progenitors. The night side should always be recognised. Men should speak of the night, for the night is a reality: but they should not forget to say that the morning cometh; and though the night hasten upon its heels, night shall fail in the race, and morning shall go alone on its eternal passage. There is enough to justify a certain measure of despondency.

Consider the vanity of life, and by its vanity understand its brevity, its uncertainty, its fickleness. We have no gift of time, we have no assurance of continuance; we have a thousand yesterdays, we have not one to-morrow. Then how things

disappoint us that were going to make us glad! The flowers have been blighted, or the insects have fallen upon them, or the cold wind has chilled them, and they have never come to full fruition or bloom or beauty; and the child that was going to comfort us in our old age died first, as if frightened by some ghost invisible to us. Then the collisions of life, its continual competitions and rivalries and jealousies; its mutual criticisms, its backbitings and slanderings; its censures, deserved and undeserved: who can stand the rush and tumult of this life? Who has not sometimes longed to lay it down and begin some better, sunnier state of existence? Who has wholly escaped sighing, weariness, yearning that means, This is not our rest; there must be a city to complete this, a city which brings to completeness of significance and joy all the symbols and hints which make this present life-stage so bewildering? And the sufferings of life, who shall number them?—not the great sufferings that are published, not the great woes that draw the attention even of the whole household to us in tender regard; but sufferings we never mention, spiritual sufferings, yea, even physical sufferings; sufferings that we dare not mention, sufferings that would be laughed at by unsympathetic contempt—but still sufferings. Add all these elements and possibilities together, and then say who has not sometimes been almost anxious to “shuffle off this mortal coil,” and pass into the liberty of rest.

Only they who are in spiritual service, only pastors who have won the friendship of a thousand hearts, can really tell how much melancholy there is in the world. The most of people never escape the limits of private individuality, so that they do not know what is passing around them; but the pastor who has the touch of sympathy, and who has evidently the ear of attention, hears and knows by numberless means—whisperings, open communications, letters well attested, and whole volumes of family history—how much misery there is in the world. We know to whom to tell the tale of our grief. Men do not care to whisper their confidences to the unheeding rock; but let them find a man who is akin to their souls, and who can listen in a way that amounts to a reply, then how they will pour into his ear the sad and saddening story, and get out of their very speech some hope at

least of mitigation. Some men are not to be consulted upon anything, because they know nothing but the sky of their own little life, the horizon of their own contracted outlook, and they cannot understand any other kind of nature than their own. Jesus Christ understands us all. We can all tell Jesus, as the disciples did, what has happened. He can listen to each of us as if his interest were entranced and enthralled. He knows every quiver of the life, every throb of the heart, every palpitation of fear, and every shout of joy. Withhold nothing from him. You can tell him all, and when you have ended you will find that you may begin life again. In your hope is his answer.

Judged by the grave being the end of things, we may well be despondent. If life ends in death, as we understand that term death, then it is a failure in many serious respects. Now Christianity would improve upon this estimate of life, even if the grave were its goal. Christianity has a wonderful message to our melancholy. Christianity would say to us, If it could be proved that all life is a gallop to the grave, still life might be made beautiful, useful, valuable, and precious beyond all possible possessions. There is much selfishness in Christian piety—so miscalled. What does some people's religion amount to but a sighing for heaven, a sighing for rest, for some form of luxury? They are always saying what it will be to escape life and earth, and time and sense, and pass into the invisible and the eternal. It is all selfishness and vanity; it is not piety; it has nothing to do with the Spirit of Christ. We should be as pure, generous, industrious, faithful, if to-morrow's sun is to set upon our grave, from which there is no resurrection of any kind. That is what Christianity would teach us. Christianity says, A noble life is worth living, even for its effect upon itself, and its influence upon others. Your mother is not dead; yea, though there be nothing beyond the grave, the good woman is not dead; she is with you in memory and inspiration and influence and secret benediction, and many a time you recover yourself from dejection and fear by a remembrance of her chivalry: how then can she be quite dead? Besides, even if the grave ended all things as to human consciousness, we are making a contribution to the general advancement of mankind. That is unselfishness. But tell persons

that there is nothing beyond, that they must find the reward in the virtue, the heaven in the goodness, and they will say they want something in both hands, something they can lay hold upon, a very tangible and real and most visible heaven. That is selfishness. It is not piety, it is not even aspiration; it is self-consciousness and preparation for selfish enjoyment. Why not treat the soul as we treat the body in these respects? Herein we convict ourselves, and answer our own foolish logic; for we know that the body will not survive many days, yet how wise men care for it, how they nourish and cherish it, how they subject it to wise discipline! Know ye not that your bodies may drop to pieces to-morrow? Yes, says the student of health, that may be so, but to-day I must care for my body as if it were going to live for ever; my body has an effect upon other bodies, and by my discipline and self-control and regularity, by my temperance and my proper development, I am helping on the good of society. That is piety, though it may not be uttered in the church; that is the large religion; that is the religion of Jesus Christ, which is not seeking some golden-paved Jerusalem for itself, but is doing justly, loving mercy, walking humbly with God, that the soul itself may be comforted, and the souls of others may be blessed.

See how it is with regard to this matter of the body. This analogon I will not part with, for it sustains a larger argument. We know that the body in a few years will be in the grave, and yet we cleanse it, and sustain it, and discipline it, as if it were to live for ever on the earth. That is wisdom. Even if the soul were to die with the body and be buried in the same grave, why not attend to it with the same diligence, with the same constancy and hopefulness? why not find pleasure in discipline? why not find advancement in self-suppression? Now you may change the point of view, and proceed upon an argument that grows because of the admission which has been made with regard to the body. Christianity says that the soul is to survive, that the spirit is not to be extinguished; that through processes known in connection with the name of Christ, and the mighty energy of God the Holy Ghost, it is to live for ever. If so, how much more attention, how much more discipline, how much more zealous, tender, and exacting care should be bestowed upon its

development! We do this for the body, and the body dies; it may die immediately: why not do the same for the soul, even if it were to go into annihilation the moment the body falls? But if the soul is not to go into annihilation at that time, but is to bid farewell to the flesh that it may pass on to a nobler tenancy, how much more does it deserve patience, and care, and watchfulness in its development!

Jeremiah has a word that is practical:—

“All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him” (ver. 10).

“All my familiars watched for my halting”: the original word does not mean my innermost friends, for true friendship can never be guilty of such treason, but the Hebrew word means, The men of my peace; the men who used to accost me on the highway with, “Is it peace?”—the men who salaamed me out of civility, but who never really cared for me in their souls: these men, behind their painted masks, watched for my halting; they all watched. Some men take pleasure when other men fall. What is the answer to all this watching of others? It is a clear, plain, simple, useful answer: Watch yourselves; be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour. It is not enough that others watch you—watch yourselves; be critical about yourselves; be severe with yourselves; penetrate the motive of every action, and say: Is it healthy? Is it honest? Is it such as could bear the criticism of God? Dare we take up this motive and look at it when the sun burns upon it in its revealing glory? If a man so watch himself he need not mind who else watches him. He will follow the advice of the Lord Jesus—advice which amounts to a solemn command: “What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.” Watch the secret places; watch the out-of-the-way doors, the postern gates, the places that are supposed to be secure against the approach of the burglar; be very careful about all these, and then the result may be left with God. He who does not watch will be worsted in the fray. He who does not watch cannot pray. He who watches others and does not watch himself is—a fool.

Chapters xxii., xxiii.

THE COMING ONE.

“Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country” (xxii. 10).

THE particular reference is to Josiah, on the occasion of whose death Jeremiah had composed a grand and pathetic dirge. It is supposed from 2 Chron. xxxv. 25 that this dirge was repeated annually in memory of Josiah's death. The injunction of the text puts an end to this annual commemoration. The weeping is forbidden in the case of Josiah, but it is ordered to continue in the case of Jehoahaz (*Jehovah sustains*). Jehoahaz was probably a name assumed by Shallum on his accession to the throne. It would seem that the word Shallum had a peculiar significance attached to it from the fact that the name had been borne by one of the later kings of Israel, whose reign lasted only one month. The point which is immediately before us is that men may often be weeping for the wrong object, and neglecting to shed tears over men and memories that deserve nothing but lamentation. The prophet says: Weep not for Josiah, but for Jehoahaz. So we may often say: Weep not for the dead, but for the living; weep not for the afflicted, but for the evil-hearted; weep not for those who pass away out of sight into the immortal state, but weep for those who linger here, and whose day is turned into night by hopelessness. Men will always persist in weeping for the wrong thing, or weeping at the wrong point. Who does not cry over death? whereas, the probability is, if we understood the economy of nature better, it would be wiser to weep over birth. It is certain that birth introduces us into a sphere of trial, difficulty, where we have to absorb much that is bitter, and undergo much that is distressing; whereas it is

possible that death may introduce us into immortal and ineffable blessedness. Jesus Christ said to the woman who followed him to the cross, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." Misspent tears exhaust or pervert the very emotion which they express. We are not to weep for the consequences of sin so much as for sin itself. If we were great enough in the realisation of our ideals and our aspirations, we should not so much weep that men are sent to perdition as that God's holiness is dishonoured, and God's law disobeyed, and the music of his creation thrown into discord by iniquity.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (xxii. 18, 19).

The description of Jehoiakim really begins in the thirteenth verse. Jehoiakim had revived forced labour, such as was known in the days of Solomon—a labour which pressed not only on strangers, but on the Israelites themselves. Jehoiakim went on building palaces when his kingdom was threatened with ruin, and when his subjects were overborne by burdens which it was impossible to sustain. In the thirteenth verse the prophet begins a description of a man without naming him; a man who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by ruin; a man who useth his neighbour's services without wages, and giveth him not for his work; a man who yields to the impulses of a foolish ambition, saying, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and who gratifies himself by cutting out windows, and cieling his chambers with cedars, and painting his retreats with vermilion. It is not until we come to the eighteenth verse that the prophet specially indicates the man against whom this accusation is levelled. Jehoiakim was king, and yet not one word of thanks do we find, nor one word of love, nor one word of regret, expressed concerning his fate. We should learn from this how possible it is to pass through the world without leaving behind us one sacred or loving memory. He that seeketh his life shall lose it. A man that sacrifices daily to his own ambition, and never sets before himself a higher ideal than his own gratification, may appear to have much whilst he actually has nothing, may

even appear to be winning great victories when he is really undergoing disastrous defeats. What is a grand house if there be not in it a loving heart? What are walls but for the pictures that adorn them? What is life but for the trust which knits it into sympathetic unity? What is the night but for the stars that glitter in its darkness? Jehoiakim had only a magnificent mausoleum; his palaces were mortuaries; his pretensions were nightmares. Jehoiakim was dragged in chains with the other captives who were carried off to Babylon. The disappointed and mortified king died on the journey. See to what we may come after all the whirl of our excitement, all the mad dance and tumult of our ambition. It is better to begin at the other end of life, so that we may realise the proverb which speaks of men being born mud and dying marble. We all know men who are born marble but who die mud. There is an awful process of retrogression continually operating in life. Experienced men will tell us that the issue of life is one of two things: either advancement, or deterioration; continual improvement, or continual depreciation: we cannot remain just where we are, adding nothing, subtracting nothing, but realising a permanence of estate and faculty. The powers we do not use will fall into desuetude, and the abilities which might have made life easy may be so neglected as to become burdens too heavy to be carried. It lies within a man's power so to live that he may be buried with the burial of an ass: no mourners may surround his grave; no beneficiaries may recall his charities; no hidden hearts may conceal the tender story of his sympathy and helpfulness. A bitter sarcasm this, that a man should be buried like an ass! What may be honourable to the ass is an infinite dishonour to the man. We often do the animal creation injustice by comparison of wicked or foolish men with its creatures. We sometimes speak of a man as being "as drunk as a beast," a phrase in which we dishonour the beasts that perish. How mighty man may become, how noble, how helpful to his brother-men! How much of beauty and tenderness, purity and gentleness, may be brought within the limited scope of threescore years and ten; every year may be a gathering of jewels, every moment may glitter like a diamond. Happy he who sits down to calculate how much good he can do, and how much of honest labour and

genuine helpfulness he can crowd into the little space which he calls his life.

‘Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth’ (xxiii. 5).

Still in these solemn pages we hear as it were the footfall of the Coming One. History never tells us in these ancient pages that the true man has descended to the earth, that the ideal man has breathed the common air, but still prophets and historians look forward and say, There is One coming whose right it is to reign; there is a sign upon the horizon of a Man who shall represent all other men, and in men shall glorify humanity. The words of the text point to an undefined future; yet they speak with certainty of the realisation of that distant age. It is thus we are drawn on from century to century: always the greater man is coming; always the greater discovery is to be made; always are we within sight of the horizon which is the threshold of heaven. That we never reach it is a joy rather than a regret, because our hope is never turned to despair, but always increased to an intenser brightness, so that whilst we are disappointed on the one hand we are elevated on the other, and the aching that is occasioned in our hearts by the literal non-fulfilment of promises is more than compensated for by the assurance that what is yet to come is worth waiting for, and that when it does come we shall forget all regrets and disappointments in its infinite satisfaction. We are told that there is to be raised unto David “a righteous Branch.” The word literally means a sprout or scion, springing from the root of the tree after the tree itself has been cut down, and is not a branch which grows out of the mere trunk of the tree—beautiful indeed, but in a sense accidental; it is rather a growth that belongs to the root, that is so to say part and parcel of the tree itself: so when this Coming One shall have come, he will not belong to the trunk, he will not be a branch or part of a branch in any sense in which he can be amputated; he will express the idea that is hidden in the root; in other words, he shall represent the purpose of God concerning humanity and time. Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, is not one of ourselves; he has not come up from the root of Adam;

he has rather come up from the root of Being, from the very fount and origin of Eternity, so that he will not be classed with ourselves or judged as we are; he will belong to us, and yet stand apart from us: we shall not be fellow-branches of the same tree; we shall be branches which grow out of him, for he is the root and the offspring of David.

“Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord” (xxiii. 23, 24).

All these questions depend, as to their effect upon the reader, upon the moral condition of the reader or hearer himself. Let the bad man hear these questions, and they will smite him as swords, sharp and heavy; let the good man hear these same inquiries, and he will receive them as so many assurances of protection and security. God is nigh at hand for judgment: the period of judgment, therefore, need not be postponed until a remote age; every man can now bring himself within sight of the great white throne, and can determine his destiny by his spirit and by his action. God is nigh at hand for protection: he is nearer to us than we can ever be to ourselves: though the chariots of the enemy are pressing hard upon us, there is an inner circle, made up of angels and ministering spirits, guarding us with infinite defences against the attacks of the foe. God is near us for inspiration: if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God: what time we are in doubt or perplexity as to the course we should take, let us whisper our weakness into the ear of the condescending and ever-accessible Father, and by the ministry of his Spirit he will tell us what we ought to do. It is an infinite mistake to suppose that God is enthroned far beyond the stars, in any sense which separates him from immediate contact with ourselves. If our heart be humble, it is God's temple; if our spirit be contrite, it is an altar whereat we may meet the Father day by day. This is the essential glory of God, and the mystery of his being, that he is far away, yet near at hand; near at hand, yet losing nothing through familiarity; far away, yet able to come at a moment's notice to guide, inspire, and sanctify his trustful children. We must never lose anything of the divine majesty: there is a purpose of the highest kind in a proper

realisation of divine majesty, dignity, glory ; but we shall be mere idolaters if we recognise these attributes or distinctions alone, and do not balance and chasten them with conceptions of sympathy, tenderness, nearness, such as our hearts delight in. Our religion should not be merely a sublime theology ; it should be an actual friendship, an affectionate companionship with God.

“The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream ; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat ? saith the Lord ” (xxiii. 28).

This is the grand characteristic of the Bible, that it fears no competition ; that whilst it is not weak enough to be defiant, it is always strong enough to be competitive. The Bible would not merely silence false prophets by force or by arbitrary arrangement of any kind ; it would not expel heresy by overwhelming majorities ; it would not oppose opinion by mere numerical strength : the Bible says, If you have a message to deliver, let us hear what it is ; if it is only a dream, tell us every line and syllable of it, that we may estimate its value ; if it is only a theory or an imagination, submit it to the practical test of life ; it is a poor faith that cannot bear the rude blasts of common intercourse, the criticism of the market-place, the testing of the sick-chamber, the pressure of life's daily need. The Bible would thus expel heresy by trying it ; would thus condemn the spirits that are not of God by calling upon them to do godly work. In this way should all heresy be treated ; in this way should all theories be momentarily entertained, as if they were duly qualified and well-accredited guests, worthy at least of temporary courtesy : let us give them house-room ; let us ask them questions ; let us create for them opportunities of self-revelation. Our confidence is expressed in the inquiry, “What is the chaff to the wheat ? saith the Lord.” Men know the difference between the one and the other ; if in some mood of mere intellectual ambition or hilarity they pretend that one is as good as the other, they will soon by tragical experience be brought to distinguish values, to see exactly what is what, what is valuable and what is worthless, what is strong and what is weak. We should allow time to work out its mystery upon all propositions, hypotheses, and speculations. If we cannot intellectually try the spirits whether

they are of God, we can practically submit them to the most infallible tests.

“Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, What hath the Lord answered thee? and, What hath the Lord spoken? But since ye say, The burden of the Lord; therefore thus saith the Lord; Because ye say this word, The burden of the Lord, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of the Lord; therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence: and I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten” (xxiii. 37-40).

This passage has justly been regarded as a protest against every form of pious cant. In these verses the prophet is denouncing the use of solemn words when they do not express really unaffected and solemn meanings. It is as if the prophet had heard men speak great swelling words of vanity, and had punctured them with the edge of a spear. He heard men talking as if they were great, as if they were the favourites of Heaven, as if they had been entrusted with a special vocabulary, arranged and dictated by Almighty God himself; and now the prophet challenges such speakers to reduce their words to action, he calls upon them to submit their lofty terms to the trial of actual life. The Lord sets himself against all hypocrisy. The Litany is an offence to him if it carry not with it the praise and trust of the heart. On the other hand, where the heart is right towards God the very simplest words will be accepted as if they were the most majestic tributes of thought and expression. The supreme consideration with God relates to the state of the heart. When men say to Christ, “Lord, Lord, have we not cast out devils in thy name?” he cares nothing for the miracle, but inquires into the state of the spirit. So to-day we may be performing miracles in Christ's name, even miracles of beneficence, in which we do but modify our own ambition: the Lord will look not at the great pile of gold and stones which we erect, he will look to the spirit which has inspired and assisted the industry of our hands; then though the pile be built of the poorest material, yet if it were the best material we could obtain it would be accepted as gold and silver, yea, and precious stones. Let us beware of the affectation of great words; let us beware of the impiety of religious polysyllables. Christianity has not been revealed to us,

or has not been felt by us, in all its quality and divine dignity, if we do not realise its simplicity, its condescension, its self-sacrifice. Praise the Bible for its nobleness; recognise the spirit of challenge, yea, even of occasional defiance, which fills its immortal pages. "What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." "With what likeness will ye compare me? saith the Lord"; and as for the idols, he scorns them, yea, he sets his feet upon them, and defies them to rise again. All this spirit of triumph and conscious supremacy, which is represented in the noblest rhetorical imagery, ought to find its counterpart and moral realisation in the behaviour of Christians; they are not to be as other men; Jesus Christ says when Christians do certain pious works, "Do not even the publicans the same?" He also says, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." As the Bible is distinct from all other books, so Christian character should be distinct from all other behaviour. It is not enough to compare surfaces or external relations; there should be a solemn and exhaustive judgment of motive and purpose. The vital criticism should be conducted within the sanctuary of the heart. It is in vain that we compete with other men who have no God, if we cannot show that every action we do springs from a true conception of human nature and divine requirement. All action is ultimately determinable as to its value and utility by the motive which inspires it.

Chapter xxiv.

FIGS GOOD AND BAD.

THERE was an immense advantage in living in Old Testament times. The evidence of that advantage is to be found on every page of the Old Testament itself. Men had a living Lord then. They spoke with him in a very reverent familiarity; although they named his name every day, never does the familiarity go below the point of reverence. You could not speak to an Old Testament man without hearing something about "The Lord"; for he said, with a child's frankness, The Lord said; The Lord told me; I saw the Lord; The Lord sent me; The Lord afflicted me; The Lord gave me deliverance; The Lord healed my diseases, and loaded me with benefits. There was nothing strained about the confession: it was simply, sweetly, gratefully uttered. Where is that Lord to-day? He was a great Lord; it required the Hebrew tongue to furnish epithets and descriptives by which he could be adequately set forth to the imagination. Is it language we are short of? or is the Lord God himself absent from our thinking? Is it possible to think much about him, and never mention his name? Is it possible to perform the miracle of being so absorbed in the claims of God as never to mention the King? Has it come to this crowning miracle, the devil the miracle-worker, that men can love Christ, and never acknowledge him? We are not insensible to the plea that we must beware of what is denominated for no known reason "cant." But love surely is inventive enough to find ways of self-expression and self-revelation; surely love must now and then have courage enough to test a popular fear, and to lift itself up in noble testimony, notwithstanding those who would affright it into silence. We now have theories, hypotheses even—things so useless as hypotheses! we have laws, persistent forces, marvellous, all-grinding continuity: would God we had the living

Father, the gentle, benignant, merciful, redeeming Saviour! It was better to be an old prophet, who even dreamed himself into this sublime association with motive, thought, and destiny eternal, than to be crammed, filled with notions we cannot understand, and theories we never think of applying.

“What seest thou, Jeremiah?” “Two baskets of figs set before the temple.” What is the meaning of these baskets? We cannot tell. Perhaps they were votive offerings. The people who set them there had some object in view. The same baskets are standing in the same place to-day. Did the Lord see only the baskets of figs? When does the Lord put a final meaning to anything? There is no final meaning to the humblest bird that flutters in the air; it is a minister of Providence, a minister of grace. There is no end to the meaning of a field of wild flowers. We can run past that marvellous display of power, wisdom, and goodness; but God himself is still there, nourishing every root, and filling every cup as with the wine of beauty. Things mean more than they seem to mean: it is the interpreter that is wanting. It is even so with the Bible. We do not want a new writing, we want a new reading; we do not want a new Bible, we simply need the old one to be properly read. The Bible is in the reader: you get out of the Bible what you bring to it. So it is with everything. If this were a philosophical law relating to the Bible only, we might question it because of its uniqueness and singularity, but this law holds good everywhere. We get what we give: our prayers are their answers; no man can pray above the answer he has already in his heart. Why do we not see? To look is one thing; to see is another. We have not the same drapery that we find in Oriental narrative or parable, but that is an advantage rather than a disadvantage, because poor readers, superficial observers, never get further than the drapery. They never see the prodigal son; if they saw him they would fall upon his neck before he left his father’s house, and would have the battle out then. The drapery conceals, not reveals, unless we have the living, penetrating eye that pierces through all clothing and accident, and fixes itself intelligibly and critically upon the core, the meaning that roots in the heart. There are many who have seen nothing but clouds in the sky: there are

some who have never seen the sky. There are some who have never seen their own children. There are blind hearts, blind understandings, that never see anything as it is, in all its outgoing of suggestion, poetry, apocalypse, possibility: what wonder that they have become the victims of monotony and complain of commonplace and weariness and tedium, and are always sighing for something that will simply startle them out of the degradation into which they have brought every faculty?

What is the abiding quantity? Remove the drapery, with all its amplitude and colouring, and get at the heart of things, and what is the permanent quantity, which the world might hold as stock to trade with? What is it which around this simple fellowship gathers in order that it may wisely calculate, expend, record its accounts, and divide its balances? The central quantity is History,—events, actions, providence. The baskets are not here, the particular literal figs are not here, but all the meaning is present with us through enduring time. History must be read, events must be looked at; for now the world has grown a history; the world has grown a library. Jeremiah had none, Isaiah and Ezekiel had to look around at nature, and endeavour through nature to look telescopically upon infinite distances; in their day there was nothing of what we call with modern significance a literature, a history. Now God is taking shape in events, is robed with incidents, deliverances, interpositions—all the marvellous garment which we denominate by the name of Providence. We see only the detail, and therefore we are lost, and sometimes we are almost atheists. If we would see anything like an outline of the sum-total, we must pray, and fear, and trust, and love. We have a mischievous habit of breaking up our lives into little morsels, and looking only at the disintegration; we have not yet learned the mystery of putting things together into all their meaning, and getting into the rhythm of the divine movement: otherwise there would be no atheists, there would be fewer agnostics, there would be a marvellous multiplication of worshippers; men would be brought to say, Explain it how you will, there are invisible fingers at work in all this machinery of things: history is an argument, history is a theology, history is a Bible of another kind, yet rooted in the old Bible as to all its philo-

sophies, possibilities, reverences, and divinest outlook and outcome. Thus through the vestibule of history men can walk arm-in-arm a thousand strong, saying, Let us enter into the Temple, for it is the hour of prayer, and bless the God of history for the other Temple which he is building, and by which he is vindicating his throne and his providence. If men would read history, Christianity would be safe. If men would read their own history, there would be less need of argument. Some of us have come to a point at which we have perfect rest in God. There may be those who need to have an elaborate and irrational and unintelligible argument by which to prove the existence of God; but no man who has lived a reflective life can look back upon his yesterdays without saying, They came as links, but they have been welded or attached or connected into chains; each day came, it was taken up, looked at, used, laid down; but the days are now a thousand in number, multiplied by ten, and by fifty, and lo! they are not links but chains, golden, strong, and by a mysterious process they uplift themselves, and are hooked on to something stronger than rocks, something brighter than planets.

Who then can wonder at the young being eccentric, having a tendency to intellectual vagary and vagabondage—who can wonder? A man cannot read other people's history until he has read his own; we cannot understand biography until we understand autobiography. We hear the words: the eloquent lecturer expounds the ways historical, the mysteries of course and consequence, and we listen as students wonderingly—our principal wonder being why he ever began: but as we advance in life we see that there is an under-current, an under-building, an outer structure, and when we compare the outer with the inner, the material with the spiritual, history with the Bible, we say, All things are one; there is at the heart of all life's wondrous mystery a Power, inspiring, guiding, shaping, refining, spiritualising,—call it by what name you may, at last you will come to call it by the name divine. Why do men not read events? If they would read events they would be believers in providence.

Events are divided. "What seest thou?" I see two kinds of events, one good, and the other vile: and there they are in life.

It is so in families: how do you account for it that one son prays, and the other never saw the need of prayer? The one is filial; the other has a heart of stone. The one is always at home; the other never was at home in all his life—the meaning of that term in music he never understood. Look at life broadly. What seest thou, O prophet, O man of the piercing eyes, what seest thou? Two events, or series of events, one excellent, the other vile; one leading upward, the other downward. What seest thou? Heaven—hell. The vision is still before us; we need to have our attention called to it. He who deals in singularities, in isolations, never enters into the philosophy of providence, the method of the sublime organisation which is denominated the universe. We have perhaps been unjust to the idea of individualism. A man says he can read the Bible at home. We have denied this. He can read it there if he has no other opportunity of reading it; but let him come into the great fellowship, and he will find another reading, in another tone, and he will feel that he needed that marvellous, inexplicable thing called touch, sympathy, fellowship, in order to make him see himself, in the real quality and quantity of his being. We must have public prayer. We can pray alone and must pray there; but we can only pray there with sufficient profitableness for the holy exercise in proportion as we crowd our solitude with memories of the great congregation. How difficult it is for any man to see the intercessor in another man! When we listen to prayer in the public congregation we are not listening to one man, we are not listening to a man confessing his own sins, we are not reduced to that contemptible relation to the universe; if the man who is praying be an intercessor, one to whom is given the gift of public expression, we hear in his voice a thousand voices—when he sobs it is because a thousand hearts have broken, when he cries for mercy it is because the world is on its knees. So with events, processes of events, marvellous action and interaction: we must see the whole if we would really say, How awful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

In Old Testament times the Lord communicated his will to special men. Here we have Jeremiah as representing that

whole thought. This would be peculiar, and would be open to a species of objection, if it did not hold good in all the relations of life. Here again we come upon the marvellous distribution of the figs, excellent and vile, full of noble meaning, and full of distressing suggestion. Jeremiah was called to interpret the symbols. Men are called to-day who have the faculty of interpretation. They do not speak from the point of information, else then they would be but articulate newspapers; they speak from the point of inspiration, consciousness, communion with the Eternal; therefore there is about their words an aroma not to be found elsewhere. One man is a poet, and another—not to put it offensively—is not a poet: how is that? One man weeps when he sees the morning come: the dawn is so tender, so condescending, so hospitable, so full of promise, and so full of that which cannot at once be apprehended: what is that dawn? Is it an opening battlefield? is it a sick-bed? is it a bright opportunity for doing noble things? The poet cannot tell, but he says, God will be in the centre of it, and if he will reveal himself the day shall be a blessing, though it be full of battle, or though it be quiet with the spirit of peace. One man is a statesman, and another is not; one man can see the whole question, and the other can hardly see any part of it. The man who can only see one point gets credit for being very definite. Poor soul! he gets a reputation for being very clear. If he could see a horizon instead of a point, he would hesitate, he would look about for another and larger selection of words; he would be critical, he would pause between two competitive terms, not knowing which exactly held all the colour of his thought. Some heads are vacant temples. What then? Let us be thankful to God for the Isaiahs, Jeremiahs, Ezekiels, Pauls, and Johns, who have risen to tell us what the Lord meant. Who was it that saw the Lord first on that marvellous morning referred to in the fourth Gospel? It was John. There was a figure on the seashore, a mere outline, a spectre; the people in the boat wondered what it was, and John said, "It is the Lord." It required John to turn that figure into a Christ: but this is the faculty divine, this is the prophetic function, this is the inworking of that mystery which we call inspiration. It required God to see his own image and likeness in the dust; it required Christ in the very agony of his love to

turn common supper wine into sacramental blood. Let us be thankful for our teachers. Some of us are but echoes—we can only tell what we have heard other men say : but let us maintain our friends who have the gift of prayer ; if we cannot join them we can listen to them, and say, Hear how he knows us, how he loves us, how he interprets our desires, how by some gift we cannot understand he puts into words the very thoughts that have been burning in our hearts. These are the men who should lead the civilisation of the world.

The Lord says he will send his people into captivity “for their good,”—“Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.” How marvellous is the action of love ! The parent sends away the child he cannot live without for the child's good ; men undertake long and perilous and costly journeys that they may accomplish a purpose that is good. Jesus Christ himself said to his wondering disciples, “It is expedient for you that I go away.” Who can understand this action of love ? It would seem to us to be otherwise : that it would be best for Jesus to remain until the very last wanderer is home ; it would seem to our poor reason, which has everything but wings, that it would be best for Jesus Christ to remain upon the earth until he saw the very last little lamb enfolded on the mountains of Israel—then he himself could come to be shepherd of the flock. Yet he was hardly here before he said, “It is expedient for you that I go away.” Are we not sent away ? have we not lost fortune, station, standing ? have we not been punished in a thousand different ways—chastised, humiliated, afflicted ? have we not been suddenly surrounded with clouds in which there was no light—yea, and clouds in which there was no rain, simply darkness, sevenfold night ? Yet it was for our good ; it was that our vanity might be rebuked, that the centre of dependence might be found, that the throne of righteousness might be seen and approached. “It was good for me that I was afflicted : before I was afflicted I went astray.” Let us look upon our afflictions, distresses, and losses in that light. Life is not easy ; life is a sacrifice, an agony, a battle that ends only to begin again,

a fight mitigated, not ended, by a night's repose. Are we to live always the accidental life, the life of mere detail, the life that only happens? or are we to live the life that is governed by law, inspired by a purpose, riveted in God, and travelling through infinite circuits back again to the fountain of its origin? This is the religious life.

What became of the evil figs? The Lord himself could not cure them. The only mercy that could be shown to them was to destroy them. How is it with ourselves? There would seem to be men who cannot be cured, healed, restored; God himself has wasted his omnipotence upon them. There are men who have resisted the Cross, who have gone to perdition over a place called Calvary. Did they see it on the road? Yes. Did they know who died upon that central cross? Yes. Did they hear his voice of love? Yes, outwardly. How have they come to perdition? By pressing their way past the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; if you go back all the miles they have travelled you will find that they crushed under their feet father, mother, home, pastor, friend, companion, wife, child, Bible, altar: what can become of them? God himself can do no more. He is at the gate of the vineyard now, saying, as he looks upon the wild grapes, What could I do for my vineyard more than I have done? Be just, be honest, and say in clear, articulate terms that your soul can hear, I am self-ruined, I am a suicide.

But who can end here? who can turn aside and say, This is the end? May it not be that one more appeal will succeed? may not God himself be surprised by the returning prodigal? may not Omniscience be startled into a new consciousness? We are obliged to use these terms with human meanings: but may it not be that some who are thought to be lost are not lost after all? To be in God's house is a proof that the loss is not complete. To have even intellectual attention bestowed upon an appeal is to show that life is not extinct. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." If any man dies it will be because God cannot help it.

Chapter xxx. 11.

“I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.”

CORRECTION IN MEASURE.

THIS is a wonderful chapter. The Lord here takes the case of Zion into his own hand. He states both sides of it in a most distinct and pathetic manner. He determined to bring again the captivity of Israel and Judah, and to give to his offending people the land which they had forfeited. The element of changefulness is seen to operate with amazing activity in the mind and rule of the Most High where human sin and human repentance are concerned. He will do certain things surely, and then he will not do them; the covenant is to be for ever, and in a few days it lies in fragments like a torn scroll; the light is never to go out, the whole sky is to be a perpetual glory, and lo! in one hour the sky is all night and the stars are like eyes that are closed in fear. Then the covenant is to be a new one; he will write it all out again from the very beginning; the old things shall be forgotten, the offence of yesterday shall not be so much as named; there shall be a new love, a new start, a new day in man's broken life. He who wrought the first miracle, which he called “Beginning”—for only God could conceive that word—he who never began continues to repeat that most hopeful wonder, and puts many beginnings in our life, many new hours. Every morning is new, every spring is new, every year is new; all the four seasons of the year are in every day we live—the morning spring, the noontide summer, the afternoon autumn, the evening winter. So he who makes all things new—who is always making new things—says he will make a new covenant, a new writing and bond, as if a thousand covenants had not been dishonoured and his signature contemned by a thousand generations. This is the mystery of love. Life is full of new chances. The door that

shut to so heavily seemed to rebound by the very violence of the closing, and it is still ajar. Life—let us say again and again, for it is a tender gospel—in itself is full of new chances, new beginnings. This is one of them: even now the morning light is like a door swinging right back into heaven to let us go in. Let us go. The door is now open—it may be shut to-morrow—let us enter and make our peace with God. “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.”

The text gives us God’s law of correction; and remember, first of all, that it is a law. It is not a passion; it is not a surprise on the part of the Ruler himself: it is part of his very goodness; it is quiet, solemn, inexorable, everlasting. The steadfast law of the universe is, that though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished. Could we have heard the solemn music of the voice which pronounced those words, the voice would have had what seems to be wanting in a violence so tremendous, the pathos which would have shown that the law was uttered in a gospel-tone. There may be a universe in which wickedness has no effect upon happiness and peace, but such a universe is inconceivable by minds which have been trained as ours have been. We know that vice punishes itself. We have tried to break the force of that law, yet it comes upon us with the certainty of the tide, with the regularity of the seasons, and claims to be one of those forces which lie beyond the hand of man. If, even for a time, we think we have evaded the law and have got clean off without a puncture from the sword, we are surprised after a while to find that the law is still unrepealed, and that our blind craftiness has but given it the opportunity of inflicting a fuller vengeance. Put it down as a law, write it among your facts, that vice means loss, pain, death. If you have been secreting that statement amongst your theories, sentiments, hypotheses, pluck it out and set it among your facts. If witnesses are called, rise yourselves. You need not write for witnesses or send for them from the ends of the earth; stand up and say, “I bear witness that never yet was wrong done, but the earth opened to swallow up the wrong-doer.” This is a law, it is not a caprice; it is a necessity of goodness, and not a burst of passion. All things fight for God; they are very loyal to him. The stars in their courses utter his

testimony ; the winds as they fly are vocal with his name ; the earth will open her mouth with eager gladness to swallow up the populations that lift their hands against him. Call it poetry if you will, but all true poetry is the highest philosophy—there could be no poetry without philosophy. Scorn not the poetic representation of severest realities, for that representation may be the sublimest truth. There are those who have divided books, thinkings, and all the mystery of human mental imagination into “history” and “fiction.” That is a rude and vulgar division. Things are not either historic or fictitious ; there is a middle quantity which combines both and lifts both up to the right level—the parabolical, the religiously imaginative ; and when we say, “The earth opens her mouth and swallows up all who rebel against God,” we are not speaking that which is fictitious, but that which is higher than history dare speak, for history has but a narrow language, a small and contracted throat, and cannot utter but whining and piping sounds. The great music of things, the infinite apocalypse and trembling revelation, you can only find in the parables, which alone could set forth the kingdom of heaven. Unless we recognise those facts, we shall not be able to go into the inner meaning of things hidden in God’s great Book. If we cannot follow the indication which ends in the generalisation that sin means death, we cannot enter into the inner and deeper Bible which deals with secret essences and spiritual mysteries, with transcendental truth and the very philosophy of things divine and immeasurable. If your child cannot understand your words, how can he grasp your thoughts ? We must be accustomed to the right reading of the outward and visible before we can comprehend the inward and the unseen. We must know something of law before we can grasp the mystery of grace. If we deny the Bible of facts, it will be easy to deny the Bible of doctrines. Let us begin with things known, with the patent and indisputable facts of life,—and amongst those facts you will find the hell which follows broken law, the earth that casts out the soul that is not holy,—and thence proceed step by step into the holy place where the altar is, and the speaking blood, and the Father, and the strange light of Eternity. There is but one true line of progress : it begins with Moses, it ends with the Lamb—Moses and the Lamb : Law and Grace ; and in the last eternal song we shall

find in one grand line, "Moses and the Lamb," a marvellous harmonisation, the up-gathering and reconciliation of all things; the old ark built again; the law within, the mercy lid covering it. Law and Mercy—Moses and the Lamb—these combine the whole purpose of the movement of the divine mind and love.

So far we have looked at the stern fact of law: we now come to what is said about it. It is a law of measured correction: "I will correct thee in measure." The depth of the meaning is beyond all human sounding. This is the sublime mystery of mercy. At this point grace gets hold of law and keeps it back. Law can never stop of itself. Fire cannot give in. Would God we could realise that fact! Law must grind the sinner to powder. Law never loses a battle. The strength of sin gives in, but law gets no bigger for its smiting. The law is the same at the end as at the beginning. It cannot palter, it cannot compromise, it cannot make terms; it grinds, bruises, destroys. If a sinful world were left absolutely to the operation of law, it would be crushed out of existence. But the law is under mercy. We are spared by grace, by grace we are saved. The law saves no man; it shuts us all up in one condemnation; within its purpose of righteous avengement it holds us all. At this point is the Christ born, is the whole scheme of things attached to a new centre, and Bethlehem takes the place of lost Eden.

The great mystery of grace regulating law has happily found a place in Christian jurisprudence, so we need not climb to the very highest sanctuary for our first illustrations. Civilised, Christianised man has fixed the punishment before the crime has been committed. There is no other way of making society secure. The measure of punishment has been fixed, and has been waiting for the crime to come that way to fasten itself upon it in righteous retribution. We bind the magistrate beforehand. Society, in Parliament assembled, says, "Such and such crimes shall be visited by such and such penalties, and by no more." Extemporised justice would rend society in twain. Justice must not be extemporised: it must be deliberate; it must be arranged before crime has been perpetrated to excite the passions and inflame the sensibilities. Were we to extemporise justice, we should really

commit outrages upon equity and reason. This is also the mystery of grace. The grace was accomplished before the sinner was created. The Atonement is not the device of an afterthought: the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world. Have we penetrated the gracious meaning of that astounding mystery? Before we can understand anything of the Atonement, we must destroy the very basis and the relations of understanding as it is too narrowly interpreted; we must think ourselves back of time, of space, of foundations, worlds, sinners. Great is the mystery of godliness—God manifest in the flesh. So now God has written the penalty before the sin has been committed in its incidental form. We are not referring to sin, the great moral transgression, but of sin the incident, sin the passing phase of life; and all our sins have been anticipated as to the penalty which should be awarded to each. This seems to be so in society. Take the case of a great bank fraud. False balance-sheets have been issued and false representations of all kinds have been made. The law deals strictly and only with those facts, and fixes its penalty accordingly. The law does not follow out all the social consequences of those facts, nor does it give the magistrate authority to follow them out: it draws distinct lines, and within those lines fixes its penalties. Suppose no such lines were drawn, and that the magistrate were open to sentimental appeals; let him hear that by those frauds thousands of innocent people have been ruined; widows and orphans have been left penniless; trustees who have done acts of kindness have been reduced to absolute beggary; ancient and beautiful estates have been taken away from honourable families; and a whole land been darkened and degraded and paralysed,—people who have only seen poverty at a distance have now to make it a companion and a bed-fellow; generous hands that gave gifts to God and man are now stretched out in mute and piteous appeal; dainty women and little children have now to beg their bread: what magistrate could be trusted to extemporise a penalty to the prisoners at the bar? No living man could be trusted to administer sentimental justice; under such circumstances he turns with relief to the law which was settled before the circumstances became known, and he deals with the facts which can be measured, and not with the consequences which

overflow all calculation, and baffle every attempt to subdue them. So the penalty is fixed.

“Correction in measure” is God’s law now. May the time not come when the measure will be withdrawn and the correction will take its unlimited course? That will be hell, that will be destruction. Correction without measure as between man and man is violence, and not justice; and it is a sign of weakness, and never of equable and holy strength. The tendency of excited weakness is toward exaggeration. Some men have no measure in their punishments: they punish the same for an unfortunate word as for a malicious deed; they strike as heavily for an error of judgment as for a wilful crime; they will be as severe with a child for an accident as for some piece of mischief done of set purpose against strict orders. Will the measure ever be withdrawn? “My Spirit shall not always strive with man.” Is there not a hint there of the measure being withdrawn and law allowed to fight its own battle out? In their calamity they will call upon me, but I will not hear, because the call is uttered too late. Is there an appointed time? Is there an end of my probation? Does the shadow lengthen, and tell me in its lengthening that my opportunities of repentance, confession, and restoration are getting fewer and narrower? The year opens upon me now—will it close upon my life or upon my death? Is this my last year? Has the voice gone forth, “This year thou shalt die”? Does God ever turn away from his creatures and leave them to the law that they dishonoured, insulted, and contemned and defied? Such turning will be hell.

We are all under correction. Find the evidence in your consciences, in your sufferings, in your fears, in your family lives: pain means correction, so does poverty, so does disappointment, so does every shadow that suddenly arrests the light that was spreading over your life. But the correction is in measure. Thank God that he does not plead against us with his great power. He does not hurl all his thunder upon our ear. “As a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee.” “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.” “If ye endure

chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" Our wisdom is to look at the Lord who chastens, and not at the chastening which is inflicted. You may look at the wound until you despair; you should look at the Smiter until you are healed.

What is the meaning of this "measure"? It is the gospel. There is a higher law than the law of death. The law of life is not changed: it is enlarged over all the sins and shortcomings and crimes of life. "Where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound." Grace says, "There has been great sin: now for my enlargement." And she enlarges her offers of mercy, and her signs of pity, and her opportunities of return, until the sin flee away—that which is great becomes little. Life is more than death, as the heaven is high above the earth. Death is only a partial law; the universal law is life, and it is for God to set that infinite law in motion. The law of destruction any sinner can move; but the law of life only God can bring into operation. Here we enter upon the mysteries of Deity; here we touch the altar of the Atonement. I will accept my chastening; I deserve it. This is my sweet, great faith—that no punishment ever overtakes me that is not a sign of God's watchfulness, and of God's care over my life. I think I will run away from this sin and evade God, but I run upon the point of a sword unsheathed. Is it vengeance? Is it not unkindness? No; that sword is God's, as certainly as is that Cross. When the sword of the Lord falls upon me, I will say, "What have I done?" I will inquire into my life and find out the sin. I have never suffered loss, social dishonour, inward compunction, without being able to say, "This is the Lord's doing, and not man's. The man did not know what he was doing to me; he was seized by God and set to do this work for my punishment—my education." Taking that view of all life, I have nothing to do with enemies, opponents, antagonists. They know not what they do; they are blind instruments in the hands of the seeing God, and they cannot go beyond their tether. Let us have no whining, no complaining, no retaliation. The man that smote you was sent to smite you. Avenge yourself by deeper confession, by larger, loftier prayer.

Chapter xxxiii. 1-8.

THE METHOD OF DIVINE PROCEDURE.

“Moreover the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying” (ver. 1).

WHERE was the prophet when the word of the Lord came unto him? He was in a good hearing place. He was “shut up in the court of the prison.” He was shut up unjustly, and therefore it was no prison to him, but a sanctuary, with God’s altar visibly in it, and God himself irradiating the altar with a light above the brightness of the sun. How hardly shall they that have riches hear the gospel! Their ears are already filled; their attention is already occupied; their hearts are fat to grossness. What keen ears poverty has! What eyes the blind man has!—inner eyes, eyes of expectation. How the man with those inner eyes looks for the Healer, the Son of David! His poor blind bodily eyes are rolling without seeing the sun, or any of the sun’s creations of beauty, but his inward eyes are keeping steadfast watch, for he says within himself, At any moment the Opener of the eyes of the blind may draw nigh. We should have had no world worth living in but for the prison, the darkness, the trouble, the blindness, the sorrow, which have constituted such precious elements in our lot. There would have been no poetry written if there had been no sorrow. The poetry of what we call joy is flippant, frivolous, a jingle of words, without soul, without agony, without that shadow of melancholy which makes even joy itself a higher gladness. No man who comes into God’s house with a sense of prosperity and comfort and self-sufficiency can hear any gospel. It was not made for him; he is a blind man going to a place that is constituted into a sanctuary of colour and beauty. The wonder is why he went to the place; some motive must have operated within him that was

unworthy of the occasion. God never spread a feast for the rich ; whenever a rich man came near him he frowned at him ; he said he could not enter with his bags of gold in his hands, he must lay them down and then come in. Jeremiah heard more in the prison than he ever heard in the palace. God knows where his children are.

There are a thousand prisons in life. We must not narrow words into their lowest meanings, but enlarge them into their broadest significance. He is in prison who is in trouble, who is in fear, who is in conscious penitence without having received the complete assurance of pardon ; he is in prison who has sold his liberty, is lying under condemnation, secret or open ; and he is in prison who has lost his first love, his early enthusiasm that was loaded with dew like a flower in the morning. Whatever our prison is, God knows it, can find us, can send a word of his own directly to us, and can make us forget outward circumstances in inward content and peace and joy. Jeremiah was in prison a second time. Fools never learn wisdom ; for the people who had shut up Jeremiah before had found that you cannot really imprison a good man. His influence increases by the opposition which is hurled against him ; goodness turns hostility into nutrition. Who can put a prophet of the Lord into such a prison as Jeremiah was thought to be occupying ? You can put his body there, but his soul is swinging around the horizon, and his heart is already among the singing angels, and the all-blessing, all-condescending God. Why live in the body ? Why subject ourselves to any possibility of slavery ? Why lay such clutching hands upon anything that it would be a sorrow to part with it ? A great man, having lost all that he had in the world, said : " The money is gone, but the treasure abides." Jeremiah might say : " The liberty of the body is gone for a moment, but I can pierce my way through all doors and bars and walls, though they be as rocks, and I can be enjoying communion with God on the top of the mountains." You cannot imprison the soul. But a man may lose the liberty of his spirit ; he may sell himself to the enemy ; when he gives up the keys of his soul he is already in perdition. Let no man say that he cannot hear God's word because he is in prison, in darkness, in trouble, because he is in

great fear. The word of the Lord to you is, Fear God, and have no other fear; look up, and hope steadfastly in God. The gaoler thinks he has laid you under his lock and key: poor fool! his lock and key are straw, and smoke, and spider's web. If that soul be with God, no matter where the body is.

Who is it that permits his servants to go to prison? By what name does he call himself? What is the descriptive clause in this great trust-deed of the Church?

"Thus saith the Lord the Maker thereof, the Lord that formed it, to establish it; The Lord is his name" (ver. 2).

How often do we say, Why does God permit this and that to occur, when it is so painful, humiliating, and distressful altogether? We had better not ask the question, for we could not understand the answer. Life is not a measurable quantity. No man can tell when life began; none can calculate when life will end; and all through it is a mystery of pulsation, of joy and agony, of trouble that falls towards despair, and gladness that aspires towards the celestial rest. It is all for our good; we do not know it, and we cannot see it, and we are not yet prepared to believe it; all history, however, is on one side, and that is on the side of the vindication of divine providence. Man after man rises from the boiling flood, saying: It was good for me that I was afflicted; I never understood human life until I was plunged into this sorrow; I lived a poor, little, narrow, selfish life, because I lived within the area of my own pharisaic respectability, and never knew what it was to be almost scorched to death at the very mouth of the pit of hell. Commend me to a man who has made mistakes, fallen seven times a day, and hurt himself in every muscle and in every pulsation, and who, out of it all, has come a chastened and sanctified man: how soft his speech, how kind his look, how like a touch of almightiness the out-putting of his hand! We need such men in society. We can do without the Pharisee: we cannot do without the publican's prayer.

Who distresses us? God. Who comes in the night-time and takes away from us everything we have in the house? God

Who turns our purposes upside down, and blows them away like smoke in a high wind? God. It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good in his sight. But "take not thy Holy Spirit from us." That is the only withdrawment that can make a man for ever poor. If we imagine that this world is a complete little place in itself, having four corners of its own, and that within those four corners the game or trick of life begins, continues, and ends, then it will be impossible for us to be other than downcast, moping, melancholy; but if we believe that this little earth is part of a great household of worlds, that there are filaments connecting all the spaces with one centre, ligaments of light and most sensitive, though invisible life, binding into one unity the whole scheme and purpose of God, then we shall have a sky over our earth, a sky with a sovereign sun all day, and stars struggling to tell us their secret music by night. What is the kind of world we live in? Is it a world of God's forming or a world of our own imagining? Are the stars held by a hand equal to the occasion, or may they at any moment fall down and crush the under worlds? Let us live in a universe that is centralised by the throne of the living God, and then whatever happens will be to our profit, not immediately and visibly always, but in the end invariably and constantly. Let all history start up from its grave and declare this with thunder voice, if it fall back again into its sleep. Such a testimony will awaken the world and cheer the Church. Let it be known then, now and evermore, that it is the Lord that allows his prophets to go to prison, that sits and looks at gaolers locking them up, and that comes down at the right moment to liberate them and give their word boundless enlargement.

On what conditions does the Lord grant fuller revelations of himself? The answer is in the third verse:—

"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. The condition is, "Call unto me": recognise my existence, rely upon me, lift up thy voice in prayer, pray without ceasing; do not pray to thyself, for thou art an empty fountain, but pray to me, for it is in answer to prayer that I enlarge and

brighten my revelations to mankind. What is this calling unto God? Is it a verbal exercise? Is it a mere act of exclamation? Nothing can be further from the meaning. It is a call that issues from the heart; it is the call of need, it is the cry of pain, it is the agony of desire, it is enclosure with God in profound and loving communion. If we have received no answers, it is because we have offered no prayers. "Ye have not because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss,"—you have been praying obliquely instead of directly; you have been vexing yourselves with circumlocution when your words ought to have been direct appeals, sharp, short, urgent appeals to Heaven: to such appeals God sends down richness of dew, wealth of blessing, morning brighter than noonday. God will show his people "great and mighty things." For "mighty" the margin reads "hidden": the change is not for the better. "Great and mighty things": when does God show his children little and impotent visions? The words great and mighty, noble and glorious, belong to the administration of God. There is nothing little. The bird in the heavens upon its trembling wing is only little to us, it is not little to God. He counts the drops of dew, he puts our tears into his bottle, he numbers our sighs, and as for our groans, he distinguishes one from the other; these are not little things to him, they are only little to our ignorance, and folly, and superficiality. We have betaken ourselves to the foolish exercise of measuring things, and setting them down in inches and in feet, in furlongs and in acres, in leagues and in miles; but God looks at souls, faces, lives, destinies, and the least child in the world he rocks to sleep, and wakes in the morning, as if he had not else to do; it is the stoop of Fatherhood, it is the mystery of the Cross. As to these continual revelations, they ought to be possible. God is infinite and eternal, man is finite and transient in all his earthly relationships; it would be strange if God had told man everything he has to tell him, it would be the miracle of miracles that God had exhausted himself in one effort, it would be incredible that the eternal God had crushed into the moment which we call time every thought that makes him God. Greater things than these shall ye do; when he, the Paraclete, is come, he will guide you into all truth; grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; add to your faith, until you scaffold yourselves up into brotherly

love and charity, for from that pinnacle the next step is right into heaven.

There is a sense in which revelation is final, and there is also a sense in which revelation is progressive. The root is final, viewed from one point, and yet it is ever increasing, viewed from another. What flowers there are by intermixture and interblending; what colours yet lie to be discovered by the eyes of art; what mysteries there are even in occasions and instances which we think are exhausted. There is an originality of combination, as well as an originality of creation. He who can readapt is, in a sense, a creator. That is what is left for human genius under divine direction to do—not to write a new Bible, not to build a new Golgotha, but to search into hidden meanings and seize the vaster aspects and larger implications of facts, that they may become helpers to a truer conception of the majesty and love of God. Enlarging revelation, in this sense, is essential to the continued vitality and power of the Church. When the Church becomes a mechanical repeater of its own dogmas it ceases to have power. There is a genius of absorption, there is an inspiration which belongs to the appropriation of commonplaces, and a turning of these commonplaces into the very bread and water of life. Herein the Bible stands apart from all other books. It can be read many times, and at the close of the last perusal it asks the guests to come again, for the feast has but begun. There are men to whom no revelation can be granted; there are rooms in our dwelling-places the sun cannot get at. The sun is larger than any house we can build, yet the smallest building we can put up may shut out the sun. An eyelid can exclude the noon-tide. The question is, Are we in need of further revelation? Do we call for it? We may call for it speculatively, and no answer will be given; we may ask for it for the sake of mere intellectual delectation, and the heavens will be dumb and frowning: but if we try to outgrow God, then we shall know what God is in reality; he challenges the sacred rivalry, he appeals to our emulation to follow him and study him, and try to comprehend him; and then how like a horizon he is, for we think we can touch him in yonder top, but having climbed the steep the horizon is still beyond. To cleverness God has nothing to

say ; to vanity he is scornfully inhospitable ; but to the broken heart, to the contrite spirit and the willing mind, to filial, tender, devout obedience, he will give himself in infinite and continual donation : “ To this man will I look, for I see my own image in him, my own purpose is vitalised in his experience—the man who is of a humble and contrite heart, and who trembleth at my word, not in servility, but in rapture and wonder at its grandeur and tenderness.”

Why does God hide his face ? Will he tell us the explanation of the cloud in which his countenance is enveloped ? Even this condescension shall not be larger than the love of God. In this very paragraph God tells the reason why he hides his face. It is the unchangeable reason. This moral action that proceeds through the Bible never changes. Men can wrestle with the history of the Bible, and prove their futile cleverness in the re-arrangement of things which need not be re-arranged ; but they find everywhere that the knife of criticism comes upon the nerve of immoral purpose ; and there, if criticism be reverent, it begins to pray. What is the Lord’s account of his having retired from his people, and from the city of his choice ?

“ For all whose wickedness I have hid my face from this city ” (ver. 5).

Nothing but wickedness can drive him away. He never left any man’s house, saying, This place is too poor for me ; he never gave up any blind man, saying, I only enjoy the companionship of those who can behold and admire the wonders of nature ; he never dropped a little child because it was too heavy a burden for him to carry ; he never abandoned the sick-chamber because he loved sunnier places, where flowers bloomed and birds sang. He would never partake of the meal of wickedness, he would never sup with the devil. Here comes the greatest cloud of mystery that ever settled upon human life. Here it would be easy to be indignant, reproachful, and disastrously critical upon one another ; but let the strongest man forbear, let the mightiest brother amongst us prove his brotherhood by his forbearance ; let those who are little and mean use their critical hatchets—presently, blessed be God, they will lop off their own hands. Every man must enter into this cloud, and find his own

confession-chamber within its darkness. Have I been wicked? After what manner has my wickedness run? Have I been unjust, oppressive, untrue, selfish? Have I turned away from God secretly whilst yet spreading still more broadly to the public gaze the banner of a nominal profession? Have I kept back the wages from the hireling? Am I carrying money to which I have no right in honesty? Have I been indolent, unfaithful, dishonourable? Have I kept the word of promise to the ear, and broken it to the heart? Why this darkness? Why this cloud that will not lift? Why these eyes that cannot see? Why this hell-pool that bubbles at my feet? God be merciful to me a sinner!

Do not let us reproach one another. You can see where I might have been wise: perhaps, in some moment of more or less unconscious vanity, I may imagine I can see where you might have been wise. We need no such criticism. It is the play of bad men; it is the trick of wicked spirits. Every man knows his own heart, and is carrying a burden of sin, and has to put up with a spectre that looks at him through the darkness of night. Let him that is without sin cast the first stone; let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. We have seen many such fall, and no man has pitied the critic when he fell. But will God be overthrown by wickedness? Never! "Where sin aboundeth, grace doth much more abound." Grammar cannot explain that text; you cannot parse it into its true significance; the heart must feel it by a sudden inspiration. God's "much more" is a line that angels cannot measure. We must forecast the future as God sees it. There are prophecies in the New Testament as well as in the Old, and all these prophecies set Christ upon the uppermost seat. The outlook of the New Testament is an outlook of brightness for the nations. They shall come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God; all nations shall call the Redeemer blessed; he shall reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death. None rose in the old dispensation to struggle with that monster; he was accepted as a necessity, his action had been reduced to a law of nature: but the Lion of the tribe of Judah will wrestle

with Death and overthrow him. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death ; he shall be dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel. So wickedness shall not overbear and destroy the goodness of God. The Lord Jesus Christ has undertaken to deal with sin. He fights sin with a Cross, he fights death with death, but with death that involves resurrection. Viewed in one aspect, the history of the world is the history of a tragedy ; the catastrophe of it is a pit and a second death : but viewed from the Cross of Christ, life leads to life, and the higher life to life higher still, and the highest life dies into immortality. Take great views of God's government ; do not be puzzled and persecuted by changing details, but get such a grasp of life as will enable you to command details into life, each occupying its own point in an infinite series ; and through that process you will find rest, dawning heaven, assured immortality.

Will God undertake to pass from wickedness to goodness ? Can he work any miracles here ? Why, it is within the darkness of wickedness that God works his greatest miracles.

“ Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth ” (ver. 6).

There are no greater words in all human language than “ health,” “ cure,” “ peace,” “ truth.” There is nothing here about gem and gold and stones hiding the shadows of night within the glories of midday ; but here is health, here is cure, here is peace, here is truth, and these are the gifts of God. “ I will bring it.” He is as a man who has gone to bring something for the comfort of his household. There is no figure suggestive of humility that God does not adopt to represent the action of his omniscience, the condescension of his pity. This is a sovereign act, this is the mystery of grace, this is the kingdom of God, that the King himself should serve, should go on an errand to bring health, and cure, and peace, and truth. This is the voice of the Son of God : I go to prepare a place for you ; I go to prepare, to make ready against the time of your coming : and, see, if there be aught wrong in the house, the blame will be mine ; if there be aught wanting in the palace, blame me : I go to prepare a place for you ; if the roof be not tempest-proof, blame me for the

destroying flood ; if there be not light enough in the palace, blame me for not making sufficient arrangements for the flooding of the house with glory ; if the pillow of your rest has a thorn in it, charge the existence of that thorn upon my cruelty : I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go away I will come again and receive you unto myself ; that where I am, there may ye be also. God will "bring," Christ will "prepare," the Holy Spirit will "lead," and thus the whole Trinity may be said to be engaged in the service of man.

A grand evangelical declaration succeeds and closes this preliminary statement :—

"And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me ; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me" (ver. 8).

He will go to the root of the matter, nothing is settled until it is settled rightly. You cannot prop up the world ; you must cut it down to its foundation and begin again, and work with the true plumb-line and under the direction of the Master-builder. "I will cleanse," "I will pardon" : this is fundamental work ; nothing is covered up, nothing is modified, nothing is compromised ; ye must be born again. Then when this grand moral process is completed, what shall happen ? Heaven shall open. Over the barrenest places there shall spread a cloth of summer green, in desolation flowers shall grow, in night the stars shall bloom. This is the word of the Lord ; it seems to involve an impossibility. As we dwell upon it and wonder concerning the operation, a voice steals upon us : "With men this is impossible ; but with God all things are possible."

Chapter xxxiii. 9-13.

“And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them : and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it. Thus saith the Lord, Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness ; the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride ; the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts : for the Lord is good ; for his mercy endureth for ever : and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down. In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the Lord.”

JOY AFTER DESOLATION.

WE are called upon to realise the fullest meaning of desolation—“desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast.” We must realise the circumstances before we approach the miracle. We lose much by slipping over whole spaces of history, without attending to the pregnant and instructive detail. Think of a forsaken city, think of being afraid of the sound of your own footfall ! Even in that desolation there comes an overpowering sense of society, as if the air were full of sprites, spectres, ghostly presences. What a singular sense there is too of trespass, encroachment, of being where you have no right to be—as if you were intruding upon the sanctuary of the dead—as if you were cutting to the life some spiritual ministry, conducting itself mysteriously but not without some beneficent purpose. You have broken in upon those invisible ones who are watching their dead ; you want to escape from the solitude—in

one sense it is too sacred for you, wholly too solemn; you would seek the society of your kind, for other society is uncongenial, unknown, and is felt to be a criticism intolerable, a judgment overwhelming. Yet if you do not fasten your attention upon the possibilities of desolation, darkness, forsakenness, loneliness, how can you appreciate what is to follow? May we not then hasten to inquire what is to follow? Is there not a voice which first says, What can follow? Can any mystery of love be wrought upon a field so lost, so desolate—a field that is but a gigantic sepulchre? Can God work miracles here? It is just here that he works his grandest miracles; it is when all light dies out that he comes forth in his glory; it is when we say, There is no more road, the rock shuts us out, our progress is stayed,—it is then that a path suddenly opens in rocky places, and footprints disclose themselves for the comfort and inspiration of the lone traveller.

Notice how exactly God's miracles fit human circumstances. They overflow them, but they first fill all their cavities and all the opportunities which they create and present. What is it then that is to follow upon this blackness, desolation, and oppressive silence? If a poet has made the promise, he has made it well; the words fit the necessity. See if this be not so. The picture of desolation having been painted, and the reader having been made to feel the terribleness and coldness of that desolation, he is told that there in that place shall be heard—

“The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness; the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride; the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts: for the Lord is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord” (ver. 11).

Thus God displaces darkness by light; thus God does not drive away the silence with noise but with music: it is no battering of rude violence that brings back human intercourse into plains that have been swept with human desolation; it is a festival, a banquet, a wedding scene, and already the forsaken valley vibrates as if under the clash of wedding bells. It is thus that God works. The miracle is not something alongside the necessity; it is something clearly within it, filling it, overflowing it, and causing it to be lost in a redundance of power and grace. When

the multitude was an hungred, Christ gave them bread : thus the miracle and the necessity were one ; the bread matched the occasion, was the only thing that could be equal to the necessity of the case. So every miracle vindicates itself, not by something metaphysical, highly argumentative, and only to be comprehended by subtle or virile intellects ; but the miracle condescends to experience, to common observation, so that it is not an intrusion upon society, but a natural revelation of God's presence and care. The healed men had no need that the miracle should be explained to them, for they themselves embodied the miracle ; the rejoicing mother who received her son back again needed not to ask metaphysical questions about the action of law, and the suspension of continuity, and the upbreking of regularity : there was the living, glowing, rejoicing son of her womb ; let her be glad with the result of the miracle, and not vex herself by cross-examination of the incomprehensible details. When you want to understand a miracle, understand the circumstances under which it was wrought, and the circumstances will be the best exposition.

What was the quality of the joy that was wrought ? It was profoundly religious. The voices that were uplifted were to say, "Praise the Lord of hosts : for the Lord is good ; for his mercy endureth for ever." That was the joy : it was religious, not sensuous ; it was experimental, not speculative ; it was the testimony of men who had handled the word of life, who had received release from captivity, and who had seen the city streets lost and desolate revived, refilled ; and under the pressure gracious and loving of that revelation of divine power there were exercises profoundly religious. There are times when men must praise the Lord. Sometimes the atheist has been at the very door of the sanctuary, and if some friendly hand had thrown it open the atheist might have gone in and left his atheism outside. There are times when men only need a word of encouragement, a gentle hint, and all the dark past will go away, and in its place will be found festival, sanctuary, altar, and long, sweet song. The heart settles many difficulties. The heart leads the judgment ; the uppermost feeling, elevated and sanctified, tells the whole man what to do, uses the understanding as one might use some inferior creature to help him in carrying out the purposes of life.

What is this highest faculty, what is this mysterious power, that takes to itself understanding, imagination, conscience, will, and all elements of energy? It is religious emotion; not sentimentalised and frittered away into mere vapour, but high, intelligent, noble feeling, glowing, passionate enthusiasm, a consecration without break or flaw or self-questioning, a wholeness of consent and devotion to the supreme purpose of life. We cannot understand God's providence when we are cold-hearted. We can only see some distances by rising to great heights; then the mountains become stairways up which we travel, and when we reach the top we see the land beyond, and rejoice in the illuminated and glorious landscape. So it is religiously: we see nothing from the little hillock of criticism; we cannot feel much whilst we are merely analysing words and sentences: all this may be needful, it may be part of a process, but not until we have climbed the Nebo of real feeling, highest sentiment, divinest, tenderest emotion, can we see what lies beyond, of hill and dale, and shaggy forest, and blooming garden, and pouring, fluent, redundant river. Never consult a cold-hearted man about anything, especially about anything that is religious. We cannot work without fire. God himself, be it reverently spoken, finds it necessary to work through the medium of fire. They who have various ways of tracing the genesis of the universe have never omitted the element of fire. At the first it was a fire-cloud, a tuft of fire-mist; there was, however, fire, and without that we can make no progress in the understanding of profoundest truths and divinest mysteries.

When this desolation is banished, when this wedding feast is held, by what picture is the safety of the people represented? By a very tender one:—

“In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the Lord” (ver. 13).

Sometimes this passage has been mistakenly interpreted as pointing to discipline and punishment:—shall pass under the hands of him that telleth them: shall be chastised, or rebuked, or chastened, or punished, or otherwise attended to with a view to

ultimate perfectness. That is not the meaning of the passage. We had in England shepherds who long ago spoke of taking care of their flocks under the idiom of "telling their tale"—counting the flock one by one. There shall be no hurrying, crowding into the fold, but one shall follow another, and each shall be looked at in its singularity; there shall be nothing tumultuous, indiscriminate, promiscuous; every process of providence is conducted critically, individually, minutely: so there is no hope for a man getting into the fold without the Shepherd seeing him; every sheep of the flock has to pass under the hand of him that telleth his tale. We spend our days as a tale that is told,—not as a story, an anecdote, a narrative, but as a number that is counted; the tale is counted one by one, and so the days are ticked off and off, until the last day falls, and all eternity begins. Let no man imagine that God conducts his processes promiscuously, under some general policy that allows a margin to indifference and criminality. Strive to enter in at the strait gate; strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life everlasting; we go in one by one. It is thus the world dies; it is thus the world lives; in units, in singular acts, in special personal dispensations. Until we realise the personality of the divine supervision we shall flounder in darkness and our prayers will be mere evaporations, bringing back no answer, no blessing, no pledge from Heaven. This is the picture presented by the prophet. Not one tittle of this providential order has been changed; the whole mystery of human life is to be found within its few lines.

Consider what desolation good men have been called upon to realise. Never let us shut our eyes to the suffering aspect of human life. On the contrary, let us dwell upon it with attentive solicitude, that we may wonder, and learn to pray and trust. It is the mystery of the ages that good men should not always be strong, successful, triumphant. This mystery has bewildered the saints of all time. They have seen what they did not expect to behold, the wicked prospering on every hand, and they have said, Surely the Lord hath forgotten his own, and the saints are no longer of any account with Heaven, for they have no bread, they are in great darkness and stress and fear;

whilst evil men are opening the door and entering in, the poor abandoned saints are but appealing for admission, and no voice from within answers their lost appeal. There are good men in the sick-chamber who will never leave it until they go to heaven; there are saintly men who have lost every possession they had in the world, and have sat down, as it were, in ashes, being themselves clothed in sackcloth. Looking at them narrowly and exclusively, who could believe that "Our Father which art in heaven" is not a mocking prayer, a lie which men tell to themselves, when they are in deepest sorrow? There are good men and women who have lost their last child, and who listen for voices they will never, never hear again on all the earth. Yet they are good men, men of prayer, spirits that trust the Cross, and say they have no other plea than the blood that was shed for the remission of sins. Realise this, and when the infidel mocks you with it acknowledge it; within given limits it is so; do not attempt to apologise for it or explain it away; accept the stern history, the naked, chilling, desperate fact. But in the darkness grope for the temple. God's church is open at night as well as at day. Say nought to the mocker, for he is not worth heeding, but say to the poor suffering heart itself, Wait: joy cometh in the morning: it is very sore now; the wind is very high, the darkness is very dense; our best plan, poor heart! is to sit down and simply wait for God: he will come we cannot tell when, in the early part of the night, or not until the crowing of the cock, but come he will; it hath pleased him to keep the times and seasons wholly to himself, without revelation to narrow human intellects; let us then wait, and there is a way of waiting that amounts to prayer: poor heart! we have no words, we could not pray in terms, because we should be mocked by the echo of our own voice, but there is a way of sitting still that by its heroic patience wins the battle.

Consider what changes have been wrought in human experience. You thought you could never sing again when that last tremendous blow was dealt upon your life, yet you are singing more cheerfully now than you ever sung in any day of your history; you thought when you lost commercial position that you never really could look up again, for your heart was

overpowered, and behold, whilst you were talking such folly, a light struck upon your path, and a voice called you to still more strenuous endeavour, and to-day you who saw nothing before you but the asylum of poverty are adding field to field and house to house. Job cursed the day of his birth: we must not close the Book of Job after reading the chapter of malediction; we must read on, for at the end of the book there is wedding and birth and feast, and a song of those who gather harvests with both hands, the shouting of triumph, the music of victory. Hold on; be steadfast; hope constantly unto the end; what time you are afraid, pray more; what time the enemy mocks you and says, Where is now thy God? answer him without defiance, with the calmness which is better than violence. If then you can say "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," you may win more by your patience than ever you could win by your excitement; you can do more by suffering well borne than ever was done by speech well spoken. You have been raised again from the very dead, you have forgotten your desolation, and you are now sitting like guests invited by heaven's own King at heaven's great banqueting table. Hold on; the end will judge all things. Yet be patient and tender-hearted to men who are but men, who are where you once were. It is not a sign of strength to mock a man who is down,—

"Oh, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant."

If you have strength, you hold it as a trustee for the benefit of the weak man; if you have money, it is yours to give, to lend, to help a brother to regain his feet. These are the uses of strength of every kind. Hope steadfastly in God; prayer is sweetest in the darkness; when there seems to be no road over which to travel up to heaven, then it works its miracles, it finds a pathway in the night-cloud. Christians can say all this, reverently and gratefully. Some of us have been as low down as it is possible for men to be; some have been without home or shelter or bread or friends; some have been orphans crying in the streets, not knowing where to lay their heads: yet they have not been able to charge themselves with direct wickedness, they have been lost in moral mystery; yet some of them have held on

to God, as it were, with finger and thumb; they could not grasp him, but they have touched the hem of his garment, and in that touch they have found resurrection, returning summer, the beginning and the pledge of Paradise.

What is the joy that is depicted in this text? It is religious joy. The joy created by religion is intelligent. It is not a bubble on the stream, it has reason behind it; it is strengthened and uplifted, supported and dignified, by logic, fact, reality. Religious joy is healthy. It is not spurious gladness, it is the natural expression of the highest emotions. Religious joy is permanent. It does not come for a moment, and vanish away as if it were afraid of life and afraid of living in this cold earth-clime; it abides with men. It does not always assume forms such as commend themselves to the vulgar and the uncritical: there is a silence that is ecstatic, there is an appearance of gloom upon the face that but veils the wedding feast that is proceeding in the soul. The vulgar would have us in one continual grin, in one never-broken smile of folly; they know not what it is to keep house in the heart, to have banqueting within; they cannot tell what it is to see at once the mystery of sorrow which shrouds the face, and the mystery of joy which gladdens the heart. We must not take our judgment from them. We consult them on nothing else—it would be superlative madness to consult them regarding religious education and progress.

Let us know by way of application that there is only one real deliverance from desolateness. That is a divine deliverance. We cannot release ourselves from captivity; we are inside the prison-door, and the key is outside. It is in vain to patter against God's granite; we do but hurt our poor fingers in trying to break down God's masonry. There is no deliverance to the soul of man but by processes known only to him who made that soul the mystery that it is. Let us flee then to the living God; let us be forced to prayer. God has to take in men under every variety of condition and feeling; some reluctantly go, but if they go they are received; they have not gone along the line of argument, but they have been driven along the valleys of desolation. Some men would never have prayed if they had had banquets at

home ; they learned to pray by the altar of their own empty table. Some would never have gone to Christ if they could have kept a fire in their own grate at home, but when the cold struck them, chilled them, when the cold lay upon them like a burden of ice, then they began to wonder if there was no way upward, if surely there was none on the right hand or on the left. Remember that there is only one fountain of real joy. The fool can have no gladness ; his life is an empty attempt to make himself glad. There is nothing in folly that can satisfy the soul, and the soul can never really eat and drink to its own nutrition and satisfaction except at the table of the Lord. We have taken our pitcher to many wells, and we have drawn from their depths nothing but crystal poison. We have accepted many an invitation to the feast spread by reason and by natural hospitality and by cunning invention, and the more we have eaten the less satisfied we have become.

It is in vain to seek joy except in one direction. There is a fool's laugh that can be had cheaply enough, there are jests that will writhe the faces of ignorance into smiles that have in them no gladness ; but if you would be really restored, if you would really be delivered from desolation and sadness, behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Once this was a speech—eloquent, pointed, but only a speech : now it is a fact ; men millions strong crowd around the witness to testify that they themselves have seen God's Son and are satisfied with an ineffable contentment. Not to have seen Christ is to have seen only darkness.

Chapter xxxv.

THE RECHABITES.

THIS part of the prophecy takes us back to the earlier years of Jeremiah's life and work. Jerusalem had not been besieged, and Jehoiakim the king had not filled up the cup of his iniquity. The Lord wished to read the king and the people of Judah a solemn lesson; and he preferred to do so by way of example rather than by way of precept. He took what to us appears to be an extraordinary course; but the issue proved that the course which the Almighty adopted was fraught with the very lesson which infinite wisdom intended to apply in all its breadth and pungency to the disobedient kingdom. The Rechabites drank no wine. This was one of the characteristics of the house or family of Rechab. It was a well-known characteristic. By the necessity of the case it was patent to God. Yet what did God do? He sent a strange message by the mouth of the prophet; he said,—

“Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink” (ver. 2).

We may well pause here a moment and quicken our vision, that we may read the strange words once more to make ourselves quite sure they are what they first sounded like. Did the Lord make a proposal to total abstainers to drink wine? Did he send for them to a kind of wine festival? Is this the meaning of the Lord's Prayer, “Lead us not into temptation”? Will he try the nostrils of the Rechabites with the perfume of wine? This is strange. We gain nothing by slurring over the difficulty; let us face it, consider it, and act wisely concerning it.

Is not the Lord always thus leading men into temptation?—not in the patent and vulgar sense in which that term is

generally understood, but in a sense which signifies drill, the application of discipline, the testing of principles and purposes and character? Is not all life a temptation? Does not every day dawn in order that we may be tempted once more? and when the darkness comes, is it not that we may have a larger sphere in which to feel the pressure of the devil? The words are exactly as we have quoted them;—"Bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink." Was not this hard? But, then, all life is hard. You can never look at another human being without having a chance to wrong him. There is nothing easy in life. One boy cannot sit next to another without being tempted to do something that is unlawful. Society is a school, a drill-house, a fiery furnace. It is a fearful thing to live! If we have by some jugglery come into easiness of relations, it may be because we have quelled the voice of great convictions, because we have undertaken to live a life that shall be undistinguished by the action of great principles. We may only have escaped temptation because we have run into folly. The Lord tries every man.

There need be no hesitation in offering the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." People have tried to soften the words. They have said instead of "lead" "leave us not in temptation"; but these are the annotations of inexperience and folly, or superficiality. Every man goes through hell to heaven, if he goes at all; some linger there; some never escape from the pit of perdition. We are not men until we have been thus moulded, tried, qualified. We can do little for one another in that pit of temptation. There is no comfort so discomfoting as that of superficial consolation. We cannot be healed by maxims, because the maxims themselves are burned up in the furnace in which our life is being scorched. Exhortation goes but a little way in the agony of life. We must be left with God. There is one Refiner; he sits over the furnace, and when the fire has done enough he quenches the cruel flame. Think it no strange thing that temptation hath befallen you; yea, think it not strange that God himself has given you opportunities by which you may be burned. He never gives such an opportunity without giving

something else. Alas, how often we see the opportunity and not the sustaining grace! It is useless, and worse than useless, it is quite a sceptic-making business, to evade the difficulties of Scripture and of life; we must look at them, and where we have not time in one brief day to adjust and determine them we must ask for larger time. The question cannot be settled either way by superficial thought. We must remember this, because it is supposed evidently by some that a denial establishes everything, and assertion or affirmation establishes nothing. If the affirmation cannot be instantly proven to the utmost point of satisfaction, the denial must also take its time for being searched and tested and weighed in the scales of adequate experience.

The drinking of wine in this case was to be done in "the house of the Lord." Now light begins to dawn. How thankful we are for one little pale ray of light when the darkness has been a sevenfold midnight! Not only is there wine to be drunk, but if drunk it is to be drunk in the house of the Lord. Mark the limitations of our temptation. The Lord is never absent from his house. If we will choose the sphere of temptation, then let us not blame God if we fall into a snare; if we will persist in trying ourselves, be not amazed if such self-temptation should end in suicide; if we say we will choose the open field without historical association or tradition, without religious sanctions, consolations, or sustaining thoughts, then we shall be brought home dead men; if God will choose the temptation, and choose the place of its application, and himself preside over the tremendous conflict, we may be more than conquerors. Here is no encouragement to men who place themselves in circumstances of temptation, who put themselves in the way of the devil, and beckon him with uplifted finger that he would come and work his will. Always carefully distinguish between the temptations of a truly beneficent providence and the temptations which men bring upon themselves, and the temptations with which men needlessly put their own fortitude to test. Let God tempt me, and he will also save me; let him invite me into his own house, that there under a roof beautiful as heaven he may work his will upon me, and afterwards I shall stand up, higher in stature, broader in manhood, truer in the metal of the Spirit.

Observe the details of this mysterious operation. The men who were taken were proved men :—

“Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habaziah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites” (ver. 3).

When the Lord calls for giants to fight his battle and show the strength of his grace, they are chosen men. The Lord knows the result before the process begins. The Lord never fails in any miracle. No work of his has been left half finished because Almightyness gave up—because Omnipotence shrank through want of strength from the completion of the design. All these men were conspicuous witnesses for the truth: they were identified with the faith of Israel; they were the trustees of the morality of society. It is so in all ages. There are certain men whom we may denominate our stewards, trustees, representatives; as for ourselves, we say, it is not safe to trust us; we are weaker than a bruised reed; we cannot stand great public ordeals; we were not meant to be illustrations of moral fortitude: spare us from the agony of such trial! There are other men in society whom God himself can trust. He might even allow the devil to work almost all his infernal will upon them. There are Jobs that can be brought almost to hell, but cannot be thrown in. If certain men could fail, society itself might collapse, saying, Human life has been defeated, and divine purposes have been dragged down into humiliation and disgrace. But certain men are fireproof; the inflexibility of their will is the strength of social life. Some could never lift up their heads again if men who could be named in Church and State were to fall from their moral supremacy. What could the fir tree do after the cedar had fallen? What could the little stars do when the morning star had slipped its foot and fallen out of the palace of the heavens? It would seem as if God looked for much from some of us; as if, speaking reverently, he were dependent upon us for his own reputation in human history. Are there none that will abide in the day of trial? Is the Lord to be utterly deserted by the creatures whom he made in his own image and likeness? Is not one man to be found who will magnify the grace of God, saying, But for the grace of God I should have fallen: grace triumphs over weakness; grace makes the frailest strong; by

the grace of God I am what I am? When such trial can be so borne, the fact becomes argument, and the argument is of that concrete, direct, and conclusive kind which the most skilful disputant can neither answer nor evade. In this way we have it in our power to magnify God, and to show how great is his grace.

What did the sons of Rechab say? "And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine. But they said"—here is the critical point—"But they said, So be it: there can be nothing wrong in following the finger of Providence: we have thirsted for this poison, now give us enough of it; we are well curtained in, the walls are thick, no eye can penetrate them; the windows are high up, there can be no overlookers: fill up the vessel, and see how strong men can drink." The story does not read so, but thus: "But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever" (ver. 6). Herein is a strange thing, that children should obey the voice of a dead father. Yet this is a most pleasing contention; this is an argument softened by pathos. The men stood up, and did not speak in their own name; they said, We be the sons of a certain man, who gave a certain law, and by that law we will live, and ever will live. "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." The trial took place in the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, a man of God, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah. The father of Maaseiah was Shallum, who was the husband of Huldah the prophetess, who had taken an active part in the reformation wrought in the reign of Josiah. So all these were so many guarantees of probity, and strength, and success. There will be no evil wrought in that chamber! Not only are the Rechabites there, but their fathers are with them in spirit. A man should never be left alone; all his best antecedents should be round about him; voices cheering him in right ways, Benjamins comforting him in sudden distresses. Though our fathers, physical and spiritual, be dead, yet they may live with us in the spirit, and may go with us and

sustain us in all the trials and difficulties of life. Our fathers cannot die. The sense in which men die is the narrowest of all interpretations of human history. When the father is dead he is nearer to us than ever he could be whilst he lived : we know not what power of vision he has now ; we cannot tell how he operates upon the soul that looks for heavenly help ; we know not what tracks he may make in the pathless darkness : here we stand in mystery, but we know that there is something which sustains and animates and strengthens us when the battle is at its sorest point.

“We will drink no wine.” Note the definiteness of the answer. No inquiry is made about the kind of wine that was supplied. Always particularly beware of those wines which are warranted not to intoxicate. They are not wines at all if they do not intoxicate. And they lead up to wines that will make you drunk. There is probably hardly any man who is doing more harm to the world than the man who thinks he can cheat the devil by changing a label. God has poured out all the wine we want : let us drink it from its fountains, and we shall be wise and strong. “We will drink no wine.” Men are saved by their definiteness. A strong, proud, decisive answer is the true reply to all temptation. An oath that strikes as with a fist of iron, a denial that is like a long sharp two-edged sword, —these must be our policies and watchwords in the time of danger.

The reason is given :—

“For Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever” (ver. 6).

It is a filial argument. Good advice is not always thrown away ; and men should remember that though exhortation may be rejected for a long time, yet there are periods when it may recur to the memory and come upon the whole life like a blessing sent from God. Noble exhortation must not be spared from human speech. The preacher may be well aware that every exhortation he utters will be thrown back upon him, and yet by the grace of God he has learned the mystery of patience ; so he can say to his soul, The people will remember this

exhortation some other day ; they will cut themselves with severest reproaches because of their neglect, and in the day of their necessity they will apply to themselves many a rejected discourse. The argument is *a fortiori*. The Lord has shown how the sons of Jonadab can refuse wine : now he will take this example and apply it to the whole host of Judah, and he will say, See what one section of your country can do ; if they can do this, why cannot you be equally loyal and true ? why cannot you be equally obedient to the spirit of righteousness ? for three hundred years this bond has been kept in this family ; never once has it been violated : if one family can do this, why not a thousand families ? if one section of the country, why not the whole nation ? This was God's method of applying truth to those who needed it. Thus we teach one another. One boy can be obedient : why not all boys ? One soul can be faithful : why not all souls ? If it had been proved impossible to keep any of the laws of God by any human creature, then the criticism would have been not only practical but final. Where one man can keep the law all men can keep it. This is the very argument of the history. The incident that has taken place in the little chamber connected with the house of God will be enlarged into a great national appeal. This is the use which God makes of every individual experience. This is the true use of history. Without such applications as these history would be lost upon us. God in his providence says : See what others can do, and as they toil and climb and succeed in reaching the highest point, so do ye follow them : the grace that made them succeed will not fail you in the hour of your trial and difficulty. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Modern Rechabites should remember that they are only obeying one part of the pledge. It must not be forgotten that the pledge was a comprehensive one :—

“Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever : neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any : but all your days ye shall dwell in tents ; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers” (vers. 6, 7).

Is it not desirable that we should keep a whole pledge, or that we should at least say that we limit our pledge to such and such sections ? Let us be careful of a partial obedience. The

lesson here goes further than it would seem at first sight to do. A man must not claim to be a Bible moralist because he keeps two of the Ten Commandments. A man ought to be careful to liberate Rechab from all responsibility in relation to his action beyond the one point which is claimed as a point of analogy. When modern Rechabs drink no wine, but build houses and abandon tents, they should say clearly that they are obeying the Rechab vow in one respect only. It is of no consequence in the local incident, for Rechab is dead, but it is of infinite consequence in all the broader paths and bearings of morality. We do not follow Christ because we wear a crucifix; we are not Christian martyrs because we put ourselves or are put to occasional inconvenience of a very superficial kind; we do not keep the Ten Commandments because we obey the first. Jesus Christ does not call us to a partial pledge. Upon this he is very severe; both himself and his Apostles teach that if we offend in one point we offend in all. If we have dishonoured our father and our mother, we have broken ten commandments in one; if we have taken that which does not belong to us, we have shattered the decalogue at a blow. Beware of partial morality, sectional respectability, rags and patches of orthodoxy. There are hardly any civilised men who are not apparently good in points. Some have pet commandments which they would not break for the world. Almost every man has chosen one commandment, and thinks in keeping that he is keeping the ten. There are persons who would not, could not steal; yet they would break all the other nine commandments as quickly as they could be handed to them. This is not obedience; this is the worst kind of disobedience. The man who will have nothing to do with the commandments at all may take to himself some kind of reputation for grim consistency; but he who palters with pledges, and histories, and vows, and moralities, pleases himself, and is not exemplifying a spirit of unquestioning obedience. How, then, does it stand with us to-day? We cannot rid men of this sophism, that to do one good thing is to have at least so much reputation for goodness. The Lord reasons in precisely the contrary way: it is because we can do one thing, and do not do the rest, that he blames us. He never blames the man who wants to keep all his law, who is conscious of failure, and who

says nightly, Lord, I have done it again; yea, I have played the fool before high heaven; I have grieved thy Spirit; and yet this night I am filled with bitterness and tears, and broken down with contrition, and thou knowest this night, though I am not worthy to look at anything thy hands have made, I love thee: it is a strange love, a love which no mortal imagination could conceive or understand, yet here it is; Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I would keep the commandments if I could, thou knowest that I love thee. Heaven never shut its door in the face of such a suppliant.

The Lord has promised in these words:—

“Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; **Jonadab** the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever” (ver. 19).

What is the meaning of that expression? Does it mean that there would be a mere continuance of the family life of the house? Certainly not. Standing before God has a priestly significance. Whenever you find this expression in the Bible, you find that the Lord has chosen this line of men out of which to bring those who shall serve before him in a priestly function. The Lord has made it clear that he will proceed along a moral basis. “Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.” He will have it understood that obedience is the root of priesthood; it must be known that character is the basis of every true ministry; it must be written in stars, in lightnings, that they have no right to be in God’s house who are not in God’s spirit. We cannot be brought up to this office; assigned to it by some gracious father or mother, thrust into it by some official power; dignified with it as by a kind of family heraldry: we are in God’s house because we love God’s law; we are in spiritual offices because we are in spiritual relations; if we have not obeyed the Lord, though we have the tongue of men and of angels, we are become as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. He is priest who is obedient. Only he is mighty to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan who is already himself destroyed by the power of God, and reconstructed by the grace of Christ.

Chapter xlv. 17.

“Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise.”

RELIGIOUS JUDGMENTS.

THIS is not a sneer. If it were a sneer it would not be worth quotation. No mere sneer can live long, or be of any true weight and influence in human judgments and human progress. There are no contemptuous remarks in all literature, so far as we can discover, equal to the contemptuous criticisms that are to be found in Holy Scripture. Go to the Bible for specimens of contempt—go to the Bible for everything. There is only one Book. It has been broken up into many volumes, but there is only one Book of true wisdom, true goodness, true life. How the Bible can torment its adversaries!—mock them, contemn them, dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Yet it is never mere contempt. The contempt of the Bible is the penal side of a profound philosophy. Its contempt is as necessary as its gospel—nay, more, its gospel renders its contempt necessary. Our God is a “consuming fire,” “God is love,” “the wrath of the Lamb.” These are contradictions in words—contradictions which the little critic delights in. Poor soul! he feels as if granted a rare boon when he finds such contradictions as these. With what rude skill he handles them! How he shows them!—lifts them up, sets them down, evokes laughter concerning them. Not knowing that under all there lies a spirit of reconciliation and unity which does not show itself to his impertinent vision.

So when Pharaoh-Necho—mighty man—is called by the contemptuous term of “noise” no mere sneer is employed. This is a righteous judgment, a moral estimate, a correct representation of things as they are in reality, not of things as they appear to be. In all judgments we must have regard to distance, proportion,

perspective. A thing is not great simply because it is near. That is a commonplace which the preacher finds it almost impossible to drive into the consciousness of his hearers: they will have it that that which is nearest is biggest. You would say that they would instantly acknowledge the necessity of distance, proportion, and perspective as elements in true and copious judgments; but they do not in reality. Hence they have a base proverb—it seems to be so wise and yet is so foolish—"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." I know not of any vulgarer sophism or more patent lie than that. Yet it is quoted as if Solomon had written it in his most pious moments. Take a map of London. What a huge sheet is required for the display of this infinite labyrinth of thoroughfares and streets. Take a map of England—where is London? There!—a large spot of black ink like the body of a spider in a large network or webwork. That is not the London you showed me just now? Yes, the very same London. How can it be? In reality. But here in this map of England it is only a drop of ink, in the other sheet it was a great city. Take a map of Europe—where is England? You have young eyes, come, find it. That must be it, I think—that rough triangle there. Take your microscope and see if that be so. But that is not the England you showed me just now on a great sheet! That is the very same England. Where is London? Gone! Take a map of the globe—where is Europe? Take a map of the solar system, and where is what the poet calls "the great globe itself"? In that moment he was inspired by size, and he called this earth—that is only eight thousand miles through the very heart of it—from edge to edge about eight thousand miles—"the great globe itself." Ask the nearest star where it is, and the nearest star never heard of it; and if it were blotted out, the nearest star would not know that a sparkle of light had been taken from the sum-total of things. So we must have regard to distance, proportion, perspective, colour, and relation, before we can settle the bulk, the value, and the influence of any quantity or any life. Pharaoh king of Egypt, with horses, chariots, swords, spears, hosts of men, is a terrific power; but to a man standing in the quiet of the divine sanctuary, "Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise"—a waft of wind, a curl of smoke dying whilst it rises. If men would but consider this

law of proportion the whole estimate of life would undergo an instantaneous and complete reversion.

The text brings before us the great subject of religious judgments—by religious judgments I mean estimates. We must call religion into the house if we would take a true appraisal of what we possess. Only religion, as interpreted in Holy Scripture, can tell you what you are and what you are worth. They tell me that a man died not long ago worth three millions sterling. Nothing of the kind, it is impossible.

With regard to those religious estimates or judgments, note how fearless they are. They are not judgments about personal manners, social etiquette, little and variable customs; they challenge the whole world. We are moved by their heroism. Religious judgments do not fritter away our time and patience in discussing little questions and petty problems: they summon kings to their bar and call nations to stand back and be judged. The tone itself befits the purpose of the revelation. There is no timidity here. "Why do the heathen rage?"—mark the challenge! "Why do the people imagine a vain thing?"—observe the call to judgment! This is not a discussion of petty questions, small controversies, as to whether this should be done before the clock strikes or immediately after. There is a sound of eternity in the cry. The Book excites one with the noblest expectation, stirs the soul with the noblest emotion, challenges the mind to the loftiest intellectual tasks. The Bible is never afraid. It takes up the isles as a very little thing; the nations before it are as a drop of a bucket; verily, it is the voice of him who sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and before whom the inhabitants thereof are but as grasshoppers. Get into the rhythm of the Bible; commit yourselves to its astronomical sweep and swing of thought and utterance, of gospel and judgment, and then tell me what man invented it. We must have in life the heroic judge; we must have a book somewhere that dare tackle nations. There is a national entity as well as a personal individuality. Blessed is the voice that fills a nation; grand is the gospel that spreads itself over the whole world. We cannot do without the heroic element, the heroic judgment, the broad estimate, the

complete arbitrament, that takes within its purview and decision everything concerning individual life and general civilisation. So many of us can judge one another, so many of us are clever upon little points, who know exactly whether we should put a comma or a semicolon there; but the great scheme of things cannot be managed by that petty ingenuity. You must have the great call, the sublime challenge, the heroic appeal, the white throne that stretches itself from horizon to horizon, and before which kings are as little men and little men as kings—the grand astronomical pomp and majesty before which all else settles into its right relation. That you have in the Bible, and nowhere else. There are times when we feel this profoundly; there are occasions when the Bible is the only book that can fill up the cavity. For a long time other books may serve us, other voices may be sufficient; we may say to our most ardent preachers, "You need not speak so loudly: we can hear you"—as if the mere hearing were enough because hearing is degraded into a mechanical exercise. But there are other times when you want the trumpet and the thunder and all the host of heaven; there are times when truth must be crowned with adequate pomp and righteousness proclaimed with proportionate circumstance. In those hours the Bible takes the foremost place, and all competitors shrink behind it, saying, "Thou alone art worthy."

The judgments of the Bible are rational as well as fearless. Under all contempt there is a rock of logic. Why does the Bible condemn things? Because of their proportion. It knows the exact proportion which everything bears to the sum-total of things and to the sovereign purpose of the divine government. The Bible stands at the centre and is not deceived by nearness or by distance. It knows precisely the relation of every living thing to the Life out of which it first sprang; therefore its judgments are rational. They are not the less rational that they sometimes appear to be excited and tempestuous. Excitement and tempest are words we do not understand in cold blood. Ice cannot understand Fire. It is only now and then in our highest moments of perception, when the mind becomes like a pointed spear that can force its way into the centre of things, that we really touch the sublimity and the poetry of those great hurricanes

of judgment which seem to tear the firmament in twain and to deluge and drown the little earth. We are not always on the same height: we must allow for level; we must not drag things Biblical down to our coldness, but endeavour to excite ourselves, by religious ministries and exercises, to the temperature of things divine. Then the judgments of the Bible are rational because the matter or element of duration is continually present to the minds of the inspired writers. That which seems to be very large to-day will to-morrow be cut down and cast into the oven. There is a sad temptation to forget this element of durability. What staying power is there in a man? That is the question we ought to ask. We have seen some men almost beyond competition in walking the first mile. They give quite a wrong impression to their fellow-traveller. How brisk they are! "Come on!" say they, with a kind of patronising contempt of your lame, crippled style of walking. I will watch the lame man; I will keep my eye upon the man who does not make much fuss during the first mile. He is a terrible competitor; I know him well. He seems, at first, as if he would be soon obliged to go home. Not he! The first mile is about done—and so is the brisk walker! The lame man says, "Well, shall we go farther? I think we might try another;" and at the end of seven miles he is stronger than when he began. He is a fearful competitor! So with regard to all things: what about their staying power? What about their durability? What have they behind? Do they bank in eternity? or do they move upon the spasm of a momentary excitement? Blessed the soul to heavenliness of joy that can say to God, "All my springs are in thee." The Bible makes small work of our heavens and our earth. We are quite oppressed by them because we do not stand at the right centre. We call them very great and glorious; whereas the inspired fisherman says, "All these things shall be dissolved." That never entered into any fisherman's head of his own wit, or dream, or nightmare; that is not a fisherman's idea—to look at the bright sun and the countless stars and the green earth, and say, "All these things shall be dissolved." The fishermen of that day have left no successors if they invented that stupendous dream. There are some thoughts to which we cannot lay any credit of our own. We speak them, and it requires Christ to tell us where they came

from. They flash from our minds ; but Christ said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." So the Biblical writers are not so impressed, after all, with our palaces, and castles, and royalties, and pomps, and armies, and Cæsars, and Pharaohs. The inspired writer has been locked up with God, and turning away from that glory all other things become as the baseless fabric of a vision. If we could see God we should be filled with contempt regarding all things, in so far as they affected to hinder us by their greatness or overpower us by their solidity.

Then the judgments of the Bible are fearless, rational, and they are also critical. They are very dainty in their expression : they take the right word with an inspired ingenuity. "Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise." You cannot amend that comment. Try to amend anything Jesus Christ ever said. There are the parables, there are the reported discourses—words picked up from his own lips, never written by his own fingers—amend them ! As well amend a dewdrop ; as well paint the lily. And the nations, according to the Biblical estimate, are but "a wind" that cometh for a little time and then passeth away ; and our life is but "a vapour," dying in its very living. You are skilled in the use of words—amend these expressions, put shorter words in their places. A shorter word than "noise" ? Or wind ? or smoke ? You cannot reply. These are the condensations of Omniscience ; these are the sharpened points whetted in eternity ; these stand incapable of amendment.

But "fearless," "rational," "critical"—is there no word that comes nearer to my own necessity ? Yes, there is a word that touches us all to-day : these religious judgments are inspiring. Man wants inspiration every day. The Bible was not inspired once for all, in the sense of having its whole meaning shown in one disclosure. Inspiration comes with every dawn, distils in every dew-shower, breathes in every breeze ; it is the daily gift of God. How are these judgments inspiring ? Because they enable a man who is right in his spirit and purpose to say, "If God be for us, who can be against us ?" "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth ?" "Who shall lay any-

thing to the charge of God's elect?" Then the positive declaration of safety and security, on the part of God's people, is made the more positive by the statements which are uttered against the wicked: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree." I went away and said, "What a great power he is," and all our little missionaries, and preachers, and Sunday-school teachers, they must go down before that man—great power, "spreading himself like a green bay tree." What can our little Bible women and Bible readers do in the presence of so huge an antagonism? "Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him,"—I had spade and mattock, and I sought him,—"but he could not be found." "The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the day of the hypocrite but for a moment. . . . He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night." "The arms of the wicked shall be broken." Kind Book! condescending Book! It puts the case positively and negatively in relation to the righteous, in relation to the wicked; and its combined testimony amounts to this: they that fear the Lord need have no other fear. "Commit thy way to the Lord." Would we could do that. It would be well with us if we could simply say, "Lord, the case is thine; I want to be right and to do right, and I am opposed by this mighty king, with all his horses, and armies, and helmets, and spears; and I know not what to do." He would say, from his great heaven, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him"; "Pharaoh, king of Egypt is but a noise."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, Father of our spirits, thou knowest what we need. We need not plead with thee, because thy love doth anticipate all our want, yet it hath pleased our Father to bid us pray, as if he knew nothing, as if he would hear the tale of want and pain and sorrow from our own lips. Our life is one long need; to-day cannot stand for to-morrow; we cry unto thee hour by hour, yea, moment by moment, for there is no cessation to our want: but the river of God is full of water; the summer sun does not dry up that infinite stream. Thou givest, and behold thou hast as much as before; if thou wert to withhold it would not tend to thine enrichment. Look upon us, then, and read our life, see our want, consider our estate, and out of the fulness of thy love send us answers of peace. We dare say all this because we say it at the Cross. Otherwhere we have no right, otherwhere we are dumb because we are guilty before God and have no defence; but at the Cross our guilt is answered, Jesus suffered the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God; he made an open way, a radiant road. In obedience to his welcoming love we come to our Father's throne to seek our Father's blessing. We rejoice that our life is of consequence to thee; we will not call ourselves by names of degradation when we know that thy love is fastened upon us even to the degree of dying for our redemption: in thy purpose we are great, in thine intent we are kings and priests and princes unto God: may we sometimes realise thy thought concerning us, and rise to all the responsibilities which that thought imposes. Lead us, guide us; wert thou to drive us we should be scourged to death: we pray therefore to be led, to be gently led, to be led by a way that we know not; then the way will not be long, for in thy companionship there is no monotony. Amen.

Chapter xlviii. 25.

"The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, saith the Lord."

THE HISTORY OF MOAB THE HISTORY OF MANKIND.

THIS chapter is full of Moab. We take next to no interest in Moab, the son of Lot; he is not one of the choice figures of history; yet, like many a land little known, there are wonderful surprises for those who will penetrate the history and study its meaning. Moab is a large word: it means not a man only, but a

nation—large, haughty, and powerful; and it is in this view that we must now interpret its continual significance. The relations between Moab and Israel had for a long time been of a troubled and uneasy character. Moab had been tributary to Israel under Ahab, but, as we saw in 2 Kings iii., on the death of Ahab, Mesha revolted, and in the war which ensued the Moabites were defeated by the allied forces of Israel, Judah, and Edom. Moab, however, was not to be so easily suppressed. The Moabites repeated their attack (2 Kings xiii. 20), and appear to have occupied the territory of the trans-Jordanic tribes. But Moab was to have no more “praise”; in silence it was to be made silent, and from her little ones a cry as of continual weeping was to be heard. The heath in the wilderness, a stunted, solitary shrub of the desert, is set forth as the type of desolation. Even Chemosh, the national deity of Moab, was to go forth into captivity. The valley which was full of cities was to perish, even the sunken valley of the Jordan, and the plains of Moab. The arms of the Moabites having been broken, there arose a taunting cry, “Give wings unto Moab, that it may flee and get away,”—Moab could strike no longer; its only hope was in flight.

The first charge brought against Moab is self-confidence, self-trust, self-sufficiency: “Because thou hast trusted in thy works and in thy treasures, thou shalt also be taken.” This makes us contemporaries of the Moabites. We thought they were an ancient people, but behold how human they are, how English, how like ourselves and our children! They were so pleased with the stone wall they had put up; they measured it, and admired it, and said that it would save them from the high wind and the mighty storm. It was enough—high enough, broad enough, impenetrable, invincible. Now that is the kind of reasoning which God will not allow in human life. He demands that human life be lived in himself, and not in things that our own hands have made. Moab became her own god, and the true God judged her, and burned her with fire. Every man is under the temptation to be self-trustful. The temptation is the more powerful because it comes out of a principle which is right in itself,—namely, the principle of self-preservation, or self-defence. It is by a very fine shading that self-defence passes

into self-sufficiency and idolatry, so much so that you can hardly see where the one becomes the other. If money is set up as a wall against providence it may be thrown down, and if intellect is content with its own victories, and will live only within the horizon which reason can see and measure, it shall be perplexed, bewildered, and humbled. We are to be taught distinctly that we do not live in ourselves; that in ourselves we have actually no life; that we have nothing that we have not received, and in that spirit alone we are to hold life and to live. "Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies"; "Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us." It would seem to be easy to put our whole trust in the living God, and yet it is the most difficult of all lessons. We will persist, even in opposition to many theories of our own to the contrary, that we are self-contained, self-consisting, and self-managing; and herein arises God's perpetual controversy with mankind. There is, too, so much to favour the temptation. It looks as if we could do most things; that as we have so much we might easily have more. God says to us in every day's providence, You are here for a purpose; you are here for a little time; you now but begin to be; every lesson you must learn, and every commandment you must keep. It is against that arrangement that we chafe, just as the little child chafes against parental authority and loving restraint. When that child puts back the hand that would do him good, we see a picture of what we ourselves are doing against the great Father. The man who trusts to his own works and his own treasures shall be spoken of with upbraiding and even taunting in the final issue—"Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness"; "Neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it." In proportion as the temptation is direct, and might on some ground be argued as even legitimate, ought the religious appeal to be strong and importunate. "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy."

From the history of Moab we see that even blessings may be

perverted, and sacred privileges may be turned into occasions of self-destruction. Read the eleventh verse:—

“Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.”

On this account Moab became self-idolatrous. Too much ease, too little upset, too little anxiety, too little trouble will kill any soul. To come into a business made to your hands, to have a fortune left you, and to have everything pre-arranged, is to be exposed to very peculiar and urgent temptation. Thank God for the rough places in your lives. They are unpleasant, but they are disciplinary. They are like steep hills, but remember that great temples and blessed sanctuaries stand at the top of them. Moab had not been emptied from vessel to vessel as wine is emptied in process of being refined and purified, but had stood always in one vessel, and the effect upon herself was bad. We ought to be emptied from one situation into another, from one town into another, from one set of difficulties into another, as wine is passed from vessel to vessel until it is pure and fit for the king's table. “Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God”; “I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.”

When discipline is not endured gradually it is brought to bear upon the life as an overwhelming judgment. This is the burden of the text—“The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, saith the Lord.” The horn of animals was the symbol of their strength, and in this instance the semblance is extended to men and nations. The broken arm is a figure familiar to Scripture: “Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and, lo, it shall not be bound up to be healed, to put a roller to bind it, to make it strong to hold the sword. Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, the strong, and that which was broken; and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand”; “The arms of the wicked shall be broken”; “The arms of Pharaoh shall fall down”; “The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth

up over it the basest of men." It would seem as if every human life required a certain measure of discipline, and must have it, and cannot by any possibility escape it; and if it be not spread over the space of the whole life, it must be condensed and given out in great bursts of judgment. "Moab hath been at ease from his youth,"—that is the opening of the chapter; "The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken. . . . Moab shall wallow in his vomit, and he also shall be in derision,"—that is the chapter of his advanced age. Two classes of persons should consider this. First, those who have daily discipline; they should say, Better have discipline a little at a time, as we are able to bear it: "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth"; "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby": these daily chafings and frettings are hard to bear, these daily disappointments are sharp thorns thrust into the very eyes; yet who knows what the judgment would be were it all to come at once? I will rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: no temptation has happened unto me but such as is common to men; by-and-by the explanation will come, and then I shall be able to say, He hath done all things well. Then the lesson should be well considered by those who seem to escape discipline of God. For a long time this was the case with Moab, and during that time Moab misinterpreted all the purposes of providence. It is impossible to deny that some persons seem to have a smooth career, without break or danger or scarcely inconvenience of any kind: all their adventures fructify in large profits; all their schemes are successes immediately they are made known; their health is strong, their sleep is sound, their estates seem to multiply themselves without the necessity of care or anxiety on the part of their owners.

Circumstances of this kind are apt to be misjudged by those who merely look on. They have driven many a good man into perplexity and have caused his feet well nigh to slip. Let the ease-loving consider well the monitions of religious history. The volcano is a long time in gathering all its fiery energy, but the outburst is momentary, and who can measure the destruction

which follows? Christ may well say, "What I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch,"—even those who have apparently least necessity to watch should not relax their vigils for a moment. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." See how frightful is the humiliation to which God can bring a man or a people. Look at the picture of Moab—horn cut off, the arm broken, the man drunk but not with wine, and reeling in helplessness, the proud one wallowing in his vomit and laughed to derision! "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Truly this has been described as "A dry drunkenness with the fierce wrath of God." Israel shall see its derider overthrown. When Israel was carried away captive by Shalmaneser, Moab made himself merry in the misery of Israel, and turned the tragedy into food for foolish laughter. Moab skipped for joy, and delighted in the evil which befell Israel. But the mocker has a short day, and his laughter is turned against himself: "Neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress. Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity." The pride of Moab was humbled; his loftiness and his arrogancy and his pride and the haughtiness of his heart were trodden down. Let boasters now and evermore beware! "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down. . . . The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low." "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

We cannot, however, rest here: for the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever. Mercy triumphs over judgment. In one verse (ver. 42) we read, "And Moab shall be destroyed from being a people, because he hath magnified himself against the Lord." The destruction, therefore, was not arbitrary, but moral, being based upon an assigned reason. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." We should say, therefore, that this verse was the concluding verse in the whole history of Moab. What can there be after destruction? With men this is

impossible, but with God all things are possible. The chapter does not end with the forty-second verse, but with the forty-seventh, and this is how it reads: "Yet will I bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days, saith the Lord." One would fain construe these words into a hopeful omen. Out of what extremities cannot God deliver mankind? Let the most desponding rekindle their hope, and the most distant prodigal hear his father's voice. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Can we be worse than Moab? Can we present fewer elements of hopefulness? Are we nearer ruin? Impossible! It is in the very extremity of our condition that God's grace is magnified. "They shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a Saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. . . . And the Lord shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the Lord, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them." Who can set bounds to the mercy of God? Yet must there be no trifling, even with a gospel of hope. He who says he may continue to the end in the service of the devil and in the enjoyment of his own passions, and at the last God will be merciful to him, is guilty of blasphemy against the mercy to which he appeals. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." To all ruined men we would utter this gracious testimony. Remember the horn of Moab was cut off, and his arm was broken, and he became the contempt of the whole earth; and remember also that at the last his captivity was turned or brought again. Destruction alone can complete despair; but where there is life there should be hope, and where there is hope it should be fixed steadfastly and exclusively on the Son of God.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou dost always astonish us by the wonders of thy power, and thy wisdom, and thy love. Our amazement heightens as we gaze upon thy way; it is full of wonder, full of light, and we bless thee that it is a continual challenge to our imagination and to our adoring love. Thou art not to be known by us in all the fulness of thy being and purpose. We cannot find out the Almighty unto perfection. All these things that we see are but parts of his way, whisperings in the air; but the thunder of his power who can understand? Thou dost give power to the faint; and to them that have no might thou dost increase strength. These are the uses of thy power; these are the condescensions of almightiness. Here we begin to wonder with a great thankfulness that thou shouldst remember the son of man and visit the children of dust. Come to us now, we humbly pray thee, as we need thee most; in darkness bring light with thee; in trouble set before us the larger truth, which involves healing and immortality, and we shall scorn the trouble that would slay us; in perplexity show us the right way; carrying heavy burdens, if thou wilt not lessen the weight thou wilt increase the strength to bear. So we fall into thine hands; it is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. Specially do we fall into the hands of the redeeming God, revealed in Christ Jesus. This Man receiveth sinners; his blood cleanseth from all sin. In his wisdom is an answer to every doubt; in his righteousness an answer to every accusation; in his atonement a triumphant vindication of the law. We have all things in Christ; we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us. Amen.

Chapter 1. 5.

“They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.”

QUESTION AND ATTITUDE.

INQUIRY and attitude should correspond. You should look as if you meant your questions. Do not let us have any discrepancy in the man himself; no asking of questions about one way whilst we are looking over the shoulder towards another. Do not mock kind Heaven. “Thitherward”: literally, Hitherward. Jeremiah is writing in Judah, and he says the time will come when the returning ones will face this way; and they will be asking from step to step, Which is the road to Zion? Some-

times we look our prayers ; sometimes we are on the right road and do not know it. There are more Christians in the world than slumber in our pews. God will interpret both the question and the man. Sometimes men will be on the right road, and be surprised to find themselves there : the answer to such will be, **Go on, turn not to the right nor to the left ; you are quite in the proper direction, all you have to do is to go on.** Thus God delights to surprise human souls. Some questions are born in us ; we know things by the very torment of our ignorance. Does that sound paradoxical ? To me it is experimental. Curiously and inexplicably, we feel that there are some things we ought to know, and do not ; then questions arise in our minds, as, for example, **Who can tell us ? Who will show us this good ? Where are the men who know things that we do not know ?** and there shall go forth out of the human heart a great cry for God's prophet, the teaching man, the seer in Israel. Questions about a certain kind of knowledge seem to be born in every soul ; love for certain kinds of intelligence is inborn. Here is a little creature three years old who cannot be kept away from the piano. He will be there when you are not looking ; he will rise early in the morning and grope his way towards the musical instrument. **Why this, thou little Mozart ? I cannot help it. Would you not like to go to the gaming-table ? Would you not prefer to go to the flower-house ? Would it not be more in your way, poor little child, to have hoop, or humming-top, or bagfuls of marbles ?** He does not answer in words, but he goes back to the piano as if he had left it in some other world and was delighted to find it again ; it talks to him, and he talks to it, and if you will allow the little soul to tarry there he wants no other heaven just now. Others are fond of language or science or history ; there is a predestination that settles us if we will listen to it. The Lord has not turned any one of us into a pathless world ; he has made little feet for every path there is up the mountains and across the deserts and through the gardenland. He says to every traveller, **I want you to go down this road ; do not turn to the right or the left ; you must be trained in the way you should go, the predestined, foreordained road ; you will find walking smooth down there, but if you get upon any other path your feet will be pricked with sharp thorns.**

Then certain kinds of need seem to grow in consciousness in the soul. We do not establish prayer by argument. If a man has to argue himself into prayer he cannot pray; if a man has to reason himself up to an organ he will never be an organist; if a man has to scourge himself in order to preach he will never be a preacher. He must preach because he breathes, he must play his instrument because he cannot be happy away from it. Prayer is the impulse of the soul: it is the cry of need, it is the utterance of wonder, it is the affirmation of spiritual certainty; the soul says, I know that if I could only speak loudly enough, or softly enough, I should be heard and answered from above. It is of no avail that we tell the spiritually minded man that the air is emptiness. He does not believe us: he says, I almost see my friends there; every waft of wind is like the throb of a heart. You are fools who have no encircling hosts of spirits: they only are wise who know that the air is the upper Church. When such need makes itself felt, then we begin to ask questions.

There must be persons who can answer great questions. First find out the human instrument if you can:—Where dwells the seer? who keeps God's keys? whose tongue is learned that it can speak a word in season to him that is weary? The soul is never called upon to ask little questions. All the inquiries of the soul when the soul has fair-play are great, sublime, heaven-ascending, heaven-storming. If you are content with asking little questions, you must be content with receiving small replies. When Jesus Christ touched the human mind interrogatively, it was to call it up to some high questioning: What think ye of Christ? How does David call Christ both Son and Lord? All the questions, therefore, which Christ ever indicated showed that question-asking is right within certain limits. We do not heed the questions of mere curiosity or impertinence; we ought not to listen to the interrogatories of profanity: when the soul is really alive with interrogation it will know how to put its own questions, and it will give the Church no rest until those questions have been answered substantially. If the Church cannot answer the great questions of the soul, then it is no Church, though its spire be high as heaven. What are Christian teachers for but to answer the questions of the soul, to rebuke all the little questions, and to

urge the soul to make bolder inquiries, yea, to thrust itself upon God in reverent cross-examination, that he may grant it great vision of light and great treasure of benediction? Nor must we think that only the nominally great can answer the soul's questions. Sometimes a little child might guide a king; sometimes a native of the very humblest type and status may know more about his village than the most distinguished stranger that approaches its obscurity. Except ye be converted and become as little children ye cannot answer some of the greatest questions about the invisible kingdom. Not when we are intellectually greatest, but when we are spiritually tenderest and most sympathetic, can we respond to those who say in pain, Who will show us any good? and to those who ask in wonder and in hope, Which is the way to Zion? We must cultivate this grace of asking really important and even sublime questions. They will lift the mind above the world; they will send currents of fresh air, so to say, from heaven's own sanctuary through the weary, hard-driven brain.

What are the great questions that men should ask? Men must answer that inquiry themselves. Why be so anxious about details and trivialities and frivolities? Why hold the letter in your hand and ask a score of questions about the sealing of it? You are not going to be saved by the seal; break it, open the letter, read it. He is not a student who fritters away his intellectual energy in inquiries about the sealing of the letter; he is the reverent inquirer, and therefore the deep and earnest student, who says, The seal must stand back until I have had time to make some larger inquiries; I may come back upon it and ask it questions; meanwhile, what does the letter itself say to me, what its message of love, what its stimulus to service? If you are really in earnest, if your souls be aflame with divine sincerity, you will know what questions are important and what are trivial. There shall come a time when the only questions worth asking will be religious questions: Where is Zion? Where is God? What is truth? Where is peace? Frivolities will then cease to excite our interest. The time will come when there will be a complete inversion even of intellectual relations. The first shall be last, and the last shall be first: inquiries which we now deem to be supreme we shall one day regard as

insignificant. Yes, Religion, sweet, fair visitant from heaven, desised and esteemed not, shall one day have its chance. What do all your inquiries amount to when set side by side with the possibility (let us use no firmer term at this moment) of knowing and realising the spiritual and the divine? Granted, merely for the sake of argument, that it is possible to know something of God, before that possibility all other inquiry fades and perishes. Suppose that we could know everything about this handful of mud we call the globe, what does it come to? Nothing! Yet the important men now on the thoroughfare are the men who are going to the geological museum. By all means, I say to my fellow-travellers, Gentlemen, stand back and let them go. The men who are important now are the men who are going to the Houses of Parliament—Hats off! Here are men who are going to make a new unintelligibility in the form of an Act of Parliament. The first shall be last and the last shall be first, and the time will come when the man who says "Let us pray" will be greatest in the kingdom of wisdom. But let us suppose, merely for the sake of acquiring information, that we know everything that can be known about the earth. The earth was formed (take down the ciphers) ten billions three millions five hundred and ninety-four thousand two hundred and seventeen years, eleven months, and three weeks ago—have you got that down? What good has it done you? Do you feel better now? Can you rest? Are you satisfied? Do you say, This is heaven—Oh say those sweet words again! Ten billions three millions. Yes, you may say them over and over again, until the day of doom, and you will not find one particle of real comfort in them. Now suppose you know all about the strata, how they were built, and how they were piled, and how they were coloured, and can trace every line, and discourse with eloquence upon every lamination,—now how do you feel after all that? Are you at peace? are you at rest? I see your fingers going out after other worlds to clutch them because you have exhausted the little volume of the earth. But the universe is just as little to God as the earth is to you and the universe. There is nothing great beside God—that is, in comparison with him, in relation to him. No: the time will come when we must know God himself; God shall be all in all, as an intellectual inquiry, as a spiritual delight, as a moral rest,

as a promise of eternal growth and never-ceasing service. It is necessary that some men should be geologists; we must have all kinds of people to make up a complete world. There must be some persons who are doomed to the humiliation of breaking stones and giving fragments long names: what does it all come to? Within its own limit, useful; within its own limit, entertaining, instructive, and delightful: but when viewed in relation to what we may call the totality of things, the highest meaning and the supreme purpose, what are all these inquiries but trivialities—learned, pompous, magnificent nothings!

We must prove the reality of our sincerity by the set and stress of our lives. Observe, these people do not only ask a question, they discover a disposition, they represent an attitude: "They shall ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward." They lose no time in asking questions; they ask them as they go:—Is this the road? we know it is: and the answer is, Yes, go on; fair Zion, beautiful as heaven's morning, stands yonder, with doors thrown back to give you welcome and hospitality. It is well thus to be doing two things at once, to be gathering information and to be realising it, to be asking questions and to be losing no time in progress. Here we have no mere speculation, no mere intellectual entertainment; here we have nothing but dead earnestness, the tongue asking the question which the face represents in action. How is it with us? We can show where we want to go. God finds our piety in the stress of our lives. How are these people looking? is the divine question: not, Are they faint, are they strong? not, Are they singing songs, or are they breathing sighs? but, Are they facing right? Then he will write in his record, "Faint, yet pursuing." Not the man who could rise and go up to the signal was healed of the serpent-poison, but he who only could turn his closing eyes in that direction, he was saved; the moment his dying eye caught sight of the typical Saviour, the virus was cleansed from his blood, the fiery flying serpent was forgotten, and he, because of his look of faith and hope, was saved, and made a man again. We can show where we would be if we could. That is all any preacher has a right to ask of us. We follow this line of policy in all ordinary life. Here, for example, is a young man about whom I

will take your judgment. He says he is most anxious to learn what the Christian religion really is. Very good: what does this young man do? He attends a course of infidel lectures. What is your judgment about him? Can the unbeliever represent faith? Can the unbeliever really do that which is fair to any question which he opposes? Can the deaf man who never heard a sound tell you what music is? I convict that young man, not of irony only, but of falsehood and of blasphemy. He does not mean what he says when he indicates his desire to know what the Christian religion is. Suppose a man says, I am most desirous to know what may be known of the Godhead, therefore I am going to listen to six lectures on Agnosticism. What do you think of that poor crippled "therefore"? Did you ever meet so base a pretender in logic? What we insist upon is sincerity.

If you want to know about the Christian religion go to a Christian church, go to Christian literature, go to Christian teachers; if you want to know about atheism, go to atheists; they ought to know their own negation. Here is your son, who longs to be an arithmetician; therefore he goes every night to the music-hall. What would you say about him as a boy—as your boy? Or perhaps you could speak more freely about him if he were somebody else's boy. But the question is, What do you think of him? He says, The desire of my soul is to be an arithmetician—and therefore he spends six nights a week in the music-hall? You would not believe the witness. Suppose a man should say, I want to know what mountains really are, and therefore I am going to visit the lowlands of Holland. You would not believe the man; you would say, If you were really in earnest about seeing mountains, you would not go to Holland; if you were really in earnest, you would not go to even low-lying countries; but you would say, Where are the mountains? and I will climb them as much as I can, for I am anxious to know something of their height and something of their formation and something of the atmosphere that blows round their elevated heads. Now that you talk so you are a sincere man, you are at all events going in the right direction, and by so much you must be credited with sincerity. You can show what you would be and where you would be if you could.

If you really wanted to know about God, you would read the Bible; but if I found you reading every other kind of literature but the Bible and yet professing to want to know about God, I should not believe you: on the other side I will take this encouragement, that if we find any man in church we have a right to infer that he wants to know God, and reconciliation, and forgiveness, and cleansing, and heaven. To be in the sanctuary should mean so much; it should cease to be a custom, a conventionality, or an aspect of social respectability: to be in the church should mean to have the face Zionward. Some may have their faces Zionward without having made any public declaration of that fact; some may peep into the church in the hope that they may see God. We will not say that any man goes to church out of mere curiosity; we would rather give the larger interpretation to human conduct, and say, Behold, what are these that fly as doves to the windows? What are these coming out on extraordinary occasions to the house of God? behold, these are earnest men, who are not only asking about Zion but who are setting their faces thitherward, and we know from their look, from those burning faces, that they mean to reach Zion. Accept that interpretation, and coming to church shall mean all that and all the *plus* which is involved in that elementary construction of human conduct.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou dost wait to be gracious ; thou dost not shut the door of Zion ; thou dost welcome all returning souls, for thou hast no pleasure in darkness or in death. Thou art the God of life, thou art the Sovereign of eternity. Behold, thou hast sent forth the gospel of thy love in Christ Jesus the Lord throughout all the earth. Thou dost wait for returning captives, thou dost tarry for home-coming prodigals. Give us to feel that we are all welcome at our Father's door. We bless thee for infinite love, for love we cannot follow with our understanding, which our dreams cannot picture, from which our imagination stands back in awe and great surprise. Thou hast sent thy Son to save us, thou hast made the Cross the centre of the universe. We bless thee for that wondrous Tree ; we thank thee for Golgotha. We come to the Cross for pardon, for purity, for peace, for all things needful for time and for eternity. For all thy care and patience we bless thee ; we have stood only in the goodness of God ; beyond that goodness we have no foothold, no hope, no light. Jesus, still lead on ! Make to-morrow more abundant than to-day, in light, in promise, in fruitfulness ; and at the end may we not know ourselves to be old, because our youth is just beginning. Comfort all that mourn : speak of rest to those who are heavy-laden : tell those who are wandering in the wrong direction that thou art waiting for them at home. Now may there be a great return of hearts, a great renewal of plighted troth at the altar which stands on Calvary. Amen.

Chapter lii. 31-34.

“And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, in the five and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon in the first year of his reign lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah, and brought him forth out of prison, and spake kindly unto him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon, and changed his prison garments : and he did continually eat bread before him all the days of his life. And for his diet, there was a continual diet given him of the king of Babylon, every day a portion until the day of his death, all the days of his life.”

FIFTY-FIVE YEARS OLD.

JEHOIACHIN was eighteen years old when he began to reign in Judah. Jehoiachin reigned three months. He had hardly been a king at all before he was taken away

captive. In captivity he spent thirty-seven years: therefore he was fifty-five years old when this took place. What changes may occur in life: who can tell what we may come to? After thirty-seven years there arose a king who took a fancy to Jehoiachin, and made quite a favourite of him in the court. Good fortune is often tardy in coming to men; we are impatient, we want to be taken out of prison to-day, and set among kings at once, and to have all our desires gratified fully, and especially at once. See what has befallen Jehoiachin. For the first time for seven-and-thirty years the man of authority has spoken kindly to him. Kind words have different values at different times; sometimes a kind word would be a fortune—if not a fortune in the hand, a fortune in the way of stimulating imagination, comforting disconsolateness, and so pointing to the sky that we could see only its real blue beauties, its glints of light, its hints of coming day. When we have an abundant table, what do we care for an offered crust? that crust may be regarded by our sated appetite as an insult: but when the table is bare, and hunger is gnawing, and thirst is consuming, what then is a crust of bread, or a draught of water? Thus we get down to reality; we are no longer in the region of fancies, decoration, luxury, but we are on the line of life, and we begin to realise what we do in very deed require, and our hearts glow with thankfulness to the man who would offer us bread of the plainest kind for the satisfaction of our intolerable hunger. More men hunger for kind words than for bread. There is a hunger of the heart. It is possible to be in a house all bread, and yet not to know the meaning of satisfaction or contentment: all the walls glow with colour, all the echoes tremble with music, of an artificial and mechanical kind; but the oppression is an oppression of grandeur: one line of civility, one hint of courtesy, one approach of love, one smile of interest and sympathy, would be worth it all, ten thousand times told.

Here is an office we can all exercise. Where we cannot give much that is described as substantial we can speak kindly, we can look benignantly, we can conduct ourselves as if we would relieve the burden if we could: thus life would be multiplied, brightened, sweetened, a great comforting sense of divine nearness would fall

upon our whole consciousness, and we should enter into the possession and the mystery of heavenly peace. See what fortune has befallen Jehoiachin! After thirty-seven years he is recognised as king and gentleman and friend, and has kind words spoken to him in a kind of domestic music. Was not all this worth living for? If Jehoiachin could have foreseen all this, would he not have been glad with a great joy? But the programme is not so plainly written as this, nor is it confined to comforts of this particular sort. It is a subtly drawn programme; the hand that executed this outline of friendship is no 'prentice hand; every finger was a master. Jehoiachin not only had kind words spoken to him, and great regard shown to him in various ways, but he was lifted up above the kings that were with the monarch in Babylon. He was at the head of the list; he took precedence at the royal table; no man must take the seat of Jehoiachin, king of Judah: see how with the port of a king he advanced to his eminent position. Was not all this worth living for? The thirty-seven years were forgotten in this elevation, this honour, this recognition of personal supremacy. Who can tell, too, how subtle was the action of this arrangement in its humiliation of the other kings? Critics have an easy trick of praising one author that they may smite another in the face; they do not care for the particular author, but through him they want to anger some other writer, to snub and rebuke and chastise and humble some other man. Who can tell what plan the monarch of Babylon had in all this arrangement of his table? You can insult a whole score of guests by your treatment of one of them, and that treatment shall be a treatment of honour, singling out one individual for recognition, and leaving others to look on until they burn with jealousy. More still: Jehoiachin had an abundance to eat and drink—"He did continually eat bread before the king all the days of his life. And for his diet, there was a continual diet given him of the king of Babylon, every day a portion until the day of his death, all the days of his life." Was not this worth waiting for? or is it a poor description? Is it a kind of anticipation of a portrait drawn by the Master Artist, when he covered with ineffable humiliation a man by simply describing him as a rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day? There are

some compliments that are bad to bear as a whiff of perdition. What man could ever recover that description? A man described by his bank-book, his coat, and his dinner! and there was nothing more left of him to be described. That was making as little of himself as he could make. There is a modesty that is sarcastic. What a delightful end of a suffering course! Who would not be content to live for such an issue? After thirty-seven years you may come to elevation and honour of the kind awarded to Jehoiachin. Lift up your heads, *sursum corda*, cheer yourselves; you cannot tell what you may be on the earth; your one little pound may become ten pounds, and the ten ten thousand, and the little house a great palace, and the small dinner an abundant banquet, and the draught of water a goblet of foaming wine. What an end to live for! What a heaven after thirty-seven years!

All this is not the fact. The teacher may take advantage of us, in order that, having mocked us, he may afterward draw us into deeper prayer, and fasten our attention with a more religious constancy upon the reality of the case. But we have so many superficial readers, persons who would not be able to distinguish the chasm between the text and the sermon. Provided the sentences run fluently, who cares what they mean, where they came from, where they are going to! What have we been doing in thus dwelling upon the good fortune of Jehoiachin? We have been playing the fool. We have been reckoning up social precedences, better clothes, and abundance of food; we have been taking a minute of circumstances, noting the opening of the day with its abundant banquet, the dressing hour with its hundred wardrobes and acres of looking-glass; and we have been adding up how much the man must have worn and eaten and drunken within the twenty-four hours, and all the while the king looking at him benignantly, speaking to him as an equal, dealing out to him kind words,—the whole constituting an ineffable insult. Yet how prone we are to add up circumstances, and to speak of social relations, as if they constituted the sum-total of life. Now look at realities. Jehoiachin was in his heart a bad man. That is written upon the face of the history of the kings of Judah, and not a single word is said about his change of heart; and bad men

cannot have good fortune. Bad men cannot have a good dinner, it turns to bad blood when it begins to work in the system. They can be satisfied as a dog might be satisfied with a bone, but they know nothing of the deeper contentment, the eating that is sacrificial, the drinking that is sacramental, the patience that culminates in peace that passeth understanding. Everything is wasted upon a bad man. For Jehoiachin has undergone no change of heart; he is just what he was when he was first taken away. The prison does not make converts. There is nothing regenerative in penal endurance literally taken as such. A man is as great a thief when he leaves the gaol as he was when he went in, unless his heart, disposition, will, soul, self has been changed. There are persons that come out of prison expecting you to receive them with delight, as "Hail fellow, well met; you have been in prison, but have come out—here is my hand." That is not the law of God; that is not the philosophy of reason. A period of imprisonment cannot turn a thief into an honest man: one hour of penitence may, one hour of real broken-heartedness without one taint of hypocrisy will do it. Let us fix our mental vision upon this Jehoiachin king of Judah. He has been taken out of prison in the narrow sense of the term, his head has been lifted up, a place of precedence has been accorded him at the royal table, and his bread and water have been made sure for the rest of his days: what a delightful situation! No. Jehoiachin at his best was only a decorated captive; he was still in Babylon. That is the sting. Not what have we, but where are we, is Heaven's piercing inquiry. Not how great the barns; state the height, the width, the depth, the cubic measure of the barns; but, What wheat have we in the heart, what bread in the soul, what love-wine for the Spirit's drinking?

Here we have a man who has a seat at the royal table distinguished from all other seats; we have a brother-king speaking kind words to him: but he is only a captive, he is a promoted dog. Why do you not fix your mind upon the reality of your situation? There were times when we used to hear how well off the slaves were, with their nice whitewashed huts, and their clean clothes; and pious but purblind ministers of Christ have been taken round to see how well off the slaves were. A slave cannot

be well off. That is the thing that must be spoken. See that rubicund man at the hut door: how well he looks, what a face he has, what a glowing eye! why, in that eye I see laughter, song, love of mirth, silent enjoyment of life's panorama as it moves; how well off he is! No. Why is he not well off? Because he is a slave. No man with a chain on his arms can be well off. Let Jehoiachin try to leave Babylon, and he will see what all the kind words amount to, and all the good clothes, and all the abundant food; let his heart ache for home, and let him tell his heart-ache to Evil-merodach king of Babylon, and he will know exactly what he is—a decorated hound. Ask what collar the dog has on! but do not tell us that a man who is a captive can be well off, and ought to be content with the trough at which he feeds.

This is the case with men who do not know it. There are persons who are perfectly content to be well off in circumstances without ever inquiring how they are off in character. This is common to nineteenth-century civilisation. Ask concerning the welfare of your friend: what is the reply?—doing admirably; has a farm of over five thousand acres; is a great flock-master; is a magistrate; is looked up to by the surrounding population; he eats and drinks with the best society in that province. Is that all? What does he read? Does he ever look with other than an ox's eye upon the landscape? Has he the land, or the landscape? Does he conduct commerce with heaven? Has he many a ship going to and fro between the countries, bringing from heaven's green shore things to make glad the heart? What ideas has he? What speculation is there in his eye? of what stature is his mind? Yet there are Christian people who would hear that a man is well-read, thoroughly intelligent, truly pious, excellent in moral tone and temper, but—— But what? His income is very small! Oh! when Christians yield to that kind of criticism their pretended Christianity is an arrant hypocrisy. A man is what he is in his soul. Jeremiah down in the mire is a happier man than Jehoiachin sitting at the head of the captive kings. For all the kings we read about here were captive kings, taken by the monarch of Babylon, and worn by him as men wear medals and stars and decorations. A religious martyr was

a happier man than Jehoiachin. A poor man may be richer than a millionaire. A wise man may be stronger than an army. When you report your son's condition, for God's sake tell me what his heart is like. He cannot want his coat long; do not dwell upon that, as if it were an essential feature in the case: reverse your mode of reckoning, let all circumstances be counted at the lower end of things, and let there stand first might in prayer, spotlessness of purity, chivalry of nobleness, patience that never complains, giving that never begrudges. The fear is that men will not take to this way of reckoning. Poor Jehoiachin! take thy seat, eat plentifully, gorge thyself, thou promoted dog; leave nothing behind, eat it all—thou art feeding for the grave! Poor man, loving books, loving truth, loving wisdom, loving God, loving Christ, thy wealth may be described as unsearchable riches. Take the right view; measure things by the right standard; and the first shall be last, and the last first, and the poor man shall have the honours of the house. What is the sublime, profound, eternal doctrine? It is that only the free can be blessed; only the free can be happy. If a man is held back by a bad habit he is in captivity; if a man has the hand of the creditor upon his shoulder, he cannot be really content and peaceful; if a man is the victim of a tormenting memory, his song is a lie, and his feast a new way of taking poison; if a man is haunted by remorse that pricks his pillow, he may have all the bullion of the bank, but in his soul he is a pauper, and he would part with it all if he could kill the demon that makes his life a pain: What is the doctrine which the Christian teacher has to promulgate? It is that only the free can be happy. How can men become free? Jesus Christ did not hesitate to tell; he said, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Paul spoke of the liberty that is in Christ as "glorious liberty." Liberty is gladness; freedom is bliss. Yet the true freedom is to be found in slavery to Christ. His bondage is liberty. His servitude is freedom. To be the slave of Christ is to be the free man of the universe. Saviour, Man of the five wounds, make us free!

THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

[NOTE.—“This book is a kind of appendix to the prophecies of Jeremiah, of which, in the original Scriptures, it formed part. It expresses with pathetic tenderness the prophet’s grief for the desolation of the city and temple of Jerusalem, the captivity of the people, the miseries of famine, the cessation of public worship, and the other calamities with which his countrymen had been visited for their sins. The leading object was to teach the suffering Jews neither to despise ‘the chastening of the Lord,’ nor to ‘faint’ when ‘rebuked of him,’ but to turn to God with deep repentance, to confess their sins, and humbly look to him alone for pardon and deliverance. No book of Scripture is more rich in expressions of patriotic feeling, or of the penitence and trust which become an afflicted Christian. The form of these poems is strictly regular. With the exception of the last (chap. v.), they are in the original Hebrew alphabetical acrostics, in which every stanza begins with a new letter. The third has this further peculiarity, that all the three lines in each stanza have the same letter at the commencement. As a composition, this book is remarkable for the great variety of pathetic images it contains; expressive of the deepest sorrow, and worthy of the subject which they are designed to illustrate.”—ANGUS’S *Bible Handbook*.]

Chapter ii. 20.

“Behold, O Lord, and consider to whom thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long? shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?”

“CHILDREN OF A SPAN LONG.”

THE English language is very rich, yet very poor. Most rich people are poor when you come to know them and want them. This English language is both a millionaire and a pauper. It is not rich in fine grades and shades of meaning. It has a right hand and a left, and there is an end of it; it is black and white, and up and down, and new and old,—rough divisions of that kind. So we are rough people, dealing largely

in rough and rude judgments, cutting things off sharply, forgetting where we cut them and for what end. If we speak of children, that is about all we have to say,—“the children,” that is all. They may be “a span long,” or they may be going to school; they may be in the cradle, or they may have assumed their first full suit: still, they are all children. That is very English; rude and snubbing, curt, and wanting in roundness and delicacy and fineness and colour. So the Bible has suffered from our poverty of language. Many passages we do not understand by reading them in English. Happily they are not passages upon which the salvation of the soul depends. Everything necessary to salvation is written as with a pencil of light. There is no ambiguity about the Cross; there is no double meaning about the need of Christ’s priesthood for the salvation and ultimate sanctification and coronation of humanity. Yet there are many passages in which distinctions of meaning would be like floods of light.

Jewish writers and commentators even of modern days tell us that the Jews had nine different words by which to say “child.” Everything depended upon the word that was used. From the word you knew exactly the age of the child, the ability of the child, the point of development attained by the child; you had no questions to ask. There was, of course, a common word by which children were all designated when there was no need to discriminate and specify. A boy was *Ben*—Ben-ezra, Ben-jamin; son of Ezra, son of Jamin. The girl was *Bath*—Ben and Bath, masculine and feminine, signifying generally “children.” But the Hebrew, we are told by the Jewish writers of eminence, did not rest there. That would have been enough for us,—a Ben and a Bath, and there is an end of it with the English language. That English language was not made for the finer theology. There was *Yeled*, and the Hebrew said that word meant the child was “newly born,” quite a little, little thing. Exodus ii. is full of it:—“put the child therein; . . . she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. . . . And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child’s mother.” The Hebrew called the little one *Yeled*. It had no need to ask whether it was seven years

old or three months, or whether it was going to school: it was Yeled. Sometimes the child was *Yonek*—"Out of the mouths of babes hast thou ordained strength." The English has done its best there; it has invented the word "babe." In Jeremiah (xliv. 7) we have—"child and suckling, out of Judah." Sometimes the word was *Oled*, as in the text. When the Hebrew said *Oled*, the Jewish writer to whom I am indebted for the nine instances tells us that the meaning was, the child was about to be weaned. There was no need to multiply words; *Oled* was the word that held all the meaning. Sometimes the child was called *Gamul*; then it was getting independent of its mother, it was looking elsewhere for sustenance,—a dangerous part of life; yet it must come. In Isaiah (xi. 8) we read, "And the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den." Then the child advanced and was called *Taph*, and we are told that *Taph* means the quickly stepping; no longer carried by his mother, but toddling sharply, taking little short steps to keep up with the longer strides of the mother: do you see it? The child is now getting on. That is referred to in Jeremiah (xl. 7)—"men, and women, and children." It is referred to in Esther (iii. 13)—"both young and old, little children and women, in one day." The Hebrew woman did not say, The child could now walk quite nicely; she said, "*Taph*." Then the child advanced and stood straighter; he looked broader: speaking of the child at that time he was called *Elem*, the strong; he was ready to assist his parents in their labour, though he was not independent. We read of this kind in 1 Sam. xx. 22—"But if I say thus unto the young man," called in the verse before the "lad": between two periods of life, a most awkward age, just ceasing to be a boy and hardly yet beginning to be a man; in what we call a very touchy and sensitive condition of life; better to be spoken to as little as possible, and never lectured. The child advanced, and he became *Naar*, the free, coming from a verb, we are told, which signifies to walk about freely and defend himself. We read of these people in Gen. xxxvii. 2 and Judges viii. 20. Finally came the ninth condition of the child, and he was spoken of as *Bachur*, the mellowed, the ripe, marriageable, fit for military service. So the little one grew up; so the generations come and go; so the days will never let us stand

still. He who but yesterday was a *Ben* has now grey hairs here and there upon him, and he knoweth it not. Time flies; eternity seems to come to meet it half-way.

When the male child was about thirty days old the Jewish commentators relate what befell in the family. There came into operation what was called the law of redemption—a law enforced amongst the Jews unto this day. The friends are called together to a little repast, the parents call to the repast a descendant of Aaron (a kind of priest, I suppose) called Cohen. The father had deposited with the priest thirty silver shekels of the sanctuary (eleven or twelve shillings of English money), and after grace and prayers and what religious rites I know not, the priest asked the father whether he would have the child or the shekels. The father replied that he would have the child; then the priest took the shekels and swung them around the child's head and uttered religious words, and the firstborn male thus became free. What a glorious interpretation is given of this by the Apostle Peter! Speaking of Christians he said, Ye were not redeemed with eleven or twelve shillings—ye were not redeemed with silver and gold; ye are the Lord's freemen, blood-bought,—stand up,—saved and crowned and enfranchised in the city of God.

Yet we must not altogether imitate the Jews. Though they had many fine distinctions in language, some of their distinctions were too fine for us and for Christian reasoning. The Jewish writer already referred to says that when he was in Moab he was talking to a sheikh who had "four wives and five children," and soon after the sheikh said he had "six daughters." "But," said the Jewish writer, "you told me a day or two ago you had only five children; now you say you have five children and six daughters—five and six are eleven." "Yes," said the sheikh, "but in counting children we do not count daughters." That is a distinction the more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Mark the difference in Christ. In Christ there is neither male nor female, circumcised nor uncircumcised, bond nor free. Christ looks upon us as human, touched with the colour of heaven, throbbing with the pulsations of eternity.

When he died he counted the women and the children, boys and girls, and the old men : he died for the whole world.

In training human life, then, we should observe some of these distinctions and profit by them. We should avoid generalities ; we should study character, we should study age. No child is identical with any other child. In giving what we term common education we are right, as we are right in dispensing common bread ; but beside the common education there should be a finely graduated training. This child is delicate, sensitive ; the east wind will almost kill that fair flower. The other child is robust, strong, audacious, venturesome. Another is inquisitive, always on the quest for something more in the way of information ; another is almost cursed with the gift of asking questions. We must therefore study each, and adapt our ministry to each, and this is what the preacher has to do. This is the difficulty of the minister. The people cannot all be treated alike ; in every congregation there are many congregations. We have all possible distinctions and classifications of personality and of growth and of necessity, and the wise great preacher would be one who brought out of his treasury things new and old, and gave to each a portion of meat in due season ; and whilst the one is being served the other should courteously wait.

We should notice the law of progress. It is impossible to deny the law of evolution on its practical and visible aspects, whatever truth or error may attach to it when its action is remote and beyond the power of being tested by the senses. Evolution is a process which is taking place before our eyes every day. We say the child is taller, the child is stronger, the child is gentler : what is the meaning of that change of terms ? It means that life has been advancing and is not to-day what it was yesterday ; and blessed is that man who has the sagacity to notice the degrees of progress, because they mean degrees of necessity. When does the child become a man ? That is an awful point in life. We do not want the child to become a man, and yet we do want it. There is a period in life when we do not know precisely what we would really want or would really prefer ; but to be no longer child, to become not only a quick-

stepping one but a young man who is independent, to cut off in some degree old associations,—we do not want the child to have a house of his own, and yet we do want him to have it to-morrow and to be warm and comfortable. And even the girls whom the Jews did not count would leave any father. Is that true? Certainly: and when the girl has left her father and gone away into the world's strife she wonders how some other girl can think of marrying: How silly girls are now! says this advanced creature, who never left her father, except on the first provocation. We must take larger views. We were made for an independence which is perfectly compatible with association; we must reach the point of individuality. There is a point at which you are no longer your father's seed. It is a point hardly to be set forth in words, but his responsibility cannot follow you, and he ought not to be stigmatised by your follies, and your excesses and extravagances and follies ought not to be charged back upon your father. If he can charge himself with them, so be it; let him burn himself at the fire which his own hands enkindled; I am now speaking more generally, and more from what may be called the statesman's point of view. There comes a point when men are no longer to have their faults and foibles and unwisdoms of every kind charged upon their parents.

What a school the world is, as God sees it! What a sight the human populations must present to the eyes of God! What variety, what contradiction, what fine shading, what almost goodness, what almost hell! Christianity alone is equal to the whole occasion. Christ knows every soul. Christ calls men by their names. Christ does not need to be introduced to any one. He knows us. Therein is his Deity. He never makes a mistake about any man. He knows the fair Nathanael, the guileless soul, meditating, contemplating under the fig tree: he knows the Iscariot who is just about to sell him after kissing him with sin's foulest lips. All things are naked and opened to the eyes of that dear Saviour. This is a terror, yet this is a joy. If he knows all the bad he also knows what we are struggling against; he knows whether we are trying really to kill the devil that is in every one of us. He knows, in the language of the poet, not only "what's done," but also "what's resisted." Many of us may have a better

account to give at the last than even we ourselves suppose. All our struggles are set down as conquests. When we have been wrestling with the enemy night and day, and the sweat-drops stand upon our brow in proof of agony ; when we think ourselves overthrown, the Lord Christ may say, No, thou didst struggle well, thou shalt be saved. Cheer thee ! take heart ! Have nothing to do with perfectionists who have no taint or stain, who have no infirmity. Avoid the Pharisees who would contaminate you with their egotism, and go to the company of those who say, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee ;— the company of those who say, I will arise and go to my Father ; I will say to my Father, I have sinned. Associate with those who say, If I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be young. In thy touch is immortality.

NOTE.

“There are perhaps few portions of the Old Testament which appear to have done the work they were meant to do more effectually than this. It has presented but scanty materials for the systems and controversies of theology. It has supplied thousands with the fullest utterance for their sorrows in the critical periods of national or individual suffering. We may well believe that it soothed the weary years of the Babylonian exile (comp. Zech. i. 6 with Lam. ii. 17). When they returned to their own land, and the desolation of Jerusalem was remembered as belonging only to the past, this was the book of remembrance. On the ninth day of the month of Ab (July), the Lamentations of Jeremiah were read, year by year, with fasting and weeping, to commemorate the misery out of which the people had been delivered. It has come to be connected with the thoughts of a later devastation, and its words enter, sometimes at least, into the prayers of the pilgrim Jews who meet at the ‘place of wailing’ to mourn over the departed glory of their city. It enters largely into the nobly constructed order of the Latin Church for the services of Passion-week (*Breviar. Rom.*, Feria Quinta. ‘In Cœna Domini’). If it has been comparatively in the background in times when the study of Scripture had passed into casuistry and speculation, it has come forward, once and again, in times of danger and suffering, as a messenger of peace, comforting men, not after the fashion of the friends of Job, with formal moralisings, but by enabling them to express themselves, leading them to feel that they might give utterance to the deepest and saddest feelings by which they were overwhelmed. It is striking, as we cast our eye over the list of writers who have treated specially of the book, to notice how many must have passed through scenes of trial not unlike in kind to that of which the Lamentations speak. The book remains to do its work for any future generation that may be exposed to analogous calamities.”

—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible.*

PRAYER.

WE have come to praise thee, Father of mercies, in the appointed place: where thy name is recorded, there thou wilt be to meet thy people. We rely upon thy promise; all the promises of God are, Yea, Amen, in Christ Jesus: thy Son is the Everlasting Yes. We shall have all things in time and in eternity with Christ, whose riches are unsearchable. We come in his name, we pray under the shadow of his Cross, we plead the power of his blood. Thou wilt not say No to the hearts who thus come to thee, Father of life, God of light. We have brought our song; for thou hast led us even in the winter-time through gardens of delight, thou hast given unto us pleasure even in the time of storm and tumult. Thy hand has been upon us for good night and day; thou hast been round about our houses as if thou didst care for them; thou hast been the light, the joy, the music of our home. Thou hast blessed thy servants in basket and in store, so that they have enough and abound, and they know not the pang of hunger or the chill of cold. They have come therefore to sing of thy mercy, and to say, Thy rod and thy staff have comforted us. Others have come to praise thee because of the opened door. The door was fast shut, and they could not move it; thou hast caused the door to fall back, and now thy people walk in a full liberty: they would praise God, they would no more be silent in dulness of soul, but with great gladness, rising into rapture, each would say, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Thou wilt not disdain our tribute of praise; the praises of eternity are thine, but how could they be complete without the praises of time? Thou didst make the little earth, thou didst round it and set it in the heaven, thou didst give it what light it has, and all our possessions are thine; we ourselves are not our own, we bear the image and superscription of God; therefore dost thou deign to come to us, and because thou hast not withheld thine only begotten Son from the earth thou wilt not rest until the whole world be bathed in the sunlight of his love. We come from the family, and say all is well; it is well with the old man, and the little child, and the busy mother; it is well with those who have gone away, yea, it is better with them: they are more to us, they are nearer to us, we now feel more complete because of their perfectness. They loved the Saviour, they trusted in his Cross; thou hast taken them from us for a little while,—the father, the mother, the child, the friend,—but only for a little while, and not far away; nay, thou hast set them nearer to us than ever they were before. We will therefore not allow the flesh to triumph, but we will cause the spirit to answer the pleading of thy Spirit, and we shall joy and rejoice even in the presence of death itself: O Death, where is thy sting? We commend one

another to thy tender care ; thou knowest how frail we are, thou art able to keep us not only from falling but from failing ; we shall not begin to fall ; thou art able to present us faultless at the last. This is thy miracle, thou dying, rising, triumphant Christ. Amen.

Chapter iii. 22, 23.

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning : great is thy faithfulness."

PROFITABLE DISCIPLINE.

TAKING the opening of the chapter along with this portion, we seem to find a good deal of inconsistency, and in fact positive contradiction. Spiritual experience must be looked at as a whole. It is not right to fix attention either upon this side or upon that, to the exclusion and the forgetfulness of the other. One side is very dark and full of sadness, sharply inclined towards despair ; the other is brighter than the summer morning, tuneful, sunned with all the lustre of saintly hope : so we must take the night with the morning, if we would have the complete day. Jeremiah had rare power in sounding the depths of disciplinary sorrow. He walked familiarly through the chambers of dark dispensations : life was often to Jeremiah little better than a thunder-gloom : hence he often had to find his way by fitful gleams of lightning rather than by the clear and steady shining of the sun. It does us good now and then to talk to such a man. The soul cannot always live in laughter ; the man who has seen much sorrow, and turned it to a right use, will help us more in all that is deepest and truest in our nature than the man who has always lived mirthfully, and who does not know what it is to have sorrow, a black and exacting guest, tenanting and tormenting his soul. He is not a man who has never had a trial or a sorrow. He knows little who has not received a great deal of his learning through the dimness of his tears. We do not read the deepest of God's words, and the tenderest of his messages, when there is no cloud in the sky, when the morning is bright and blue and lustrous, and there is no intercepting cloud. God often lowers his voice to a whisper when the heart-broken feel that the clouds are very many and the way crooked and extremely perilous. When Jeremiah does laugh his joy will be rich and full ; when he does sing he will fill heaven and earth with his resounding

joy. No man can be truly joyful who has not been deeply, heart-brokenly sorrowful. It should be pointed out that depression is not an exclusively religious state. It might be supposed from a great deal that one hears that not until we become religious do we become depressed ; not until we love and follow God do we know what is meant by heart-sinking and stealthy walking in perilous places. This is a mistake from beginning to end. We may find depression in all the conditions of life that are healthy. Sometimes the painter cannot paint with his soul : his hand has lost its cunning, because his spirit has lost the key of mystery and has no vision of the invisible. Sometimes the poet cannot sing : he cannot read the parable of nature, nor construe the language of the fretted shadows, nor detain the sweet spirit which baptises the dreaming soul at the font of God. To painter and poet the world often becomes dark at noontide ; beauty retires and music ceases, when painter and poet would give half their living to retain those twin angels in their heart's confidence. The fact is that religious spirits are most depressed simply because they are most exalted. Where we find the highest mountains we find the deepest valleys. In proportion to the range and spirituality of the world in which a man lives will be the pensiveness and gloom of his occasional hours. If the poet droops when his harp does not respond to his touch, how must the soul faint when God hides himself ? If the timid child moans because his chamber-light has gone out, with what bitterness of complaint should we speak if the sun were extinguished ? If men say they are never depressed, that they are always in high spirits, it is probably because they never were really in high spirits at all—not knowing the difference between the soul's rapture, mental and spiritual ecstasy, and merely animal excitement. What can the barn-door fowl know of the experiences of a disabled eagle ? The man who is breaking stones on the highway may never be depressed, but his elder stone-breaking brother, who moulds marble into angels, may often sigh for a clearer light and a daintier touch. So everything depends upon the world we live in ; and, depend upon it, there is something wrong with a man somewhere if he be always in the same high key. No year that God ever made was made from beginning to end of July.

This is a very wonderful strain of talk on the part of the lamenting Jeremiah. Gather together lines out of his third chapter, and put them into couplets; and see what very startling and pathetic contrasts may be made out of his complaint. Let us hear Jeremiah:—

**“I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath;
It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed.**

He turneth his hand against me all the day;
His compassions are new every morning.

When I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer;
The Lord is good unto the soul that seeketh him.

He hath pulled me in pieces; he hath made me desolate:
He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.”

These are the contradictory experiences of the same soul. Such are the night and morning of a man’s spirit in its relations to Almighty God! Here is a man who is saying that God is turned against him all the day. Then we say we shall have nothing to do with a God so exacting and so terrible as that; and he detains us, recalls us, ere yet we have moved away from him, by saying, “His mercies, compassions are new every morning.” So we must never break off at a semicolon. We might read lines in this chapter and say, “God hath treated Jeremiah with great unfatherliness.” But let him finish his sentences, sphere off his utterance, and when he has done so, we may judge of his speech as a whole. “I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath; his compassions fail not.”

Here are two men having a little talk about a district of country through which they have passed. The speech of one of them is this: “It is a poor, desolate, barren land; I never wish to go through that district of country again: it is so featureless, wanting undulation and variety, and that brokenness of line which delights an artistic eye, defective in colouring too,—it is altogether a poor, wretched piece of country. I do not care ever to retrace my steps over it.” The other man’s speech is this: “I do not know a piece of lovelier country anywhere; the undulation is so easy, the lines are so beautifully broken up, there is such pleasing variety, you have all the features that can enter into a piece of beautiful landscape on a small scale,—not to be romantic, I do not know

any lovelier expanse of English scenery." "Why!" you say, "the fact is that both these statements cannot be true,—either the one man or the other is mistaken: they contradict each other flatly, and therefore both their statements cannot be true." A third man puts this question: "When did you go through that district?" "Why, sir," the first man says, "I went through it in November, one of the foggiest, murkiest days that I ever found in the English climate." "When did you go through the district?" is the inquiry put to the second man; and he says: "I went through it about midsummer, and a lovelier day I think never shone upon the island." Now we begin to see a little, at least, as to how the discrepancy came. A great deal depends upon atmosphere. The mountains are there in the night-time, but you cannot see them. The rich, verdant, flowery meads are there at midnight, but you cannot light up the landscape with your little candle. You must have the medium as well as the object. A great deal depends upon the clearness of the atmosphere as to whether we appreciate this object or that in natural scenery. So it is with souls. A great many of us seem to have such long winters, short days, with poor artificial light, and such murky, gloomy, dispiriting weather, with cruel fogs. Others of us have more sunshine, more summer weather in the soul. But what we want to understand is this—that religion, right relations with God, a true standing before the Almighty, does not depend upon this feeling or upon that; it is not a question of climate, atmosphere, air, spirits: it is a question of fact. The question is not, How do you feel to-day? but, Where are you standing? are you on the rock? The rock will not change; the climate will. Be right in your foundation, and the season of rejoicing will come round again. So many people are occupied with the question of mere experience of feeling that they are apt to forget that the primary question, the vital question, is the soul's relation to God at the foot of the Cross. Where there is an established standing upon the Rock of Ages, the foundation laid in Zion, there will be carefulness of judgment, patience of waiting, in relation to all climatic annoyances and all the atmospheric variations of the soul's feeling. He who is right in his principles will come right in his feelings. He who lays hold of God by the truth that is in Christ Jesus will patiently, quietly, and successfully wait for

the incoming of the dazzling glory of the sun. I wish to speak with discrimination, with judgment, perhaps with severity, but only with the severity of truth, about this question of depression and feeling. There is a depression which admits of explanation. Here is a man who in the time of trial succumbed; he spoke the coward's word when he ought to have been resolute. He was timid, not with modesty, but with cowardice. Here is a man who has been rolling iniquity under his tongue as a sweet morsel,—rolling that iniquity under his tongue in the very act of singing hymns and uttering the words of formal prayer. Here is a man who has some evil purpose in his heart, luxuriating over prospects on which God's disapprobation rests like an immovable frown. He has been planning forbidden enjoyment, scheming pleasures at the expense of conviction, conscience, righteousness, and Christian standing, and he comes to church in a depressed state of mind. Thank God! If that man could be as joyful as the pure little child-heart in Christ's kingdom, then God hath forgotten to be Judge, and there is no righteousness in his law. The question therefore is: Can our depression be traced to moral causes? Have I been keeping false weights and balances? Have I been clever at the expense of virtue and righteousness? Have I been untrue to my vows, faithless to my professions? Then I have no right to expect anything but depression, and if I were not depressed there would be something wrong in the moral government of the world. Yes, and a man may be depressed though he may be showing at the time great animal exultation; but there is a ring about honest excitement and true joy which is not to be mistaken by practised ears. Many a man seeks to drown his conscience and to dismiss his depression by overstrained religious excitement, and he cannot do it. The ghost is there! He hangs up a veil before the spectre, and says, "Now it is gone, I shall be at ease." He takes up the veil. Behold! there it is—grim, grizzly, ghastly, with judgment written upon every lineament. And it is well that a man cannot dismiss these memories, these presences, that ought to be to him terrible as the light, awful as the judgment of God.

Taking Jeremiah's experiences as a whole, what do we find that sanctified sorrow had wrought in him? In the first place

it gave him a true view of divine government. Jeremiah was brought to understand two things about the government of God. He was brought to understand that God's government is tender. The word tenderness we do not very well connect with the word government. When we think of government, we think of something severe, stern, inflexible, unyielding, imperial, majestic, magnificent, dominating. But that is only half a truth so far as the government of God is concerned. What words do you suppose Jeremiah connected with the government of God? Why these two beautiful words, each a piece of music, "Mercies," "Compassions." A man can only get into that view of government by living the deepest possible life. We are always jealous when we find sentiment entering into governmental relations and governmental decisions. But here is God, Almighty God, and all tender, ruling with infinite majesty, stooping with more than motherly grace. God's government is not composed of huge, unsympathetic, tearless strength. A God all strength would be a monster. A God throned on ivory, ruling the universe with a sceptre of mere power, could never establish himself in the confidence and love and trust of his creatures. We might fear him, but when we got together in some corner where his face was excluded for a moment, we should turn round upon him with many execrations! Man cannot be ruled and governed by mere power, fear, overwhelming, dominating, crushing strength and force. So we find David saying, "Power belongeth unto God: unto thee also, O Lord, belongeth mercy." Power in the hands of mercy, Omnipotence impregnated by all the tenderness of pity. "This is the God we adore, our faithful, unchangeable Friend." That preaching would be untrue, one-sided, misleading, which dwelt entirely upon the regal, majestic aspect of God. That is the true exposition of divine nature which opens up the fatherliness, motherliness, mercifulness, and compassion of God's great heart.

This discipline wrought in Jeremiah the conviction that God's government was minute. Speaking of God's mercies he says, "They are new every morning." Morning mercies—daily bread. This is what we find in the Old Testament, and in the New; but the Old Testament saints seemed only to be able to get from one morning to another, just the clock once round, and then they

wanted more. New every morning! A beautiful word in the Old Testament is that, and we get in the New Testament—What? Daily bread, new every week, new every year? No. “Give us this day our daily bread.” That is it. God shutting us up within a day and training us a moment at a time. The Psalmist said, “Thy mercies have been ever of old.” And another singer said, “Thy mercies are new every morning.” Is there no contradiction there? Ever of old—every morning! Time is old: every morning is new. Existence comprises a long, long succession of years, but no year ever had an old May given to it, or an old June thrown into it. Thy mercies have been ever of old, and they have been new every morning. Old as duration, new as morning; old as human existence, new as the coming summer. These are all inconsistencies that mark our life. Age and infirmity, the Ancient of Days, the Child of Bethlehem; the root out of the dry ground, the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley; the despised and rejected of men, but the desire of all nations. And you cannot grasp the contradictions and inconsistencies till you have been closeted long with God and got to know something of the mysteriousness of his dear heart.

Jeremiah having given this view of the divine government, gives two notions about human discipline as regulated by God the Judge and God the Father. He tells us two things about discipline. He tells us, in the first place, the goodness of waiting: it is good for a man to wait. It does one good to have a lesson of that sort from a grey-headed and wrinkled-browed man, to have a word from a man who has come out of very dangerous and terrible places. One wishes to get near him the very first moment, and say, “Well, what is it? what have you to say to us now?” And Jeremiah coming up, crushed, sorrowful, heart-wrinkled, pained, says to the young people who are at the door, “Do not enter yet. It is good, my children, to wait.” That is the lesson to us. We do not like to wait: impatient because incomplete. Observe you: wait for God. I am not called upon to wait because somebody has put a great waggon across the road; I might get that out of the way. But if God had set an angel there, I must make distinctions. There is a waiting that is indolence; there is a waiting that is sheer faith-

lessness; there is a waiting that comes of weakness. This is the true waiting,—wanting to get on, resolute about progress, and yet having a notion that God is just before us teaching patience. A determination to go, yet a willingness to stand still,—that is the mystery of true waiting.

Jeremiah tells us this second thing about the divine government. It is good for a man to bear the yoke. Ephraim like a bullock bemoaned himself; the yoke was very heavy on the shoulder; he was as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, and he chafed sorely under it, complained and moaned; but by-and-by the yoke was worn with ease. And then God came and said, “Ephraim is my dear child.” God puts yokes upon us, heavy yokes upon our necks; sometimes he binds our hands in manacles, and our feet in fetters,—shuts us up and feeds us on bread of affliction and water of affliction; then we say, “This cannot be good for us.” But it is. Commend me to the man who has been through deep waters, through very dark places, through treacherous, serpent-haunted roads, and who has yet come out with a cheerful heart, mellow, chastened, subdued, and who speaks tenderly of the mercy of God through it all. And that man I may trust with my heart’s life. If he speak not words which to my natural taste are best and sweetest and most to be coveted, yet under all his instruction there is a divine mystery, a fatherly tenderness; and it is better to yield to the remonstrance and instruction of such a man than be driven with great urgency and made impatient by a creature who never knew what it was to have a heart torn in two and the prospects of his life clouded and smitten.

Some of us have given way to an abuse of divine discipline, and so we get worse and worse. A right acceptance of God’s schooling, God’s rod, God’s judgment, and God’s mercy, mingled together, will cause us to become learned in divine wisdom, tender in divine feeling, gentle and charitable in all social judgment; good men whilst we are here, and always waiting, even in the midst of our most diligent service, to be called up into the more fully revealed presence and the still more cloudless light. May all our discipline be to that end! Amen.

Chapter iv. 1.

"How is the gold become dim ! how is the most fine gold changed !"

DIMMING OF THE GOLD.

NOT changed in a moment, but changed imperceptibly. If evil things would only come at specified times, we should know how to prepare for them and to defend ourselves against them. Had the strong man known at what hour the thief would come, he would not have suffered his house to be broken through. But we cannot tell the time, nor the way, nor the speciality of the attack, nor the exact scope that will be taken by the enemy. "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." It would seem as if life needed continual culture. Nature seems to teach us this, in so far as it is under our control. We cannot let a day go by in neglect without suffering loss, or being conscious of some change for the worse. The garden will not stand still. If you say, "Leave the garden to the laws of nature," the laws of nature will choke your garden, filling it with weeds, causing it to live with life not agreeable to you. So with your own person ; so with everything round about you. Every day must have its own washing, cleansing, sweeping, watching. Life would seem to be set in circumstances necessitating continual critical and religious inspection and culture. This illustration can be carried all round the circle of life, and made to preach to us a great and powerful discourse. We cannot live one day in negligence, things slip down so suddenly and completely. The change, too, is written upon the man. It matters not how skilful the dissimulation, how perfect even to exquisiteness of management the whole hypocrisy, the evil nature will sign itself in unmistakable tokens upon the face and upon the manner of the man who succumbs to evil. He will not change in a moment ; you will begin to wonder what has taken place in his thought of you and his relation to you ; you will examine yourself to know if the reason be in you. He is not

so punctual as he used to be, or regular; not so vivacious; not marked by that abandonment of perfect confidence which used to characterise his intercourse. He is more suspicious, more difficult to deal with, less easy to please. What is it that has taken place in the man? The revelation is there—at present in dim characters and symbols, but it will grow into fuller expression and leave no doubt as to the origin of the change which you have watched with dislike. “How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!”

We might so far alter the obvious meaning of the text as to lay great stress upon the meaning of the word “How”—as if it involved a mystery rather than declared the fact. How is it possible? It is gold, but it is dim; it is fine gold, but it is changed—how has it been done? Marvellous is the history of deterioration. The late Archbishop Trench in his most instructive little book upon “Words” has shown this in a very vivid manner in the matter of certain expressions and phrases which have gradually but completely changed their meaning in English speech and intercourse. Some of the instances given by Dr. Trench are of a striking character. He quotes the word “innocent.” What could be more beautiful in its original application? A word of gold, yea, of fine gold, indicating beauty of character, simplicity of spirit, incapability of double-mindedness or ambiguity of thought and intent; all so plain, so pure, so straightforward. How is the word now employed in many cases? It is now used to indicate, the Archbishop tells us, people who have lost mental strength, or people who never had mental strength; weak-minded people; even those who are little short of imbeciles are described as “innocent”—those having no longer any responsibility; having out-lived the usual obligations of life or never having come under them; persons from whom nothing may be expected. “How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!” A change of that kind does not take place on the surface; changes of that sort have history underneath them as their cause and explanation; the soul has got wrong in order to allow a word like that to be perverted from its original beauteousness. Another instance he gives is the word “silly.” Originally the word *silly* meant holy. He quotes a poet who describes the Saviour as

“that harmless, *silly* Babe,” meaning “that harmless, *holy* Babe,”—the word, with a little variety of form, being used to-day in the German nation with the same old meaning of holy. But now what does it mean? Frivolous, senseless, pithless, worthless. “How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!”

This is not a trick in merely vocal transition; underneath this is a sad moral history. Even words may indicate the moral course which a nation has taken. So with many other words. We find the change upon the gold even in the matter of speech. But why say “even in the matter of speech”? as though that were of secondary importance. The speech is the man. “The Word was God,” and the word is man. We must not trifle with language, or endeavour to deceive ourselves by using soft words in place of hard ones. That is an evil game to play. It shows that already the heart has lost its jointing and true setting in God, and is abroad seeking for excuse, inventing palliations, and trying by tampering and conjuring with language to give a new view to moral nature, to moral action. Watch! Be careful even about the very words you use. Choose the very hardest word you can when speaking of wrong-doing, and do not deceive yourselves. I would say—involving myself most of all in the great application of the sentiment—Do not seek by a mere wizardry in the use of words to soften the accusation which ought to be addressed to every wrong-thinker and wrong-doer.

I will quote one more instance from the Archbishop's book. It is of another kind, but strikingly illustrates the uses to which the highest dignities may be dragged. The greatest of all the orators of his day was Cicero; and now the man in Italy who can show you over galleries of art and describe glibly what you see is called a “Cicerone,” a follower, a descendant of Cicero, a talker, a chatterer, a man who can amuse you and partly inform you, or otherwise entertain you, by long speeches about paintings and statuary and things curious and historical. “How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!” That ragged, ill-kept man, chattering about things he does not know, has come from the mere fluency of his speech to be called a little Cicero. It is thus that we trace many a declension, and

thus we may trace many an apostasy in our own case. Unhappy phrases we have altered to fine euphemistic speeches, which fail to strike between the eyes the crimes which we ought to abhor.

What is true of words is true also of merely social manners. "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" How different you are now in some of your social relations from what you used to be! We need not go into detail of a special and vivid kind, but every man will supply his own illustration of the point towards which we direct attention. How civil we used to be; how courteous; how prompt in attention; how critical in our behaviour; how studious not to wound! What delicate phrases we used; what gracious compliments we paid! How we endeavoured to incarnate the very spirit of courtesy and chivalry! "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" How rough we are, and brusque! How blunt—and we call our bluntness frankness! How positive, stubborn, self-willed, resolute, careless of the interests of others! What off-handed speeches we make! What curt answers we return! Where is the old gallantry, the old gentlemanliness, the fine old courtesy? "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!"—perhaps not changed upon one side more than upon the other, but still changed; the old patience buried, the old forbearance done away with; questions that could be asked in earlier times with ease and directness have now to be almost smuggled into conversation in order to extract information needful for the proper upholding and direction of the household. The gold has become dim. No suspicion is thrown upon the original character and value of the gold; but it has become dim. It is not enough to say, "It is still gold,"—it is the dimness we are speaking about in this immediate connection. It will not do to set ourselves up in righteousness and sterling honour and unquestionable veracity, and say, "We are as golden as ever." What about the dimness? the change of surface? Who can tell what that dimness may lead to? And the more sure you are of the gold, the more careful you ought to be of the dimness. What if that dimness should so deepen and extend as to lead some persons to question the reality of the gold? In these matters we must as Christian

men be careful, thoughtful, watchful, critical. There is nothing little that concerns the integrity and the fulness of Christian character.

What is true of words and of manner is also true of the high ideals with which we began life. Let us be thankful for ideals. We cannot always live up to the ideal, but we can still look at it and cherish it; and from our uplifted ideal we may sometimes draw healing when we have been beaten by some flying fiery serpent whose bite has flung us in agony upon the ground for a while, like worsted and mortally wounded things. We cannot have ideals too lofty, too pure, too heavenly. Be ye holy as your Father in heaven is holy; be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. Behold the real lying in the dust; see the divinely ideal shining with infinite lustre in the skies. "Aim high; shoot afar, higher than he who means a star—than he who means a tree." Let this wisdom of George Herbert be carried up into all our relations. We cannot strike the star, but the arrow goes the higher for the point it was aimed at. What ideals we used to have! Who dares bring back to memory all the ideals with which he started life? Where are they? "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" When I—for I will speak thus in the first instance upon narrow grounds—wished to become a preacher of the eternal Word, how lofty was the ideal! how devoted was to have been the life! how long and agonistic the prayers! how ardent the appeal! every sermon a sacrifice, every call delivered through the learning of God. "I am determined not to know anything among men, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Do I not thus quoting my own early ideal and purpose touch the experience and the pensive recollection of every minister of the Cross? "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" What deference to the customs of the times! What fear of offending men!

What study to win the approbation of all! What resource to unhappy and unholy expedients in order to keep men together in unbroken consolidation, lest any evil-speaker should charge the preacher with want of public success. What a desire to accommodate the prayer and the sermon to the regulation hour of conventional impatience! What fear of striking directly and heavily! What temptation to be hard upon the absent, but to let the present go free from the scorching fire of divine criticism, and the appalling judgment of the eternal righteousness.

What is true of the minister is true also of nearly all other men. What a life yours was to have been in business! I think I see you now, when a fair-faced boy, without a wrinkle on your bonnie brow, how you said that when you began life in business, you would show how business was to be done: there should be no moral blot upon any stationery upon which you wrote; everything should be exact, liberal, just; you would endeavour to found a model business. Bless God for the boyish fancy that wants to found "model" things! I would not curb the boy who was going to be a model preacher, a model merchant, a model politician, or a model anything else that was really healthy and good. You used to like the word "model"; we used to detect it in your speech frequently, and point it out, and wonder when you would use it next. You would be a model man of business—model in punctuality and regularity in payment; in all the relations involved in active commerce. Where is the ideal now? It is thirty years ago since you spoke thus about your model life; produce your books, let us see your record; what have you done in that span of a generation? You will not show the books? I know why. You turn my attention away from the record to the latest news from Egypt and Ireland. I understand. "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" But is it gold still? Be sure: you may have substituted the clay for the gold; you may have bartered away the fine gold for stones without value. I will not press the impeachment, for it cannot be urged in your direction without coming with added recoil in the direction which I myself occupy. What an ideal of home-life you used to have! You remember when you walked between the green hedges in the springtime among blossoms and singing

birds, you used to remark upon the life which other people were living in the house—such querulous lives, so discontented, so ill-kept, so wanting in natural and proper discipline, and you used to say that when you had a house of your own, it should be as beautiful outside as inside; all its windows should, morally and socially, look towards the south and the south-west, and the house should be full of music, and though you could not afford expensive pictures, yet whatever you had, even in the way of a little engraving, it should be of the very best thing of its kind, and you said that by a little giving and taking and little concession that a home might be made into a kind of heaven. I remember your sweet words; they were beautiful: how have they been realised? I have not been in your house for the last fifteen years: how are you going on now? Do not speak aloud; answer mentally: how is your house? It is not a big one, but is it a beautiful one? It is not full of riches that can be sold by auction, but is it full of the wealth of the soul and the mind and the heart? Is Love the spirit of the house? Is the good old altar standing just where it was? Is the big family Bible still the centre of the house and the chief of its riches? Do not answer me: answer yourself, answer God. But may we not say of some family life?—"How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" The meals are no longer sacramental; the sleep is no longer prefigurative of true rest, out of which shall come physical and moral recruit and preparation for the next day's fight; the front door is no longer so high or so wide, nor does it swing back so easily upon its hinges as used to be the case in the early time. Everything is wrong now: the old arm-chair is never in its former place, the fire is always dull, and stir it as you will you cannot get back the old glow and the old hospitable warmth. Everything is out of place, and everybody but you is to be blamed. "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!"

Then what a church-life you were going to live—all of us. When we entered the church, what a model career we were going to complete! We were going to be gentle, courteous, true-minded, large-hearted; we were never going to take offence at anything; we were never going to listen with the ears of criticism, but with

the inner ears of necessity, appreciation, penitence, and thankfulness; we were going to do everything in our power to make the church we attended such a place as was hardly to be found in any other part of the globe; we would not curl our nostrils even if an ill-dressed person came and sat next us in the pew; we were never going to complain of anything; the minister we were going to hold up in prayer and to sustain in love; our faces were to become bright at his coming, and the answer to his appeals was to be instantaneous and complete. How is it now? You remember the poor person that wanted to come into your pew, and you pointed her to the other end of the church. How is it now? Any critical remarks? Any desire to show your supernatural quickness in detecting mistakes and want of continuity in the discourse? Any little self-idolatrous pranks and antics of a kind unworthy of the holy Church of God? Any unkind and bitter little speeches about other people? Do not say "Yes." I ask questions. Oh! may the answer be such that you may not have to say, "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!"

Let me add to the criticism the gospel which says, We may every one begin again. I feel as if I had spoken a great warm truth that will go into every home, every church, and there do its gracious work. Brothers, fellow-breakers of the ideal we started with, common criminals, we may every one begin again. What say you to that gospel opportunity and gospel challenge? Let each say, "I will arise and go to my Father"; let each one say, "I will arise and go to my ideal, and say, I have wounded thee, dishonoured thee, fallen infinitely short of thee in every particular. I am no more worthy that thou shouldst be associated with my poor name." We may begin again. We have finished this immediate page that is now under our hands, and now we may turn over a new leaf—white as snow, no trace of the bad writing upon it. We may begin at the very top, and write, line by line, down to the finis, without an erasure, a mistake, a blot, a blur. O brother! thy life's new page is now laid before thee, take heed how thou writest thereupon! At the end the best writer amongst us will have to say, "What is writ is writ; would it were worthy!"

Chapter iv. 12.

“The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem.”

THE INCREDIBLE THINGS OF LIFE.

WE are reminded by these words that there are many things in life quite incredible. On hearing them we say they cannot be true; reason is offended, feeling is revolted, the whole man almost instinctively rises to say, No; that report is impossible:—“The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem.” This was not the opinion of the inhabitants of the world only, in the lay sense—men who knew nothing about fortifications and strong positions and strategical defences; people who simply looked upon the outside and said, Behold, that is invincible and that is impregnable. Such might have been a layman’s opinion, but the opinion was shared by “the kings of the earth”—the mighty men, the soldiers; men who knew the weight and value of every stone in the fortress; and “The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem”—gates so high, gates so strong, gates welded for resistance, locked as with thunder and lightning—they were not to be taken; they were not pasteboard gates, they were not portals of straw; they were meant to resist the world; and the impression made upon the world was that they were irresistible—kings said so, and soldiers and laymen, and the unanimous opinion of mankind in that day and place was that Jerusalem was impregnable. Report to those people that Jerusalem can be taken, and they instantly receive the suggestion with disdain; they do not consider it worth while to answer such a thought: it

is incredible, impossible, absurd ; kings would not listen to it, and as for all other men, long ago they made up their minds that Jerusalem could resist any stroke of earth, and would yield only to the artillery of heaven. Very proud and haughty was Jerusalem, so much so that she fell into a mocking vein when her enemies approached her gates ; she did not care to fight, it was enough to snort, to laugh, to puff—enough to wave the hand in easy defiance. Jerusalem had counted her enemies, and had reckoned up their strength ; and she sat down to her feasting and her piping and her dancing, and said, Let the mad men rave, they but bruise their own knuckles. When the enemy came nearer, Jerusalem indulged herself in great boasting and taunting. She would not bare her arm ; she would but show a finger, and that the least. When the enemy was quite near she put upon her walls all her blind men, and all her little children, and all her cripples—the very meanest, poorest, weakest of the population, and through them she said, When you have struck down these soldiers we will find you another relay ; first beat the blind, first kill the cripples, and when you have got rid of these military persons you shall find there is strength behind them. And she laughed, she shook with laughter ; she went back to her feasting, filled the goblet, kept the dance well up, and was secure in her pride.

“The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem.” But the enemy did enter ! They hanged her princes by the hand ; the faces of the elders were not honoured. They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood. There was no elder in the gate ; and the young men were taken from their music. The joy of the heart of Jerusalem ceased, and the dancing was turned into mourning ; the crown fell from her head. Thus things that are incredible do happen. That which is held to be impossible often becomes quite easy. See Jerusalem ; learn from history ; do not let the facts of time go for nothing. Why do men waste history ? Why do men pay no heed to that which is written as with a pen of iron on the tablet of Time ? But history is lost upon most of us. If we were wise, the first

two chapters of Ecclesiastes would save us from all experiments in the direction of attempting to find heaven in earthly things and eternity in the little moment of time. But who believes the testimony of Solomon? He swept the whole ground, drove madly throughout the whole line of the curriculum; and when he had done he said, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." But who believes him? Who does not leap upon the same steed, run the same career, and come to mourn the same fate? Let us understand therefore, at the very outset of this study, that the "impossible" is not impossible, the incredible may come to be true, that which revolts the sense and shocks the feeling may become a commonplace of life. Let us illustrate this.

All the neighbourhood, all the friends and acquaintances, would not have believed that the great rich man to whom scores were mean and hundreds trifles could have come to beg his bread. But it is possible. Riches take to themselves wings and flee away. Certainly, such an issue seems to be quite incredible. Were the man entrenched behind units, tens, hundreds, we should think but little of it, for they constitute but a poor cobweb security; but he goes into higher figures—thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, and sometimes the word "million" does not seem to be too great a word for his boastful lips. He can thrust his arm into gold, and fasten it there, so that he cannot move in the golden prison. He delights in this. He says to his soul, "Thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; never heed domestic politics, or foreign politics, near or distant complications of states and empires; soul, be glad!" All the neighbours, friends, acquaintances, bankers, and men in the city would not have believed that that man would some day come with a suppliant's crouch and a beggar's appeal to ask an alms. Take heed! It is right to be rich, very rich, but it is wrong for the riches to be master of the man; hold them so that coming or going they never interfere with prayer, with faith, with charity, with noble, generous love; they are servants, helpers, great assistants in the philanthropic cause: hold them so, and you never can be poor. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The Lord will stain the pride of all glory. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and

spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away"—a contemptuous phrase—"he passed away"—glided off, secretly departed: "yea, I sought him"—I asked the wind whither he had flown, and the wind had no reply; I dug for his roots, and there were none; he had been living all the time upon nothing, and he vanished like smoke. Why not learn from history? Why not pause and consider, and put things wisely and solidly together, and say, These things are but for a moment; for a moment's use they are invaluable, but as securities, towers, defences, rather let me entangle myself in some elaborate cobweb, and trust to that against God's lightning and thunder.

Who would believe that the great strong man, whose every bone is, as it were, wrought iron, should one day be glad of the help of a little child? How humbling! how instructive! The man was an athlete. He lived a life of discipline. How erect! how energetic! how lithe! how gleesome always by the very redundancy of life! Headache? He never knew the meaning of the term; he had heard of it by the hearing of the ear, that is all. Weariness? He was as energetic at the close of day as at the beginning; the sun in his course could not wear out that man's abounding strength. One day that same man, all steel and iron, will want the help of a little child to lead him over the road. Impossible! It is a fact. You may accost him, and ask him if he remembers the time when he could have lifted a man in each hand and felt he was not doing anything in particular as an exercise of strength; and with a hollow laugh he will say, Ay, I remember! How now?—the sinews melted, the bones no longer iron, the great frame bent down, the sunken eyes peering for a grave. What did this? Ill-conduct? No. Wastefulness of strength and energy? No. What did it? Silent, insidious, mighty Time. Who calculates that element in making a reckoning? Who ever calculates the main forces that shape and direct and determine life? On what slate of what calculator can be found such words as Time, Spirit, God? Let me see the slate, and I will read it to you; and this is the writing of "rational" men!—"Reports, telegrams, policies, actions of governments, the sharp practice of knaves—add these up, to what do they total? To this chance, and to that I am left."—Beware! Do not play the

fool. Set down upon your slate one word, and that includes all—God. We live and move and have our being in God. “Seek first the kingdom of God.” “Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth,” not only in the physical and natural sense, but at the beginning of every enterprise; in the youth-time of every endeavour, in the morning ere the dew be exhaled by the sun. Then old age will have a beauty all its own. Then ask the old man if he remembers the days of his riotous strength, and he says, Yes; but I have a nobler health in view; that was a strength that could be worn out, a strength that seemed to defeat itself; its very victories were failures; but now, “if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Strength? There was not a horse that could beat me, there was not an eagle that could go more quickly,—nay, there was not a little bird in the hedge that could sing more sweetly or get across space more rapidly; it was animal strength, all good so far as it went, and most valuable in some directions; but the soul is now strong, the spirit is mighty; I seek a country out of sight, “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”; I shall soon “shuffle off this mortal coil,” and stand in the strength and majesty of immortal power. Do not, therefore, trust to your great bodily strength and your great material resources; Jerusalem trusted to these things, and Jerusalem was overthrown. Servants ruled over Jerusalem; they gat their bread with the peril of their lives, because of the sword of the wilderness; their skin was black like an oven, because of the terrible famine. Learn betimes; be wise in anticipation.

Who could believe that a man of great capacity and great judgment in all earthly things should come to be unable to give a rational opinion upon the affairs of the day? Once the man was an oracle. People differed from his judgment with reluctance; however stubborn in their own opinions, when he spoke to the contrary they began, inwardly at least, to falter; their pride might keep them from ostensible recognition of what he said, but in their hearts they felt that a deadly blow had been struck at their own conceptions and line of judgment. He was made to **be a counsellor.** He saw things at once, and saw the whole of

them. His was no little field of vision; his eyes were made to read horizons; he heard things other people did not hear; he omitted nothing from his calculations; and, to repeat, when he gave his conclusion they were hardy men who ventured to differ from him. Were I to say that such a man will come to be unable to write his own name, to read his own letters, to understand the correspondence of his own children, you would meet the suggestion with a kind of gracious disdain. Impossible! say you. How godlike in reason! How all but infinite in faculty! He will be to the last bright as a star. What if he stumble at noon-day? What if he forget his own name? What if he cannot tell where his own house is? and what if they who trusted him aforetime so implicitly should say, Poor soul! he is gone; it is no use looking in that quarter for wisdom or direction; his genius is dead; alas! but so it is? If that be so, why should we not learn from that fact, and work while it is called day, for the night cometh wherein no man can work? Redeem the time, buy up the opportunity, knowing that our brightest genius shall be eclipsed, our strongest sagacity shall lose its penetration, and our judgment shall halt for the judgment of others. Why pretend to be wise when we have lost our wisdom? and why seek light when there is none? What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch. Now is your day. We want to hear you now. Your voice is pleasant to us, your judgment gives us strength, your suggestions are inspirations; when you speak you speak light; God be thanked for your companionship and co-operation. Lay up against the day of evil, ere "the golden bowl be broken." Be now useful, attentive, and spend and be spent for the good of others.

And have we not often been shocked in another direction, worst of all? The instances now stated are but introductory to that which is greatest, saddest of all. To be told that some men will fail morally is a statement not to be entertained for one moment. The foundations would be destroyed. Who of us cannot name men who, if they were to fail in moral completeness, in probity, in honour, in truthfulness, would shake Society to its base? They are the trustees of Society; they are the very stewards of honour, the very bankers and custodians of the world's most precious wealth. To be told that their reputation,

so brilliant, hides a character corrupt, is to shock our moral sense and to rouse us to indignant repulsion of the base and infamous slander. What! every word a hollow word, every action a selfish calculation, every attitude part of a fraud and conspiracy, every generous deed a new bid for self-promotion,—signatures forsworn, bonds broken, by such men? Never! It is impossible, incredible; the suggestion is born of the pit. We are right in so saying. Have no faith in men who cannot be fired into godly anger when they hear great reputations assailed and when they see great characters slurred and defamed. At the same time let us learn from history. Great men have fallen from high moral excellence. He—the unnamed—“the starry leader of the seven”—fell from heaven. Some angels “kept not their first estate.” We remember these things, not to turn them into instruments of cruel and unrighteous criticism upon men, but to teach ourselves that boasting is dangerous, presumption is fatal. “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe”; never let me go out alone; always make me put my hand in thine, great Father, mighty God. That is the spirit in which to live. The moment we trust in ourselves the staff is broken; the moment we think we can do anything of ourselves that is essentially good and noble, we have severed the connection between earth and heaven, and the communication being interrupted, all the disastrous issues must eventuate. Let us, then, be wise. Rich men have become poor; strong men have become weak; capable men have become imbecile; men of high moral excellence have fallen from the heavens in which they shone like guiding stars. With these wrecks before us, what is our course of wisdom? To consider them; to weigh carefully what has been done; to remember that we are but dust; to consider our estate, how frail it is. Let us trust under the wings of the Almighty, let us live within the shadow of his presence, let us be hidden in his pavilion; then, come weal, come woe, our end will be heaven:—say ye to the righteous, It shall be well with him, however black the immediate cloud, however storm-laden the immediate outlook.

The principle admits of being turned in many directions, but we have endeavoured to keep steadily by the line of the text itself; still, who can resist the gracious temptation to remark

very briefly upon the fact that there are things incredible on the other side which will come to pass? Who would believe that the child of a poor couple, who kept no servant, who had to light their own fire, should stand up one day before kings, and be honoured by them for deeds of valour, for conquests of wisdom, for attainments of knowledge—as scholars, adventurers in perilous lands, explorers? Who could believe that such children could rise from such roots? Take heart! One of the most learned books of the day in its own sphere, and the most useful of books for its own purpose, was written by a lad who had to study his Latin grammar under a street-lamp. He had no candle, he had no money to buy a light; so there in the open street under the flickering lamplight, he learned what Latin he first acquired. Impossible! A fact. Turn such “impossibilities” into the realities of life, and God bless you.

Who would believe that a Carpenter and the Son of a carpenter should save the world? Do we not know his father and mother? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence hath this Man his wisdom, since he never learned letters? Yet there is something about him we cannot deny, as to high quality and great strength of mind; he certainly is a wonderful Person; and he grows and his influence extends, and he says he will have the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. The old Hebrew saints were full of music concerning him: he was to come down like rain upon the mown field, like showers that water the earth; kings were to fall down before him, and gold and incense bring. We say, Impossible! for the cause is not equal to the effect. No more it is if we limit it within the four visible points; but God is in it, the purpose of Heaven is in it, and the Lord's oath is that he, Christ, shall reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet. This is indeed impossible, with a cross for a subject, a dying man for a theme, a crucified malefactor for a hero, that such results should accrue. Within these points the judgment is right, but truly this Man was the Son of God. His words do marvellously come to pass. We believe that Jesus Christ “shall reign where'er the sun does his successive journeys run.” In this faith we live, and labour, and hope; and we ask no other faith in which to die.

PRAYER.

We want to feel thy nearness, thou living Spirit. Thou knowest how much there is to bow us down to the earth, and how little there is to lift us up into heaven: our hope is in thyself, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Give us one glimpse of heaven; may we detect in the winter wind one odour from the garden of God. Save our souls in the hour of darkness; thou hast all the stars, thou canst command them to shine upon us; we know thou wilt not leave our souls to die in darkness. Thou hast given unto us thy Son, thine only Son. He tasted death for every man, he made the Cross the way to heaven: because thou hast given him thou wilt not withhold anything from us that is good for our souls. This is our assurance, this is our daily song. Come then to us in the deep valley, in the far-away paths, and come to us in the wilderness; whilst thou dost commune with our hearts we shall know thy presence by their burning love. We bless thee for thy wondrous care; the very hairs of our head are all numbered; the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down: thou art the Light of the good; thou art the strength of them that put their trust in thee. How glad shall the Christian heart be from day to day! It is nearing the heavenly land, it is rich in promises, and we know that thou art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Give us the joy of our faith; clothe us in this holy hour with the gladness of them that live in God. Help us to live this little life wisely and well. It is but a span long, the last inch will soon run off, and then we shall see the light, then we shall have the answer to life's mystery. Amen.

Chapter v.

SIN'S GARDEN.

“Renew our days as of old” (ver. 21).

IF we would work our way up to this text, it will be through a very dreary course of reflection. Probably there is nothing like this chapter in all the elegies of the world. For what is there here more than elegy? There is a death deeper than death. The blank verse is noble, but the moral sentiment is horrible. Let us not deceive ourselves by blank verse. We do not know anything finer than these lines, or many of them,

regarded simply as poetry ; but when we look into the morality, the poetry is a facial sheen that dies. There is no substance in it. Here is a prayer that never got itself into heaven. Blessed be God, there are some prayers that never get higher than the clouds. Perhaps they ease the uttering heart for the passing moment—evaporation lessens the volume of water ; but in reality there are some prayers that have no answer. This may be one of them. Look at it. Behold how internally rotten it is.

“Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us” (ver. 1).

No man can pray who begins in that tone. There is not one particle of devotion in such an utterance. “What is come upon us.” It is a falsehood. It is putting the suppliant into a wrong position at the very first. The cry is not “Remember, O Lord, what we have done, what we have brought upon ourselves, what fools we have been, and how we have broken all thy commandments”; then out of such sorrow there would have arisen the noble music of supplication that would have been answered. But these poor creatures come as if they were quite the injured parties. Behold us ; thou knowest our excellence, thou knowest that we deserve all heaven, and yet by some curious action of circumstances here we are, little better than beasts of burden, crushed into this humiliation by Egyptian or Assyrian or other tyranny : Lord, see what has happened to the excellent of the earth ! So long as men talk in that tone they are a long way from the only tone that prevails in heaven—“God be merciful to me a sinner.”

“Consider, and behold our reproach” (ver. 1).

How possible it is for penitence to have a lie in the heart of it ; how possible it is for petitions addressed to heaven to be inspired by the meanest selfishness ! Our prayers need to be taken to pieces, to be reduced to their elements by a fine analysis ; then I think we should never offer them—we ourselves should deem them worthless, and cast them away to be forgotten. But let us take the statement as it is here written, and let us note well the inventory which is particularised by these persons, who are very careful to note all that they have lost. Let us see what claim they make upon the bank of heaven to restore to

them the property that has been taken away. Read the bill; it is a bill of particulars :—

“Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens” (ver. 2).

Here is material dispossession. If the inheritance had been retained, would the prayer have been offered? Probably not. If the houses, well-built, and well-furnished, and well-pictured, had been retained, would there have been any cry of distress? Perhaps not; for it is always difficult to pray in a palace. A palace has gilt enough and paint enough to stifle any prayer. It is when men get displaced and disrobed that they begin to wonder whether it is not time to be religious.

“We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows” (ver. 3).

Here is personal desolation. If the fathers had lived, would the prayers have been offered? If the husbands had lived, would the desire of the heart have turned towards God? Why, all this is rottenness. This is poetry without argument; this is not logic on fire, this is not morality going up in incense: this is a self-reproaching and self-condemnatory plea.

“We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us” (ver. 4).

Here is social humiliation. The emphasis is upon the pronoun, “Our” water, the water that we have in our own gardens, water taken out of the wells which our own fathers did dig. We have to buy our own wood, to go to our own forest, and actually lay down money for the timber that has been growing on the estate for countless generations! What an awful lot! what a sad doom! If it had been otherwise, where would the prayer have been? where would the confession, such as it is, have been? If the water had been plentiful and the timber had been untouched, where would these vain wretches have been? Would they have been at church?

“Our necks are under persecution; we labour, and have no rest” (ver. 5).

Here is a sense of grievous oppression. What do the men complain of? They complain of the yoke; it is on the neck, and it excoriates them, it chafes them; they cannot bear this unfamiliar burden. We labour who were never meant to toil; our backs were never made to stoop—we were made to stand

upright and look round and see that other people laboured ; and, behold, we—we—have to work for our bread !

“Servants have ruled over us” (ver. 8).

Here is an inversion of natural position. The greater the man, the greater the ruler, should be the law in social administration. Let me have a great man to direct me, superintend me, and revise my doings, and it shall be well with me at eventide. Men will judge according to their quality. The great judge will be gracious, the noble soul will be pitiful, though I bring him but a bungling return at the closing of the day ; he knows my weakness, he will remember that I have been working under a spirit of fear and under the stress of great difficulty, and he will cheer me, though I am ashamed to look upon my own work. But the servant will be hard upon me, the slave will not pity me. He is a slave though he wear the golden chain ; he never could rise above the level of servility. He is a mean hound to begin with, not because of what he is officially, but because of what he is naturally. Some kings have been slaves ; some noblemen have been servants. We are only speaking of the soul that is a slave, and whenever the slave mounts his horse he gallops to the devil.

Read this fifth chapter and look upon it as a garden which sin has planted. This is what sin does for the world. This is what sin always does. This is what sin must do. Here we are not dealing with accidents or casualties, very singular and unexpected occurrences ; we are dealing with the great philosophy of cause and effect, sowing and reaping :—Be not deceived, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap ; and man would complain if that law were inverted. It is the sinner that would complain if that law were not a statutory law of the universe. No, quoth he, we must have something more solid than to sow one thing and not know what other is going to be reaped : if I am to live in this universe, I must know what the statutory law is. And the Lord says, The statutory law is, “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Good ! quoth the sinner. He goes out to sow his seed, and he reaps his harvest accordingly ; but when

this great law is applied to morals he complains. He wants to get drunk, and have no headache; he wants to steal, and not to be imprisoned; he wants to do wrong, and then to have his own way, and to be accounted an excellent man. Thus souls trifle with themselves. In the common field they will have statutory regulations, or they will complain of the eccentricity of Providence; but in morals they want to have their own way in everything in the matter of personal gratification and indulgence, and to escape all the penalties of enormity. God will not have it so. This is the garden which sin has planted. All these black flowers, all these awful trees of poison, sin planted. God did not plant one of them. It is so with all our pains and penalties. It is so with this halting mind, that cannot keep steadfast to its own logic and remember its own conclusions, to obey them in all their force and urgency. It is so with this treacherous memory. Once it remembered everything, now it remembers nothing; it has forgotten the mother's name. It is so with that bad luck in business, with that misfortune in the open way of life. What is all this? All this goes back to a moral seed-time. Why not face that fact? We are reaping what has been sown by ourselves or by our forerunners. It is quite right to remember our ancestors in this particular. The men who made this plaint did not forget that element. Said they, "Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities." That is too much; that is making religion irreligious; that is committing the falsehood of exaggeration. It is quite true that our fathers have sinned, and that we in a sense bear their iniquities, and cannot help it, for manhood is one; but it is also true that we ourselves have adopted all they did. To adopt what Adam did is to have sinned in Adam and through Adam. Why theologise about some immemorially historic Adam when we have taken up all his bad doings and endorsed them every one? We need not go behind our own signature; we have signed the catalogue, we have adopted it, and therefore we have to account for our own lapse in our own religion.

Wondrous it is how men turn to God in their distresses. The Lord said it would be so—"In their affliction they will seek me early." So we have God in this great plaint, and what position

does God occupy in it? He occupies the position of the only Helper of man. "Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us." There are times when we know that there is only one God. When we begin theologising, we can do wonders with the Deity, but when we are all cut to pieces and have no more help left in us, then we simplify our theology and go direct to the Eternal himself. There is no calling out here for sacraments and for connecting links with the divine throne. When the soul is mad with self-accusation, it finds God or creates him. We know men best in their agony.

Here God is represented, in a sense, as being the only possible Source of such punishment. No mere man could have inflicted a penalty so vast, so penetrating, so immeasurable as this. We may know God by the vastness of the hell which he digs, or which he permits us to dig. Here the men are afflicted at every point; there is not one little spot left on which the stinging thong has not fallen. All gone! The inheritance has gone, and the houses are gone; orphanage and fatherlessness and widowhood are present; water is bought and wood is sold, the neck is under the yoke and the hands are given to toiling; the Assyrian claims every finger, and the Egyptian has a lien upon every energy. Who could have inflicted so vast a punishment? Only God. And God is represented as the only eternal Power—"Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation." How great we are in adoration or reverence! How poor we are in obedience! Let it be a question of exalting God, and even the mouth of a sinner may be opened in blank verse, even the tongue of a liar may forge great polysyllables; but let it become a question of acquiescence in the divine will, obedience to the divine law, then selfishness triumphs over righteousness.

Then comes the cry for old days—"Renew our days as of old." There is a sense in which the old days were better than these. What is that peculiar religious fascination which acts upon the mind and leads us back again into the nursery? We cry for the days of childhood, when we were unconscious of sin, when we played in the wood, when we gathered the primroses, when we came back from bird-nesting and summer joys. Oh

that these days would come back again in all their blueness, in all their simple joyousness! sometimes the soul says. "Renew our days as of old"—when our bread was honest. Since then we have become tradesmen, merchants, adventurers, gamblers, speculators, and now there is not a loaf in the cupboard that has not poison in the very middle of it. Our bread is a lie; the bed on which we rest at night is a bed full of thorns. We are richer at the bank, but we are poorer in heaven. God pity us! "Renew our days as of old"—when our prayers were unhindered, when we never doubted their going to heaven and coming back again with blessings; when we used to pray at our mother's knee we never thought that the prayer could fail of heaven. We were quite sure when we said "God bless father and mother, and brother and sister," that God blessed them straight up into heaven, and all the angels smiled when they heard the cry, and God moved all the heavens to bring the blessing down. Now we are theorising about it, and doubting, speculating, and controversialising about it. Oh for the old child-days, when God was in every flower and in every bird, and when all the sky was a great open Bible, written all over in capitals of love! The old days will not come. Still we can have a new youth; we can be born again. That is the great cry of Christ's gospel. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again"—and thus get the true childhood. He who is in Christ Jesus is a new creature, a little child; old things have passed away, and all things have become new; we have a new heaven and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness. When we have passed the touch of God the Holy Ghost, when we have been washed in his laver of regeneration, oh, how green the earth is, and how blue the kind heaven! The poorest beggar becomes a brother because our overflowing love shuts nobody out. If we would have back our old times we must have back our old selves, when we were in our low esteem, consciously poor, broken-hearted on account of sin. When we get these old experiences we shall get back all the lost love of God.

“HANDFULS OF PURPOSE,”

FOR ALL GLEANERS.

“How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!”—LAM. i. 1.

An old Roman medal represents Judæa as a woman sitting under a palm tree in the deepest consciousness of desolation. The picture in this verse is strong by contrasts: solitary, and full of people; a widow, once a queen great among the nations; a princess receiving homage, now stooping in the act of paying tribute to a higher power. A picture so graphic is full of suggestion to those who are in great strength, who are, in fact, in possession of royal riches and imperial dominion. No nest is built so high that God's lightning may not strike it. Men build huge towers in the hope of finding in them an asylum from judgment and death, not knowing that the higher they build they are, according to the senses, the more nearly approaching the centre of criticism and the tribunal of assize. Who has not seen the greatest inversions of human fortune? Who does not know how true it is that pride cometh before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall? To human vision, it certainly does appear impossible that

certain estates can ever be turned to desolation; the owners are so full of health and high spirits, and they apparently have so much reason to congratulate themselves upon the exercise of their own sagacity and strength, that it would really appear as if no bolt could shatter the castle of their greatness. Yet that castle we have seen torn down, until there was not one stone left upon another. In every sense of the words, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall: riches take to themselves wings and flee away. We are only strong in proportion as we spend our strength for others, and only rich in proportion as we invest our gold in the cause of human beneficence. The ruins of history ought to be monitors and guides to those who take a large view of human life. Is not the whole of human history a succession of ruins? Where is Greece? where is Rome? where is proud Babylon? where the Seven Churches of Asia? where is classic culture? Yet although these have all been buried in ruin, there remains to-day the spirit of progress which testifies to the presence of God in the development of human life. We do not despair when we look at the ruins which strew antiquity; we rather reason that certain institutions have served their day, and what was

good in them has been transferred into surviving activities. In the text, however, we have no question of ruin that comes by the mere lapse of time. Such ruin as is here depicted expresses a great moral catastrophe. The tears shed by the holy city are tears of remorse over sin. Judah did not go into captivity because of her excellency or faithfulness; she was driven into servitude because of her disobedience to her Lord. What was true of Judah will be true of every man amongst us. No man can sin, and prosper. The inviolable fortresses were never built by wicked hands. One sanctuary alone there is which never can be invaded or overthrown, or even temporarily injured, and that is the sanctuary of simple, earnest rectitude. "I have seen the wicked in great power; . . . yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not."

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"All her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies."—LAM. i. 2.

Probably this was the keenest pang in all her agony. Men have a right to look for their friends when the clouds darken and the wind rises, but when it is found that even friends have abandoned us we may well begin to feel the misery of loneliness. We do not know our friends until we are in some extremity of suffering. Fair-weather friends are not to be implicitly trusted. You cannot know a man until you have had occasion to test him by some practical sacrifice; until you have opposed a man you do not know what his temper is; until you have disappointed a man you cannot tell the extent of his good nature; until you have seen a man in trial you know nothing whatever of his grace or his virtue. Many persons shine the more brightly because of the sur-

rounding darkness; they have no genius for conversation, they cannot display themselves in public, they are but poorly feathered and coloured, so that they have nothing to attract and gratify the attention of curiosity: but how full of life they are when their friends are in trouble, how constant in watchfulness, how liberal in contribution, how patient under exasperation! These are the men to trust. As we should never see the stars but for the darkness, so we never should see real friendship but for our affliction and sorrow. In the case before us the friends not only abandoned Judah, they dealt treacherously with her; they not only assumed an attitude of indifference, they occupied a position of direct and bitter hostility—"They are become her enemies." How poor a trust is human love if it be not sanctified and inspired from on high; how frail is our best affection, and how empty our truest confidence, if it be a matter of calculation or investment or mere policy: only that friendship is true, and therefore eternal, which is founded upon merit, upon a recognition of moral attributes and qualities, and upon an assurance of moral worthiness. These are the circumstances which do not change with clime or temperature or circumstances. There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. It is the very glory of Christ that when all others forsake us he appears to our soul in larger stature and in diviner loveliness than before. To him midnight is as mid-day; he does not walk with us only in the flowery garden or in the summer meadow, he is at our side when the hill is steepest, when the road is roughest, when the wind rises into storm and fury; we need not say to him, Abide with us, for the thought of leaving us never entered into his heart; if he were to leave us it would

be in the summer-time, but in winter frost and snow his love is always round about us as a protecting robe. Have no friends but those who are friends of Christ. Let each human friendship express a still larger affection; then it will be without hesitation or reserve or self-regard, a living sacrifice, a beautiful, unselfish, Christianlike service.

"The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness."—LAM. i. 4.

This is the description of a religious desolation. Once the roads leading to Zion were thronged with ardent pilgrims, urging onward in a spirit of worship and homage and rapturous love; now not a pilgrim is to be seen near the gates which open upon the holy place. Virgins and priests are alike left without official occupation; no broken heart seeks ease in Zion, no tormented spirit brings its sorrow to be healed. All men have turned in other directions for light and hope and safety. A pathetic picture indeed is this, that the feast is spread and no man comes to the banqueting-table; every gate is open in token of welcome and hospitality, yet no wandering soul asks for admittance; the priests once so noble in the service of song, the virgins once so beautiful as images of innocence, now stand with hands thrown down, with eyes full of tears, with hearts sighing in expressive silence their bitterness and disappointment. All this can God do even to his chosen place, and to altars on which he has written his name. Officialism is no guarantee of spiritual perpetuity. Pomp and ceremony, with all their mechanical and external decorations

and attractions, are no pledge of the presence of the Spirit of the Living God. On many temples we may write Ichabod. The temples are as large as ever, and yet they are full of emptiness: every ceremony may be gone through with punctilious care, but the Lord himself has withdrawn, and service is turned into mockery. Here is a lesson for all persons who care for the sanctuary and for the extension of its redeeming influence. The sanctuary is nothing but for the Lord's presence. Eloquent preaching is but eloquent noise if the Spirit of the Lord be not in it, giving it intellectual value, spiritual dignity, and practical usefulness. Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord; because men have forgotten this doctrine they have trusted to themselves and have seen their hopes perishing in complete and bitter disappointment. One wonders how all this has come to pass in Judah, and how this sorrow has befallen sacred and beautiful Zion. We need not wonder long, for the answer is given in these words—"For the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions." That is the reason. When did we ever find other explanation of human suffering? When did God ever willingly chastise the children of men? When did the Lord say that merely to display his power he would shake his rod over the nations and torment them with great pain? Never. Whenever judgment has gone forth it has been in the cause of righteousness, it has been to avenge some offence against the laws of heaven, which are not arbitrary laws, established for the mere glory of the Potentate, but they are what may be called laws of health, laws of sanity, laws of progress, laws of pureness, laws of equity,—to sin against these laws is to go to the bottomless pit. Why disguise the result when

all history has made it so plain? Why spoil by mocking euphemism what is so direct and patent even to the judgment of reason itself, to say nothing of that nobler imagination which bears the distinctive name of faith? Always transgression is the high-road to the grave. Men say this and acknowledge it, and yet they repeat the offence as if no intimation of consequences had been given to them. What can remain for such people but increasing hardness of heart, until their sense of God's existence has faded out of the mind?

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"Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore is she removed."—LAM. i. 8.

God does not inflict the punishment without giving the reason. He has no need to explain to men why punishment is awarded, yet he is condescending enough to say that punishment is the counterpart of iniquity. If we want to explain the punishment we have only to look at the sin; the punishment is from above, but the cause is from within: in proportion as a man looks at himself, studies his own nature and fully acquaints himself with the quality of his own motives, will he understand why it is that his life is troubled and torn and pained exceedingly. Any facts to the contrary are not sufficient in number or in quality to justify another conclusion. These facts have been recognised by the religious observers of all ages, and they have always been associated with another series of facts, to the effect that the triumph of the wicked was short, and the fatness of the unrighteous was as the fatness of oxen prepared for the slaughter. All nature testifies that only to goodness is reward given, and only to righteousness can heaven be promised.

"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."—LAM. i. 12.

This need not be put as a question, but may be read literally thus—"Not to you, ye passers by." Sometimes the expression has been taken as an interjection—"Oh, all ye that pass by." Zion does not speak to those who are merely passing on; to them she has nothing to say which they can understand. On the other hand, it may be imagined that Zion is complaining because of the indifference with which the world regards her. She is amazed that sorrow like hers can be in the world, and that men can pass by without paying any attention to it. We must beware of unduly magnifying sorrow, and yet we must be equally on our guard against lessening it, and taking out of it the suggestions of its greatness and dignity. Brooding over our sorrow, it may become disproportionately important: neglecting it, or trifling with it, we may lose all its most solemn and tender lessons. He is the wise man who measures his sorrow by right standards, and who asks God to reveal to him its scope and purpose, in order that through his sorrow he may form a truer estimate of his sins. God does not allot punishment to us according to our own estimate of sin, but according to the sin as it appears to him. If there is aught of clemency mingled with judgment it is because of the frailty of our frame, and our simple inability to encounter the judgment which is due even to what we may call our smallest transgressions. Some men have not scrupled to apply these words to Jesus Christ himself, as he was stretched upon the Cross, bearing such agony as never

before tormented the human soul, or rent the human body. According to these interpreters, Jesus Christ is represented as saying, Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by, that I should be thus crucified? Do ye not understand this agony? Is it not apparent to you that, if I suffer thus for your sin, your sin must have been of infinite hatefulness in the sight of God? Thus Jesus Christ is represented as drawing sympathy towards himself by reason of his sufferings, and is thus indirectly magnifying the grace and love of God in human redemption. Whether this be a legitimate interpretation or not, it is certain that no suffering was like the suffering of Christ; he poured out his soul unto death; he did not suffer for his own sins, but for the sins of others; he was wounded for our transgressions.

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“The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity. I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: my priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls.”—LAM. i. 18, 19.

Now Zion is turning to a better mind. Here are signs of penitence. Zion acknowledges that her judgment is from the Lord, that the fire in her bones is kindled by the divine hand, and that her desolation and faintness are the judgments of the living God. When we see God in our punishments we begin to take a right view of them; when they are nothing to us but self-humiliations or signs of contempt, they embitter us and harden our hearts, but when we see God at work in the very desolation of our fortunes we are

sure that he has a reason for thus scourging us, and that if we accept the penalty, and bow down before his majesty, we shall be lifted up by his mighty hand. Zion says that the Lord hath made her strength to fail, the Lord hath trodden under foot all her mighty men, the Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a winepress. But Zion does not accept these results with a hard heart; no: rather she says, “For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me.” Whatever brings us to this softness of heart is a helper to the soul in all upward and divine directions. Zion confesses the righteousness of the Lord. In proportion as we can recognise the justice of our punishment, may we bear that punishment with some dignity. It has been pointed out that with this beginning of conversion the name of the Lord, or Jehovah, reappears. The people whom God has punished on account of their sins have, in the result, been enabled to recognise the justice of their punishment. Of this we have an example in the Book of Nehemiah (ix. 33, 34): “Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them.” In the case of the Captivity, we see the extreme rigour of the law in the expression, “My virgins and my young men are gone into captivity . . . My priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls”: the most honoured and the most beautiful have perished of hunger, as it were, in the open streets. **How**

impartial and tremendous are the judgments of God! May not virgins be spared? May not his priests be exempted from the operation of the law of judgment? Will not an official robe protect a soul against the lightning of divine wrath? All history answers No; all experience testifies to the contrary, and thereby re-establishes and infinitely confirms our confidence in the living God. Zion complains that her lovers have deceived her. We have a similar confession in the Book of Jeremiah (xxx. 14): "All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased." But Zion will from this time forth lift up her head, and the cloud of God's wrath shall pass away. Hear how pathetic is the music of penitence: "Behold, O Lord; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death. They have heard that I sigh: there is none to comfort me: all mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that thou hast done it." This is indeed human confession, not only in the depths of its pathos and the reality of its grief, but in its hardly suppressed desire that personal enemies should be made to suffer by the sword of Heaven. Zion desires that the law of retaliation should take place in the case of her enemy: "Let all their wickedness come before thee; and do unto them, as thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions: for my sighs are many, and my heart is faint." How can a man even in his prayers be greater than himself? We reveal ourselves in our most pious aspirations. How selfishness taints

our petitions! How our desire to see vengeance upon our enemies contracts and enfeebles our best prayers! Lord, teach us how to pray! Grant thy Spirit unto us, that even in our prayers we may love our enemies, and desire blessings for them which despitefully intreat us. This would be the perfection of character; in this holy, Christ-like desire we should become even as the Son of God himself. This attainment is beyond us for the time being; all we can do is to move in the direction of its realisation; we may but move imperceptibly, yet if there is any movement which even God can detect, it will be accounted to us for righteousness. In all respects strive to enter in at the strait gate! Not only is the gate which opens upon conversion strait and the road narrow, but the gate is strait and the road is narrow which lead unto the completion and perfection of human character.

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"How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!"

—LAM. ii. 1.

Still the prophet is dwelling upon the sufferings of Jerusalem. The image is that of an infinite thunder-cloud dissolving in a tremendous tempest, under which the beauty of Israel perishes and the temple itself is overthrown. It is supposed that the "footstool" is the Ark of the Covenant, which was involved in the destruction of the temple. It is to be noticed that the word "Lord" here is not Jehovah, but Adonai: by such changes of designation, moral change on the part of Jerusalem is indicated. Sometimes the minor name is used, and sometimes the major, according as Jerusalem

realises the greatness of its sin or the nearness and love of God. All God's acceptances of humanity are conditional. We are only safe so long as we are obedient. God keeps his thunder for his friends as certainly as for his enemies, if they be unfaithful to the covenant which unites them: nay, would it not be correct to say that a more terrible thunder is reserved for those who, knowing the right, yet pursue the wrong? “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” If we had been in darkness God would have been pitiful to us, but because we say, We see, therefore our sin remaineth. Even the ark has no meaning to God as a mere piece of mechanism; it is only of value in proportion as it represents in living activity the law and the mercy which it symbolises. We cannot live in a holy past: we can only live in a sacred present; not because a lifetime ago we prayed and served and did our duty lovingly can we be saved. We are what we are from day to day. Yesterday's virtue is not set down against this day's negligence. As every day must bear its own burden, so every day must witness to its own faithfulness. Nothing is carried over from the account of yesterday to the account of to-day. Each link in the whole chain of life must be strong, or the chain itself will give way at the weakest point.

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“He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel: he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about.”—LAM. ii. 3.

The horn of Israel must be regarded as the symbol of strength, and the passage represents God as scattering all his warriors and rulers and for-

tresses and princes and mighty men, turning their strength to contempt, and making them as the weakest of the sons of men. What can compare with Omnipotence? Would any man set forth his arm as symbolising the almightiness of God? When the Lord arises in his fierce anger all our strength trembles in the most pitiable weakness. The Lord's right hand is now employed in a work for which it can be said to have no pleasure. The “right hand” is of course the symbol of power, and that right hand had been stretched out of old to protect Israel, to defend Jerusalem, and to guard Zion from her foes; and now that same right hand, so infinite in strength, is turned to the punishment and destruction of those who were once the chosen and favoured of Heaven. We have no prescriptive rights to God's protection. There is nothing hereditary in our enjoyments. Again and again we are reminded of our direct personal relation to God; not because our fathers were good, but because we ourselves are obedient, is judgment withheld, is mercy permitted to shine in all its tender light upon the life we lead. Let no man mock himself by saying that because his father was good God will be kind to him with an everlasting kindness. Every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Our fathers' goodness is but an element which increases our responsibility, not an element which guarantees the partiality of Heaven. We must of necessity suffer because of the wrong-doing of others, and we may also, and must indeed, reap advantages on account of the honourable life led by others; but all these disadvantages and advantages relate to social circumstances and to outward conditions, they do not relate to eternal consequences or to our moral standing before God. Every man has it in his power to show that he would be better

if he could, and in proportion as we show this disposition towards progress will God look upon us with favour and assure us of the protection of his right hand.

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“Hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: the Lord hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest.”—
 LAM. ii. 6.

The word rendered “tabernacle” means a booth, a shed, some little temporary place of abode, such as were erected in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles. Jehovah is here represented as throwing down his own temple, as treating it as if it were a temporary shelter, as disregarding all its glory, and merely throwing it from him as men might tear down and cast away a shed from an orchard, a garden, or a field. God’s destruction was complete: it overturned the places of assembly; it drove away as if in wrath solemn feast and holy Sabbath; it cast down with a violent hand the holy altar and the sanctuary once beloved. Who can set a measure to the wrath of God? Continually does the Lord assert that he will have nothing to do with mere form or ceremony, with mere locality or consecration; he will only accept living obedience, living faithfulness, living sacrifice. He will have no mercy upon polluted temples and polluted altars; nor will his own Book be spared if men have used it as an idol: he will destroy and utterly drive away everything that once was sacred if it has been perverted to unholy purposes. When the Sabbath has been desecrated it is no longer a Sabbath; when the altar has been

used for selfish purposes it no longer reaches unto heaven. Let not men say that they will be safe in God’s temple from God’s wrath, because when law has been violated there is no sanctuary where God will regard man as safe from the visitation of his penal sword. How living and real does all this make the providence of Heaven! How near does this bring God to our daily life and conduct! How clearly does this show that it is the heart on which God looks, and not the handiwork or mechanism, which may but represent, not our skill only, but our religious vanity.

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*“Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment.”—*LAM. ii. 14.

The prophets had degenerated into professional flatterers. Prophets soon come to understand what the people want for their own gratification, and soon come to understand whether the people are in quest of God’s truth or the satisfaction of their own taste. When this discovery is made the prophet must be a strong man if he does not fall into the temptation to please the people rather than to obey God. People being pleased will return flattery for flattery, and probably the prophet will find his immediate compensation in the gifts and applause of the populace, rather than the testimony of a good conscience. The action between prophet and people is reciprocal: where the prophet is in dead earnest the people will be compelled to listen to his prophecies; where the people are more earnest than the prophet the man of God will be tempted to turn aside that he may gratify rather than

instruct or correct. The charge made in this passage is the most serious accusation that can be urged against any trustee or steward or minister. Prophets have perverted their function; they have seen what they have looked for; they have gone in quest of things to please rather than of things to profit and educate, and in their delusion they have seen what will delight or amuse the people whom they ought to have instructed. One sign of a degenerate race of prophets is to be found in the turning aside of the prophetic mind from the deep consideration of moral subjects. Who is not tempted to give himself up to intellectual delights rather than to the study and application of moral discipline? Surely it is human to accept the suggestion that the mind should wander in courses where delights grow abundantly rather than turn into directions where the rod and the sword meet the eye on every hand? God complains that the prophets have not discovered the iniquity of Zion, or told her plainly to her face that she owes her punishment to her sin. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means,"—but this is not the whole explanation: not the prophets alone are to be blamed: the explanation is given in the words which immediately follow, "and my people love to have it so." Thus there was a process of buying and selling as between the prophets and the people: the people wanted pleasure, and the prophets sold it; the people wished to be flattered, and flattery was to be had for money; men asked for restful speeches, such as should calm their fever-stricken life, such as should bring back sleep to their throbbing brains, and the prophets hearkened to this moaning cry, and instead of

delivering the rousing messages of God they lulled with opiates of human invention the life which they ought to have chastised and humbled. The great want of every age is a succession of faithful prophets. The prophets themselves may not reach their own ideal, may indeed expose themselves to much reproachful and condemnatory criticism; yet it is necessary that the age should hear great words, listen to grand appeals, and be continually reminded that there is more than the bodily eye has yet seen, and infinitely more than the mere reason has yet comprehended. Whilst we need intellectual prophets to stir up our highest nature, we especially need moral prophets who will recite in our hearing the commandments of God, and urge upon us in our dilatoriness and self-considerateness our duty as subjects of the great King. Exhortation to moral obedience ought never to be regarded as a mere commonplace. Unless we put ourselves strictly on our guard, this word "commonplace" will become a danger and a stumbling-block to us. Men say they know the commandments, and they declare they are well aware of their duties, and they show signs of impatience under the teaching that would incite them to a closer following of the letter of the divine law: they crave for excitement, for originality, for a kind of stimulus that brings no strength; all this craving is not to be set down to the credit of the age, but is rather to be looked upon with suspicion and positive dislike. Woe unto the foolish prophets that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing; woe also unto those who have sought the priest's office for a morsel of bread: blessings be upon those heroic and noble souls who, without reference to their own promotion or comfort, declare the word of the Lord with a noble voice, not the

less noble because it is in many tones restrained by a consciousness of self-defect.

"All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?"—LAM. ii. 15.

Thus the bitterness of Zion is increased by the exultation of her foes. Men are always ready to remind the fallen of the days of prosperity. It is hard to pass by a man who is thrown down without telling him what he might have been, what he once was, and how foolishly he has acted in forsaking the way in which he found prosperity and delight. Even our best friends sometimes unconsciously mock us. Without intending to wound our feelings, they cannot forbear to recall holy memories, sacred enjoyments, or opportunities which we might have turned to our higher advantage. In this case Zion is mocked openly by her enemies. We must expect this from all men. It is not in their nature to heal our diseases, to comfort our sorrows, to sympathise with us in the hour of desolation. The Psalmist complained, "Thou makest us a by-word among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people." Wonderful things had been spoken of Zion in the better days. In proportion to our exaltation is our down-throwing. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King." "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." In Ezekiel we read the exclamation, "How great is his goodness! and how great is his beauty!" But all this will go for nothing where there has been moral apostasy, spiritual

disobedience, or spiritual idolatry. Decoration is vanity. All that men can do in the beautifying of their lives is as rottenness if the heart itself be not in a healthy condition. Add to the bitterness of self-remorse the triumphant exultation of enemies who pass by, and say whether any humiliation can be deeper or more intolerable. Where, then, is hope to be found? In what quarter will light arise? If a voice of liberation or promise sound upon the ear, along what line will the music of that voice proceed? Behold, our whole hope is in Heaven. The God whom we have offended must be the God who can forgive us. Do not let us seek to placate our enemies, or turn their triumphing into felicitation: we have no argument with them; not a word ought we to have to say to such mockers; we must acquaint ourselves with God, and make ourselves at peace with Heaven, and if a man's ways please the Lord, the Lord will make that man's enemies to be at peace with him. It is in vain to compromise with men, to arrange for a social armistice, to seek to bribe our enemies into flatterers: we must go direct to the throne of judgment by way of the seat of mercy, and having become reconciled to God, we must leave all other issues to adjust and establish themselves. It should be to the encouragement of our faith that God's judgments are thus gone abroad in the earth, making Jerusalem a heap, and desolating the beauty of Zion. We see most truly the character of God in his dealings with his own sanctuary. He is as impatient with evil in his own temple as with evil in any part of heathenism. It would not be too much to say that he is more so. Where much has been given much is expected; when judgment begins at the house of God the fire will burn more hotly and destruc-

tively than it will be permitted to burn in pagan lands and amongst people who have never known the true altar, the true worship, the true Jehovah. It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for us: for we have seen God's power and God's mercy, and have heard God's welcome to forgiveness and to hospitality. How tremendous are our responsibilities! Truly it is high time that we should awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed. Civilised and Christianised countries boast themselves of their temples, their museums, their sanctuaries, their schools, and all the mechanism of social progress; but when the heart is disloyal to truth, when statesmen care more for party than for man, when honour is bought and sold for pelf, when men calculate their own interests rather than the interests of the commonwealth, and when men make an investment of religion, and merchandise of the Cross, their temples, their sanctuaries, their schools, and their buildings consecrated to learning will stand them in no stead before the wind of God's wrath and lightning of his holy anger. We are only safe in proportion as we are obedient.

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 “I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.”—LAM. iii. 1.

The third chapter would seem to be the property of all sorrowful men. From century to century persons who have been subjected to great suffering have felt that this chapter has expressed their feeling and their aspiration better than any other human composition. Job's lamentation over the day of his birth, and Jeremiah's lamentation over his personal sufferings, are the heritage of sorrow throughout

all time. We never know what sorrow is until we feel its personality. It is one thing to look upon sorrow at a distance, and to feel amazed that men can endure such burden and stress; and another to feel how weighty is the burden, and how hard to bear is the stress that urges us downwards. Yet this personality of sorrow is enriched with many advantages. Every man must have his own sorrow, must receive sorrow into his nature, so that the whole plan of life may, so to say, be saturated with tears, and be made to know how much weight God can lay upon human life, as if he were heaping it up in cruelty. What would be sorrow to one man would be no sorrow to another; hence the infinite variety of the divine visitation of our life. God knows where the stroke would hurt us most, and there he delivers the blow, so that we may know ourselves to be but men. Every man having a sorrow of his own is thereby tempted to make a species of idol of it. It is curious to observe how variously sorrow is treated by men. It is possible for even death itself to become a kind of commonplace in the family; child after child may have died, and friend after friend may have departed, until death is looked for with a kind of resigned expectancy. Are there not persons who make a luxury of this kind of sorrow? Are they not pleased to be the objects of social interest and sympathy, instead of being humbled by their losses and taught to seek the true riches which are in heaven? Are they not inclined to allow their sorrow to evaporate through much sighing and speaking in vain? Silent sorrow is the most poignant. If sorrow could sometimes shed tears it would be relieved of its keenest agony. In many cases it is impossible for the sufferer to give expression to his distress, and there-

fore he is deprived of all the compensation and holy excitement to be derived from earnest and intelligent human sympathy. If a man has not seen affliction, what has he seen? The deepest students of human life assure us that unless joy has in it somewhat of a tinge of melancholy it is not pure gladness. When the fool delights himself with laughter he supposes himself to be glad. Fools can have no real joy, because they can have no real sorrow; even when loss falls upon them they are not sufficiently in earnest to estimate the value of that of which they are deprived; frivolity, lightness of mind, superficiality of thought can never know the height and depth and intensity of truest joy. How often is men's moral condition as to happiness estimated by the expression of the countenance! We look upon men and say, How sad they are! when in very deed their joy is broad and deep. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that frivolity and gladness are equivalent terms. Yet, on the other hand, who could steadfastly and continuously look only at the sorrowful side of life? Sorrow coming upon sorrow, like storm following storm, would take out of life all its joy and all its hope. We must look at both sides of the picture; we must allow the light and the shadow to interplay, and judge not by the one nor by the other, but by the result.

"When I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer."—LAM. iii. 8.

God wants more than prayer from his creatures, when that prayer is limited to mere asking, or to the expression of a beggar's desires. Prayer may be but a religious form of selfishness. This notion of prayer must be

driven out of our thought if ever we are to realise what is meant by prayer as it is used in New Testament speech and exemplified in New Testament suppliants. Asking must, of course, enter into prayer: every day brings its need; life indeed is one succession of necessities: all this is of course understood; but what is prayer in its widest and most enduring acceptation? It is communion with God, submission to the divine will, patient waiting for the incoming of heavenly influence, tender and affectionate expectation of deliverance to be effected, not in man's way, but in God's own method and at God's own time. When we omit the element of communion from prayer we degrade ourselves and our prayers to the level of selfishness. When our prayer is so degraded it is shut out from heaven; it does no good to the suppliant, it never reaches the skies, it never returns with a leaf or a bud from the tree of life. Sad beyond all imagination is the condition of the man to whom his prayers are returned. Think of the picture! The man supposed that he had sent up his prayers to heaven, and he expected them to come back in the form of answers; and lo, he finds them all lying dead around the very altar whence they started! There is no mystery in this. Let us always understand that we are accepted, not because of our formality, but because of our sincerity and earnestness and importunity. Good men in all ages have had experience of this exclusion of prayer from heaven, and sometimes they have misjudged it. Job exclaimed, "I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not." What an entire misconception of the relation of the soul to God is presented in these words! Yet probably no other misconception was then possible to Job's

thought; the whole horizon was loaded with thunder-clouds, and the whole sky of heaven gleamed with lightning: what else then could Job say? He seemed to be crying into emptiness, and not to be favoured even with the echo of his own voice; this was the very solitariness of solitude, the very loneliness of orphanhood. Again, the Psalmist used a similar expression when he said, "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." This is a most pathetic representation. It is as if the Psalmist had resolved to find God if he searched for him every hour in the twenty-four that make the little circle of the day: he cried in the morning, and there was no answer; he cried at noonday, and no reply was returned; he sought for God in the shadows of the twilight, but no figure of a friend appeared; at midnight he lifted up his voice in anguish, and yet the heavens were silent. It is well to have such experiences, terrible as they are at the moment of their realisation; they chasten the spirit, they are full of theological teaching, they drive us back to first principles, they constrain us to ask the most serious and penetrating questions. God will not allow such experiences to be unduly prolonged, for he knows that the extension of such trial would end in despair or madness. The Lord can take us very near to the brink, but he will not let us fall over; a sight of that awful abyss which lies beyond may be full of happy influence to us, if we rightly accept its teaching; let us realise that even whilst we walk along the precipice the Everlasting Arms are round about us, and none of our steps shall slide,

"He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes."—LAM. iii. 16.

The figure would seem to represent the prophet as eating and drinking sorrow. Distress is his daily food. In the metaphor of the text the prophet has seized bread in the extremity of his hunger, and lo, when he comes to eat it he finds that his mouth is full of gravel stones. This is disappointment, this is mortification, this is fatal to faith. Who knows how far God can go in the infliction of punishment? We think we have tasted all the bitterness of death, when we are suddenly taught that as yet we have not begun to know how terrible can be the judgments of God. The wise man has told us that "Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel." How forgetful we are of that "afterwards"! Experience of this kind has not been unknown. "Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not; but keep it still within his mouth: yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him. He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly. He shall suck the poison of asps: the viper's tongue shall slay him." Gehazi supposed that he had enriched himself, but he knew not that the heart of Elisha had gone out after him in his felonious errand. Gehazi began as a hypocrite, and ended as a leper. By every metaphor that is graphic, and expressive of real torment, God has endeavoured to show us that the wages of sin is death. Take out of all these metaphors what we may, we still leave behind the essential truth that the way of transgressors is hard, and that no man can

fight against God and prevail: his hands shall be enfeebled, his skin shall be filled with leprosy, his eyes shall be blinded, his teeth shall be broken with gravel stones; he shall be stripped of his purple and fine linen, and be clothed with the raiment of ashes.

"My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope."—LAM. iii. 20, 21.

Read: "Thou wilt surely remember that my soul is humbled." Now the prophet begins to realise the results of discipline wisely and gratefully accepted. At first probably, like all other men, he was obstinate, resentful, and wholly indisposed to look for moral teaching in the midst of physical suffering. Better thoughts came to his aid. After a while he began to survey the situation, and, as he looked upon the plan of God, light came to him, and he saw that God's meaning even in man's humiliation was the elevation and perfecting of the man himself. Let us be rich in remembrance. Who cannot recount the sorrows which have been turned to his advantage? There was a day that was all cloud, a cloud that was all thunder, and we said we should die when that cloud discharged its tempest upon us. The cloud broke, the thunder rolled, and our life was refreshed by the very torrent that we looked forward to with dread. Do not let us forget those days of rain and storm and high wind, but call them to remembrance, and count them as amongst our jewels, for we then saw somewhat of the treasures of the Most High, and saw how even in what appeared to be extremity God could provide a way of deliverance. The prophet derives hope from a sanctified review of providence

—"therefore have I hope." The sorrow had not been in vain; it had become a sweet gospel to the soul which it overshadowed, and this it will become to every one of us if we remember that the Lord reigneth, and that discipline as well as benediction is in the hand of the living God.

"It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."—LAM. iii. 27.

From this reference it would appear as if man must of necessity at some period of life undergo the discipline of the yoke. The prophet speaks as if it were commonly known by himself and his contemporaries. Here is no long explanatory introduction, but an immediate use of something with which the people were well acquainted. By "yoke" we are to understand discipline, trial, education, every incident that teaches us the limit of our strength, and the proper range of our ambition. Every man is at some period of life to be mortified, disappointed, humbled, thrown down, and made to feel that he is only a man. The question arises, At what time shall this experience take effect in human life? The prophet has no hesitation in answering the inquiry, for he instantly fixes youth as the period at which discipline shall be undergone. This would appear to be reasonable: are there not compensations in youth which make the yoke-bearing less irksome than it otherwise would be? Youthful spirit soon returns even after humiliation. A kind of collateral life runs along the current of youth,—may we not call it a species of alternate life?—so that youth can change from one position to another, or from one set of circumstances to another, inasmuch that youth can be crying and laughing, groaning and rejoicing, even within the compass of one little day.

Besides, is it not important that every man should get his education at the right end of life? We adopt the principle of yoke-bearing in youth in the matter of intellectual education: why not in the matter of the higher moral training and chastening? Who puts off the learning of the alphabet until he is well advanced in life? Who at middle life could begin to commit to memory the things which almost seem to grow up in the mind of childhood and to abide there for ever? Yet the child must be constrained to undergo the discipline needful to the acquisition of elementary knowledge. His play must be curtailed, his inclinations must be rebuked, his indolence must be overcome; it is for the child's good that his parents should insist upon the acceptance of the yoke, otherwise the child will grow up to be an ignorant man. Is it not also true that in youth passion is most violent, and might hurry the young life into the uttermost excesses were it not curbed or cooled or in some degree restrained? Hence it is important that young life should be filled with work, should be almost exhausted at times by long-continued labour. The profit is not seen in the labour alone; behind all the labour there are moral advantages which can hardly be described in words: passion is subdued, pride is mortified, the energy of the will is turned into the right direction, and labour so treated becomes in the end pleasant, as music is pleasant, and easy as breathing is easy. We know what all this is with regard to the learning of a language: how hard at first, how minute the distinctions, how pedantic the regulations, how obstinate and perverse the irregularities and exceptions! Yet after a certain point all things settle down into a happy adjustment, conversation becomes possible, and by the exchange of sentiments friendship is established,

and the medium through which this end was attained becomes itself an object of pride and pleasure, and has assigned to it marks of the highest value. What may be expected from one who has borne the yoke well in his youth? I lay special emphasis upon the fact that the yoke must have been borne well. From such a man we expect chastened but not extinguished energy. God does not intend to destroy the passion or the enthusiasm of youth, but to chasten it, sanctify it, and turn it to the highest uses. Paul the Apostle must be as energetic as was Saul of Tarsus, but the energy must be expressed along different lines. Mature saints are not expected to be demure, exhausted, feeble, indolent, or lacking in interest in the pursuits and ambitions of youth: they are expected to take a right view of those pursuits and ambitions, to set a proper estimate upon them, and where the men are wise they will encourage those who are in the very agony of life's race to persevere, because at the end a crown awaits the successful winner. No man has borne his own yoke well who has lived without sympathy for those who are still feeling the burden. The man who has overcome the irksomeness of moral discipline should know exactly where every young man is. He need not explain himself in words, but he should watch the development of the struggle, the increase of the pain, and going back upon his own record he will be able to advise according to his own experience. A word fitly spoken, how good it will be to the young struggler! It need not, and must not, come in the form of a lecture; it must be dropped as it were incidentally, it may even be dropped thoughtlessly, to the observation of the young yoke-bearer himself, but it will not be dropped without calculation on the part of the speaker; he will remember

just what he himself wanted to hear at that particular time, and the young man will be surprised that the older one could speak so exquisitely, tenderly, and seasonably upon the very point that was irritating his own life: out of this sympathy will come a corresponding patience with those who are unaccustomed to the yoke. The man will say of the boy, Presently he will be better, he will see the whole matter in the right light; he must not be hurried or driven now, because he is in a state of high sensitiveness, and every word that is spoken to him will come with double weight, and every misunderstanding that is created will come with double aggravation: suspend intercourse, or regulate it, or bring to bear upon the life some sudden and unexpected compensation, and in a hundred wisely devised ways show that more is not expected than can be given; in this way will experience be wisely expended. The right use of this text would renew the life of the world. Foolish parents spare the young, saying, There will be trouble enough by-and-by, let there be lightness and laughter now; and saying again, The old ones must work, and the young ones must play. All this seems to be kind—it is indeed set down as generosity—and the speakers of these sophisms are looked upon as tender-hearted and considerate. All this estimate must be changed; we must ask ourselves seriously what is the end of all such laxity of discipline. By discipline we must never mean cruelty; by discipline we must never mean the glorification of those who impose it: we must understand by discipline a necessary process of life, something that must really and actually at one time or another take place in the education of every soul. What is the end of trifling with young life? **The end of it is bitterness and re-**

proach, and it may be such a recollection of parental names and kind deeds as will awaken in the soul of the sufferer a real and just resentment. On the other hand, discipline carefully administered and wisely regulated, though painful in its immediate operation, may result in many an expression of thanks to God that such parents had charge of the young life. In all these things we need the wisdom of the Holy Ghost; we must pray mightily to God to show us what each child can best endure, what is best for each child; and we must vary the administration of discipline so as to suit it to every temperament and every faculty and even every combination of peculiarities.

“Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?”—LAM. iii. 37.

Here is an appeal to history, an appeal which Christianity never ceases to employ. We are not dealing with speculative matters, but with facts as they stand in all their naked simplicity on the field of history. The prophet is maintaining the sovereignty of God, and his contention is that, whatever may have been spoken that is not in harmony with the divine will, it is impossible that any man can secure its fulfilment. So we are face to face with a living challenge. Christian history is full of such challenges: the Bible challenges the production of false gods, of idols, of all manner of images, so that they may be compared with the living God, the Sovereign and Redeemer of Israel; the Bible constantly challenges the production of any other Bible that shall be wiser, grander in its spiritual conceptions, loftier in its moral discipline, tenderer in its human sympathy; prophets are called for that they may tell their visions and their dreams, and have

them tested by the lapse of time, and by the necessities of life. So here we are called upon to produce instances in which man's word has prevailed against the word of God. Has any man commanded the sun to go backwards, and the sun has obeyed the instruction? Has any man commanded the seasons to change the order of their procession, and have they changed accordingly? Has any man been able to reverse moral duties, moral actions, and moral consequences, so that evil shall end in joy, and iniquity shall conduct to rest and heaven? The Lord asks for the production of evidence by which people may be able to judge as to moral duty and moral consequence. The interrogation assumes a gracious and initial fact, namely, that the word of the Lord alone can stand fast, and ultimately and completely prevail in the direction and settlement of human affairs. Has this assumption the justification of history? If so, see what wondrous inferences may be drawn from that justification! Let us at once inquire for the word of the Lord, and study it, and exclude from our ears all other voices, because in the word of the Lord alone is complete wisdom, and in the testimony of the Lord is an assured protection. How foolish are men who follow their own devices, inventions, theories, and speculations, when the Lord has sent down a light for the illumination of the path of life. If it could be proved that the Lord's word has been turned aside and a better word has taken its place, the whole argument would be changed. The Bible never allows this; our own observation cannot permit such a declaration to pass unchallenged; our own consciousness is against the wanton theory: we have seen in our own life that only the true, the wise, the pure can bear reflection, and come to a fruition which brings

with it contentment and joy. It stands to reason that if we could discover the word of the Lord it would be the only word worthy of our acceptance. Granted that we can surely find the word of the living God, then we need go no further, for we have all wisdom, all light, all truth. But this is not to be discovered by mere argument: it is not the clever man that discovers the word of the Lord; nothing is revealed to mere cleverness or ingenuity of mind: the word of the Lord is discovered by conduct, suffering, self-sacrifice, the acceptance of certain principles for the guidance of life, and then the issue is to determine which is true and which is untrue. We thus fall back upon Christian consciousness and Christian history, and we declare that not because of our intellectual sharpness, but because of our moral docility, have we been able to find out the word of the Lord, and to identify it amid all the voices and claims which have asserted themselves on behalf of rivals.

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“Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens. We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned.”—LAM. iii. 40-42.

Thus the sufferers turn themselves to wise counsels. Suffering only fulfils its mission when it constrains a man to look within himself and search and try his reins and ways that he may know how far he is sincere. Only suffering can get at our hearts with any profound and saving effect. Joy touches the surface, success hovers above us like a singing bird: it is when we are in the furnace of affliction that we discover what we really are, and what we really need. **The**

sufferers in this case come to wise decisions. No longer will they murmur against the Lord, as if providence were fickle and arbitrary, as if providence found a wicked pleasure in the torture of human life: the sufferers say, The fault must be in ourselves; we carry the deadly poison within us; our hearts are lacking in the spirit of loyalty and obedience; they are lifted up in the ways of haughtiness, and they submit themselves to the rule of vanity; the time has now come for a different discipline and a different policy; we must lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens: we do not lift up the heart alone, as if we were intending to be religious in one part of our nature, and to reserve the liberty of self-service in another; nor do we lift up our hands alone, as if we were willing to indulge in bodily exercise, in ceremony, in ritual, or as if we were prepared to render in some degree the service of a hireling; but we lift up both our heart and our hands in sign of a complete consecration.—Religious exercises cleanse and elevate the worshipper. The very act of lifting up heart and hand unto God in the heavens is an act of purification and ennoblement. All such exercises are valuable as parts of a larger discipline. Herein is the value of public worship: man helps man; voice increases voice; joy and sorrow mingle together, and produce a tender melancholy that is the surest pledge of perfect and enduring delight.—Here we have the gospel before the time, because the gospel proceeds upon the basis that without repentance there can be no real joy. The Old Testament is indeed full of exhortation to repentance and broken-heartedness before God: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts—and innumerable other passages all testify to the fact that without repentance God himself

cannot begin to reconstruct shattered human life. This is philosophical as well as theological; that is to say, it is based on the plainest and soundest reason as well as inspired by the most inscrutable and metaphysical faith. We adopt this philosophy in all departments of life; we must cleanse away the evil before we can begin to put up the good; we must get rid of the poison in the system before we can fill the veins with healthy blood; we must displace all the superstitions of ignorance before we can get standing ground for the deductions of reason and enlightened reverence. Let no man imagine therefore that he can love his sins, and yet avail himself of God's mercy. The mercy is excluded from all who bring love of sin in their hearts; but it is offered with infinite generosity to all who hate their sins and desire to be restored to sonship and spiritual harmony. This is the law, and there can be no change in it; this is the decree, and it admits of no tampering and of no compromise. Let us therefore preach the doctrine of repentance towards God; deep, earnest, thorough, heartbroken repentance: thus only can we throw down the falsehoods of an organised or invented morality, and bring in the righteousness that springs from the very throne and heart of God. Until we know the need of repentance we cannot realise the need of salvation. When a man does not realise his sickness he does not realise the necessity for calling in a physician. Any one contented with ignorance can never know the pain and the joy of thirst for knowledge. When man is so insensible to the joys and responsibilities of freedom as to be content with slavery, then he cannot understand those who have devoted themselves to the extension of human freedom. The gospel is a

tinkling cymbal to those who have not felt the pain, the bitterness, and the burdensomeness of sin. Blessed day for the Church, blessed day for the world, when men shall arise and say with heart and voice, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens." Scarcely will they have formed the resolution before God himself shall come down, and heaven and earth shall find music in one thorough and everlasting reconciliation.

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"Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people."—LAM. iii. 48.

Thus the prophet does not live for himself, he lives the larger life of philanthropy and sympathy. There are men who separate themselves from the race and think of themselves only in their petty individualism; so long as they are personally comfortable they ignore the misery of society. No Christian man should reason in this way, for such reasoning has not in it one spark of the pity of Christ. We are to look upon ourselves as brethren, as put in trust with a common citizenship, and as bearing one another's burdens as well as sharing one another's joys. He is not a Christian man who is not moved towards joy by the laughter of childhood, and who is not depressed by the moan of human woe. When a man has bread, and another man is in want of bread, he is bound to give what he has, because the bread is not his only, it belongs to mankind. Christianity above all things seeks to dispel and utterly drive away all selfishness. We are to have all things in common in a larger than a merely mechanical sense. The strong man is to feel that

his strength belongs to the weak; the rich man is to know that he is the trustee of the poor; the wise man is to know that he holds his wisdom as an open treasure on which those who are in need of wisdom can freely draw. Probably we cannot realise the whole ideal in all its detail: we must not however degrade the ideal to our capacity, but strenuously endeavour to enlarge our capacity so as to include the ideal. There are those who take a hopeful view of the world simply because they take care to walk in flowery places: they take a golden path through the world and only go abroad when the sun is shining and the birds are singing; then they exclaim, What a lovely world it is and how foolish are they who seek to darken a place made glorious by its Maker! If they would go out at other times and take other paths, how much would their view be changed, and how greatly would their tone be transformed! The prophet wept over a process which he describes as "destruction": now this word does not always imply what is meant by violence or wreckage or visible ruin: there is another destruction—a destruction of bloom, of fine feeling, of tender sensitiveness, of will power; a destruction of old ideals, and an overthrow of early conceptions of prayer and worship, of love and sacrifice. The more truly spiritual we are, the more penetrating will be our judgment of the processes of destruction. There was a time when we could only see trees that were upturn, walls that were thrown down, towers that were dismantled: but now, being led by the Spirit, being daily taught by the Holy Ghost, we see that many a tree that is apparently rooted in the ground is perishing for lack of knowledge; many a wall that is apparently standing upright on its foundation is

beginning to moulder at the top; and many a tower that seems to be as lofty as ever is giving way at the base and may any night be thrown down by some sharp blast of wind. It is not enough therefore from a Christian standpoint to take rough views of life, and to make hurried and general summaries of human experience: the Holy Spirit is in us as a spirit of penetration and discrimination, insisting upon fine and often exhaustive analyses: we are to be in our degree as is the word of the living God itself, sharp and powerful, keener than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. Christianity is not distinguished by its rough judgments, but by its fine analyses. Christianity does not deal with promiscuous conduct, with all its common and obvious issues; it deals with life, thought, purpose, with the very intents of the heart.

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"Mine eye affecteth mine heart because of all the daughters of my city."—
LAM. iii. 51.

Here is the proper use of observation. We are not to look upon life with the eye of the statistician or the political economist or the collector of facts so called; our heart is to be in our eye, and our observation is to be conducted in the light of our tenderest sympathy. When the prophet says "affecteth" he means harms, or causes grief, to my heart: it is as if he said, What I see hurts me; does not merely hurt me outwardly, but hurts me within, strikes me at the very heart, gives me pain of soul, distresses the very springs of life. Note then how keenly sensitive was the prophetic heart. We need not wait for the New Testament in order to show us the range and quality of truest sym-

pathy. The prophets were in their day and according to their light and their capacity as was Jesus Christ himself. They felt all sickness, they mourned in the presence of all oppression, they pronounced the doom of all sin, they sympathised with every one who was groaning under a burden or suffering from some stinging and often unspeakable pain. Speaking of "the daughters of my city," we are to understand the reference to be to the maidens of Jerusalem, and of the maidens of the daughter town which looked towards Jerusalem as children might look towards a mother. The prophet sees here an image of the destruction and desolation of youth and beauty and music. The tears of Jeremiah were easily accessible; hence he has been called the weeping prophet. He hesitates not to say, "Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission." Not only were the prophet's eyes moistened, as modern sensibility often professes that its eyes are bedewed: Jeremiah speaks of a fuller sorrow, a richer sympathy; he says, "Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people." In another passage he desires that he might have even greater power of weeping, that he might express his sympathy with the destruction proceeding around him: "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" Not only was this copious weeping characteristic of the prophet Jeremiah, it would seem to have been characteristic of the whole prophetic life of the Old Testament. Speaking in the Psalmist's day, we read of the tears of sympathy, because of the destruction that was proceeding in the city and in the household: "Rivers of water run

down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.” And again: “My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?” Prophets and psalmists have wished to escape from the evil visions that filled their eyes. Thus Jeremiah himself, strong and valiant as he was, seems to have seen enough, and to have desired to run away to quiet places: “Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!” The Psalmist desired that he also might fly away and find rest in unknown places. “Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness.” Why is it that our hearts are so little affected by the destruction that is wrought in the city? Simply because we are content to look at surfaces, to look with the eye of science or art or social mechanism. Prophets looked with the eye of the heart, and they could not bear the sad and tragic visions of the streets. Were our hearts right with Christ, were we one with the living God in all the tenderness of his love, a walk down the city thoroughfares would crush us, disable us, and drive us into the utterest despair; only then by some other vision—that is to say, by the very vision of the Cross itself—could we be recovered from our dejection, and constrained to renew our efforts at amelioration.

“I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry.”—
LAM. iii. 55, 56.

This is a testimony which cannot be set aside by mere criticism, but is per-

sonal and direct, and is endorsed not for official purposes, but with the extremest and happiest consciousness of which the soul is susceptible. There are great hours in life which men cannot forget. Answers have come to us that have written themselves upon the very tablets of the heart, and we cannot consent to have them erased merely to endorse or sanction some frivolous or speculative theory of life. Testimonies of this kind acquire still greater force and value from the fact that the witnesses are not ashamed to testify that many prayers have remained unanswered, and many cries have awakened nothing but mocking echoes. For example, this very prophet has already said, “Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer. He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked.”—Never do the Biblical saints hesitate to acknowledge that their prayers have remained without answers. Thus Job: “I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not.” And thus the Psalmist: “O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.”—Whilst, therefore, we speak about unanswered prayer, as if there could be no doubt concerning the reality of the witnesses, we are bound by our own reasoning to accept those witnesses when they testify that they have cried unto the living God, and have received direct and sufficient replies. In this chapter Jeremiah is full of gratitude because of his communion with God; he says: “Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not. O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life.”—What variety of experience we have in all these chapters! Sometimes the prophet is on the mountain,

and he waves the banner of victory; and sometimes he is down in the valley, putting on a shroud as a garment, and making ready to lie down with those that are slain. This image of God drawing nigh has been taken up by the Apostle James — "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." This image of pleading is familiar in the Old Testament: "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me"; "Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will plead thy cause." We must not take the light as expressing the sum-total of religious experience; nor must we regard the darkness as the only aspect of the divine government of men: we must think of the night and of the morning, of the winter and of the summer: in other words, we must not judge God by special aspects or particular incidents, we must take in

great breadths of time, large areas of observation and experience, and ground our inferences upon them. So judged, Christianity has nothing to fear from the most bitter and persistent of its enemies. The older men become, the richer should be their store of Christian evidence: there is a learning of experience as well as of letters; there is a genius of spiritual enjoyment as well as of intellectual penetration: here the simplest may assist the greatest, and the men who have seen the most of affliction can throw light upon many problems which puzzle the most intellectual minds. Letters can belong but to a few. Genius is the badge of individualism. The common experience of mankind is the fund on which we must draw both for argument and illustration in many attempts to elucidate the **divine government of man.**

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL.

[NOTE.—“Ezekiel (*God will strengthen, or prevail*) was, like Jeremiah, a priest as well as a prophet. He was carried captive with Jehoiachin by Nebuchadnezzar, B.C. 599, eleven years before the destruction of Jerusalem. All his prophecies were delivered in Chaldæa, on the river Chebar (Khabûr), which falls into the Euphrates at Carchemish, about two hundred miles north of Babylon. Here he resided (i. 1; viii. 1), and here his wife died (xxiv. 18). Tradition says that he was put to death by one of his fellow-exiles, a leader among them, whose idolatries he had rebuked; and in the Middle Ages what was called his tomb was shown, not far from Bagdad. Ezekiel commenced prophesying in the fifth year after the captivity of Jehoiachin (i. 2), that is, in Zedekiah's reign, and continued till at least the twenty-seventh year of his own captivity (xxix. 17). The year of his first prophesying was also the thirtieth from the commencement of the reign of Nabopolassar and from the era of Josiah's reform. To one of these facts, or perhaps to his own age (see Numb. iv. 3), he refers in chapter i. His influence with the people is obvious, from the numerous visits paid to him by the elders, who came to inquire what message God had sent through him (viii. 1; xiv. 1; xx. 1, etc.). His writings show remarkable vigour, and he was evidently well fitted to oppose 'the people of stubborn front and hard heart' to whom he was sent. His characteristic, however, was the subordination of his whole life to his work. He ever thinks and feels as the *prophet*. In this respect his writings contrast remarkably with those of his contemporary Jeremiah, whose personal history and feelings are frequently recorded. That he was, nevertheless, a man of strong feeling is clear from the brief record he has given of his wife's death (xxiv. 15-18).”—ANGUS'S *Bible Handbook*.]

Chapter i.

SPIRITUAL MINISTRIES.

“The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God” (ver. 1).

IF a man were to say this to-day we should regard him as a fool. It is better that we should acknowledge this frankly. We keep our superstition locked up in the Bible; we boast

ourselves of our practical common sense. Were any of our friends to say the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God, we should hide our faces behind our morning journals and wonder what he would say next. We have no objection to men who saw visions two thousand years ago ; but to-day we deal in reality. Such is our proud talk, such our philosophical nonsense. What is reality ? Which of the two is real—the man who saw the vision, or the man who saw nothing, and who sees nothing, and who never can see anything, for he is one of those dogs that nine days cannot open their eyes ? What is reality ? Which is your real self—the self visible, or the self invisible ; the self that thinks, or the self that talks ? We have in the Church no objection to reality : the only thing we call for and insist upon is proper definition of the term.

Some men never had any religious experience even of the lowest type ; some men never prayed : are we to go and ask such men what they think of prophets, inspired souls, minds that burn with enthusiasm ? We shall go to them for religious judgment when we go to the blind for an opinion of colour, and to the deaf for an opinion of sound. There are some men whose opinion we do not take upon any subject. The one thing they are never asked for is an opinion. Yet they do not feel the subtle contempt. We talk to them of the weather, the market, the price of cattle ; but consult them ! never. It would be strange if we went to them for an opinion of religious thinking, religious philosophy, religious hope ; we should startle them out of their decorum, for it would be the first time in their lives they had ever been asked to give an opinion upon anything. To challenge them all at once to pronounce upon God and Eternity is too much. Be reasonable : “ A righteous man is merciful to his beast.” On the other hand, when a man says he has seen heaven opened, and has seen a divine vision, and has felt in his heart the calm of infinite peace, we are entitled to question him, to study his spirit, to estimate his quality of strength and tenderness, and to subject his testimony to practical trial. If the man himself is true, he will be better than his certificate ; and if the man himself is false, no certificate can save him from exposure and destruction.

There is an advantage in not seeing heaven opened. It is the advantage of being let alone, and of being allowed to drop into obscurity and nothingness, and to fill a large space in the land of oblivion. There is torture for any mind that sees visions. That mind never can be understood. The kindest of its friends will always be conscious of a little touch of the spirit of forbearance; signals will be exchanged which masonic observers can understand, the full meaning of which is that in certain astronomical conditions an allowance must be made for certain types of mind.

If we do not get back to visions, peeps into heaven, consciousness of the higher glory and the larger land, we shall lose our religion; our altar will be a bare stone, unblessed by visitant from heaven. Yet we lock up our visions in the Bible; we have no objection to them there. There is an old-time flavour about them, and men love their beauty, mentally and sacrificially, when it is embalmed in antiquity. We want modernness of insight, immediateness of vision, present-day apprehension of larger realities; otherwise we are living upon our capital, and we shall soon be in the workhouse. Many persons are religiously eating up their capital. We do not live upon what the capital produces. If we wrap up our talent, be it one or a thousand in number, we shall find at the end that we have not a friend in the universe. Use what you have; sow your seed, scatter your best thoughts with a prodigal hand wherever a man will listen to you, and you will find that you are not pursuing a process of exhaustion, but a process of reduplication, and that true giving is true getting.

Let us attend to this man awhile. He comes amongst us with unique pretensions. At the very opening of his mouth he is religious. He does not by long preamble or courteous exordium beseech our attention; he claims it. A trumpet cannot utter an apology; it blows a battle-blast. Where was he when he saw the heavens opened and visions of God gleaming upon his eyes? He says he was "among the captives by the river of Chebar." Then was Ezekiel a captive? The historical answer is, Yes; the religious answer is, No. Can both answers be true? Perfectly. If you have not realised your double self, you have not seen

visions of God. Ezekiel was with the captives; he declares himself to have been among them. He does not accept the personal humiliation of being one of them, yet in a sense he was certainly a captive, or he would not have been there. Yet Ezekiel was the freest man in all the multitude, probably, indeed, the only free man. He was a prisoner, and yet he was enjoying the liberty granted to him by enlarging heavens and descending visions. Have we not had experience of this kind? May we not so far claim the companionship of the prophet? You do not live in the prison. Plato said that when Socrates was taken to prison the prison ceased; it was the prison that gave way. A right mind can never be in prison. In a plain and technical sense, the man can be incarcerated and chained, yea, loaded with iron; but his soul is at liberty, his soul is marching on. We need heroic men of this kind to tell us some of the possibilities of life. Ezekiel does not say, I was in prison, and therefore I could take no note of anything that was going on. Bunyan could only have had his dream in gaol. The poor man may have but a small table in every sense, and yet he may be banqueting with royalty. Do not suppose he is dining at the table you see; he is not dining there, he is eating bread with the sons of God. You are not bounded by the four walls of your house; no matter how palatial the habitation may be, you want all heaven to swing in. Why? Because you burn with the eternity of God. The more you want in that sense, the sense of perception, sympathy, appreciation, education, the more you prove yourself to be in the image and likeness of God. They could not take Ezekiel into captivity, except in the poorest sense. Already Ezekiel heard the great Christ's speech: Fear not them that kill the body, imprison the body, insult the body; after that they have no more that they can do. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven," therefore let them do what they will with the physical man; it is the spiritual man that roams throughout the liberties of heaven. You may mope in your small house if you please, and be discontented and otherwise pettish and foolish; that course is always open to impiety and ignorance: or you can make it a perch on which with temporarily folded wings you can sing psalms of truth, and love, and hope. **Your house-making is in your own hands.**

What did Ezekiel see?—"visions of God." By this term we are not to understand simply great visions. We have become familiar with the fact that in the Hebrew language there is no superlative degree, and, therefore, the divine name was always used to indicate superlativeness of excellence, as "gardens of God," "trees of God," "mountains of God." These are but grammatical, not religious terms, indicating superlativeness, language becoming religious that it may become expressive. That is not the grammar of this passage. The word "God" is not here used in any grammatical sense to eke out the insufficiency of grammar. Ezekiel saw God, hints of God, gleams of the divine presence, indications and proofs of God's nearness; verily, they were sights of God. "The word of the Lord," he continues, "came expressly" unto him. By "expressly" understand directly, certainly, without mistake. There are some voices we cannot confuse with others. The great trouble with most men is that one tune is very much like another. The tune is not altogether so execrable as it might have been, but it is so very much like a thousand other tunes that we lose all interest in it. The voice of God cannot be mistaken: it startles men; then it soothes men; then it creates in them an attentive disposition; then it inspires men; and then it says, Evermore, till the work is done, shall this music resound in your souls. Then there *is* a "word of the Lord," actually a "word." There is some word the Lord has chosen, taken up, selected, held up, stamped with his image? Yes. Where is it? Every man knows where it is. We cannot have any pretence of wanting to know where the Lord is. That is a hypocrisy which even we must not tolerate. There is an inquiry we must look down upon with rebukeful contempt, as who should say: Where is the Lord? where is the word of the Lord? If I could discover him or his word, I should do homage to him. Avaunt! The word of God is nigh thee, in thee, is in a sense thyself. To want God is to have him; to demand the word of the living God is to know it. What may come of expansion, enlargement, higher and higher illumination, only eternity can disclose; but the beginning is in the very cry that expresses necessity or desire.

Then comes the vision itself. Who may enter upon it?

Personally, I simply accept it. We are not all poets, prophets. Some of us have but one set of eyes; the best thing for us to do is to listen, and wonder, and believe. "Behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire enfolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass." Is that how it is behind the veil? Yes. "Their wings were joined one to another,"—literally, their wings kissed one another,—“they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward.” Is that what they are doing behind the film which hides the glory from me? Yes; why not? Thou fool, why not? This is the larger life, the grander reality, the fuller development. "As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning." Tell me, O thou man of God, is it so they live? "I saw it," is the prophet's reply; "it occurred; it is the one fact now of my recollection, and the one glory of my hope." Ezekiel continues: Thou, O man, dost not see anything until thou dost shut thine eyes; thine eyes deceive thee: thou must kill the body to have the soul; thou must get rid of the body to know what manhood is, what life, soul, spirit is. Blessed be God for these revelations from beyond, hints and peeps and gleams of things that are just outside the screen we call life

We are rebuked by these revelations. We think we see everything when we see nothing. What have we seen? Trees? No: only the wood in which trees grow. Flowers? Not one; but things that want to be flowers, aspirations, struggles towards beautiful expression and fragrance. We have not yet seen one another. We have seen nothing as it really is. When a man, therefore, has seen aught of God or spirituality, we should listen to him with entranced attention. "Now as beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels." We are glad it is so; it makes the universe so much larger. The talk is to us lunacy, the words are madness, until we are touched with a kindred spirit, sublimed by a kindred faith; then all things are known to be possible with God.

The need of every age is a spiritual ministry. Spirituality and superstition are not the same thing. We want men who will give us ideal visions of life, high conceptions of morality, sublime forecasts of destiny, and a deepening sense of the sinfulness of sin. We need men who can create, not moral commandments and stipulations, but a moral atmosphere, which a bad man cannot breathe. We are in danger of falling under the contracting and benumbing influence of men who rigorously

bind us down to the study of what is called matter, and what are called phenomena. Such men fail to remember, in fact if not in words, that any quantity or degree of matter accessible to our inquiry is infinitesimal, and therefore is too small a base on which to found any argument. This they are coming to admit more and more frankly. The earth itself in any mile of it is flat, but as a totality it is round. When will men, therefore, learn that the whole may alter the part? Is there anything more incoherent than an alphabet? There is not an idea in it; it is dry, unmeaning, pointless, utterly without the power of giving enjoyment. Who can find an organic unity between the letters of the alphabet, as they stand in their separateness and their symbolism? They might all be upside down, and it would make no matter; they might be of different shape, and no appalling consequence would ensue. The letters of any alphabet are incoherent and useless in their separateness. Yet there, in that incoherent alphabet, is the beginning of logic, and music, and eloquence. You do not know what the alphabet is until it has undergone manipulation; after the magician has shaped it you shall see "visions of God." When will men come to learn that the part may be absolutely altered, changed in every aspect, by the whole? At his birth the infant is but an animal, without discrimination or judgment or moral sense. He does not know one being from another; you cannot appeal to him; you cannot reason with him; you cannot discourse to him about heaven or hell; all your discourse is useless sound: yet in that same infant there may be a judge, a hero, a genius, an Ezekiel. When will men come to learn that the part may be utterly changed and transformed by the whole? St. Paul, who learned everything first, our largest, truest scholar, said: "We know in part, we teach in part; when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." There are some people who have got further on than Paul; where they have got to I do not know. What do we know about matter? Where is it? and is that all of it? What if a man should bring the letter "X" to me, and say: "It is out of that kind of thing they say poems come." Who can believe such a ridiculous suggestion? There it is; look at it for yourself; handle it; examine it; hold it up to the light; do what you please with it; and then tell me, as a rational

man, that out of that sort of thing can come the infinities of expressed human thought. What do we know about matter? What is the measure of it in feet and inches, in miles? We see but a speck of matter; it is as if we saw but one letter in an alphabet. The solar system itself is but a speck of sand on the shore of infinity. How dangerous it is to build any theory upon the frail basis of a fraction! We hear but echoes, not voices. Sounds do come to us: what are they? whence come they? These sounds are but the subsidence of thunders that rolled in infinite music through the universe in the far-away eternities. We are proud to know this in astronomy: why not in theology, and morals, and the higher philosophy? We are told that the light which left a certain star thirty thousand years ago has just arrived within human vision. Does that announcement make infidels and sceptics and heterodox persons? Not at all. It is accepted as a sign of the vastness and grandeur of astronomical spaces and figures. But when we are told that what we know of God, man, truth, eternity, has come down to us from infinite reaches of space and time, from incalculable fountains of origin, we become heretics, sceptics, infidels, unbelievers, and doubters, taking to ourselves very critical names to distinguish us from the vile herd of men who will believe anything. It is not for our poor ignorance to dogmatise God out of a creation the very threshold of which we have hardly begun to recognise. Notwithstanding our investigation, there may be some chamber in so vast a universe in which is seated an everlasting Father. It is better to pray than to doubt; it is mentally stronger to believe than to deny. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God"; the prophet hath said in his faith, "The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God." I would rather listen to the second man than to the first. The probabilities, at least, are on his side. Already there are intimations that the universe is larger than any fool has discovered it to be. Let us hear the prophet.

You cannot object to this claim, for you have prophets of your own. The poet sees what the prosaic mind never apprehends or supposes to exist; the painter sees pictures where the inartistic observer finds nothing; the sculptor looks upon a block of marble and sees in it image, aspect, heroism, grandeur, beauty,

and his fingers long to get hold of the tools that he may evolve the marvellous secret. Even a comedian sees things which the man who is humourless never suspects. The comedian will spend a day in the market-place, and come back with a portfolio full of pictures that delight even the man who went with him, and who saw nothing of all the scene. The dramatist gathers up all the elements, lines, colours, suggestions of human action, and makes a picture of them, and men pay to look at it. Why did not they see it and make it? Because they were captives only. They have not lived the spirit's mighty life; and whilst, therefore, you who are outside, so to say, have your poets, painters, dramatists, comedians, men of the inner visions, do not wonder if the Church of Christ says there is a height beyond this, a glory infinitely transcending all that you have seen of light, and if you would know what God is, hear what his prophets have to say with respect to him. No other man but one who is spiritually qualified is entitled to expound divine mysteries. The scholar cannot expound the Bible. The poorest creature that ever undertakes to deliver a discourse is the grammarian. He is a weary creature from end to end of him. He is so great in parsing, that he never can preach. There is indeed a wonderful difference between reading and parsing. Undertake to parse the opening lines of the "Paradise Lost," and you may parse every word correctly, and give every rule of syntax without a blunder, and yet you have not begun to read "Paradise Lost." If you were to parse your little girl's letter that comes by post to-morrow morning, you would think she was out of her head. You do not parse it, you read it; you devour it; you know the soul that wrote it. Let the grammarian have it, and wear his spectacles out in trying to parse it.

In all ages spiritually minded men are needed. There are men who, in undergoing preparation for the ministry, would undergo destruction. They are not to be touched. Even a grammarian's well-shapen paw is not to be laid upon them. They know the kingdom, they know the truth, they know the music, they know the Cross, the blood, the priesthood, the atonement; let them declare, each in his own way, and God will see to the result. May the day hasten when much that is called ministerial

preparation shall be cast out with disapprobation, perhaps with some degree of disgust. The preparation for this great expositional work is in the sanctuary, in the secret place, in solitude with God. Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that he will send out Ezekiels and Johns and Pauls to this great work. A man thus qualified carries a spiritual and indisputable authority: his authority is not in his papers, it is in himself; we do not ask for his certificates, we say, Stand up and speak. Said a Welsh farmer to some wandering ministerial tourists who besought a night's accommodation, "If you are ministers you can pray; now kneel down, and let me hear you." They knelt down, they prayed, and he said, "You are my guests." He knew the voice of the Spirit, the tone of sincerity. That tone cannot be successfully simulated in the presence of men who are schooled in real spiritual criticism. This is the authority of the ministry, that it can touch human life with a mighty hand, with a tender pity, with a sympathetic helpfulness. Such a ministry will always create its own sphere, and compel its proper degree of attention. Without men thus gifted, society would lose an element essential to completeness and illumination. God forbid that we should be delivered over to materialists, literalists, mere gropers after so-called phenomena. We want men who will uphold the spiritual ministry, defend the spiritual position, welcome the soul into spiritual liberties, and tell men in the market-place and everywhere that they are to do business as if not doing it, to hold the world as if not holding it, to be obedient to a heavenly vision. The Lord will see that such a ministry is never wanting in his Church.

Chapters ii., iii.

EZEKIEL'S COMMISSION.

FROM beginning to end the Book of Ezekiel may be regarded as a series of divine visions, or one vision presented in many varying aspects. The second and third chapters, which give an account of Ezekiel's call to his office, ought to be read through as one chapter. We are to understand that although Ezekiel changed from place to place, yet the vision was substantially the same. The prophet is constantly receiving fresh instructions, but the variety of the instruction does not interfere with the continuity and integrity of the divine vision. We must not seek for literal interpretations of many of the mysterious words in this prophecy ; our business must rather be to discover the line of spirituality as between God and man, the line along which God comes into the human soul with new instructions, new inspirations, that he may impart new confidence and succour to the hearts of his children. Each man will have his own vision. God is continually speaking to the hearing ear, and continually showing himself to the discerning eye. Inspiration is as distinct and vital in the case of the poorest living prophet of the Lord as in the case of the glowing Ezekiel. Each of us should seek for his own vision, for his own part and lot in the divine inheritance, for his own particular truth ; but no one man should imagine that he has been entrusted with the whole vision of God. Men see nature differently, and men interpret the events of the day differently, and each man has an interpretation of his own consciousness, with which no other man can wisely interfere : there should be direct personal communication between the soul and its eternal Lord, and every man should expect to receive his own message or charge from heaven, and should hold himself accountable for the right use of what he has seen and heard, rather than for the right use of what other people have supposed

themselves to have received from heaven. The prophets are not to judge one another simply because of contrasts in the visions which they have beheld. To his own master each prophet stands or falls. Visions upon which Ezekiel looked with comparative composure would dazzle the eyes of other men and utterly overflow the capacities of minor souls. Yet how small soever may be the capacity of any prophet, he is responsible alone for the use he makes of it, and according to his degree his enjoyment will be equal to the rapture of the most fervid and glowing souls that ever have been called to receive the baptism of the divine glory.

In the second chapter Ezekiel is in vision recovered from his prostration and made to stand upon his feet. He is addressed by the peculiar title of "Son of man" (ver. 1). Who is the wondrous "he" who spoke unto Ezekiel? We are not told as a substantive who is referred to, yet we feel that the reading of the vision permits no other supposition than that it was the most high God whose glories had filled the firmament, and whose majesty had thrown down the prophet upon his face in lowliest humility and adoration. The title "Son of man" we often meet with in the Scriptures, and generally it means nothing more than "Man." The title is never applied in an address to a prophet except in the instances of Ezekiel and Daniel, each of whom was addressed as "Son of man." In the case of Daniel, however, the title was assigned only once (Daniel viii. 17), but in the case of Ezekiel careful enumerators have counted its use in ninety instances. "Son of man" has been used of Adam himself in one version of the Scriptures. A singular dignity would be given to the title if it were abbreviated to the one word "Man"; we should then read: "Man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee." The tone of such a command is at once compassionate and inspiring: it is compassionate in that it recognises the frailty of the instrument. He is but a man, a creature of the dust, a child of a day whose breath is in his nostrils; he is not mistaken for an angel, or a cherub, or some mighty being unnamed in human speech; but he is recognised as a man, a creature, a brother of the human race, one of a great multitude whose origin is in the dust. On the other hand, it is inspiring in that it

recognises the capacity of the prophet to receive a divine communication, to be filled with it, and to accept it as an inspiration that was to end in practical service on behalf of humanity. The prophet does not speak of himself as recovering his own energy, or overcoming his own fear, or as in any sense the originator of new strength and capability; on the contrary, he distinctly recognises the work of God within his soul, and attributes to divine energy his own returning strength. Thus we read in the second verse: "And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me." By "the spirit" we are to understand the spirit of God. This was not a man reviving himself, it was a man invigorated and encouraged by divine energy.

The Lord first overthrows a man, and then recalls him to renewed dignity and hope. The two instances which are given even in this early portion of the prophecy are strikingly confirmatory of this view. When Ezekiel first saw the vision he fell upon his face, he was overwhelmed, he could not bear the dazzling glory, the mighty sound of the on-coming hosts thrilled him and paralysed him, and he was for the moment overthrown and undone. But having passed through this experience of humiliation, he was recovered by the very spirit that had for the moment destroyed him. So truly are we in the hands of God! Sometimes we feel that exaltation in very deed comes from on high, and is a divine blessing, a very seal and double assurance of adoption. But it is not so easy to realise that prostration is also an aspect of the divine ministry, and is absolutely essential as the forerunner of the highest excitement and rapture of soul. Whom God throws down into great humiliation he intends to revive and clothe with supreme power. By poverty we may be prepared for wealth; by solitude we may be qualified for the excitement of society; by great pain we may be quickened into great sympathy with all who suffer. Let us not repiningly say that God has overwhelmed us, and laid his hand heavily upon us, and filled us with excessive contempt; even if this were true, it can, by the very necessity of the case, only be true temporarily: we should rather look upon it as intermediate, or as initial, or as in some way preparatory to broader revelation, to higher light,

to promotion to larger office and function in the ministry of the universe. No man should rise from his humiliations except by the spirit of God. It is possible for us to do much under the impulse of merely animal spirits; we may be so physically vigorous as to trace our animation to physical causes: he is not truly brought out of prison who is not delivered by the angel of the Lord; he may be released in a dream, he may enjoy freedom in some shadowy state of mind, but real and permanent liberty is the exclusive gift of God. We may pray God to keep us in the house of affliction, which is the house of bondage, until he has wrought in us all his purpose of wisdom and love; this being accomplished he will lead us forth into the garden of delight, or send us in his own name and strength to work out some purpose worthy of our spiritual origin and our immortality.

Now the prophet is given to understand what his exact vocation is to be:—

“And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiff-hearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God” (ii. 3, 4).

This is the beginning of the distinct commission of the prophet. When does the Lord grant vision only? Is not every vision a preparation for a duty? Is not every period of rapture to be considered as introductory to a period of service or suffering? We are not called to mere contemplation or rhapsody, or selfish spiritual delight; when we walk by that way of pleasure, or live in that dream of glory, it is that we may at the end be strengthened for ministry, more highly and completely qualified for the rough and arduous work of endeavouring to bring other men to see their sinfulness, and to cry out in the language of penitence.

The two tribes which formed the kingdom of Judah, together with such remnants of the others as had been induced by Hezekiah to cast in their lot with them, are constantly spoken of as “Israel.” Ten tribes had been lost, but the continuity of the whole nation was looked upon as sustained in that small remnant. It may be that one man shall be looked upon as constituting the whole

household of his father, so that he should not be a mere individual, but a family, a clan, a tribe, and whilst he lives all the members of the household to which he belonged may be considered to be living too. Far, indeed, they may have gone astray, yea, they may have utterly cut themselves off from the literal covenant of mercy, but the survivor in whose heart there is one spark of divine love is to consider himself as in a federal capacity, and is to go out after that which is lost until he find it.

A very significant expression is "a rebellious nation." Literally, that phrase might be read "rebellious nations," because the word so translated is only applied to the heathen, and therefore the children of Israel, God's chosen ones, the very anointed sons of Heaven, are now regarded as belonging to the rebellious heathen: every spiritual association has been cut, every filament uniting Israel with God has been sundered, and they who were once unique in their relation to Heaven have become, as it were, commingled with the pagans and heathen of other nations. The epithet means less to us than it would mean to an Israelite. Yet, though this alienation had been completed by Israel, God could not surrender his shepherdly relation to the wandering people; in his heart there was a yearning love towards them. God could not forget the past. When God forgets a soul, and turns away from it in disdain, who can imagine what has transpired on the part of that soul to create and justify the divine contempt? The children of Israel are called "impudent children"; in the margin the phrase is "hard of face." They could hear reproof, and reject it; they could stand up in the presence of accusation without feeling one pang of shame or remorse; they had become habituated to evil, and the practice thereof had become easy to them; all spiritual sensitiveness was lost, all holy feeling had been destroyed; to such condition may men bring themselves by oft-repeated wickedness. Little by little moral sensitiveness is blunted; little by little the nature that was meant to live in God averts itself from the light of heaven; little by little we go down into decay, and noisomeness, and death. Surely men are not hard of face against God all at once? There are times when they have felt keenly that they have done the things that they ought not to have done, and have left undone the things they

ought to have done ; but custom destroys sensitiveness, familiarity with wickedness hardens the soul and the face against God.

The prophet is given to understand that his message may not at first be received by the people to whom it is delivered ; the Lord says, " And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear " (ii. 5). This expression is used in subsequent verses, so that the prophet was duly prepared for the possible rejection of his word. Ezekiel might have supposed that he had but to deliver the message, and the house of Israel would directly and joyfully respond to his appeal. On the contrary, he is here assured that rejection may be as confidently looked for as acceptance, but whether acceptance or rejection should follow the exercise of his ministry, he was not to be deterred from the discharge of his duty. It is hard indeed to throw away compassion and solicitude upon the wind, or upon the sea, or upon the wilderness. A prophet, how highly qualified soever for his work, might soon become weary of thus abortively endeavouring to do good where the doing of good was an impossibility. Men who are called to the prophetic office are not called to reap their reward from the field in which they exercised their function : they are called upon to sustain themselves by the inspiration of Heaven. If they are delivering a mere speculation of their own, they will soon become weary of repeating the pointless words ; if preachers have to live upon their own inventiveness, they will soon fall into self-neglect or into official carelessness ; but when they have simply to repeat their message, to translate into the words of time the truths of eternity, where they may at all moments turn aside to refresh themselves at the very fountains of heaven, they will grow stronger and stronger, and in proportion to the stubbornness and ingratitude of the age to which they minister they will strengthen themselves in the living God. Only the Word of God can live through the thick and tremendous dangers which beset a public career. Men who are charged with divine messages, and who look rather at themselves than at the Author of their gospels, will soon succumb to the lures and blandishments of society, for the flesh is weak and the temptation is strong, and men are naturally lovers of ease rather than devotees of labour.

Not only is the prophet warned that the people may not hear him, but he is also warned that they may actually put him in danger and make his life a burden to him. In the vision therefore the prophet hears a voice which says, "Son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words": they will be angry, petulant, vindictive; they will resent the supposed interference of a holy prophet; they will dislike to be disturbed at their feasts of iniquity and their revels in the house of darkness; but let divine hope exceed human fear, and live thou, O son of man, in the sanctuary of divine truth, and arm thyself with all the panoply of divine grace. If the people be as briars and thorns, and if thou hast to dwell amongst scorpions, still make thine heart strong in the Lord: "Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house"—that is, a house of rebellion, an expression which is used in the prophecies of Ezekiel eleven times. The people were originally the house of Israel, but now they have become the house of rebellion; they have gone from extremity to extremity; lifted up to heaven at one period of their history, they have been plunged down into the pit of death at another. We are not to suppose that a faithful ministry is an easy task. No man can continually rebuke his age, and yet be living a luxurious life, unless indeed he be the victim of hypocrisy, or the tool of some vicious hallucination. The prophets of the Lord have always been opposed to the age in which they lived. Whenever the ministry has fallen into accord with the age, it is not the age that has gone up, it is the ministry that has gone down. A reproachful, corrective, stimulating voice should always be characteristic of a spiritual ministry. No evil shall be able to live in its presence, and no custom, how fashionable or popular soever, should be able to lift up its head without condemnation in the presence of a man who is filled with the burden or doctrine of the Lord. We should have persecution revived were we to revive the highest type of godliness. Sin has not altered, but righteousness may have modified its terms; the earth remains as it was from the beginning, but they who represent the kingdom of heaven may have committed themselves to an unworthy and degrading compromise. Evermore shall the wicked hate the godly, unless the godly take down their banners and are contented to live in dumbness and in

traitorous suppression of the truth. Again and again is the prophet encouraged in his work. God would seem to be almost afraid that the prophet would be swallowed up of fear. "The fear of man bringeth a snare." It is hard to be always on the reproofing side; and the hardness is increased by the fact that oftentimes the prophet can only refer to a vision as the ground and authority on which he stands and by which he works. It was a spiritual vision, a spiritual impression, a spiritual assurance; and to oppose spirit to matter has always been a task of the greatest severity.

The prophet is not to go at his own charges, or to deliver messages of his own invention—"But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee." Even the prophet must be doubly qualified. It is not enough to be a prophet as if by birth; men must be made prophets by divine communion, by enlarged experience, by spiritual education. The most high God in this vision actually addresses the prophet as if he himself might fall into the rebellion of the people whose heathenism he was to reprove. "Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house." Even prophets may be dragged down to the level of their age. What is one amongst many? What is a single persecuted life against the uncounted millions whose eyes stand out with fatness and who have all that heart can wish? A curious process now takes place in this course of divine preparation. Not only has the prophet seen something, heard something; now he has to perform another function—"Open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee." All this is, of course, figurative. "And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; and he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe." In the third chapter the prophet is still represented as eating the roll, that he might be prepared to go forth and speak unto the house of Israel. The prophet was to fill himself with a book. His experience of it is thus stated: "Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness." Who has not felt in his first call to high office and dignity a sense of pleasure, a sense of having partaken of that most exquisite luxury? The message is known to be so true, so wise, so good, that we feel we

have only to deliver it in order to be acknowledged as the heralds and ambassadors of Heaven. This was the experience of John the Divine on the occasion of his eating the little book referred to in Revelation (x. 10). Inward experience is not often confirmed by outward fact and reality in the case of a maledictory ministry. The prophet is assured that he is not being sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel: he is not going to speak to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words he could not understand. This was at once an encouragement and a discouragement: it was an encouragement in that he had the support of relationship, association, and a common history; and it was a discouragement in that the Most High assured him, "Surely, had I sent thee to them,"—that is, to people of a strange speech and of a hard language,—**"they would have hearkened unto thee."**

The prophet is assured that he would have received better treatment from the actual heathen than from the perverted Israelites. Jesus Christ said the same thing in relation to the miracles and the teaching of his own ministry: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day." We are not to suppose that any unusual experience has befallen us because the divine word which we declare is thrown back upon us, and is branded with contempt.

The prophet was further assured in most expressive terms that his ministry would fail of effect:—

"But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted" (iii. 7).

When men reject truth they do not reject the human speaker, but the divine Author. It was not Ezekiel who was driven away,

it was the Most High himself who was profaned. People can only act according to their nature and their quality; having debased themselves into impudence and hard-heartedness, they could only be faithful to their depraved condition and prove the reality of their depravity by their ingratitude, their want of sensitiveness to moral appeal, and their want of shame under divine accusation. How does God meet the hardness of the human heart? We find the answer in chapter iii. 9—"As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house." The adamant is the diamond, as the word is translated in Jer. xvii. 1. The Lord says that the people to whom Ezekiel was sent were as flint, but he tells Ezekiel that he shall be to them as a diamond, and the diamond is able to cut the hardest flint. So the words of Ezekiel being the words of God were able to cut through all their resistance, and make themselves felt in the moral nature that was to all appearance destroyed.

In all this, however, Ezekiel is never allowed to speak one word of his own:—

"Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear" (iii. 10, 11).

Never does the voice say, Ezekiel, excite thine imagination, call upon the fountain of thine eloquence, arouse thy noblest intellectual faculties, and consider what had better be said to people who are living in such moral neglect and corruption; on the contrary, Ezekiel is simply to listen, to receive, to hear, and then he is to go; and having gone, he is to open his commission and continue it, and conclude it with the words, "Thus saith the Lord God." It has been noticed that in the eleventh verse Ezekiel is commanded to go "unto the children of thy people." Once the expression would have been "my people," but now the people are spoken of as belonging to another, and Ezekiel is actually regarded as associated in some way with them. The people may be ours by many a link and many an association without being ours by moral sympathy, or in any sense that

involves us in their guilt. There are hereditary claims; there are moral impulses starting out of genealogical lines which cannot safely remain unheeded. Men are to provide for their own household, not only in necessary meats and drinks, but also with moral education, or that moral welcome or that spiritual illumination needful to recover the soul in its uttermost destitution and despair.

The spirit took the prophet up, and he heard behind him "a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place." He "heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing." The spirit then lifted him up, and took him away, and he went upon his errand in bitterness, in the heat of his spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon him. No longer is the word sweet to his taste; the roll that was given to him was as honey in his mouth, but now that the task is to be practically undertaken, literally and resolutely performed, Ezekiel begins to realise how heavy is the trial which has been assigned him. "But the hand of the Lord was strong upon me,"—an expression which means compulsion, or which means an assurance of sustentation, comfort, and ultimate success. No faithful man can rid himself of the burden of the Lord except by faithfully declaring it, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. The prophet now leaves the place where he had been, and is brought "to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar." The word "Tel-abib" means mound of ears of grain, and was probably a place of known fruitfulness, a place of harvest and abundance. There the prophet sat where the people sat, and he was astonished among them seven days. He could not break the awful silence. He had a message to deliver, but could not speak it; a preparation of silence in the presence of the people to whom the message was delivered was not the least severe part of Ezekiel's discipline. Moses had his forty years of exile, Elijah had his forty days in Mount Horeb, St. Paul had to undergo a journey to Arabia, and our Lord himself was driven into the wilderness after his baptism.

These are conditions of life hardly to be explained in words.

We know their power, we have entered into their innermost meaning, and yet we can hardly tell through what we have passed. Our solitude is either wasted or turned into the greatest profitableness. A man is not necessarily preparing because he is silent, but when a man is silent he may, if faithful to his divine call, be more strenuously preparing for his work than if he were engaged in tumult and found delight in the midst of the most exciting scenes. Solitude has its dangers; retirement is in itself a very subtle temptation; the soul says: Why not remain here? Why go out to the battle when peace can be enjoyed? Why encounter the fray when one might linger on the sunny side of the mountain, and all day long inhale the fragrance of flowers, and listen to the song of birds? Ezekiel went forth from Tel-abib into the plain, that there he might have further talk with the Most High God. Again he fell on his face, and again the spirit set him upon his feet, and talked with him as a man might talk with his friend. Not yet was the preparation complete. Ezekiel was commanded in these words, "Go, shut thyself within thine house." There he might either pray in secret, or begin his mission in a small degree, speaking to one and another, but not yet publicly declaring himself as the prophet and the reformer of Israel. Thus we begin by being overthrown and filled with a sense of humiliation; then we are invigorated by the Spirit of God; then we are driven away that we may see somewhat of the field wherein we are to work; then we have imposed upon us a discipline of silence; then we go forth into the plain to hear, as it were, the whispers, the last trembling cadences, of the divine instruction and exhortation; then we begin within the small limits of our house to speak the word with which we have been entrusted: all the while God will be with us, to watch us, chasten us, help us; and inasmuch as we are identified with him we have the assurance that, troublous as our ministry may be, it will end in victory and in immortal joy.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, make the place of thy feet glorious, we humbly pray thee. The house is thine, and the book, and the day, and all souls are thine. Let this be a time of revelation, of entrancing and ennobling vision; may the dullest eye be opened to see lights shining afar; may the heaviest ear catch sounds from heaven; may the whole people be richly blessed from above. We thank thee for all hints of the wider life, the greater space, the freer liberty. We bless thee for a day which means heaven begun, toil ended, the battle concluded, tears dried for ever, and service without weariness constituting the delight of eternity. Once we were blind, and did not see these things: then we had heard no voice beyond the grave; but now we see, we hear, and our hearts are alive with joy. This gladness no man gave us, and no man can take away: this is the music of the Lord's voice; this is the gift of God; this is the purchase of the Cross; this is the meaning of Gethsemane. We worship at the Cross of Christ: there is no other altar where prayer may be made with effect. We behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world; we see him in his agony: we will wait, thy grace helping us, until we see him in his triumph. Jesus died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our iniquities; he is our Saviour: he shall be our Lord and King, and we will know no crown but his, and will for ever worship at his throne. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Fix our vision upon the Son of God; draw out our love towards Jesus Christ; then shall every motive be pure, every impulse shall be upward, and every energy shall be a sacrifice unto God. Come to us as we need—to the old man and the young, to the little child, the weary and the ill-at-ease, the broken-hearted, the blind through crying bitter tears, the secret sufferer who dare not tell his complaint, the broken spirit that may not even sigh its distress;—come to us as we need. Let our necessity be our plea; let our weakness be our attraction for the Father: then shall we be young, and strong, and glad; there shall be a new tone in our voice, our whole life shall be music, our whole action shall be pleasant unto God. We have sinned; we have done the things we ought not to have done; we have been selfish, unkind, cruel, ungrateful; we have forgotten the lives to which we owe our own; we have turned aside from those who had claims upon us; we have filled our ears with the world's din and noise that we might not hear the cry of pain or the prayer of poverty; we have uttered thy name and broken thy law; we have entered thy house, but have not been in thy spirit;—God be merciful unto us sinners! The blood of Jesus

Christ, thy Son, cleanseth from all sin. To that blood we come, night and day, in youth and age; it is the answer to human sin, the reply to dishonoured law. We pray for one another. God bless us every one. Send none uncheered away, or uninstructed, or unblessed, but let every one feel that the Father's house is as wide as the Father's universe; and as for his love, it has no height, no depth, no measure to be named in human speech—infinite, infinite as God. Now give us the hearing ear, the eye that sees; give us the judgment that waits upon God, the reason that will not speak until its message has been learned; and then send us to our homes, carrying the fragrance of thine house with us: and all the week shall be glad; its work will come quite easily to our hands; we shall do it as if not doing it, for our citizenship shall be in heaven. Amen.

Chapters iv., v.

THE MINISTRY OF SYMBOLISM.

IN the fourth chapter there begins a series of symbols utterly impossible of modern interpretation. The prophet is commanded to take a tile, and portray upon it the city of Jerusalem, and to conduct certain military operations against that city; then he is commanded to take an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between himself and the city; having done so he is to lay siege against Jerusalem. Afterwards he is commanded to lie upon his left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: this symbolic act is to be followed by lying upon his right side, in signification of burning the iniquity of the house of Judah forty years. He is afterwards commanded to take wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and fitches, and put them into one vessel, and to make bread thereof, according to the number of days he was to lie upon his side; certain instructions are then given regarding the wheat, and the way in which he is to eat it; and water, and the way in which he is to drink it: and so the instruction proceeds from stage to stage, full of what to us, and probably was to Ezekiel himself, dark image and troubled symbol. This ministry of symbolism has still a place in all progressive civilisation. Every age, of course, necessitates its own emblems and types, its own apocalypse of wonders and signs, but the meaning of the whole is that God has yet something to be revealed which cannot at the moment be expressed in plain language. If we could see into the inner meaning of many of the controversies in which we are engaged, we should

see there many a divinely drawn symbol, curious outlines of thought, parables not yet ripe enough for words. The whole year, from spring to winter, is a long parable, a curious symbol, a marvellous revelation of divine purpose: he that hath eyes to see, let him see; he that hath ears to hear, let him hear. The difficulty of the prophet begins precisely at this point, forasmuch as he has the genius that can read interior thought, and can forecast purpose before it has taken the shape of words: hence he is a madman, a fanatic, a loose-minded person, or at best he is credited with being an eccentric genius, who is always seeing something that nobody else can see, and always talking in a style which to commonplace observers is inflated, bombastic, or intensely conceited and affected. Prophets always go up and down the ages as madmen. It must have been an awful thing to have been a prophet of the Lord, to have secrets entrusted to the heart which were to be put into human language, to have symbolism set before the eye which was to be translated into the common language of the day.

How manifold is human life! How innumerable are the workers who are toiling at the evolution of the divine purpose in things! One man can understand nothing but what he calls bare facts and hard realities; he has only a hand to handle, he has not the interior touch that can feel things ere yet they have taken shape. Another is always on the outlook for what pleases the eye; he delights in form and colour and symmetry, and glows almost with thankfulness as he beholds the shapeliness of things, and traces in them a subtle geometry. Another man gets behind all this, and hears voices, and sees sights excluded from the natural senses; he looks upon symbolism, upon the ministry of suggestion and dream and vision; he sees best in the darkness; the night is his day; in the great cloud he sees the ever-working God, and in the infinite stillness of religious solitude he hears, rather in echoes than in words, what he is called upon to tell the age in which he lives. Here again his difficulty increases, for although he can see with perfect plainness men, and can understand quite intelligibly all the mysteries which pass before his imagination and before his spiritual eyes, yet he has to find words that will fit the new and exciting occa-

sion ; and there are no fit words, so sometimes he is driven to make a language of his own, and hence we come upon strangeness of expression, eccentricity of thought, weirdness in quest and sympathy,—a most marvellous and tumultuous life ; a great struggle after rhythm and rest and fullest disclosure of inner realities, often ending in bitter disappointment, so that the prophet's eloquence dissolves in tears, and the man who thought he had a glorious message to deliver is broken down in humiliation when he hears the poor thunder of his own inadequate articulation. He has his "tile" and his iron pan ; he lays upon his left side, and upon his right side ; he takes unto him wheat and barley, beans and lentils ; he weighs out his bread, and measures out his water, and bakes "barley cakes" by a curious manufacture ; and yet when it is all over he cannot tell to others in delicate enough language, or with sufficiency of illustration, what he knows to be a divine and eternal word.

In the fifth chapter Ezekiel is commanded to take a sharp knife, a barber's razor, and to cause it to pass upon his head and upon his beard ; then he is to take balances to weigh and divide the hair ; he has to burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled ; then he is to take another third part, and smite it about with a knife, and the final third part he is to scatter in the wind ; and so the new commission rolls on like a series of wind-driven clouds, now full of terror, now lighted up with beauty, now significant of great change and judgment and progress. The Lord is determined that the small remnant of his people left after the great Captivity should be regarded with favour, yet even some of these were to perish—to be cast into the midst of the fire. The result of the whole was the utter cleansing of Judæa, the utter banishment of the chosen people. Here the prophet is allowed to rest awhile. He has seen strange things, and heard strange voices, and now for a little time he is permitted to descend to commonplace thought and utterance. He will hardly know himself, coming out of this wonder and perilous excitement. This is the action of God in training his ministers and prophets. He takes them to great heights, shows them scenes of transfiguration, delights their vision, excites their wonder to the point of rapture, thrills them with a consciousness of the larger

possibilities of life, and then almost suddenly he brings them down the hill to talk their mother tongue, and do the ordinary business of men.

How much our prophets endure on our account! There is a sense in which the prophet is the priest of his age, for on account of that age he suffers much: he is the instrument chosen of God through whom to express divine thoughts and commands; he is both the divinely chosen instrument and the servant who is to carry out his own messages in practical life. Who can tell all he knows? Who has language that will go with him through all the winding mazes of his highest thought? This is true of our common intellectual life, apart from special excitements and inspirations. We suppose ourselves to be writing our whole mind, yet, as we have often said, the only thing that is most certain is, that we have not yet begun to express our deepest thoughts. When the spirit of the Lord seizes us, and causes our whole nature to enter into a state enthusiastic, rapturous, and almost bodiless, we cannot come back and tell the experience through which we have passed. We blunder, we hesitate, we correct ourselves, we go in quest of larger and truer words, and cannot find them, and then we seek to eke out our meaning by invented phrases, and sometimes by perverted and tortured language. There is no room on the earth for the stars. The poor little earth is only large enough to hold a few flowers, and even these flowers overflow with poetic meaning, and prophetic symbol, and instructive suggestion. The stars we must keep high up in heaven, and can only see a little twinkling and gleaming of them now and then. They are so distant we cannot measure their fulness, and yet we are assured of their majesty and splendour. So it is with our thinking: we have a few flower-words that we can make use of, a few things that we can say in tolerably plain language; yet how few they are! On the other hand, we have star-thoughts, great planetary contemplations, marvellous impressions regarding the vastness of things, and the immanence of God in his universe: here our eloquence breaks down, and we betake ourselves to the higher eloquence of hesitation, self-correction, and agony of endeavour, not always ending fruitlessly, but often the more fruitful in that it apparently fails

in its great purpose. There are failures that are grand. Some defeats are assurances of future victories.

At the fifth verse of the fifth chapter there is quite a change of communication. Instead of high prophetic language we have comparative simplicity and directness, until another vision begins with the eighth chapter. The Lord brings a great moral charge against Jerusalem; he says:—

“I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her. And she hath changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and my statutes more than the countries that are round about her: for they have refused my judgments and my statutes, they have not walked in them” (v. 5, 6).

“Set in the midst of the nations”: Egypt and Ethiopia on the south; the Hittites, the Syrians, and Assyrians, from time to time, on the north; on the coast, southern and northern, were the Philistines and the Phœnicians; whilst on the deserts of the east, and in the near south, were the Ishmaelites going to and fro, and keeping up intercourse with all the nations. It is thought that Solomon himself established commercial relations with the nations of India. So situated, what opportunities Israel had of presenting the aspect of a people well instructed in the divine law, and sweetly obedient to the divine will and purpose; how without so much as uttering one word of mere exhortation she might have preached with the eloquence of unimpeachable consistency and generous beneficence: Jerusalem was called upon to be the great expositor of monotheism in the ancient world. Yet how wondrously was Jerusalem separated by natural barriers from all other lands or nations—by deserts, by the sea on the west, by the northern mountains; how in this geographical solitude Israel might have cultivated to perfection the worship of the one true God! When the Israelites failed in this high purpose they seemed to dry up the sea, and create a high-road through the desert, and break down the mountains, that they might not only allow, but almost invite, the surrounding nations to come in and reduce them to subjection, making a prey of the very treasure of God’s heart. While the judges judged Israel, Israel was continually falling under the power of some of the petty tribes on the confines of the Holy Land. When the

empire of Solomon was broken up, in consequence of the sins of the people, the Israelites had no defence against the powerful nations that assailed them; Judæa and Chaldæa made sport of the Israelites. How is the fine gold become dim! how is the giant of God reduced to the feebleness of childhood! how are the mighty fallen! All this apostasy was moral; not because the surrounding nations had better arms, or better military training, did Israel fail in the war, but because Israel had wickedly resisted divine judgment. Immortality is always weakness. When conscience ceases to take part in the battle of life, the battle has already ended in ruin.

What is true of the Israelites is true of all other peoples; and what is true of peoples in their collective capacity is true of the individual man; he goes up or down according to his moral temperament, his moral discipline, his moral purpose in life. How tremendous is the judgment of God as revealed in such words as these:—

“Wherefore, as I live, saith the Lord God; Surely, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abominations, therefore will I also diminish thee; neither shall mine eye spare, neither will I have any pity. A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of thee: and a third part shall fall by the sword round about thee; and I will scatter a third part into all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them” (v. 11, 12).

And so the judgment passes on from thunder to thunder, and the last grand note of that judgment-thunder is, “I the Lord have spoken it.” It was impossible for Ezekiel to invent all these moral judgments. We feel that they must have come up from eternity, because they express what never entered into the heart of man to conceive concerning the proper desert and issue of sin. Hell itself is a revelation. Make of that part of the invisible state what we may, it surely never entered into the heart of man to invent it. We may have perverted the idea; by our foolish exaggerations we may have distorted the divine revelation; but the great central fact of judgment, of burning indignation, of unquenchable anger against sin, we must always recognise as one of the unchangeable realities of true religion. It is clear that all judgment was not future in the Old Testament.

There was an immediate degradation, and an immediate infliction of tremendous penalty. "I will make thee waste, and a reproach among the nations that are round about thee, in the sight of all that pass by"; "I shall send upon them the evil arrows of famine"; "I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread"; "So will I send upon you famine and evil beasts, and they shall bereave thee; and pestilence and blood shall pass through thee; and I will bring the sword upon thee." These were immediate visitations. In the New Testament we are supposed to come upon a prediction rather than a realised judgment. What we have to suffer for our sins is supposed to be in the future, whilst here we may enjoy ourselves in the very act of drinking goblets of iniquity, and sitting down to partake of the festivities of darkness. All this is an error on our part. Under the New Testament dispensation, as under the Old, judgment is immediate, penalty is now impending, our very next step may be into a burning pit. They allegorise who postpone judgment, not they who immediately feel it and respond to it penitentially. Every serpent that bites the hedge-breaker is but a hint of the still greater punishment that awaits us when all life is looked at by a judicial eye and pronounced upon by a judicial voice. Blessed are they who take counsel of immediate dispensations and providences, and who have the spiritual eye that in all these can see symbols of something infinitely more appalling. The Lord does not fail to set forth the great truth that the bread and the water are his, and that in his hands are all the issues of the immediate time. It is not man that makes the sword; it is the Lord that fashions it: it is not a mere failure in the arrangement of accidents that ends in physical disaster; it is a plan of the Most High by which he brings us to religious considerateness, to penitence, to self-renunciation, and to that high state of being which is best expressed by the word Faith.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee for thy house. The tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth. Where there is no tabernacle thou art thyself the more accessible; thou art as a sanctuary in the wilderness, thou art a pavilion from the heat and from the storm. We thank thee that neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem alone shall men worship the Father; thou thyself art everywhere present to be adored and spoken to, and to receive our thanksgivings because of the multitudinousness of the blessings of thy right hand. May we find thee in the wilderness, and find thee in the city; at midnight do thou speak unto us in whispers, at midday do thou come to us with all the glory of light: wherever we are, whatever our estate or condition, let it please thy condescending love to visit us, and minister unto us, and comfort us with exceeding succour. Thou hast been with us all our lifetime; thou hast left no empty day upon all the record; specially hast thou been with us in the day of trouble; thou didst ask us to come to thee on that dark day and tell thee all about the calamity and the sorrow of our life. Thou didst heal us and comfort us, and in renewed strength thou didst send us back to the vineyard and to the battlefield. We bless thee for thy Son Jesus, who told us all about thee and taught us to call thee Father. From the cradle to the Cross he was always the Christ, the Anointed One, the Bright One, the Centre of Light, the Fountain of Blessing, the Alpha and Omega, beyond whom there is no space, beyond whose duration there is no time. We thank thee for the cradle, for the Cross, for the crown of Christ. In Christ our souls begin their everlasting heaven. The Lord hear us when we cry for pardon, listen to us when we sue for help and added joy, and multiply his blessing upon us in the time of broken-heartedness. Amen.

Chapters vi., vii.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD.

IN the sixth and seventh chapters there are two distinct prophecies, yet both are to be traced to the symbolism detailed so graphically in chapter v. It is supposed that the prophecies in chapters vi., vii. were uttered, not immediately one after the other, but with such intervals of time as to allow each of them to make a distinct impression upon those to whom they were delivered; yet, on the other hand, it has been noted that the interval could

not have been long, on the ground that the eighth chapter bears the date of the sixth month of the sixth year. Blow upon blow the judgment falls; shock after shock of thunder rolls through the heavens, warning and threatening the people as with the audible voice of God. In the seventh chapter the judgment is set forth as coming with startling quickness, and as being utterly inevitable, either by the cry of the heart or by the use of the arm. The people are made to feel that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. In these prophecies there would seem to be enlargement of the object upon which they were to take effect, for they are not denounced against Jerusalem exclusively, but against the whole land, as if not one corner of it should be safe from the bolt of avenging fire. The sixth and seventh chapters may be taken to be almost complete in themselves.

The prophet was commanded to set his face toward the mountains of Israel and to prophesy against them. He personified the mountains and spoke to them as if they were living creatures, and in the same noble rhetoric he addressed the rivers and the valleys. It was not uncommon to speak to inanimate objects as symbolising the people. The mountains may be specially named because they were the seats of the most conspicuous and defiant idolatry. In various portions of the preceding Scriptures we have had testimony borne to this effect. For example: "I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcases upon the carcases of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you." Again we read: "Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar." And once more we come upon the same grim fact: "Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon."*

What wonder, then, that God should look upon these mountains

* Other passages of Scripture will bear out the same thought: Deut. xii. 2; 2 Kings xvii. 10, 11; Jer. ii. 20, iii. 6; Hosea iv. 13.

as representing the supreme iniquity of his people! The prophet is made to speak in the name of God, yea, as if he were God himself incarnate, saying, "Behold, I, even I." This is a strong way of representing the fact that these judgments were not invented by the fancy of the prophet, but were direct communications from God himself, and not the less were they divine in their origin and their purpose that they were worked out as usual by human agency. When the prophet refers to "images," saying, "Your images shall be broken," we are to understand that these figures were used in connection with the worship of the sun. The verse is indeed a repetition of Lev. xxvi. 30. Moses had delivered the prophecy, and Ezekiel takes it up and affirms the nearness of its fulfilment. Great significance is to be attached to the threatening, "And I will cast down your slain men before your idols." The figure is a very graphic one. The idols were no longer to have a living congregation of worshippers, but were to be surrounded as by a cordon of dead men, so that the gods and their worshippers should resemble one another. From Numbers ix. 6-10, and 2 Kings xxiii. 14, 16, we have learned that there was nothing so utterly defiling in the view of the Mosaic law as the touching of a dead body. It would seem as if God were about to execute what is known as poetic justice upon the land; because the Israelites have defiled it with idols, the idols themselves were to be defiled and degraded by the contact of dead bodies, the dead bodies being the carcases of the former worshippers of these very idols. God thus thrusts his justice in the faces of men in forms which they can understand. Sometimes he will take up the method of man and adapt it to his own uses, and thus give the idolater a familiarity with his idol and his idolatry which the idolater himself had never supposed to be possible.

There is no vengeance spoken of in the Bible that is so terrible as the slaying of a man by the word of his own mouth, taking that word, turning it into a spear, and thrusting it into the heart of the man who had once actually employed it as a defensive weapon. God promises that not only shall the images be cut down, but the works of the idolater shall be "abolished." We must not overlook the strength and completeness of the meaning of this word. To be abolished is to be utterly obliterated, sponged

out, taken wholly out of existence, so treated as to leave no trace or token behind. Israel was required to abolish the images and idols of the Canaanites, to so utterly blot them out that no temptation could arise from a stone of the unholy altars that could be found in any part of the land. Not only was idolatry to be condemned or denounced, or spoken of in general terms of contempt; it was to be rooted out, eradicated, utterly, completely, and eternally destroyed. Here Israel failed in duty. Whatever general fulfilment of the prophecy there might be, it was not carried out to the letter, and therefore the very ruins of idolatry became temptations addressed to the men who had overthrown the altars, and became also a kind of plea that the ruin should be repaired and the altars reconstituted.

Amid all this thunder and lightning and terrible tempest of judgment, there was still a promise that a remnant should be left. "Yet will I leave a remnant." For a moment the darkened heavens are somewhat relieved by light shining upon them from an infinite distance, but scarcely has that transient gleam passed over the thunderclouds than they seem to become darker than ever. From the beginning God has kept a remnant to himself. The Apostle Paul remarks strongly upon this fact in his Epistle to the Romans. We cannot understand what is meant by a remnant, except that it indicates that the divine purpose should not be utterly overthrown, and the word of God utterly avoided. What if this allusion has a reference far beyond the local Captivity? What if it should refer to wider and grander themes and prospects? Who can tell what that remnant might do even in heathen countries in the way of maintaining the worship of the true God, and keeping up a testimony in favour of the spoken word?

In the eleventh verse the prophet is commanded to "smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot." This was suiting the action to the word. It is in vain to lay down rules about men using gesture or dramatic action; when the heart is roused, when the whole man is thoroughly informed and inspired by a divine message, the actions will naturally express the great emotion. To clap with the hands and stamp with the feet are actions with

which we are not unfamiliar.* This energy is under moral inspiration. The prophet is not mad; this is not mere fanatical excitement, this is not rhetorical artifice; this is a natural method of expressing the judgment of God. Quietness has its place in all divine ministries, but so has storm and tempest or even violence itself. Do not limit the prophet in his use of methods, in his range of instrumentality; let him be faithful to the inspiration that is in him, because only a ministry that expresses the reality of emotion can be profoundly and lastingly useful.

The seventh chapter is to a large extent a threnody, or song of mourning and lamentation. It is judgment set to music. It loses nothing of solemnity, but rather gains in spiritual effectiveness by its poetic structure. Even in English we feel how majestically the rhythm moves.

"An evil, an only evil, behold, is come. An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come. The morning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land: the time is come, the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains" (vii. 5-7).

This last is a singular word, occurring only in this place. It denotes the joyful sounds of harvesters, who, returning from their gracious toil, fill the land with delightful music of praise. But this harvest-song was to be exchanged for tumult and trouble, suitable to the day of cloud and storm and war. Again, the poetry proceeds:—

"Behold the day, behold, it is come: the morning is gone forth; the rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded. . . . The time is come, the day draweth near; let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn: for wrath is upon all the multitude thereof" (vii. 10, 12).

All business had ceased, all life had been turned into utter desolation. Buying and selling of land was the most important transaction in which the Israelites engaged. Jubilee year was obliterated from the calendar of Israel. The desolation of this judgment was to continue so long that, even if the owner of the land lived, the year of jubilee could bring him no opportunity of selling the land or availing himself of any of the jubilee rights and privileges. Because of the sin of the people, all natural relations

* See Numbers xxiv. 10.

were to be reversed, and even the operation of cause and effect was in a sense to be suspended; for, in the language of St. Jerome, "when slavery and captivity stare you in the face, rejoicing and mourning are equally absurd." Nor were the people to be able to go forth to war; they should be utterly without energy and without disposition to defend themselves: the man who was in the field died of the sword, and he that was in the city was devoured by famine and pestilence; even those who escaped were to be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity. "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove; mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." Strong men were to be bowed down as if knees of iron had been turned to knees of straw. Hands that were once as steel were to fall down in absolute feebleness. The knees of the warrior were to be weak as water, and as for military panoply, it was to be exchanged for sackcloth and horror; every face was to burn with shame, and every head was to be naked with baldness. "In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth."

Taking these two chapters as revealing the character of God, in how awful a light is the divine Being made to appear! How infinite, for example, are his resources of judgment and penalty! Never does he look around him, so to say, that he may find some new instrument or weapon larger and stronger than he has yet at command. In every instance he is more than equal to the iniquity that has to be avenged. He attributes to himself the exercise of every possible action of vengeance and humiliation: "I will bring a sword"; "I will destroy your high places"; "I will cast down your slain men"; "I will lay the dead carcasses"; "I will scatter your bones"; "I will break the whorish heart"; "He that is afar off shall die of the pestilence"; "He that is near shall fall by the sword"; the man who remained was to "die by famine"; and thus, and thus, in every way, God said, "I will accomplish my fury." He said he would stretch out his hand upon the idol-cursed hills and mountains, and green tree and thick oak, and he would make the fair land desolate, yea, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblah.

These are the judgments of the living God! Think of every disease that can afflict the human body; think of every force of nature that can strike human edifices and habitations; think of every trouble that can assail the sanity of the mind; think of every spectre and image that can come along the highway of the darkness and fill night and sleep with mortal fear; think of every appeal that can be addressed to the imagination; think of all possible terror, and loss, and shame, and ruin; multiply all these realities and possibilities by an unrestrained imagination, and even then we have hardly begun to touch the resources of God when he arises to shake terribly the earth and to inflict upon the nations the judgments which they have deserved and defied. Wonderful is the striking frankness of all these declarations on the part of the Most High God. He does not come before his people in an attitude of humiliation or supplication or apology; he tells them in words which are in themselves thunderstorms of the judgments that are immediately impending. There is mercy even in the terribleness of the revelation. An opportunity for repentance was created by the very awfulness of the method of revelation. Had the words been few, had the tone been quiet, had the attitude been apologetic, it would have been possible for the human heart to have doubted even the sincerity of God. The human heart believes in emphasis, in energy, in tremendous modes of utterance and action; it has not yet come to that state of moral rhythm which can accept a whisper as being as sincere as a voice of storm. God, therefore, sends, as it were, a preliminary tempest of words, if haply the people might be made afraid by such a whirlwind, and might at the bidding of such prophecies turn again in repentance and broken-heartedness. This is the meaning of all cross-providences, painful visitations, overwhelming sicknesses, and temporal losses. All these indicate, so far as they are related to the obduracy of the human heart, a still greater punishment to be inflicted in another world. Threatenings are meant to lead to promises. The thunderstorm is sent to avert us from a way that is wrong and to drive us to consideration on account of sin. God does not fulminate merely for the sake of showing his greatness; when he makes us afraid it is that he may bring us to final peace.

Nothing is more evident than that underneath all these denun-

ciations, and in explanation of them, there is a sublime moral reason. These judgments are not exhibitions of omnipotence; they are expressions of a moral emotion on the part of God. The people had departed from him—they had done everything in their power to insult his majesty and to call into question his holiness and his justice; they had worshipped false gods; they had been faithful to forbidden altars; they had made a study of profanity and blasphemy; they had defied Heaven in all their abominations; and not until the cup of their iniquity was full did the last beam of light vanish from the skies, and the whole heaven become darkened with thunderclouds. It is not for a little evil, so to speak, that God turns away from his people; it is for evil upon evil, for iniquity continued through days and nights, for offence piled upon offence, until the very sunlight is shut out: then, not till then, does God awaken to execute his terrible judgments, and to pledge his word that it shall go sadly with the wicked in the day when the Lord comes to judge the earth. Nor was he judging the wicked as that term is generally understood. God is gentle towards the heathen who have not known him, as compared with his action towards those who, having known him and received his covenants, have turned away from him in a spirit of rebellion and thanklessness, and have prostituted the knowledge of the true God to the service of vain idols. When judgment begins at the house of God, it burns with infinite indignation; there are no mitigating circumstances, there are no palliations whatsoever; the judgment is inflicted upon men who knew the right and yet pursued the wrong, who were entrusted with the custody of the truth, and yet threw it down and went with eagerness to the altar of falsehood that they might worship and obey a lie. How terrible, then, must be our judgment when God comes to visit us! What have we not known? With what treasures have we not been entrusted? We have seen the Son of God, we have watched him die upon the Cross, we have heard his welcomes to pardon, to purity, to peace; if we have despised the blood of the everlasting covenant, and accounted it an unworthy or unholy thing, who shall speak for us when God comes to demand an account of our ways?

In the seventh chapter, as we have seen, judgment is turned to

song. Is not this but another aspect of the truth we have been endeavouring to set forth? God employs every method that he may attract human attention, and win men to consideration and lure them through consideration to repentance and obedience. In this instance we have not religion degraded to art; we have art raised to religion. When men take to singing the judgments of God and the promises of Heaven and the vows and oaths of divine love, they may be but degrading the highest truths to merely artistic and commercial purposes. It is, indeed, a serious question whether any artist is not blaspheming when he sings in song, of which he has made a careful study as an art, the agony and the love of Christ. It is no wonder that when the sorrows of Gethsemane are imitated vocally or instrumentally some hearts should be shocked and wounded. On the other hand, there are times when by sudden and indisputable inspiration a man may employ every art known to human genius and custom for the purpose of carrying home divine truths to obdurate or uninstructed hearts and minds. No rule can be laid down. This kind of inspiration does not come forth at special times that can be defined or forecast: in this, as in other instances, at what hour the Son of Man cometh no man can tell; but when he does come there can be no doubt of his identity or of his power, by reason of the high, noble, unselfish excitement to which the heart yields itself with enthusiasm and thankfulness. The judgments which Ezekiel was charged to denounce began in symbol, but they ended in reality. The symbol might be treated as representing a more or less insane excitement. It would be easy for those who were wishful to avoid the judgments to credit Ezekiel with fanaticism or uncontrollable excitement, altogether destitute of moral dignity or spiritual purpose. We have seen, however, how the symbol became a reality, and how the reality transcended all that was suggested by the type. It is thus in all the providence of God. Rightly interpreted, every event in life is symbolical of the larger life that is to come. What we want is the seeing eye; what we should pray for is the hearing ear; for verily we are not left without instruction if we could correctly interpret all that is occurring in our lives day by day.

Then came the last great judgment of all: not when the heathen

possessed the houses of the Israelites, not when the pomp of the strong ceased, not when mischief came upon mischief and rumour upon rumour; these judgments were heavy enough, but there was a greater judgment still—"Then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients." The prophets, the priests, and the elders were all to wander in a state of blindness. The spiritual element was taken out of human life, and consequently human life was reduced to poverty, darkness, and ruin. We do not value the prophet; we smile at his predictions, as we should smile at the expressions of fanaticism; but not until we have lost him shall we know how large a space he filled in human life. We have seen Saul when he was left without the presence of a spiritual ministry, we have watched him trying to reunite himself with spiritual actions; we have seen the desperateness of his mood, the utter despair which settled upon his once luminous and forceful mind. Pitiably is the figure which is brought before our vision—men seeking the spiritual, men inquiring for the prophet, men crying out for Samuel, men praying that they may be enabled to pray; yet every cry returning to the suppliant without an answer, and every expectation falling back upon its author only to increase his sense of mortification and loss. The end of all is—"The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people of the land shall be troubled." Again we ask the question, Was this arbitrary? Was this a mere trick of the higher powers? Was this but a theatrical display of the forces of Omnipotence? To these inquiries there is a plain, solemn, sufficient answer: "I will do it unto them after their way, and according to their deserts will I judge them." Thus is the answer within the man himself, and thus, without awaiting for any formal day of assize and judgment, every man may now determine his relation to the Almighty, and through that his relation to all the punishment which lies within the ability of God.

Chapters viii., ix.

CHAMBERS OF IMAGERY.

WITH the eighth chapter we begin a new series of prophecies, occupying eleven or twelve chapters. Before the prophet commences what may be termed his moral ministry he always passes through an experience of ecstasy or rapture, in which he sees manifold and most perplexing visions. We can only guard ourselves from what would amount to a profanation of these visions by reminding ourselves constantly that we really have no power of literally interpreting them. We have to do with the application and not with the mystery. This is the course which the prophet himself took; hence the folly of any subsequent reader attempting to find meanings where Ezekiel himself was bewildered. Visions are useless unless they lead to some moral point. We cannot understand the vision, therefore we must go to the moral application of it in order to see its utility. Why not adopt this principle of interpretation in all cases? Why should we be so fascinated with the mystery as to let the moral purpose wholly escape us? Yet this is what men do in the matter of all the higher doctrines of the Christian faith. They trouble themselves about predestination, election, foreknowledge, divine decrees, instead of attending to the plain and simple duty which lies immediately to hand. In all interpretation we must begin where we can. Happily, we can all begin at the point of duty and sacrifice, at the point of patience and unselfishness, at the point of prayer and hope. Ezekiel is transported in vision to Jerusalem, and to the temple itself, where he sees the infamous idolatries invented and practised by degenerate Israel. Afterwards he sees the judgment whereby all who have not received the mark of God upon their foreheads are to be destroyed. A wonderful procession of events passes before his vision: the city itself is

given over to fire. The glory of the Lord lifts itself from the temple, and flies away like a wounded and dishonoured angel. Eventually the glory of the Lord leaves not only the temple but abandons the city, so that Jerusalem, once the thing of beauty, and the very delight of Heaven, becomes deserted and desolate, black because of the visitations of divine judgment.

What is thus seen in symbol is seen every day in reality. Men who have been unfaithful to their trust have been similarly abandoned by God, so that the divine name might be no longer compromised by their worldliness and depravity. The spirit of the Lord lifts itself up, so to say, outstretches its mighty wings, and flies away to heaven, leaving the man who has grieved and insulted it to feel how dark is the universe when God has withdrawn his glory from it. Terrible was the state of Israel at the time of this vision. Ezekiel was a priest and a prophet, held in high esteem by his fellow-captives. From the first verse it would appear that Ezekiel was a private householder. By "Judah" we are not to understand a term used in contradistinction to Israel; the captives were mainly of the tribe of Judah, so their elders were known by the name of the tribe. The vision which appears in the second verse is not a revival of any former vision. Though we are not told that this was a human vision, or in any sense what we understand as an incarnation, yet there are terms in the description of it which might lead to that conclusion. Always it is made evident that a struggle is proceeding in Biblical history towards the miracle of incarnation. The angel would be as a man; cherubim and seraphim come before us in human outlines; yea, God himself is not afraid to reveal his glory to us under human forms and symbols. In all this there must be a meaning, to be interpreted by subsequent history. What is the signification of this perpetual attempt to show us something we have not yet seen? What is the meaning of those presences and ministries that come before the imagination as if they would come farther if they could, or as if they were only waiting for the fulfilment of a definite period of time? Nothing of mere fancy is found in the interpretation that all these initial intimations, struggles, visions, point to One whose name was to be Emmanuel—God with us. In the fulness of time God sent forth

his Son. In Christ Jesus we see the meaning of all these premonitions, hints, dim yet exciting suggestions.

When Ezekiel is taken, in the third verse, by a lock of his hair and lifted up between the earth and the heaven, we are of course to understand that this was done, not literally, but in vision. The prophet did not actually leave Chaldæa at all. Here is what we have often seen as the power of being absent, yet present; in an immediate locality, yet far away beyond the horizon; in Jerusalem, and yet at the ends of the earth; in the midst of the sea, and yet beyond the stars. Here is a counterpart of the action which has just been described. Whilst spirits are continually struggling to assume human shape, men are continually aspiring towards some new condition of being and service. There is a continual process of descent and ascent in the whole economy of God. Angels would come down and tabernacle with men, yea, would be as men in the mystery of their humanity; men on their part aspire to be as angels, to read the deeper mysteries, to see the upper light, and to roam with infinitely enlarged liberty through all the spaces that are on high. Such double action is full of moral suggestion, and should certainly ennoble us with a feeling that as yet we know little or nothing of the possibilities of our own nature, but that a great revelation of God's purpose in our existence is yet to be made.

In the same verse there is a singular expression—"where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy." The best commentators do not consider "jealousy" as a proper name—that is, the name of any particular heathen divinity; they accept it rather as a descriptive name, referring to an image which arouses the divine indignation. It has even been taken as generic in its signification, representing the whole spirit and genius of the idolatry into which Israel had fallen. It has been supposed that at this time heathen idols had actually found a place in the holy temple, and this is supposed to present the most vivid and appalling proof of the corruption into which the priests and the people had fallen. Since the time of Solomon idolatry had been extending itself with awful aggressiveness. It seemed, indeed, as if nothing would be kept holy or preserved from the ravages of this new

spirit. Ahaz had placed an idolatrous altar in the temple itself, and had even made room for its reception by removing the brazen altar. In after years Manasseh repeated this inconceivably grievous offence. In long succession wicked men ascended the throne of Judah; with the one exception of Josiah, it would seem as if the throne of Judah had been occupied for a long succession of years by men whose delight it was to rebel against the God of heaven. Is the meaning of the fourth verse that for the last time there was an evident struggle as between the image of jealousy and the glory of the God of Israel? It has been suggested that we are not to understand by this "glory" the glory of the Lord which once filled the temple, but the particular glory which was seen in the vision shown to Ezekiel in the plain, a vision within a vision, a dim light in a far-off horizon, not the old glory which burned with infinite brightness, but another glory as of one preparing to vanish in judgment from the temple and the city. Notice the expression, "The God of Israel," for it is emphatic, and points to the God who had loved and elected Israel, enriching that people with innumerable signs and tokens of special regard; the God whom Israel should have served with daily constancy; a God set in contrast to the miserable and worthless idol which had been placed in his own temple.

It is interesting to notice that we have in all these descriptions, not the view which Ezekiel took of the condition of Israel,—we have the condition of Israel as it revealed itself to the divine eyes. Had Ezekiel been the reporter as well as the prophet,—in other words, had we been dependent upon Ezekiel for an estimate of the moral condition of Israel,—we might have supposed that his estimate was affected by prejudice, or temper, or personal resentment on account of neglect and slight; but we have the Divine Being himself revealing to Ezekiel a moral condition for which even the prophetic imagination was not prepared. It is essential to all true and lasting ministry that it should proceed upon God's own estimate of human nature. We are not left to form our own fancies regarding human origin, or human apostasy, or human capability: in this as in all other things we have to trust to a revelation which has been made to us, a revelation which would be the less valuable if it were not confirmed at

every point by our own painful experience. Ezekiel is plainly told that he is sent to a rebellious people, and the word rebellious is not chosen by himself, but chosen by the Lord whose prophet he is. We should not forget the sacred and gracious fact that, notwithstanding the rebelliousness of the house of Israel, one of their own number was sent to pronounce divine judgment and to reveal divine purpose. In what contrast did Ezekiel stand to his own countrymen! How was it possible that the many could have sunk into so desperate an apostasy, and the one should have preserved, as it were, his garments unspotted from the world? Here is a mystery in human development; here indeed is a mystery which would excite our incredulity but that it coincides so entirely with our experience. God has never left himself without an Elijah, or an Ezekiel, or some other prophet, or suppliant, that has proved the continuity of divine providence and the continuity of divine grace.

Ezekiel was to be astounded by revelations which he never could have discovered by himself. The mighty Being under whose conduct he was placed brought him to the door of the court, and when he looked he beheld a hole in the wall. This hole or window was too small for entrance, hence Ezekiel was directed to enlarge it so that he might enter in—"Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door." All this is indicative of extreme secrecy, as if the men would have hidden themselves from the very God of heaven, as if they would have had a hole all their own, unpenetrated by divine inspection. We are to remember still that all this was seen in vision, yet the vision itself was true to the fact, giving but ideality to the most shocking and revolting actuality. What did the prophet see when he went into the hidden place? The answer is explicit: "I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about." This shows how deep was the Egyptian taint in the moral nature of Israel. Creature-worship was not indeed confined to Egypt, yet the whole tableau is so completely Egyptian that the greatest scholars have had no difficulty in considering that the origin of these portraiture is settled. During this period old Jeremiah

was contending strenuously against the desire of many to enter into an alliance with Egypt against Chaldæa. Those Jews who were most anxious about an Egyptian alliance were most widely known as rebelling against the divine commandments. A very singular image is represented by the eleventh verse: "And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up." The seventy elders were not the Sanhedrim, for, as has been pointed out, that body was not constituted until after the return of the captives from Babylon: it is supposed, therefore, that the number has reference to the seventy referred to in Exod. xxiv. 9, 10, and the other seventy referred to in Numb. xi. 16. These two seventies were selected for the purpose of enjoying special nearness to God, but the seventy referred to in the text seem to have been princes of iniquity, thoroughly skilled and trained in the use of all the abominations which were most abhorrent to the God of Israel. Ezekiel saw that every man had his censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up. We have seen (Numb. xvi. and 2 Chron. xxvi. 16-18) that the burning of the incense was the exclusive function of the priesthood. By offering incense to their idols the seventy elders claimed to be the priests of those idols. How men can delude themselves! how the most gifted teachers can yield their minds to the most obvious infatuations! It was worth while putting on record all these deviations from the right road simply to trace the whole history of human nature in its unity. From the beginning human nature has been given to apostasy, to self-worship, and to all manner of disobedience. Wickedness is no modern invention. Iniquity has not come upon us as the result of our civilisation. From the beginning every feature was lurid in its vividness, was appalling in the striking resemblance which it bore to the discoveries of our own consciousness. All that was done by rebellious Israel was done "in the dark." By the "dark" we are to understand that the idolatry was performed in secret. There was an open and public idolatry in Jerusalem at this very time, but such is the downward tendency of all evil that it was not sufficient to have a public and an almost established idolatry, but something further

should be done in darkness and concealment. Stolen waters are sweet. Man cannot have enough of evil. He always invents another sweetness, another luxury, another delight in the service of his evil master. When wickedness can be enjoyed in public it ceases to be an enjoyment. It would appear as if the darkness were necessary to bring out the full savour of a bad man's delight.

By "chambers of imagery" understand chambers painted throughout with images such as Ezekiel saw. We are not to understand that this was a solitary instance, we are to accept it rather as indicative of the general condition and worship of the idolatrous people. What was done in this one particular chamber was done in every other chamber, and had become indeed the new method in which Israel served the devil. Conscience had been driven away from the rule of human life. The people who were once the very elect of God said in their wickedness, "The Lord seeth us not": we have found a refuge from his eye, and here we may do what we please in the gratification of our worst desires. Is this merely a historical instance? Is there no desire now to plunge into an impenetrable concealment? Is it not true now that in many enjoyments the whole delight is to be found in the secrecy of their participation? A man can hide himself from his fellow-man in this matter, and can in the very act of prayer place himself within chambers of imagery, and delight himself with visions which no eye but his own can see. What is meant by "There sat women weeping for Tammuz" we cannot now certainly say. Tammuz is nowhere else mentioned in Scripture, but learned men have discovered that in ancient tradition it is a term identified with the Greek Adonis, the beloved of Venus. "The annual feast of Adonis consisted of a mourning by the women over his death, followed by a rejoicing over his return to life, and was accompanied by great abominations and licentiousness." From 2 Kings xxiii. 7 we infer that women were engaged in the service of idolatry near the temple itself. The painful part of all this revelation consists in the fact that the idolatry was perpetrated within the sacred enclosure of the temple. This was not something done at a distance, in some far-away grove, in some spot which but few had ever penetrated; it was actually done in

the temple, in the sacred building, on the consecrated floor, and the altar itself was dragged into the unholy and disastrous service. How are the high places made low ! How are the mighty fallen ! A decay of veneration is a decay of the whole character. Once let us feel that all places are equally common, and the level of our whole life will go down with that conclusion. For this reason it has pleased God to set up for himself a token in the succession of the days, so that we say of one particular day, " This is the day which the Lord hath made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it " : it has pleased God to claim a certain part of the produce of the earth ; it has pleased God to ask for a certain portion of the wealth which we have earned : so long as we maintain the reality of these claims, and respond to them with the willingness of love, we save our life from its worst degradation ; once let us give up our idea of sacred time, or any divine claim upon the produce of the earth or the earnings of industry, and we not only surrender these particular instances, but we surrender all the tract and area of life and time to which they belong. Superstition is better than atheism. The worship of the sun is better than the utter denial of God.

In the seventeenth verse there is another peculiar expression which cannot be explained—" And, lo, they put the branch to their nose." Learning and ingenuity have failed to discover the precise meaning of these words. It is allowed that it must be an allusion to some custom familiar to the people, but now utterly lost. The Pharisees had a habit of holding twigs of the tamarisk, palm, and the pomegranate before their mouths. These habits and customs really have but little interest for us, seeing that there remains the fact, of ever-enduring interest and signification, that men may turn from the living God to dead idols. Now the Lord stands up in the terribleness of his wrath ; out of his nostrils there proceed, as it were, fire and brimstone and a great anger. He says he will delight in fury, his eye shall not spare, and he will have no pity, and though the people cry in his ears with a loud voice, yet he will not hear them. How unfamiliar are these exclamations to us ! How little of accord is there between them and the quiet tenor of divine providence as seen in daily life. The words are such as could hardly have been invented by the human imagina-

tion. Who would ascribe fury to the Lord, and an unsparing eye to him who made all tender and beautiful things? Who would venture to suppose that pity would be a stranger to him whose mercy is over all his works? How incredible the miracle that it should ever come to pass that the God and Father of men should be deaf to prayer and regardless of human entreaty! Yet here is the statement in plainest terms. Nor is it a statement in a book only; it is the saddest fact in human consciousness. Every bad man knows what is meant by a withdrawal from the universe of all holy ministries, all tender pities, all yearning solicitudes, so that there is nothing left but an infinite void, a great resounding emptiness within which we cry without an answer, and supplicate without any recognition from on high. Attribute as much of this as we may to Hebrew poetry, and to the redundancy of the Hebrew language, man has only to go within his own consciousness to know that there is a fact higher than the poetry, a bitter experience untouched by the sublimest rhetoric, by the noblest and most copious eloquence.

In the ninth chapter there is a vivid and instructive figure—"Cause them that have charge over the city" (ver. 1). By these we should naturally understand the magistrates, the judges, or the constabulary. Yet no such reference is intended by the command. There is no allusion to earthly officers. Those who had charge over the cities were spirits, angels, chosen ones of God. No doubt the same word is used of human officers, but such officers are utterly excluded by all that gives speciality to the vision of Ezekiel. We might suppose from the words "every man" that human officers were intended, but we have had experience to the contrary.* The representation here, therefore, is evidently that angelic executioners were awaiting the order to carry out the wrath of God. Are they not all ministering spirits? Are we not in charge of guardian angels? A noble yet most solemn thought is it that every city has its band of watchers, and that every man has near him the angel of the Lord, bringing blessing or inflicting judgment, or training the life in all the mystery of progress. We cannot understand these things, but

* See Gen. xviii. 1, 2; Josh. v. 13; Judg. xii. 11.

we should be infinitely poorer if we excluded them from our thought and confidence and imagination. How little we see! We know not that the whole air is full of spirits, and that every breath we draw is a special gift of God, watched over as if we were the solitary trustees of Heaven's richest benefactions. Anything that impoverishes our lives, that takes out of them such solemnising and uplifting thoughts as these, is verily a foe to our best education. At the same time we must watch against the superstitious degradation of these thoughts, lest we fall into the patronage of wizardry and enchantment, witchcraft and incantation: we have nothing to do with any attempt to incarnate these spiritual watchers, we must accept their ministry as an assured fact, and, asking no questions, must believe that if we are pure, docile, and obedient, God will not withhold the communication of his secret from us.

What was meant by the six men coming from the way of the higher gate, what was meant by the one man clothed with linen carrying a writer's inkhorn by his side, we need not inquire: it is enough for us to know that God has agents other than ourselves, scribes that do not write with our ink, registrars that are following the course of human life, and are writing in the books that are on high. An awful passage is this:—

“And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women” (ix. 4-6).

This is not the God with whose lovingkindness we have been familiar! So should we say in our ignorance, and yet we owe the very lovingkindness of God to the fact that such anger is possible: apart from the exercise of such indignation the lovingkindness would be simply sentiment; but seeing that the wrath of God can be so terrible, we find in his lovingkindness a counterpart of that dire extremity. A singular suggestion is that that the eye of the executioner might spare where God's own eye had failed to shed a tear: it would seem as if the executioners would be more pitiful than their Lord: were this

so it could only be because they could descry only a partial aspect of the awful case. He who could see all had no hesitation in giving the commandment for an utter extermination of the rebels. Ezekiel himself broke down when the fearful vision passed before him. Whilst the slaughter was proceeding, he fell upon his "face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord God! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem?" This was very human, but this was profoundly sentimental. Ezekiel saw little more than the merely physical suffering of the people; he could not grasp the full majesty of eternal law. The Lord gave the reason in words which cover the whole of the sad occasion:—

"The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not. And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head" (ix. 9, 10).

Observe, it was their way. Notice in particular that this is not an arbitrary act on the part of God. This is a Lord of measurement, of proportion, who adapts means to ends, who does not act indiscriminately and ruthlessly; a God who holds in his hands the balances of righteousness and judgment, and who gives to every man according to his deeds. The Lord himself is always careful to maintain this fact. Whatever we have seen of the terribleness of divine judgment has been matched by the terribleness of human sin. We may not see it; we may look upon the divine judgment as an exaggeration; but surely those who have studied the divine way are prepared to believe that God does nothing in excess, that in reality, if we could see things as he sees them, it would be almost impossible for judgment to be co-ordinate with sin. So terrible a thing is iniquity! so fearful a reality is a stain upon the robe of ineffable holiness! We cannot tell how awful a thing this is. We must take it on the authority of revelation that sin is the abominable thing which God hates, that it is an insult, a wound, a shame, a degradation which can never be explained in words. Hell itself can hardly enlarge its borders so as to take in all the tremendous issues of sin.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, help us to keep our foot when we enter into the house. Say unto us, The place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Yet hast thou made room at the altar for penitence and broken-heartedness. They have nothing to fear from the judgment of God; thou dost welcome such, and offer pardon upon pardon in wavelike abundance. We are sinners before God; we therefore pray thee have mercy upon us; drive us not away because of our unholiness. We have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done: God be merciful unto us sinners! Is there not mercy in the Cross? Are there not pardons upon Calvary? Doth not the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanse from all sin? Did he not die the just for the unjust? We come in the name of Christ, we stand in the sanctuary of the love of Christ; we are sure that, being in Christ, we shall not be turned empty or unforgiven away. Thou knowest our life, a dawning cloud; thou knowest our experience, a daily need and a daily pain; thou knowest our best desires, they are thine own creation, therefore wilt thou answer our petitions. Come and save us, come and help us, come and abide with us, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Our days are few; may we spend them all for Christ. We know not when our life may end—may we be ready for its close by being ready for its duties. Give us masculine strength, efficient power, great energy, and dominance of will in things that are heavenly and in things that are beneficent: thus may our life go from us day by day, and the last shall be as a gate folding back upon immortality. Pity us when we are very weak; sanctify our strength lest it become riotousness; chasten us, that all our energies may be acceptable sacrifices. Bless the old man with such hopefulness that he shall forget his days in his dawning youthhood coming to him from the heavenly heights. Bless the busy man lest he should prove to be a fool at last, saving up that which must be burned, and leaving that which may be ill-spent. Bless the little child—may angels rock its cradle, may Christ be its earliest friend. Be with the sick and the weary and the sore of heart; send such help from the sanctuary, and strength out of Zion. Give us alway to feel how great the earth is, because it is part of the great universe. Amen.

Chapter x.

CONCERNING THE CHERUBIMS.

THIS chapter is a varied representation of the vision disclosed in the first chapter; including, indeed, two new points, but still practically being the first vision as contemplated from another

point of view. The two chapters may be regarded as in a sense binocular: looking through both of them we seem to see the real vision, so far as human sense can apprehend it. What is this variety of the same vision but a repetition of what occurs constantly in human life? Is it not always the same things that we look at? Are there in reality two things to be observed? Is it the object that changes, or the point of view? Is it the revelation or the atmosphere that undergoes modification? Is the landscape the same on cloudy days as in the full tide of summer sunshine? Yet the land abides; the trees, the towns, the gardens, the rivers are all the same, yet not the same by reason of the varying light which plays upon them, giving distinctness and shadow, new accent and proportion, according to a mysterious operation not yet fully comprehended. It is the same with theology, or with theological thoughts, such as God, Man, Salvation, Destiny: there is a central quantity which abides the same and unchangeable, and yet in all practical effect that central quantity seems to be continually changing; what we have to accept is the doctrine that it is not the central quantity that changes, but the conditions, the atmospheric density, the degree of light, and innumerable other circumstances which constitute the medium through which all our observations are taken. What is to-day but a repetition of yesterday? To-day has of course brought its own light, its own temperature, its own immediate appeals; yet the two days are not dissimilar, they are indeed continuous; in very truth they are the same day, though we have divided them with a black line which we call night. What is this summer but a repetition of the summer of last year? Yet this summer has its own flowers and fruits, its own birds, its own aspect of glory; still there is but one summer in all time,—a day of warmth and beauty and tenderness, a day of revelation and mystery and fructification, a day which seems to shadow forth somewhat of the brightness and meaning of eternity. So with all beauty, so with all childhood, so with everything that grows. The difference is in the external, not in the internal; in the outward and visible leaf, not in the inward and invisible root. This is the very glory of providence; in it there is no monotony or mere repetition or tediousness; the providential sovereignty abides, but all the events through which it expresses itself continually change their

light, their shadow, their agony, their tragedy. He therefore who studies providence studies a book that is always the same, yet never the same. The student of providence never wearies. He sees differences that are minute, but being microscopic are not the less important. We lose much by studying only great broad lines of historical movement: he is the truest historian who can lead us to see the finest lines of human thought, purpose, and action, and who afterwards can combine these into massive philosophies and laws.

Ezekiel saw a "sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne." So in all the world's tumult, revolution, and tempestuous politics and wars, we ought to be able to see over and above the whole the outline of a throne. The meaning is that the misrule, the fury, the rush of elements, is far below the point of sovereignty, and is under the continual vigilance and rule of a supreme Power. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." So early as the Book of Exodus we were made aware of a rulership enthroned in glory: "They saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness." Yet the prophet is very careful in his statement, not speaking as one who had seen the fulness of the glory or the vastness of the magnitude of the throne; he speaks of "the appearance of the likeness of a throne,"—that is to say, it was an outline, a shadow, a hint, something projected by an object infinitely greater than itself, a shadow that might have come down from infinite heights. It is thus that we see God in nature, in providence, and in all human life—"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him"; "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." It is given to the spiritually minded to see these outlines of sovereignty. Not always do they come upon the vision as distinct images, but the events themselves are actually shaped as into the outline of a throne; the events are from one point of view sundered and scattered and unrelated, yet as time elapses they are brought together by an invisible hand, and set up in expressive unity, so clearly indeed that the only image which will represent their new relation is the image of a throne

filled with majesty. Blessed be God, this throne is not always to be a distant and dazzling object; there is a way by which men may share the glory and security of that throne—"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with my Father in his throne." Are we not all called to rulership? Are not the saints to judge the world? Is not all our toil, if rightly accepted and sanctified, to end in glory, honour, and immortality? These are questions which should cheer the heart amid all the rush of events, the turmoil of history, the tempest and fury of revolution.

In the second verse we have one new point varying the chapter from the opening vision:—

"And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city."

Jerusalem was to be burned by the Chaldæans. That the event did not take place immediately is not a circumstance that can be cited as against the prophecy, it is rather an incident confirmatory of the seership of Ezekiel. Jerusalem was not burned until four or five years after this vision. What a time the Jews had to revel in! How deeply they drank, and how loudly they mocked and gibed, when the prophecy was referred to; how they turned the very prophecy itself into an element of mutual congratulation; and how eagerly they trampled upon the very name of the prophet, as if to show alike their contempt and their defiance! "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Thus the patience of God is misunderstood, perverted, and turned into an agent by which iniquity strengthens itself. How evil is that heart that can nourish its own wickedness, as it were, upon the very attributes of God! We turn the goodness of Heaven into a reason for continuing our impenitence. We mistake patience for approbation. We practically say, If God hated evil with all the intensity of hatred often declared of him, he would not tolerate it for one hour, but would instantly consume it with fire and brimstone. Such, indeed, would be the course of our ignorance, or short-sightedness: we do not recognise the great doctrine that the sinner is greater than the sin; nothing

that man can do can ever be equal to the sum-total of God's purpose in the creation of man. Regard man as merely mortal, a mere animal, capable of cultivation and capable of self-enjoyment, and punishment could easily be meted out in due proportion to his sin: dogs can be whipped sufficiently; even children can be made to suffer adequately for disobedience: but who can measure the penalty due to a man's intentional crime? That crime is not a single act without relation to other acts and issues; that crime is a prostitution of the whole nature, an uncrowning of the sovereignty of manhood, and a handing over of all that is meant by human nature to the service of the devil. Man is not condemned simply for single acts, for hasty words, for unreflected excitements; when man sins he sins altogether, wholly and absolutely, with the united stress of his complete and complex nature; herein is that saying true, he that breaks one of the least of God's commandments breaks the whole economy of the law. This is the peculiarity of manhood. When manhood sins all heaven is distressed because of the magnitude of the offence. Yet though time elapsed before the judgment culminated, the judgment itself was written, and no human hand could obliterate it. It is even so now. The judgment of the Lord is gone forth against all manner of wickedness, and no reasoning, however ingenious and specious, can mitigate the force of the divine decree. Summer days may lie between us and the execution of God's purpose; days of delight, nights of intoxication, periods of great prosperity and success of every kind; so much so that we may say, God hath not seen, and God hath delayed his coming, and God hath changed his mind, and now he begins to look kindly upon our wickedness as the mere mistake of a moment; but suddenly the Son of Man cometh, and all hell opens to receive those who are ripe for its burning garners.

A wonderful thing it is that fire burns and does not burn! Here is a man clothed with linen who goes in between the wheels, and fills his very hand with coals of fire: they do not burn him; he handles them with impunity; and yet when he scatters them over the city the whole metropolis burns to destruction. The elements are one thing in the hand of their Creator, and another when thrown in an act of judgment upon creation.

The gospel is either a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death ; fire either becomes a summer to warm, or a conflagration to destroy ; fire is either servant or master—as servant, a friend ; as master, a destroyer. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

In the twelfth verse we read concerning the cherubims that “their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had.” Here is an image of vigilance. God has been called “All eye.” This is the terrible pain of living, that there is no privacy, no solitude, no possibility of a man getting absolutely with himself and by himself. Wherever we are we are in public. We can indeed exclude the vulgar public, the common herd, the thoughtless multitude ; a plain deal door can shut out that kind of world : but what can shut out the beings who do the will of Heaven, and who are full of eyes, their very chariot wheels being luminous with eyes, everything round about them looking at us critically, penetratingly, judicially ? We live unwisely when we suppose that we are not being superintended, observed, criticised, and judged. “Thou God seest me” ; “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth.” What Ezekiel saw in vision John also saw : “In the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. . . . And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him ; and they were full of eyes within.” All this must be taken as symbolic of vigilance and criticism. We need not regard this aspect of divine providence as alarming. The aspect will be to us what we are to it. Faithful servants are encouraged by the remembrance of the fact that the taskmaster’s eye is upon them ; unfaithful servants will regard the action of that eye as a judgment. Thus God is to us what we are to God. If we are humble, he is gracious ; if we are froward, he is haughty ; if we are sinful, he is angry ; if we are prayerful, he is condescending and sympathetic. Let the wicked man tremble when he hears that the whole horizon is starred with gleaming eyes that are looking him through and through ; but let the good man rejoice that all heaven is one eye looking upon him with complacency, watching all his action that it may come to joy, reward, rest, and

higher power of service in the generations yet to dawn. Whilst on the one hand we have an image of vigilance, we have in the fourteenth verse an image of manifoldness: "Every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle."

We have read that one face was like the face of an ox. It has been suggested that in the Syriac tongue the word "cherub" is derived from a word which signifies drawing the plough, which was considered the proper work of the ox. All these, however, may be but fanciful interpretations. The great doctrine is that the providence of God is manifold, and the ministry of God is also manifold, and that his Church should not have one aspect but many, looking in all directions, typifying all states of life and emotion, and providing for all the varying necessities of life and time and progress. The first face was that of a cherub, expressive of knowledge, wisdom, largeness of mind, omniscience; the second face was the face of a man, expressive of brotherhood, sympathy, relationship, so that the face could be approached, and all the powers and elements which it typified could be implored, reasoned with, appealed to; the third was the face of a lion, expressive of courage, determination, aggressiveness, strength; the fourth was the face of an eagle, expressive of loftiness, fearlessness, enterprise, holy ambition. This is to be the image of the Church. It is to know, to sympathise, to express strength, and to represent invincible determination and magnificent enterprise.

Now the prophet realises the vision in its inter-relations:—

"When the cherubims went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubims lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them. When they stood, these stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also: for the spirit of the living creature was in them" (vers. 16, 17).

The inspiration was common; all forces, actions, ministries, are after all in the hands of one sovereign. If the universe is an infinite machine, part is related to part with infinite skill, and the weight of the whole is as nothing, because of the ease with which

the entire body moves: we have the action of wheels, representing smoothness; the action of wings, representing swiftness; combined action, representing unity; and the whole moving with such regularity, spontaneity, and completeness as to represent a living creature. Wheels move, wings fly, place is changed, yet it is possible amid all this mutability to realise the blessedness of permanence. The living creature is greater than the machine which he moves; that living creature we do not see, but we are sure of his presence because of the action which is patent to our vision.

The second new point is in the abandonment of the temple, related in verses 18, 19:—

“Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above.”

A fearful picture is this when looked at in the light of its spiritual significance. The sun may be darkened, the moon may be turned into blood, the stable earth may be shaken and blown about like a withered leaf: say not to-morrow shall be as this day and more abundant, because we hold all our privileges conditionally; the very glory of the Lord may be ashamed of the Lord's house, and may flee from it as from a polluted body. The cherubim do not rest with us because of our being necessary to their happiness; they only abide with us because of the good we are willing to receive from them: we do not honour God; God honours us. When did the Lord so communicate himself to any being as to deprive himself of any part of his sovereignty? God has not given anything that he cannot take away again. The gifts and calling of God are undoubtedly without repentance, so long as we receive and appropriate them with willing hands and grateful hearts; but he will not suffer his gifts to die with our death, or to remain with us when we have forsaken him, merely for the sake of preserving his literal word. Understand clearly, deeply, and once for all, that God only gives us life that we may live; he only gives us honour that we may reflect it, and use it for the good of others; he only causes his light to abide with us so long

as it can be made useful to our own education and to the assistance and comfort of others. When the Church is unfaithful, God will abandon her altars. No matter how glorious the house we have built for him, if our lives be not more glorious still we may write "Ichabod" upon the temple doors, for the Lord hath fled away from us. No man can guarantee the continuity of his own genius. We have no unchangeable hold on our own life; what we have we have conditionally, we hold as trustees, and only as we are faithful can we rely upon the continued custody of the divinest blessings. Genius may fade, riches may flee, health may decay, and all outward things may become to us as the image of so many reproaches and rebukes, and even life itself may wither and die. This power of withdrawal on the part of God is a power we may not have sufficiently considered. We awake in the morning and expect to find everything as it was yesterday, when, lo! God may have visited us in the night-time, and taken away from us everything that made life a blessing and a hope. God never does this arbitrarily; when this is done there is a great moral reason below it and behind it: God acts by certain well-declared and unchangeable laws, every one of which we can read for ourselves; and we well know that obedience leads to blessedness, and disobedience leads to unrest and self-contempt. How unwilling is God to withdraw from his house! How loath he is to lift himself up from any mind that he may abandon that mind to its own devices, which hasten it swiftly to destruction! God lingers with us, communes with us, intercedes with us, asks us, Why will ye die? How good he is, and tender; how patient and longsuffering! What is the meaning of all this? Can our poor life be of consequence to him? Yes; he holds every one of us as of great value. He has made nothing that is insignificant; he looks upon each life as necessary to the completeness of his kingdom, and the fulness of his music. When one of us goes astray the Lord comes after the lost one with a shepherd's tender care. Hear the word of the Lord—so grand, so pathetic, so tearful: "Turn ye, turn ye! why will ye die?" "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." On the other hand, remember this solemn word, that the glory of the Lord may lift up itself and flee away, and leave poor human, sinful, impenitent life to enter into the mystery of judgment and penalty.

Chapter xi.

PROPHETIC MALEDICTION.

A REMARKABLE characteristic of this chapter is that it gives the vision from an unexpected and totally different point of view. We are not to look upon the chapter as an historical sequence ; it is rather another aspect of a dream. In the ninth chapter, those who had not divine marks upon their foreheads were slain by the destroying angels ; in the tenth, the city itself, as we have already seen, had fire scattered upon it with a view to its destruction. After this we should have thought the tragedy complete. The prophet in this eleventh chapter sees evil-doers again, and once more he pours upon them his prophetic malediction. We are to consider that the same things which have been before looked upon by the prophet are now regarded from a distinct point of view. Not historical sequence, but moral variation, must be regarded as the key of what follows. In the eleventh chapter the princes are judged, blessings are promised upon those who repent, and at the end the glory of the Lord vanishes altogether from the city, and Ezekiel is in vision restored to Chaldæa to tell the captives what he has seen.

From verses 1-12 we have the judgment on the "princes." When he was come to the east gate of the Lord's house Ezekiel saw five-and-twenty men, princes of the people. Against those men a terrible indictment is produced. The spirit told Ezekiel that the princes were the men that devised mischief and gave wicked counsels to the city. How often have we seen this prostitution of great mental power and great official authority through the service of evil ! The prophets prophesy falsely ; men who are ordained to proclaim the truth have taken up with the practice of telling lies, and misrepresenting the powers and thought of God ; the whole head is sick, the whole heart is

faint : the disease of which God complains is not cutaneous, nor does it attach itself to any of the inferior members of the body ; it has penetrated the very head, the very genius, the supreme power and dignity of the state. Imagine the picture of five-and-twenty men, the princes of Israel, all given over to the conception of evil policies and the execution of selfish designs ! We shall miss the whole purpose of divine revelation if we suppose that evil is local, or that it is confined to the ignorant and the poor. Evil is universal : it is in the thrones of the nations, as well as in the hovels and huts of poverty ; the king has wandered as far from the standard of righteousness as has the meanest subject of his crown. Education, when not sanctified, is simply an instrument of evil. Great social station, when it is divorced from the action of a healthy conscience, only gives a man leverage, by the working of which he can do infinite social mischief. Moral security, therefore, is not in circumstances, but in character. When princes are right and just, wise and patriotic, it does not follow that the people will follow their example, or reproduce their excellences ; but when the princes are of a contrary mind it is easy to imagine how their great influence may contribute vastly to the spread of wrong thinking and mischievous action. When wealth is sanctified, poverty will feel the blessedness of it ; but when wealth is left without sanctification, it will become an instrument of monopoly, oppression, and utterest selfishness. Does God forbear to prophesy against falsehearted princes ? Is it true that all religious judgment is directed against the poor ? Did the ancient prophets only make themselves free to the houses of the needy, that there they might speak their words of threatening ? On the contrary, the ancient prophets thundered at the doors of kings, spoke their judgments to the occupants of thrones, denounced mighty men who were doing wrong, and impeached princes of high treason—"Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man." The message which the Spirit of the Lord delivered through Ezekiel was, "Thus have ye said, O house of Israel : for I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them. Ye have multiplied your slain in this city, and ye have filled the streets thereof with the slain." What was to be the upshot of this action ? Were men permitted to do these monstrous deeds and

to escape with impunity? Is there not a "therefore" in the divine reasoning?

The seventh verse will reply:—

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God: **Your slain whom ye have laid in the midst of it, they are the flesh, and this city is the caldron; but I will bring you forth out of the midst of it.**"

This comes of alienation from God. Religious apostasy means social anarchy. When the princes ceased to pray they ceased to regard human nature as of any value; slaughter became a pastime; heaps of slain men were passed by as mere common-places, and the whole city became as but a caldron in which the flesh of men might be boiled. But God himself says he will make this use of the city; he will make it a caldron, and they who supposed it was a place of security shall find what uses providence can make of human arrangements. Thus the passage may be taken from either of two points of view: the princes had made the city as a caldron, or God would so make it; the place which had been regarded as a security for the living God should henceforth become only a security to the dead. Like many of the figurative expressions of Ezekiel, it is impossible to fix any definite and exclusive meaning to his words; yet it is impossible not to see that the spirit of judgment runs through the entire issue of this malediction. The Lord says that he is proceeding on account of the sins of the people, saying, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." The empire of the mind is supposed to be the exclusive property of the individual: what brother can take out of his brother's heart all the thoughts that live there? What man can read the mind of his dearest friend, and be as familiar with that friend's motives as he is with that friend's conduct? The mind can shut out the closest observer, yet the one observer that it cannot exclude is the living God. The things that come into the mind determine the real character of the mind of man. Conduct is but a short measure by which to estimate a man's character. The things that he would do are the things that he does in reality, according to the judgment of God. But this has also a gracious as well as an alarming aspect. If the sins that come into the mind are set down against us as positive charges, all the blessed intentions

which come into the heart, and which would execute themselves if they could, are also regarded as accomplished facts. The cup of water which we would give, were it in our power, is recorded in our name as if we had actually given it. Thus the way of the Lord is equal.

In the thirteenth verse there is a remarkable incident. Whilst Ezekiel was prophesying in vision, Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. He was one of the princes of the people who devised mischief and gave wicked counsel. It would seem as if the prince had fallen dead at the prophet's feet. The incident overwhelmed Ezekiel for the moment, for he fell down upon his face, "and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah Lord God! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?"—as if he had said, Shall every one die as Pelatiah has died? is this but the beginning of a course of destruction? am I to see man after man fall dead at my feet? wilt thou not spare thy judgment, O Lord, and give even the worst men a place for repentance? We have already seen how the prophet himself was overwhelmed when he came to minister the judgments of Heaven: they were too heavy for him; he could not wield such thunder and remain at ease. It is one thing to hear of destruction by the hearing of the ear, and another to see it carrying its processes of desolation and annihilation through houses, and districts, and cities. All startling events should not terminate in themselves, but should be regarded as significant of the full judgment that is yet in reserve. In the death of Pelatiah, Ezekiel saw the death of all the wicked, and therefore with a loud voice he inquired whether the Lord would not stay the hand of wrath.

From the fourteenth verse a new tone is noticeable. It would seem as if for the moment the Lord was about to change his course:—

"Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come" (ver. 16).

Instead of "a little sanctuary" read "as a sanctuary for a little," the original word being rather an adverb than an adjective. The

idea is that the sanctuary was to exist for a little time, or was to be in some degree a sanctuary. Already God has declared that he had vacated the temple, and given up Jerusalem to the wrath of the destroyer; and yet now with characteristic clemency he halts a little, and says, even in the fury of his indignation, that an outstretched hand or an eye uplifted in prayer will turn aside his anger and elicit expressions of his love.

A beautiful picture he represents in the nineteenth verse:—

“I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh.”

Thus can God rebuild broken and scattered ones. Through all the mind of the exiles the Lord could send unity of purpose, and could knit the hearts of his people together in one strong brotherhood. This promise of unity is set in opposition to the state of the wicked as described in Isaiah liii. 6: “We have turned every one to his own way.” This is the result of self-will. Unity is broken up, and each man becomes a king to himself, and he who was his own king soon becomes his own god. The Lord’s answer to all this self-completeness and self-idolatry is, “I will give them one heart and one way.” The purpose of Christ, too, is that all his Church should be one. In the Lord’s intercessory prayer this is one of the main points. In the early Church we read, “The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” How does the Lord propose to make Israel united? He proposed as usual to proceed fundamentally. No mechanical arrangement is suggested. We cannot have unity by schedule or stipulation. We can only have unity by a changed state of heart; therefore the Lord says, “I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh.” Stoniness of heart is unnatural, altogether an incongruity, wholly a libel upon the purpose of God in the creation of man. God would have us sensitive, responsive, easily impressible, so that we can be moved by divine appeals, and instantly respond to every call to the enjoyment of divine fellowship. This is the thing that is wanted in every age: not a new hand, but a new heart; not a new arrangement, but a new spirit. From the beginning the Lord has moved according to this policy: “This

shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel ; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." The Psalmist cried, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." What is true of the Old Testament is equally true of the New. God's method of procedure does not change, except in things that are outward and temporary. Still it is the heart on which God fixes his attention ; still it is the spirit that he would renew and establish in righteousness. The Apostle Paul says, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind" ; and again he describes the Corinthians as "the epistle of Christ, . . . written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God ; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." Thus in wrath God remembers mercy. Even whilst his hand is held up and stretched out bearing a glittering sword, he is still open to the cry of penitence and to the desire of convicted hearts.

From verses 22 to 25 we have another picture of the abandonment of the city, the final departure of the divine glory :—

"Then did the cherubims lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them ; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city" (vers. 22, 23).

The meaning always is that the divine glory may vanish. Let us work while it is called day, for the night cometh wherein no man can work ; let us redeem the time, buy up the opportunity, seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Faithful preachers must always declare the brevity of the day of grace. We see how all things here are marked with brevity. How little a time there is for our education ! In how short a period we have to gather our experience ! Though the number of years fully told is but small, yet no man has any guarantee that he will live to see their expiry. The destroyer is at the door, judgment has already gone forth against evil-doing ; at any moment the avenging lightning may strike us down. It is well to live under this consciousness of the brevity of life, when it moves us to deeper prayer, and compels us to sweeter communion with him whom we may at any moment see, as it were, face to face. Brevity need bring with it no alarm to pre-

pared hearts ; indeed, the fact of the brevity is itself an element in the true enjoyment of the Christian. He says of all separations, They are but for a little while ; he says of all affliction and pain, They endure but for a moment ; he says of all the unsatisfactoriness of time, The time of my satisfaction is hastening ; I shall see the Lord, and be made comely with his beauty.

"Afterwards the spirit took me up, and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me. Then I spake unto them of the captivity all the things that the Lord had shewed me" (vers. 24, 25).

In these verses Ezekiel is charged to declare the vision to them of the Captivity. The spirit took him up and brought him to Chaldæa ; then the vision that he had seen went up from him, and then he began to address the people, the mourning exiles, telling them of the things that the Lord had showed him. Probably this was the hardest part of the whole process through which he had passed. Sometimes the enjoyment of a vision will not bear transference into words ; some joys are spoiled by speech. We keep them in our hearts ; we ponder them in silence ; we will not let the vision go : it was so bright, so tenderly beautiful, so exactly what the soul needed in its pain and fear. On the other hand, there are visions that must be told in the plainest terms, for on the proper telling of them much may depend of the world's education, rectification, and solid progress. But who can tell all that he knows ? When the thunderer has delivered his most alarming messages, he knows that he has only spoken in whispers, for the thing that is coming is so much larger than the way in which he has foretold it. Men should be careful only to say what they themselves have seen. We cannot repeat the visions of other men. They are useful for purposes of reference and for purposes of confirmation, but any vision that is to be told to the highest advantage of the hearer must be told as a vision which the man himself has seen. Herein is the power of true preaching. The preacher does not repeat a lesson, he relates an experience. The preacher takes up the visions of the ancient prophets only because he can confirm them by his own happy religious consciousness. To-day we see everything Ezekiel saw, or Jeremiah, in so far as our own age is concerned. Whatever may change, the law never

undergoes any modification ; righteousness is as stern as ever, holiness is still as the unspotted snow ; the gospel is still the ineffable sweetness of the divine love ; the Cross is still the one central and eternal necessity of a sinful world. The form of the vision changes, but the God of the vision abides the same. Let us say of the Lord that he is good and that his mercy endureth for ever ; let us declare that righteousness is unyielding, and that the inflexibility of its spirit is the very guarantee of the largeness and tenderness of the gospel. If righteousness could be changed in its demands, or modified in its severity, there would be no need of the gospel ; it is because the law is unchangeable that the gospel is needed to absorb, engross, fulfil, and glorify it. Jesus Christ did not come to abolish the law, except by its fulfilment. Let us tell what we have seen of God's readiness to forgive. We may not have seen many instances of positive forgiveness in others, but the gospel we have to declare is that we ourselves are pardoned, we ourselves have undergone the wondrous change, we ourselves know what it is to have had the stony heart taken away, and a heart of flesh set in its place. If we thus keep to our own experience and declare it with modesty, simplicity, and unction, men may listen with interest, and who shall say that they will not accept our word and flee for refuge to the same redeeming Christ ?

PRAYER.

O THOU Saviour of the World, may every soul hear thy cry, saying, Turn ye, turn ye ! why will ye die ? Thou didst say, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ! how often would I have gathered thee ! Thou hast said, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. On the last day of the feast, thou didst stand and cry, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. Thou art the Saviour of the world ; thou hast tasted death for every man ; thou wouldst not that any should die, but that all should turn and live. We remember thy sweet word : thou art come to give us life, and to give us life more abundantly, life upon life, even unto immortality, the immeasurable duration of bliss. This is thy gift, eternal life : may none die ; plead with every heart ; show thy Cross to every one who is asking the upward way ; bring all men to the tree of life. Amen.

Chapter xi. 5.

"I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them."

GOD'S OMNISCIENCE.

WE have found it convenient to divide nature into matter and mind. Some of us regard all so-called body as an incarnation, in some sense an expression of thought : every bridge, every picture, every house, each is an embodied incarnation, or represented thought. We realise this more vividly because its applications are very large. Men look at a bridge who never suppose that that bridge is only a thought put into stone : hence they talk about that which is practical—forgetting that there is nothing practical, in the truest and largest sense of the term, that does not back upon infinity, mystery, deity. The bridge does not begin and end in itself ; it represents a man, a thinking man, a student, a man who has deeply thought over mathematics, quantities, forces—composition and resistance of forces ; a man who has talked metaphysics to himself before he called in a man with a spade to begin to dig. The labourer never could have dug if the mathematician had not thought. Why do we not see that everything belongs to God ? Why this cutting asunder of the

currents of things? What has the fountain done that the very stream which has issued from it should be cut off as if it had originated itself? All things are religious. It may be convenient for us to shut our eyes to that fact, and thus perpetrate a species of idolatry, instead of entering into some act of profound and simple worship; but there stands the fact, that every bridge is a thought, every picture is a thought, every building is a thought, every pebble claims the care of the creatorship of God. Man, above all things known to us, represents the thought or purpose of God. What wonder then that God knows what is in man—knows man's thoughts before they are in shape? The Psalmist says, "Thou understandest my thought afar off"—before I know it myself; thou knowest my thought in plasm, while it is yet a film, while it is the mystery of a mystery, coming up out of eternity to tabernacle for a while within the narrow spaces of time. Jesus "needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." These are the texts that prove the deity of the Son of God. Of what other man could it be said without palpable exaggeration: He needed not that any should testify of man, because he read him through and through, was part of him, was always in the inmost sanctuary of the man's heart? Curious Carpenter! marvellous Man! The mystery is greater if we limit Jesus Christ to humanity than if we accord him the prerogatives and dignities of Godhood. On either theory there is mystery enough. On the one side we find the mystery of darkness and palpable contradiction; on the other side we find the mystery of light and possible glory to come.

The doctrine of the text is that the mind or man can have no secrets from God. This ought not to be a commonplace; it should be indeed the very sanctuary in which men worship, and think and grow in all holiest edification. We are face to face with the omniscience of God, and especially with that omniscience as applied to mind. You know everything that is in your child's wardrobe: you know very little of what is in your child's mind. God may know all the stars, and yet he may be shut out from the human mind; but he says, No: "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." There is no escape from God. "Thou God seest me."

This doctrine is the more remarkable as being so prominently set forth in the Old Testament. Very little is said in the New Testament about what we call the attributes of God ; yet they are all assumed. The New Testament did not come first to re-write the Old Testament, and then say it approved of it : the New Testament assumes the Old Testament, and every word and letter in it. Without the Pentateuch we could not have had the Gospels : they would have come upon us as nothing else has come, with a kind of rudeness, violence, and sense of intellectual and moral collision ; we should have been startled by a miracle without being prepared for it. You cannot have read the Gospels if you have not read the Pentateuch. By reading I do not mean going through the words, but reading with the heart, appreciating with the mind, responding with the soul, tabernacling God in the very heart's heart. The New Testament re-writes the Old Testament by assuming it.

God's omniscience is mental : "I know the things that come into your mind." Not only does he know all the worlds, he knows what is going on in the secret heart of the meanest member of the innumerable throngs that tenant the mansions he has built. This is a doctrine ; at this moment we are not dwelling upon the fact, but upon a certain conception of God, and that conception accords God the power of intimately reading everything that ever passes through the human soul. It is a grand conception. Whoever dreamed it ought to have influence upon human thought ; and seeing that many men dreamed the same dream, and represented it in the same words, there seems to grow up from these facts an argument that God himself revealed to the dreaming mind his own omniscience in all mental as well as in all material spheres. Wonderful is the concurrent testimony of the Bible upon this mental omniscience. "I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me." All our murmurings are not spoken ; our deepest, bitterest murmurings are inarticulate sighs, sounds often soundless to human ears, but which fall under the roof of heaven like minor thunders ; there is a complaining heart, a begrudging, and reproaching, and fretfulness, never uttered in words that can be written out in form of libel and signed as printed slanders. The

murmur is sometimes in the look, in the furtive glance, sometimes in the ill-suppressed sigh, sometimes in a suggestive twist of the body, sometimes in a gnarled, wrinkled old face that ought to have been all sunshine. God says: I know it, I know what you are thinking about, what you are complaining concerning; I know all your little frets and all your unspoken complaints against my providence. "I know their imagination which they go about." That is a penetrating judgment, quite the subtlety of insight, the most piercing of all mental actions. God says: I follow their imagination—now a dream, now a nightmare, now something so bad you will not, dare not speak it. I know all the tricks of the serpent when he plays upon the imagination of men. "The Lord looketh on the heart"—not the little muscle which the physiologist calls heart, but that spirituality which makes the man. "The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." No man can believe this fully and live another day. Yet every man believes it theoretically, and calls it a commonplace. Think of it, that God's eye burns on your soul's soul! That we may write down in a creed, and give it distinct enumeration as a separate and gorgeous dogma, but if a man really believed that, got hold of it with his whole soul, he would commit suicide; in some form at least he would utter a protestation arising out of sheer intolerable agony: never to have a moment to himself; the soul to have no eyelid, closing which it can exclude God, as the eyelid of the body can exclude the midday; never, never to have one moment's release from the burning criticism of God: who can bear it? Yet we must write it theoretically, insist upon it dogmatically, and pass it by simply regarding it as a commonplace. But it is no commonplace: if a fact, it should burn us, it should afflict us with the profoundest humiliation. God judges by our dispositions as well as by our actions. This is the supposition that lay at the heart of the old bitter Calvinism. When such Calvinists as Boston said there were children in hell not a span long, they vindicated that monstrous doctrine by the very theory that God judges dispositions, not actions; protoplasm, not completed growth: God does not need to wait until he sees what the child may turn out, so said the old pestiferous Calvinism; God knows what the child is, he reads the plasm, the quality and stuff of which the child is made:

he saw Iscariot in Iscariot's father, in Iscariot's father's father, in Adam. That is how it is we have a damned world; and as for children being a span long or men being six feet long in hell, that, said the old Calvinism, has nothing to do with it; it is the disposition that is perditioned, not the stature in feet and in inches.

"I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." This should be a great terror to us. Hear Job (xxxiv. 21): "His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings." What! not a moment's loneliness? not one secret thought, not one undivided purpose? What! not one little corner of the heart in which the man can sit and think his own thoughts without the presence and without the criticism of God? Hear Job again (xlii. 2): "No thought can be withholden from thee." Nor did Job bear testimony alone, in some mood of desolateness representing the pessimism of the human mind: the Psalmist, man of the harp, said, "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? . . . He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?" This is the cold argument of cold reason. This is no dreaming, affrighted, hysterical rhetoric; here is a man arguing as he would argue in geometry: He that planted the ear, shall he himself be deaf? he that formed the eye—an eye that can take in a universe at a glance—is he himself a blind Creator? God knoweth the way of the soul. Here is an evil thought against a brother; we have never spoken it, yet it is written in heaven as if an historical incident, day, and date, and hour, and minute, and there stands the record of heaven, God the Registrar. Here is a secretly planned device wrought out in the chamber of imagery, and we say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge with the Most High? We elaborate all our mischief, and it is all telephoned to heaven. The soul will not keep secrets from God. If your soul has told you that it is going to do something for you without telling God about it, your soul has told you a lie. Whenever the soul speaks it speaks right into a telephone—it cannot help doing so; if it wanted to avert its head it would speak but into another telephone, if possible, of larger capacity and finer sensitiveness. There is nothing that is hidden from God. "The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he

pondereth all his goings." Before the man sets a foot outside on the path, the Lord says, He will take this course to-day—sinuous or direct, or uphill or down the valley, or he will call a ship and bid the captain speed across the flood, that he may get his mischief done the more quickly: it is all foreseen, it is all known in heaven; there is no escape. "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them." No escape! This is the doctrine of the Bible. If we believed it we could not live. Yet we would not for the world deny it. We write down "omniscience" as a divine attribute; then we call its application a commonplace.

"I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." This should be a great comfort to us. What! both a terror and a comfort? Yes: behold the goodness and the severity of God. God is love—our God is a consuming fire. The good have nothing to fear. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

What was the comfort of Job? God's omniscience. The very thing that is a terror to the bad man is a comfort to the good man. Hear Job (xxiii. 10): "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Here is a man rejoicing in the very doctrine that fills the world with terror. Observe, if it were a terror only life would be destroyed; it is because it is a comfort as well as a terror that the Christian can face the sublimity of the doctrine of the omniscience of God. This was the comfort of David—"The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." And again, "The Lord knoweth the days of the upright"; and again, "He that keepeth thee will not slumber"; and again, "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path." Think of men drinking comfort at this fountain! We have just declared that if God looked only that he might judge and deal out righteous judgment to the sinner's heart

no man could live before him. "Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." And yet we go to this very fountain—on the one side a fountain of lava, on the other a fountain of crystal water—and on the consolatory side we drink, lift up our heads by the way, and are glad. "He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust." His omniscience is our defence. The very thing we were afraid of a moment ago we now run into as pursued men might run into a city of refuge. He knoweth our frame, he knoweth how slender we are and frail, he knoweth the temperature of our blood; he knoweth the peculiarity of our structure; he is physiologist as well as theologian; he knows our weight, our stature, everything about us, and he remembereth that at our best estate we are as dust and as vanity, and because he knows so much he speaks so tenderly. The knowledge of God is either our hell or our heaven.

Did Jesus Christ and his Apostles say anything about this omniscience? They assumed it, in some instances they almost explicitly referred to it. Jesus Christ described God in these terms—"Thy Father which seeth in secret." That is the Old Testament written all over again in one sentence. There must be prayers we dare not tell our dearest friends about. Distrust the man who can tell you all he ever prayed. Whilst on the one hand there are public prayers meant for public edification, and that ought to be published all round the earth in every language of man, there are other prayers that are prayed when the door is shut, bolted, sealed. That door may not be wooden or physical; we have doors that are mental, and whilst we are looking at our friend we can be plunged into the depths of eternity. He may think he sees us and hears us, but he does neither the one nor the other. Jesus reiterates the doctrine when he speaks about a falling sparrow; he says, "One of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." Your Father will say, That is my bird. It took God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost to set that little pendulum-heart in motion; it took the whole Trinity to shape that eye. "God knoweth your hearts." Hear Paul: "The Lord knoweth them that are his." And John comes in with a great gospel of this whole doctrine, and says,

Do not be too despondent, do not be too overwhelmed with dejection; "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." He knows how you came into that difficulty; he understands how it was that you were caught in that wickedness; he saw how it was that you fell into drunkenness and shame; he knows all the story of your bankruptcy. These things being so, let us leave our judgment with God. Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest how I came to be this and do this and say this; I am sorry for it all now, but I am fearfully and wonderfully made; I did not make myself, and I cannot unmake myself; my judgment is with the Lord, other men rebuke me and condemn me, other men think they speak more wisely and to greater purpose than I do, and yet somehow I cannot hold my tongue; I want to serve thee in my very blunders: God be merciful to me a sinner. I will leave my judgment in thine hands; thou knowest all things: now it is my mother, now it is my father, now they are both operating in me by an inter-action that tears and wounds me and enfeebles me; thou knowest all things: it is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men: thy very omniscience is my protection if my purpose be right.

This being so, leave all providence with God. Do not intermeddle with providence. Forbear thou from meddling with God. Do allow God some room in his own universe. Do not pester thyself with heresies, and straying theologies, and erratic speculations, and new inventions that have been offered for patent at the office, but have been declined because nobody fully comprehended the specification. Do not tear thyself to pieces because of evil-doers, but rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him, and he shall give thee thine heart's desire. God cares more for his Church than we can care about it. He bought it with blood—he will not forsake it.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou hast sent forth thy word as a sign; thou hast given unto men kindly ministry that cannot be mistaken; thou hast charged thy ministry as with thunder and lightning, also with warnings deep and solemn, also with promises and welcomes tenderer than all we know of human love. Strange men hast thou created; we cannot tell all they say, nor do they themselves know what they speak: yet we are sure that their word is not the word of man, the creation of time, the picture of a transient moment; it cometh up from eternity, it trembles with the music of another world. We know thy word when we hear it; there is none like it: sometimes it is a terrible word, splitting the heart as fire splits the rock; and sometimes a gentle, gracious morning dew that the weakest flower can carry without the sense of burdensomeness: but thy word is always unlike every other word: may we hear it, treasure it, answer it, and live according to its discipline, and be glad because of its rich promises. Oh that we had hearkened unto thy law, and that thy commandments had been the delight of our heart! then had we been signs to our brethren; they would have seen our peace, and have asked whence such tranquillity came. But are we not carnal and weak as men? Are we not yet in our nonage? Are we not also carried about by fear, anxiety, trouble, and imagined care? Ought we not to be the sons of peace, the children of light, the princes of God, calm amid all upset, tranquil though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea? We have trusted to ourselves, and not to the living God; hence our agitation, and unrest, and disturbance, and distrust, no better than atheism. But these confessions we make because of a voice within us which says, If we confess our sins thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins. We would not confess the iniquity were we not inspired by hope of pardon, and by a conviction that even yet our life may be made beautiful by God. Hear us when we confess; listen to us when we plead; because we confess at the Cross, we plead at the Cross, and we abide at the Cross, and other altar we have none. Our prayers are mighty through Jesus Christ, Priest of the universe, Intercessor on behalf of man: may each heart say, He is my Advocate, therefore my cause shall not fail; I have entrusted him with my pleading, therefore will he bring an answer of security. Thus may we stand upon eternal rocks, thus may we abide though the wind be high and the thunder roar. Amen.

Chapter xii.

EZEKIEL'S VISION.

EZEKIEL will speak nothing in his own name. He does not guarantee one word of what he speaks by his own authority. The wondrous imagery is not the birth of his fancy,

it is something which his soul's eyes have seen. Ezekiel makes no sermons, he simply tells what he has heard. It was his business to deliver messages, not to make them. When he is incoherent, he makes no apology; when we cannot follow him, he cannot help it; when he is apparently mad, he does not know it: he will only tell what he has seen and heard. He will not write a sentence, he will not study literary form, he knows nothing about taste, polish, style; he roars, he whispers, he screams like a man in fright, he prays like a man who is sure he can have what he asks for. He is a thousand prophets in one; hence his peculiarities—his imagination so gorgeous, his command so authoritative, his threatening so appalling, his signs and tokens so bewildering. He knows nothing of what he is talking about. No house will hold him: he would tear its clay walls down by that burning fury which is characteristic of his prophetic genius; he would melt the furnace and flow abroad in a freedom chartered by Heaven. He must stand upon a mountain—no other pulpit will do; he must ride upon the wings of the wind, and with the thunder talk as friend to friend. You must get into his key before you can understand his speech; you must be as mad as he is before you can take any pleasure in him.

Inspired men should have inspired students. Perhaps here and there we may be able to join him in his tragical progress.

"The word of the Lord also came unto me, saying, Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house" (vers. 1, 2).

He was a prophet though the house was rebellious. Can the Lord find no better place for his prophets? Can he not make them a second garden? He made one: can he not make two? Can he not cause his prophet to stand in some high tower where he will be untainted by the pollution of place and time, and whence he can thunder out the divine word? Has the prophet to mingle with the people, to live with them, to touch their corruptness, to feel the contagion of their evil manners? Might he not have a pedestal to himself? No. The Son of man when he comes will go on eating and drinking, a social reformer, a brother, a fellow-guest at tables; he will take the cup after we have partaken of it, and we may cut him what morsel of

bread he may eat, or he will hand them to us ; he will be one of his fellow-creatures. And yet Ezekiel was a prophet. So is the Son of man. Nothing could mingle Ezekiel with the rebellious house, so as to be unable to distinguish between the one and the other. Proximity is not identification. We may sit close to a murderer, and be quite distinct from him as to all our proclivities, and desires, and aspirations. We need not be corrupt because we live in a corrupt age ; we need not go down because the neighbourhood is bad. It is poor pleading, it is an irreligious and inexcusable defence, which says it could not resist atmospheric pressure, the subtle influence of social custom and habitude. It is the business of a prophet to stand right apart from his fellow-men, and yet to be so near as to be able to teach them, exhort them, rebuke them, and comfort them when they turn their face but a point towards the throne, the Cross, and the promised heaven. Ezekiel's experience was tumultuous, rough, difficult, hard to undergo and impossible to understand.

“ A rebellious house.”—What was the charge made against this rebellious house ? The words “ rebellious house ” are general : does the accusation descend to particulars ? It does,—“ Which have eyes to see, and see not ; they have ears to hear, and hear not.” Rebelliousness means loss of faculty. You cannot commit sin and be as clear-minded as you were before you committed it. The obscurity of mind may not be immediately evident, but let a man allow one bad thought to pass through his brain, and the brain has lost quality, a tremendous injury has been inflicted on that sensitive organ ; by-and-by, after a succession of such passages, there will be no brain to injure. Sin tears down whatever it touches. Your habit is bringing you to imbecility, if it is a bad habit. You must name it ; preachers may not speak distinctly and definitely, but they create a standard by which men may judge themselves, and by which preachers may also judge their own aspirations and purposes. You are losing your eyesight by your sin ; you are becoming deaf because you are becoming worse in thought and desire and purpose ; you are not the business man you were a quarter of a century ago when you were a disciplinarian, a Spartan, a self-critic, when you held yourself in a leash, and would not allow yourself to go an inch

faster than your judgment approved: since then you have loosened the reins, you have allowed the steeds to go at their own will, and the consequence is that you miss one half of what is spoken to you, and you fail to see God's morning and God's sunset; they are but commonplaces to you, mayhap but broad vulgarities. Men should be good if they wish to keep their genius. Morality is the defence of mental power and general faculty. The bad man goes down. His descent may not be palpable to-day or to-morrow, but the process is not the less certain and tremendous because it is sometimes imperceptible.

What does the prophet do? This chapter indicates that Ezekiel was called upon to show himself in two distinct aspects. Ezekiel is charged to represent two signs:—

“Therefore, thou son of man, prepare thee stuff for removing, and remove by day in their sight; and thou shalt remove from thy place to another place in their sight: it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house” (ver. 3).

He was to be performing a very singular act, and to be so constantly doing it that people would say, What is he doing now? He is moving things: what is the madman after to-day? Watch him:—he brings forth his stuff in their sight; he goes forth at even in their sight; he digs through the wall in their sight; in their sight he bears the burden upon his shoulders and carries it forth in the twilight (*i.e.*, in the dark); he covers his face that he may not see the ground. The Lord makes this use of the man that by an act singular, absurd, irrational, unaccountable, he may attract attention, so that the people may say, What is it? It is thus the preachers would do if they dare. The preacher has lost his power of sign-making, and he has taken now to sentence-making. The preacher should always be doing something that attracts the religious attention of mankind. He should be praying so unexpectedly and vehemently as to cause people to say, What is this? But he dare not. Quietness has been patented, and indifference has been gazetted respectable. They are right who beat drums, sound trumpets, fly flags, tramp the streets like soldiers taking a fortress, so that people shall say, looking out of high windows and round the street corners, What is this? what are these men doing now? “It may be,” saith

the Lord,—“it may be they will consider.” But they can only be brought to consideration by sign and token, by madness on the part of the Church. Trust the Church for going mad to-day! The Church now locks up its premises six days out of seven, and blesses the man who occupies it as little as possible on the seventh day. Rebelliousness overflows the fading energy and zeal of the Church.

All prophets are to be signs. When a minister becomes indistinguishable from another man he ceases to be a minister. He is nothing except in his distinctiveness. His whole power is in his individuality. If he does anything like another man he has by so much obliterated his whole function. The Lord has always been setting signs in the ages, so much so that at one time they were in danger of losing their significance and their power:—“The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” Do you not see amid all the tumult the outline of a Face, the shaping of a Hand, the direction of a Will? Or is the day nothing to you but a succession of unrelated events? If your souls' eyes were opened you would see every night another colour in the web, and you would say to one another, See how the divine purpose proceeds: how singular the figure, how marked, how emphatic, how divine! The Lord's hand rests not day nor night. “A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.” You have had your signs: read them well. Noah was a sign when he was building his ark, but the sign became so common that the people signalled to one another as they passed the poor old carpenter, and said some half-genial pleasant word about his infatuation. Jonah was a sign to his generation. The people heeded not the sign; the religious people called it a miracle, and the irreligious people called it a lie. The great complaint against the Church is that it makes no signs. **He who makes a sign will**

expose himself to momentarily ruinous criticism ; therefore it is that men dare not make a sign. If they could overget the first sensation, and welcome the first difficulty, after that they would occupy the position of conqueror, not of conquered. If you could only plunge into the water you would be warm in a moment. But that first moment looks like eternity when it is still to be taken in hand. Plunge in, leap into the sea of providence, accept your destiny ; the little moment will be forgotten in the glad hereafter.

See to what straits they may come who oppose God :—

“And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the twilight, and shall go forth” (ver. 12).

Princes always lay burdens upon other people. A prince is an incubus. The time comes when princes have to carry burdens ; that is the burden of the Lord, that is the prophecy of eternal righteousness. The prince that is among them, who has been heaping burdens upon other people's shoulders, shall one day stoop to take up his own load, and his eyes—those “inlets of lust”—shall be dug out, and Zedekiah shall accept the fate of a blind slave. Verily there is a God that ruleth in the world. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” You cannot die before harvest-time. Though you physically die, the harvest is still to be reaped. Imagine not that having had a season of seed-sowing you can run away from the harvest, for the harvest will run after you, and you will have to reap it, here or at the antipodes, or in the invisible state. That black harvest must be cut down and garnered, and you must keep the key of the granary. Sometimes it seems as if it were not so. There have arisen in the Church from age to age men who have been troubled by the prosperity of the wicked, saying, They are not in trouble as other men ; neither are they plagued like other men ; therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain ; violence covereth them as a garment ; their eyes stand out with fatness ; they have more than heart could wish ; they live in palaces, they play on harps and viols, and whatsoever they call for, the answer is immediately at hand ; the righteous are driven out, and virtue is thrown down in the streets, and the devil is the prince of this world. There is too much immediate reason for

saying so, but ultimate reason there is none. Any part of life that we can see is nothing in its relation to the whole mystery and purpose of divine duration. Our life of seventy years all told is a breath, a gasp, a sigh,—sustaining no relation to the duration that is to be. Who is this man who sits as Chief Justice on the king's bench, and then sits as Lord High Chancellor of England? Who is this Denbigh boy, who has, by unquestionable ability, and by the absence of conscience, worked his way to great eminence? Hear him: how he storms on the bench; how his gaunt eyes express anger, hatred, malice! Hear how he sentences Sidney, and sends Baxter to prison, and turns the gaol key on John Bunyan! He will dine to-night with some of his own company, and in their wine how they will sneer at the puritan fanatics! Surely the Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the righteous are given over to be burned and scourged by wicked hands. Let us travel eastward in London awhile. Who is this man in front of us? He is an attorney. Where was he a little while ago? Before the judge. How was he treated by the judge? Contemptuously, as every honest man was treated. Who is that in the window of a Wapping public-house? A seaman?—no, but a man with a seaman's clothes on. To whom can those eyes belong? Only to one man. Where are the eyebrows? Shaved off. Who is that? It is the infernal Jeffreys. The populace is maddened; the populace will seize him, and drag him out, and bring him to the Council, and frighten the Lord Mayor of London, and Jeffreys shall beg to be taken to prison, and be thankful for the shelter of a gaol. Let him go to the Tower, and live awhile, and then die within those capacious and to him inhospitable walls. The Lord will look after all issues. Believe not that bad men can have all their own way, and displace the throne and occupy it themselves. It would seem as if providence allowed men to go a long way without punishment, and then made mean men, as well as prophets, signs to their generation and to after ages.

Then the prophet was to be a second sign:—

“Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness; and say unto the people of the land, Thus saith the Lord God of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and of the land of Israel; They shall eat their

bread with carefulness, and drink their water with astonishment, that her land may be desolate from all that is therein, because of the violence of all them that dwell therein. And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate; and ye shall know that I am the Lord" (vers. 17-20).

Thus the prophet was to eat bread as if he were shaken by the palsy, and as if the very eating of the bread added to his pain and distress. He was to take up his water and drink it as if it were bitter, yea, as if it were poison, and the people, seeing this palsied man, quaking, white with fear, and alarmed by familiar things, were to say, What is he doing now? what is this madman now about? Thus by outward signs, by physical pictures, by visible demonstrations, the prophet was to call attention to great truths. This would be called sensationalism now: but the Church is ruined for want of it. What sign do we make that the people take heed of? The prophet in every age is to represent his own prophecy. What is the prophecy of the good man to-day? A prophecy of the future. What is the future which he is to represent? He is to show that he has a consciousness of futurity, so that every act he does should be a mysterious action, incomplete in itself, stretched out, tentacle-like, to something beyond. He is to declare plainly that he seeks a country out of sight. Men will say to him, Why do you not sit down and be thankful? Why do you not eat your daily bread, and not distress yourself about to-morrow? Why not eat and drink, and rise up and play? Why not take a short view of life, and make all things as easy as possible? So will they address him in irritating and frivolous questions. But the man who has got a right view of life sees that the earth is only a stepping-stone, that time is only a little link in an endless chain; the man who has right ideas of life, character, duty, power, destiny, says, There is something I have not yet seen, and that other greater invisible something influences me like an aspiration; I endure as seeing the invisible; here I have no continuing city, but I seek one to come: I am a pilgrim, I can tarry but a night; for a night's lodgment I am grateful to you, but wake me when the first hint of morning whitens the East, for I must be up and off: I am heaven-bound. We are afraid to declare our religion. The late Canon Liddon once told of a dinner that was held in London fifty

years ago in one of the finest houses of the prosperous metropolis. The gentlemen of the party had been speaking in terms dishonouring of our Lord: one of the guests was quiet; in a pause of the conversation he asked that the bell might be rung, then he requested that his carriage might be called, and then with the finished polish and courtesy of a gentleman he explained the reason of his departure, saying to his host, "For I am still a Christian." That gentleman was Sir Robert Peel, Prime Minister of England. No argument could have been so effective, no eloquence could have gained the point as that one instance of personal faithfulness gained it. We should show to our age that we have some religious conscience, some religious loyalty. To be indifferent is to crucify the Son of God; to let judgment go by default is to betray him and to pierce him with five more wounds, and crush more deeply into his throbbing temples the sharp and cruel thorn. Son of man, prophesy, prophesy! To this high duty, to this splendid responsibility are we called.

What was the effect of this sign-making and prophesying? The effect was mockery:—

"And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?" (vers. 21, 22).

Jeremiah has been talking about this upbreking of the kingdom, and Ezekiel is talking about it; and when the prophecies were delivered to Zedekiah he said they did not sufficiently coincide to confirm one another: for he looked for those literal coincidences which bewilder so many people and which can only satisfy pedantry; he did not see that coincidence is in the purpose, in the substance of the message. So there came up a proverb in Israel, "The days are prolonged," then came a laugh suggestive; "and every vision faileth," then the laugh was prolonged. We have fallen into the mockery of proverb-making. In English we say, "Words are but wind." How foolishly we have lived to believe that: whereas words are the only real life. In the beginning the Word was with God, and the Word was God; and the word is the man, the soul if he be other than a profane person. We ourselves say in English, "In space comes grace": God does not mean to kill us, or he would not have given us

such space for what is called repentance and amendment. We ourselves say, "Every man for himself, and God for us all": a singular mixture of mammon and spirituality, of selfishness and pseudo-religion. Let us not be victimised by our own wit. See to it that we do not slip into hell through the trapdoor of an epigram. There is only one word about this business that is true, namely, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."

The Lord says his patience will give way, his longsuffering will come to an end:—

"There shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the Lord: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord God" (vers. 24, 25).

Better believe this. All the ages have testified to it; all philosophies point in this direction. "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Do not enter a fool's paradise; do not enter upon vain imaginations, saying, As it was yesterday, so it will be tomorrow,—for there is a moment which changes all things. Study the action of time, and you will see how many critical moments there are. It is only a moment that separates the night from the day, the day from the not-day, the positive from the negative—an almost incalculable line, so minute, so infinitesimal. God can work wonders in a moment. He may take eternity for some works, but in many a moment he strikes men blind, and turns men into perdition. There is but a step between thee and death. Thy breath is in thy nostrils: a puncture in the right place, and life is gone. One touch, and the balance is lost, and he who was strong an hour since will be buried next week. Seizing these realities, grasping them with the whole mind and heart, the Church ought not to be other than in dead earnest.

Chapter xiii.

FALSE PROPHECYING.

THE whole chapter is a denunciation of lying; the worst kind of lying, because it is religious lying. Things are all either better or worse for being in the Church and connected with the Church : the way of the Lord is equal in this as in every other respect. What is done faithfully and lovingly in the Church accumulates virtue, excellence, value in the divine esteem; and what is done unfaithfully, selfishly in the Church aggravates its own sinfulness and makes surer of its own hell. The Bible will not have any lying. From beginning to end it is a protest against falsehood. False balances, false measures, false tongues, false prophets go down in one common unmitigated condemnation. Yet all life is a lie. To be is to be false. Not in the vulgar or ordinary sense of the term. Who can pray without being false, if he pray more than one sentence, and if that sentence be other than "God be merciful to me a sinner"? There is a positive falseness, and there is a negative falseness, that is to say, a falseness created by the simple absence of sincerity—that burning influence which purifies the spirit over which it passes. To pray, and not to mean it, what greater falsehood can there be? Thou hast lied, not unto men, but unto God.

In this chapter we have not only false prophets but false prophetesses; both the men and the women have sunk in a common love of lying. We have been reminded that we have in the Bible several excellent prophetesses, as Miriam, Deborah, Noadiah; and in the New Testament we meet with one sweet prophetess whose name was Anna and whose home was in sacred places. This, however, is but a superficial annotation upon the facts. We do not find false prophetesses here for the first time in the real sense, though in some literal or historical sense we

may come upon these profaners of holy mysteries at this particular juncture. Who dares go right back to the very beginnings of things? The first woman was the first liar, as was the first man. Do not let us suppose that lying came into the world late in the world's history; do not let us suppose that lying was ever a novelty that startled contemporary piety. Jesus Christ found a murderer from the beginning, and called him the devil; he found a liar from the beginning, and called him the devil; he never saved a life; he never told the truth. Unless we really seize these verities we shall be living a kind of accidental life, calling this man true, and that man false; this man honourable, and that man dishonourable; this man respectable, and that man disreputable. Nothing of the kind. These distinctions are vanity, except for immediate purposes, and except for social conveniences. The whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint; from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot we are wounds and bruises and putrifying sores; and if we do not believe it, that is one bruise and one sore the more.

What is the specific charge made against false prophets? That they speak out of their own hearts, and that they follow their own spirit. How prone are all men to do this! We have come now to give quite an honoured name to a certain power which we suppose ourselves to possess; we call it the verifying faculty, and it pleases us to smell this fragrant flower, it suits the nostril of our vanity. Whether we have a verifying faculty or not, we certainly have a falsifying one. We turn everything into poison rapidly; the very events that are sent down from heaven to teach us as spectacles and pictures are misread, or are perverted as to their moral force and meaning. Every man now prophesies out of himself. Let us beware how we degrade a right into a perversion of liberty and a mischievous use of independence. There is a right of private judgment, there is an individuality of conscience: but no judgment is complete that does not measure itself with other judgments, and no conscience is complete that is not in touch with other consciences; for the last conscience is the result and expression of spiritual chemistry, combination, intermixture, divinely conducted. We have said that no man is complete in himself; he does not know all that is in himself until

he touches some other man, and they two are not aware how divine they might be until they are caught in the influence of common prayer. It is not to be denied that prophesying out of one's own heart is a very delightful exercise. It saves a good deal of trouble ; it sets up an image of infallibility at home. When a man can do this he need not open his front door and trouble to go out to seek any other judge in Israel or counsellor in the Church. But the wiser piety says, Man is a brother ; prophecy of the highest sort is a common quantity, the result of marvellous combinations, and we must therefore hasten to meet one another, and to speak out what is in our hearts, broadly and lovingly, with all frankness, and there shall come back to us the truth shaped and ready for use. Herein we have found our proof that a man cannot pray sufficiently when he prays in solitude. Private prayer can never be neglected to the soul's advantage ; but we get in public prayer what we never get in solitary communion, and we get in solitary communion singular and blessed advantage and sustenance. We must not prophesy out of our own hearts, pray out of our own hearts, alone. There may come a time when personal testimony must be delivered with burning emphasis, and when a man is compelled to enclose himself within a solitary altar ; all these concessions do not interfere with the central and dominant truth that no prophecy is of private interpretation, and that all secret prayer needs to be brought out into the open air of the Church that there it may bloom in its completest beauty.

False prophets excite false hopes : what other could they do ? "They have made others to hope that they would confirm the word." A liar is very careful to maintain some foothold upon the confidence of society. He who is all false himself can only live upon the trustfulness of others. So, then, the false prophet is the creator of false hopes ; and if there be counterfeit coin-makers in our neighbourhood, it would not be an unwise thing to put out our coin upon the table and look at it very carefully ; and as there are false prophets who have excited false hopes, it would not be unwise to take our hopes one by one and conduct upon each of them an unsparing analysis, saying, What is it ? what is its reason ? what is its purpose ? what is its value ? what is its origin ? how is it supported by evidence ? how is it ennobled by

sacrifice? Any hope that will not accept the test of sacrifice is a false hope. And therein I do not forget that many men have had false conceptions of religion, and have submitted to false sacrifices; and I do not send one of them to hell: I hope to meet them all in heaven. They are not false—they are uninformed, uninstructed, undeveloped; according to the light they have, they are amongst the sincerest men in the world; and God never damned sincerity. Of course, if a man shall say, I am walking according to the light I have, and I shall take care not to have any more light,—then he destroys his own sincerity; he is not sincere, he is selfish; he is not real, he is rotten: sincerity is only of value in so far as it says, This is the only light I have, but as soon as I can get more light I will have more light. Blessings on the little taper that will stop with us all night; the dear little light says, I would do better for you if I could, but I will stay with you until the break of day, and when the day comes you will not want me; I hope you will not thanklessly forget me; I stayed with you when the sun was not there; the sun would not stay with you all night, otherwise it would not be night; I did my little best: farewell. But what shall we say of the man who says, I will not open my windows, or admit any fuller light—I will have another taper? We should say of him that he makes life night, and that he who walks in the night when he might walk in the midday is a man of perverted mind, corrupt imagination, and most deceitful and self-destructive in thought and heart.

False prophets had, however, some little ground to work upon: they mistook the imaginary for the real:—"Have ye not seen a vain vision?" That is the difficulty. If there was absolutely nothing we should have a clear course: but we have lying definitions, we have occasional dreams, and peculiar impressions; and people who resent the idea of accepting a theology made by the Church adopt an astrology or a theology of their own, founded upon cobwebs, built upon mist, and pointing to nothing. Let us pray God to cleanse our vision, lest, seeing men as trees walking, or trees as men walking, we confound the reality of things; and above all let us say to one another, Brother, help me, and I will help some weaker man. Let us have our strength common. If we cannot have our gold and silver, let us have our ideas, our

sympathy, our spiritual strength common. If you will help me weaker than you, I will help some other man weaker than I am; and thus massed together, serried, settled into phalanx, who knows but that accumulated weakness may be the beginning of strength? This is the idea of the Church. It is not the idea of one man, but of all men; it is not the thought of a single individual, weak and easily overcome, but the thought of a united, because a redeemed and sanctified, humanity.

What course does the Lord pursue against such falsity? "Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord God." We know, then, exactly what strength we have to encounter. It is only omnipotence. When the Lord says he is "against" a man it is in vain for that man to continue the fight one day longer. That man is so constituted that he thinks in the end he will succeed. No lie ever succeeded, except in bringing the liar to exposure and judgment and heavy penalty. If a lie could finally succeed the universe is not worth living in. All creation depends upon this one statement, namely, that it is impossible for a lie ever to escape the criticism of God. We have sometimes wondered how it is we do not succeed. There need not be any wonder about it; for our failure arises from one of two causes: either, first, that God is against us, in the sense of judging us to be false; or God is trying us to develop our strength. Let us opt the second conclusion where we can, for it will cheer us and help us on many a weary day. Present to your mind the spectacle of God watching you, trying you, causing the prize to drop out of your hand just when you were going to seize it, sending a sudden mist over your eyes when you thought you saw your friend at the gate. God may do so to us in love. We have to be variously treated. That is admitted in the family circle, and that is admitted in the wider circle of the state; the physician admits it, the pastor knows it, we are all aware of it. Who was it that could not get the sheep to follow him until he took a lamb into his arms and plunged with it into the river, and then all the flock followed the wise yet apparently cruel shepherd? The lost child may be the salvation of some; a broken fortune may take the last element of vanity out of

others ; the torn banner that was eternally to float in the blue sunshine may lead some men to pray. It is wondrous how we are thus taught. For the first few miles of life, how jocund we are, how cheery, how independent, how blithe ! Life is a holiday, the road is a carpet of flowers, the air has been made to sing for us, God is so pleased to have such creatures round about him as we are : but when the mountain-top is gained, and we look around as conquerors might look, then we begin to feel not so energetic as we used to be ; things do not fall so easily to our hand ; we turn over two pages at a time and cannot open them, and when we do we forget what was written on the page before ; and a little child helps us, whom a giant would not once have ventured to offer to assist ; and we take another view of life, and we begin to wonder what is beyond. That is the hold which God has upon us. He will not have life all on one line. Sometimes he will send a voice in the darkness to frighten us ; sometimes he will send a sudden note of music to gladden us ; sometimes he will make our opportunity less than we thought it was ; and sometimes he will so trouble our accounts that we cannot add them up. Our helplessness may be the beginning of our strength. Sanctified dejection may be the beginning of sanctified and immortal hope. Take this view of life, and be glad.

What further course will the Lord take against these false prophets ? He will destroy them. They build a wall, he sends hail down upon it, and brings the wall all to pieces. We need not go to the Prophet Ezekiel to know if this is true. We have built walls ourselves which have fallen down. We have propped them, buttressed them, and said it is only a momentary accident, we shall soon put it right again. But God said, I am against you and against your wall : ye fools ! Put it up a little further and in the morning you will find it flat upon the ground. What walls we have built ! What strength we were going to have ! We had already drawn out a hundred programmes, every one of which ended in pounds, shillings, and pence ; and a hundred more, ending in honour, fame, influence ; and another hundred, ending in herds and flocks, and abundance of family connections, and great peace, and long days : and whilst we were filling our

mouth with the wind the Lord touched us, and we fell down as dead men. If the Lord then is so set against falsehood, what will he do for us? He will speak the truth, he will send angels of truth, messengers of mercy and love. The very fact that there is falsehood means that there is truth. If there were no truth, there would be no falsehood; if there were no genuine coin, there would be no counterfeit; if there were no sincerity, there would be no hypocrisy. This is our answer to those who charge upon us right heavily the accusation of insincerity; and this is our reply to those who expect great things from us: we say, Your expectation is a tribute to the excellence of the religion we profess: you do not expect light from the fields you till, you expect light from the boundless sun. To expect light is to pay a tribute; to expect a noble character is to compliment the Cross. When we desire to know the truth, let us first desire to be true ourselves. There is something greater than truth, and that is truthfulness. The greatest of all blessings is a truth-loving spirit. A man may have a hundred false conclusions in his intellect, his imagination may have gone wildly astray, and yet if he have a truth-loving spirit, and if he shall say to himself in perplexity and bewilderment, "I will have the truth—yes, I will have it," his ignorance shall not keep him out of heaven, his infirm imagination shall not disappoint him of his crown. Beware lest we have all our truth on paper, in propositions, innumerable and well-detailed dogmas: we must first have it in our souls, hearts, lives; we must be prepared to live for it and to die for it, and then it will grow, accumulate, multiply; and we shall begin to see, with the ever excellent because ever modest philosopher, Sir Isaac Newton, that we have only gathered a few shells on the shore, while the great ocean of truth lies all undiscovered before us. Such modesty well becomes men who were born yesterday and may be forgotten to-morrow.

Chapter xiv. 1-11.

HEART IDOLS.

“**T**HEN came——” So some event had taken place before, and the incident now about to be related is to be read in connection with preceding circumstances. A wall had been built of which the Lord God disapproved. It was a wrong wall altogether—wrong in the foundations, wrong in the structure, wrong because it was daubed with untempered mortar: the Lord therefore sent a strong wind to rend it, and he caused an overflowing shower to fall upon it in his anger, and great hailstones expressed the fury divine against this unholy and unstable erection. The Lord having accomplished his wrath upon the wall, and upon them that daubed it with untempered mortar, proceeded to address the false prophetesses, women that sewed pillows to all armholes, and made kerchiefs upon the head of every statue to hunt souls. They sought to live by lying to the people of Israel; so the Lord said he was against the women and against their pillows, wherewith they hunted souls to make them fly; and he said he would tear the pillows from their arms, and let the souls go through; their kerchiefs also would he tear, and he would deliver his people out of their hand, that they should be no more in the hand of the false prophetesses to be hunted: and by this deliverance would God make himself known once more to be the only living and true God. Such were the preceding events. These events were open, concrete, palpable; every one who passed by could see what was being done, every ear could hear the furious hailstones as they came down in judgment, and every one could see pillow and kerchief torn from the base women who had undertaken to hunt human souls. But that was not enough—God does not content himself with outer judgment; then would his daily providence be enough to instruct the sons of men and turn them to considerateness and to piety. But the Lord cannot

succeed thus. Judgment can do but little. Hell has played but a poor part in the conversion of men; it has always been burning there, and the smoke of its torment has ascended for ever and ever; yet in the midst of that hot smoke have men done their evil deeds and defied the God of judgment. Punishment is hardly ever reformatory; it is simple penalty, pain for offence, loss for trespass, shame because of violence: now a higher judgment seat is erected, another process of criticism is about to be conducted. The Lord is now going to search the heart, to turn out the corners of the inmost recesses of the mind, the idol and favourite sin. He will proceed to do a spiritual work; he will lay aside his hammer with which he has broken the wall, and no more will he tear and rend the garments which cover falsehood: he will enter the heart, he will name the idols one by one which occupy that secret sanctuary; he will name them, he will bring them forth to judgment, and he will conduct that most penetrating of all criticism, the judgment of the thought and motive and purpose of man. It is well it should be so. We expected fury about an ill-built wall; men themselves cannot tolerate any edifice that is tottering; when a pillar leans men go to the other side of the way, for it may fall: we want in our God eyesight from which nothing can be hidden, judgment that looks the soul through and through, from the burning of whose vision no secret can be successfully and permanently withheld.

What we want we find here. Who are these men? "Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me"—came to be judged, came to sit down to be looked over, looked through, weighed, measured, and adjudged. No office can save men from divine criticism. The Lord takes nothing for granted. He does not say, This man clothed in official pomp must be good because his robes are good. No robe is good that covers a traitor's heart; the heart spoils the pomp. How unsparing the criticism! Even elders must be judged. How comforting is this thought, though terrible in some aspects! It were well that our judges should be judged, else who can tell to what extremes of folly they might go, hounded on by ambition, or stung to further issues by envy and malice? The judge is nobody in the sight of God; he is a man who is himself to be judged: he must hold

himself with the loftiness of modesty it he would be truly dignified ; he must remember that he has a Judge in heaven if he would read the law aright, and distribute sentences with righteousness. The pastor cannot escape, or the teacher, or the head of the house, or the senior member of the firm, or the magistrate, or the prime minister, or the king crowned and throned : judgment shall begin at the house of God, and no man there shall live upon his certificates. Life shall only be guaranteed to the pure in heart. How impossible it is to escape ! If it had been a matter of the wall we should have expected judgment ; if the penalty had been confined to pillow and kerchief, used by Israelitish women after the fashion of pagan sorceresses, we should have had large liberty to serve the devil in : but now the Judge thunders at the heart-door, and says from without that he is coming in. Nor can we hinder him ; he will burn down the portal if we will not open it ; into the heart he must come ; the heart is the man !

How improbable are some defections. Who would not say that the elders would be good men, simply because they are elders ? If they had not been good they would not have been promoted to office ; the very fact that they are in the pulpit, in the presidential chair, in the seat of honour, that they wear the purple of authority, is proof enough of their excellence. No : the Lord will not have it thus. The higher the office the greater the responsibility ; the larger the privileges the greater the sin if they are outraged ; the more brilliant the genius the more infamous the mischief if that genius be perverted. The able man, the man of faculty and education, can do more sin in one moment than a poor uneducated soul can do in a lifetime. Elevation aggravates sin. Expectations founded on reason will turn into burning fires when they are disappointed by the men whose office has excited them. How strong the Bible is in reason and justice ! It is no respecter of persons. It will behead a king as soon as a peasant if the king be evil-minded, and there will be a ring in the hatchet that takes off his head that will indicate an accent of peculiar disapprobation. Kings ought to be better than their subjects : consider their advantages, their education, their elevation ; they

should live in an atmosphere of self-restraint and spiritual thoughtfulness. Who would not have faith in a book thus marked by broadest justice? This Book favours none. It is a standard which never lowers; its balances are made of fine gold, and never vary; the hand that holds them never tilts the scale one way or the other. We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. That being so, let us be quiet, strong in confidence, bright in hope; for the Judge of all the earth will do right. Let not the poor man envy the rich, as if God favoured him. Better not read life from the outside and make rough criticism and judgment upon it, for in reality we know nothing about its secret, and its expansion, and its issue: at best we can read but accidents and surfaces, and ill-spelling it is and bad reading, full of stumbling and hesitation and lack of music. Let God read the account and demand the balance.

The place of the disease indicates its fatal character—"in their heart." This is heart-disease. Men almost whisper when they indicate that some friend is suffering from disease of the heart; there is hopelessness in the tone: great allowance should be made, they say, for a man who is suffering from heart-disease; he must not be startled or excited or suddenly pounced upon; his wishes must be gratified, they must as far as possible even be anticipated; and any little impatience he may show must be looked at charitably, because he is suffering from heart-disease. The talk is humane, the considerateness is full of affection, the conditions imposed are suggested by reason. Is there not a higher disease of the heart? Is it true that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked? Is it true that the heart delights in concealment? Is it true that the heart has offered a bribe to secrecy to hold its lips for ever? Is not every man, did he but know it, suffering from heart-disease? What is the meaning of this disease of the heart, this idolatry in the inmost soul? When a moral disease is of the heart it means that the disease is liked, enjoyed, gloated over; it is wine drunk behind the door, it is a feast of fat things eaten in secrecy; every mouthful so sweet, so good, so rich. When a disease is of the heart in a moral and spiritual sense it means that it is consented to; it is voluntary, it is personal, it is desired; there would

be a sense of loss without it. Sometimes men are forced into uncongenial circumstances, and they express their reluctance and their annoyance by many a gesture and many a tone; but when the disease is of the heart it has secured the consent of the will, and the judgment has been bribed to nod a kind of tacit approval: the whole conscience has been put under narcotic or opiate, and is no longer the sharp, pungent, unsparing, wakeful critic that God meant it to be when he set it in the centre of human thought and human action. Disease of this kind, too, is most difficult of eradication. It is not in the skin, or it might be cut out; it is not in the limb, or it might be amputated, and the knife might anticipate mortification: the evil is in the heart; no knife can touch it, no persuasion can get at it; nothing can be done with it but one thing—only a miracle of the Holy Ghost can overcome that difficulty and turn that disease into health. “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” If a man does not know his own heart he cannot be religious; he cannot begin to understand what is meant by the demands of Christ; the Cross will be a foolishness and a mockery and nothing but a sham in his estimation. Let him once know his own heart, how much of the serpent there is in him and of the beast of prey, and how thinly skinned over he is, and that sometimes he is only the bent and crooked and twisted shape of a man, that in reality he has the heart of an evil beast within him; let him see what a murderer he is, and a liar and a thief,—then you can make upon him some spiritual impression. The respectable man can never receive the gospel. How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven!—riches of any kind, not of money only, but of self-conceit, and self-respect, and self-idolatry, and self-confidence,—how hardly shall they press into a gate so strait as that which is set in front of the kingdom of heaven.

Are we chargeable with heart-idolatry? We have no idols of a visible kind it may be, yet we may be the veriest pagans in our hearts. Is there aught of irony so piteous, in some aspects so comical, in every aspect so detestable, as the irony of Christian England when in annual piety it listens deprecatingly to the stories of idols worshipped by savage men in far-away climes? The ill-shaped idols are held up, and excite the laughter, the pity,

or the scorn of Christian England. Christian England is full of idols; but Christian England has not courage in all cases to shake them and displace them. We pity the man who would sell his little idol-god for a rupee, and all the time we are selling our convictions for a handful of barter. We say, How distressing that poor human nature should fall down before stock or stone and worship it! and we, inflated pagans, worship a golden calf, a tinsel crown, a sounding name, a crafty policy. The man who would sell his convictions is a more consummate idolater than all the poor thick-lipped savages that ever lifted up their expectant eyes to some little god of their own formation. This is heart-disease! The man who will keep silence in the presence of wrong is an idolater, is a pagan; he worships self-ease, self-indulgence. The man who will stand by and see the weak struck down without at least protesting against the tyranny, or who will accept a bribe for his silence, has sold, not an ivory god, but a living, bleeding Christ.

Are we chargeable with heart-idolatry? Certainly we are. No man can escape this accusation. It is subtle, far-reaching, all but ineradicable. If we do not face such difficulties our piety is a stucco that will peel off in the wet weather, and leave the ghastly moral ugliness exposed to public scorn. Doubt may be an idol used to diminish responsibility. We can become intellectual doubters on occasion; we begin to wonder if the Bible is really inspired: as who should say—dear souls!—that if we could only be convinced intellectually of the inspiration of the Bible we should be the whitest babes ever nursed by the mother-creation. What liars we are! We are only standing back because we wonder if the Hebrew text is not exceedingly corrupt, in some of the minor prophets. We do not care one iota about the prophets, minor or major; only we wish to hide ourselves behind a doubt that we may shirk a responsibility. We had better tell the truth to ourselves sometimes; mayhap we can only tell it in the dark, but we should not let the dark night pass without the soul issuing from itself some dark messages of impeachment and accusation. Others, again, may have in the heart an idol called Ignorance, kept there for the purpose of diminishing service: we will not go into the dark places of the

city, then we need not attend to the cries which are said to be arising there from overborne and hopeless humanity; we will keep on the broad thoroughfare, where the gaslight is plentiful; we shall see the surface and outer shape of things, and then retire to rest, saying that, say what fanatics may, there is really a good deal of solid happiness in the city. The ghost is three steps down the side street; turn to the left, take the first turning to the right, climb up the stairs that will hardly bear you, and there you will see how much happiness there is in the city. "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it?" Canst thou escape his criticism? Can you eat your fat dinner and know that gaunt hunger is not half a league off, but is behind a wall? You owe your appetite to that wall, to that concealment. Keep your money, multiply it tenfold, put it out at exorbitant usury, pile it up; but think not you have postponed the day of criticism: the poor will do without us as they always have done until they come up a thousand strong as witnesses and accusers.

Have we not an idol in the heart we call Orthodoxy, which we keep there in order to enlarge moral licence? Is there not an intellectual orthodoxy and a spiritual heterodoxy often united in the same man? Are we not the victims of phrases? Who can bear to be called heterodox? Even a man who does not understand the word thinks there must be something wrong about it. How possible it is to be orthodox in words, and heterodox in spirit; how possible to preach the gospel without feeling it: alas, then, we do not preach the gospel, we preach about it. There is an infinite difference between preaching the gospel and preaching about the gospel. No man can preach the gospel whose heart is hard: his genius is in his sympathy; the splendour of his gift is in the richness of his kindness and pity for the souls of men. It is intolerable that some persons should set themselves up as the custodians of orthodoxy: blessed be God, there is a hell for them! The men who are hindering the truth, and crucifying the Son of God afresh, are the men who are boasting orthodoxy without being orthodox in heart, soul, spirit, motive. For them

let torment be eternal! Poor sinners, wayfarers, wanderers, who never heard about orthodoxy and heterodoxy, but who want forgiveness and hope and a new life, they shall come in thousand upon thousand; the scribe and the Pharisee, and the man who lives on the sale of his orthodoxy, shall be thrust out into darkness utter.

Is there nothing but judgment in this passage? Does the paragraph include nothing besides penalty, threatening, denunciation? Even in this paragraph there is an evangelical word. "Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Repent." When did the Lord ever conclude a discourse without some evangelical tone in it? We have seen him step from his chariot of thunder that he might put his arms around some poor sinner and say, Come home ere the sun set, for we will wait for thee in night's darkest hour, and receive thee when they who would be ashamed of thee are lost in slumber. The Bible is terrific in denunciation, awful beyond all other books in its denunciation of sin and its threatening of perdition; yet through it, and through it again, and ruling it, is a spirit of clemency and pity and mercy and hope, yea, across hell's burning mouth there lies the shadow of the Cross.

Chapter xiv. 14.

“Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.”

THE LIMIT OF INFLUENCE.

THE solemnity of this assurance is increased by the fact that it forms quite an exception to the general tenor of the divine government. Again and again we have come upon instances which have shown that God has saved the earth because of the righteous men who were in it: he would have spared the cities of the plain if Abraham could have found ten praying souls in the whole of their corrupt population; he blessed the house of Potiphar for Joseph's sake; he allowed the intercession of Moses to shield Israel from judgment well deserved; for Paul's sake he saved the ship in the storm;—these are but instances of his regard for the prayers of the righteous and for the influence of godly character. In the text we come upon a sharp variation of the general method: no longer is Noah or Daniel or Job to count for more than one; the day of prevailing intercession is to close; character is to be individualised, and the diffusion of collateral benefit is to pass away for ever. Four times is this declaration made in the conclusion of this chapter, as if to prevent the possibility of mistake; the contrary law has been so long in operation that the people have come to trust it as an everlasting resort in time of peril; and, therefore, that there may be no misunderstanding about his purpose, God smites the refuge four times with the hammer of his anger and says that he will overthrow it.

“Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God” (vers. 13, 14).

We speak about the continuity and unchangeableness of law,

but again and again in Holy Scripture God declares that he will change this and that, and institute quite another standard of criticism, and quite another method of administration. We too often pass over all these words which point to change as mere matters of course, forgetting that they are part of a higher revelation, showing that God is not confined to method and form as to his conduct of the universe, and that even what we call his laws are subject to change. The law-maker must always be greater than any law which he has made. We should reason concerning moral laws from our own standpoint as well as from God's, because in the operation of moral laws there are of necessity two parties—the Sovereign giving the law, and the subject consenting to it or rejecting it. In reality there is no change in God, nor can there ever be any change in him, but he holds himself in relation to us as one who is guided in his administration of affairs by our spirit and attitude towards himself. The parent sometimes takes the law from the child—that is, in the sense of accommodating a law to the child's peculiarity of temperament or specialty of conduct. It is distinctly laid down in the Bible that God has acted upon the principle of intercessory prayer, and has accepted such prayer as really determining his action in reference to certain well-known cases. That must be taken to be the law which God has been pleased to lay down and act upon. The historical instances of its application are too numerous to admit of any dispute as to the reality and stability of this law. Yet here we come into contact with what may be described as an almost violent change. Noah is no longer to pray for more than himself; when Daniel speaks it must be in his own name and in reference to his own circumstances; and when Job, the most experienced of all patriarchs, lifts up his voice toward heaven to make his plea, he must omit from it all collateral considerations, and simply state in his own name his own condition and his own necessity.

Terrible as it may seem on first reading, yet there is quite a deep well of comfort in all this wilderness of desolation. It will be observed that though the darkness brought down upon the earth by sin is very great, yet through all the gloom the figures of Noah, Daniel, and Job are seen in all their vividness and

pathetic suggestiveness, showing that the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and that their memory is precious to him.

From the beginning, God said he would not destroy the righteous with the wicked. Nor is God governed by what we call the principle or law of majorities. He does not sink the righteous with the wicked when he drowns the world, or when he pours his tempests of fire and brimstone upon doomed cities. The comfort of the text is that the Lord's judgment is not blind and indiscriminating, like the wrath of man. The angels that bear his sword and do his will spare the houses whose posts are marked with blood, and leave untouched the men who have been true to the Lord's altar. Herein is great deliverance from fear, that the good man's house is founded on a rock, and that not one hair of his head shall perish. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked." Here is the discrimination of divine providence. The arrow falls just beside the good man, but does not strike him. It may strike down even a companion who walked by his side, yet he himself shall be spared because of his fidelity to the altar. Any confusion here would invalidate the whole system of the universe, as it has been understood from a Christian standpoint.

When God ceases to discern between the righteous and the wicked his throne is overturned, and he himself has become but a mere figure in religious romance. Nor is it selfish comfort that is derived from this view of the text. It is not the mere self that is saved, it is the all-precious righteousness that is honoured. Where this righteousness is most fully developed there will be least regard of merely individual interests; our petty personality will be swallowed up in our holy trust of God, and our perfect assurance that he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner. The Christian man never reasons, I am safe, and therefore I care not what becomes of other people. If he could reason so, he

would disprove his own Christianity. When he is most assured of the divine complacency and protection, he is at the same time most assured that the value which God sets upon righteousness is infinite and unchangeable. There is comfort, too, in the thought that the righteous are held in everlasting remembrance, as we have just said. Noah, Daniel, and Job had long ceased to mingle with men, yet their names are household words, and are pointed to as men would point to mountains majestic and lofty beyond all other hills. Whenever we come upon the name of Noah we find it associated with a description of character which shows that the complacency of Heaven was moral and not arbitrary: "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. . . . Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." Daniel also is referred to as one whose conduct had attracted the special recognition and benediction of Heaven—"Daniel, a man greatly beloved." Nor does Job figure on the page of Scripture as a mere name, but rather as a character singular in its loftiness and purity—"Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?"

It is clear, however, that the text is meant to be a warning rather than a comfort, and it is in this spirit that we must approach its interpretation. It is a warning to individual men. They cannot tell how soon they will be called upon to cease their intercessory ministry. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Let him earnestly continue in the exercise of this great gift of prayer, lest God should suddenly command him to pray no more for those who have most deeply engaged his religious solicitude. Specially, however, is this a warning to households:—

"Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only shall be delivered, but the land shall be desolate" (ver. 16).

How terrible is this tragedy, that a man should no longer be the priest of his own family! Realise the scene as vividly as you can: for many years the father, as the head of the house, has been as a priest in the estimation of God; he has erected his family altar; there he has offered the sacrifice of prayer and

praise ; there he has named his children one by one, and pleaded for them with all the pathos of passionate love. Events, however, have occurred which seem only to have developed the obduracy of the hearts of the children. They are no longer in sympathy with the spirit of the altar, nor have they anything to say to the Invisible Listener. To iniquity they have added iniquity, as water to water, until the river of their wickedness has flowed broadly and deeply through the very midst of their life. Now the time has come when God says he will hear no more parental prayer on their behalf. The son shall be separated from the father, and the daughter from the mother, and shall realise in an awful individualism of position how true it is that every soul must give an account of itself to God. The Lord will not spare the children when they have gone astray, having broken every holy vow and shattered every commandment issued from heaven. "I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number ; and your high ways shall be desolate." This is a threatening which may operate in either of two ways : either because the children have forfeited divine confidence, or because the parents have abandoned the right way, and can only be brought home again by processes of affliction and desolation.

This is a warning also to nations. The nation is saved because of the living Church that is within it. Sneering at such a doctrine has no effect upon its reality and beneficence. If this doctrine be not true, then the whole Bible proceeds upon false lines, and would seem to be almost constructed for the purpose of deceiving mankind. Prophets do pray for nations, and God recognises the intercession that is offered on behalf of whole peoples and kindreds and tongues. Moses and Samuel prayed for the people as a whole, yet God would reject even their entreaty under given circumstances—"Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people : cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth." The prophet was forbidden to pray for the people in their entirety, the word of the Lord coming to him, saying, "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me : for I will not hear thee." Moses was often

excited because his prayers for the people did not seem to prevail, and because his arguments were practically rejected. We have seen how upon one notable occasion Moses pleaded with Heaven almost in a spirit of agony: "And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever." Here we have an instance in which prayer prevailed, and therefore we have an instance which establishes the law that intercessory prayer was appointed of God: "And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." That the Lord did answer the intercessory appeals of the prophets of ancient times is clear from another instance given in the Book of Numbers (xiv. 17-20): "And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word." Sometimes the Lord would seem to be almost impatient with his intercessory prophets. We call to mind the instance in which he said, "Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation." Prophets must not cease to pray for the land in which they live. Amid political tumult and uproar, the voice of their prayer may seem to be but a feeble sound, yet they are called upon by the very genius of their faith to keep the way clear between heaven and earth for large and profitable intercourse. Into the mystery of intercession we can-

not enter, but we find that it is at the very heart of things, a rule and a law, a judgment and a blessing, an opportunity large in its possibilities, but always hastening to a solemn conclusion.

The great principle of mediation is, of course, most vividly and gloriously represented by the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ; but even in his case the priesthood is to cease, the long and loving prayer for others is to come to a perpetual close: "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. . . . And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." We live in a great intercessory period: the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered: we need not fear because our prayer halts and stumbles as to the mere eloquence of its expression; the eloquence of prayer is in its sincerity; to the man who is of a broken and a contrite heart will God look, and on him will he set signs of approval. A wondrous gift is it to have the gift of intercession, the power of putting into heavenly words the wants of other men, and the power of pleading with God on behalf of those who never plead for themselves. Verily, there is a gift in prayer as well as in preaching and in song. Some men, by the largeness of their hearts, the tenderness of their love, the sagacity of their judgment, their marvellous understanding of human nature and human events, are peculiarly qualified to represent at the throne of the heavenly grace the case of families and nations and of the world at large. Some supplicants can but pray for themselves; others can only pray concerning great events and great subjects; others, more Christ-like, seem to carry the world in their hearts and to plead for continents and empires in great intercessions.

Let us get a clear view of the system of spiritual government under which we live. There is something of law in our life beyond what we see in God's legislation in the ordinary sense

of the term. The system under which we live is this, namely, that there is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. We are to conclude all our prayers, and indeed begin them and continue them, with the sentiment, "For Christ's sake." We cannot understand the mystery of this ground, and yet we feel how solid it is, and how impossible it would be for us to pray without it. It is in Christ that we find God. It is through Christ that we find access to the throne of the heavenly grace. We do not plead Christ as if we were pleading with an arbitrary Deity, who would not do anything for us ourselves, but would only do it through the mediation of his Son, or because of his partiality for one whom he calls his Only-Begotten. We might think of the clause, "For Christ's sake," until we ourselves were driven away into something like spiritual contempt. But let us reason from the other point, and then we shall see that even we ourselves fill the imagination and thought and love of God, and draw towards us all the resources of heaven in view of our salvation. Though our prayers are to be heard for Christ's sake, yet Christ himself was given for our sake! Herein is love, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us! God sent his Son to seek and to save that which was lost.

It is a great thing, then, as Christ came forth from eternity for our sakes, that we should approach God, and ask to be heard for Christ's sake. The two points in the line agree one with the other, and constitute a noble harmony. There are aspects in which man may be so viewed as to bring down upon himself an intolerable sense of humiliation,—he is a worm, and no man; he is weak, foolish, helpless; his breath is in his nostrils, and his days are but a handful; he breaks up little by little, until at last dissolved in death,—all this is exceedingly depressing, and full of the horror of self-humiliation: on the other hand, how the light shines, how the whole horizon beams with celestial glory, when we know that man was made in the image and likeness of God, and that only the Maker of man could be his Redeemer! So then, though all our prayers are offered in the name of Christ and answers are expected for Christ's sake, yet Christ himself came forth from the Father for our sakes, took upon him the seed of Abraham, and he stands before God, the representative

Humanity, the Second Adam, the Lord from heaven,—a priesthood, however, which is destined, as we have seen, to close for ever. When Christ has left the mediatorial throne there can be no availing prayer; then the wicked will receive unmixed and untempered judgment; for the Mediator is gone. The time is coming when all advantages will be exhausted, and every man, even Noah, Daniel, and Job, will have to stand simply on his merits, and the wicked will be overturned by the righteous judgment of the Almighty. How terribly his anger burns! Sometimes it would seem to be ready to break through all boundary, and environment, and restriction, and utterly to consume the universe. On this appalling theme we may not dwell; enough to know that “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” But we may not end at this point. Blessed be God, we need not separate in the darkness of midnight, not knowing what is going to befall us, whether our next step will plunge us into an infinite abyss. We advance and stand in the morning light, and preach the blessed gospel that even now man may repent and live, may turn to God and sun himself in the brightness of the eternal love. The Cross of Christ is still available. What we have known as the Atonement wrought by the Son of God may now be realised by saving faith and childlike love. He who thus comes to God will need no Noah to pray for him, or Daniel, or Job: he will come boldly unto the throne of grace, and obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need,—he will not stand afar off, but will draw quite near, and know what it is to have sweet and ample access to the very heart of God.

Chapter xv.

FRUITLESS AND USELESS.

THE single idea of this brief chapter is that if the vine should fail in grapes it fails altogether. There is a whole philosophy of life in that single and simple fact. The argument of the Lord is founded upon that one circumstance. The vine is good for nothing for timber. With the vine, it is grapes, or nothing. Some trees might be made use of even if they did not grow the fruit whose name they bear; they might be cut down and used for fencing, for carpentry, for purposes of art; some good might be made of the wood even if there were no fruit. With the vine it is not so. Say that upon the vine there is no fruit, and you can say the vine may be burned at one end, and burned at the other end, and burned in the midst; having failed in the one thing, it has failed totally and absolutely. "Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? . . . Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work: how much less shall it be meet yet for any work, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned?" It is grapes, or ashes; it is fruit, or nuisance: "Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned." You cannot get a peg out of the vine to hang anything upon that is of the least weight. You cannot use the vine-wood for timber. Then what is the vine for? For grapes, for grapes only: no grapes would mean no use; without the grapes the vine is to be burned. There is no middle course; there is no refuge in the old word, "We must make the best of it." There is no best to be made of it, unless we include the word burning and the word destruction in that miserable best.

On this law of the vine and fruit, or the vine and uselessness,

we may build all our life. The great and solemn doctrine is this, that everything is to be judged by the purpose for which it was created. We cannot have side-issues, we cannot have humanly invented alternatives. A man goes up, or he goes down; there is no middle zone where he can live long: he blooms into a beautiful son of God, or he withers away and is lost in regions unknown. There is a right hand, there is also a left hand; I have not heard of any middle position. What is the purpose of our creation? Why were we made? Why are we here? If any revelation has been declared in reply to these questions, let us judge ourselves by the purpose of the Creator. This would make swift and clear and righteous judgment of the whole mystery of human life. Here is a school: what ideas do we associate with the word school? Reading, study, letters, arts, instruction, mental illumination, intellectual development and progress: these ideas are right, they are cognate, they are just. Does this school produce that result? No. What then? Then it is not a school: it is a place of darkness, or an asylum of ignorance; it is a corner of imprisonment, or a place of mental degradation. The school is but a poor building, you may say, a little wayside edifice covered with thatch, without palatial lines or classic form, or aught that can be described as expressive of culture and dignity: all that may be true; but inside the boys and girls do read, they are quickened intellectually, they are highly informed; ask them questions in letters, in history, in philosophy, in art, and how readily, how copiously and accurately they will reply! Who now talks about the poor-looking building? It serves its purpose well. On that vine find luscious grapes, then care nothing for the trellis on which it grows; thank God for the unshed wine with which that vine abounds. What do you think of this painting? It is a likeness of your dearest friend. Having given you this introduction to the painting, what will be your standard of judgment? You will at once seek your friend in it; it will not do for you to say that the drapery is beautifully painted, the foreground is excellent, and the background is superb, and everything about it of the nature of technique would please an artist of the highest degree: you are not looking in that direction, because in that direction you have no vision; the gate of that outlook is locked against you: but you

know your friend, and your friend is not there. Will you purchase that picture? No. If it had been a picture only you might have bought it; but it professed to be a friend. It lies. That which, introduced to me as a work of art, might have charmed me, shocks me when it comes under false pretences. Where the fire, the strength, the playfulness, the music? It is not there; then there can be no masonry between me and that picture. You rightly judge the picture by what it professes to be. Here is a beautiful lamp painted by hand—a great recommendation to those who know nothing about it; it will hang well anywhere. Will it light the place it hangs in? No. Why not? Because it is opaque. Then why do you call it a lamp? A lamp must not be opaque, it must allow the light to come through: a lamp is for the sake of the light; it is no lamp if the light be imprisoned. So you have this law of judgment in your own life. If you admit it in full you are simply building a judgment bar by which your soul will presently be tried. First feel how just the law is, and how commonly accepted amongst men, and how without it society could make no progress in civilisation. Why do you despise the lamp? Because it conceals the light. But it is hand-painted! You properly reply that you do not care about its being hand-painted because what you want is light, and light out of that lamp you cannot have; and therefore you, not as a theologian, but as a man who knows the value of money, very properly decline to purchase a lamp that conceals the light within itself. Would it not be so with an organ? What a noble-looking organ it is! It has innumerable pipes; as for manuals, nothing was ever seen like it in the history of organ-building: now play it. The keys will not move. What a beautiful outline it presents to the eye! What we require from an organ is music; this organ has everything but music: then let some fool buy it, we will not have any responsible relation to it. So then you have this same law of the fifteenth chapter of Ezekiel operating through and through your life; you keep your shop upon it, you conduct your whole business upon it: why do you shrink from applying it to yourself, your character, the result of your training? Oh that men were wise, that they were fearless enough to apply their own common-sense to their own moral condition!

It is worth while to spend time upon the thorough elucidation of the law and fact in order that we may bring up the slower-minded students to the full recognition of the central thought of the chapter. We may proceed to say that the purpose of piety, or religion, is character. Here, for example, is a very able dialectician; he can split a hair in two; he is not only a member of the church, he is a preacher. Is that all you can say about him, that he can split a hair in two? Yes, that exhausts the certificate. Here is a most orthodox man; he would give up his seat in church if the preacher said one word he did not believe; and yet he is the man who rails against the Pope of Rome: thus consistent are we! He will have a full body of theology in every discourse. A man may preach upon the tenth chapter of Nehemiah, containing all the Jewish polysyllables that ever could be collected into one view; and yet if he does not find in these polysyllables the fall of man, and every other doctrine, either invented or elucidated by theologians, he will abandon the church. Is that all you can say about him? No, we could say a little more about him. What? He is hand-painted, like the lamp and like the organ. Who painted him? Artist not known, probably himself. Some men do write their own books and paint their own pictures; why may he not have taken up with a little self-decoration? Will he lie? Not frankly, not bluntly. Will he steal? Not with his hands; he can put his hands behind him, and rob you all the day long; but he is extremely orthodox. Does this vine bear grapes? Not one. What is it good for? For burning. Can wood be taken from him to do any work? No. Will men take a peg of him to hang any vessel thereon? They would not hang a dog on his word. But he is extremely "clear in his views." So I should imagine! In the matter of piety, if character fails all fails. Away with your theology and church-going and hymn-singing and canting. What is character? It is described at length by the Apostle Paul: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." A man may bear all these fruits and know nothing about scholastic or formal theology.

Do not believe the little technicalist, the ill-grown pope, who

tells you that he knows more about the Cross than you do. Poorest woman, poorest man, heartbroken because of sin, thou knowest all that is in the Cross, for in the Cross you will find love, and righteousness, and law, and tenderness, and pardon, and hope, redemption, salvation. When a man begins to explain these words he begins a work he has no right to undertake. Explanation has rent the Church in twain. Are not some things to be felt? Is it not profanity to attempt to analyse certain things? Who would analyse the love which inspires a mother? Who would take to pieces the sympathy which heals the heart that is sore? To analyse the Cross, to dissect the dead Christ, to show some cleverness in the analysis of divine affection—this it is that has made infidels by the thousand. We want tenderness, love, sympathy, pity; we need to incarnate the Spirit of Christ in actual beneficence; then shall we bring men to our Lord, and find heaven in the bringing of them. By "character" do not understand outward decorum. There is no man who has so base a character as the man who selfishly and boastingly thinks he has a good one.

Never trust a self-idolater. Jesus Christ would have no connection with the Pharisees. The Pharisees were all respectable men. If there is a worse character than the respectable man it is the man who boasts of his wickedness. The true character feels its unworthiness in the sight of God, which judges itself not by human standards but by divine requirements, and that says, when it has uttered its best prayer and done its best deed, Unprofitable! unclean! We are not bearing fruit to God until we have subordinated the whole soul to his will. That is piety. The one thing we have not given up is the thing we will not surrender, and that is our will. We have marked the will as private property. We are quite prepared to adopt any number of views: but who can give up his own way? It is difficult to do so at home on a small scale; and there are parents who would never break a child's will: I have seen them when their child has broken their heart. The human will must be broken at some point. We do not give up our will to God, and therefore we are not Christians. No matter what else we are, until our will has gone out of us and has been taken into God's keeping we are

not Christians. "Not my will, but thine, be done"—that is the issue and the glory of the Cross. Have you any will regarding yourself? If you can say, "None: let God's will be done," you have been with Jesus, and have learned of him. What about your views? *You* cannot have any views. What have you seen of the universe? What other worlds have you been in? You are the tenant of one of the smallest worlds that has any name. For you and me, therefore, to talk about views is monstrous. Where did we come from? We do not know. How long shall we be here? We cannot tell. What will happen to-morrow? Nobody can predict. But what "views" we have! Poor blind moles! Better have clean hearts, better yield ourselves to our Father's keeping, let our whole life go up in continual incense to him who gave it us; and as for views, intellectual conceptions, these may come as the ages roll over us; in a thousand millenniums from this moment we may possibly have seen something; up to the present time it will be enough if we have seen our sin and seen Christ's Cross.

This standard of judgment will keep us right in estimating everything. Do you seek grapes on thorns? You are operating in the wrong direction. Do you seek figs on thistles? You will never find them. You must judge everything by its purpose, and according as a thing serves its purpose is it really good and really valuable. That standard would keep us right in all judgment if we would abide by it. It would keep us right in judging sermons. What is the object of a sermon? The object of a sermon is multifold, and yet one, and may be thus stated: Stimulus, encouragement; instruction, sympathy; all resulting in edification, upbuilding. Sometimes the purpose of the preacher is to stimulate: judge him by his purpose. You have no right to set up a false standard of judgment. Sometimes the preacher's purpose is to wrestle with a human soul, and say, "I will not let thee go to hell": judge him by his burning object. Do not judge him by some cold standard, or apply some little critical foot-rule you may happen to have borrowed from some better man, but judge him by his evangelistic zeal, by his apostolic fervour; say, To-day he wanted to save a soul, and everything gives way before that mighty, beneficent, holy purpose. Sometimes his object is to

instruct; then see how careful he is in the analysis of words, in the tracing of histories, in the correction of mistakes, in the collection and right presentation of intelligence of every kind: by his purpose he must be judged. Even the poet has given this canon of criticism. Says Pope:—

“In every work regard the writer's End,
Since none can compass more than they intend.”

The grammar of the couplet might be found fault with if we were critical; but we are in search of a just canon of criticism, and the poet submits one which we accept as just, and tersely expressed. Judge prayer by the same standard. What is the object of prayer? Submission to the divine will. It is no part of my business to pray conclusively, and without leaving God any alternative, that the child's life may be spared. The child is not mine. No man or woman has a child; the child is God's: “All souls are mine.” I will therefore say, Lord, I love this little child, and without it I feel as if I could not live: may I have it a while longer? No. Thy will, my God, be done. That is Christianity. Your views are folly; your orthodoxy is a hypocrisy; but when you looked up to God and could not see him for your tears, or saw him better through the waters of your grief, and said to him in that night of agony, “Thy will, my God, be done,” the angels whispered, “Behold, he prayeth.” I have no right to pray for an excellent crop of wheat, or for a fine day for my excursion, or for the re-establishment of my health, except in the sense of indicating what I should personally like to be accomplished; but having uttered it I must leave it, and if Heaven should darken into a great cloud above me, indicating that the answer is negative, all I have to do is to say, The Lord knows better than I know: the wet day will be a fine day, the crop will be an enlargement of the garner in some way or other which I cannot understand, and this wasting away of my health is but hastening me toward the enjoyment of immortality.

The same judgment ought to be applied to the Bible. What is the purpose of the Bible? To reveal God. We have laid the emphasis, as we have often said, upon the wrong words; we have gone to the Bible for things it does not grow. What does the

Bible profess to be? A revelation of God, of God's personality, of God's method of governing the world, of God's purpose in the education of human nature. Then the man who is puzzling himself over the authorship of the books and the dates of the various treatises is on the wrong track? Entirely. For what should a man go to the Bible? For God. Will he find God there? On every page. You are now in the right direction, you have gone upon the proper quest; you will receive answers along that line, and doors will fly back along the whole circle of the horizon to admit you into larger liberty. Some men are always on the wrong quest; intellectually they are fearfully and wonderfully made. They want to know what people did in the early centuries. Those centuries will be the death of them. What heaps of slain will be found on the field of the first centuries! It would occasion me no surprise to find that clubs had been organised for the solitary purpose of finding out what men did in them. We are living in the nineteenth century, and we have around us ignorance, and oppression, and wrong, evil of every form, weakness, poverty, and our business is to address ourselves to the immediate time: whilst we are mooning about the early ages a woman or a child may be dying of cold on the threshold of our houses consecrated to the study of antiquity.

In all things judge by the purpose. The Bible is a vine that grows, so to say, revelations of God. And judge men by the same standard. What is the great purpose of man? To represent God. When he fulfils that purpose he fulfils his election and calling; when he fails of that purpose, no matter what he is, he has failed to bring forth fruit unto God. How all things would be harmonised and adjusted righteously if we could receive this rule! One star differeth from another star in glory: judge each star by its weight, distance, magnitude, and relation to the whole solar system as known to us. Do not find fault with one man because he is not another. How is it that we cannot praise one man without disparaging some other man? How difficult it is for the critic to fix his attention upon one solitary worker! He will describe a preacher as having certain faculty and ability, but he has not the polish of A, or the culture of B, or the massive dignity

of C, or the almost superhuman glory of D. What a marvellous monster he would be if he combined all these people, and almost laid hold of E! Let us ascertain what the purpose of the man, the book, the institution is, and be just to it in proportion as it realises that purpose. Jesus Christ said: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." Do you blame the violet because it is not the vine? Do you blame the little, weak, limpid vine because it is not the sturdy and umbrageous oak? Do you denounce the oak because it does not bear figs? Or do you denounce the fig tree because it does not grow bread-corn? Every man in his own order; every institution in its own place. The law is one: judge everything by the purpose for which it was created; and judging man by this purpose we expect of man character. Without that character, such as the Apostle has described, no matter what else man has, he is fit only to be burned. Let the word of the Lord prevail.

Chapter xvii. 2.

"Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel."

PROPHECY IN PARABLE.

THE word "riddle" may in this connection mean parable, picture, symbol; whatever will excite and interest the imagination. "A great eagle with great wings, longwinged, full of feathers, which had divers colours"—this is a parabolical representation of Nebuchadnezzar—"came unto Lebanon"—came unto Jerusalem—"and took the highest branch of the cedar"—there was so much cedar in Jerusalem and in the holy edifice that the term "Lebanon" became not inappropriate as a description of the holy city itself. "He cropped off the top of his young twigs"—the reference here is to Jehoiakim; there was also a "vine of low stature," the reference being to Zedekiah; "There was also another great eagle"—the reference here is to Pharaoh. In order to see the whole image in its proper historical relation and perspective, compare 2 Kings xxiv. 8-20; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9-13; Jer. xxxvii., lii. 1-7: put all these passages together, and you feel the atmosphere of the sacred riddle or pictorial representation of a chapter in the marvellous history of divine providence.

Note God's method of creating interest in his administration or way of doing things—"Son of man, put forth a riddle." God will appeal to our interest in some way. If the zephyr has not voice enough to arrest us, God will employ the thunder; if the little silvery streamlet, hurrying through its green banks, has nothing to say to us, the great floods shall lift up their voices and compel us to attend. God is trying to get at our attention by every possible means; now by a star, now by a flower; now by a great social revolution, now by the overturning of dynasties;

now by the pulling up of old trees in which men have built their nests for ages ; now by taking away a little child, now by throwing down a fortune which had taken a lifetime to build ; now by a solemn psalm, now by an appeal as if uttered by a lute : thus, and so, and every way, God is trying to get at our attention, to arrest our thought, to compel us to think, if afterwards he might constrain us to pray. The direct way is not always the best. There cannot be two masters of providence : let God be King. Some men are much too direct and practical ; they do not allow for the variety which is characteristic of the human mind : such men are gifted with stubbornness, and it is often called steadfastness, a very different term—the one poor, iron-like, and altogether without accommodation or tenderness ; and the other a fine mixture of elements, culminating in strength that may be leaned upon. Who shall say which is the best method of getting hold of people's attention ? The circuitous way may sometimes be the shortest way. There are some people who have no imagination. When they hear the word imagination they are amused. Were we to charge, as we could well do, some preachers and theologians who are always full of fear about other people with the want of imagination, how merry they would be ! They would almost be constrained to prolong the feast that they might laugh the more merrily at our folly ; because they associate with imagination false meanings. Imagination is the highest faculty of the mind, it is almost that other mind that associates itself with the highest enjoyments and uses of immortality. There are others who have no practical judgment, or sound, prosaic, real reason ; they are all feathers, like an owl ; you do not know where they are, when they will return, or whether they will ever come home again. God must arrest them with great stone pillars, with huge granite walls ; to appeal to their imagination would be to appeal to what does not exist. Who will say there is only one way of preaching, teaching, educating young men ? There are a thousand ways : what we want is that a man shall say when his way is not being adopted, This will suit a good many : God bless the teacher in this effort ; he is not now speaking to me, but to persons who can understand that way alone ; let Heaven's grace make hearts tender as he unravels his parable, as he takes up his harp and discourses upon it sweet, mysterious music. When a preacher

is setting forth riddle and parable, the man who falsely thinks himself a logician—for there can only be a logician once in a generation—should pray that the parable may be blessed. When the preacher or teacher is seeking by hard, strong argument to force home a truth, those who live on wings should carry themselves as high as possible, that they may bring down a larger, riper blessing upon the teacher and his method. This is God's administration; this is the many-coloured robe of providence with which he would clothe our naked shoulders. Let us make room for all men, all talents: the Church of the living God is not constituted of one colour; it is that marvellous rainbow-like aggregation of hues which, when revolving with the speed of God's own thought, becomes a perfect white. What has come to us—a riddle, a parable, a dream, a process of logic, a historical induction? Take God's gift, and through it find the Giver.

Observe how God works through instrumentality. We do not know the full meaning of that word. Sometimes we stop at the instrument, and forget the Hand that is using it. What a great figure the king of Babylon makes in this chapter! Yet the king of Babylon knew nothing as to what he was doing; he held councils, and projected schemes, and elaborated policies, and thought himself a prime mover in the whole action of this dramatic and exciting story. What have kings to do with the order of the world? Nothing. What have noisy legislators, and pugnacious debaters, and dreadful theological controversialists to do with the final shaping and rule of all human processes? Nothing. God works by instrumentality. The Lord uses the king of Babylon, and the king of Babylon thinks he is using God. Who can measure the depth of human folly? Who built the prison which is a necessary structure in all society? God built it. Who arrests the thief and hales him to the judgment seat? The constable? No: society takes up the felon. The constable's hand is not one of five fingers only, strong, muscular, lithe fingers; the constable would be thrown down and trodden upon if he did not represent society, conviction, justice, righteousness; and before that every Judas falls back, blanched, depleted, shamed. Yet kings nod their heads at one another and imagine

themselves prime factors ; and every man, in his own house, or business, or other little way, thinks himself a king. We know not that all things are governed by the Lord. Who erected the Cross of Christ ? Not the Jews, except in an intermediate, transient way ; God built the Cross, or it would only have been a Roman gallows. The Cross was fashioned in eternity. If we had eyes that could see, instead of the blurred vision that can really see nothing, we should discern the shadow of the Cross upon the face of every star and every flower, and on the disc of the whole scheme of things. Who kindled the fires of martyrdom ? God. Let it never be supposed that the children of God were handed over to the merest tyrants and representatives of brutal temper and black blood, that they might wreak their vengeance on purity, simplicity, and godliness. There is a sense in which bad men did it, or in which infatuated good men did it, but God was all the while educating the world by suffering, by exhibitions of heroism ; and who can tell what compensations thrilled the hearts of those who were unknown till persecution dragged them into fame and chased them up to heaven ? We know not how God speaks to the heart. We have never had a message from quite the edge of the grave ; words have been spoken to us, it may be, within ten feet of the tomb, but not from the very edge of the grave itself ; what visions then shone on the departed soul we cannot tell ; here and there some exceptional instance of triumph has been recorded : but who knows how God receives into his arms at last those who are ready for home ? The Lord reigneth. There are no accidents. There are no mere tyrannies. There are no sub-gods. Nero was a creation of the Almighty. He did not know it ; the poor, emaciated, gluttonous, bibulous soul did not know it : but the devil himself is a black servant in the great household. It will be explained at last : let the Lord reign.

Ponder God's interpretation of an oath. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God ; As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head." Zedekiah plighted his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, and Zedekiah's oath is called the Lord's oath. That is a mistake which many persons make when they suppose that they are taking an oath : it is God's oath that they are taking,

it is God's word that they are plighting. There is the upper side of an oath, that relates to the throne of God. Zedekiah swore in the name of God, and God said, That word must be carried out, because my name has been used in sanctioning and authenticating it. We must not bandy about the divine name, and imagine God takes no heed of it. There are many ways of setting aside God. God will not be set aside. We vote him out of our Parliament and out of our history, and we think we have got rid of him. He will come again, rendingly, judicially, penally; may he not come destructively! When an oath is taken profanely it is not done with. If you have used the king's seal, you are responsible for that stamp; the wax is no longer common wax. Where did you find the seal? How did you use it? Why did you employ it? What is the meaning of it? Have you been trifling with your best self, and not only doing so, but seeking to force eternity into your menial service? The Lord is a jealous God, in the sense of seeking the issues of all human actions, and showing men by divers providences that they are not acting on their own responsibility alone, until they renounce the name of God, and even then they suddenly stumble upon the throne of judgment. How many vows have we broken? Let every man answer the question himself; it is not the business even of a pastor to tear open wounds that are hardly cicatrised, gashes in the life out of which the red blood is still oozing. Let every man testify to himself and to God as to how he has broken vows and made oaths of no account, and so familiarised himself with altars at which he has sworn that the altars have become common stone, mud, without fire, or glory, or divinity. We best rebuke the oath-breaker by keeping the vows we have made ourselves. When we are careful about our own vows and oaths we shall be quiet but mighty examples, rebuking with severest accusation and reproach those who use human language merely for personal convenience.

What is the meaning of all these riddles and parables inspired by Heaven? The answer is given in verses 22-24. These verses have been accepted by Jewish commentators and by Christian commentators alike as referring to the Messiah, to be read and pondered and grasped as to their inner meaning and effect. God

winds up the whole parable and its application by some marvellous words; he says, "And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it." Then what mistakes we have to correct! We had been thinking otherwise of the whole schemes of things. What a revelation there will be at last, what a different view, what a correction of our misinterpretations of providence! Everything has been of God. Is the high tree down? God felled it. Is the low tree exalted? God lifted it upwards to the blue heavens. Is the green tree dry, withered, utterly desiccated? God hath sucked its juice, and left it a barren, blighted thing in the meadow. Is the dry tree flourishing? Is the tree that men thought dead beginning to show signs of vitality? Are there spring buds upon it? Are the birds looking at it curiously, as if by-and-by mayhap they may build even there? The Lord hath made the dry tree to flourish. This is divine sovereignty. The God of the riddle and the God who works his will among the trees must be regarded as the same God. What is true in this verse which closes the chapter is true to all human life. Is one man successful? God made him so, in the degree in which his success was legitimate, healthy, righteous. Is a man vainly, viciously successful? The green tree shall be dried up. Is a man humbled, laid low in the dust? God may have done that for the man's salvation; after a day or two who can tell what may happen, if the overthrow has been accepted in the right spirit, and if instead of being turned in the direction of despair it has been turned in the direction of self-examination and self-accusation, and penitence, and broken-heartedness? Is the nation suffering from singular visitation? Is trade going away? Are men working much for nothing? Do men rise in the morning simply that they may sting themselves with disappointments all the day, and come back at night to seek rest from a world of tumult and worry? God is looking on, and he will know when to send the ships back to the ports, and when to revive commerce, and when to make the desert blossom as the rose. Is an enemy hard upon me? It is not the enemy, it is God: I have been doing wrong; when I have opposition to encounter I must ask myself serious

questions ; as for any man that can assail me, who is he ? what faculty has he ? what can he do ? “ Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” The king of Babylon may be sent to smite me because I have forgotten the King of heaven. Have no fear of your enemies, but interpret their enmity aright. If a man’s ways please the Lord he will make even his enemies to be at peace with him ; if a man shall try to be right and good, virtuous, generous, and to live a divine life, no weapon that is formed against him shall prosper ; it shall be forged, it shall be whetted, it shall be lifted up, but it shall never come down upon the head of him for whom it was intended. How joyous would be our life if we could live in this strong conviction ! Some of us have had opposition enough, and we have now lived long enough to thank God for it. Opposition made us. Patronage will kill any man ; success will turn almost any head. We cannot be helped by recommendation beyond a very little degree ; but we can be helped all but infinitely by contempt, neglect, sneering, mockery, foolish, baseless reproach and accusation. There is no man in the front line of the section of life to which he belongs who has not been set there by hostility. But the hostility has been rightly interpreted, rightly accepted, piously applied. The man on whom the stroke has fallen has kissed the rod and said it is in the hand of God.

The Lord having discoursed by the medium of a parable upon the greatness and the glory of certain men, says, “ Shall it prosper ? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither ? it shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof. Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper ? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it ? it shall wither in the furrows where it grew.” “ I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not : yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.” Asaph beheld the world, and thought it had turned itself upside down, that virtue was somewhere wailing like a lost child, and vice was eating up the banquet of heaven. He stepped into the sanctuary, and all was explained.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we know that thy word is right. We see the good: how to perform it we know not. We are assured that thy word is good and right, and the only word worth attending to; yet, how to do that which we know we find not. We cannot tell how this is. Thou hast made us, and not we ourselves: yet we feel that we have found out many inventions; that ours is a perverted judgment and a debased will. We know that, but we cannot account for it. We see the wrong thing, and go straight to it and do it: we could not do it more heartily had it been commanded from heaven to be done. We have done the things we ought not to have done, and we have left undone the things we ought to have done; and this we will do to-morrow, and do on our dying day; and all this afflicts us like a strange mystery in the night-time. We have no answer, we have no explanation. We mock ourselves with vain arguments, but still there remains the deadly fact that we are living away from God, turning our back upon the light, mistaking an opinion for a revelation, and regarding bigotry and obstinacy as religious veneration and firmness. Then how ignorant we are! We do not know the meaning of our own words; we fill our mouth with them, but the heart knows nothing of their meaning. God pity us! Let the Lord in heaven cry over us with tears of his own heart; for verily we are lost and undone, and we are strangers to ourselves, and in our heart there is a tremendous schism. Oh that we might recover ourselves by thy power, that we might hearken to the voice of thy Son, and answer his call with instant and glad obedience! Oh that we might keep thy law and walk in the way of thy commandments! then would our peace flow like a river, and our righteousness would be as the waves of the sea. May we fall into the divine movement; may we accept the divine will, and have no will of our own: then shall we revolve with the stars, and move on with the solemn forces of the universe; and wherever we are we shall see the gate of heaven standing wide open, and hear voices tender as the music of heaven. Amen.

Chapter xviii. 2.

“What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?”

ABUSE OF DOCTRINE.

THIS is an instance of the abuse of doctrine. The doctrine itself may be right, but the use which is made of it may be wrong. It is precisely there that many practical and serious

mistakes are made by men. Instead of looking at the doctrine itself, they look at what somebody has said respecting it, or at some use which has been made of it; and dwelling upon the perversion of the doctrine, they forget what the doctrine itself really requires: so good becomes evil spoken of; mistakes are made which tend towards looseness of faith, and after that to enslavement, and darkness of doubt and unbelief. There is nothing wrong in the proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." All life is teaching that. This has ceased to be a proverb in the sense of being a local epigram, something that a few people have discovered here and there: it is now the philosophy of life; it is now a condensed expression of universal and irresistible law. Yet this doctrine, so true to fact, so coincident with history and experience, has been twisted into private interpretations, and has been demoralised, and has been perverted into an occasion of offence. Therefore the Lord will have no more of it. He will put a stigma upon it, he will brand it as obsolete in its merely epigrammatic form, and he will show that although he can do without our proverb his great law rolls on, the same, inevitable, irresistible, and in the end beneficent.

How do men pervert this doctrine of the fathers having eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth being set on edge? They seek to ride off from responsibility on the ground that they are suffering vicariously, and perhaps innocently; they cannot help doing evil: the thirsty throat was born within them, and water cannot quench it, so they must drink fire and brimstone: they say they are fated to do evil; the thief is in their muscles, and they must steal; their father was a felon, and they must keep up the family line. Do they speak so frankly? No. Whoever speaks frankly may be converted; whoever looks at himself and says, You are a drunkard, you are a thief, you are a bad man, may to-morrow pray. His frankness is the beginning of a religion. How then do men speak about themselves now? In a pensive tone, with a melancholy that is supposed to express a degree of resignation, philosophical, although self-reproachful; they speak now about law, heredity, development: and thus they walk down to darkness on the stilts of polysyllables. The

fathers have eaten sour grapes, say they, and our innocent teeth are set on edge : this is the outworking of the mystery, the occult law of heredity. The Lord will not have that any longer ; he says : This proverb shall cease ; these people are being ruined by their own epigrams ; they do not see the full sweep and scope and bent of things. Then he lays down the grand, all-inclusive, all-involving doctrine to which we shall presently turn. But is there not a law of succession, of heredity ; is there not a mystery of paternity, following the little boy all the time ? Yes, there is. Take care what use you make of that fact. Let it fall under the great all-governing law, and then it will come into right perspective. Do not take it out and look at it in its isolation, or then it will become a fallacy, a lie. Be careful how you pluck anything out of its proper place. The buttercup that looks so beautiful on the greensward looks ashamed of itself and offended at you the moment you pluck it. Take care how you pull things out of their setting. You have put the buttercup into a vase filled with scented water, but it drinks, and dies. Be careful how you take out a text from the Bible. The Lord never made any texts. Where did we get that word "text" ? It has ruined us ; it has ruined the pulpit, it has emptied the pews, it has turned honest, frank, brave men into bigots. God knows nothing about texts ; he knows about the book, the revelation, the whole thought, the all-encircling thought and love : but little preachers, with partial digestion, suffering from an eternal disagreement with the things they have eaten, have discovered texts, chapters, verses, and thus they have cut up God's paradise into little bouquets of flowers which they have set in their houses, and if they be not accepted as the only flowers which God ever made, then the man who doubts that solemn fallacy is a heretic.

How does society, that humanity which is next to God, treat this law of heredity ? From the highest spiritual civilisation get hints of the true theocracy. How then does society treat this law of heredity ? Very directly, summarily, and justly. The culprit, being not only a felon but a philosopher, says to the magistrate, I was born as you find me ; I am not the thief, it is my father who is guilty of felony ; I am the victim of

heredity ; I do not know what the word means, but I feel as if it covered all I want to say : excuse my detaining your worship any longer, I have an engagement in another place ; pity me as the victim of heredity. And his worship, being also a philosopher, without being a felon, says, The argument is good, it is based in reason ; you are discharged. Is it so in society ? Is it not accounted just in society that the soul that sinneth it shall be punished ? Instead, therefore, of having a theology that does not coincide with our own highest instincts and noblest practices, we had better see what adjustment can be created as between our theology and our habits, laws, and practices. Society may be right, when the individual citizen may be wrong. There is a spirit in the individual man, and there is also a spirit in the social man, and no law can stand in any civilised country that does not represent the supreme instinct and highest spiritual education of the citizenship. In society we ignore heredity : what if in the Church it has been pushed as a doctrine to evil because of irrational uses ?

What is the great principle then that is to supersede small proverbs, and local sayings, and misapplied epigrams ? “As I live, saith the Lord”—solemn word : when it is uttered I feel as if the gates of eternity had been thrown back that the King might come out in person and address his people the universe—“As I live, saith the Lord God, . . . behold, all souls are mine” ; and the law of punishment is, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” The universe replies, That is just, that is good. The word “soul” does not bear a merely theological definition in this connection ; there is no exclusive reference to what is termed the doctrine of immortality, or to any psychological puzzle : by “soul” understand person, individual man,—mind, intelligence, and moral accountability, as represented by an abstract term. All souls are God’s : in their coming and going, in their evolution, in their reflux, and in their flowing, in all the changing phases of their education they are God’s own souls, and he watches them with a care he does not bestow upon the stars. He will not have a child lost ; if one member of his household be gone astray he will leave those who are at home that he may follow the one that is wandering. “The Son of Man is come to seek

and to save that which was lost." God is not at ease whilst one of his children is out of doors. "God is love." That does not prevent his laying down the law, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." That is not arbitrary; that is necessary, that is reason working itself out, a great stern law operating beneficently, when judged by sufficient breadth of time. The Lord is not a tyrant with a rod of iron in his hand, smiting men because they do wrong; he is the Sovereign of a universe so constituted that no man can tell a lie without loss—loss of quality, loss of standing, loss of dignity, loss of confidence. That is God's universe—sensitive to truth, sensitive to all that is exact, honourable, noble, pure, right. It is good to live in such a universe so long as we are in harmony with its spirit, but when we lose touch with its moral music it crushes us, not tyrannically and arbitrarily, not in a spirit of petty resentment, which begets resentment, but in a spirit of justice, reason, righteousness.

Do not hew this law into little proverbs: accept the law in its unity, entirety, and purpose; live in harmony with it, then it will be living in a house that is founded upon a rock; live otherwise, and the rock will, so to say, leap from its place to avenge the affronts that are dealt on the face of its land. We need no theologian with his elaborate apparatus to teach us this doctrine, for we see it in our own circle, we observe it in the operation of our own consciousness, and we note it in all the evolution and procession of human history. Do not understand the word "die" as imparting some narrow physical fact. The word "die" needs to be properly defined. There are those who say, Why do you not believe the word "die" when it stands there? Simply because the word "die" does not stand there in any little, narrow, partial signification. To die is not to fall down and be prostrate and cold. Many a living man, according to social interpretations of that term, is dead. It is possible, in Christian terms, to be dead whilst we are living: this is a contradiction which words can never reconcile, but which consciousness and experience daily and amply testify. There are men who are sepulchres; there are men who know they are dead, but try to persuade an unsuspecting companionship, whether in the house or in the church, that they are living, because they can utter

religious words and attend to religious formalities. By "die" understand loss, want of sympathy with God, alienation from right, life without life. My soul, come not thou into that mystery or secret! Thus interpreted the word "soul" has its true significance, the word "die" is promoted to its right symbolism, and then the law operates, and we acknowledge its operation and attest its beneficence: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"—go down in volume, in quality, in power, in utility, in interest, in sympathy with things upright and beautiful. To die in the fleshly sense of the term would be nothing. There are men who are so weary of what is called their life that they would be glad to die. When we read "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," persons say, Why not accept the word "die" as indicating a sublime and solemn fact? Because there is a sublimer and more solemn fact. It is possible to be dead whilst we live; it is possible to be conscious yet not to be blessed. Along that suggestion lie all the mysteries of the future, and we cannot follow them in their evolution and culmination.

See how good the Lord is. The just man shall live, saith the Lord. If the just man have a son that is a robber, the robber shall not be saved because the father was a just man. If a bad man have a good son, that good son shall live, though his father be wallowing in hell. There is the law of heredity torn to shreds, so far as it is perverted into a refuge of lies. Your father is a good man, therefore you are a good man, would seem to be the short and easy logic,—wanting in nothing but in reason and truth. If the Lord will not take you to heaven because your father was a good man, is he likely to send you to hell because your father was a bad man? Be faithful to the reasoning: do not shrink from all the issues of the statement. The Lord defends himself against accusations so unjust and debasing; he deals with the individual soul; he inquires into individuality of character. The question is, not what was your father, but what you are. Shall we say, Lord, my father was a bad man, and therefore I cannot help being bad myself? The Lord will not allow that reasoning. The Lord gives every man a chance in life, an opportunity; allots to every man a measure of faith, or grace, or reason; attaches to every man something on which he

can found a divine judgment. Shall we say, My father was so good that I have not felt the need of being good myself; I want to be saved with the family? The Lord will not admit such reasoning. We are not saved in families, we are saved one by one; so the Lord will have it that his way is equal. The great law of punishment therefore stands. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." Finally? Perhaps. Certainly finally? No. When did the Lord ever speak without putting in some sign of his fatherly heart? Where is there a history without at least the suggestion of a gospel?

"But"—here the divine voice took upon it all the music of eternity—"But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die." That is the gospel, the good news, the glad tidings of the Cross. But, Lord, he has made a history, he has a foul past; what shall be said of the yesterdays all stained and tainted with crime? There is an answer to that inquiry, the inquiry itself being natural—"All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him." That is a divine forgiveness. Sometimes men increase the estimate of their own virtue by reminding the forgiven one how much has had to be forgiven. The Lord will have none of that partial pardoning; transgressions of yesterday shall have no life to-day, no memory; they shall never be the subject of reproachful reminiscence—nay, they shall never be the subject of ungracious comment; they shall die: "In his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" This God is the God we adore. May a righteous man fall? The Lord says he may: "But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath

sinned, in them shall he die." No election can supersede character. It is character that is elected—goodness to life, evil to death; and the devil has never been able to invert or modify that law.

Now the Lord God becomes preacher, apostle, missionary, and he says: "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." That is preaching. It is so righteous, so stern in law, so noble in reason, so tender to tears of the heart in mercy and grace. The old preachers used to wrestle with their hearers. The great men of the pulpit that made the pulpit what it was in its best days wrestled with their hearers, seized them, arrested them, in the name of the Cross, in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and would not let them go until there was a clear understanding as to the responsibility of the preacher and the hearer. Such preaching has its vindication in God's own voice and in God's own method. Here is the exhortation, here is the appeal, here is the application. What is forgotten in the modern sermon is the application, the last tug, that final wrestle, that concluding importunity. A sermon should have reason, doctrine, philosophy, Scripture, experience: but it should never be without emotion, exhortation, appeal, tenderness. The preacher stands up to call men to repentance, to forgiveness, to heaven. A wonderful spectacle this of all men turning away from their paths of death, and turning into the paths of life. "Turn ye, turn ye! why will ye die?" Think of ten thousand all going in one direction, and a voice following them—a voice of reason and pleading and tenderness, and think of a moment in which the whole ten thousand feel that they are wrong, and they turn and return. That is the picture. God looks for it, expects it, welcomes it. Do not wait until the whole world turns, but let each man himself, as one, turn, think, pray, love, and say to the dying Christ, the one Saviour of the world, "Let me hide myself in thee."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou settest up and thou puttest down as seemeth good in thy sight. The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. Thou doest as thou pleasest amongst the armies of heaven, and amongst the children of men. Thou art doing all things well. Help us to believe in thy fatherly providence: oh that we may rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him, that he may give us our heart's desire. May our heart's desire be that God's will shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Thou art a great Destroyer: who can stand before the breath of thy mouth? Our God is a consuming fire: none can stay his hand, none may say unto him, What doest thou? Thou art a great Saviour; it is in thine heart to save the men thou hast created; there comes to us the great cry, Turn ye, turn ye! why will ye die? This is thy voice; it is the voice of thine heart, it comes from heaven, it comes from the Christ, it comes in all the events of thy providence. In God there is no death; thou wouldst have all men turn and be saved; thou art the living God, and thou wouldst give life to all those who put their trust in Christ. For this Christ we bless thee; he is the brightness of thy glory, he is the express Image of thy person. We see not God, but we see Jesus; we follow him with wonder, admiration, rapture, confidence; we give ourselves wholly into his care. We say, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Creator of all men, and the Redeemer of the world: have us ever in thy holy keeping. Thou knowest the world we live in; thou dost govern all its affairs. For a time we seem to rule them, but thou dost overrule our dominion, and out of darkness thou dost bring light, and out of tumult great peace. Thou knowest the weariness of many: oh the heart-break, the heart-ache, the weariness, the tears that bring no relief, the sighing that is almost prayer: thou knowest all our life; continue to pity us and to sustain us by thy love; and when the night draws nigh, so much longed for by many, may it be found that even in our waiting and sighing and weariness we have been enabled to show forth somewhat of the grace and majesty of Christ. Amen.

Chapters xxvi.-xxviii.

THE FATE OF TYRE.

THese chapters are superb reading. There is nothing to equal them out of Isaiah and the Apocalypse. Read them verse by verse privately; they grow as they are read. Was ever such a picture of a city drawn as is here drawn of the now all-but-forgotten Tyre and the adjacent city, Phœnician Sidon? How could Sidon escape when the great wind of God fell upon

Tyre? It is dangerous to live near some cities, some people, some institutions. The twenty-seventh chapter more particularly describes in detailed specification the grandeur, the royalty of Tyrus. Everything about the city was beautiful. Where are all the beautiful cities of antiquity? God must needs pull down every city after a certain point. Cities forget themselves. They are apt to think they are the centre of power, the origin of sovereignty, the limit of deity. What is that wondrous ghostly power that has pulled all the cities down? We need not be theologians to entertain a question like this; we may be mere historians or geographers or inquirers. What has become of the pride, the pomp, the majesty of antiquity? Men have to dig for chiselled marble; they have to explore in order to get at the old streets that once were full of fashion and grandeur and pomp and ostentation. How is this? The earth can only stand a certain measure of sunshine; she must let the rest run off into any other worlds that are about. Churches, too, have been hewn to pieces in the same way. Where are the Seven Churches of Asia? Gone. Was it not a pity to take down the Seven Churches of Asia? No; it was educational, disciplinary. It takes, it may be, millions of years to scatter a pinch of dust upon the surface of the earth: it takes ages to humble man, to chasten him; to rebuke churches, and dogmatisms, and prejudices, and sectarianisms. The Lord hath weary work! He has been toiling some fifty years with you, and you are not perceptibly better to-day than you were when he began. Yet you are better if you have been in earnest all the time. Astronomers tell us that the earth is getting larger—there is a kind of fine powdered dust that comes from some place high away—and that the surface of the earth is being increased. Have you seen the accretion? No man has seen it in its process. It is so that God is working, little by little, one prejudice more killed, another ray of light admitted, another folly struck down at the root; and thus in ages hence the world may be a trifle better than it is to-day. Great cities must be cut down in the meantime, like great forests, to let the light in, and to let God walk abroad upon the face of his own earth. We have been building him out; the question now is quite a serious one whether civilisation has not been a failure. All our plans, ambitions, and stupendous schemes

must be withered every seven years more or less, that we may be taught something. Some lessons are only to be learned at the grave's mouth. They cannot be read in any other light; they can be read best in shadow. How comes it that a city gets up to a certain point, and we say, Now nothing can hinder that city building right into the stars,—and lo! in the dawn of tomorrow the city is gone, yea, I sought it, but it could not be found, saith the man of wisdom and of honest and large research. What is it that checks everything at a given point? What is it that prevents one man more coming into the Church? What is it that says to you in your business, No further: here shalt thy proud waves be stayed? If this were not a fact we should not regard it religiously or care to inquire into it metaphysically or economically, but there it is. We are permitted to build on and up, and actually to call for the capital to be raised, and while the capital that was to crown the pillar is in mid-air the pillar itself is struck off in the middle, the whole scaffolding comes down, and the builders along with it. It is thus that God trains the world, trains the individual. If we could accept this providence we should know that the bounds of our habitation are fixed, that every faculty is measured out to us, that there is a man, an angel-man, going up and down the earth with a measuring rod in his hand, measuring off all things, and returning in decades or in centuries to ask how the inheritances have been treated, to turn out evil husbandmen and replace them, and to carry on the economy of providence. Thus rebuked, humbled, trodden in the dust, men may either be destroyed or they may there learn to pray, and learning to pray they shall stand up again princes elect and crowned of God.

Why was Tyrus rebuked and stripped and humbled? Because it came to pass in the case of Tyrus, as it comes to pass in our case, that too much prosperity begets a spirit of sneering. And God will not have any sneering in his school. Argumentative opposition as much as you please; such intellectual friction is educational, healthy, and helpful: but no sneering. When you sneer you are going down; when you sneer God is raising up a wind against you from the east, and it will blow you away. How did Tyrus sneer? She sneered religiously, which is the

worst kind of sneering. Keep sneering to the tavern, to the racecourse, to the place where evil men do congregate; but sneering has no right, title, or status in God's Church. Why was Tyrus rebuked? Why was all the ivory taken away? Why were the crowns taken up and dashed together, and thrown away, and broken like a potter's vessel? For this reason: "Because that Tyrus hath said against Jerusalem, Aha." That "Aha" cost Tyrus her life. No mockery, no taunting of man against man on religious or solemn subjects! Controversy if you will; sneering none. We were not made to sneer. Sneer at no man's prayers. They may be very imperfect as compared with ours, but they are not to be sneered at. Do not sneer at the idolater in the jungle. He is worshipping a fetich, some poor stone or branch of wood; or mayhap he is a little higher, and is worshipping the dawn and paying homage to the evening star. Do not laugh at him; any man who can fall down on his knees worshipfully before any object is not far from the kingdom of God. Your business is not to sneer at him, but to show him a more excellent way, and to show that way by walking it.

Is the Lord then interested in religious citizenship, and fellowship, and brotherhood? It would so appear from all history:—"Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus." He who sneers at Jerusalem challenges God; he who mocks the humble poor defies high Heaven. Tyrus *versus* Jerusalem,—the case so limited, Jerusalem might go down; but so long as Jerusalem stands for godliness, the true worship, the right conception of things, he who offends Jerusalem has to fight Omnipotence. Are we good?—not really and absolutely, no man is good in that sense, but good and honest in purpose, in thought? Do we keep a clean and lovely conscience? Are our aspirations all lofty, unselfish, noble? Do we want to be good? Then they that be for us are more than all them that be against us. Momentary defeat foreruns abiding victory. It is not we who are being opposed, it is God, in the degree in which we ourselves are godly. Do not fight your own battles, spitefully, resentfully. Do not say, I must draw my sword, and settle this by the arbitrament of steel. Give God some room in your life. When you need him most he will be most present. Your

prayers that have lain all these years without God's Amen shall all be answered in a moment. The prayers shall be so many replies to the enemy. Oh rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him, and though Tyrus be thine opponent she shall be stripped, driven away by the east wind into the inhospitable desert.

Can Tyrus fail? When Tyrus fails all the islands of the sea know of it: "Then all the princes of the sea shall come down from their thrones, and lay away their robes, and put off their brodered garments." Behold them all!—princes of Polynesia coming down from their thrones, stripping themselves, themselves folding up the garments and putting them away, and then replacing the garments embroidered and golden with garments of trembling. Why? Because famed Tyrus has fallen. Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen. We should learn thus from history. Can the greatest banks of the city come to nothing? Are there not some financial institutions that cannot be touched? Not one. The smallest bank in a country town may be as solvent as the Bank of England; but the Bank of England could be ruined to-morrow. There is no security out of heaven. He builds too low who builds beneath the skies. All other security is partial, relative, good as far as it goes; but so long as old Tyre lies in ruins, a rock on which fishermen dry their nets, let us believe that the proudest gold store may be a barren place and the very city of poverty and chagrin in the working out of the evolution of providence. We should learn from ruins. O vain man, poor boaster, you shall beg to-morrow! You that steep your arms to the elbows in gold shall write a begging letter ere the year closes. Riches make to themselves wings and fly away, and the great Babylon which you have builded is but a bubble in the air. Lay not up for yourselves riches where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: have riches in heaven; have riches in the word of God. Then you can never be poor; yea, though there be not one penny-piece in all your fortune, you may be richer than you ever were. There is a poverty that is unconscious of need; there is a poverty that can pray and hope.

See the uselessness of what is called environment. Tyrus had environment enough: her shipboards, trees of cedar; her masts

made of the cedars of Lebanon ; her oars of the oaks of Bashan ; fine linen with brodered work from Egypt, blue and purple from the isles of Elishah ; treasure upon treasure. So much for environment ! We think if we had more pictures on the walls we should pray more ; if we had a larger garden behind the house we should be more spiritually minded. It is not so. A man's heaven is in his heart ; a man's hell is within. Moreover, what is environment ? What you think a beautiful and educational environment another man may regard with horror. I know of a house whose dilapidation no words can describe ; hardly such a place can be imagined for darkness and filth and vermin and everything that is hideous. The poor man who was dying there was entreated to permit himself to be carried to an asylum, a hospital, a place of comfort ; "Nay," said he, "let me die comfortably in my own bed." What different views are taken by different men ! We staggered out of the room—we thought that corruption itself could go no further ; yet the poor man's only desire was to die in comfort in his own environment. I know of another case in which a man was besought to give himself over to friendly hands that something might be done for his recovery and for his renewal of strength, and when it was proposed that he should be taken to the hospital, he said, "No." Why not ? "Because they will wash me to death in that place." We talk about environment. We are told on the best authority that the bath is as great a terror to some people as is the prison itself, nay, in some instances it has been found to suggest a deadlier terror. Who are we that we should define environment and say, Under such and such circumstances such and such moral issues would take place ? Never ! unless there be something more. Only the Spirit can make man right, and only Christ, according to the faith, to the Christianity which I solemnly accept, can get at the spirit with renewing and sanctifying energy. All other teachers are reformers : Christ is a Saviour. What is the difference between Saviour and reformer ? The difference is the distance between the east and the west. Has any line been laid upon that measure ? It is the unmeasured immensity. When Christ gets into a man's heart, all the rest follows—all the cleanliness comes the same day, and on the morrow comes music, and on the third day comes the dawn of heaven.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou searchest the heart and triest the reins of the children of men: all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do: thou God seest us. We have heard that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; and now we are here at the altar of grace to testify that this witness is true. We know not the depth of our own heart, we cannot tell all that is within us; we suppose that the enemy is dead when he is only asleep; we say, Surely now he has gone and will return no more, for we are new creatures in Christ Jesus, when suddenly he returns and reasserts his mastery, and we feel that we are still his bondmen. The Lord grant unto us such self-searching of heart as shall lead to the expulsion of every evil thing. Search us and try us, and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting. Come not with the candle of judgment with which to search us, or we shall be consumed, but show us unto ourselves, until we are humble and conscious of helplessness, and are made to cry out for the living God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ, the only hope of the soul. Save us from self-delusion, from self-deceit; may we understand ourselves thoroughly, knowing what strength we have, and by what weakness we are enfeebled, clearly apprehending how inflammable we are, and understanding also how near thou art to extinguish the baleful fire. If our hands be clean, what if our heart be unclean? Can cleanness of hands save a man? Is there not a voice which comes down from heaven and from eternity, saying, Ye must be born again? Enable us to realise the necessity of the second birth, and if there is aught in us which thy Spirit can move into prayer may our cry day and night be, Oh that we might be born again! We bless thee for the prospect of a new beginning, a new birth, a new starting-point in life. Thou art always giving us new opportunities, beginnings of years and weeks and months, times of renewal, times which have upon them the sacredness of opportunities: may we understand these beginnings, and see how possible it is by the might of the Holy Ghost to begin again, to be new men in Christ Jesus. Save us from making a fair show in the flesh; save us from the dominion of all ceremony and form and calculated piety; bring us into penitence, contrition, broken-heartedness, self-abhorrence; then lead us to the fountain filled with blood, to the Cross of Christ; and to thy name, thou Three-One, shall be the praise.

Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Chapter xxxiii. 11.

"Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?"

DIVINE EXPOSTULATION:

[AN EVANGELISTIC ADDRESS.]

WE ought now and then to have an address from every pulpit that is distinctly evangelistic. By an evangelistic address I mean one that is specifically designed to show men the way of salvation, and to induce them to enter it and prosecute it to the end. In a stated ministry we cannot always have such addresses; we must have steady, persevering, sober, devout exposition of the divine Word. Occasionally, however, there ought to be a change, and that change ought to express itself in an ardent attempt to persuade men to come to the Saviour.

What is the Christian idea? Christian teachers are always talking to men about conversion, change of heart, and consequent change of habit. The Christian teacher seems to be intent upon pressing upon the attention of men a certain scheme of thought. He will not speak to us so much about practical life, conduct, habit, manners, and the like; he persistently addresses himself to the exposition and enforcement of certain abstract or metaphysical arguments. The plea is in part good; if good, it is very good. This is the only way worth proceeding, attempting the prosecution. The Christian idea is that if you can really alter a man's thought, you at the same time alter the man's life. The Christian teacher, therefore, if really sent from God, begins with the heart. He does not come to wash the hands, but to cleanse the soul; knowing that when the heart is really clean, thoroughly purified, the hands cannot be foul. He would make the fountain good that he may purify the stream. Why, then, this irrational and ungrateful aspersion upon the Christian ministry, that it is always dealing with thoughts, conceptions, intellectual and spiritual attitudes, and not addressing itself to social oppressions, and political considerations and exigencies?

For the reason I have given, we believe that the Christian method is the most fundamental; it carries everything before it; it is only abstract that it may become concrete; it only comes

down with celestial power and grace upon the heart that it may work out all manner of social reconciliations and duties. Are we right? We want to be right; we do not want to be as they are who simply beat the air. We know we could make a show of greater progress, but we also know that it would be but an appearance, a vain and transitory ostentation, because we believe that until the heart is right the hand cannot be clean, and we further believe that when the heart is right the hand will be industrious in all manner of kindly, gracious, helpful service. Are we right? How persons do under-estimate the power and the value of right-thinking! Who pays any attention to mere thought? Who in reality cares for the truly and lastingly spiritual? The carnal man likes to see demonstrations; he is fond of banners; he likes to see that something is, as he phrases it, going on. It is the judgment of a fleshly man. There is no real philosophy or durability in his proposal. It is a noise for to-day and a disappointment for to-morrow. But when the heart is right, when the thinking is true, when all internal estimates are exact, and we do know the true relation and values of things, then our whole conduct is built upon the right scale and is directed to the right end, and issues in delightful and heavenly satisfaction, because it is inspired by the right motive. We hold that motive is everything. We judge conduct by the motive. Conduct that does not represent motive of the highest quality is a lie. Character that has not at its very core the right motive is a calculated hypocrisy. The motive determines the quality. If a man be building from the outside and only on the outside, then be sure he is not a durable builder. Hence the slowness, or the apparent slowness, of the Christian movement. You can write a programme in a few moments; you can, by using proper instrumentalities, organise a demonstration for fourteen or ten days, and it shall be quite impressive and portentous to some minds and eyes; but it means nothing unless there be behind it a conviction, a spiritual reality, a noble motive—then it must win. Time is with it, the movement of the sun is with it, God is with it; all checks and recessions are only part of a great process: the right must come to throne and crown.

Hence it is that the Christian teacher does not take such an

active part in many fussy, aggressive, and noise-creating reforms. When a match is struck there is more noise than when the sun rises. All the great movements of the universe are silent. No man ever heard the falling back of the gates of the morning; yet the morning opens her radiant portals and comes up high in the sky to create the miracle of noontide. But what can we expect from outside critics when the men within the Church itself are not spiritual? They are organisers, machine-makers, manufacturers, always getting up something, and absolutely leaving no room for the ministry of God the Holy Ghost. When your minds are full of right thoughts we need take no further care of you—you are under the government of God; but whilst you have cast out the evil thoughts and have not received the good thoughts you are yourselves a temptation and an opportunity to the devil. First of all, then, we lay down this proposition, that a man must be born again; not merely restored, reformed, redressed, rehabilitated, but born, born again; starting life as a babe, with a babe's heart, and a babe's eye of wonder, and a babe's trustfulness. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

The proposition which Christianity has to make to men is: All this being granted, what you have to receive into your hearts is the power of the Cross of Christ. Who is Christ? He has many names that you need not learn just now. Have you begun at the right name? If you set a child down to begin anywhere about the middle of the alphabet he will never be able to find the place again. You must begin at the beginning; then there can be no mistake about it. Reason, nature herself tells you when you are right. My Lord hath a thousand appellations, yea, by ten thousand names is he known to all the adoring angels, but to me he is known first and midst and last by the sweet name—Saviour. Shall we make that name a little more English and say Saver? The man who is this plucks out of danger, draws in from peril, raises from hopelessness and helplessness; yea more, raises the dead. That is the true poetry, that the eternal reason. Possibly some men have begun at the wrong end of the appellations of Christ. Men may have been thinking of him as God, as King eternal, immortal, invisible; they may have been exciting their veneration and thus reducing their

penitence or their contrition ; in other words, they may have been working on the wrong side of their nature. What man wants in the first instance is the distinct consciousness that he needs a Saviour. Until he gets that consciousness he can make no progress. Let a man think he is quite well and he will never send for a physician ; let a man believe himself able to direct all his own movements, and he will never trouble any counsellor for suggestion or advice ; let a man fall into ill-health and feel more and more that he cannot cure himself, then he will begin to ask where the healer lives. It is exactly so with regard to this gospel. Let a man feel that the world as he knows it is quite enough for him, that he wants no other treasure than gold, that he wants no other duration than time, and that he is able to meet all exigencies out of his own resources ; and that man is outside the very purpose and mission of the Son of God. Saith Christ, " I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance " ; " They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick " ; " The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Until we realise the full meaning of these terms we cannot apply to Christ ; we could not accost him in the right spirit, or address him in the right tone ; even if we tried to pray, our prayers would freeze into ice upon our reluctant lips. Only broken-heartedness can pray ; only helplessness can cry mightily to Heaven ; only agony has the key of the Cross. If you have never felt this emotion in regard to the aggravation and guilt of sin, you are not gospel-hearers. Why should you be ? The gospel has nothing to say to you. The gospel meets men who are inquirers, who are saying, Who will show us any good ? This world is poor, is there no other world from which we can draw higher light and richer streams of blessing ? Then the gospel will say, Let us tarry here, on this very spot, and talk this matter out ; and it will not withhold from you any of its treasure, any of its music, any of its love. The first thing, however, is that you must supply the opportunity, you must come with a definite necessity. No man ever came to Christ with that necessity and went away empty. On the last day of the feast Jesus stood and cried, " If any man thirst——" That is what we mean by need. When

a man does not thirst he does not inquire for the stream, but when his throat is burning with thirst his lips are full of heat because of want of water; he tries to say, though chokingly, Where is the well? where is the stream? Then a child might lead him; but so long as that necessity is not biting him, burning him, scorching him, he holds his head aloft, he will not be talked to, he will not have any dogmatic teaching; let him alone. The time will come when he will ask the least child that can talk to tell him where the living stream doth flow.

The Christian idea is that there is only one Saviour. But he is a thousand Saviours in one. He has all man needs, and man needs all he has. It is a very complex problem, though simple in some of its aspects. Man never knows how great a being he is until he knows Christ. Christ makes the man himself so much larger. Christ develops necessities the man never suspected; Christ touches imagination, and imagination creates or dreams new universes; Christ gives us life, and gives us life more abundantly, so that we increase in capacity. This is what education does for a man. The man says, It will be enough for me that I can read a little, and if I can sign my own name. So be it; now teach him to read a verse, and in the degree in which he enjoys that verse he says, I think I will try to read the next one. That is what we call the true evolution of Christian education, so that a man cannot be quite content or satisfied with one degree of progress: what he has done prepares him to do something more. His first prayer encourages him to breathe his second, and when he prays again he prays still more, and as he prays he knows what the Apostle means when he says, "Pray without ceasing." Little by little. Christ's life does not come down upon us in great overpowering cataracts. The life of Christ within us springs up a little to-day and a little to-morrow; only do not let the babe think he is a man, or the man suppose that he is an angel. Do not outrun your inward progress; be calm, be modest, be hopeful, be grateful, and ye shall grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is, then, only one Saviour, but, I repeat, he is a thousand Saviours in one. He addresses himself to the very mystery of our manhood. He does not ignore our will. He knows that we

are fearfully and wonderfully made ; he knows that he is dealing with the handiwork of God, for a moment spoiled by the devil ; therefore he saith, What wilt thou, poor blind man ? what wilt thou, lonesome leper ? Therefore saith he, " Believe ye that I am able to do this ? " and when he reproaches us he says, " Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life " ; and in that last, grandest, sublimest plaint he says, " O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ! killer, stoner of prophets and missionaries, how often would I have gathered thee together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not " : and these words he could hardly speak, for he was choking with emotion, and the tears were running from his eyes. Jesus Christ, therefore, does not come down upon us overpoweringly, tyrannously, or oppressively ; he comes pleadingly, he has a proposal to make, he comes with invitations :—Ho ! every one that thirsteth, come : let the unrighteous man come, and the wicked man, each forsaking his way and his thoughts, and he shall be led into abundance of pardon. Christianity is a pleading religion, it is a missionary religion ; it goes out after that which is lost, and will not return until it hath found it.

The gospel has only one time—now ! The gospel has no to-morrow ; " Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. " All earnestness has only one time. Earnestness never says, Can I do this to-morrow ? Burning earnestness never says, We can put this off a day or two. The gospel is the most ardent earnestness that is known, and it is continually saying, To-day, Now : Buy up the opportunity : Work while it is called day, for the night cometh wherein no man can work. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, with a will, with a tremendous concentrated energy, for in the grave there is no device.

Christianity has only one way—believe ! How this word has been maltreated ! To believe is to give the soul over to the keeping of the way of God. The commandments were not delivered to us, we are delivered to the commandments. It is the eternal that holds the temporal, the divine that involves the human. We have before explained this word " believe. " It occurs in the first instance in connection with Abram. The Lord

took him out to show him all the lights of the night in a land where they can be seen as they cannot be seen here, and as they were all gleaming like bannerets in the sky, host on host, infinite, endless, the Lord spake certain great promises to Abram, utterly stunned his reason, and overwhelmed his imagination. The man took a little time, and then, according to the historian, Abram believed God. What a crisis in human history! And the Hebrew word means so much that is tender; it means Abram embosomed and nestled himself in God. Abram like a little babe went to the very bosom of God, and lay there. Abram believed God,—how his face shone! how his voice changed! how the whole heaven became spiritual to him because of his claimed kinship with the Eternal himself! Belief is not assenting to something, saying, That is true: I see no reason against it: in the meantime your proposition seems to be wholly impregnable, your position is invincible: on the whole I accede and consent. That is not faith; that is a mere intellectual action. To believe is to nestle the soul in God. Where is your soul? We do not want your intellectual assent to disputable propositions: we want you to say, I believe; Lord, help my unbelief! I will go over to the side of God.

Christianity has only one purpose—Holiness. Christianity ends in conduct. Christianity begins in motive, but it ends in character, in manhood. We are to be perfect men in Christ Jesus; we are to be as he was on the earth; we are to breathe his spirit, repeat his deeds, follow his footsteps, and represent him to mankind, so that we cannot be Christ himself, but we can be Christ-ones, Christ-ians, and we ought to be able to say, There you see as much of Christ as it is possible to see here and now.

Christianity has only one test—Service: to die for Christ, to work for Christ, to be always repeating Christ's great mission to the world. One time, Now; one way, Believe; one purpose, Conduct; one grand test, Service. Lord, what wilt thou have me do?—watch a door, light a lamp, or preach thy Word? Wouldst thou make me a great thunder-voice to the age, or wouldst thou have me teach what little I know of thy kingdom by patient suffering, by heroic patience? Not my will, but thine, be done; only dismiss me not thy service, Lord!

Chapter xxxiii. 30-33.

THE PROPHET AND THE PEOPLE.

WHEN it is said, "The children of thy people still are talking against thee," we must not misunderstand the word "against." The prepositions are variously used in English, and especially perhaps in old English. When the Apostle Paul says, "I know nothing by myself," he does not mean through the exercise of his own penetration; the word "by" in that connection means more literally and truly *concerning*—I know nothing concerning myself. In this instance the word "against" would perhaps be better replaced by the word "about"; then the text would read, "The children of thy people still are talking about thee,"—thou art still a popular name among them; they discuss thy gifts and graces, they have much to say about thy personality, thy manner, thy voice, thy whole scheme and tone of ministry: thou art still the subject of popular criticism and estimate. A paraphrase of this kind best suits what follows, namely: they "speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord."

The text is a beautiful picture: man is saying to man, Come, let us hear the word of the Lord. That is the only thing worth doing. All other things derive their value and importance from that central thought, from that vital action. There is no other word worth listening to. The word of the Lord comes forth from eternity, and reverberates through the ages, and returns to eternity; it is true, every whit and syllable, every tone and whisper, just as true in the undertones as in the mighty thunders and tempest-blasts of its power. How charming, then, is the idea that man is saying to man, Come, and hear what God the Lord will say; come, and listen to the true music, the only music,

and your hearts will be made glad. This invitation expresses the action of a very profound instinct in human nature; not only so, it expresses a need, an aching, yearning need of the heart. Man likes to hear his mother tongue after long residence in foreign lands where the language has been a difficulty in the way of enjoyment; how musical is the native language, the speech into which the man was born!—there is a hint here of our higher relationships, our true kindred, our real ancestry. Trace that ancestry as you may—stop here, stop there, build an altar in this place, and begin to express a wonder in some other locality, amid all the hills and valleys of human history; and all that may be partially because temporarily right: but all the theories go back to one Creator. There is no theory that has the large support of wise and learned men that does not leave room for a living, personal, mighty, tender Redeemer. Hence the folly of those who, more blatantly perhaps than they are quite conscious of, declare amid all the conflicting voices of theory and speculation, As for us, we will say “The Lord hath made us, and not we ourselves.” I do not know of any man who ever said that he made himself, even though he worship under the rent canvas of agnosticism; he simply cannot tell who made him, and there are moments when I do not wonder at his amazement. The heart needs a voice other than human; the soul says, I have not seen all my relatives: I hear their voices, and I like them; some of the tones are good; but the tones are more suggestive than final: I hear the ocean in the shell. Where is that ocean? Where is that mighty roar? I am not content with the shell; I want to go and see the instrument out of which there comes such thundrous, solemn music. So give the soul fair play, let it talk itself right out in all its native frankness, under the inspiration of necessity, rather than under the force of merely mechanical instruction, and the soul cries out for the living God; even men who in public are loud controversialists, when shut up alone with the stars, looking at those mysterious palpitations of light from secret, solemn places in the hills, put out a hand, gropingly and meaningly, though they never confess that they have been guilty of a religious exercise. Religious exercises are manifold, and the sanctuary has an infinite roof, and there are men who can only sigh their religion, who can only grope after their deity,

their ultimate thought: and there are others who having seen Jesus are content to stop there and build the tabernacle of their life. When the desire to hear God's word ceases, life in all its noblest aspects and best aspirations closes, perhaps for ever. When the soul is no longer conscious of an aching, a gnawing hunger, the man is dead: he may try to talk himself into a kind of spasmodic life, but in the truest sense he is dead; when the earth satisfies him, when time is enough, when the senses alone bring him all the contentment or all the joy he needs, he is a dead man.

The text brings before us a distressing possibility:—

“And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness” (ver. 31).

The people come to hear the letter only, and there is no letter so disappointing as the letter of the Bible. If you stop at a certain point you miss everything; you are surrounded by mountains, but they are so high that you cannot see any sky beyond them, and, therefore, they become by their very hugeness prison walls. To profess or to attempt to read the Bible without the spirit of the Bible is to plunge into one mystery after another, and to return from the disastrous exercise stung with disappointment. The people were artistic, not penitent; they were students of vocal exercises; they actually formed an opinion of the man's voice: to think that Ezekiel's ministry should have sunk to that humiliation! But Christ's own ministry was brought down to a similar degradation,—“They,” the people, “wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth”; they remarked upon his personality and his method, his voice, his action; they were artists, not penitents. And we want no artists in their professional capacity in God's house; we want no millionaires in the sanctuary; we expel all pedants from the altar: in God's house we are simply sinful, necessitous, repentant men and women; we have left all else outside; we do not know how the man is talking, we have no care about his method of speaking to us; we say with the heart's concern, What is it? deliver the message; tell us the news from heaven: how goes the march

eternal? what would the Lord our God have us be and do? Great questions will elicit great replies; solemn looks will make a solemn ministry; a visible hunger will make the steward of the household bring out all the bread the King has given him.

Ezekiel's hearers were formal, not vital. The congregation addressed by the Prophet might have met this morning—for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. This is not ancient history, whatever else it may be. If Ezekiel could have lived upon "loud cheers," he would have been living now; if he could have satisfied himself with popular applause, he would have reigned as a king; but he said, I do not want your mouth-worship, I want to find you at the Cross. For in the Old Testament, as certainly as in the New, there is the Cross by which alone men are saved. You can find the Cross in the Old Testament if you want to find it. It is the glory of God sometimes to conceal a thing, but that Cross always projects its shadow across the human history of the Old Testament.

Here is misdirected admiration:—

"And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument" (ver. 23).

When we get no further than the voice we soon become weary. There are very few persons who know anything about voices: there are incarnate stupidities to whom all voices are alike; the voice of a public bellman and the voice of the finest speaker that ever uttered his native tongue are both alike. There are spheres in which it is right to study the voice and cultivate the voice, and in which it is right to play well upon the instrument—for there is no instrument like the human voice. Instrumental music—even the mighty organ—has its limitations; but the human voice has in it tears, entreaty, passion, living solicitude: if men would therefore attend to the fact that they are called upon to preach by the voice, they could have no competitors in journalism. Journalism is by the necessity of the case all writing: it has no voice, no heart-tone; it has a simulation of it, and sometimes when the words are written with the heart rather

than with the hand they have a strange and mighty palpitation : and some things cannot be spoken until they have been written—notably the Bible. It was to be written, set down in such form as was possible, yet all the while it was throwing itself beyond its literal limitations ; and in the Bible you have a thousand Bibles, a thousand revelations. What is wanted in every congregation is earnestness. Let the people have a subject as well as the preacher ; and no man should come to church except to hear God's word, and so to hear it as to be compelled to do it. For religion is an action as well as a thought : Christianity is a sacrifice as well as a theology. Many men who cannot understand Christian metaphysics can do Christian charities, can exemplify Christian tempers, and so can interpret concretely the subtlest, profoundest metaphysics of divine thinking. There are great doers as well as great speakers ; there are men mighty in holy deed as well as masters in sacred thought ; there are heroes as well as metaphysicians : we cannot be both, but we can be the one or the other. The true metaphysician will by the degree of his truthfulness be compelled to be earnest as well as subtle, and the hero who knows nothing about spiritual metaphysics will see that in doing God's will he is becoming a great scholar in God's school. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" : *there* is a school in which there are hoary-headed scholars and little children just spelling their first little lesson.

The text presents us with the possibility of a too-late discovery.

"And when this cometh to pass (lo, it will come), then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them" (ver. 33).

But the man is dead ! It is no use building a granite monument to him ; he does not know what you are doing : if you had shaken hands with him warmly whilst he lived you would have helped him in his work. Do not let the man pass away, and then grave his name on memorial brass : a cup of cold water, part of the five loaves and two fishes you were keeping for yourselves, would help him to love and think, and would cheer him into richer, broader prayer than even he has uttered in the night of his trouble. Who does not know what it is to make a discovery too late ? Parents say, If we had brought up our children upon

another basis they would have been a comfort to us in our old age. The talk is too late; no other parent will heed it: every man must make a fool of himself. Who has not heard men complain that they have neglected their educational advantages? They played truant when they were children; they did not attend to the instruction that was given to them; they had an opportunity of becoming really well informed and highly instructed, but they allowed the opportunity to pass by without improvement. Too late! the greatest realisation of loss is that a prophet has vanished, a prophet has been here and gone. Will he not return? Never. Foolish are they who stretch their necks to look over the horizon to see if the prophet is not coming. John rebuked that irrational expectancy when he said to those who were asking questions concerning the Messiah, "There standeth one among you whom ye know not; he it is." The prophet is never far away if you really want him. If you are looking out for a prophet of your own invention, or that shall correspond with your own nightmare which you impiously call a dream, that prophet is miles upon miles beyond the widest horizon which any possible heaven ever made. Your mother could be a prophetess to you if you wanted to pray: your father, who is probably not a great scholar in the literal sense, could speak things to you that would open your imagination to new universes if you really wanted to be guided in upward thinking and heavenly action. There is no prophet, how poorly gifted soever, who cannot hand you the key of the kingdom of heaven if you want to go in; and no Ezekiel that ever flamed like a constellation in the prophetic heavens can help you if you do not want him.

Chapter xxxiv.

RULERS REPROVED.

THIS chapter contains a divine reproof of "the shepherds." It will be necessary first of all to understand the meaning of that word as it occurs in this connection. We think of pastors, bishops, Christian overseers, and the like. There is no reference to them whatsoever in this tremendous indictment. In this case the meaning of "shepherd" is ruler. It may be king, or magistrate, or prince; but the idea is magisterial, governmental, and not of necessity priestly or pastoral. Here is God, if we may so say without irreverence, standing up for the people. When did he ever do otherwise? Verily this is a People's Bible. The Lord has never been kindly to kings and rulers and merely nominal and official magistrates; they have done their utmost to disestablish the theocracy. Every king is by so much an enemy of Heaven. He cannot be otherwise. From the beginning the history is a history of protest on the part of God. We forget the introductory arrangement; we have obliterated from our minds the practically atheistic prayer which said, Give us a king, that we may be like the other nations of the earth. God often answers prayers that he may plague people with the effect of their own supplication. God knows how to conduct the school; we are in a place of education and of discipline; he knows that it is better to answer some prayers than to neglect them, and he knows that every answer means disappointment, humiliation, chagrin, and possibly ultimate confession, penitence, and restoration. The Lord is condemning shepherds who feed themselves and neglect the flocks. Is not God the God of classes, aristocracies, west-ends, and official personages generally? Is he not for the popes and kaisers and czars and men who head and lead the armies? Never. They are conducting as far as they can a process of disestablishment of the Church; they are trying to

disestablish the theocracy, the rule of God. The whole tendency of their personality and government is towards materialism, force, spectacular display, military pomp and grandeur. Give them guns, and they want no other church or altar; multiply their horses, and they ask not for your missionaries, teachers, and instructors in moral sentiments: whereas God is all on the side of the invisible, the moral, the spiritual, the metaphysical. His kingdom cometh not with observation: the sun never rises noisily; when he wakes the whole heaven knows it, but not by any noise or tumult he has made—knows it by the quiet ministry of all-blessing light.

Here then is the Lord God of heaven and earth leading the cause of the "flock"—the mean, the weak, the neglected, the despised. What is God's policy towards the peoples of the world? By these words let us stand as Christian Churches for ever. Here is our charter; this we learn from a negative point of view is what God would have the nations be and do:—

"The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost" (ver. 4).

What! is God interested in the sick, the broken, the outcast, the lost? Why do we not then one and all fall down and worship him, and say, The Lord he is God? He would defend us, espouse our cause, break in upon our solitude with heaven's own companionship. Why should there be any atheist? Even ideally this is the grandest conception in the whole universe with which we are acquainted; as an ideal representation of shepherdliness there is nothing in all poetry to compare with this domestic, tender music. He does not complain that no battles have been fought, no victories won, no renown acquired. His list is worth reading again—"sick," "broken," "driven away," "lost" That is God's record. He wants vouchers on all these points. What about the sick? he says. What is our answer? Lord, we had a theory about the sick and the broken—we thought the weak ought to go to the wall; we assembled and discussed the matter, and we all voted for the survival of the fittest. Is that an answer to Eternal Righteousness? You left the sick man behind because

he was sick. Will that do in any day of judgment that is governed by the spirit of right? What then did the shepherds or rulers do to the people? What they are doing to-day: "with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them." There is nothing modern in coercion, there is nothing startlingly original in cruelty. God will not have it so; he will have a ministry of light, intelligence, persuasion, reason. Is God then opposed to law and judgment and penalty? By no means: but he prefers to administer them himself—"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." He will balance all things; he himself will make all things right in the end. It is a dangerous thing for any man to ascend the judgment seat; it is an infinite peril for any man to say, This is right, and that is wrong, in relation to disputed or controverted questions. All such exercise of right or office leads to the accession of vanity and self-trust on the part of the administrators and judges. We are all men—poor, frail, fallible men. "To err is human; to forgive, divine." "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

Can rulers misbehave themselves without the people feeling their misbehaviour either directly or indirectly? It would appear not: the indictment reads, "And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd." It is the place of the ruler to be a pastor, a father, a *pater in Deo*. Beautiful even up to the point of sweetest music is the title "father in God"—the great broad-hearted father, skilled in excusing things that other people would turn into grounds of accusation and condemnation and expulsion; that fatherliness which keeps all doors open, so that if there be any return on the part of the wanderer there shall be no difficulty in getting into the house softly, stealthily, and to be found there next morning as if the place had never been vacated. There is a music of love; there is a skill of affection; there is a masterliness in redemption. We cannot amend the ways of God. What will the Lord do to the shepherds? He says: "Behold, I am against the shepherds." What a challenge is that! Omnipotence speaks, Almighty marks the battlefield and sounds the battle bugle. But will he not visit the flock with tremendous indignation? A beautiful answer is given to this inquiry in pronouns: "My sheep," "my flock"; and again, in verse II,

“my sheep,” and in verse 12, “my sheep,”—“my,” “mine,” though so neglected, bruised, desolated, orphaned; still mine. His mercy endureth for ever: when my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up; never so much the Lord as when my poor heart needs him most. He comes for you to the public-house, to the den of iniquity, to the place consecrated to blasphemy, and he says, You are still mine: I want you, I have come for you: let us go home together, as if our companionship had never been interrupted. Oh skilled love, masterly pity!

When God gathers all the sheep together again what will he do with them?

“I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God” (vers. 14, 15).

There is joy in the shepherd's heart when he brings back that which was lost. The parable says the shepherd has more joy over the sheep found than over the ninety-and-nine that went not astray, and likewise there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, more than over the ninety-and-nine just persons which need no repentance. We are to look upon this people not so much in the light of moral aliens from God as of people who have been unjustly treated or basely neglected; we make all the distinction between the one class and the other when we speak of outcast Israel and outcast nations, and people who have voluntarily and shamelessly left the kingdom of heaven. Yet it is wondrous to observe how even in the latter case mercy prevails against judgment, softens judgment by the sheer force of tears.

There is one class described which is most noteworthy. It is described repeatedly, notably in verse 16: “That which was driven away.” Some people go away, some people are driven away; we must make a distinction between the two. Are we driving away men from churches? That is quite a possible mischief. We may be so hard, so unreasonable, so pharisaic, so wanting in all the tenderness of practical sympathy, that people

will be simply driven away. I would not present myself before any harsh ministry ; I would never sit to listen to any man who simply and exclusively denounced the judgment of God against my life ; I can do that myself : I want a great shepherd-brother, a great pastor-king, who will assure me over and over again—for such repetition will never be tedious—that God really does love and wants me to go home again at once. Some may condemn this as sentimental, but I do not take the cue of my life from such foolish persons. I am so weak, frail, self-helpless that I want a thousand ministers to tell me at the rising of every sun that to-day I may be a better man than I was yesterday. We need ministries of comfort, encouragement ; and in such ministries we shall often find skilfully introduced the element of fear ; but when it is introduced by men who talk thus the music of life, it will be introduced with a thousandfold force : it will come upon us with such unexpectedness, and it will be associated with such an atmosphere of pathos, that we shall no longer rebel, but rather say, “The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.” Are we driving people away ? Are we driving people away from the family ? I have known children driven away because their fathers were fools in discipline. When children have to go out from the fireside to seek their innocent recreations and amusements ; when they have to steal away to these, and come back in the guise of hypocrites and liars, I do not expect them to turn out Christian men. The home should be the brightest place on earth ; then the Church : the Church should be the larger home.

How one evil leads to another, and how iniquity gathers as it rolls, is strikingly illustrated in this chapter :—

“Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures ? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet ? And as for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet ; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet” (vers. 18, 19).

To live at such a table, who can do it ? We do get some little things, but they are all bespattered, they are all fouled ; they do not come to us like virgin snow from heaven : we get them at second-hand, after they have been mauled and crushed, after the bloom

has been rubbed off them ; or if they be streams they have been fouled by other feet. What do many of us ever get but something that has been thrown to us, or something that other people else could not themselves devour ? If they could have devoured it we should have never seen it. I owe all I have in the world to the people. I owe nothing to the upper classes ; in so far as they are the upper classes in mere name, I hate them. I take up the indictment of history against them. What then ? Are they all personally bad ? Nothing of the kind : some of the choicest souls the Lord ever made have been found amongst them. I am not speaking of all persons, I am speaking of official designations, functions, appointments ; and I am speaking not of them only, but of them as they are misconceived, abused, and administered, in malfesance or in selfishness. There are good men in all classes ; there may have been good kings. We must take care how we drive people away from law. The driving-away policy is always a bad policy, if it be possible to substitute for it the policy of reason, persuasion, sympathy, and love. Let us be just to all men.

The Lord is against all monopoly and tyranny, against all heedlessness of the flock, against every form of neglect ; he will never sympathise with the few against the many, with the strong against the weak, with the mighty against the frail. I know a family at this time who have been a hundred years on the land, and they dare not ask my lord god the duke to put a little annexe to their house that they might be able by some arrangements to mitigate the pressure of their rent. Is God with the duke or with the tenant ? If he is with the duke he has belied the revelation of his providence. We must live quietly, without rebelliousness or revolutionariness, merely for their own sake. "God's mills grind slow." The ages are to us a long time in coming, and a long time in going ; but God must not be judged by to-day, yesterday, or to-morrow, but by the whole scope and purpose of his throne. So judged, my faith is that one day we shall say, "God is love," and we shall hail one another in the language of true companionship and brotherhood, saying, After all, we are the stronger and the tenderer for our conflicts and sufferings below.

Then God says he will make all his flock and the places round about his hill a blessing; he will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing; and God will raise up for his flock "a plant of renown,"—rather, a plantation renowned for plentifulness: the fruit of it shall be heard of; the fruit of it shall be free; the fruit of it shall satisfy the hunger of the world.

The concluding words are very sweet, "And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture" (ver. 31). This seems to be an individual and direct address; princes and rulers are no longer within the purview of God; but turning to the flock itself he says, "And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men." The meaning is, You are only men, made yesterday, and very frail. "And I am your God": here is a great and necessary contrast. God's condescensions are never any abdications of his majesty. When he stoops it is with the stoop of a King; he is never less than King, never less than God. He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust; he knoweth that we are of yesterday and know nothing; he describes us as "a wind that cometh for a little time, and then passeth away," but he pledges his Godhead that manhood is precious and shall not be lost if love can save it. Here is the gospel before the incoming of the historical Christ. But Christ was always in the world. Christ is the God of the Old Testament, according to Christian interpretation. He was in the world, and the world knew him not. Abraham, he says, rejoiced to see his day; he said, "Abraham saw my day, and was glad," and beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded to two auditors in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. When therefore we preach an Old Testament gospel, we are in reality preaching a New Testament gospel. There is only one Testament—old as God, new as the present day.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou hast measured all things, and set all things in order. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; the hairs of our head are numbered; not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Father. All things are thine, and thou knowest them one by one; if one be gone astray, thou dost go after it, and thou wilt not return until thou hast found it. Thou art the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep; the Shepherd lives for the flock. Our Saviour liveth, ever liveth, to make intercession for us, and thou art thyself thinking about us always. We cannot understand thy thought; sometimes we reproach the action of God, not knowing what we are doing, saying, This is wrong, when afterwards thou dost prove it to be right. Thou dost rebuke our will; thou wilt not permit us to go our own way, and lo, when all is concluded we see that thy way was right, thou didst lead the blind by a way that they knew not. Now at the Cross of Christ, gathered loyally and lovingly, and trusting our whole soul to Christ for salvation, we would trust our whole life to our Father in heaven for guidance. We are unwise, we are foolish, we know it all, our own experience witnesses against us; so now in the sanctuary, at the Cross, with all holiest, sweetest ministries acting upon us, we would renounce the self-considering past, and put ourselves wholly into the hands of God. Guide us, O thou great Jehovah; Jesus, still lead on. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Help us to cut off our right hand, or pluck out our right eye, if we have offence from either, and to do everything at thy bidding. We do sometimes, yea, even now, wish to live the divine life, that has no self, no interest, no narrow solicitude; the great, broad, generous, everlasting life of passionate love to God. Canst thou work this miracle for us? Lord, if thou canst do anything for us, help us herein. Why should we go astray when we might rise upward day by day towards fuller and clearer light? Why should we mistake a scorpion for an egg? Why should we seize the stone supposing it to be bread? Lord, help us, guide us, and with all thine almightiness of wisdom, strength, and grace do thou endeavour to make us better. Thou shalt yet have a man upon the earth that shall serve thee, a redeemed and perfected humanity, an Adam as thou didst mean him to be—pure, holy, simple, childlike, loving; having no self, having only God. Amen.

Chapters xxxv., xxxvi.

MOUNT SEIR.

MOUNT SEIR represents Edom; Edom represents Esau. Idumea and Edom, found in this chapter, are one and the same, to all practical intents. Edom was the enemy of Israel;

the record of their associations is a record of hatred and blood. We have in the third verse what may be termed the severe aspect of God. Behold the goodness and the severity of God! We would gladly curtain off the frowning countenance, and ignore it, and say, God is love; his mercy endureth for ever, and his face is brighter than the shining of the sun, there is no cloud in all the lustre of his countenance. We might talk so: we should talk ignorantly, superstitiously, falsely. We had better, as wise men, take in the whole case; our testament will lose nothing in music and in grandeur by retaining in it the words "the wrath of the Lamb." We would rather not have such words, if we were to consult our sentiment, our feeling; but we are to consult history, philosophy, the right of things, and the reality of the economy under which we live. We are, therefore, forced to say, that God can be severe in aspect, terrible in judgment, that his hand is weighty, and when it falls upon the nations they are crushed like a moth.

What a blast of fire is this? When God is against a mountain or a city or a man, what is the issue? These are the words:—

"I will stretch out mine hand against thee, and I will make thee most desolate. I will lay thy cities waste, and thou shalt be desolate" (xxxv. 3, 4).

That is what God means by being "against" a man. Here is an instance of sublime personification. The mount stands for the nation, the people, the whole idea Edomitish. Yet is there not something contemptuous in the personification? He makes all the people into a mountain—a heap of mud. What else is a mountain when viewed physically and materially? He turns the people one upon another, so to say, and having made a great mountain of them, he addresses the mountain as impersonal, and says, "I am against thee." The language itself is full of suggestion. "I am": there is life; life against matter; life against materialism; the living God against the dead mountain. He will tear it to pieces. Life can tear to pieces anything it can lay its hands upon. A child could waste a mountain. Its little fingers could carry it all away; give it time enough, and the mountain cannot withstand the child. Herein, as we have often had occasion to see, man is greater than any mountain. Measured in stature,

where is the man? Far away, all but invisible; yet the man says to the mountain, I will climb thee, I will stand on thy top and wave the banner of victory, and will tunnel thee and drive fire and iron right through the heart of thee. What must it be then when God is against a man, a mountain, a nation? He has so many resources; we cannot calculate his armoury; the weapons of war at the disposal of God are more than the number of his chariots, and they are set down at twenty thousand. He can blight the mind, he can baffle the memory, he can make the feeling callous: he can so work upon the parent's eyes that the parent shall not know his own child when they stand face to face; he can waste wealth, he can take the sunshine out of prosperity, he can separate chief friends. To God there are no giants; the mightiest of the Samsons of the world is as a frail insect.

It is, therefore, one of two things: God is either for us or against us. Is not the place and relation occupied by man to God largely determined by the man himself? Does not God plead for friendship? does he not ask for alliance? Hath it not pleased the Eternal to assume the attitude of a suppliant, and to say, Why will ye die? why will ye not live? why will ye not come unto me and have life? I wait to be gracious; behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man open the door I will come in? God does relieve man of responsibility. It may please man to have some crabbed and intricate theory, some metaphysical conception of human will, that enables him to relieve the pressure of the sense of responsibility, and to take refuge in the roofless hut of destiny and fate, to be lost and damned: but the Lord never consents to that reasoning. The Lord's speech to obdurate man is always a speech involving a challenge or involving a remonstrance and a persuasion. God never says to any man, Thou art fated to be damned, and therefore I will not plead with thee. Taking the Bible as the basis of our evidence, we have God evermore pleading with man, as if man were of consequence to him, as if when he lost man he lost part of himself.

Does God give no reason for his frowning? Is his anger

arbitrary? Is he a God of moods, so that we know not in what temper he will awake? It hath pleased the Lord to give an account of himself, and to say when he is against any man why he assumes the attitude and the policy of hostility.

"Because" [this is the reason, and the reason always covers the necessity of the case. Peril is no bigger than sin]—"because thou hast had a perpetual hatred, and hast shed the blood of the children of Israel by the force of the sword in the time of their calamity, in the time that their iniquity had an end: therefore, as I live, saith the Lord God, I will prepare thee unto blood, and blood shall pursue thee: sith thou hast not hated blood, even blood shall pursue thee" (xxxv. 5, 6).

Here is reason, here is justice, here is the husbandman who will reap the harvest which he sowed with his own hands. Be not deceived, God is not mocked: with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged. Your case shall be determined, as it were, by yourself; as ye have done to others, so shall it be done unto you. Here in the original grammar there is a play upon words. It hath pleased God in the inscrutableness of his speech to man to mock man with his own verbs and substantives; it hath pleased God to make a caricature of man's grammar by sneering at him through his own syntax. "Edom" means red, the red of blood; God says, As thou hast been Edom, so shall all others be Edom to thee, red for red, blood for blood: "I am against thee." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

The Lord knew the argument which Edom had conducted in his own soul. The Lord quotes our own words against us. We have whispered them in confidence; the Lord has heard them every one, and he thunders them from the housetop: "Because thou hast said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it . . . Therefore—" Why can we not have one hour's conference in absolute secrecy and exclusion from God? Why may we not whisper "*murder*"? What is this in the very air that hates the secrecy of blood, and that says, I am listening, and every drop of blood you pledge yourselves to take I shall speak of with thunder and lightning?

Why was God so jealous lest Edom should take Judah and

Israel? The reason is given in verse 10: "Whereas the Lord was there." Edom thought to take the two nations, Judah and Israel, and do as he pleased with them. The Lord will not have sacrilege without punishing it. You cannot take away the true Church without having to account for it in some form; because God is in it. We should be very careful how we touch places that have been consecrated by noble usage, by high custom, by solemn prayer; it may be right sometimes to take them down stone by stone or to remove them elsewhere, but we should do so with reverent thought and with reverent hands. Edom said he would take Judah and Israel, forgetting mayhap that "the Lord was there," and that he had to reckon with the Lord. That is what man always forgets; that is to say, man always forgets the divine element, the supernatural presence—the mysterious element in life that will not be measured, that cannot be touched, —imponderable, invisible, immortal, inevitable. The rich fool said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry": but God said—Never forget that—a monologue is but a one-sided talk, and that one-sided talk is out of place in a universe that is governed by a living Sovereign, an ever-present, ever-watching, ever-listening Father. Men want to wrest things out of the hands of God; men try to invert destiny or to reverse providence. This miracle lies beyond the reach of human power. He is foolish who ignores election. Everything is settled and determined as to the purpose of God, but that purpose is a purpose of love and inclusion and universal blessing, if men will accept the overtures of condescending and gracious Heaven. We believe in the election of nations; we believe in the call of men to do particular work; we believe in the destiny of the race. God is Judge and Sovereign, Father and Ruler. The days of our years are appointed; the bounds of our habitation are fixed; the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; the very hairs of your head are all numbered. God is not a God on one aspect or side of his character; he is always God, never less than God; the Lord reigneth.

What miracles of consolation there are! When God says "I am for you," what does he mean? Will he give us an account of his

favour as he has given us an account of his opposition? We have that account in chapter xxxvi. :—

“I will turn unto you, and ye shall be tilled and sown: and I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded.” [Will he do anything more?] “And I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring fruit.” [Aught more?] “And I will settle you after your old estates.” [Aught more?] “And will do better unto you than at your beginnings. . . .” [He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.] “Yea, I will cause men to walk upon you, even my people Israel; and they shall possess thee, and thou shalt be their inheritance, and thou shalt no more henceforth bereave them of men” (vers. 9-12).

When does God give short measure? When did he give otherwise than pressed down, heaped up, running over? This is the consolation of Heaven; this is the measure of the divine benison. That blessing is to be physical: “Ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit.” God does not fear to associate his name with our daily food. Why should we eat bread unblest by our own thanksgiving and prayer? God is not ashamed to have his name connected with the daily loaf and with the daily goblet of water. When we go to the harvest-field we should think we are going to church; when we go to the well of springing water we should think we are going to a fountain rising in heaven. Your harvests are God's; your fields are the green ways leading up to his sanctuary. Blessed are they whose bread and whose water are blessed, whose bed is an altar, whose home is a church. Not only physical, but social: “I will multiply men upon you, . . . and the wastes shall be builded.” God would have all the earth inhabited. He would build men into organisations and brotherhoods; he would establish fraternities of souls. The Lord is never ashamed to associate himself with social economy, social purity, social progress. Not only physical and social, but municipal “And the cities shall be inhabited.” Cities have not a good history; cities had a bad founder. The foundations of cities were laid by a murderer. But it hath pleased God to accept many human doings, and to purify them and ennoble them and turn them to purposes sanctified and most beneficial. The Lord never set a king over anybody with his own real consent. He gave the people the desire of their hearts, and plagued them every day since they got the answer. So he accepts the city, and he will do

what he can with the municipalities, to inhabit them, and direct them, and purify them. Here is the area within which this divine consolation is to operate ; it is physical, it is social, it is municipal : at every point God touches us with his rising light.

The Lord never concludes simply within the letter. At the last he invariably says something that opens up a distant and ever-receding because ever-enlarging horizon. He says in this instance, "I will do better unto you than at your beginnings." He is able, let us say again with rising thankfulness, to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. The Church constantly exclaims, Thou hast kept the good wine until now ! We never can get in advance of God. When we have reaped our most abundant harvest, he says, This is only an earnest of the harvest you shall one day possess ; I will do more for you and better unto you than at your beginnings. When does God move backwards ? When does God give less and less to the children that love him and obey him ? Whenever did the Lord cry, It is enough ; further blessing you cannot have ? Take all the types and illustrations supplied in Biblical history, and we shall ever find that the supply on the part of God never failed. Bring forth vessels now, said the prophet, and fill them : and they came to the last but two, the last but one, the very last of all, and when it was full, then the oil ceased,—plenty of oil for the vessels, none for the floor ; plenty for use, none for waste. It is our vessels that give out, it is not the oil of the divine love that is exhausted. I will do better—better—better. It is the refrain of the divine song of divine government. We never touch the horizon ; as we approach, it recedes : so we never touch the fulness of the divine blessing. Answered prayer is only another promise that the next prayer shall have a larger answer if itself represent a larger capacity and a larger love.

Then let us grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us be no longer thoughtless ; let us no longer limit the Holy One of Israel, saying, The Lord hath made an end of his revelation, the Lord hath no more grace to give, no more love to show ; he has given us the Cross. Paul says, If he has freely given us the Cross,—it is not an end, it is a beginning,—

with the Cross he will also freely give us all things. In one sense the Cross is the culmination of love ; in another sense it is the genesis of God's affection. The Lord cannot be exhausted. His providence is ascending, expanding, deepening. This is the way of the Lord. Oh that we had hearkened unto his commandments and kept his law ! then had our peace flowed like a river, and our righteousness had been as the waves of the sea.

We have not begun to know what God does for us ; we have been too prone to yield ourselves to the seducer and the tempter when he told us that the age of miracles was past. That tempter waits to persuade us that all the great epochs of history are closed : the miracles are closed, inspiration is closed, communion with God in a very endearing sense of presence is closed. Why, then, it were better to have lived in the days of the prophets than in the days of the apostles, and better to have lived in the days of the apostles than to live under the full dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Is God's a narrowing policy, a self-withdrawing, self-depleting economy ? or does it move out in the other way, enlarging, expanding, heightening, advancing ? Let those testify who have lived with God. We do not here at this particular juncture of the argument want the critic's opinion ; he ought not to have any opinion about such subjects, he is a dog in the sanctuary : when we come to these great heights and these close applications and inquiries we want the testimony of experience. When, therefore, we ask the question, Does God enclose himself in ever-narrowing paths, or does he pursue his gracious way in ever-expanding courses of graciousness and kindness ? we await not the evidence of the critic, but the experience of the man who daily lives with God.

Chapter xxxvii.

DRY BONES.

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones" (ver. 1).

ALL this is seen, not in literal reality, but in spiritual dream and vision. Again we ask the question, What is reality? It may be that the things which we call real are not things at all; they may be but transient and misleading shadows. Let us be careful how we talk about reality. Vision is the larger life. A man is still a man in his dreams. He may not be able to put them together well, or to read their enigmas fluently and precisely; but they are still efforts of the mind, hints of sublime possibility, indications that we are not walled in with stones, but limited by skies. Let us, therefore, once more remind ourselves that reality is a term which has not yet been exhaustively defined.

When Ezekiel saw the bones, and knew that "there were very many in the open valley," and that "they were very dry,"—a circumstance put in to indicate that if there were a miracle at all it would be a supreme effort of divine power,—the Lord said unto Ezekiel, "Adam [the Hebrew of son of man], can these bones live?" There was a time when Ezekiel might have answered, No, certainly not; there can be no doubt about that; the bones are so dry that live they never can. Men are not so fluent in their older age as in their youth. Ezekiel had been educated by visions,—not educated into frivolity, but educated into adoration, reverence, wonder, expectation. So this most dazzling of the prophets answered, "O Lord God, thou knowest." A finer answer than the rattle and gabble of fluent youth. We are made to see that there are possibilities which did not enter into our earlier calculations in life. Men are gradually trained

to see the eloquence of hesitation. Youth is impatient with all things that stop; the great conception of youth is to go on, to quicken, to hasten, to fly, never to stand still. It is of no use endeavouring to exhort youth to take another view; only time can work that miracle. By-and-by older men begin to see that the speaker who halts may be the prophet; the man who never stopped for a word was but a reciter of his own nothings. May Ezekiel typify us in this present attitude and in this eloquent hesitation! Ezekiel the man, looking upon the bones, would say, No, they can never live, for they are very dry: I could stake a universe on that declaration. But Ezekiel the prophet says, I must speak whisperingly, reverently; no one can tell what God can do: I will therefore reply, O Lord God, thou knowest.

This is an answer which becomes a world educated as ours has been. We should be very careful now how we say that we have reached the limit of things. Rather have we been educated to say that in things there is no limit; in other words, we never can overtake the omnipotence of God, or forecast Omniscience, or tell what the Eternal will do. God is never short of resources. We have misspent our time and lost the very bloom and perfectness of our education if we do not now hesitate before denying anything that is grand, sublime, beneficent, wonderful in majesty and tender in goodness. After all our tragedy and sorrow and stress we ought to be able at this moment to say regarding any grand proposition, however unlikely it appears on the surface, Yet even this thing of wonder may become one of the commonplaces of life. Education tends to larger faith, or it is a false education. The liberalisation of the mind means larger imagination, larger trust in the Infinite: deep, complete spiritual education, when told that mountains may be carried into the midst of the sea, says, Yes, it may be so; only ignorance flatly denies. Obstinate, self-worshipping minds draw boundaries and live within geometric lines and limits; but the imagination that has been schooled in the divine sanctuary, the faith that has been trained through the wilderness, the trust that has seen the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living,—all these combine to say, We have seen nothing yet compared with the glory that is to be revealed.

Ezekiel at this moment is not on his wings of fire. He often flies away from us, and we cannot overtake him in all his airy course; but at this moment he stands with bent head, and with voice subdued he answers God, saying, "O Lord God, thou knowest." Let us keep by that answer. That fits all the great situations of life; within the sanctuary of that reply we may enjoy a sense of security, in other words, a sense of ineffable peace. God is always addressing great questions to us either audibly or typically or inferentially. But for these great questions the world would stagnate: along all the winds there come, whirling, thundering, the great inquiries that keep the world fresh, pure, masculine, hopeful. Can dead men live? What is the answer?—"O Lord God, thou knowest." Once we should have said, No; they are dead and buried; their native earth has devoured them, and there is no deliverance from the grasp and the greed of the grave: but now, having seen such wonders in other directions, we hesitate and say, "O Lord God, thou knowest." Are not God's questions God's answers? Does God mock the universe by interrogation? Does he not rather by interrogation suggest that other miracles are coming? Interrogations are alarm-bells rung in the sleeping chambers of the race to rouse us to gaze upon the morning of undreamed beauty. Is there an unseen world? is a question that rings in the audience-chamber of every soul. What is the answer? We know what it would have been once. Men mock the unseen, men taunt the invisible; that is, when they are fat and prosperous and full of gain—many of whom dare not go up a green lane alone at midnight: these be thy gods, O unbeliever! Now we say, in reply to the inquiry, "O Lord God, thou knowest." There may be a world unseen; we begin to believe there is; we ourselves are unseen; no man has seen himself; we have not seen ourselves, there may therefore be a world unseen: O Lord God, thou knowest. Then we ask ourselves questions. Taught by the great interrogations of the divine, we have learned to put deep inquiries to ourselves and about ourselves, and sometimes we say, Do the dead visit the living? do they take no notice of us? are they clean gone for ever? are we not mentally touched by their influence? how otherwise do we account for sudden thought, startling inspiration, the upsetting of plans well calculated

and exquisitely moulded? Why that flashing thought? whence that new impulse? Do the dead come to us in unseen whiteness, in ineffable silence? "O Lord God, thou knowest." Hear our little prayer, and send them to us more and more. We are not afraid of the sainted dead.

How is this great miracle to be wrought out? As usual, by human instrumentality. The Lord employed the prophet:—"Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones." Why did not the Lord himself order the bones to live? Because we live under a mediatorial economy. It hath pleased God so to construct all the kingdoms we know about that one thing is done through another: instrumentality is the key of progress: we live for God and for one another. There is no lone soul; there is no isolated life: every touch sends a thrill through the universe. We were not asked how kingdoms were to be builded and related; we find this great mediatorial economy prevailing everywhere: God seems to do nothing now directly. He came into direct service, so to say, in the first chapter of Genesis; then he hurled his fiat from his burning throne, and all things addressed answered him. Since then he has controlled one thing by another; he has made large use of man. What does the word "Prophecy" here mean? It does not mean predict. The word "prophecy" is too often limited to mere foretelling; here "prophecy" may mean, Speak on my behalf: represent me: be God's vicar. What was the prophet to say?

"Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live" (ver. 5).

The great prophet always brings life. The true preacher is never associated with mere death, which is negation, which is darkness, which is night without a star or a hope. The prophets have kept the world young. The poets keep us young in heart, yet men in understanding and dreamers in hope. Herein the Bible takes the supreme position in literature: it is the leading book. The Bible never ends; when it says Amen, it is only that we may take breath before beginning again. It is the book of prophecy, it is the book of prediction; the book of transfiguration, the book of divine emphasis and representation. Take the Bible in this sense, and it enlarges with every reading,

and glorifies with every new experience. The Church therefore ought to be the leading institution in the world. All music ought to be there, all beauty ought to find its housing in the sanctuary ; all nobleness of life, all sweetness of charity, all greatness of view and effort and enterprise for the good of man should originate at the altar. There is but one tree the healing of which is for the healing of the nations, and the name of that tree is the Cross ; it is rooted in Calvary.

What did Ezekiel do when called upon to utter words that were unlikely ever to be fulfilled ? He gives the answer in verse 7 : "So I prophesied as I was commanded." That is the right spirit, and that is the right method. This is all we have to do. Ministers do not make their own sermons ; if they do, the people never hear them, or at once forget them. They do not get down to the heart's great needs ; they have no sphere in the valley of dry bones. Such sermons have no music for shattered lives, and broken fortunes, and dead souls. Poets do not make their own poems. The poet does not know what he has written : he reads his own lines with wonder. The great intercessor does not know what he is praying. He is carried away by prayer ; he is taken, as it were, by invisible hands and lifted into unmeasured altitudes, and there he talks with God ; and if some hand has caught the words and fastened them to the steadfast page the suppliant reads these words as if he had never spoken them. The prophet does not invent his own prophecy. He is entranced, filled with enthusiasm, divinely infatuated, mad ; and when he reads he wonders, and often weeps. Only Materialists know what they are doing as to beginnings and endings.

Sometimes men have to prophesy under distressing circumstances—the valley was "full of bones," and the bones "were very dry," and Ezekiel prophesied as he was "commanded." We are not to be disheartened ; we are to speak to the deadest men as if they could hear us ; we are to address bones as if they could reply ; in the churchyard we are to find an audience ; among the dead we are to constitute an assembly of eager listeners. It is not for us to control the circumstances, and to say, Give me a fit audience, give me a kingdom for a stage. It

is for us to prophesy according to the bidding of God,—in the village, full of dull heads and lifeless eyes, and weary, dispirited hearts; in the city, mammon-driven and mammon-cursed; among the ignorant, who have no sublime ambitions; among the rich, who are trusting to uncertain riches; among the atheists, who have said, There is no God: wherever our field is appointed, there we are to prophesy in gladness of heart. God will do the rest. “My word shall not return unto me void” is an assurance that goes ringingly through all the winds that circulate round the globe, breathing their blessed inspiration upon every sick-visitor, every Sunday-school teacher, every missionary toiling under difficult circumstances, every pastor and preacher and prophet. If it were man’s word it would go forth void and come back void; it is God’s word, and therefore it cannot fail.

While Ezekiel prophesied, what happened ?

“As I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them” (vers. 7, 8).

That is the first miracle. Here is a miracle by instalments. When we come to the New Testament the work is done at once; Christ commands, and the work is done. Some of us are in this department of God’s miracle: we are mere outlines, we are not yet men; we stand, articulately we are right, joint is attached to joint, and the figure is complete; but we are mere spectres, skeletons, anatomically perfect. How many persons of this kind we meet! We say, The figure is good, the stature is right, the anatomy is perfect; but there is no breath in them. Afterwards another prophecy was delivered, and the wind was bidden to come, and to breathe into the standing bones; and it came, “and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.” Some of us have not got into that second department of the miracle, do not let us therefore be discouraged; some of us are in that second department of the miracle, let us not therefore be boastful, let us abstain from contemning those who are not so far advanced as we are. The miracle is one, and God is one.

“Then he said unto me, Son of man these bones are the whole house of

Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord" (vers. 11-14).

Here we have the literal explanation of the miracle, the literal boundary of God's thought in this vision. But who is to limit the spiritual? The material is only given to us as a suggestion; what we have is to lead us on to what we have not; the known is to point with steady index-finger to the unknown. We may have the literal interpretation given, but that does not bar the action of the great sublime and tender and reverent imagination. Here we have all the kingdom of miracles in one act. Resurrection—why, that is almost declared in the text. We sometimes say the doctrine of resurrection is not to be found in the Old Testament: here in this very chapter we have God promising to open graves; in this vision we have the resurrection prefigured. If God could do this miracle, what miracle is there that lies beyond his omnipotence? We take the act of eating food: does it end in itself? then it were a beast's act. When the poet eats bread he eats poetry; when the prophet nourishes himself at the common table he performs a sacramental act; every draught of water drunk by the true man acts upon his soul like the wine of God. Do not be imprisoned by the material and the literal and the geometrical. Your home is meant to signify heaven; every height points to some sublimer altitude. Who can fix the issues of any one action? What then is our hope amid the dry bones, the shattered fortunes, the fatal diseases, the moral pestilence of the world? What is our hope? Our hope is the hope of Ezekiel. That God who has brought him to see the reality of the desolation will make him the instrument through which shall come the rush, the surging life, the resurrection—immortality

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we come to an altar not made with hands. We come to the unseen, the ineffably holy, the divinely complete; we come to the altar of the Cross, a Cross for ever towards us, a crown beyond. We come to confess our sin, but if we confess our sin where shall we begin the appalling recital? We remember no moment that bore not its own stain. Yet we will confess that we have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things we ought to have done; with our whole soul we will say, each for himself, God be merciful to me a sinner! Wash us, and we shall be clean; sanctify us, and there shall be no stain upon our souls. The blood of Jesus Christ, thy Son, cleanseth from all sin. It finds its cleansing way into the inmost recesses of the soul; may we know what is meant by the cleansing of the blood of Christ, and rise and follow after holiness with eager and ardent hearts. Thou hast called us to sanctification; thou hast set apart thy Church. She is not one of many, she is not in the great crowd; thou hast called her and elected her and sanctified her, and all these processes are promises of the final and everlasting crown. May we be in the Church of Christ which he hath redeemed with his own blood; may we bear the name that is new on the palms of our hands and on our forehead; in all our life may we show that we have been with Jesus, not in the sunshine only, but in the darkest night of sorrow. The Lord look upon us; comfort the downcast, the broken-hearted, the bereaved, and such as are called upon to walk in long darkness: dry the tears of sorrow, that the vision of the soul may once more behold, and the heart exclaim, How good, how gracious is the Lord! Pity us in our low estate; have mercy upon us because of manifold infirmity; and bring us, life's journey done, to the river which flows fast by the throne of God. Amen.

Chapter xliii. 13.

"These are the measures of the altar after the cubits."

THE ALTAR MEASURABLE AND IMMEASURABLE.

THERE is nothing held to be insignificant in the Book of God that pertains to the divine altar or the holy house. Everything is of consequence; perhaps it would be more than paradoxical to say that everything is of supreme consequence.

"The cubit is a cubit and an hand breadth; even the bottom shall be a cubit and the breadth a cubit, and the border thereof by the edge thereof

round about shall be a span : and this shall be the higher place of the altar. And from the bottom upon the ground even to the lower settle shall be two cubits, and the breadth one cubit ; and from the lesser settle even to the greater settle shall be four cubits, and the breadth one cubit. So the altar shall be four cubits ; and from the altar and upward shall be four horns. And the altar shall be twelve cubits long, twelve broad, square in the four squares thereof " (vers. 13-16).

And so the specification runs. "These are the measures of the altar after the cubits." That is to say, if you look upon the thing geometrically, here it is, so long, so broad, so high, thus, and thus, and no other way. Such is the divine specification ; the altar is measurable, it is a question of cubits ; make the cubits right, and you make the geometric altar right. Beyond that, the measuring man can do nothing. He can only talk in cubits ; he has no other measure but cubits and the varieties thereof. He measures up his work and returns it in arithmetical forms, and so far as he is concerned there is an end of the matter. But when you have given the cubits you have given nothing. Yet we cannot drive this out of people's minds. They are learned in cubits ; they know the length of the temple and the height thereof, and they can quote the specification for the woodwork and the goldwork and all the furnishing ; and the worst of it is that, having done so, they think they have been in the temple, and that what they have told you is the temple : whereas they may know all about the cubits and the goldwork, and the cherubim and the seraphim, and the altar and all the order of the ceremonies, and never have been in the temple at all. The altar, as a mechanical structure, is measurable ; as a spiritual symbol, it is without measure. There are persons who imagine that if they have read the book called the Bible through, they have read God's revelation completely. It is the same sophism. There are ingenious men who have written at the very beginning of the English Bible how many chapters there are in Genesis, and how many in Exodus, and how many in the Apocalypse. In the front of most of your Bibles you will find an analysis of chapters ; some other Bibles give you an analysis of the number of verses in each book. All this is interesting ; it has its ingenious, and, indeed, its useful side : but, coming to realities, it is nothing. All this frivolous information may be familiar to you, and yet you may never have seen God in the book which bears his name. There are men

who think if they have told you how far it is from Dan to Beer-sheba they have been preaching. They have not begun to preach in the name and spirit of Christ. All this is mere secular instruction. We sometimes boast that in the Sunday-school there is now no need of secular education. What do we find in Sunday-schools and in Bible-classes that is more than secular instruction? We do not want a map of Palestine except as a momentary convenience; we do not want your waxen and wooden models of the temple except for a moment's glance: what we want to be at now is what the Apostle describes in the Hebrews as the altar not made with hands, of which all other altars are dim symbols, poor, wasting, yet in their limits useful, types.

There are what are called ecclesiastical antiquarians. They occupy a respectable position in society. They are often pensive-looking men; they are men of most studious habits. If you wanted to know the meaning of any ecclesiastical term, they would find it for you; they can go back century after century, and tell you the measure of every part, and the colour of every robe, and the significance of every line; and they can press matters down to the centuries of corruption, when all these original meanings were lost or perverted; then they can proceed to the centuries of restoration, and tell you all concerning the reconstruction of matters that had been overthrown, perverted, or neglected. All this they can do without ever praying. A man may build a cathedral and never pray. The workmen that built St. Paul's or St. Peter's may have mingled their cement with their blasphemy. Because you build a church you are not therefore pious; because you endow a church you are not therefore a saint; because you go to church you are not therefore good: this is the altar by cubits; this is the geometric story of the altar: and the mischief is that people hearing about all these cubits and colours, all these forms and relationships, call it instructive preaching. Whilst the pulpit is thus dragged down, it cannot live its own royal, spontaneous, divinest life. We want to hear about the Altar of which geometric altars are types. We ought to be above the temple in which we assemble. In itself, it should be little or nothing to us; beyond a momentary convenience, it should be a rough, palpable, almost wearisome incar-

nation of that Temple that has no form, that Sanctuary of which God is the eternal flame. It is so difficult to bring men out of the elementary and alphabetic.

But we have escaped all these geometrical limitations. Have we? Take care! We must be very careful how we throw stones at ecclesiastical antiquarians—the most wan-looking and harmless of men. We also may have our measures and cubits and colours and forms. Beware lest we be deceived, and think ourselves freemen whilst we are in the veriest bondage. There are things in our church which, if they were missing, we should think the whole religious service had been wanting or had been polluted or corrupted. There are some of us who do not know a religious service except we begin at point A and go to point F by a certain stereotyped way. Kept on the highway, we think the service good. We are main-road travellers; we have no wings. We should not know Jesus Christ if he had not the same robe on every time we meet him. We do not know him when we see him in the beggar; we do not recognise the veiled Son of God when we see him and hear him in the crying of a little child. Nay, more, there are some who cannot hear the gospel out of their own surroundings. Whatever happens within their own four walls is right, pleasant, profitable, wholly commendable; but if the selfsame thing were to occur within any other four walls they would not know it. These are the victims of the masonic altar, the geometric sanctuary, the brick and stone that should be transformed into poetry and music. We must not therefore ruthlessly condemn other men, even ecclesiastical antiquarians. It is so easy to smile at them. You do not know the exact use of the chasuble, refer to the ecclesiastical antiquarian; you are not sure what the stole meant in the fifteenth century, go to Oxford and consult the ecclesiastical antiquarians. You make light of these instructions. You are just as bad. If you want to know the creed of your own church you have to go to the iron safe and take out the trust-deed and turn it over to see really what is it that you do believe. You are not the men to smile at the ecclesiologist, or the antiquary. You would hardly know a hymn if you found it out of your own hymn-book; you would not know a sermon

if it were not preached by your own favourite preacher. To get you out of this is my purpose ; to lead you to see that all forms, shapes, colours, arrangements, relations, are significant of something impalpable, unseen, everlasting,—that is my sublime, my tremendous theme! If we could retain all these outward forms and cubit measures, and yet rise into their highest meanings, we should develop along the right lines and come to consummations that would be rich in spiritual profitableness. If we could enter into the mystic meaning, the upper, ever-shining meaning of things, what charity there would be amongst men. We should then see restored an ancient order of officers in the Church, namely, the seers, the men of eye-sight, the brethren who are up earliest and climb highest, and who telephone us from the mountains that the sun is coming. Let us escape from the letter into the spirit.

Remember in dealing with the altar we are not dealing with a merely geometrical figure. The altar has its finite side, yet it has also its infinite aspect. What does the altar do? Poor, man-built symbol, what dost thou do in the training of God's Church? The altar looks towards the Unknown. If we might personify the altar, we should think of it as having eyes that wander through eternity. The altar would be saying in its silence, There is another home ; this is but a stepping-stone to something higher, this is but the dawn of the coming day, this is but the seedtime—the golden harvest is not yet : I look beyond all these white sapphires that make the midnight rich with their jewellery, and I see beyond, and still beyond, God's unmeasured sanctuary. It ought to be a grand thing to have amongst us an altar that talks thus. We want some sublimating influences. We easily drop into commonplace and vulgarity ; we need to have in the air evermore sounds like a great, mighty, rushing wind from heaven, telling us that there is a heaven and there is an eternity. That is what the altar ought to be and ought to do. The altar should speak of things supreme, the altar should give us the right relation and contrast and value of all things round about us. We should test our conduct at the altar ; we should assay our gold at the altar ; we should try everything by the spirit of the sanctuary. To know the measure of the altar by

cubits and not to know the measure of the altar by spiritual influence is learned ignorance, is elevated and exaggerated impertinence. The tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth. Our houses are sanctified by the presence of the holy place. The walls of the sanctuary give security to the city ; not its banks and festive chambers, but its sanctuaries are the glory of the town. We do not know what the sanctuary is doing in any city. It may be the humblest place viewed architecturally and geometrically, but seen in its spiritual significance and relationship it may be the poor little despised church or conventicle that is keeping the city out of hell. Do not, therefore, despise anything that has spiritual significance in it. There are no weak churches ; there are no poor churches. Do not imagine that any church is standing at your door as a mendicant who cannot do without your support. It should be the proudest honour of your life that you are invited to sustain the outward and visible kingdom of God. Despise, I repeat, nothing that has spiritual significance in it. We cannot tell how far its influence reaches. Little noise it makes ; the kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation : when the morning dawns there is no crash of wheels upon the hills ; the dawn is glorified silence. What is true of the public sanctuary is true of the home sanctuary ; it is your family altar which keeps your house together. It may not be a formal altar, but the spirit of prayer that is in your house makes your bread sweet, and keeps all the windows towards the south, though geometrically they may stand square north. It is the Spirit of God, the altar, the divine genius that makes the house warm in January and glorious in June. Spiritually minded men should seize upon these thoughts, and magnify them, and take heart when they are in moments of depression because only the spiritual worker touches the root. Every other worker brings his waxen apple and ties it to the tree. Summer finds the apple in the root, and brings it to its elevation, its beauty, and its usefulness.

See what other words occur in connection with the term altar. You never find that word alone. Some men could not read this description of the altar. They are too sensitive ; there are men so super-refined that they could not read this description of God's

altar. Thou shalt "sprinkle blood thereon. . . . Thou shalt take of the bullock's blood, and put it on the four horns of the altar, and on the four corners of the settle, and upon the border round about : thus shalt thou cleanse and purge it." They would not like to read about blood. Are they refined men ? They are the vulgarest men. They do not know what blood means. They judge it by its commonest signification, and by its most revolting suggestion. Blood is life, love, God. We are not going to be driven away from our Calvary by men who think that the word blood has only one, and that the very lowest and meanest, signification. Wherever there is love there is giving of blood ; wherever there is a withholding of blood there is no love. There is calculation, there is prudence, there is a selfish regard to limited interests, but if it come not to laying down the life, love has not begun to show its beauty or exert its influence. Nay, more still : according to the Revised Version, this altar is not to be cleansed and purged only ; instead of these words we now have words which signify that for the altar itself atoning blood shall be shed. The altar which man has looked at needs to be atoned for because that sinful glance has fallen upon it. The Bible that man has touched with his worldly fingers would seem to require to be atoned for with blood before it can be really approached as to its innermost and tenderest meaning. God is a God of holiness. Without holiness no man can see the Lord. Yet we are tempted away from all these holy innermost truths by people who say that they revolt from the word blood, they are shocked by the term blood ; they cannot bear it, they hate it, they detest it. So they may, because they do not understand its significance. Without it the Bible would be an empty book ; without it the Bible would be a forsaken sanctuary : with it, in all its sublimest meanings, the Bible is unlike all other books, unique in its individuality, unapproachable in its sublimity. If the altar needed cleansing or atoning for by blood, so do the priests ; so does every minister of Christ. O poor soul, minister of the Saviour, thou dost need washing ; the chrism of blood must be thine own deepest experience ; unless thou hast been cleansed with blood thy lips cannot pronounce the message of the gospel, God is love. No man is love who withholds his blood. God is not love if he has not emptied his heart on the Cross.

This is our faith. It presents to us an aspect of depth, grandeur, moral influence that nothing else has ever presented to our judgment, or our conscience, or our imagination. Beware of that insensate sensitiveness which cannot pronounce the word "blood" in its religious and spiritual signification. Do not imagine yourselves refined and sensitive because you can talk about the example of Christ but not about the blood of Christ. You can debase any word; you can pronounce the word "music" so as to take all melody and all harmony and rhythm out of it; you can pronounce the word "gospel" so that it shall be but a common word of two syllables; you can shrink from anything: but you can so pronounce music and blood and Cross and Christ as to give those who hear you to feel that you have caught some inner and upper meaning which had hitherto escaped your own attention.

This cleansing, this atoning for the altar, these burnt-offerings, these sin-offerings, these peace-offerings—what will come out of it all? In the twenty-seventh verse we have the answer: Do all this, "and I will accept you, saith the Lord God." Acceptance comes out of it all. We are accepted in the Beloved. Consider the meaning of the word "accepted"—so rich in spiritual suggestiveness, so tender in spiritual pathos. "I will accept you"; I will take you into my heart, my home, my hope, my love—I will accept you: the past as a simple record shall be forgotten, your transgressions I will take and cast them behind me—who can find out the place that is behind the Infinite? As far as the east is from the west—that always unmeasured line—so far will I remove your transgressions from me.

Then how do we stand in this matter? You are Bible readers, are you students of revelation? You can quote all the dimensions of the altar, have you ever entered into its spirit? You know the meaning of every ecclesiastical garb and every ecclesiastical attitude, have you ever prayed the publican's prayer and brought cleansing heaven down into your heart? If not, you are still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, whatever church you attend, whatever orthodoxy you debase by your patronage. Then we must not rest in instruction; we

must go from the altar to the spirit, from the altar of cubits to the altar of infinity; we must go from the altar itself to the thing that is signified by the altar. Have you been baptised by water? Did your mother bring you to the font, and did some loving father-pastor drop the dew upon your face and call you by your name in association with the Trinity? Unless you are baptised with fire, that baptism will stand you in no good stead. Were you baptised in the river, immersed, and did some holy man of God raise you from the water and proclaim you a member of the Church? Unless you are baptised with fire, with the Holy Ghost, that immersion will be an argument against your going into heaven at all. Were you taught to read the Bible, taught by your father, mother, teacher, pastor? and have you read all the sweet syllables of the Bible? If you can answer Yes, I will follow your admission with another inquiry—Has the Spirit of revelation entered into your hearts? does it rule your lives? does it give vitality to your conscience? does it enlarge the sphere of your authority? If you say No, then the Lord will say, Thou wicked and slothful servant, out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee! thou hast read the letter, but not the word; the book, but not the revelation; thou hast heard all the syllables, but thou hast not transfused and elevated them into the music of a beautiful life. How stands this matter? Let every man answer for himself. I am afraid of the pedant. He has no business in the Church. I am ashamed of the antiquarian that he should know the merely and temporarily old, and not the eternity that preceded all time. I am afraid of the man who measures the prayer in words and in lines and in printer's ink, and does not measure it by its yearning, its love, its passion. We are called to spirituality, not to carnality; to profoundest wisdom, not mere literal information; to an altar not made with hands, and not merely and exclusively to the altar built even upon the terms of a divine specification. Holy Spirit, baptise us as with fire! Spirit of the altar, teach us how to suffer, how to pray! And, O thou Spirit of the Cross, atone for us every morning, every night! Amen.

PRAYER.

FATHER in heaven, we come to thee in a spirit of triumph. Our victory is assured in Christ Jesus the Lord. Thou art against all evil, thou art for all good. If God be for us, who can be against us? If we are in Christ Jesus our Saviour, our dying, atoning, risen, triumphant Lord, who shall lay anything to our charge or overturn the foundations of our hope? God is for all that is good and beautiful and true; may we also follow things that are lovely and honest and of good report—then shall we be found on the side of the majority, for God is with us. Take away all our love from things that are unworthy, and fix it upon things that are honourable and deserving; may we set not our affections on things below, but on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; may our life find its centre and its home, its rest and its hope, in heaven. We gather at the Cross; the world shall gather there, all nations shall rest under the shadow of the Tree of Life. Thou knowest our lives, our sorrows and doubts, our depressions and exultations; thou knowest the pain for which there is no word, thou knowest the joy that is unspeakable. We pray thee at the Cross to come to us according to our varied need; answer our hunger and thirst in thine own way; help us to be industrious, noting that in the day of work there are but twelve hours; may we consecrate every one of them to the service of the Cross. Make us strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; make us wise unto salvation, and especially wise to win souls. Take our poor little labour as we are able to do it day by day, purify it at the Cross, accept it, own it, and cover it with glory. The Lord be with the lonely and the sad; the Lord be the Helper of the helpless, and lead the blind by a way that they know not; and in the time of winter find flowers for those in whose hearts there is no hope. The Lord hear us in these things; mercifully condescend to visit us day by day: when all earth's little days are passed and for ever closed, may our eyes behold the light that fills the city of the blest. Amen.

Chapter xlv. 9-16.

GOD'S CARE OF HIS ALTAR.

"Thus saith the Lord God; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel" (ver. 9).

IS not this rather severe upon the stranger? The injunction does not rest upon the fact of the strangeness of the stranger, because in chapter xlvii. 22, 23 there is a distinct provision for the

stranger in Israel:—"And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord God." That preserves the great catholic genius of the Bible. From the first God was trying (with reverence be it spoken) to find a foothold for the stranger. The Jew had wholly misapprehended the purpose of God. The Jew thought he only had the book and the seal, the covenant and the whole insignia of election. God was constantly endeavouring to make a little place for the outsider, the Gentile, the stranger. It would be very perplexing to the spiritual conscience to find at last that the Redeemer is less than the Creator; that God fails in his second endeavour in the region of human propagation and culture; great in creation, but only partial in redemption; making all men, but able only to save a few of them. The Lord was constantly rebuking this superstitious imagination. What did it come to in the case of the Jews? It came to this, and to this it must always come, that if any man suppose himself to be the pet and favourite of Heaven, or any nation should entertain so wicked a superstition, they will kill the very God whom they suppose themselves to have accepted. The Jews so treated themselves, mischievously and falsely interpreting the purpose of God, that when God came to them in an incarnate form, they murdered him. You can only be just to yourselves in proportion as you are just to others. Only the man who sees the whole can properly see the individual part. God will therefore have the stranger in Israel have his inheritance, his lot; but when it becomes a question of the altar God naturally looks round for the Levite.

In this case the Levite was not present; the Levite had "gone away." How had the Levites disqualified themselves? The facts are given in the context and in the text itself. First, in verse 10, they "are gone away." Better not adorn that simplicity; that is a pathos to which we may not add one tear. Pause awhile and think of it—"are gone away." Some men

have no right to go away; some men are bound by heredity, by environment, by pledge and covenant, by solemn seal and vow, to be always here. Other men seem to be uncentred, and to be as much at home in one place as in the other. They have a liberty that has corrupted itself into licence and wantonness; we never know where to find them. But the Levite, the sworn man, the man who has exchanged vows with God, should always be found in his place. When he goes away, it is like high treason in the army; when such a man goes away, it is as if a troop had been cut down with the edge of the sword. Some men are the trustees of society. We can always point to them and say, Come weal, come woe, they will be found heart-stout, true as steel, faithful unto death. When we lose these men the earth has lost its rocks, and when the rocks have gone the gardens will soon go after them. "Gone away far." Observe that next word. The statement could not have ended at "gone away." It was not a little lapse, one step aside, a little *outré*; but "gone away far from me." You cannot stop one inch away from God; one inch means two, and two inches mean a foot, and the foot soon grows into furlongs and miles. When some men do not pray it is as if there were silence in the whole universe; their voices seem necessary to the completeness of things; a great awful breach or rupture has been made in the music of creation when such voices cease their adoration and the utterance of their desires. Here, then, is a wonderful difference in men. Sometimes one man is as a thousand. If that one man be found true he will bring the thousand right, if they can be brought right; but if that one man be gone astray and far away from God, who can set the thousand in their places? It is as if a section of the stars had been shattered.

To what had they gone? They "went astray away from me after their idols." Here is the prostitution of reason. Here is no theological mystery, but a mystery of daily life—that a man should know the true God, and turn away from him; a man should know that there is a coming eternity, and yet tabernacle himself in the huts of minutes and hours and all the other little details of perishing time. This we do; this is not a lesson to be found in the ancient books only, this is the tragic and

unpardonable experience of the day. To know the right, and yet the wrong pursue, is the miracle of manhood. A man shall know that to take a certain vessel and drain its contents means madness; he shall walk around the vessel and look at it and condemn it, and say that he is well aware that there is death in the cup; and, having made this plain avowal, it lies within the mystery of manhood to take that vessel and drain its dregs. Why trouble yourself, therefore, about metaphysical perplexities and differences of a purely scientific or theological kind? Here is the awful mystery, that a man can turn his back upon the truth, and run after lies, and love them with all that is left of his soul.

But were the Levites without excuse? They had their reasons. They knew that they could account for this. There was a general decadence in Israel. In verse 10 we have these awful words: "When Israel went astray." What is the meaning of that word, which may be regarded as in some sense parenthetical? The reference is to a great historical apostasy: as who should say, in paraphrase, There was a time when all Israel loved the Lord. It was not the movement of a man or two here and there, or of a Levite or a priest, or an eminent legislator or leader; but all Israel in one great mass, as it were, went away, and the Levites went with them. Were not the Levites justified? May we not follow the times? Is there not a lead in the air? The Levites could rise and say, We did not go away by ourselves, we were only part of a general apostasy; there were hundreds or thousands or tens of thousands of us; the great lapse was in Israel, and not in any one section of Israel: may we not therefore be pardoned for following a multitude? If we had gone astray Levitically or officially, we should see that we had deserved the great judgment of God; but all Israel, as it seemed to us, went astray, and we were only part of the crowd. The Lord will not have it so. It is the part of the Levite to stem the torrent of the crowd. It is the part of great statesmen and great writers and great characters to stop others from doing evil, not to go along with them. The Levites should have stood firm, whatever others did. Yet we must not make a perverted use even of this explanation. There is no more claim for a Levite to be good than there is for the

humblest man in Israel. There is no more claim, in other words, for a Levite to go wrong than there ought to be for the very humblest creature in the whole Church. God expects every man to be firm, and we only increase in responsibility as we increase in capacity, in opportunity, in faculty, and in profession. Whilst, therefore, it is quite right to expect that certain men should keep the faith and walk in the right way, our expectancy concerning them is no excuse why we ourselves should go wrong. True, all Israel, speaking in the bulk, had become apostate; but the Lord will not, therefore, excuse the Levites—"they shall even bear their iniquity." The Lord will not deal with us in crowds, but in individual relationship to himself, his throne, and his law.

What was the result? Were the Levites wholly discharged? No; the word "yet" with which the eleventh verse opens points to an exercise of the divine clemency that is really wonderful, and it is worth while to indicate this in words because it continues unto this day. The Lord will never give up a man until the man literally wrenches himself out of the divine grasp. What became of the errant Levites? First, they were deposed. They were to have charge at the gates of the house; they were to do certain menial work in the house; they were to slay certain offerings and sacrifices. They were simply, therefore, deposed, put down to lower work; degraded, we may say, to the second place; taken down one step, three steps, a dozen steps, but still not wholly banished and excommunicated from the service of the sanctuary. Now this may happen with all of us. This may happen with men. What some men might have been! They might have led us; instead of that they are put down to menial service. Search into the reason, and you will find there has been a moral lapse, or an intellectual infirmity, or some proof of disqualification. Providence rectifies things, providence attends to its own music. The harmony of Providence will not be ultimately and permanently spoiled by the works of men. All persons shall be put into their right places and set in their right relation. If the Levite who might have been at the top has disqualified himself he may not be altogether ungowned, but he will be put far away down according to the enormity of his transgression.

This is right. Some men go amongst us as deposed. They might have been as the star of the morning, they might have led the way to better things, to green Canaans and fruitful places; and yet because they have gone far away from God they are degraded. They are not cast into the bottomless pit, they are not put beyond the reach of light and hope and mercy; but it is of necessity that they should be deposed or degraded.

What is true of men individually is true of men ecclesiastically. Churches are put into the second place; churches are put back into the third place. There is a law to this effect: "The first shall be last and the last shall be first"; and the reason of the transposition shall not be arbitrary or mechanical, but shall be spiritual and moral. If we are not faithful to our vocation we shall go back a point or two; if we are lacking in courage other men shall be called forth to do the work; and what the Church is lacking in every day is courage, fire, accent, and emphasis of purpose. Thus the great Church is put down, and the almost new Church is put to the front. The Church that ought to lead the world because of its wealth, its learning, its historical opportunities and advantages, may so act that men who have no name, no status, no background of history, shall come forward by the voice and appointment of God, and lead the world into redemption and liberty and prospect of heaven.

Was the Lord then left wholly without faithful men? We find the contrast in verse 15:—

"But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord God."

There is always a contrast in history. We thought in the preceding verses that all Israel had gone astray, we find in this verse that the sons of Zadok "kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me." There has always been a faithful party in the State. There has always been an element of constancy in all the mutation of men and times and institutions. God keeps watch over that permanent quantity; it is as his own ark in the wilderness of time. Some-

times the faithful man says he alone is left ; and the Lord says, That is not the case, for in point of fact there are seven thousand men within call who have not bowed the knee to Baal. This is God's historical record. Sometimes the case of the ark has been brought very low ; now and then in history it would seem as if the kingdom of God had been within a very short distance of extinction : but what is a "short distance" in the estimation of God ? A hair's breadth is a universe ; if there is one moment between a nation and destruction, in that one moment God can work all the miracles of deliverance. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." This lies within our province and within our hope—may it lie also within our sense of duty—that it is possible for us though few to be faithful ; it is possible when all others have proved faithless for us to be faithful found. It is hard work. The other way would be much pleasanter to the flesh and to the sense—to go with the multitude to do evil ; we might go behind a blaring band and flaunting banners, and we might make merry because we were going down to the house of the devil to revile the memory of God. But reviling hath only a short night ; wantonness hath but a short story, and then comes its ever-deepening perdition. Let us pray for the spirit of faithfulness, not for the spirit of popularity. Let us pray that we may always be able to express our conscientious convictions, come what may ; then even if we be wrong in judgment it shall not be reckoned against us. The things that are reckoned against men in heaven are moral offences. The judgment may go far astray, but if the heart point to the north-star of righteousness and heaven, God will bring all the judgment up, and all the understanding will be rectified. All our merely intellectual errors shall be set down as transient infirmities, and if the heart be staunch to God, **no man, no devil, can keep us back from heaven.**

Chapter xlvii.

CURIOUS THINGS IN LIFE.

THIS chapter is a chapter of measurement. Everything is meted out, as it were, by so many cubits and inches. So we read, "he measured," "again he measured," and "again he measured," and in the fifth verse, "afterward he measured." It was a man who represented God. Thus the Lord shows us how everything is measured out. There is so much, and there is no more. You may measure it over and over again, sometimes with suspicion and unbelief, but it all comes to the same total. Everything is staked out, marked down, appointed. The voice is very dogmatic:—"This is the north side" (ver. 17); "This is the east side" (ver. 18); "This is the south side" (ver. 19); "This is the west side" (ver. 20). "So shall ye divide." Everything is done for us in grand totals. Within the main boundaries we do a great deal of detail, and so foolish are we and so easily imposed upon that sometimes we think we fix the main boundaries themselves. If we could but know that everything—birth, death, riches, poverty—is marked out, and that we live within positive bounds, we might make a great deal more of our strength, and we might spend to greater advantage the solitudes which are now wasted upon impossibilities. Am I a whale, that thou hast set a watch over me? Am I a sea, that thou hast written round about my foaming billows, Hitherto, but no further? We see this illustrated every day, and yet every day we doubt it or deny it, and the day following we go out as if we had learned nothing. We have added some lamps to the thoroughfares, but we have not extended the horizon one ten thousandth part of an inch in all the ages of human history. No, we are committed to detailed work, comparatively small interior work, but with the four points and the great outline of history we have simply nothing to do. God is the Measurer, and all things

are meted out. What, then, is the suggestion of wisdom? Surely it is, Lord, teach me where I am bounded, and how I am limited, and help me with patience and eager expectancy to do my little day's work with all industriousness and heart-loyalty, knowing that that servant shall be blessed who shall be found working steadily at his humble lot whenever his Lord cometh. By following out this doctrine of measurement we shall get rid of a great deal of fret and worry and excitement, and we shall be able to welcome weird-looking guests into the house, and say, For God's sake you are welcome, though we do not know you, and we do not like you at first; the Lord sent you this way; and presently that weird face will become beauteous as the face of a child-angel.

How curious is life, and from certain points how utterly unmanageable! From other points of view, how beauteous is life, how well-proportioned, and how easily handled if we would only keep our own hands off it, and let God do what he will! Look at your own industry and endeavour in the market-place, and in all the pursuits of business. What a curious law it is that in order to do a few things we must do many. In order to get six people to read what you have written you must probably address six thousand persons. If you knew beforehand the six who would read you would send direct intimation to them, and there would be an end of your trouble and expense; but you do not know them, and so to get at the six you must address the six thousand. There must be some moral and educational intent in all this; we must be illustrating some great doctrine or policy of Heaven. It is God's own way; even the Lord, if we may say so reverently, is put to this selfsame trouble. He preaches the gospel to the whole world, and probably only one man replies. Here are mysteries we cannot solve; we can touch them at their remotest points, but on their innermost meaning we cannot dwell with ease, for we cannot comprehend the unspeakable and illimitable significance. This one thing we know, that all tends in an educational direction. The things you do without any positive or profitable result are really profitable to you in another way. Your disappointments are your educators, as well as your satisfactions. You are taught patience, your ambition is limited if not rebuked; you say again and again, We must do a thousand

things by way of endeavour in order to accomplish half a dozen things by way of positive and literal success. It is better that man is not omniscient; he would soon lose his omniscience, he would become proud of it. We cannot have one divine attribute only; we must have such a combination and interrelation of attributes as shall keep a balance, so that no man shall be topheavy, no man shall be overborne with one attribute that puts all his other attributes and features to shame. In unity is rest, in harmony is real progress. So we must be balanced on this side and on that; the thousand must be measured out. If there be a thousand and one, and a thousand, there will be loss of equipoise, and all such loss means unsteadiness, uncertainty, dissatisfaction. What money you could have saved if you had known how to go immediately and directly to the persons who wanted you! But you had to go up and down the world soliciting, trying, asking, appealing, wondering, and after many a snub and many a sneer and many a contempt meant to be cruel you did here and there light upon one who said, We have been waiting for you, we give you welcome. Why were you sent to all the inhospitable doors? To be taught, to be humbled, to be refined by chastening.

What a curious thing it is that though we know that only one can find the prize yet we all go out to seek for it! We are accustomed to the illustration of a treasure being lost in the darkness and on the broad thoroughfare. A thousand men get to know that a purse has been lost. It was only a purse, only one individual could find it and take it, and yet all the thousand are looking round and groping about for it. Do you not know that only one person can get that? You know it, but something says to you, Perhaps you are the one person. Could we just have that amount of faith in the Christian Church we should have a revival of godliness. Here is salvation; let us suppose that only one man can get it: who knows who that one man is? "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." Even suppose we knew that only one man in all the congregation could realise the Saviour's presence, and all the advantages of the Saviour's Cross, so long as we did not know who that one man was, should we not arise and strive mightily and cry loudly? Then who knows

how human passion, the excited, ennobled pathos of the soul, might even move God himself to some unheard-of benevolence ?

What is the meaning of all this? Even such apparently trifling circumstances as the possible finding of lost treasure should teach us some religious lesson. What if the Lord should say at last, when we say, "Master, we understood that many were called, but few were chosen; we understood that a certain number of persons were elect, and that the number could not be increased,"—what if he should say to us, "How do you know that you were excluded? and if you did not know that you were excluded, why did you not search and strive and try mightily? You were the man I saw seeking for the lost purse: thou wicked and slothful servant, out of thine own mouth I condemn thee." We had better seek and strive and work and pray vehemently and wait patiently, for, who can tell, it may be the meanest of us that is elected to some principedom in heaven. Never was earnestness disappointed, never did earnestness find the door shut. The earnest, the vehement in heart take the kingdom of heaven by force. God is willing, so to say, to be stormed by a besieging heart. It may be you might succeed; you cannot be sure that you are excluded even if we admit the doctrine of election in its most literal and even cruel form; unless you have a writing from heaven signed by God, who says, "You are excluded from my love," you ought to try; and no man tries in vain who tries with his whole heart.

A still more extraordinary thing is this, and curious in its way, that although we know we may at any moment die our plans are laid as if we were going to live for ever. That, I repeat, is a circumstance so extraordinary as to be charged with religious suggestiveness. Ask any man how long he will live, and he will tell you he does not know. Ask him if he may this very day die, and he will say, Certainly, this very day I may cease to live upon the earth. Now examine his plans—his plans of business, his plans of home, his plans of education—and you will not find one of them limited to the day. And the most curious part of it is that the man cannot help it. He could not be bound by the sunrising and the sunsetting. He will tell

you plaintively that he may never live to see the sunset, yet his whole life is set in plans that shall endure for years and ages. Why build this fine house? You may never live to see the roof put on. The man cannot help building it; that is not in his disposal. He was told to build it, and build it he must. If he had been told in plain terms, he might have resented the commandment, but there are many ways of telling men what to do without speaking the commandment in so many cold and measurable words: there is a pressure that is not speech. Can we for a moment imagine that there is nothing religiously suggestive in this action? Do we not contradict our own atheism and our own theories of annihilation by it? On paper we write ourselves down as annihilationists; we die like dogs, and there is an end of us. We do not live like dogs—how strange that in the hour and article of death our whole nature should be transformed, and that we who were men planning for immortality are content to go into the kennel and sigh out our last breath and be lost! It cannot be. There is something within the heart that says, No, this is not right; there may be mystery about it, and there may be perversion about it, but we are not the creatures of a day: so far as the body is concerned, we may go any moment, and yet even the body says, Work for to-morrow; build for posterity; write for the unborn ages; breathe out your poetry; if it be not understood now there shall come up a generation by-and-by that shall say no such singer ever charmed its imagination or delighted its heart. Yet we say posterity has done nothing for us. Why, it is posterity that inspires us.

We are not so much indebted to our ancestors as we are to the unborn ages. We feel they are coming, we are their house-keeper, we are preparing for them; we are saying, not in words, but in actions, The unborn must be prepared for—they must not come like starvelings into the world, we must get ready for them; we must get the library, and the fire, and all the house appointments duly arranged to receive the oncoming ages. Yet there are fools that tell us that they will do nothing for posterity because posterity has done nothing for them—a blank, palpable, absurd fallacy. The present is drawn upon by the future. I have

no doubt about the immortality of man. Man now is immortal every day he lives; that is to say, he is immortal by some sign of his thought or action or plan or purpose. He never says, To-night at six o'clock I may be a dead man, therefore I will draw my lines accordingly. He says, To-night at six o'clock I may be a dead man, but the world will not be dead; the individual may go, but the race will remain; man dies, but humanity abides; and my last act, if it be my last act, upon earth, shall be an act of generous contribution to the progress of the total world. Do not stifle these voices. You need not give them any theological accent of any narrow or sectarian kind, yet you should not neglect their broadest moral suggestions. Instead of trying to make things less you should endeavour to make things greater; and in this spirit you will find that everything in life suggests the larger life. For that larger life, O my soul, prepare thyself. Such preparation comes by industry of every kind. In all labour there is profit. Even in the things you have done without result you have found some advantage to the soul if you have laboured faithfully. And as for that larger life, we know not what it is, it is enough to know meantime that it is larger. God is always enlarging and ennobling the outlook of man.

We might also notice as a curious thing in all this measurement, that when we have done our best there comes a point when we must simply leave results. We cannot follow our own labour beyond a certain point. The agriculturist has done what he can in the field; now, he says, I must wait. Can you not be more active in the field? No. Why do you not go into this ploughed and sown field every day and do something to show your activity? He says, I cannot, I must wait, I cannot hasten the sun or the processes of nature. So with the training of your children; all you can do is to show them a noble example. You can be chivalrous in the midst of your family, you can give them the best education in your power, you can encourage all that is good and beautiful in their nature, and then you must wait. You may have heartache, heartbreak, sorrow upon sorrow, tears may be your meat night and day, whilst you are continually mocked by the very presences that ought to have been your bodyguard and your loyalest allies and

helpers in life ; but having done a certain amount of work you simply now must wait, leave it, read the writing, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further. And so with business. You can apparently be driving your business with tremendous energy which ends in nothing. Really a quiet industry may often do more than a vehement impotence. You can be industrious, faithful, honourable, generous, and having done all you can, not as an atheist, but as a believer in God, you must say, Now, Lord, the harvest is in thine hands : I have done what I can in my poor little field ; thou knowest that I have spared no energy and no thought : now let the harvest be as thou wilt ; if I come back in the autumn and find this field sterile, the day of harvest a day of sorrow, help me to say, Thy will be done : I will leave it all now ; I have tried to be a faithful and honest servant ; and then if the harvest be golden, abundant, and far beyond the resources of our accommodation, to God's name be the praise ; he always surprises us by the infinity, the boundlessness of his gifts. If for a moment he disappoint us, and we say, "There is nothing," he comes and says, "For a small moment I have forsaken thee ; I put all the field back that thou mightest learn how to pray some deeper, tenderer prayer ; thou hast done it well, poor chastised soul : now with everlasting mercies will I gather thee." The disappointments are momentary, they act as foils to the eternal radiance of love.

There must be a point of trust in our life. We find it in business, we find it in investment, we find it in friendship. There comes a point when all we can do is to confide ; and if we be disappointed in consequence of treachery, remember it is better to be wronged than to wrong ; it is better to be betrayed than to be the betrayer. You act the gentleman, let others do what they may ; you act the Christian, and let us in the sum-total of things find out who was right and who was wrong. Then consider that life is a plan. It is not a cloud ; it could be more perfectly illustrated by geometry than by cloud and mist or vapour. It has its four points, its main boundaries, its architectural shape ; its elevation imposing, and all its appointments detailed with scrupulous care towards the education and spiritual comfort of the inhabitant. Work on that plan, and all will be

right. Ask for the plan every morning ; go into the little office, and have a look at the paper. Here is the great skeleton-building with all its anatomy of scaffolding and planking : what is that little house or wooden shed outside ? That is where the plan is kept. Why do men go in there now and then ? To look at the plan. Can they not carry the plan in their heads ? Not well. Can they not make the plan as they go on ? No. Architecture is not conjecture. It is settled, designed ; every little part mapped out, and put down and set to scale. And art thou, poor fool, building a life-house without a plan ? The only man who has ever grasped life in all its bearings and relationships and issues is the Son of God.

You can hew away at this old book called the Bible as much as you please, you cannot get away from this living and all-dominating fact, that no man known to history has so laid hold of life in all its depth and length and breadth and height, in all its pain, tragedy, agony, destiny, in all its discipline, education, and culture, with such grasp, such clearness, and such wisdom as it has been realised and provided for by the Christ of God. There are other religions, and many of them fine, fantastic speculation, beautiful, cloudy, rainbow-like dreaming ; but for culture of the soul, for discipline of the will, for stirring the whole nature into benevolent impulse towards other men, Christianity stands alone. To that Christ I ask my fellow-men ; to that Christ I would go every day and say, Lord Jesus, what is the next thing to be done ? and tell me how to do it, and never leave me one moment to myself : measure out the thousand cubits ; tell me which is the north side, the south side, the west side, the east side ; and if it comes to a great fight, show me how to stand, how to move, how to stretch : Lord, be with me all the time, till "the hurly-burly's done," till "the battle's fought and won." Given a young man who goes out to make his own fortune and his own destiny, and you have an image of folly : given a young soul who says, As everything else is meted out, measured, adjusted, and balanced, mayhap my poor little life is treated in the same way ; I will go to the divine Measurer, and he will tell me within what lines to work, where to stop and how to live — and in that young soul you have an image of Wisdom.

Chapter xlvii. 9.

“Every thing shall live whither the river cometh.”

THE LIFE-GIVING RIVER.

THE river would have been of small consequence to us but for this declaration. Ezekiel is not describing poetically a river which he saw in vision or in dream. The poet may deal only in words, but the poet-prophet deals in realities. The river means something; it means beauty and fruitfulness and issues a thousandfold. The whole story of the river is told in these words—“Every thing shall live whither the river cometh.” In the earlier part of the verse we have the same thought—“It shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live.” We do not need to spiritualise this river, for it spiritualises itself. The river is Christian life, Christian revelation. It is the revelation of Christ; it is the dispensation of the Spirit; it is the outflow from heaven of all blessing and truth and goodness. No other interpretation would fit the occasion; small poetical annotations would not rise to the dignity of the central thought. Here is a divine outflow, making for itself a channel everywhere, and wherever the channel is the banks are full of green trees, and the trees are fruit trees, and the leaves are medicinal, and the whole vision is a glimpse of heaven. We might profitably commit the first twelve verses of this chapter to memory. Teach your children such recitations. They will outlive the comic song, the foolish and impossible romance, the pile of words that ends in evaporation. Fill the memory of your child with such words as these, and they will come up in old age a rich and imperishable inheritance.

Ponder the words. “Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house.” The heathen have a proverb that we might as Christians well copy. The heathen proverb says, “Follow

the gods wherever they lead." Have we exceeded that thought? Is not heathenism a rebuke to us in this matter? Have all the great thoughts of the human mind not been anticipated? Is not antiquity the really modern thought and modern literature? It is like going back, not to ten miles farther down the stream—that would be nothing; it is like going back to the well-head. You like to go back to the spring, the fountain, and the origin of the uncommon water. Who has not, who has entered upon the danger and enterprise of exploration at all, desired to find the sources of the Nile? No man has been content to go twenty miles down the river and say he has come to that point and means to stand there. Twenty miles is nothing, fifty miles is a mockery; that is not going back to antiquity. You must find the source, the fountain, or you have found nothing, and all your journeying is a fool's enterprise. Who is this anonymous "he" who is always bringing men to new visions, and undreamed-of rivers, and revelations that glow and shine like summer skies? Who is that other person? Has he no name? Did he not sign on our roll of signatures? We cannot get rid of him; he finishes the experiment, or he begins it, or he interrupts it in the middle. There is a ghostly quantity or force always having its own way. We cannot explain it. Why did you pray so long? You cannot tell. Why did your thoughts fix themselves in one tremendous centralisation upon a point? We cannot tell; to-morrow we shall know. There is a Ghost in the world. You may vote out God, and you may vote out all the theological terms, and come down to the plain vulgar word ghost; but there it is. When you come to the full comprehension thereof you will return to the old words and say they are best—God, Father, Sovereignty, Providence. Some men have to go a long way round to get at their theology, but if they are honest men they will come to it at the last, and we shall find that antiquity is the present day, and the present day is a poor experiment that may end in nothing.

What saw the prophet?—"waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward." Who knows what water is? Yet how we reject it! The universe could not live a day without water. It could live a little whilst the water was sinking down,

but when the water really went out of it the universe itself would collapse. Christ is water; Christ is commonplace; Christ flows and trickles; Christ is not a measured wine, he is an unmeasured and immeasurable river, now a torrent, now a stream of silver, now a river that a lamb might gambol in, so shallow; and now a river so deep that navies might rock themselves in its abundance of water. There was a man who had a line in his hand, and he went forth eastward to measure a thousand cubits. Who is this man who is always measuring the world? He cannot lay that line down. Is the world growing, shrinking? Why this eternal measurement? Plato said, God is always measuring the world. We find these waters in Joel and in Zechariah and in the Apocalypse, and we find this measuring man everywhere. The earth is mapped in heaven. Heaven's map will be the final geography. We may meet in military committees for the purpose of redistributing geographical areas, but the map of the old sinning earth is kept in the archives of heaven. One day, we shall see, the desert shall be marked out as garden-land, and stony places shall glow with flowers. What a marvellous river was this! The man "measures a thousand cubits," and "the waters were to the ankles"—hardly more than a pool: yonder a little bird was sitting at the brink, farther on a lamb was lapping its daily portion, a little farther on and green grass was waving above the little stream. It was a beauteous lake, hardly more than a mirror, laughing at the blue heavens, and doubling them. And then there was a second measure, another thousand cubits, and "the waters were to the knees"; another thousand, and "the waters were to the loins"; another thousand, and there "was a river," a river "to swim in." The waters never broke, they increased; at last they demanded a sea. The river must find the sea, or make one. All this motion means a grand finale. This increase means ultimate benediction. This is the way of the gospel in the world: first very little, then more, then still more, and then the mightiest and grandest of all objects. O Saviour of the world, what is thy kingdom like? It is like a grain of mustard-seed. So small? Yes, so small in itself, but when it is grown it is a cathedral for birds to sing in. Oh tell us more, thou gentle One! to what is the kingdom of heaven like? It is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures

of meal until the whole was leavened. We think that God should reveal himself in some tremendous exposure or declaration. God will not work after this manner; the path of the just is as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The year has its springtime; life has its infancy; the river reaches to the ankles at first, but at the last it cannot be passed over. Here is the law of progress, beneficent, continuous, and consummating increase.

Then said the anonymous one, "Son of man,"—literally, Adam,—“hast thou seen this?”—then be wise: in the little see the great; in the seed see the harvest; in hints see consummations. This is the very gift of God, the intellectual miracle, the spiritual coronation of man, namely, that he shall see in beginnings the meanings of endings, that he shall see in the first chapter and the first verse of Genesis the meaning of the Apocalypse. That is the difference between the literalist and the prophet. The literalist gets no further on; the prophet is at the end when he is beginning. His soul burns with heaven.

Beautiful is this imagery, but not so beautiful as the reality. Sometimes history has to lag after symbolism. In the case of Christian missions or the propagation of the truths of the Cross, history shakes off the brightest symbolism as being inadequate to express the glorious realities. We are to judge of the river, fairly, clearly, by the life which it brings. The Lord is always willing to submit himself to practical tests. If Christ cannot give life, disbelieve him. Do not talk about his beautiful expression; his tender poetic strain, his gracious voice, his manifold appearances; but put the testing, crucial question, What does it total up to? and if the answer be other than life, let him be crucified; he is the prince of mocking poetasters, he is not the Son of God. Even when Christianity is willing to be judged in this way it by so much establishes a great claim upon the confidence of man. Christianity does not say, Examine my metaphysics, consider me as a philosophy, compare me as an effort in thinking with all the other religions in creation: Christianity says, Judge me by my fruit, see what I do, and if I do not make the dead live, then I am going forth on false pretences. Is it true that wherever

Christianity has gone—the spiritual idea, the true conception of God, the right view of the Cross of Christ—is it true that wherever this has gone life has gone? We hold it to be true upon every ground, and we undertake to prove its truth not by tropes but by figures statistical and by facts human, palpable, and accessible. He would not enter upon any very perilous experiment who undertook to prove that the Christian idea—by that involving the whole work and function of Christ—has done more for the commerce of the world than any other force. Christianity has turned over more money than any other thought of man. Christianity has kept more workpeople, paid more wages, patronised more art, than any other religion, or any other conception of the human mind. The highest artists could not have lived without the religious genius and the religious fact. This is true in sculpture, in oil, in music, in architecture, in literature, in poetry. Take out of the world all the cathedrals, all the churches, chapels, religious houses; take away all the monuments that Christianity has erected; take away all the pictures that represent religious or Christian subjects; burn all the oratorios and all the music that derives its sublimity from Christian inspiration; take away all the books that have been printed, all the engravings that have been published, representing Christian thought and Christian history; go into the nursery and into the drawing-room and into the studio, and take out of them everything that the Christian thought has done,—and then, viewed commercially, you have inflicted the greatest possible loss upon the civilised world. “Every thing shall live whither the river cometh”: plenty of business, plenty of work,—clearing forests, building cities, exchanging merchandise; the seas alive with vessels, and the desert encroached upon for more city-room.

This religion of Christ is a great business thought. It is the principal factor in civilisation of an active kind. There has been civilisation without it, there is civilisation to-day that ignores Christianity; but what a languid civilisation, what a self-enjoying and self-destroying civilisation! How wanting in pathos, in pity, in care for others; how exclusive, how selfish, how little! We do not call that civilisation from the point of view of the Cross. When Christianity uses the term civilisation it means to use it

in its deepest and most inclusive senses. So judged, Christianity keeps the widest market-place in the world, circulates most money, keeps the world alive. Not the less truly so that some who carry on the merchandise of the world do not know under what inspiration they are working. Who cares for atmosphere? Who cares to go into subtle questions about spiritual relationships, spiritual movements for operating upon the mind and heart? Who knows the mystery of dreams that have ended in temples and in civilisation? Yet there must be a sanctuary in which all these things are adjusted, regulated, and directed to certain positive issues.

Or, leaving the commercial thought altogether and looking at moral progress, only those who have not studied the history of missions can be wanting in sensitiveness on this point. If men would read the Acts of the Apostles published yesterday they would see that the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament is being continued in many a glowing supplement. How many people have heard, from a missionary point of view, of New Guinea? It was a heathen country, given over to all manner of debasement and corruption and foulness and cruelty. To-day it blossoms as the rose. Why? Because the gospel has been instituted there, preached there, received there; and men who once would have devoured you are now inquiring about the very highest possibilities of thought and destiny. In the name of justice, find the cause of this transformation, and acknowledge it. Did a band of purely scientific persons go over there and colonise? Not they. Was New Guinea transformed by a little brigade of botanists? Never. Who went first? The man who always goes first—the Christian. Then crowds follow, and the crowds that follow are apt to think they made the highway on which they travel. Not a stone of it did they lay. Have you heard of Madagascar and the islands of the Pacific—of any missionary field at all? The missionary has gone and found it given over to all manner of evil, all manner of cruelty, and he has left it a comparative paradise. The question ought to be asked, What did it? and the answer is, The river came, the river brought life with it. It may seem to be a simple thing to say, but it contains a whole philosophy of civilisation, that the river does not come to the city, the city comes to the river. What a gracious thing it was

for the Thames to come to London! The Thames never did come to London; the Thames made London. We as a city are built on the Thames. Rome stands on the Tiber. How kind of Rome to receive the Tiber! How very condescending of London to make way for the Thames to roll through almost her very centre! The river did not come. Where water is men go. Build a magnificent palace, anywhere, and then find out at the end there is no water in the neighbourhood: now you may sell your palace to any fool who will buy it. What is wanting? The river. Has a river anything to do with building? Everything. No water, no life; no river, no home. Yet how many persons act as if they thought London had brought the river, and act as if they thought that they were the creditors of religion, and not debtors to it! The truth is, men do not go back to facts; they do not force themselves back to first principles and starting-points; they accept civilisation as it is without tracing it to its fount and origin. Has the river brought life to your house? Wherever it has come it has brought life, has tamed ferocious nature, has made the feeble strong, has made the sick at heart hopeful and glad. Has the river come into your soul? If so, you are a new man. You live now; your thought is quicker, more sensitive, larger, tenderer; now you think about other people, and when you put on all your wrappings you wonder if you could not find room for poor shivering poverty under one corner of your gaiety; when you make a feast you are, at all events, now disposed to give the leavings to the poor: by-and-by you will reverse the arrangement and let the poor sit down first. "Every thing shall live whither the river cometh"—honesty and beauty, and all holy purpose, and all generous thought and effort; everything shall live: the domestic animals on your hearthstone, your horse in the stable, your man in the loft. When you are converted the poorest beggar that knocks at your door will know it.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL.

[NOTE.—“THE BOOK OF DANIEL is the earliest example of apocalyptic literature, and in a great degree the model according to which all later apocalypses were constructed. In this aspect it stands at the head of a series of writings in which the deepest thoughts of the Jewish people found expression after the close of the prophetic era. . . . Whatever judgment be formed as to the composition of the book, there can be no doubt that it exercised a greater influence upon the early Christian Church than any other writing of the Old Testament, while in the Gospels it is specially distinguished by the emphatic quotation of the Lord (Matt. xxiv. 15, τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ Δανιὴλ τοῦ προφήτου . . . ὁ ἀναγνώσκων νοείτω. . .). In studying the Book of Daniel it is of the utmost importance to recognise its apocalyptic character. It is at once an end and a beginning, the last form of prophecy and the first ‘philosophy of history.’ The nation is widened into the world: the restored kingdom of Judah into a universal kingdom of God. To the old prophets Daniel stands, in some sense, as a commentator (Dan. ix. 2–19): to succeeding generations, as the herald of immediate deliverance. The form, the style, and the point of sight of prophecy are relinquished upon the verge of a new period in the existence of God’s people, and fresh instruction is given to them suited to their new fortunes. The change is not abrupt and absolute, but yet it is distinctly felt. The eye and not the ear is the organ of the Seer: visions and not words are revealed to him. His utterance is clothed in a complete and artificial shape, illustrated by symbolic imagery and pointed by a specific purpose. The divine counsels are made known to him by the ministry of angels (vii. 16; viii. 16; ix. 21), and not by ‘the Word of the Lord.’ The seer takes his stand in the future rather than in the present, while the prophet seized on the elements of good and evil which he saw working around him and traced them to their final issue. The one looked forward from the present to the great ‘age to come’; the other looked backward from ‘the last days’ to the trials in which he is still placed. In prophecy the form and the essence, the human and divine, were inseparably interwoven; in revelation the two elements can be contemplated apart, each in its greatest vigour,—the most consummate art, and the most striking predictions. The Babylonian exile supplied the outward training and the inward necessity for this last form of divine teaching; and the prophetic visions of Ezekiel form the connecting link between the characteristic types of revelation and prophecy.”—SMITH’S *Dictionary of the Bible.*]

Chapter ii. 1-30.

GREAT DREAMS.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR was not content to have an interpretation of his dream; he demanded that the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans should tell him not only the interpretation but the dream itself. The question to them is, What did I dream? The Chaldeans said, Tell us the dream, and we will tell thee the interpretation. But the king said, No; the thing is gone from me: it was a broken dream; I dreamed dreams, that is to say, I dreamed one dream, but it was so broken and so disarranged that I cannot put it into coherence; the whole thing is gone from me, but if you are really wise men you will just be as clever in recalling the dream as in giving a right interpretation of it. The magicians and sorcerers said: This is unreasonable; we must have something to start with: we ought not to be called upon first to make a dream and then to answer it by way of interpretation; give us the dream, and we will give the meaning of it. "The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can show me the interpretation thereof."

Then the Chaldeans complained: "There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean. And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh." The Babylonian theology was peculiar in this respect; it assumed that every man who came into the world had a god, or demon, or angel, or spirit peculiarly his own, appointed to watch over him for defence and guidance and the like, but it did not lie within the scope of the genius of these individual deities first to recall a dream and then to give the interpretation of it; but the

Babylonian theology had in it the further assumption that there are other gods, a million thick it may be when they gather in full hosts, gods that do not dwell with flesh, non-incarnate gods; and only they can see the whole circle of things, only they can tell a man, king or peasant, what he has dreamed, and can show the dreamer the meaning of the vision.

“For this cause the king was angry and very furious,”—kings soon got angry in olden times and in Oriental nations,—“and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.” Daniel was not one of the wise men of Babylon; Daniel was only a student at this time; he was preparing to join the ranks of the wise men; but the king’s decree was complete, all-inclusive, final, that every man who professed to study wisdom be killed, because no man can be found to recall my dream, and put it in the shape which I can recognise. That was a short and easy method with imperfect teachers; many would like to practise it now. We do not recognise the limitations of our function as teachers, seers, and prophets, and children of wisdom. We do not see that there are limits even to prayer; it is not fully recognised by us that men can only go a very little way, a mile or two at the most, on the wondrous road that stretches into infinity and eternity. Sometimes we want to scourge our teachers or goad them, or to prick them with the spears of our inquisitiveness, so as to touch their blood and make them bolt forward several miles at once, but it cannot be done. The wisest man has only a lamp, and a certain quantity of oil in it; if he withhold not his oil he is doing all that lies in his power. We must not insist upon impossibilities from our fellow-men; give us what you can, pray what prayer lies within the urgency of your felt need; if you can bring in our sin, and name it with aught of delicacy to God, help us thus by your intercession; and if you have power so to name the Cross as to bring down the answer ere the prayer has gone, use that power for our edification, our release, and our general advantage. Do not hearers expect too much? They want to know things that are only known to God.

Yet there is a sense in which Nebuchadnezzar was right. This is the cry of heathenism. Tell us what we dream; put the

nightmare into shape. We have seen wild things, we have walked across wildernesses, we have been lost in storms, we have been deafened by thunder, we have been affrighted by lightning ; serpents have coiled round us, questions have risen in the heart like sparks of fire : tell us what it means. Heathenism is right. By heathenism do not understand something that is five thousand miles away, rather understand the unchristianised portion of your own nature ; we, dwelling in civilised lands, represent no inconsiderable amount of heathenism ourselves. Christianity ought to be able to tell heathenism what it has been thinking about and what it wants. This is the difficulty of the missionary abroad, and this is the difficulty of the teacher at home. The Christian evangelist has first to tell his hearer the dream that has troubled the hearer's imagination. It will not do for the hearer to tell his own dream ; he really cannot tell it ; he can hint at a word here and a symbol there and a shadow yonder : only the interpreter in the Christian sanctuary can tell the dreamer what he dreamed. Christianity therefore undertakes in the first instance to put our memories right, to recall vanished images, to make echoes find their way back to the voices to which they owe their existence. Christianity says, I will tell thee, O poor soul, what thou hast been dreaming about : they were strange things that appeared in thy dream ; there was an image, black, grim, awful to look upon, with eyes of reddest fire, and a voice full of reproach and cutting rebuke, and denunciation of the most poignant and severe character : thou didst hear other witnesses testifying against thee in the great clamour, voice following voice, accusation following accusation, until thou wast bewildered by the tremendous impeachment : through it all there was a black line, strange, a crossed line ; as thou didst look upon that line it shaped itself into a gallows-tree ; there was One upon it, his face marred more than any man's ; he was wounded in five places ; he looked at thee with the look of omnipotent weakness, the pathos of that face was mightier than the almightiness of God : that was thy dream—it was a dream of need, a dream of self-accusation, a dream full of trouble, woe unspeakable, and expectation that burned like hell. That is a dream of humanity : a great fear containing a great hope ; a tremendous accusation broken in upon by possibilities of eloquent pleading

and prevalent intercession; a sin, a creditor, black, stern, oppressive, and One side by side offering to pay all the debt. Thy dream expressed universal necessity: it was a cry for the living God, it was a groping after something that seemed to be quite near, yet strangely to elude the fingers that searched for it. Until you realise the dream the interpretation will seem to refer to some other man's vision. Every dreamer so far must recognise the nightmare, the dream, the troubled sight that came before him; then he will sit attentive and solemn, and listen to the interpreter who has the key of mysteries.

It may be held, therefore, in general terms, that the demand of Nebuchadnezzar was not so unreasonable as it seemed to be. Christianity must do something that no other religion can do, else it will become one of many. Jesus Christ had no plural; Jesus Christ may be described grammatically as a noun of multitude: he represented all the rest, all life eternal, all beauty unfading, all music everlasting. Jesus Christ does not come in with a conjecture, following the guesses of other men; Jesus Christ claims to be unique, original, one, only begotten of the Father; the Ruler of men, their King, and one who brings from eternity water that can slake the thirst of time; the only one who can do away with the little artificial lamps invented by human genius, and displace them by suns that can never burn away, suns that brighten with their burning. When Christianity loses its distinctiveness it foolishly undertakes to descend to a level already thronged by fretful competitors. When the preacher descends from the platform God built for him and begins to read essays, he puts himself into competition with more able men than himself, who know more about the subject and can more fittingly express it in formal and logical manner. So long as he stands upon the crag built by God, and thence thunders the law, or proclaims as with silver trumpet the evangel of reconciliation, he has no rival; only himself can be his parallel. Christianity does not come to answer our curiosity; Christianity comes to reply to our need. The Cross has nothing to say to our intellectual speculativeness; it comes to tell the broken, self-accusing, self-condemning heart that God is love. **Keep to your function; stand by your charter: do not dis-**

franchise yourselves by condescending to occupy the lower levels of wrangling controversy, wordy and pitiless disputation.

When the intelligence was brought to Daniel he said, "Why is the decree so hasty from the king?" Does he look everywhere That was John Foster's argument, or part of it, in answer to atheistic inquiry. The celebrated essayist said, Unless a man has been everywhere, the place where he has not been may contain the proof of the presence of the living God; and if a man has been everywhere through and through the universe, why, he seems fit to be God. "Why is the decree so hasty from the king?" Daniel took the right course; he "went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would show the king the interpretation. Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon." That is always the course that is profoundly prudent, because profoundly rational as well as profoundly Christian. To God! That is your marching order. When you are troubled, affrighted, overwhelmed, imperilled, to God! Do not consult equals, or measurable superiors, but flee! Haste thee! Beat urgently upon heaven's door! Knock, and it shall be opened unto thee. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him: ye have not because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss.

Here is the divine hand magnified in the distresses of mankind. Life was brought to a sharp crisis. The king's decree went forth, and in Oriental lands kings cared no more for human life than we care for insect life—perhaps even less. The decree darkened the whole heaven; there was gloom in every house in the city, mayhap in the whole country. Because Nebuchadnezzar was wrathful, therefore did the sun retire and the whole firmament drape itself in awful guise. What was done? Daniel knew what course to take; he instantly sought fellowship in prayer,

and he and his companions fell on their knees and cried to the God of heaven. "Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven." The captain reported to the king that he had found an interpreter. That interpreter was found in unexpected places, as all interpreters are found. Said Arioch, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah." That is God's inscrutable way. It was not a brother-king that told Nebuchadnezzar what had troubled him; nor was it some man that drove to the king's house in a chariot of gold, with steeds of fire, whose scarlet nostrils were distended as if in pride that they were called upon to enter such lofty service: it was a man among the captives of Judah. How wondrously events touch and interrelate in life! Thus captivity is made true freedom, and thus men far from home established a second nativity, and thus persons who suppose themselves to be instances of humiliation find that those circumstances are but a stairway up to primacy, to sovereignty. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You are in the captivity of poverty, perplexity, difficulty: there will be a message for you some day; for though you have so little outwardly, what treasures you have spiritually; though everything has been taken from you that can be taken except yourself, you live, you pray, you own Christ's dear, sweet name, you have understanding of human nature; therefore you are rich: when you are sent for, speak roundly, with authority, directly, and make no obeisance that has not in it the stoop of royalty.

Some men cannot be captives except in form. All men are not prisoners who are in gaol. Sometimes the turnkey is more a prisoner than the man whom he has locked up, and oftentimes the judge is more a captive than the man whom he may with unconscious injustice have consigned to a prison undeserved. Consider what you are, and what you have, intellectually, spiritually, educationally. Give a boy a good education, and you give him a fortune, which he cannot spend or throw away, and which will come usefully to his aid in far-away places and far-away times; give a child a rich Christian education, a real, sensible, healthy, wise training, store the memory with Zion's own Psalms and minstrelsy, and with the words of Jesus, small

as dewdrops but immeasurable as suns, and somewhere the child may become even in poverty and expatriation and shame a prophet, a teacher, one who can let fall upon the darkening mystery the illumination of Heaven. This is the attitude of Christianity to-day and every day. It tells men the meaning of their nightmare and trouble and sorrow, and it often has to put before the distracted imagination the very thing that was dreamed. But Jesus can do all this. He answered every one who came to him earnestly and urgently. It was only to speculation that he was so stonily dumb and deaf; it was only curiosity that he smote and turned away with a wheal on its brazen face. When men came broken-hearted, with eyes blind with tears, he told them all they could receive of wisdom and gospel and tenderness. The disciples sometimes failed, but Jesus Christ never. The disciples were represented in some feeble degree by the magicians and astrologers, the necromancers and the soothsayers of Babylon, but Jesus Christ was partially represented by the true interpreter, the completely equipped and qualified prophet. Said one, "I brought my son to thy disciples that they would heal him, but they could not." Said Christ, "Bring him hither," and the diseased son went home a free man, strong, and full of gratitude. Said the disciples, "We cannot feed this great multitude, for we have only a few loaves and a few fishes." Said Christ, "Make them sit down; now," said he, "bring what you have got." What hands he had! He brake, and brake, and gave the disciples a busy time of it. There is a touch that multiplies; there is a smile rich as the dawn of a summer day; there is a voice every tone of which has in it a martial inspiration or a tender benediction. That voice is **Christ's**.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we are thy children; thou hast made us, and not we ourselves. We live by thy power, and because of thy love, thy tenderness, thy daily grace. We are in liberty, we are looking forward to perfect emancipation, when we shall see light in thy light, and have all thy heaven to dwell in. Thou hast inspired great hopes in us through the power of the Cross of Jesus Christ; now we see that with God all things are possible; we have been living in the midst of difficulty and wonder, so that we could not see how the day was to dawn upon the world; but seeing that Jesus Christ, thy Son, has come and has taken upon him the sins of the world, and died for every man, we see that in him is fulness of salvation, and from his Cross and from his throne shall come the redemption and the sovereignty of the world. We bless thee that all souls are thine; thou wilt not forget the least of them; thou dost remember thy jewels; the old man and the little child thou wilt reckon in thine host; the great hero, and the humble sufferer who accepts thy will and does it with a full heart, all alike are thine; thou dost see thine image in the great and in the small, and in the end nothing of thine shall be lost. We pray thee that we may ever remember the solemnity of thy law, The soul that sinneth, it shall die; may we look upon this law as thine, and as irresistible, unchangeable, everlasting; and thus may we discover that we are bound round about by limitations of thine own imposing; may we not seek a freedom with which thou hast not invested us, but accepting what thou hast done for us, may we live in the liberty of thy law, may we enjoy the freedom of thy righteousness, and may we know ourselves to be at our best estate but men, whose breath is in our nostrils, whose days fly like a weaver's shuttle, and whose end can never be far away. Thus in humbleness and reverence, in docility and love, may we spend our time, and behold how the will of God is being done on earth as it is done in heaven. Amen.

Chapter ii. 31-49.

GREAT IMAGES.

THE image which King Nebuchadnezzar saw was a remarkable one:—

“This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass. His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay” (vers. 31-33).

A wonderful ministry is this image-reading. We are too

frequently content with outsides, geometrical shapes, and colours that can be named; we have not sufficiently entered into the dream region, that wondrous world that lies immediately behind a translucent veil. We do not know how near the angels are. We have contrived, possibly through some temptation of the evil one, to put heaven a long way from us: it is across bleak cemeteries, it is beyond deep black rivers, far away: that may be due to our perverted and vicious imagination. Heaven may be within us, within hand-reach of us, and the angels—who can say where they are? are they not all ministering spirits? and is not the very fact of their ministering a proof of their nearness? Do servants work at an infinite distance? Do they not draw near that they may work easily, sometimes silently, and always effectively? We should gain more if we paid more heed to the dream region, the ministry of image, impression, suggestion, wordless stimulus of the mind. We know there are dangers along that line; but what line is there worth going along that has not danger on the right hand of it and on the left? It draws nearly all its value from the perils which assail or beset its progress. There is the danger of nightmare, there is the peril of our imagining things that should occur for our selfish interests or for our personal consolidation. These dangers are not sentimental, they are substantial, they are living, they are to be overcome only by the strength of God the Holy Ghost; but we are the temples of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost dwelleth in us.

Do we get all our knowledge, do we acquire all our best possession, by hand or eye or other frail sense? Have we not shut out the living God from most of our life, and admitted him only by partial entrances, guarding with a kind of blind vigilance that often mistakes presences that ought not to enter for ministries that should be welcomed with all the enthusiasm of the soul? Daniel knew the dream; it was not the king's nightmare, it was God's revelation. That dream came forth from the Lord of Hosts, and he handed it to the interpreter, that every line of it might be read distinctly, with an enunciation that was itself a commentary with an emphasis which was itself a proof of its royalty.

The image is a picture of all evil—"gold," "silver," "brass,"

“iron,” “clay.” That is the difficulty of the case. If evil were only evil we could easily get rid of it; it is when evil has a head of gold that we are bewitched or bewildered by it. It is true personally. Men are not always instances of black evil, all over, from head to foot, in and out, through and through. Some evil men have heads of gold, tongues of silver, looks that are fascinations, tones that importune the soul with the solicitude of music. If you look more clearly and closely at them you see that they are not all gold. But the very mixture which we find in our own character is itself either a hope or a temptation; everything depends upon the spirit of our reasoning, or the purpose of our inquiry; we start where our imagination says we must begin. If laying hold of our deeper selves, then we can turn the whole character into gold, yea, fine gold; we can pray more simply, more filially, more effectually, great, broad, strong, tender, prevailing prayers, that were answered before they were begun, because the soul out of which they went was a prepared tabernacle, every door flying open that the God of the house might come in and own it, every corner and stone. Starting from our clay selves, or iron, we sometimes lose heart and say what little gold there may be about us is only superficial—it is gilding rather than solid gold, it is a species of gold liquid into which we have been dipped; it will all wear away, and in reality we are nothing but iron or clay, we are some base metal, or some worthless dross; and thus we lose touch of Heaven, thus the light of hope is blown out, and too frequently we sink clear down into the abyss of despair. The same rule holds good in regard to institutions. Sometimes we are told, in a rough-and-ready logic that is pregnant with everything but reasoning, if an institution is good, accept it; if it is bad, reject it. But institutions do not divide themselves thus cleanly and sharply. There is no institution that can be publicly named and honestly advocated that has not in it some gold, some fine metal, some noble and valuable elements; and when we approach institutions of a mixed kind it is with some hope that we may be able to take out all that is base and comparatively worthless, and show how the entire institutional figure may be made from head to foot of gold. If institutions were all bad, we should not discuss them; if ministries, agencies of every kind, were either good or bad, our course in reference to them

would be very simple and easy; it is where the mixture is large, yet subtle, that our difficulty begins and ends. We are not going to say that wickedness even has not its attractions. Young people would never run after a beast that was all darkness, a horrible, terrible image that was all fire and all cruelty. The young see in the image some glimpse of gleaming gold, or hear from it some sound of voice well trained, tones aimed at the target of the heart with unflinching precision; and they say they are going after the better parts of the image, they will be able to distinguish between the gold and the brass and the iron and the clay, and they will know which to take and which to refuse, and the image says, Come! and when they get over to the place which he has appointed it will take all Heaven to bring them home again.

How is this image to be handled? It is not to be handled; it is to be thrown down "without hands." That is the emphatic reference in the thirty-fourth verse.

"Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces" (ver. 34).

There are influences in the universe other than human. That is a fact which Science cannot ignore. Poor, yet self-conscious and partially haughty, yet erewhile humble, Science sometimes drops from a tone of great boasting into a confession of know-nothingism. You never saw a figure more limp, drenched through and through with invisible rain, bedraggled and mendicant-like, than Science (with a very large S) when it has come to certain parts of the mystery of life; no undertaker overwhelmed with a great rain outside a pauper's funeral ever cut a less imposing figure than Science cuts when it sees things done "without hands." It is a coward then; it knows the way home. But we want a judgment, a revelation, a testimony, that will cope with invisible, immeasurable, incalculable influences; a sovereignty that will rule the spectres and run with a monarch's dignity and a mother's sweetness over all the things that baffle and startle and bewilder the soul. "Without hands." That is the mysterious element in life. If all things were done with hands we could arrange by careful calculation what could be done under given circumstances. It is the unknown quantity that troubles

our arithmetic. The fool wrote upon his slate so many thousand bushels of grain, so many scores of years, so many necessities provided for by so many supplies; then, having added the thing up, he said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease," and a voice without a shape said, "Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee." The calculator had set down in his calculation everything but God, which means that he had filled his slate with ciphers. All great things are done "without hands." The sun, to use popular language, is rolled up in the east morning by morning without hands, and the least flower warms itself at that great fire, erects itself without hands, and is painted without hands. It is the handless ministry that is so mysterious and sublime. We were delivered by a hand unseen; we were reared from our cradle by influences that only embodied themselves in father and mother and home agency. The real Father we have not seen; he is father-mother-nurse, shepherd-lover-friend; hyphen all these great, sweet words, and so link them into eternal wedlock, and they will stand a poor symbol of the thing that never can be fully spoken.

Think of convictions, impulses, impressions, inspirations, urgings of the soul that we cannot explain—these are things that are done without hands. In all spiritual work there may be too much of the operation of the mere hands. We may build great machinery, we may build a very fine organisation, we may build noble stone edifices, all of which may be more or less useful according to the circumstances; but we are not to look to the machinery to do the work, but to the indwelling, overflowing Eternal Spirit. Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name, be all the glory, all the praise, world without end. We did but build the altar and supply the wood and the fuel, and we laid upon it the flesh; but the spark, the accepting fire, was thine. There is another and better side of this handless ministry in life. We read of a house not made with hands. That house is heaven, home, the temple invisible, the great gathering place in which there is room for all; hands could never have built it; it is the creation of God. "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The rhythm

is good in that sentence, "Not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"; it is not a rugged and abrupt ascent, but a gentle and infinite slope right into things infinite and celestial. Thus the Lord builds the city, thus the Lord keeps the life, thus the Lord without hands ministers to us; so there is no noise, no flutter in the air, no palpitation to irritate the most sensitive brain; we open our eyes, and the table is spread in the wilderness; we lie down at night, and awake, having lost our old age and our feebleness in the river of sleep, and come up out of that invisible water young again, strong with invincible strength. Fear thou not, O loving soul; they that be with thee are more than all that can be against thee, if so be that in the heart there is honest, healthy pureness, simplicity of trust, reality of love.

How wondrously this whole interpretation illustrates the fact that only similars can really and permanently unite!

"And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay" (ver. 43).

There is a law of unity, of brotherhood or consolidation. Mechanical association has nothing to do with true unity. Men may sit side by side in the same church, and yet have a universe between them. Men may handle the same psalm-book and sing the same words without worshipping the same God. Brotherhood is a question of the soul. We are new creatures, and therefore we have new relationships in Christ Jesus. At first, of course, the only possible relationship was a relationship of blood; man and man stood together in a certain sequence; but Jesus Christ came to alter all that; it does not follow that your father according to the flesh is now your father at all, and as for your brothers, they may be the greatest strangers to you on the face of the earth; the great relationship now is a Christian one. We are in relation to one another what we are at the Cross of Christ. The man who is on the Cross is not one with the man who never was crucified with Christ. This is a great mystery, and it goes dead against the first instincts of nature, which must be killed one by one before we can understand the mystery of the new life, the blessed mystery of the new kinship. Thanks be unto God, it is not necessary that a man's father should

cease to occupy the paternal relationship; the father and the child may both be crucified with Christ, and thus belong doubly to each other. Nor are we to throw off old relationships frivolously and Pharisaically, saying, I am now a Christian, and therefore I can hold no consort with those of my own household who are not Christians. We must prove our Christianity by seeking to make other people Christians; we must evangelise at home. A little child can lay its tiny fingers upon its father with great effect; if moved by the spirit of the Cross, the dear little evangelist could say, "Come and see the Son of God," and the father would feel the child to be twice his and for ever his, if they could only kneel together to pray, and each say for himself, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Compromise is never strong. Carry this law fearlessly through and through life. Do not marry into strange faiths, or into no faith. If you are a Christian soul, and shall wilfully marry one who is not a follower of Christ, do not be surprised if vengeance suffer you not to escape. It would be strange indeed beyond all reason and all calculation if in this line only law failed. If men could set up any compacts they pleased in life, and evade the law, why there would be one great province of creation left untended, unwatched, undirected by the God and Father of men. Apply the doctrine also to business. You, a Christian business man, cannot keep a partner to tell the lies of the business, whilst you attend to all the religious ceremonies; ye cannot serve God and mammon. Clean the house, suffer loss, but let the morsel of bread that remains be sweet, because it is the bread of honesty.

Then Daniel lays down a great law:—"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed." Only the divine is the eternal. Have nothing to do with any temple that God does not build; renounce all policies that God does not inspire; have nothing whatever to do with any engagement about which you cannot openly pray and hold consort with God at the Cross of Christ; then your life, though not outwardly successful according to the calculation of men, will have in it a sanctuary, safe from every storm, an altar where the cold winds never blow, a secret gate opening upon all heaven.

Daniel told the king what it all meant, and we too have interpretations to give. "The great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter; and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (ver. 45). We can solve the world's problem; we can interpret the world's wild dreams. Even if we abstain from going into details, yet here is the interpretation of all:—Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him; speak it loudly, clearly: say ye to the wicked, with an emphasis as strong, though divested of all sense of exultation or triumph, that it shall be ill with him; he shall be torn to pieces, he shall go away into eternal punishment. This is the great interpretation, not an interpretation that deals with little details, and puts together accidents and incidents so as to make a mosaic that will please the eye: the great interpretation is that righteousness means heaven, and wickedness means hell. And God himself cannot alter these consequences; they are part of himself; they originate in himself; they are the expression of his godliness.

Then the king answered Daniel and said: I see it, it is right, I know it; every word thou hast spoken unto me confirms itself,—"Of a truth it is that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a Revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret." Have we not lost this power of revealing secrets to men? Then I would rather have lived under the Old Testament than under the New. Has inspiration all ceased? Does God give less now than he used to give? Has he caught himself in some act of extravagance, and is he economising by starving succeeding generations? Is this the God who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think? Here we must be reverent, but reverence is consistent with lofty, eager, hungry expectation.

NOTE.

"The wealth, greatness, and general prosperity of Nebuchadnezzar are strikingly placed before us in the book of Daniel. 'The God of heaven gave him, not a kingdom only, but 'power, strength, and glory' (Dan. ii. 37) His wealth is evidenced by the image of gold, sixty cubits in height, which he set up in the plain of Dura (*ib.* iii. 1). The grandeur and careful organisation of his kingdom appears from the long list of his officers, 'princes, governors, captains, judges, treasurers, counsellors, sheriffs, and rulers of

provinces,' of whom we have repeated mention (*ib.* vers. 2, 3, and 27). We see the existence of a species of hierarchy in the 'magicians, astrologers, sorcerers,' over whom Daniel was set (*ib.* ii. 48). The 'tree whose height was great, which grew and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto the heavens, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth; the leaves whereof were fair, and the fruit much, and in which was food for all; under which the beasts of the field had shadow, and the fowls of heaven dwelt in the branches thereof, and all flesh was fed of it' (*ib.* iv. 10-12), is the fitting type of a kingdom at once so flourishing and so extensive. . . .

"The moral character of Nebuchadnezzar is not such as entitles him to our approval. Besides the overweening pride which brought upon him so terrible a chastisement, we note a violence and fury (*ib.* ii. 12; iii. 19) common enough among Oriental monarchs of the weaker kind, but from which the greatest of them have usually been free; while at the same time we observe a cold and relentless cruelty which is particularly revolting. The blinding of Zedekiah may perhaps be justified as an ordinary Eastern practice, though it is the earliest case of the kind on record; but the refinement of cruelty by which he was made to witness his sons' execution before his eyes were put out (2 Kings xxv. 7) is worthy of a Dionysius or a Domitian than of a really great king. Again, the detention of Jehoiachin in prison for thirty-six years for an offence committed at the age of eighteen (*ib.* xxiv. 8) is a severity surpassing Oriental harshness. Against these grave faults we have nothing to set, unless it be a feeble trait of magnanimity in the pardon accorded to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, when he found that he was without power to punish them (Dan. iii. 26).

"It has been thought remarkable that to a man of this character God should have vouchsafed a revelation of the future by means of visions (*ib.* ii. 29; iv. 2). But the circumstance, however it may disturb our preconceived notions, is not really at variance with the general laws of God's providence as revealed to us in Scripture. As with his natural, so with his supernatural gifts, they are not confined to the worthy. Even under Christianity, miraculous powers were sometimes possessed by those who made an ill use of them (1 Cor. xiv. 2-33). And God, it is plain, did not leave the old heathen world without some supernatural aid, but made his presence felt from time to time in visions, through prophets, or even by a voice from heaven. It is only necessary to refer to the histories of Pharaoh (Gen. xli. 1-7 and 28), Abimelech (*ib.* xx. 3), Job (Job iv. 13, xxxviii. 1, xl. 6; comp. Dan. iv. 31), and Balaam (Num. xxii.-xxiv.), in order to establish the parity of Nebuchadnezzar's visions with other facts recorded in the Bible. He was warned, and the nations over which he ruled were warned through him, God leaving not himself 'without witness' even in those dark times. In conclusion, we may notice that a heathen writer (Abydenus), who generally draws his inspirations from Berosus, ascribes to Nebuchadnezzar a miraculous speech just before his death, announcing to the Babylonians the speedy coming of 'a Persian mule,' who, with the help of the Medes, would enslave Babylon (Abyd. ap. Euseb. *Præp. Ev.* ix. 41)."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible.*

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we love to look up to the place where thine honour dwelleth. Thou dost call upon us to look up when we are sad that we may see and try to count the stars. When Jacob said his way was passed over, and Zion thought herself forgotten, thou didst call upon thy people to look up, and behold who hath made these lights, so that by regarding thy wondrous works we may recover our faith and rekindle our hope. All nature talks to us; each season has its own sweet gospel of youth, or energy, or beauty, or fulness, or rest, and all things declare the goodness of God. But our eyes cannot see; our ears are dull of hearing; our hearts do not quickly answer the music of thine appeal. Oh, woe unto us! Having eyes we see not, and ears we hear not, and hearts we do not understand; all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, but now by thy goodness in Christ Jesus, thy Son, our Saviour, God with us, we have returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls; now we see, now we hear, now we somewhat understand; we have beheld the descent of the kingdom of God upon the earth, and we are enlarged, and ennobled, and sanctified by the Holy Ghost. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes: blessed be God for this heart-hunger; thanks unto the eternal God for this thirst of the soul. These are new appetences, new desires; they proclaim our origin, they hint at our destiny, they prepare us to receive the kingdom of the Cross. The Lord be with us; fighting on the battlefield; suffering in quietude and loneliness; wondering much because of the bewildering things that smite our life and make it reel; praying, hoping, despairing; sometimes full of God, and sometimes conscious of an infinite vacancy in the heart. Thou knowest the tumult, the variety, the wonder: come to us, and if thou dost come by way of the Cross thou wilt bring with thee many pardons. Amen.

Chapter iii. 1-5.

WHY THE IMAGE?

WHY did Nebuchadnezzar make this image of gold, whose height, including the pedestal on which it stood, was threescore cubits? Was he trying to realise the dream which Daniel related to him and interpreted? Was the image a picture of himself, an expression of self-consciousness and self-glory? Was it in memory of some all but forgotten victory?

These questions have been considered, and left, as they well may be, undecided. The king's "image of gold" was a wooden effigy inside. That effigy was only plated with gold,—“All that glitters is not gold.” It reads well in history that a man who was a king had so much gold at command that he could make a lofty image of it. Many persons would be content to tell lies in a similar way. There are not wanting persons who would be quite willing that observers should count as solid gold the little thin plates that cover a wooden idol. There is a want of reality; there is much reading of the surface, and very little penetration into the inner quality and value of things—“The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.” There was no harm in making the statue; men must have some kind of recreation; our pride must have some way of embodying and revealing itself to observers whose days are weary because of idleness. We may, however, put harm into very innocent recreations. Things are what we make them: “unto the pure all things are pure.” The bad man never sees any good; the jealous man is never at rest; the selfish man has no outlook upon fruitfields and odorous gardens and orchards large as forests. It is so with our recreations, our amusements: a sour-natured man looking upon any recreation sees in it all possible depravity; recreation is to such a nature a species of profanity. It may well be so; the mischief arises at the point at which the sour-natured man wishes to measure other people by his standard. If he could say to himself, “I am poverty-stricken in my soul, I am a born bigot, I am a Pharisee that never can get into heaven, and therefore I must not judge other people,” he would speak a plain and wise language; but when he sets himself up as king and judge, and says, “This is right, and that is unlawful,” then he becomes a trespasser, a speaker of mischievous things, a marplot in houses that but for his presence would be quiet and cheerful and gladsome as homes. Beware of appearances. We may appear to be good when in reality we are but covered with thin and almost worthless tinsel; we may be studying vanity when we are only professing to be adjusting appearances. There is a study of appearances that is decent and proper, wise, economical, and instructive; but how easy it is to go out of the appearance into the vanity, the conceit, the ostentation, and the

display. The harm is not in the things themselves, but some of us have learned of the very devil himself, Beelzebub, prince of devils, to spoil everything, and to turn God's sweet, restful, sunny Sabbath into the cloudy week.

Nebuchadnezzar set his image up, and then he sent to "the princes, the governors and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces," to come to his dedication. When Nebuchadnezzar sent for them, they came. "The princes, the governors and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up." How then could it be wrong or unwise? It is impossible that so many great men could all be mistaken. If the princes went wrong the governors would make it right; and if the counsellors got bewildered the judges would explain the law with sepulchral and ponderous wisdom; and if the sheriffs were mistaken the captains would bring them into order again. So we should say. Here we have royalty, rulership, military pomp and splendour, all gathered about this wooden-gold image. They are still there. That assembly never dissolved. These people were born to accost one another, and were never happy in each other's absence. Yet the assembly provokes some sharp questioning. Did they want to be there? We visit many places we do not want to. Some of these men surely were poets, gardeners, horticulturists; surely some of them saw more in a lily than in Nebuchadnezzar's mighty image, or in Nebuchadnezzar's personal garniture; surely there was some poet there that longed for the green lane, for the verdant mead, for the rill that trickled in the field, for the birds that sang amid the snowy blossoms; but they must be there. Fashion kills all its devotees. "Society" is a monster. It is a sin to be simple in the judgment of society—self-created, self-dressed, self-gratified.

Do great ceremonies make men happy? Are all the coloured garments so many visions of beauty? Is there some strain religious in the blare of brazen trumpets and the throb of

military drums? Most of the people that we see gathered together around great sights would gladly be at home, listening to the voice of child, or friend, or bird. Do external images fill the soul? Is it enough to have a painted God? What wonder if we begin by worshipping things that are seen? That course would seem to be natural, and would seem to be able to justify itself by sound reasoning of a preliminary kind. Who could not in ignorance of other deity worship the sun? Sometimes he seems to be almost God! How multitudinous are his phases, how manifold the apocalypse within which he shows his uncounted riches: now so pale, as if he were weary, an eye half closed in sleep long needed, long delayed; and then in full pomp, every beam, so to say, alive, and the whole heaven amazed and delighted at this vision of glory, as if hidden within that fount of flame and heat there lay ten thousand times ten thousand summers and ten thousand times ten thousand purple autumns, with all their largesses of fruit and flower and benison, for the sustenance and the nutrition of men; then lost among the clouds, where, indeed, he seems to be disporting himself in painting a thousand academies by one look of his eyes: see how he fills the clouds and seems to shape them or fall into their shape, making them burn and sparkle and glitter, and invests them with unimagined and untransferable colours, a marvellous, glorious sight! Who could not uncover his head in presence of such glory, and say, Surely this is the gate at least that opens upon the palaces of God? To worship nature would seem in certain stages of development to be right. God made it; God made the green grass and the blushing flower, the great hills, stairways to heights which man never scaled; God made the valleys and the mountains; and what are these fountains saying to the hearing ear? Only the true listener can tell; the vulgar man hears nothing in that splash of water, but the refined soul hears in it melody and song, music religious, and hint of other music that might please the ear of God. As we grow in wisdom, in capacity, in understanding, in sympathy, we close our eyes upon the universe, and say it is no more to us an image that should be sought unto for purposes of worship; but we see within, by a divinely directed introspection, the true altar, the true sanctuary, the true centre of acceptable worship. Thus we grow

from the natural to the spiritual, and when we have attained the measure of our growth we say, "God is a Spirit." If we still preserve the image, it is as we should preserve a symbol that was helpful to us before we saw the thing signified. If our religion is in colour, form, æsthetic attitude and motion, it will surely come to nought; but if our piety live in eternity, if it feed itself upon the almightiness and the grace of God, as shown in the Cross of Christ, then it will abide for ever. What took place after the great assembly gathered?—

"Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up" (vers. 4, 5).

Poor herald! He was a memoriter preacher; he could but deliver a little lesson which others had caused him to learn. Think what happened here! The people were commanded to worship. That is an impossibility. The highest life lies beyond human command, though the word "human" be qualified and enriched by the word "royal." This king is making a fool of himself: he has supposed that because he can do much he can do more. He fails where all imperfect education fails; he cannot be content to live within his limits: he must try the risky delights of trespass. Suppose we command some one to love, can it be done? Let consciousness reply. Command the child to love some one appointed to teach and direct it; the child does not understand the imperative direction; the child will either love or not love, without any decree being issued from the royal court. Suppose it should be said to us by the monarch of the day, "Worship!" What would our reply be? The reply would be, It is philosophically impossible to obey such a command. Worship does not lie within human directions, rules, stipulations, and military threatenings or social penalties. Worship is a condition of the soul, it is an instinct of the life, it belongs to the interior nature, and can only be spoken to by one voice with authority, and that is the voice of God. Think of some king or mighty man commanding the nation to sympathise: the obedience could only be of the most literal and mechanical kind; it would be without richness, without nobleness, and, therefore, without acceptableness. He does no sacrifice who merely cuts the lamb's throat;

he is not a worshipper who bows the knee only ; the attitude is picturesque, and indicative of obedience, but whilst the knee is bent the heart is in high, scornful rebellion, and within there is an inarticulate laughter that means defiance and contempt.

We cannot do without this word "command" in our religious education. It is a divine word. It would be instructive to trace the history of that term, and to study its meaning in the various relations which it assumes. The Bible is full of commandments ; in Genesis the Lord commands, in the Apocalypse there is a commanding voice ; and Jesus, gracious, meek, patient, tender Jesus, commands—he says, "A new commandment give I unto you." How then can Jesus give commands ? Because of what he is. God can give commands because he is God ; and not only so, but being God, he knows human nature, and can address it in its own terms, and according to the line of its own instincts and necessities. When he thunders down his commands there is nothing that offends the mental or moral constitution on which the commanding voice falls with ineffable authority. The command awakens something that is already slumbering in the nature. We must have our duties in the first instance in the form of commands, but only God can tell what commands are not arbitrary, but are natural, and operate in the line of instinct and divine intention. What is a commandment to one man is an easy task to another. Some hard and all but impenetrable natures require to be commanded, stirred, roused ; and others hear the word of the Lord and spring to it in obedience that seems to understand it all ere it be fully spoken. Many have sweetened the bitterness of their lot by an ample and proper use of the promises who have forgotten that every promise has behind it or near it a corresponding command. The imperative mood has never been allowed to fall into disuse in the Bible : it is, "Son, give me thine heart" ; it is, "Love one another" ; it is, "Hear my words and do them." We draw the line, then, as between human authority and divine sovereignty, as between an arbitrary decree and a command that is in harmony with the wisdom and love of God, and in harmony with the peculiarity of human constitution and capacity.

Chapter lii. 5.

"That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up."

SPIRITUAL FAITHFULNESS.

NOTHING is safe that is wrong. Nebuchadnezzar would take any angel and yoke him to his chariot if he wanted to go in a certain direction; here he takes the angel of music—sweet, heavenly music. Are we staggered by these perversions? Are we overwhelmed by these unconscious tyrannies? See what this man does. If he had set up the image which we have gazed upon, that would have been bad enough, if meant to be an idol and to elicit the service of adoration; but Nebuchadnezzar proceeds further, and makes music an ally of his evil work. That would not be worth commenting upon if it did not hold within its suggestions that touch all human experience, and flow through all the channels and currents of time and action. Get wrong in your idea of worship, and everything falls down before it. A man cannot be partly an idolater. In proportion as his idolatry at any one point is real, the very reality of it makes him an idolater through and through. Do not suppose that something done on Sunday will subtly affect the whole week, how contrary soever your behaviour may be to that something which was supposed to sanctify succeeding days. Where character goes it goes altogether. Music has been seized upon by war; cruel, bloody, devastating war has had its trumpet and its drum; the carnival has hired music to keep up the dance.

Our business should be to sanctify music. We have not yet given hospitality enough to that radiant visitor, meant to make us glad with exceeding ecstasy. The walls of the church should vibrate with music. The music should be such that everybody has some part in it. Music that only a few can sing might have

charms, and unquestionably has fascinations of a very dominating kind; but there is a larger music, that takes up all hearts, that makes the dumb sing, and gives a man a sense of intolerable incompleteness if he does not at some point come into it and swell its noble volume. Never let us forget that we can sing sympathetically as well as vocally. It is not necessary that all men should always sing with the voice; when the music is divinest the truly musical soul will be most silent. It acknowledges the kinship of the service; it says within itself, That is complete; that is acceptable to God; my heart swells when I hear it; I thank Heaven for voices so rich and pure and healthful. Yet there are times of overflowing, when religious ecstasy becomes supreme, and every old man and little child must have some share in the grand shout. Why should the devil have all the instruments of music, and write his name upon them as if he had made them? He never made one of them; he is a thief from the beginning. The devil has nothing that is fascinating that he has not stolen from the Church. There is no genius in evil; there is hardly any talent in it. There is a genius in goodness; blessed are the pure in heart, for that genius shall see God. There shall come another day into the history, on which day it shall be said: At what time ye hear the sound of music, rise and pray: it is the Master calling in his sweetest voice; he has left behind the mechanism of mere words, and is appealing to us through the mystery, the magic, the miracle, of tender strains of noble music. The Church has a right to all the music in the world.

It appears from this narrative that "there are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Jealousy can be very astute. Envy has little tricks and ways that easily take upon them the guise and semblance of perfect innocence. "There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon." This is a stroke at the king himself; this is a suggestion that Jews, colonists or captives, ought not to have been put into high office. All state functions and state pay

should be in the hands of the people of the country. Still these Chaldeans accept the situation, and remind the king that he himself is responsible for the elevation of the men who have disobeyed him. There are many ways of stabbing a man; and guilt is never so guilty as when it tries to be mealy-mouthed and mock-pious. These Chaldeans suppressed themselves, controlled their feelings, and spoke with a consciousness of injury borne with ineffable dignity; but in reality they cast the king himself into a burning fiery furnace. There are many furnaces, and many ways into them, and many ways of drawing men into their awful heat. These ways are known in the family:—the sweetly bitter little speeches that are made to one another by members of Christian households; the prayers that have stings in them; the benedictions that are all teeth: yet what meekness, what self-suppression, what beautiful self-control! Yet all the while the devil is trying to get his way, and to suggest what he dare not express in words; realising the words of the poet, "willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike." "Certain Jews," colonists, strangers, only a handful of them; then why mind them? why pay this tribute of recognition to a minority? Are men to be reckoned arithmetically? Do we count hands or heads? Do we number men, or weigh them? Why this trouble, when the Jews are so few that they can be named without taking breath? There is something deep behind all this; there is trouble here. Men are influential not according to their numbers, but according to their convictions. These men troubled the whole host of Babylon.

How is it that we bow down unconsciously before the strength of religious conviction and enthusiasm? Our very attempts to destroy it are tributes paid to its majesty; when we seek to sneer at an enemy we often pay him the highest compliment in our power. Why take notice of him? He is here and gone. Why trouble about a bubble, a moment seen, and gone for ever? There is an energy that cannot be sneered out of society; there is a prayer that by its very excitement of controversy proves its reality. Who would care to sit down and argue with, who would care to run after and persecute, men who are talking to mere stones, who are babbling in the air, and who have no touch or

eternity? Get the conviction that three men have laid hold of the Infinite, the divine, and society can never be at rest again until those three men have been settled with. They will tear down any pillars however broad, solid, lofty, their ploughshare will tear up any foundations how skilfully laid soever that are not in harmony with the law of righteousness and the demand and claim of God. Why all this discussion about Jesus Christ, if he were only son of Mary, son of Joseph the carpenter, or an excellent man, or a fanatic that lived upon his own mistakes? Why those long, elaborate, expensive books about him? Why do not men let him alone, assured that where there is no deepness of earth the plant will soon wither away? Our enemies themselves, being judges, are continually paying tributes to Jesus Christ by the very attacks which they make upon him. And when men question the reality of prayer, what if that be but an indirect recognition of its reality and prevalence? There may be beneath the surface what we cannot wholly understand in all these moral collisions, in all these spiritual and intellectual hostilities. The minority always rules, independently of its arithmetical littleness, in proportion as it has seized a principle that is rational, profound, beneficent. The politician never succeeds—except in making a noise; the statesman calmly proceeds, because he keeps pace with the march of calm philosophy, large-eyed, contemplative, assured wisdom, to whose custody is assigned the development of the ages. Christ gives us peace; Christ does not give us mere genius, mere controversial power, quick repartee, slashing and destructive retort; he gives us peace.

This difficulty about “certain Jews” must be faced. The case is brought before the king, and the king gives his directions:—“Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?” Now ye shall have another chance. “Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made, well”—you shall have an opportunity of being idolaters—“but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that god that shall deliver you out of my

hands?"—I who made the image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits. An image so grotesquely disproportionate might by its very height have condemned the foolish king. He was struck with its height; he never saw its breadth. It is so with men who make false religions and vain philosophies and assaults upon citadels set up by hands divine; their great attacks have but one dimension. When God builds he builds foursquare. "The city lieth foursquare. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal." Nebuchadnezzar gave them their chance, and they replied:—"O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Never was a king talked to before in that tone.

This was, so to say, the beginning of the democracy in that time and place. There are hours in which men are themselves in the fullest expression of the divine purpose in their constitution. We cannot always live at that great height, but to have occasional moments of conscious heroism is to be assured of our immortality. Judge yourselves by your best occasions. Were we to criticise ourselves by certain special hours of weakness, folly, vanity, conceit, self-trust, despair, and the like, we could never pray any more; the last little flickering light would be blown out, and we should spend eternity in darkness. God has, however, so ordered that we are enabled to take measure of our best selves, and take heart from our best moods; and it hath pleased God so to deal with us as not to answer our prayer when it is least, but to feel it and reply when it is most expanded and most reverently audacious. See what may be on the earth; three men who have no social standing worth naming, except as the gift of this very king, say to Nebuchadnezzar that their religion is greater than their sense of self-protection! Men will risk anything for their religious conviction. These men were the heroes of their time. Their tone is very grand; it is so calm; there is no sign of fume or fury, or bluster or denunciation; the men speak as if they had

just risen from prayer ; these noble souls look at the king with eyes that have just been closed that they might the better see God. When men have been closeted with God no king can frighten them. Let a man see the Almighty, and he fears no face of clay. Acquaint yourselves with the living God, live and move and have your being in him, and then no face can terrify you by its sudden frowning. We are to men what we are to God : living in God, we shall love men ; fearing God, we shall hold all men as but his creatures and servants and dependants. Let our worship be right, and all the details of life will settle and adjust themselves accordingly.

This answer is grand because it is so distinct. There is not one ambiguous word in the whole of the speech. Nebuchadnezzar had no doubt about it : "Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed." I am glad of that, because he understood the speech ; it went straight into his mind and heart. Congregations would be maddened if they rightly understood many a sermon. The greatest compliment that could be paid to certain ministries would be to leave them. It is an awful thing to see all the pews full, for then whom can we have offended, slashed, ripped up, broken down, confounded with judgments ? There are tributes that are terrible dangers.

How easily these men could have evaded the king's fury ! Let us study that a moment. They might have bowed down as a matter of form. Men of the nineteenth century would have been capable of doing so. There are persons who can attend church as a matter of form. It is possible to enter God's sanctuary simply as a matter of custom, saying in the heart : It means nothing ; it is the usage, it is the fashion, it is the way of the time, and it is not regarded as conveying anything of the nature of pledge, oath, testimony, or profession ; it is generally understood amongst men that to go to church means nothing. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego could have evaded the king's fury in that way ; or they could have availed themselves of what is known as mental reservation ; they could have bowed the knee, but not the heart ; they could have assumed the Babylonian attitude, and yet have said in their souls, What does this matter ? We have our state

function, we are appointed over the province of Babylon, and thus and thus we keep our faith. It is shocking to read some biographies, because they reveal the fact that men have been guilty of mental reservation—that is, saying one thing and meaning another; or saying one thing and mentally resolving upon another; or saying one part of the declaration very loudly, and the other part quite in an undertone, which nobody can hear, but which the speaker can aver to have been the case should he be called to criticism or penalty. We must get rid of all this if the Church is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and is to be lifted high upon a hill.

Do not profess to believe more than you really believe. A little real faith is worth ten thousand folios of written doubt. Do not try to add another item to your creed. When a man has to really agitate his brain in order to know what he does believe, you may be perfectly sure he believes nothing. He may like to have a long creed in order that he may pose as a kind of theological philosopher—the very worst type of man since the days of Judas Iscariot, unless he be watched at every point, and watch himself when all other watchers are asleep. Have faith, but know what it is; and having formed your conviction, it will sustain you in the midst of challenge and criticism, hostility and menace. You could hold on to the one little line. Do not try to embrace the horizon, but lay hold upon one substantial, vital, living, redeeming truth. Say, God is love; and having written that down, look at it, stand by it, live in it, return to it; it is the dawn of heaven: it is the assurance of further light and pledge of unceasing growth. Others could begin at different points; the thing insisted upon is that every man should begin somewhere, and have at least one line that he can swear by, so that when all other things become cloudy he can say, This is the refuge to which I flee:—God is love;—Christ died for me;—God is willing to keep me in all my ways;—The Bible is the living word of the living God;—In the house of the living God there is a fountain that never ceases;—In the Cross there is pardon for the vilest sinner. Let one of these lines be taken out and be your line, and you shall have more added until you know the meaning of the word, “the increase of faith and growth in grace.”

The three men were thrown into the hot furnace, and Nebuchadnezzar came near and looked in, and he saw a fourth man walking with the three. "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God"—like a beautiful image, like something I have never seen before, for beauty, radiance, lustre, One that seems to be able to control the fire and turn the furnace into a very garden and paradise. That is historically true of Christianity, for Christianity has been thrown into all the furnaces that men could light and heat for eighteen hundred years, and is walking about in them with the ineffable dignity of imperishable truth. This is morally true of every Christian. No Christian soul was ever in a furnace that did not realise the nearness and the protection of God. So this is experimentally true of every saint:—It was good for me that I was afflicted: fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. When man rages most God descends more nearly and closely into the soul, to comfort it by all the solaces and encouragements of his infinite love. Call this dream, picture, allegory, poem, still there remains a truth we cannot part with, namely, that there is divine companionship in sorrow, and that some of us never learned aught of theology until we learned it in a burning furnace. The man who has studied in that school will come out of it wise, mellow, tender, sympathetic; he will not be narrow, exclusive, domineering, and much inclined to the excommunication of others, but he will know that in life there is a great ministry wrought out by suffering, and he will know that the wrath of man is made to praise God, and the remainder of it is restrained or cut off. Until we have suffered for our religion we do not know what our religion is worth. What we need to-day is persecution. If we could have the fires of martyrdom relighted we should know exactly who are believers and who are mere speculators. We miss the fire; we die for want of the block; the taking down of the scaffold has ruined the altar.

Nebuchadnezzar paid a beautiful tribute to the Lord when he said, "the smell of fire had not passed on them." God's triumphs

are complete. God never leaves a miracle half done. God will not permit your redemption to perish in nothingness; he does not begin without being able to finish; I am persuaded that he who hath begun a good work in you shall continue it until the day of consummation. This is our confidence, this our joy, this our music. We are not almost delivered, we are not greatly comforted, we are not very largely protected, but all men say concerning those who have been tried, The fire had no power upon them, nor was a hair of their head singed, nor were their coats changed, nor had the smell of fire passed upon them. A beautiful image is that of Buddha when he comes to the great stallion that no other rider could mount, lays his hand upon the beast's noble head, and whispers to it, as if they had met in some other state or had interchanged their relations. When God comes he turns fire into water, or water into fire; he makes things destructive into things conservative; he finds flowers for his children in the winter, in the wilderness he makes gardens, in the rocks he finds honey; and when men say there is no more hope he fills the sky with morning, and the leaden air quivers and vibrates with music. This is the God we adore. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. If we are in the fiery furnace, and have Christ with us, the fire will not burn; if we are in a great sea of trouble, tossed to and fro by wave and billow and great wind, and have Christ in the vessel, we smile at the storm.

Chapter iv. 1-18.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM.

IT does us good to hear how a man like Nebuchadnezzar spoke. We do not know what we ourselves have said, as to its effect, until we have heard some other man repeat our own words. The speaker never exactly expresses himself. He is talking to his own consciousness, and is often approved by himself; he therefore supposes that other people can hear what he is speaking to his own spirit. He does not give utterance to all his thought, that is to say, an outside aspect and effect. The speaker hears his own tones; he also hears, as it were, spiritual tones when none but himself can hear. Not, therefore, until we hear other people read our letters do we know what we have written: we are not ashamed of the letters, but we are ashamed of their reading of them. We do not know our own sermons until we hear other people quote from them; then in very deed we are ashamed that we ever preached. Quotation is the ruin of eloquence. The quotation shows how short we have fallen of our purpose. It is interesting beyond all other studies in words to hear an out-and-out worldly talk about religion; it is refreshing, exhilarating, surprising, confounding. We should listen to Nebuchadnezzar. How wondrously he mixes up gleams of the true faith with the strange crosslights of his own pagan thought and heathen education! He is perfectly willing to mix up ideas respecting any number of gods with the ideas which he has derived from the study of his own mythology. Nor must we be amused at him as at a unique specimen of the genus theologia. We are always mixing thoughts that have no proper or vital relation to one another. Herein again is that saying true, *Ye cannot mix, or serve, or intermingle God and mammon.* The speech of the Church is partly Christian and partly pagan.

The whole utterance of the Church needs revision, filtration, sanctification. In this chapter Nebuchadnezzar is both heathen and Israelitish ; there is part of himself and part of Daniel in his talk ; he is in an initial state of education into higher mysteries ; and it is delightful to hear how this infantile giant tries to talk the new speech.

Nebuchadnezzar was an instance of sudden conversion : he began instantaneously to preach and testify and publish ; he went into authorship before he was a week old in the new faith. That was characteristic of the man's ardour : he was an urgent, furious, tempestuous man, and what he did he did at once. It would have been better if he could have waited, thought, studied, prayed. But you cannot re-create a Nebuchadnezzar ; we must allow him to be himself, for he never could be any other man. We must not even smile at these child-letters ; there is something sweet in them, and comely, and right beautiful, such as suits the soul when it is in its finest moods. We must not parse the religion of Nebuchadnezzar ; it is not laid before us for grammatical analysis and criticism. He who would parse a child's letter ought never to receive one.

Nebuchadnezzar the king thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God had wrought toward him (ver. 2). This was a fine passion. Here indeed is a sign of reality. A wonderful change is marked by this new thought. Many men who look upon Nebuchadnezzar as a pagan could allow all the signs and wonders of God to pass by without note, comment, or record. We have filled up our diaries with chaff ; we ought to have stored their pages as garners are stored with wheat. Many have risen to see the dawn of day from some mountain tower, and have all the while regretted that they got up so soon. Many persons allow a whole summer to pass away without ever seeing a flower ; yet they think they see it. When we charge men with not having read the Bible they say they read it through once every year. Perfectly so, and yet they never read it at all ; but you cannot drive into such heads the thought you mean to convey by " not reading." A man cannot read the Bible through once a year if he reads it at all ; it is not an almanac ; it does

not admit of being read through once a year. It is the eternal, the infinite record; it arrests a man at the first verse, and will not let him pass by. If he be a fool, and can vault over the Bible once a year, who would disturb his nightmare or his mechanical piety? Nebuchadnezzar was a man of different metal. He had seen a new revelation, and he would talk about it; something new had shone upon him from the opening heavens, and he would tell all the empire about it—Armenia, Syria, and the dwellers by the Persian Gulf, and the Elamites, and all who trembled at his frown, should hear that he had seen a new aspect of the universe. Nebuchadnezzar had not yet become so ineffably pious as to say nothing about his piety. There are Christian men concerning whom it would be a revelation if one of their workpeople could be told that they even professed Christianity; an errand-boy might be frightened out of his propriety and sanity if he were told that his employer had family prayer. Nebuchadnezzar did not belong to the silent religious community: he would publish a proclamation, he would announce a fact, he would preach what little Gospel he had; he would say, There is more light in creation than I had imagined: come, let me tell you what the light is like, and what wizardry it works in colour and shadow and suggestion.

That the spiritual impression of Nebuchadnezzar was of the right kind is shown by his introductory exclamation,—“How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders!” It is beautiful to see how the shining of God upon the soul affrights all our little speech. Here the man is touching the inexpressible, the infinite; he can only hint at his meaning by way of exclamation: How great his signs! how mighty his wonders! there is no attempt at analysis, explanation, measurement, definite statement. All religious exaltation is overpowering. The mischief of our piety is that we can tell just what we believe and exactly what we feel. When a man can be so definite about his religion, the question is whether he has any religion to be definite about. No religion is complete that does not simply defy the believer to tell what it is in all its scope, in all its indications, in all its exalting enthusiasms. Sometimes we can only tell our creed by our tears. When a man touches the highest point of his faith he is

silent ; when he does speak he speaks in great bursts of feeling. To those who listen he may indeed be incoherent and unconnected, so that they, listening, may wonder what he is saying, for the only thing definite about the man is the indefiniteness of unutterable joy. Do not measure God ; report nothing concerning his stature ; gather up his universe, and regard it but a symbol, poor and dim, of his majesty. We are the better for these great billows of enthusiasm rolling through the soul ; it does us good to be brought into the sanctuary of the unutterable ; so long as we can speak all we feel the fountains of the great deep have not been broken up. Incoherence in the sanctuary may be but the highest and grandest aspect of eloquence :—how great, how noble, how wondrous : all this is but exclamation to the man who carries his religion as a burden ; but all this is inspiration to the man of whose soul his religion is an essential part.

Nebuchadnezzar will now speak about himself, and like all undisciplined minds, minds that are just feeling the first touch of intellectual dawn of the highest kind, he will tell his dream. Let us hear the king's quaint speech :—" I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace" : there was nothing wanting ; every goblet full of wine, every corner an echo of music, every chamber a refuge from pagan trouble and imperial excitement : I never was more comfortable or restful in my life ; the house never was so charming, the palace was never so grand, and I pillowed my head on down, and expected to see visions that would make me glad by doubling and redoubling all the poetry and music and wealth of my existence : that was my delightful case ; and even in the midst of that enjoyment " I saw a dream which made me afraid." Let us not tamper with this graphic language, but take it as it stands in the English tongue. Nebuchadnezzar " saw " a dream : it was part of himself, yet it was wholly outside, so that he could fasten his eyes upon it ; it was in him and without him, above him, round about him, beneath him ; and he was " afraid." Sometimes we ask the question, Do dreams come true ? Why, they *are* true. A dream does not need to come true, because it is there, a fact ; it is already part of the history of the brain. There need be no other hell than a dream. Who can count the resources of God ?

In a dream we can be burned ; in a dream we can be encoiled by serpents ; in a dream we can be eternally suffocated ; in a dream the serpent's fang may be within one inch of striking our life, and we may have no power of resistance or flight. The dream made Nebuchadnezzar afraid, and Nebuchadnezzar was not accustomed to fear, for he had brass enough, iron enough, chariots enough, horsemen enough ; at the blast of his trumpet an empire stood up in his defence : but a dream made a fool of him. You cannot strike a dream ; you cannot lay your hands upon it and compel it to make terms with you. These are the resources of God. If he would fight us with lightning we could make some device that might catch the lightning and bear it away ; if he would fight us always with whirlwinds we could order our masonry accordingly, and hide ourselves behind the granite wall till the great euroclydon cried itself to rest : but he will not do this ; he will trouble us with dreams, and make us afraid with visions ; and whilst we are flourishing in the palace he will make the floor tremble under us, or there will be a movement behind the screen, the curtain, the arras, and that movement will frighten us more than we ever were affrighted by thunderstorm at midnight. If Nebuchadnezzar had heard that an army was thundering at one of the gates of Babylon, he would have been delighted : war is the amusement of kings ; battle is the recreation of royal luxury and ambition : but this was a dream that came through the great brass gates that made the great wall of Babylon memorable as one of the finest structures in the world. You cannot bar out a dream, or lock it out, or bolt it out, or set a watch to keep it out ; a wakeful sentry, armed at every point, may be looking at the dream while it touches him, and he cannot touch it, or blow it back, or threaten it, or defy it ; it smiles upon him, and passes on, to work its murder in the king's head and the king's heart, and turn the king's imagination into an intolerable perdition. When Pilate was puzzled about the new king and the new theology and the unheard-of sedition which was not written in the Roman books, "his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man : for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." God has made great use of dreams in history. Spiritual impressions may be laughed at by those who read nothing but cold type ; but they

are regarded as having unutterable suggestion to those of a more sensitive and exalted order of mind.

Nebuchadnezzar now sought for interpretation. He had all the wise men of Babylon brought before him :—

“Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream. Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers : and I told the dream before them ; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof” (vers. 6, 7).

He was more earnest this time than he was in the first instance. We have not forgotten that in the first instance he insisted upon the magicians telling him the dream itself, and then the interpretation ; now Nebuchadnezzar speaks from the centre of fear, the dark point of mental apprehension, and therefore he tells the magicians all the dream in the hope that they may be able to explain it away. They could make nothing of it ; before these ciphers they could set no unit to turn them into value ; these men had not the key of this mystery. “But at the last Daniel came in before me.” This was in official order ; the terms “at the last” have no real reference but to the etiquette and ceremony of the court. Daniel as the chief came in at the last. But still, allowing for this matter of etiquette and form as amongst the magicians, there is a deep moral suggestion underlying this point of chronology. “At the last Daniel came in.” It is always so ; if we can do without the true man we will. Physicians know the meaning of this ; they tell us that not until patients have exhausted every other source of inquiry do they come to them that they may test their skill : so the houses of these physicians are filled with cripples and maimed and halt and blind that have been all round the world and have only come at the last to men who were able to handle the occasion, or would have handled it with effect had the application been earlier. It is in human nature not to go to Christ first. We begin by doctoring ourselves, by interpreting our own dreams, by asking any liar if he will accept a bribe to flatter us into security. It was always so with Jesus Christ, the Son of God ; nobody went to him in the first instance : “He was despised and rejected of men.” Sufferers tried theories, inventions, experi-

ments, philosophies, falsehoods, hypotheses, and when the soul got no better, but was near death, then it inquired for the Son of God; the poor woman who "had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse," came to Jesus when there was no other physician to go to: "He was despised and rejected of men." There are *roués*, debauchees, men false to themselves, worldlings, who will come to Jesus within three weeks of their dying, and if he were less than Jesus he would turn his back upon them; it is because he is the Son of God that he will look in after all flatterers and deceivers have told their lies and received their fees: "He was despised and rejected of men." His patience is the proof of his Deity; his longsuffering is the noblest argument for his Godhead. He was kind to the unthankful and to the evil; he never denied the prayer of agony, or said "No" to the plea of broken-hearted necessity: "He was despised and rejected of men." Why are not worldly men and unbelievers heroic to the last? Why do they not leap into eternity cursing the Christ of God as they make the final effort? Why this whining prayer, this last appeal to Heaven? Why this attempted compromise with an accusing past? This is the mystery of moral life.

In exalting God, are we to be outdone by a heathen king? Have we nothing to say for our God, our Master, our Christ, the Cross by which we are saved? Is our piety to be dumb? Are our prayers to be so spoken that none may hear them? Is there no place for enthusiasm in the service of the Church? Exclamation may be argument, enthusiasm may be logic with wings, reason on fire. Are we to take no heed of spiritual expressions? Nebuchadnezzar had his dreams, and remembered them, and encouraged them, and dwelt upon them, and sought interpretations from them. Have we no dreamings of a moral kind? Are there no efforts of imagination which require to be explained? Are spiritual impressions nothing? Is the world we can see all there is to be seen or appreciated or valued or appropriated? What! has it come to this: that we have life that could grasp the heavens, and yet must feed it with a handful of dust? It cannot be; the irony is its own answer. Is it of no account that all the wise men have failed? Christ has not yet been written down. The

very noblest attempt that ever has been made to reduce Jesus Christ to insignificance has but formed part of the pedestal on which he stands in infinite uniqueness and unparalleled glory. Where are those wise men themselves? Ah me! they wrote when they were in mid-life, when the blood was full and hot, when the world was applauding and cheering and paying; but when these same assailants had to put their own theories to the test they found their polysyllables were hard pillows on which to lay a dying head. No religion is complete that forsakes a man when he is an invalid, when he has lost all his money, when his friends have withdrawn from him and left him in loneliness; no religion is worth cultivating that will not sit up with the sick man all night, and a hundred nights, and never say, I am tired. The religion of Jesus Christ has proved itself practically; it has a sublime argument and is itself an argument sublime: but when it comes to practical service, the real service of man, it may dismiss all its advocates and will prove itself by its beneficence. It wipes the tear from every eye, it trims the midnight lamp, and makes the flickering light as a dawning morning to the soul that yields itself to its inspiring, illuming, ennobling influence; it is as a rod and a staff in the valley of the shadow of death, and when our loved ones leave us Christianity tarries in the house to say: "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Christianity does not die with the dying saint; Christianity goes to the grave, fills it with flowers, and then comes back to the house of mourning, and says it will tarry till the torn hearts be healed, and they are permitted to begin a new and hopeful youth. The religion that can do that has for its symbol the Cross, and for its end the glory that excelleth.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD we cannot tell what thou art doing, but if thou wilt walk with us through all the mystery of this life, and tell us somewhat of its meaning, we shall be comforted and strengthened. There are those who tell us the meanings of thy riddles and parables, but they do not fill the soul with sacred contentment; we feel that the answer is still beyond, a larger reply than has entered into the heart of man to conceive; if thou thyself, by thy Holy Spirit given unto us through our Lord Jesus Christ, wilt explain the meaning of all that is passing around us, our edification will be assured, and thou shalt have all the praise. We see great tumult, and we are afraid of it; we see the great billow rolling towards our poor little vessel, and we cannot tell why the waters should be angry with us; then we see portents in the sky, strange lights, cross-fires, wonderful colours; sometimes we think we hear voices in the wind that we ought to know, voices of old friends, voices of genial ones, who would make our life better if they could; then in our dreaming what trouble we have: we cannot reconcile the lines or the figures or the voices; we know not what is going on around us: what wonder if sometimes our knees smite one another in fear, and we are utterly left without strength to do the duty of the day? Lord, abide with us; say unto us, Be not afraid, it is I, working out all manner of discipline for the soul's good: then shall we be glad in the storm, and we shall have our full vision in the night-time, and at midnight we shall sing, and at noonday we shall be glad to rapture. We begin to see a little of thy meaning; now that we do see it we are glad with a sacred joy, we say, This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes; we should have been presumptuous but for that affliction, we should have trusted to ourselves but for God's humiliation of our vanity; we should have said, We know all things, but that we were convinced of our boundless ignorance; we should have put forth our hand to touch the forbidden tree if God had not smitten it with disease, and left us to mourn over it as men mourn over a wreck. Now take us wholly into thy care; we would rest in our Saviour's arms; he who loved us so much as to die for us will love us unto the end, he will complete in our final deliverance what he began in our redemption. We have seen Jesus walking amongst his disciples, pitying their littleness, condescending to their weakness, anticipating their hunger, going to them through the wild winds when the waves were high; and in all this he was but expressing his inexpressible love. The same Lord rules, the same sweet Jesus looks down upon us all; he will not let one of us perish, he will put out his hands farther than sin can drive us, and he will draw us to himself again. Let the Lord's blessing be given to us as if it were a new benediction: surprise us by the brightness of thy presence, by the tenderness of

thy voice, by the largeness of thy gifts: once more show thyself to be acquainted with us, so that there is not a word on our tongue, or a thought in our heart, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. If thou dost know our need thou wilt supply it; we have not been permitted to wish; thou hast been so good yesterday that we know thou wilt not fail us to-morrow. Amen.

Chapter iv. 19-37.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S TESTIMONY.

“**T**HEN Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him.” There are moments of astonishment in all true ministries. The word “hour” should be replaced by the word “moment”: Then Daniel was astonished for one moment. But into one moment how many hours may be condensed! Into one feeling a whole lifetime, with manifold and tragical experience, may enter. We have nothing to do with mere time in calculating spiritual impression, spiritual service, spiritual enjoyment. Daniel was not a man to be easily affrighted; the astonishment which befell him was moral, imaginative, not in the sense of fancying things that did not exist, but in the sense of giving realities their largest scope and meaning. He was astonished that such a fate was awaiting King Nebuchadnezzar. It was like a blow struck upon the very centre of his forehead; when he saw what was going to befall the king he was struck, as it were, with a spear of lightning, his voice altered, as did the fashion of his countenance. He had a message to deliver, and yet he delivered it with tears that were hidden in the tone of his voice. He was not flippant; he was solemn with an ineffable solemnity. Never was he in such a position before. Only the Divine Spirit could make him equal to the responsibilities of that critical hour. Many words we can utter easily, but to pronounce doom upon a life, any life, old man's or little child's, is a task which drives our words back again down the throat. We cannot utter them, yet we must do so; we wait in the hope that some relief will come, but relief does not come from this burden-bearing in the sanctuary of life. The preacher is often as much astonished as the hearer, and as much terrified. In proportion as the preacher is faithful to the book which he has to read, expound, and enforce, will he sometimes come to passages that he would rather not read. It would

be delightful if we could expel the idea of penalty from our human intercommunion. Men have tried to fill up the pit of hell with flowers, and all the flowers have been consumed. It would be delightful to hide by concealment of any kind the horrors that await the wicked man, but to hide those horrors is to aggravate them. It can be no joy to any man to go forth and say, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." No man could utter such words but in obedience to the election and ordination of God. It is easy, if we consult our own flesh and sense and taste alone, to hide the Cross of agony and shame; but he who hides the Cross hides the salvation which it symbolises, and without which it is impossible. It is not easy for any man, Jonah or Daniel, Hosea or Joel, to say unto the wicked, It shall be ill with thee. We would rather live upon the other side of the hill, where the sun smiles all day, where the flowers grow as if they would never cease to unfold some new secret of colour and beauty, and where the birds trill a song from hour to hour, as if growing in capacity as they multiply in service. But the hill of the Lord is many-sided; we should be unfaithful and unjust if we did not recognise its multifold aspects, and show them to those who have come to see the reality and the mystery of the divine kingdom amongst men. Daniel looks wondrously well in the moment of his astonishment. The man's best self is now in his face. How quiet he is, and what singular tenderness plays around the sternness which befits the message that he is about to deliver! What a mixture of emotion, what an interplay of colour, what an agony of sensation! yet Daniel is a true man, and he will speak the true word, come of it what may, so far as he himself is concerned; furnace of fire or den of lions, he must speak the word which the Lord has given to him. Why do we not follow his example? Why do we try to take out of the divine word all things offensive? It would be easy to pander to human taste, and to flatter human vanity, and to assure the half-damned man that the process cannot be completed, but that after all he will be taken to heaven and made a seraph of. Who can tell lies so thick, so black? Let him eschew the altar and the Cross.

Daniel repeats the dream to the king and says—

"My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation

thereof to thine enemies. The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: it is thou, O king" (vers. 19-22).

This is the personal application of truth. What is an interpretation if it be not followed by an application? What is a sermon if it end not in a tremendous appeal? The great fathers of the pulpit were mighty in exhortation. They wrestled with their hearers. We have retained the exposition and the criticism, and the eloquence to some extent, but the application we have cut off, because we dare not offend the tastes of people who are going down to hell on the swift steed of self-flattery. Say what figure in history is grander, as representing the idea of ministry, than that of Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar, a prisoner before a king, a captive in the house of a man who could crush him with a word or destroy him with a frown? Yet this Daniel, captive, exile, tells the king that the whole dream belongs to himself, and that mighty though he be, yet it is written in heaven that Nebuchadnezzar shall keep company with the beasts of the field; the man's heart shall be taken out of him, and a beast's heart put in its place. It was not a pleasant message. What delight hath the Lord in "pleasant" sermons delivered to sinners? The sermon should be true, whether it be pleasant or unpleasant; and no man faithful to the divine word can make himself pleasant to all people. What skill there was in the manner of delivering the message! It was better that it should be done all at once. There are some things we must speak abruptly, or we never shall speak them at all; they must, so to say, be forced out of us: the word must come like the shot of a musket: "It is thou, O king," a short sharp stroke. Who would vacillate when he knew he was going to deliver sentence of death, worse than death, all deaths in one agonising humiliation? Better it should be after the pattern of Daniel, clear, simple, prompt, resonant, put in the very smallest words, words that a child could understand and repeat, monosyllables that made the heavens black with unimaginable terror:—"It is thou, O king."

Nor did the message end there. That is the message that must be delivered every time men meet for religious counsel, and every time the wicked man appears in the house of God. Nor is the message, in all its best applications, to be limited to mere wickedness. There are applications of this passage which fit themselves in all the necessities and varieties of human experience and relationship. Sometimes the physician has to say to a man whose constitution is of iron, whose sinews are brass, *It is thou, O strong man; the sentence of dissolution has gone out concerning thee: the frame is great, strong, noble in appearance, and apparently invincible; but there is at work within thee an influence that will kill the soldier and kill the hero and kill the king.* That is not a pleasant speech to make to any man. Yet, knowing the truth and keeping it back, what is he less than a murderer who does not reveal it, and give the sufferer an opportunity to set his house in order? Sometimes the preacher has to say even to a millionaire, *It is thou, O rich man: it is with infinite difficulty thou canst get near Christ: how hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of heaven! thou hast wine, and beast's flesh, and fowls of the air, and bread in plentifulness; but thou shalt sleep with strange bedfellows, yea with poverty and affliction and loathsomeness: set thine house in order: riches take unto themselves wings, and flee away; he who yesterday gave orders on the Exchange, to-morrow will beg a piece of bread to break his fast.* Sometimes the teacher has to address himself to the boastful man, and say, *It is thou, O boastful man: thou didst suppose thyself to be in possession of everything; to be lord and king and mighty man and counsellor and lawgiver; the word shall die on thy blackening lips, and thou who didst serve in the house of vanity shall be a bondman in the house of disappointment.* This was personal preaching, the kind of preaching that is resented. We are willing that any man shall be preached to except ourselves. The minister who succumbs to that dire temptation was ordained by men, but the ordaining hand of Christ was never laid upon his faithless head.

What was the fate that befell the king?

"They shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they

shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee" (ver. 25).

Some men require violent teaching. We will not obey God's love: when he whispers to us we do not hear him; unless he take up the trumpet of his thunder, we pay no attention to the voice of Heaven. Pleasant angels have come to seek us and bring us home, but we have declined their evangel and their gospel and their company; summer has come, with spring on one side and autumn on the other, all beautiful and rich, abounding in all things lovely and useful; and they have said they have come to bring us back to heaven, and we have defied the whole of them. Not until God takes up the rod of his lightning do we begin to be religious. A plague would fill the church; an epidemic would make a prayer-meeting at five o'clock in the morning seasonable: we are cowards! Yet, blessed be God, he does not withhold violence if it will do us good. If we will not have the company of angels we shall be thrust into the society of beasts, and in that humiliation we may be willing to listen to terms and proposals that otherwise would have fallen upon deaf ears; and there in the open field, with only beasts to talk to, we may begin to pray.

What was the end of this exile? Daniel explains the purpose of the providence:—

"Till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (ver. 25).

That is the end of discipline—"Till thou know." When will God take us out of the furnace? When he can see his image enough. When will God cease to lacerate our poor shrinking flesh? When we have learned to obey him. When will he take the wolf away from the door, so that we can go out into the meadow and enjoy the sunshine? When we have yielded back all wickedly acquired gain, and have thrown down the thirty pieces of burning silver for which we sold the Christ of God. Why this penal system in the universe? Why loss? Why decrepitude and helplessness? Why burning fevers? Why all the maladies that afflict the body? Why all the ills that flesh is heir to? "Till thou know." Will they then be taken away? Perhaps not, but they will have a new meaning, and we shall have acquired a new strength with which to bear them, and it

may be that even affliction will be a welcome guest, for we shall say to the black visitant, Come in : thou only canst teach us one side of God's meaning and God's thought ; come in, and teach us what we never could learn by the mere vanity of the intellect, and could never understand by a mere exercise of mind : chasten us, yea refine us and purify us ; make us mellow and tender and patient ; yea, work out in us all Christ's mystery of love : come in, thou darksome angel of Providence. It took a great deal to make some of us pray ; we were not born to prayer ; it would seem as if we were born to denial or doubt, to scepticism or cursing, and as if we were specially born to aid the devil in his ministry of darkness : but the Lord has conquered, cutting off one limb after another ; taking away the children one by one, till nothing is left of child impression or child presence ; breaking the business all down, so that the threshold is no longer worn by the steps of eager clients and patrons ; disappointing us at every turn in life ; going to pluck a flower, and getting only pierced with the thorn ; at last we began to say, What is the meaning of it ? and when we began to know God's purpose things all acquired a new value, set themselves in a new calendar, and besought us with a new solicitude to awaken and serve the Lord. There are those who are not ashamed to say, Blessed be God for loss and poverty, for affliction and death : before I was afflicted I went astray ; in the furnace I saw the Lord, the Lord I never saw in the green paradise of prosperity. God does not willingly afflict the children of men. When we are driven out among the beasts of the field, it is only until we come to our senses, when we shall find the home-door standing wide open, and over the portal written, "Return, thy father welcomes thee."

Yet there was something left in all this :—

"And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots, thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule" (ver. 26).

God does not make an utter end of us ; he leaves a root, a stump, something that may yield a scion, something that may come to branch and leaf and fair flower or rich fruit. What have we left ? Reason, power of thinking, reflection, memory, power of forecast ; we have our mother tongue left us, and we could put

all its words into prayer; we could build our mother's words into a cathedral of praise. It is not quite night yet; the darkness is not yet outer darkness; there is time to get home before the night settles in black and endless dominion upon the earth: hasten to be wise; make the sunset hour a time of return; sanctify the evening by the sacrifice of obedience: in thy Father's house there is bread enough and to spare.

The providence was not lost upon Nebuchadnezzar. He be-thought himself; he was brought back to the habitations of men, and when he saw the purpose of God and accepted it he uttered his testimony: he was not ashamed to declare what wonders had been wrought:—

“At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase” (vers. 36, 37).

That is the testimony of history on both sides. Have we no testimony to bear? Is there no word we can speak on behalf of divine providence? If we are not theologians we can still observe the ways of God amongst men. We are not called upon to talk theology, but we are called upon to talk gratitude. Thankfulness is decency, and if we have received mercies of the Lord and never mentioned them, we are ungrateful, and we deserve no repetition of divine favours, and our deserts would lead to an abandonment of our life by the sunny and instructive providence of God. The testimony is always acceptable. Testimony may be argument. When a man cannot put into logical form his ideas of God he can still himself stand up and say, “Once I was blind; now I see.” How were thine eyes opened? Hear the answer:—“A man that is called Jesus opened mine eyes.” That is due to the Saviour of the world; if we said less we should surely be thankless, and unjust, and unworthy altogether. If the Church would be faithful in the deliverance of a simple, personal, definite testimony, who can say that the world would not be won to Christ? If on every hand unbelievers heard the testimony of belief, who knows but that a miracle

would be wrought along the whole line of their thinking? But if unbelief is continually seeing in the Church doubt, denial, suspicion, suggestion of possible error or failure, what if unbelief should say, "Better be certain in unbelief, than uncertain and hesitant in so-called faith; thorough, sound, emphatic denial has advantages which are not possessed by a hesitant religion, by a continually self-readjusting and self-excusing theology"? We may not be strong in metaphysics, but we can be strong in personal experience. You were once amongst the beasts of the field; where are you now? Stand up and praise the Lord, saying you have returned unto the habitations of men. Once you had no hope, and now you have a light that the wind cannot blow out: who kindled that flame? speak out the name; have no fear: it will do you good in body, soul, and spirit to be fearless in your testimony. Say simply, frankly, This is the miracle of Christ.

NOTE.

"It must be observed that, in accordance with the principle enunciated by St. Paul in 1 Cor. xiv. 15, dreams, in which the understanding is asleep, are recognised indeed as a method of divine revelation, but placed below the visions of prophecy, in which the understanding plays its part. . . . In exact accordance with this principle are the actual records of the dreams sent by God. The greater number of such dreams were granted, for prediction or for warning, to those who were aliens to the Jewish covenant. Thus we have the record of the dreams of Abimelech (Gen. xx. 3-7), Laban (Gen. xxxi. 24), of the chief butler and baker (Gen. xl. 5), of Pharaoh (Gen. xli. 1-8), of the Midianite (Judg. vii. 13), of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. ii. 1, etc.; iv. 10-18), of the Magi (Matt. ii. 12), and of Pilate's wife (Matt. xxvii. 19). Many of these dreams, moreover, were symbolical and obscure, so as to require an interpreter. And where dreams are recorded as means of God's revelation to his chosen servants, they are almost always referred to the periods of their earliest and most imperfect knowledge of him. So it is in the case of Abraham (Gen. xv. 12, and perhaps 1-9), of Jacob (Gen. xxviii. 12-15), of Joseph (Gen. xxxvii. 5-10), of Solomon (1 Kings iii. 5), and, in the New Testament, of Joseph (Matt. i. 20; ii. 13, 19, 22). It is to be observed, moreover, that they belong especially to the earliest age, and become less frequent as the revelations of prophecy increase. The only exception to this is found in the dreams and 'visions of the night' given to Daniel (ii. 19; vii. 1), apparently in order to put to shame the falsehoods of the Chaldæan belief in prophetic dreams and in the power of interpretation, and yet to bring out the truth latent therein (comp. St. Paul's miracles at Ephesus, Acts xix. 11, 12, and their effect, 18-20)."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have come out of the winter to praise thee for the spring ; we have come from the wilderness into the garden of God ; we have come from the field of battle to the home of peace. The world is one great fight all the week long ; some win, some lose : but through all the action there is a tone of misery. The world is full of wailing ; there is no happiness unmixed. We have left the plough in the furrow that we may come for a while to pray ; we shall go back to the plough the stronger if thou wilt answer our heart's desire. All the work is standing still whilst we worship ; blessed be thy name, we can say to our toil, Stand here while we go and worship yonder. We mean to take on the yoke again, and to resume all the fight, and to endure all the misery ; but we can do all this better if we see God as it were face to face through Jesus Christ his Son. We want to pray, our hearts are full of desire, but in our mouth there are no words fit to tell all our pain and all our want ; hear thou what little we can say, and answer it in the boundlessness of thy Fatherly love. We want to say how glad we are that we have not been forsaken ; even in the night we have had stars to keep us company : it has not been all darkness ; sometimes we thought we saw the dawn soon after midnight. Thou hast kept us, fed us, led us, and we are now in this green garden, this paradise of God, waiting to give thee praise and to see thy light. We want to tell thee how sad our heart is that we have done wrong ; but wrong we are always doing : we are accustomed to do evil ; we do it with the one hand as skilfully as with the other ; we are practised in things forbidden. God be merciful unto us sinners, because our faces are hidden at the foot of the Cross. We look up for a moment to see the Sufferer ; he is our Priest ; he is doing our work ; he will save us every one ; our hope is in the dying, rising Christ. We come to him with fulness of love and fulness of trust, and if we know aught of distrust it is not in God, but in ourselves. Humble us, that we may be raised up, tread us deeply in the dust, that at last we may stand up before God elevated and sanctified by his grace. We want to give ourselves more perfectly to thee ; to this end give us health, full, radiant, bounding health ; may the blood run well, may the brain be strong, may every nerve respond to the fingers of the sun : and thus in great health of body may we entertain a healthy, loving soul ; may the mind be a mind of health, loving the fresh air of God, and seeking only to nest itself in the very light of heaven. Take away from us all disease, all infirmity and imperfectness, every sign and token of death ; may we trample grim old death in the dust to which he belongs. Thus do thou hear our cry. Thou knowest our meaning, though

we cannot utter our words aright; thou dost not look at our words, but at our thought, the thing we would be at, the great desire, the master impulse. We give one another to thee in a great act of dedication; we would be born in God's house and wedded at God's altar, and we would live under God's roof: yea, we would dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, crying out our little miseries there, and there singing our little songs of joy, and there plighting and trothing one another in holy trust and generous hospitality. Help the bad man to overthrow the devil: turn aside the counsel of the mean of soul, so that their seed may never come to fruition; when they go out to seek the harvest may they cut down sheaves of darkness. Help the good man to be better; give him more light, more confidence: so often is goodness associated with timidity that thy people strike feebly when they might strike with a battering-ram. Help those who have to carry great burdens; say to them that at the most it is only for a handful of days, that there may be one or two moments of agony, but they are like the gates that fall back upon heaven. The Lord be in our sick-chamber and make it the brightest room in the house; the Lord be in the nursery and take care specially of the weakest child, and specially of him whose forecast in this world is very dark because he is lame, deformed, blind, incomplete, poor. The Lord be everywhere like the living air, a great ventilation, a great hope, a great impulse, a great inspiration. Lord, the little earth, so little, is still thine, though it is stained through and through with sin. Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and when thou hearest, Lord, forgive! Amen.

Chapter v.

THE HAND AT THE FEAST.

"Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand" (ver. 1).

THIS reads like a torrent—king, and feast, and great feast, and lords a thousand strong, and wine-drinking worthy of the occasion. That is the beginning. If it were a piece of music the last note would be as the first; whether it be another note, we must wait a while to know: it will be a grand note,—whether harmonious and sympathetic with the beginning we shall see. There was no harm in making a great feast to a thousand lords. Many persons are content to stop at that point; if there is no harm in an exercise they take it for granted that they may indulge it without limit or licence. That is a point the devil often begins at. It is something to have reached the conclusion that there is no harm in this or that reply to local suggestion or personal temptation. He is a subtle beast, more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God hath made, for he saith to the Son

of God, Thou art hungry; if thou hast power, why not turn these stones into bread? The suggestion was harmless: it was beneficent; when was he ever less a devil? when was he ever more the tempter and the destroyer, the seducer and the assassin of mankind? Study your point; ascertain distinctly where you are; write down in the record every day, write in your clearest hand, so that there can be no mistake in deciphering the line, Nothing good ever came from a bad source. That will keep you right when you cannot summon to immediate service your metaphysical piety. Always have a good moral injunction well at hand; from that you may pass into the metaphysics of religion, the profoundest depths of theology. It is said that it is not an arithmetical exaggeration to suppose that Belshazzar had a thousand lords; it is not a rhetorical number; it might be a piece of dry statistics. Look at the picture: who can blight it? who would disturb it? The king, the lords, the wine, the revel: who would interpose or send into a scene so gay with all colours a spectre or ghost? It is the ghost we cannot keep out. We bar out the burglar, but the ghost comes in without noise or invitation, and tarries as long as he will. The life that ignores ghostly presences is a fool's life.

Belshazzar tasted the wine, and the wine burned in his blood, and he "commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem,"—not necessarily his father according to the flesh, but his predecessor, the larger sense in which the word "father" is often used. A bright idea has struck him in wine. *In vino veritas* (In wine is truth); in such wine is the devil. Having good wine, he would have good vessels; the goblet should be worthy of the liquor: Perhaps it was an æsthetic mood; rather let us incline to the comment which assigns to this action the attribute and the wickedness of defiance. There was no æstheticism in it; it was the vulgarity of the man awakened by wine, that never fails when taken in due quantities to wake up every devil that is in a man. Belshazzar would outdo his fathers; what is wickedness if it cannot also be modern, new, inventive, and put into remote and fading perspective the audacity of earlier trespassers? All the people should drink out of these

cup, vessels, goblets ; the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, drank in them, and laughed over them, and left the slime of their throats on the gold and silver of the sanctuary. It was a night of triumph ; the air was full of defiance ; there was a noise in the banqueting-hall that the queen-mother overheard. We do not all go to these violent extremities, but the act is not to be judged by its violence, but by its essence, its nature, its purpose, its spirit. We say violent delights have violent ends, but there is no need to pause in self-complacency and to return a verdict in favour of ourselves to the effect that such violence as this has never marked our lives. We may tell lies in whispers ; we may break all the commandments in silence ; we may not have the frankness of a bold chivalry ; we may be doing the deed without acquiring fame for its accomplishment. Search your hearts ; hold God's own candle over the secret lie. We need not judge ourselves by the accidents of this Oriental occasion ; the accidents, we know, have all died away, and they may or may not have been literally true, but the inner reality abides evermore that men have moments of intellectual and spiritual dropsy, moral inflation, times when self-control is lost, when reverence is soured into profanity, and when man imagines that he has now but to put out his hand to a given tree, and snatch from its branches all he can hold of Deity.

What became of it all ?

“They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone” [and the gods did not hear a word of their doxology] (ver. 4).

This is, on the part of the banqueters, a curious logic—“They drank wine, and praised the gods.” There is a point at which wine-drinking has in it an element of religion ; there are tears of quite a pietetic kind at the beginning of a wine feast ; men feel mellow towards one another, kind, forgiving, hopeful ; they forget wives and children, or remember them only in some sentimental way that has in it no virtue, or touch or colour of sacrifice ; they talk in vague philanthropic generalities, and the next draught turns them swiftly from piety to profanity and blasphemy. The action was that of a contrast. The vessels might have been held aloft as the vessels belonging to the service

of Jehovah, and whilst the vessels were held aloft and then brought to the fiery lips of the drinkers, those who imbibed the liquid damnation began to praise the gods of heathendom and to ask loudly, or with subdued breath, or with significant whispering, or with sneering that had no words, Where is the God of Jerusalem? His vessels are here; his sacramental cups are here: where is he himself? And merrily the feast went on, and the wine disappeared like rivers in forests, and the night was redolent with all the odours of unholiness.

Thus the four verses contain quite a little story by themselves. Say what we may about chapter and verse, as a mechanical device often misleading the reader, yet in this instance there seems to be something useful in the typographical distribution of the matter. Verse 5 opens with a new paragraph boldly indicated. It is in very deed a new paragraph, God's own paragraph. If it were written here only it might be called part of a romance, assigned to a very hoary antiquity, and quoted when we were in a mood to recall our mythological romances, but it is written every day: it is written in our diaries; it is written in our family Bibles; it is written on the face of our pulpits; it is graven upon our family altars.

"In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace" (ver. 5).

That "hand" is the terror of men, or it is the surest proof of their defence, security, and progress. That hand presents two distinct aspects; we could not do without it: the bad man needs it to frighten him into prayer; the good man needs it often to save him from despair. Where is the hand of the Lord? It is everywhere—not everywhere visible, but sight is not the limit of existence; vision does not determine our possession. What can we see? We do not see anything that is worth seeing; at best we see but image, type, symbol, hint, indication: all the things that are to be seen are patent only to the vision of the soul:—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"—see him everywhere, see him at all times, see him at midnight as certainly as at midday; the darkness and the light are both alike to him, and he makes them both alike to us, if so be our hearts

are alive with the sensitiveness of love and expectation. "In the same hour"—could the fools not have had an hour to themselves? Does God divide the hour of revel? Does he write across the face of the bad man's programme? Does God interfere with the soliloquy of the rich atheist, saying to him, "Thou fool!"? Thus God will not let us quite alone. He can make us sober: one look, and the marrow chills; one touch, and the brain recovers itself from the sleep or the madness of wine, and awakes to ask eternal questions.

Did this occur long ago, in some old forgotten Babylon? This is occurring to-day, in our cities, within the range of our vision. Whilst we are discussing the supernatural, the supernatural is asserting itself; whilst we write volumes that amount to nothing more than notes of interrogation, the supernatural is operating, arranging, adjusting, tearing down, putting up, colouring, and dispesing, according to a will immeasurable, incomprehensible, but always, though not on the face of it in all instances, beneficent. This hand came out beside the candlestick. God loves light. God lighted the candle; why should he not use it? Never suppose you can light anything; it is only God that lends you a spark. He went to the candlestick, and there he wrote. The night does not exclude him; he did not wait for the sun to rise; his judgment took effect at the time and on the spot. What is the matter with Belshazzar? How white he is! What a new expression in his erewhile dreamy eyes—eyes that were just yielding to the felonious slumber of intoxication! The joints of his loins are loosed, and his knees smite against one another; the man who a few minutes ago was iron is now straw. Did this happen long ago in some banquet-hall deserted? It happened last night; it will happen to-night; it will occur in vivid and monitional repetition until the end of time. Drunken men see strange sights. We try to persuade them that it is a species of nightmare. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God; cursed are the wicked in heart, for they too shall see God: God is love;—Our God is a consuming fire. See him we must; the aspect of his revelation may largely depend upon ourselves. Marvellous is this action of the ghostly element or ministry upon the human mind! Men who could fight a whole army have their

hair blanched in one night by the touch of a spectral finger; soldiers that never feared the face of man fear the face of unnamable and invisible guests who are unbidden to the wedding feast or funeral morsel, and there sit down and do what they like with the inventions of men. You have to meet the ghost somewhere; there is a time coming when you only can answer the question, meet the emergency, and satisfy the demand: there is no discharge in that war. Infidel, Agnostic, unbeliever, irreverent sneerer, what canst thou do for those whom thou dost mock and seduce? God has so arranged the economy of his providence that he must have a few moments with us quite alone. Sweetest mother cannot speak for us then; tenderest friend cannot come between us and God at that moment: there must be a secret interview with the supernatural. We have not lived like beasts; why should we die like them? Men put away these thoughts from themselves, and attempt to fill up the vacancy with frivolity; it ends in mockery, disappointment, and piercing pain. Do not suppose you can exclude God by noise, by wine-drinking, by high feasting, and by committing yourselves to revels that warm the blood and goad the passions,—“Thou God seest me.” Sometimes we see part of his hand, and we see what it is doing; at others we see all his hand, and can recognise what it is doing, and when we have looked upon the action for a little while we say, “Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.” The hand of the Lord is in heaven, on earth, and it grips the bridle that holds the devil back. “The Lord reigneth”; in that doctrine let us find assurance, consolation, stimulus, invincible defence. Poor Belshazzar! He was weak as other men. Where now the repartee that set the Babylonian table in a roar? Quite chapfallen, quite gone. Is the candle used then blown out?

“The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers” [and the king offered them scarlet and a gold chain, and a place in the triumvirate: He shall be the triumvir if he will tell me the upshot of this unexpected business. They all came; they could not read the writing; some read it horizontally, others read it vertically; some, perhaps, tried to read it diagonally; but they had never seen that alphabet before]. “Then was King Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished” [and the queen-mother came in and said, There is a man that can tell thee all about it]. “Then was Daniel brought

in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. . . . And I have heard of thee that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another " (vers. 9, 13, 14, 16, 17).

How the prophet always clears a space for himself; how on great occasions men distribute themselves into proper classes. When the occasion is little, one man is as good as another; there is a general hum of conversation, and it is difficult to tell the great man from the small, the obscure man from the famous: but when the crisis comes, by some law hardly to be expressed in words, men fall into their right relations, and there stands up the man who has the keys of the kingdom of God. Preachers of the word, you will be wanted some day by Belshazzar; you were not at the beginning of the feast, but you will be there before the banqueting hall is closed; the king will not ask you to drink wine, but he will ask you to tell the secret of his pain and heal the malady of his heart. Abide your time. You are nobody now. Who cares for preachers, teachers, seers, and men of insight, while the wine goes round, and the feast is unfolding its tempting luxuries? Midway down the programme to mention pulpit, or preacher, or Bible, would be to violate the harmony of the occasion. But the preacher, as we have often had occasion to say, will have his opportunity. They will send for him when all other friends have failed; may he then come fearlessly, independently, asking only to be made a medium through which divine communications can be addressed to the listening trouble of the world. Daniel will take the scarlet and the chain by-and-by, but not as a bribe; he will take the poor baubles of this dying Babylon and will use them to the advantage of the world through actions that shall become historical, but he will not first fill his hands with bribes, and then read the king's riddles. The prophet is self-sustained by being divinely inspired. He needs no promise to enable him to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Indeed, he has nothing to say of himself. Every man, in proportion as he is

a Daniel, has nothing to invent, nothing to conceive in his own intellect; he has no warrant or credential from the empty court of his own genius; he bears letters from heaven; he expresses the claims of God. O Daniel, preacher, speaker, teacher, thunder out God's word, if it be a case of judgment and doom; or whisper it, or rain in gracious tears, if it be a message of sympathy and love and welcome.

Then Daniel began to talk as only Daniel could talk; then he looked the king into another man; then he read the writing to him:—"Numbered," "wanting," "divided." There is some incoherence that is better than the finest rhetorical continuity; a hiatus may be more significant than an elaborate detail. Let the king hear the principal words, and he will understand; he will not come up again to ask petty questions. There is an interpreter within the man; the moment he hears the right word from without, the interpreter within will say, That is the word of the Lord—"numbered," "wanting," "divided." "That night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, slain." He began riotously, and thus he ended. The first note of this tragic anthem was one of revel; the last was a groan of helplessness, defeat. **He died drunk.**

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, the days are short ; the light of the sun is too scant for us ; but thou canst make another light, brighter than the noonday, and fill our whole life with a tender glory that shall not dazzle, but reveal thyself and make us glad. Thou canst give summer comfort in the deep winter-time ; thou canst give us flowers from the snow : behold, the winter is not all ice ; thou hast a place in it for thy benediction and tenderness, for the warmth and cordiality of thy love : and behold, when we feel this, then we know that judgment itself is mercy, and that sternness is an element of compassion, and that winter is needful to help forward the work of summer. The seasons are one ; we must not separate them, and talk about them as separate jewels ; they are all one : the year is one ; life is one ; every morning is New Year's Day ; every night is the closing day of life. Help us to read the parable wisely, with true discernment of deepest and broadest meanings ; then time shall be a revelation, and the days and the hours shall become chapters in the large Bible of providence and visible movement. Thou hast made the year as it hath pleased thee : thou hast dug many a grave ; thou hast emptied many an arm-chair ; thou hast driven the pastor from his study and the preacher from his pulpit ; and thou hast also called away from nearly every pew in every church some member, that thou mightest assert thy right and show that all souls are thine. We fall into thy hands in one way or the other—willingly, lovingly, consentingly, with our whole heart and soul, with burning love that yearns to be absorbed in God ; or we fall by providence, by efluxion of time—subtle time, fatal time, that makes the strongest man bow down as if carrying an invisible burden. It makes the hair white, and wrinkles the cheek, and clouds up the brow. Behold, this is thy minister—now an angel, now a hornet, always doing thy work and preparing the way for thy kingdom ; and if now and again, by specialty of circumstance, we are touched by the solemnity of peculiar occasions, we thank thee for the sobriety, the gravity, the solemnity of mind and heart, concurrent therewith. May we so use every opportunity as to enlarge the next, and so multiply our facilities for getting good, for doing good, and for the better fulfilling our calling and election in time. We have met frequently with the open book and the open altar, and have spoken bold and cheering words in thy name, and heard thy word read in our midst—now a thunder ; now a psalm ; now a great tempest of judgment ; now a still small voice, or gentle stream, or hint of the Almightyness which is praised. The Lord be praised for all the Sabbaths—golden days, jewels of the memory, points of time to be looked back upon in old age, or from higher kingdoms ; and now that

the space is dwindling, and the years are lessening, and the pulses are enfeebling, may we rise to the grandeur of the occasion and make, through the blood of the everlasting covenant and the mighty inspiration of the Holy Ghost, our last days our longest, brightest, best. Saviour Christ, hear us! Priest of the universe, plead for us! Thou atoning Sacrifice, let us see in the Cross a way of access even to the throne of light. Thus shall we have no fear; going up by Calvary, we shall come upon Righteousness itself, and have no speech with the law that would otherwise destroy us. Let thy benediction make summer in winter, and let some touch of thine hand give us to feel that though the days are short and the nights are long, our Father is close at hand. Amen.

Chapter vi. 1-14.

THE PROMOTION OF DANIEL.

“OF whom Daniel was first.”* That is the explanation of all that follows. Do not let us lose ourselves in the details of a story which has entranced us since our childhood. When we began to hear the story we did not listen to such words as these—“Of whom Daniel was first”; we were then taken up with the lions, the den, the night spent in great trouble and danger: now we have had time to look away to reasons, to first thoughts, to beginnings and causes. Here we find the story in one sentence—“Of whom Daniel was first.” Not only first in some chronological sense, or in some mechanical sense, but first altogether, obviously, dominantly first; everybody knowing it, although some owned it with bated breath. “This Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes.” The

* “Of Daniel little is known beyond what may be gathered from his own writings. He was not a priest, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but, like Isaiah, of the tribe of Judah, and probably of the royal house (Dan. i. 6, 3). He was carried to Babylon in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (*i.e.*, B.C. 606), eight years before Ezekiel, and probably between the twelfth (Ignatius) or the eighteenth year (Chrysostom) of his age (i. 4). There he was placed in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, and became acquainted with the science of the Chaldees, compared with whom, however, God gave him, as he records, superior wisdom. By Nebuchadnezzar he was raised to high rank and great power, a position he retained, though not uninterruptedly, under both the Babylonish and Persian dynasties. He died at an advanced age, having prophesied during the whole of the Captivity (i. 21), and his last prophecy being delivered two years later, in the third year of the reign of Cyrus.”—ANGUS'S *Bible Handbook*.

word "preferred" scarcely brings out all the meaning: substitute for it the better term "outshone"; then we read, "This Daniel outshone the presidents and princes." There was more light in him than in any of them; he was a man of divine genius; he was characterised by what we commonly express by the term "inspiration"; when he spoke there was wisdom in his speech; there was no hesitation, no spirit of doubt or controversy underlying what he said; all his words seemed to come from an infinite height, and to belong to the eternal reality and fitness of things. If other men spoke first they were sorry they ever opened their lips upon the subject when Daniel declared his judgment; he simply eclipsed them all, put them into comparative darkness; his words were light: his syllables were flashes of glory. He will have to pay for this.

All primacy has to be paid for. Do not understand that men go forward to any possessions they please up banks of glory, slopes of flowers, fancy work written in imaginary paradises. A Burmese student has lately been contesting with European claimants and candidates, and he has taken everything before him. He said the other day, "Everything is possible here to a man who works." That is an old English word. What a rebuke to those who do not toil! If the Burmese student so successful had used a long word, how many thousands of English youths would have found that long word a grand opening for a thousand excuses! But he explained his position by a very simple term, that term being none other than the good old English term "works." His primacy was paid for. Some men pay for it by work, and others pay for it by work and suffering too. There is no spirit so cruel as the spirit of jealousy; and yet men ought to compel themselves to fight that spirit every day in the week. That is a fine theological training; that is a noble spiritual education. A brother has been applauded; do not put your fingers in your ears, but listen to the applause: how it rises, swells, multiplies; and not one cheer of all the tumultuous acclamation is for you, but for him: hear it; pray yourself out of the unworthy feeling that dislikes it. That will do you good all the days of your life. If you can pray yourself into an answering Amen, mayhap you may come to join the

gracious tumult, and do so not to be seen of men, but to express the emotion and the appreciation of a healthy heart. Go where your rivals are praised; read the criticisms that lift them up into larger public light and notoriety: do not scan the criticisms, and say reluctantly and half-whisperingly that you did see something of them; get them by heart: they will be bitter in the mouth, but they will sweeten as they descend; get them well into you; fight the devil on his own ground; be glad that you are not first. These are the lessons that come to us from the history of jealousy; we recognise them, we repeat them word for word: but do we repeat them as a recitation, or pronounce them as a testimony and a faith? Sometimes we think how good a thing it must be to be the outshining Daniel. It is, and it is not; everything depends upon other circumstances and elements than the mere outshining.

Men have to pay for all exaltation; a sense of responsibility comes with it where it is honest and worthy, and men do not ascend to the primary positions instantly, but gradually, and as they ascend they become accustomed to the air, so that when they do reach the throne it seems as if they had but a step to take from the common earth to the great altitude. Thus we are trained, graduated, perfected, not by suddenness, abruptness, not by any vulgarity of government, but by that fine shading and graduation which is all but imperceptible, and which only makes itself known in all the fulness of its reality and value when we are prepared to accept the throne, the crown, the sceptre, humbly, modestly. How could Daniel bear all this exaltation? Because it was nothing to him. He had been in prayer. The man who prays three times a day, really prays, whose window opens upon heaven, cannot receive any honour; he cannot be flattered. If Darius had asked him to take the throne it would have been but a trifle to Daniel. A man who has been closeted with God cannot be befooled by earthly baubles and temporal vanities. It is with these things as with miracles. We have often had occasion to say that miracles may be approached from one of two points. Everything depends upon the point of origin chosen by the mind for the purpose of travelling towards the miracles. A man travels towards them from the earth, from limitations that

are patent and oppressive, from observations that are narrow and cloudy and few in number ; and he says when he struggles up the hill of difficulty, It is impossible that miracles, that these miracles, can ever have occurred. Another man descends upon them, comes out of the sanctuary of the invisible where he has been long with God, and when he comes upon what are termed the miracles he reads them as commonplaces, wonders at their smallness, takes God's own estimate of them, and sees in a penitent heart, a praying soul, a mightier miracle than can be seen in any department of nature, controlled, regulated, by a higher law, and directed to unsuspected and unimagined uses. So with this greatness of such men as Daniel ; it is not greatness to them : it is but a new responsibility, another opportunity for doing good, a larger opening for higher usefulness. The man should always be greater than his office ; the author should always be greater than his book ; the picture should be nothing compared with the picture the artist wanted to paint. The musician does well to set aside his thousand-voiced organ because it is useless when he wants to express the ineffable. If we prayed aright, if we loved God truly, then all honours would be accepted with an easy condescension, and every gift and recognition and promotion would be used with modesty, and every honour given by men would not be despised, but would be used to the promotion of the highest ends of being. It is thus the Daniels of the world sit upon their thrones ; verily, they *sit upon* them ; they use them, they are mere temporary conveniences and symbols to them ; the real king is intellectual, spiritual, moral, sympathetic, invisible, divine. It is useless for us to wish to be what Daniel was ; we shall be what Daniel was, and where he was, when we have the same qualifications. The universe is not being built by an unskilled carpenter ; it is being constructed—I mean that inward and spiritual universe of which all other universes are but the scaffolding—by a divine Builder ; and he will not put the top stone in the foundation, or the foundation stone in the pinnacle ; he will put us just where we ought to be. Daniel and Paul, Peter and John, the seraph all flame, the cherub all contemplation, each will have his place. O foolish soul, do not build thyself into God's wall ; let the Builder handle thee, and be glad that thou hast any place in the spiritual masonry.

What was it that accounted for Daniel's primacy, Daniel's influence? The explanation is given in some words that should be remembered—"because an excellent spirit was in him." Define the word "excellent" by all its possible meanings; for the occasion will take upon itself all that is dignified in intellect, all that is tender in moral feeling, all that is noble in spiritual and moral judgment. The spirit that was in Daniel was "excellent"—genial, tender, sympathetic, quite large in its capacity, holding within its magnanimity all sorts and conditions of men, seeing something good in the worst of them. Anybody can see infirmities; the dullest eye may detect a cripple: it requires an eye quickened and strengthened by divinest ministries to see good or the soul of good in things evil. Sometimes men require but the warmth of fraternal recognition to blossom into quite other men. What flower can grow under frowning clouds, and what flower does not struggle to grow when the sun is doing all he can with the little root? So Daniel made an empire within an empire; he developed men who before were unrecognised; to come near him was to come into the sunshine; to hear him was to hear music; men did not grow less in his presence, but greater, not weaker, but stronger; and they felt that all his primacy was held in trusteeship, and that whatever good he could do to others he would do, and thus multiply himself not by selfishness, but by beneficence—the true multiplication, the right royal road to ultimate and permanent coronation.

What will an excellent spirit do for a man? Read the history of Daniel, and find the answer. Daniel was a captive; when does he complain of his captivity? His spirit is free, his soul is not in bonds, and therefore it becomes of little consequence where his body is. Does he whine and moan about his captivity? Is the groan always in his throat? Is the frown upon his dejected countenance? If you would find real joy, healthy gladness, look at Daniel. He lives in the unseen: he endures as seeing the invisible; he goes right up to heaven to find answers to the enigmas of dream and vision, and he comes back from heaven's throne with replies to human necessity. He who is spiritually minded thinks nothing of little local bodily captivity. Some people are all complaints; you never hear one cheerful word from them.

They would die if they were cheerful ; they would die of amazement , they would be so frightened at themselves if ever they were caught singing anything gladsome that they would expire on the spot. Their only hope is in the indulgence of their infirmity. An excellent spirit is not in them, the spirit of youthfulness, the spirit of hopefulness, the Christian spirit. One man who had this spirit in abundance said, " Yea, and we glory exceedingly in tribulations also." That was triumph ; that was the power of Christ. An excellent spirit raises men to supremacy, and other men are glad when they are so raised, for they know the more wealth they have, the more the poor will have ; the wiser they are, the better directed will be the whole nation.

Yet here we come upon words we gladly would have omitted from the history—" Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom." They tested his policy at every point ; they pressed all their weight down upon the policy and purpose of Daniel in things imperial ; but that policy bare all the burden—" They could find none occasion nor fault, forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him." Then what should they have said ? They ought to have said thus : Any religion that will make a man so faithful, so trusty, so real, and so beneficent, is a good religion, though we cannot explain it, and though we never heard of it before. Christianity would not hesitate to say that of heathenism. If heathenism can make men not only honourable, true, faithful, industrious—which it may have done—but if it can make them spiritual, holy, if it can give them such a sense of triumph over death as not to accept it as a fate or as an annihilation or an absorption into the sum total, if it can make them look upon death with the eyes of victors, saying to death, Where is thy sting ? to the grave, Where is thy victory ? if it can translate men from time into eternity, not to be forgotten, but to be developed in endless progress, Christianity would say so, it would recognise the miracle ; it might even say, There is no further occasion for me to be here, for all my work has been anticipated and accomplished by an enlightened paganism. But Christianity has not found that to be the case. Christianity acknowledges all your Platos and all your moralists, but it says,

This is not vital ; it is not sufficient ; it does not go to the root and core of things ; the attitude is artistic, the manner is excellent, the calculation is admirable, but there is no regeneration of the soul in all the process ; and that is what Christianity has come to do : to create men anew in Christ Jesus. The pagans therefore should have said, A religion that keeps Daniel so right in his action and policy must be a good religion, although we cannot understand its metaphysics, and although it is opposed in deadly hostility to all our Babylonian and Chaldean conceptions and imaginings. Why not reason so in modern civilisation ? Here the Christian has great opportunity for doing good ; he may not be able to explain the metaphysics of his Christianity, but what a chance he has for verifying its morality ! And to morality the whole thing must come at some point or other. A man can never be so transcendently pious as to take out a licence to be wicked. If you are not correct in your accounts you cannot be correct in your prayers. Your piety is a mistake and a farce if it be not upheld and elucidated with dazzling illustration by your behaviour. Men then in some instances will be constrained to say that a piety which expresses itself in such conduct must be good. Through your morality men may come into God's own sanctuary ; through your noble behaviour men may begin to inquire about the Cross which accounts for it : that is your chance. The penetration which belongs to metaphysical reasoning you may not possess ; the power which inheres in expository and hortatory eloquence may not be your gift ; but the humblest, youngest, simplest man may show what his Christianity has done for him by his industry, his punctuality, his faithfulness, his obedience, his reliableness in all circumstances, his ability to bear the test of every analysis and every pressure. So thus we may form ourselves, by the grace of God, into a great body of witnesses, each in his own way explaining the divine kingdom, and accounting for the holiest conduct in human life.

What was to be done ? Daniel must be killed. Paganism has no other way of treating its enemies ; heathenism must get its enemies out of the way : they must be poisoned, they must be imprisoned, they must be dashed from great heights, they must be thrown to lions, they must be burned with fire. That is the

vulgar process of paganism. We know the story: the poor king—Pilate before the time, the Old Testament Pilate—was inveigled into signing something that appealed to his vanity. He was quite willing to be God for a month; it lay within the scope of Oriental vanity to be God for thirty days; a lunar month or a calendar month either would do for a man who was asked to be vice-president of the universe, and do what he liked. "Wherefore King Darius signed the writing and the decree." Daniel knew all about it, and when the writing was signed he went into his house and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforesaid. Some men you cannot write down. Kings cannot put them down; decrees cannot kill their patriotism; and even votes of Parliament cannot turn aside the noble enthusiasm of a pure purpose. Parliament has locked up all kinds of Daniels; kings have signed all sorts of decrees against praying people; persons who were eccentric, erratic, insane, have been sent to prison, have had all their goods sold in the market-place, have been branded, have been disabled by the cutting off of limbs, have had their ears wrung, their eyes gouged out, their tongues cut out of their mouths, and still they have given thanks before God as they did aforesaid. Nothing was injured but the apparatus; it was only the mechanical part that was at all brought into infirmity and suffering: "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do"; they cannot kill the soul: while the soul is alive the man is alive. Men have prayed in prison; men have turned dungeons into churches; ay, fissured rocks, caverns given over to the sovereignty of night, have heard music that has been denied to loftiest cathedral arch, music that only martyrs, hunted men, could utter. A happy, healthy man who has all he wants cannot sing like a soul that is in trouble; in its muffled music there is a pathos that pleases God.

Daniel's answer was what our answer ought always to be—he went on praying. That is the only answer that God asks from us. When the Bible is attacked, publish another edition of two million copies. Oh, spare the Cross the patronage of another "defence" in the form of an elaborate and unintelligible book. When men question the reality, utility, practicability, of prayer, pray on; do not rise from your knees to conduct a debate,

nothing comes from such a process. When men ask if the Cross is true in all its highest suggestions, answer by uncomplaining endurance, by patience, by forgiveness, by magnanimity. When people ask if it is possible for sin to be pardoned, because they have got some idea of all things abiding as they were under a severe reign of continuity, prove it by your spirit, by releasing the enemy who has done you most injury, by praying on the very Cross itself. It may be when they hear, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," that that prayer may do more for their conversion than all the abstract and metaphysical theology that is symbolised by the Cross itself. It is on the Cross men pray their mightiest prayers; it is on the Cross we learn what God is by feeling first the hunger created by his absence; it is on the Cross that men see the finishing of divine purpose on one side and the beginning of divine purpose on the other.

When men ask if the history of Daniel is literally true,* what is their reason for asking it? It must be a frivolous one. That the history of Daniel is true has been proved every day since Daniel lived. There is nothing in the mere thing itself if

* "The history of the assaults upon the prophetic worth of Daniel in modern times is full of interest. In the first instance doubts were raised as to the authorship of the opening chapters, i.-vii. (Spinoza, Newton), which are perfectly compatible with the fullest recognition of their canonicity. Then the variations in the LXX. suggested the belief that chaps. iii.-vi. were a later interpolation (J. D. Michaelis). As a next step the last six chapters only were retained as a genuine book of Scripture (Eichhorn, first and second editions); and at last the whole book was rejected as the work of an impostor, who lived in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (Corrodi, 1783. Hitzig fixes the date more exactly from 170 B.C. to the spring of 164 B.C.). This last opinion has found, especially in Germany, a very wide acceptance, and Lücke ventures to pronounce it 'a certain result of historical criticism.'

"The real grounds on which most modern critics rely in rejecting the book are the 'fabulousness of its narratives' and 'the minuteness of its prophetic history.' 'The contents of the book,' it is said, 'are irrational and impossible' (Hitzig, § 5). It is obvious that it is impossible to answer such a statement without entering into general views of the providential government of the world. It is admitted that the contents of the book are exceptional and surprising; but revelation is itself a miracle, however it be given, and essentially as inconceivable as any miracle."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

it be not repeated in all history, repronounced and confirmed by all succeeding ages. To-day primacy brings jealousy ; to-day "an excellent spirit" wins its way in society at great expense and by incurring great penalty ; to-day men are seeking to put down praying souls and to break down all spiritual religion : it is so ghostly, so interior, so subjective in its operations, and then expresses itself in such broad and graphic moralities ; and to-day the true Daniel-spirit regards the king's decree when it interferes with matters religious as a dead letter. Let the king say, "Pray," heed him not ; he has no right so to command : if he exhort, listen to him ; if he command, despise him, and pray on ; if he say, "Do not pray," open all your windows Jerusalemward, and cry unto the Lord with a mighty heart-cry, and let the king's decree be burned. This spiritual religion is a divine gift ; it is not under human decrees or royal patronage or imperial direction ; it is a question of the soul, of the conscience, the judgment, the moral imagination ; it belongs to the internal man : let every man be persuaded in his own mind. We owe our security, as we owe our tranquillity, to the Daniels of preceding ages ; other men laboured, and we are entering into their labours. Let us not forget "the dead but sceptred monarchs, who still rule our spirits from their urns." Civilisation was never wrought out by delicate, sensitive, self-preserving persons, who never gave any offence ; the highest civilisation has been wrought out and secured again and again by men who have turned the world upside down—revolutionary souls, children of flame, enthusiasts, persons who were accounted by a cold world as beside themselves. Thus was Paul characterised ; thus was Christ characterised : "He hath a devil," said the people ; "why hear ye him ? he worketh by Beelzebub ; he is the prince of the evil powers." If they have done these things to the Lord they will not spare the servant. What we need now for one little space is persecution. We have things too much our own way. We open the church in the middle of the day now. Thirty days' wandering in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, might take some of the polish off our piety ; but it would add inexpressibly to its energy.

Chapter vi. 14-23.

DANIEL IN THE DEN.

"Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed. Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords, that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting, neither were instruments of musick brought before him; and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel; and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me, forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God."

WE have seen in what position Darius was placed by the scheming men whose case we have perused: "The king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself." That was good, but it was too late. Is it possible for reflection to come too late in life? Do some men knock at the door when it cannot be opened? What a mystery is this above all mysteries: that men—reasoning, reflective, gifted men—should thus play the fool! If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness; if the reasoner that is in thee have taken to this folly, how profound, yea, possibly how incurable is this

insanity! What is it that has fallen within us—some little outside work, some squares of the trellis-work up which the vines climb? No, no; the fall—as we feel it, not as we are taught it; for teach a man anything, and he can contradict you, or argue against you, or fee himself to lie against you,—but the fall as we feel it is a total fall. We have all gone together: reason, imagination, conscience, will, understanding, judgment—describe the attributes and qualities of the mind as you will, yet there is the felt fact that we are the subjects of an awful apostasy. Would it were only taught to us in reading books! How then we could speak against it with vehemence, which, if lacking in argument, would be tremendous in impertinence. But it is in the heart; if our heart condemn us, why do we allow a perverted reason to indulge the licence of a loose tongue, and aggravate our fall by large effusions of impious senselessness? Let us take care lest our reflection come too late, lest our displeasure do but add to the agony felt in consequence of our sin. Hear the voice of nature, reason, experience, history, which calls us to halt, and think, and pray, and go home to tell in tears what we cannot tell in words.

The men who stood before Darius had, unfortunately for themselves, a case:—

“Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, **Know**, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed” (ver. 15).

They were constitutional persecutors. They were constitutional liars. Some men are nothing if not constitutional. They would die for a constitution; they dream of constitutional order: these men who are so addicted to constitutional precedent and usage could kill a man. That is the difficulty we always have to deal with. You cannot convert a scribe: with man this is impossible; with God all things are possible. Once let a man become the victim of the letter, and the case is hopeless. See how these men deport themselves: all for a law, nothing for a life; on the one side full of constitutional obedience, on the other without feeling in reference to a human soul, a brother's life; only shed man's blood, but keep the letter of the law. The great complaint we have to make against this in all ages and countries

is, that it has about it a taint of respectability. You cannot get at the scribe on account of the scroll which he holds up between you and him. He is not worth getting at. He has the law, the chapter, the verse, the letter; he has no genius of law, no spirit of liberty, no inspiration and enthusiasm of human nature. The thing that was given to him as a hint, a help, a temporary assistance, is pressed so as to become an excuse, if not a defence, in the matter of murder. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; the law was made for man, not man for the law. We must take care how we throw things out of proportion and perspective, how we overweight the one side or the other; let us see what it is that is really involved: if it is criminality, it must be put down; if it is a difference of judgment, if it is an exercise of conscience, then we must see what relation the law has to such spiritual or intellectual relationships and possessions and responsibilities.

What is God always doing? Setting law aside. That seems strange. Certainly, God must be strange. God's government must be immeasurable in its inner thought, in its outward relation; it must be under his hand; it must lie well within the sweep of his omnipotence. Why does God set law aside? For man's sake. Law could never turn aside from the punishment of sin; the law must have its pound of flesh. Law is stern, resolute, implacable. Certainly; it must be so. Law could never accommodate itself. If this universe were wholly a question of what we understand by law, forgiveness would be impossible. The man sinned; all the laws possible to our imagination cannot alter that fact. There is the stain; there is the wound; there is the black spot on the disc of ineffable purity: what hands may touch it, remove it? what catharism can cleanse with effectual detergency that black sin? Then comes into operation what we understand by the gospel. We cannot explain it, but God has put a new word into human speech; he has so used the word himself that we have become familiar with it; now we talk right eloquently about pardon, forgiveness, forgetfulness; now we speak of the miracle of God taking up our sin and casting it behind him. Law never did that. Herein is love, the greater law, the law that goes where mere statute and precept can never

enter. A mystery, certainly; of all mysteries the Cross is the culmination and the clouded glory. Let us never understand that the gospel is simple in the sense of having in it nothing profound, philosophical, rational, going deeper than all known philosophy and reason, and opening up a new kingdom of thought and a new universe of moral possibility. The gospel is simple in that a child can begin to take hold of it, but it is like its Origin and Author, infinite, eternal, requiring all the summer day of heaven to understand its beginning. When we see persons so very anxious about law we are partly surprised and superficially interested. They do not know what the law is in all the fulness of its meaning, and in all the possibilities of its application. That God could turn round and face a sinner with tears in the divine eyes is the impossibility of thought, but he did it. This is the gospel. Once wounded, insulted, dishonoured, disobeyed, what has law for man but that God should turn his back upon him and go externally from him? But there is a heart in the universe; there is a Father-Mother looking over all things, handling and directing all things, leaving doors open that prodigals may come home again in the dead of night, and making proposals that the veriest sinners may accept, and accepting may themselves live again. It is because we are lost in this thought that we begin to feel its possible reality and truthfulness. When we can measure God we shall no longer adore him; to know him without knowing him touches, inspires, sanctifies our reverence.

How had Daniel lived? He had so lived as to make a very distinct impression upon the minds of those who had observed him, and he had so lived as to give a marvellous impression respecting his religion:—"Now the king spake and said unto Daniel,"—with a choking voice, more man than king, more mother than father—"Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee." A beautiful sight when a heathen stands on tiptoe and just sees the dawn of the gospel throughout, just beholds the eyelids of the morning, the morning that comes with full explanations and great deliverances, the gospel that uses law and elevates upon it as upon a pedestal the evangel of God! How Daniel must have lived so to impress Darius! Up to this time Daniel has been more than chief of the magicians even in the heathen

imagination ; he has displayed "an excellent spirit" ; there has been moral beauty, there has been moral earnestness, in the man not seen in other persons ; Daniel has acquired a ghostly influence. Any mastery that you can explain you may outlive ; any preaching that you can account for is poor preaching ; any influence that has a beginning and an ending, a measurable and estimable quality and value, is a dying influence. Only the spirit lives ; only the spiritual is the immortal. Daniel had so lived as to exert a ghostly influence upon the conscience and imagination and whole feeling of the people. They could not understand him. Nor was he a young man ; yet he was getting younger as the years increased. There is no old age possible on earth to the good man. Such a man gets younger ; he is nearing the morning ; he is just about to wake. Old age ! shall we call threescore years and ten old ? The tree in the forest laughs at the foolish suggestion. Is a man a hundred years old ? He is an old man, but he is a young being. If we live and move and have our being in God, we grow Godward, youthward, summerward ; always throwing off some old self, and rising into some new manhood, and realising some larger inheritance. This is the spirit and this the power of true religion in the soul. Darius had no doubt about Daniel's faith. We do not know what Darius said except in the letter ; we should have heard how he said it, with what pathos and unction, how now he turned preacher and exhorted Daniel, as if with pre-Christian comfort, to hold himself steadfastly in God, for the lions of the forest were but the creatures of his power. It is touching to hear a heathen man's first prayer. He will not be very grammatical or precise, formal, or distinguished by coinciding with precedent ; yet what praying it is ! What life it takes out with it ! The whole heart throbs in every syllable. What beautiful preaching is the first preaching of a heathen man as we have it here !—"Thy God whom thou servest"—"servest continually" ; why, he has hit all the thoughts : he has got hold of the case as it was in its reality. "Thy God" : personal God ; as if all thine ; for so God treats each man, as if he were an only child, and lavishes his love upon him. "Whom thou servest," "servest continually" : here is service, obedience, faithfulness, steadfastness, continuity, persistence, perseverance ; a service without distraction, flaw, hesitation ; a concentrated worship.

What will the upshot be? Deliverance. Darius saw the working of that law. Truly man cannot serve God for nought. When Peter told the Lord that he had "left all" to follow him, such a torrent fell upon Peter as drowned him altogether, and never did he appear so pitiable a spectacle as when that deluge fell upon him: "Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." How Peter's poor "all" was lost in that cataract like a tiny pebble! He never mentioned the subject again. Blessed is he who makes a fool of himself only once. What impression are we making upon the heathen, upon observers, upon the Dariuses who are looking at us? Do they expect us to be delivered, honoured, crowned? Or are we so full of doubts and hesitations and controversies, and so busy resolutionising ourselves into orthodoxy, that the world cares nothing about us and thinks we might be poor picking even for the lions? What impression are we making as to our Christian faith? Do worldly people say, "You cannot hurt these Christians: if you smite them on the one cheek they turn the other; if you pour contempt upon their prayers they only pray more vehemently; and if for a moment they seem to be forsaken by their God he quickly follows up the forsakenness with everlasting kindness: you cannot hurt them, you cannot stop them, you cannot hunger them into submission; it is not in the power of thirst to make them cease their prayer; when the throat is dried up and they have no more power of speech, they will look the agony of their trust, and God will answer them as if they had spoken to him many words"? The Daniels of to-day are poor creatures. They are anxious about their orthodoxy; would walk miles to declare themselves orthodox; would not for the world sit next to an Agnostic, even in an omnibus, if they knew it: but what are they in spiritual regnancy, supreme force, real influence upon the world? Let us take the question to heart and wrestle with it when we have most power in prayer.

So Daniel's fate came upon him, and there was a point at

which there was nothing between him and destruction but God. It is well to be shut up with God and to God. Men begin to pray when the rock closes in upon them, and they can see no pathway through it or over it. Then the rock becomes an altar, and when the eyes are closed in prayer, a door is opened, and the rock becomes a highway. Have we been shut up to God? Have we ever been so poor that we had not one morsel of bread for the next hunger fit? Many Christians have been in that fix. But the bread has come. Have we ever been closeted with a supremely loved one after all the physicians have gone home, and there has been nothing between us and the last wrestle but God? Even when we have failed in that controversy, so far as physical relationship is concerned, there has stolen into the heart a consciousness of triumph, and we have stood over the dead dear one more than conqueror. To have been conqueror was good; but who could explain the words "more than conqueror"?—as if a thousand victories gathered themselves around the head like a divinely fashioned diadem! These are mysteries which we know of, to which we could testify, but which perhaps are sometimes at least better hidden in the heart, as fruit to eat in winter, as water to drink in desert lands.

When the king saw what happened he was "exceeding glad" for Daniel. He was glad that his mistake had proved itself to be such; that a mischievous plot had come to nothing. We know the meaning of this action in our own souls. We have lived to thank God that he turned a deaf ear to some prayers. We have had as much occasion to bless God for his denials as for his concessions and benefactions. We have lived to thank God that sometimes our best programme has been burned to ashes, and our strongest policy has been turned to confusion. Once we thought we could not do without it. God knew that we only wanted time in order to see the case in its proper lights and bearings, and then we should come back to him and say, Bless thee, loving Father, for saying "No" to us; if thou hadst given us our way at that time thou wouldst have slain us; we thank thee with full hearts that we did not go to that city, that we did not get our own policy assured to us as we desired it to be; we cannot thank thee sufficiently that thou didst forbid us to go

down the brink to pluck that tempting flower : we never should have returned again. Let us be quiet, patient, hopeful, trustful. It is very bitter at first not to have one's own way ; everything seems so simple, clear, reasonable : why should we not be permitted to realise our pleasure ? We cannot tell ; we wait ; and in a year or two we come back to say, God's love was shown in God's denial.

A wonderful chapter is all this. Here you have the power of numbers on the one side, and the power of one man on the other ; you see on the one hand the power of anger, on the other hand the power of holiness : here you see God known through a man. God comes to be known as the " God of Daniel." From the beginning he has incarnated himself in definite personalities. He was the God of Moses, the God of Hezekiah, the God of Daniel—far better than if we had found here endless polysyllables, as God eternal, infinite, majestic, immortal, immutable ; we might have lost ourselves in that grandeur : but when we read of the God of Daniel we realise an incarnation before the time.

What was it that was asked of Daniel ? That he would suspend his prayers for thirty days. Why not do it for so short a time ? Thirty days would soon be over ; then the people would be foiled, the law would be kept, the king would be preserved from doing a very cruel deed, and Daniel would be glorified in the sight of the kingdom. Only thirty days ! It is so we reason now. Only a signature, only a compromise, only a word ; it may be spoken by the lips, and not by the heart : only a vow, modified and weakened by a mental reservation. Of such an " only " Daniel knew nothing ; he was simple, frank, straightforward, honest through and through, because holy. Thirty days without prayer ! Nay, say thirty days without sight, without hearing, without food, without friendship, without communication with the outer world ; let all these combine in one agonising deprivation, and they do not touch the good man's meaning when he thinks of not speaking to God for thirty days. Why not have spoken to him in secret ? Because religion has a public aspect as well as a secret phase and relation. Why not have

closed the windows that looked towards Jerusalem and walked abroad and prayed in heart, looked a heathen and been a true worshipper? Because frankness, truthfulness, can have only one policy and one purpose; it cannot double itself, or so modify itself as to destroy its distinctive and immediate effect and influence. Daniel must pray as it were in form, by the appointed way. There are persons now who think they can be Christians at home; they need not go to church; they say they can read the Bible at home, and I say they cannot. The Bible is a book that is made to be read in public as well as in private. There are some portions you can never touch the meaning of till you read them in the great congregation; then by a touch human and divine the whole thing comes up before us in the amplitude, glory, and mystery of its meaning. There are those who think they can pray at home. They can only pray a little there; the great prayer is in the congregation, in the fellowship of prayer, in the communion of saints, in the realisation of the household of faith. Prayer at home we must have; reading at home we cannot do without; but the public aspect of these things is as important as the private. Daniel therefore must have his windows open. He must make his testimony and his declaration very simple and clear. If you are trying to win the worldling's applause by not going to church, but praying a good deal in secret, you are playing the fool; you are trying to do what is impossible to be done. You have no right to look a worldling, you have no title to exclude yourself from your Father's house: he does not call upon you to make for yourselves a hole in the rock where you will be hidden and unknown; he asks you to come to his holy mount; he loves to see his hosts gathered together; and over all voices there comes one sweet appeal, fit for Sabbath morning: "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, for ye belong to one another." All voices are required to make up the one voice, all tones to constitute the complete music. Do not give up your forms, your altars, your manner of testimony; abide by them, and God, who ruleth all, will accept the altar you have built—accept it by burning it with his own fire.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, when thou dost ask us great questions we can only answer, Thou knowest. Thou dost train us by asking us questions; thou dost challenge us, and there is no answer in our mind; we fall down before God and say, Thou knowest. We cannot follow the way of the Lord; as the heaven is high above the earth, so is the Lord's way above our way, and the Lord's thought above our thought. We will therefore stand before God, and say, Thou knowest; thy will be done: the Lord reigneth. We have come to thank thee for all thy succour and love; we have come to thank thee in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. We have all things and abound if we have Christ; there is no want to them that have the Cross. To that Cross do thou bring our love in willing and adoring consent; may it be the inspiration of our life, the object of our manhood, by which we are known; may we live in its spirit; may we exemplify its purpose. We have come to kiss the hand that has given us all we have. Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. There is no complaint in thy universe where there is obedience; there is no want to them that fear thee. Thou hast many ways in which thou dost sustain all life: it is not for us to say it must be so, or thus, or otherwise; it is for us to say, God's will be done. We cannot say this but for the grace of God; we know the words, but we cannot utter their spirit unless the Holy Ghost dwell within us. Good is the will of the Lord; hard is the will of the Lord; inscrutable is the will of the Lord: yet thou hast taught us to say willingly and lovingly, The will of the Lord be done. Hear us in our various pleas, petitions, thanksgivings, and adorations. Thou hast made us one, yet thou hast made us variously; behold us in our varied unity, in our united variety, and come to each as each may be able to receive thee. To some come as a light, for they have sat long in darkness, and they have brooded sorely in the night of desolation. Come to others like the summer in all its plentifulness, for they have suffered famine; they have not known sufficiency; they have desired to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, but their eyes have long been holden. Come to the churchyard of all and raise the dead; we would not that thou shouldst raise them in body, but that we should have them in our love evermore, a bright vision in the memory, a tender object in all the outgoing of the heart's deepest solicitude. The Lord look upon us in all our relations, and bless us according to our necessity. We pray always for broken hearts; there are broken hearts under laughter that is assumed; there are shattered lives that never tell the story of their ruin; there are souls that long for God, but dare not say so in the hearing of men. Thou knowest our ambitions, our plans, our purposes, and our desires; if it be for our soul's good, frustrate them all and burn them with unquenchable fire. Create in us thine own purpose, thou Holy Spirit; fashion us to thine own will, and use us to thine own ends. Take of the

things of Christ, and show them unto us; show them all, show them every day; they will be above the brightness of the sun in their glory, and at night-time they will put out all the stars. Blessed be the Christ of God, our Saviour and our hope; to him we give ourselves day by day; to him we would live, for him we would serve, and him we would see when this mortal shall put on immortality. Amen.

Chapter x. 21.

"There is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince."

THE TRUE MAJORITY.

MICHAEL was known amongst the ancient Jews as the angel or prince who had special charge of the nation of Israel. The very best Jewish writers concur in teaching that the name "Michael" is the same as the title "Messiah." It is held by them that the few passages in which he is referred to can be most satisfactorily explained on this supposition. The man speaking in the text was "a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz. His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude" (vers. 5, 6). This is the dazzling and nameless personage that has appealed to the religious imagination through all the known centuries of time. One day—not one of earth's cold, grey days, but a day of brighter cast—we shall see that Personage, and name him, and thank him for the tender veiling of a light that might have struck creation blind.

The text invites us to look at the astonishing fact that the speakers of truth have always been in a minority, and that the quality of that minority has given it the dignity and force of a majority. "There is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince." Granted that a statement is true, and surely there can be nothing more astonishing than that it should array against itself the majority of mankind. We might not hesitate to say, All beauty will be admired;—All excellence will be imitated;—All divinity will be adored. These would seem to be but commonplaces. No argument is needed to enforce them. You have but to state the transparent propositions, and the applauding world will accept them. Now this, which appears to

be so simple, and so certain, is contradicted by the almost unanimous verdict of history. Take, for example, the proposition—All beauty will be admired, or, All excellence will be imitated, or, All divinity will be adored. First of all, there is an intellectual difficulty, for the man who hears the proposition will instantly say, What is beauty? What is excellence? What is divinity? Thus the ground is changed from the practical to the metaphysical. Did any two opinions ever exactly coincide and constitute a perfect agreement? The moment we come into the region of opinion we come into the region of difference. Opinions always separate men sooner or later; even when they appear to unite men it is upon a very temporary and fickle basis. There may be a large agreement, or almost agreement, or practical agreement, or agreement for purposes of expedience and convenience; but real and absolute agreement in every point and sentiment would seem to be impossible,—may we not say happily?—impossible, having in view the education of the world on a large and complete scale. But where the intellectual difficulty may be overcome the moral difficulty is most stubborn. For example, admiration ought to mean imitation, imitation ought to mean discipline, and adoration ought to be translated into self-suppression. To say that you admire beauty, and yet to remain unbeautiful, is more than a contradiction in terms—it is a practical and reprehensible irony. To profess to reverence a certain quality of character, and yet to live under conditions which minister to a precisely opposite quality of being, is surely an unintelligible and practical blasphemy. Then there is a social difficulty, which ought to be taken into account in our estimate of this whole matter. To break away, to be singular, to stand aloof, to speak an unpopular language, who does not shrink from such conspicuousness? and who does not call such cowardice modesty? The most astounding fact is that men can look on beauty and think evil thoughts in its sacred presence; men can go from the holy atmosphere of the altar and drink the poison-cups of perdition; men can bow their heads as if in prayer, and raise them as if they had been scorched by baleful fire. This is the mystery of human nature! This is the enigma of the heart! This is the infinite perplexity which needed the equal mystery of the Cross to counter-work its subtlety and undo its fearful shame!

There stands, then, the appalling, and as one would suppose the unintelligible, fact that men may see the good and yet pursue the wrong, and that if right and wrong were put to the vote to-day the cause of the wrong would be carried by an overwhelming numerical majority. When the religions of the world are tabulated, and the nominal adherents of each religion are set forth in arithmetical forms, it is found that Jesus Christ is at the foot of the list! This is simply incredible from the point of view of imagination. This would indeed seem to be a disproof of the Messiahship of Christ, for surely none could come from heaven, and work the right miracles, and speak the right words, without instantly touching the heart of the world and securing the allegiance of all ages and lands. All this would constitute an almost insuperable difficulty in the way of Christianity did we not see the selfsame thing in relation to other things which are divested of all theological mystery. Take the case of temperance, cleanliness, self-culture, honesty, or any of the common and palpable virtues, and it will be found that the same argument relates to them, so that if the argument proves anything in regard to Christianity it proves too much; for it would destroy the very idea that virtue is possible, and that society can be organised upon lines of righteousness and truthfulness. As a matter of fact, it would probably be found that the majority of men are to-day on the side of false-speaking. Even when they speak the truth in considerable degree, they may mar the whole statement by some hidden falsehood of thought, which never comes into the openness of audible speech. If, therefore, we give up Christianity on the ground of majorities of a numerical kind, we must give up every namable virtue; but as we cannot give up every namable virtue, neither can we give up Christianity on the mere ground that the overwhelming majority of mankind are opposed to the Cross of Christ. What, then, is our consolation? what is our hope?

Notwithstanding the majority of evil as to mere number, the quality of the minority has outweighed its influence, and given assurance of its ultimate extinction. "There is none that holdeth with me in all these things, but Michael your prince." This is a grand "but." It points indeed to the true majority, a majority not of number, and not for the present, but a majority of quality

and a majority for the future. It was upon this principle that the Apostles always operated, and by this doctrine they were continually and abundantly sustained. Even in the darkest days they comforted themselves with the assurance—"He that is with us is more than all that can be against us." "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." The Apostle Paul knew that he was in a numerical minority, yet he lifted up his voice in passionate appeal, saying, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." The Apostle knew that the present was full of grievousness and bitter disappointment, yet he knew also that the present was quite measurable, but for a few moments or years at the most, and would soon pass away, never more to be remembered. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The Church cannot fail, simply because Christ cannot fail. "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." The Apostles and Christian teachers of all ages have comforted themselves in all weakness and fear by knowing that the triumph of Jesus Christ was assured. "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." When Jesus Christ "ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." He is our Leader, and in him we have all things pertaining to life and godliness, and in him is laid up the certainty of our victory as followers of the Cross. "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." "He was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God." "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, wherefore God hath also highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name." When the seer, in the book of Revelation, beheld the opened heavens, he saw One there on whose head

were many crowns; yea, he saw the Lamb, and was assured that he was the Lord of lords and the King of kings.

All this may seem to be of the nature of religious fancy; but here again we establish ourselves by analogies of a historical kind, which cannot be denied, so patent are they, and so overwhelming in the evidence by which they are sustained. Suppose a young composer of music should say, The world has rejected my compositions; there is no sale for my books; there is only one man who has uttered a word of promise or comfort to me: there is none that stands by me in all these endeavours but Beethoven! What a noble "but"! The very singularity of the exception creates a majority in the young man's favour. Where Beethoven has contributed his signature it is of but little consequence what the rest of the world may have done as to the merit of the music which has been submitted for criticism. Suppose a young painter should say, There is none that supports me in the view I have taken of my art but one; all my fellow-students are against me; all rivals hold me in contempt; the public is blind to any merits which I may persuade myself I possess: there is none that holdeth with me in this matter of art but Raphael! Here again is the majority. Hamlet tells us that the praise of such an one is worth a whole theatre of others. This is the great principle on which we are now insisting, namely, that there may be a majority of quality when there is not a majority of number. All these are but dim suggestions as to the glory of the text; they are as if we were lighting a lamp to show the width of the firmament. The speech of the Church is—I know that I am despised and rejected; I know that my bodily presence is often weak and my speech contemptible; I know that I have but little chance of being heard amid the clamour and fury of an excited world: there is none that holdeth with me in this great plan of evangelisation and redemption but the Son of God, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. This also is the speech of truth: I am thrown down in the streets; I am not allowed to make my statement; all my pleas are carried away in a whirlwind of disapprobation and contempt: there is none that thinketh with me in this matter of reality, equity, probity, and innermost pureness of heart, but the living God, the Eternal Father, the almighty Jehovah.

But what a glorious majority is this supposed minority! "If God be for us, who can be against us?" There can be no permanent success against truth, wherever you find it—truth in building; truth in promises; truth in prediction; truth in friendship. At last the truth prevails over all things, and stands in glory when night has overwhelmed every form and claim of falsehood. In calling men to unite themselves to the Christian cause I call them to enlist with the majority. It cannot be denied that the majority of number has great fascination for minds which are but partially enlightened or educated. It is easy to go with a multitude to do evil, and it is easy to sanctify the deeds of the multitude by the sophistical proverb that the voice of the people is the voice of God. A perverted proverb may do more harm to the opening minds of a generation than could be done by the most elaborate processes of reasoning. Lay it down as a fundamental principle that right must prevail, that truth must conquer, simply because God lives and his throne is established in the universe. Appearances are against us. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it"; "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." Here we come upon the terms "few" and "many"—terms of mere number. But those who enter by the strait gate follow the Son of God; their strength is in his omnipotence, and their conquest is assured by his triumph. O Church of the living God, few in number, small in resources, contemned amongst the organisations of the earth, comfort thyself with the truth that thy majority is one of quality, and that in the long run quality prevails over number, subduing all things to itself and permeating all things with the richness and vitality of its own nature. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God." "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem." The day of wickedness, however gorgeous and dazzling may have been its apparent triumphs, hastens to darkness and night; the day of goodness hastens on to still fuller glory, and banishes night, and enlarges itself into the splendours of eternity.

PRAYER.

WE will sing aloud of thy goodness, our Father in heaven, made known unto us by thy Son Jesus Christ our Saviour. We cannot deny thee; our own hearts would cry out aloud against us if we did not name thee aloud in adoring psalms. Thou hast made us, and not we ourselves; we have nothing that we have not received; yet we feel within us the movement of thy Spirit, aspirations not of our own creating, desires which testify to a ministry of which thou alone art the Author. We are not satisfied with time and sense; we feel that when we have thrown our arms around all possible acquisitions we have nothing but poverty; we are only satisfied with the living God. Knowing thee, loving thee, as thou art revealed in the Cross of Christ, we have all things, yea we abound in riches, and we call the riches of Christ unsearchable. We bless thee for many an experience of ecstasy which has not ended in itself, but which has enabled us to come down to the practical work and the actual suffering of life to do the one and endure the other with heroic strength, with tender patience. These are the gifts of the Holy Ghost: strength is thine, patience is the miracle which thou dost work in the impetuous human will; we magnify thee, we glorify thee, for any little strength we have ever had, for any little patience we have ever shown. Increase thy work within us; we feel how much thou hast yet to possess of this wondrous nature with which thou hast blessed us; thou hast not wholly conquered all the land of our life; the enemy is lurking behind many a fence: the foe is looking on and is ready to spring if we relax our attention for one moment. Lord, save us, or we perish; Christ of Calvary, die for us every day, and live for us again in our holiest consciousness, or we shall lose what little faith we have and fall into eternal darkness. Having begun a good work in us, thou wilt not abandon it; thou dost know the end from the beginning; surely thou wilt not throw thy comforts away upon our souls; they are meant for nourishment and stimulus and strengthening; may we receive them according to their purpose, and magnify God by their results in our life. Oh that we had hearkened unto thy law, and that we had kept thy commandments! for then our peace had flowed like a river, and our righteousness had been as the waves of the sea. Yet how little we are, and poor and mean; how narrow our conceptions; how wanting in courage and valour and sacrifice all the life we lead; how we seek ourselves rather than humanity; how we follow the instinct of our own vanity rather than carry the heavy cross to Golgotha that we may die upon it. Is there no release from this prison? Is there no liberty for us poor captives? Or are we to blame ourselves for the dungeons in which we live? Ought we not to charge back upon our own soul the accusation of guilt on this account? Verily we have enclosed our-

selves in little places and within narrow conceptions; thou art not the Creator of these prisons, or the Author of these poor dim twilight views; thou art the God of the universe, the Lord of liberty. If we now confess our sins, wilt thou not forgive us our sins? If we now cry for larger spaces and fuller spiritual delights, wilt thou say "No" to the petitions thou hast inspired? Thou canst not deny thyself; thou wilt not leave thine own prayers without answer: Lord, make the prayer, and the prayer shall be its own reply. Comfort us according to the necessity of our life. Darkness falls suddenly upon us; thou dost not give us the advantage of twilight; darkness falls upon noon like a sudden judgment, and the shining of the sun is cut off in the midst of its strength: others thou dost lead by a long weary way down to the cold valley; we know not how thou dost establish this difference, but we behold it with our eyes, and wonder is awakened within us when we see the swift-falling sword and see the long-continued agony. Help us to believe that all things work together for good to them that love God; help us to cast ourselves wholly upon thee, and say, The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good in his sight; he taketh one from my side to-day, and he will call for me to-morrow, and on the third day we shall forget the period of separation. Speak comfortably to thy people, and add to the mystery of redemption the mystery of consolation. Pity us in our weakness and manifold littleness. Thou knowest how our faces burn with shame when we are alone with thee. Pardon our guilt; it would darken every line of the sky if from the Cross of Christ thy Son there did not flame forth a light above the brightness of the sun. Amen.

Chapter xii. 8-13.

"And I heard, but I understood not; then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days. But go thou thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days."

THE RESERVATIONS OF GOD.

WHO can be so perplexing as God? "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." We think we have got an answer when we have only got a reply. There is a great sound of thunder in the air, but what it all means not even Daniel can tell. Yet the thunder is very useful; the thunder is the minister of God. There are mountains that have never been climbed; if they had been climbed they had been vulgarised. The pin-

nacles of the church were not made to be stood upon. Daniel asked a question and received all these words in reply, and no man knows what they mean. There they are, and they are useful every one of them. Who would be without the mystery? Who would have an earth without a sky? It would not be worth having. Yet the earth is under foot and comparatively manageable; we can dig it, plough it, put stones into it with a view of putting up a house, which the earth will always try to cast out, for the earth does not like masonry: the earth does not like to be violated. But the sky no man has touched. The sky is the best part of us. We get all our vegetables out of the sky, though we think we do not. All the flowers are out of the sun, though we think we planted them. So easily may we be misled by half-truths and by mere aspects of facts! Yet we cannot do without astronomy. We may have it as a science, it is not every mouth that can pronounce long words, but we must have it as a sovereign and gracious effect.

Daniel was bewildered. He said, "And I heard, but I understood not." That is exactly our position to-day. Not one inch has the world advanced since that time in the matter of understanding, though it has published many books. Who ever knew a second edition of a book that was not amended? Why did not the man publish the second edition first by waiting until he had amended his own manuscript? It is thus, however, that God trains us and educates us. We are all trained up through our mistakes. Blessed is the man who knows the number of his mistakes, and who uses them for educational purposes. To-day is a second edition of yesterday, with emendation, if we be wise. We can publish to-day, just as we published yesterday, without amending a line, but therein we shall do nothing but establish our own folly. It is not necessary to understand in order to profit. Many persons will insist that unless they understand a matter they cannot be edified by it. I question, then, whether they are ever edified at all. We want both sides: the simple and the complex, the earth that can be ploughed and the heaven that can only be reverently looked at through a telescope. Herein we do great injustice to persons who have not much letter-learning. There is a learning of the soul; there is a spiritual sensitiveness

that amounts to genius. There are children who understand more of the sanctuary than grey-haired fathers do. Children often see things first. They do not see them mechanically and artificially, and they do not publish a plan or map of them; but you relate your originalities to the child, and if they are real the child saw them quite one week before you ever dreamed of them,—saw them in another way, its own dear, sweet, beautiful, and useful way. Persons think that if they understand religion they have got it. But no man can understand religion. Religion was never meant to be understood; it was meant to be felt, a secret, subtle, infinite fire, a climate, not an overcoat. When your life laughs with new joy, springs up to do heroic service, goes out to seek opportunities of doing good, then know that God is at work in your souls, and never mind what you understand. You know perfectly well you never had an understanding about anything that you have not modified or obliterated. What you want is Pentecostal fire, divine emotion; not silly, shallow sentiment, but deep, grand emotion that will express itself in discipline and in service.

What a noble counsellor this prophet will make! He tells us with great frankness and brotherly-kindness that what he is talking about he does not understand. That is the teacher we have been seeking all our lives. We want the learned professor who will sometimes denude himself of his spectacles and come before us and say, "Children, you know as much as I do about this, and that is nothing at all." I could trust that man. The religion of the Bible is not some masonry that can only be understood by scribes who are eighty years of age, and who have passed through regulation courses. The religion of the Bible is an inspiration, something that is insubstantial, but that somehow gets hold of the life, and leads it out into the fresh air and the sunshine, and sends it back into the market-place and the field to buy and sell honestly and to toil faithfully for harvest. A pulpit that understands is a pulpit to be dreaded. Religion in some of its forms has been well-nigh wrecked by creed-makers and catechism-mongers, who have actually parcelled out the whole universe into paragraphs and called one of them "one," another "two," and another "three," and on to fifty. How much better

these men had been employed in a day's good ploughing, in six months with hard labour! Parcel out your little earth if you like, and sell it in lots and leases and freeholds and copyholds, "with the said messages"; but let the sky alone.

Many persons have arisen in the evolution of the ages who could have told Daniel what he did not understand. The man himself who wrote the book said he knew nothing about it, but persons who were born eighteen hundred years afterwards could now raise up Daniel and tell him what a fool he was not to have seen it at the time. All these days have been calculated; nearly every great man has been discovered by name in these emblematic numbers. All the Napoleons and Cæsars and Leos of creation have been imaged by these mystical numerals. One might have believed in the interpretation if they had referred to one man only, and if every age had succeeded every other age in confirming the discovery; but when numerals can be so twisted as to bring in even you and me, as well as Hannibal, Julius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate, the Pope, and the last Prime Minister, it seems to me that numbers which are so infinitely accommodating ruin themselves by their generality. Let us take our stand by Daniel and hear without understanding.

What was the direction given to Daniel? It was a divine direction—"Go thy way, Daniel"; in other words, Be at rest. The man was not ordered off like a trespassing dog; he was quieted like a troubled heart: Sit down, be at rest, be quiet, wait, expect. That is God's answer to us all in our eagerness and our impatience. Daniel wanted to know "the end." That is precisely what we may not know. We have nothing to do with the end; what we have to do with is the beginning and the middle, and every intermediate point in the series of points. The end hath God reserved unto himself. All that he has told us about it is that it shall be well. Will he bring all the crooked lines quite straight? He says he will. But will he get such hold of the devil as to make him part of the furniture of the universe in some way or other? Yes. And hell? He will work it up into jewellery. And night? He will drive it away like a bird of evil omen, and no other world will receive the unwelcome

visitor; it shall be a wanderer for ever. When? It is not for us to know. How? Wait; be patient; be calm; be useful. The Lord has never yet discovered the end to his servants. What end can there be in God that is not another beginning? Yet what we would call the end because of our own finiteness shall burn like a midday sun, and no cloud shall violate that sanctuary of light. God is always keeping us back, reining us in, telling us that quietness is our strength and silence is our confidence. We think we could go ten miles an hour faster, but God knows we should drive ourselves into destruction: therefore he says to us, Stand; be quiet; rest. How wise it is! When we have taken the advice and really rest, into what a noble temper we come! Then no man may hear our words of self-chastisement: we blister ourselves with reproach; we say we will never do so again, but always be patient and waiting and watchful; then in one little hour we catch ourselves just as eager and impatient as ever, wanting to knock upon doors upon which there is printed in letters bright as stars, "Private." Why can we not let these doors alone?

Yet God will give some little light after all. There shall be cross-beams that shall vex the eyes and yet shall throw a lurid elucidation upon the mad processes of earth's tumult:—"Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand." God will get something out of this battle; he will get the "many." How shall we know that we are God's? When we are "purified, and made white, and tried." But why shall the wise understand—not understand in the intellectual sense, but understand in that large moral sense which can say with frank definiteness and grateful love, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him"? I cannot explain it, but I feel it; I do not know God in my head, but I know God in my heart; I understand the purpose, not the end. "The wicked shall do wickedly"; that is to say, the wicked shall become worse and worse. The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day; and the path of the wicked is as the growing night, deepening in darkness until the darkness can be felt. It is one of two things

with us: we are either growing up or growing down. We cannot remain at the same point. We say we are no worse than we were ten years ago; but if we are not better we are worse. We cannot grow better by mere abstinence, negation, by endeavouring not to do anything. The man could not increase his one talent by hiding it in the earth; nor can we stand still in character. The wicked man becomes worse and worse, until hell is too good for him. There is nothing outside a man, even though it be called perdition, that can be half so bad as the man himself. Oh the heart! bottomless pit! Oh the heart! an opening heaven Which is it in our case?

Has the devil no season of triumph? Has he no jubilee? He has delusions and illusions which he tries to make into a kind of jubilee:—"And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up." There is therefore a temporary triumph. It shall come to pass that somehow, by door or window, the enemy shall get into the sanctuary and put out the altar fire; and there shall be nothing on the altar but white ashes. Somehow an evil power shall get hold of legislatures and nations and families, "and the abomination that maketh desolate"—a grim, horrible, ghastly figure—"shall be set up" as if for worship. How is it that God sometimes stands quite aside that the devil may have one hour's triumph? "I heard, but I understood not." The devil has his day; there are times when everything is loosened, when the very foundations are out of course, and when there is no building anything with any hope of duration. What then? Blessed is he that waiteth. The "days," whatever may be their mystic significance, are a number. Is the number a thousand two hundred and ninety? So be it; a child could write that set of figures. The figures may be four or five, yet they amount merely to a breath, a flash of the eye, a wave of the hand, and the five-and-thirtieth day drops into nothingness and is forgotten. Be not afraid of anything that measures itself by days. The Christians were to be handed over, according to the apocalyptic statement, for ten days. Be not afraid of anything that was made in days. In six days the Lord finished the heavens and the earth, and they are set up for burning; they are nothing; they are a framework; we

shall hear them go off in a crackling fire, countless red lurid sparks; what we call the heavens and the earth have gone back to their primordial mist. The heavens shall pass away with a great noise. They were made in days. What then is our security, and what is our rest? Eternity, that which hath no beginning and no end, only continuance. Blessed is he who is resting in the pavilion of eternity.

What is to become of the inquiring Daniels? They are to go their way "till the end." Daniel, thou shalt have something; thou hast listened to all this strange weird music, and canst make nothing of it; it was not intended that thou shouldst make much meaning out of all this tumult of words and figures, and yet thou art a better man for having heard it all; thou hast a roomier nature, a keener fancy, a hotter imagination, and a larger life. We are the better for having stood upon the unpolluted mountain, for having breathed the higher air; we are the better for every great sight we have lovingly looked upon. Every man is the richer if he has looked upon colour with an enlightened eye. There is no man so bad as he was since he saw the primrose and kissed it. There was so much in it—banished winter, melted ice, released forces, resurrection, liberty, possible heaven. When he kissed that little harbinger of the summer he parted with some of the pollution that was upon his lips. "Thou shalt . . . stand in thy lot"—a term taken from the division of the lots in old Israel. Every tribe had its lot; every prophet shall have his lot; every good soul shall have its little garden. There is land enough in God's paradise. Here we have had but enough to lay our dead bones in, but at the end each of us shall have a little strip of garden and right of entrance into the whole paradise of God. I lay more stress upon that right of entrance than merely upon my own little slip; I like to have the little cut of greensward and the few coloured daisies growing around its hedge, but to have right of entrance into God's paradise, God's palace-park, all the land—that is the portion of them that trust.

What then have we to do? We have to do three things. **First**, we have to attend to the practical. Many men have been

trying to make out the meaning of the twelve hundred and ninety days who have never kept one of the commandments. There are empirics and adventurers now who are publishing placards calling upon the unwary public to come and hear the meaning of the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days who never loved an enemy and never helped a friend. If we are to understand the Apocalypse we must first keep the commandments. If we would enter heaven we must keep the commandments first. Do the little which you do know. "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" O thou foolish soul, trying to make out the meaning of the twelve hundred and ninety days, and forgetting to pay the wages of the hireling, forgetting to cool the brow of fever! Then, secondly, we are not to deny the mysterious. The Bible will always be the most mysterious of books. Why shall it be always the most mysterious of writings? Because it contains God. No man can find out the Almighty unto perfection. He cannot be searched or comprehended or weighed in a balance or set forth in words and figures. So long as the Bible tabernacles God it will be an awful sanctuary. Then, in the third place, we have to learn patience. Personally, I am waiting for God's comment upon God's words. There are many persons who have handled the Bible indiscreetly. They have been keen in finding discrepancies and contradictions; they have busied themselves about signatures; they have asked whether Moses signed this, and David signed that, and Daniel signed the other; and they have got up a *post hoc* case in favour of the Bible. On the whole they have come to think that possibly bits of it may be inspired. I have not reached any such conclusion. All I know of it in the matter of conduct, and elevation of soul, and prospect of salvation, is inspired enough for me; and as for the parts I do not understand, I am waiting, and perhaps when God comes to read it to me I shall find that not God, but the critics have been wrong.

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