

THE  
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE  
VERY REV. H. D. M. SPENCE, D.D.,  
DEAN OF GLOUCESTER;

AND BY THE  
REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

WITH  
INTRODUCTIONS

BY THE  
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*NEW EDITION.*

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

1906

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

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## E Z R A.

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REV. W. CLARKSON, B.A.;    REV. J. S. EXELL

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# E Z R A.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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### § 1. SUBJECT OF THE BOOK.

THE Book of Ezra is a work of so simple a character as scarcely to require an "Introduction." It is a plain and straightforward account of one of the most important events in Jewish history—the return of the people of God from the Babylonian captivity. This return had two stages. It commenced under Zerubbabel, the lineal descendant of the kings of Judah, in the first year of Cyrus the Great in Babylon, which was B.C. 538; and it was continued, and in a certain sense completed, under Ezra, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, which was B.C. 458. The Book contains an account of both these periods, and is thus, primarily, divisible into two portions—the history of the first, and the history of the second return. The former occupies the first six, the latter the last four chapters. A close harmony may be observed between the two narratives. The origin of the movement in either case is traced up to a sentiment of goodwill in the mind of the reigning Persian monarch; the sentiment gives birth to a decree, which is recited at length; then a commission to conduct the captives back to their own land issues; the number of those who returned, and the names of the leading men, are given; the exact weight of the sacred vessels which the exiles brought back on each occasion is put on record, and the exact number and character of the offerings which they severally made to the God of Israel. The history is also carried on in either case to the main result which followed the return. And here again there is a parallelism. On the first occasion the zeal of the exiles raised up with difficulty, and after much opposition, the material church of God—the temple—which the Chaldeans had destroyed; on the second, they raised up and restored to its pristine glory the spiritual Church, or congregation of the people of Israel, which had sunk into a low and miserable condition through the influence of the neighbouring heathen. As history does not ever exactly repeat itself, there is of course much diversity combined with this resemblance. The rebuilding of the temple occupied a long term of years; the religious reformation was accomplished in a few months. The one was the work of the established civil ruler; the other of a mere scribe and priest, holding a temporary commission. To effect the one it

was necessary to struggle with adversaries, and make appeals to the Persian king ; prayer was the means by which the other was brought about, and a single appeal to the King of heaven sufficed.

## § 2. AUTHORSHIP.

It is maintained by many that the Book of *Ezra* is the work of several different hands, and that such unity as it possesses has been given to it by a compiler. The compiler is by some believed to have been *Ezra*, by others an unknown Jew contemporary with him. This latter theory rests upon the fact of the curious transitions from the third to the first person, and back, which occur in the later chapters (*Ezra* vii. 28 ; x. 1). *Ezra*, it is thought, would have kept to one person or the other ; and, as the parts where the first person is used are manifestly his, those where he is spoken of in the third person (ch. vii. 1—26 ; and x.) are ascribed to a different hand. In the earlier portion of the Book it is supposed that different styles may be traced ; and here some have even ventured to name the authors of certain chapters.\* But it may be questioned whether these views do not spring from over-refinement, and assume a keenness of critical discernment which cannot be claimed without arrogance. The simple view, that *Ezra*, who is admitted to have written at least one section, really composed the whole, using for the most part his own words, but in places inserting documents, is to the full as tenable as any other hypothesis. The general harmony of the whole Book already noticed, and the real uniformity of its style, are in favour of this view. The objection from the changes of person is of no great importance, changes of this kind often occurring in works admitted to be the production of a single writer, as in *Thucydides* and in *Daniel*. Moreover, tradition ascribes the whole Book to *Ezra* ; and if *Ezra* wrote *Chronicles*, which is the view of many critics, then the connection of the Book with *Chronicles* will be an additional argument in favour of *Ezra's* authorship.

## § 3. DATE.

The last event recorded in the Book of *Ezra* is the reformation of religion effected through *Ezra's* influence in the spring of B.C. 457, the year after his arrival at Jerusalem. The date of B.C. 457 is therefore the earliest that can be assigned to it. It may have been written a year or a few years subsequently, but can scarcely be given a later date than B.C. 444, the year of *Nehemiah's* arrival ; since, if that event had taken place when the author wrote, he would almost certainly have mentioned it.

## § 4. GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE WORK.

"*Ezra*," as already observed, is a history, and a very simple history. No book of Scripture has fewer difficulties or fewer obscurities. There is no miracle

\* Bishop A. Hervey assigns the first chapter to *Daniel*, the second to *Zechariah*, and chs. iii.—vi. to *Haggai* ('*Dictionary of the Bible*,' vol. i. p. 607).

recorded in it, and hence its historical truth is admitted almost universally. The language closely resembles that of other Books of Scripture written about the same time, as Chronicles, Daniel, and Haggai. Like Daniel, it is written partly in Hebrew, partly in Chaldee, the latter being the form which Hebrew had assumed during the captivity. Like the same Book, Chronicles, and Esther, it contains a number of Persian words, as was natural at a time when Judæa was a province of Persia. The tone of the writing is level and uniform, never sinking into the familiar, and only in one place (ch. ix. 6—15) rising to eloquence. Very little that is directly didactic occurs in it: the writer tells his story as plainly as he can, and leaves his story to teach its own lessons. Once only (ch. vii. 27, 28) does he interrupt his narrative with a burst of gratitude and devotion, as he thinks of the goodness of God in putting good resolves into the heart of a Persian king, and in making him (Ezra) the instrument of carrying these out. Apart from this, he simply narrates facts, placing before us, briefly but clearly, the circumstances of the two returns, and the events immediately following them. It is remarkable that, instead of making his history continuous, he passes over, absolutely without notice, an interval of nearly sixty years, which is the space of time intervening between his sixth and his seventh chapters. We may perhaps conclude from this that from the time of the dedication of Zerubbabel's temple (B.C. 516) to the mission of Ezra (B.C. 458), the history of the Palestinian Jews was a blank; which may well be, since during the whole of the period they were submissive and attached subjects of the Persian empire.

#### § 5. POSITION AND CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR.

The only facts which are certainly known to us of Ezra are those recorded in his own Book and in the Book of Nehemiah. From these works it appears—

1. That he was a priest, a descendant of Eleazar, the son of Aaron (ch. vii. 5).
2. That he belonged to that branch of Eleazar's family which had recently furnished the high priests, being descended from Hilki'ah, high priest in the reign of Josiah (2 Kings xxiii. 4), and from Seraiah, high priest at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (*ibid.* xxv. 18).
3. That he was a "scribe," or teacher, interpreter, and copier of the law, one who made the law of Moses his main study, and the teaching and expounding of it his chief practical work.
4. That, being resident at Babylon, one of the Persian capitals, and well known to the king, Artaxerxes (Longimanus), he requested (ch. vii. 6) and obtained permission from the king to visit Jerusalem, and was allowed to carry with him all those of Israelite extraction who liked to take the opportunity of returning to their own land (*ibid.* ver. 13); various privileges were granted to him (*ibid.* vers. 16—26), and a commission issued giving him supreme authority over Judæa for a time. He accordingly quitted Babylon in B.C. 458, the seventh year of Artaxerxes (*ibid.* ver. 8), accompanied by a band of about 1800 men (ch. viii. 3—14) with their families (*ibid.* ver. 21), and reached Jerusalem after a journey of

four months (ch. vii. 9). His authority was recognized; and after depositing in the temple a number of sacred vessels which Artaxerxes had intrusted to his care, and making numerous offerings (ch. viii. 35), he effected a reformation of religion, inducing all those Israelites who had married heathen wives, and become entangled in the abominations of heathen idolatry, to put their wives away (ch. x. 16—44), and return to the pure worship of Jehovah. He then, it is probable, returned to Babylon. Afterwards, in B.C. 444, he is again found at Jerusalem (Neh. viii. 1), occupying a position secondary to that of Nehemiah the governor (*ibid.* ver. 9)—a position purely ecclesiastical, in which, as scribe and priest, he teaches, blesses, and directs the devotions of the people. Here he continues till the dedication of the wall (B.C. 431), when he takes a leading part in the solemn procession, or perambulation of the wall (*ibid.* xii. 36), which was a principal feature of the ceremony. At this point the Scriptural notices terminate. Ezra is not said to have been concerned in the religious reformation of Nehemiah—one in some respects so like his own—whereof we have an account in Nehemiah's last chapter; and the probability would seem to be that he had died, or quitted Jerusalem, previously to it. Jewish tradition adds to this account various particulars, which would be of the utmost interest if we could rely on them. 1. Ezra is said to have instituted the "Great Synagogue," and to have been its first president. 2. He is declared to have settled the Canon of the Jewish Scriptures, and to have re-edited the whole of them, making additions and alterations under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and at the same time forming the arrangement into the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa, which obtains among the Jews to the present day. 3. He is said to have begun the practice of building synagogues in the Jewish provincial towns, and to have instituted the synagogue service, which seems certainly to have been unknown to the Jews before the captivity. Finally, he is reported to have lived to a good old age, and to have died—on his way from Jerusalem to the court of Artaxerxes—at Samarah, on the Lower Tigris, where his tomb was shown in the time of Benjamin of Tudela. What historical basis these traditions rest upon it is impossible to say. As we find no trace of the "Great Synagogue" either in Ezra or in Nehemiah, its institution by Ezra is scarcely probable. Even less weight belongs to the statement that he finally settled the Canon, since Nehemiah probably, and Malachi certainly, wrote their works after his decease. On the other hand, it is anteriorly probable that some priest learned in the law collected and re-edited the sacred Books on the return from the captivity, and the tradition that Ezra did so is remarkably in accordance with what is said of him, both in his own Book and in that of Nehemiah, as, that he was "a ready scribe in the law of Moses" (Ezra vii. 6), "a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel" (*ibid.* ver. 11), and that he "had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (*ibid.* ver. 10). With regard to the institution of synagogues, there is no evidence; but perhaps it is most probable that they arose in the early

Maccabee period, when the temple had been defiled, and Jerusalem was in the hands of the Syrians. Ezra's death and burial at Samarah has nothing about it that is improbable; but it is curious, that while the tombs of Jonah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are still shown in Mesopotamia, that of Ezra has passed into oblivion.

The personal character of Ezra stands out in the narrative, both of "Ezra" and "Nehemiah," as that of a thoroughly earnest, God-fearing, and man-loving man, and is without speck or flaw. Not, of course, that he was really perfect; but his defects are unnoticed. In his indefatigable activity as a teacher, in his deep sense of dependence upon God, in his combination of horror at sin with pity for the sinner, he reminds us of St. Paul, while in the depth of his self-humiliation on account of the transgressions of others he recalls the utterances of Daniel. As a servant of the Persian king, he so approves himself to his master as to be singled out for the high trust of an important commission. In executing that commission he exhibits devotion, trust in God, honourable anxiety to discharge his duties with exactitude, and a spirit of prayer and self-mortification that cannot be too highly commended. As supreme governor of Judæa, he is prompt and decided in taking the measures necessary to purify the Jewish community, while he abstains from all arbitrary acts, persuades rather than commands, and effects his purpose with the good will and hearty acquiescence of all classes. Placed in a subordinate position under Nehemiah after having held the entire direction of affairs, he shows no jealousy or discontent, but carries out with zeal the designs of his civil superior, is active within his own sphere, and does good service to the nation. Simple, candid, devout, sympathetic, full of energy, unselfish, patriotic, never weary in well doing, he occupied a most important position at a most important time, and was a second founder of the Jewish state. Eminent alike as a civil governor, as an ecclesiastical administrator, and as a historian, he left behind him a reputation among the Jews inferior only to that of Moses; and the traditions which cluster about his name, even if they had no other value, would at any rate mark the high esteem in which his abilities and character were held by his countrymen.

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#### LITERATURE OF EZRA.

Ezra, so far as the present writer is aware, has not been made the subject of any special work. Bertheau has, however, written a comment, which is valuable, on the three Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. General 'Commentaries on the Old Testament,' and 'Introductions to the Old Testament,' have necessarily treated of it. The best of these, so far as Ezra is concerned, are the 'Speaker's Commentary' and the 'Introductions' of Hävernicks and Dr. Davidson. There is an important article on the Book of Ezra in Winer's 'Realwörterbuch;' and others containing much that is interesting will be found in Dr. W. Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' and in Kitto's 'Cyclopædia.' Of the earlier commentators, Patrick may be consulted with most advantage.

#### ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOK IN SECTIONS.

The best arrangement of Ezra seems to be the following:—

Part I. (chs. i.—vi.). First return of the Israelites from captivity, under Zerubbabel.



Section 1 (chs. i., ii.). Decree of Cyrus, and return under Zerubbabel, with the numbers of those who returned, and the names of the chief men.

Section 2 (ch. iii. 1—7). Restoration of the altar of burnt sacrifice, and celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Section 3 (ch. iii. 8—vi. 15). Rebuilding of the temple, and opposition made to it.

Section 4 (ch. vi. 16—22). Dedication of the temple and celebration of the Feast of the Passover.

Part II. (chs. vii.—x.). Second return of the Israelites from captivity, under Ezra.

Section 1 (chs. vii., viii.). Decree of Artaxerxes, and return under Ezra, with the numbers of those who returned, and the names of the chief men.

Section 2 (chs. ix., x.). Reformation of religion accomplished by Ezra.

# THE BOOK OF EZRA.

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## PART I.

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### 1. THE FIRST RETURN FROM THE CAPTIVITY.

#### EXPOSITION.

THE DECREE OF CYRUS (ch. i. 1—4). The origin of the return is found in an exertion of Divine influence on the mind of a heathen king, who was moved thereby to put forth a proclamation or decree, addressed to all the people of the Lord God of Israel dwelling in any part of his dominions, granting them free permission to return to their own land, and at the same time recommending his other subjects to expedite their departure by giving them out of their abundance gold, silver, goods, and cattle, so that none should be hindered by poverty from taking advantage of the king's kindness. Many things are remarkable in this decree:—1. Its promulgation by a heathen king, spontaneously as it would seem; 2. Its recognition of a single supreme God, "the Lord God of heaven;" 3. Its declaration that the supreme God had "charged" the king to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem; and 4. Its actual origination in a "stir" of the king's spirit by God himself. The secret government of the world by Jehovah is, in part, opened to us, and we see how great political events, anteriorly improbable, are brought about by his action on men's hearts; we see that he does not leave, has never left, the heathen wholly to themselves, but condescends to put thoughts into their minds, and bend their wills, and so bring about his purposes. We see, moreover, that the heathen

EZRA.

were not universally without some knowledge of the true God; and especially we perceive that in Persia at this date (B.C. 538) there was a distinct recognition of a single supreme Deity, and an identification of this Deity with Jehovah, the God of the Jews. This fact throws light on the whole history of the Jews under the Persians—on the friendly tone of the decrees of Darius (ch. vi. 6—12) and Artaxerxes (ch. vii. 12—26), on the amicable relations between the latter king and Nehemiah (Neh. ii. 2—8), on the position occupied by Mordecai under Ahasuerus (Esther x. 2, 3), on the quiet submission of the entire people to the Persian yoke for above two centuries, and on their faithful adherence to the cause of the last Persian king when he was attacked by Alexander (Joseph. 'Ant. Jud.' xi. 8, § 3). A religious sympathy, it is clear, united the two nations. We must not, however, carry this notion too far, or regard the Persian religion with too favourable an eye. The native literature shows that the Persians worshipped more gods than one, although one was supreme, and that their religion was moreover dualistic, involving a belief in a principle of evil, co-eternal and almost co-equal with the principle of good.

Ver. 1.—In the first year of Cyrus. The context shows that it is the first year of Cyrus at Babylon which is intended. Cyrus

the Great became King of Persia by his final defeat and capture of Astyages, in B.C. 559 probably. His conquest of Babylon was, comparatively speaking, late in his reign (Herod., Xenoph.), and is fixed by the Canon of Ptolemy to B.C. 538. He took the city on the night of Belshazzar's feast (Dan. v. 30), when Daniel had just been appointed to the third place in the kingdom (*ibid.* ver. 29), and was practically at the head of affairs. Thus the great king and the great prophet of the time were brought into contact, and naturally conferred together, as may be gathered from Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' xi. 1). **That the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled.** The reference is to Jer. xxv. 11, 12, and xxix. 10. Jeremiah had prophesied not only the fact, but the date of the return, by assigning to the captivity a duration of "seventy years." There might be some doubt when exactly this term would run out, since the year of 360 was in prophetic use no less than the year of 365 days ('Dict. of the Bible,' s. v. YEAR), and, moreover, the exact date of the commencement of the captivity admitted of question; but Daniel appears to have calculated in B.C. 538 that the term was approaching its termination (see Dan. ix. 2—19). If the captivity were regarded as commencing in the third year of Jehoiakim (Dan. i. 1, 2), which was B.C. 606—605, and if years of 360 days were regarded as intended, this would clearly be so, since  $360 \times 70 = 25,200$ , and  $365 \times 68 = 24,820$ , so that in B.C. 538 only another year was wanting. For the prophecy to be fulfilled, it was requisite that the first steps towards bringing about the return and the cessation of desolation should not be delayed beyond the close of B.C. 538. **The Lord, accordingly, in this year stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia.** As God in earlier times had worked on the minds of Abimelech (Gen. xx. 3) and Balaam (Num. xxiii. 5, 16), and more recently of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. ii. 28), so now, it would seem, he directly influenced the heart and will of Cyrus. This is the less surprising, as Cyrus was, in the Divine counsels, fore-ordained to do this work, and had been raised to his high station for the purpose (Isa. xlv. 28; xlv. 1—4). Cyrus was thus induced to make a proclamation (literally, "to make to pass a voice") throughout the whole kingdom, which reached from the Ægean Sea to the borders of India, and from the Caucasus to the Persian Gulf, and even to put it in writing, *v' miktab*, that so it might be sure to become generally known. Writing was probably of recent introduction into Persia; but there is positive evidence in the native remains of its use by Cyrus. His proclamation was probably issued in at least two languages, Persian and Chaldee.

Ver. 2.—**Thus saith Cyrus.** Persian inscriptions do not ordinarily commence in this way; but the formula "says Darius the king," "says Xerxes the king" is frequent in them. **King of Persia.** So the Behistun inscription: "I am Darius, the great king, the king of kings, *the king of Persia.*" **The Lord God of heaven, Yehovah Elohey hashshamayim.** "God of heaven" seems to have been a usual title of the Supreme Being among the Persians (see below, ch. vi. 9, 10; vii. 12, 23), and perhaps designated Ormuzd in contradistinction to Ahri-man, who was lord of the infernal regions. The use of the term "Jehovah," instead of Ormuzd, is remarkable, and was probably limited to the Hebrew transcript of the proclamation. **Hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth.** An acknowledgment that they have received and hold their royal power from Ormuzd is universal on the part of all the Persian kings who have left inscriptions of any length; but they do not often indulge in such a hyperbole as this of Cyrus. Artaxerxes Ochus, however, calls himself "king of this world" (Rawlinson, 'Cuneiform Inscr.,' vol. i. p. 341). The mention of the "kingdoms of the earth" is appropriate, since Cyrus had not inherited his empire, but built it up by the conquest of a vast number of independent states ('Herod.' i. *passim*). His own feeling that God had in all cases given him the victory harmonizes with the statement of Isaiah in ch. xlv. 1. **He hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem.** The *he* is emphatic, and is expressed by *αὐτός* in the Septuagint and *ipse* in the Vulgate. He himself, Jehovah-Elohim, has given it me in charge to build him a house. Most critics rightly explain by referring to Isa. xlv. 28, and accepting the statement of Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' xi. 1) that the passage was shown to Cyrus shortly after his capture of Babylon. He understood the prophecy as a command, and proceeded to obey it. **Which is in Judah.** The addition of this clause marks strongly the oblivion into which the ruined city had fallen. Apparently, it was necessary to recall its situation to men's minds by an express mention of the province whereof it had been the capital. Note the repetition of the clause in the next verse.

Ver. 3.—**Who (is there) among you of all his people?** Cyrus does not limit his address to the Jews, or even to Judah and Benjamin, but extends it to the whole people of Jehovah, *i. e.* to all the tribes equally. Gozan and Media, to which the ten tribes had been transported by the Assyrian monarchs, were within his dominions no less than Babylonia. That many non-Jewish Israelites did return appears from 1 Chron. ix. 3. **His God be with him.** A pious wish, almost a

blessing, indicative of the deep religious feeling and great goodness of heart which characterized Cyrus alone of Persian monarchs. Among the Greeks, Æschylus, who first speaks of him, calls him "kindly" or "gracious" (*εὐφρων*); Herodotus says he ruled his subjects like a father; Xenophon makes him a model prince; Plutarch observes that "in wisdom and virtue and greatness of soul he excelled all other kings;" Diodorus ascribes to him a remarkable power of self-command, together with good feeling and gentleness. The Latin writers, Cicero and others, add their meed of praise; and altogether it may be said that, so far as the evidence reaches, no nobler character appears in ancient history. The Scriptural notices, whether in this book or in Isaiah, are in remarkable accord. Let him go up. Jerusalem was on a much higher level than Babylon, and the travellers would consequently have to ascend considerably. And build the house. The "charge" to Cyrus did not require him to take a personal share in the building. He was simply to "say to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isa. xlv. 28). He is therefore content to assign the actual work to others. He is the God. The Septuagint and the Vulgate attach the last clause of the verse to these words, and render "He is the God who is in Jerusalem," which greatly weakens the force of the expression. According to this punctuation, Cyrus makes Jehovah a mere local Deity; according to

the far preferable arrangement of the A. V., he declares emphatically that Jehovah is the one true God, beside whom there is no other. Compare the very similar confession of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. vi. 26).

Ver. 4.—*Whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth.* Literally correct; but the meaning is, "And with regard to all those who remain (of the captive people) in any part of the country where they have their temporary abode, let the men of his district help him with silver," &c. Cyrus finishes his decree by calling upon his heathen subjects to come to the aid of the poorer Israelites, and assist them with money, cattle, and other commodities, in order that none may be hindered by poverty, or by the want of beasts of burthen, from joining the band of emigrants, and setting out on their return to Jerusalem. Again, the kindness of his disposition is apparent. *Beside the freewill offering.* So the Septuagint; but the Vulgate has, "Except the freewill offering," &c. The Septuagint and the A. V. are right. Cyrus means that money, cattle, and goods are to be made over to the poorer Israelites, *in addition* to any offering that might be intrusted to them for conveyance to Jerusalem, either by himself or by his subjects. Individually, he was about to send "a freewill offering," consisting of a number of gold and silver vessels for the service of the temple. His words suggest that his subjects might follow this good example.

### HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*The crisis.* The very first word of this book (literally "and," *Keîl*, Wordsworth, &c.) has its importance. It shows the book to be an additional and continuous portion of that most important of all histories, the history of the Jews. How large is the place of that history in the Bible, beginning at Gen. xii. and hardly passing again to that of the Gentiles at Acts x. How interesting a story in itself! No people so favoured (Amos iii. 2; Rom. iii. 1; xi. 28). No people so exalted (Exod. iv. 22; Jer. xxxi. 9; John i. 47). How important a story to us! So instructive (1 Cor. x. 11, &c., &c.). So vital (Gen. xii. 1—3; Num. xxiv. 9, &c.). We are all the better or the worse for the lessons of the story of the Jewish people. This opening verse of Ezra introduces us to this singular people at a very important juncture, and relates, in connection with their history, a very momentous event.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE JUNCTURE. We find the people, *e. g.*, in very great tribulation. They are under the rule of a stranger, counting the years of their history by the years of a "king of Persia." This not so in former days (see 2 Chron. xxxiv. 8; xxxv. 19; and, as perhaps an instance of transition in this respect, Jer. lii. 12). We are thus pointed backward to the invasions of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, and to those three successive waves of desolation which came over the land under him. See 2 Chron. xxxvi. 6, 7; Dan. i. 1, 2, for the first invasion, in the days of Jehoiakim or Eliakim, about 607 B.C. For the second, in the days of Jeconiah or Jehoiachin, about 599 B.C., see 2 Kings xxiv. 13; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9, 10. For the third, in the reign of Zedekiah, B.C. 588, see 2 Kings xxv. 14; Jer. lii. 8. Some idea of the desolation thus caused in the land itself may be inferred from what is said in 2 Kings xxiv. 14, of only "the poorest sort of the people" remaining after the second incursion; and from what is said in Jer. xlii. 2, after the third; as also from what we

are told respecting the "few" mentioned there in Jer. xliii. 5—7. No wonder we read the prophet lamenting, as in Lam. i. 1; v. 18. Awful indeed was that gray and silent Sabbath which had fallen on Judah's cities and fields! As to the people thence carried away, equally desolate were their hearts. How grievous their reproach and "confusion of face" (Dan. ix. 7, 8). How bitter their recollections (Lam. i. 10; iv. 10, 20, &c.). How inconsolable their anguish (Ps. cxxxvii. 4). Could any sorrow be worse (Lam. i. 12; Dan. ix. 12)? At the precise moment, however, when our story begins there was a little light in this darkness. Some of the people evidently were in expectation of some change for the better. The name of the king mentioned seems to show this to begin. Also the fact of its being the "first year" of his reign. Now that he had come to the throne, what would he do? See, for evidence of the great interest elsewhere attached to this date, Dan. i. 21, as compared with vi. 28 and x. 1. How exceedingly natural is this interest if we believe Isa. xli. 25; xlv. 28, &c., according to the best commentators, to be *prophecies* of this Cyrus by name! What a great turning-point in the history of the exile, his capture of Babylon, and subsequent coming to the throne. Another ground of great expectation at this juncture is also hinted at in the text. The prophecies of Jeremiah, a prophet whom many of the exiles may have heard for themselves, had foretold seventy years of sorrowful "rest" to the land (see Jer. xxv. 12; xxxix. 10, compared with 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21, and Lev. xxvi. 34, 35, 43). The end of those seventy years coincided with this first year of King Cyrus. There was one at least amongst the exiles who knew this "by books" (Dan. ix. 2). This same man had been the tried friend and chief adviser of the immediate predecessor of Cyrus (Dan. vi. 3, 14, 26), and had a deep thought and constant love for his people and land (Dan. vi. 10). From a man of such a character, and with such influence and knowledge, what might not be hoped for at such a time? And how exceedingly welcome, in such a condition of misery, would be any such hope!

II. THE EVENT RELATED was quite in accordance with these natural expectations. While the people were thus anxiously listening, there came a sound on their ears. This new ruler had spoken; he had issued a proclamation—no unimportant thing in itself. We do not expect kings to speak unless they have something to say. It was also, as they would soon learn (a more important point still), a proclamation about themselves. Further yet, it was made in two ways, each worthy of note. On the one hand, to make it public, it was made orally, by word of mouth (see margin, "caused a voice to pass"), throughout all his kingdom, for the information of all who could hear (comp. Dan. iii. 4). On the other, to make it sure, it was "put in writing," as a thing meant to abide (comp. Dan. vi. 8, 10). How momentous, therefore, even thus far, the thing which had happened. It was a loud knocking at the door of their prison-house, whatever it meant. Observe, in conclusion—1. The *fulness* of God's word. How much here (apparently) beneath the surface; viz., the prophecies of Isaiah; the influence of Daniel; also in the reference to the Sabbatical years, the legislation of Moses; and, finally, in the appearance of Cyrus as a predicted restorer and deliverer, the promise of Christ himself. 2. The *consistency* of God's word. How many, how various, and from what widely-distant parts of it are the stones, as it were, thus brought together. Yet how admirably they fit together, and what a whole they compose. 3. The *promptness* of God's mercy. Many centuries passed before God visited his people for their neglect of the Sabbatical years; but as soon as the seventy years of enforced compensatory rest are concluded, that moment his mercy shines forth. See this characteristic illustrated in the case of Israel (Gen. xv. 16; Exod. xii. 41). In the case of the world (Gal. iv. 4).

Vers. 2—4.—*The edict.* When the proclamation, which captive Israel had heard of with such interest and expectation, came to be examined, what was it found to contain? Besides a proper preamble, showing in whose name and by whose authority it was issued, three principal things; viz., 1. a remarkable confession; 2. a satisfactory permission; and 3. a considerate command.

I. A REMARKABLE CONFESSION. A confession or acknowledgment—1. Of Jehovah's *existence*. Cyrus, brought up as a worshipper of Ormuzd, begins his proclamation here by mentioning Jehovah by name. 2. Of Jehovah's *greatness*. Jehovah the "God of heaven"—so he goes on to describe him—i. e. according to Persian usage

(see Keil *in loc.*), the supreme God, the Most High. This the more remarkable because neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Darius before, nor Artaxerxes afterwards, when much impressed with the power of Jehovah the God of the Jews, speak of him in this way (comp. Dan. ii. 47; iii. 29; vi. 26; Ezra vii. 15; also Ezra vi. 12). 3. Of Jehovah's *goodness*. "He has given me all the kingdoms of the earth." How great a possession! how true a gift! This language very significant from the lips of a Persian king (comp. "By the grace of Ormuzd I am king," as quoted in Lange on this passage). 4. Of Jehovah's *authority*. "He hath charged me." With all this authority laid upon me, I am under his authority still (comp. Matt. viii. 9). Cyrus speaks here of himself just as God had spoken before of Nebuchadnezzar (see Jer. xxv. 9; xxvii. 6). And 5. Of Jehovah's *will*. "He hath charged me to build him an house." This is the special thing which he desires me to accomplish. Also a significant acknowledgment, if we suppose (and there is really no other supposition before us) that Cyrus understood the declarations of Isaiah respecting him (see above) to imply a charge of this kind. At the same time, with all that we know from other sources of the singular integrity of his character, and with all that we can infer from the Bible of his probable intimacy with and respect for Daniel, only a natural thing in his case. Who so likely as his prime minister Daniel to draw up this "king's speech;" and if he drew it up, to commence it in this way? Certain it is that no beginning, taking it for all in all, could have been more full of hope and promise to the Jews.

II. A SATISFACTORY PERMISSION (ver. 3). 1. Satisfactory as to its *object*. The great thing that Israel needed for their true restoration and deliverance from captivity was the restoration of Jehovah's House. On the one hand, there could be no restoration of Israel without that of Jerusalem (see Ps. cxxxvii. 1, 5, 6; Dan. vi. 10; ix. 16), and no true restoration of Jerusalem without that of the Temple (see Ps. cxxii. 4, 9, &c.). On the other hand, with Jerusalem and its Temple restored, and all Israel going up to its feasts, the whole people, even if in part dispersed, would still be one nation, one Church (comp. Acts xxvi. 7). This seems to have been the exact ideal of the post-captivity Church. Israel before the captivity was national, local, and centralized; identified with one race, one land, one house. The true Israel since Christ has been none of the three (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20; John iv. 21; 1 Cor. i. 2; Gal. iv. 26). Israel in the intermediate centuries was in a kind of intermediate condition, still national and still centralized, but only local in part—in part, on the contrary, becoming almost as much dispersed as the "Catholic" Church is itself (Acts ii. 5—11). In these intermediate centuries, therefore, the importance of the "house," as a central bond by which to prevent the dispersion from ending in total obliteration, was almost greater than ever. Accordingly this whole book of Ezra has to do in the main with this question, and may be called, not inaptly, the Book of the Restoration of the House. Also the prophecies of Zechariah are greatly concerned with the same subject, and the prophecy of Haggai in particular does not speak of much else. This also is the great object of this permission of Cyrus: "Let him go up and build the house;" the great topic, in fact, of the whole proclamation—being mentioned in some way in each verse. See, finally, how it is all summed up on a subsequent page: "Let the house be builded" (Ezra vi. 3). In other words, "Let that be done which is needed the most." So Cyrus speaks in this place. 2. The *manner* of the permission was equally satisfactory. It was very *definite*, being addressed, it seems, to all Israel, and yet to Israel alone, as was right (see beginning of ver. 3). Contrast the Samaritans afterwards, who offered to help in building God's house, though none of his people. It was very *cordial*. "Jehovah" (see 2 Chron. xxxvi. 23) "his God be with him, and let him go up." Cyrus would not only have them go up, but go up with a blessing, such a blessing as he himself had already received. Compare the words of Jacob (Gen. xlviii. 16). It was very *complete*. Cyrus would have them "go," or leave where they were (Isa. li. 14); he would have them "go up," or reach the place they desired (Ps. cxxii. 2); he would have them "go up and build," *i. e.* do the very thing that was needed. What could he do more to show his goodwill?

III. THE CONSIDERATE COMMAND which we have in ver. 4 seems to answer this question. Besides saying "Be ye warmed and filled" (James ii. 16), he "gave" to the Israelites in various ways what was "needed" in their case. He did so, partly, so we

understand the words, by a *tax*. There were various places in his dominions where some of the "remnant" of Israel ("whosoever remaineth": comp. Neh. i. 2, &c.; Haggai ii. 3, &c.) were "sojourning" as strangers. In any such "place," if any Israelites wished to go up, the men of that place were hereby commanded (the request of such a sovereign would be a special command) to assist them by their gifts. But this was not all. The king helped the Israelites also in their great undertaking by his *personal gifts*. So we understand those gifts distinguished as "freewill offerings," and mentioned at the end of ver. 4 (and again at end of ver. 6) as being "beside." Not improbably we find these afterwards partly specified in ch. vi. 3, 4. At any rate, we learn from that passage that the king did give of "his own." Both by his people, therefore, and by himself he did what he could. So far as a mere proclamation could do such a thing, he not only permitted, he enabled them to go up. In this proclamation, as thus understood, may we not see a picture of that great declaration of liberty to the captives (Luke iv. 18), the gospel of Christ Jesus? How many the points of resemblance. How "definite" its language. "Whosoever will, let him come" (Rev. xxii. 17). How "cordial" its invitations. "I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37). How "complete" its provisions (John iv. 14; Col. ii. 10, &c., &c.). How ample and "considerate" its gifts, God Almighty both, as it were, taxing the whole world for the benefit of his true servants (Rom. viii. 28; 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22), and also being pleased to give them indeed of "his own" (John iii. 16; Rom. viii. 32).

NOTE.—It is interesting to observe how the intermediate condition of Israel or the Church in the "fourteen generations" between Salathiel and Christ (Matt. i. 17), as above noted, by leading to the establishment of synagogues throughout the Roman world, prepared for the subsequent founding of the New Testament Church or Israel. See, *inter alia*, how the synagogues are mentioned in Acts ix. 2, 20; xiii. 5, 14, &c.; xiv. 1; xvi. 13 (the Proseucha); xvii. 1, 2 (as his manner was), 10, 17; xviii. 4; xix. 8, &c., &c. The effect also of so many thousand Jews coming up to Jerusalem at the time of Christ's death (the Passover) and at the descent of the Spirit (the Pentecost) should be considered in this connection.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The sovereignty of God.* Dualities are everywhere seen. Amongst these are things passive and active; things ruled over and things ruling. The mechanical heavens are active and rule the passive earth. In animated nature rulers and subjects are individualized; most remarkably so in the kingdom of men. Passing into the spiritual world, we still find order and rule; "principalities and powers in the heavenlies"—amongst angels of light, also amongst angels of darkness. But behind all these sovereignties and over them is the glorious sovereignty of God.

I. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS ALL-CONTROLLING. 1. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." (1) This he did by means. Josephus says that Cyrus was shown the places in Isaiah where he was mentioned by name and his exploits indicated about a century before he was born (see Isa. xlv. 28; xlv. 1—5). Possibly Daniel, who was in Babylon when Cyrus entered it, and the fame of whose wisdom was far-reaching, may have pointed them out to him. (2) By his Spirit God made the means he employed effective. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." "He can turn the hearts of princes as the rivers of the south." Means are ineffectual without his blessing. That blessing should be sought upon all our undertakings. 2. By means of Cyrus God moved the *Persian empire*. (1) The royal edict was issued. (2) It was vocally proclaimed. Heb., caused a voice to pass, &c. This form of proclamation is for the multitude. For the multitude God causes his gospel to be preached. (3) It was also written. This was for the magistrates. Also for reference. The word of the truth of the gospel is also written. This fixes its certainty. 3. The sequel shows *how cordial was the response*. As the exodus from Egypt was a figure of the emancipation of the believer in Christ from the bondage of sin, so was the return from the captivity of Babylon.

II. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS ALL-PERVADING. 1. He rules the world according

to a grand plan. (1) This fact is seen in the Scriptures of prophecy. Broad outlines of future history of the world drawn (see for example Gen. ix. 25—27). Here consider "the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah" (see Jer. xxv. 12; xxix. 10). (2) Further seen in the conversion of prophecy into history. Examples abound. Example before us in the restoration of Judah from the captivity of Babylon. The time was "in the first year of Cyrus." This was B.C. 536. Add to this the seventy years of Jeremiah's prophecy, and we have the year B.C. 606, the very year in which "Nebuchadnezzar carried Jehoiakim and the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon (see 2 Chron. xxxvi. 6, 7). 2. The plan of Providence includes the means to be employed for the accomplishment of his purposes. (1) Stirs up the spirits of men to study his word (see Dan. ix. 2). Stirred up the spirit of Cyrus also. Daniel was stirred up to pray; Cyrus, to act. It is God's order that his people should pray for their blessings (see Ezek. xxxvi. 37). There is often a connection between the prayers of the good and the better actions of the wicked.

1. Learn that there is no such thing as chance. (1) Afflictions do not spring out of the dust. (2) See the hand of God in our deliverances. 2. Learn that providences are often retributive. (1) The seventy years of captivity were in retribution for seventy sabbatic years in which selfishness refused the land her rest, and consequently the poor their privileges (comp. Lev. xxv. 1—6, and 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21). (2) If we open our eyes we may see the operation of retributive providences every day. "Be sure your sin will find you out."—J. A. M.

Vers. 1—4, 7—11.—*The wide reach of the rule of God.* We are accustomed to pray that the kingdom of God may come; we desire, and therefore ask, that men may offer themselves in willing subjection to the service of their Divine Sovereign. For this we must labour and pray, and always shall do so the more earnestly as we ourselves are the more unreservedly subject to his benign and gracious rule. Meantime there is a sense in which God's rule is a present thing. The kingdom of God is among us; the arms of his power are around us; the hand of his skill is directing our affairs. And this rule of the Supreme is wider than some suppose; its reach is far beyond the thought of many, perhaps of most of us. These verses will suggest to us how far it goes.

I. FURTHER THAN THE CHURCH IS APT TO THINK. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus," &c. "The Lord God of heaven hath charged me" (Cyrus) (vers. 1—4). The Jewish Church was slow to believe that God had much to do with any nation beside Israel. Jehovah was, in their thought, the God of Abraham and of his seed in a very distinctive if not positively exclusive sense. His action on those outside the sacred pale was, they popularly imagined, to punish or subdue rather than to control or rule them. They did not expect him to manifest himself to "the uncircumcised," or to use them in his service. But he *was* governing those outside nations, and he *did* act upon others than the children of the faithful. He who inspired Balaam to utter those exquisite words of poetic prophecy (Num. xxiii., xxiv.) now "stirs up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia;" makes this heathen monarch "his shepherd, performing his pleasure" (Isa. xlv. 28); calls him his "anointed one whose right hand he has holden" (strengthened) (Isa. xlv. 1), and constrains him to render signal service to his people which had great and enduring issues. The Christian Church is slow to believe that the hand of God is at the helm of all national and international affairs, and that he lays that hand of Divine power and wisdom upon men and things whether these be counted among his own servants or not. "Upon whom doth not this light arise?" It was by his all-wise direction that Greece prepared her thought and her language, and Rome her highways for the gospel in the "fulness of times." We know not to whom God is speaking, or whose hand he is guiding, in civilized or savage lands, but we may be sure that he is where we do not suspect his Presence, and is acting through men we should not have ranked among his servants, as the end will one day show. "His kingdom ruleth over all."

II. FURTHER THAN THE WORLD SUPPOSES (ver. 2). We smile now as we read that Cyrus imagined that God had given him "all the kingdoms of the earth" (ver. 2). The heathen monarch little dreamt what God was doing elsewhere, and what strong workmen he had in other spheres that were outworking his holy will, his gracious and



redeeming purposes. Little does the world know, greatly does it under-estimate, the work which God is doing in the midst of it.

III. FURTHER IN INDIVIDUAL MEN THAN THEY ARE THEMSELVES AWARE. Cyrus did not know what use the Lord was making of him. "I girded thee, though thou hast not known me" (Isa. xlv. 5). The Persian king could not foresee that God was inducing him to take a step which should have not only wide and lasting, but world-wide and everlasting, issues and influences. God may be prompting us to take steps—as he has with many since the days of Cyrus—which, when taken, will lead on to the most happy and fruitful consequences, stretching on far into the future, reaching wide over land and sea.

IV. THROUGH THE HEART AND MIND TO THE HAND OF MEN (vers. 3, 4, 7—11). God so acted on Cyrus that that king was (a) inclined in his heart to take the generous course of liberating the Israelites and causing the temple to be rebuilt. It was generous on his part, for he was thus denuding his country of many of his most industrious and skilful subjects, and he was acting on behalf of a religion somewhat different from his own. And, thus disposed, he (b) took every necessary and desirable step for its thorough execution. He (1) issued a proclamation, which he put into writing, authorising all Jews in his kingdom to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of the Lord (vers. 2, 3); (2) invited his subjects to aid the Israelites with money, cattle, and other valuable gifts (ver. 4); and (3) restored the sacred vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem (vers. 7—11).

God may use us whether we know it or not, whether we will or not. He may employ us in his service even if, like Cyrus, we have a very partial knowledge of his will, and some inclination to do it, though we are not fully and wholly on his side. We may be, as many among the heathen have been, *instruments* in his hand. But how much better to be, as Ezra and Nehemiah were, *agents* of his, deliberately opening our minds to his truth, fixedly and finally yielding our hearts and lives to his service, consciously and rejoicingly working with him in his beneficent design. It is only such co-workers that will win his final acceptance and, hearing his "well done," enter into his glory.—C.

## EXPOSITION.

THE RESPONSE TO THE DECREE (vers. 5—11). The response made to the decree fell short of what might have been expected. The "patriarchal chiefs" who responded belonged solely, or mainly, to the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin; the "ten tribes" were for the most part deaf to the invitation addressed to them. Some, however, of Ephraim and Manasseh (1 Chron. ix. 3), and perhaps some of other tribes, were more zealous, and took part in the migration. Many, on the other hand, even of Judah and Benjamin, preferred remaining in Babylonia to undertaking the long and perilous (Ezra vii. 22) journey to Palestine, and taking the chance of what might happen to them there. They were, as Josephus says, "disinclined to relinquish their property." In the course of nearly seventy years great numbers of Jews had acquired wealth; some had invested their money in lands and houses; others had extensive business connections; others, again, though poor, may have been unenterprising; and the result was that only some 42,000

persons took advantage of the opportunity, and proceeded from Babylonia to Jerusalem (ch. ii. 64). The response to the latter part of the decree, addressed by Cyrus to his heathen subjects, was more satisfactory. The Jews were helped by their neighbours freely, with gold, and with silver, and with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things (ver. 6); and besides all this, a certain number of freewill offerings were contributed. As in Egypt at the time of the Exodus (Exod. xi. 3), so now, the Jews found favour in the eyes of the heathen on their departure from among them, and were made partakers of their worldly substance. We may well suppose that once more God gave his people favour in the sight of those with whom they had been living, and disposed their hearts to liberality.

Ver. 5.—Then rose up the chief of the fathers. The "chief of the fathers" are the hereditary heads of the families recognized as distinct and separate (see ch. ii. 3—19).

Ver. 6.—All they that were about them.

*I. c.* all their neighbours. **Strengthened their hands.** This is the literal rendering. The margin gives the right meaning—"helped them." **With precious things.** *Migdānōth*, a rare word, only used here, in Gen. xxiv. 53, and in 2 Chron. xxi. 3; always connected with silver and gold; derived from *meged*, which means "precious." **Besides all that was willingly offered** (comp. ver. 4). The gold, silver, precious things, &c. previously mentioned were free gifts to individual Jews, and were additional to certain offerings which were intrusted to them for conveyance to Jerusalem. On the value attached by the Persians to offerings made in Jerusalem to Jehovah, see below, ch. vi. 10, and vii. 17.

**THE RESTORATION OF THE SACRED VESSELS BY CYRUS (vers. 7—11).** Following the ordinary custom of the early Oriental conquerors, Nebuchadnezzar, long before he destroyed the Jewish temple, had carried off from it, partly as trophies of victory, partly as articles of value, many of the sacred vessels used in the temple service (see 2 Chron. xxxvi. 10; Jer. xxvii. 19, 20; Dan. i. 2). At his final capture and destruction of Jerusalem he bore off the remainder (2 Kings xxv. 14, 15). These he deposited at Babylon in the temple of Merodach (or Bel), the god whom he chiefly worshipped (Dan. i. 2), where they probably remained until Belshazzar had them brought out and desecrated at his great banquet (*ibid.* v. 2). A religious instinct now prompted the Persian king to give the vessels back, in order that they might revert to their original use. The careful enumeration of them (vers. 9—11) is characteristic of Ezra, who is very minute and exact in his details, and fond of making lists or catalogues.

**Ver. 7.—The vessels.** Probably all that he could find, yet scarcely all that had been taken away, since many of these were of bronze (2 Kings xxv. 14), and the restored vessels seem to have been, all of them, either of gold or silver (see ver. 11). **Which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth.** The carrying off of sacred vessels, as well as images, from temples is often represented in the Assyrian sculptures. It was a practice even of the Romans, and is commemorated on the Pillar of Titus, where the seven-branched candlestick of the Jewish temple is represented as borne in triumph by Roman soldiers. **And had put them in the house of his gods.** *Elohayv*, which is the form used in the text, can only mean "his god," not "his gods." Nebuchadnezzar represents

himself, in his inscriptions generally, as a special devotee of a single Babylonian god, Merodach, whose temple, called by the Greeks that of Bel, is no doubt here intended (comp. Dan. i. 2).

**Ver. 8.—Mithredath the treasurer.** Not "Mithridates, the son of Gazabar," as the Vulgate renders. The Hebrew *gizbār* represents a Persian word, *gazabara* or *ganzabara*, which had no doubt the meaning of "treasurer," literally "treasure-bearer." We have here the first occurrence of the famous name, borne by so many great kings, of Mithridates. The name is thoroughly Persian, and is excellently rendered by the Hebrew מִיתְרָדָת. It means either "given by Mithra" or "dedicated to Mithra," and is distinct evidence of the worship of Mithra by the Persians as early as the time of Cyrus. Mithra was the sun, and was venerated as Mitra by the early Vedic Indians. His worship in later Persia is clearly established; but, except for the name of Mithredath in this place, it would have been doubtful whether he was as yet an object of religious veneration to the Iranians. *Sheshbazzar*. It is generally allowed that this was the Chaldean or court name of Zerubbabel. (The chief evidence of this is to be found in ch. v. 16 compared with ch. iii. 8.) What the name signified is uncertain. **The prince of Judah.** Zerubbabel was the son of Pedaiah, brother of Salathiel, who was the legal heir of Jchoiachin, king of Judah. He appears to have been adopted by Salathiel as his son, and to have been recognized as the legitimate heir to the throne of David. Thus he did not owe his appointment to the mere favour of Cyrus, but was the natural leader of the people.

**Ver. 9.—Chargers.** *Agartelei*, a rare word, perhaps Persian. The LXX. translate ψυκρίτες, "wine-coolers;" the Vulgate has *phialæ*, "vases;" the apocryphal Esdras, σπονδεῖα, "vessels for drink-offerings." Probably basins or bowls are intended. **Knives.** *Machalāphim*, another rare word of doubtful sense. The LXX. render παρηλλαγμένα, "changes," regarding the word as derived from נָחַם, "to exchange." The apocryphal Esdras has θύσσαι, "censers." But the most usual translation is that of the A. V., "knives."

**Ver. 10.—Of a second sort.** Not "double," as the LXX. render; but "secondary," or "of inferior quality" (comp. 1 Sam. xv. 9 where *mishnim* has the same meaning).

**Ver. 11.—All the vessels were five thousand and four hundred.** The numbers previously given produce a total of only 2499, or less than half of this amount. There must be some corruption, but whether in the total or the items is uncertain. The apocryphal Esdras raises the total number of the vessels to 5469.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 5—11.—*The muster.* We have noted already that the great and primary feature in the restoration of Israel from captivity was the restoration of the house. With a view to this restoration, as we have seen, the whole edict of Cyrus was framed. In the passage now before us we shall see, in the next place, that the results of that edict were in accordance with this design. They secured, *i. e.*, the two first requisites for carrying out this design, providing, as they did, on the one hand, the requisite men; and, on the other, the requisite means.

I. THE REQUISITE MEN. 1. The requisite *laymen*. "Then rose up . . . . Judah" (Heb. vii. 14) "and Benjamin." The Church is before its ministers (comp. Phil. i. 1). Perhaps, also, the laymen in this case were the first to be stirred. Next, the requisite *lay-leaders*, the "chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin." Whether any body of men moves towards an enterprise, there must be some to go first. In this case it pleased God so to arrange by his providence, and so to work by the edict of Cyrus, that some of those were ready to go first who naturally stood first as it were. This was particularly the case, as we afterwards find, with him who stood first of all amongst these "chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin," viz., "Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah," mentioned in ver. 8. This Sheshbazzar, better known as Zerubbabel (comp. ch. v. 16 and Zech. iv. 9; see also Dan. i. 6, 7), about whose exact descent and lineage it is difficult to make sure, seems, at any rate, to have been regarded both by Israelites and Gentiles as the representative of the house of David. As such, he was the natural leader of the movement for restoration; and as such a leader, in God's providence, he was found willing to act. In addition, next, to this sufficient lay element, we find also, 2. The requisite *ecclesiastics*. And that, as before, of all ranks. Both "the priests and the Levites," *e. g.*, both the appointed ministers and their appointed assistants, are specified in ver. 5. Mention is also made afterwards of Jeshua, the legitimate high priest, or supreme ecclesiastical head (cn. ii. 2; iii. 2, &c.); and of the Nethinims and children of Solomon's servants (ch. ii. 43—58), the lowest grades of all those occupied in purely ecclesiastical work. This, therefore, completes the list. If the Church is before its ministers, it is not, therefore, without them. Neither Judah and Benjamin without Levi, nor Levi without Judah and Benjamin, could have restored the kind of house that God wished. It is to be admired, accordingly, that in this instance God caused the edict of Cyrus so to operate as to call forth sufficient of both. And something more than merely sufficient, so some have supposed. Besides men of Judah and Benjamin, and men belonging to or connected with the ecclesiastical tribe of Levi, some also belonging to other tribes of Israel are thought to be pointed to in the words "with all them whose spirits God had raised." The return of some such appears clearly implied in 1 Chron. ix. 3, and was only natural, when we bear in mind how many men of other tribes at various times before the captivity had joined themselves to that of Judah (see 2 Chron. xi. 14—16; xv. 9; xxx. 1, 10, 11, 18; also Blunt's 'Undesigned Coincidences,' p. 189). It is further evident that such a separate ten-tribes element amongst those returning from Babylon would be a fact of much weight, since it would serve so greatly to make the restored house, as originally intended (Ps. cxxii. 4), a house for the whole race, a centre of unity for all "the twelve tribes scattered abroad" (James i. 1). And it would also aid us in understanding St. Paul's long-subsequent description of those "twelve tribes" as "instantly serving God day and night" throughout the world (Acts xxvi. 7). They did so in that common temple which they had all thus helped to restore.

II. THE REQUISITE MEANS. The men thus duly called were also duly equipped. Almighty God, by the edict of Cyrus, both "raised" their "spirit" and filled their hands (see Ps. cx. 3; Phil. ii. 13). For example, we find them provided with the requisite *means of support*. These men would have to live whilst on their journey, and whilst building the house. The "gold" and "goods" mentioned in ver. 6, added to what we may suppose them to have made by selling their possessions (Jer. xxix. 4, 5), may have been meant for this end. So also the "beasts" in the same verse (comp. ch. ii. 66, 67, where none but beasts of burden are mentioned) may have supplied them with another requisite, viz., *means of transport*. Next, if we are

right in referring the last words of ver. 6 to the grant made by Cyrus himself, as afterwards defined in ch. vi. 3, 4, we see that they had, further, at their disposal the requisite *materials for building*. This point will perhaps appear more plainly if we compare the last-quoted passage with what is said in 1 Kings vi. 36. Not only, *i. e.*, were the necessary materials for building the temple granted, but they were granted, it would appear, of the precise shape and size required for erecting one most important part of the new temple, *viz.*, its inner court. Further yet, another most important point, we find that the requisite *temple vessels* were supplied in this case (vers. 7—10). God's providence had so ordered it that a sufficient number of these—sufficient, at any rate, to make a beginning; sufficient also, it may be, to serve as a pattern for others (a point of great importance according to Exod. xxv. 9, 40; 1 Chron. xxviii. 11); and sufficient, in this way, to keep up the identity of the old worship and the new, and make it a true restoration—were placed at their service. This is a point to be marked. Taken away by Nebuchadnezzar principally at his first capture of Jerusalem (2 Chron. xxxvi. 7, as contrasted with 2 Kings xxiv. 13; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 19), placed by him in the house of his "god" (Dan. i. 2), brought out thence at the great feast of Belshazzar on the same night that Babylon was captured (Dan. v. 3, 23, 30), they were preserved by God through all these vicissitudes as something destined for further use. Exactly corresponding with this is the careful way in which we find them handled by the Persian treasurer Mithredath, taking them in his "hand," according to Lange, so as to inspect and recognize them as Jerusalem temple vessels; and afterwards "numbered" or catalogued by him in the way that follows (vers. 9, 10) before giving them to Zerubbabel. What these vessels exactly were it is impossible for us now to make out; but it is evident that they were considered most important by all concerned at the time, and also evident that they leave little else in the way of "requisites" to be named. We may, perhaps, conjecture, however, that under the "precious things" of ver. 6 may be included those priestly "*garments*" of which we read in ch. ii. 69, and those *musical instruments*, no longer now to be hung on the willows, of which Josephus informs us. Also (one other point yet), that other vessels besides these preserved ones were now offered for temple use, in such numbers as almost to double the whole number at the disposal of the priests (comp. the total of the numbers in vers. 9 and 10 with the total given in ver. 11). In fact, certain other "vessels of silver," for which no other use is specified, are mentioned by name in ver. 6. But, whether with or without these conjectures, we have much here to admire. (1) How willing are God's people in the day of his power! When he has special work to be performed in his Church, how easily, how surely he provides the right men. (2) How carefully, also, and how completely he enables them for their work, either by providing them with fresh instruments, or by using those which they have. Compare Ehud's "left hand," David's "sling," the "eloquence" of Apollos, &c. If called, therefore, to any work (and we are all called to the great work of glorifying Christ and fighting sin), in that call itself is our strength. "Go in this thy might" (Judges vi. 14; see also Josh. i. 9; Judges iv. 6). (3) At the same time, we must not mistake. Preparation is not accomplishment (1 Kings xx. 11). Collecting soldiers is one thing; arming and supplying them another; actual campaigning another yet. "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." "Go in this thy might." The first word in that sentence as important as the last.

#### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 5, 6.—*God's action on the minds of his people*. When Cyrus, moved of God, proclaimed liberty to the captives in Persia and invited the children of Israel to return to their own land, there was a very large proportion that preferred to stay, some from excusable and others from insufficient motives, but a large company of the people of God made an immediate and honourable response. These, to the number of 42,000 persons, forthwith made ready to leave their adopted country and to go up to Jerusalem, to build again the house of the Lord, rebuilding, at the same time, the shattered fortunes of the land of their fathers. The response to the king's overture illustrates God's action on the minds of his own people. We have—

I. HIS TWO METHODS OF APPROACH. "Then rose up," &c. (ver. 5). 1. *Instrumental*. God worked on the minds of the chiefs of the people by means of the proclamations and edicts of Cyrus, and on the minds of the generality of the people by means of their leaders. Then—when the king's offer was circulated—"rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin," &c. And when Sheshbazzar (Zerubbabel) and the other natural leaders came forward, then the multitude volunteered: there is human agency here. 2. *Direct*. God's spirit acted directly and immediately on their minds. They were men "whose spirit God had raised;" they were like the "band of men whose hearts God had touched" (1 Sam. x. 26). God "laid his hand upon them," and lifted them up, spiritually, and they became strong and brave, ready to do a good work for him and for the world.

II. ITS SPIRITUAL RESULT. Elevation of soul. Their *spirit was raised*—as ours will be whenever God works within us as he did in them—(a) *above its common level of thought and feeling*. They saw, as otherwise they would not have seen, the excellency of the service of God and of their native land; they felt, as they did not usually feel, how glorious a thing it was to lay everything on the altar of God and strike a brave and faithful blow for their country's freedom and independence. Their views were cleared, their ambition heightened, their mind enlarged, their soul exalted. God "raised their spirit," and they were lifted up (b) *above the inducements of a comfortable present*; so that the pleasant homes and prosperous employments and agreeable friendships and enjoyable amusements in which they had been spending their days, these they were willing to leave behind them. And they were raised (c) *above the fear of misfortune in the future*; so that the difficulties of the journey, the "lion in the way," the arrangements between one another, the desolate ruins of the once-favoured city, the enemies that might dispute their right, all these dangers and difficulties they were prepared to encounter and overcome. Under the touch of the hand of God they became, as we may now become, men whose "heart was enlarged" to dare and do great things, to attempt and accomplish what, in an unenlightened and uninspired state, they would never have dreamed of doing. God was with them, his spirit was in them, and these children of men became the servants and the soldiers of God. Dare to attempt nothing if God's Spirit be not in the soul, inciting and sustaining it. Dare to undertake anything if he opens the eyes of the understanding and if he dwells within the heart.

III. ITS MATERIAL ISSUES (ver. 6). Such was the spirit of these men, that (a) those of their kindred who did not accompany them and their Persian neighbours "strengthened their hands with vessels of silver and gold, with goods and beasts and precious things;" and (b) thus equipped they marched out of their captivity, and went forth free men to espouse the cause of Jehovah and to make their mark on their age and, indeed, upon future ages.

Our great wisdom is to know when God comes to us; to listen when he speaks; to respond when he calls. Many Jews in Persia heard but heeded not that voice; they felt the touch of that Divine finger but obeyed it not. They lived on in such comfort and enjoyment as their adopted country yielded; but they entered not the open gate of opportunity; they rendered no great service to their land, their church, their race. Not theirs the victory and the crown; these were for the men who responded when God called, and whose spirits rose to the height of that great occasion.—C.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The return*. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are the historical introduction to this third period of Jewish history. The first or formative period is that of the exodus and the conquest of Canaan. The second, that of the kings, is the period of national development, when all that was possible to them as a nation was accomplished. The third period was that of national dependence, and it lasted 600 years. From the return from captivity to the fall of Jerusalem, the history of the Jews is bound up with the policy of the great empires, Persia, Macedonia, Greece, and Rome, on whose favour they depended, or to whom they offered a fruitless resistance.

Just as the exodus and the conquest trained the people for the second stage in their development and prepared its way, so the third period prepared for the fourth—

Judaism in its relation to modern history. The true destiny of Israel is now revealed, to exist as a "leaven" among the nations. The Divine purpose in the Israelitish people is accomplished in Christendom; religious susceptibility, fitness for inspiration, has been the signal endowment of the Jews; theirs is a spiritual, not a national, glory. And the modern history of the unconverted remnant is not without significance; we see in them the natural stock out of which Christendom has grown. The tenacity and steadfastness which still characterise the race, their patience, gentleness, and readiness to serve or to rule, are some of the elements of their fitness to affect most intimately the history of the world, some of their qualifications to be the depository of the promises of God.

The period of the return is sometimes contrasted with that of the exodus as an unheroic with an heroic time. It is easy to exaggerate the force of this contrast. That is not an unheroic or uneventful history which contains, as its heart, the story of the Maccabees. Even in these two books—Ezra and Nehemiah—the narratives of the rebuilding of the altar, the foundation and dedication of the temple, the building of the walls of Jerusalem, and the reorganisation of a corrupt society, are not inglorious. The tact, the courage, the patience, the fidelity displayed awakened admiration; and some of the incidents strike the imagination and stir the soul.

The true contrast is rather that between ancient and modern life, the conceptions and conditions of the old and the new world. Instead of miracle, we read the story of providential guidance and of homely virtues winning the hearts of the captors. We are involved in the details of foreign policy, brought face to face with the intrigues of Oriental rulers. The successive fortunes of the great heathen states profoundly affect the fortunes of the Jews. Their history is becoming international, cosmopolitan. A new source of interest appears in these books, commonly reputed dull, as we perceive this. The history affects us not by its contrasts with our more commonplace life, but by its revelations of the Divine and noble in the commonplace; it appeals not to our wonder, but to our sympathy.

The period of the exodus was marked by a splendid cycle of miracles inaugurated by Moses, and fitfully appearing down to far later days. In the period of the monarchy God revealed himself in a succession of prophets; men whose glory and whose main office it was to declare the great moral principles of the Divine rule into which they had the insight of spiritual genius; but who yet had often conferred upon them a predictive gift, a power to foresee and to foretell events, which fixed attention on their utterances and confirmed their mission as from God. The period of which we are now speaking was marked by regard for law; the reverence for God as the God of order which characterises modern thought and modern piety had here its birth. Ezra was "a priest," but he was also, and even more, "a scribe;" and the scribe, as Dean Stanley points out, was the forerunner of the Christian minister. We have wise men still, men of marvellous spiritual insight, ability to read the secrets of the human heart and to forecast human story; not these, however, but "pastors and teachers" are the officers of the Church. With the study of the law began the recognition of the sphere of the intellect in religion, the interpretation of God's will. The synagogue—in which, and not in the temple, the Christian congregation finds its historic origin—dates from this time; and so does the common school of the Jews. All this is of profound significance; it is the beginning of a religious revolution. God will henceforth be increasingly conceived of, not as interfering with, but directing, the course of events. Study is to take the place of signs; the knowledge of his will is to be gained, not through rare and fitful glimpses and glances, but by constant thought and careful reasoning.

Two lessons may be noted here—

First, AS TO THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD. "The fall of Sardis and Babylon was the starting-point of European life; and it is a singular coincidence that the beginning of Grecian art and philosophy, and the foundation of the Roman constitution, synchronize with the triumph of the Arian race in the East."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Christ came "in the fulness of the times," when Gentile history, as well as Jewish expectation, had "prepared the way of the Lord." These coincidences have an evidential value;

<sup>1</sup> Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' art. 'Cyrus.'

they mark design in history. Time, which removes us so far from events that they lose impressiveness, compensates for the loss by revealing more fully correspondences that speak of purpose. The majestic march of Providence makes also a direct appeal to the emotions of piety.

Next, AS TO THE PURPOSE OF GOD. The object of the separation of Israel to a peculiar destiny and discipline was that they might contribute moral and spiritual force to humanity. The "election" was for the sake of the human race. They were chosen not to judge mankind, but to influence it. The Jewish people, like him who was its archetype and greatest representative, came not to condemn the world, but to save the world. And this is the common order of spiritual efficiency. First separation, then influence. The first precept is, "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing;" then we can "be all things to all men," can "eat and drink with publicans and sinners." Some of these thoughts receive emphatic illustration in these verses.

I. IT WAS A PEACEFUL RETURN. God had "raised their spirit" "to go up to build the house of the Lord." They went with the good wishes of Cyrus and the people. "All they that were about them strengthened their hands." Jeremiah (ch. xxxix.) had told them what spirit they were to cherish during their years of bondage. "Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." It is still a characteristic of the Jews that they are good citizens. Many of them signally won the confidence of their masters; as Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Mordecai, and the three Hebrew youths. The reward of their meekness and service came. Contrast this return with the flight out of Egypt. "They were thrust out of Egypt." "The Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men."

II. THE CHARACTER OF CYRUS. It is a large assumption which appears in his decree—"Jehovah the God of heaven hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah;" but it is not out of harmony with what we know of his character. The noblest epithets are heaped upon him in the prophecy of Isaiah. He is "the anointed, the Messiah, of Jehovah." God "saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure." He is "the righteous man" whom God "raised up from the East." Contrast this with the scorn of Egypt as an ally (Isa. xxx., xxxi.), and the denunciation of the pride of Assyria, and the prophecy of its doom (Isa. x.). And heathen writings illustrate the Scripture representation of him. They speak of his virtues; they record romantic circumstances in his early career which justify the belief that he was providentially preserved for some great purpose.

III. THE POINTS OF RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN THE JEWISH AND THE PERSIAN FAITH. The unity of God; that he should not be worshipped under the form of idols; that God was good, and that evil was not from him. Each faith was able to contribute something to the other; but fundamentally they were in harmony. Contrast this with the idolatries of Babylon, the scornful picture of Isa. xlv. 1, 2; and picture the meeting in Babylon of the Persian victors and the Jewish exiles. An interest might well be excited in one another such as is indicated in our text.

The narrative illustrates "*God's making use of men's goodness*" to advance his purpose. He can make "the wrath of man to praise him;" but he loves rather the frank service of those in sympathy with him. We too love to contemplate good acts done graciously; favours unmarred by any bitter memories. The feeling of the return finds lyrical expression in the joyousness and trust of Ps. cxlvi.—M.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The response.* "Then rose up," &c. The edict of Cyrus had been issued (see vers. 2—4). The voice of God was in the voice of the king (see ver. 1). But who responded?

I. THE CHIEFS OF THE FATHERS OF JUDAH AND BENJAMIN RESPONDED. 1. *Happy the people whose magistrates lead them nobly.* (1) In politics. The voice of the king. The purpose of that voice. (2) In religion. The voice of God. The purpose of that voice: immediate; ulterior with respect to fulfilment of prophecy, &c. 2. *Politics cannot be divorced from religion.* (1) God has joined them in the con-

stitution of our nature. (2) He holds citizens, as such, responsible to himself. (3) Experience proves that godly men are the best citizens. 3. *Evil rulers are scourges of God to wicked peoples.* (1) Not appointed without his providence (see Isa. iii. 4). (2) Rulers are no worse than their people. Representative governments—responsibility of the franchise. In hereditary magistracies (see Isa. i. 10). “Rulers of Sodom” associated with “people of Gomorrah” (see Isa. i. 25, 26). When the vices of a people are purged away, then worthy magistrates are raised up to them.

II. THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES RESPONDED. 1. Priests, leaders in religion. (1) Sons of Aaron—type of Christ, also of Christians. (2) Offices at the altar. (3) Offices in the sanctuary. 2. Levites, leaders in literature. (1) Scattered in Israel—schoolmasters, scribes of the law (2 Chron. xxxiv. 13). (2) Services about the temple. Literature should be the handmaid of religion. When otherwise, inversion of God's order—fearfully mischievous.

III. SKILFUL ARTIFICERS RESPONDED. Those whose spirit God hath raised to go up and build the house of the Lord. 1. *All useful labour is from God.* (1) He is the Author of our faculties. (2) His providence furnishes opportunities for their culture. 2. *All talent should be devoted to God.* (1) In building up his material temple. (2) In furthering the building of his living temple. (3) In our secular calling (see 1 Cor. x. 31).

IV. A WILLING PEOPLE RESPONDED. 1. *All they that were about them.* (1) Not all the nation. Some elected to remain in Babylon. Gain of merchandise, &c., &c. So it is still when God calls us to forsake the world. (2) Those responded whose sympathies were true—“about them.” Frequently the children of godly persons elect the service of Christ. 2. *These strengthened their hands.* (1) True sympathy is help. Moral influence of virtuous citizens strengthens the hands of magistrates. (2) Where sympathy is true it will furnish active help. Gifts from the wealthy—viz., things of “gold and silver,” “goods,” “beasts,” viz., for transport (see ch. ii. 66, 67); “precious things.” Gifts from the multitude—“freewill offerings.” All is precious that comes from a loyal heart. 1. *Learn that religion and politics may be harmonised without resorting to compulsion.* The response was voluntary. Uniformity is not unity. Endless variety in living things. 2. *Harmony in religion and politics is truest when free.* With compulsion comes resistance and contention. Admit the principle of coercion, then the question is not between religion and politics, as abstract principles, but becomes often an ambitious and unholy strife.—J. A. M.

Vers. 1—11.—*The beginning of a great religious movement.* Israel had experienced long bondage in a foreign land under a heathen king; this would have a beneficial influence. 1. It would tend to cultivate within them a right view of the sorrow consequent upon sin. Their captivity was a punishment for idolatry. Sin sends men into slavery. 2. It would tend to cultivate within them a right view of the external in religion. Solomon's temple was the pride of Israel. They prided themselves in the magnificent masonry, in the richly-coloured garments, in the lofty altar; but now all is in ruins, and they in bondage, will they not learn to worship God in simplicity, in spirit and in truth? The sensuous in religion leads to slavery. It is well sometimes that our temple should be destroyed; God lays the outward in ruins that we may see the inward. The Church has often to go into captivity to learn the meaning of the spiritual. 3. It would tend to cultivate within them a right view of the Divine in worship. Israel thought that the temple was the one place of worship; but in captivity the scattered people learn that God will hear their cry from heathen cities and in desert places. 4. It would cultivate within them a right view of the sympathetic feeling which should prevail in their midst. Israel had been sore rent by faction; in captivity they are one. The Church is united by its sorrows. We observe respecting great religious movements—

I. THAT THEY OFTEN TAKE THEIR RISE IN THE STIRRINGS OF AN INDIVIDUAL SOUL. “The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.” 1. A *Divine* commencement. Here we see the beginning of the great movement of Israel's restoration to fatherland. History is unveiled and God is seen. The voice of God is heard in the proclamation of Cyrus. The human historian can only write the proclamation



of the king; the inspired historian makes known the secret working of God. We know nothing of the Divine heart-stirrings which precede the great movements of our age. God is behind the king and we see him not. The political serves the spiritual. Let us rightly interpret our heart-stirrings; God is in them, they have great meanings. They are more than the beatings of a pulse, they are the beginnings of spiritual liberty. Heaven has various ways of stirring our souls. 2. A *secret* commencement. The restoration of Israel began in the secret stirrings of one heart. It did not begin with the crowd, but with the individual. And so great religious movements generally commence in the secret awakening of the one man. See the power of a God-moved heart. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Restorations are in the heart before they are in the world. 3. An *unlikely* commencement. The Jews were looking for a rod out of the stem of Jesse to restore them; God sent an alien deliverer. A man of war becomes a man of peace; a man of conquest becomes an emancipator of the people. God employs unexpected agencies. Great religious movements often have unlikely beginnings. 4. An *effectual* commencement. The stirring of the heart of Cyrus had great possibilities in it—it expanded into a temple of worship; its pulsations are felt in our own age.

II. THAT THEY ARE TIMED BY THE FAITHFUL PROVIDENCE OF GOD. "That the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled." Thus the captivity of Israel terminated in the set time of God. 1. The *mercy* of God. In the proclamation of Cyrus to the wretched slaves see the Divine mercy to those most undeserving of it; the word of God is a merciful message to man, it is a word of liberty, that the ruined temple of life may be rebuilt. 2. The *fidelity* of God. Israel had the promise of liberty fulfilled; so all the promises of God respecting the future glory of the Church will be accomplished. 3. The *purpose* of God. The captives were not to go out of bondage merely for their own freedom and enjoyment; but to build the temple of the Lord. Men are freed from the tyranny of sin that they may establish the kingdom of heaven; they must be liberated before they can build. This is the Divine purpose in the salvation of men, that they may engage in promoting spiritual good.

III. THAT THEY OFTEN REVEAL IN MEN UNEXPECTED EXCELLENCES OF MORAL CHARACTER. 1. The *hidden* excellences of men. The Jews probably did not expect much aid from Cyrus; but he had excellences of knowledge, of grace, they little suspected. God saw this and used him. Men are often better than we know, and are more prepared to aid the work of God than we suppose. 2. The *revealed* excellences of men. Cyrus incidentally shows by his proclamation the good that is in him. Times of religious revival reveal unexpected abilities in men; then the dull man becomes brilliant; the man of little opportunity becomes rich in knowledge; the cold man becomes generous in gift. 3. The *utilised* excellences of men. All that is good in men God uses for the welfare of his Church.

IV. THAT THEY ARE OFTEN FURNISHED WITH NEEDFUL MATERIAL AID IN THE MOST UNEXPECTED MANNER (ver. 6). The departure of such a people would require great preparation, and would necessitate great expense. How are the captives to meet it? The proclamation of Cyrus provides for it. A wondrous providence often causes the world in unexpected ways to minister to the temporal needs of the Church; men of the world often help to erect a temple in which they are little interested, and into which they will never enter.

V. THAT AT SUCH TIMES SPIRITUAL THINGS ARE RESTORED TO THEIR RIGHTFUL SERVICE (ver. 7). The vessels of God were brought from the heathen temple and given to the returning Jews. In times of religious revival money, talents, children, all are brought from the possession of sin and placed in the service of God. Heaven now proclaims liberty to the captive!—E.

# CHAPTER II.

THE NUMBER OF THOSE WHO RETURNED FROM CAPTIVITY WITH ZERUBBABEL, AND THE NAMES OF THE CHIEFS (ch. ii. 1—64). It has been argued that the whole of this chapter is out of place here, and has been transferred hither from Nehemiah (ch. vii. 6—73), where it occupies its rightful position (Bishop A. Hervey). According to this view, the list is one embodying the results of the census made by Nehemiah, not a list of those who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel. But it seems strange that such a theory should ever have been seriously maintained, since not only does Ezra declare the list to be a catalogue of those "which came with Zerubbabel" (ver. 2), but Nehemiah himself warns us that it is "a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first" (Neh. vii. 5). The Jews, like other Semitic races, especially the Arabs, set great store by their genealogies; and, to secure a sound basis for these in the restored community, it was essential that a correct record should be kept of the families by which the state was re-established. Already there was a large number of Jews among the captives "which could not show their father's house, or their pedigree, whether they were of Israel" (ver. 59). It was essential, according to Jewish ideas, that such ignorance should, at the least, be arrested, and not spread through the nation. Hence the elaborate genealogies with which the first Book of Chronicles opens (chs. i.—viii.), and hence also the present list.

The list may be divided into ten parts:—

1. Enumeration of the leaders (ver. 2).
2. Numbers of those who returned, arranged according to families (vers. 3—19).
3. Numbers of those who returned, arranged according to localities (vers. 20—35).
4. Numbers of the priests, arranged according to families (vers. 36—39).
5. Numbers of the Levites, arranged similarly (vers. 40—42).
6. Families of the Nethinim (vers. 43—54).
7. Families of "Solomon's servants" (vers. 55—57)

EZRA.

8. Number of these last two classes together (ver. 58).

9. Account of those who could not show their genealogy (vers. 59—63).

10. General summation (ver. 64).

Ver. 1.—These are the children of the province. *I. e.* of Judæa, which was a province of Persia, distinguished here from Babylon, which was one of the capitals—a mode of speech indicating the foreign standpoint of Ezra. Unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city. Jerusalem was not the only site occupied by the people on their return. Many took up their abodes in the neighbouring towns and villages, such as Jericho, Tekoah, Gibeon, Mizpah, Zanoah, &c. (see Neh. iii. 2—19, and vii. 20—35). These were chiefly persons whose families had belonged to those places.

Ver. 2.—Zerubbabel, Jeshua, &c. In the corresponding verse of Nehemiah (vii. 7) there are twelve names, one of which (it is probable) has accidentally fallen out here. The twelve are reasonably regarded as either the actual heads of the twelve tribes, or at any rate as representing them. Notwithstanding the small number among the returned exiles who belonged to other tribes than those of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, there was a manifest wish on the part of the chiefs to regard the return as in some sort that of all the tribes (see ch. ii. 70; vi. 17; viii. 35, &c.). The number of the men. The lists in Nehemiah and the apocryphal Esdras differ in many details, and furnish strong evidence of the corruption to which numbers are liable from the mistakes of copyists, and the facility of error when there is no check from the context. Of the forty-two numbers here given by Ezra (vers. 3—60), as many as eighteen differ from the corresponding numbers in Nehemiah. The difference, however, is mostly small; and even the sum of the differences is trivial (see comment on ver. 64).

Ver. 20.—The children of Gibbar. For "Gibbar" we should probably read "Gibeon," which occurs in the corresponding passage of Nehemiah (vii. 25). The writer at this point passes from persons to places, making the latter portion of his list topographical. Gibeon was a well-known town in Benjamin (Josh. xviii. 25). Other Benjaminite towns in the list are Anathoth, Ramah, Gaba, Michmas, Bethel, and Jericho. It would seem that the descendants of the captives carried off from these places retained a traditional knowledge of the locality to which they belonged.

Ver. 36.—**The priests.** Four priestly families went up with Zerubbabel. Of these, three traced their descent to persons who had been heads of the priestly courses in the reign of David, viz., Jedaiah, Immer, and Harim (1 Chron. xxiv. 7, 8, 14). The other family had for founder a priest named Pashur, who was not otherwise distinguished. The numbers assigned to the priests by Ezra are identical with those in Nehemiah (vii. 39—42). **Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua.** So whose house, that is, Jeshua, the existing high priest, belonged. Hence, no doubt, the precedence given to the house of Jedaiah, which numerically was the least important.

Ver. 40.—**The Levites.** The non-priestly Levites are divided into three classes:—1. Ordinary Levites (ver. 40); 2. Choral Levites (ver. 41); and Levites descended from those who had had the charge of the temple gates (ver. 42). Compare 1 Chron. xxiv. 20—31; xxv., and xxvi. 1—19. Of the first class, only two families seem to have returned—those of Jeshua and Kadmiel, both of which traced their descent to a certain Hodaviah, or Judah (ch. iii. 9).

Ver. 41.—**The singers, the children of Asaph.** See 2 Chron. xxv. 1. It is remarkable that no descendants of either Heman or Jeduthun (*ibid.*) took part in the return.

Ver. 42.—**The porters.** Six families of doorkeepers returned; three of which bear old names, those of Shallum, Talmon, and Akkub (1 Chron. ix. 17), while the other three have names that are new to us. **One hundred and thirty-nine.** The smallness of this and the two preceding numbers is remarkable. While the returning priests numbered 4289, the returning Levites of all classes were no more than 341 (350, Nehemiah). It would seem as if some jealousy of the priests, like that which animated Korah and his followers (Num. xvi. 1—10), must have grown up during the captivity (comp. below, ch. viii. 15).

Ver. 43.—**The Nethinims.** See note on 1 Chron. ix. 2.

Ver. 55.—**Solomon's servants.** Solomon formed the remnant of the Canaanitish population which survived at his day into a separate servile class, which he employed in forced labours (1 Kings ix. 20, 21). It would seem that the descendants of these persons, having been carried into captivity by the Chaldeans, continued to form a distinct class, and had become attached to the sacerdotal order, as a body of *hieroduli* inferior even to the Nethinims. We may account for their special mention at this time by the importance of their services, when such a work as that of rebuilding the temple was about to be taken in hand.

Ver. 59.—**Tel-melah** is probably the Thelme of Ptolemy ('Geograph.' v. 20), a city of Lower Babylonia, situated in the

salt tract near the Persian Gulf. Hence the name, which means "Hill of Salt." **Cherub** is no doubt Ptolemy's Chiripha, which was in the same region. The other places here mentioned are unknown to us, but probably belonged to the same tract of country. **Tel-Harsa** means "Hill of the Wood." **They could not show their father's house.** It is more surprising that so many of the returning exiles had preserved their genealogies than that a certain number had omitted to do so. Considering the duration of the exile, its hardships, and the apparent improbability of a restoration, there could have been no cause for wonder if the great majority had forgotten their descent.

Ver. 61.—**Of the children of the priests.** Some of those who claimed to be descendants of Aaron, and therefore priests, had also lost the evidence of their descent. This loss was held to disqualify them from the exercise of the priestly office (ver. 62).

Ver. 63.—**The Tirshatha.** As "Shesh-bazzar" was the Babylonian name of Zerubbabel (ch. i. 8), so "the Tirshatha" seems to have been his Persian title. The word is probably a participial form from *tars* or *tarsa*, "to fear," and means literally "the Feared." It is used only by Ezra and Nehemiah (vii. 65; viii. 9). Haggai calls Zerubbabel uniformly *pechah*, "governor" (Haggai i. 1, 14; ii. 2, 21). **They should not eat of the most holy things.** The priests' portion of the offerings, called "most holy" in Lev. ii. 2, 10, is intended. Of this no "stranger" might eat (*ibid.* xxii. 10). **Till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim.** Zerubbabel evidently expected that the power of obtaining direct answers from God by means of the Urim and Thummim, whatever they were (see note on Exod. xxviii. 30), which had existed in the pre-captivity Church, would be restored when the Church was re-established in its ancient home. The doubt whether the families of Habaiah and Coz (or Haccoz) belonged to the priestly class or no might then be resolved. But Zerubbabel's expectation was disappointed. The gift of Urim and Thummim, forfeited by disobedience, was never recovered.

Ver. 64.—**The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore.** Ezra's numbers, as given in detail (vers. 3—60), produce when added together a total of only 29,818; Nehemiah's items (vii. 8—62) give a total of 31,089; those of the apocryphal Esdras a total of 33,950. The three authorities agree, however, in their summation, all alike declaring that the actual number of those who returned with Zerubbabel was 42,360. Esdras adds that children under twelve years of age are not included. If this were

so, the entire number must have exceeded 50,000—an enormous body of persons to transport a distance of above a thousand miles, according to Western experience, but one which will not surprise those acquainted with the East. In the East caravans of from ten to twenty thousand souls often traverse huge distances without serious mishap, and migrations frequently take place on a much grander scale. In the year 1771, 50,000 families of Torgouths, reckoned to number 300,000 souls, arrived on the frontiers of China, after a journey of 10,000 leagues through a most difficult country, and were given lands in the Chinese empire. They were followed in the next year by 180,000 Eleuths and others, who had accomplished a similar distance (see De Hell, 'Travels,' pp. 228, 229). Jenghis Khan is said to have forced 100,000 artisans and craftsmen to emigrate in a body from Khiya into Mongolia (Howarth's 'History of the Mongols,' p. 85). The transplantation of entire nations was an established practice among the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians.

THE NUMBER OF THE SLAVES, HORSES, MULES, CAMELS, AND ASSES OF THOSE WHO RETURNED (vers. 65—67). It may seem strange that matters of this trivial character should be recorded with such exactness in Holy Writ; but enumerations similar in character are not unfrequent (see

Gen. xxiii. 14, 15; 2 Chron. xvii. 11; Job xlii. 12). They may perhaps be viewed as teaching the lesson that with God nothing is too trivial for exact knowledge, even "all the hairs of our head" being "numbered" (Matt. x. 30). In the present passage the enumeration is not altogether without a further historical value, since it is indicative of the general poverty and low estate of the returning exiles, who had but one slave and one ass to every six of their number, one horse to every sixty, one camel to every hundred, and one mule to every one hundred and seventy-five.

Vers. 65.—Two hundred singing men and singing women. Nehemiah says two hundred and forty-five, and so the apocryphal Esdras. Perhaps, in the great default of Levites, the services of these persons may have been used to swell the sacred choruses of the time (ch. iii. 10). Hence, it may be, the mention of this otherwise unimportant fact.

Vers. 67.—Their asses. The ass (we see) is still, as in the earlier times, the chief beast of burden employed by the Israelites. Horses are rare, camels and mules still rarer; but most emigrant families had, it would seem, one ass (comp. 1 Sam. viii. 16; 1 Chron. xxvii. 30; Isa. xxx. 6).

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—67.—*The muster-roll.* The last chapter gave us a catalogue of the sacred vessels returned. In that portion of the present chapter which concludes with the above verses we have a similar catalogue of the sacred people returned (see Lam. iv. 2). The first verse seems to show us where this catalogue was made out, viz., in the land of their exile, where Judæa was constantly spoken of as "the province" (comp. Ezra v. 8; Neh. i. 3; xi. 3). If the nearly identical catalogue which Nehemiah (ch. vii. 5) describes himself as having found at Jerusalem, about 103 years afterwards, were the same catalogue as corrected and laid up after the arrival of the exiles at Jerusalem, this might account for the various minor differences which are discoverable between them. Many enrolled to start might never start, or never arrive; some not enrolled to start might join afterwards and be enrolled then. At any rate it is easier to suppose something of this kind than to suppose, in connection with such careful and formal documents of state, so many glaring "mistakes." See also the very curious coincidences with regard to numbers in this case adduced by Wordsworth *in loc.*; coincidences hardly to be accounted for except on the supposition of some secret but perfect method of numerical reconciliation. We may take the catalogue before us, therefore, very much as it stands. Not improbably, according to its own methods of interpretation, it is quite correct as it stands. Can we regard it as being also instructive from a moral point of view? Perhaps if we merely regard it in a general way, and as setting before our notice, first, the kind of men, and second, the number of men, that came up, we shall find even this apparently barren Scripture not without some sacred use to us. Some lessons can also be gathered from the very names we find here.

I. THE KIND OF MEN THAT CAME UP. They appear to have been men, in the main, loving the old state of things. They were conservatives, *e. g.*, in politics, keeping still, in the person of Zerubbabel as their chief civil ruler, to the ancient dynasty, that of David. They are also thought by some, comparing the names in ver. 2 with the probably correcter account in Neh. vii. 7, and with Ezra vi. 17; 1 Kings xviii. 31, to have shown the same spirit touching the ancient twelve-fold "constitution" of Israel. In Church matters, again, so to call them, the returning exiles showed their strong respect for precedents and the past by submitting to Jeshua as chief priest (see 2 Kings xxv. 18—21; 1 Chron. vi. 15; Haggai i. 1, 14). Also we see another branch of this Church conservatism of theirs in the especial importance attached by them to the question of genealogy. While, further yet, on this last-mentioned matter, the only proposal made for settling the doubts that beset it was by an ancient method again (ver. 63). Nor is it altogether unworthy of remark in this connection that they also appear to have been men showing great attachment to race and place, and assembling together for their proposed return to Jerusalem in family groups. In most cases these groups are described as "the children" of some one man. This is the case of vers. 1—17, and again of vers. 33—35. In other cases (vers. 18—33) the groups are described as being connected with particular towns, which, considering how necessarily near of kin all Israelitish fellow-townsmen had formerly been, comes to much the same thing (see Num. xxxvi. 7; 1 Kings xxi. 3). All the priests also who returned amongst them are in similar groups, being all described as belonging to four "courses" or family lines (vers. 36—39). The same kind of thing, again, is true of the Levites (vers. 40—42), and even of those Nethinims and children of Solomon's servants who appear to have been the "hewers of wood" and "drawers of water" for the congregation at large. A strong "clannish" spirit, a great desire to be and do as in "the old times before them," seems to have prevailed among all; the same spirit which afterwards degenerated into that false conservatism, the conservatism of mere human traditions (comp. Jer. vi. 16 and xviii. 15), found in Pharisaism and Rabbinism. Meanwhile, however, and while still uncorrupted, it made them just the men for their work: returned refugees, not colonists; men called upon merely to rebuild and restore, and not, like Moses before and the apostles of Christ after them, to devise and create.

II. The NUMBER of those who returned is also worthy of note. They were only a few, all told; some 50,000, of all sorts, including, so it would seem from comparing the items, about 10,000 souls of some kind not mentioned in the detailed catalogue. How different from the 600,000 "that were men," beside women and children and many others, that had come up out of Egypt so many generations previously! How many others must have been left behind (as some indication of the state of things on this point, see Esther ix. 16)! Counting also by the number of families or groups that returned, what are thirty-five, the whole number mentioned here, out of the many thousands of Israel! Moreover, a comparison of this chapter with what we read in ch. viii. of such names as Pharosh, Pahath-Moab, Adin, Shephatiah, and others, shows that all the members even of these thirty-five families did not come back at the first. So also, although the proportion of priests returning was very considerable (about one tenth of the whole), only four courses out of the twenty-four (vers. 36—39; 1 Chron. xxiv.) were represented among them; whilst some 341 Levites of all three descriptions, as against 38,000 in David's time, and some 392 Nethinims and others, comprised in forty-five groups, complete the catalogue given, except of cases of doubt. Yet even these few appear to be many, viewed from a different point. Of beasts of burden of all kinds they had rather more than 9000 amongst them (about one to every six travellers); but of these only 736 were horses; and of camels, the animals so especially required by them in the desert journey before them, there were only 435—a very different proportion indeed to that which we read of in Gen. xxiv. 10, where ten camels appear to have been provided for one traveller's use. Altogether it may well be questioned whether caravans of greater apparent importance in every way do not annually cross the deserts of the East without leaving any visible trace behind them on the history of the day. The secret of the difference was in the "blessing" that went with them. In those holy vessels, in the duty before them, and in the presence among them of the prophets and priests of Jehovah, and of the ancestor of the coming Saviour, they were indeed "bearing precious seed" (Ps.

xxxvi. 6). That being so, their small number was just the proper one for God's use ; sufficient to form a nucleus and make a beginning, but not sufficient to give them the appearance of being more than instruments in his hands (comp. Judges vii. 2, 4 ; and in connection with the very people and time we are speaking of, Zech. iv. 6).

III. A word or two may be added, finally, as to the special NAMES we find here. It cannot surely be a mere coincidence that we find this second entrance into Canaan, this return from Babylonian captivity, headed (ecclesiastically) by one bearing the greatest of Jewish names. Are not such truths as we find in Ps. lxxviii. 18 ; Acts vii. 45 ; Col. ii. 15, &c. pointed to here by this name of Jeshua ? See further, as to the typical relation between this "Jeshua" and the man Christ "Jesus," Isa. xi. 1 ; Jer. xxiii. 5 ; Zech. iii. 8 ; vi. 11—13, &c. Also let the name of Bethlehem in ver. 21 of this chapter be noted. Was not the fact there recorded, the return, viz., of certain Bethlehemites to their ancestral home in Judah, one step in the many steps taken to fulfil the prophecy of Micah v. 2, and to make this town of Bethlehem in after ages the exact spot where heaven came nearest to earth ? When we remember, indeed, yet further, as before noted, that we have in the name of Zerubbabel the name of a direct ancestor of Messiah himself (Matt. i. 13—16), as also what we read in Heb. vii. 9, 10, can we not, in these three names of Jeshua, Zerubbabel, and Bethlehem, prophetically see the Lord Jesus himself leading his people back to their land ? And can we not also, in the march of that little company, as it were, hear the very sound of his feet ? How true, therefore, and how much to be remembered by us, what we read of as declared on this subject by apostles, by angels, by himself (John v. 39, 46 ; Acts x. 43 ; Rev. xix. 10).

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The restoration of Israel.* This is an important subject. Great portion of Scripture occupied with it. Events of the utmost moment connected with it.

I. AS THE SCATTERING OF ISRAEL WAS GRADUAL, SO MAY HIS GATHERING BE. 1. *His tribes became distributed into two kingdoms.* (1) United until the evil days of Rehoboam (see 1 Kings xii. 20). (2) Thence distinguished as Judah and Israel. Under the name of Judah is comprehended also the small tribe of Benjamin, with priests and others of the tribe of Levi. 2. *The ten tribes were first carried captive by the Assyrians.* This was in two detachments. (1) By Tiglath-pileser, B.C. 739 (see 2 Kings xv. 29). (2) By Shalmaneser eighteen years later, when the deportation was complete (see 2 Kings xvii. 6, 18). 3. *The Jews were afterwards carried away to Babylon.* This was 130 years later, and was also accomplished in two detachments, viz.—(1) That, B.C. 599, when Nebuchadnezzar removed the principal people (see 2 Kings xxiv. 14). (2) That eleven years later, when the remnant was removed (see 2 Kings xxv. 11). (3) Then, six centuries later, came the dispersion by the Romans. Prophecy views the scattering as a whole, without breaking it up into its details, and so it views the restoration ; and as the scattering was accomplished at long intervals by instalments, so may the gathering be.

II. THIS RESTORATION BY EZRA WAS NOT THE FULL ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE PROPHECIES. 1. *The ten tribes were not included in it.* (1) They were the "children of the province." Not of Babylon, as some think, for Babylon is contrasted with it here. But of Judæa, now a province of the Persian empire (see ch. v. 8). Behold the goodness and severity of God ! (2) Further specified as "those whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away." No mention made of those before carried into Assyria. (3) Further, as "the number of the men of the people of Israel." Given in detail in this chapter. Here we find children of Judah, of Benjamin, of Levi and the priests, and even of the Gibeonites, but no mention of Ephraim and his associates. (4) But the restoration of the ten tribes is promised (see Ezek. xi. 15—17). (What a rebuke to those who repeat this conduct of Judah in exclusively claiming for themselves as Christians the promises made to Israel !) Therefore there is yet a grand restoration for Israel. 2. *This restoration did not reunite the divided nation.* (1) This fact already shown. (2) But prophecy requires this (see Ezek. xxxvii. 21, 22). "Therefore," &c. 3. *This restoration was not permanent.* (1) Even the

Jews were subsequently scattered by the Romans. Have since been kept scattered by Romanists and Mahomedans. (2) But prophecy requires this (see Jer. xxxi. 10; Ezek. xxxiv. 27, 28; Amos ix. 14, 15). "Therefore," &c.

III. THIS RESTORATION WAS A PLEDGE OF THE GREATER EVENT. 1. *It answered great purposes of prophecy.* (1) Those connected with the incarnation. To take place while the tribe-rod was yet with Judah (see Gen. xlix. 10). (See Julius Bate on 'The Blessing of Judah by Jacob.') While the family of David yet had their genealogies; while yet they dwelt near Bethlehem (see Micah v. 2). (2) Those connected with the atonement. Jerusalem the place of sacrifices. Zion the place from whence the gospel law should issue (see Isa. ii. 3; Joel ii. 32). 2. *There is a prophecy in accomplished predictions.* (1) The preservation of the Jews amongst the nations. Without a parallel in history. What for (see Jer. xxx. 11)? "Full end" of Assyria, Babylon, Rome. Anti-Christian nations doomed. (2) History of the land as remarkable as that of the people. No permanent settlers. Romans, Greeks, Saracens, Papists, Turks! 3. *The Jews expect their restoration.* (1) Good reason, for the word is sure. (2) Their faith is patient. Centuries of disappointment. *Is our faith so patient under trials?*—J. A. M.

Vers. 1—67.—*Spiritual significances.* What signifies to us, it may be asked, the exact number of the children of Parosh and Shephatiah (vers. 3, 4)? What does it signify to us that the heads of the returning families bore such and such a name? Why record this? What is—

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RECORD OF NAMES AND NUMBERS? The pains which the children of Israel took to keep a strict record of their families in Persia may have been (a) *an act of faith*: it may have been the expression of their belief that God's word of promise spoken by Jeremiah (i. 1) would be fulfilled, and that the hour would come when they or their children would lay claim to their ancestral inheritance. Or it may have been (b) *a habit of obedience*, which itself is suggestive enough. It was the will of their Divine Sovereign that everything, however minute, which pertained to his people should be scrupulously cared for. Nothing was unimportant that pertained to the people of God. It was worth while to chronicle every birth in every household of every family of every tribe of the holy nation. It was important to count every head of every division and rank of those who came out of Babylon, the "ransomed of the Lord." This striking particularity has no little interest to us. Things which the great and good among men would overlook as unimportant, are accounted not unworthy of regard by the Highest and the Best One. He who redeems us from a worse captivity than that of Babylon, and leads us to a better heritage than the earthly Jerusalem, counts everything of consequence that relates to his redeemed ones. He writes their names in the palms of his hand; he counts their tears; he hears their sighs; he orders their steps. Not one is overlooked; every name is entered in the book of life; every liberated soul has a place in the heart of the Redeemer.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LOSS OF THE RECORD (vers. 59, 62, 63). "These could not show their father's house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel" (ver. 59). "These sought their register . . . but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood," &c. (vers. 62, 63). (a) Some of the Jews had not taken sufficient pains to prove that they were of the people of God. (b) Others, who believed themselves (rightly, no doubt) to be descendants of Aaron had lost their register; perhaps some of these may have more cared to claim and prove descent from the "honourable" house of Barzillai (ver. 61), esteeming such secular rank of greater value than the more sacred lineage. The descendants of both of these classes suffered through their neglect; the latter more particularly, for they were separated from the priesthood for an uncertain and, as it turned out, an indefinitely long period. The retention of our claim to be of the "Israel of God," or to be of those who "minister in holy things" in the gospel of Jesus Christ, does not depend on any documentary evidence; no revolutions here can affect the roll that is "written in heaven;" but carelessness about our own spiritual life, negligence in the worship of God, inattention to the claims of our spirit, indifference to the work and the want of other souls—this may lead to our name being "blotted out from the

book of life," or to our being counted all unworthy to "speak in the temple the words of this life" to others.

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PAUCITY OF THEIR NUMBER (ver. 64). "The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and three score." Counting children they may have amounted to 50,000. This was but a small number compared with that of the exodus from Egypt, a feeble nucleus of a renewed nation! But the slenderness of their number was fitted (a) to bind them the more to the service of God, and (b) to knit them together in closer bonds of union. A small number, devoted to Christ and united to one another, is far more powerful than an undevout and inharmonious multitude.

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SCANTINESS OF THEIR RESOURCES (vers. 65—67). Their "servants and maids," and their "singing men and singing women" (ver. 65), their "horses and mules" (ver. 66), their "camels and asses" (ver. 67), made but a small show of property for the ransomed people. Doubtless there were amongst them men "well to do," if not wealthy. But the greater part of the rich members of the community remained behind. They who had the most to lose were least likely to accept the invitation to go up to Jerusalem. They who had least to leave behind them were most easily convinced of the wisdom of returning. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven."—C.

Vers. 61—63.—*The privileges of the priesthood.* We are here forcibly reminded—

I. THAT THE PRIESTHOOD HAD ITS PRIVILEGES. These were—1. *They were sanctified to the service of God.* (1) Distinguished from the tribes whose inheritance was in the soil (see Num. xviii. 20). (2) Distinguished among the Levites. They were sons of Aaron. Were served by the Levites. While they served in the holy places, at the altar, within the veil (see Num. xviii. 7). 2. *They ate of the most holy things.* (1) As Levites, they had tithes from the nation. (2) As priests, they had tithes from the Levites (Num. xviii. 20, 21, 26—28). (3) They partook of the altar (see Lev. vi. 16, 26; vii. 6, &c.). (4) They ate the shew-bread of the Presence, viz., of the Shekinah, the visible glory of God. All this symbolically expressed near fellowship with God.

II. THE LAW PRIESTS WERE TYPES OF TRUE CHRISTIANS. 1. In their *birth*, as sons of Aaron. (1) Aaron was a type of Christ. See arguments in Epistle to the Hebrews. (2) Christians are of the family of Christ (see Eph. iii. 14, 15; Gal. iv. 4—7). Have we the spiritual birth? 2. In their *office*, as priests of God. (1) Christians are a spiritual priesthood (see Isa. lxi. 6; 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9; Rev. i. 6). (2) They have a spiritual consecration (see 2 Cor. i. 21; 1 John ii. 20, 27). (3) They offer spiritual sacrifices. Themselves (Rom. xii. 1). Sacrifices of prayer, of praise, of service (see Hosea xiv. 2; Heb. xiii. 15). 3. In the *privileges* of their office. (1) They draw nigh to God. The law priest entered the holy place. We enter the most holy (see Heb. x. 19—22). (2) They feast with God. This glorious fellowship is now expressed in the Lord's Supper.

III. THOSE WHO ASPIRE TO THESE PRIVILEGES MUST BE ABLE TO SHOW A VALID TITLE.

1. *As to the priesthood under the law.* (1) Case of the children of Habai and Koz. These not elsewhere otherwise mentioned. Here acknowledged as sons of Aaron. Their reputed descendants could not show their genealogy from them. (2) Case of the children of Barzillai's daughter. Honourable mention made of Barzillai (see 2 Sam. xvii. 27—29; xix. 31—39). This accounts for descendants of his daughter assuming his name rather than that of their father. (3) They were therefore excluded (Heb., *polluted*) from the priesthood. Lost the sanctity; also the privileges. 2. *As to the priesthood under the gospel.* (1) As with the aspirants through Habai and Koz, the reputation of being of the family of Jesus will not avail. Have you evidence of spiritual birth? (2) As with the aspirants bearing the honourable name of Barzillai, respectability will not avail in place of a spiritual title. We must be real. (3) The Tirshatha will scrutinize our claims. We must all pass the scrutiny of the judgment. 3. *But is it possible for us to make up a valid title?* (1) What does the Tirshatha say (see ver. 68)? (2) The Urim and Thummim were wanting then. These were used in the breastplate of the high priest for obtaining responses



from the Shekinah of God in the temple. Neither these "lights and perfections" nor the Shekinah to illuminate them were found in the second temple. (3) We have an High Priest who stands up with these, even Jesus, who ministers in the grander temple. Through his glorious Spirit, the true Shekinah, we have in our breasts the most perfect illuminations. By these we ascertain our spiritual birth with its titles. Have we this most sacred, this most indubitable assurance?—J. A. M.

### EXPOSITION.

THE OFFERINGS MADE BY THE RETURNED EXILES ON THEIR ARRIVAL AT JERUSALEM (vers. 68—70). It has been customary among the pious of all ages and countries to make thank-offerings to the Almighty on the accomplishment of any important or dangerous work. The long journey of the exiles from Babylonia to Jerusalem involved considerable risk (see ch. viii. 22, 31), and its successful termination naturally called forth their gratitude. The character of the offerings made is indicative of the fact, otherwise probable, that the exiles had turned all that they possessed into money, and had brought to Jerusalem a considerable amount of coin.

Ver. 68.—Some of the chief of the fathers. That is, "Some of the heads of families." Each family went up under a recognized head or chief, the number of such heads being, as it would seem, nearly a hundred (vers. 3—61). When they came to the house of the Lord. No doubt considerable ruins of Solomon's temple existed when the exiles returned, and were easily to be recognized, both by their situation and by the size of the stones employed (1 Kings v. 17). The place occupied by these ruins was that whereto the emigrants flocked, and about which they, in the first instance, located themselves. Offered freely for the house of God, to set it up in its place. The first object of the returned exiles was the rebuilding of the temple, and their offerings were consequently given expressly towards the expenses of this costly work.

Ver. 69.—After their ability. As each was able; the richer more, the poorer less. Threescore and one thousand drams of gold.

The word translated "dram" is *darkēmōn*, which appears to be the Hebrew representative of the Persian word which the Greeks rendered by *dareikos*, or "daric." This was a gold coin, stamped with the figure of a Persian king, wearing his crown, and armed with a bow and arrow. According to the most exact computation, each such coin contained somewhat more pure gold than an English guinea, and was worth £1 ls. 10½d. of our money. The 61,000 darics would therefore have been equal to £66,718 15s. Five thousand pounds of silver. The word translated "pound" is *maneh*, an equivalent of the Greek *mina* and the Latin *mina*. In Greece the silver *mina* was worth a little more than £4 of our money. The value of the Hebrew silver *maneh* is uncertain, but probably was not very different from the Greek. Thus the sum contributed in silver may be estimated at above £20,000, and the entire contribution at nearly £90,000. It must be noted, however, that Nehemiah's estimate (vii. 71, 72) is less. One hundred priests' garments. Nehemiah says ninety-seven (*ibid.* vers. 70, 72), whence we may conclude that Ezra uses a round number.

Ver. 70.—In their cities. Not in Jerusalem only, but in the neighbouring towns also, e. g. Bethlehem, Anathoth, Ramah, Gaba, Michmash, Bethel, Ai, Nebo, and Jericho (see above, comment on ver. 1). All Israel. Ezra very determinately puts forward this aspect of the return—that it was participated in by all the tribes (see ii. 2; iii. 1; vi. 16, 17; vii. 13; viii. 29, 35, &c.). He does not, however, exclude the other aspect, that it was especially a return of Judah, or "Judah and Benjamin" (see ch. v. 1; x. 9).

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 68—70.—The arrival. After the muster-roll, as described to us in vers. 1—67 of this chapter, the next thing, naturally, is the expedition itself. In the present instance, however, this is disposed of in a couple of syllables. "They came." In these modern days—so some one has noticed—in consequence of the great comparative ease and rapidity of the means of locomotion, we speak rather of arriving at than of travelling to our destinations. There is something parallel here. Nothing is related of this journey except that it was duly brought to an end. It does not follow from this, however, that it is unworthy of note. Often, where little is said, all the more is implied. How far this is the case in the present instance will

be our first branch of inquiry. What we are afterwards told of the doings of these pilgrims immediately on their arrival at Zion will be our second and last.

I. BEFORE THE ARRIVAL. These travellers "came." That is all. What does this show as to their method of coming? The route traversed, it must be remembered, was by no means a short one. Babylon was always considered a long way from Jerusalem (Isa. xxxix. 3). Ezra, afterwards (ch. vii. 9), was four months on the road, a time, in these days, more than sufficient to travel round the whole globe. The road also at that time, viz., during the subsequent reign of Artaxerxes, was by no means a safe one (ch. viii. 22; see also Neh. ii. 9). On the other hand, such travellers as these were, returning with spoils which had evidently seemed precious even to Nebuchadnezzar in all his pride (Dan i. 2), would be especially liable to attack; to say nothing of the fact that their very errand would rouse the hatred of not a few. At the same time, the character of their company, as being a collection of families intending to "settle" again in Palestine, would itself put very great difficulties, in their case, in the way of defence; as also in regard to progress, and commissariat too. It is not every man who could have conducted even an army in safety so far; much less so large a household, so mixed a multitude, a caravan at once so vulnerable, so feeble, and yet so rich. It is something to be able to say of such that they did arrive at Jerusalem. Perhaps we shall see the significance of this brevity more plainly still in the way of contrast. "When Israel came out of Egypt" and travelled to Canaan before, they had a very much shorter journey before them, and their numbers were so vastly larger that they were able in some measure, even at first, to defend themselves (Exod. xvii. 8—13). Yet how much we are told, and how copiously, of their difficulties, their dangers, their deliverances, their many murmurings, rebellions, and judgments, and all the long succession of marvellous vicissitudes that befel them by the way (Num. xx. 14). That first journey of theirs to Canaan is the most adventurous journey on record. Never were any travellers so guided, so fed, so protected, so often so near to destruction and so triumphantly rescued from it. Nowhere, at any rate, are we told so much of any other journey on earth. The absolute silence of Scripture, therefore, respecting all the incidents of this second journey of the same people to the same land seems well worthy of note. We can only account for it by supposing that there was nothing notable to be told. But how much this implies, as we said. How much, 1. As to *the character of the pilgrims*. How unlike the Israelites in the desert, how quietly persevering, how free from "murmurings and disputings" these Israelites must have been. Considering how many occasions for disputing fellow travellers are known to find (Gen. xlv. 24; Mark ix. 33), the fact that in this four months' journey on the part of 50,000 people there was nothing of the kind worth mentioning is not without weight. Do we see in it one wholesome result of the heavy discipline of their long captivity? Like the singular post-captivity freedom of Israel from idolatry, that constant pre-captivity sin (see Ps. cxix. 67)? How much, 2. As to *God's rule in this world*. It was certainly by God's "good hand upon them" (Ezra viii. 31, 32; Ps. cvii. 7; James iv. 13—15) that they had come where they were, just as much so as in the case of those addressed in Josh. xxiii. 14. How complete, therefore, in both cases, his faithfulness to his promise! How constant and effectual his providence! How all-ruling his power. Yet how exceedingly opposite his modes of operation! In the one case by a succession of miracles which Israel never forgot. In the other case without a single incident that left any trace of its path; unless, indeed, we consider such consummate finish and ease of operation to be a kind of miracle in itself—the standing miracle of his rule (see Col. i. 17; Heb. i. 3: "upholding," &c.).

II. AFTER THE ARRIVAL. The journey thus happily accomplished, what was first taken in hand? As far as possible, their first duty. They had come up specially to build the LORD's house. It was necessary, of course, in order to do this, that they should have homes of their own. Before, however, they see to this second point in any way, they do all they can for the first. They cannot yet, whilst themselves homeless and unsettled, actually begin the LORD's house. But they can lay aside of their substance for that purpose, and so show their desire; they can make their "offerings" (ver. 68) and put them into the "treasury" (ver. 69), adding thus to that which they had already collected in various ways (see ch. i. 4, &c.) for that end.

And this they do. it seems, first. Such is the Scriptural, such the politic, plan (see Deut. xxvi. 1—11; 1 Kings xvii. 13; Matt. vi. 33; Luke xi. 41). It is also to be observed that they do so “freely”—the Scriptural spirit (see Exod. xxv. 2; xxxv. 5; Deut. xv. 10; 2 Cor. ix. 7). And that they do so, once more, sufficiently—the Scriptural proportion. “They gave after their ability” (see Mark xii. 43, 44; xiv. 8; 2 Cor. viii. 12). It would almost seem, indeed, as though 2 Cor. viii. 2 had been fulfilled in this case; so large, considering their numbers and probable condition, is the computed value of their contributions. For example, if the 61,000 drams or dareics of gold=£66,718 15s., and the 5000 pounds or minæ of silver=£20,000, we have a total contribution of about £90,000, which, for a congregation of not quite 50,000 (children and poor and servants included, as it would seem), is nearly two pounds per head. Well would it be if no other “congregations” ever did any less. This additional provision thus made for God’s house, they next see to their own; the result being as briefly summed up to us in ver. 70. Comparing this verse with Neh. vii. 73, which seems to relate to the same transaction, we find that in both cases, with some diversity on other points, God’s ministers are named first. If this means that they were attended to first, it harmonises well with what went before. God’s house before their own houses; God’s ministers before themselves. In any case we seem invited to notice that all his ministers of all ranks were attended to; not the “priests” only, but all the divisions of the “Levites” (Levites proper, singers and porters), and even their assistants, the “Nethinims,” too. Indeed, however we are to understand the peculiar expression, found both in Ezra and Nehemiah, “[some] of the people,” it would seem, from the special subsequent mention in both cases of “all Israel” as “dwelling” “in their cities,” that the laity also of all tribes, and probably also of all classes, including those mentioned in ch. ii. 59—63, were duly provided for in like manner. And if so, the picture is one of a very beautiful kind. All these pilgrims, down to the humblest, were pilgrims no more. All these once banished ones both arrived now and settled. In their true country; in their proper “cities;” in their respective homes! In all which we may see an illustration of the wonderful variety, order, and completeness of God’s ways. In creation (Ps. civ. 27; cxxxvi. 25; cxlv. 15, &c.). In providence (Acts xxvii. 43, 44). In grace (John x. 28; xvii. 12). In the “dispensation of the fulness of times” (Dan. xii. 13, as contrasted with Ps. i. 5; Luke xxi. 36, &c.). Happy, indeed, who can say, “We are journeying home to God” (Num. x. 29).

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—70.—*Men forsaking the worldly life.* We regard the people returning from Babylon as typical of men going out of the worldly life into the life and work of the kingdom of God. Observe—

I. THAT MEN FORSAKE THE WORLDLY LIFE FROM CHOICE. Cyrus compelled no man to leave the land of captivity. The Jews left Babylon in the exercise of their own free will. Israel as a nation went out of Egypt; but as individuals they come out of Babylon. Heaven compels no man to forsake sin. 1. It was a *good* choice. It was better to build the temple than to work in Babylon; the spiritual is better than the servile; it is good to serve God. 2. It was a *wise* choice. They would be honoured as the heroic builders of the second temple; and how would they be blessed in their holy toil. It is wise to choose the unworldly life. 3. It was a *self-denying* choice. They had to leave friends and companions behind; they had to forsake vested interests, and enter an unknown future. The unworldly life necessitates self-denial, but the reward is a hundredfold. 4. It was a *believing* choice. They believed that God would be with them, and that his angel would go before them. There are great duties in the pursuit of an unworldly life; there are many temples to erect, but God is an infinite resource.

II. THAT THERE ARE NUMEROUS ENCOURAGEMENTS TO MEN FORSAKING THE WORLDLY LIFE. 1. They have encouragements of a *spiritual* nature. “The priests” are with them (ver. 36). All that belongs to heaven’s priesthood goes along with the unworldly life in its march from Babylon. 2. They have encouragements of a *social*

nature (ver. 64). The companionships of the unworldly life are helpful. 3. They have encouragements of a *joyful* nature. "The singers" are with them (ver. 41). And men who seek to live an unworldly life are accompanied by many celestial joys. 4. They have encouragements of a *varied* nature. There were many to aid in unnumbered ways the people in their new work.

III. THAT IN FORSAKING THE WORLDLY LIFE MEN MUST BE SOLICITOUS AS TO THE EVIDENCES OF THEIR MORAL REALITY. "But they could not show their father's house" (vers. 59—63). These were with the returning people, and to all appearance as loyal as any of them, but they could not prove their oneness with them. 1. There is a register *within*. Are the dispositions of a renewed life within us? have we the testimony of a good conscience? 2. There is a register *around* us. Whom do men say that we are? Are our lives such as become the builders of God's temple? 3. There is a register *above* us. God's witness is true. The register is soon lost by sin. Let us not sacrifice it to temporal gain; let us not sacrifice it by marriage (ver. 61). If we lose it we shall be morally unclean, spiritually depraved, and eternally cast out (vers. 62, 63). We must *prove* our religion as well as possess it.

IV. THAT IN FORSAKING THE WORLDLY LIFE MEN MUST GIVE THEMSELVES ENTIRELY TO THE NEW TOILS THAT DEVOLVE UPON THEM (vers. 68—70). 1. They *came* to the work. "They came to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem." Sight quickens activity. The ruined temple would awaken a sense of duty. 2. They *gave* to the work. "They gave after their ability." Ability is the universal law of service. Men who enter upon the unworldly life must be ready for all the work of the Lord.—E.

Vers. 68—70.—*Social and spiritual gradations.* The company that came out of Babylonian captivity was by no means a disorderly or unorganized multitude. It was well officered, and was divided and subdivided into ranks. It probably marched in regular order. Under the "Tirabatha" Zerubbabel, Jeshua the high priest, and Mordecai (probably the honoured deliverer), with other natural leaders, came (ver. 70), priests, Levites (a singularly and disproportionately small number of these), the people (typical Israelites—laymen, citizens), the singers, the porters, the Nethinims. There were—

I. VARIOUS RANKS IN THE HOST OF THE LORD (ver. 70). "The priests, and Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims," &c. Each man of the 42,000 had a part to play in this exodus as well as in the settlement and the building which should follow; but some had more difficult and responsible posts than others. No service was without value of its kind. They could not have carried their treasures without help from the *porters*, nor conveyed the sacred vessels without the *Nethinims*; nor could they well have spared the *singing men and women*, whose sweet songs of Zion must have beguiled the way and helped them on over rough places and up steep heights towards the site of the city of their hopes. Much less could they have spared the *priests and the leaders*, who by their clear head and commanding will were to do more than the others with their hand and tongue. One is our Master, even Christ: we all take the truth which we hold and teach from the words of the great Teacher himself. But many are the parts we take, and varied the services we render, as we journey toward the heavenly Jerusalem, as we build the house and kingdom of the Lord. In our Christian ranks are great leaders, like Luther, and Calvin, and Knox, and Chalmers, and Wesley; great writers and apologists, like Augustine, and Butler, and Baxter; great preachers and missionaries whose name is legion; and below these in spiritual rank and influence are ministers, teachers, officers, "sweet singers," and all the company of those that help in the service of the sanctuary, in the work of the Lord, down to the "doorkeeper of the house." Each man in his place renders valued service: service which, if not marked "valuable" by the handwriting of man, is yet truly and really valued by the observant and discerning Master. He who does well, working conscientiously and devoutly, the work for which he is fitted, is rendering a service to his race and to his God which is not overlooked, and will never be forgotten. Its record is on high, and he who wrought it will hear of it again, when every man

(who is anywise praiseworthy) shall have praise of God, and the blessed, heart-satisfying "Well done" shall be spoken by the Son of man.

II. EXCELLENCY OF WORK IN HIS SERVICE (vers. 68, 69). The narrative (vers. 68, 69) anticipates the arrival in Judæa and the work to which they there addressed themselves. It states that some of the chief of the fathers "offered freely for the house of God," and that they "gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work." Here were two acceptable elements in all sacred service—(1) *cheerfulness*, which the Lord loveth (2 Cor. ix. 7); and (2) *fulness*, according to ability, every one doing the best he can: not the least that can be offered with decency, but the most that present resources will allow. In building up the spiritual house of our Lord's kingdom—a work in which every Christian disciple is to be engaged—we may bring silver and gold to the treasury, or we may bring manual labour, or mental work, or spiritual exercises, or we may contribute the services of the teacher or the organizer. We may help in one of a hundred ways, more or less important. And not only is each one honourable and valuable in its way, but each work *admits of being done in varying degrees of excellency*—more or less cheerfully, more or less efficiently. We must aim at perfection in every department. When we realize that we are giving to him (a) who "gave himself for us," (b) who is giving his Spirit to us, and (c) who will give his glory to us, we shall give, not of our weakness, but our strength; not sluggishly and inefficiently, but "after our ability." The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive "*riches*."—C.

## § 2. RESTORATION OF THE ALTAR OF BURNT SACRIFICE, AND CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

### EXPOSITION.

#### CHAPTER III.

RESTORATION OF THE ALTAR (ch. iii. 1—3). On their arrival in their own land, the exiles, it would seem, proceeded first of all to their several cities, reconnoitring the ground, as it were, and at first taking no step that could arouse the hostility or jealousy of the previous inhabitants. After a while, however, "when the seventh month was come," they ventured with some misgivings to restore and rebuild the great altar of burnt sacrifice, which Solomon had formerly erected in the principal court of the temple, directly opposite to the porch (2 Kings xvi. 14; 2 Chron. iv. 1), and on which, until the destruction of the temple, the morning and evening sacrifice had been offered. We gather from Ezra's narrative, that when the ruins were carefully examined, the site of the old altar was ascertained, and care was taken to put the new one in the old place. The restoration of the altar thus considerably preceded even the commencement of the temple; the one being essential to the Jewish service, which could not exist without sacrifice, while the other was only a convenient and desirable adjunct. The

altar must have been completed by the last day of the sixth month (see ver. 6).

Ver. 1.—**When the seventh month was come.** The seventh month was Tisri, and corresponded nearly to our October. It was the most sacred month of the Jewish year, commencing with a blowing of trumpets and a holy convocation on the first day (Lev. xxiii. 24), which was followed on the tenth day by the solemn day of atonement (*ibid.* ver. 27; comp. ch. xvi. 29—34), and on the fifteenth day by the feast of tabernacles or "ingathering," one of the three great annual festivals, which lasted to the twenty-second day. Zerubbabel and Jeshua determined to risk a disturbance rather than defer the restoration of the altar beyond the commencement of this sacred month. **The people gathered themselves together.** The people were bound to attend the feast of tabernacles (Exod. xxiii. 14—16); but something more than this seems to be intended. The restoration of the altar and the re-establishment of the daily sacrifice having been announced, there was a general influx of the country Israelites into Jerusalem to witness the proceedings. **As one man.** Very emphatic (comp. Judges xx. 1, 8; 2 Sam. xix. 14).

Ver. 2.—**Jeshua the son of Jozadak.** The position of Jeshua, both here and in vers. 8, 9, sufficiently marks him as the

high priest, though Ezra does not give him the title. Haggai, however (ch. i. 1, 14; ii. 2), and Zechariah (ch. iii. 1, 8; vi. 11) distinctly assign him the office. His father, Jozadak, or Josedech, was the son of Seraiah, high priest at the destruction of Jerusalem (1 Chron. vi. 14). The name Jeshua is a mere variant of Jophua, and so corresponds to Jesus, of whom Jeshua may be regarded as a type. **His brethren the priests.** As being all of them equally descended from Aaron, the priests were "brethren." Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel. See note on ch. ii. 2, where Zerubbabel's actual descent is given. **And his brethren.** Such other members of the royal house as had returned with him. **As it is written in the law.** See Lev. xvii. 2-6; Deut. xii. 5-11. It was an express command of God to the Israelites that sacrifice should be offered only at Jerusalem in the place which he should appoint. **Moses the man of God.** That is, "the Prophet;" but the phrase is emphatic, and characteristic of Ezra (comp. 1 Chron. xxiii. 14 and 2 Chron. xxx. 16).

Ver. 3.—**They set the altar upon his bases.** They built the new altar upon the foundations of the old one, making it exactly conform to them. This was done, no doubt, to indicate that the religion which the exiles brought back from Babylon was in every respect identical with that which they had possessed before they were carried thither. Many moderns hold the contrary; but it has not yet been proved that the sojourn at Babylon modified the religious ideas of the Jews in any important particular. **For fear was upon them.** Or, "though fear was upon them." Notwithstanding their fear of the surrounding nations, they set up the altar. We must remember that their neighbours were not Persians, but descendants of various idolatrous nations—Hamathites, Babylonians, Susianians, Elamites, Cuthæans, &c.—bitterly opposed to anything like a pure spiritual religion (see 2 Kings xvii. 24; Ezra iv. 9, 10). Though the exiles had permission from Cyrus to raise up not only their altar, but their temple, it was not at all certain that his nominal subjects would passively submit. It was as if a modern Turkish Sultan should decree the erection of a Christian altar and a grand Christian cathedral at Kerbela or Bussorah, towards the verge of his empire. There would be great danger in acting on such a decree. **Burnt offerings morning and evening.** So the law required (see Exod. xxix. 38, 39; Num. xxviii. 3, 4).

**CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES** (ver. 4). Emboldened by their successful restoration of the altar of burnt sacrifice, Zerubbabel and Jeshua allowed the

people to gather themselves together and celebrate the autumnal festival, though they can scarcely have made it on this occasion a "feast of ingathering."

Ver. 4.—**As it is written.** According to the mode of celebration prescribed in the law; i. e. for seven consecutive days, from the fifteenth to the twenty-second of Tisri, with burnt offerings every day, and a holy convocation on the first day and the last, and a "dwelling in tents" during the whole period (see Lev. xxiii. 31-42). **The daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom.** The offerings for each day of the festival are carefully laid down in Num. xxix. 13-38. We must understand that all the particulars there enjoined were carefully observed.

**PERMANENT ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DAILY SACRIFICE, THE SET FEASTS, AND THE OFFERING OF FREE-WILL OFFERINGS** (vers. 5, 6). Having set up the altar, and celebrated the particular festival which the revolving year happened to have brought round, and which it would have been wrong to neglect, the exiles re-established permanently three things:—1. The daily sacrifice; 2. The celebration of the new moons and other regular feasts; and 3. The practice of allowing the people to bring offerings whenever they pleased, to be offered on the great altar by the priest or priests in attendance. The first of these was for atonement; the second for public thanksgiving and acknowledgment of God's mercies; the third for private devotion, the payment of vows, and the like.

Ver. 5.—**The continual burnt offering.** This is beyond a doubt the daily morning and evening sacrifice, called "the continual burnt offering" in Exod. xxix. 42 and Num. xxviii. 3-6. The clause is not modified by the succeeding words, which are additional, not exegetical, and which should not be translated, as in the A. V., both of the new moons, but, "and those of the new moons." The returned exiles kept henceforth regularly both the daily morning and evening sacrifice, and also that appointed for the new moons (Num. xxviii. 11-15), and those appointed for the other "set feasts," such as the passover and the feast of Pentecost. **And of every one that willingly offered.** Nor was this all. The practice was resumed of sacrificing on the great altar at any time any free-will offerings that individual Israelites might bring (see Lev. i., ii., iii., &c.). Thus provision was made

for all that was most essential in the ritual of religion, while the temple itself still remained unbuilt (see ver. 6).

**PREPARATION OF MATERIALS FOR THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE** (ver. 7). When the restoration of religion had progressed thus far, the civil and ecclesiastical rulers turned their attention to that object which had been specially mentioned in the "decree of Cyrus" (ch. i. 2, 3), the rebuilding of the temple. And, first of all, it was necessary to collect building materials, wood and stone, which were the chief materials of the first temple, and which Cyrus had particularized in a supplementary decree (ch. vi. 4) as those to be employed in the construction of the second.

Ver. 7.—**They gave money also unto the masons.** The exiles had no doubt been employed by the Babylonian monarchs to a large extent in building, as their ancestors had been during their sojourn in Egypt (Exod. i. 2). Consequently, among those who returned there were many masons and carpenters. These were now set to work by Zerubbabel, and received their wages in money. **And meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre.** The Phœnicians, on the other hand, received

their wages in kind. As Phœnicia was a narrow strip of country, and grew but little corn, it had always to depend mainly for its supplies of food on its neighbours, and generally drew the greater part from Palestine (see Acts xii. 20). Hiram had furnished materials to Solomon for the first temple on condition of receiving wheat, barley, wine, and oil (2 Chron. ii. 15). Zerubbabel made a similar arrangement at the present time with the Tyrians and Sidonians. **To bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa.** Having cut the timber in the mountains, the Phœnicians conveyed it to the coast, perhaps sometimes letting it pass down the rivers, and, collecting it on the coast into large rafts or "flotes" (2 Chron. ii. 16), took these by sea to the roadstead of Joppa (Jaffa). Hence it was conveyed by land a distance of thirty-five miles to Jerusalem. Lebanon cedar was in great request in the East, and appears to have been cut and carried off both by the Egyptians and the Assyrians. The forests must in the ancient times have been far more extensive than at present. **According to the grant that they had of Cyrus.** A special grant of Phœnician timber, made by Cyrus, seems to be intended. Though Cyrus had not conquered Phœnicia ('Herod.,' iii. 34), he might regard his conquest of Babylon as involving the submission of what had for some time been a Babylonian dependency.

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—**The first sacrifice.** The third chapter begins much as the second chapter concluded, with a picture of the restored Israelites in their respective "cities" or homes. But they do not stay there very long. The temple and the temple worship, for which they had laid by (ch. ii. 68, 69) before dispersing, is still much on their minds. These verses tell us of the consequent action next taken in that direction—1. on the part of the people specially; 2. on the part of their leaders specially; and 3. on the part of them all collectively.

I. **THE PEOPLE SPECIALLY.** They left their "cities" for the city of God; of their own consent (they "gathered themselves together"), with one consent ("as one man"). *ἁποσυμὰδόν*, 1 Esd. v. 45. What stirred them all in this manner? The fact, apparently, that the "seventh month" was "come," or was "approaching" (Keil). Certainly, connected with that month there were many things which might well have this effect. How important this month ecclesiastically, and from the point of view of the temple worship. On the first day, besides the new moon, came the festival known as the feast of trumpets (Num. xxix. 1). On the tenth the great day of atonement, the great fast of the Jewish year (Num. xxix. 7). From the fifteenth to the twenty-second was celebrated the third of the three great annual feasts, viz., that of tabernacles or ingathering. No other month was equally distinguished. No subsequent month of the twelve was distinguished by any universal call to the temple precincts. The next such call would be five months afterwards, in the passover month. How important, again, this seventh month, as the first month of the civil year, the month from which the Sabbatical and Jubilee years were computed (Lev. xxv. 9). Its first day would answer exactly to our "New Year's Day," a most natural time for instituting or recommencing a new order of things. Historically, also, as being a month in which one of the special captivity fasts (see Zech. vii. 5; viii. 19) had been observed, this

was a marked month in these exiles' minds. How fit a month, therefore, in every way, for making a beginning of some kind. "Now, if ever;" almost "Now, or never," the occasion seemed to exclaim. It is by such conjunctions, perhaps, that God most frequently signifies his guiding will to his willing people (comp. Acts xvi. 6—10).

II. THE LEADERS SPECIALLY. If the time for action was now so near, who should take the lead in regard to it? Who, of course, but the natural leaders. The leaders in the Church first ("Jeshua," &c.), the matter in hand being one so specially concerning them. But not the leaders in Church only; "Zerubbabel and his brethren," as laymen, also having their interest in it. Together they resolved to begin by rebuilding the sacrificial altar, that which had stood in the old temple before the holy place and in the court of the priests. Why did they begin in this way? Partly owing to the tenor of the "law of Moses," that being a law of sacrifices from beginning to end (see Heb. ix. 21, 22), according to which there was no approach to the most holy place itself without the previous use of the altar. This consideration would probably tell especially on Jeshua and the priests; as the example of David, next, who desired to build the house, but was only permitted to "find out" its "place," and so far to begin it as to consecrate as it were its altar (1 Chron. xvii.; xxi. 26; xxii. 1; Ps. cxxxii. 5), would tell especially on Zerubbabel, David's representative and descendant, and lead him also to wish to begin by erecting the altar upon the old "base" (ver. 3). There would also be a third reason to influence both sets of leaders alike. By this time the returned remnant would find the hostility of their new neighbours awakened. Only surprised at first to hear of their return (comp. Ps. cxxvi. 2), afterwards inclined to ridicule and despise them (comp. Neh. iv. 2—4), when they saw them settling down in their old habitations as a distinct and separate people (Num. xxiii. 9), these strangers would begin in various ways to show their dislike, and perhaps to murmur their threats. In this condition of danger how natural to follow the example of Samuel (1 Sam. vii. 10; comp. xiii. 11, 12), and sacrifice to Jehovah. A very instructive lesson, by the way, for these gospel times. Just so our need of an atonement is the very first of our needs. The nature of God's law, the example of God's servants, the enmity of the world and Satan (Rev. xii. 11) combine to teach us this truth.

III. THE CONGREGATION EN MASSE. Representatives of all Israel having come to Jerusalem, and the leaders having erected the altar, what were they all to do next? The place of sacrifice was restored. Out of the many kinds of sacrifices connected with it in former days, which should they place on it first? That which God had appointed for sanctifying the beginning and end of each day (ver. 3). This quite in accordance with the very first use of the original altar itself (Exod. xxix. 38), and with the happy consequences thereby secured (*ibid.* 43—45). Also with the many remarkable successive injunctions of Num. xxviii., xxix., where we find it expressly commanded that whatever special sacrifices might be ordered on any day—whether for the Sabbath (ver. 10), or new moon (ver. 15), or passover (ver. 23), or any day of it (ver. 24), or Pentecost (ver. 31), or feast of trumpets (xxix. 6), or day of atonement (ver. 11), or feast of tabernacles, or any day of it (vers. 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 38)—these regular daily sacrifices were always to be offered "beside." Also with the prominence given to them in 1 Chron. xvi. 39, 40; 2 Chron. ii. 4; xiii. 11; xxxi. 3. Also with the peculiarly grave character attached in Dan. viii. 11; ix. 27; and xii. 11 to their cessation and interruption. Indeed, from a spiritual point of view, and regarding this people of Israel as a "congregation" or living Church, these daily sacrifices seem always presented to us as the very pulse of its life. How fitting, therefore, in the endeavour to restore that Church's suspended animation, to attend to them first. How important, also, under the new economy, the perpetual intercession of Christ. "He needeth not daily, as those high priests" (Heb. vii. 27), to offer for sin; "for this he did once [for all] when he offered himself." But there is a need that he himself should continually be pleading this one sacrifice on our behalf. On this depends our justification (Rom. viii. 34). On this in every way our salvation (Heb. vii. 25). Herein is the pulse of *our* life. So we seem to be taught by such passages as Col. iii. 3; Gal. ii. 20. And so, with regard especially to the restoration of that life when impaired or suspended (just as with



Israel in the case before us), in what is said in 1 John ii. 1, 2 respecting this great Intercessor or "Advocate," and the effectual plea of his death. "If any man sin," as every man does (1 John i. 8—10), and so begins to die, as every sinner then does, here is his way of escape.

Vers. 4—7.—*The first feast.* "Also," ver. 4; "afterward," ver. 5; "but," ver. 6; these are the three stepping-stones of this passage. After making a good beginning in restoring the daily sacrifices, the people "also" kept their first feast. "Afterward" they did what they could in restoring the observance of all the other ordinances and feasts of Jehovah. "But," it being impossible to do this satisfactorily as they were then situated with regard to the temple, they further proceeded to make the necessary arrangements for commencing its erection, which was, after all, their great work. Such seems to be the order here of thoughts and events.

I. The "ALSO," the SPECIAL FEAST. In the natural order of things, the seventh month having now come, the feast of tabernacles would be that nearest at hand. We cannot, therefore, exactly consider them to have chosen this as their first restored festival; but we can see indications that they specially welcomed it, and observed it with much joy. The seventh month also brought round the feast of trumpets and the day of atonement; yet the observance of these, if now observed at all by them, was not of such a kind as to be considered worthy of special mention. The first thing mentioned is the daily sacrifice; the next, this feast of tabernacles. If not the next thing that occurred, therefore, it was certainly, to their thoughts, the next thing in importance. Observe, also, what is expressly recorded as to the spirit in which they observed it. The regulations for the observance of this feast were amongst the most intricate in the whole book of the Law. Many victims of many kinds were required for its due observance; some the same, some different, for all its seven days in succession; those required for the eighth day being different, again, from them all (see carefully Num. xxix. 12—38). All this, as there found "written," if not as also added to by long-established "custom" (see John vii. 2, 37, 38 for a supposed reference to a "custom" of this kind), as "every day required," they fulfilled. How great, now manifest their pleasure in learning, in doing all. This not to be wondered at when we bear in mind the peculiar joyfulness of this annual feast. As the feast of ingathering or harvest (Deut. xvi. 13—15; Exod. xxiii. 16), and as the feast which celebrated the close of their wanderings (Lev. xxiii. 40, 42, 43), it was, even more than the passover or the Pentecost, a special season of joy. Accordingly, while we read in the passover of the bread of affliction (Deut. xvi. 3), and read once of rejoicing at Pentecost (*ibid.* 11), we read of it twice (*ibid.* 14, 15) in this case. Also, in the history of Israel we find mention of certain special cases of peculiar joy, all connected with ideas of permanent habitation and finished toil, when this feast was celebrated with peculiar glory (see reference to Joshua in 1 Kings viii. 65; 1 Chron. xvii. 1, 5; 2 Chron. vii. 8—10; Neh. viii. 9—18). No feast, therefore, in every way, could have been more appropriate to their case.

II. The "AFTERWARD," the OTHER ORDINANCES. However peculiarly suitable to them this timely festival, it was not the only thing they observed. On the contrary, besides that which they had previously reinstituted (as again referred to in ver. 6) they attended henceforward now to all things enjoined in God's law. They kept up still the continual burnt offerings (mentioned specially again perhaps because of their special importance), and began from this time to order regularly all monthly, or annual, or even occasional rites—"the new moons," "the set feasts," "the free-will offerings" of individuals. All that the Lord had "consecrated" or directly enjoined, all that he had also declared his willingness to accept, they gladly observed. In short, they restored in spirit the religious year, and as far as they could, in their circumstances, brought back in this respect the old days.

III. "BUT"—for, as we have remarked already, there was a serious "but" in this case—THEY COULD NOT AS YET DO ALL. They had the proper altar and priests; to some extent the proper vessels; also the requisite knowledge and inclination; and, in a certain way, the requisite means. For all this, however, to be done as they should be, with proper state and significance, and as Israel's future functions required

perhaps more than ever, there was needed a proper house. To this matter, accordingly, they next turn. Its very "foundation" at that time was not laid, and could not be as things were. But the necessary preparations could now be seen to, and must be, indeed, without delay. For example, they could arrange as to wages, &c. with those workmen who were to work on the spot, as we read in the beginning of ver. 7. Also with those to work at a distance ("them of Zidon and Tyre," ver. 7), who were to cut the requisite cedar trees in Lebanon and convey them for use both by land and sea. In which last particular it is to be noted that they followed the example of the wise king himself when building the first temple, as well in choosing the right persons as in adopting the right route, and in offering the right remuneration, viz., not "money," but "meat" and so on (see 1 Kings v. 6, 9, 11; 2 Chron. ii. 8, 16; also Acts xii. 20). Further, we find that they asked for no more than they were already authorised to ask by King Cyrus (end of ver. 7). It would be well if all business transactions were equally prudent and fair, especially those which have to do in any way with God's service. Seek out the hands that are truly skilful, offer them what it is worth their while to accept, ask of them only what is lawful, this makes the man of business and the man of honour as well. And in doing business on God's account the man of God should be both. May not this whole passage teach us yet another lesson in regard to doing God's work? There is always something, whatever our circumstances, that we can all do in that line. We can begin if we cannot complete. We can prepare if we cannot begin. Even where we can do nothing ourselves, we may engage others to do it. Moreover, if we really seek to use such opportunities as we have, our endeavours are quite sure to be accepted and blessed (Mark xiv. 8; 2 Cor. viii. 12). This applies to learning as well as doing God's will (John vii. 17).

#### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1-3.—*The altar rebuilt.* The return from Babylon is supposed to have been in the spring. The first employment of the people would be to construct for themselves huts, or so to repair dilapidated buildings as to make them fit for habitation. This accomplished, no time was lost in setting about the great work of re-establishing their ancient worship. So "when the seventh month was come," the month Tisri, corresponding to portions of our September and October, they repaired to Jerusalem to encourage and witness,—

I. THE REBUILDING OF THE ALTAR OF BURNT OFFERINGS. 1. They saw it *placed upon its old bases*. (1) They regarded it as the same altar. No ceremonies of consecration needed—wanted no novelties in religion. Here is a useful lesson to Christians. The religion of their fathers was Divine, and was associated with a wonderful history. (2) Antiquity should be tested by appeal to Scripture. 2. They saw it *rise to its completion*. (1) They had hostile neighbours (see ch. iv. 1, 9, 10). Idolaters of all sorts will ever oppose true worship. (2) These were overawed by the multitude. The wicked are cowards at heart. (3) The hands of the elders were encouraged. This is the force of the particle, "*Then stood up*," &c. Learn the great value of witnessing for Christ.

II. THE OFFERING OF THE DAILY SACRIFICES. These are described Num. xxviii. 1-8. 1. *The offerings*. These were—(1) The burnt offering—a lamb of the first year, type of Christ, consumed in fire, and so called the "food of God." (2) The meat offering—fine flower mingled with oil, consumed by the worshipper or his representatives. (3) The drink offering—wine—like the meat, partaken of by God and man (see Judges ix. 13). This feasting the symbol of friendship. 2. These were *continual*. (1) Morning, evening, day by day the year round, so forward "year by year continually" (see Heb. x. 1). (2) Kept up a continual remembrance of sin. (3) Continually procured the "forbearance of God" until his justice should be satisfied in the perfect sacrifice and offering of Calvary. 3. But there was *no sacred fire*. (1) The Jews confess the absence of this after the captivity. No account of any in the more recent Scriptures. (2) Strange fire would scarcely be used. No account of its authorisation. Without this would it be accepted (see Lev. x. 1, 2)? (3) Burnt offerings without fire! Significant of the waning of the dispensation.

Designed to wean the Jews from Moses in favour of Jesus. Strength of prejudice! Strong tendencies even in Christians to ritual rather than to the spiritual in worship (see Gal. iii. 1—3). We witness here—

III. A UNITED NATION OF WORSHIPPERS. 1. There was concert among the *priests*. (1) The high priest was there. Jeshua is not here expressly so styled; implied in the words, "Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren." Thus distinguished elsewhere (see Haggai i. 1; ii. 2; Zech. iii. 1). He was the grandson of Seraiah, the high priest who was slain by Nebuchadnezzar (see 2 Kings xxv. 18—21). He was a type of Christ not only in virtue of his office, but also in his name, which is the same as Jesus, and in his leading the captivity out of Babylon. (2) The "brethren" of Jeshua were with him. The sons of Aaron in general. 2. There was concert among the *nobles*. (1) Zerubbabel was there. He heads the roll of names (ch. ii. 2) as a principal leader of the restoration. He was the representative of the royal family, and now a worthy successor of his ancestors, David and Solomon, who were so gloriously concerned with the first temple. (2) His "brethren" were with him. 3. The people were there "*as one man*." (1) Responsive to the summons of the chiefs. They assembled fifteen days earlier than the feast of tabernacles, when all the males should appear (see ver. 6). (2) They came with exemplary unanimity; their heart was in it; they were the noblest of the nation, under 50,000, leaving the indifferent ones in Babylon. Such unanimity could never have been secured by coercion. Value of the voluntary principle.—J. A. M.

Vers. 1—7.—*Acceptable service*. When the 42,000 Israelites arrived in the land whither they went forth, they took peaceable and glad possession of their old homes; many, if not most, of them returning to the very fields and homesteads from which their fathers had been led away. They then showed a piety which was partly the fruit of the long discipline they had passed through in Persia. Their service of Jehovah, on this their return, was characterised by—

I. SPONTANEITY (vers. 1, 5). They must have had much to do to bring into good condition the long-forsaken fields; agriculture must have been neglected, and there must have been a strong demand for the most active and unremitting labour. Nevertheless, without any edict or decree from any spiritual or secular authority, "the people gathered themselves together as one man at Jerusalem" (ver. 1). A common impulse urged them all to leave business employments and household duties and repair to the sacred city for the worship of God. And when there, they "willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord" (ver. 5). Their service was, as ours will be, the more acceptable because unconstrained, spontaneous, the prompting of individual piety. Not the mandate of an earthly master, but the will of our Divine Lord, the love of Christ, should constrain us to activity and liberality.

II. RIGHTNESS OF PLACE (vers. 1, 3). They gathered at Jerusalem (ver. 1), and built an altar on the very same basis as that on which the old altar had stood (ver. 3). They were right in this. For it had been very specially enjoined that only on that one site should sacrifices be offered unto God. They had regard to a precise injunction in thus confining their offerings to one place. No such restrictions limit our worship. The hour has come when neither on one mountain nor another shall men worship the Father (John iv. 21). Wherever the people of God meet in sincerity and earnestness, there they "behold his mercy-seat." "Every place is hallowed ground" to the devout heart. Yet there is such a thing as propriety of place. Still "the Lord loveth the gates of Zion," and to worship him regularly at his house, to unite regularly with his people at the table of the Lord, is a useful and acceptable service.

III. UNITY (ver. 2). Jeshua and Zerubbabel stood together to build the altar of the Lord. It is a most excellent thing for any society when those who are influential in the Church and those highly placed in the State unite and do not divide their influence, strengthen and do not weaken one another's hands, in the promotion of morality and religion.

IV. READINESS THROUGH EAGERNESS (vers. 3, 6). After using Solomon's temple as their sacred edifice wherein to worship, it was natural that the people should desire something more than a rude altar reared under the skies. But so eager were they to

return to the old sacrifices, which had so long ceased to be offered, that they could not wait for the erection of a building; before the foundation of the temple was laid (ver. 6) they began to present burnt offerings unto the Lord. The apathetic soul will be ready enough to find an excuse for irreligion, for leaving unoffered the sacrifice that is due; but the eager-hearted will be prompt to substitute one instrument for another, that the service may not be unrendered. A feeble piety will yield to the first check. Spiritual earnestness will be ingenious to devise means, and will anticipate the hour when all outside circumstances compel to devotion. Do not let God's praise remain unsung because a full-toned organ is not at hand for accompaniment, nor let his truth be unspoken because there are no fine walls to echo its proclamation. Godly zeal will find utterance whether art be present or absent.

V. REGULARITY (ver. 4). "They offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required" (ver. 4). There must be room left for some play of spontaneity, or our spiritual life will become mechanical and lose its animation and elasticity and beauty. But there must be also regularity: constant services, daily devotion, morning and evening prayer. Liberty and law must be reconciled and dwell harmoniously together, not only in every home, but in every heart.

VI. COMPREHENSIVENESS (vers. 3, 4). Opposite feelings led them to the mercy-seat: their *fear* led them to seek God—they set up the altar for fear of the people by whom they were surrounded (ver. 3); and their *joy* also led to devotion—they kept the joyous feast of tabernacles, and united in the service in which gladness of heart prevailed (ver. 4). The truly devout man is he with whom all paths lead to the throne of grace; to whom all things, however varied and unlike one another, suggest the thought of God; who brings his burden of grief and fear, as well as his treasure of joy and hope, to the feet of his Master.—C.

Vers. 1-7.—*Aspects of worship.* I. THE HUMAN IN WORSHIP. "Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak," &c. (ver. 2). These men were the leaders in this movement of worship; they gathered the people thereto. There is a human side to Divine worship; the altar looks toward earth as well as toward heaven; man builds, if God consecrates it; man appoints the time of worship, arranges its method, gathers the people, stimulates the conscience by faithful words, and enforces the law. A few good men can awaken the devotional in the multitude, can give the impulse of altar building.

II. THE ESSENTIAL IN WORSHIP. "And builded the altar" (ver. 2). The altar was built first because it was of primary importance; because it was essential to their sacrificial offerings. The altar first. 1. Then it is important to begin *early*—the altar before the city; early in life; in the day; in the enterprise. 2. Then it is important to begin *aright*—to commence with the essential rather than with the incidental. There are devotional, doctrinal, social, domestic altars; begin with them in any work of restoration; well begun is half done. Love before worship, pardon before works, Christ before civilization; commence with the altar. 3. Then it is important to begin *under good leadership*. 4. There is acceptance in a *rude moral beginning*. It was only an altar, but its offerings were accepted by God. When we have not all that is needful to ornate worship, heaven will accept a sacrifice from a rude altar; the heart is more than the structure. God will accept worship from the rude altar in the forest as well as from the stately altar in the temple. 5. Then there is a great power in a *feeble but devout beginning*. The flower is in the seed; the temple is in the altar.

III. THE ADDITIONAL IN WORSHIP. "And they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord," &c. (ver. 3). A true worship will not rest content when the altar is built; the altar is only a commencement; we must go on to perfection. There is a binding influence in the erected altar; we cannot cast down what we have built. It is an inspiration; to what service will it lead. Faith and worship have numerous addenda. A man who begins with the altar to God can only end by working it out in all loving possibility, in fact, by placing *himself* upon it. We must put large offerings on our altars; Christ gave himself for us.

IV. THE TIMOROUS IN WORSHIP. They built the altar, all the while in fear of the

people who perhaps had little sympathy with the edict of Cyrus (ver. 3). The people erected the altar at once because they feared interruption; an altar erected is a power against the adversaries. In these days of quietude we can build our altar without fear of the persecuting enemy. What fears often animate the soul of the devout worshipper!

V. THE SECULAR IN WORSHIP. "They gave money also unto the masons," &c. (ver. 7). Worship combines the sentiment of the soul and temporal aid; the bread of life which God gives us and the bread we give him. It combines—1. Prayer. 2. Gifts. 3. Work. The temple of God is built by a variety of gifts and by a variety of men; it provides a service for all. Many have to do with it mechanically who have nothing to do with it morally; a man may be a "mason" without being a minister. —E.

Vers. 4—6.—*The worship of the first year.* In connection with the worship of the first year after the return of the children of Israel from Babylon, we notice—

I. THAT IT WAS SUCH AS COULD BE CONDUCTED IN THE OPEN AIR. 1. They had *their altar rebuilt*. (1) This was the first thing done, because it was essential. Sacrifice is interwoven with all the ceremonies of worship according to the law. The principle of sacrifice is no less essential under the gospel. Ponder the thought that there can be no true worship without sacrifice. (2) They lost no time in this. They came forth from Babylon in the spring. The journey probably occupied four months (comp. vii. 9). They had therefore barely time to get housed before the seventh month came, upon the first day of which they were "as one man" at Jerusalem. Learn that things essential to worship should have prompt and early attention. Forsaking Babylon—seeking Zion. 2. But the *foundation of the temple* was not yet laid. This recalls the worship of the patriarchs. (1) That of the first family eastward of Eden (Gen. iii. 24, and iv. 3, &c.). (2) That of Noah emerging from the ark (Gen. viii. 20). (3) That of the Hebrew patriarchs in Canaan (Gen. xii. 6—8; xiii. 18; xv. 9—11; xxii. 13; xxvi. 25; xxxiii. 18—20). Learn, worship may be genuine without being elaborate (see John iv. 23, 24). 3. There appears to have been *no celebration of the ceremonies of the great day of atonement*. (1) The daily sacrifice commenced on the first day of Tisri (ver. 6). The great day of atonement was due on the tenth of the same month, of which there is no mention. The narrative carries us at once to the feast of tabernacles, which followed on the fifteenth day. (2) The reason of the omission is found in the want of the temple. The sprinkling of the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry would be impossible (see Lev. xvi.). There was no most holy place for the high priest to enter (see Heb. ix. 7, 25). There was no altar of incense (see Exod. xxx. 10). Lesson: If we cannot worship God as we would, we should worship him as we can.

II. THAT IT COMPREHENDED ALL THE FESTIVALS OF THEIR RELIGION. 1. Foremost amongst these was the *feast of tabernacles*. This was one of the great annual festivals (Exod. xxiii. 1—6). (1) The passover. This was held on the first day of Abib—instituted to commemorate the events connected with the exodus from Egypt (Exod. xiii. 3, 4; Deut. xvi. 1—8). (2) The feast of first-fruits. This commenced with the putting in of the sickle for the harvest. Also called the feast of weeks, for it lasted seven weeks, while the fruits of the earth were being gathered. Lesson: We should recognise God in all our blessings. In all this rejoicing the Israelites still kept up the memory of their emancipation from Egypt (see Deut. xvi. 7—12). (3) The last was the feast of tabernacles. In the present case this came first. This arose from the accident of its occurring first after the return from Babylon. Yet in this accident there was a providence, for the feast of tabernacles has a peculiar relation to gospel times (see Zech. xiv. 18). This feast also called the feast of ingathering, for it was a rejoicing over the garnering of the harvest and vintage (Deut. xvi. 13—16). Not so called here, for there would be no extensive ingathering in this first year. There was a remembrance of the deliverance from Egypt in this festival also; it called to mind the dwelling in tents in the wilderness. In this celebration the people could not but associate with this their own recent deliverance from Babylon. Lesson: In all our festivities let the grateful remembrance be present with us of our spiritual emancipation from the Egypt and Babylon of sin and

error. (4) Particularly note that they "offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the custom as the duty of every day required." On each of the days during which this feast lasted there was a difference in the custom (see Num. xxix.). "As the duty," &c. Heb., "the matter of the day in the day." Learn: (a) Every day brings its own religious duties. (b) We must do the work of the day in the day. 2. They offered also the *continual burnt offerings*. (1) The daily offerings. These were never interrupted. They continued morning and evening throughout the year. (2) Those of the Sabbaths (see Num. xxviii. 9, 10). The word Sabbath is applied not only to the seventh day of the week, but indifferently to all the Jewish festivals (Lev. xix. 3, 30). (3) Those of the new moons (see Num. xxvii. 11—15). (4) Additional to all these were the free-will offerings of the people. Lesson: The services of religion are not to be taken up fitfully, but must be steadily observed. They are not irksome, but delightful to those whose hearts are brought into sympathy with them by the grace of God. This grace should be diligently sought.—J. A. M.

### § 3. REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE AND OPPOSITION MADE TO IT.

#### EXPOSITION.

LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE AND CEREMONIAL ON THE OCCASION (vers. 8—13). Seven months were occupied with preparations. The winter was past, and the spring had arrived. It was the second month, Zif, the month of "blossom," corresponding to our May—the same month in which Solomon had laid the foundation of the first temple (1 Kings vi. 1)—when Zerubbabel judged that the time had come for commencing the foundation of the second. The correspondence of the month was no doubt intentional, like the correspondence of the foundations of the altar (ver. 3), and was to mark that all was to be as before, that nothing was to be wantonly changed. Zerubbabel and Jeshua presided; but to Zerubbabel is assigned the chief part in the work. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house" are the words of God himself to Zechariah (Zech. iv. 9). It was arranged that the work should commence with a religious ceremonial, natural piety here suggesting what was not recorded of the "first house," though it may have occurred and not have been put on record. The ceremonial consisted chiefly of praise, and was accompanied with sacred music, according to the pattern set by David and Solomon in their sacred processions and ceremonies (1 Chron. xv. 19, 24; xvi. 5; 2 Chron. v. 12, &c.). Their special parts in it were assigned beforehand to the priests, the Levites and the people.

Ver. 8.—In the second year. In B.C. 537, the second year of Cyrus in Babylon, which was also the second year of their coming (*i. e.* after their coming) to the (ruined) house of God (ch. ii. 68), began Zerubbabel, and the others, and appointed the Levites. Small as the number of the Levites who returned with Zerubbabel was, to them especially was intrusted the work of the house of the Lord, *i. e.* the superintendence of the workmen employed to rebuild it (see ver. 9).

Ver. 9.—Jeshua here is the head of the Levitical family mentioned in ch. ii. 40 as "the children of Jeshua," and Kadmiel is the head of the other family. Judah represents the "Hodaviah" of that place, and is probably a corrupt reading, as Nehemiah (vii. 43) has "Hodevah." The sons of Henadad, who are here united with the Jeshuites and Kadmielites, constitute a third Levitical family, which (as the text stands) was also engaged in superintending the work. But there is some reason to suspect that the passage is an unauthorized addition to the true text.

Ver. 10.—When the builders (Zerubbabel and Jeshua) laid the foundation of the temple, they set the priests in their apparel—the rich apparel, designed "for glory and for beauty," which the law required (Exod. xxviii. 40; xl. 27—29), and which the people had recently provided (Ezra ii. 69). With trumpets. To blow with trumpets was always the duty of the priests (Num. x. 8; xxxi. 6; Josh. vi. 4; 1 Chron. xv. 24; xvi. 6; 2 Chron. v. 12), to praise God with cymbals the task of the Levites (1 Chron. xv. 16, 19; xvi. 5; 2 Chron. v. 12, 13; xxix. 25, &c.), perhaps because the trumpet was regarded as the instrument of greater

dignity. After the ordinance of David. David's ordinance on the subject is first expressed briefly in 1 Chron. xv. 16; afterwards, more fully, in vers. 17—21 of the same chapter. The musical service of Zerubbabel fell short of the "ordinance of David," since it comprised neither psalteries nor harps, which were an essential part of David's system. Apparently, the musical skill of the Levites had declined under the depressing circumstances of the captivity (see Ps. cxxxvii. 2).

Ver. 11.—*They sang together by course.* Literally, "They replied (to each other)," or sang antiphonically; the burthen of their song being, that God was good, and his mercy towards Israel everlasting (comp. 2 Chron. v. 13; vii. 3, where the Levites of Solomon's time are reported to have praised God similarly). *All the people shouted with a great shout.* Shouting on occasions of secular joy and triumph has been practised by most nations, both in ancient and modern times. But religious shouting is less common. Still we hear of such shouting when the ark of the covenant was taken into the Israelite camp near Aphek (1 Sam. iv. 5), and again when David solemnly brought it up from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem (2 Sam. vi. 15). Shouting appears also in the Psalms (xlvii. 5) and in Zechariah (iv. 7) in connection with religion. It is always indicative of religious joy.

tion with religion. It is always indicative of religious joy.

Ver. 12.—*Many . . . who were ancient men, that had seen the first house.* The old temple had not been destroyed so much as fifty years. Consequently, there would be many who could remember its grandeur and glory. These persons, when the foundation of the (new) house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice. It was "the day of small things" (Zech. iv. 10). The new house, in comparison with the old one, was "as nothing" (Haggai ii. 3). The difference was perhaps not so much in the dimensions (see note on ch. vi. 3) as in the size and quality of the foundation-stones (1 Kings v. 17), the excellence of the masonry, and the like. Solomon had employed the best workmen of one of the greatest of the Tyrian kings; Zerubbabel had only the arms of his own subjects to depend upon.

Ver. 13.—*The people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping.* One, it would seem, was as loud as the other; neither predominated. This, which would scarcely be possible among ourselves, was not unnatural in the East, where those who lament utter shrill cries, instead of weeping silently. Herodotus describes the lament of the Persians for a lost general as "resounding throughout all Bœotia" (ix. 24).

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 8—13.—*The first stone.* We now come in this story to a very critical time. The great work of the restoration of the house, for the sake of which the partial restoration of Israel to Canaan had been brought about and was to continue (see again ch. i. 2, 3, 4, 5; also vi. 3, noting further how, in fact, all recorded in Ezra, and even in Nehemiah, may be regarded as introductory, subsidiary, or supplementary to this point), at last is before us. We read, on the one hand, of the very last step in the way of prelude and preparation. We read, on the other, of the very first step in the way of actual construction. In both we shall find how much importance is attached to the juncture.

I. *THE LAST PRELIMINARY.* The site being fixed, the workmen engaged, as also, we may suppose (the "second month of the second year" having arrived), the proper materials being now on the spot, it only remains to arrange, before finally starting, for proper superintendence. Who so likely for this as those who had a kind of family fitness or hereditary call to that work, viz., the Levites of sufficient age? And what so proper an age (*i. e.* if second thoughts are best) as the age fixed by the "last words of David" (1 Chron. xxiii. 27, compared with vers. 3, 24—26; and see 2 Chron. xxix. 25 as further evidence of the authority attaching to all David's arrangements concerning the house)? Such, accordingly, was the precedent followed by all concerned in this case. All who helped to make up the whole "remnant" that had returned to Jerusalem (including by name both leaders, and by express mention the priests and Levites, and by implication all other Israelites) approved of this plan. And all thus called and "appointed," *i. e.* all those Levites belonging to those families which had that hereditary acquaintance before referred to, equally approved of it too. Two families of such have been already mentioned among those that came up (ch. ii. 40). We find mention now for the first time, though not for the only time (Neh. iii. 18, 24; x. 9), of a third, viz., the family or

"sons of Henadad." Possibly these may have come up at some subsequent date, or it may be that they only form some minor division, which, as being specially qualified for the work now to be entered on, come specially now to the front. In any case it is a significant indication of the universal readiness on the part of all qualified Levites "to set forward the work." Indeed, in this "last preliminary" this seems the principal feature presented to us, this marked unanimity of will and judgment. As they appear to have travelled from Babylon, as they had harmoniously arranged in distributing the people (ii. 70), as they had all agreed about erecting the altar (iii. 2), so are they all of one mind also in this finishing touch. We may well believe that it was one secret of their happy progress so far. There is nothing so fatal as the absence of unanimity in building a house (Gen. xi. 6—8). Nothing so effectual as its presence, especially where God's house is concerned (see Zeph. iii. 9, 10; John xiii. 34, 35; xvii. 20, 21; also Acts iv. 32, 33; Ephes. ii. 19—21; 1 Pet. ii. 5).

II. THE FIRST MOVE. This was the action, of course, of placing the first stone. (Contrast, as a description of utter destruction, Matt. xxiv. 2.) How important a step this was considered may be seen by noting the formalities observed on the occasion, being almost identical with those observed at that more than royal progress described in 2 Chron. v. 4—14 (comp. also 1 Chron. xv. 27, 28). How significant too these formalities were in themselves. "Trumpets" are used commonly on occasions of state, to notify the approach of the sovereign, to draw attention to proclamations made in his name. In the Old Testament we find them employed to "sound an alarm," or assemble the people, or proclaim the Jubilee year (Lev. xxv. 8—10; Num. x. 9, 10; Joel ii. 1, 15; Amos iii. 6); and that generally, though not always, in the hands of the priests (Josh. vi. 6, 8, 13; Judges vii.; 1 Chron. xv. 24; xvi. 4—6; 2 Chron. v. 12). The priests, therefore, as here, sounding these, and clad in official garments, made the occasion one of state in God's name, as though himself present and speaking peace. On the other hand, the cymbals and songs of the Levites, praising God again in the ancient, national, and highly-esteemed manner (1 Chron. xvi. 41; Ps. cxxxvi.; and the prophecy of Jer. xxxiii. 10, 11), was a kind of response to that voice. One is almost reminded of the "goodwill towards man" and "glory to God in the highest," when the foundation-stone of redemption was laid in Christ's birth (Luke ii. 14). How important also the occasion was found to be in practice. "Well begun is half done." A foundation-stone is both a proof and a promise—a proof of much, a promise of more. How much had now been accomplished! How great a step at last taken! How much more might be hoped! When the heart is full of such feelings, what can it do but shout out (see Zeph. iii. 14; Zech. ix. 9). Compare also the shout of Xenophon's returning ten thousand when they found out how far they had travelled towards the goal they desired on first catching sight of the sea. Just so the men here. "The foundation is laid. We shall soon have the house. Praise God." So they felt, so they shouted in the exuberance of their joy. So may a Christian also, when laying, as it were, by simple faith in Christ, the "foundation-stone" of his hope. With these "pleasures of hope," however, there were also sorrows of memory. Some fifty years or thereabouts before then there had been another house on that spot. There were "ancient men" present there who had seen it in all its glory. They could see it still in their minds. To them, therefore, this present "foundation-stone" recalled years of shame, and terror, and agony. Oh, that such a thing as this should ever have been required! That there should ever have been this pitiable necessity for thus beginning again! That there should be such a scene around them as they saw at that time (see, even long afterwards, Neh. vii. 4; also Haggai ii. 3; Zech. iv. 10)! Bursting into uncontrollable tears at these thoughts, they filled the air with their cries. It was impossible indeed for any to distinguish which kind of cry prevailed most, the cries of sorrow or those of joy. No wonder the story adds that "the noise was heard afar off." Regarded, indeed, from a typical and prophetic point of view, has it ceased echoing yet (see, *inter alia*, Ps. cxviii. 22—24; Isa. xxviii. 16; 1 Pet. ii. 4—8)?



## HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 7—13.—*Thought, work, and feeling.* We have in this passage—

I. A TRUE THOUGHT (ver. 8). "Now in the second year of their coming," &c. We can easily imagine any orator among the company of the returned Jews making out a strong case for leaving the building of the temple till better days should dawn. The sufficiency of the altar already reared for the practical purposes of devotion; the readiness of God to accept any offering that came from the heart, however mean the outward circumstances might be; the insecurity of their present state; their incompetence to build a temple which would compare with that of Solomon; the imperative necessity that existed to spend all their strength in consolidating their new-gained liberty; the wisdom of waiting till they could do something worthy of the God they worshipped, &c.—all this might have been made plausible enough, perhaps was so made. But if so, it was overruled by the true thought that to the God who had redeemed them from bondage, and given back to them their old liberties and their beloved land, they owed the very best they could offer, and that at the earliest moment. The first-fruits, they had long learnt, belonged to him who gave them everything. It was meet and fitting that as soon as ever they were established in their own old land they should build to him, the Source of all their blessings, the best house they could rear. This was a true thought of theirs, and should find a home in our minds now. Not anything that will do, but the very best that can possibly be done, for God. We should not be content that "the ark of the covenant of the Lord should remain under curtains" while we dwell in a "house of cedars" (1 Chron. xvii. 1). Whatever, in the affairs of his kingdom, is improvable should be improved. The slain lamb is to be "without blemish." The building should be without disproportion; the singing without discord; the service without mistakes. Let worthiness, excellency, beauty, grace be offered to him who has given us not only the necessary and indispensable, but the exquisite, the delightful, the glorious. Let nothing detain us from the immediate service of Christ.

II. SYSTEMATIC WORK (vers. 8, 9). They set about accomplishing their design with great carefulness and method. They committed it to the Levites, who were most interested and best instructed—to those of them who were of a suitable age (ver. 8); they sent to Tyre and Sidon and to Lebanon for the best workmen and the best materials that could be had for money (ver. 7); while, for love, the high priest and the priests overlooked and directed the work, and saw that all was according to the book of the law of the Lord. The work was quickly begun, but it was not hurriedly and slovenly dispatched. Each part was wrought by those who were specially adapted for it. No amount of zeal in the cause of God will make up for lack of intelligence and adaptation. We must build up the spiritual house of the Lord—the Church of Christ—not only inspired by consecration of spirit, but guided by a wise and intelligent adoption of the best means and appliances. Generous impulses must be sustained by sound methods, or the cause we have at heart will suffer, and instead of joy and exultation will come sorrow and shame.

III. MINGLED FEELING (vers. 10—13). No more touching and pathetic picture can be found even in the Bible itself—that book of tenderest pathos and truest poetry—than the scene recorded in the closing verses of this chapter. The Jews, pure in heart and godly in spirit, have ever been capable of the most profound emotion. Here was an occasion to call forth the fullest joy and at the same time the tenderest grief. Once more, on the ruins of the ancient sanctuary, the new temple was about to rise. It was the hour from which a new era in their nation's history should date. It was an act from which the devotion of a reverent people for many a long century should spring. Patriotism and piety lent their strong and hallowed influences to ennoble and consecrate the scene. Feeling touched its deepest and rose to its highest note. And when the aged fathers, the ancient men, remembering the perished glories of the temple on which the eyes of their youth once rested with such pride and joy, wept as they looked on its ruins; and when their tears and lamentations mingled with the shouts of gladness, resounding far and wide, that came from all the younger men, who rejoiced with great joy at the sound of the sacred songs celebrating the goodness and mercy of Jehovah, there was such a scene as can never have been

forgotten by any of that goodly throng while life and memory remained. Thus hand in hand go joy and sorrow, inseparable companions, along the path of life. Thus do they stand together round the same altar, under the same roof. Thus do they mingle their smiles and tears at the same hour and scene. "Shadow and shine is life, little Annie, flower and thorn," says the aged grandmother in one of our poems; and in another we read most truly that

"There's not a string attuned to mirth  
But has its chord in melancholy."

"We thank thee more that all our joy is touched with pain," sighs another tender spirit. That which forms so constantly recurring a strain in our poetry must be, and is, a prevalent and abiding feature of our life. Ill is it for those who have no other portion than the pleasures of the present, no other heritage than the satisfactions of earth and time. Well is it for those who thankfully accept earthly joy and the shaded brightness of the present time as flowers that spring at the touch of God's finger along the path of duty and devotion, intended to help us onward in that goodly way, speaking to us of the fuller blessedness which the future holds in its folded hand for them that are faithful unto death.—C.

Vers. 7—13.—*The founding of the temple.* The worship of Israel during the first year of the restoration from Babylon was such as could be conducted around an altar in the open. The people naturally felt how imperfectly they could fulfil the law of Moses without a temple, with its courts, its veil, and its sacred furniture. They did not let discouragement paralyse them, but taxed their energies and resources. These words bring under our notice—

I. THE PREPARATORY WORK. 1. *What was required* (see ver. 7)? (1) Here we read of "masons." These suggest the quarrying and cutting of stones, and their transportation to the site (comp. 1 Kings vi. 16—18). (2) "Cedars of Lebanon" are mentioned. These suggest also other kinds of timber. The trees had to be felled, transferred to Tyre or Zidon, thence floated to Joppa, and conveyed across the country to Jerusalem (comp. 1 Kings vi. 5—10). Other preparations suggested by these hints. 2. *How did they meet the demand?* (1) Indirectly, by the gifts and sacrifices offered in connection with their worship at the altar. These were required for the support of that worship. But the spirit of the worship thus encouraged animated them to further efforts. So it operates still under the gospel. (2) Directly, in their additional subscriptions of cash and kind (ver. 7). These gifts rewarded the workmen of Tyre and Zidon (comp. 1 Kings vi. 11; 2 Chron. ix. 10). Also workmen of their own nation (comp. 1 Kings vi. 13—15). How anticipative of the wide spirit of the gospel that Jews and Gentiles should be jointly concerned in this typical work! (3) Do not these efforts shame those of Christian congregations? Here were under 50,000 persons, all told (see ii. 64, 65), equal to about fifty out of the many thousands of our Christian congregations, undertaking this great work! What are we, each individual, doing towards the building of the spiritual temple?

II. THE STONE-LAYING. The arrangements were—1. *The appointment of officers for the building* (vers. 8, 9). (1) Zerubbabel had supreme command (see Zech. iv.). This he had as of the seed royal, and representing David and Solomon. (2) Jeshua the son of Josadak, as high priest, was associated with Zerubbabel. (3) The priests of the courses were his seconds in command—captains of the hosts of workmen. (4) The Levites were made foremen over the workmen. "And appointed the Levites," &c. (vers. 8, 9). There should be order in everything connected with the work of God. 2. *The presence of all things essential to the ceremony.* (1) The stone itself was there. This was a type of Christ, the Foundation of the living temple (see Ps. cxviii. 22, 23; comp. with Matt. xxi. 42—44; Eph. ii. 20—22; Isa. xxviii. 16; viii. 14; comp. with 1 Pet. ii. 6—8). (2) Zerubbabel was there to lay the stone. In this he, too, typified Christ (see Zech. iv. 6—10). This language has unmistakable reference to the triumphs of the Messiah. (3) Jeshua the son of Josadak was there to witness it (see Zech. iii. 9). In this he, too, was a type of Christ, our great High Priest (see Zech. iii., and vi. 9—15). Essentials in religion are those things which concern Christ. These should be held as fundamentals. 3. *The pro-*

*vision for the celebration of praise.* (1) There were the trumpeters. These were the priests, distinguished by their apparel (see Num. x. 8, 10). (2) The Levites, sons of Asaph, struck the cymbals. This was "after the ordinance of David" (see 1 Chron. xvi. 4—6). The Levites also led the singing. This was responsive. The burden was "Praise and thanksgiving be unto the Lord;" the response, "Because he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever towards Israel." The leaders of praise in Christian congregations should be godly persons.

III. THE EFFECT OF THE PROCEEDINGS. This was various. 1. There was the emotion of the *people*. (1) Excitement was so strong that it vented itself in shouting. (2) Ours should be intense as we realise the glorious things foreshadowed. 2. There was the emotion of the *ancients*. (1) While "all" shouted "because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid," yet on the part of many the shouting was mingled with wailing. These were the ancients who looked on the ruins of the temple of Solomon, which they remembered in its splendour. They saw a mere handful of people, the relics of a great nation as they remembered it. They looked upon their chief magistrate, a dependent upon the Persian king, in contrast with what they remembered of the earlier representatives of David and Solomon. (2) The passion of the weepers was such that it rivalled that of the exulters. No interests are so vital as those of religion. None should move us so deeply. 3. The outsiders heard the *sound*. (1) Those "afar off" were the Gentiles (see 2 Kings xxvii. 6). (2) The nations of the world should be made to hear the sounds of Christian exultation.—J. A. M.

Vers. 8—13.—*The joyful and sorrowful in religious worship.* Here we have illustrated the power of a right leadership, the wisdom of devout co-operation, and the progress of a great enterprise (vers. 8—10).

I. THE JOYFUL in religious WORSHIP. "They sang together" (ver. 11). 1. That God will deign to consecrate by his Presence the temple erected. God will dwell in the temple made with hands; what a condescension and benediction is this toward man; hence the joy. 2. What God is in himself to those who worship him. "Because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel" (ver. 11). 3. In the strength which worship imparts during the trying circumstances of life. Who can tell the gladness put into the heart of Israel during their arduous task by their worship. Worship inspires joy in time of difficulty. 4. In the progress of religious enterprise. Another house to be erected for moral uses. 5. In religious youth the joy of worship is eminently strong. Natural feeling combines with spiritual delight.

II. THE SORROWFUL in religious WORSHIP. "Wept with a loud voice" (ver. 12). 1. That sin has thrown life into such a condition that a temple should be necessary. Eden had no temple; heaven has none. Sin has rendered necessary the material aids to worship. 2. That disobedience should ever violate the holy sanctuary of God. The first temple had been destroyed; its glory had departed. 3. That the best temple man could build should be so poor and imperfect. The poverty of their work awakened tears. 4. That the temple should be so little cared for by man, and that so little good should be gained by its frequenters; so many of their comrades were left in Babylon.

III. THE BLENDING OF JOY AND SORROW IN RELIGIOUS WORSHIP. "So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people" (ver. 13). 1. A scene in the soul. In the soul joy blends with sorrow. 2. A scene in the sanctuary. In the same Church joy and sorrow blend in the experience of the worshippers. 3. A scene in the world. Sorrow and joy blend on earth. 4. Not a scene in heaven; *there* no more tears.—E.

Vers. 11—13.—*The foundation laid.* The weeping of these old men was the first check on the enthusiasm of the builders of the temple. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the prophecies of Zechariah and Haggai, which illustrate them, are a very troubled history: sorrow, disappointment, and indignation again and again break out; but until now there had been no consciousness of hindrances, or the consciousness had been suppressed. The time of preparation, which is pre-eminently

the time of hope, was over; the people stood face to face with the work they had undertaken; its difficulties were before them; they felt the poverty of their resources. But though the enthusiasm of the multitude was checked, it was not daunted; the hope of the younger men overbore the depression of the elders; the influence of their sacred festival sustained them; the popular feeling was wiser and more healthy than the despondency of the leaders. The work of preparation had been carried forward with spirit. Not more than a year, probably a good deal less (ver. 8), had elapsed since "the chief of the fathers" had come "to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem" (ch. ii. 68), and much work had been accomplished in the organising of labour and the collection of materials for the building (ver. 7). Patriotism, wisdom, and piety had been manifested in their plans. The whole remnant of Israel was enlisted in the cause; this was the work, not only of those who had returned, but also of those whom the military leaders of Assyria and Chaldæa had not deemed of sufficient importance to carry away (cf. ver. 1 with 2 Kings xxiv. 14; xxv. 12). The daily sacrifices had been early re-established, that the courage of the people might be sustained by their faith in the God of Israel (vers. 3—6). Great carefulness was manifested that all things should be done according to the law; they were scrupulous in their obedience of God (vers. 2, 4, and ch. ii. 59, 61, 62). A beautiful simplicity and hope appear in the counsel of "the Tirshatha" (ch. ii. 63), the expectation that the LORD would again reveal his will for their practical guidance. The responsibility of all this action must have been felt by the "ancient men" "of the priests and Levites;" overstrained feeling may have been one reason of their weeping. Among the causes of their grief, notice these—

I. THE DESPONDENCY WHICH IS NATURAL TO THE AGED. There was a great contrast between Solomon's temple and the ruins which were around them; between the glorious past of Israel and the scattered, demoralised condition of the nation now. But the greatest contrast was between the energies of their own youth and their present inability to rise to the demands of a great occasion. "We receive but what we give." Difficulties are a spur to a young man's courage; the consciousness of power shows itself in the desire to struggle and to overcome.

II. THE PARTIAL AND INSUFFICIENT RESPONSE THAT HAD BEEN MADE TO THE DECREE OF CYRUS. "Forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore" was the number of "the whole congregation" that offered themselves for the return; and of these a large proportion were persons professionally engaged about the temple. "The priests and Levites" mourned that their readiness met with so small a response from the people. Some of the leaders of the nation, noble men bearing noble names, were there; but many also of small account, "a mixed multitude," like a great proportion of our modern emigrants, unable to succeed anywhere and eager for any change (ch. ii. 58—63). The "great middle class" of Israel never returned. They continued "dispersed among the Gentiles." The feelings of the ancient men would probably exaggerate these facts.

III. UNREADINESS TO DENY THEMSELVES FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORK FOR WHICH THEY HAD RETURNED MAY HAVE ALREADY APPEARED IN MANY. Only "some of the chief of the fathers offered freely" (ch. ii. 68; cf. with the phrase "chief of the fathers" in our text). Zechariah (ch. vii.) speaks of the greed which characterised the nation during the captivity; Haggai first, and Malachi long afterwards, indignantly rebuked it in the men of the restoration (Haggai i. 3, 4, 9; Mal. i. 6—10). The great grief of the old men, however natural, would have seriously hindered the work. The want of hope, and the selfishness which made many plead hopelessness as an excuse for abandoning their efforts, were the sins against which Zechariah and Haggai had to testify. The frank impulse which led the multitude to shout for joy was wiser than the weeping. It anticipated the subsequent teaching of Nehemiah under similar circumstances (Neh. viii. 10), "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

Lessons:—1. *The mingled character of all human work.* We begin in enthusiasm and continue in depression. There is the contrast of the actual with the ideal; the sense of accumulating difficulties; the consciousness of failing powers; the perception of imperfection in all human instrumentality. The work remains, though the feeling changes; remains to be done, remains when it is done. "Duty remains, and God abideth ever." "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." 2. *The advantage of*

*fellowship in labour.* Many weep and many shout aloud for joy; and this is well, for each can temper the emotion of, and furnish help to, the other. "Tis held that sorrow makes us wise;" but happy ignorance is also blessed. Care is good, and so is the occasional outburst of joy that sweeps care away. Blend old and young together; the old with memory which is the nurse of great purposes; the young with the passion to make a future for themselves. 3. *The cause that can bind true men in a fellowship of labour.* It is the cause of God; the cause in which we can worship together as well as work together. "They sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord;" "all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid." A common faith in God and God's call harmonises all diversities of feeling.—M.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER IV.

OPPOSITION MADE TO THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE BY THE SAMARITANS (ch. iv. 1—24). In this world, whenever a good work is begun, some kind of opposition is sure to show itself, since Satan will never suffer any attack upon his kingdom without resenting it. The opposition may, however, be of two kinds. It may be open and proclaimed, or it may take the subtler and more dangerous shape of seeming approval and patronage. In the case before us, the opposition to Zerubbabel's mission was, at the first, of this latter kind. The mixed race, partly Israelite but mainly heathen, which had been settled by the Assyrian monarchs in central Palestine (2 Kings xvii. 24; Ezra iv. 9, 10), made a specious proposition to the Jewish prince, acceptance of which would have been fatal to the entire movement. The movement was one for the re-establishment of God's peculiar people in their own land, under their own system, as a witness to the nations against polytheism, against idolatry, against materialism and sensualism in religion. As the Samaritans had adopted a mixed or mongrel worship, uniting idolatrous rites with the acknowledgment of Jehovah (2 Kings xvii. 29—41), their admission by Zerubbabel to a partnership in his work would have been equivalent to the abandonment of pure religion, and the acceptance of a syncretism inherently vicious, and sure to develop into pronounced forms of impurity and corruption. Zerubbabel therefore declined the offer made him—most properly, since there is no "communion between light and darkness" (2 Cor.

vi. 14), no "agreement between the temple of God and idols" (*ibid.* ver. 16). His determination was bitterly resented. Unable to seduce him into alliance with them, the Samaritans became his open and avowed enemies; during three reigns—the remainder of the reign of Cyrus, the reign of Cambyses (Ahasuerus), and that of the Pseudo-Smerdis (Artaxerxes)—they so worked upon the Persian court that the rebuilding of the temple was almost wholly stopped; no progress was made until the second year of Darius, when a new opposition showed itself, as appears by the next section.

Ver. 1.—*The adversaries.* Notwithstanding the friendly guise in which they came, the historian sees from the first that the Samaritans are in reality "adversaries," or "persecutors" (*tsazey*), identical in spirit with Sanballat and his followers, whom Nehemiah designates by the same word (iv. 11).

Ver. 2.—*We seek your God, as ye do.* "We seek your God" was true; "as ye do" was not true. The Samaritans worshipped Jehovah, but not, as the Jews did, exclusively. "They feared the Lord, and worshipped their own gods" (2 Kings xvii. 33). Such worship dishonours Jehovah almost more than total neglect of him. Since the days of Esar-haddon. There was more than one colonisation of Central Palestine by the Assyrians. Sargon relates that he placed Arabians in the country; the writer of Kings tells us that it was occupied by Babylonians, Cuthæans, Avites, Hamathites, and Sepharvites (2 Kings xvii. 24); the Samaritans themselves said that they were "Dinaites, Apharsathchites, Tarpelites, Apharaites, Archevites, Babylonians, Susanchites, Dehavites, and Elamites" (*infra*, ver. 9). They attributed this last colonisation to Esar-haddon. We may suspect that the second colonisation was by Sennacherib, who appears to have taken Babylon, Hamath, Sephar-

vaim, and Ivah or Avah (2 Kings xviii. 34). The result was that the Samaritans were a very mixed race.

Ver. 3.—**Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God.** You have no ground on which to rest your claim of uniting with us in this matter. You do not really wish to build to our God simply and singly; nor were you mentioned in the decree of Cyrus, which is our warrant for what we are doing.

Ver. 4.—**Then the people of the land** (*i. e.* the Samaritans) **weakened the hands of the people of Judah.** As aiding is called "strengthening the hands" (*infra*, ch. vi. 22; Isa. xxxv. 3; Jer. xxiii. 14; Ezek. xvi. 49, &c.), so hindering is expressed by "weakening the hands" (Jer. xxxviii. 4), though this latter phrase is, comparatively speaking, unusual. **And troubled them in building.** Probably as Sanballat and his followers troubled the builders of the wall in Nehemiah's time (Neh. iv. 1-12).

Ver. 5.—**And hired counsellors against them.** It is always possible at an Oriental court to bribe some of the royal favourites, and induce them to use their influence with the monarch for the furtherance, or hindrance, of any work that is being proceeded with in any part of the country. The Samaritans now had recourse to this system, and employed it with great success for a considerable period. **All the days of Cyrus.** *I. e.* "all the remaining days," from B.C. 537 to B.C. 529, when Cyrus died, and was succeeded by his son Cambyses. **Even until the reign of Darius.** It is implied that the reign of Darius did not immediately follow on that of Cyrus. Profane history tells us of two intermediate kings, *viz.*, Cambyses,

son of Cyrus, who reigned from B.C. 529 to B.C. 522, and Smerdis, or Bardes, a usurper, who occupied the throne for about ten months in the years B.C. 522, 521. Darius became king in this last-named year, but seems to have counted his reign from the date of the decease of Cambyses.

Ver. 6.—**And in the reign of Ahasuerus.** Some critics regard this Ahasuerus as identical with the Ahasnerus of Esther, who is generally allowed to be Xerxes, the son and successor of Darius Hystaspis, and the invader of Greece. In this case the Artaxerxes of the next verse is taken to be Artaxerxes Longimanus, and the entire passage from ver. 6 to ver. 23 inclusively, is regarded as parenthetical, having reference to events which happened later than any of those recorded in ch. vi. But the evident *nexus* of vers. 23, 24 is fatal to this view, which has nothing in its favour beyond the sequence of the royal names, an uncertain argument in this instance, since we know that Persian kings had often more than one name. If on these grounds we reject the proposed identification, and regard the chapter as chronologically consecutive, Ahasuerus here must be explained as Cambyses, and the Artaxerxes of ver. 7 as Smerdis. This is the view most usually taken, and it seems to the present writer to present fewer difficulties than any other. **In the beginning of his reign.** As soon as ever a new king mounted the throne, fresh representations were made to him by the "adversaries," lest the work should be recommenced. **Wrote they an accusation.** Comp. vers. 12-16, by which we see the sort of "accusation" that could be plausibly brought.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1-3.—*The work endangered.* Moses was exposed to danger whilst still in his cradle. The same was true about Christ. There is yet another parallel in this passage. No sooner is the foundation-stone of the restored temple laid, than we hear of that branch of the great work of Restoration being in imminent peril. To profit rightly by this story of danger, two things must be pondered, *viz.*, the nature of the danger, in the first place; and the manner of the deliverance, in the second.

I. THE NATURE OF THE DANGER. This was—1. *Serious in itself.* It was a serious thing for the Jews, in their circumstances, that their work should have so strongly attracted the notice of their "adversaries." "The adversaries" (see ch. iv. 3) "heard" of their doings. This was bad, to begin. Such hearing was only too likely to lead to "doing;" and to unfriendly doing, of course. So, in fact, it turned out. After unfriendly notice came unfriendly interference. The people referred to "came." How unwelcome a sight to the Jewish builders and rulers. How far from "beautiful" the "feet" of these strangers on the "mountains round about Jerusalem" (Ps. cxxv. 2). "What have they come for?" Not merely to inquire and observe; but to interfere, and that not for good (comp. 1 Sam. xvi. 4; 2 Kings ix. 17-23). Still more serious, when these adversaries did come, was the course which they took. We must bear in mind who they were. A "mixed multitude" in every sense. Of

various stocks; of various creeds. The descendants of men brought to the cities and hills of Samaria from widely-distant provinces of the great Assyrian empire; bringing with them, in all cases, their old idols and creeds; but grafting on to these afterwards, through the mere motive of fear, something of that already grievously-corrupted worship of Jehovah which had prevailed in the kingdom of the ten tribes previously to its final overthrow and dispersion (see 2 Kings xvii. 7—18, 24—33). Such mingled worship, being in violation of the very first of the ten commandments, was especially displeasing to the one true God; and had, indeed, in this instance, been already condemned by him as no true worship of his name (see *ibid.* vers. 34—39). It was the children then of these men, walking in the steps of their fathers, who now came to Mount Zion. To whom had they come? To those "children of the captivity" who had been so careful to prove themselves of the stock of Israel only (see ch. ii. 59), and who had been brought back to that holy mountain to restore there, in a for ever purified form, the worship of Jehovah alone. To such men came this mixed multitude, as though brothers in blood and religion. "We seek your God; we would help in your work; let us build by your side." A serious proposal, indeed; being a proposal virtually to break down the very division which they were engaged in constructing, and for neglecting and despising which that long, just-completed Babylonian exile had come upon their race. To consent to such a proposal would be to consent to their ruin. They could never so build the house of Jehovah. What could they so build, in fact, but a Babel, a monument of displeasure and disaster to themselves, and of no benefit even to their adversaries? Better not build at all than build thus. At the same time this danger was—2. Most *insidious* as to its *form*. After all, the proposal made came in the shape of an offer of help. Better to have that help than be without it. So many would think. Better to have such neighbours for us than against us (see 2 Chron. xxv. 9); especially they being so many and we so few. Besides which, to all appearance, it was an offer of help made in perfect good faith; and by men even of tried sincerity, it also appeared. "We seek your God, as ye do; we have done so ever since coming to these regions, some 150 years from this date."\* How harsh it would seem to reject such assistance! How bigoted! How "narrow!" How opposed indeed to true religion! Even supposing these men to be seeking Jehovah in a somewhat ignorant and unacceptable way, might they not be won over to the truth by a little brotherly kindness? Might not the influence of the Jews tell for good on them, if they two were associated in so good a work? Whereas, if rejected and driven away from the work, would they not also be driven away even more from the truth? In a word, be servants to them so far; afterwards they will be your servants—and, what is more, the servants of Jehovah—for ever. So plausible, and, therefore, so doubly dangerous, was this offer of help.

II. THE DELIVERANCE vouchsafed from this danger has, next, to be marked. God, who allowed this great and subtle temptation to come on his servants, made them also a way of escape (1 Cor. x. 13). This he did by granting to them—1. A spirit of *discrimination*. "Ye have nothing to do with us to build." In other words, This is not a task "for you and us in common" (see Lange, who compares Josh. xx. 24 [*sic*]; Judges xi. 12; 2 Kings iii. 13). The root or foundation of the proposal made lay in the assumption that there was much in common between the Samaritans and the Jews. In reality, so far as this matter was concerned, there was nothing in common except a name. The Samaritans worshipped other gods first, and Jehovah only second. The Jews worshipped Jehovah first, and no one else second. This was not holding common ground, but being at opposite poles. How could forces thus intrinsically antagonistic work efficiently together? 2. A spirit of *decision*. Besides seeing the truth thus clearly, the Jewish leaders were also enabled to act on it boldly. Was it indeed for "them alone" to undertake this enterprise? They alone, as one body, would do so. They would say so openly, and in so many words.

\* This may be the purport of the end of ver. 2, even if we read it, as some do, "We do not sacrifice, &c., &c.;" the meaning probably being, in that case, "We have sought or wished to sacrifice to him all these years, but have not been able to do so for want of such a temple as you have now commenced. Hence this proposal of ours to assist in that effort."

Let their Samaritan neighbours at once understand that so their minds were made up. "We ourselves together" will be responsible for this task. 3. A spirit of *discretion*. God gave them this in conclusion, so that they put the matter, in concluding, on a very wise ground. The decision arrived at might not be pleasing to the Samaritans; but at any rate it ought not to be regarded by them as an injury or a grievance; for it was only in strict accordance with the will of one whom they were all bound to obey. "King Cyrus, the king of Persia"—King Cyrus, our common ruler—has given express commands on this point, as you know. He has commanded us to erect this building. He has commanded us alone to do so (see ch. i. beginning of ver. 3). That being so, let us all obey him; some by labouring, some by abstaining. Possibly, also, this further thought can be traced in their words:—"If Cyrus himself as a Gentile did not engage personally in this work, but only commissioned us Israelites to perform it, why should any others who are not Israelites put their hands to the task?" At any rate the reply answered the immediate purpose in hand. It delivered the Jews completely from that great danger to which they were at that moment exposed. The Samaritans were compelled thereby to retire, and, like another adversary in another case on a subsequent occasion, to leave them alone "for a season" (Luke iv. 13). Amongst other general lessons the following may be noted:—1. *The need of patience in God's work*. True progress, from its very nature, creates resistance and opposition. This applies to our work for others (1 Cor. xvi. 9). Also to much of the scepticism of the day. That scepticism is not a wholly desperate sign (see Rev. xii. 12). Also to our own spiritual progress (Luke ix. 42; Acts xiii. 7, 8). *Per aspera ad ardua tendo* is a very wide rule. 2. *The need of firmness in God's work*. True toleration will not go out of its way to interfere with others; but it will not allow others to interfere with it. Neither will it prevent us from telling others the truth. Compare, in connection with certain later Samaritans, "They went to another village" (Luke ix. 56), and, "Salvation is of the Jews" (John iv. 22). 3. *The need of scrutiny in God's work*. Scrutiny, first, as to faith. There are some errors of doctrine which affect the root of the tree. There are some which only tend to hinder its full development and fruitfulness. These must be dealt with in different ways. Scrutiny, next, as to persons. Those who are altogether "without" we leave in God's hands. Not so those who, though really aliens, claim to be considered as brethren (comp. 1 Cor. v. 9—13). None are so truly the enemies of the Church as those "who call themselves Jews but are not" (see Rev. iii. 9).

Vers. 4, 5.—*The work checked*. The incidents related in the previous verses would happen some time after the second month of the second year of King Cyrus, that being about the date of laying the foundation-stone of the restored temple (see ch. iii. 8, 10). Tidings of these incidents, and of the discouragement and intrigues which they led to, as described in the present passage, would probably reach the Persian court towards the end of that year. In the beginning of the next year—so we find from Dan. x. 1, &c.—the aged prophet Daniel was still alive, but in a state of much sorrow and perplexity, near the river Hiddekel or Tigris. Also we find that his last recorded vision was given to him at that time. The two passages, therefore, seem sufficiently contemporaneous in character to be considered together, and may serve to give us thus a more complete conception of what was then coming to pass. We will first consider the human view, and then the superhuman view, of the scene.

I. THE HUMAN VIEW of the story. What was being done, 1. In the *province*. What were men doing now at Jerusalem, or, on that side the Euphrates, in connection with it? Were the Samaritans quiet after their recent rebuff? Were they likely to be, if like other men? The Jews did right, and did wisely, as we have seen, in rejecting their help; but who could expect things to end in that manner? Such a repulse, however justifiable, would be felt as an insult, a moral *soufflet*. The more justified, in fact, by the circumstances, the more galling it would seem, and the more insulting. The greater the truth, in this sense, the greater the libel (comp. Gen. xix. 3). We cannot wonder, therefore, that Samaritan feeling now took a different turn. If they cannot help on the terms they had offered,—the virtually destructive terms they had offered,—they will do the next best (in their view)—they will thwart. The



Jews are anxious to do *all* by themselves. Let us take care they do *none*. Such was their inward resolve. Their outward actions accorded. They contrived, *e. g.*, to "weaken the hands of the people of Judah." The "hands" of the people, figuratively speaking, may mean those persons on whose manual labour the work of building depended. Just so we often speak now of "factory hands." By weakening their hands, therefore, is not improbably meant causing those who laboured for them to retire from the work: whether those hired carpenters and masons, of whom we have read, on the spot (ch. iii. 7); or those Tyrian labourers, of whom we have also read, on Mount Lebanon (*ibid.*); or those seafaring men who would be necessary to convey to Jerusalem what was cut down at Lebanon. It would not be difficult for the Samaritans, as long-established Gentiles of superior wealth and influence, either by bribes or threats to draw or drive many of such men away from their work; and it would not be easy for the Jews to go on with it in that case. But, besides this, the Samaritans are said to have "troubled them in building." Besides depriving them of labourers, they deprived them, that is, of peace. Besides weakening the "hands," they distracted the heads; most probably by such measures as those we read of, many years afterwards, in the story of Nehemiah (see Neh. iv. 2, 3, 7-9, 16-23; vi.). But, above all, 2. They seem to have directed their chief endeavours, with true military instinct, *against the key of the position* before them. To human eyes the chief Jewish reliance was on the assured favour of Cyrus. Hence the edict, and all its consequences. Hence this whole attempt of theirs to rebuild the temple, and their very presence there, on its ancient site. Deprive them of that imperial favour, and you deprive them of all. Moved, apparently, by such considerations, the Samaritans, as we said, delivered their chief assault at the great (human) centre of Jewish hope. They secured those (for they were able to do so) who could speak "against" the Jews at the court of the king; they sought out the most fitting men (counsellors) to do this; they secured them by proper fees; they instructed them as to the object wished for; and they urged their point with a spirit of pertinacity which nothing seemed to wear out. What must have been the original vigour of that impetus which survived "all the days" described in ver. 4? And what, on the whole, therefore, the Jewish prospects, humanly speaking, when first it took place? How weak, how distracted the builders! How powerful, how united, how embittered, how skilful, how unsparing, how determined their opponents! The deadly Samaritan friendship had, no doubt, been escaped. But was not this furious Samaritan enmity almost as great a ground for despair? And was not the whole work, in short, if not dead already, at least ready to die?

II. THE SUPERHUMAN VIEW OF THE JUNCTURE. Just at this time, as we have seen, the prophet Daniel, who, of all the Israelites then alive, would be most concerned and confounded at this condition of things (comp. Dan. ix. 16-19), was in great sorrow and deep perplexity (*ibid.* x. 2, 3, 12). Just at this time, also, a vision was sent him, having for its object to give him instruction respecting the destiny of his people (*ibid.* 14). We believe, therefore, that we have in that vision a superhuman view of that time of trouble—a light from heaven itself on that day of disappointment and fear. Here was the work for which he had prayed and laboured all his lifetime, and for which God had done so much, and which he had treated as so important, almost brought to a stand. What did it all mean? This the vision seems to explain. It meant, 1.—so much we can see without going into any of the disputed features of this remarkable vision—that the matter now perplexing him was one *exceedingly deep*. It had to do, *e. g.*, with that glorious Person before whom he fell as one dead (vers. 5-9), and so with that great and all-restoring kingdom which that Holy One was to set up upon earth (Dan. vii. 13, 14; Acts iii. 21). Being so, it was a matter of great interest to angelic intelligences of all kinds (Matt. viii. 29; 1 Pet. i. 12); even leading in consequence (so we understand the passage) to long-continued contentions and struggles among them (see Dan. x. 13, 20, 21; and comp. Eph. v. 11, 12; 2 Pet. ii. 11; Jude 9; Rev. xii. 7). 2. A purpose thus deep would naturally appear sometimes *exceedingly deliberate* in its rate of progress. Such great contending forces, such wide-embracing operations, such evidently intricate and far-seeing methods, could not do otherwise than take time. Hence the language of Dan. x. 1, 14, and the repeated reference to the future, and the "end" and the "time of the

end," and the blessing pronounced on "waiting" in ch. xii. 1, 4, 6, 8, 12, 13 (comp. also 2 Pet. iii. 9). 3. But if deliberate, it was also *sure*—all the surer, in fact, on that ground. See again ch. x. 21 about the "Scripture of truth" (a purpose, it would seem, "written" down in order that the exact terms of the purpose and the exact nature of its fulfilment might afterwards be compared); also xi. 2; also the solemn oath in xii. 7; also, as showing the effect left on Daniel's mind when he began recording the vision, the opening declaration, "the thing was true," in Dan. x. 1. Thus we see how the prophet was lifted up in order that he might see things from above. And thus, as it were, in his company, we are enabled to take a like view. We learn from it—1. *How great is our natural ignorance.* "There are more things" indeed "in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy"—yes, in our philosophy, with all its talk. More things, by far, are concealed than are revealed, both by our sight and by our search. 2. *How false the estimate of our senses.* The assaults of earthly enemies, disputes of Jews and Samaritans, the doings of kings and counsellors, the delays of years and centuries, only seem great to us because we see them so close. Viewed from a proper distance, as the mount of prophecy enables us to view them, they almost shrink out of sight—only important because of those larger issues of which they form part. At the same time, we also see—3. *How great is God's care for his people.* Even in these smaller matters his eye is on them for good. Even in the darkest days he is shaping their path towards the light. The things of earth are not too petty, the things above earth are not too lofty, all together are not too intricate for his omnipotent care (see Ps. xcvi. 11; Rom. viii. 28). What was said of Gad is true of all Israel (Gen. xlix. 19)—"They shall overcome at the last." 4. *How great is God's concern even for the comfort of those who fear him.* How affecting, on this view, at this crisis, is this seasonable vision to the afflicted prophet. How significant, also, that it should have been recorded and preserved to us as a kind of standing illustration to us of God's ways on this matter. He is not only always caring for his people; he is always wishing them to know that he is. Never more so than when it seems to them, as it probably seemed to Daniel and the Jerusalem Jews in this day of rebuke and blasphemy, that he had "forsaken his people" (see Judges vi. 13).

# HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Peace and purity.* No sooner had the "children of the captivity" begun their good work of rebuilding the house of the Lord than difficulties began to arise. They found, as we find, that the work of God does not proceed smoothly from beginning to end, as, at the outset, we are apt to think it will; that from without and from within obstacles and discouragements spring up and beset us. They soon found that they had to do with—

I. A PROFFERED ALLIANCE (vers. 1, 2). Their neighbours, the Samaritans, a mixed people, composed in part of the remnant of the ten tribes and in part of the Assyrians deported by Esar-haddon from their own country and planted there, made offers of alliance. Moved by jealousy, thinking that the name and fame of a temple at Jerusalem would eclipse anything of the kind they had, perhaps fearing lest it should win the hearts of the people away from the "mongrel religion" which they had adopted—a miserable compromise between pure religion and gross superstition—they came proposing to make common cause with the returned Israelites. "Let us unite our forces," they said. "We will build together; this temple, erected by our joint labours, shall be common property: we worship the same God whom you worship, and there need not be any separation between us." Thus impurity approaches purity; thus error seeks alliance with truth; thus worldliness addresses piety. "Let us walk together," it says. "We will sink our differences; we will keep unpleasant divergencies of conviction in abeyance, and stroll together in sweet communion along the path of life." Here was—

II. A POWERFUL TEMPTATION. Jeshua—and still more Zerubbabel, who was answerable for the peace and order of the community—may well have thought that it was a time for conciliation. The little state was not yet fairly established. It was still in its very infancy, and might well shrink from the field of contention. It

was a time when they might excusably go far in the direction of peace. Would it not be wrong, by any churlishness or obstinacy on small points or narrowness of view, to plunge the infant Church into strife, perhaps mortal strife, with those who had so much in common with them, and whom charity might consider brethren? What a pity to endanger the work in hand and, it might be, bring everything to failure when the prospects of success were so bright, if, by entering on an alliance with these men, they could insure the consummation of their hopes! Perchance, too, they might win these men to a purer faith; the sight of the temple on its old site, the performance of the old rites, the singing of the old psalms, &c. might purge their hearts of the evil leaven that had crept in, &c. Thus their minds may have been agitated by doubt and distraction, questioning whether they should have a perilous alliance or a defiant and dangerous isolation. So purity, truth, piety find themselves courted by those who are their adversaries, but who speak with the voice and use the language of friendship. And often do they find themselves greatly tempted to make peace and enter into alliance. Sometimes they do, and disastrous is the result. Like the Rhone and the Arve outside Geneva, the pure blue waters of the one flow for some time side by side, without mingling, with the muddy and earth-discoloured waters of the other; but farther down they intermix, and the blueness and the purity are gone! But here we have—

III. A STOUT-HEARTED REFUSAL (ver. 3). Zerubbabel and Jeshua peremptorily declined the offered alliance. "Ye have nothing to do with us." "We ourselves will build," &c. (ver. 3). Whatever inward conflict there might have been, there was no vagueness or hesitancy in their answer. It was explicit and downright, as an answer should be to a deceitful offer. It was seen to be their duty to keep apart from men whose association would too probably have ended in corruption, and they dared all consequences. *First purity, then peace* (James iii. 17). Let there be no compromise when the maintenance of principle is at stake. There is far more to lose than to gain in having the help of those who are not really and heartily at one with us. Mere matters of detail are things for arrangement, and it is often wise and Christian to forego our preferences for the sake of brotherly accord. But when great and vital truths are at stake, truths on which human hearts live, truths which heal and save and sanctify the soul, truths for the purity and integrity of which we exist to testify, then let us put our foot firmly down, and, risking misrepresentation and attack, say, "Ye have nothing to do with us." We must walk apart.—C.

Vers. 1—5.—*A sinful alliance sought and rejected.* I. A sinful alliance SOUGHT. "Let us build with you" (ver. 2). 1. The *people*. "The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" (ver. 1). These were a mixed race, partly Israelitish but chiefly foreign. The more dangerous because the more nearly related to Israel; error is more dangerous when allied with truth. 2. The *pretext*. (1) Utility. "Let us build." They would help in the enterprise of Israel. Sinful alliances always seem advantageous. (2) Religion. "For we seek your God" (ver. 2). Those who seek sinful alliances often assume the garb of piety; they come as angels of light. (3) Community of interest. The Samaritans wanted to make a common cause with Israel; what fellowship hath light with darkness? 3. The *plan*. (1) Secret, and not open. They concealed their real intentions. Suspect the world. (2) Friendly, and not hostile. They came not as warriors, but as helpers. Be not deluded by the smiles of sin. (3) Dangerous, and not safe. The kiss of sin is perilous; the dagger is behind.

II. A sinful alliance REJECTED. "Ye have nothing to do with us" (ver. 3). 1. *Wisdom*. The hypocrisy was detected by the leaders of Israel. We need spiritual discernment in dealing with the world; we must try the spirits. Be wise as serpents. 2. *Independence*. "But we ourselves together will build" (ver. 3). The Church can do its own work; it needs not the aid of the unholy. God requires the good man to be independent of carnal helpers and of worldly compacts; dare to reject apparent advantage. 3. *Determination*. A most decided reply was given to the proposed allies, and Israel was prepared to brave the result. Hesitation would have been fatal. 4. *Disaster*. The professed friends soon reveal their enmity: reject the

world, and it will soon "trouble you in building." The enmity of sin is better than its friendship; sin triumphs for a time.—E.

Vers. 1—5.—*The friendship of the world.* Two classes, strongly contrasted, divide the human race (see Eph. v. 8; 1 Thess. v. 4—8; 1 John iii. 10). There is no intermediate class (see Matt. xii. 30). Between these classes genuine sympathy is impossible. The syren voice of "charity" must not be heeded here; it is treachery to Christ. "The friendship of the world," however this may be taken, "is enmity against God." Selfishness and hypocrisy often guide the policy of malignity. Hence—

I. THE FRIENDSHIP OF THE WORLD IS OFFERED TO THE GODLY IN THEIR PROSPERITY.

1. The world is cold to them in their *adversity*. (1) No sympathy came to Israel from the Samaritans when nothing apparently was to be gained. They were only "children of the captivity"—born in captivity, scarcely emerging from bondage, impoverished by a four months' march; comparatively few, 50,000 persons, scattered over the south, and likely to be absorbed into the mass of "the people of the land." (2) There were even signs of hostility. For the elders of Israel did not venture to build the altar of the Lord until encouraged by the demonstration of strength in the universal response to their summons to the convocation (see iii. 1—3). Lesson—It is folly to look to the wicked for help. Even Rabshakeh spoke truly (2 Kings xviii. 21; comp. Ezek. xxix. 6, 7). 2. But when *prosperity* comes this policy is changed. (1) The "children of the captivity" had made rapid progress towards national consolidation. Not content to become gradually absorbed in other nationalities, they have raised a national altar, and laid the foundations of their national temple. Note—Religion is the strongest bond of national union. It touches the deepest sympathies of our nature (see Prov. xiv. 31). (2) This made its impression upon "the people of the land." They discerned in Israel the elements of future greatness. By the laws of association the value of the patronage of Cyrus would gain in importance, and the traditions of the ancient greatness of Israel would revive. (3) Therefore they now volunteered their friendship. They said, "Let us build with you." Let us share your labours and the charges, and we will reap with you also. "We seek your God as you do." "Do not hesitate to trust us." "We do sacrifice to him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us hither." "We will not cause you embarrassment by any disagreement with your worship." Lesson—First, be aware of worldly plausibility. Why was not all this pleaded earlier? Secondly, discern the selfishness which guides the policy of worldly friendship. Thirdly, never lose sight of the nature of the carnal mind (Rom. viii. 7).

II. WHEN THE POLICY OF THE WORLD'S FRIENDSHIP IS FRUSTRATED, MALICE WILL DISCOVER ITS HYPOCRISY. 1. The reply discovered to the Samaritans that they were *comprehended* (ver. 3). (1) "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God." You say, "We seek your God as ye do." This we do not accept. You say, "We do sacrifice to him," &c. This also we dispute. We have too good reason to do so (see 2 Kings xvii. 34—38). Note, (a) The true God is not worshipped at all if other gods are worshipped along with him (see also John iv. 22). Note, (b) No sacrifice to God is true that is associated with spurious sacrifices. Query—Is not the sacrifice of Christ "made of none effect" to those who associate with it the sacrifice of the mass and works of supererogation? (2) Therefore "we ourselves together," in a unity of faith and love which we would not have interrupted by your heresy and malignity, "will build unto the Lord God of Israel," our own covenant God, "as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us." So, take notice that in thus serving God we are countenanced by the pleasure of the king. Note, here, the lawful mingling of the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove. 2. They now appear as the "*adversaries of Judah and Benjamin*." They have now no policy of selfishness to restrain their malignity. So (1) "the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah." They stirred up dissension. Their proposition would be variously viewed by the people; worldly men would no doubt think that the Samaritans' offer should have been accepted by the chiefs, who with advancing years were grown too conservative and narrow. Note—Dissension in sentiment is a weakening of the hands. (2) "They troubled them in

the building." This would be the effect of dissension. They would aggravate the embarrassment by ridicule, &c. (3) "They hired counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose." Some of these would operate upon the workmen; others in the Persian court. (4) This was continued "all the days of Cyrus." To what extremities will the malignity of the wicked carry them! Reflect—The worst enemies of Judah and Benjamin were those "who said they were Jews and were not" (Rev. iii. 9). Let those who discourage a good work consider whose example they follow.—J. A. M.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Human hatred.* Whatever drops of neighbourly kindness there may have been in the cup of friendship offered by the Samaritans to "the children of the captivity," these, on the refusal of Zerubbabel to enter into alliance with them, turned into bitterest animosity. Thenceforward they "breathed threatening" and made opposition to those whom they had courted. We have illustration or suggestion here of the character and outworkings of human hatred.

I. ITS BLINDNESS. Like all cruelty, and indeed like all sin, "it knew not what it did." It thought it was only indulging in a natural and proper resentment; in truth it was lifting up its hand against the people of God, and was doing its best (which was indeed its worst) to undermine and bring to nought the good work of God. Anger is always blind. It does not see its own hideousness; nor does it perceive the end of its doing. Its eye is darkened or discoloured, and its hand is a suicidal, a self-injuring hand.

II. ITS DELIBERATENESS. These men deliberately set themselves to undo what their neighbours had begun. No mere outburst of indignation theirs, but deep, steady, well-cherished purpose to be avenged. Nothing was left undone, no stone unturned, that these new-comers might feel the full weight of their wrath. They found means to hinder them in their work, and they got up all the evidence they could collect of past excitements and disturbances in Jerusalem, and "hired counsellors" to represent them at the court of Babylon (ver. 5), that they might frustrate and overthrow the purpose of Israel. There is no more painful sight in this world, and no more saddening evidence and consequence of sin, than the fact of men cherishing and nursing a rancorous hatred in their hearts against their fellows, and plotting and scheming, month after month, to do them injury, to break their schemes, to disappoint their hopes.

III. THE MISCHIEF WHICH IT WORKS (ver. 4). These angry interferers had all too much success. They did weaken the hands of those whom they sought to hinder; "they troubled them in building;" they succeeded in gaining the ear and winning the support of Cyrus, and ultimately they caused the work of building the temple to cease. There is a prevalent belief that persecution defeats its own ends—and this is true. We say that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church"—and often it is. The fires it lights are often, if not always, purifying, cleansing the gold of its dross, and making the vessels of the Lord more "meet for the Master's use." Yet, on the other hand, it often works most serious mischief to the Church and the world, from which they painfully and only gradually recover. History shows that human rage against the truth and cause of God has done injury on a large scale, and doubtless it is continually making its evil power felt on a small one: it is "weakening the hands" (ver. 4) of the people of God; it is troubling them in building up his kingdom; it is causing "the work to cease;" it is "hindering the gospel." This instance of unrighteous anger, like all other illustrations of it, reminds us of—

IV. ITS ESSENTIAL UNNATURALNESS. No doubt it seemed natural enough to these Samaritans to indulge in this bitter wrath and to take these vindictive measures. One of the greatest of the Romans, writing only a few years before Christ, declared that "war was the natural relation between neighbouring nations." But how really and essentially unnatural it is for one human heart, made to be the home of love and kindness and compassion, made to be the spring and source of beneficence and generosity, to be harbouring hatreds, to be finding pleasure in another's pain, to be rejoicing in the humiliation and disappointment of another human heart! What blank contradiction to the will of our Creator! What a wretched departure from his design! How utterly unbeautiful, how infinitely repugnant to his eye!—C.

## EXPOSITION.

**Ver. 7.—And in the days of Artaxerxes.** See the comment on ver. 6. If Artaxerxes be the Pseudo-Smerdis, we can readily understand why an application was not made to him at once, and how it came about that the Jews recommenced their building, as they appear from vers. 12, 13 to have done. The Pseudo-Smerdis was a usurper; his reign was a time of partial anarchy; in a distant part of the empire it would not be known for a while who was king. Men would be thrown on themselves, and would do as it seemed good in their own eyes. Later, there may have been some doubt whether a king, who was known to be a religious reformer, would follow the policy of his predecessor with respect to the Jews, or reverse it. Hence a delay, and then a more formal application than before for a positive decree to stop the building (see ver. 21). **The rest of their companions.** Literally, of their companies—the abstract for the concrete. **The writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue.** Rather, “in the Syrian fashion,” i. e. in Syriac characters. **And interpreted in the Syrian tongue.** Or “translated into the Syriac language.” The character and the words were alike Syriac (comp. 2 Kings xviii. 26). Ezra gives the letter in Chaldee.

**Ver. 8.—Rehum the chancellor.** Literally, “the lord of judgment.” It may be conjectured that Rehum was the sub-satrap (ὑποσατράπης, Xen.), of the province of Samaria. **And Shimshai the scribe.** Or “secretary.” Herodotus tells us that in every Persian province the governor had a secretary attached to him, who was appointed by the crown, and acted as a check upon his nominal master (Herod., iii. 128). The position assigned to Shimshai in this chapter (see especially vers. 9, 17, 23) is such as might be expected under these circumstances.

**Ver. 9.—The Dinaites, &c.** It is curious that the Samaritans, instead of using a general appellation, describe themselves under the names of the various nations and cities which had furnished the colonists of whom they were the descendants. It would seem that they were not yet, in the time of the Pseudo-Smerdis, amalgamated into a single people. From the list of names we may gather that the colonists of Esar-haddon's time had been derived chiefly from Southern Babylonia and the adjacent regions of Susiana, Persia, and Elymais. The Babylonians, Susanchites, and Elamites speak for themselves, and require no explanation. The Archevites are the people of Erech or Orchoë (now Warka), a city to the south-

east of Babylon. The Apharsites are no doubt Persians; the Dehavites, Dai or Dahie, a tribe located in Persia Proper (‘Herod.’ i. 125). If uncertainty attaches to any of the names, it is to two only—the Dinaites and the Tarpelites. Of these, the Dinaites are probably the people of Dayan, a country bordering on Cilicia, whose inhabitants are often mentioned by the Assyrian monarchs. The Tarpelites have been regarded as the people of Tripolis; but it is improbable that that city had as yet received its Greek name. Perhaps they are the Tuplai, or people of Tubal, mentioned in Scripture and the Assyrian inscriptions, the letter *r* being a euphonic addition, as in Darnesek for Dammesek *sharbith* for *shebeth*, and the like.

**Ver. 10.—The rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over.** Nothing more is known of “the great and noble Asnapper,” who is here mentioned as bringing the colonists and setting them in the cities of Samaria. We must suppose him to have been an officer employed by Esar-haddon on this service. The name is Assyrian in form, and may have meant “Asshur pursues.” **The rest that are on this side the river.** Rather, “across the river.” As Romans in North Italy, writing to Rome, would have spoken of themselves as “*Transpadani*,” so Persian subjects, writing to Susa from the west of the Jordan, speak of their country as “across the Jordan.” **And at such a time.** Rather, “and so forth.” This and the preceding verse set forth the address of Rehum's letter. The whole address not being given, the writer ends with the phrase *uk'eneth*, which means “and so forth,” or “et cetera” (comp. ch. vii. 12).

**Ver. 11.—This is the copy of the letter.** The address having been given, the writer now proceeds to the contents of the letter. **Thy servants the men on this side the river, &c.** This was a sort of heading inside the letter—a repetition in brief of the address.

**Ver. 12.—The Jews which came up from thee.** I. e. from the central provinces—from that part of the empire where thou dwellest. **To us.** To our part of the world—to Palestine. **Are . . . building the rebellious and the bad city.** The ground of this accusation must be sought in the various revolts of the Jews from the Babylonians recorded in 2 Kings xxiv., xxv. There had been one, or perhaps two, previous revolts from Assyria (2 Kings xviii. 7; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11); but of these the Samaritans probably knew nothing. They would, however, be likely to know that before Nebuchadnezzar

took the extreme measure of removing the Jews from their own land to Babylon, they had rebelled against him three several times—once under Jehoiaikim (2 Kings xxiv. 1), once under his son Jehoiachin (*ibid.* vers. 9, 10), and once under Zedekiah, the last king (*ibid.* ver. 20). Thus they had a basis of truth on which to ground their charge that Jerusalem was “the rebellious and the bad city.” And have set up the walls thereof. It appears very clearly from the book of Nehemiah that the walls of Jerusalem were not restored till his time, seventy-five years after this. The Samaritans, however, would naturally exaggerate, and call the rebuilding of the temple, and of a certain number of dwelling-houses, a fortifying of the place. The exaggeration, however, is not so great in the Chaldee text as in the Authorized Version. What is said seems to be, that “they are setting up the walls and joining the foundations.” That the work was far from complete is admitted in the next verse. We may doubt whether it was really begun.

Ver. 13.—Then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom. This was plausible reasoning. In Greece, if a subject city set to work to fortify itself, rebellion was immediately anticipated, not unfairly. But the circumstances of the Persian empire were different. In the remoter parts of that empire the central government was weak, and disorders frequently occurred. A city might need fortifications to protect it against its immediate neighbours, when it had not the slightest intention of asserting independence. Judging from the later history, which shows no revolt of the Jews against Persia, we may say that the accusation now alleged was unfounded, though perhaps it was not made in bad faith. Toll, tribute, and custom represent the chief heads of Persian taxation, which, however, did not include “custom” in our sense of the word. The three terms used by the Samaritans really represent, respectively, “tribute,” or the money payment required from each province, “provision,” or the payment in kind equally required (Herod., i. 192; iii. 91), and “toll,” or contributions from those who made use of the Persian highways. According to the Samaritans, none of these would be paid by the Jews if Jerusalem was

once fortified. And so thou shalt endamage the revenue. The general meaning is given correctly enough by this rendering, but “revenue” is not expressly mentioned. *Aphthom*, the word so translated, means really “at length,” “at last.” Translate, “And so at last thou shalt endamage the kings.”

Ver. 14.—We have maintenance from the king's palace. The marginal rendering is better, and shows the true sense. “Eating a man's salt” in the East is deriving one's subsistence from him. The man who eats another's salt is bound to look after his interests. It was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour. Rather, “the king's detriment or loss”—it was not meet for us to stand by tamely and see the king stript of his due.

Ver. 15.—That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers. It was the practice at the Persian court to register all important events in a book, which from time to time was read to the kings (Esther ii. 23; vi. 1). The Samaritans suggest a consultation of this book, which would at any rate contain their own previous accusations against Jerusalem (*supra*, vers. 5, 6), and might make some mention of the revolts from Babylon (see the comment on ver. 12). For which cause was this city destroyed. This was the great fact on which the Samaritans relied. Nebuchadnezzar had only destroyed Jerusalem in consequence of repeated rebellions. True; but no sufficient indication that there would be revolt from Persia, which was anti-idolatrous, and had proved herself so true a friend to the Jews.

Ver. 16.—Thou shalt have no portion on this side the river. It is not quite clear whether the river intended here and in ver. 10 is the Euphrates or the Jordan. Generally in the Old Testament *hannahar* means the Euphrates, but the exaggeration is gross if that river was intended here. Only twice in their history had the Israelites advanced their frontier as far as that stream—under Solomon (1 Kings iv. 21) and under Menahem (2 Kings xv. 16); in their present depressed condition it was absurd to imagine that they could rival those early glories. But jealousy does not stop to weigh the reasonableness of its accusations.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 6—16.—*The work maligned.* Besides “hiring counsellors,” as mentioned in ver. 5; or, it may be, in order to provide these counsellors with documents to present and act on; we are here told that the Samaritan “adversaries” sent various letters to the Persian kings against the temple builders at Jerusalem. One of these, sent to a king here styled Ahasuerus, is merely referred to as an “accusation.” Another and more successful one, sent “in the days of Artaxerxes,” is described at full length. With many commentators of note and of various schools (see Words-

worth, *in loc.*), we shall assume these two kings, notwithstanding the apparent diversity of their names, to be Cambyzes and the Pseudo-Smerdis, the son and pretended son, and two next successors, of Cyrus. In any case the latter-named letter (ver. 33), if not an exact copy, may be regarded as a fair sample, of what was sent. Looked at thus from the Jewish side of the question, it was a most formidable production:—equally so whether we now consider, on the one hand, its writers; or, on the other hand, its contents.

I. THE WRITERS. Much of the importance of a letter turns, of course, on this point. Were they (1) *persons of note*? It is evident that they were in this case. "Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel" (ver. 7) were clearly well-known names at that time. No one then required to be told who they were. It is also evident that they were (2) *persons of much acuteness*. They had their letter written in the Syrian or Aramaic language and characters, as being those used (Lange) in Western Persia in all official documents. Such a plan, of course, would give their letter all the better chance of perusal. Further, it was so contrived that some of those signing the letter should be (3) *men of rank*. Every Persian governor (so Herodotus, quoted by Rawlinson) was accompanied to his province by a royal secretary, having an independent authority of his own. These correspond in this instance to the "chancellor" and the "scribe" who are described in ver. 8 as writing the "letter against Jerusalem." Bishlam, &c., in all probability, were its concocters and framers; Rehum and Shimshai its official senders. Both sets appear also to have been (4) *men of much influence*. Mention is made both of them and their "companions." They acted for others besides themselves; for others who could be named, but are not. At the same time, there were others named by them, as persons joining with them in sending this letter, whose names were such as to give it much additional weight. These were men, for example, who, in the matter of origin, represented very various cities, provinces, and races in the wide empire of Persia; such as ancient Erech (Gen. x. 10), mighty Babylon, royal Susa, and others. Yet they were men, again, who, as to recent history and present position, represented only the province from which the letter came, having been brought long ago to where they were by the same kind of imperial authority as that to which they appealed (ver. 10). All these things made them the right persons to address the ruler of the whole empire respecting a matter affecting the welfare of the whole empire, yet arising exclusively in that province of it in which they all dwelt. Not only so, these same individuals, as a matter of fact, represented the whole of that province. With the exception of those they wrote about, they were able to speak of themselves as all "the men on that side the river." In a word, numbers, rank, influence, authority, character, origin, situation—the writers of the present letter had all these things on their side. It was, indeed, a great league; reminding us of what we read of in Ps. lxxxiii. 3—8, and Acts iv. 27, and (as something to happen hereafter) in Rev. xx. 7—9. In the presence of such a league the temple builders were like the two flocks described in 1 Kings xx. 27; or like the disciples when the Saviour said to them as in Matt. x. 16.

II. THE CONTENTS of the letter. These also were very formidable, because both weighty and well put. They comprised—1. *A severe accusation*. The returned Jews were described as rebuilding a city always notorious for its evil name—Jerusalem "the rebellious" (ver. 12). Such a charge no chief governor could afford to pass by. Such a charge, also, in this instance, had a very plausible look. Situated as the temple was, at the eastern edge of the city heights, the building of its foundation and enclosures (the real work of the men of Jerusalem) might easily be misrepresented as a "making ready" of the "walls" of the "city" itself. 2. *A plain warning*. "In the judgment of us who live on the spot, this thing is even worse than it seems. The building of this city means, in reality, the building of a fortress against the king; and that means, in turn, serious loss of revenue; for no taxes of any sort will that city pay, whether in money, or kind, or for using the highways." 3. *A skilful apology*. Why do we refer at all to so unpleasant a contingency? Simply as a matter of duty, and because of our loyalty. Having eaten of the king's salt (margin), being his dependents and subjects (possibly also his covenant servants, 2 Chron. xiii. 5), we could not see even such possibility of hurt without speaking. 4. *An appeal to history*. Besides, the king can judge for



himself on this subject. He has only to inquire for himself in the government records, and see what has always been said there about this city. Why, in fact, if not thus "rebellious," was it ever destroyed? 5. *An appeal to reason.* If things be thus, what must be the consequence—the inevitable consequence of such a city being again established? Has our warning gone *far enough*, in reality? There will not only be rebellion here, but a rival sovereignty; not only some revenue, but a whole province, lost. Such, at any rate (so we assure the king), is our fear.

This subject illustrates—1. *The perilous nature of Christian warfare.* All the neighbours of the Jews were against them; all that could be urged was urged against them, and in the very best way. It would be difficult to improve the letter before us, considering the purpose in view. So many, so powerful, so subtle always are the enemies of the Church. (Comp. Matt. xxiv. 9; Luke xxi. 16, 17; Acts xxviii. 22.) Consider also, in a different sphere, Job i. 9-11; ii. 4-6; Rev. xii. 10; and the very meaning of the name Diabolus. 2. *The secret of Christian vitality.* How has the Church survived all this except by help from above? Could Jerusalem have survived this present league and letter if left to itself? Comp. "I have reserved to myself," in Rom. xi. 4; 1 Kings xix. 18. 3. *The proper direction of Christian trust.* With such enemies, with such accusers, to whom must we look for defence? Not to other men, not to ourselves, but only to the appointed "Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John ii. 1). He is more than all that are against us (Num. xiv. 9; Ps. xxvii. 1-3; cxviii. 6). Also, being our "propitiation" (1 John ii. 2), he can say more *for* us than they *against* us. (Comp. "I have prayed for thee," in Luke xxii. 31, 32; and see Rom. viii. 33, 34; Heb. vii. 25.)

#### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 4-16.—*The world's opposition to the Church.* We observe, in reference to the world's opposition to the Church—

I. THAT IT OFTEN SEEKS TO HINDER USEFUL ENTERPRISE. These Samaritans sought to "trouble them in building" (ver. 4). As Israel was employed in rebuilding the ruined temple, so the Church is engaged in erecting a great spiritual temple; this noble enterprise is hindered by the varied enmity of the world. The moral building is hindered as well by the pleasures as by the enmity of men: how sinful to hinder the work of God.

II. THAT IT COMBINES A VARIED AGENCY. 1. *Costly.* "And hired counsellors against them" (ver. 5). The world often expends much time and money in its opposition to the work of God; it always has "counsellors" ready to take its unprofitable pay. The Church opposes with the unsearchable riches of Christ. 2. *Numerous.* The enemies of the Church are legion; but more are for it than all that can be against it. 3. *Competent.* The men here named were capable of the most effective method of obtaining their end; the enemies of the Church are often socially great and mentally gifted. Learning is sometimes arrayed against the Church. But God hath chosen the weak things of the earth to confound the mighty. 4. *Influential.* These men have influence with the king, and stay the work of Israel. But a faithful Israel has power with God, and shall prevail. Strange are the intellectual and social elements allied against the Church.

III. THAT IT TAKES ADVANTAGE OF POLITICAL CHANGES. "And in the reign of Ahasuerus" (ver. 6). During the former reign the Samaritan enmity did not obtain much favour; but it is more successful with the new king. This opposition is—1. *Persistent.* Kings may die, but it continues. 2. *Vigilant.* It is ever on the outlook for new opportunity. 3. *Flattering.* Thus it seeks to win its way with the new monarch. The Church must remember that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and ever; his purpose standeth sure. 4. *An appeal to self-interest.* "Enlarge the revenue of the kings" (ver. 13).

IV. THAT IT MAKES A CUNNING USE OF MISREPRESENTATION. "They will not pay toll" (ver. 13). The worldly opposition represents the Church of God as injurious to the state. 1. *Rebellious.* "Building the rebellious" (ver. 12). That the Church will obey God rather than the king; true if their laws come into collision; but are not Christians the most law-abiding subjects?

2. *Defrauding*. "They will not pay toll." But does not the Church render unto God the things that are his, and to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's? 3. *Hypocritical*. They build not the walls of Jerusalem for God, but to shut out the king. 4. *Wicked*. They designate Jerusalem a "bad city." Thus the world maligns the Church; it spoke evil of Christ; it will undervalue his followers.

V. THAT IT MAKES THE PRETENCE OF A DISINTERESTED MOTIVE. "It was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour" (ver. 14). The world will not allow that its opposition is angry or jealous. The most wicked plans seek the aid of righteous pleas. This opposition appears—1. *Disinterested*. It does not seek its own, but the king's welfare. 2. *Loyal*. They had "the king's maintenance," and therefore inform the king of his peril. 3. *Open*. They will tell the king plainly of the matter, and he can decide. Thus would the world conceal its hatred to the Church.

VI. THAT IT PUTS A FALSE INTERPRETATION UPON NATIONAL HISTORY. "That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers" (ver. 15). 1. The historical *record*. The history of the Church is blended with the history of the world; the Divine and human records move together. 2. The historical *argument*. 3. The historical *perversion*. History, rightly interpreted, is on the side of the Church. 4. The historical *vindication*. We justify Israel now and condemn the Samaritans; time will surely vindicate the Church.—E.

Vers. 6—24.—*Three thoughts from old documents*. The determined attempts made by the Samaritans to prevent the Jews from building the temple and the walls of Jerusalem are well illustrated in the correspondence between them and the king of Persia. Documents passed between the two of which we have the superscription and contents in these verses. They remind us—

I. THAT MEN MAY TAKE AN IMMENSITY OF TROUBLE TO DO OTHER PEOPLE HARM AND MAKE THEMSELVES INFAMOUS. These men, "in the days of Artaxerxes" (ver. 7), secured the sympathy and co-operation of the Persian "chancellor" and "scribe" (ver. 8); also of their "companions," various Persian colonists then living in Samaria (ver. 9), with "the rest of the nations" whom "Asnapper brought over and set in their cities" (ver. 10): with their aid and through their medium they gained access to King Artaxerxes, and induced him to listen to a long statement of complaint. They had a momentary success, as the king granted their prayer and arrested the work; but in the end their evil designs were defeated, and those against whom they plotted gained their end. All that these malignant Samaritans did was to annoy and delay without defeating their neighbours, while they have earned for themselves a most unenviable immortality. This document is only read now by those who will condemn their conduct. How often do we see men putting forth patient energy, expending great ingenuity and labour, to compass that in which it is best for them to fail, of which they will live to be ashamed. If there be a sense in which "all labour is profit" (Prov. xiv. 23), it is also painfully true that thousands of men are laboriously engaged in doing work which will perish, and had better perish; in making a name and repute which they would be glad afterwards to hide. Well for those who are doing that which really serves, that which will stand, that for which other generations will not rebuke but bless them.

II. THAT A TIME OF SPECIAL ACTIVITY WILL PROBABLY PROVE A TIME OF UNUSUAL ENDURANCE (vers. 12—16). The Jews at this time were actively engaged in building—not merely in erecting stone walls, but in rebuilding a nation, in relaying the foundations of the kingdom and cause of God. Thus employed, they found themselves exposed to bitter hostility and deadly machination. Their nearest neighbours were plotting against them; and now they were doing that which is always found very difficult to endure—they were misrepresenting and maligning them; they were reporting them to the king as a "rebellious and bad city" (ver. 12), bent on refusing to "pay toll, tribute, and custom" (ver. 13), "hurtful unto kings and provinces," intending to break off their allegiance, so that the king "would have no portion on this side the river." Though not incapable of turbulence, and not indisposed to throw off a foreign yoke when that should be possible, the Jews were not cherishing any purpose of this kind; they had been faithful subjects when in Persia, and they had honourable and loyal intentions now. This "accusation" (ver. 6) was essentially

false; it was a malignant misrepresentation. When men are actively engaged in building the kingdom of Christ, they may expect Samaritan misrepresentations. Things will be said by the ill-disposed which, as here, may have a colouring of truth, but which are essentially false. We must not mind misrepresentation when we are doing earnest and faithful work. The very excellency of our effort will bring down the hatred and opposition of those who are enemies of the truth, and our work and ourselves will be slandered; we may find ourselves members of a "sect everywhere spoken against." We shall not, then, forget who it was that was charged with sedition, and so far from being surprised that "the disciple is not above his master," we shall rejoice that we are counted worthy to "partake of the sufferings of Christ." No truly great work has ever been wrought which has not been covered at times with black clouds of misrepresentation.

III. THAT SELFISHNESS AND JUSTICE ARE SELDOM ASSOCIATED TOGETHER. The king listened to those who seemed so desirous of serving him; he was inclined to believe those that were anxious his "revenue should not be endamaged" (ver. 13), who did not wish to "see the king's dishonour" (ver. 14), and who took measures that he should not lose his "portion on one side the river" (ver. 16). And search being made, it was easy to find some incidents which might be construed in the sense of these complainants: the city "of old time had made insurrection," &c. (ver. 19); there had been "mighty kings" to whom "toll, tribute, and custom" had been paid, &c.—there might be some possible danger too in the future; let the work cease for the present (ver. 21), for "why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?" (ver. 22). Rather send bitter disappointment to the holiest hopes of a province than endanger the prosperity of kings. Thus does self-interest pervert justice. To save themselves from slight, remote, and contingent harm, men will cause much present and certain injury to their fellows. Selfishness is unfair and often cruel. To be true and just one must be disinterested.—C.

## EXPOSITION.

Ver. 17.—**Then sent the king an answer.** The complaint made was of such importance that an answer was returned without delay. It was addressed both to Behum and Shimshai, since they were independent authorities. **Peace, and at such a time.** "Peace" (*shelâm*) is the ordinary Oriental salutation. The other word, *uk'eth*, is taken by our translators to refer to the date; but it really means, like *uk'eneth* (ver. 10), "and so forth," or "et cetera."

Ver. 18.—**The letter hath been plainly read before me.** Despatches are read *to*, not *by*, Oriental sovereigns, who have often no literary education. (Compare Esther vi. 1.)

Ver. 19.—**I commanded, and search has been made.** The Pseudo-Smerdis, who was a fanatical adherent of Magism, which disallowed temples altogether (Herod., i. 130), and who had already destroyed the temples of Ormuzd in Persia ('Behistun Ins.,' col. i. par. 14, § 5), was naturally willing enough to do as the Samaritans desired, and stop the restoration of the Jewish temple. Accordingly, he had a search made among the state records, and found, as they had expected he would, evidence of insurrections on the part of the Jews against the foreign countries to which they had been subject, as Assyria

(2 Kings xviii. 7) and Babylon (*ibid.* xxiv. 1; Jer. lii. 3), and also proof of the formidable power possessed by certain Jewish or Israelite kings; upon which he thought himself justified in complying with the Samaritan request, and ordering the work that was going on at Jerusalem to cease (see ver. 21).

Ver. 20.—**Mighty kings.** David and Solomon best answer to this description, possessing as they did a kingdom which extended from the Euphrates to the borders of Egypt (1 Kings iv. 21, 24), and drawing tribute from the various petty princes or chiefs of the nations dwelling within those limits (2 Sam. viii. 6—12; 1 Kings x. 14, 25). Josiah had, perhaps, more recently, possessed an almost equally extensive sway.

Ver. 21.—**Until another commandment shall be given.** It can scarcely be supposed that the Pseudo-Smerdis had any intention of issuing "another commandment;" but, since "the laws of the Medes and Persians," as a general rule, "altered not" (Esther i. 19; Dan. vi. 15), it may well be that the clause before us was one inserted as a matter of form in most decrees, to prevent them from being irrevocable.

Ver. 23.—**They went up in haste.** The "adversaries" lost no time. Having ob-

tained the decree which forbade further building, they proceeded with it to Jerusalem, and by a display of force compelled the Jews to submission. No doubt resistance might have been made, but resistance would have been rebellion.

Ver. 24. — Then ceased the work . . . until the second year of the reign of Darius. The interval of compelled inaction was not long. The Pseudo-Smerdis reigned, at the utmost, ten months; after which a revolution occurred, and the throne was occupied by Darius, the son of Hystaspes. If the work was resumed early in this monarch's second year, the entire period of suspension cannot

have much exceeded a year and a half. **King of Persia.** There is probably no intention of distinguishing the Darius of this book from "Darius the Mede" (Dan. v. 31; vi. 1). "King of Persia" is appended to his name merely out of respect and honour, as it is to the names of Cyrus (i. 1, 2, 8), Artaxerxes I. (iv. 7), and Artaxerxes II. (vi. 14). Such a superfluous attachment to his name of the style and title of a monarch is common throughout the Old Testament, and generally marks a distinct intention to do the individual honour (see Gen. xli. 46; 1 Kings iii. 1; ix. 11, 16; xi. 18; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, &c.).

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 17—24.—*The work stopped.* The ostensible object of the letter to Artaxerxes (vers. 11—16) was to stop the building of the walls of Jerusalem. Its real object was to put a stop to the building of God's house. In this for a time it succeeded, as our present passage records. Two things are to be especially noticed in the story of this grievous success. The weapon obtained was most efficient; the use made of it was most effectual.

I. AN EFFICIENT AID IN AN EVIL PLAN. This the Samaritans found provided for them in the reply of King Artaxerxes. Besides the bare fact of having a reply at all, which was satisfactory so far as showing that their accusation had reached headquarters (as they had planned), the reply itself, when examined, turned out all they could wish. For example, its language showed that their representations had met (1) with most *favourable attention*. The number and character of those making them (as noted in our last) had been duly observed (ver. 17). Their friendly object in doing so was acknowledged by the usual friendly salutation ("Peace," &c.) in return. Also, the contents of the letter had been submitted carefully to the notice of the king (ver. 18; comp. Esther vi. 1). As a beginning, therefore, what could be better? Next, we find that the recommendations of the letter had met (2) with most *ready compliance*. The suggested "search" had been formally ordered (obs. word "decree" in margin), and properly instituted and carried out. Further, the result of that search had proved such as to give their words of warning (3) most *ample support*. All that they had said was found true. Jerusalem was found described in the government archives as "seditious," and that "of old" (ver. 19). Also their fears as to the loss of revenue, and even of the province, had been fully justified by the search. Jerusalem, so it was found, had formerly both ruled and taxed all "beyond the river;" and might do so again, of course, if rebuilt (ver. 20). Not only so, but it may perhaps be noticed that, so far as the search went, nothing of an adverse nature had been found; or, at any rate, if found, had not been referred to. Esther vi. 2, 4 are at least sufficient to show how different a complexion the results of this search might have had, if thorough and earnest. Also, that, had it been so, the designs of the Samaritans would probably not have met, as we find them doing, (4) with such *signal success*. For example, the builders at Jerusalem were to be made to "cease," the very upshot wished for. Not only so, they were not to begin again, except by express permission for it from the king himself. This "commandment" was to continue binding until there should be "another commandment" in its place. Added to which, the Samaritans themselves were not only at liberty, as though by a kind of "permissive legislation," to see to the execution of this decree of the king, but they were strongly urged, and almost entreated in fact, to prevent its infraction. One can see, in that concluding remonstrance, how well their (mis-)representations had told; and how fully they had succeeded in alarming and arousing the jealous covetousness of the king. "Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the king?" Must they not have read this language with a smile of triumph as well as joy? Here was the king, in urging his

own desires, forwarding theirs even more. Here was that which could be used against the Jewish elders at their only strong point—as it seemed. The one thing, as noted before, which appeared to give any strength to the builders of the temple, was the edict of Cyrus. Here was a similar edict, still more urgent and quite as explicit, on the exactly opposite side. Surely the means of success, if not success itself, was now placed in their power.

II. AN EFFICIENT AID IN AN EVIL PLAN EFFECTUALLY EMPLOYED. Were the Samaritans able to use the aid thus placed in their hands? Were they satisfied with merely obtaining so welcome a decree? Unless a weapon is effectually wielded, it might as well remain hanging up in the armoury. Unless a decree is made known and enforced, it differs nothing from one not yet passed—so far, at any rate, as its results are concerned? The Samaritan leaders and council, to whom came, in the first instance, the above-described decree of the king, seem to have been fully alive to these truths. They appear to have met together (ver. 23) in order to hear its contents. It was doubtless “read before” them with all proper state. After this, there was (1) *no delay*. They proceeded to take action on it “in haste.” They determined to strike, as we say, while the iron was hot. Also, they did this, we find, (2) *in person*; not deputing action, it seems, on so pressing a matter, to any kind of subordinates. “They” themselves, who had thus received the letter, and heard it read, at once proceeded to act. May we not notice, too, in what way they did so? Namely, on the one hand, (3) *as to place*. They went to Jerusalem, the city in question, the place which the king’s letter and their wishes had both so plainly in view. Also, on the other hand, (4) *as to persons*. They went “to Jerusalem to the Jews,” it is stated; *i. e.*, as we take it, to the Jewish rulers and elders (so the expression “the Jews” is constantly used by St. John in his Gospel); in other words, to those men at Jerusalem who were actually engaged in directing and overseeing the erection of the temple, and so were those really responsible, in fact, for the whole of that work. Nor is this quite all we are told. We are told, further, of these Samaritan authorities—and the point being expressly mentioned seems worthy of a special note, at least, in passing—that they “made” the Jewish authorities “to cease” from their work; and that they did so, also, “by force and power”—that is to say, no doubt, with a very considerable exhibition of ill-usage and threat. In a word, it is as though, with this decree from Shushan in their hands, they had rushed all the way from Samaria and struck these Jerusalem Jews as they worked; and that with so much force and such a degree of skill as to deprive them of all power to go on. Nothing, in fact, could be better aimed, nothing more effectual, than this their stroke. It utterly destroyed the thing struck; at any rate for so long a time, and so completely, that there was nothing more to be said. “Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem.” Not till a year and a half have passed by, not till a new king and even a new dynasty have appeared on the scene, shall we hear of it again!

See, therefore, in this matter—1. *The mystery of God’s ways*. The omnipotent God himself allowed his own work to be stopped! Not merely his own workmen. That is another thing, and often the case (see Matt. xiv. 3; Mark ix. 18; Acts xvi. 6, 7; Rev. xi. 7—10). Even such a stoppage, however, is, not uncommonly, a sufficiently mysterious thing in our eyes. The Baptist, apparently, felt this himself (Matt. xi. 2—6). Who, again, without marvel, can see the glorious sunrise of Stephen’s ministry (Acts vi. 8—13) so suddenly set before men (Jer. xv. 9; Acts vii. 59)? But this phenomenon of the cessation of the work itself is more marvellous still, because it appears at first hardly consistent with God’s own attributes and nature. Does it mean that he has changed his purposes (1 Sam. xv. 29; Rom. xi. 29; James i. 17)? Or that he cannot carry them out (Matt. xix. 26; Mark xiv. 36)? Especially may we ask thus where the work in question is one for which he has done so much and so triumphantly, as in this instance (see chaps. i.—iii., almost throughout). And still more where the cessation of the work is brought about by the enemies of himself and his people, and that with such a spring-tide of success as our eyes have just seen. The greatest things and the smallest (so our attention to some of the very *minutiæ* of this case has served to show us), the “stars in their courses” and the dust of the desert have seemed in league here with God’s foes. And the end

has been—what? The open failure, in the eyes of his enemies, and in the eyes of his friends as well, of the undertaking on which he had set his heart. That is what that deserted temple enclosure, with its manifestly interrupted labours, and its sorry wealth of unused materials, seemed to say for so long. It was like the flag of the enemies of Jehovah waving triumphantly over the very citadel of his strength (Ps. lxxiv. 7)! 2. *The mercy of God's ways.* After all, the case was not desperate. There was just a gleam of light in the darkness; a gleam, it is possible, that would never have been noticed unless the surrounding darkness had been so extreme; a gleam, however, all the more worthy of notice on that very account. Why that singular suggestion of a possible second "commandment" in the (otherwise) unfaltering royal decree of this chapter? Does Scripture tell us of anything like it in any other document of this nature (comp. Ezra i. 2—4; vi. 6—12; vii. 11—26; Dan. iii. 29; vi. 25—27)? Considering, indeed, the almost excessive value attached by the ancient Persian government to the idea of "finality" in its legislation (Dan. vi. throughout), is not this curious hint in the exactly opposite direction a feature of most singular note? And may we not believe, therefore, with all reverence, that we see in it the special handiwork and the special mercy of God himself? Often does he give such dim but priceless glimmerings of hope to those on the very verge of despair (see Judges xiii. 22, 23; 2 Sam. xxiv. 12—14; Jer. iv. 27; v. 9, 10, 18; Luke viii. 49, 50; xxiv. 17, 32; Acts xx. 9, 10). This is equally true of his Church (Ps. xii. 1), and of souls (Ps. xxvii. 13). So often may it be said of both of them, as in 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.

#### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 17—24.—*Man hindering the work of God.* I. THAT MEN ARE CAPABLE OF HINDERING THE WORK OF GOD. "Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded" (ver. 21). 1. *Presumptuous.* "Then ceased the work of the house of God." How could presumption be greater than to stop the work of God; let men pluck the stars from the heavens, but let them not injure the Church of Christ. 2. *Perplexing.* Is it not a mystery that the Eternal will allow frail and sinful men to impede the work of his people? 3. *Prejudicial.* The walls of Jerusalem required restoration. The temple must be built and the old worship restored. This hindrance is injurious to the Jewish commonwealth. How do men prejudice great interests by staying the beneficent ministries of the Church. 4. *Permitted.* These hindrances were allowed for a time, that new energy might be stimulated, that the mercy of God might be seen in the aid given to the dejected workers, and his glory in the final defeat of all enemies. 5. *Preparatory.* To greater success; the pent-up stream will soon flow on more rapidly. 6. *Patient.* The work of the Church is patient; it will outlive all enmity.

II. THE METHODS WHICH ARE MOST CALCULATED TO HINDER THE WORK OF GOD. The letter to the king caused the work to cease. The impediments to Church work are—1. *External.* The political may hinder the moral; unjust law, civil persecution, and the force of circumstances may sometimes cause the work of God to cease. (1) Haste. (2) Force (ver. 23). 2. *Internal.* The work of God is more often hindered by a low spiritual condition, by a quarrelsome temper, by a critical spirit, by the thoughtless word; it is indeed sad to cause moral work to cease from within. See the responsibility of conduct, when a word may, like this letter to the king, stay the work of God.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES WHICH FOLLOW WHEN THE WORK OF GOD IS HINDERED. 1. *Disappointment.* After the generous edict of Cyrus how disappointing this order to cease work. How often is the Church disappointed in her best efforts. 2. *Complaint.* No doubt many Israelites would indulge a complaining spirit. The Church should not grumble when its work is hindered, but pray. 3. *Sorrow.* That the good work should be unfinished. 4. *Hope.* That God will yet undertake their cause.—E.

Ver. 24; v. 1.—*Hindrances.* These two verses suggest the two sorts of hindrances which, immediately after the foundation of the temple, interfered with the

progress of the building of it. Circumstances were adverse to the Jews; these are recorded in Ezra iv., and are illustrated in the Persian history of the time. There crept over the people a growing indifference to the work; they became unready for the self-denial which it demanded; their spiritual unfitness for it was increased by the presence of the external obstacles: to understand this we must turn to the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. This is the right way to study all history. The issue of events cannot be understood apart from the moral condition of the men who are affected by them; men's moral condition, again, and their actions are profoundly affected by circumstances. The Divine Providence ordains and permits events; in the use we make of them our character reveals itself, here our responsibility lies.

The letter of Artaxerxes effectually prevented the progress of the building: "then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem." No prophet rebuked the people during this period; rebukes of inaction, when activity is impossible, only fret and wear out the soul. There is "a time to keep silence," as well as "a time to speak." With the accession of Darius, work, though it might be arduous, became possible; and then Haggai and Zechariah did not spare their words. *God gives us men as well as times and seasons.* He gives also men of different qualifications according to different needs: the preacher as well as the workman; him who has insight into the springs of human conduct as well as him who can lend activity. Haggai and Zechariah are henceforth joined with Zerubbabel and Jeshua as builders of the temple (ch. v. 2; vi. 14).

I. THE OUTWARD HINDRANCES. (a) The *jealousy* of the surrounding heathen (ch. iv. 1—3). These were the people mentioned in 2 Kings xvii. 24—41, sent to occupy the northern kingdom when the Israelites were carried away into Assyria. They were superstitious (2 Kings xvii. 26), followers of the lustful and cruel worship, to contend against which the Hebrew nation was raised up (vers. 29—31). They had no conception of Deity but that of polytheism (vers. 26, 32, 33, 41). It was impossible for the Jews to admit their partnership in building the temple. It would have been treason to the object for which Cyrus had sent them back; it would have been a denial of their own faith; it would have been a new provocation of God. Our age, which understands that truth is one and indivisible, ought to be able to see that not intolerance, but fidelity, prompted their refusal. These people, from whom the leaders of the Jews expected trouble at the first (ch. iii. 3), and whom they counted "adversaries" (ch. iv. 1), directly opposed them (ver. 4), and intrigued against them at the court of Persia (ver. 5). (b) No direct appeal was made to Cyrus to countermand the proclamation which was the charter of the Jews' return. "The law of the Medes and Persians altereth not." But *no protection was afforded them.* The history of the later years of Cyrus is obscure. "The warlike prince," says Rawlinson, "who conquered the Persian empire did little to organise it." He was pursuing schemes of conquest to the last. The Jews were left in their feebleness to execute his original decree in their favour as best they could. (c) The troubled history of Cambyzes, the Ahasuerus of Ezra, enables us to understand why *he too was indifferent to a local quarrel in a distant province.* His jealousy of his brother was his first engrossing care. Then came his schemes of conquest, necessitating his absence from his capital; and, finally, the revolution which placed the Pseudo-Smerdis (Artaxerxes) on the throne. We can understand the indecisive character of Ezra iv. 6. (d) The whole character of the Persian rule was changed on the accession of Artaxerxes. A usurper, he had no loyalty to the purpose of Cyrus. A "Magian," he was out of sympathy with the Zoroastrianism of his great predecessor. Appeal was made to political jealousy alone; the history of the Jews had shown they were too strong to be tolerated (vers. 12—16). The appeal was successful: "then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem."

II. THE MORAL HINDRANCES. The people were reluctant to resume work when the accession of Darius made it possible. Darius was a second Cyrus; "the greatest of the Persian monarchs." He was a strong man, a conqueror. He knew the need of good government, and organised his empire. He abolished tributary kingships, and placed in every district an officer directly responsible to the supreme authority.

Such a man would not tolerate petty local jealousies; he was worthy of trust. Hence Haggai and Zechariah began to urge on the work of building; and Zerubbabel and Jeshua began to build. Then appeared the old vices of the people, testified against by many a prophet; they were also demoralised by their enforced inaction. (a) They were *dispirited*. Haggai urges them "be strong." God is with them: "my spirit remaineth among you, fear ye not." All resources are his, "the silver and the gold." He can make all nations serve them. "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former" (Haggai ii. 1—9). Zechariah's prophecy glows with encouragement and hope. God loves his people (Zech. i. 14—17; ii. 8, 10—12). Jeshua and Zerubbabel are his chosen servants (chs. ii., iii.). The prosperity of Jerusalem is assured (ch. viii. 1—8). (b) They were *worldly*. The force of character native to the Jews, diverted from the work of building, had found a channel in agriculture and trade. Some were rich, dwelling in "ceiled houses" (Haggai i. 4); they were very active (ch. i. 6). And they were hypocritical, making professed regard for God's word an excuse for their unreadiness. They had begun too soon; the "seventy years" of Jeremiah were not completed: "the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." (c) They were *selfish*. The old sins of oppression were rife (Zech. vii. 8—10), side by side with sanctimoniousness (vers. 1—7). They were careless of justice and truth (ch. viii. 16, 17). They were dishonest and perjured (v. 4). These are the very vices that a time of adversity is likely to foster. One of the perils against which we ought to be on our guard when a check is imposed on our prosperity, and we find ourselves unable, for a time, to execute a noble purpose, is that we drop into an altogether lower mood. A few men can mould circumstances; there are more, but still few, who are indifferent to them; most men are profoundly affected by them. Practical lessons:—1. Since circumstances so intimately affect our moral and spiritual life, *the sphere of circumstance is a sphere for prayer*. "Give me neither poverty nor riches." To limit the use of prayer to personal character is impossible; for among the influences affecting personal character are the order of nature, and the course of events. 2. *Let all circumstances be rightly used by us*. There are virtues, as well as vices, fostered by special seasons. Prosperity may nourish the generous virtues; a liberal habit acquired in prosperity may help to preserve us from a craven, niggardly spirit in times of care. Adversity may give us an opportunity for patience, meekness, and faith; and, by teaching us to be indifferent to personal ease, may fit us to consecrate returning prosperity to God and our fellows. 3. *Our responsibility for the use we make of varying circumstances*. These may master us or we may master them. Our ability to read the "signs of the times" is an indication of our moral character. Contrast the Jews' perversion of the "seventy years'" prophecy (Haggai i. 2) with the prophets' quick perception, so soon as the second year of Darius, that here was a man on whom they could rely, and that the time was come to resume work. Compare also our Lord's solemn denunciations of the Pharisees (Matt. xvi. 1—4). It is thus, by events working upon and revealing character, that time is preparing our eternity.—M.

Ver. 24; v. 1, 2.—*Spiritual amendment*. It is quite true that the building of the house of the Lord ceased in consequence of the opposition of the Samaritans; it is also true that this cessation continued because of their animosity and opposition. Yet this does not express the whole truth. Here, as elsewhere, if not everywhere, different causes combined to produce the one result. The long inactivity on the part of the returned Jews was partly due to their own moral deficiency; there was with them some—

I. **SLACKNESS**. "Then ceased the work," &c. (ver. 24). We have here the great advantage of being able to compare one book of Scripture with another, and (what is more) a historical with a prophetic book. Comparing Haggai i. with Ezra v., we conclude that, under the pressure from without, the first zeal of the liberated captives cooled, and that they allowed themselves to be too much affected by the unfriendliness of their neighbours. If it was really necessary—as perhaps it was—to lay down their weapons at the first, they might have resumed them much sooner than they did. They permitted nearly two years to pass without venturing to take up that



which they laid down. Meantime the first ardour abated, and priests and people, taking their tone from the governor and the high priest, settled down into satisfaction when they should have been filled with eagerness and anxiety. A noble aspiration was rapidly giving way to an ignoble contentment. This is but too frequently recurring a page in the history of human goodness. First an all-consuming ardour, an intensity of heat which promises to shine with utmost brilliance and burn up everything which is impure; then, after a while, the light dies down, the spirit cools, and only a few sparks, with a little smoke, are left. First devotion, which thinks the hours of worship all too short; zeal which longs to multiply its labours; consecration which prefers the post of danger and the field of difficulty. Then languor, laziness, love of ease; the hours of worship are too long; the duties too heavy; the perils too great. The sanctuary is passed by, the vineyard deserted, the enterprise abandoned.

II. REPROOF (ver. 1). "Then the prophets . . . prophesied," &c. How vigorously, after the manner of a Hebrew prophet, Haggai reproved and incited Zerubbabel and Jeshua, we may read in both chapters of that book of prophecy. "Is it time for you to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?" is the burden of the Lord which Haggai delivered. These men of God—for he was joined by Zechariah—must have sought the praise of God rather than that of man; their one care was to be faithful to him in whose name they spoke, and so to "deliver their soul." They did not "prophecy smooth things," but rough, hard, trying things. Not only those whose chief vocation and profession it is to speak for God, but all who fear his name and call themselves his disciples, must be ready, on occasion, to declare the "burden of the Lord," to speak the word which is unpalatable, which wounds and troubles the soul. Sometimes it is our duty, like the Master, to send men away "sorrowful" (Matt. xix. 22). Sometimes we must receive in grief rather than anger the reproaches of our friends. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

III. RECOVERY. "Then rose up Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and began to build" (ver. 2). The Jewish leaders hearkened to the voice of God speaking to them through the prophets, and they regained their lost devotedness. "Then they rose up, and began to build." They heeded the admonitions given, and cheerfully co-operated with those who gave them. They had the wisdom to perceive that they were wrong; they frankly owned it, and they promptly and energetically set themselves to rectify their ways. Here is true manliness as well as wisdom. It is a weak and foolish thing for a man to go on in a false course when he sees that he is in the wrong. There is nothing which more (1) honours our manhood than to submit at once to the known will of God, whether by pursuing our path, or by returning in our way, or by holding our hand. There is nothing which more (2) conduces to our own spiritual elevation and dignity. Before honour is humility; if we humble ourselves, when wrong, we begin at once to enter the path which leads to true exaltation. There is nothing which more (3) conduces to lasting usefulness and joy. If Zerubbabel had rejected the counsel of the Lord, he would certainly have suffered. As it was, he was honoured and enriched of heaven.—C.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER V.

RECOMMENCEMENT OF THE BUILDING IN THE SECOND YEAR OF DARIUS. PREACHING OF HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH (ch. v. 1, 2). It appears from the extant prophecies of these two prophets that the long frustration of their hopes had had its natural effect on the spirits of the people. They had begun to weary of endeavours which produced no practical result, and to despair of accomplishing an object which all their efforts did not perceptibly advance. A reaction had set

in. The burning enthusiasm which had shown itself on the first arrival of the exiles with Zerubbabel (ch. ii. 68, 69; iii. 11) had faded away; indolence had succeeded to activity, and a selfish desire of comfort to zeal for the honour of God. Instead of watching eagerly for an opportunity of recommencing the great work, and seizing the first occasion that offered itself, the people had come to acquiesce in its indefinite postponement, and to say among themselves, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Haggai i. 2).

Laying aside all idea of moving further in the matter of the temple, they had turned their energies to the practical object of establishing themselves in good and comfortable houses (*ibid.* i. 4, 9). The great revolution in Persia, by which the Pseudo-Smerdis was dethroned and slain, Magism put down, and the (comparatively) pure religion of Zoroaster re-established as the religion of the Persian state, failed to stir their minds or raise their hopes. A whole year was allowed to elapse, and nothing was done, no fresh effort made. It was the *second* year of King Darius (Ezra iv. 24)—nay, it was the *sixth* month of that year, the month Elul, corresponding to our September, as we learn from Haggai (i. 1)—and still no step was taken. The nation was “eating,” and “drinking,” and “clothing itself” (*ibid.* i. 6), and making for itself “cield houses” (*ibid.* ver. 4), while the house of God lay “waste” (*ibid.* ver. 9)—in that unsightly condition always presented by works commenced and then suspended for years. Even Zerubbabel and Jeshua—the civil and ecclesiastical rulers—acquiesced apparently in this miserable state of things—this tameness, sloth, indifference to God’s honour, and general pursuit of mere carnal delights. Such was the situation, when suddenly, unexpectedly, to the people’s consternation rather than their joy, a Prophet appeared upon the scene. “In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel.” Prophecy had been in abeyance for sixteen years, since the “third of Cyrus,” when Daniel uttered his last warning (Dan. x. 1). It was now revived. Haggai came forward, self-proclaimed a prophet of Jehovah (Haggai i. 13), and rebuked the people in the old prophetic tone, and “stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel and the spirit of Jeshua” (*ibid.* ver. 14), and by exhortations, and warnings, and threats brought about in little more than three weeks (*ibid.* ver. 15) the resumption of the work, which was henceforth pressed forward

with zeal. Haggai’s mission continued only for a very short space—from September, B.C. 520, to December of the same year; but before his work came to an end God raised up a second prophet—“Zechariah the son of Iddo”—who carried on his task, sustained the spirit of the people and the rulers, and saw the happy accomplishment of the great undertaking, which he had previously announced as near (Zech. iv. 9), in the sixth year of Darius, B.C. 516.

Ver. 1. — Zechariah the son of Iddo. Really the grandson (Zech. i. 1). But Berechiah, his father, probably died while he was a child, and, being brought up by Iddo, he was called “the son of Iddo.” Prophesied unto the Jews. The addresses of Haggai and Zechariah were only occasionally “prophetic,” as we now commonly understand the word. But in the language of the Biblical writers all religious teaching is “prophesying,” and Ezra here refers mainly to the exhortations addressed to the Jews by Zechariah and Haggai.

Ver. 2. — Then rose up Zerubbabel . . . and Jeshua. Haggai’s preaching was especially addressed to these two leaders (Haggai i. 1), and their spirit was especially “stirred up” (*ibid.* ver. 14) by his preaching. The prophets of God—Haggai and Zechariah—were with them, throughout their work, helping them; and that in various ways. 1. By direct command to the people—“Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house” (Haggai i. 8); 2. By warnings—“Because of mine house that is waste . . . therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit” (*ibid.* vers. 9, 10); 3. By exhortations—“Be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedeck, the high priest; and be ye strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work” (Haggai ii. 4); and 4. By encouraging prophecy—“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it” (Zech. iv. 9); and “the glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts” (Haggai ii. 9). By these and similar means the two prophets aroused a spirit of enthusiasm, which caused the work to make rapid progress, and was an invaluable assistance.

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The work revived.* How completely the work described in these verses was a revival of the previous work of building the temple, as described in chaps. i.—iii., may be seen by the use of the word “began” in ver. 2. Even

"Zerubbabel" and "Jeshua," the leaders, had been remiss and, as it were, dead to the enterprise; consequently, in again going on with it, had again, as it were, to "begin." This seems also the best explanation of the singular way in which Haggai (ii. 18) and Zechariah (viii. 9) speak of the "foundation" of the Lord's house as having been "laid" at this time. This second "foundation," in the reign of Darius, led to so much more than the first did in that of Cyrus, and proved so much more worthy, therefore, of such a name in the issue, that, not unnaturally, it got almost to monopolise that name even on prophetic lips. It is thus, in another sphere, that historians speak of the Roman empire as being founded by Augustus Cæsar, though in reality he only re-established in a more abiding form (as it turned out) what his predecessor, Julius Cæsar, had previously founded and lost. Strictly speaking, indeed, would either of these first foundations have been a foundation practically if it had not been afterwards followed up and, as it were, superseded by a second? How this happy resurrection of a buried cause was brought about in this instance is the special point now to consider. It was by the indications of Providence, we shall find, in the first place; and by the voice of prophecy, in the next.

I. THE INDICATIONS OF PROVIDENCE. Providence had spoken to the people, in the interim between the visit of Rehum (ch. iv. 23) and the time at which our chapter opens, in various ways. 1. *In the language of hope.* A change of rulers had taken place—both of chief rulers and also of subordinates. Darius instead of Artaxerxes; Tatnai, &c. (ch. v. 3) instead of Rehum, &c. This was something of itself. When things are as bad as they can be, no change, to say the least, can be for the worse. In such a case, moreover, a violent change, such as this which brought Darius Hystaspis to the throne in place of the usurper Pseudo-Smerdis, and which probably, therefore, affected the empire in all its provinces, was of a still more hopeful description. How likely that the hand which took the previous monarch's crown should also reverse his policy! Especially as, in this instance (and it is almost certain that some rumours of this would reach the ears of the Jews), the new king was showing almost ostentatious respect to the name and memory of that Cyrus<sup>1</sup> who had been so favourable to the Jews. To men anxious to be at work again, this would have been great encouragement to begin. 2. *In the language of blessing.* Judging from the apparently royal luxury which some of the returned Jews were enabled to indulge in (Jer. xxii. 14; Haggai i. 4), the means of recommencing the work must have been somehow placed in their power. This, also, a call to do so (comp. Deut. viii. 12, 17, 18; Gal. vi. 10; James iv. 17). 3. *In the language of affliction.* These other calls not being attended to, there came one of a different kind. God met the people in their path of disobedience, as the angel met Balaam (Num. xxii. 32), with signs of displeasure. The blessings he had given being misused, he began to withdraw them. Instead of plenty there was "dearth" (Haggai i. 11), to the great impoverishment (ver. 6) and sore disappointment (begin. ver. 9) of them all. See further Zech. viii. 9, 10 as to the wide extent and deep severity of this visitation; and also as to the precise time of its occurrence, viz., just "before" the people for a second time laid the "foundations" of God's house. Putting these things together, were they not a loud constructive call to begin? So fair an opening, such ample means, such a clear-timed judgment, what does it all mean? To this effect, at least, the Jewish elders ought, in such circumstances, to inquire (see end of Job x. 2).

II. THE VOICE OF PROPHECY. It was the special privilege, however, of Israel to have more than "constructive" calls from God's throne. He was graciously pleased to make known his will to them by articulate speech (Deut. iv. 33; Rom. iii. 1, 2). So, accordingly, it was here. Besides these silent gestures on the part of Providence, so to call them, there were direct verbal utterances also from the lips of those who were authorised to speak to Israel in his name. Two such men, two of these prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, raised up especially, as it appears, for this special emergency, prophesied at that time to these returned Jews (ch. v. 1). Much importance seems attached here to this fact. These prophets prophesied to these Jews, it is said, "in the name of the God of Israel which was upon them." Being God's people—being, in fact, the very heart and hope of God's people at that

<sup>1</sup> By marrying, *e. g.*, two of the daughters of Cyrus. See Wordsworth on vi. 10.

particular moment—God's prophets were commissioned to recognise and address them as such. Well might the people listen, that being the case. The purport, also, of the message thus sent to them was just as much to the point. A mere glance at the extant prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah will suffice to show this. The prophecies sent, *e. g.*, were just what was needed—1. *In the way of appeal.* "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider" (Haggai i. 5); so again i. 7, "Consider;" so, twice over, and with a special note of urgency, in ii. 18: "Consider now from this day and upward . . . consider." Consider what you are doing, and what you ought to be doing, in your present circumstances. Consider their meaning and message, and what they are now saying to you, in effect. 2. *In the way of interpretation and explanation.* This is what these circumstances are saying to you, viz., that it is "time" to build the Lord's house (Haggai i. 1—3). There is no further change to be waited for. Now, under your present ruler, is the "time" to begin. Your recent blessings mean this (ch. i. 4). Your present trials mean it too (*ibid.* vers. 6—11). Thus did prophecy, in this case, interpret Providence, and explain the "signs," as it were, of those "times." 3. *In the way of promise.* Our present history seems to speak of this particularly in the end of ver. 2—"the prophets of God helping them." The first result of the appeal and remonstrance above spoken of seems to have been a feeling of "fear" (Haggai i. end of ver. 12). As soon as this began to manifest itself (see middle of same verse) in a spirit of obedience, the voice of promise was heard. "Then spake Haggai the LORD's messenger in the LORD's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD" (ch. i. 13). Within a short month after (comp. ch. i. 15 and ii. 1) came another and larger promise (ch. ii. 2—9); and two others again from the same prophet in about two months from that time. Besides that notable series of eight prophetic visions, mainly of hope and encouragement, from the prophet Zechariah, before the close of the same year (Zech. i. 7—vi. 15). So plentifully was this precious dew vouchsafed at this special season of growth; and so harmoniously did all these various changes, dispensations, and voices work together for this revival of God's work.

From these considerations we see—1. *The duty of studying God's works*: his works in providence, and in nature too, so far as we have opportunities for so doing, because in all of them he has something to say to us, if we are only able to understand it. This applies especially to those works or doings of God which concern our own persons and times, because we may almost say of such doings that they are presented to us for study. Note the comparison on this subject between nature and providence in Matt. xvi. 2, 3; and see 1 Chron. xii. 32. 2. *The duty of listening to God's word.* Partly on account of the clearer significance which it gives to God's works; partly because of the additional message which it brings of its own. For the language of some of God's works see Ps. xix. 1—6, and comp. Rom. i. 19, 20. For the further language of God's word see same Ps. 7—9. Compare also, as showing the specially exalted and complementary character of prophecy or revelation, the remarkable declaration of Ps. cxxxviii. 2, and 2 Pet. i. 19—21. The dark page of God's doings (for so it is to us, see Ps. xcvi. 2) should never be neglected; but it never can be safely interpreted apart from the plainer page of his word. We may also see from these considerations what is—3. *The central topic of all prophecy.* The building of God's house by God's Israel pointed forward in manifold ways to the coming and work of God's Son. That house was a well-known type of his body (John ii. 19—21). In that restored house he himself was to appear (Haggai ii. 7; Mal. iii. 1; Luke ii. 25—30). And out of that figurative "house" or family of Israel, as their peculiar crown and salvation, and as a blessing to all other families on earth, he was to arise. When, therefore, the work of building that house, under apparently hopeless circumstances, has to be revived, how fittingly does the spirit of prophecy suddenly reappear on the scene, to stimulate, direct, and encourage these men, who were, virtually, building for all mankind in building for their own Messiah. It may remind us of those well-known passages, John v. 39; Acts x. 43; Rev. xix. 10. May it teach us also to give that adorable Saviour a similarly pre-eminent place in our thoughts!

## HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The inspiration of prophecy.* Through the hostility of the Samaritans, who obtained authority from Artaxerxes, the work of building the temple was interrupted. This interruption seems to have commenced under Cyrus (ch. iv. 5). It was continued under the brief reign of an upstart who feigned himself to be the brother of Ahasuerus; and it was carried on "unto the second year of Darius king of Persia." Thus the work was stopped for about sixteen years. "Then the prophets," &c. Here notice that—

I. THE INSPIRATION OF PROPHECY IS ROUSING. 1. The people now *needed rousing*. (1) During the stoppage of the building they had cooled in their zeal for the house of the Lord. Had they examined their hearts they might have seen this, and they might have inferred from it that God must be displeased. But they had not the courage to do this. Query—Are we not slow to examine our own hearts, and to draw faithful inferences from their state? (2) If they looked around they might have seen the tokens of Divine displeasure. For, year after year, the heavens refused their dew, and the scanty harvests were smitten with "blasting, and with mildew, and with hail." Query—Are we not slow to see the hand of God in our afflictions? Reflect—What greater calamity could befall us than that God should leave us to ourselves! 2. Haggai brought home the truth to them. (1) His first commission was to awaken them to a sense of their growing selfishness and apathy (see Haggai i. 1–5). Query—How far are we ever justified in quietly "dwelling in cieled houses" while the work of God is neglected? (2) Then he reminded them that the blast upon their harvests was from God, and incited them to arise and build (see Haggai i. 6–11). (3) This message from God had the desired effect (see Haggai i. 1–12; comp. text). What part *Zechariah* took at this early date we are not particularly informed. 3. They were *satisfied with the credentials* of the prophet. (1) What these were we are not told. Miracles might have authenticated him. This was notably the case with Moses. Or he may have foretold the drought through which they had passed. In this way Samuel "was established to be a prophet of the Lord" (1 Sam. iii. 19, 20). (2) In whatever way it may have been, Haggai so prophesied, "in the name of the God of Israel," that there was no doubt about him. Look at this expression (see Exod. iii. 13–20; xxxiii. 19; comp. also Num. xiv. 17), where "power" is put for "name," as in Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6). Reflect, gratefully, that we have the truth of God upon the clearest testimony. The Scriptures are authenticated to us not only by miracles, but by the ever-accumulating evidence of prophecy, and by the deep experiences of the heart.

II. THE INSPIRATION OF PROPHECY IS SUSTAINING.—"And with them were the prophets of God helping them." 1. It sustains *under the burdens of the work of God*. (1) The work is stupendous. Many interests are involved in it. Many workmen are engaged in it. If all these were loyal, still the work would be heavy. (2) Haggai therefore, four and twenty days after his first commission, again appeared with needed words. "Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord." What a blessed assurance! How spirit stirring! (Haggai i. 13, 14; see also Exod. xxxiii. 14, 15.) 2. It sustains *against the murmuring of God's people*. (1) Sons of Belial will for very perversity cause trouble. There are also crotchety persons among the godly who embarrass their leaders. And there are croakers who have a morbid pleasure in disparaging the good things of the present by comparing them with the things of the past (see ch. iii. 12). (2) Haggai, seven and twenty days after his former message, again appeared to strengthen the hands of the faithful against these. In doing this he uttered a very glorious prophecy, showing how by the presence of Jesus in this disparaged building it should come to exceed the glory of the temple of Solomon (see Haggai ii. 1–9). Note—This prophecy should convince the Jews. They admit that the Shekinah never came to the second temple; that temple is now no more. If the presence of Jesus did not constitute the greater glory of the second house, what did? 3. It sustains *against the assaults of enemies*. (1) Opposition reappears, now led by Tatnai and Shethar-boznai, who question the right of the Jews to resume

the building which had been stopped by command of Artaxerxes (vers. 3, 4). (2) Zechariah now appeared. He opened his commission by exhorting to repentance (Zech. i. 1—6). Note—When trials come we should search our hearts, and, if we see cause, amend our ways. (3) Haggai also followed with words of encouragement, and assurances that, despite the opposition, the work would be prospered. Zechariah subsequently gave them like assurances. These messages came at seasonable intervals to help the leaders and the workers. Reflection—All these encouragements belong to those building the spiritual temple, for the prophecies have an ulterior reference to gospel times. Let us use the inspirations of prophecy.—J. A. M.

Vers. 1—5.—*A faithful ministry in the Church.* I. THAT IT IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DIVINE NAME. "In the name of the God of Israel" (ver. 1). 1. It advances in the Divine Name. These two prophets came to Israel in the name of God; a faithful ministry is commissioned by God, has his authority, and is qualified by him (2 Cor. v. 20). 2. It partakes of the Divine Character. These prophets must bear in their conduct the purity of God, and in their words the mercy of God; a faithful ministry must exhibit the Divine Character. 3. It recognises the Divine Covenant. These two prophets came to Israel as the covenant people engaged in a great work; a faithful ministry is for the Church in its redemptive relationships.

II. THAT IT IS REQUIRED IN TIMES OF MORAL DEGENERACY. The building operations of Israel had ceased; Israel had settled down to an easy life, and was reluctant to enter again upon the arduous task of civil and religious restoration. 1. This faithful ministry was necessary. The Israelites were dwelling in ceiled houses, and God's house was waste (Haggai i. 4). They required to see the wrong of this; and who will show it them if the prophets of God do not? 2. It was timely. It was a word in season to the people; they needed to be called from indifference to their great work. A faithful prophet will adapt his words to the condition of his hearers, and seek to engage the Church in the duty of the hour. 3. It was effective. The people no longer "earned wages to put into a bag with holes," but they feared the Lord, and entered upon his work (Haggai i. 6). Duty is really more remunerative than luxury. See then the reviving effect which two earnest men may exert within a lukewarm Church; they quicken its fading life and inspire its languid work. A faithful ministry is most influential for good.

III. THAT THE SPIRITUAL IS THE MEDIUM OF ITS INFLUENCE. "Prophesied unto the Jews." 1. Not carnal. No sensational appeals were made to set the luxurious Israelites to build again the ruined temple; but by the word of the Lord they were urged to duty. The weapons of our warfare are spiritual; the word of God is the preacher's power. Christ's ministry was spiritual. 2. Not coercive. The sword did not drive the Israelites out of their ceiled houses; but the word of God spoken by his servants, working in the conscience. The truth is attractive, not coercive. Christ drew sinners to hear him. 3. Not cunning. These two prophets did not seek by cunning arts to win the Israelites from luxury to work for God; but by faithful words of remonstrance. Christ sought not to win men by artifice, but by a solemn statement of fact and duty. The world will not be subdued to virtue by the statesman, by the warrior, by the educationalist, but by the prophet.

IV. THAT ITS WELFARE WILL BE ENHANCED BY THE CO-OPERATION OF GOOD MEN. "Then rose up Zerubbabel" (ver. 2). The prophets alone are morally powerful; but much more so when Zerubbabel and Jeshua are allied with them. 1. The alliance augments numbers. The work of restoration gathers strength by numerical addition, especially by the addition of influential men like Zerubbabel. The ministry needs numerical support; numbers increase the force of the testimony: exhibit the power of the gospel; aid the argument of the truth; are prophetic of future increase. 2. The alliance ensures efficiency. Zerubbabel will aid, advise, support the two prophets, and they in turn will aid him; this combined agency will inspire Israel with duty and courage. Four men can do what two cannot (Mark ii. 3). In the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom.

V. THAT IT LEADS THE CHURCH TO THE HOLY ENTERPRISE FOR WHICH IT IS CALLED. 1. Productive work. "To build the house of God" (ver. 2). But for these two prophets it is likely that Israel would have continued to dwell in their ceiled houses,

and have neglected the temple. The Church would be much more unmindful of Christian work than it is were it not for its faithful ministers. They awaken its memory. They quicken its conscience. They arouse its affections. They give it a good personal example by coming themselves to build the house of God; well nigh all houses of God in the earth would be unbuilt but for the ministers of the gospel.

2. *Permanent work.* The house endures when those who built it are gone.

VI. THAT IT IS SURE TO MEET WITH IMPEDIMENTS IN THE ENTERPRISE IT CONTEMPLATES. "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet" (ver. 1). "At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river" (ver. 3). When the prophet comes to a Church to aid its work, Satan generally sends agencies to hinder it. The satanic:—1. *Simultaneous.* The prophets and the hostile governors come together; the spiritual and the satanic move side by side. 2. *Inquisitive.* "Who hath commanded you to build this house?" How the satanic interrogates the spiritual. 3. *Overruled.* "But the eye of the Lord was upon the elders of the Jews." Providence is co-operative with a faithful ministry, and helps to overcome all hindrances.—E.

### EXPOSITION.

RENEWAL OF OPPOSITION ON THE PART OF THE NEIGHBOURING HEATHEN. LETTER WRITTEN BY THEM AND SENT TO DARIUS (vers. 3—17). Once more opposition showed itself. Tatnai, a high officer, called "governor on this side the river" (ver. 3), perhaps satrap of Syria, and Shethar-boznai, or Sitrabarzan, a Persian noble probably, at this time took the lead, and learning that the building was making progress, came in person to Jerusalem, and demanded to know by what authority the temple and city were being restored. Zerubbabel seems to have answered, "By the authority of a decree of Cyrus, issued in the year that he became king of Babylon" (ver. 13); whereupon a second question was asked, "What are the names of the men responsible for carrying on the work?" Zerubbabel answered that he was alone responsible, giving his name as Sheshbazzar, and declaring himself to be acting under a commission received from Cyrus (ver. 15), and never revoked. Thereupon Tatnai and Shethar-boznai seem to have proposed a cessation of the building until reference could be made to Darius and his pleasure learnt (ver. 5); but Zerubbabel declined to agree to this, and the work proceeded without intermission (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, a letter was written to Darius, not unfairly stating the case, and suggesting that the state archives should be searched for the decree ascribed to Cyrus, that it might be seen what exactly it was that the decree sanctioned, and further that the king should expressly declare what his own plea-

sure was in the matter (ver. 17). This letter Tatnai, in his capacity of satrap, despatched to the court by special messenger, and so left the business to the decision of Darius and his counsellors, without further seeking to influence him. Remark the strong contrast between this despatch and that of the Samaritans. In the Samaritan letter private pique and enmity show themselves—Jerusalem is "the rebellious and the bad city" (ch. iv. 12), "hurtful unto kings and provinces" (*ibid.* ver. 15); its intention to revolt is assumed (ver. 13); the king is warned that his dominion and revenue are in danger (ver. 16); no hint is given of there having ever been any such document as the decree of Cyrus; no reference is made to Sheshbazzar or the royal commission that he had received; altogether, the case is stated as strongly as possible against the Jews, with great and manifest unfairness. Here, on the contrary, where the person who takes up the matter is the Persian governor, a dispassionate tone prevails; no charges are made; no abuse uttered; the letter is confined to a statement of facts and an inquiry; the Jews are allowed to give their own account of their proceedings, nearly half the letter being their statement of their own case (vers. 11—15); the decree of Cyrus is brought into prominence, asserted on the one hand, not denied on the other; that it should be searched for is suggested; and finally there is a simple request that the king will declare his will in respect of the building.

Ver. 3.—**Tatnai, governor on this side the river.** The title given to Tatnai is the same which is assigned to Zerubbabel, both in ch. vi. 7 and in Haggai (i. 1, 14, &c.), viz., *pechah*, which is a somewhat vague term of authority, translated sometimes "captain" (1 Kings xx. 24; Dan. iii. 2, 3, &c.), sometimes "deputy" (Esther viii. 9; ix. 3), but generally, as here, "governor." The etymology is uncertain, but seems not to be Semitic (see Pusey's 'Daniel,' pp. 570—572). The respective rank of Tatnai and Zerubbabel is indicated, not by this term, but by what follows it. Tatnai was *pechah* "beyond the river," i. e. governor of the whole tract west of the Euphrates; Zerubbabel was *pechah* of Judah only. A Greek writer would have called the one "satrap of Syria," the other "sub-satrap of Judæa." It was the duty of Tatnai to watch the proceedings of his sub-satraps.

Ver. 4.—**Then said we unto them.** It is impossible that the existing text can be sound here. Ezra must have written, "Then said *they* to them." Tatnai and Shethar-boznai followed up their first question by a second, "What are the names of the men that make this building?" (comp. below, vers. 9, 10).

Ver. 5.—**The eye of their God was upon the elders.** "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous" (Ps. xxxiv. 15) with a jealous watchfulness, which never for a moment slackens. "He withdraweth not his eyes from them" (Job xxxvi. 7). Nothing happens to them that he does not know and allow. At this time the elders, who presided over the workmen employed in the restoration, were a special subject of God's watchful care, so that those who would fain have hindered them could not. The work of rebuilding went on uninterruptedly during the whole time that the messengers were away.

Ver. 6.—**The Apharsachites recall the 'Apharsites' and the 'Apharsathchites'** of ch. iv. 9. Possibly all the three forms are provincial variants of the more correct *Parsaya*, which appears in Daniel (vi. 28) as the Chaldean equivalent of "Persian." Here the Apharsachite "companions" of Tatnai and Shethar-boznai are perhaps the actual Persians who formed their body-guard and their train.

Ver. 8.—**We went into the province of Judæa.** It has been supposed (Pusey's 'Daniel,' p. 571), on the strength of a doubtful passage in Nehemiah (iii. 7), that Tatnai ordinarily resided at Jerusalem. But this expression indicates the contrary. Most probably the satrap of Syria held his court at Damascus. The house of the great God is a remarkable expression in the mouth of a heathen. It has some parallels, *c. g.* the expressions of

Cyrus in ch. i. 2, 3, and of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. ii. 47 and iii. 29; but they were persons who had been brought to the knowledge that Jehovah was the one true God, under very peculiar and miraculous circumstances. Tatnai, on the other hand, represents the mere ordinary Persian official; and his acknowledgment of the God of the Jews as "*the great God*" must be held to indicate the general belief of the Persians on the subject (see the comment on Ezra i. 2). Which is builded. Rather, "being builded."

**With great stones.** Literally, "stones of rolling," which is commonly explained as stones so large that they had to be rolled along the ground. But the squared stones used in building neither were, nor could be, rolled; they are always represented as dragged, generally on a rough sledge. And it is not at all probable that in the "day of small things" (Zech. iv. 10) the Jews were building with very large stones. The LXX. translate "choice stones;" the Vulgate "unpolished" or "rough stone." Some of the Jewish expositors suggest "marble." And timber is laid. A good deal of timber had been employed in the old temple, but chiefly for the floors of chambers (1 Kings vi. 10), for the internal lining of the walls (*ibid.* vers. 9, 15), and probably for the roofing. In the new temple, timber seems to have been employed also as the main material of the party-walls. Here again we have a trace of the economy necessary in the "day of small things."

Ver. 11.—**We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth.** Instead of doing as they were requested, and giving in a long list of names and titles of office, the elders merge their individuality in this general phrase; as though they would say, "As individuals, we are nothing; as men of mark in our nation, we are nothing; what we do, we do simply as servants of God, directed by him (Haggai i. 8), bound to obey him, answerable only to him for our conduct." They speak of God as "the God of heaven and earth"—a very rare title—partly in humble acknowledgment of his universal and absolute dominion, as Christians speak when they call God "the Maker of heaven and earth;" partly to impress favourably those to whom they speak, persons accustomed to regard God primarily as the Being who "gave mankind earth and heaven" (Rawlinson's 'Cuneiform Inscriptions of Persia,' vol. i. pp. 285, 291, 319, 324, &c.). And build. That is "rebuild." The house that was builded these many years ago. The old house, begun more than 400, finished nearly 400 years previously, and only just beginning to rise again from its ruins, after lying waste for nearly seventy years. Which a great king of Israel builded and set up.



Solomon, the greatest of the Jewish monarchs, if we consider the extent and prosperity of his kingdom, and the position that it occupied among the other kingdoms of the earth—a “great king” under whatever aspect we view him, though one who sowed the seeds of that corruption which ultimately sapped the national life, and provoked God to bring the monarchy to an end.

Ver. 12.—**Our fathers provoked the God of heaven unto wrath.** Mainly by their long series of idolatries, with the moral abominations that those idolatries involved—the sacrifice of children by their own parents, the licentious rites belonging to the worship of Baal, and the unmentionable horrors practised by the devotees of the Dea Syra. For centuries, with only short and rare intervals, “the chief of the priests, and the people, had transgressed very much after *all* the abominations of the heathen,” and had even “polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem” (2 Chron. xxxvi. 14). Therefore, **he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon.** He punished, as he always does, national apostasy with national destruction. Making an idolatrous people, but a less guilty one, his sword, he cut off Judah, as he had previously cut off Israel, causing the national life to cease, and even removing the bulk of the people into a distant country. Not by his own power or might did Nebuchadnezzar prevail. God could have delivered the Jews from him as easily as he had delivered them in former days from Jabin (Judges iv. 2—24), and from Zerah (2 Chron. xiv. 11—15), and from Sennacherib (2 Kings xix. 20—36). But he was otherwise minded; he “*gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar*” (comp. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17). He divided their counsels, paralysed their resistance, caused Pharaoh Hophra to desert their cause (2 Kings xxiv. 7), and left them helpless and unprotected. Nebuchadnezzar was his instrument to chastise his guilty people, and in pursuing his own ends merely worked out the purposes of the Almighty.

Ver. 13.—**In the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon.** Recent discoveries of contract tablets have shown that at Babylon Cyrus bore the title of “king of Babylon” from the date of his conquest of the city. The same title was passed on to his successors, Cambyses, Darius, &c. Hence we find Artaxerxes Longimanus called “king of Babylon” by Nehemiah (xiii. 6).

Ver. 14.—**The vessels also of gold and silver.** See ch. i. 7—11. On the great importance attached to these vessels, see the comment on ch. i. 7. So long as they remained at Babylon they were a tangible evidence of the conquest, a glory to the Babylonians, and a disgrace to the Jews. Their retention was a perpetual desecration. Their restoration by Cyrus was an act at once of piety and of kindness. **On the temple of Babylon, out of which Cyrus took them,** see the comment on ch. i. 7.

Ver. 15.—**Let the house of God be builded in his place.** *I. e.* upon the old holy site—the place where Abraham offered his son Isaac, in a figure (Heb. xi. 17—19), where the angel stood and stayed the pestilence in David’s time (2 Sam. xxiv. 16—18), and where “the glory of the Lord descended and filled the house” under Solomon (2 Chron. vii. 1).

Ver. 16.—**Since that time even until now hath it been in building.** It is not quite clear whether these words are part of the answer given by the Jews to Tatnai, which he reports to Darius (see ver. 11), or Tatnai’s own statement of what he believes to have been the fact. Perhaps the latter view is the more probable; and we may suppose Tatnai not to have been aware that from the second year of Cyrus to the commencement of the reign of Smerdis, and again during the latter part of this reign and the first eighteen months of the reign of Darius, the work had been suspended.

Ver. 17.—**Let there be search made in the king’s treasure house.** The Vulgate has “in the king’s library;” and this, though not the literal rendering, is probably what was intended by Tatnai. Libraries or record chambers were attached to the royal residences under the old Assyrian and Babylonian kings; and the practice was no doubt continued by the Persians. Some of these record offices have been recently found, and their stores recovered. In the year 1850 Mr. Layard came upon the royal library of Asshurbanipal at Koyunjik, and obtained from it several hundreds of documents. More recently, in 1875-6, some Arab explorers happened upon a similar collection near Babylon, which yielded from 3000 to 4000 tablets (*‘Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology,’* vol. vi. pp. 4, 582). It is quite possible that the “decree of Cyrus” may still exist, and be one day recovered.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 3—17.—*Opposition revived.* We have in these verses a twofold account of two different things. In vers. 3, 4, in the first place, we have the historian’s account of the revived opposition called out by the revival of the work of temple-

building on the part of the Jews. In vers. 6—10 we have an almost identical but slightly fuller account of the same matter in the letter sent by the opponents themselves to Darius. In ver. 5, in the next place, we have the historian's account of the amount of success to which that revived opposition attained, viz., to obtaining the consent of the builders, whilst still justifying and continuing their operations, to refer the whole subject to King Darius. In vers. 11—17 that same letter of the same opponents to Darius gives us a fuller account of this point also. Altogether, we cannot help seeing how very marked is the difference, so far as the question of result is concerned, between this attempt and that made before. In that other case, while the appeal was pending, the work on the spot almost expired of itself (ch. iv. 4). In this case, although the appeal is consented to, the work on the spot, meanwhile, thrives to perfection (vers. 5, 8). What are the reasons of this striking difference? So far as second causes go, they will be found, we believe, in two things, viz., I. In comparatively greater moderation on the part of the attack; and, II. In comparatively greater vigour on the part of the defence. Let us proceed to see how the whole story illustrates these two points.

I. A WEAKER ATTACK. For example, it was (1) apparently *not so general*. Names we read of before (iv. 7, 9), such as Bishlam, &c., the Dinaites, &c., are now mentioned no more. Tatnai and Shethar-boznai are acting, if not in ignorance, yet in independence, of native ideas. So much so, that the only "companions" mentioned in this case, the Apharsachites, are supposed by some to be themselves "Persians" of some sort. At any rate, all the other previous "companions" are only conspicuous now by their absence. The present movement is less formidable than the previous one both in numbers and names. Also the attack is (2) *less vital*. There is no such plausible yet utterly fatal proposal for co-operation in this instance as that we read of before; only certain not unnatural and, all things considered, not disrespectful inquiries are addressed to those engaged in so evidently important a work. "Where is your authority for operations such as these? Who are the persons who hold themselves really responsible for them?" (See vers. 3, 4, 9, 10, reading "they" for "we" in ver. 4 with Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, and even in the Chaldee with very slight change.) These deputy rulers would have failed in their duty if they had asked any less; even if we infer, as we must, from ver. 5, that their object in so doing, at any rate in the first instance, was to "cause" the Jewish elders to "cease" for the time. Such opposition, even so, is very different from that settled intention to "frustrate" the Jewish "purpose" entirely of which we find traces before (iv. 5). Once more, the attack is (3) *less unreasonable and malignant*. The answer of the elders to the official inquiries put to them is heard with candour, and reported with truth. Nor are any charges made, as before, of treachery or sedition. Nor is anything more proposed to the king than a due hearing and examination of the appeal which the Jews have made to a previous edict of Cyrus in justification of their conduct (ver. 17). Meanwhile, moreover, though apparently with some reluctance, the chief authorities of the province in which Judæa was situated have consented to treat that justification as being, till proved otherwise, sufficient and valid, by allowing that work to go on without endeavouring to stop it by menace or force. In all this, if there is something of opposition, as there undoubtedly is, it is not like that of the previous occasion—not a wide conspiracy, not a deadly aim, not a malignant effort, like that before.

II. A STRONGER DEFENCE. The answer of the Jewish elders was a good one—1. *On the score of principle*. "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth" (ver. 11). In other words, "Do you ask our names? We are named after the great God (see ver. 8), the God of heaven and earth. Do you ask why we are thus labouring? Because in doing so we serve him" (comp. Acts xxvii. 23). It was well for them to put this first, like soldiers displaying the flag they fight under on entering into the battle. "Before all things we wish you to understand that this is a question with us of religion." 2. *On the score of precedent*. This was no novel idea that they were engaged in promoting. They were not beginning, but restoring, the temple. Many successive centuries (though these officials were perhaps not aware of it) a glorious temple to the great God had stood on that place. Not only so, the man who had originally "built" and "set it up" had been one of the greatest of their kings. This

was also a wise line to adopt. If they were permitted to be Jews at all (as they certainly were), they might not only be allowed to worship their own God (as already touched on), but also to worship him according to so long-established and truly national a manner. 3. *On the score of necessity.* Their national welfare and even existence depended on the work they were engaged on. Long experience and heavy affliction had brought home this truth to their hearts. Why had their fathers gone into captivity? Why had the original house been destroyed? Because their "fathers" had "provoked the God of heaven" for years in connection with the worship of that house (ver. 12; also 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14—20; Jer. vii. 1—15, 30). On the restoration, therefore, of the true worship of Jehovah, and, as a first step towards that, on the restoration of this his house, depended, nationally, their very life. The very permission, in fact, to rebuild it at all was a kind of token of restored animation which it would be double death to neglect. 4. *On the score of authority.* In all this they were acting, furthermore, as good subjects of Persia. One of the first decrees of that king of Persia who conquered "Babylon" and became its "king" (see ver. 13) was a decree to rebuild this house. Also, one of his first appointments the appointment by name (ver. 14) of a Jewish "governor" to see to this work. Also, one of his first actions the very significant action of restoring the temple vessels. 5. *In the way of conclusion.* All these things being so, was it to be wondered at that "the same Sheshbazzar," thus empowered and equipped, had come to Jerusalem and begun the work? Was it not rather to be wondered at that a work of such amazing importance should have remained on hand for so long (ver. 16)? Even "yet it is not finished!" What a master-stroke was that to end with. "You ask why we have done so much. As Persian officials, speaking to us as Jews, rather ask why we have done so little." Observe, in all this—1. *The secret of spiritual deliverance.* God delivers his people sometimes by restraining their adversaries (Ps. lxxvi. 10; Prov. xvi. 7); sometimes by giving themselves special wisdom and courage (Luke xxi. 15; Acts vi. 10); sometimes, as here, by doing both. How comparatively tame these adversaries. How bold and wise these defenders. How complete, therefore, even so far, the deliverance granted (comp. Acts iv. 8—14, 21). 2. *The secret of spiritual courage.* Why is it we fear man so much? Because, as a rule, we fear God too little (Luke xii. 4, 5). How different the case when, as here, we feel the "eye of our God" to be "upon" us (ver. 5). See also, in case previously referred to, Acts iv. 19, and v. 29; also Isa. li. 12, 13. Many feel a difficulty in speaking for Christ. If they were more often in the habit of speaking with him the difficulty would greatly diminish. Possibly it might even be found on the opposite side (see once more Acts iv. 20). 3. *The secret of dealing with honest doubt; viz.,* (a) listen to it, do not repel it; (b) confront it, do not avoid it; (c) enlighten it, do not despise it. The reason why many are "sceptics"—i. e. (if they are so honestly) merely "inquirers"—is because they do not know the strength of the believer's position. If you know it, as the true strength of their position was known by the Jews before us, and can make it known in turn to such "inquirers" with like courage and wisdom, you will at least obtain their respect. It may also please God to cause your effort to do even more (see 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25).

#### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 3—5.—*The eye of God.* The "people of the land" procured authority from the Persian king to stop the rebuilding of the city and wall of Jerusalem, and used it to stop the rebuilding of the temple as well. After an interval of nine years, through the incitement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the great work was resumed, and with the resumption the old hostility was revived. So the text, &c. The eye of their God was upon them—

I. TO GIVE THEM ASSURANCE AND COMFORT. 1. This figure expresses his *watchful care*. (1) His eyes are everywhere (see Job xxviii. 24; Prov. xv. 3). He observes us in the work of the sanctuary. When working in the city. When working on the wall. (2) His vision searches the heart (see 1 Sam. xvi. 7). He fully comprehends the hypocrite. So the sincerity of the innocent. How assuring! How nerving to moral courage! 2. It also expresses *loving favour*. (1) As pity is

expressed by the human eye, so, &c. Thus used to express the compassion of God for his suffering people in Egypt (Exod. iii. 7—10). Also, for the tears of Hezekiah (2 Kings xx. 5). So he pitied his people in Babylon, and his eye of pity is over them here. (2) As the eye also expresses satisfaction, so the complaisancy of God, &c. Thus favour towards the holy land (Deut. xi. 12). Towards the holy temple (1 Kings viii. 29). Towards the holy people (Ps. xxxiv. 15; Jer. xxiv. 4). What comfort to the faithful!

II. TO GIVE THEM WISDOM AND DISCRETION. 1. They need this in the presence of their *inquisitors*. (1) They are people of influence. There is "Tatnai, the governor on this side the river." If the "river" here be the Euphrates, then he would be over the provinces of Syria, Arabia Deserta, Phœnicia, and Samaria. If the Jordan, then still a great personage. There was Shethar-boznai, probably the secretary appointed by the Persian crown, as was customary, to act as a check upon the governor. There were "their companions," probably magistrates. (2) They put questions which imported mischief. By whose authority do you build (ver. 3)? Expressed again, ver. 9. Who are your leaders in this questionable business? Implied, ver. 4 (see ver. 10). 2. Their answers were guided by a *watchful wisdom*. (1) That they acted as the "servants of the God of heaven and earth" (see ver. 11). No authority could be higher. Query—Do we always and adequately recognise that authority? (2) That they claimed a prescriptive right in the temple which was originally built by one of their great kings (see ver. 11). (3) That their captivity did not forfeit them that right. For God banished them into captivity for their sin: Nebuchadnezzar was but his servant; and God now favours their restoration (see vers. 11, 12). We should never be ashamed to avow our connection with God and his work.

III. TO DEFEND THEM FROM THEIR ENEMIES. 1. *By moderating the opposition*. (1) Their former unscrupulous foes are not mentioned (see ch. iv. 7—9). Changes in the supreme government often involve changes of provincial rulers. Possibly the judgment of God may have overtaken them. (2) The temper of these men is better. They state facts honestly. 2. *By sustaining them at their work*. (1) Tatnai proposed that, until the question of their right should be determined by Darius, the work should cease. But they saw the eye of their God, and declined (ver. 5). (2) The prophets kept this vision vividly before them. They came forth from the presence of God, having witnessed his visions and heard his words, which, under the strongest sense of the reality, they so communicated that the people saw as it were the very eye of God upon them, and went on with his work. Query—Should not ministers, as coming from the very presence of God, so deliver the gospel message that? &c. 3. *By bringing good out of the evil*. (1) The attention of Darius was thus called to the decree of Cyrus (see ver. 17). (2) The king issued instructions accordingly (ch. vi. 6—12). (3) These instructions were carried out, and the good work was carried on to its completion (ch. vi. 13—15).—J. A. M.

Vers. 3—17.—*Wisdom in trial*. Hardly had the Jews recommenced their work, when they again found themselves subjected to a—

I. TRIAL OF FAITH. "At the same time," &c. (ver. 3). Again their unfriendly neighbours came to the attack. They challenged their right to build up the walls: "Who hath commanded you to build?" "By whose authority do ye these things?" The names of the leading men were demanded (ver. 4), with a view of sending them on to the Persian court. Pressure was evidently to be brought to bear on them to compel them to desist. Accusations would certainly be made against them; ill feeling would inevitably be fostered; prohibition would probably be issued; and, not unlikely, there would be forfeiture of privileges if not loss of goods, perchance of liberty. What, now, should they do? Should they again lay down the saw and the trowel, leave the woodwork and the walls till a more favoured time, and content themselves with using the altar they had reared, as hitherto? They were enjoying freedom in their own land, with liberty to worship the Lord according to their ancient law; perhaps they would lose everything by striving after more than they had. Should they yield to these alarms presenting themselves in the form of prudence? or should they dismiss them as cowardly fears, and go on with their work,

confiding in the help of Jehovah? Such distractions must have (or may have) agitated and perplexed their minds. Such trials of faith we may expect when we have entered the path of piety or the field of Christian work. Inexperience might imagine that in a path so sacred and Divine the adversary would not be allowed to enter. But experience knows that it is not so; that "there are many adversaries" we must expect to encounter. Not only from "them that are without," but also from those that are within the Church do obstacles, hindrances, discouragements arise. We may look for sympathy, help, success, victory; and, behold! there meets us conflict, disappointment, defeat. Shall we, we ask ourselves, retire as unfitted for what we have undertaken? or shall we hold on our way, still grasp our weapon, trusting that the insufficiency which is of man will be more than made up by the sufficiency which is of God? But in this trial of faith we have, as they had—

II. A TWOFOLD INCENTIVE. "The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease" (ver. 5). Here was (1) a *spiritual force* working within them. They felt that their work was marked of God. The active participation of his prophets in the work (ver. 2) would help them to this. They realised that they were being Divinely guided, and were engaged in the most sacred cause: "We are servants of the God of heaven" (ver. 11). They were wisely conscious that past misdoings had led to penalty and suffering (ver. 12). They lived and wrought "as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye;" and because they felt that he who "looketh from heaven and beholdeth all the sons of men" (Ps. xxxiii. 13) was continually regarding them, accepting their service, recording their negligence and distrust, prepared to reward or to rebuke, they were incited to continue, let their enemies say or do what they please. The thought of God's all-seeing eye, of his all-searching glance, is one of the strongest spiritual forces which can work within us. Man sees and blames. Man sees and threatens. Yes; but God is an on-looker also, and an *in*-looker too. What does *he* see? What does he think? What judgment is he forming? What does he purpose? If he is for us, who can be against us? But here was also (2) a *Divine power* working upon them. There is suggested here a prompting, controlling influence exerted upon them from on high. God saw them, and, beholding their difficulty and their need of his Divine help, interposed to sustain their courage, to strengthen their hand, to uphold them in their work. This is a power to be earnestly sought, and found, in believing prayer, when we are passing through the time of trial.

III. A TIME OF SUSPENSE (vers. 13—17). Their adversaries now laid their case before the Persian authorities. They gave a fair representation of the answer of the Jews to the royal court, and begged that steps should be taken to confirm or disprove this their reply. "Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house . . . whether it be so" (ver. 17). We may presume that the Jews knew the tenor of this communication. We can picture to ourselves their anxiety to know the result of the appeal. What if the record should not be found in the Persian archives! What if some ignorant librarian failed to know where it was kept! What if some venal officer should be bribed to get at it and destroy it! &c., &c. Should they win or lose their case? It might, after all, go ill with them and their work. It was a time of suspense. A very hard time to go through. Souls that can endure all else know not how to be tranquil then. Then is the time to trust in God, to cast ourselves on him. When we can do nothing else, we can look up to heaven and wait the issue calmly, because all issues are in the hands of the holy and the mighty One. "What time I am afraid I will trust in thee" (Ps. lvi. 3).—C.

Ver. 5.—*The providence of God over the Church.* I. THAT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD EXERCISES A STRICT WATCH OVER THE ENEMIES OF THE CHURCH (ver. 5). As soon as the Israelites commenced to build the temple their enemies began to trouble them; but while the eye of "Tatnai," "Shethar-boznai, and their companions" was upon them, "the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews." 1. The Divine providence is cognisant of the first motion of the enemies of the Church; this should cause them to pause in their unholy task. 2. The Divine providence watches the men

who would oppose themselves to the enterprise of the Church; they cannot escape the Omniscient eye. 3. The Divine providence watches the Church earnestly in the midst of its enemies. The look sends light, means love, indicates help, should inspire trust. Let the eye of the Church be toward God. The Church must remember that the eye of God is upon it, and not yield to the enemy. History proves that God's eye is upon the Church; the Bible asserts it; reason suggests that the heavenly Father will watch over his troubled children and workers.

II. THAT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS CALCULATED TO DEFEAT THE ENEMIES OF THE CHURCH. "That they could not cause them to cease" (ver. 5). The providence of God sustained the Israelites in their work of building, notwithstanding the hostility of their enemies. 1. Providence awakens a persistent spirit in the Church. "They could not cause them to cease." 2. Providence inspires the Church with right views of its citizenship. "Till the matter came to Darius." The people of God have citizen rights, and are not to cease their work at the bidding of unauthorised men. 3. Providence uses the incidental processes of life for the welfare of the Church. The letter in those days was a slow process; before it could be answered the building would be well advanced. This delay was useful to Israel. God causes all the little processes of life to work for the good of his people. Thus God's aid renders the Church victorious over enemies.

III. THAT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS ALLOW THE CHURCH TO EXPERIENCE THE FULL SEVERITY OF TRIAL. The opposition of Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions (ch. iv. 7) was much more inveterate than that of Tatnai; the hostility now is feeble. Heaven does not always allow the furnace into which the Church is cast to be seven times hotter than is wont; in wondrous and kindly manner it restrains the wrath of man, that spiritual work may be completed. The worst passions of men are controlled by God; the old enmity of the serpent is limited and often subdued.

IV. THAT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD OFTEN WINS KINDLY HELPERS FOR THE CHURCH. "Let the work of this house of God alone" (ch. vi. 7). God can raise up a Cyrus to commence the work, and a Darius to conserve and complete it; kings are within the plan of Providence. Let the Church take hope, for the eye of God is upon it.—E.

Vers. 6—17.—*The letter to Darius.* The occasion of this letter was the resumption of the work of rebuilding the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem after an interval of sixteen years. The authors of it are Tatnai, the governor, probably of all the provinces west of the Euphrates, and Shethar-boznai, who may have been the scribe or secretary associated with him, as Shimshai was with Rehun (see ch. iv. 8). Or possibly Shethar-boznai was the leading man of the Apharsachites; for these are mentioned as more particularly "his companions." The Apharsachites probably called the attention of Tatnai to the matter, who attended to it in a spirit of fairness which favourably contrasts with the conduct of the former leaders of these instigators (see ch. iv.). Having authenticated the letter, the writers proceed to state—

I. WHAT THEY DID. 1. *They surveyed the building.* (1) They describe it as "the house of the great God." The renown of his wonderful works in Egypt, in the wilderness, in Canaan had filled the world. They were judgments upon the little gods of the nations (see Exod. viii. 10; ix. 14; xii. 12; xviii. 12; Num. xxxiii. 4). (2) They noted the importance of the building. "Great stones" (Mark xiii. 1; Luke xxi. 5, 6). "Timber laid in the walls." Beams of cedars from Lebanon. All work for God should be nobly done. (3) They also noted the rapid progress of the work. 2. *They interrogated the elders.* (1) Who commanded you to build this house? This question is radical. Not, Who hath authorised you to resume the building? but, Who authorised the commencement of the work? (2) By whose authority do you "make up this wall"? Probably referring to their repairing of breaches in it made by the "people of the land" (see ch. iii. 23). (3) "What are the names" of the chiefs? Those who work for God with his approval need not fear the scrutiny of inquisitors.

II. WHAT THEY LEARNED. 1. That the builders professed themselves *servants of the God of heaven and earth.* (1) What a glorious Being! (2) What a noble

service! Query—Are we his servants? This honour not limited now to Israelites. It is common to all true builders of the spiritual temple. 2. That they were engaged in no *novel business*. (1) "We build the house that was built these many years ago." About five centuries had elapsed. But even Solomon's temple replaced the tabernacle which had been set up about five centuries still earlier. True religion may have external changes, but remains essentially the same. 3. That its ruin was occasioned by the *rebellion of their fathers*. (1) God gave it up to desolation. The outward splendours of religion are nothing to him when the spirit of it is dead (see Matt. xxiii. 37; xxiv. 1, 2). The temple of Solomon in ruins was a fit emblem of humanity degraded by sin. (2) Guilt is hereditary. "Our fathers had provoked," &c. They suffered; we suffer. 4. That the building is in *process of restoration*. (1) "In the first year of Cyrus." Memorable for the termination of the seventy years of Jeremiah (2 Chron. xxxvi. 21; Jer. xxv. 11, 12; xxix. 10; Dan. ix. 2). In this memorable year "the king made a decree," &c. (2) Vessels of the house also restored. These had been desecrated "in the temple of Babylon." This was the temple of Belus or Bel. This desecration of the vessels a figure of the condition of backsliders from God (see Acts ix. 15; Rom. ix. 22; 2 Tim. ii. 21). 5. *The prominent place occupied by Sheshbazzar*. (1) Cyrus trusted him with the custody of the sacred treasure. Made him governor. He was of the seed royal of Judah. (2) His people honoured him. He laid the foundation-stone. Conducts the work. (3) Type of Christ.

III. THE RECOMMENDATION. 1. *To test the question as to whether Cyrus authorised the work as alleged*. Nothing to object to the fairness of this. It could only prejudice the Jews if found untrue. 2. *To signify the king's pleasure to his servants that they might carry it out*. It were well if all who oppose God's people were as reasonable as Tatnai. Opponents so honest and free from prejudice may have the honour, like Tatnai, of promoting the work of God (see ch. vi. 13).—J. A. M.

Vers. 11—17.—*Things a Church should understand concerning itself*. I. THAT IT IS ENGAGED IN THE SERVICE OF HEAVEN. "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth" (ver. 11). 1. An exalted service. It is the service of God. 2. An extensive service. It reaches in its influence throughout heaven and earth. 3. An arduous service. It is to rebuild a ruined temple in the midst of enemies. 4. A humble service. At best the Church is but a servant.

II. THAT IT HAS SUFFERED MUCH THROUGH THE COMMISSION OF SIN. "But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon" (ver. 12). This is the best confession a Church can have; the Church is alone responsible for its weakness. 1. Its degradation. Israel is subject to a heathen power. 2. Its suffering. Israel is in captivity. 3. Its destruction. "Who destroyed this house." All this was attributable—(1) Not to the Divine inability to help. (2) Not to the Divine lack of interest. (3) But to the Divine displeasure on account of sin. Let the Church understand and acknowledge that her sad condition before the world is due to her lack of fidelity; she must take the discredit of her broken temples.

III. THAT IT IS CONNECTED WITH THE HISTORY OF A WONDROUS REDEMPTION. "But in the first year of Cyrus" (ver. 13). 1. The fact of redemption. The Israelites were delivered from Babylonian captivity. The Church has been set free by Christ. 2. The history of redemption. The history of Israel's deliverance was written in the records of Babylon. The history of redemption by Christ is written in the Bible; it is an earthly record as well as a heavenly history. It is in the annals of Babylon as well as in the annals of God. 3. The research of redemption. "Let there be search made" (ver. 17; 1 Pet. i. 12). 4. The pleasure of redemption. "And let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter." God's pleasure is man's freedom.

IV. THAT IT IS ENGAGED IN A YET UNFINISHED ENTERPRISE. "And since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished" (ver. 16). It is indeed true that the Church is as yet engaged in an unfinished enterprise; all its temples are not built; its walls are not erected; Jesus does not yet see all things put under him. 1. The reason. Why is the work of the Church unfinished—is it from lack of energy or fidelity? 2. The duration. How long is it to remain

unfinished? only God can tell. How long, O Lord? 3. The reproach. With so many workmen, and with the aid received, the work of the Church ought to be more advanced. The half finished walls are a rebuke to us. 4. The requirement. We must go with new determination and more fervent prayer to complete the work of the Church. 5. Caution. We cannot judge the temple till it is finished; the work of God will appear best at the end. 6. The anticipation. When the top stone of the great temple shall be brought on with joy. Let us build to completion.—E.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER VI.

DISCOVERY OF THE DECREE OF CYRUS ON THE SUBJECT OF THE TEMPLE, AND RECITATION OF ITS EXACT TERMS (ch. vi. 1—5). The application made by the satrap of Syria to Darius received his immediate attention. A search was instituted—in the first instance, at Babylon, but afterwards at the other capitals also; and in Ecbatana, the Median metropolis, where the Persian kings always resided during a portion of the year, a copy of the original decree was found, which is considerably fuller and more definite, though in some respects covering less ground, than the “proclamation” with which Ezra opens his history. The decree not merely provided for the rebuilding of the temple, but gave directions for its dimensions and for the style of its construction, points on which the proclamation said nothing; it also provided that the whole cost (of the materials) should be defrayed out of the royal revenue; and it concluded with an express command that *all* the gold and silver vessels carried off by Nebuchadnezzar should be restored. We may account for the decree not being found at Babylon, or Susa, by the Pseudo-Smerdis having destroyed it when he was accomplishing his religious reforms, though accidentally he omitted to destroy the copy laid up at Ecbatana; thus, as so often happens with wicked men, by a slip of memory frustrating his own intention.

Ver. 1.—**Darius the king made a decree.** Rather, “gave an order” (*Vulg., præcepit*). A “decree” would not be necessary. **And search was made in the house of the rolls.** Literally, “in the house of the books,” *i. e.* in the royal library, or record chamber. **Where the treasures were laid up.** The same repository was, apparently, used for documents of value and for the precious metals. An underground apartment is perhaps indicated

by the word translated “laid up,” which means “made to descend.”

Ver. 2.—**There was found at Achmetha.** Not “in a coffer,” as our translators suggest in the margin, and as Aben Ezra and Jarchi interpret; but “at Ecbatana,” which is expressed letter for letter by the word used in the original, except that the final *n* is dropped. Compare for this omission the passage of Haran into Carrhæ, and of Shushan into Susa. **In the palace that is in the province of the Medes.** The palace of Ecbatana was very famous. Herodotus says that it was built by Deïoces, the first Median king, occupied the centre of the town, and was defended by seven circles of walls, one inside the other (i. 98). Polybius states that the building covered an area 1420 yards in circumference, and consisted of a number of halls and cloistered courts, supported by wooden pillars, of cypress or of cedar, both of which were coated with a plating of gold or silver, and supported roofs sloped at an angle, consisting of silver plates instead of the customary tiling (v. 27, § 10). This grand building was the residence of the old Median monarchs, and also of Cyrus and Cambyses. Darius built himself still more magnificent residences at Susa and Persepolis; but both he and the later Achæmenian monarchs continued to use the Median palace as a summer residence, and it maintained its celebrity till the close of the empire (see Arrian, *Exp. Alex.* iii. 19). **A roll.** According to Otesias (*Diod. Sic.* ii. 32), the Persians employed parchment or vellum for the material of their records, not baked clay, like the Assyrians and Babylonians, or paper, like the Egyptians. Parchment would be a suitable material for rolls, and no doubt was anciently used chiefly in that shape. **Therein was a record thus written.** The decree would no doubt be written, primarily, in the Persian language and the Persian cuneiform character; but it may have been accompanied by a Chaldean transcript, of which Ezra may have obtained a copy. Public documents were commonly set forth by the Persians in more than one language (see ‘Herod.’ iv. 87; and comp. the ‘Inscriptions,’ *passim*, which are almost universally either bilingual or trilingual).



Ver. 3.—**Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifice.** Or, "the place where they may offer sacrifice." It is the future, rather than the past, which Cyrus is contemplating. **Let the foundation thereof be strongly laid.** Isaiah had prophesied that Cyrus should "say to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, *Thy foundation shall be laid*" (xlv. 28). Cyrus adds an injunction that the foundations be laid "supportingly," or "strongly," that so the house may the longer continue. **The height thereof threescore cubits.** Half the height of the first temple, according to the existing text of Chronicles (2 Chron. iii. 4); but one-third *more* than the previous height, as estimated by the author of Kings (1 Kings vi. 2). **And the breadth thereof threescore cubits.** This breadth is thrice that of the main building, according to both Chronicles and Kings. It is even double that of the old temple, *with the side chambers*, which occupied a space of five cubits, or seven and a half feet, on either wing. That such an enlargement actually took effect would seem to be most improbable; and we may perhaps conclude that Cyrus designed a building on a grander scale than Zerubbabel, with the resources at his disposal, was able to erect. It is curious that Cyrus did not in his decree specify the length of the temple.

Ver. 4.—**With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber.** The Septuagint interpreter understood by this that the new temple was to be four *storeys* high, three storeys being built of stone, and one of timber. The two wings of the temple of Solomon were undoubtedly three storeys high (1 Kings vi. 6). But it is perhaps doubtful whether the word *nibbak* ever means "storey." Most commentators suppose three *courses* of stone, and then a course of timber, repeated from foundation to summit; but there is no known example of such a mode of building. The **expences** were to be given out of the king's house, defrayed, *i. e.*, out of the royal revenue; but either this intention of Cyrus was not carried out, or it was understood to apply only to the materials. Large sums were subscribed by the Jews themselves towards the building (ch. ii. 69), and large payments were made by them to the persons employed upon the work (ch. iii. 7).

Ver. 5.—**Also let the gold and silver vessels . . . be restored.** The decree terminated with instructions for the restoration of the vessels. Undoubtedly it was impressed upon Cyrus, when he took Babylon, that the wanton desecration of the vessels by Belshazzar at his feast (Dan. v. 2, 3) brought in a great measure the terrible judgment of God upon him, causing his own death and the destruction of his kingdom. He was therefore most anxious to clear himself of

any participation in so great a crime, and not only instructed his treasurer, Mithredath, to deliver the vessels over to Zerubbabel (ch. i. 8), but devoted to the subject almost half of his decree.

DECREE ISSUED BY DARIUS IN FURTHERANCE OF THE DECREE OF CYRUS. OBEDIENCE OF THE PERSIAN OFFICIALS, AND RAPID COMPLETION OF THE TEMPLE (ch. vi. 6—15). The religious policy of Darius being directly opposed to that of his immediate predecessor, he would naturally reverse his decree with respect to the Jews (ch. iv. 11—22). He would also be glad to show himself in accordance with the great founder of the empire, who was universally revered, and regarded as a truly wise king. Hence his recital of the decree of Cyrus, which it would have been enough merely to have referred to. By recalling its terms he showed how completely his policy tallied with that of Cyrus, and how thoroughly he inherited the spirit of the first monarch. We may also give him credit for a real sympathy with the Jewish religion, and a real belief that the prayers of the Jews in their recovered sanctuary would bring God's blessing upon himself and his children (ver. 10). His decree is not a mere formal and colourless document, but breathes a reverential spirit, and shows him at least as true a servant of Jehovah as Cyrus.

As the trumpet had given no uncertain note, the Persian officials, Tatnai and Shethar-boznai, whatever their wishes may have been, had no choice as to their line of action. The king's word was law; and his favour, when clearly manifested, secured to the objects of it the warmest assurances of good-will, and the most active help, on the part of every official in the empire, from the highest to the lowest. The temple, therefore, made rapid progress, and within four years of the time when Zerubbabel and Jeshua resumed the building (ch. v. 2), the entire work was completed—"the house was finished." The whole time which elapsed between the laying of the foundation (Ezra iii. 10) and the completion was twenty-one years; but scarcely any progress had been made till Haggai began his preaching. The main part of the work was accomplished between the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month of the second year of Darius (Haggai i. 15) and the third day

of the twelfth month of his sixth year. This was a space of four years and a half. The temple of Solomon, after a long term of preparation, occupied in its construction seven years and a half (1 Kings vi. 37, 38).

Ver. 6.—**Now therefore, Tatnai.** It is hardly to be supposed that Darius was as abrupt as this. Apparently the author has not thought it necessary to put on record the whole royal letter; but only the most essential parts of it—the recitation of the decree of Cyrus, and the further decree of Darius himself. The address of the letter, the opening words, and the passage by which the two main portions were linked together, are either omitted or greatly abbreviated. **Be ye far from thence.** Keep away from the Jews—do not go near them to trouble them.

Ver. 8.—**Moreover, I make a decree.** Literally, “By me too is a decree made.” The decree of Cyrus is not enough. I add to it, and require you (1) to pay the wages of the workmen employed out of the royal revenue, and (2) to supply the temple perpetually with all that is needed for the regular sacrifices (see ver. 9). **What ye shall do to the elders.** Not, “Lest ye do anything to the elders” (LXX.); much less, “What must be done by the elders” (Vulg.); but, as in the A. V., “What ye shall do to them”—how ye shall act towards them. **Of the tribute beyond the river forthwith expences be given to these men.** The Persian satraps had to collect from their provinces a certain fixed sum as the royal tribute, and had to remit this sum annually to the court. Darius orders that the expenses of the men employed on the temple shall be paid by the satrap of Syria out of the royal tribute of his province, and the balance remitted. Thus no additional burthen was laid upon the taxpayers.

Ver. 9.—**Both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs.** These were the chief sacrificial animals of the Jews—a lamb being required every morning and evening, two more on the sabbath, seven at each of the great feasts and at the beginning of each month, and fourteen on every day during the feast of tabernacles, altogether more than a thousand in the course of the year; and rams and bullocks being joined with the lambs on the more solemn occasions. The only other ordinary sacrificial animal was “a kid of the goats.” **Wheat, salt, wine, and oil** were needed for the “meat offerings” by which every burnt offering was

accompanied (Exod. xxix.\* 40, 41; Lev. ii. 13, &c.). **Let it be given them day by day.** Since sacrifice was offered every day.

Ver. 10.—**That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours.** Either incense, as in Dan. ii. 46, or “sacrifices that are pleasing and acceptable” (see Gen. viii. 21; Num. xxviii. 2). **And pray for the life of the king.** The Jews have always maintained the practice of praying for the civil ruler of any country in which they have had their abode. Jeremiah’s exhortation to “seek the peace” of Babylon (xxix. 7) was understood in this way, and the tradition has been handed down even to the present day. Under monarchs so favourable to them as the Achaemenian Persians the duty would certainly not have been neglected. **And of his sons.** In Persia “the royal house” was the special object of regard. Individual kings must die, but the house would go on (see the speech of Artemisia to Xerxes in ‘Herod.’ viii. 102; and compare the references to the “gods of the royal house” in the Inscriptions). Kings took special care of their sons. Thus Cyrus sent Cambyzes back to Persia when he was about to attack the Massagetæ (‘Herod.’ i. 203), and Xerxes gave several of his sons into the charge of Artemisia, to convey them by ship to Asia, while he himself took the long and perilous journey by land (*ibid.* viii. 103).

Ver. 11.—**Whoever shall alter this word.** Rather, “this edict.” To alter the terms of a royal decree would in any country be a heinous offence. In Persia, where the monarch was absolute, and where decrees were regarded as “altering not” (Dan. vi. 8, 12), it was a crime of the deepest dye. Hence the severity of the punishment threatened. The punishment has been explained as crucifixion, impalement, and “whipping at a post;” but there seems to be no real doubt that crucifixion is intended. Great criminals were almost always crucified by the Persians (see Brissou, ‘De Regno Persarum,’ ii. pp. 327—329; and comp. ‘Behist. Inscr.’ col. ii. par. 14; col. iii. par. 8). **Let his house be made a dunghill.** Some render “be confiscated,” but wrongly. The best Hebraists agree with our translators.

The practice of concluding important documents with maledictions was common to the Persians, with the Assyrians, Babylonians, and others (see ‘Records of the Past,’ vol. i. pp. 53, 105, 126; vol. v. p. 26; vol. vii. pp. 19, 20, 56; vol. ix. pp. 35, 36, 95, 100, 107, &c.).

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—12.—*Opposition silenced.* The letter of Tatnai and his companions to Darius, the contents of which are given us in ch. v. 7—17, seems to have led to some disappointment at first speaking, i. e., from the point of view of the  
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Jews. The search recommended, it is true, was duly decreed and instituted; and that, so far as appears, without any delay or reluctance. But the important document sought for was not forthcoming immediately. On the contrary, in that "house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon," and where "search was made" in the first instance, as being apparently the most likely place in which to find a copy of such an edict, no such copy was found at all. This would be trying news for those at Jerusalem; till followed up, as it afterwards was, by intelligence of a more cheering kind; viz., that further search in another place (Achmetha or Ecbatana) had discovered the decree in question, and had led afterwards, on the part of Darius, to a further imperial decree on the very same subject. What were these two decrees found to say? The rest of this passage tells us. We shall find the contents of the first, as rehearsed here by Darius, exceedingly encouraging to the Jews. We shall find those of the second more encouraging still.

I. THE FORMER DECREE. This, when at last found, was found to be in everything as before described by the Jews. King Darius expressly acknowledges this in his public reply to the Syrian governor. 1. With reference to *date*. The decree in question had been issued by Cyrus in his "first year" (ver. 3), as reported. 2. With reference to the "*house*." Darius had found that decree to be beyond question "a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem." Note also, on this point, (a) how express its purport had been. "Let the house be builded, as a place where they may offer sacrifice." Also, (b) how precise its directions. Let this building have adequate, *i. e.* weight-carrying, foundations; and together with these, proper proportions, viz., of more than the former width, all included, and not less than half the old height (see Wordsworth, *in loc.*); and, finally, suitable style, viz., four stories (*δῶμα*, Joseph., 'Sept.,' see also 1 Kings vi. 6) in height, three of stone, and one of new wood (vers. 3, 4). Also (c) how complete its provisions. Whatever the necessary "expenses," they were to be "given out of the king's house" (ver. 4). In a word, could Cyrus have shown greater zeal and anxiety as to the erection of this house unless he had stepped out of his proper province, and sought to build it himself? So, again, with reference (3) to the *sacred vessels*. The restoration of these by Cyrus had been justly made a great additional point in the defence of the Jews (ch. v. 14, &c.). Darius next (ver. 5) virtually acknowledges that here also their statements had been fully confirmed by this decree of Cyrus. These very vessels which they had spoken of were found exactly described there (ver. 5). Their material, their original use, the place they had left, the man who had taken them, the place they were taken to, were all mentioned by name. Also, as to the alleged order for their restoration, things were equally plain. Let them, first, be given up or "restored;" let them "go," next (margin), to the temple at Jerusalem; let them be deposited there where they were before, each in its proper "place" in God's "house." Could Cyrus, here again, have said more? Could he have shown greater zeal and anxiety as to the restoration of these vessels unless he had carried them himself to Mount Zion? All this Darius here acknowledges in briefly reciting the contents of that decree of Cyrus as a kind of preamble to his own. "I have found the decree you have spoken of; and I have found it all you have said."

II. THE PRESENT DECREE. What did this satisfactory "preamble" lead to? To a direct enactment which, if possible, was still more satisfactory. 1. As to its *matter*. This was all that the Jews could wish for. It was so (a) negatively. Tatnai and his fellow officials were neither to approach the place in a hostile spirit, or interfere with the effort, or hinder the men (vers. 6, 7). "Whatever you do, do nothing hostile. This, of all things, is the very first." It was so (b) positively. If you want to know what "ye shall do" (begin. of ver. 8), I will tell you. Ye shall help these men with money as to "building this house," at my expense and out of the "tribute" now in your hands; ye shall do so at once ("forthwith"), and so long as they need (so some the last clause of ver. 8). Also ye shall help them in kind as to using this house, providing them cheerfully with all they require of every description for offering their appointed sacrifices; and doing so, be it also observed, according to their own account of their requirements, and that "day by day without fail" (ver. 9). In a word, let everything be as they wish. The enactment was

equally satisfactory (2) as to its *spirit*. For example, it evinced (a) much respect for the Jewish religion. How signal a mark of such respect such a public request as that we find in ver. 10 so mighty a king thus openly asking those humble believers for an interest in their prayers! (b) Much sympathy with the Jews themselves. Whatever we may think of the king's feelings towards his enemies, as shown in ver. 11 in his reference to the barbarous punishment of crucifixion (so Ges. and Bertheau; see Wordsworth), that verse at least shows how thoroughly he felt with his Jewish subjects at Jerusalem on the project so near to their hearts. He counted any one who should oppose that as amongst the worst enemies of himself. Also (c) much *personal confidence* in their God. If any enemies to this project should appear, or hereafter arise, whom the king's hand could not reach, he hereby openly invokes against them the God of the Jews (ver. 12). May the God who has placed his Name in that house at Jerusalem himself protect it from all such. It is with this prayer he concludes. What was left to the Jewish builders except to add their "Amen"? In the letter thus analysed by us, we see—

1. *The influence of good example*. "The evil that men do lives after them." So, sometimes, does the good (Prov. x. 7). See the effect here, on the decisions of Darius, of the previous decisions of Cyrus.\* Is not the whole appeal of Heb. xi. an appeal, in fact, to influence of this kind? "By faith" the many illustrious "elders" there mentioned "obtained a good report;" i. e. were justified before God. To this truth they are "witnesses" (Heb. xii. 1). Let us try the same plan. Every man adds to that "cloud"—to its size, to its splendour, to its influence—who seeks and finds salvation in a similar way. 2. *The importance of written records*. What hope would there have been for the Jews, humanly speaking, if there had been no written document in this case to appeal to, but only the recollection of certain scattered survivors as to some proclamation of former days? or only the report of what some of these survivors had said in their time? How, indeed, could the good example of Cyrus have told on Darius except by the channel of communication provided in his written decree? We can hardly be too thankful for the *Scriptures* of truth (see 2 Pet. i. 15; also the constant "it is written" of Luke iv. 4, 8, &c.). 3. *The wisdom of waiting upon God*. Often, as in this case, the "vision" may seem to "tarry" at first. But "at the end it shall speak, and not lie" (Hab. ii. 3). Rather, as in the present instance again, the answer may only have grown ripener meanwhile. This applies to difficulties connected with God's providential dealings, whether with communities or individual souls. Also to difficulties connected with Scripture itself. A first search, as in this instance, like the first or second interpositions of Moses on behalf of Israel, may only seem to make matters worse (Exod. ii. 11—15; v. 20—23). But how more than satisfactory, how glorious, how triumphant the end! "God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain!" 4. *The thoroughness of God's work*. "The time to favour Zion, yea, the set time, is come" (see Ps. cii. 13, a psalm written not improbably not far from this date). See how it pleases God to speak for her, that being the case. With what fulness of provision, with what minuteness of detail, with what tenderness of consideration—by the voice of the living, by the influence of the dead. The Persian king is made to speak as though almost an Israelite himself. At any rate, if he had been, he could scarcely have displayed greater knowledge of the Jewish worship, greater familiarity with their creed (comp., further, ver. 9 with Exod. xxix. 40; Lev. ii. 13; Ezra iii. 3, and the previous notes on that verse, and begin. of ver. 12 with Deut. xii. 11; 1 Kings viii. 29, &c.). Even so is it with all those who put themselves into the way of favour by coming under the ample conditions of the covenant of the gospel. They will find it, indeed, as David speaks (2 Sam. xxiii. 5), "ordered in all things and sure." There is nothing really needed, nothing really desirable, however arduous, however insignificant, which it has not already thought of, specified, and secured (Ps. xxxvii. 23; Matt. x. 30; Rom. viii. 28; Phil. iv. 19; Col. ii. 10).

\* The fact, referred to by Wordsworth, that the eastern gate of the restored temple was called the Shushan gate, and had a sculpture on it of the city of Susa, in grateful commemoration of the issuing of this decree of Darius from that city, may also be noticed in this connection.

## HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The decree of Cyrus.* In the letter of Tatnai to Darius he advised that search should be made to ascertain whether there existed any decree of Cyrus authorising the building of the temple at Jerusalem. Search was accordingly made, and the roll recovered. The decree may be viewed as consisting of three parts:—

I. THE AUTHENTICATION. 1. *The author's signature.* "Cyrus the king." (1) This name calls to mind the remarkable prophecies of Isaiah, in which, a century before his time, he was surnamed (see Isa. xlv. 23; xlv. 1, 13). (2) The same God that inspired the prophecy found means to bring it under the notice of the king. Cyrus accordingly accepted the Divine commission (2 Chron. xxxvi. 23; Ezra i. 2, 3). Lesson—We should trust that providence which rules all rulers. 2. *The date of the document.* "In the first year of Cyrus." (1) This date, B.C. 536, recalls the prophecy of Jeremiah, which assigned seventy years for the duration of the captivity. These were now completed. (2) This prophecy also seems to have been brought under the notice of Cyrus (2 Chron. xxxvi. 22; Ezra i. 1). Lesson—(a) Let us see the hand of God in everything. (b) Nothing is too trivial to be mentioned in prayer. 3. *The place of its custody.* (1) Tatnai specified "the king's treasure house at Babylon" (ch. v. 17). Probably because the decree may have been signed there. Search was made accordingly at that treasure house in the royal library, but the document was not found. The malignity of the Apharsachites would now be gratified. (2) Further search was made at Achmetha, "in the palace that is in the province of the Medes." Here the roll was recovered. Note—(a) God watches over the true. (b) The triumphing of the wicked is transient.

II. THE MATTER "CONCERNING THE HOUSE OF GOD AT JERUSALEM." 1. *"Let the house be builded."* (1) At Jerusalem. The place which God chose to put his name there (see 1 Kings viii. 29; 2 Chron. vii. 12; Ps. lxxviii. 67, 68; lxxvii. 1, 2). God favoured particular places for his worship. 1. To serve typical purposes. 2. To keep his people from mingling with idolaters. Note—In this spiritual dispensation these reasons no longer obtain (see John iv. 20—24). (2) "Where they offered sacrifices." Levitical sacrifices were restricted to the temple because the Shechinah and sacred fire were there; and this ordinance kept the people from sacrificing on high places with idolaters. For this latter reason, though the Shechinah and fire were absent from the second temple, still the ancient place of sacrificing is respected. Lesson—Every species of idolatry should be scrupulously avoided. 2. *The manner in which it was to be done.* (1) "Let the foundations be strongly laid." These typified Christ, upon whom the fabric of his Church is built (see Matt. xvi. 16—18; 1 Cor. iii. 11; Eph. ii. 20—22). Note—We may confidently rest on him the whole weight of our eternal interests. (2) "The height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits." This differed from Solomon's temple, first, in that it was larger; and secondly, in that it was square. Solomon's temple was thirty cubits high and sixty broad. The New Jerusalem also is four-square (see Rev. xxi. 16). The cube was by the ancients regarded as a figure of perfection and universality, and, in the typical temple, may anticipate these qualities of the heavenly state of the Church. (3) "Three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber" (see ch. v. 8). The timber seems to have been laid upon every third course of stones. Note—This timber built in amongst the stones would facilitate that destruction of the temple by fire described by Josephus. 3. *How the cost was to be defrayed.* (1) "Let the expenses be given out of the king's house" (see ch. iii. 7). Note—The hearts of princes are in God's hands. Prayer should be made to him rather than recourse be had to precarious expedients for raising funds for his work. (2) The royal bounty was not such as to preclude the necessity for contributions from the people of God (see ch. i. 3, 4; ii. 68, 69). Note—There is valuable moral education in liberality.

III. THE MATTER CONCERNING THE SACRED VESSELS. 1. *Vessels of the precious metals.* (1) These were taken as figures of the servants of God (see Acts ix. 15; Rom. ix. 21—23; 2 Tim. ii. 20, 21). (2) "Of gold and silver." Showing the preciousness of the saints (see Ps. xlix. 7, 8; Matt. xvi. 26; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19).

2. *Removed by Nebuchadnezzar.* (1) Taken from the temple. The sin of the people was the cause. The removal of the vessels was therefore a sign to them of their apostasy. (2) Taken to Babylon. Type of the confusion of the world. Placed there in the temple of his god (see ch. i. 7, 8; v. 14). Thence taken out only to make sport for the licentious (see Dan. v. 2—4). What a graphic figure of the condition of the backslider! 3. *Now to be restored.* (1) "Brought back again to the temple." Sign of the hope a backslider may cherish in the mercy of God. (2) Restored "every one to his place," i. e. every one that was restored. Many things were wanting in the second temple, and some of the vessels may have been lost. Backsliders must not presume upon an infallible final perseverance of the saints.—J. A. M.

Vers. 1—12.—*Some useful things.* I. THE UTILITY OF HISTORY. "And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written" (ver. 2). 1. Its *permanence*. The "roll" contained the records of past ages. The memory of man could not retain these events. History preserves them. It would be a pity for the nation and Church to let die the events that have made them what they are; history gives permanence and solemnity to life. Cyrus and his edict lived before those who made search into the old records; history causes dead men to live. 2. Its *continuity*. The roll linked the times of Cyrus with the times of Darius; showed the continuity of human life. There is no interruption in the plan of the world's life; it runs on from one reign to another. There is no interruption in the making of history; it is made by great edicts, as also by common deeds. It shows the succession of labour: one man issues an edict to commence a temple, another issues an edict to complete it. 3. Its *publicity*. In the days of Darius the historical records were written and hidden away in the royal treasure-house; now they are printed and widely circulated; hence history is more influential than ever. 4. Its *interest*. 5. Its *admonition*. Darius will soon be as Cyrus, only a figure in history; men soon pass from the actual to the historical. Life continues but for a little (Ps. xxxix. 4).

II. THE FORCE OF EXAMPLE (ver. 8). Darius is inspired by the example of Cyrus to issue a decree for the aid of the Jews in their great enterprise. 1. The force of example surviving the flight of time. Cyrus has long been dead; but his edict has power to animate the heart of Darius. The influence of example never dies. 2. The force of example morally beneficial in its influence. The edict of the dead king inspires a new edict of help for Israel. Let us try to leave the influence of good deeds behind us; thus we may help to build temples our hands can never touch.

III. THE WORTH OF SUPERIOR STATION (ver. 6). Darius commanded Tatnai to let the Jews build in peace. It is the work and worth of superior official power to restrain and to keep inferior men in their right place and to their right duty; to see that they hinder not the great moral enterprises of society.

IV. THE SPIRITUAL USE OF MONEY (vers. 8, 9). The king decreed that his tribute should be given to Israel to aid in completing the temple. Money realises its highest meaning in the service of God.—E.

Vers. 6—13.—*The decree of Darius.* The full document containing the decree or decrees of Darius occupies the first thirteen verses of this chapter. The former portion of it is principally taken up with a recital of the decree of Cyrus, published seventeen years earlier. This has been considered under a distinct heading. The remaining portion of the document may be viewed as in three parts:—

I. THE INSTRUCTION FOUNDED UPON THE DECREE OF CYRUS (vers. 6, 7). 1. The instruction is *intrinsically good*. (1) Do not hinder the work of God. (2) Do not molest those who are engaged in it. Good men would receive it gladly. The work of God is their work. Those engaged in it their fellows. 2. But to the wicked it is *mortifying*. (1) Not to all equally so. The governor, Tatnai, did not commit himself to the opposition in the spirit of bitterness. Therefore to him the turn of events might not be mortifying. (2) But to the Apharsachites it would be intensely so. Their opposition was malicious (see ch. iv.). Therefore the frustration

of their purposes would sting them to the quick. Lesson—Never do anything that may involve humiliation. Reflection—What an agony of mortification there will be in the vanquished insolence of the lost!

II. THE REQUISITION MADE BY DARIUS (vers. 8—10). 1. *That from the king's revenue from beyond the river expenses be given to the builders of God's house.* (1) Not from the kingdom in general, but from that portion whence the opposition came. What a public defeat! Yet not so public as that of the enemies of Christ before an assembled universe in the great day of judgment. (2) The leaders of the opposition are the very persons required to raise and make these payments. What a retribution! Eye for eye; tooth for tooth. 2. *That all they required for sacrifice and offering should be supplied.* (1) For burnt offerings "young bullocks and rams and lambs." (2) For meat and drink offerings "wheat, salt, oil, and wine." In the service of God there is nourishment and refreshment (see John iv. 34; vi. 27, 55). (3) These, "according to the appointment of the priests, to be given day by day without fail." We need the continual efficacy of the sacrifice of Calvary. We need a daily supply of spiritual as well as natural food. 3. *Their patriotism and loyalty* concerned in carrying out this. (1) Patriotism. To avert the anger of the God of heaven. To conciliate his favour. The blessing of God is essential to the prosperity of a nation (Job xii. 16—25; Ps. lxxv. 6, 7; Dan. ii. 21). (2) Loyalty. To ensure his blessing upon the king and his sons (see 1 Kings xi. 11—13; xiii. 33, 34).

III. THE MALEDICTION DENOUNCED UPON THOSE WHO MAY FAIL TO FULFIL THE REQUISITION (vers. 11, 12). 1. *Civil penalties.* (1) His house to be demolished. Infliction not only upon his person, but also on his family. (2) The timber of it to be made into a cross or gibbet for his crucifixion or destruction. Thus held up to public execration (see Deut. xxi. 22, 23). (3) The place of his house to be made a dunghill. That his very memory might be abhorrent to men. 2. *The vengeance of heaven* imprecated. (1) Civil penalties are for the breach of the royal decree; the vengeance of heaven for "putting their hand" to injure the "house of God" (see Josh. vi. 26; 1 Sam. xiv. 24). (2) This vengeance imprecated upon "kings;" may refer to deputies, and particularly to Tatnai and Shethar-boznai. (3) It is also called down upon the "people." Those "of the land" particularly intended. Query—Does not this suggest a belief in a future state; for if the civil penalties are to the death, what more can there be else? Let us "fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."—J. A. M.

### EXPOSITION.

Ver. 13.—*So they did speedily.* Tatnai and Shethar-boznai showed no reluctance. They had no enmity against the Jews. Once clearly advertised of the king's wishes, they carried them out with zeal. The rapid completion of the temple must be in part attributed to their good-will.

Ver. 14.—*And the elders of the Jews builded.* See above, ch. v. 5, 9. Probably the same as "the chief of the fathers" of ch. ii. 68, and ch. iii. 12. While the younger men were those who actually laboured, the elders superintended the work. Zerubbabel and Jeshua are no doubt included among them. *And they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai . . . and Zechariah.* It can well be understood that Haggai's earnest exhortations, his warnings, his threats, his sarcastic reproaches (ch. i. 4, 9), his prophecies of a coming glory to the house greater than any known previously (ch. ii. 9), would rouse the spirit of the people, and make them labour diligently and persever-

ingly; but the visions of Zechariah seem less calculated to stir popular feeling. Still the knowledge that the angels of God were interesting themselves in the restoration of the temple (Zech. i. 9—21; ii. 3, &c.), and the many promises that God would "comfort Zion," and "choose Jerusalem" (i. 17; ii. 12; iii. 2), and that the temple should assuredly be brought to completion (i. 16; iv. 9), helped no doubt to strengthen the hands of Zerubbabel, and to keep up the zeal of the people. *According to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.* The commandments of Cyrus and of Darius have been set forth by the writer (see ch. i. 3; vi. 3—5, 7); but nothing has been said as yet of any commandment given by any Artaxerxes to "build" or "finish" the house. On the contrary, the only Artaxerxes mentioned has been declared to have expressly forbidden the work to proceed (ch. iv. 7—22). The Artaxerxes of that place, moreover, reigned between Cyrus and Darius,

whereas this Artaxerxes should, by the position of his name, be one of the successors of Darius. It has been suggested that Xerxes is intended, and that he may have been associated with his father during the building of the temple. But as Xerxes was the son of Atossa, whom Darius did not marry until he had ascended the throne (Herod., iii. 88), he cannot have been more than five years old when the temple was finished. Nor was he ever associated on the throne by his father. Xerxes, therefore, cannot be meant. The next king to Xerxes, however, who really bore the name of Artaxerxes was a favourer of the Jews, and did give commandment to "beautify," and in that sense "finish," the house of the Lord (see ch. vii. 20, 27). We must suppose, therefore, that he is the person intended. The objection that the name is not spelt the same, but has a *samech* in one place instead of a *schin*, is too minute to require consideration. The Persians themselves spelt the name of Artaxerxes in more ways than one (Rawlinson, 'Cuneiform Inscriptions of Persia,' vol. i. p. 348).

Ver. 15.—The house was finished on the third day of the month Adar. Haggai (i. 15) gives the exact day of the recommencement of the work as the twenty-fourth of Elul in Darius's second year. Ezra here gives the exact day of the completion. From Zerubbabel's laying of the foundation (Ezra iii. 10), the time that had elapsed was twenty-one years. From the recommencement under the inspiring influence of the two prophets, the time was only four years, five months, and ten days.

DEDICATION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE (ch. vi. 16—18). Following the example of Solomon, who had solemnly "dedicated" the first temple (1 Kings viii. 63), and had offered on the occasion a sacrifice unexampled for its magnitude in the whole of Jewish history (*ibid.*), Zerubbabel now, under the advice of two prophets, inaugurated the new building with a similar ceremony. In "the day of small things" it was not possible for him to emulate Solomon's magnificence in respect of the number of victims. Solomon had sacrificed 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. Zerubbabel's means only enabled him to make an offering of 712 animals, more than half of them lambs. He did, however, according to his ability; and God, who accepts all our endeavours according to that we have, and not according to that we have not, was content to receive graciously the humble offering made to him, and to bless the building thus inaugurated with a glory

unknown to the first temple. The Lord himself, the Messenger of the covenant, so long sought by his people, suddenly came to this temple (Mal. iii. 1)—came to it, and frequented it, and taught in it, and gave it a dignity and a majesty far beyond the first temple, which possessed indeed the Shechinah, but was once, and once only, vouchsafed a brief manifestation of the actual Divine presence (2 Chron. vii. 1).

Ver. 16.—The children of Israel. Again the writer is careful to present the returned exiles to us as "Israel," and not merely "Judah" (comp. ii. 70; iii. 1, 10, 11; iv. 3; v. 1). This is especially fitting when he is about to explain why the number of the he-goats offered was twelve (see the next verse). **Kept the dedication of this house of God.** The primary dedication seems to be glanced at in the words, "the dedication of this house," an expression repeated in the next verse. It is one of the great objects of Ezra to link the present with the past, the new temple with the old, the restored religion with that of former times.

Ver. 17.—And offered . . . an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs. A poor offering, if it be compared, not alone with Solomon's (1 Kings viii. 63), but even with Hezekiah's (2 Chron. xxx. 24), or Josiah's (*ibid.* xxxv. 7). Hundreds now take the place of the thousands offered under the old monarchy. **A sin offering for all Israel.** See comment on ver. 16. We may assume that some of every tribe had returned with Zerubbabel, and that consequently it was possible to regard the re-established people as "Israel" (comp. Neh. xi. 20; Zech. viii. 13; Mal. i. 1); though, since the great majority were Jews, they were more commonly spoken of as "Judah" (Ezra iv. 1, 6, 23; v. 1, 5; vi. 7, 14; Zech. viii. 15, &c.). Zerubbabel, desirous of emphasising the nobler and grander view, made this solemn sin offering of twelve he-goats, one for each of the tribes. Ezra acted similarly when he brought the second colony (*infra*, ch. viii. 35).

Ver. 18.—They set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses. The completion of the new temple was naturally followed by an arrangement of the ministers corresponding to that which had been originally made by David, and afterwards adopted by Solomon, for the service of the old temple (see 1 Chron. xxiii. 6—23; xxiv. 1—19). This arrangement was based upon the ordinances of the law with respect to the respective offices of the two orders, as given in the Book of Numbers (iii. 6—10; viii. 6—26), and, so far, was



according to the writing of the book of Moses. But the "courses" themselves were not established till David's time.

**CELEBRATION OF THE PASSOVER IN THE ENSUING MONTH, AND OBSERVANCE OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD** (ch. vi. 19—22). Specially solemn passovers were celebrated on specially solemn occasions; and these received special record at the hands of the sacred writers. Of this kind are the passover celebrated by Hezekiah in the year B.C. 726, recorded in 2 Chron. xxx., and that celebrated by Josiah in B.C. 624, recorded in 2 Chron. xxxv. Both of these followed upon a cleansing of the temple, and restoration of the temple worship after a period of suspension. Ezra seems to place the passover of B.C. 516 in the same category. It marked the period of the full re-establishment of the regular ordinances of religion, more or less interrupted from the time of the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. It terminated the abnormal and commenced the normal condition of things. Perhaps it is to mark this, that Ezra at this point disuses the Chaldee dialect, which he had introduced in ch. iv. 8, and returns to the Hebrew, the established language of the Jewish religion.

Ver. 19.—**Upon the fourteenth day of the first month.** The day fixed by the law of Moses (see Exod. xii. 6).

Ver. 20.—The opening section of this verse is mistranslated. Ezra really makes a distinction between the priests and the Levites, the former of whom, he says, "purified themselves," while the latter "were all pure, as one man;" wherefore the latter killed the paschal lambs, not only for themselves and for the people, but also for their brethren

the priests. It would seem that, as in Hezekiah's time, "the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests" (2 Chron. xxix. 34).

Ver. 21.—**Such as had separated themselves unto them.** I. e. such proselytes as had been made since the return from the captivity. We have perhaps a mention of some of these proselytes in the "Sherezer" and "Regem-melech" sent by the men of Bethel a short time before this to make inquiries of the priests at Jerusalem in respect of fasting (Zech. vii. 2). These names are Assyrian, and not likely to have been given to persons born Jews. **From the filthiness of the heathen** means "from their moral defilements" (see ch. ix. 11). It is always to be borne in mind that heathen idolatry was full of such impurities.

Ver. 22.—**Kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days.** As required by the law (Exod. xii. 15; xiii. 7; Lev. xxiii. 6, &c.). On the spiritual meaning of the feast, see 1 Cor. v. 8. **The Lord had . . . turned the heart of the king of Assyria.** It has been generally supposed that Darius is personally meant here, and surprise has been expressed at his being called "king of Assyria." That title is never elsewhere given in Scripture to a king of Persia. Perhaps the writer's real intention in this place is to express in a general way the thankfulness of the Jews that God had turned the hearts of their civil rulers, whether Assyrians, Babylonians, or Persians, from hostility to friendship, having replaced the bitter enmity of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar by the hearty good-will of Cyrus and Darius. On this view, Assyria would represent merely the great power of Western Asia, and "the king" would not be Darius personally, but the lord of Western Asia in a more general way, who by God's goodness had become the permanent friend of Israel instead of her oppressor and enemy.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 13—22.—*The work completed.* These words form the conclusion of the first and longest portion of this scriptural Book of Ezra. All the remaining portion of the book is divided off from this in three separate ways. It is so, partly, on the question of time, a gap of something like sixty years intervening between the events mentioned at the close of this sixth chapter and those referred to at the beginning of the seventh. It is also divided off in regard to its method, being not so much, like the former portion, a piece of history, strictly so called, as an interesting extract from the life-story of one particular man. And it is, finally, divided off to some extent on the question of subject, inasmuch as it only touches in a subsidiary and altogether supplemental manner on that which the former portion related at length. The proper record of the work of restoring the temple finishes here. Corresponding to all this is the character of the passage itself. It bears the impress, in every way, of being a winding-up of that record. How the material building was finished; how it was solemnly set apart for its proper service; and how it was

first employed in that service; these are the only particulars now requiring to be described. These, we shall find, are accordingly described to us here.

I. *THE BUILDING FINISHED.* This was done, as we gather—1. *Without delay.* There was no delay on the part of Tatnai, &c. in making known the edict of Darius, or in complying with its injunctions. The language was very plain; its tone very urgent; its results, therefore, very prompt. As "the king had sent, so they did speedily" (ver. 13). On the other hand, there was just as little delay on the part of the Jews. The king's decree and the prophet's message (ver. 14) together were like wings to their work. They "built," and "prospered," and "finished" (vers. 14, 15), so we are told. It would almost seem, indeed, as though from the time of the arrival of this decree of Darius (probably in the fourth year of his reign; see Wordsworth on ver. 14, and compare dates in iv. 24; Haggai i. 1; Zech. i. 1, &c., in connection with time required for sending to Darius, for search, for sending reply, and so on), the Jews looked upon the completion of the temple as a mere question of time, and so at last regarded their condition of captivity as being practically at an end (see Zech. vii. 1—3). The very "headstone" (Zech. iv. 7) of the building was now within sight. 2. *Without defect.* As God himself wished it to be, "according to the commandment of the God of Israel" (ver. 14), so the building was "finished." That was the main point, of course. But it was not the only point to be marked. We are also to observe that it was "finished" as Cyrus and Darius had given "commandment." Artaxerxes, it is true, long afterwards, did not a little, in a supplementary manner, for the beauty of this house; and, therefore, it is proper that he should be mentioned here in this "commemoration of benefactors." But all that was essentially necessary had not only been fully specified in the decrees of his two predecessors, but had also been fully carried out during the reign of the second. Soon after the beginning of the last month in the sixth year of Darius "this house was finished;" finished as God had intended; finished as he had caused his servants, the kings of Persia, to decree; finished as his own people had been taught to expect. The last stone had been placed; the last test had been applied; all was ready for use (see prophecies in Zech. iv. 7—10).

II. *THE BUILDING SET APART.* All was ready for use as to construction. To make it equally ready for use as to condition, it must be solemnly handed over, as it were, to God's keeping and service. We are next told, therefore, how this was done. Namely—1. With *proper "joy."* This to be noted first because required first. God can only accept and bless that which is offered with joy (Exod. xxv. 2; 2 Cor. ix. 7). Comp. also the joy of David and Israel in offering for the erection of the first temple (1 Chron. xxix. 9), and that of Solomon and all Israel at its dedication. Equally universal, and possibly, on the principle of Luke xv. 6, 9, 24, 32, even deeper, was the joy of these "children of the captivity" at this dedication of the second house. 2. With *proper humility.* That which they were now offering to God had been first given to them by himself (1 Chron. xxix. 14, 15); and could not, in reality, in any way make any addition to his glory (Ps. xvi. 2; l. 9—12; Luke xvii. 10); and was utterly inadequate, in fact, for his use (1 Kings xviii. 27; Acts vii. 48, 49). Not only so, as coming from such as they were (see Isa. vi. 5), it was altogether unfit (as it was) for his service, and required, in consequence, in order to make it so, like themselves, to be "purged." In open acknowledgment of these various truths, by way of thank-offering for his many bounties, by way of adoration of his infinite majesty, by way of appointed propitiation for their own unworthiness, they accompany their offering of this building by the other bleeding offerings here enumerated (ver. 17). Observe especially the number of victims—two lambs for every ram, two rams for every bullock; the less the value, the greater the number, as is natural in true thank offerings. Also, in regard to the sin offering, one victim to every tribe; partly, it would seem, in believing reference to that covenant promise of God which was given to the twelve tribes as a whole (1 Kings xviii. 31; Acts xxvi. 6, 7), and partly in order that the humiliation for sin therein involved might be of a truly national kind. All Israel were understood to confess their sins on the heads of those goats. 3. With *proper care.* It was not much they could offer (comp. the total of 712 here with the 142,000 of 2 Chron. vii. 5), but it should be the best in their power. Because God was indulgent, and willing to accept, for his covenant's sake, what was in itself

imperfect and unworthy, they would not therefore be negligent. Rather, they would seek to order everything exactly as he had prescribed, so far as lay in their power. Not merely the house, but the household (Matt. Henry), the "priests" and the "Levites," who should attend to the building and its services, were solemnly then set apart. And all in the way in which God himself had directed his servant Moses to specify and record. All were dedicated, in short, to God's service according to God's way.

III. THE BUILDING IN USE. Why did it please God, notwithstanding Acts vii. 48—50, to have such a house among men? Partly to help in separating and consolidating his Israel (see Exod. xxiii. 17; Ps. cxxii. 4, &c.). In the new circumstances of Israel (see earlier outline) this more needful than ever. Would this restored house, now at last completed and consecrated, answer this end? This first recorded use of it answers this question; and seems, in short, to be recorded with this object in view. What a strong spirit of separation is found in these verses (19—22) throughout.

1. *Separation from other nations*—the very feast observed, that of the passover, being a commemoration of the most conspicuous separation ever made between Israel and the nations (Exod. xii. 26, 27, also 45, 47).
2. *Separation from ceremonial uncleanness*—even the priests being superseded on this occasion by the Levites, in the matter of killing the passover lambs for all, as not being so universally "pure" (see Rawlinson on ver. 20, who translates, "And the priests were purified, and the Levites as one man were all of them pure").
3. *Separation from false brethren*—no other persons being allowed to join with the returned children of the captivity in celebrating this feast, except those, whether "proselytes from the heathen" or "Israelites" never captive at all, who "had separated themselves unto" these others "from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel." The description is almost scientific in its accuracy and precision. Separated from the heathen; from their "filthiness" too. Separated unto Israel; to seek Israel's God.
4. *Separated with joy*. To find themselves once again with a house of their own; to think of all that God had done for them in providing them with such a house, even bringing them help from that very Assyrian land which had formerly been their destruction (Isa. lii. 2, &c.); and so now at last, once again, to feel themselves openly and fully a "peculiar people" to the Lord their God, was a very great joy. Nor was this joy at all lessened, but rather increased, by the nature of the feast they were keeping, involving, as it did, not only separation from the heathen (see above), but also as the "feast of unleavened bread" (ver. 22), separation from inward sin (Exod. xii. 8, 15, 18—20; 1 Cor. v. 7, 8). So great a delight, as well as clear a duty, did they feel their present separation to Jehovah. And so thoroughly did this their first use of their just-restored house suit the character of that house (Ps. xciii. 5). How forcibly all this instructs us—

1. *As to the real nature of God's purposes*. Looking back on all these six chapters of Ezra, we see one object in view, viz., the restoration of God's house. Looking on the house now at length completed, we see, however, that even its erection was only a means to an end, viz., the sanctification of God's people. So even of that spiritual temple, the body of Christ (John xvii. 19; Heb. x. 10). So of the Sabbath as "made for man" (Mark ii. 27). So of all trials and affliction (Heb. xii. 10). So of the whole Christian calling (1 Pet. ii. 9), and the whole work of redemption (Titus ii. 11—14). Does not the very expression indeed, "the means of grace," teach us as much? Unless these means do really minister grace to believers, they fail of their end.
2. *As to the true wisdom of God's people*, viz., to seek for the full realisation of these gracious purposes in themselves. Even in being definitely in the way of their realisation there is much joy, but some sorrow as well (see above, ch. iii. 12, 13). But we read of no such sorrow mingled with joy now that the completion and dedication of the house has been consummated by a similar dedication of the people themselves. Even "unleavened bread" and "bitter herbs" in that case are eaten with "joy." What, indeed, is more natural if we come to consider? "Without holiness no man shall see God" (Heb. xii. 14). Nor can any man see true happiness without seeing God (Ps. xvi. 11; xvii. 15; 1 John iii. 2; Rev. xxii. 4). Even as our Lord himself has summed up the argument in Matt. v. 8. The nearer to God's image, through the help of his Spirit and for the sake of his Son, the nearer to his

bliss. W may almost describe the whole Christian creed as practically summed up in these words.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 12—15.—*Overthrow and upbuilding.* The end of this mission brings to our view—

I. THE OVERTHROW OF EVIL. "Then Tatnai, . . . Shethar-boznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius had sent, so did they speedily" (ver. 13). With deepest mortification and chagrin must they have received these tidings from the Babylonian court. Their failure was complete and conspicuous. Not only had they not done what they wanted to do, but they had been compelled to aid and prosper that to which they were implacably opposed. "According to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily;" they paid the expenses (ver. 8) and presented the offerings (vers. 9, 10), and thus contributed to the cause they set out to demolish. In the end we shall see evil overthrown by the power of God, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. By faith we may say what our Master said by Divine provision, "I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke x. 18). And sometimes God gives us to see evil overthrown before our eyes, its designs upset, its fabric brought down to the ground. It is a pleasing and cheering sight when we see it simply defeated, as when, after long and hard struggle, a good cause succeeds in establishing itself despite the utmost efforts of iniquity to hinder it. Still more gratifying is it to see it suffer such an utter rout as on this occasion, when its forces are not only arrested, but made to serve the cause it had assailed. Then God not only restrains man's wrath, but makes it to praise him and to serve us (Ps. lxxvi. 10). Let us be encouraged under oppression and persecution. Our Divine Leader can not only deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, but he may even, as here, and as often since in the history of the Church, compel those who are hating us, and maligning and misrepresenting us, and seriously injuring us, to bring us their tribute and aid us in offering our sacrifice of prayer and praise unto the Lord our Saviour.

II. SPIRITUAL BUILDING. "And the elders of the Jews builded" (ver. 14), "and they builded and finished" (ver. 15). Then the Jews, under their elders (in order, giving rank and direction to those who were men of experience and capacity), builded the house—1. *For God*: for his worship and praise; that offerings might be presented unto him which should be acceptable to him; and—2. *With God*: they gladly availed themselves of the help accorded them by the prophets of the Lord. These men (ver. 14) "prophesied," i. e. they spake in the name of the Lord, urging all to do their work *diligently and faithfully*, and therefore speedily and soundly; also *obediently*, "according to commandment" (ver. 14); and thus they brought their work—3. *To its completion*: "they finished it;" it stood strong and fair and well furnished, from foundation to top-stone. We, too, are building for God; not, perhaps, a material fabric, but that which is more precious in his sight—a *Christian character* or a *Christian cause*. We are engaged in "building up ourselves in our most holy faith" (Jude 20), adding to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, &c. (2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7). And we are (or ought to be) engaged in building up the temple of some good cause. Some work of God is occupying our time, is engaging our strength and skill. We are laying the foundation in some small beginnings, or, on the foundation another has laid, we are building up the imperishable "gold, silver, precious stones," rejecting (as far as possible) the "wood, hay, and stubble," which the fires of God would consume (1 Cor. iii. 12). Let us see to it that, in building up both our own character and the cause of God, we build—

1. *For God*; doing all things mainly and chiefly unto him; as "unto the Lord," and not as unto ourselves. Let the glory of Christ be the mainspring of our action. Whatever toil, patience, forbearance, charity may be required, let us gladly yield all because "Jesus is worthy to receive," &c. 2. *With God*; accepting all the help God offers us through the varied means of grace he has supplied—notably the preaching (or "prophesying") of his servants; consulting his word to know his will, that all our building may be "according to commandment." We must do what we do in the way, i. e. in the spirit and after the method, in which he would have us work. 3.

*Unto completion.* Learning, growing, ripening until death; sympathising, giving, striving, co-operating till the work is done and the fabric is finished.—C.

Vers. 13—15.—*The successful issue.* The vicissitudes through which the building of the temple was carried to its completion figure forth those of the spiritual temple of the Church. This eventful history teaches—

I. THAT GOD'S PURPOSES WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED. 1. This truth is exemplified in the *creation*. (1) A universe sprang into being in obedience to his voice (Ps. xxxiii. 9). (2) It serves his purposes in all its complicated movement (Ps. cxlvii. 7—9, 15—18; cxlviii.; Col. i. 17). 2. This truth is also exemplified in *prophecy*. (1) The temple was finished in accordance with prophecy (Isa. xlv. 27, 28). The events which prepared the way were also pre-indicated (see also Jer. l. and li.). These are samples. The whole subject of prophecy proves that God governs the moral world by a plan. (2) This plan must comprehend all possible contingencies that may arise from the action of free beings. There is a limit to all freedom except that of God. His absolute freedom ultimately limits all that is relative. Lesson—To attempt to resist the will of God is indeed madness.

II. THAT GOD HONOURS HIS WILLING SERVANTS. 1. He gives them an *interest in his work*. "They prospered," viz., in the success of God's work. (1) They obeyed his commandment because it was his. Love to God animated their zeal. (2) Thereby their own moral nature became ennobled. 2. He encourages them by his *approving voice*. "They prospered through the prophesying of Haggai," &c. (1) His word supplies the noblest motives. To the true servant of God nothing is trifling; he does all to the glory of God. This stamps the most ordinary things with sublimity. (2) His word gives wisdom, viz., to sustain them in his work against the prudence of the world (see ch. v. 5). Also to answer prudently in the face of the enemy (see ch. v. 11—15). Prophecy in Christian sanctuaries is a grand thing for business men. 3. He crowns their labours with *success*. (1) There may be, there will be, vicissitudes in the way. Even in these there is real success when the signs of it are not visible. (2) But the issue is sure. The sequel will be glorious. Lesson—Trust God when you cannot trace him.

III. GOD MAKES UNLIKELY PERSONS HIS WILLING SERVANTS. 1. *Several Medo-Persian kings were such*. (1) These were worshippers of the elements. Why should they favour the worship of Jehovah, who had humiliated their idolatry by defeating their gods? The miracles of the Old Testament in general were levelled against Sabianism. (2) Political as well as religious reasons would render it unlikely that they should favour the return of the Jews. They succeeded to the place of the Babylonish kings, and might be presumed to follow up the policy of Nebuchadnezzar. (3) But God found means to move the heart of Cyrus. Darius also was moved by him to follow his great predecessor. This he was the more disposed to by nature of the laws of the Medes and Persians, which alter not. Artaxerxes Longimanus, in after years, rendered his service to the people of God. 2. *Perhaps Tatnai was another example*. (1) He was unlikely inasmuch as he had been moved by the enemies of Israel. But he seems to have had little sympathy with their malice. (2) The "speedy" obedience which he rendered to the decree of Darius may have been cheerful. Lesson—Let no one despair of the power of the gospel to convert unlikely sinners.

IV. THAT GOD MAKES UNWILLING PERSONS SERVE HIS PURPOSES. The "*people of the land*" were in this category. (1) Their opposition was undoubted. Their conduct hitherto proved this. Their enmity was transmitted to their posterity (see Neh. ii. 9, 10, 19; iv. 1—3; vi. 16; John iv. 9). (2) But their opposition was overruled for good. It brought the necessities of Israel, occasioned by the neglect of the decree of Cyrus, under the notice of Darius. The enemies now had to pay and collect taxes to supply those necessities. They do this too "speedily," not because they love God, but because they fear the king (see vers. 11, 12). So God "makes the wrath of man to praise him." Better *we* should praise him with a loyal heart. "When a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."—J. A. M.

Vers. 14—16.—*The temple finished.* The building of the temple was finished in about four years after the work was resumed. This was a short time for a work so vast, when compared with the resources of the Jews. It was carried through without intermission; the zeal of the people was not suffered to become languid through delay. The fact illustrates both the propitious character of external circumstances and the wisdom of the Jewish leaders. When the building was completed it was dedicated, and the worship of the LORD was re-established with solemnity and with joy. Here are two themes, distinct and yet united—first, the rebuilding of the temple; and secondly, its dedication.

I. THE REBUILDING. The accession of Darius appeared to Haggai and Zechariah the sign that the Lord had again visited his people. The last monarch had been a Magian, "opposed to belief in a personal God," and "not approving of temples." Darius was in sympathy with the work of Cyrus, having faith in the God of heaven, and regarding the Jewish nation with special favour (vers. 10, 12). Darius was the great organiser of the Persian kingdom. He made each province feel itself under the protection of the central authority, and by his system of "posts" brought each province into immediate communication with himself. A strong central authority is the best protection against the tyranny of provincial governments, with their petty jealousies and miserable intrigues. Modern as well as ancient Oriental history illustrates how heavily anarchy may press on a people like the Jews, too steadfast in religious convictions to join in prevailing heathenism and immorality, too feeble to enforce their claims. The change in the method of administration of which general history informs us is indicated in the sacred history (cf. the title "governor" given to Tatnai, ch. v. 3, with the titles "chancellor" and "scribe" given to Rehum and Shimshai, ch. iv. 9). Tatnai's personal character, moreover, appears in favourable contrast with the characters of the "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" whose letter is recorded ch. iv. 7—16. He writes no "accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem;" he simply reports the case for the decision of Darius (ch. v. 6—17). Nor is his a one-sided report; fairly enough he states the pleading of the elders, referring definitely to the decree of Cyrus under which they acted, and asks that search may be made for it. And when the answer of Darius comes to him, he loyally endeavours to fulfil it. Tatnai's doing, and doing speedily, "according to that which Darius the king had sent," is mentioned in connection with the "prospering" of the elders of the Jews. The wisdom of the leaders of the Jews is seen in their hurrying forward the work. The zeal of the people might flag; changes might occur in the monarchy; they must take advantage of the favouring circumstances. The work was a great one; not all was accomplished when the temple walls were built; the mention of Artaxerxes in conjunction with Cyrus and Darius shows that they were in the middle, not at the end, of their labours. But this at least they could do—make sure their steps as they proceeded; the temple once erected was not destroyed; it stood a point of vantage for the carrying out of further projects. Their wisdom appears again in their refusal to relax their efforts while the appeal to Darius was being made (ch. v. 5). They knew the character of Tatnai; they acted in confidence either that he would not desire or would not venture on his own authority to disallow their appeal to the decree of Cyrus. Their boldness was the truest prudence; it would keep up the hearts of their own people; it would overawe the "adversaries." The basis of their wisdom was piety; they knew that "the eye of their God was upon them." They not only confided in the general providence of God; the prophets Haggai and Zechariah urged the Jews to remember his special commission to them: he had brought them back from captivity to do this work; his blessing would crown their fidelity with success; his curse would fall on their negligence. Haggai spoke to the people, pledging the fidelity of the Lord to them (Haggai ii. 10—19). Zechariah appealed to the sense of Divine inspiration in Zerubbabel (Zech. iv. 6—10), and strengthened Jeshua the high priest by lofty assertions that he and his purpose and his trials were near the heart of God (Zech. iii.). Special tokens of the Divine favour encouraged the people in their labour. The closing Psalms of the Psalter are assigned to this period of Jewish history; Ps. cxlvi.—cxlviii. are entitled in the Septuagint version "of Haggai and Zechariah;" and they speak of deliverance out

of trouble, and prosperity after distress. Haggai's pledge on behalf of God was fulfilled: for drought they had flowing waters; instead of fruitless labour they had "food for the hungry," and "the finest of the wheat" (cf. Ps. cxlvi. 5—10; cxlvii. 3, 8, 13—20, with Haggai, *passim*). In almost all great histories of deliverance and progress these two elements are found united—favouring circumstance and human character. One-sidedness must be avoided in our interpretation of history. It is not wise to overlook the force of propitious events; we break human hearts if we teach that everything depends on our own fidelity, our own skill; not only so, we thus obscure men's faith in the providence of God. On the other hand, no times are propitious to those who are not ready to serve God. God's providence does not supersede our service, nor render needless his choicest gift of men. Inability to read "the signs of the times" is declared by Christ to be a mark of insincerity (Luke xii. 54—57); the highest service man can render man is to be an "interpreter" of God's purpose, a prophet calling for the fulfilment of God's will.

II. THE DEDICATION. The festival of the dedication contrasts strikingly with Solomon's festival. "The holy of holies was empty. The ark, the cherubim, the tables of stone, the pot of manna, the rod of Aaron were gone. The golden shields had vanished. Even the high priest, though he had recovered his official dress, had not been able to resume the breastplate with the oracular stones." (Cf. 1 Kings viii. and 2 Chron. vi. with Ezra vi. 17, and Ps. cxxxvi. with Ps. cxlvi.—cl.) It is the contrast of youth, flushed with prosperity and of an exultant tone of piety, with experienced and saddened manhood. The barbaric munificence of Solomon's offering, 22,000 bullocks and 120,000 sheep, contrasts also with the 100 bullocks, 200 rams, and 400 lambs of the second sacrifice. But one touch of pathos appears here wanting in the first—the offering of twelve he-goats, a sin offering for each of the tribes. The sin offering, for sins of ignorance and negligence, was a confession that all had been heedless; they knew not, with all they had learnt, the full extent of their remissness, they felt "the sin that mingled with their holy things." We are touched by the record; the appeal went to the heart of God. "Thou desirest not sacrifice." "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." With the dedication was associated the first passover, about a month after. The true consecration of a house of prayer is not the august ceremonial which attends its opening, but the habitual service offered in it. Note the carefulness to follow the law which is characteristic of this period (vers. 18—20). Negligence had been their undoing; the sin offering confessed that; but the true repentance is amendment of the evil habit. There was a forward look in this arrangement of the priests and Levites; it was provision for a long future of Divine service. And with this was combined hope for the ingathering of all the nation. All the tribes, the children of the captivity, the children of the dispersion, and the undistinguished remnant left behind by the king of Assyria were regarded as one. Their hearts—like that of Paul (Rom. ix.—xi.)—could not endure the thought of losing any. The family is not complete until all are gathered; humbler members, its very prodigals, as well as the virtuous and the prosperous. A nation, a Church, includes the weakly and the "less comely" members as well as those which are honourable. Among those who "had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land to seek the Lord God of Israel" may have been heathen proselytes. The "court of the Gentiles" appears for the first time in the temple of Zerubbabel. The true separation, it was recognised with increasing clearness, was separation from the sins of heathenism, not national exclusiveness. The joyousness of the festival is twice noticed (vers. 16, 22). It is remarkable how much is said of joy in the Divine service in these books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Perhaps we are never fully conscious of joy till we have been sobered by sorrow. And it is a religious duty to encourage hope and gladness in the depressed. We must learn how to treat the various experiences with which we have to deal; not only weeping with them that weep, but doing all we can to win them to smiles. Elevating influences are most needed by the depressed. It was to *slaves* Paul told Titus to speak of "adorning, making beautiful, the doctrine of God our Saviour." To the prosperous we may speak of sobriety; we may remind him who lives many years, and rejoices in them all, of the "days of darkness," which shall be many. But those who have seen affliction, and who have arduous

labour and adverse times before them, require that their religious services should be made as joyous and as bright as possible.—M.

Ver. 15.—*Church prosperity.* I. THERE WAS A CHANGE OF MOOD IN THOSE WHO HAD SOUGHT TO HINDER THE WORK. Tatnai, who had sought to hinder the building of the temple, now by the royal command does all he can to promote it. The world sometimes changes its mood toward the Church; often from motives of policy or fear; seldom from good will. Civil governors can greatly aid religious builders. When enemies help the Church prospers.

II. THERE WAS A FAITHFUL MINISTRY EXERCISED IN THE MIDST OF THE PEOPLE. "They prospered through the prophesying of Haggai" (ver. 14). The ministry has much to do with the prosperity of a Church; men like Haggai and Zechariah cannot fail to inspire their comrades with their own earnest spirit. A faithful pastor will often make a Church prosperous.

III. THERE WAS THE COMPLETION OF AN ARDUOUS UNDERTAKING. "And this house was finished" (ver. 15). A great enterprise, which had passed through so many vicissitudes, was now successfully ended. By the completion of its toils the Church indicates its energy, provides for its own welfare, and glorifies God.—E.

Ver. 15.—*Church building.* I. THAT GOD REQUIRES A HOUSE ESPECIALLY ERECTED FOR HIS WORSHIP. "This house." 1. As a *dwelling* on the earth. God's presence pervades the universe; there is no place where it is not. The heaven of heavens cannot contain him, much less the house which we have built; yet in great condescension he manifests a richer presence in his holy sanctuary than in all the world outside. The Shechinah dwells in the temple. God's dwelling-place is in Zion. Christ is in the midst of his gathered people (Matt. xviii. 20). 2. As a *testimony* for the truth. The temple was a testimony to the heathen nations and to all people of the worship and sacrifice due from the Israelites to Jehovah. Our Christian churches testify to our belief in the great God, and to all those sacred truths which he has revealed in his book. 3. As the *evidence* of a religious feeling. While others are only building houses for themselves; we build also for God; we sacrifice the comfort of our ceiled houses and of our gains so to do. Our churches are evidence of the unselfish and devout sentiments of the human heart. 4. As the means of social *philanthropy*. We love the nation, and seek its moral welfare, hence we build it a sanctuary.

II. THAT THERE ARE A GREAT MANY IMPEDIMENTS IN THE WAY OF BUILDING CHURCHES. The Israelites had many hindrances in their work. 1. The lack of a good heart for the work. 2. The lack of generous gifts for the work. 3. The lack of suitable men to lead the work. 4. The lack of sympathy in men for the moral welfare of God's cause. 5. The lack of mutual concession to opposing ideas. 6. The lack of right help from the outside circles of society. Christian enthusiasm, generosity, sympathy, good feeling, are the requisites of successful church building.

III. THAT THE COMPLETION OF A NEW CHURCH IS WORTHY OF SPECIAL GRATITUDE. The Israelites would indeed be grateful to see their finished temple. 1. Grateful for the kind providence that had aided them. 2. Grateful for the valiant leaders that had inspired them. 3. Grateful for the persistent spirit of work which had been given them. 4. Grateful that their arduous toils were at an end. 5. Grateful that the glorious worship of God could now be fully celebrated. 6. Grateful that they had a new impulse given to their national life.—E.

Vers. 16—18.—*The dedication of the temple.*—As the temple was a type of the Church of God, and the stones of which it was composed represented individual believers, so the completing of the building foreshadowed that grand consummation in which the number of the elect shall be complete. The consequent dedication of the finished edifice will therefore represent the future devotion to the service of God of his glorified Church. By anticipation it also describes the service which believers should now render to God, since each part should be a true sample of the whole. In this view how fittingly was the dedication of the temple an occasion of joy (ver. 16)!



**I. THE REJOICING WAS OVER THE FINISHED WORK.** 1. It was the *end of all their toil*. (1) The end, in being the consummation towards which they wrought. So will the heavenly state be to all true workers in the Church of God. (2) Also the end, in the sense of bringing their toil to its period. The labour of twenty long years was now closed. No more straining of muscles in felling of cedars in Lebanon. No more sweat of the face in lifting great stones. No more endurance of cruel mockings and violent persecutions. So when we gain our reward "there will be no more curse" (Rev. xxi. 3—5). 2. It was the *triumph of their faith and hope*. (1) The word of God sustained them against opposition from the rulers and from the rabble. It nerved them under the discouragements of threats and violence. So amidst vicissitudes for twenty years they plodded on. Now they reap the reward of their constancy. (2) So has the Church of God been carried up stone by stone amidst opposition from princes and people. Amidst poverty and perplexity. With interruptions and threatenings. But it is destined to witness a magnificent sequel (see Rev. xxi. 1, 2, 9, &c.). (3) The history of the Church has its epitome in the experience of its members. Their constant faith will reap its reward too in the heights of the heavenly Zion.

**II. THEY REJOICED OVER IMMENSE SACRIFICES.** 1. There were *peace offerings for the dedication*. (1) The number of the victims was 100 bullocks and 600 smaller animals, viz., 200 rams and 400 lambs. At the dedication of Solomon's temple the sacrifices were 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep (see 1 Kings viii. 63). Yet this immolation does not compare unfavourably. Here were only 50,000 Jews as against say 10,000,000 Israelites in the days of Solomon, or 1 to 200. Multiply these victims by 200, and they scarcely differ in number from those offered at the earlier dedication (see also ch. viii. 35). Consider also the difference in their circumstances (see 2 Cor. viii. 2, 3). Well might they rejoice in their religious zeal. (2) Corresponding to this enormous slaughter, there will be in connection with the dedication to God of his glorified Church a fearful sacrifice of his enemies. These judgments began upon the antichristian Jews (see Jer. xix. 6, 7). They will culminate in the destruction of the Antichrist of Gentiledom (see Isa. xxxiv. 1—7; Ezek. xxxix. 17—20). If mercy rejoices, it rejoices *upon* judgment (not "against" it); as the ark of mercy rode upon the flood of judgment (see Rev. xxii. 15). 2. There were *sin offerings for all Israel*. (1) "Twelve he-goats according to the number of the tribes." The number of the victims sacrificed for the tribes at the dedication of Solomon's temple is not mentioned (2 Chron. vii. 4). (2) Why for "all Israel," when so large a part of the ten tribes remained in their dispersion? Perhaps an expression of faith in those promises which speak of a full restoration of "all the house of Israel wholly" (see Ezek. xi. 14—20). This restoration was but an instalment of the ultimate restoration even of Judah. (3) Atonement necessary to the acceptableness of services. The "children of the captivity" had a lively remembrance of the miseries they had suffered through sin. The redeemed in heaven will sing of Calvary (Rev. v. 8—13).

**III. THEY REJOICED OVER THE ORDERING OF THE SERVICE OF GOD.** 1. *The priests* were distributed into their divisions. (1) These "divisions" are also called *courses* (2 Chron. viii. 14). They were twenty-four in number, and so ordered by David (1 Chron. xxiv. 1—5). They served in turn, under the direction of the high priest, and on entering this service were ceremonially sanctified (2 Chron. v. 11). Example in the case of Zacharias (see Luke i. 5, 8). (2) There will be supreme order in the service of God in heaven. 2. *The Levites* also were distributed into courses. (1) David, the type of his infinitely more illustrious Son, gave this ordinance likewise (1 Chron. xxiii. 3—6). (2) Their services were (a) those connected with sacrifice (2 Chron. xxxi. 2). (b) Supervising matters pertaining to the temple. (c) Keeping the doors of the house of the Lord. (d) Leading the praise in the worship of God. 3. *Believers in Christ* are the priests and Levites of the spiritual sanctuary. (1) They offer continual sacrifices of prayer, of praise, of service. (2) Everything which concerns the house of God concerns them. The service they render is therefore joyful service. We should welcome holy ordinances with joy (Ps. c. 2).—J. A. M.

Vers. 16—22.—*Timely and wise enthusiasm.* It was natural and right that, when the temple was finished, the Israelites, who had spent on their work so much anxiety and toil, and who looked on the sacred building as the one great possession and glory of the land, should find their hearts elated with a strong and glowing enthusiasm. It was *timely*, and, moreover, it was *wise*; let us see its characteristics.

I. JOYOUS. "And the children of Israel . . . kept the dedication . . . with joy" (ver. 16). It was "the Lord had made them joyful" (ver. 22). Their souls were all alight and aglow with that best kind of happiness, the *joy of gratitude*. There is nothing so miserable as unthankfulness; nothing so happy as gratitude. They were mindful of his mercies who had brought them out of bondage, away from the "strange land" where they could not "sing the songs of Zion" (Ps. cxxxvii.), to their own home, the land of their fathers. They remembered him who had "turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them," and made him even lend them his aid; they blessed the Divine hand which had arrested and diverted the blow of their enemies. "Not unto us," they said, "but to thy name," &c. (Ps. cxvi.), and their souls thrilled with enthusiastic joy as they took possession of the new house they had built (ver. 16), and again as they kept the feast of unleavened bread (ver. 22). Happy they who "drink of the river of his pleasures," whom God makes joyful, whose gladness of heart is not the mere excitement of the flesh, but the pure and healthy satisfaction of the spirit.

II. SACRED (vers. 17, 20, 21). Proceeding from a pure and sacred source, it flowed in a sacred channel, and took a devout and holy form; for (a) they purified themselves, "separated themselves from the filthiness of the heathen" (ver. 21); they made themselves clean of heart and hand, preparatory to worship, and "all of them were pure" (ver. 20). And (b) they brought sacrifices in abundance to the altar of the Lord (ver. 17). Not the "thousands" of Solomon's time of wealth, but the "hundreds" of their own time of poverty; gladly, spontaneously, liberally they presented their offerings unto God. Here are two of the requisites of acceptable service. (a) *Purity*. If we regard iniquity in our heart the Lord will not hear us (Ps. lxxvi. 18). We must be clean who bear the vessels of the Lord (Isa. lii. 11). Only the pure in heart can hope to see God, either here by faith, or hereafter by sight (Matt. v. 8). (b) *Spontaneity*. The willing, cheerful surrender both of ourselves (our will, our affections, our intelligence) and of our possessions (our time, our strength, our money) unto our Lord. "In the strength of grace, *with a glad heart and free*," we must dedicate ourselves unto him.

III. HUMBLE-HEARTED. They "offered for sin offering," &c. (ver. 17). Twelve he-goats were offered as a sin offering (ver. 17). It was not forgotten that, beside God's mercies to be celebrated, there were their own sins to be atoned. In the midst of our overflowing joy, joy before God and in him, it is well to remember that there are "sins of our holy things," and many shortcomings in our service, beside trespasses in our daily life, which should lead to the prayer, "Let thy mercy, O Lord, lighten upon us," blending, not inharmoniously, with the voice of our supplication, and the song of our thanksgiving.

IV. SOCIAL. "And the children of Israel . . . did eat, and kept the feast," &c. (vers. 21, 22). All the children of Israel, from the highest to the lowest, from the governor to the humblest menial of the state, from the high priest to the lowliest Levite, all sat down together to eat, to keep the feast. Their holy joy was multiplied and was beautified in the sight of God by being shared, and by being made as social as their circumstances and customs would allow. So should ours be; and though we have no longer Christian institutions answering to the early "*agapæ*," we should seek for and discover some ways by which our "common joy in the common salvation" should be expressed together, in social as well as sacred service.

V. SYSTEMATIC. "They set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses" (ver. 18). They kept the passover according to law (ver. 19), and instead of letting enthusiasm simply blaze up and die down, they made provision for future devotion (ver. 18). Here is enthusiasm in its wisdom; in the hour of its strength providing for the hour when its excitements will be over, when reliance must rest on calm conviction, and when piety must be maintained by devout habits and wise methods of worship and of work.—C.

Vers. 16—22.—*Church dedication.* I. THAT WE SHOULD DEDICATE A NEW CHURCH TO GOD IN A SPIRIT OF SOLEMN REJOICING. "With joy" (ver. 16). 1. The work itself a joy. As a material structure, embodying the skill and handiwork of man, it is a joy. 2. The purpose of the work a joy. It is built for the glory of God and for the good of man. 3. The spirit of the work a joy. 4. The completion of the work a joy. 5. The prospect of the work a joy. 6. The interest of the work a joy. Heaven rejoices in the finished sanctuary, in which its holy worship shall be conducted, and its redemptive purposes be promoted. Religious worship is a joyful thing; let us enter the house of God with thanksgiving.

II. THAT WE SHOULD DEDICATE A NEW CHURCH TO GOD IN A SPIRIT OF DEEP SELF-ABASEMENT. "For a sin offering" (ver. 17). 1. We must not be proud of our mechanical skill. Israel might be tempted to think that as a band of captives they had displayed great skill in building the house; they rather felt that God had built it. 2. When we have completed any great work for God we must not think that we have done anything worthy of praise; we must not commend our energy, devotion, or self-sacrifice; but we must remember our delay, our weakness, and how we needed the ministers of God to stir us to duty. 3. We must humble our souls before God in deep confession of sin. 4. We must come offering by faith the only sacrifice that can avail to make us and our imperfect work acceptable to God. The best house we can build for God is unworthy his acceptance; he can only accept it through the sacrifice of Christ. 5. We must come united in the sacred fellowship of the Church. Israel united in the feast.

III. THAT WE SHOULD DEDICATE A NEW CHURCH TO GOD BY INAUGURATING USEFUL MORAL AGENCIES. "They set the priests in their divisions" (ver. 18). The house will be comparatively worthless unless it becomes the scene of busy Christian toil and enterprise; it is to be a house of moral industry. The agencies are—1. Authoritative. 2. Varied. Priests and Levites; all kinds of workers. 3. Orderly—"in their course." 4. Useful—"for the service." 5. Continuous. One course will relieve another. It is impossible to indicate the manifold agencies which ought to be set in operation by a new church, or to estimate the mighty impulse which should be given to the work of Christ on the earth.

IV. THAT WE SHOULD DEDICATE A NEW CHURCH TO GOD REGARDING IT AS THE REPOSITORY OF CHRISTIAN TRUTH AND THE SCENE OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP. "As it is written in the book of Moses" (ver. 18). "And killed the passover" (ver. 20). 1. The repository of the truth. The temple was the repository of the law of Moses; in it the law of Moses was recognised as of supreme authority. In the new church God's book must rule our thought, speech, and action; a law more complete than the law of Moses; for in these last days God hath spoken unto us by his Son. 2. The scene of worship. The new church is not merely for literary, scientific, philanthropic purposes; but for the passover, for Christian worship. See that it is used for its rightful purpose.—E.

Vers. 19—22.—*The passover.* Six memorable passovers are mentioned in Old Testament Scripture. The first was in Egypt (Exod. xii.). The second in the wilderness (Num. xi.). The third at Gilgal (Josh. v.). The fourth in the days of Hezekiah (2 Chron. xxx.). The fifth in the eighteenth year of Josiah (2 Kings xxiii.). The sixth is that here mentioned. The subject is distributed into two parts:—

I. THE FEAST. This also is distributed into two parts. 1. *The passover proper.* (1) This was held "upon the fourteenth day of the first month." This was the anniversary of the night before the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt, when the angel who destroyed the first-born of the Egyptians passed over the Israelites, who were protected by the blood of a slaughtered lamb. (2) What an expressive type of the protection we derive through the sprinkling of the blood of Christ (see 1 Cor. v. 7)! The very time of the death of Jesus was indicated in this date. He suffered not only in the first month and on the fourteenth day, but also "between the evenings" (Matt. xxvii. 46). 2. *The feast of unleavened bread.* (1) Scrupulous care was taken that no leaven should be found in their dwellings. Leaven is a salt and sour matter which is put into dough to ferment the mass for bread, and is also of a putrefying nature. Its exclusion by the ancient Israelite expressed his

aversion to the abominations of the Egyptians from which he was delivered (Exod. xii. 17; xiii. 3). These Jews would associate with the abominations of Egypt those of Babylon from which they were now delivered. (2) The Eucharist is our feast of unleavened bread. Those who partake of this should put away all leaven of heresy (Matt. xvi. 16). All notorious and scandalous living (1 Cor. v. 6, 7). All malice and wickedness of the heart (1 Cor. i. 8). 3. *The feast was kept with joy.* (1) With the joy ordinarily fitting to such an occasion. They kept it "seven days," and therefore with its "holy convocations" on the first and last days. Holy convocations to godly persons are essentially joyous. They anticipate the convocation in the heavens. (2) But they had special reason for rejoicing. "For the Lord had made them joyful by turning the heart of the king of Assyria unto them to strengthen their hands," &c. The Persian monarchs are here collectively called the "king of Assyria" because they were rulers over the ancient Assyrian territory. (Note—May not this suggest the key to many prophecies which evidently relate in their fuller expression to the latter times, in which names of ancient kingdoms are still used?) The finishing of their temple was an occasion of great joy. There is no joy to be compared with that which the Lord makes for us.

II. THE PREPARATION. 1. The priests were purified, and the Levites were *all of them pure*. The state of things was now as it had been in the days of Hezekiah, when the passover had to be held in the second month because the priests had not sufficiently sanctified themselves to hold it at the more proper time (2 Chron. xxx. 3). Note—When the spiritual temple is complete the priests and Levites—the saints of God—will be all morally pure. 2. *All the children of the captivity were pure.* (1) This is evident from the fact that the passover was killed for them all (ver. 20). The second passover was instituted to meet the case of those who through ceremonial uncleanness were incapable of taking the first (see Num. ix. 6—11). Here there was no need of a second, for the whole nation was ceremonially clean. This was a very remarkable circumstance, and shows what a wonderful providence was over their families, for a dead body in a house was sufficient to render its inmates unfit for this feast (see Num. xix. 14). What a type of the glorified Church! The joy of the paschal feast when it is renewed in the kingdom of God will not be interrupted by death. All there will be pure in the noblest sense. 3. *Believing Gentiles* were joined with their Jewish brethren (ver. 21). They were qualified for this holy fellowship—(1) By "separating themselves from the filthiness of the heathen land." Some may have come with them from Babylon, as the mixed multitude came up from Egypt (see Exod. xii. 38; Neh. xiii. 3). Some may have been "people of the land," descendants of Esar-haddon's importation (ch. iv. 2). But they must have become Jewish proselytes. (2) By "seeking the Lord God of Israel." True worship and salvation are nowhere else to be found (see John iv. 22). At whatever sacrifice, let us seek the fellowship of the saints (Eph. ii. 13—22).—J. A. M.

## PART II.

### SECOND RETURN OF THE ISRAELITES FROM CAPTIVITY UNDER EZRA.

#### § 1. DECREE OF ARTAXERXES, AND RETURN UNDER EZRA, WITH THE NUMBERS OF THOSE WHO RETURNED, AND THE NAMES OF THE CHIEF MEN.

#### EXPOSITION.

##### CHAPTER VII.

FIFTY-SEVEN years after the completion of the temple and its dedication, when the long and eventful reign of Darius was over, and

his son Xerxes, probably the Ahasuerus of Esther, had also lived and reigned and passed away, and the grandson of Darius, known generally as Artaxerxes Longimanus, occupied the Persian throne, a further return

of Israelites from Babylon, on a tolerably large scale, took place. Ezra, a member of the high priest's family, a descendant of Seraiah, the "chief priest" at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings xxv. 18), and probably a third cousin of the existing high priest, Eliashib, having access to Artaxerxes, and, apparently, a certain influence with him, asked (ch. vii. 6) and obtained the royal permission to reinforce the colony in Judæa by a fresh body of emigrants, and at the same time to convey to Jerusalem a sum of money, which the Babylonian Jews had subscribed towards the temple service (*ibid.* ver. 16). Artaxerxes appears to have had a high respect for Ezra; he recognised in him one possessed of wisdom from on high (ver. 25), and readily granted him, not only the request that he had made, but an important commission, which was mainly one of inquiry (ver. 14), but which made him for a time paramount civil ruler of the province, with power of life and death over its inhabitants (ver. 26); and also conferred upon the Jewish people certain valuable gifts and privileges. The terms of the decree are set forth in ch. vii. 12—26, where the Chaldee version of the text, as published by Artaxerxes, is probably given *verbatim et literatim*. After reciting it, Ezra breaks out into a brief but earnest burst of thanksgiving and acknowledgment of God's goodness, which concludes ch. vii., occupying the last two verses. He then proceeds, in ch. viii., to give an account of the number of the Jews who returned with him, with the names of their leaders, whom he calls "chief of the fathers." Having completed his list in ver. 14, he goes on (vers. 15—31) to describe the circumstances of the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, which occupied exactly four months, commencing on the first day of the first month and terminating on the first day of the fifth month (ch. vii. 9). In conclusion, he tells us how, after a rest of three days, he discharged himself of the most pressing of the commissions intrusted to him, delivering over to the priests in charge of the temple the gifts sent by Artaxerxes, and making known to the various Persian officials of the district the terms of the royal decree so far as they were affected by it (ch. viii. 32—36).

This section may be subdivided into seven

parts:—1. The genealogy of Ezra (ch. vii. 1—5); 2. The fact of his journey, with its dates (*ibid.* vers. 6—10); 3. The decree of Artaxerxes with respect to Ezra (*ibid.* vers. 11—26); 4. The thanksgiving of Ezra (*ibid.* vers. 27, 28); 5. The numbers of those who accompanied him to Jerusalem, with the names of the chiefs (ch. viii. 1—14); 6. The circumstances of the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem (*ibid.* vers. 15—31); and 7. The three days' rest at Jerusalem and execution of the more pressing commissions (*ibid.* vers. 32—36).

THE GENEALOGY OF EZRA (ch. vii. 1—5). It is plain that this genealogy is incomplete. It gives no more than sixteen generations between Ezra and Aaron, whereas the number of generations between Zerubbabel and Nathon, prince of Judah in Aaron's time (Num. i. 7; ii. 3), was twenty-six (1 Chron. ii. 10—15; iii. 5—19), and that between Aaron himself and Eliashib at least as many (1 Chron. vi. 13—15; ix. 11; Neh. xii. 10). Six names are omitted between the Azariah and Meraioth of ver. 3, which will be found in 1 Chron. vi. 7—10; and at least three must be wanting between Ezra himself and Seraiah, who was the great-great-grandfather of Eliashib, Ezra's contemporary (Neh. iii. 1; xiii. 4). The curtailment of genealogies by the omission of names was a common practice of the Jews. A notable instance is the omission of three royal names in St. Matthew's genealogy of our Lord (i. 8).

Ver. 1.—The writer makes a marked division between his first and second sections by means of the words, "Now after these things," which he uses in this place only. The actual interval seems to have been one of between fifty-seven and fifty-eight years, the sixth year of Darius being B.C. 516, and the seventh of Artaxerxes Longimanus A.D. 458. Artaxerxes is in the original "Artakshasta," which reproduces the Persian *Artakshashtra* with the change of only one letter. That Longimanus, the grandson of Darius, is meant seems to follow from the fact that Eliashib, the grandson of Jeshua, is high priest under him (Neh. iii. 1).

Darius,	} correspond to	Jeshua,
Xerxes,		Joiakim
Artaxerxes,		Eliashib.

But for this it would be possible to regard the Artaxerxes of Ezra (ch. vii.) and Nehe-

miah as Mnemon. **Ezra** the son of Seraiah. Probably the great-great-grandson. In the language of the sacred writers, every descendant is a "son," and every ancestor a "father." Christ is "the son of David," and David "the son of Abraham" (Matt. i. 1). Joram "begat" Uzziah (*ibid.* 8), his great-great-grandson. Jochebed was "the daughter" of Levi (Exod. ii. 1). Ezra omits the names of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, who were undistinguished, and claims descent from Seraiah, the last high priest who had ministered in Solomon's temple (2 Kings xxv. 18). Azariah, the father of Seraiah, does not occur in either Kings or Chronicles; but Hilkiah, Azariah's father, is no doubt the high priest of Josiah's time (2 Kings xxii. 4-14; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14-22, &c.).

Vers. 2-4.—This portion of the genealogy agrees exactly with that of Jehozadak in 1 Chron. vi. 3-15, excepting in the omission, which has been already noticed, of six names between Azariah and Meraioth. We may gather from 1 Chron. ix. 11 that a Meraioth is also omitted between the Zadok and Ahitub of ver. 2.

**EZRA'S JOURNEY FROM BABYLON TO JERUSALEM, WITH DATES** (ch. vii. 6-10). In introducing himself, Ezra seems to regard it as of primary importance to state two things—(1) who he was, and (2) what place he had in a history of which the main object is to give an account of the return of Israel from captivity. In connection with the former point, he gives, first of all, his genealogy; and, secondly, the account of himself contained in vers. 6 and 10. He describes himself as "a ready scribe"—one who "had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it," and also "to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." In connection with the latter, he is careful to put before us at once the fact that he too, like Zerubbabel, "went up from Babylon" to Jerusalem by the permission of the Persian king, and, like Zerubbabel, was accompanied by priests, Levites, both singers and porters, Nethinim, and a number of the people (ver. 7). He adds an exact statement as to the date of both his departure and arrival, very natural in one who is his own biographer, and very interesting to the general historian. He also, without any parade of religious sentiment, acknowledges the hand of God as directing, helping, and sustaining him in all his proceedings, ascribing to the Divine favour, especially, Artaxerxes allowance of his journey, and his safe

accomplishment of it within a moderate space of time (vers. 6, 9).

Ver. 6.—**This Ezra went up.** See comment on ch. ii. 1, where the same expression—"went up"—is used. He was a ready scribe in the law of Moses. On the meaning of this phrase, and the new position occupied by "scribes" after the captivity, see 'Introduction to Ezra,' § 5. Which the Lord God of Israel had given. It is characteristic of Ezra's piety never to forget that the law was not a mere human code given by an earthly lawgiver, not even a national treasure, the accumulation of centuries, but a direct Divine gift—"the law of the Lord" (ver. 10), "the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel" (ver. 11), "the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses" (Neh. viii. 14). According to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. *I. e.* "by reason of God's favour to him." God, by reason of his favour to Ezra, inclined the heart of Artaxerxes towards him, so that he granted all his request. The nature of the "request" is not directly stated, but may be gathered from the "letter of Artaxerxes," especially vers. 13, 14, 16.

Ver. 7.—The same six classes are here mentioned as furnishing colonists under Ezra which, according to the earlier narrative (ch. ii. 70), had accompanied Zerubbabel. The order in which the classes are mentioned is nearly, but not quite, the same. In the seventh year of Artaxerxes. This is the emphatic clause of the verse; Ezra's main object in the section being to give the exact date of his journey. As Artaxerxes began to reign in B.C. 464 (Clinton, F. H., vol. ii. p. 380, note b), his seventh year would be B.C. 458.

Ver. 8.—**And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month.** From the ninth verse it appears that the first day of the first month—the opening day of the year—was selected for the commencement of the journey. This was no doubt viewed as an auspicious day for beginning an important undertaking. The time occupied on the way was exactly four months, which is longer than might have been supposed to be necessary. Herodotus reckoned it a three months journey from Sardis to Susa (ver. 53), and the younger Cyrus conducted an army from Ephesus to Cunaxa, near Babylon, in ninety-three marching days (Xen., 'Anab.' ii. 1, § 6)—the distance in either case being considerably more than that from Babylon to Jerusalem, even supposing the route followed to have been by Balis and Aleppo. But a caravan, like an army, requires rests; and we hear of one such rest at Ahava (ch. viii. 15). Cyrus gave his troops more days of rest than

of movement, and took half the year to reach Cunaxa from Ephesus. We need not be surprised, therefore, that Ezra's journey occupied four months. Some delay must almost certainly have been caused by the perils of the route (see ch. viii. 31).

Ver. 9.—**According to the good hand of his God.** For the meaning of this phrase, see comment on ver. 6. The special favour of God here intended would seem to be deliverance from certain enemies who designed to attack the caravan on the way (see the next chapter, vers. 21—23, 31).

Ver. 10.—**For Ezra had prepared his heart, &c.** God's favour towards Ezra, and the prosperous issue of his journey, were the consequences of his having set his heart on learning God's will, and doing it, and teaching it to others. **To seek the law** is to aim at obtaining a complete knowledge of it. **To teach statutes and judgments** is to inculcate both the ceremonial and the moral precepts. Ezra appears as a teacher of righteousness in ch. x. 10, 11, and again in Neh. viii. 2—18.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*The reformer.* "After these things"—nearly sixty years "after," as usually understood—certain other things came to pass. Things so far similar that they may be recorded in the same connection; things so far different as to open out to us quite a new part of this book. There is this similarity, for example—that we have the story here of another and supplementary pilgrimage of captive Israelites from Babylon to Jerusalem. On the other hand, there are these points of difference—that the new pilgrimage is on a much smaller scale; and that the story itself is rather biographical than historical, as before—all of it, in fact, centring closely round the doings of one man. Accordingly, it is with the portrait of this one man, Ezra, that this new portion begins. We can see at once, on looking at the portrait, that he is a zealous ecclesiastical reformer; and we can easily understand there being a great necessity at Jerusalem for such a man at that time. Of this, however, and of what he did there, we shall read by and by. At present we see chiefly his fitness for this difficult rôle; and that in connection—1. with his ancestry; 2. his attainments; and 3. his ambition.

I. **EZRA'S ANCESTRY.** This, given us in vers. 1—5, would be such as to fit him for the work of Church reformation in several ways. 1. *As to office.* By lineage we see that he was a priest; and therefore an authorised preacher (Lev. x. 11; 2 Chron. xv. 3; Mal. ii. 5—7); and therefore a person who would have special facilities in reforming or setting things right, because such endeavours would, in his case, be only expected. How can any man teach truth and right without correcting error and wrong? 2. *As to tradition.* It may at least be noticed that, according to this lineage, very many of the traditions of his peculiar priestly ancestry would be specially in favour of reforming work. He belonged, *e. g.*, to the better of the two principal priestly lines, viz., that of Eleazar as compared with Ithamar, to which Eli and his sons (1 Chron. xxiv. 3, 4; vi. 8) belonged. Also, even in this very abridged form of his genealogy, how conspicuous are the individual names of Phinehas (Num. xxv.; Josh. xxii.; Ps. cvi. 30) and Hilkiah (2 Kings xxii.; 2 Chron. xxxiv.) in regard to this point! It could never, therefore, be said of him, in attempting similar work, as in 1 Sam. x. 12. 3. *As to position.* Being himself descended from Seraiah, the grandfather or great (or great-great) grandfather of the high priest of that time (1 Chron. vi. 14; Ezra iii. 2; Neh. iii. 1; xii. 10), he would be not only a priest, but a priest with peculiar family advantages for exerting an influence for good, something as is the case with a "prince of the blood" among us. On the whole, while all these things by themselves would not necessarily dispose him to become a reformer, they would all help him, if so disposed.

II. **EZRA'S SPECIAL ATTAINMENTS.** These would also qualify him for such labours. For we find that he had learned—1. *How to listen to God.* The man who would reform others must begin by reforming himself; and this he can only do effectually by means of an accurate knowledge of God's will, that one standard of perfect right (see Ps. cxi. 10, and end of Luke xi. 2). This point secured in the present instance (a) by Ezra's discrimination. He knew where to look for God's word, viz., in the "Scriptures" of truth, recognising clearly their double aspect, as at once human (the

"law of Moses"), and also Divine (which "God had given"). Comp. 1 Thess. ii. 13—"the word of *God* which ye heard of *us*." He recognised also their peculiar value (which the "God of Israel had given"), as God's special gift to his own people (Rom. iii. 1, 2). (b) By Ezra's diligence. Being thus valuable, he treated them accordingly. How much is implied in that expression, a "ready scribe"! "Reading," to know the letter. "Marking," to know the meaning. "Inwardly learning and digesting," to know the power. And all together, to acquire the right use—to be "ready" with them whenever called for. A man thus familiar with the "sword of the Spirit" might naturally be expected to further the Spirit's work.

2. *How to speak to men.* Many book-learned men are too bookish for this; and, therefore, not fit for reforming efforts. They can describe their weapons, but not employ them. Ezra, we find, on the contrary, was a man able to persuade men of all ranks and conditions, whether superiors, from whom he asked permission to go (end of vers. 6 and 28), or equals and inferiors, both lay and clerical (ver. 7), whom he persuaded to go with him. Note, however, that this second qualification or attainment was the result of the first, as implied in end of ver. 6, and in what we afterwards read in viii. 17, 18.

III. EZRA'S SPECIAL AMBITION. Unless a man desires an end—unless he strongly desires it, if difficult of attainment—he is never likely to reach it. However favoured by circumstances, however qualified in itself, the locomotive will never go forward without the requisite moving power. This supplied here by Ezra's special ambition. We notice—1. *Its patience.* What is said here (in ver. 9) of the length of his journey from Babylon may help to illustrate this. Also what we read afterwards in the detailed account of that journey, his waiting for the Levites, in ch. viii. 15—20, and subsequent delay for fasting (*ibid.* vers. 21—23). What is worth obtaining is worth waiting for. Perhaps this conviction is, of all necessities, the most necessary for success (James v. 7). 2. *Its depth.* "Ezra prepared his heart." He was deeply earnest as well as patient; could strike as well as endure; and not only bide his time, but use it too. This a rare combination, but most important, in doing good (see Gal. vi. 9; also examples of Jacob, Moses, and Jehoiada, the high priest, in 2 Chron. xxii. 12; xxiii. 1—15). 3. *Its direction.* Those qualifying attainments we have spoken of were his because he had sought them—sought them not only as an end, but as a means also to other ends. How definite and complete the description. "Ezra had prepared his heart, to seek—to do—and to teach." "To teach in Israel statutes and judgments:" there was the summit of his ambition. First to know and "do" it himself: there was the path, in his judgment, that led to that summit (comp. 1 Tim. iv. 12, 16; Titus ii. 7). As the poet has written: "Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way."

Such is the opening portrait of the man whom God had called then to this special calling. We may gather from it some general considerations as to God's preparatory work in such cases. We see, *e. g.*—1. *How far back such work may begin.* In this case of Ezra, *e. g.*, as far back (shall we say?) as Aaron. Certainly before his own birth (comp. Jer. i. 5; Gal. i. 15); and thenceforward, continually, in all his early training and studies, and in all the various hereditary and circumstantial influences that made him finally the man that he was. This especially illustrated in the case of the greatest of all these "sent forth" (Heb. iii. 1). As far back, at least, as the birth of Seth, God was preparing for that of Christ. 2. *How far off such work may begin.* Here, *e. g.*, in Babylon for the benefit of those in Jerusalem. So afterwards at Joppa for Cornelius in Cesarea. So in Egypt in Pharaoh's bed-chamber (Gen. xli.) for the preservation of those then in Canaan. So in Troas for the benefit of Macedonia (Acts xvi. 8, 9); and in Philippi for that of Thyatira (*ibid.* ver. 14; Rev. ii. 18); and in Palestine for the salvation of Ethiopia (Acts viii. 26—39); and, finally, in heaven itself for the good of earth (Luke xix. 10; John iii. 16; 1 Tim. i. 15). 3. *How far in both ways it extends.* Here the good work afterwards done by Ezra at Jerusalem helped to preserve by purifying the nucleus of the whole Jewish dispersion then residing there; and so, afterwards still, the whole dispersion. The dispersion, thus preserved, prepared the way, as we saw before, for the preaching of the gospel to all nations in all parts of the world; which, again, is to prepare for the restoration of Israel to God's favour, and the consequent fulness of blessing to all



mankind (Rom. xi. 12, 15). What an extraordinary power and depth and stretch of influence for good is implied in these words—"Beloved for the fathers' sakes"! And how constantly we see similar influence telling on strange peoples and future generations in the history of the world!

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10.—*The exodus under Ezra.* "After these things," viz., the events which culminated in the dedication of the temple, and consequent ordering of the service of God. "In the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia," after an interval of nearly sixty years, during which the house of the Lord had so fallen into disrepair as to need "beautifying," and the civil state of the children of the restoration had become disordered, and needed readjustment. With these purposes, and with a view to leading back to Judæa another detachment of Israelites, Ezra received a commission from the king. In the text—

I. HE AUTHENTICATES HIMSELF AS THE LEADER OF THIS EXODUS. 1. He evinces his *social qualification*. (1) He announces himself as "the son of Seraiah." This was the high priest who was killed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings xxv. 18, 21). Ezra was not *immediately* his son, for even supposing him to have been born the year of Seraiah's death, that would make him now 122 years of age! The immediate son of Seraiah who went into captivity was Jehozadak (1 Chron. vi. 14, 15). Ezra, therefore, was probably the grandson or great-grandson of Jehozadak, and nephew or grand-nephew to Jeshua, the high priest who accompanied Zerubbabel. By calling himself "the son of Seraiah" he seems to have claimed now to be in some sort his representative. Jeshua was probably deceased. This stepping over intermediate generations has other examples in this list (vers. 1—5), for it only reckons sixteen from Seraiah to Aaron, whereas, according to 1 Chron. vi., there are twenty-two. (2) Lineage is not without religious as well as civil advantages. Sons of Aaron only could officiate as priests. It was of substantial advantage to have descent from Abraham when temporal blessings of the covenant were limited to his seed, for these were not without their relation to the spiritual, though these are limited to the children of his faith. Children of godly persons are generally those who keep up the succession of the Church both in its membership and ministry (see Isa. lxx. 23). 2. He evinces his *moral qualifications*. "He was a ready scribe," &c. (1) This law is distinguished as that "which the Lord God of Israel had given." The solemnities of Sinai and the miracles of the first exodus are here called to mind. Such a glorious authentication can be pleaded in favour of no other system of religion. Buddhism? Hinduism? Confucianism? Mahommedanism? (2) This is the law, therefore, to be studied. Its author, God. Its matter, truth the most sublime. Its spirit, holiness. Its end, heaven. (3) A ready scribe (not a skilful penman only, but an able expounder also) of such a law has the noblest qualifications to be a leader of men. 3. He evinces his *political qualification*. (1) He had the commission of the king. "The king granted him all his request." There was great advantage in this, viz., to influence the Jews to muster, to influence the heathen to aid them. (2) This he had "according to the good hand of the Lord his God upon him." By God's blessing he had wisdom to influence the king. That blessing also disposed the king to listen (ch. vi. 22). Note—God is in everything good; it is our duty to discern this.

II. HE RELATES THE SUCCESS OF HIS UNDERTAKING. 1. In the *muster*. (1) He had "some of the children of Israel." Those who came to his standard were volunteers (see ver. 13). They numbered 1773 adult males, which with a proportionate number of women and children would make 9000 persons. (2) Amongst these were persons of influence. There were "priests and Levites." Of these last some were of the families of the "singers" and of the "porters." (3) There were also Nethinims, descendants of those "whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites" (ch. viii. 20). The limitation of particular functions to families tends to perfect efficiency. The service of God in all its departments should be the most efficient. 2. In the *journey*. (1) Incidents are scantily given. The time occupied

was four months (ver. 9). It appears to have been, at least for the able-bodied, a march; for whence could carriages be procured for the transport of 9000 persons? Amongst the requisites they were provided with they had tents for their encampment (ch. viii. 15). During their pilgrimage their hearts would be in Zion. So the Christian pilgrim on this earth, &c. (2) If incidents are not particularly given, the success of the enterprise is, most emphatically. They "went up from Babylon" and "came to Jerusalem" (vers. 6, 8, 9). Far better go up from the mystic Babylon to the mystic Jerusalem than reverse the journey, as too many do. Ezra had not only the skill to plan an exodus, but also the energy to carry it out. Many a good thought perishes for lack of executive ability. Happy is the coincidence of noble thoughts and noble deeds. 3. In the *blessing of God*. (1) Ezra "sought the law of the Lord." No study more remunerative—more ennobling—more pleasing to God. (2) He sought it in earnest. "Prepared his heart," viz., by raising it above impure prejudices; by seeking the light of the great Inspirer in prayer. (3) He reduced it to practice. He prepared his heart "to do it." Glorious example. His life was therefore righteous, and his influence consequently great—viz., (a) With God. (b) With the king. (c) With the people. (4) And "he taught it to Israel." He taught Israel the "statutes," viz., precepts and "judgments," viz., sanctions (1 Kings vi. 12; Ezek. xi. 12). What a degenerate succession from the noble Ezra were the scribes of our Lord's day! Let us emulate his qualities.—J. A. M.

Vers. 1—10.—*Ezra: his character and work*. The study of human character and of human life is not only an essential part of human knowledge, but of spiritual culture. Biography is a means of grace. We do well to follow in thought the lines along which the noblest of our race have moved: we are thereby attracted toward them, and grow up toward their spiritual stature. We may learn from the life and character of Ezra by considering—

I. WHAT WE KNOW HE WAS AND DID. He was—1. *A priest*, claiming descent, as we see, from Aaron (ver. 5); and we doubt not that he discharged, faithfully and conscientiously, the duties of the priesthood. He was, moreover, what came to be called—2. *A scribe* (ver. 6), i. e. (1) a student, (2) an interpreter, and (3) a copyist of the law. Ezra "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach," &c. (ver. 10). These three functions of the scribe include the three most important duties a man can undertake: viz., (1) his duty to *himself*, in studying the will of God as revealed in his word, that he may have it in his own heart; and, (2) his duty to *his own generation*, in teaching his fellows what he has learned: in interpreting, in "giving the sense" (Neh. viii. 8), in "teaching statutes and judgments" (ver. 10), i. e. in declaring and enforcing the great truths which God had revealed, especially those which affected the duty and the prospects of the Jewish people; and (3) his duty to *his race*, in copying, and thus multiplying and preserving intact the word and the very words of God. Ezra "gave his heart" to this (ver. 10), and the result was that he did it with conspicuous and commanding ability (Neh. viii.). He was a "ready scribe" (ver. 6). 3. *Administrator and reformer*. He conducted the party whom he headed to Jerusalem in peace and safety (ver. 8); there he established himself as leader of the people, and set about the work of reforming abuses with a vigorous hand. His ardour led to a serviceable organisation and reform. He seems also to have been, as few strong-willed men are, a *co-operator with others*. He acted with Nehemiah, the governor, and it may well have been difficult to define strictly their respective offices. 4. *Man of influence* with his fellows. There was that about him, due to the elevation and disinterestedness of his character as well as to the vigour and robustness of his mind, which gave him strange influence with the king, so that he gave him leave to lead out a large return party, and also entrusted him with large powers in the commission. Men who, like Ezra, earnestly seek the will of God and *do* what they know to be right (ver. 10), and lay themselves out for "doing good and communicating" (Heb. xiii. 16), are likely to have power with men. 5. *Man through whom God wrought*. "The hand of the Lord his God was upon him" (vers. 6, 9, &c.). His soul felt the quickening touch of the Divine finger, and it kindled with a sacred glow of piety and zeal. He was moved of God to

attempt great things, and helped of God to achieve them. His life flowed on like a fertilising river, and did so because "all his springs were in God" (Ps. lxxxvii. 7). Our character may contain much that is excellent, and our lives include much that is honourable, but except the "hand of the Lord our God be upon us," renewing our heart and blessing our life, we shall not be or do that which is pleasing to him or useful to our fellows.

II. GENERALLY RECEIVED TRADITION RESPECTING EZRA. It is commonly believed among the Jews that he instituted the Great Synagogue, that he settled the canon of Scripture, that he himself wrote the books of the Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and (perhaps) Esther, and that he established the system of synagogue worship. This last arose about his time, and, if indeed due to him, is a work which laid his countrymen, and indeed us all (for had not the forms of the synagogue something, if not much, to do with the forms of the early Church?), under a heavy debt of gratitude. Ezra was a holy and zealous man, with a strong mind and a firm will, exercising a commanding influence on his contemporaries, making the word of God the basis and mainspring of his action, seeking and striving for the purity of the people of God. Some things he did we know. Others we know not of. We may not be so great and distinguished as he was. It may not be in our power to render such signal services as he did, or to leave behind us such a reputation as he has left. Yet in the essentials of his character and work we may be like him. We also may—(1) Be devout students of God's will as revealed in his word—"preparing our heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it." (2) Open our hearts to receive heavenly influences; gain by humility, docility, and prayer "the hand of the Lord our God upon us," so that he will dwell in us and work through us. (3) Make known the will of God to others, teaching in some sphere, higher or humbler, the word of God and the truth of Jesus Christ. (4) Co-operate cheerfully with others, yielding our preferences to theirs, being "of the same mind in the Lord" with those who are our fellow-labourers in the field of Christian work. And if we do this as did Ezra, we shall, like him, (5) do that which men will mark and praise, but much more that they will not record; much, however, that will not be unwritten in some book of God, and that will "in no wise lose its reward."—C.

Vers. 1—10.—*Ezra the type of an ideal minister.* I. THAT HE IS GENERALLY A MAN OF GOOD MORAL ANCESTRY. "The son of Aaron the chief priest" (ver. 5). Ezra was in the line of a renowned and religious ancestry; the past history of Israel would be full of meaning to him; sacred traditions would inspire him in the present national crisis. It is well for a minister to have in his ancestry men whose lives and activities have been intimately associated with the Church; their holy example will animate him; natural sympathy will stimulate him; the sacred enterprise of his family will inspire him; a blessed heritage will be his. It is a privilege for a minister to be in the line of Aaron, if he continue faithfully in the work of Aaron. The inspiration and influence of a holy ancestry is a rich ministerial endowment.

II. THAT HE IS A MAN OF SELF-SACRIFICING SPIRIT. Ezra left Babylon for Jerusalem. He exchanged the comfort and influence which he enjoyed in the court of Artaxerxes for the hardships of a perilous journey, and for the broken fortunes of Israel. The true minister will ever be ready to leave Babylon for Jerusalem; he will esteem luxury, and even life itself, as subservient to the welfare of the people of God. Christ left a better court than Babylon, and allied himself with sinful men that he might restore their broken hopes. The early disciples left all and followed Christ; the carnal must be sacrificed to the spiritual.

III. THAT HE IS A MAN INTELLIGENTLY TAUGHT IN THE WORD OF GOD. "And he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses" (ver. 6). 1. He intelligently understood the truth. (1) Its divinity. (2) Its obligation. 2. He carefully prepared his moral nature for the reception of the truth. "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord" (ver. 10). 3. He constantly endeavoured to make his conduct an embodiment of the truth. "And to do it" (ver. 10). 4. He wisely recognised the deeper meanings of the truth. "To seek the law of the Lord" 5. He earnestly sought to impart to others a knowledge of the truth. "And to teach in Israel." Thus the true minister will understand the gospel; will prepare his soul by repentance

and prayer for the reception of the gospel in all its entirety; will exhibit the gospel in his daily conduct; will seek the hidden messages of the gospel; and will strive to bring mankind to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.

IV. THAT HE IS A MAN CAPABLE OF ATTACHING MEN TO HIMSELF (ver 7; compare viii. 16, 18). Ezra went not alone to Jerusalem, but succeeded in getting many to accompany him. 1. He awakened sympathy in many of his comrades. 2. He awakened conscience in some of his comrades. 3. He employed appropriate agencies to induce others to join him in the journey (ch. viii. 18). The true minister will employ all rightful means to induce men to walk with him in the ways of a new life to heaven; he will not isolate himself from men, but take them with him by the force of sympathy.

V. THAT HE IS A MAN WHO ENDEAVOURS RIGHTLY TO INFLUENCE THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES. Ezra was evidently on the most friendly terms with Artaxerxes; magistrates and ministers should be in sympathy with each other. The sovereign and the scribe should be mutually helpful; there should be no antagonism between the Church and the state. The true minister will cultivate a judicious co-operation with the "powers that be." Ezra taught the king, hence his knowledge of the God of Israel (ver. 15). It is the office of the minister to instruct men in lofty social station, when they have the opportunity, as well as to aid the poor Israelite. The Church is the best teacher of the state.—E.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Ezra and his mission.* Two generations had elapsed between the close of Ezra vi. and the events with which the final chapters of the book are concerned. The prophetic voice was silent; Haggai and Zechariah had long since passed away. Zerubbabel, the last representative of the house of David, in whose person some had looked for a restoration of the Jewish kingdom, was dead. The high priesthood, which had been filled by the saintly Jeshua, was occupied by Eliashib, who became connected by marriage with two conspicuous enemies of the faith of Israel. His grandson married a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite; he himself "was allied unto Tobiah," to whom he gave a residence "in the courts of the house of God" (Neh. xiii. 4—7, 28). Darius had been succeeded by Xerxes, the story of whose pride, lasciviousness, passion, and feebleness is one of the most ignoble of the records of classic history. He was the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther. We may judge from the book of Esther how unfavourable the times were for carrying on the national and spiritual restoration of Israel. The full extent of the debasement of the settlers in Palestine was not known in Babylon; it broke on both Ezra and Nehemiah with painful surprise (Ezra ix.; Neh. xiii.). But enough was known to awaken concern; he desired "to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." Filled with this pious desire, he obtained permission to go up to Jerusalem.

I. THE CHARACTER OF EZRA. He was a priest, but he was still more a scribe; tradition assigns to him a leading part in the formation of the canon of Jewish Scriptures. The beginning of the study of Hebrew literature belongs to this period; the dignity of the pursuit invested the name "scribe" with honour, changed the mere registrar of documents and chronicler of events into the scholar and teacher. The change of language consequent on the deportation of the Hebrews into Babylon rendered it necessary that some should draw the inspiring record of the past from the obscurity of a dead or dying language, and make the people acquainted with their Divine mission and the duties that mission imposed upon them. Above all, the law of the Lord was the object of Ezra's reverence; he was "a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given;" he "had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do and teach it." The character of Ezra was intimately associated with his vocation: his were the habits of the student; his virtues were not those of the statesman, the warrior, or the priest, but the virtues of the scholar; it was his not to give, but to interpret, laws. 1. The profound piety of the man first strikes us. The precepts of the law were to him "the words of God;" behind the writings he saw the august personal authority of the ever-living Ruler of his people. He lived in awe of his will; he had a deep conviction of the evil of sin against him, so deep that it impressed itself on others; they who sympathised with his purpose were those who "trembled at the words of the God of Israel" (Ezra ix.

4; x. 3). He had a vivid consciousness of his mission, and the nearness of God to him in its fulfilment; again and again he refers his success to "the good hand of his God upon him." 2. Ezra had courage, but it was the courage of the student; not impulsive, but meditative. He knew and feared the dangers of the way; but he knew how to conquer fear (viii. 21—23). He needed to be aroused to effort, and when he was called to action he prepared himself for it by consecration (x. 4, 5). There is a physical, and there is also a moral, courage; that is the most enduring bravery which, knowing of dangers, faces them, trembles but advances, which supplies the lack of impulse by resolve. The "fear of the Lord" casts out all other fear. 3. The sensitive conscience and tender sympathy of the recluse are also his. Contrast his manifestation of feeling with that of Nehemiah when confronted with glaring impiety (ch. ix.; Neh. xiii.). Nehemiah is indignant, Ezra is overwhelmed. Nehemiah "contends," Ezra weeps. Nehemiah curses the transgressors, and smites them, and plucks off their hair, and "makes them" amend; Ezra is prostrate from morning until evening, solemnly intercedes with God on their behalf, and wins the people to concern and repentance. This is the sacrificial spirit, feeling and confessing the sins of others as our own, bearing their transgressions, and recovering them by suffering; it is the lesson of the cross, the Christian spirit. 4. The firmness, even ruthlessness, with which he commands the separation of the husbands from their wives and children also bespeak the man of the study. None have shewn themselves more able to rise above family ties, none have more imperiously demanded this sacrifice from others, than those whose lofty ideal, cherished in the cell, has known none of the abatement which we learn to make in social intercourse. There is room for such men in history, and a work sometimes which none can do so well as they. Here are, unquestionably, the elements of a noble character. Not the only noble type, nor need we inquire if the noblest; enough that his was the character required for the reforms he inaugurated. Nehemiah was not called to do over again the work Ezra did. The style of Nehemiah's record (Neh. xiii. 23—28) indicates a very different state of things from that which Ezra found. This is the true test of the value of a man's character, that he is fit for the work he has to do; the test of his worth is that he does it effectually.

II. THE REFORMATION EZRA BROUGHT. He went up on a twofold errand. His own object was to teach the people "the words of the commandment of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel." Disobedience of these had always been the crying sin of the nation, and had entailed on it its woes (ix. 7); the new favour God had extended to them would be forfeited if they disregarded his laws (ix. 14). And the disobedience that would provoke God might be through ignorance as well as through presumption. A nation perishes through ignorance; the violation of the Divine order brings social disorganisation and ruin, it needs not that the violation be wilful. In the sacrifice offered on his arrival, together with the renewal of consecration—the burnt offering, and the feast of thanksgiving—the peace-offering, there occurs again the touching sin-offering, twelve he-goats are sacrificed to acknowledge and ask pardon for sins of ignorance. In the disordered state of the times it was certain there must have been many defects in the people's service, many errors, many transgressions of which they were not conscious, and these must be confessed. Then he was charged with a double mission from Artaxerxes, the gentle prince at that time reigning over Persia. The furnishing of the temple was to be proceeded with; he was laden with gifts for this purpose (viii. 25—27); he was charged to attend to its service, and empowered to draw from the royal revenues what was needed for a stately ritual (vii. 16, 17, 22). He was also commissioned to set magistrates and judges over the people charged with the administration of Jewish law, and he was empowered to execute it (vii. 25, 26). Artaxerxes knew that the law of the Lord was more than a mere ritual, that it prescribed social customs and regulated the life of the people, and he sympathised with Nehemiah's desire to re-establish its rule. One great reform, however, overshadows all other works of Ezra; when this is recorded the book abruptly closes, as if Ezra's work was done. The story of Ezra's dismay at hearing of the marriages of the Jews with the heathen, and his prompt dissolution of the marriages, is so far removed from the tolerant spirit of modern Christendom that it needs some special observations. 1. These were idolatrous

heathen, not monotheistic heathen like the Persians; they were the heathen of Syria, whose worship was fouled with lust and blood. The term "abominations," as applied to their customs, is no mere outburst of Jewish arrogance; the tolerant modern spirit is revolted by the record. Intermarriage with them meant sharing in their festivals, and exposed the Jews to the utmost peril (cf. Neh. xiii. 26). The past sufferings of the people should have warned them against this new folly; it seemed like provoking God, so soon to forget the past (ix. 6—15). The intermarriage of the people, and especially of the priests, with idolatrous women was unfaithfulness to the purpose for which they had been restored from Babylon; a betrayal of the confidence reposed in them by Cyrus and his successors; a denial of the testimony of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (iv. 3); it argued indifference to their national position, contempt of their Divine calling. 2. The demand for divorce seems inconsistent with Paul's counsel (1 Cor. vii. 14), and the hopeful charity on which it is based; with many of Christ's words, and the spirit of Christ's life; it seems to argue the terror of the separatist rather than the confidence of the strong believer. We must not, however, argue the question from a Christian, but from a Jewish, standpoint; it is as foolish to look into the Old Testament for modern ethics as for modern science. The immense moral force of the gospel renders possible a genial and tolerant spirit which was not possible to an earnest Jew. As a matter of fact, the seductions of idolatry had always proved stronger than the attraction of Judaism; the heathen corrupted the Hebrew, the Hebrew did not convert the heathen. Judaism, with all its signal merits, was not a missionary faith; its office was protest, not evangelisation; the spiritual power of the gospel was not in it—the cross, and resurrection, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The presence of these forces in Christianity is the reason of its tolerant spirit; it moves freely in a world which it has power to change and sanctify; its work is not to protest, but to reclaim; the Son of man came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

Some practical lessons:—1. A lesson of wisdom. Force of character is needed as well as a pure religious faith to render Christian intercourse with the world a safe thing. The stronger will draw the weaker; and it is not always the Christian who is the stronger. "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful, but all things edify not. All things are lawful, but I will not be brought under the power of any." 2. No sacrifice is too great which is needed that we may preserve our spiritual integrity. Natural tastes and faculties—the eye, and hand, and foot; the tenderest ties—father and mother, sister and brother, wife and husband. 3. The true object of toleration. It is that the noblest, holiest influence may prevail. Christian tolerance is not indifference to truth and falsehood, evil and good; it is not a passive grace, a mere easy disposition; it is an intensely active, a missionary grace. It is bent on overcoming evil with good. If it were otherwise, it would neither be fidelity to God nor charity to man.—M.

## EXPOSITION.

THE DECREE OF ARTAXERXES WITH RESPECT TO EZRA (VERS. 11—26). The present decree was of the nature of a *firman* granted to an individual. It embodied, in the first place, a certain number of provisions which were temporary. Of this character were—1. the permission accorded to all Persian subjects of Israelite descent to accompany Ezra to Jerusalem (ver. 13); 2. the commission to Ezra to convey to Jerusalem certain offerings made by the king and his chief courtiers to the God of Israel (vers. 15, 19); 3. the permission given him to convey to Jerusalem the free-will offerings

of Jews and others resident in Babylonia (ver. 16); 4. permission to Ezra to draw on the royal treasury to the amount of a hundred talents of silver, a hundred measures of wheat, a hundred "baths" of wine, a hundred "baths" of oil, and salt to any amount (ver. 22); and, 5. an indefinite commission to "inquire" (ver. 14). Besides these temporary enactments, the decree contained certain provisions of a more permanent nature. 1. Ezra was invested with the chief authority over the whole district "beyond the river," and was commissioned to appoint all the subordinate "magistrates and judges"

(ver. 25). 2. He was authorised to enforce his decisions by the penalties of imprisonment, confiscation of goods, banishment, and even death itself (ver. 26). 3. An exemption from taxation of every kind was granted to all grades of the sacerdotal order—to the priests, the Levites, the singers, the porters, the Nethinim, and the lowest grade of "ministers"—to all, in fact, who were engaged in the performance of any sacred function connected with the temple (ver. 24). This last provision was absolutely permanent, and probably continued in force down to the close of the empire.

Ver. 11.—**The copy of the letter that the king . . . gave to Ezra.** This decree, as already observed, was a private *firman*, one copy of which only was made, which was presented to Ezra, and was his authority for doing certain things himself, and for requiring certain acts of others. **The priest.** This is implied in the genealogy (vers. 1—5), but not directly stated elsewhere by Ezra himself. Nehemiah, however, designates him similarly (viii. 2, 9). His most usual title is the "scribe." **A scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord.** Not so much a writer as an expounder (see above, ver. 10).

Ver. 12.—**Artaxerxes, king of kings.** 'King of kings, *kkshayathiya khshaya-thiyanam*,' an equivalent of the modern *shahinshah*, was a recognised title of the Persian monarchs, and is found in every Persian inscription of any considerable length (Rawlinson, 'Cuneiform Inscriptions of Persia,' vol. i. pp. 195, 271, 279, 287, 292, &c.). It was a title that had been used occasionally, though not at all frequently, by the Assyrian monarchs ('Records of the Past,' vol. iii. p. 41; vol. v. p. 8), and naturally expressed the fact that those monarchs for the most part maintained the native princes on the thrones of the countries which they conquered (see Isa. x. 8). It was less appropriate to the Persians, whose empire was in the main satrapial, but still had a basis of truth to rest upon, since the Persian monarch had always a certain number of tributary kings under him (cf. 'Herod.,' v. 104, 118; viii. 142; Xen., 'Anab.,' i. 2, § 12; 'Hellen.,' iv. 1, §§ 3, 4, &c.). The Parthian kings took the title from the time of Mithridates I.; and from them it passed to the Sassanians, who style themselves *malikan malika*, from first to last, upon their coins. **The God of heaven.** On this favourite Persian expression see comment on ch. i. 2. **Perfect peace.** There is nothing in the Chaldee original in any way corresponding to "peace;" and the participle

*g'mir* (from *g'mar*, "to complete") should be taken with *sdphar*, "scribe," the whole passage being translated as in the margin of the A. V.—"to Ezra the priest, a perfect scribe of the law of the God of heaven." **And at such a time.** Rather, "and so forth," as in ch. iv. 10, 11, 17.

Ver. 13.—**All they of the people of Israel.** The decree of Artaxerxes is as wide in its terms as the proclamation of Cyrus (ch. i. 3), and gives permission not to the Jews only, but to all Israelites of whatever tribe, to accompany Ezra to Jerusalem. That Israelites of all the tribes actually went up to Jerusalem on the occasion seems indicated by the "twelve bullocks for all Israel," which those who returned with Ezra offered on their arrival to the "God of Israel" (see ch. viii. 35).

Ver. 14.—Ezra received his commission from the king, and from his seven counsellors, who thus seem to occupy an important position in the Persian state. They are commonly identified with the "seven princes of Persia and Media," mentioned in Esther (i. 14), "which saw the king's face," and "sate first in the kingdom." A conjecture, which, though not unreasonable, cannot be said to be substantiated, connects the "seven counsellors" with the seven great Persian septs, or families, which had privileges beyond the rest, and among them the right of unrestricted access to the royal presence ('Herod.,' iii. 84). The commission which Ezra received is described in this verse as one to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem; but the subject-matter of the inquiry is not mentioned. He can scarcely have been sent to make inquiry whether the law of Moses was observed or no, since that was certainly not a matter with which the Persian government would concern itself. Probably he was to inquire generally into the material prosperity of the province, and to report thereon.

Ver. 15.—**And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered.** Large sums in specie had in ancient times to be remitted from one country to another *under escort*. The roads were never safe from robbers; and the more considerable the remittance, the greater the danger of its being intercepted. We hear of its being usual to protect the treasure annually remitted to Jerusalem from Babylon in Roman times by an escort of above 20,000 men (see Joseph., 'Ant. Jud.,' xviii. 9, § 1). **The God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem.** No more seems to be meant by "habitation" here than by "house" in ch. i. 2, 3. Artaxerxes does not regard Jehovah as a local God.

Ver. 16.—**All the silver and gold that thou canst find.** Rather, "that thou canst

obtain"—"all that thou canst get my other subjects to give thee." Compare the proclamation of Cyrus (ch. i. 4, 6).

Ver. 17.—**That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, &c.** The primary application of the money sent by Ezra was to be the maintenance of the Jewish ritual in its full splendour (compare the decree of Darius, ch. vi. 9, 10). The residue was, however, to be employed in any way that Ezra, acting under Divine guidance, might direct (see below, ver. 18). Apparently, this residue was actually employed on beautifying the temple (see ver. 27).

Ver. 19.—**The vessels also.** It does not appear that these were sacred vessels belonging to the temple, like those which Cyrus had intrusted to Zerubbabel for restoration to the house of God. Rather, it would seem, they were a part of the voluntary "offering" mentioned in ver. 15, in which they are distinctly included (viii. 25—28). We may perhaps conclude that the vessels sent with Zerubbabel had proved insufficient in number for the great festivals.

Ver. 20.—**Whatever more shall be needed.** Here the terms of the *firman* are very wide indeed, and authorise apparently an unlimited application of the royal revenue, or, at any rate, of the revenue of the province, to any purpose in any way connected with the temple. Probably it was expected that Ezra's own discretion would act as a restraint. If this failed, the royal treasurers would see that the amounts specified in ver. 22 were not exceeded. **The king's treasure-house** is not the royal treasury at Susa, to which the tribute went up from the various provinces, but the local treasury of Judæa or Syria, to which the Jews made their remittances, and on which Ezra was now authorised to draw. Such local treasuries existed of necessity under a satrapial system.

Ver. 22.—**Unto a hundred talents of silver.** At the lowest estimate of the Jewish silver talent, this would be a permission to draw on the royal treasury to the amount of £24,000 sterling. If we adopt the views of Mr. R. S. Poole ('Dict. of the Bible,' Articles, MONEY AND WEIGHTS AND MEASURES), it would authorise drawing to the amount of £40,000. **A hundred measures of wheat.** Literally, "a hundred *cors* of wheat," as given in the margin. The *cor* is variously estimated, at 4½ gallons and at 3½ gallons. It contained ten *baths*. Orders on the treasury for so much wheat, wine, oil, and salt sound strangely in modern ears; but were natural enough in the Persian system, where taxation was partly in kind, and every province had to remit to the court the choicest portion of its produce. Wine, corn, oil, and salt were all of them produced abundantly in Palestine, which was "a land of

corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive, and of honey" (2 Kings xviii. 32), and which, in the region about the Dead Sea, abounded with salt.

Ver. 23.—**Why should there be wrath against the realm?** In the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus there was "wrath against the realm" of Persia in a very dangerous quarter, viz., Egypt. Egypt had revolted from the Persians in B.C. 460, and in the following year, with the assistance of the Athenians, had driven the last Persian out of the country. A vain attempt was made by an embassy to Sparta, towards the close of B.C. 459, to force Athens to recall her troops. In B.C. 458, Artaxerxes' seventh year, it was resolved that a Persian force should attempt the recovery of the revolted country. Artaxerxes gives his *firman* to Ezra when this expedition is preparing to start, and partly alludes to the past "wrath," shown in the success of the rebels, partly deprecates any further visitation. Without pretending to penetrate the Divine counsels, it may be noticed that from the year B.C. 458 things went well for the Persians in Egypt. Memphis was recovered in that year or the next; and in B.C. 455 the Athenians were finally defeated, and the province recovered. **The king and his sons.** This mention of the "sons" of Artaxerxes has been regarded as a proof that the Artaxerxes of Esther was Mnemon, and not Longimanus (Patrick). But it is quite a gratuitous supposition that Longimanus, who had attained to manhood before he ascended the throne, had no sons in the seventh year of his reign. Ultimately he left behind him eighteen sons (Ctesias, 'Exc. Pers.,' § 44).

Ver. 24.—**We certify you.** The use of the plural is curious. Hitherto the king has made every permission and command to rest on his own sole authority (see vers. 12, 13, 21). Now that he reaches the most important point in the whole of his decree—the permanent exemption of a large part of the people from liability to taxation of any kind, his style changes, and he says, "We certify you." Perhaps he speaks in the name of himself and *his successors*; or possibly he means to say that in this matter he has asked and obtained the assent and consent of his council (compare ver. 28). **Or ministers.** Rather, "*and ministers.*" It is generally allowed that the word here translated "ministers" is not applied to the Nethinim, but to that still lower grade of attendants in the sanctuary called "Solomon's servants" in ch. ii. 55—58, and Neh. vii. 57—60. **It shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom upon them.** It may be suspected from this proviso that the Persians exempted from taxation their own (Magian) priests, though



of this there is no other evidence. But they would scarcely have placed a foreign priesthood on a higher level of favour than their own.

Ver. 25.—**And thou, Ezra.** This conclusion would be by itself sufficient to remove the document out of the ordinary category of “decrees” or “edicts,” and to render it, what it is called in ver. 11, *nish-tevan*, “a letter.” **After the wisdom of thy God, that is in thy hand.** *I. e.* “that is in thy possession.” Set **magistrates and judges.** Both the words used are derived from roots signifying “to judge,” and it is difficult to draw any distinction between them. The one translated “magistrates” is that which gives its title to the Book of “Judges.” Which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God. The latter clause is probably intended to be limitative of the former, and to consign to Ezra’s government only the Jewish portion of the population, in which, however, are to be reckoned the proselytes (see comment on ch. vi. 21). **And teach ye them that know them not.** As the other inhabitants of Syria were not Zoroastrians, but idolaters, Ezra was given free permission to spread his religion among them.

Ver. 26.—Finally, to Ezra is intrusted distinctly the civil government of the Jewish people, with power to fine, imprison, banish, or put to death offenders, as he may think right. These powers were always intrusted by the Persians to the civil administrators of provinces, who were autocrats within their respective territories, and responsible to the king alone for the exercise of their authority.

**EZRA’S THANKSGIVING ON RECEIPT OF ARTAXERXES’ LETTER** (ch. vii. 27, 28).

With an abruptness that may appear strange, but which has many parallels in the works of Oriental writers, Ezra passes without a word of explanation from Artaxerxes’ letter to his own thanksgiving upon the receipt of it. Compare the interjectional prayers of Nehemiah (iv. 4; v. 19; vi. 9, 14, &c.).

Ver. 27.—Having concluded the important document, which he has transcribed, and not translated, and which is consequently in the Chaldee dialect, Ezra now resumes the use of the more sacred Hebrew, and henceforth employs it uninterruptedly to the close of his narrative. The form of his thanksgiving a little resembles that of David in 1 Chron. xxix. 10. **The Lord God of our fathers** is an unusual phrase, only elsewhere employed by David (1 Chron. xxix. 18) and Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xx. 6). “God of our fathers” is more common, being found in Deuteronomy (xxvi. 7) and Acts (iii. 13; v. 30), as well as in Chronicles frequently. **Which hath put such a thought as this in the king’s heart.** Compare i. 1 and vi. 22. All thoughts favourable to the Jews are regarded by Ezra as impressed upon the hearts of heathen kings by the direct action of God. **To beautify.** Or “adorn.” Ezra gathers from the general tenor of the king’s letter that the adornment of the temple is his main object (see comment on ver. 17).

Ver. 28.—**Hath extended mercy unto me before the king.** *I. e.* “hath given me favour in the king’s sight”—“hath made him graciously disposed towards me” (see ver. 6). **And his counsellors and . . . princes.** Compare the comment on ver. 14. The “counsellors” and “princes” are the same persons.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 11—26.—*The reformer’s commission.* The insertion here of this decree of Artaxerxes at length, and in its original Chaldee form, is in more or less close keeping with the earlier parts of this book (i. 2—4; iv. 11—16, 17—22; v. 6—17; vi. 3—12); and furnishes an argument, therefore, strongly in favour of the unity of authorship of the whole book. It is also in keeping with the character of Ezra himself. As a special student of God’s written law, he would naturally think much and make much of the very letter of the written decree of those who ruled in God’s name (John xix. 22; Rom. xiii. 1, 2). Turning now to our special subject here, viz., the contents of this document itself, we find them such as to present Ezra to us yet further as the central figure of this last part of the book; and that under two principal aspects, viz., (1) before the king Artaxerxes himself; and, (2) through the king’s orders, before the world.

**I. BEFORE THE KING.** It is evident, from the nature of the case, as also from a comparison of the end of ver. 23 with 27, that this decree was not wholly spontaneous on the part of the king. We also gather from vers. 14 and 28, that when Ezra preferred the “request” spoken of, it was in a special audience of state. There

are several things, therefore, under this aspect that we may note of Ezra at this time. 1. *His courage*. It was never a light thing, and not always a safe thing, for any man, and especially for one of a nation of captives, to stand and speak there (comp. Prov. xvi. 14; Neh. ii. 2; Esther iv. 11, end of ver. 16, &c.). Also, 2. *His faithfulness*. Whence that acknowledgment on the part of this king and his council (ver. 25) of the "wisdom" of Ezra's God; that special respect for the "law" of the same God (vers. 11, 14, 21, 25, 26); also, perhaps, that special acquaintance, as in the case of Darius in ch. vi. 9, of what was required for Jehovah's sacrifices (ver. 22); and that notable fear of his judgments (ver. 23; comp. vi. 10)—except in part, at least, from Ezra's previous words on these points (see also what is said afterwards in ch. viii. 22). These many widely-scattered points of reflected light argue some common source of light of much size and potency. Not a little light had there been from him to them, before so much in so public a manner from them to him. 3. *His patriotism*. Why was all this said and asked? Why so much as this so freely risked? For Jerusalem's and Israel's sake. It was in going to Judah and Jerusalem (ver. 14), and in the welfare of God's people (ver. 25), that he was known to be interested. All that is offered him turns upon this, because all that he requested, and all the arguments by which he had supported his request, had previously turned on it too. It is thus, therefore, that we must think of this Ezra pleading at this time, before those who then ruled the world, on behalf of a captive people, and in the name (to his hearers) of a strange divinity. The history is silent as to what particular occasion led to his doing so (contrast case of Neh. i. 2, 3; ii. 2—5); but the characteristics which enabled him to do so are patent enough. How bold a man, how faithful a witness, how true an Israelite he appears!

II. BEFORE THE WORLD. How great was Ezra's success in thus pleading before Artaxerxes, the decree before us informs us next. That decree was the king's reply to his pleadings. It was the "commission" which he received in consequence. Observe, as such—1. *How exclusive its application*. It is a commission to Ezra in person (see "Artaxerxes unto Ezra" in ver. 12; also beginning of ver. 25; also the repetition of "thee," "thou," and "thy" all throughout). It is addressed, in fact, almost to Ezra alone; certainly to no one else beside him, except as being either appointed by him (ver. 25), or commanded to assist him (ver. 21), or associated with him (ver. 18). It says to him throughout, "Thou art the man." 2. *How weighty its character*. Ezra being, so to speak, its *terminus ad quem*, where, on the other hand, was its *terminus a quo*. Not from any subordinate, but the king (king of kings he calls himself, ver. 12); not even from the king alone, and therefore, possibly, only as an individual and in a private manner, but from "the king and his seven counsellors" (ver. 14)—the "queen in council," as we should say—and therefore, in fact, from all the authority of the Persian empire as represented by such. "All the empire to Ezra." That is the virtual heading of this decree. 3. *How ample its provisions*. Whoever Ezra wished for as a companion (ver. 13), whatever Ezra could find to take before starting (ver. 16), whatever Ezra wished to do (ver. 18), whatever more he might find afterwards to be needful (ver. 20), whatever even, within certain most liberal limits (ver. 22), he might think fit to require (ver. 21)—there was the same injunction about all. Just so he might have, or take, or do, or ordain on his part; and just so others were to do for him upon theirs. 4. *How cordial its spirit*. How was this shown? By the magnitude, cheerfulness, and thoughtfulness of the presents made him (vers. 15, 20); by the "speediness" and "diligence" enjoined both on Ezra himself (ver. 17) and on those who help him (ver. 21), and on all concerned in doing anything for the good of God's house (ver. 23); by the special and, up till then, unexampled exemption from any description of tax secured for every minister of that house, down to the lowest (ver. 24, where observe the "also," as though the king had been thinking how else he could show his good will); by the intelligent sympathy shown in ver. 25 with Ezra's special anxiety to teach all Israel the law of his God; and, finally, by the thorough determination shown in ver. 26 to regard and "speedily" punish all who opposed Ezra in that matter as offenders against the king himself. (Note—"The law of thy God, and the law of the king.") In all these ways does this whole document present Ezra to the world as "the man whom

the king," as the king, "delighted to honour" and help at that time (see Esther vi. 11).

May we not, therefore, learn here—1. *The noblest use of worldly advantages*, viz., to help, either directly or indirectly, in the great work of acquainting men with God and his will, under which we include, of course, his way of salvation, his way of love. Of all the things the various kings of Persia ever did with their wealth and power, what was really wiser and more illustrious than to use them as we read of here? Are not those three names, therefore, in the end of ch. vi. 14 the three greatest of all? Compared to such uses, also, what were Ahab's "ivory house" (1 Kings xxii. 39), and Nebuchadnezzar's "great Babylon" (Dan. iv. 30), or Solomon's "apes and peacocks" (1 Kings x. 22), or all his royal luxuries (Eccl. ii.), or even his deserved reputation for wisdom (*ibid.* end ver. 9), if regarded as anything more than means to a better end, but vanity and vexation? It is one principal part of God's will that his will (*i. e.* his "way," Ps. lxxvii. 2) should be "known upon earth." All else in the world is but transient; but he that helps in making this known doeth that which, like God himself, "abideth for ever" (1 John ii. 17; also Dan. xii. 3). To this, perhaps, may be applied the language of 1 Cor. iii. 9—13. How great a mercy that it is possible for us thus to build for eternity with the things of time! How great an insanity, that being so, to neglect to do it! (See Luke xii. 21; xvi. 9; 1 Tim. vi. 17—19, &c.) 2. *The noblest ideal of human life*, viz., like Ezra here, to devote oneself and all one's days to this "use" (comp. 2 Cor. xii. 15). Who is the true "king" in this passage? Not Artaxerxes, whatever he calls himself (ver. 12); not Artaxerxes, with all his court, nor even with all he does here for God's service through the instrumentality of Ezra; but Ezra himself, as the man whom Artaxerxes and his seven counsellors and his mighty princes are proud to honour and help. What, in fact, is this whole decree, thus regarded, but their homage to him? So true is that ancient saying, "Whose service is perfect freedom;" or, still stronger and truer and more to our present purpose, as we read it in the original Latin—"Cui servire regnare est."

Vers. 27—28.—*The reformer's psalm.* Very abruptly, even in our translation, does this short psalm of praise come in. Still more so in the original, where the writer here passes suddenly from Chaldee to Hebrew; that being, in his case, the natural language of such praise (Ps. cxxxvii. 3). This makes the psalm all the more valuable to us as an index of inward feeling. Carefully studied forms of expression may or may not be the language of the heart. Sudden and unpremeditated expressions, words that escape from the lips before the speaker has had time to attend to their appearance, cannot be anything else. We may take these words, therefore, as giving us a peculiarly life-like picture of Ezra's feelings, both when first receiving this decree of the king, and also when afterwards committing it to writing. Thus seen they teach us specially—1. His true piety; and, 2. His sincere humility.

I. EZRA'S TRUE PIETY. The fact, to begin, of his offering and also recording any such sudden praise to God under the circumstances is some distinction in this direction. Not every one would have done so. "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?" His piety is shown, however, still more—1. *By the subject of his thoughts*, viz., Jehovah himself ("Blessed be the Lord"). Also, Jehovah alone in this sense, others being only referred to either as helping to describe him more accurately (the God of our fathers), or else as being influenced by him for good (the king, &c.), or else as having received blessings from him (Ezra himself). This is a great characteristic of true piety (Ps. xvi. 8, contrasted with x. 4; xiv. 1). God has far the first place in a really good man's thoughts, both in order of time (comp. two tables of Decalogue, and structure of the Lord's prayer) and also in that of importance (Ps. lxxiii. 25; Phil. iii. 8). This also is specially exemplified on all occasions where the heart is much stirred, such as here, *e. g.* in very great joy, or in great temptation (Gen. xxxix. end ver. 9), or in deep sorrow for sin (Ps. li. 4), or in very extreme danger (2 Chron. xviii. 31). In a heart fully under the influence of God's grace (Acts vi. 5; xi. 24), the more deeply that heart is penetrated, the more you discover this to be true. 2. *By the subject of his praise*, viz., first and foremost, that the result of God's special interference in this instance should be for the "beautifying" of God's own house; and next, that "morries" and help should

have been extended to Ezra himself as concerned in bringing about this result. This again, this love for God's house, this joy in all that tends to its prosperity, a great mark of true piety. Observe on this point, in Ps. xxvi., the connection between the declaration of ver. 8 and the prayer and hope of ver. 9. Also the connection, in Heb. x., between the neglect of God's worship or house in ver. 25 and the total forsaking of God himself in ver. 26, &c. In the eyes of God's true servants, every blessing to God's house and people (God's house in the highest sense, 1 Pet. ii. 5) is a blessing to themselves. This feature, also, is the more noticeable here, because in that decree which led to this praise nothing is said, except most indirectly, as to the beautifying of God's house. But Ezra, with his great desire for the good of that house, and his zealous intentions in that direction, perceived with admiration and praise how all the provisions of that decree could and would be used in that manner. To have God worshipped in the proper way was the great desire of his heart. Whatever, therefore, promised to help this on was to him a great joy. So with all who truly love God (see Ps. cxxii. almost throughout, &c., &c.).

II. EZRA'S SINCERE HUMILITY. This also shown here in two ways. 1. *In what he says here of the king.* What Artaxerxes had done was undoubtedly due, under God, in great measure, to Ezra himself. Not every man in the same position would have shown the same happy combination of courage, faithfulness, patriotism, perseverance, patience, and tact. Not every man, having displayed such qualities, and done so much by them, would have passed them all by so completely. Even as the *instrument* employed for doing so much, Ezra entirely passes himself by. "Blessed be the Lord, who by my *instrumentality*," &c. We cannot find even such words in the text. We cannot read them even between the lines. It is the characteristic of pride to search out the highest seats (Matt. xxiii. 6). In this case the highest seat stands empty and ready, and yet is passed by without thought. Of all humility this is, perhaps, the rarest, not even thinking of self. 2. *In what he says of himself.* True humility, for all we have said, is never, however, unnatural. It does not make an effort to forget self; an effort which necessarily fails the more it succeeds. Where it is necessary for any purpose intrusted to us that we should mention ourselves, purposely to avoid doing so is of all ostentation the worst. It is saying, in effect, "Please admire my great humility. Observe how very lowly I am." How different, in this instance, Ezra's mention of himself in ver. 28. There is no pretence of having had nothing to do with the result he joys over. He had been "before the king," &c.; and his being there had been overruled to procure help in this matter; and this was one part, therefore, of the present call on his gratitude; and so, in offering his praise, it could not be omitted. At the same time, it is only mentioned as such—as a reason for praise. "HE hath extended mercy to me before the king. HE enabled me to do what I did. Mine the advantage: be his the praise." So in what Ezra says afterwards as to being strengthened by God's hand (comp. the parallel case of St. Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 10; Eph. iii. 8; 1 Tim. i. 12; and perhaps Jacob, Gen. xxxii. 10). Doubtless there is much humility sometimes in not thinking at all about self. There is equal humility sometimes in simply thinking of oneself as one is (Rom. xii. 3). Why should not the mirror shine when it is shone upon by the sun?

In connection with these characteristics of Ezra we may also observe, in conclusion—1. *The steadiness of his purpose.* With all his spirit of praise, with all his constant reference to God's "hand," and constant dependence on God's power, his was no indolent soul. Rather, by this "good hand" of God upon him, he was the more stirred up in work and encouraged. This is just the spirit of true faith. Does God really "work in me both to will and to do"? Then I will seek myself to work all the more (Phil. ii. 12, 13). Are none of those with me to perish? I will exert myself all the more to save them (Acts xxvii. 24, 31—44). Men reasoning in this way are the kind of men to depend on. None so truly trusty as those who truly trust Christ. 2. *The consequent greatness of his influence.* What a natural issue to all that we have read before is that which we read in the last words of ver. 28! How likely such a man to gather others about him. How likely to gather "chief men," men of character and position like himself. How likely, when gathered, to retain them, so that they should join him in going up. How especially likely, how certain, all this, with the "good hand" of God still on him.

## HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 11.—*The royal and the religious.* I. THE ESTEEM WHICH THE ROYAL HAD FOR THE RELIGIOUS. "Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace" (ver. 12). Ezra had so conducted himself as to win the regard of the king; the king admitted the moral character of Ezra in all its grandeur. The minister must gain the esteem of his comrades before he can influence them for good; piety is attractive, and when rightly manifested will win the esteem even of a heathen king. The enemies of Christ cannot but admire the devout scribe. The Christian is the light of the world, and as such will attract by his moral loveliness.

II. THE INQUIRY WHICH THE ROYAL MADE THROUGH THE RELIGIOUS. "To inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem" (ver. 14). The king sends Ezra on an important commission. 1. *Authoritative.* "Thou art sent of the king and of his seven counselors." The true minister is sent of God to his work. The moral often requires the authority of the civil and political. 2. *Interrogative.* "To inquire." The true minister has many inquiries to make concerning the moral condition of men. 3. *Religious.* The mission of Ezra had chiefly a moral purpose; he was sent to Judah and Jerusalem. Ministerial inquiries must be of a religious character; concerning the work of God. 4. *Regulative.* "According to the law of thy God." Man must measure life by God's law; how Ezra's teaching appears in this decree of the king. It is the duty of the Church to watch over the welfare of the state; this is part of its commission.

III. THE RESOURCE WHICH THE ROYAL INTRUSTED TO THE RELIGIOUS. "And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem" (ver. 15). The king intrusts Ezra with great treasure; religion conduces to honesty and awakens confidence. The true minister will always be faithful to the treasures and trusts of men—monetary, experimental, and moral. The state may safely commit its most sacred interests to the care of the Church.

IV. THE DISCRETION WHICH THE ROYAL PERMITTED TO THE RELIGIOUS. 1. As to amplitude of resource (vers. 18—20). 2. As to judicial arrangements (ver. 25). 3. As to the requirements of God's house (ver. 23). 4. As to exemption from civil duty (ver. 24). The true minister requires and must be allowed full discretionary powers; always subservient to the Divine law. God places great resources at the command of his servants, greater than Artaxerxes had to give.

V. THE PROPITIATION WHICH THE ROYAL SOUGHT FROM THE RELIGIOUS. "For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king" (ver. 23)? The king sought the aid of the scribe in order that he might propitiate an offended Deity. Men seek the spiritual from varied motives; often animated by fear; they little know that God's way is merciful to them. The spiritual often remove national calamity; the true minister will be glad to do all he can to remove the wrath of God from men.—E.

Vers. 11—26.—*Pagan piety.* It is certainly a striking fact that a second Persian monarch should have shown so right a feeling toward the people and the cause of God. We have in this Artaxerxes another illustration of pagan piety. We see—

I. ITS FAITH. "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done," &c. (ver. 23). Evidently Artaxerxes thoroughly believed in the existence and the power of Jehovah. It is noteworthy that he speaks of him not as the God of Judæa or of the Jews, but as "the God of heaven" (vers. 12, 23). Whence this? Chiefly, if not wholly, from what he saw of the Jews about his court; of their strength of conviction, refusing, as they did, to accommodate themselves to the evil ways of the land they lived in—to "do at Rome as Rome did;" of their purity of life; of their probity; of their diligence. Probably Ezra's own character and demeanour exerted a powerful influence on his mind. The captives lived the truth, and the monarch became its subject.

II. ITS FEAR. "Why should there be wrath against the realm of the king," &c.

(ver. 23)? Artaxerxes had at least so much fear of the living God that he desired to propitiate him and to avert his wrath. This is, as it ever was, the chief note of pagan piety. It is a system of propitiating power and averting its anger rather than reverencing goodness and rejoicing in its love. "I will let you go," said the Persian king; "take money, vessels, &c.; levy tributes at the expense of my people, &c. . . sacrifice, pray; for *'why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?'*" Our missionaries continually witness the prevalence of this feeling of dread of the wrath of a higher power and attempts to divert it, as the sum total of pagan piety. Fear is not a false or wrong principle in religion. "Noah, moved with fear, prepared an ark," &c. (Heb. xi. 7). "Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry" (Ps. lxxvi. 7)? But, good so far as it goes, it does not suffice; it must pass on into that which is higher—into reverence, trust, love, obedience.

III. ITS OCCASIONAL EXCELLENCE OF BEHAVIOUR (vers. 13—18; 21, 22, 25). Hardly anything could have been better—indeed, considering the light *and the shade* in which he lived, we may say nothing could have been better—than the king's conduct toward the people of God. He freely gave them up as his subjects (and they were valuable ones) to return to their own land (ver. 13); gave freely himself, and invited his courtiers to give also of their possessions towards the expenses of the exodus (vers. 14, 15); gave full permission to Ezra to get all he could from his own compatriots (ver. 16); gave wise directions as to the use of the treasure, with leave to regulate all things according to the "will of their God" (vers. 17, 18); took measures for the same succours to be granted beyond the river (vers. 21, 22), and charged Ezra with the exercise of political powers, bidding him also discharge his functions as a teacher of the law of God (ver. 25). Thus the pagan king did his best to serve the cause he espoused. "What his hand found to do he did with his might" (Eccles. ix. 10). Much more incumbent is it on us, who live in such brighter light than he, with whom so many shadows have flown away, to work with our whole strength, putting not only our hand, but also our mind and our heart, into any task we undertake for God and for his people. But of this pagan piety we must see—

IV. ITS INSUFFICIENCY. Artaxerxes did well so far as he went; but he did not go far enough. He had faith enough in God to fear him; and fear enough to take some considerable trouble, on one occasion, to avert his displeasure. But he did not yield to him the chief place in his heart. He had not such regard and reverence for God as to put away his superstitions and malpractices. We dare not inquire further into the particulars of his life. True piety is in giving to God, to the Lord Jesus Christ, the *supreme place* in our hearts; making him, not ourselves, the King of kings and Lord of lords (ver. 12), Sovereign of our soul, Lord of our life. Not one fine spurt of zeal, like this of the Persian monarch, but a continuous regal force, uplifting our spirit day by day to heaven, regulating our feelings, controlling our will, shaping and guiding our words and deeds, in all relations and in every sphere—that is the piety which pleases God.—C.

Vers. 11—26.—*Ezra's commission from Artaxerxes.* After giving a general account of the exodus of Israel from Babylon under his leadership, Ezra transcribes the letter of the king of Persia containing his commission. In considering this very remarkable document, we notice—

I. THE GREETING. 1. *The monarch announces himself.* "Artaxerxes king of kings." (1) This, in its perfect sense, is a title of Messiah (see Rev. xvii. 14; xix. 16). He is destined to become the universal monarch (Dan. vii. 14; Rev. xi. 15). Happy will this earth be under the sway of his intelligence and grace (Isa. xxxv.). For any earthly potentate to affect this title, in its full sense, would be at once blasphemous and ridiculous. (2) In a limited sense Artaxerxes was "king of kings." This title was given to the king of Babylon by God himself (see Jer. xxvii. 6—11; Ezek. xxi. 7; Dan. ii. 37). The Persians succeeded to the empire of the Babylonians. (3) Artaxerxes used this title religiously. He acknowledged in it his vast indebtedness to the providence of God. So its equivalent was used by Cyrus (see ch. i. 2). The whole tenor of this letter sustains this view. Glorifying is legitimate

when we glory in the Lord (see Jer. ix. 23, 24; 1 Cor. i. 31). 2. *He addresses his letter*: (1) "Unto Ezra the priest." The emphatic article is used because Ezra stood out prominently amongst the priests of his nation by his many noble qualities. Noble qualities evermore give Christians distinction among their brethren. (2) "A scribe of the law of the God of heaven." The margin, with justice, makes the word "perfect" in the next member of this sentence a part of this, so reading it "a perfect scribe," &c. He calls himself (ver. 11) "a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel." Here is an obvious reference to that great work with which he is credited by the Jews, viz., issuing under Divine inspiration a corrected edition of the more ancient books of Scripture. Ezra rejoiced more in this title than in that of his governorship. Spiritual are vastly more noble than earthly distinctions. (3) "Peace, and at such a time." This form of expression is common in Persian state documents (see ch. iv. 10). The import seems to be that the peace, tranquillity, or happiness which the document is intended to promote may continue to be enjoyed so long as it continues to be, as at present it is, merited. No peace is so blessed or so enduring as that peace of God which passeth understanding.

II. *THE FAVOURS.* Ver. 13, &c. The particulars are—1. *Permission to go up to Jerusalem.* (1) This, in the document, is implied rather than expressed, but yet so implied as not to be mistaken. (2) Ezra was a captive, and could not move without permission. How can slaves of sin escape its wrath without manumission from God? 2. *Permission to the Jews to go up with him.* (1) The different classes of them are specified, viz., priests, Levites, singers, porters, and Nethinims, together with the people of the tribes (vers. 13, 24). (2) This permission was not to be construed into an expulsion. They were free to go or stay (ver. 13). All religious service should be voluntary. 3. *Authority to set things in order in Judæa.* (1) This authority was not to be questioned. It came direct from the crown, and with deliberation, for it is with the advice of the seven counsellors. The names of seven such counsellors may be found in Esther (i. 13, 14). (2) It was authority to *inquire*, viz., into the extent to which disorganisation and demoralisation may have been carried. Then to *adjust*, viz., by appointing faithful magistrates and judges (ver. 25). And if necessary to *punish* the refractory (ver. 26). This power of life and death was withdrawn from Jewish magistrates in after times (see John xviii. 31). The sceptre was then visibly departing from Judah because Shiloh had come. 4. *Authority over the Persian deputies beyond the river.* (1) The powers now described were not limited to Judæa. If the "river" here be the Euphrates rather than the Jordan, which is agreeable to the use of this phrase in Scripture, then the commission of Ezra invested him with very extensive powers. But whatever provinces were comprehended under the expression, there were Persian deputies there (ch. iv. 20; vii. 21). This authority would effectually check opposition from the ancient enemies of the Jews. (2) The treasurers were instructed to furnish Ezra with whatever he might require for the service of God, in silver, wheat, wine, oil, and salt (vers. 21—24). 5. *Commission to carry offerings to God.* (1) "Silver and gold freely offered by the king and his counsellors" (ver. 15). Here was a mark of confidence in the integrity of Ezra! (2) "All the silver and gold" which the people "in the province of Babylon" were willing to confide to him. There never was a time when Gentiles were necessarily excluded from the service of God. Now the partition is broken down. (3) "With the free-will offerings of the people and of the priests," &c., viz., for the provision of sacrifices and offerings daily required in the temple. (4) And from the king's treasure-house vessels to be delivered to the house of God, and whatever else might be needed for his service (vers. 19, 20). Upon review of the whole subject three things strike us, viz.—1. The wonderful accuracy of the knowledge of this heathen king of the religion of the Jews. 2. The largeness of his liberality in the service of the God of heaven. 3. The enlightened judgment which he formed of the true principles of civil government. In these things he is not an unworthy pattern even to Christians.—J. A. M.

Vers. 21—24.—*The decree of Artaxerxes to the treasurers.* Embodied in the letter of the Persian king to Ezra we have certain directions addressed through him

to the treasurers beyond the river. These directions, though emanating from a heathen source, suggest *the principles which should guide liberality in the cause of God*, as to its measure, its spirit, and its reasons.

I. THE MEASURE. 1. This should be *generous*. "Whatsoever Ezra the priest," &c. (1) Provision for the immediate wants of the temple had already been made in the free gifts—viz., from the king, from his counsellors, from his people in the province of Babylon, from the Jews abiding there (see vers. 15—20). (2) This direction was intended to sustain the service in *perpetuity*. Fitful generosity is better than none; but principle, rather than emotion or passion, should guide. The cause of God should not languish for support until men make their wills and die. (3) The ministers of the sanctuary were to be exempted from taxation (ver. 24). The reason is that they were dependent for support upon the gifts of the people; and it is respectful to their sacred office that they should be generously treated. 2. It should *not be reckless*. (1) Here is a prescribed limit. "Unto," &c. (ver. 22). A talent of silver is estimated as equivalent to £400, so here the limit is £40,000. The measure (cor) is estimated at 86 gallons, so here the limit is 8600 gallons of wheat. The bath is seven gallons and five pints, so the limit of wine is 760 gallons. (2) Two things should limit our liberality—viz., (a) The necessity of the case. (b) Our ability. If we give what is not ours we act fraudulently. 3. It should be *religious*. "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven," &c. (ver. 23). (1) The laws of God are reasonable, merciful, just. (2) Therefore if "the scribe of the God of heaven," an inspired man, be he Ezra, Moses, or Paul, in the sacred writings, make demands, these should be respected. (3) But this does not say that uninspired men, because in clerical orders, have any right dogmatically to prescribe to the laity. If there be no sphere for the right of private judgment, there is an end to individual responsibility.

II. THE SPIRIT. 1. *It should be diligent*. "Let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven" (ver. 23). (1) Sacred objects are fittingly called "charities," or objects of *love*. The cause of God in all its departments should be dear to us, and the claims of these will be diligently studied as a labour of love. (2) Pains should be taken so to minister liberality that the maximum of good may be attained. Causes should be "sought out" (Job xxix. 16). Promiscuous relief may encourage deception, and what is given to the worthless is diverted from the worthy. (3) Careless donors are responsible to God for the misery they might have alleviated by the use of diligence. 2. It should be *prompt*. "Let it be done speedily" (ver. 21). (1) This note was rendered necessary by the tardy manner in which things are commonly done in the East. Through this slowness incalculable misery is endured. But "the king's business requires haste." (2) Much more the work of God. This is of the utmost importance. Eternal issues depend upon it. Time is running. Souls are perishing.

III. THE REASONS. 1. It should be *done unto God*. (1) Ezra was to receive from the treasurers what he needed—viz., in his capacity as "the priest" and the "scribe of the law of the God of heaven." What he should need for the temple and the altar. What his learning in the law of God should instruct him was needful to the service of the God of heaven (ver. 23). (2) No higher reason than this can be conceived. 2. *The prosperity of the realm required it*. "For why should wrath be against the realm?" The history of nations shows that as they became haughty against God they suffered adversity. Egypt. Old Canaan. Nineveh. Babylon. (2) Why should not a blessing be upon the realm? Was not the hand of God conspicuous in the prosperity of Persia (see ch. i. 2)? At this very time Longimanus began to be successful against a formidable rebellion in Egypt. 3. *The happiness of the royal family is concerned*. (1) "Why should wrath be against the king?" The reverses of a nation are reverses to the king. But the king, like his subjects, has his individual responsibilities to God. His elevation no more exempts him than their obscurity conceals them from his claims upon the personal homage of intellect and heart. (2) Why should wrath be against the king's "sons"? God has set mankind in families, so "the seed of the righteous is blessed." History also shows how families are ruined by irreligion. The antediluvians. The posterity of Nebuchadnezzar (see Dan. v. 5). Money is a prodigious power for evil



or for good. Those who have it should never cease to pray for grace to use it wisely.—J. A. M.

Vers. 27, 28.—*The extension of the mercy of the covenant.* After recounting the wonderful success of his enterprise, Ezra breaks out into a rapture of gratitude to God. "Blessed be the Lord God," &c. Here—

I. HE ACKNOWLEDGES GOD IN HIS COVENANT CAPACITY. 1. This is expressed in the terms "*God of.*" (1) This is shown in the record of the Sinai covenant (see Deut. xxix. 10—13). Thenceforward Jehovah speaks of himself as the "*God of Israel.*" (2) So in reference to the gospel covenant (see Jer. xxxi. 31—34; Heb. viii. 8). (3) So likewise when all blessings culminate in the bliss of heaven, and the mercy of the covenant is fulfilled (see Rev. xxi. 7). 2. *Covenant relationship subsists in Christ.* (1) There is no covenant relationship with God apart from him. He is the impersonation of promise. He is the depository of the promises (see Rom. xv. 8, 9; 2 Cor. i. 20). (2) Hence he is distinguished as *the covenant* (see Isa. xlii. 6; xlix. 8; Zech. ix. 11). 3. *The promise of the Christ was the establishment of the covenant with the "fathers."* (1) Hence the covenant in the family of Noah was limited to Shem, who was elected to be the progenitor of the promised seed (see Gen. ix. 26). (2) In the family of Shem it was afterwards limited to Abraham for the same reason (see Gen. xvii. 7, 8). (3) In the family of Abraham Ishmael was excluded and Isaac chosen (Gen. xxvi. 24). (4) In the family of Isaac the limitation was to Jacob (Gen. xxx. 13—15). (5) In the family of Jacob the restriction was to Judah (Gen. xlix. 8—10). (6) In the family of Judah the covenant was established with David (Ps. lxxxix. 3, 4; Jer. xxxiii. 19—26). (7) In the line of David the promise was fulfilled with the Virgin Mary (see Luke i. 67—79).

II. HE ASCRIBES HIS SUCCESS TO THE EXTENSION TO HIM OF THE MERCY OF THE COVENANT. 1. *The covenant was not established with Ezra.* (1) He was of the tribe of Levi (see ver. 1—5). Levi was shut out when Judah was chosen. (2) Why then does Ezra speak of the Lord as *his God*? This expression may have reference to the temporal blessings of the covenant which were made over to all the tribes, and embodied in the Law. Thus, as he expresses it—2. *The mercy of the God of his fathers was extended to him.* (1) Temporal blessings are extended to all who have connection with the favoured line. Thus Esau was blessed because he was the seed of Isaac, who had the promise of the holy seed (Gen. xxvii. 39, 40). In like manner Ishmael had temporal blessings because he was the seed of Abraham (Gen. xvii. 20). (2) But the farther back the connection is, the farther off is the person concerned. Hence the Israelites, in general, are spoken of as "*nigh*;" while the Gentiles, some of whom would have to go back as far as Noah before they touched a patriarch with whom the covenant was established, are spoken of as "*afar off*" (Eph. ii. 17). 3. *To this extension of the mercy of the God of the covenant to him he attributes his influence.* (1) The king of Persia, the counsellors, and the mighty princes all felt the influence of his integrity and ingenuity. The people of Israel also felt these influences. So did the "*chief men*" who gathered around him and acted as his lieutenants. (2) But all this influence he traces to God's mercy extended to him. What a rebuke is here to those who *plume themselves* upon their influence or abilities!

III. HE RECOGNISES THE INTERESTS OF THE COVENANT AS THE TRUE REASON FOR THE PERSIAN FAVOUR. 1. *The covenant God put it into the heart of the king.* (1) God does put things into men's hearts. We should see his hand in all the good that is done by rulers and magistrates. (2) In so doing he serves the purposes of his covenant. The measures to which Artaxerxes was prompted were important links in the chain of events which issued in the advent of Messiah. The very "*temple*" which the king "*beautified*" was to become the scene of some of the grandest predicted events (Haggai ii. 5—9; Mal. iii. 1). Consider—2. *How the covenant has moulded history.* (1) Ancient history is preserved to us only in so far as it stood related to the people of the covenant. Persian history is especially interesting in this view. (2) Modern history is no less intimately connected with the people of God. Those nations who have the purest truth of the gospel are the most influential in moulding the politics of the world. No matter how "*far off*" he may be, no man

is so remote from the covenant as not to feel its influence in temporal blessing. Whereas every limitation of the covenant down to the advent of Messiah tended to remove collateral lines further off, now since his coming this tendency is reversed, and he is "lifted up" that he may "draw all men unto him" (see Eph. ii. 13—22).  
—J. A. M.

Vers. 27, 28.—*Aspects of the Divine and human.* I. Aspects of God. "Blessed be the Lord God" (ver. 27). 1. He is blessed by devout men. 2. He is the God of our fathers. 3. He puts good things into the hearts of men.

II. Aspects of MANHOOD (ver. 28). 1. Mercy extended. "And hath extended mercy unto me." 2. Influence augmented. "Before the king and his counsellors." 3. Encouragement imparted. "I was strengthened." 4. Enterprise undertaken. "And I gathered together out of Israel," &c.—E.

Vers. 27, 28; viii. 1—20.—*Influence.* These verses give us the idea of Ezra as a man of great influence over his fellows; one of those men that lead others, that inspire them with confidence and regard; one of those who can make their thoughts and their desires tell powerfully on the mind and the will of others. We see his influence—

I. OVER THE KING AND HIS COURT (ver. 27). He puts it modestly, as becomes a devout man accustomed to refer everything to the Divine hand that governs everywhere, and says that God "extended mercy to him before the king and his counsellors, and all his mighty princes." Putting it into everyday language, we should say that he gained a commanding influence over the minds of these courtly men, and over this great sovereign.

II. OVER THE CHIEFS AND THE MULTITUDE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE (ver. 28). In the same modest and unassuming strain he speaks of being "strengthened as the hand of the Lord was upon him," and he "gathered out of Israel chief men" to avail themselves of the royal decree and go up with him to their own land. In other and more familiar words, he succeeded in winning the confidence and prevailing on the minds of the leading men of his own nation to such an extent that they were willing to forsake their homes and seek their fortune in Judæa. And not only the leaders, but also a large company of the "rank and file" among his compatriots responded to his call; there were "the people" as well as "the priests" (viii. 15).

III. OVER THE UNRESPONSIVE LEVITES (viii. 16—20). When it was found that, for some reason, no Levites had joined the party of the exodus, Ezra picked out "men of understanding" (ver. 16), the right men for the task, and told them what to say, giving them the right message for the purpose (ver. 17), and he thus succeeded in attaching to their company many who had meant to stand aloof, thus completing the number that should go up to Jerusalem (vers. 18—20). Only a man of commanding influence, a man of firm conviction who knew well his own mind, and a man of persuasive force who could impress his will on others, could possibly have accomplished this. On the great and important subject of *influence* there are two truths we shall do well to learn—

1. *That those who find themselves possessed of it bear a weighty responsibility.* In many cases influence comes to a man unsought. (1) Wealth, or (2) rank, or (3) office, or (4) intellectual eminence, or (5) beauty and grace of person, or (6) an exceptionally strong will, or (7) a fascinating disposition, may confer influence on a man or woman, without any effort on their part to acquire it. It is a very great possession. A grave thing it is to be insensibly drawing many souls either along the path of virtue, holiness, and life, or along the path of sin, and shame, and death. Unconscious influence is very far from being irresponsible for what it does. We are most solemnly bound to see to it that such is the spirit of our life, such the colour and complexion of our words and deeds, such the tendency of our conduct, that, without any direct endeavour to do so, we shall be influencing our fellows towards truth, wisdom, God, heaven. Those whom God has made markedly influential are specially bound to consider what they are doing. "They know not what they do" may be a palliation, but it is not a justification, when they might know by

thinking. 2. *That those who would cherish the highest aspiration should strive to win it.* To win wealth or fame or office for the sake of these things themselves is a comparatively mean thing; it does not rise higher than a refined gratification. But to win influence with the view of leading human souls in the path of heavenly wisdom, this is a noble aspiration, worthy of a child of God, of a follower of Jesus Christ. It may be acquired as well as inherited. It is the outcome of excellency of character, of strenuousness of soul, of kindness of heart, of likeness to Jesus Christ.—C.

## EXPOSITION.

THE NUMBER OF THOSE WHO WENT UP TO JERUSALEM WITH EZRA, AND THE NAMES OF THE CHIEF MEN (ch. viii. 1-14). This list is parallel with that of ch. ii. 3-19, and repeats for the most part the same family names, though not quite in the same order. The numbers are in each case very much smaller, never amounting to one-third, and sometimes falling below one-twelfth. At the utmost, three new families are mentioned as furnishing colonists—those of Shechaniah (ver. 5), Shelomith (ver. 10), and Joab (ver. 9); but in two of these cases the reading is doubtful. Altogether, we may say that Ezra was accompanied to Jerusalem by members of the same families as Zerubbabel, but by fewer families, and by fewer members of each. Thus Ezra's list is much shorter than Zerubbabel's. It contains, however, more names of chiefs, eighteen such names being given, whereas in Zerubbabel's list there are, including Zerubbabel himself, only eleven. The entire number of adult male colonists who accompanied Ezra was, including Levites and Nethinim, 1773. Counting five to a family, this would give a total of nearly 9000 souls. Among the chief men, there is no name that is remarkable, excepting that of Hattush. "Hattush, of the sons of Shechaniah," is, beyond all reasonable doubt, the descendant of David mentioned in 1 Chron. iii. 22, who was a son of Shemaiah, and Zerubbabel's great-great-grandson.

Ver. 1.—On the expression **chief of the fathers** see comment on ch. ii. 68.

Ver. 3.—**Of the sons of Shechaniah.** This clause should be attached to the preceding verse, since it refers to Hattush, who was Shechaniah's grandson; and ver. 3 should begin with the words, "Of the sons of Pharosh, Zechariah."

Ver. 5.—A name has fallen out either between "Shechaniah" and "the son of Jahaziel," or between "of the sons" and "of Shechaniah." The Septuagint has,

"Of the sons of Zattu, Shechaniah, the son of Jahaziel." Zattu is mentioned in ch. ii. 8.

Ver. 10.—Here again there is a similar omission of a name, which the Septuagint supplies by reading, "Of the sons of Bani, Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah." Bani appears as the head of a family in ch. ii. 10.

Ver. 13.—**The last sons of Adonikam** are probably his younger sons, whose descendants returned with Ezra, their elder brethren's families having returned with Zerubbabel.

DETAILS OF EZRA'S JOURNEY FROM BABYLON TO JERUSALEM (ch. viii. 15-31). We gather from scattered statements in this passage—1. That Ezra, with his companions, after a journey of nine days' duration, reached Ahava from Babylon on the ninth day of the first month; 2. That he rested three days at Ahava, and proclaimed a fast; 3. That he was there joined by a small number of Levites and a considerable body of Nethinims from the immediate neighbourhood; 4. That, on the twelfth day of the first month, he resumed his journey, and, though threatened by some opposition upon the way, arrived safely at his destination fourteen weeks after he quitted Ahava, and exactly four months after he had started from Babylon. The only other important fact mentioned is, that at Ahava twelve of the principal priests were selected by Ezra, and the royal offering of silver, gold, and vessels handed over to them for safe custody, after having been carefully weighed. The weights are recorded with Ezra's usual exactness in vers. 26, 27.

Ver. 15.—**I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava.** The "river that runneth to Ahava" is now generally identified with the Is of Herodotus (i. 179), a small stream flowing into the Euphrates from the east, at a point where stood a city of the same name, distant (according to Herodotus) *eight* days' journey from Babylon. The city appears to be mentioned under the slightly variant forms of

Ava (אָוָא) and Ivah (אִיבָה) in the Second Book of Kings (xvii. 24; xix. 18). It is called Aia, or Aba, by the LXX.; Ihi in the Talmud; Aei by Isidoro of Charax. The modern name is Hit. The town has always been one of some importance in connection with the bitumen springs of the neighbourhood. Ezra's reason for selecting the place as a halting-point seems to have been the fact that many Jews were settled in the district (see ver. 17). **We abode in tents.** A large caravan, like Ezra's, even when it reached a town, would pitch its tents outside, and remain in them rather than scatter itself among the khans and caravanserais. The phrase is therefore to be understood literally. **I viewed the people.** Rather, "I looked among the people"—I looked to see whether there were any Levites or no. ("Quæsi in populo et in sacerdotibus *defiliis Levi*."—Vulg.) **And found there none of the sons of Levi.** It is difficult to account for the fact; but there seems certainly to have been a special disinclination to return to Jerusalem on the part of the Levites. Only seventy-four went up with Zerubbabel, when the priests who returned were 4289 (ch. ii. 36—40); and now there was not a single one in the whole of Ezra's band. Did the jealous spirit of Korah (Num. xvi. 8—10) still animate the great body of the tribe?

Ver. 17.—**Iddo, the chief at the place Casiphia.** Not "the Caspian" certainly; nor even "Casvin," which is at least 400 miles from Hit by the nearest route, but some Babylonian village in the vicinity of Ahava, not otherwise known to us. **Unto**

**Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims.** The "and" here is rightly supplied. It has fallen out in consequence of the word Iddo ending with the same letter. Iddo, though the head man of the village under the Persians, belonged by descent to the comparatively low grade of the Nethinims.

Ver. 18.—**By the good hand of our God upon us.** This is Ezra's usual mode of acknowledging the good providence and favour of Almighty God (see ch. vii. 6, 9, 27; and ch. viii. 31). Similar expressions occur also in Nehemiah (ii. 8, 18), but not elsewhere in Scripture. **A man of understanding.** In the Hebrew *Ish-sekel*, which some take for a proper name, but without any necessity. No such name is known to have existed; and the real name of "the man of understanding" appears to have been "Sherebiah," who is mentioned more than once in Nehemiah (ch. viii. 7; ix. 4, 5) as a chief Levite. **And Sherebiah** should be simply "Sherebiah." The preposition "and" (Heb. ו) has been inserted by a careless copyist.

Ver. 20.—**The Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed.** We learn this fact from the present passage only; since neither in Kings nor Chronicles is there any mention made of David's adding to the *hieroduli*, or temple servants. It is, however, quite in accordance with his other arrangements that he should have done so. The original Nethinims were the Gibeonites (Josh. ix. 23). **All . . . were expressed by name.** Iddo sent to Ezra a list of the Nethinims, which, however, he does not think it necessary to insert.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—20.—*The rendezvous, or the second muster.* We have been told twice before in this story that Ezra went up from Babylon to Jerusalem (vii. 6—8, 9), and that he did not go by himself. But we only now enter upon the actual details of this second and supplementary expedition. Who were those that went up with him? And what was the nature of the first step which he and they took in common? We may answer these questions in the opposite order. The first step was to meet Ezra at the river or town of Ahava, situated, it is supposed, on the road to Jerusalem *viâ* Carchemish, and far enough off from Babylon to ensure comparative quiet and proper discrimination. Those who came consisted of two principal detachments, one of which came to the spot not only before the other, but in a somewhat different way. We may describe the first detachment as one in which we find the *first last*; the second as being one in which we find the *last first*.

I. THE FIRST LAST. Who might be expected to be foremost in a case of this kind? Where do we find them in actual fact? Let us consider this—1. As to *family*. Judging by all analogy, the family of David, the royal family of Judah, ought to have been foremost in such a matter. Who so likely to feel the evils of captivity as the heirs to a throne? Who so eager to return from banishment (one would suppose) as those who had been banished at once from dignity and from home? The previous return, also, under the edict of Cyrus, seems to bear out this idea. Though no figure there is so prominent as that of Ezra is here, yet the most prominent of all those there mentioned is that of Zerubbabel, the lineal descendant

of David, and representative of his house. Under his Babylonian name of Sheshbazzar he is the only person mentioned by name as returning in ch. i., and he comes first of all in the detailed catalogue of ch. ii. Most probably, also, judging from what we read long afterwards of the descendants of David in Luke ii. 4, the 123 returning "men of Bethlehem" mentioned in Ezra ii. 21 in a later part of the same catalogue were kinsmen of his. In the present instance, on the other hand, we find apparent mention in vers. 2, 3 of only one of this same royal family as returning, viz., Hattush, of the sons of Shechaniah (so, with many, we read these verses. Comp. 1 Chron. iii. 22 and preceding verses). Also we find even this solitary specimen of that royal race only occupying the third place on the list of those named. Whatever the reasons, therefore, this is the fact, that the family first in rank and genealogy appears anything but first here either in importance or position. Is it the beginning of that descent which ends long after with finding David's greatest descendant as a "carpenter's son"? (2) As to *class*. Here, also, judging from analogy, the class to take the lead in a journey to the centre and heart of Jewish worship and faith would be that class to which belonged exclusively, in its various ramifications, the administration of worship. Such, we find, too, in the previous expedition, was the case on the whole. The Levites then, it is true, were not many either in number or in proportion, when all told; but the priests then, though all belonging, apparently, to only four out of the whole twenty-four courses, were very many in proportion. The exact numbers of both (Wordsworth) were 350 Levites and 4200 priests, out of a total of 42,300 Israelites, the priests, therefore, constituting about one-tenth of the whole (Ezra ii. 36—42, 64). A very large proportion, if we bear in mind that the priests represented only one family (that of Aaron) out of two families (those of Aaron and Moses), both sprung from Amram, one of the eight grandsons of Levi; a state of things, it will be easily seen, which would probably make the priests about one-sixteenth of one tribe, instead of being, as in this case, one-tenth of the whole assemblage. In contrast to this, in the present case, though something more than twelve priests, judging from ver. 24, must have been present, only two, exclusive of Ezra himself, were thought worthy of being named (see ver. 2), those who accompanied them (if any really did) being not referred to or even mentioned, as was the case before in ch. ii. 36—39, and as is the case also here as to all the other Israelitish families referred to in vers. 3—14. The case as to the Levites is still more surprising. Not only were none numbered in this first detachment; none at all after three days' search were even to be found (end ver. 15). They were "conspicuous by their absence." Other families of Israelites that had sent up members before were doing the same now (comp. vers. 3—14 with ch. ii. 3 seq.); one such family, apparently, their very last man (ver. 13); but no Levitical family had done anything of the kind. Many lay Israelites, a few priests, no Levites at all. Altogether, this is the most notable feature in this detachment as here reviewed by Ezra (ver. 15), viz., that those who should have been in the van of all are either, as it were, in the rear, or else not present at all.

II. THE LAST FIRST. This will be seen by considering the steps taken by Ezra to remedy the state of things just described. We find that he went (1) to the right quarter, viz., to a place called Casiphia (possibly the "White House," from *keseph*, white), the geography of which is unknown, but which may have been (Wordsworth and others) a kind of college for Levites, or at any rate a place where many dwelt in company with their associates the Nethinims, and under the presidency of one Iddo, either himself perhaps a Levite, or even a Nethinim (comp. "his brethren," ver. 17), of high repute. Also he sent (2) by the right sort of messengers, viz., by a considerable body of them, even eleven well-known men, likely therefore to be of weight. Also by men well qualified, being men accustomed to command ("chief"), and yet prepared to obey ("with commandment"); some of them, further, being accustomed to teach ("men of understanding" = teachers—1 Chron. xv. 22; xxv. 8; Neh. viii. 7, 9, &c., Kiel), yet not unwilling to be taught, and to have words put in their mouth (ver. 17, margin); thus showing, as noticed before, that Ezra understood men as well as books. (3) With the right kind of result. (a) As to number, bringing back 258 pilgrims in all; (b) as to qualifications, all brought back being such "ministers" (ver. 17) as were sought; (c) as to variety, being both Levites and

their assistants; (*d*) as to character, being all men of resolution and purpose, whose "names" (end ver. 20) would be given as those of men whose minds were made up. Also, among these, two especially of much note, viz., Sherebiah and Hashabiah (comp. ver. 24, and Neh. viii. 7; ix. 4; x. 11, 12; xii. 24), the first named especially being a man of such acknowledged judgment and learning that his coming was regarded as a special mark of God's providential goodness (so we understand, with many, begin. ver. 18). Thus conspicuously were the "last first;" thus happily were the vacant places in Ezra's company, as it were, more than supplied—Ezra himself being judge.

In CONCLUSION, we may see here—1. How important religious movements often begin, viz., with the comparatively undistinguished, the rank and file. So with John the Baptist (Matt. xxi. 26), and our Lord himself (Mark xii. 37; John vii. 48). Both cases seem referred to in Matt. xxi. 31, 32. 2. How they are often perfected afterwards, viz., by the coming in then of distinguished persons assuming the lead of the whole. So amongst those baptized by John came Jesus among the last (Luke iii. 21). See, also, in regard to the burial of Christ, how the two "counsellors," Joseph and Nicodemus, then interfered. And, finally, in the preaching of the gospel, how Paul was "born" last and became the first (1 Cor. xv. 8—10; 2 Cor. xi. 5, 23, &c.; Gal. ii. 5, 8). 3. How all so assisting have their peculiar points, both good and evil. Some are to be praised for forwardness (2 Cor. ix. 2), some for steadiness when begun; some to be blamed for backwardness, some for fickleness, as the Galatians. So John is first to reach the sepulchre, Peter first to go in. 4. How perfect the impartiality of the Scriptural record. All this, so little to the credit of the Levites, written by a Levitical hand. Comp. story of Gen. xxxiv., also xlix. 5—7, as recorded by Moses, himself a Levite. 5. How devoutly humble its spirit. Every advantage is attributed to the good hand of our God (1 Cor. xv. 10; Ps. cxv. 1; Phil. ii. 13).

#### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—20.—*The Church preparing itself for duty.* I. THAT IT IS PREPARED BY COMING OUT FROM A HUMILIATING CAPTIVITY. "This is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon" (ver. 1). Ezra and his comrades must quit the scene of their captivity before they can carry the sacred vessels to Jerusalem; the Church must arise and leave its moral Babylon before it can serve God in successful enterprise.

II. THAT IT IS PREPARED BY PRAYERFUL SOLITUDE. "To the river that runneth to Ahava" (ver. 15). 1. Sacred solitude. Not the solitude of the misanthrope. 2. Prayerful solitude. Seeking guidance before setting out for Jerusalem. 3. Thoughtful solitude. Counting the cost of the journey to Jerusalem. 4. Active solitude. Ezra inspected the people and the priests, and finding none of the sons of Levi, successfully sent for them. 5. Friendly solitude. The companionships of heaven were with Ezra and his company by the river. Such solitude cannot fail to prepare the Church for duty.

III. THAT IT IS PREPARED BY THE PROVIDENTIAL GIFT OF TALENT (ver. 18). 1. Talent required. Ezra inspected his company. God requires ability in the work of his Church. Ministers should see that the Church has the requisite capability for its work. 2. Talent varied. "The people, the priests, the Levites." The Church needs combined capabilities; the lower as well as the higher; the Levites as well as the priests. 3. Talent absent. "And found there none of the sons of Levi." 4. Talent sought. Ministers should endeavour to bring talent into the Church. 5. Talent obtained providentially. "And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding." Thus God prepares the Church for duty.

IV. THAT IT IS PREPARED BY THE ENERGY OF ONE DEVOUT MAN. "And I gathered them together" (ver. 15). Who was this man? He was a "ready scribe." He had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord" (ch. vii. 10). Such men are competent to prepare the Church for duty; they have first prepared themselves. 1. The power of sanctified individuality in the Church. 2. The use God makes of a sanctified individuality in the Church. 3. The wisdom of a sanctified individuality in

the Church. It discovers the absent Levites. 4. The authority of a sanctified individuality in the Church. It sends for the Levites and they come.—E.

Vers. 15—20.—*The halt at the Ahava.* The journey of the children of Israel from Babylon to Jerusalem may be viewed, like that of their fathers from Egypt to Canaan, as a type of the pilgrimage of Christians from the abominations and miseries of the sinful world to the purity and happiness of heaven. In this view the halt at the "river that runneth to Ahava" may suggest—

I. THAT WE SHOULD HAVE SEASONS FOR REFLECTION. 1. The halt furnished Ezra with *such a season*. (1) It gave him an opportunity for "viewing the people and the priests." His purpose was to see how the company he conducted would be useful in recruiting the colony at Jerusalem. Christians should consider of what service may they be to the Church of the firstborn in heaven. (2) The value of service is measured by sympathy with its purposes. Therefore we should cultivate fellowship with God and with the purest and noblest of his people. 2. The review discovered to Ezra *a want of Levites in the company*. (1) There were priests there who were Levites. But the priests had functions of their own distinct from those of the Levites who were not of the family of Aaron. (2) There were no Levites who were not priests. These too had their own proper functions. (3) As in Jerusalem there was work for every order of sacred person, so should there be in the Church. So will there be in Jerusalem above. Query—Do we, as Ezra did, reflect upon the needs of God's Church? Is God's cause ours, as it was his?

II. THAT REFLECTION SHOULD LEAD TO ACTION. 1. Ezra resolved upon *a mission*. (1) There were Levites still in Babylon. So are there Christians mingled with the communities of Antichrist. (2) The Levites were congregated at Casiphia. This word comes from a root which denotes *silver*. Some think Casiphia meant the Caspian Mountains, in the silver mines of which these Levites were working. Others construe it to mean *Silver Street*, possibly some bazaar in Babylon in which silver-smiths conducted trade. How characteristic of the sons of Levi to be where precious metals are exchanged! 2. The mission he resolved upon *he organised*. (1) He chose "chief men" for his missionaries. If Providence has given men high social position, its influence should be devoted to the ministry of his message. (2) He also summoned "men of understanding." The world should not so monopolise the talent of our sons that only the refuse, the imbeciles, are given to the Church. There is scope in the message of God for the greatest ability. (3) "Men of understanding" here are not only those of good natural parts, but those who are skilled in the teaching of God's law (Neh. x. 28, 29). 3. He then *instructed his missionaries*. (1) He sent them "with *commandment* unto Iddo, the chief at the place of Casiphia." Calls to the service of God come with authority. Ministers of the gospel are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. v. 20). (2) He sent them with *arguments*. He "put words into their mouths." The import of the words is suggested in the end to be accomplished, viz., "that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of God." Surely the service of God in his house is far more important than the trade in Silver Street.

III. THAT WELL-DIRECTED EFFORT WILL INSURE SUCCESS. 1. The missionaries returned, having gained over *"a man of understanding."* (1) This achievement is put in the forefront. This son of Mahli was evidently a great acquisition to Ezra. (2) A man of understanding is an acquisition to any cause. How valuable to the cause of order is the influence of such an one! 2. *Thirty-eight Levites* are next mentioned. (1) The "man of understanding" is mentioned before Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and Jeshaiiah, with their sons and brethren, perhaps because of the influence he may have exerted in bringing them over. A man is not only valuable for what he is, but for what he does. (2) We have Sherebiah the Levite again mentioned amongst them that made religious confession of God's goodness and their own wickedness (see Neh. ix. 5). 3. Then follow 220 *Nethinims*. (1) Here is an acquisition for which Ezra had not asked. God does for us more than we ask (1 Cor. ii. 9; Eph. iii. 20). (2) All success is from God. Ezra recognised this (ver. 18). Let us follow his good example.—J. A. M.

## EXPOSITION.

Ver. 21.—**Then I proclaimed a fast there.** The right of the civil ruler to “proclaim a fast” was unquestioned among the Jews and Israelites. Jezebel proclaimed one in Ahab’s name when she wished to impress the Jezreelites with the notion that a great crime had been committed. Jehoshaphat did the same when he was invaded by the Ammonites, Moabites, and Meunim (2 Chron. xx. 1—3). A fast was proclaimed in the fifth year of Jehoiakim when the kingdom of Judah was menaced by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. xxxvi. 9). Ezra therefore assumes that he may command one now, in connection with the perils of the coming journey. **That we might afflict ourselves.** The Jews were commanded to “afflict themselves” on the great day of atonement (Lev. xvi. 29), and understood that the affliction was to be mainly by fasting and abstaining from the bath. **To ask of him a right way.** Or “a direct road,” *i. e.* a prosperous and unimpeded journey to Jerusalem. **For us and our little ones.** The colonists went up attended by their families.

Ver. 22.—**I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers.** Before he apprehended danger Ezra had boasted to Artaxerxes of the power and goodness of God, and had spoken of himself and his brethren as assured of the Divine protection. Now that peril threatened he found himself afraid, and would have been glad of such an escort as Nehemiah obtained at a later date (Neh. ii. 9). But after his boasts he was ashamed to confess his fear. Who the **enemy in the way** was it is impossible to decide; but we may gather from ver. 31 that it was no imaginary foe. Probably some of the Arab tribes, who owed no allegiance to Persia, had formed a design to intercept the caravan and plunder it.

Ver. 24.—**Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, &c.** Our translators, following the Vulgate, have omitted to render the preposition *?*, which occurs in the Hebrew text before the name of Sherebiah, and have thus represented Sherebiah and Hashabiah as priests, whereas they were not priests, but Levites, as appears from vers. 18, 19. The true sense is given by the LXX.—“Then I assigned twelve of the chief priests to Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren;” *i. e.* “then I appointed twelve chief priests to act with twelve chief Levites, of whom Sherebiah and Hashabiah were two, in the matter of the royal offering.” Ezra seems to have considered, that as the gift of Artaxerxes was an offering to the house of

God, it ought to be handed over at once to the custody of the ministers of religion, and not remain in secular hands (compare ver. 28).

Ver. 25.—**And weighed unto them the silver, &c.** We may gather from this that the silver and gold were in bars or ingots, and not in coined money. The Persians had coined money at this time, but the Treasury kept the bulk of its stores in bars (Herod., iii. 96).

Ver. 26.—**Six hundred and fifty talents of silver,** according to Mr. Poole’s estimate of the talent, would be nearly a quarter of a million of our money. The annual revenue of Persia was about three and a half millions (Herod., iii. 95). **Of gold an hundred talents.** Rather more than a million of our money.

Ver. 27.—**Twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams** (see comment on ch. ii. 69). The “basons” would be worth about £55 each. **Fine copper, precious as gold.** The metal intended is probably that known to the Romans as *orichalcum*, which is generally believed to have been brass, but which may have been a more complicated amalgam. Being rarely, and perhaps only accidentally, produced, this metal was highly valued.

Ver. 28.—**Ye are holy.** Consecrated to God by their office, the priests and Levites were the fitting custodians of consecrated things.

Ver. 29.—**The chambers of the house of the Lord** are the rooms placed on either side of the main building (see 1 Kings vi. 5), partly as chambers for the priests, partly as store-rooms (see Neh. xiii. 5).

Ver. 31.—**The river of Ahava.** Rather, “the river Ahava,” as in the Vulgate (“*a flumine Ahava*”). The place had probably taken its name from the stream. **The twelfth day of the first month.** Compare ch. vii. 9, and viii. 15, from which it appears that Ahava was reached by Ezra and his company on the ninth day after they left Babylon, which helps to identify Ahava with Is, since Is (according to Herodotus) was eight days’ journey from Babylon (see comment on ver. 15). **God delivered us from . . . such as lay in wait.** The boast of Ezra (ver. 22) was justified by the event. He “trusted in God,” and was “delivered”—how delivered we are not told, but evidently through no “arm of flesh.” The hand of God led him safely through all the perils of the way, and brought him and his companions without loss or damage to the “city of their rest.”

EZRA’S THREE DAYS’ REST AT JERUSALEM,



AND SUBSEQUENT EXECUTION OF THE MORE PRESSING OF THE COMMISSIONS INTRUSTED TO HIM (ch. viii. 32—36). After the fatigues of a four months' journey, a brief period of complete rest was well-nigh necessary. Like Nehemiah (Neh. ii. 11), Ezra was content with a rest of three days. On the fourth he discharged himself of his commission to present to the temple treasury the offerings of the Persian king, his counsellors and lords (ver. 25), together with that spontaneously contributed by the Israelites who had accompanied him (ch. vii. 16). This he did by appearing in person before the priests and Levites who were in charge of the temple, and making over to them the entire offering of gold, silver, and vessels which had been brought to Jerusalem from Babylon. At the same time the exiles whom he had induced to return, and whom he had conducted in safety through so long a journey, sacrificed on the altar of burnt offerings a number of bullocks, rams, lambs, and he-goats, as a token of their thankfulness to God for delivering them from the perils of the way. After this Ezra proceeded to make known to the satraps and other governors of the provinces lying west of the Euphrates the terms of the permanent commission which he had received from the king. The result was that these officials thenceforth helped the Jews instead of hindering them, and furnished the necessary supplies for the temple service.

Ver. 33.—**Meremoth the son of Uriah**, or **Urijah**, was one of the heads of the priestly order, both under Ezra and under Nehemiah. He is mentioned as repairing two pieces of the wall of Jerusalem when Nehemiah was governor (Neh. iii. 4, 21), and also as one of those who set their seal to the covenant with God which the whole people entered into, under Ezra's and Nehemiah's guidance, shortly after the completion of the wall, in B.C. 444. **Eleazar the son of Phinehas** is perhaps the Eleazar mentioned as taking part in the dedication of the wall (Neh. xii. 42). Like Meremoth, he was a priest. **Jozabad and Noadiah**, chief Levites, occur

again in ch. x. 23, and Neh. viii. 7; x. 9; and xii. 3.

Ver. 34.—**By number and by weight.** The gold and the silver were weighed; the vessels were both counted and weighed; the object being to see that what was delivered to Meremoth corresponded exactly with what Ezra had given in charge to Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and others at Ahava (see above, vers. 24—27). **All the weight was written at that time.** Not only were the vessels counted and weighed, but an inventory of them was made by the priests in charge of the temple, and the weight of every vessel noted. Such was the care taken to prevent any embezzlement of the temple property by its custodians.

Ver. 35.—**Also the children of those who had been carried away.** *I. e.* the newly-returned exiles. Like their predecessors under Zerubbabel, who had made an offering for all Israel (ch. vi. 17), so the present colonists under Ezra, assuming that they represented all Israel, offered for the whole nation. The classes of animals offered are the same on the two occasions, and the number of the he-goats is identical; but in every other case the victims are far less numerous now than on the former occasion. This is fully accounted for by the comparatively small number of those who returned under Ezra.

Ver. 36.—**And they delivered the king's commissions.** Parts of Ezra's *firman* concerned vitally the other provincial governors, and had of necessity to be communicated to them. Such were the provisos concerning Ezra's power of drawing upon the provincial treasuries for corn, wine, oil, salt, and money (ch. vii. 22, 23), and concerning the exemption of all ranks of the Jewish sacred order from taxation of any kind whatsoever (*ibid.* ver. 24). **Unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors.** The word translated "lieutenants" is that which corresponds to the Persian term "satrap," and designates the highest class of the Persian provincial governors. That translated "governor" is the term which has been already applied by Ezra to Tatnai (ch. v. 3, 4) and Zerubbabel (ch. vi. 7). It denotes a lower grade of official. They furthered the people. The satraps and lower officials, on being made acquainted with the king's wishes, readily complied with them, and became supporters and favourers of the Jewish people.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 21—30.—**Before starting.** Ezra's body of travellers now duly assembled and organised, what else was required? On the one hand, they were in a condition of much danger. Without being very numerous, they were numerous enough to be

worth attacking while prosecuting their journey. On the other hand, they were in a position of much responsibility, being intrusted with the care of many treasures for God's house. These were the two things Ezra had to see to before they actually moved. The plans he adopted in doing so are very characteristic and instructive, and may be employed to exhibit to us, in the first place, an example of *courage*, and in the second a model of *caution*.

I. EZRA'S COURAGE. As we have partially noted already, the danger was great. The travellers were possessed of some "substance" (ver. 21). They were carrying trust-treasures as well. They were also bound on a route where persons so circumstanced were exceedingly likely to be attacked. At the same time, as a company, they were by no means organised for defence, being little more, in fact, than a large family party, with many women and "little ones" (ver. 21) among them. Almost like Luke x. 3. How natural, in such circumstances, to think of military protection! How readily obtainable, also, such protection in this case! Ezra seems to feel (naturally enough under the terms of his commission, ch. vii. 12—26) that he had only to ask for this to obtain it. Instead, however, of going out of his way at all to obtain it, he rather goes out of his way to avoid it. He turns *from* the king to Jehovah. Refusing to ask at all in the one case, he asks with all his heart in the other, and prepares to go forward armed with nothing whatever but promise and prayer. How conspicuously great, therefore, his courage; more so even than that of David in 1 Sam. xvii. 39, 40, 45; still more so than that of Jacob (Gen. xxxii.), and almost a contrast to Nehemiah (ch. ii. 9). The secret of this was to be found (1) in his confidence in God's power. Whatever the king could do for him in the way of protection, God could do more (comp. Rom. viii. 31; Ps. xx. 7; Ps. xli. 1—3, 7, 11). (2) In his confidence in God's faithfulness. Here was just one of those cases in which God might be expected to exert his great power. His well-known promise (see 2 Chron. xvi. 9) to defend all those who sought him in truth had been openly referred to before the king (see end of ver. 22). If Ezra, in such circumstances, had now asked for an escort, he would have unsaid what he had said already, and put an open reproach on God's truth. On the other hand, if God, when thus appealed to, had not granted his protection, may we not almost say that he would have brought a reproach on himself? It was Ezra's conviction of this being an impossibility which gave him his great courage at this time. But chiefly, perhaps, that courage was due (3) to his confidence in God's mercy. God's protection was ready for those who sought it. Sought it on what terms? Sought it (a) with becoming earnestness, as shown by their "fasting" or turning aside from ordinary pleasures and occupations in order to be wholly occupied in this seeking (comp. Isa. lviii. end ver. 3; Acts xiii. 2). Sought it (b) with proper humility, as shown by their "afflicting" themselves on account of their sins, and not asking this great favour as though they in any way deserved it. Sought it (c) with a profound sense of his goodness, as being One concerned much for the "little ones" (ver. 21; comp. Gen. xxxii. 11; Jonah iv. 11) of his people, and far from unconcerned also even as to their "substance" or temporal welfare at large (comp. Ps. xxxv. 27; Matt. vi. 25, 26, end 32; Luke xii. 7). These were the kind of thoughts which made these companions of Ezra as we find them pictured to us here in ver. 23, viz., with Babylon left behind them, a perilous journey before them, yet all the defence they sought for found in fasting and prayer (see Ps. xxxvi. 7).

II. EZRA'S CAUTION. As we have already intimated, he was in a position now of great trust. The mere money value of the trust was exceedingly large, amounting in silver alone, if we take the talents as Hebrew talents, worth £375 each, to £650 × 375 + £100 × 375. It was also valuable as being contributed by many of the chief personages of Persia (the "king," &c., &c.), and by all the *élite* of Israel in those parts ("all Israel there present"). And it was especially precious as being intended for the most sacred, as then known, of all purposes, "the house of the Lord." It was truly requisite, therefore, for such a steward not only to be "faithful," but to be "found" so (1 Cor. iv. 2; 2 Cor. viii. 20, 21). Accordingly, Ezra took care, first, to transfer the safe-keeping of this precious trust to other hands than his own, thus avoiding all ground for mistrust or possibility of scandal in one important direction. Next, he selected for this purpose, out of the two classes most suitable by office for

such a trust, a company of no fewer (apparently) than twenty-four men (ver 24), taking especial care to have among them two of those last-comers whose coming had been looked upon as so great a gain to them all. Further, all that was intrusted to them he duly and carefully weighed (we are told of this twice) in their presence, and then placed in their hands, evidently accompanied by a correct catalogue of the whole. And, finally, in handing it over, he sought to impress upon them a similar feeling of responsibility to that entertained by himself. "Watch ye and keep" (ver. 29) these treasures. Do so (1) as a matter of principle. Ye yourselves are "holy," persons separated by your own office and by my choice for this work. The treasures, also, are "holy;" the vessels made for God's house, the money a "free-will offering," i. e. something deliberately separated for his service whom we have worshipped so long. Nothing, therefore, can be plainer, nothing more solemn, than this trust. Do so (2) as a matter of prudence. You will be asked for an account of this stewardship; a very exact account ("by weight"), a very public account ("before the chief of the priests," &c., &c.), a very solemn account, viz., in God's own city, in God's own house. Thus anxiously and scrupulously do we see him seeking to avoid any injury, or any occasion of blame, either to others or to himself, in connection with this trust.

From the whole we learn—1. To avoid some common mistakes. Courage is not imprudence. Caution is not cowardice. It was brave conduct on Ezra's part to be afraid of the reproach of unfaithfulness or of bringing shame on God's cause. It was prudent conduct on Ezra's part to neglect human defence for Divine. 2. To make an important distinction. Precaution, in trusting God, is always weakness, generally folly, and sometimes sin. Precaution, in trusting men, even men of God, is none of the three. In such a case it is not unadvisable to associate men in companies so as to be checks and supports to one another (Luke x. 1); and to appeal to comparatively low motives, such as prudence and the fear of detection, and not only to high ones (Luke xii. 1, 2). 3. To recognise the spiritual unity of the Bible. In Ezra we find a man so identified with the "Law" that he has been called a second Moses. Yet the gospel itself could not teach us more than we have learnt here of the freeness of God's mercy. (So comp. Exod. xx. 6, in the very heart of the Decalogue, with the Master's own words in John xiv. 15.)

Vers. 31—36.—*After arriving.* "We departed." "We came." Thus it is that Ezra here relates the rest of his journey, the only thing worthy of note between Ahava and Jerusalem being this, that, through "the good hand of God" upon the travellers, they were kept in safety the whole way. This being acknowledged with a suitable note of thanksgiving, as something remarkable in such a journey (see end of ver. 31), the story goes on to tell us of the first doings of the pilgrims after reaching the place which they had sought and thought of so long. Some of these doings, we shall find, affect their position principally as travellers just arrived; and some have to do with them, on the other hand, rather as residents just admitted.

I. TRAVELLERS JUST ARRIVED. Under this aspect we see them, very naturally, (1) *enjoying their rest.* For the first three days this is all that we are told of them, that they abode or "sat" in Jerusalem for that time (comp. Neh. ii. 11). We can imagine easily what took place: the stir occasioned by their arrival (Ruth i. 19; Matt. xxi. 10); the family inquiries and recognitions; the consequent dispersions and hospitalities; and the final absorption and disappearance of all the newly-arrived within walls. There they would gradually recover from the effects of their long journey, and realise the grateful fact that they were no longer on the march. Those who have been long travelling, or otherwise labouring, in connection with God's service have a kind of right at times to such rest (Mark vi. 30, 31; Acts xxviii. 17), if only with the object of enabling them thereby to do better service in time to come. In the present instance we may well believe that some part of these days of quiet was employed in this way, the result being that "on the fourth day" we see these just-arrived travellers (2) *discharging their trust.* On that day there appears to have been a solemn gathering for this special purpose within the precincts of the temple. Ezra and his twenty-four trustees (ver. 24) would doubtless be on the one side to hand over the treasures; and four representatives of the Jerusalem hierarchy,

two priests and two Levites, are described as being present on the other side to receive them. Very carefully, also, as became the place and the trust, was everything done. All the gifts of every description—"the silver and the gold and the vessels"—were "weighed;" they were weighed by "the hand" of the chief man who had to receive them; they were weighed in the presence of the three others associated with him, and probably also in that of all the chief personages both in Church and state (see ver. 29) at Jerusalem; they were not only weighed in their presence, but also "numbered"—numbered "every one"—as a still further precaution against any error in the past; and then, finally, with a view to their safety for the future, they were "written down," or added formally to the existing catalogue of temple treasures and gifts. So honourably and so completely were these travelling treasurers relieved of their trust. And so happily, therefore, was their journey now terminated, both as to its labours and as to its special cares. Now they were able to rest indeed, both in body and mind.

II. AS RESIDENTS JUST ADMITTED. Their next cares, therefore, were in connection not with their journey, but their arrival. What were the duties devolving on them in connection with the place they had come to? They had some such duties, it is clear, (1) in regard to *God and their brethren*. For example, having been conducted safely, by God's providence, to take up their abode in that place which he had chosen to put his name there, it was very fitting that they should openly declare their consecration to that name. This was represented by those "burnt offerings" of which we are twice informed in this place (ver. 35. See also Lev. i.; 2 Chron. xxix. end 31, and Ps. lxxvi. 13—15, for the connection of devotion or "vows" with burnt offerings, and the various kinds of animals so offered, almost the same as here). In so consecrating themselves, however, they only acted as a portion of that whole consecrated Israel of God to which they belonged. This identification of themselves with the covenant people they appear to have represented by their evidently studied reference in the number of animals offered to the appointed number of the covenant tribes, viz., by offering twelve bullocks, twelve he-goats, and  $8 \times 12$ , or ninety-six rams. Note, also, how it is expressly said of the twelve bullocks that they were offered "for all Israel," and comp. vi. 17, and Numb. vii. 2, &c. For the peculiar number of lambs (seventy-seven) it seems difficult to account, but the mention of the twelve he-goats as being for a "sin offering" was a silent confession on their part of their own need, and of all Israel's need, of propitiation and atonement. In the next place, these three religious duties of consecration, communion, and confession being thus duly attended to, we find them turning to those civil duties which were required by their position; i. e. to their duties (2) in regard to their *earthly ruler and king*. In the discharge of these they handed to the governors and deputy governors (ver. 36) of that part of the Persian empire the orders of Artaxerxes (vii. 21—24). This was done in the proper order. It was certainly true, in their case, that they were Israelites first, and Persian subjects afterwards (see also Matt. xxii. 21). It was also done with proper completeness. To hand these orders of Artaxerxes to his deputies for the purpose of securing the advantages therein specified was to acknowledge, in the fullest manner, both his authority and theirs. It was to confess clearly that the Persian power extended so far. It was to acknowledge the authority of the Persian laws and officials over all souls in that land; and, therefore, to prove themselves not only true Israelites, but loyal subjects too.

CONCLUSION. Let all those who name the name of Christ see from all this—1. *The importance of showing "all good fidelity"* (Titus ii. 10). Before these returned children of the captivity allowed themselves to present their offerings in that house of God which they had travelled so far to visit and to benefit, they made all clear on this other point. We find a somewhat similar spirit in 1 Sam. xii. 3—5; 2 Cor. viii. 20, 21; and may be reminded in two different yet equally instructive ways of Numb. xvi. 15, and Matt. x. 23, 24. 2. *The importance of believing in the necessity of atonement*. Even the burnt offerings of God's own Israel, without the sin offering, would not be acceptable. That which we desire to offer to him must be purified first. But how can it be purified except by the sacrifice of the cross (Heb. ix. 22; x. 10)? 3. *The importance of being good subjects*. We have seen the significance, in this

respect, of the beginning of ver. 36. We may also see the good results thus secured in what is recorded in the end of that verse. It caused those who had the rule in that land to "further" the welfare of God's "people," and the work of God's "house." This is one advantage of honouring the "powers that be" as ordained of God. It causes them, in return, to honour and favour the religion we profess. Just as it is with servants in a household, so is it with subjects in a kingdom; it is thus they may especially "adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour" (Titus ii. 9, 10). Other branches of "politics" may not be forbidden; this is positively enjoined (Rom. xiii. 1, &c.).

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 21—23.—*The fast at the Ahava.* The halt on the banks of the Ahava lasted three days. Ezra lost no time. He viewed his company, and finding no Levites, organised a mission to induce some of them to join him. To the credit of the sons of Levi, strong as was their attachment to the silver of Casiphia, they promptly forsook it in favour of Zion. On the third day the caravan was made up; but before the journey was undertaken Ezra proclaimed a fast. Consider—

I. THE OBJECT. It was to obtain the Divine guidance and protection. 1. The adults needed this *for themselves*. (1) The weight of responsibility rested with them. Duties are claimed from adults which are not required from children: religious, civil. Excuses may be pleaded for infants which would not avail for adults. (2) Where responsibilities are onerous, the greater the need of prayer and fasting. This is not sufficiently considered. Hence the serious blunders, the disasters. 2. They needed it *on behalf of their "little ones."* (1) Any army encumbered with women and children would be at an immense disadvantage in the face of a foe. The claims of natural affection would so distract as to destroy presence of mind, and expose to a more easy prey the very objects of solicitude. (2) This would be so in the highest degree in an army of civilians. How helpless are we in the face of our spiritual adversaries! What need have we for the hand of God upon us for good! 3. They needed it *for the safety of the treasure in their custody.* (1) It was vast in its value (vers. 24—27). The plate alone is estimated at £1,038,600. Then there was the private property, "all the substance," of the whole caravan. (2) It was therefore tempting to the cupidity and rapacity of marauders. These were known to exist. "The enemy in the way." We have to guard our Christian honour, which is of priceless value, against the rapacity of the "enemy in the way." So have we need of fasting and prayer.

II. THE MOTIVE. 1. He was jealous *for the honour of God.* (1) He might have had an escort from the king. He had influence enough at court to have procured this. The safety of the treasure, to which the king himself and his counsellors and princes had so handsomely contributed, would have been a sufficient reason to influence him. (2) But then he had proclaimed to him great principles, viz.—(a) That "the hand of God is upon all them for good that seek him." The king might say, "Why then do you not seek him and trust in him?" May we not say this to ourselves when we are tempted to lean upon an arm of flesh? (b) That "his power and his wrath are against all them that forsake him." The king might reply, "Why then do you not confide your defence to him from those wicked persons who would molest you?" (3) What a testimony to Artaxerxes of their faith in their principles, and of the jealousy of God for his honour, that Ezra did not ask for a military escort, and yet was prospered in his way! 2. He was jealous *for the honour of his people.* (1) The great principles enunciated might be true, and yet the way of the people might be disastrous. In that case it would argue that they did not "seek God," and that, "forsaking" him, they made him their adversary. (2) To prevent this the fast was proclaimed. The "afflicting of the soul" was to express repentance for departures from God, that his wrath might be averted and his favour conciliated. Do we not need this? (3) Prayer was then added to the fasting (ver. 23). Fasting and prayer are naturally associated (see Neh. i. 4; Dan. ix. 3; Matt. xvii. 21).

III. THE ISSUE. 1. "*The Lord was entreated of them.*" (1) Some favourable

sign may have been given them. On another occasion God authenticated his servant Ezra by sending heavy rain to show his anger (see ch. x. 9). Their faith in God would have carried its own evidence. True faith is of Divine inspiration (Col. ii. 12). Therefore it is the subsistence of things hoped for, *i. e.* things hoped for are to genuine faith as certain as though they subsisted. 2. *The success of their journey proved it.* (1) They were "delivered from the hand of the enemy." The enemy was there, but he was restrained by the hand of God upon his people. The lurking foes as well as the avowed enemies were restrained (see ver. 31). (2) They "came to Jerusalem" in safety (ver. 32). Our safe arrival in heaven will be the most glorious proof of the good hand of God upon us. But it would be folly to remain unassured of that good hand upon us until this proof may or may not be given. Until a present assurance be given we should not cease to pray; and if prayer without fasting does not secure it, then let fasting be added unto prayer.—J. A. M.

Vers. 21—23.—*The spiritual and secular aids of life.* I. THE SPIRITUAL NEEDING THE AID OF THE SECULAR. "To require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way" (ver. 22). Ezra was about to conduct his comrades on a perilous journey to Jerusalem; hence he felt the need of a military guard as well as of the good hand of God upon him. The spiritual, as a rule, requires the aid of the secular. 1. Divine truth needs secular aid. As the companions of Ezra would be in danger during this march, so the word of God is often in peril in the world; infidels assail it, and secular aids are necessary to defend it. 2. The Church of God needs secular aid. It is exposed to many enemies on its journey to Jerusalem, and requires the defence of secular agencies—legislative, intellectual, and social. 3. The life interests of the good need secular aid. The good man needs the aid of the physician; his property must be protected, his ships must be insured. True, God loves his own book, his own enterprise, his own people, but it is his method to aid them in the use of means. As a general rule Ezra must employ both horsemen and prayer; prayer and precaution must go together. 4. The moral needs the aid of the secular:—(1) Because God has ordained that the spiritual shall move in the sphere of the secular. The sacred vessels of the sanctuary journey in the desert under the care of man; piety is subject to physical law. (2) Because the spiritual is in danger through the natural antagonism of the sinful heart. Ezra and his companions were endangered by men who wished to frustrate their mission; the carnal hates the spiritual, hence the need of horsemen. (3) Because God has intrusted the spiritual to men as a discipline. The truth of God is put within the power of men that they may be cultured into a right attitude toward it; that they may become "fellow-helpers of the truth."

II. THE SPIRITUAL ACTING WITHOUT THE AID OF THE SECULAR. "For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers." 1. *Why* did Ezra act without the aid of the secular? (1) Because he feared lest he should manifest greater dependence upon the aid of a heathen king than in the God of heaven. Ezra did not wish Artaxerxes to take the place in his enterprise which belonged to God; he had more confidence in his God than he had in his king. There are times in religious life and in moral service when it would be wrong to put any trust in man, when Divine aid may alone be sought. Ezra wanted to show that God was the object of his supreme confidence; that *he* was indeed conducting the sacred vessels to Jerusalem. (2) Because he feared lest he should deprive God of the glory of his own operation. Had Ezra obtained the band of soldiers, they would have concealed the operation of God; Christian workers must not give the glory of the Divine activity and achievement to another, much less to the soldiers of a heathen monarch. (3) Because he feared lest he should seem to compromise Divine truth in the view of the king. Ezra had said to Artaxerxes that "the hand of our God was upon all them for good that seek him;" he feared even in appearance to compromise this statement. (4) Because he feared lest he should substitute a carnal expedient for a spiritual preparation. Secular aids do not often avail in the absence of moral fitness. Soldiers cannot give safety to disobedience. 2. *How* did Ezra act without the aid of the secular? He was not indifferent to the danger to which he might be exposed in marching without the band of soldiers; he did not superstitiously seek to avert it; he did not frantically

rush into it; he religiously braved it. (1) Humility. He humbled himself before God in view of his perilous journey. (2) Supplication. He sought the Divine aid. Thus must we act when we are called upon to reject the secular aids of life. 3. *When* did Ezra act without the aid of the secular? Ezra travelled without the soldiers in an important crisis; it is but seldom that we are called upon to divorce prayer and precaution. 4. *What* moral qualities did Ezra exhibit in thus acting without the aid of the spiritual? It is evident that he was zealous for the honour of God; courageous in sacred toil; devout in daily life; and could act alone when necessary. God answered his confidence by leading him safely to Jerusalem.—E.

Ver. 24.—*The sacred trusts of life.* I. THE TRUST GIVEN. "And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God" (ver. 25). 1. Their nature. As the men appointed by Ezra had costly and sacred vessels committed to their care, so men have given to them money, time, genius, and influence to carry through life. 2. Their purpose (ver. 28). These vessels of gold and silver were given for the use and adornment of the temple at Jerusalem. Men must hold their sacred trusts for God. 3. Their measure (ver. 26). The gold and silver given were carefully weighed; all the capabilities of men are weighed by God: to some he gives two talents, to others five talents; to each man according to his several ability. 4. Their responsibility. The comrades of Ezra had the responsible task of safely conveying the vessels of the temple to Jerusalem; human talent is a solemn gift. 5. Their registration (ver. 34). The gifts of man are written in the book of God.

II. THE FIDELITY REQUIRED. "Watch ye, and keep them" (ver. 29). 1. Their peril. The men conveying the costly vessels of the temple would be exposed to many enemies by the way (ver. 22); men of talent are liable to many moral enemies—pride, indolence, misuse, and neglect of culture. 2. Their safety. The prayers of these men were their protection. Ezra says, "So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us" (ver. 23). Devotion is the safeguard of talent. 3. Their inspection. "Weighed in the house of our God" (ver. 33). At the last God will judge men for the use of their talents; then every man will be morally weighed in the unerring balance of truth. 4. Their fidelity. The comrades of Ezra were faithful to their trust; happy if at the close of life we are found faithful to the trusts we have received.—E.

Vers. 24—30.—*The custody of the treasure.* After fasting and prayer, before the caravan moved from the halt on the banks of the Ahava, Ezra made arrangements for the custody of the offerings with which he was intrusted. Whatever is done under Divine direction is intended to instruct, and in these arrangements we may seek for matter of profitable meditation. Let us then consider—

I. THE TREASURE. The vessels which were for the service of the house of the Lord typified his saints (Acts ix. 15; 2 Tim. ii. 20, 21). 1. The treasure was *various*. (1) Various in its qualities. Some vessels were of silver, some of gold, and some of "fine copper precious as gold." This last the Syriac, somewhat oddly, construes as *best Corinthian brass*, referring to the amalgam, formed by the fusion together of copper, brass, silver, and gold, found by Lucius Mummius after the burning of Corinth. More probably it was some factitious metal (see A. Clarke, *in loc.*). Though all men have the attributes of each, yet these are variously developed. It should be our endeavour so to cultivate our powers that our service should be like gold, of the most valuable kind. (2) Various in its sources. Some of the vessels were the free-will offerings of Jews. Some were from the Gentiles. So whether Jew or Greek now it matters not, for all believers are one in Christ (Matt. viii. 11). 2. The treasure was *precious*. (1) Gold, from its purity and costliness, has ever been taken as a symbol of preciousness. Silver also has the same signification, though in inferior degree. Here also were vessels of a "fine copper precious as gold." (2) But what material substance can compare in value to the human spirit (Isa. xiii. 12)? (a) Immortal. (b) Capable of God (Job xxviii. 19). Redeemed by the Son of God (1 Pet. i. 7). 3. The treasure was *sacred*. (1) It was rendered so by being freely given to God. Having freely given ourselves, we have no right to resume the gift. What an anomalous

position is that of the backslider from God! (2) By virtue of God's acceptance of a gift it becomes holy. When God receives a sinner he sanctifies him by his Spirit. As the Levites and Nethinims kept the vessels of the sanctuary clean, so are all the ordinances of religion designed to keep believers pure. Consider—

II. THE TREASURERS. 1. These were *twelve in number*. (1) This number is sacred in Old Testament Scripture. There were the twelve sons of Jacob, and so the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. xxxv. 22; xlix. 28). According to the number of these tribes were the twelve pillars built by Moses; the twelve stones in the breast-plate of judgment; the twelve stones in the Jordan, and in the altar of Elijah (Exod. xxiv. 4; xxviii. 21; Josh. iv. 8; 1 Kings xviii. 31). So the twelve cakes on the table of shewbread, &c. (Lev. xxiv. 8). (2) This number is no less sacred in the New Testament. Corresponding to the twelve patriarchs we have the twelve apostles (Matt. x. 2). Twelve thrones are to be assigned to the apostles for the judging of the tribes of Israel. Twelve and multiples of twelve are common measures in the Apocalypse in things pertaining to the Lamb (Rev. xii. 1; xxi. 12, 14, 21; xxii. 2). 2. They were *of the chief of the priests*. (1) They had a consecration to God in their birth as sons of Aaron. So ministers of Christ who have the oversight of precious souls should be regenerate persons. (2) They had also a consecration in their official separation. So ministers of Christ must have a vocation from Christ. God assigns special work to special men (see Acts xiii. 2). By this special service they become holy, though they were officially holy already (ver. 28). Every service we faithfully render to him God makes to react upon us with a sanctifying virtue.

III. THEIR DUTIES. 1. They were *duly to estimate the value of their charge*. (1) To impress this upon them, they had all the precious things weighed. (2) The value of the soul cannot thus be estimated, yet it may be considered and pondered until the very spirit of a minister is penetrated with a sense of the magnitude of his responsibility in those over whom he is placed in the Lord. 2. They were *to watch over it*. (1) To see that it was not lost through neglect, or by becoming mixed with other property. Ministerial neglect has resulted in the loss of many a precious soul. (2) To defend it from the cupidity of robbers. These infested the way: some openly, others stealthily. So are souls in danger of encountering those who would rob them of peace. 3. They were *to present it in its integrity in the temple*. (1) Having kept it amidst the dangers of the journey by the blessing of God, the custodians present the treasure in the house of the Lord. It will be a happy thing for ministers if they can as completely fulfil their commission in leading their flock into the better Jerusalem. For parents with their children, &c. (Eph. iv. 11—13). (2) The balances of the sanctuary are true. The actions of all men will there be weighed up. May we not be found wanting in the great day of scrutiny.—J. A. M.

Vers. 24—36.—*Zionwards*. Ezra and the company he had gathered were now fairly on their way homewards, and we may look at them, looking also at ourselves, as—

I. TRAVELLERS TO JERUSALEM. "Then we departed to go unto Jerusalem" (ver. 31). They had come forth from a land of captivity and comparative privation, and were on their way to the land where they would no longer be bondsmen, and where every possible privilege would be theirs to enjoy: they were "going home;" to the land consecrated to their thought by innumerable hallowing associations; to the city whose walls should, to their fond imagining, shut them in to liberty, security, and joy. Onwards we move, we who have left the land of spiritual bondage behind us, to the land of our hope; *our* faces are steadfastly set toward the heavenly Jerusalem. We "seek a city yet to come." Every day we are travelling forward to its open gates; every night we pitch our tent "a day's march nearer" this home on high.

II. GUIDED AND GUARDED OF GOD UPON THE WAY. "The hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy," &c. (ver. 31). In answer to their earnest prayer (ver. 23) and to their humility (ver. 23), God gave them his guidance and guardianship along the road, and whatever enemies may have been near either refrained from attacking them or were easily repelled. In answer to our earnest prayer and our humility, God will be our guide and guardian along the



heavenward way. He will (a) show us the path we should take, saving us from error, and thus from evil, and (b) defend us from our adversaries: (1) those above us—principalities and powers, &c.; (2) those around us—evil men, dangerous fascinations, worldly honours, pleasures of the flesh; (3) those within us—unholy propensities, wayward dispositions, tendencies towards pride, sensuality, selfishness, &c.

III. THOSE CHARGED WITH SACRED TREASURE (vers. 24—30). Ezra put into the hands of some of the priests and Levites very precious treasure—the gold, silver, vessels, &c., which had been contributed for the temple; they, as holy men, were to take charge of the holy things (ver. 28), to watch them and keep them intact, to be prepared to have them weighed when they reached their journey's end (ver. 29). All of us who are spiritual pilgrims are men charged with treasure—some with more than others. All of us have in charge that most valuable treasure—more precious than the precious gold they carried (ver. 27)—*our own spirit*, created in God's likeness to bear his image, to dwell in his glorious presence. Each one of us must sedulously, scrupulously, devoutly watch and keep this unharmed, and be ready to have it "weighed in the balances" of God, not being found wanting then. To some of us—parents, teachers, pastors—God has intrusted the precious treasure of others' souls, and he bids us take earnest heed of them, "watching for them as *those who must give account*," doing our best in every way, publicly and privately, by direct solicitation and by prayer on their behalf, that they may be found whole and blameless "in that day."

IV. AT THE END OF THEIR JOURNEY. They "came to Jerusalem" (ver. 32), and their arrival was marked by three things—(1) judgment (vers. 33, 34), (2) presentation of sacrifice (ver. 35), and (3) kindly reception by those across the river (ver. 36). When we reach the end of our journey we shall find these three things—(1) *Judgment*, for we must all stand at the judgment seat, &c. (2 Cor. v. 10). God will bring every work into judgment (Eccles. xii. 14). (2) The *offering* of no more sacrifices as under the old dispensation, and no more pleading of the one great Sacrifice for sin; no sin offering at all (ver. 35), but the offering of praise and of holy service—of our purified, renewed, perfected selves, whole and without blemish, vessels meet for the Master's use even in the heavenly sanctuary; and (3) *welcome* from those who are there. Those who are on *that side* the river will wait, with outstretched hands, with eager hearts, to receive us to those blessed shores, to lead us into that better land, to introduce us to that country which *has* no temple because it *is* a temple, full of the presence and the glory of the Lord.—C.

Vers. 31—36.—*Progress*. When the treasure was disposed in custody of priests sanctified to watch over it, and the caravan was otherwise ordered, the pilgrims started from the camp of the Ahava *en route* for Jerusalem. As we might expect from the piety which influenced them in their preparations—

I. THEY WERE PROSPERED IN THEIR JOURNEY. 1. *They enjoyed the blessing of their God*. "The hand of our God was upon us." (1) The hand is the symbol of power (Judges i. 35; 2 Sam. xxiv. 14). Appropriately so, since it is the instrument by which commonly we exert our strength. So when the "hand of God" is mentioned his *omnipotence* is supposed (Exod. xv. 6; Ps. xvii. 7). (2) The hand of God "upon" men sometimes denotes his almighty *judgments* (1 Sam. v. 11; 1 Pet. v. 6). "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Sometimes it denotes his all-sufficient *protection* and *defence* (John x. 28, 29). In this good sense it is intended here (see also vers. 18, 22; vii. 9; Neh. ii. 18). (3) The hand of God with his people coming up from Babylon may be likened to the glorious cloud which accompanied their fathers in their exodus from Egypt (see Zech. ii. 9, where "I will turn my hand upon the little ones" denotes the sheltering of the little ones when the sword smites the Great One). 2. *The Divine protection was respected by the enemy*. (1) There was the open "enemy" in the way. There ever were, as to this day there are, bold marauders in the East. Temptations often, with impudent ostentation, attack the Christian pilgrim. (2) There were also "those that lie in wait." There are stealthy as well as sturdy foemen. The brood of the old serpent is legion. Temptations are often most successful when they attack by surprise. (3) But the people were armed with "all prayer." The knowledge of this so over-

awed the enemies that they did not attack. Or else if they did attack they were overwhelmed by the "hand of God." "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

II. THEY ENTERED INTO JERUSALEM WITH JOY. 1. It was *the end of a toilsome march*. (1) The journey occupied four months. They "departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month." They "came to Jerusalem in the fifth month" (vii. 8). It would be a joy to them to have the discomfort of that tedious pilgrimage ended. (2) It will be an inexpressible joy to the Christian pilgrim to end life's toils in the heavenly city. 2. It was *the satisfaction of a cherished hope*. (1) They were "children of captivity," born in Babylon, never having seen Jerusalem. Yet would they not be without the traditions of the glory of their forefathers. The spirit which breathed in Ps. lxxix. and cxxxvii. could not leave them in ignorance of these things. (2) They had also their Scriptures, which associated Zion with the glories of history and of prophecy. Now they were standing in the very place where their fathers had worshipped. In this also they had a pledge of the superior glories of the heavenly Jerusalem. (3) They were relatives of those who had preceded them under the conduct of Zerubbabel. This is evident from a comparison of the catalogues of names (ch. ii. and ch. viii.). Therefore they would have happy recognitions, congratulations, and greetings. If in heaven now there is joy over the repentance of a sinner, what will be the joy of that entrance which shall be ministered abundantly into the kingdom!

III. THEY ABODE IN JERUSALEM IN PEACE. 1. They had *peace in themselves*. (1) This is the happy fruit of fidelity. Tranquillity dwells with integrity. They faithfully delivered up their precious charge. "Now on the fourth day," &c. (vers. 33, 34). (2) The balances of the sanctuary are true, and the weights are just. Sad is the case of him that shall be "found wanting" (see Dan. v. 27). 2. They had *peace with God*. (1) They went the right way to secure this by offering sacrifices (see ver. 35). Christ is our peace. (2) Note—These sacrifices were offered not only for themselves, but also "for all Israel." But "Judah and Benjamin" alone were present, and these only by a representation, for the bulk of the Jews remained on the Babylonish side of the river Euphrates. Query—Is there not here an expression of faith in the ultimate restoration of all Israel (Rom. x. 26)? 3. They had *peace from their neighbours*. (1) This was secured to them, through the good providence of God, by the king's commissions to lieutenants and governors. These documents were probably sealed; but the purport of them is evident from the letter of Artaxerxes (ch. vii. 21—23). (2) No wonder, then, that these lieutenants should "further the people and the house of God." Persecution would cease. "When a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Let us never move without God. Let us ever move with God.—J. A. M.

## § 2. REFORMATION OF RELIGION ACCOMPLISHED BY EZRA AT JERUSALEM.

### EXPOSITION.

#### CHAPTER IX.

In the interval between Zerubbabel's rule and the coming of Ezra from Babylon with a special commission appointing him governor of Judæa, the Jews seem to have been left without any strong controlling authority. The civil administration devolved upon a certain number of chiefs or "princes," who maintained order in Jerusalem, collected and remitted the tribute due to the Persian crown, and held courts to decide all causes, criminal and civil, in which only Jews were concerned. Tranquillity and order were

sufficiently maintained in this way; but the governing power was weak, and in matters outside the range of the civil and criminal law men did pretty nearly "as it seemed good in their own eyes." During this interval, of governmental debility, it appears that a fusion had begun between the Jews and the neighbouring nations. Although the law of Moses distinctly forbade intermarriage between the people of God and the idolatrous nations whose land they had inherited, and by implication forbade such unions with any neighbouring idolaters, the newly-returned Israelites, perhaps not fully provided with

women of their own nation and religion, had taken to themselves wives freely from the idolatrous tribes and nations in their vicinity. They had intermarried with the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Amorites, the Egyptians, and even with the remnant of the Canaanites. Not only had this been done by the common people, but "the hand of the princes and rulers" had been "chief in this trespass" (ch. ix. 2). Nor had even the sacerdotal order kept itself pure. Priests and Levites, nay, the actual sons and nephews of the high priest Jeshua himself, were guilty in the matter (ch. x. 18), had taken to themselves wives of the accursed races, and "mingled themselves with the people of the lands" (ch. ix. 2). The danger to purity of religion was great. Those who married idolatrous wives were tempted, like Solomon, to connive at their introducing unhallowed rites into the holy city; while the issue of such marriages, influenced by their mothers, were apt to prefer heathenism to Judaism, and to fall away from the faith altogether. A fusion of the Jews with the Gentiles in Palestine at this time would have meant a complete obliteration of the Jews, who would have been absorbed and swallowed up in the far larger mass of the heathen without materially affecting it. Thus God's purpose in singling out a "peculiar people" would have been frustrated, and the world left without a regenerating element. Considerations of this kind help us to understand the horror of Ezra when he understood what had taken place (ch. ix. 3—6; x. 1), and enable us to estimate at its right value the zeal that he displayed in putting down the existing practice and establishing a better order of things. His task was lightened to him by the fact that a large religious and patriotic party rallied to him, and associated itself with his reforms; a party including many of the princes and elders (ch. ix. 1; x. 8), and no doubt a certain number of the priests. He effected his reform by means of a commission of laymen (ch. x. 16), which in the space of little more than three months inquired into all the suspected cases, and compelled every person who had married an idolatrous wife to divorce her, and send her back, with any children that she had borne him, to her own people. Thus, *for the time*, the corruption

was effectually checked, the evil rooted out and removed. We shall find, however, in Nehemiah, that it recurred (Neh. xiii. 23), in combination with various other abuses, and had to be once more resisted and repressed by the civil power (*ibid.* ver. 30).

This section is divisible into ten parts:—

1. The complaint made by the princes to Ezra concerning the mixed marriages (ch. ix. 1, 2); 2. Ezra's astonishment and horror (*ibid.* vers. 3, 4); 3. His confession and prayer to God (*ibid.* vers. 5—15); 4. Repentance of the people, and covenant sworn to, on the recommendation of Shechaniah (ch. x. 1—5); 5. Ezra's fast (*ibid.* ver. 6); 6. Proclamation summoning all the Jews to Jerusalem (*ibid.* vers. 7—9); 7. Address of Ezra, and consent of the people to put away the strange wives (*ibid.* vers. 10—14); 8. Opposition of Jonathan and others (*ibid.* ver. 15); 9. Accomplishment of the work (*ibid.* vers. 16, 17); and 10. Names of those who had married strange wives (*ibid.* vers. 18—44).

COMPLAINT OF THE PRINCES TO EZRA (ch. ix. 1, 2). It is remarkable that complaint on a matter of religious transgression should have come from the secular, and not from the ecclesiastical, authorities of the city. But there clearly appears about this time some remissness and connivance at evil, if not even participation in it, on the part of the chief ecclesiastics. On this particular occasion, actual sons and nephews of Jeshua the high priest were among those who had married idolatrous wives (ch. x. 18), and afterwards, in Nehemiah's time, not only did the high priest's family indulge in similar alliances (Neh. xiii. 4, 28), but Eliashib actually assigned to one of the heathen, and one who was a bitter opponent of Nehemiah, a chamber in the temple itself (*ibid.* vers. 5, 9). When the heads of the sacerdotal order were themselves implicated in the abuses prevalent, it was perhaps not unnatural, though highly reprehensible, that the inferior clergy should be silent and stand aloof. By God's good providence, however, it often happens that when things have come to this pass, and the priestly order is hopelessly corrupt, godly princes are raised up to take in hand religious reforms and carry them to a successful issue.

Ver. 1.—*When these things were done.*

It must have been some considerable time afterwards. Ezra reached Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month (ch. vii. 9), rested three days (ch. viii. 32), and on the fourth day of the same month made over the vessels to the temple authorities. It was not till the seventeenth day of the ninth month that, on Ezra's motion, the matter of the mixed marriages was taken in hand (ch. x. 8, 9). Yet we cannot suppose that action was long delayed after the matter came to Ezra's knowledge. **The princes.** The civil heads of the community, whom Ezra found at the head of affairs on his arrival, and whose authority he did not wholly supersede (see ch. x. 14, 16). **The people of the lands.** The idolatrous nations inhabiting the districts adjoining Palestine: Egyptians and Amorites on the south; Moabites and Ammonites on the east; Canaanites probably towards the north and the north-west. **Doing according to their abominations.** Rather, "in respect of their abominations." The complaint was not so much that the Jews had as yet actually adopted idolatrous functions, as that they did not keep themselves wholly aloof from them. The foreign wives would introduce idolatrous rites into their very houses.

Ver. 2.—**The holy seed.** Compare Isa. vi. 13. The "seed of Israel," however much it polluted itself by transgressions, was still "holy" by profession, by call, by obligation, by prophetic announcement. They were "a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Exod. xix. 6); bound to be "separated from all the people that were on the face of the earth" (Exod. xxxiii. 16), and to keep themselves a "peculiar people." When they mingled themselves with the people of the lands, they not only broke a positive command (Deut. vii. 3), but did their best to frustrate God's entire purpose in respect of them, and to render all that he had done for them of no effect. **The hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in the trespass.** "Princes and rulers" are here opposed to people of the middle and lower ranks. The upper classes, whether clerical or lay, had been the chief offenders (see ch. x. 18); and compare the similar defection of Jews of the upper classes in Nehemiah's time (Neh. vi. 17, 18; xiii. 4, 28).

**EZRA'S ASTONISHMENT AND HORROR** (ch. ix. 3, 4). In Babylonia, whence Ezra had come, the inclination to intermarry with the heathen had not, it would seem, shown itself. Exiles in a foreign land naturally cling to each other under their adverse circumstances, and, moreover, being despised by those among whom they sojourn, are not readily accepted by them into social fellowship,

much less into affinity and alliance. Thus the thing was to Ezra a new thing. His familiarity with the Law, and, perhaps we may add, his insight into the grounds upon which the Law upon this point was founded, caused him to view the matter as one of the gravest kind, and to feel shocked and horror-struck at what was told him respecting it. He showed his feelings with the usual openness and *abandon* of an Oriental: first rending both his outer and his inner garments, then tearing his hair and his beard, and finally "sitting down astonished," motionless and speechless, until the time of the evening sacrifice. Such a manifestation of horror and amazement was well calculated to impress and affect the sympathetic and ardent people over whom Providence had placed him.

Ver. 3.—**I rent my garment and my mantle.** Rending the clothes was always, and still is, one of the commonest Oriental modes of showing grief. Reuben rent his clothes when his brothers sold Joseph to the Midianites, and Jacob did the same when he believed that Joseph was dead (Gen. xxxvii. 29, 34). Job "rent his mantle" on learning the death of his sons and daughters (Job i. 20); and his friends "rent every one his mantle" when they "came to mourn with him and comfort him" (Job ii. 11, 12). Rent clothes indicated that a messenger was a messenger of woe (1 Sam. iv. 12; 2 Sam. i. 2), or that a man had heard something that had greatly shocked him, and of which he wished to express his horror (2 Kings xviii. 37; Matt. xxvi. 65). Ezra's action is of this last kind, expressive of horror more than of grief, but perhaps in some degree of grief also. **And plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard.** These are somewhat unusual signs of grief among the Orientals, who were wont to shave the head in great mourning, but seldom tore the hair out by the roots. The practice is not elsewhere mentioned in Scripture, excepting in the apocryphal books (1 Esdr. viii. 71; 2 Esdr. i. 8; Apoc. Esth. iv. 2). **And sat down astonished.** Compare Dan. iv. 19; viii. 27, where the same verb is used in the same sense.

Ver. 4.—**Then were assembled unto me.** The open manifestation by Ezra of his grief and horror produced an immediate effect. A crowd assembled around him, attracted by the unusual sight—partly sympathizing, partly no doubt curious. **Every one came that trembled at the words of the God of Israel;** by which is meant not so much all God-fearing persons (see Isa. lxvi. 2) as all

who were alarmed at the transgression of the commands of God (ch. x. 3), and at the threats which the Law contained against transgressors (Deut. vii. 4). **Because of the transgression of those that had been carried away.** The transgression of "the children of the captivity" (ch. iv. 1)—of those who had been removed to Babylon and had returned under Zerubbabel. **I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.** As morning is the time for business in the East, we may assume that the princes had waited upon Ezra tolerably early in the day—before noon, at any rate—to communicate their intelligence. The evening sacrifice took place at three in the afternoon. Ezra must, therefore, either from the intensity of his own feelings or with the view of impressing the people, have "sat astonished"—speechless and motionless—for several hours.

**EZRA'S CONFESSION AND PRAYER TO GOD** (ch. ix. 5—15). The most remarkable feature of Ezra's confession is the thoroughness with which he identifies himself with his erring countrymen, blushes for their transgressions, and is ashamed for their misconduct. All their sins he appears to consider as his sins, all their disobedience as his disobedience, all their perils as his perils. Another striking feature is his sense of the exceeding sinfulness of the particular sin of the time (see vers. 6, 7, 10). He views it as a "great trespass"—one that "is grown up into the heavens"—which is equivalent to a complete forsaking of God's commandments, and on account of which he and his people "cannot stand before" God. This feeling seems based partly on the nature of the sin itself (ver. 14), but also, and in an especial way, on a strong sense of the ingratitude shown by the people in turning from God so soon after he had forgiven their former sins against him, and allowed them to return from the captivity, rebuild the temple, and re-establish themselves as a nation. If after their deliverance they again fell away, the sin could not but be unpardonable; and the punishment to be expected was a final uprooting and destruction from which there could be no recovery (vers. 13, 14).

**Ver. 5.—At the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness.** The time of sacrifice was the fittest time for prayer, especially for a prayer in which acknowledgment of sin was to form a large part. Sacrifice symbolized expiation; and Ezra probably felt that his supplication would be helped by the expiatory rite which was being performed at

the time. **He rent his garment and his mantle a second time,** as a renewed indication of sorrow, and with the view of impressing the people who "were assembled unto him" (ver. 4) the more, and stirring them up to penitence. "*Segnius irritant animum demissa per aures Quàm quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.*"

**Ver. 6.—I am ashamed and blush.** Jeremiah had complained that in his day those who "committed abominations were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush" (Jer. vi. 15; viii. 12). Ezra, with these words in his thoughts possibly, begins his confession with a protestation that he at any rate is not open to this reproach—he blushes and burns with shame for the sins of his people. **Our iniquities are increased over our head.** *I. e.* have kept on rising like a flood; "gone over our head" (Ps. xxxviii. 4), and overwhelmed us. **And our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.** Has grown to such a height that it has attracted the notice of God, and made him angry with us.

**Ver. 7.—Since the days of our fathers.** The historical sketches in Nehemiah (ix. 6—35) and the Acts (vii. 2—53) show that this phrase might be taken in a very wide sense, and be regarded as including the "fathers" of the nation who came out of Egypt; but perhaps Ezra has rather in his mind the series of idolatries belonging to the *kingly* period, and extending from Solomon to Zedekiah. **We, our kings, and our priests, have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands.** Menahem into the hand of Pul, Pekah of Tiglath-Pileser, Hoshea of Shalmaneser or Sargon, Manasseh of Esarhaddon, Josiah of Pharaoh-Necho, Jehoshaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, of Nebuchadnezzar. That the priests had their full share in the calamities of the captivity appears from 2 Kings xxv. 18; Jer. lii. 24; Ezek. i. 1—3. **And to confusion of face.** *I. e.* To disgrace and shame (compare Ps. xlii. 13—15).

**Ver. 8.—And now for a little space grace hath been showed.** The "little space" must be understood *relatively* to the long enjoyment of Divine favour from Abraham to Zedekiah. It was a space of more than eighty years. **A remnant to escape.** The Hebrew has simply *p'leythah*, "a remnant," the "remnant" being that which had escaped the two dangers of destruction and absorption, and had returned from Babylon to Palestine. **To give us a nail.** "A nail" seems to mean here "a firm and sure abode," as our translators note in the margin.

**Ver. 9.—For we were bondsmen.** Rather, "we are." The Jews had not recovered their independence. They continued to be the subjects of a despotic monarch, and were therefore *'abâdim*, "slaves." All the favour

shown them by the kings of Persia had not changed this fact. To give us a wall. That is to say, "a shelter." The city wall still lay in ruins (see Neh. i. 3; ii. 13, &c.).

Ver. 11.—The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land, &c. These exact words do not occur elsewhere; but the "unclean" and corrupt character of the Canaanitish nations is constantly proclaimed in the Law, and was the sole reason why their land was taken from them and given to the Israelites. On the special character of their "filthiness" and "abominations" see Deut. xii. 2, 3; Levit. xviii. 6—27.

Ver. 12.—Give not your daughters, &c. Here Deut. vii. 3 is plainly referred to, though not verbally quoted. This is the sole place in the Law where the double injunction is given, Exod. xxxiv. 16 referring to the taking of wives only. Nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever. So Moses had enjoined with special reference to the Moabites and Ammonites (Deut. xxiii. 6). With regard to the other idolatrous nations, the exact command was "to make no covenant with them" (Exod. xxxiv. 32; xxxiv. 12), i. e. no terms of peace. Much the same was probably meant by both injunctions. That ye may be strong. See Deut. xi. 8. And eat the good of the land. These words are taken from Isa. i. 19. And leave it for an inheritance, &c. No single passage seems to be referred to here, but the clause embodies the idea found in Deut. xi. 9; Prov. x. 27; Ezek. xxxvii. 25, and elsewhere.

Vers. 13, 14.—After all that is come upon us, &c. After the punishments that we

have suffered, the loss of our independence, of our temple, and our city, the long and weary period of captivity and servitude in a foreign land, which should have bent our stubborn spirits to obedience; and after the mercy shown us in the fact that thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserved, and given us a deliverance, or rather a residue, such as this, which should have stirred us up to gratitude and love, should we again break thy commandments, and fall away, what can we expect but final abandonment, complete and entire destruction? If neither severity nor kindness avail anything, what can God do more? must he not view our case as hopeless, and so make an end of us altogether? (Compare Isa. v. 1—7; Luke xiii. 6—9).

Ver. 15.—Thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped. Righteousness, in its widest sense, includes mercy; and so the meaning here may be, "Thou art good and gracious; of which thy having spared us is a proof;" or *tsaddik* may have its more usual sense of "just," and Ezra may mean to say, "Thou art just, and therefore hast brought us to the low estate in which we are to-day, and made us a mere remnant." We are before thee in our trespasses. We are here, in thy presence; here, before thy holy place (ch. x. 1); sinners, with all our sins upon us, confessing our guilt; for we cannot stand before thee—we cannot boldly stand up and face thee ("Who shall stand in thy sight when Thou art angry?" Ps. lxxvi. 7), because of this our heinous transgression, for which there is no excuse.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*An astounding discovery.* The previous chapter ended with every appearance of peace. The people already at Jerusalem, the new arrivals, the Persian authorities, seemed all of one mind. So far as the house and worship of Jehovah were concerned, and, therefore, so far as the welfare and prosperity of the returned remnant were concerned, there did not appear to be a cloud in the sky. But we have hardly begun this next chapter before we are in the midst of a storm. On the one side we hear the language of agitation and distress. On the other we see the silence of consternation and awe. Rightly to appreciate either we must dwell upon both. Let us ask—(1) What was the origin of this cry of distress; (2) what its exact nature; (3) what its immediate results.

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE CRY. This was traceable, we believe, in large measure, to Ezra's own arrival and influence. He had come to Jerusalem avowedly (see vii. 25) for the purpose of giving instruction, and, where need was, of administering correction, in regard to that Law of Moses which he had studied so well. As we read the story, he had now been something more than three months in the holy city (comp. vii. 9, and x. 8, 9). During that time he certainly had not been silent as to the commands of that Law; but had doubtless both explained and enforced its directions and warnings with a clearness and force that made it in those comparatively bookless days almost a new thing in Jerusalem. Consider all that is implied in this connection in Neh. viii. 8. In the case of many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem this would have a twofold effect. It would at once enlighten their understanding (Rom.

iii. end ver. 20, vii. 7) and arouse their fears (2 Chron. xxxiv. 19—21). In proportion, also, as his work in these respects was made effectual by God's blessing, in the same proportion would they be led to think and feel thus, not only about such open sins as Ezra might denounce by name, but also about any other offences which, from his position as a new-comer or other causes, might be known to themselves, but not to him. Violations of God's law in connection with the peculiar privacy of domestic life in the East would be sins of this kind. It would be very difficult for Ezra, merely by seeing the heads of households in public, to know who might be found connected with them in the women's apartments at home. Nor would he even learn this probably, in many cases, by seeing such men in their homes, as he would seldom, if ever, see the women themselves (see Gen. xviii. 9, and comp. "bring forth" in the margin of ch. x. 3). On the other hand, amongst those who listened to him there would be many who, as resident in Jerusalem from their birth, and not hitherto separated from others as Ezra was by position and character, might be perfectly well aware of what was thus unknown to himself. Such appears to have been the case. Some of his hearers knew of many marriages in Israel at large which they now found from his teaching, or else now felt more strongly than previously, to be contrary to God's law. Such men would naturally begin to speak of these things to others like-minded, and afterwards would resolve with them unitedly on bringing the subject before their teacher. It is thus, apparently, that we find them speaking to him as in vers. 1, 2 of this chapter. Ezra had influenced them to such an extent that they could not help informing him about all (comp. Acts xix. 18). That was clearly the first step. What steps should be taken afterwards they would learn from himself.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THEIR CRY. In their way also of confessing the facts of the case to Ezra there is much to be noticed. We find, for example, that in speaking of the sin of these mixed marriages they acknowledge—1. Its *national bearing*. "The people—the priests and the Levites"—the whole people, *i. e.*, including even those who ought to have been furthest from such a transgression, have been concerned in this evil. Either by example, in short, or else by connivance, we are all guilty in this respect. 2. Its *intrinsic wickedness*. Wherein and why were they bound to be separated from the neighbouring tribes? In respect of the "abominations" practised by them, and because of the exceeding danger to the Israelites themselves of pollution thereby. This may be the reason why they make mention here of three other nations (*viz.*, Ammon, Moab, and Egypt) besides those Canaanitish nations which are expressly mentioned in that part of the Law referred to. In their then present critical and struggling condition there was similar danger to them from these quarters as well (Lange). From all those who "hated God" (see 2 Chron. xix. 2) they rightly felt that they ought to be separated in such times as theirs. 3. Its *deadly character*. Instead of being thus "separated" from these dangerous neighbours, they had become united with them, in many cases, in the most intimate possible way, *viz.*, by admitting the daughters of these idolaters to be the mothers and teachers of the Israel of the future, to the utter corruption in two ways of the "holy seed" (see Isa. vi. 13) of God's people. 4. Its *special aggravations*. The very hands which "bare the sword" (Rom. xiii. 4), and ought to have "restrained" and prevented this evil, were those stained by it most. "The princes and rulers" have been "chief in this trespass."

III. THE IMMEDIATE RESULTS of this unsparing confession. These appear to have been even more serious than the princes had expected. 1. *On Ezra himself*. What depth of grief as evidenced by the violent rending of both his outer and inner garment (vers. 3 and 5), more even than we read of in the case of Job (Job i. 20) after losing all his substance, and all his children as well. What depth of indignation as shown by the sudden injury done to himself, as it were, for being identified with such a nation (comp. somewhat similar case in Neh. xiii. 25). What utter bewilderment and terror, sitting down in silence as one "stunned" and confounded, not knowing, in such circumstances, what to do or even to say. Nay, one had almost said, what despair—so remaining, as in a kind of ecstasy, till all who truly sympathised with him in Jerusalem had heard of his grief and come to him. 2. *On Ezra's friends*. What a picture of them is here presented to us. All "trembling" like

Ezra himself. All silent, like Job's friends, when first they came to him and beheld his grief (Job ii. 13). There are occasions when silence says most. It does so when it proclaims a sorrow to be too overwhelming to allow of speech. In such silence that afternoon passed, till the hour for the evening sacrifice had arrived, and the usual preparations were being made for its solemn observance. But not till that sacrifice spoke to them, as it were, like a voice from heaven was any other voice heard.

See, in conclusion, from this passage—1. How *wide* the grasp of God's law. Even as given in a written form, and with a peculiar minuteness of specification, in the Pentateuch, we see that it was rather a thing of principle than precise enactment. Hence, in one way, its "exceeding breadth" (Ps. cxix. 96), and its applicability, as here, to analogous cases as well as direct ones. Hence, also, the way in which we read of it as being an object of "love" and "delight" (Ps. i. 2; cxix. 97, 113, 165, &c.). Those who love it ask not how little, but how much, it implies. 2. How *subtle* the infection of sin. There is danger even in being witnesses of other men's sins (Ps. cxix. 37). There is almost certain contraction of guilt in anything like intimacy with evil men. Observe on this point the sixfold warning of Prov. iv. 14-16. No privileges, no office, no rank secure exemption from this peril. 3. How *especially destructive* the sins of God's people. What can be said or done for those who "hold the truth in unrighteousness" (see 1 Cor. v. 11)? If it were not, in fact, for the voice of the "sacrifice," the "propitiation" appointed even for such (1 John ii. 1, 2), what must there be for them but despair?

Vers. 5-15.—*A flood of tears.* As we noticed before, and as is here noticed again, the approach of the evening sacrifice seems to have been the first thing which opened Ezra's lips. Speaking to him at last as he sat like a rock (comp. Ps. cv. 41), it was answered immediately by a mingled outburst of confession and tears. Again by outward gesture expressing his sorrow, but not, as before, his indignation, he added now, by falling on his knees and spreading out his hands, the outward tokens of humiliation and prayer. And all that he says we find to be in exact accordance therewith. Unqualified shame; irresistible proof; inexcusable guilt. In these words we have a sufficient key to the nature and order of his thoughts.

I. UNQUALIFIED SHAME. How difficult a thing it is to look on any one to whom we have done wrong. How especially difficult if that other is one to whom we are especially bound to show honour. This was the great trial of the prodigal's case. He had to say to his father, I have sinned before thee (see Isa. i. 2; Mal. i. 6). The same kind of feeling is traceable here. "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God." As one of thy chosen people Israel, how can I look on thee as things are? My own countenance proclaims its shame, its burning shame, if I do. For, indeed, there is cause for shame in this case. There is nothing else, in fact, as things are. Like a man in the waters, when, being above his head, they destroy his life, so are we overwhelmed now with our shame. Like those who have nothing to say to thee because the proof of their guilt is before thee, so are we silenced now by our shame. "Our guiltiness (margin) is grown up into the heavens" (comp. Ps. xc. 8). Altogether this opening confession is like that of Job (ch. xl. 4; xlii. 6). Behold, I am vile, and abhor myself: or, like that of the prodigal, before referred to, "I am not worthy to be called thy son." My very privileges having become my disgrace, what disgrace can be worse?

II. IRRESISTIBLE PROOF. There being nothing perhaps less pleasing to God than to accuse ourselves before him without knowing why, such an extreme confession as the above ought not to be made without sufficient proof. This we have in abundance in the words which come next (vers. 7-12). The sin which Ezra had that day heard of, and which had led him to make this confession, was in every way a reproach. It was so because committed—1. In defiance of God's *judgments*. For similar sin in previous days on the part of their fathers an almost unexampled visitation of judgment had come on them as a nation. Though a people sacred to Jehovah, he had handed them over in consequence, together with their "kings and priests," the most sacred classes among them (2 Sam. i. 14, end 21; Ps. cvi. 16; Lam. iv. 20), into the hands of their foes. Loss of life, or liberty, or substance—in the best case loss of



respect—had been the result (see end ver. 7). Even to that “day,” in fact (*ibid.*), this “confusion of face,” of which Daniel had spoken so feelingly some eighty years ago, after some seventy years’ trial of it, remained as part of their lot. Yet, with all this in their memory and experience, what had been their reply? To repeat again now the very offence for which they had suffered so much! 2. In despite of God’s *mercy*. Notwithstanding this heavy displeasure, there had been compassion as well. For some little time back (little in the life-history of a nation, that is to say) various signs of “grace” or favour had been vouchsafed to them. The destruction of the people, *e. g.*, had not been total; a “remnant” had “escaped”—a great token of good in itself (Ezek. xiv. 22, 23). Nor had their dispersion from their home under God’s wing been for ever. On the contrary, a “nail,” or fixed habitation (Isa. xxii. 23; xxxiii. 20), had been given them “in his holy place.” There was some cheerfulness also, or “lightening of the eyes,” with all their “confusion of face,” and some “reviving” in their death-like bondage. Truly wonderful mercy, indeed, it was!—that restored house after such long desolation; that restored “wall” or fence round such captives; how much it proved; how much it promised; what an undeserved mercy it was. How amazingly wicked, therefore, how ungrateful, to despise it as they had done. 3. In contempt of God’s express *will*. Most clearly, most strongly, most earnestly, and that from the very first, had God declared his mind on this point. He had done so by his words, as here quoted. He had done so by his actions, as here referred to. Why had he ever swept away from Canaan its original inhabitants? Why had he introduced the Israelites in their place? What had he made their inheritance of it to depend on? The answers to these various questions were clear and emphatic on this subject, and made the conduct which Ezra was bewailing like that of soldiers ordered by their commander to charge the enemy, and drawing their swords instead against himself. These were the three reasons why Ezra spoke as he did of their sin (comp. 2 Chron. xxviii. 22; Luke xii. 47; Rom. ii. 4; Rev. ix. 20, 21).

III. **INEXCUSABLE GUILT.** In circumstances such as these, what could they say or expect? After such experience, after such deliverance, and in the face of such knowledge, they had begun again the old sin. Must not this bring down again the old anger, and this time without bound (ver. 14)? Even as things were, would not God be “righteous” (ver. 15) if their whole remnant were destroyed? So much so, that it does not seem to occur to Ezra even to speak to God of any other course of proceeding. It is even a marvel to him, in the circumstances, that they continue “escaped.” Here we are—do as thou wilt—we cannot stand before thee in our trespasses (see Ps. cxxx. 3)—we can only place ourselves before thee in the dust—we have nothing to urge. This total absence of all plea or entreaty almost reminds one of Eli’s silence in 1 Sam. iii. 18 (comp. also ii. 25), knowing as he did the inexcusable guilt and impotence of his sons. Even Daniel, in his deepest humiliation on account of the sins of his people, could take a different line (Dan. ix. 19).

**CONCLUSION.** In this remarkable picture of true penitence we may notice—1. *Its singular accuracy of judgment.* Sin here, as with David and Joseph and all truly “God-conscious” men and minds, is an offence against God himself (see Gen. xxxix. 9; 1 Sam. xii. 23; Ps. li. 4; Rom. iv. 15; 1 John iii. 4). 2. *Its unswerving loyalty.* See the acknowledgments here of God’s mercy and justice in vers. 13, 15; and comp. Ps. li. end ver. 4, also l. 4, 6; Luke vii. 29; Rom. iii. 4, 19. This sin, at any rate, the sin which renders amendment and forgiveness impossible, the sin of charging God foolishly, the true penitent is free from. 3. *Its unsparing sincerity.* So far from denying, hiding, or palliating the evil it refers to, it seems anxious rather to bring to light and exhibit its very worst traits. We read of Elias in one place (Rom. xi. 2) as making “intercession against Israel.” Ezra here, identifying his own case with that of Israel, may be almost said to do it against himself. Could even the great accuser (Rev. xii. 10) with truth have said very much worse? Contrast Gen. iii. 12, 13; 1 Sam. xv. 13, 20, 21; and comp. perhaps the *ἐκδικήσις* of 2 Cor. vii. 11.

## HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Spiritual separation.* I. THAT SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD IS A LAW OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. The Israelites must separate themselves from the people of the land (ver. 1). This separation is not (1) *local*. The Israelites and Canaanites must live in the same world, in the same town, and often in the same house. This separation is not (2) *political*. Both the Israelites and the Canaanites must act their part as citizens of the same state. This separation is not (3) *commercial*. The Israelites have to do business with the Canaanites. This separation is (4) *spiritual*. The good man is separate from the world by the moral dispositions and aims which are cherished by him; so that while he is in the same place, state, and business, he is of a different mind, temper, and character. Why must the good man thus separate himself from the world? True, he has sympathy with his comrades; he shares their manhood; he does not leave it in pride, or in sullenness; but—1. That he may maintain the *dignity* of the Christian life. The Israelites were the followers of Jehovah, and could not place themselves on the same platform with idolaters. There is a moral dignity about religion which must not be sacrificed by undue familiarity with the common things of the world. There is a dignity in the Divine name, in the cross of Christ, in spiritual devotion, in the truth of the gospel, in the hopes of the believer, which the good man must maintain, which is likely to be forfeited in worldly companionships. The sacred things of God must not be profaned by worldly associations. The rose must not cast in its lot with the nettle. 2. That he may exemplify the *purity* of the Christian life. The land of the people was unclean (ver. 11). Israel must not be contaminated by its abominations. The worldly life is sinful. The Christian life must be holy. Its commandments are holy. Its Supreme Example is sinless. Its duty is to manifest the beauty of holiness, and to inculcate the pursuit of piety. In order to this it must be separate from sinners. 3. That he may insure the *safety* of the Christian life. The Israelites were exposed to great danger by contact with the heathen, and separation was their only safeguard. Piety has no right to endanger itself by unholy associations; separation is safety. 4. That he may conserve the *purposes* of the Christian life. Israel had a mission to the other nations, and only by separation could it be accomplished. Separation is necessary to the moral design of the Church.

II. THAT THE LAW OF SPIRITUAL SEPARATION IS OFTEN VIOLATED BY CHRISTIAN MEN. It is difficult to separate from those amongst whom we live. It is not easy to avoid unholy contact with the people of the land who are so near to us. There are many temptations which attract the spiritual to the carnal. The people of the land have daughters to give in marriage, they have oftentimes prosperity and wealth; and these things are calculated to tempt the godly into unholy alliance (ver. 11). Great will be the condemnation of those who yield to this solicitation.

III. THAT THE LAW OF SPIRITUAL SEPARATION IS CONDUCTIVE TO THE PROSPERITY OF THE CHURCH. "That ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever" (ver. 12).—E.

Vers. 1—4.—*Ezra's grief.* "Now when these things were done," viz., when the free-will offerings were deposited in the temple, when the sacrifices had been offered, when the king's commissions had been delivered to his lieutenants and the governors of the provinces—when all things promised well, a new cause of trouble arises. "The princes came," &c. (vers. 1, 2). Here we have—

I. THE CAUSE OF EZRA'S GRIEF. 1. The law of God was *violated*. (1) The holy people had made marriages with strangers. God had separated the people or Israel to himself (Deut. xiv. 1, 2). For them to form such affinities was against the law (Deut. vii. 3). The marriage union of children of God with children of Satan is monstrous. It is an outrage against the spirit of the gospel (2 Cor. vi. 14). (2) They had in consequence been drawn into their abominations. This is just what might have been expected. This issue is constantly foreshown (Exod. xxxiv. 15—17). The effect of these unequal yokings upon Christians is most melancholy.

2. The violation of the law was *general*. (1) The rulers were involved in it. The civil; the ecclesiastical. "The princes and rulers have been chief in this trespass." Being in it, this could not be otherwise. Position involves responsibilities. Those who are conspicuous for station should be conspicuous for goodness. (2) The people were in it. Crime is contagious. Witness too often the tyranny and slavery of fashion. What absurdities are endured because prescribed by the leaders of fashion! How demoralising to a people is corruption in the court. The rulers could not reprove the people when implicated themselves. 3. The fact was *incontestable*. (1) It was reported to Ezra by the princes. The representatives of David and Solomon were the princes of Judah. They had the rule over the people, and must be presumed to be well informed. (2) But in this matter they cannot be mistaken, for they are themselves also in the transgression. They bear witness against themselves. Note here the power of conscience. Crime cannot be hidden for ever. The great day of judgment will bring all deeds of darkness to the light. Consider now—

II. THE DEPTH OF EZRA'S GRIEF (vers. 3, 4). 1. *He rent his clothes*. (1) In early times emotion was commonly expressed in symbolical acts. This action was expressive of deep distress of soul (Gen. xxxvii. 29, 30; Lev. x. 6; xi. 44; Judges xi. 35; Job i. 20). The rending of the heart is the idea (Joel ii. 13). (2) Ezra rent his *garment*. The word here rendered "garment" (*בגד behged*) is the common term for clothes. His rending the vestments personal to him would express his personal grief. The honour of God should be personal to each of us. (3) He also rent his *mantle*. The term here employed (*מעי' m'el*) describes an official robe. It is used for the robe of the ephod worn by the high priest; also for the kingly robe of David, and that of Saul, the skirt of which was cut off by David (1 Sam. xxiv. 4; 1 Chron. xv. 27). The "mantle" in which the ghost of Samuel was seen is described by the same word (1 Sam. xxviii. 14). In Ezra's case it might be his official robe either as a priest or as a civil ruler, or both. In rending his mantle, therefore, he expressed his distress as representing the people. Religious men are the truest patriots. 2. *He plucked off his hair*. (1) The hair of his *head*. As the head is the symbol of rule, so the hair of the head was regarded as a natural crown (1 Cor. xi. 7). Righteousness is the crown of our glory (2 Tim. iv. 8). Sin plucks this crown from us, and reduces us to the deepest humiliation (Neh. xiii. 25). This humiliation was expressed by Ezra. (2) The hair of his *beard*. This sign of manhood was regarded as a symbol of honour, and a greater insult could scarcely be given to an Oriental than to pluck or cut off his beard (2 Sam. x. 5). This action of Ezra set forth how he regarded the honour of his nation to be wounded in the tenderest place by this mingling of the holy seed with the people of the land. 3. *He sat down astonished*. (1) The state of silent, awful desolation in which Ezra sat is not inaptly expressed by this old English word, which suggests the idea of being stunned as by thunder. He was awed by hearing as it were the rumbling of the approaching thunder of God's judgments upon a guilty people. (2) Then were assembled to him "every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel." The sympathy of a common fear brought them together, as a terrified flock would gather when the elements become sulphurous for the thunder-storm. Good men love to meet in joy; so do they love to meet in grief. Let us admire and imitate (a) this zeal for God. This grief for his honour being outraged by sinners. (b) This purest patriotism which repents vicariously for our people.—J. A. M.

Vers. 1—4.—*Disappointment and disobedience*. And now then for rest and satisfaction! now for spiritual enjoyment! now for the continuous exercise of the soul in sacred privileges in the holy place! now for the goodly sight of a holy people walking in the commandments of the Lord blameless! Such was probably Ezra's feeling as he first settled down in Jerusalem with the children of the captivity. It would have been natural and human for him to think thus; but if he did thus think he was mistaken. He was to be an instance of—

I. DISAPPOINTMENT—the lot of the Christian workman. Hardly had he established himself in the city of God when he found, with painful experience, that it was an earthly Jerusalem in which he had come to dwell. Zerubbabel was dead,

and Haggai was no longer prophesying, and some of those who had the direction of public affairs—"princes" they are called (ver. 1)—came to Ezra with a very serious complaint. They came to tell him that several of the Jews, including many of the Levites, and even of the priests, and also (and notoriously) some of the princes, had broken the clear and plain commandment of the Law by mingling and even intermarrying with the people of surrounding lands, in fact with the heathen (see Exod. xxiii. 32, and xxxiv. 12, 15, 16; Deut. vii. 3). It is not quite certain that they had not gone further than this in the way of laxity and worldliness; but as far as this they had certainly gone, and the fact that the leaders, secular and spiritual, were setting the example (ver. 2) made the matter one of the greatest consequence. The soul of Ezra was filled with sadness; with extreme disappointment and dismay that there should be found so serious a blemish in the holy nation. When he was thinking that everything promised well, here was an evil in the midst of them which threatened to undo all that had been done, to bring down the wrath of God, and to demolish the good work which he and others before and beside him had so laboriously built up. He "rent his garment and his mantle;" he "sat astonished until the evening sacrifice" (vers. 3, 4). Such is the common experience of Christian workmen. When the Master himself gathered disciples, the scribes and the Pharisees sought to sow estrangement and separation in their hearts. When Paul, with untiring labour, had founded Churches in Galatia, Judaizing teachers followed, undermining his influence and corrupting the truth he had preached. When we think that all is going well with the cause of God, and that we may rest in spiritual enjoyment, then we, too often, find that tares are among the wheat, that dross is mixed up with the gold, that error is falsifying and distorting truth, that sin is in the Church of Christ. We need not look out for disappointment as a thing to be certainly found, but when it comes we may remember that it has been an invariable ingredient in the Christian workman's cup, from the Master down to the humblest teacher, from apostolic days to our own. It is *trying* in the last degree. It tries our patience, our trust in God, our confidence in his truth; but it leads us to him, as then it led Ezra, in humble, earnest, united prayer. The Jewish people at this period afford an instance of—

II. DISOBEDIENCE—a recurring note in the life of the Christian Church. Disobedience had seriously affected the Jews from the highest social rank to the lowest. Princes, priests, Levites, and the common people were all compromised to a greater or less degree. The wrong-doing may not seem so flagrant to us as it did to Ezra, for wide-spread intercourse, national intermingling, is a marked feature of our times. But the one special virtue the Jewish Church was bound to exemplify was *purity*; its principal duty was to maintain separateness from surrounding evil. It was now failing in that respect in which it was most urgently required to be steadfast and true. Hence the intensity of the feeling of Ezra and those who "trembled at the words of the God of Israel" (vers. 3, 4). How often and how sadly has the Christian Church disappointed its Lord by disobedience to his will. (1) Sinful alliances with the secular power which have corrupted and enfeebled it; (2) guilty conformity to the (a) idolatrous, or (b) licentious, or (c) convivial, or (d) untruthful, or (e) dishonest practices of an unrenowned, unpurified world; (3) culpable disregard to his will respecting the equality of his disciples, and our duty to the "little child," the lowly and helpless member of his Church; (4) faulty negligence to evangelise the surrounding and outlying world—these are disobediences which (a) disfigure the beauty of the Church, (b) disappoint and displease the Master, and (c) delay the conversion of the world.—C.

Vers. 4—15.—*Sensibility*. Ezra was a man not only of vigorous mind and strong will, with whom things soon took shape and form, but also of keen sensibility, into whose heart things cut deeply, and whose soul was stirred with strong emotion. Therefore he knew not only great joys, but great sorrows also.

"Deeply bought the hidden treasure  
Finer feelings can bestow;  
Chords that vibrate deepest pleasure  
Thrill the deepest notes of woe."

When he learnt how the children of Israel had gone astray in the matter of the mixed marriages, he was overwhelmed with strong and profound feeling. There was—

I. DISMAY AT THE PRESENCE OF SIN (ver. 5). He sat "astonished until the evening sacrifice" (ver. 4), having just given way to an Oriental exhibition of extreme agitation (ver. 3). This blow seems to have stunned him. He was simply dismayed, appalled. After a burst of grief he sat overwhelmed with a sense of the exceeding great folly and iniquity of the people.

II. SHAME UNDER A SENSE OF SIN (vers. 5, 6, 15). Placing himself in penitential attitude, he addressed himself to God, and said, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee" (ver. 6). He went on to identify himself (though personally guiltless) with his people: "Our iniquities," &c. (ver. 6). "We are before thee in our trespasses" (ver. 15). And he concluded by saying, "We cannot stand before thee because of this" (ver. 15). Such was his intense fellow-feeling and sympathy with those whom he was serving, that he felt overwhelmed with shame under a consciousness of their guilt. Sin, the sin of our family, of our city, of our country, of our race—quite apart from our personal share in it—is a shameful thing, something to humiliate us and cause us "confusion of face."

III. FEAR OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN. "Wouldest thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us," &c. (ver. 14). He lamented that the brief sunshine they were enjoying would probably disappear, in God's rekindled wrath, in utter darkness. God's mercy was for a space encompassing them, and now they were going to throw it, desperately and wantonly, away. No sooner were they out of bondage than they were inviting the great Disposer, in his righteousness, to send them back into captivity. Sin had ruined them before, and would surely ruin them again, and this time utterly and completely (vers. 7, 8, 9, 14). What insensate folly!

We may look at sensibility in respect of sin as it relates to—1. *Our Divine Lord himself*. He became man in order that he might suffer in our stead; in order that, as man, he might bear the penalty we must otherwise have borne. The Sinless One was never conscious of sin, nor yet of shame *as we know it*; but by becoming a member of our race, thus entering into perfect fellowship and intense sympathy with us, he could be affected, sorrowfully and sadly, by a sense of human sin. He did, in a way necessarily mysterious to us, thus suffer for us. It was to his soul a dreadful, horrible, shameful thing that mankind—to whose family he belonged, and of which he was a member—should have sinned so grievously as it had. 2. *Our own souls*. It is well for us indeed when we have come to feel the shamefulness of our own sin. The heart that, thus affected, can say, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face unto thee" (ver. 6), is in that state of contrition, of poverty of spirit, "of which is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 3). Sin is shameful because (1) it is the act of those who owe everything they are and have to God, and (2) it is directed against him who has (a) multiplied his mercies unto us in so many ways, and (b) borne so long with us, and (c) done and suffered, in Christ, so much to reclaim us; and because (3) it is continued in spite of our knowledge of what is right, reasonable, and beneficial. 3. *Our fellows*. We may well be sympathetically affected by the sins of others—our kindred, our fellow-citizens, our fellow-men. Rivers of water should run down our eyes because men keep not his law. We may well be ashamed and appalled, and pour out our souls to God, under a sense of the guilt of the world.—C.

Ver. 5.—*The dawn of hope*. Here is a graphic scene. Behold Ezra, the chief man of his nation, and a prince of the Persian Empire, with his garment and his mantle rent, his hair and beard torn and disordered, bowed in silent grief, and surrounded by the best men of his people, all trembling at the word of God. But lo! a ray of hope from the fire of the altar kindles in his soul. "And at the evening sacrifice," &c. Here learn—

I. THAT THE ONE WAY TO GOD IS THROUGH THE BLOOD OF ATONEMENT. 1. *Ezra sat astonished until the evening sacrifice*. (1) He saw the sin of his people. Its enormity. Its aggravations. (2) He saw the gathering storm of Divine anger. The more he reflected, the blacker became the cloud. (3) He saw no way of escape.

His suspense was awful, until the fire of the altar began to light up the darkness of the gathering night. 2. *Now he is encouraged to pray.* (1) God has found out a way. Sacrifice would never have occurred to the unaided reason of man; or even had it occurred to him, he could not be sure that God would accept it. (2) God has made his ways known unto men. It was revealed soon after the fall (Gen. iii. 15, 24; iv. 4; viii. 20, 21). More formally established in the Levitical law. This was authenticated by all the miracles of the exodus. Fulfilled in the solemnities of Calvary.

II. THAT HE MUST BE APPROACHED IN THE SPIRIT OF HUMILIATION. 1. *Ezra rent his garment and his mantle.* (1) His "garment" to express his *personal* grief at the dishonour done to God. At the wickedness of his people. At their consequent liability to fearful punishment. (2) His "mantle," which was such a robe as was worn by persons of birth and station, was rent to express his distress in his *magisterial* and *representative* capacity. Public men should recognise a public responsibility to God. 2. This he now did the *second time*. (1) In the first instance he rent his clothes to express to *men* his grief. It produced the desired effect. All those who "trembled at the word of God" gathered round him. We should witness for God to man against sin. We should do this in the most emphatic manner, so as to produce conviction. (2) Now by similar acts he expresses his grief to *God*. This second rending of his garment and mantle was in connection with his rousing himself to pray. God expects from us a formal and full confession of sin. He does not need information, but requires it for our benefit. 3. Ezra also now *fell upon his knees*. (1) Hitherto he had been *sitting* in his grief, bewildered and astonished, not knowing what to do to avert the looming vengeance. To pray he knew not how until his spirit was stirred within him "at the evening sacrifice." All true prayer is from God (Prov. xvi. 1). The fire that stirs a prayerful soul is from the altar of Calvary (see Isa. vi. 6, 7). (2) *Kneeling* is an appropriate attitude for prayer. It expresses submission (Phil. ii. 10). We should beware of the hypocrisy of bowing the knee when there is no submission in the soul. (3) Posture, however, is not essential to prayer. Scripture furnishes examples of various postures. The attitude of the heart is of vital importance. This is a comfort to those who are physically incapacitated for kneeling (1 Tim. iv. 8).

III. THAT WE MUST DRAW NEAR TO GOD IN FAITH. Ezra "spread out his hands to the Lord his God." 1. He recognised God as *his covenant friend*. (1) Note the possessive case. All that is meant in the title "God" he claims as *his*. What a proprietary is here! (2) There is a glorious complement to this. If the Lord be our covenant God, then are we his covenanted people. He too has a property in us (Cant. ii. 16). We are his "peculiar treasure" (Ps. cxxxv. 4). (3) The covenant relationship evermore recognises Christ who is the "Covenant of his people," and whose blood is the "blood of the covenant." The recognition of all this is faith, and when this recognition is raised in us by the Spirit of God the faith becomes saving. 2. Therefore *he spread out his hands*. (1) The open hand is the symbol of *truth*. Ezra approached God with the sincerity of a genuine faith (see Ps. xxiv. 4). The open hand of the impenitent hypocrite is bloody in the sight of God (Isa. i. 15). (2) The hands spread out are in the attitude of *craving* and *receiving*. Corresponding to this, the outstretched hands of God denote the offers of his mercy (Prov. i. 24). Let us ask and receive, that our joy may be full.—J. A. M.

Vers. 5—15.—*A good man's sight of sin.* I. That the sight of sin **AWAKENS WITHIN THE GOOD MAN A SPIRIT OF EARNEST PRAYER.** "I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God" (ver. 5). 1. The *humility* of the prayer. Ezra fell upon his knees in deepest self-abasement; he did not stand erect like the Pharisee in the temple, but smote upon his breast like the publican (Luke xviii. 13). Surely the sin of God's chosen people could not but inspire humility within the patriot. 2. The *earnestness* of the prayer. Ezra spread out his hands in earnest entreaty before God; the solemnity of the circumstance awakened him to holy fervour. At such a time a lifeless prayer could be of no avail. 3. The *direction* of the prayer. Ezra directed his prayer to the Lord his God; he felt the vanity of human help, and that God only could avert the consequence of their transgression.

A sense of sin should lead to God. 4. The *personal claim* of the prayer. "My God," "O my God."

II. THAT THE SIGHT OF SIN AWAKENS WITHIN THE GOOD MAN A SENSE OF SHAME. "I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens (ver. 6). He is ashamed—1. Because he is *morally sensitive* to sin. Purity is sensitive to evil. 2. Because he understands the *true nature* of sin. "Our iniquities," "our trespass." 3. Because he realises the *magnitude* of sin. "Our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up to heaven." Sin brings shame; this the good man feels.

III. THAT THE SIGHT OF SIN AWAKENS WITHIN THE GOOD MAN MEMORIES OF SORROW. "And for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil" (ver. 7). 1. A memory of *degradation*. Sin will send kings and priests into degrading captivity. 2. A memory of *cruelty*. Sin delivers men as to the sword. 3. A memory of *bondage*. Sin is slavery. 4. A memory of *loss*. Sin spoils men of their best treasures. The history of sin is a history of sorrow, and the sight of sin calls up to the mind of the good man sad memories.

IV. THAT THE SIGHT OF SIN AWAKENS WITHIN THE GOOD MAN THE THOUGHT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD. 1. Its *mercy*. "And now for a little space grace hath been showed from the Lord our God" (vers. 8, 9). 2. Its *fidelity*. "Yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage" (ver. 9). 3. Its *forbearance*. "Seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve" (ver. 13). This life is not the scene of complete punishment. 4. Its *delay*. "For we remain." Sin is not immediately punished in this life. 5. Its *rectitude*. "O Lord God of Israel, thou art righteous" (ver. 15). 6. Its *retribution*. "For we cannot stand before thee because of this" (ver. 15). Thus Ezra viewed the sin of Israel in its relation to the moral government of God.—E.

Vers. 6—15.—*Ezra's prayer*. While the smoke of the altar rises to heaven from the evening sacrifice, lo! there is Ezra before the temple of the Lord with rent garments and disordered hair, bowed upon his knees, and with lifted hands, pouring out confession of sin in tones of plaintive grief and shame and terror. "O my God, I am ashamed," &c. In this prayer we mark—

I. THE CRIME CONFESSED (vers. 11, 12). 1. Here were *open violations of the law of God*. (1) The patriarchal law was pronounced against the intermarriages of the holy race of Seth, with whom was the promise of the Holy Seed, with the profane race of Cain the excommunicate. The infraction of this law provoked the Deluge (Gen. vi. 2, 3). Abraham, who, like Seth, was the depository of the Promise, was averse to the intermarriage of his issue with the daughters of the accursed Cainan (Gen. xxiv. 3, 4; see also xxviii. 1, 2). (2) This patriarchal law became incorporated in the Mosaic system (Deut. vii. 3). (3) The prophets also declared against these mixed alliances. In particular, it would seem, Haggai and Zechariah (ver. 11 with vi. 21). (4) This law, in the spirit of it, is still binding upon Christians (1 Cor. vii. 39; 2 Cor. vi. 14). 2. The *reasons* given for this law are *most weighty*. (1) The holiness of God's people. This reason holds in all ages. (2) The tendency to be swayed from true worship to idolatry (Exod. xxiii. 32; xxiv. 16). (3) These reasons were vividly before the mind of Ezra. So should they be ever present with Christians. 3. *Nothing should induce men to commit this sin*. (1) The wealth of idolaters is dearly purchased by the imperilling of the inheritance of the saints. (2) Peace with idolaters is costly at the sacrificing of the peace of God.

II. THE AGGRAVATIONS ACKNOWLEDGED. Ezra confessed for his people—1. That *their experiences in the captivity should have taught them differently* (ver. 7). (1) Their humiliation was deep. They suffered from the "sword," viz., of the Babylonians who in the days of Nebuchadnezzar invaded their land. From "captivity," for their Babylonish victor carried them away. Who can estimate the sufferings entailed by that deportation? From the "spoil" which they suffered from the invaders, and from those who removed them. And from "confusion of face," viz., in the remembrance that all their sufferings were on account of their sins. This

shame they felt in the presence of their Babylonish lords (see Dan. ix. 7, 8). Also before their Persian masters. (2) Their calamities were sweeping. The people were involved in them. So were their "kings." What a contrast between the condition of David and Solomon and that of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah (2 Kings xxv. 7) ! So were their "priests;" and in the ruin of the priests the ruin of the temple also was involved. (3) They were also of long continuance. There were the initial sufferings from the time of the first invasion of the Babylonians. Then the interval of seventy years from the date of the captivity to the first year of Cyrus, when Zerubbabel led back the larger body of the restoration. Another period of seventy or eighty years had elapsed before this second contingent was led back by Ezra. What excuse then, after all these sufferings, could be pleaded for their sin? 2. *The mercy of God should have been better requited* (vers. 8, 9). That mercy was shown—(1) In his "leaving a remnant to escape." That was mercy not only to the individuals spared, but also to the world, for the holy Seed was among them, through whom the blessings of an everlasting salvation were to come. (2) In "giving them a nail in his holy place." The margin explains this to be "a constant and sure abode," and refers to Isaiah xxii. 23 in support of this interpretation. The passage in Isaiah points to Christ; so may this point to him. (3) In this view there is the greater force in what follows, "that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage." And how the mercy of God in all this becomes increased when the spiritual blessings of the gospel are seen in it. (4) Even in their bondage God had not forsaken them. For he gave them favour in the sight of the kings of Persia. This favour enabled them to return, "gave them a reviving," and to repair the desolations of the temple, of the holy city, and the wall. Such mercy claimed gratitude, but was requited with rebellion. Ezra is without apology (ver. 10).

III. THE SUBMISSION TO THE JUDGMENT OF MERCY (vers. 6 and 15). 1. *Here he awaits the judgment of the Lord.* (1) He is ashamed to look up. Who can bear to look into the face of an injured friend when we have nothing to plead in apology? That will be the position of the sinner in the great day of judgment. (2) He is oppressed by the growing weight of accumulating rebellion and ingratitude. He is terrified by the cloud upon the face of God. (3) He confesses that wrath to the uttermost is deserved. 2. *Here is no formal plea for mercy.* (1) There is the silent cry of misery and distress and blushing shame. But who can trust in this? It is only the consciousness of sin. (2) There is eloquence in the evening sacrifice. The victim slain is a vicarious sufferer. It is the shadow of a better sacrifice.—J. A. M.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER X.

REPENTANCE OF THE PEOPLE, AND COVENANT SWORN TO, ON THE RECOMMENDATION OF SHECHANIAH (ch. x. 1—5). While Ezra was uttering his prayer aloud, upon his knees, in front of the temple, where the evening sacrifice was being offered upon the great brazen altar (ch. iii. 2), the people gathered about him, heard what he said, and had their feelings so stirred that numbers of them burst into tears and "wept very sore" (ch. x. 1). When he had ended, Shechaniah, the son of Jehiel (one of those who had married an idolatrous wife—ver. 26), took the word, and suggested an immediate step towards that reformation which

Ezra seemed to him to have had in his mind and to have tacitly recommended. This step was that all present should at once enter into a special covenant with God that they would do their utmost to have the mixed marriages dissolved, and the idolatrous wives, with their children, sent out of the country. The idea of such a special covenant was no new thing. One such had been made under Asa (2 Chron. xv. 12) against idolatry; another, more general, under Josiah (2 Kings xxiii. 3); a third, nearly parallel with this, since it touched a single point of the law only, under Zedekiah (Jer. xxxiv. 8). The proposition of Shechaniah approved itself to Ezra, who "arose, and made the chief priests and Levites" present



and "all the people" present, to swear to this covenant. "And they swore." An engagement of a most sacred character was thus entered into by a number of influential persons, and the way was prepared for the actual reformation which followed.

Ver. 1.—When Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed. Rather, "As Ezra prayed, and as he confessed." (Vulg.: "Orante Esdra et implorante." LXX.: Ὡς προσεύχετο Ἐσδρας καὶ ὡς ἐξηγόρευσε.) Weeping and casting himself down. Ezra had knelt at first (ch. ix. 5); but as he proceeded, and felt more and more the heinousness of the people's transgression, he threw himself forward upon the ground, in the attitude of extremest humiliation. Before the house of God. So far as can be gathered from the context, Ezra was in the great court of the temple when the princes came to him with their information (ch. ix. 1). He at once "sat down astonished" (ver. 3). So he remained until preparations began to be made for the evening sacrifice, when he arose, and took up a position directly in front of the altar and the holy place, towards which he proceeded to pray. Doubtless he had in his mind the words of Solomon, assented to by God (1 Kings ix. 3), and pleaded by Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xx. 9): "What prayer and supplication be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands towards this place: then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and do," &c. (1 Kings viii. 38, 39).

Ver. 2.—Jehiel. Probably the "Jehiel" mentioned again in ver. 26, who was "of the sons of Elam," and had married an idolatrous wife. Yet now there is hope. The penitence of the people, evidenced by their "sore weeping," gave hope that they might be brought to amend their ways and return to God.

Ver. 3.—Now therefore let us make a covenant. Shechaniah had probably in his thoughts the (comparatively) recent covenant which the people had made in the reign of Zedekiah (Jer. xxxiv. 15) on the subject of releasing their Hebrew slaves after six years of servitude. That covenant was entered into before God, in the temple, by the princes and all the people (*ibid.* ver. 10). To put away all the wives. Shechaniah probably held that marriages made contrary to the law were not merely wrongful, but invalid. At any rate, since the law of Moses, as interpreted by the Rabbis, allowed divorce "for every cause" (Matt. xix. 3), the remedy suggested was feasible, though scarcely one which the civil power could enforce. And

such as are born of them. "Fili matrem sequuntur" was a maxim of Roman, and, apparently, also of Jewish law. Young children require especially a mother's care. Older ones might be already tainted with idolatry. It was best, Shechaniah thought, to make a clean sweep, and dismiss the children as well as the mothers. According to the counsel of my lord. Ezra had not yet advised any course; but Shechaniah gathers from the horror which he has expressed what his wishes must be. Let it be done according to the law. Either, "Let the law, which forbids these marriages, be in this way satisfied" (Dathé); or, "Let the repudiation of the wives take place in the mode prescribed by the law" (see Deut. xxiv. 1).

Ver. 4.—This matter belongeth unto thee. Ezra's commission was to "let judgment be executed on those who would not do the law of God" (ch. vii. 26), and so to constrain them to obedience. It was therefore his place to inquire into the serious matter brought before him, and set it right. We will be with thee. We, the "very great congregation" which had gathered around Ezra, and of whom Shechaniah was the spokesman, undertake to be with thee, and support thee, in the steps which thou takest in this matter. Only be of good courage, and act.

Ver. 5.—Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests . . . to swear. Rather, "made the princes, the priests, &c. to swear" (ἠρκισεν τοὺς ἀρχοντας, τοὺς ἱερεῖς κ.τ.λ.—LXX.). That they would do according to this word. That they would act in the matter as Shechaniah had recommended, and put away the idolatrous wives.

EZRA'S FAST (ver. 6). Matters having reached this point, the covenant having been made, and the only question remaining for consideration being how the decision come to should be carried out, Ezra "rose up," and withdrew himself for a time from the people, entering into one of the side chambers of the temple, and secluding himself there. The guilt of his brethren still pressed heavily on his spirit, and he continued the mourning which he had commenced as soon as it came to his ears. To this mourning he now joined a fast of the strictest kind, an entire abstinence both from eating and drinking, like that of Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod. xxxiv. 28). Natural piety seems to have taught men generally (Jonah iii. 5-7), and the Jews among them, that such abstinence was a fitting accompaniment of

penitential prayer, and might be counted on to lend it additional force with Almighty God. Compare the private and personal fasts of David (2 Sam. xii. 16), Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 27), Daniel (Dan. ix. 3), and Nehemiah (Neh. i. 4).

Ver. 6.—**The chamber of Johanan.** On the temple chambers see comment on ch. viii. 29. Johanan appears by Neh. xii. 22, 23, compared with vers. 10—11, to have been really the grandson of Eliashib, who, as high priest, would have the right of assigning him a chamber in the temple (compare Neh. xiii. 4, 5). **I did eat no bread nor drink water.** Strict fasts of this kind had been observed by Moses twice (Exod. xxiv. 28, and Deut. ix. 18), and by the Ninevites (Jonah iii. 7), but they were very uncommon. Usually it was considered enough to abstain from eating (1 Sam. i. 7; xx. 34; 2 Sam. iii. 35). Sometimes the person who fasted merely abstained from "meat and wine, and pleasant bread" (Dan. x. 3). Ezra's great earnestness appears in the severity of his fast, which (it is to be remembered) was not for his own sins, but for those of his brethren.

**PROCLAMATION MADE, SUMMONING ALL THE JEWS TO JERUSALEM** (vers. 7—9). After due deliberation between Ezra, the princes, and the elders (ver. 8), it was resolved, as a first step, to summon all Jews—or, rather, all those who had returned from the captivity, whether they were Jews or Israelites—to Jerusalem, in order that the decision come to with respect to the mixed marriages might be communicated to them. The limit of three days was fixed as the latest date at which any one might make his appearance, and absentees were threatened with the heavy penalties of excommunication and forfeiture of all their possessions. Proclamation having been made to this effect "throughout Judah" (ver. 7), there was a gathering of all the males of full age to Jerusalem within the prescribed time. The place of meeting was the great court of the temple (ver. 9). According to Hecataeus of Abdera (Fr. 14), this was "a stone-walled enclosure, about 500 feet long and 150 feet wide," which might perhaps afford sitting room for 20,000 men. Deducting the aged and infirm, the sick, and those between twelve and twenty years of age, the country Jews would scarcely have reached this number.

Ver. 7.—**They made proclamation.** Liter-

ally, "they made to pass a voice" (*παρήγγυον φωνήν*.—LXX.). They sent criers to make the matter known. To all the children of the captivity. *I. e.* to all those who, having returned from the captivity, were now in the land. The expression is a favourite one with Ezra (see ch. ii. 1; iv. 1; vi. 16, 19; viii. 35, &c.).

Ver. 8.—**Within three days.** The limits of Judæa at this time appear to have been Bethel on the north, Beersheba on the south, Jericho on the east, and the Mediterranean upon the west. As the frontier was nowhere much more than forty miles from Jerusalem, three days from the day that they heard the proclamation would be sufficient time to allow all the able-bodied men to reach the capital. **Forfeited.** Literally, "devoted," *i. e.* confiscated to the temple treasury. **Separated from the congregation.** *I. e.* excommunicated.

Ver. 9.—**All the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem.** This is of course to be understood with certain necessary or natural exceptions, as of the sick, the aged and infirm, and the youths under full age. Still it would be a vast gathering, doubling probably for the time the population of the city. **It was the ninth month.** The month Chisleu, corresponding nearly to our December. **All the people sat in the street of the house of God.** The word translated "street" means any broad open space, and is probably used here to designate the great court of the temple (Patrick). By "all the people" we must understand as many as the court would conveniently hold. If the court had the dimensions given it by Hecataeus of Abdera, it may have accommodated the whole body of the country Jews. **The great rain.** December is a rainy month in Palestine; and the incidental mention of "the great rain" is one of those small touches which stamp the writer as an eyewitness.

**ADDRESS OF EZRA, AND CONSENT OF THE PEOPLE TO PUT AWAY THE STRANGE WIVES** (vers. 10—14). Hitherto Ezra seems to have allowed the leading part in the matter to be taken by the civil authorities, whom he had found established in Jerusalem on his arrival (ch. ix. 1—8). Now he came forward boldly, denouncing the sin committed, and as supreme governor commanding the repudiation of the strange wives. The assembled multitude consented, but urged that the matter required time; that the season was unsuitable for a prolonged stay of the whole body of country Jews at Jerusalem, and that the business would be most conveniently

carried through by a standing commission consisting of the chief authorities of the city of Jerusalem, who should take the case of each country town separately, and, in conjunction with the elders and judges of each town, investigate the alleged mixed marriages of each locality, and adjudicate upon them. By this arrangement the bulk of the country Jews would be allowed at once to return home; and the case of each locality being taken separately, only a small number would at any given time be suffering the inconvenience of a compulsory absence from their residences, and the expense of a stay of some duration in the capital. The proposal was reasonable, and it appears to have approved itself to Ezra and his advisers, and to have been at once adopted.

Ver. 10.—**Ezra the priest stood up.** Now that the time had come for action, Ezra was not wanting to his duties. The chief authority had been put into his hands by the Persian king (ch. vii. 25, 26), and he was bound to exercise it. Accordingly, the great bulk of the nation being assembled in obedience to the proclamation, Ezra came forward in person, and declared that the “strange wives” must be put away. **Ye have taken strange wives.** Literally, “have caused to dwell,” i.e. have made them come and live with you in the holy land.

Ver. 11.—**Make confession.** This is undoubtedly the true meaning of *ʿnu thodah* in this place, and not “give praise” (*dōre aīmeir*), as the LXX. render. **Separate yourselves from the people of the land.** The marriages naturally led on to familiar intercourse with the relatives and friends of the women, and so tended to break down the barrier between Jew and Gentile which it had been the special object of the Mosaic legislation to erect.

Ver. 13.—**We are many that have transgressed.** The marginal rendering, “we have greatly offended in this thing,” is nearer to the original. No doubt, however, the greatness of the offence consisted partly in the large number that had offended.

Ver. 14.—**Let now our rulers of the congregation stand.** Let Ezra, together with the princes and the elders at Jerusalem (ver. 8), form a standing body to act with the elders and judges of the provincial towns in this matter, and let the case of each town be taken separately, and the inhabitants of each attend at Jerusalem in their turn. **Until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.** This is probably the true meaning of the writer, but it is not to be obtained from the ordinary text. To

produce it we must read *by* for *u* and *haddābār* for *laddābār hazzeḥ*. As the text stands, it is unintelligible.

OPPOSITION OF JONATHAN AND OTHERS (ver. 15). It was natural that some opposition should manifest itself when so trenchant a measure was announced as that which Ezra had declared to be necessary. To compel men to divorce their wives was to touch many in the tenderest place. Nor was it difficult to bring forward very plausible arguments to show that the marriages—or at any rate some of them—were allowable. Joseph had married an Egyptian (Gen. xli. 45), Moses a Midianite (Exod. ii. 21). True, these marriages had taken place before the law was given; but subsequently, also, Boaz had married Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth iv. 13); David had taken to wife Maacah, a Geshurite (2 Sam. iii. 3); and Solomon had without blame married the daughter of a Pharaoh (1 Kings iii. 1). These examples might be pleaded in proof that the Law admitted of exceptions, and individuals might argue that their cases were of an exceptional character. Again, in some instances the foreign wives may have become proselytes, and the children may have been circumcised, and so accepted into the congregation; which would give them a claim to remain, which would extend in some degree to the mothers. We therefore cannot be surprised that an opposition was made. Rather, it is remarkable that it was so slight, only extending (so far as appears) to four persons, and so easily quelled.

Ver. 15.—**Only Jonathan . . . and Jahaziah . . . were employed about this matter.** If this were the true meaning of the passage it would contradict the next verse, by which it appears that Ezra himself, together with several “chiefs of the fathers”—probably identical with the “rulers and elders” of ver. 14—took the matter in hand, and were occupied with it for three months. The true meaning of the clause, however, is almost certainly that which was assumed in the preceding paragraph: “Only Jonathan and Jahaziah stood up against this matter,” or “opposed” it (see 1 Chron. xxi. 1; Dan. viii. 25; xi. 14, where the same expression has the sense of “oppose, resist”). Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them. The “Meshullam” intended is perhaps the person of the name mentioned in ver. 29 as having married an idolatrous wife. The others seem not to have had any

personal interest in thwarting Ezra and preventing the reform.

**SETTLEMENT OF THE WHOLE MATTER BY THE REPUDIATION OF THE STRANGE WIVES** (vers. 18, 17). The opposition made did not delay the business more than a few days. The great assembly had been held on the twentieth day of the ninth month. On the first day of the tenth month, little more than a week later, the commission for examining into the matter met under the presidency of Ezra, and commenced proceedings. The method of proceeding suggested at the great meeting was no doubt followed. The case of each city was taken separately. Its male inhabitants of full age attended, and its "elders" and "judges" sat on the commission as assessors while the conjugal position of their townfolk was being investigated. Where a "mixed marriage" was proved the wife was repudiated. In 112 cases the necessity of repudiation was made out to the satisfaction of the commission, and this number of wives was put away. Probably the entire number of cases adjudicated upon was very much greater, since the commission continued at work for three months, and probably sat on seventy-five different days, judging (we may presume) three or four cases a day. On the whole, the small extent to which the evil had prevailed is remarkable; for 112 mixed marriages in a population where the adult males were about 40,000 would give only one such marriage to three hundred or three hundred and fifty legitimate ones. Nevertheless, evils in a community are not to be judged simply by their prevalence. Great evils must be checked at once, even though they have not extended far, lest, if they spread at all widely, they become irremediable. Ezra is to be commended for having perceived the greatness of the peril, and for having taken prompt and decided measures to check it, without waiting till it had got to a head, and so become uncontrollable.

**Ver. 16.—The children of the captivity did so.** The people generally, notwithstanding the opposition of Jonathan, acquiesced in Ezra's decision, and acted accordingly. **Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers.** There is no "with," or other connective, in the original; but our translators did right in supplying one, since the conjunction *ו*, "and," has almost certainly

fallen out of the text by the mistake of a copyist. **After the house of their fathers.** Rather, "for each father's house" — *i. e.* "for each family." It would seem from this clause that each recognised family was represented on the commission by its head. The number of such families appears by ch. ii. 3-61 to have been ninety-eight. **And all of them by their names.** Compare with this ch. viii. 20. In both places Ezra probably means that a list of the names was made out, and was in his possession, though he does not think it necessary to give them. **Were separated.** *I. e.* "set apart for the business." **And they sat down,** *i. e.* "began their sittings," on the first day of the tenth month, the month Tebeth, corresponding nearly to our January.

**Ver. 17.—They made an end with all the men.** They ran through the whole list of those who were accused of having taken strange wives, and adjudicated on every case, by the first day of the first month, Nisan, corresponding nearly with our April. Deducting Sabbaths, the number of days in the three months would be seventy-five or seventy-six; but it is of course possible that the court did not sit continuously.

**THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO HAD MARRIED THE STRANGE WIVES** (vers. 18-44). Aware of the danger that the nation might relapse into the sin which he was seeking to root out, Ezra punishes the wrong-doers by placing their names on record, that others might fear to do the like. He assigns the first place in his catalogue of offenders to the priests, doubtless because in them the sin was greatest; they, as the special custodians of the Law, were most bound to have observed the Law. Next to the priests he puts the Levites, on the same principle, because of their semi-sacerdotal character. He then concludes with the laymen, arranged under their several families. By the list of laymen it appears that ten only out of some thirty-six lay families were implicated in the sin. Three of the four priestly families, on the other hand, and even the near kindred of the high priest, were among the guilty. It is remarkable that it is Ezra, a priest, and one by many accused of over-sacerdotalism, who gives this testimony against his own order.

**Ver. 18.—Jeshua the son of Jozadak** is, undoubtedly, the high priest of chs. iii. and v. Four members of his family had committed the sin (compare Neh. xiii. 28).

**Ver. 19.—They gave their hands that they would put away their wives.** It is not clear whether this is intended to be said

of Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah only, or of the entire body of persons found guilty of having married strange wives. Most probably the court made out the divorces in the generality of cases, but were content to take a solemn pledge from members of the high priest's family.

Vers. 20—22.—On the priestly families of **Immer**, **Harim**, and **Pashur** see above, ch. ii. 37—39.

Ver. 24.—**The singers and porters.** These were special subdivisions of the Levitical order, appointed originally by David (2 Chron. xxv. 1; xxvi. 1—19).

Ver. 25.—**Of Israel.** *J. e.* "of the laity."

Ver. 26.—**Jehiel.** Probably the father of the Shechaniah who counselled Ezra (ch. x. 2—4).

Ver. 44.—**And some of them had wives by whom they had children.** Rather, "And there were some among the wives who had given birth to children." The fact is implied above in the advice of Shechaniah (ver. 3), but is here alone distinctly asserted. No doubt it was more difficult to arrange the terms of the divorce where the marriage had been fruitful.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—**A gleam of hope.** The only trace of comfort in Ezra's previous prayer (ix. 6—15) was of a negative kind. Notwithstanding all the aggravated evil which he had had to confess, the people were not destroyed. That, at least, could be said, "We remain yet escaped." That being the case, "who can tell" (see Jonah iii. 9) what it may please God to do for us? In the present passage this little suspicion of light becomes a positive ray of encouragement, gradually bringing before us (1) hopeful feelings, (2) hopeful thoughts, and (3) hopeful resolves.

I. **HOPEFUL FEELINGS.** There was something of this description—1. *In Ezra himself.* From sitting originally in almost despairing astonishment (ix. 3, 4), he had afterwards knelt in prayer (*ibid.* ver. 5); and now, in the depth and intensity of his feelings, he seems to have cast himself prostrate before the house of God. The more he turns the matter over, the more he feels it. This is a good sign in repentance (comp. Mark xiv. 72, "As he thought thereon, he wept;" and see Alford *in loc.*). A good sign because a sign of sincerity, without which there is no possible room for any hope (Ezek. xiv. 1—8). 2. *In the people at large.* Not only were more persons continually led to sympathise with his sorrow, until "there assembled to him out of Israel a very great congregation;" but this congregation was composed of persons of both sexes and various ages ("men and women and children") whose influence would tell respectively in the state, the home, and the future, and who were affected, also, with a degree of grief hardly less than his own (see end of ver. 1). In a case such as this, in which a national sin was involved, this was also a very good sign. The more numerous and varied the penitents, and the deeper their sorrow, the better, of course, the prospect of that thoroughly national repentance which was required in this case. So far, therefore, things were of such a nature as to give a ground of hope, though not more. It was something to find, in so many quarters, so much sorrow for sin.

II. **HOPEFUL THOUGHTS.** One man, *e. g.*, out of the many present next expressed such thoughts for the rest. His words were all the more worthy of attention because the evil bewailed seems to have had place amongst his own family and connections; possibly in the household of his own father, Jehiel (comp. vers. 2 and 26). Yet even *he* felt, though so near the evil, that the case was not beyond hope. It was not a case, *i. e.*, (1) in which a remedy of any kind was impossible. There are some evils which, if once begun, must necessarily continue; but that was clearly not the case here. Besides the obvious fact that there was no necessity for any further marriages of this unhappy description, it was at least possible to think of a method of undoing, to some extent, the harm already accomplished. Wherever such forbidden wives had been "taken," or brought home to dwell (Lange), they might be again "brought forth" (margin), or brought out—the exactly opposite course (Lange again). Even if children had been born to them—a worse form of the evil no doubt on many accounts—there was still a remedy conceivable, however distressing it might be, and however harsh it might seem. These children might be sufficiently provided for, and then sent away with their mothers, as at once the most salutary and the

most natural course of proceeding. Only, in short, let all those concerned "covenant with their God" to act in this manner, and it would evidently be possible for them to become free of this plague. (2) The case was one in which such a remedy was quite *lawful*. They would not be endeavouring, by the proposed process, to get rid of one sin by another. The plan proposed, in fact, was the "counsel" of Ezra himself. Either he had taught as much beforehand in explaining generally the Law of Moses, or they understood as much now from his actions, or from some unrecorded words of his at this time. In any case, as being *his* counsel, it was the counsel of an adequate authority—of one to be addressed as "my Lord"—on this subject. It was also the counsel of all those among the people who were known for their profound and even "trembling" reverence for the commandment of God. There could be no doubt, therefore, if this remedy should be adopted, that all "would be," or "would happen" (so Lange), according to the law. (3) The proposed remedy was also *feasible*—another capital point. There was a fitting person to undertake its application, viz., Ezra himself. "This matter belongeth unto thee." It is the kind of thing we expect from thee; it is within thy commission to do it. There were those also ready to assist him, when once the thing was begun—even the speaker himself and his friends. One can imagine all that "great" and penitent "congregation" murmuring their willing assent at this point; and the speaker, in consequence, feeling enabled to assure him that he would be sure to succeed if he tried. "We also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it" (ver. 4).

III. HOPEFUL RESOLVES. The proposal and declaration of Shechaniah were great points gained—very great—but they did not embrace all. The nail was driven through. It still required to be clenched. A mere vague and general willingness to assist in so extraordinarily difficult and invidious a task, and one affecting so many persons in so painful and (in their eyes, perhaps) so inquisitorial a manner, would never be sufficient to carry that task through. The people assembled, therefore, must be solemnly pledged and, as it were, bound over to the undertaking. What better time for so doing than that very moment before they dispersed? What better place than that very spot in front of God's house? What better manner than with Jehovah as witness, and by a solemn oath in his name? Such, accordingly, was the next thing done. "Then arose Ezra"—then at last, so it seems to signify, as though feeling at last that he could exert himself to some purpose—"and made them swear to do according to this word." "Chief priests, and Levites, and all Israel," he made them all swear, for they were all concerned in it; and were all required to help, also, in so great an enterprise. When he let them disperse, therefore, it was with the legitimate feeling, doubtless, that a beginning, at least, had been made. There was a great and dreadful evil, it was true, in their midst. But there was also among them a great and influential body who had been brought to feel it most acutely, and who had also been pledged to a distinct plan for removing it in the name of Jehovah himself. So far, in much sorrow, there was also some hope.

Observe here, in conclusion, how we find in all true repentance—1. The idea of cessation. "Repentance is that whereby we forsake sin." "If I have done iniquity, I will do so no more" (Job xxxiv. 32). A well-known children's hymn teaches that, on this point, which many adults never learn—

"Repentance means to leave  
The sins we loved before;  
And show that we in earnest grieve,  
By doing so no more."

2. The idea of urgency and promptness. "I made hasty, and delayed not, to keep thy commandments," &c. (Ps. cxix. 59, 60). 3. The idea of restitution, or of undoing the evil done, so far as lies in our power (Luke xix. 8; Acts ix. 2, 22; xix. 19; Eph. iv. 28). 4. But not the idea, in any way, of propitiation or atonement thereby. It is noticeable, rather, how the language employed seems to avoid this idea. The evil done to Israel by contracting such marriages can be undone (in part) by dissolving them; but as to the position of the people, in consequence, before God, they have nothing to urge (ix. 15. See, also, as understood by some, Ps. xlix. 7; Matt. xvi. end 26; Luke vii. 42).

Vers. 6—12.—*A national call.* We have traced before the probable influence of Ezra's piety and instructions; how they seem to have aroused the national conscience, and so to have brought to light the secret national sin; and how they afterwards brought together so many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, first to grieve for it, and then to renounce it, and resolve to suppress it. But these men, however influential, were only a fractional part of the nation. If their resolves were to be carried out satisfactorily, and so as to insure a truly national forsaking of the evil amongst them, they required the general consent, and, at least, the partial co-operation, of all the children of the captivity. And, as a first practical step towards obtaining these things, they would naturally desire, in Jerusalem itself, the presence of all such. Accordingly, we find described to us in this section (1) such a national call to assemble, and (2) such a national call to amend.

I. THE CALL TO ASSEMBLE. This call is deserving of notice—1. As to its *origin*. Where did it really arise? In that chamber to which we find Ezra retiring after pledging the assembled inhabitants of Jerusalem to suppress the evil bewailed by them. At first sight it seems strange, when there was so much requiring to be done in public, that he should seek privacy in this manner; but doubtless in that priestly chamber (see Neh. xii. 10, 22) to which he retired he was in frequent communication with the most like-minded of the princes and priests; and doubtless, also, his penitent abstinence there from bread and water, with other signs of his still continuing grief and alarm, would be an effectual means of stirring them up to do their part of the work. Wherever he was, at this time, there was but one thought in his heart. This would lead in them to but one endeavour, that of putting a stop to the plague. Hence the "proclamation" which "they made" (ver. 7). 2. As to its *extent*. Here, also, see Ezra's influence. The proclamation was universal; made "throughout," and made to "all;" to all the "children of the captivity" (ver. 7)—to all "those that had been carried away" (ver. 8)—to all those, *i. e.*, for whose transgressions (ver. 6) Ezra was mourning at that time. In this thrice-repeated description of them can we not trace the mainspring of his grief, the recollection, viz., of the great judgment and still greater deliverance which those who thus sinned had experienced (comp. ix. 7—9)? It is to all such, therefore, as thus described, that the proclamation goes forth. 3. As to its *urgency*. How speedily these "children of the captivity" are called to come up. Within "three days" they must all be at Jerusalem. One day, probably, for receiving the message; one day for preparing and travelling; on the third day to be there (comp. Mark viii. 31; ix. 31). Also, how peremptorily. Every man summoned must come up on pain of two things, the confiscation of his property (comp. vii. 26, as connecting this with Ezra's influence) and the excommunication of his person. No man so refusing would be considered by the returned remnant as still belonging to their company. If he did so refuse, the sin of it should belong exclusively to himself (see 1 Tim. v. 22). 4. As to its *success*. "All the men of Judah and Jerusalem" came up within the required time. It is also evident that they came up in the requisite spirit. It was a great day—a wonderful scene. Both seem to have impressed themselves upon the national memory. "It was the ninth month; the twentieth day." They could see it all still; the restored house, the open court before it, the multitudes there assembled, their weary attitude, their trembling grief. They could even hear still the heavy showers—not unusual indeed at that season, yet evidently at this time of very unusual severity—which would help so much, in that land of sunshine, to intensify the prevailing gloom; not impossibly, also, reminding some of those present of 1 Sam. xii. 18. See how well this call had succeeded; and how much reason there was to trace its success (when we remember Prov. xvi. 1; Matt. vi. 6) to the secret intercessions of Ezra in the "chamber of Johanan, the son of Eliashib."

II. THE CALL TO AMEND. This again was very successful, and, doubtless, from much the same cause. Not only had the people come together, as we have already seen, most willing to hear; but all that followed was also correspondingly bright. For example, observe—1. *How faithful the counsel given.* Doubly distressing as the distress of the people must have been to Ezra himself, he will not attempt to remove it by any cry of false peace (Jer. vi. 14). On the contrary, he states the fact plainly, "Ye have transgressed;" that is certain. Also he states it exactly, "Ye

have taken strange wives;" that is the main point of your trespass. Also, once more, he states it fully, "To increase the trespass of Israel;" to add to that which was already too great, and which once before, in fact, except for God's wonderful mercy, would have ruined Israel beyond recovery. That being the case, what ought to be done? First of all, let the truth be acknowledged. The sin has been public. Avow it, "therefore," publicly. Make open "confession" of it before "Jehovah;" before "Jehovah the God of your fathers," against whom ye have sinned. Next, let the sin be forsaken. You have greatly displeased God by this conduct. Now, therefore, seek the opposite, and be ready to "do his pleasure," and not your own. Also do it voluntarily. "Separate yourselves" from these evil associations; and that, moreover, at whatever sacrifice, and with however much pain—"from the people of the land, and from the strange wives." To all this observe—2. *How hearty their response.* Observe its purport, as direct as an echo: "As thou hast said, so must we do." Its unanimity, from "all" those present, however many, however diverse. Its manner, with outspoken clearness, and therefore without hesitation, or reluctance, or false shame, or indifference—all these, as we know, being things which restrain the utterance and prevent it from being "loud." Very grave, very brave, very distinct, and very determined, in the midst of the descending rain-storm, was this their response—a truly national, a truly faithful pledge of amendment of life.

Hence we may see, in conclusion—1. How national affairs are determined, viz., so far as men are concerned, rather by the supplication of God's servants than by the proclamations of rulers. Not cabinet councils so much as closet prayers shape the history of the world. The will of Ezra in Johanan's chamber was in communication, by the way of God's throne, with all the wills in the land (comp. Gen. xviii. 23—33; xix. 29; xx. 7; 1 Sam. vii. 5; Job xlii. 8; 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2; and, in a certain sense, 1 Kings xix. 16; Ps. cxlix. 5—9; Jer. i. 10). 2. How national judgments may be averted, viz., by that which amounts, however expressed, to a really national confession and subsequent forsaking of sin. The exact mode of making this confession is of minor importance, and may perhaps be a subject admitting of considerable diversity of opinion, provided only that there is no real room for uncertainty as to its meaning and scope. The voice that said what was forbidden, must be the voice, it is clear, to unsay it, so far as lies in its power. This applies not only to nations, but to cities, to Churches, to families, to all associations, in fact, of human beings. Wherever there is association in evil, there must be like association in its repudiation. The fact, also, that such repudiation of evil is the only step that we can take on our part towards its ultimate forgiveness, only makes the duty of taking it, if that be possible, more imperative still (see Jer. iii. 12, 13). The less God asks, the less excuse for our refusing to give it (see 2 Kings v. 13).

Vers. 13—44.—*A satisfactory close.* When a nation has openly resolved on the reformation of a national sin, there is still one thing remaining to be accomplished, viz., that reformation itself. This, accordingly, is that which we read of in the remaining part of this chapter. "As thou hast said, so must we do." Such was the resolve of all as expressed in ver. 12. In vers. 13—44, which come before us now, we see that resolve carried out. We shall find that it was so carried out, first, with very great zeal; and secondly, with very great care.

I. **VERY GREAT ZEAL.** When the people had spoken, as just noted, they did not stop short. Neither did they wait for Ezra or the rulers to arrange proceedings for them. They themselves, on the contrary, made proposals for so doing. We may suppose that they all, as a body, joined in the resolve of ver. 12. Afterwards, probably, some one or two of them spoke in the name of the rest, suggesting the method of action described to us in vers. 13, 14. This spontaneous promptness in such a direction was itself a proof of much zeal. It is true of all men in earnest that they show their desire of success by the plans which they form for securing it (see Ps. xxxvi. 4; Isa. xxxii. 8). In the present instance, moreover, it is to be noticed that the people formed such plans (1) in the *face of great difficulties*. It was no light task which had been resolved on by them. With all the good will in the world they could not do it where and as they were then—their numbers so great, their circumstances so trying, the operation required so cumbrous, the transgression



itself so deep (see margin, end ver. 13). And yet if they were once allowed to disperse, how could its accomplishment be secured at all? How much might be lost in such a case beyond their power to regain! Equally unattainable the thing appeared, whatever they did. Any persons less in earnest would have given it up altogether. With them, however, this only caused them to form their plans (2) *with very great wisdom*. That which they suggested met fully all the difficulties in question. First of all there was to be a tribunal—a “commission,” as we might call it—a tribunal easily constituted and recognised because composed in the main of the acknowledged national heads (“the rulers of all the congregation”)—on whom was to rest the responsibility of seeing this thing carried through. Next, this commission, sitting at Jerusalem, was to have power, by the vote of that assembly, to appoint times and summon persons as they might find to be needed, care being taken, in every separate case of investigation, to have the support of the local “elders” with their weight of influence and character, and the assistance of the local “judges” with their weight of authority and knowledge. Also the powers of this commission were not to cease nor their labours to be relinquished till they had done all in this matter that could be done in the way of averting God’s wrath. - So feasible, so effectual, so complete was the plan they proposed in their zeal. And this wise plan was proposed (3) *with wonderful unanimity*. Amongst the many heads of households (some 113 it appears in number) directly concerned in this evil, there must have been some who, from pride of wealth or position, or dread of public exposure, or strength and tenacity of natural affection, would be tempted to feel peculiar repugnance to such a proposal. It does not appear, however, that any of these said anything against it. If any others did on their behalf, we have their names in ver. 15, as some understand one expression in the former half of that verse. But if, on the other hand, we rather understand that the four persons there referred to were, as it were, the two “secretaries” and two “assistant secretaries” of this commission, who therefore at once “stood” (see margin, and comp. “stand” in ver. 13) to organise and arrange for the commission according to the just-carried “resolution” of that great assembly, then we have no expressed divergency of opinion at all. In either case the practical unanimity was exceedingly great; so great, in the one case, that the opposition of these four conspicuous Israelites could do nothing against it; so great, in the other, that there was no opposition in existence worthy of being named.

II. *VERY GREAT CARE*. These things being agreed on, the meeting, no doubt, dispersed. No time appears to have been lost in carrying out the resolution passed. We find evidences, however, of the care this was done with—1. In the *final settlement of the commission* resolved on. Ezra, it appears (so some understand ver. 16), did not take all those who were qualified by position to act upon it; but himself “separated” off only “certain” men of each principal “house” among them. Also, in order to prevent all mistake, or confusion, or subsequent possibility of objection, he enrolled and announced publicly the “names” of all such. And, finally, notwithstanding the urgency of the matter, he took ten full days for this work of selection and enrolment, viz., from the twentieth day of the ninth month to the first day of the tenth. This was time, we may be certain, very well spent, but it was in great contrast to the “three days” of ver. 8, and a great evidence, therefore, of his great care in preparing for this work. 2. In the *actual operations of the commission*, when thus fixed. The very manner, *e. g.*, of their commencing seems to be indicative of this spirit. “They sat down to examine this matter,” as men who felt how long and arduous a task they had on their hands, and who wished, therefore, to give to it their undivided attention and care (comp. Matt. xxvii. 36). We see the same spirit in the long continuance and perseverance of their work. It took them three months to “make an end” of the examination; but it was a full end when they did. By the “first day of the first month” (ver. 17), of the next year, there was nothing left to be done. And we see it also in the impartiality and thoroughness of their work. On the one hand, there was no respect of persons on the side of the great. “Among the sons of the priests” (ver. 18) were found those who had taken strange wives, some of these being even amongst the high priest’s own relations. What was to be done about these? As teachers and ministers of the truth, were they in as much danger as others from idolatrous connections in their houses? Even if so, was it necessary

for their severance from such connections to be made an occasion of public scandal? Must the names of each be made known? Must they be made known as those of offenders? Must men of such standing be openly bound over to reform their households? If these questions were ever asked, we see from ver. 19 how they were answered. If anything, the severest measure was dealt out to these distinguished offenders. They had to lead the way in repentance; also a written promise of amendment, and an open confession of transgression, were required in each case. On the other hand, there was no respect of persons with regard to the lowly (Exod. xxiii. 3). Whosoever had offended, whether priests (vers. 20—22), or Levites (ver. 23), or singers (ver. 24), or porters (ver. 24 again), or lay members of the house of Israel; and however difficult and painful in some cases the circumstances might be (end ver. 44), there was but one measure for all. This, indeed, is what makes this catalogue here a fit conclusion to the whole. This apparently unnecessary list of names had great value in its day. It was the formal "report," so to speak, of Ezra and his brother "commissioners," the last part of their labours, the final proof of their care. That "report" being presented, the "commission" ceased to exist.

Let us learn, in conclusion, the following lessons respecting the eradication of evil in God's congregation, viz.—1. *Its peculiar difficulty*. From the time when Ezra first heard of this mixed-marriages evil to the last day of the last month of that year, when the last case of the kind was disposed of, what a long succession of difficulties and obstacles he had to encounter and overcome! Also, what tears, prayers, fastings, watchings, efforts, and seeming extremity of severity on his part and that of others were required in order to overcome them! Yet, even so, some years afterwards, what do we find (Neh. xiii. 23—29)? 2. *Its peculiar costliness*. See what had to be given up in this particular case. It reminds one of Matt. v. 30; Deut. xiii. 6—11. The only way to prevent the destruction of the whole house of Israel and of each individual Israelite, by the spreading of the infection, was by "stamping it out," wherever found, and whatever the cost. 3. *Its peculiar importance*. If it costs much, how much more is it worth! Well does the account of the completion of this reformation come in at the end of this book. It is indeed "the crowning of the edifice," to borrow a modern phrase. All that we read of in the previous chapters would have been valueless without this. Of what avail the strongest fortification, if in treacherous hands. It was much to have restored to them the material house of God's presence. It was much more to have such a reformed spiritual "house," or congregation, rightly to use that material house for God's glory. So much more, in fact, this spiritual congregation, when it finally arrives at its best, will be without any house of that other kind (Rev. xxi. 22).

## HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The speech of Shechaniah*. Ezra was a very remarkable man. He represented the Persian court as governor in Judæa. But this was the least feature of his distinction. He was a man of the most exemplary piety, a very profound scholar, and withal the subject of Divine inspiration. When it was noised in the city that such a man had rent his clothes, there was naturally a vast concourse of people. In the presence of this assembly he offered his prayer to God, in the whole of which there is not an expression of hope. This stirred the soul of Shechaniah to deliver his speech, which was eminently wise and most appropriate to the occasion.

I. IT CONTAINED A FULL CONFESSION OF SIN (ver. 2). 1. This had been *done before by Ezra*. (1) He did this for himself, to express to God the grief of his soul that the Divine honour should have been so insulted; that his people should have been so wicked and foolish as to have exposed themselves to the vengeance of heaven. (2) But not on the part of the people who were involved in the crime. Ezra had no ground for hope; for without repentance a sinner has no plea for mercy (Ps. lxxvi. 18; Isa. i. 11—15). To Ezra, therefore, the smoke of the evening sacrifice could only be a symbol of wrath. 2. Now it is *done on behalf of the people*. He does not appear himself to have been guilty; but his father and other members of his family were implicated (ver. 26). He was in a position to know that the "sore

weeping" of the people, sympathetic with the weeping of Ezra (ver. 1), was the expression of a genuine contrition. Note—By weeping for the sins of others we may set them weeping for themselves.

II. IT PROPOSED A NATIONAL REPENTANCE AND REFORMATION (ver. 3). 1. They were to pledge themselves to *put away all the strange wives and their issue*. (1) This extreme measure was required by the law. For in ancient times it was the duty of the children of Israel to exterminate the idolatrous people of the land (Deut. vii. 1—3). (2) The genius of the gospel is different (see 1 Cor. vii. 12, 13). Now if there be *one* believing parent the offspring may receive baptism and Church recognition. 2. This was to be done *in the most solemn manner*. (1) "Let us make a covenant," literally, let us *cut* (כָּרַח *carath*) a covenant. The allusion is to the custom of dividing a victim, and laying the pieces over against each other, so that the people covenanting might pass between them (see Gen. xv. 10). (2) This ceremony on the part of the people expressed their willingness to be treated as the victim had been, viz., to be cut up by the sacrificing knife of Divine justice if they proved faithless to their pledges (see Jer. xxxiv. 18—20). (3) This ceremony points to the gospel of Christ, who is our covenant or purification-sacrifice, securing to us all blessings if we comply with the terms of mercy. It also admonishes us that if we do not comply, then the sword of flame will be turned upon us, and we shall be made ourselves the sacrifices for our sin.

III. IT SUGGESTED MEASURES FOR CARRYING OUT THE REFORMATION. 1. *Ezra was himself to be the prime actor in this*. "This matter belongeth unto thee." (1) He had the moral qualifications for the work. His very soul was in it. His influence with his people was unequalled. He was the most eminent servant of God. (2) He had the political qualifications. Governor, &c. 2. He was to associate with him as his council "*those that tremble at the commandment of God*." (1) These were the godly persons whose sympathies led them first to gather round him (ch. ix. 4). (2) "With such a council the reformation would be the more likely to be carried out 'according to the law.'" 3. *The chiefs of the people pledged themselves to be with him*. (1) Surely then "there is hope in Israel." "The valley of Achor," *i. e.* of trouble, has ever been "the door of hope" (Hosea ii. 15). God promises to return to those who return to him (1 Sam. vii. 3; Isa. lv. 7; Hosea vi. 1). (2) This speech of Shechaniah was surely God's answer to the prayer of Ezra. He was to Ezra what the angel was to Daniel (comp. Dan. ix. 20). (3) Now is the moment for action, and Ezra is equal to the occasion. "Then arose Ezra," &c. (ver. 5). "There is a tide in the affairs of men," &c.—J. A. M.

Vers. 1—8.—*Things exceptional*. Human life is a river which flows evenly along from day to day; but it is a river like the Zambesi or the Congo (Livingstone), not without its rapids and its falls. Usually it flows silently, but sometimes it dashes along with impetuosity and uproar. So is it with our Christian life, with our religious course. There are things exceptional as well as things ordinary and regular, for which room must be made by ourselves and allowance by other people. There may be, as here at this juncture in the life of Ezra and the returned Jews, a time of exceptional—

I. EXHIBITION OF FEELING. "When Ezra had prayed . . . weeping and casting himself down," &c. (ver. 1). Ezra "wept," *i. e.* made lamentation, audible and visible, in presence of all the people, and instead of standing or kneeling he cast himself down, and lay prostrate in the temple court, in order to impress on the multitude the strength of his feeling, and the critical character of the present emergency. And his example proved contagious, for all the people "wept very sore" (ver. 1), and there was a great and general outpouring of emotion. Ordinarily our feelings are wisely kept under control. In this country we are, indeed, apt to press this a few points too far, and let self-control pass into a chill or cold reserve. But self-control gives force and dignity to character, and almost anything is better than habitually giving way to tempestuous feeling. Men that are constantly violent in their expression of feeling are disregarded if not despised; they lose all influence over others; they expend themselves in trifles, and have nothing in reserve for large occasions. But there are times when feeling may be freely poured forth; when, as in

Ezra's case, there is (1) urgent reason for exciting others to feel as we do; or when, as in the case of the people, there is (2) general fervour in which it would be unsympathising or unpatriotic not to share. It is a very noble sight when a whole people mourns with an honourable repentance, or arises in holy indignation, or braces itself up to a generous struggle, or rejoices with a pure and holy joy. Then let feeling swell to its highest tide; let it pour itself forth as "the mighty waves of the sea."

II. ATTESTATION. "Let us make a covenant with our God" (ver. 3). "Then arose Ezra, and made . . . all Israel to swear that they should do according to his word" (ver. 5). Usually, as our Lord tells us, it is far better to speak simply without strengthening our word by protestation or oath (Matt. v. 33—37); but there are times when we feel called on to add to the word of promise which we make either to God or to man, something which shall confirm and secure it. We may (1) *make a formal covenant with God*, as Shechaniah recommended (ver. 3); we may take upon us his vows, alone or in company, (a) to do some duty which is binding on us, but which we are strongly tempted to leave undone; or (b) to render some service which we may lawfully leave alone, but which, in our better hours, we are inspired to undertake; or (c) to leave untouched that which is either wrong in itself or dangerous or hurtful to ourselves or those we have in charge. Or we may (2) *enter into a solemn and sacred pledge with our fellows*. Ezra felt that this was an occasion on which it was of the utmost consequence that everything should be done thoroughly; not only begun in zeal, but carried out and perfected; and for this purpose he made the chief priests, Levites, and all Israel bind themselves with a solemn oath to sustain him (ver. 5), and they did so. It is right and wise, on occasion, to require something more than a word of promise. We do well to demand a written engagement, or even a declaration made before God that what is promised shall be done.

III. SEVERITY. "When he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water" (ver. 6). "Whosoever would not come . . . all his substance should be forfeited" (ver. 8). Ezra showed some little (1) *severity toward himself*: he neither ate nor drank (ver. 6). He allowed the public concerns so to occupy his mind and affect his heart that he gave himself no time or felt in himself no inclination for the ordinary comforts and refreshments of life. We, too, on occasion, if not only sincere but zealous for the public good, shall deny ourselves that which we usually and rightly allow ourselves. There are demons (iniquities, sins, propensities) only to be cast out with that intensity of thought, and feeling, and action which implies "prayer and fasting" (Matt. xvii. 21). He also showed considerable (2) *severity toward others*. With the concurrence of the leaders (princes), those who did not present themselves in three days were to suffer forfeiture of goods and excommunication (ver. 8)—a heavy penalty for recusancy. Severe crises justify strong measures. There are times when leniency is only another name for cruelty. An Achan must perish that Israel may be saved; the immoral member of Corinth must be cast out that the Church may be pure. We must "make a difference" according to requirement (Jude 22, 23).—C.

Vers. 6—44.—*The reformation*. Roused by the speech of Shechaniah to the work of reformation, Ezra promptly took his measures. These are set forth in the words before us. The consideration of the subject may be conveniently arranged under three heads, viz.—

I. THE PROCLAMATION. 1. *This was drawn up in the temple* (vers. 6, 7). (1) In the "chamber of Johanan, the son of Eliashib." Eliashib was high priest, in which office he was succeeded by his son Joiada (Neh. xii. 10). Some think Johanan was another name for Joiada; but Joiada had a son Jonathan, who more probably was this Johanan (Neh. xii. 11). In this case Ezra consulted with the grandson of Eliashib. Sagacity for counsel is not always found with age. (2) Perhaps the chamber of Johanan was the place in which a council of priests assembled. The plural "they" who "made proclamation" shows that Ezra did not issue it upon his sole authority. It would go forth with the sanction of the civil and ecclesiastical rulers of the nation (see ver. 8). (3) It was also drawn up in a spirit suited to the solemnity of the occasion and the place. Ezra still continued his fast; "for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away." Mourning should not cease until sin is abandoned. Under the influence of this true

spirit the document was framed. 2. *Its measures were strong and peremptory.* (1) All the children of the captivity were to assemble in Jerusalem within three days. Sufficient time was given. No man can plead that God has not given him sufficient time for the securing of his salvation. But there was no time to waste. We must not play with repentance. Procrastination is peril. (2) Failing to appear, the ecclesiastical penalty was excommunication. Exclusion from the society of God's people upon earth is a fearful forfeiture. But what must be the calamity of permanent exclusion from the holy universe! (3) There was also a civil penalty, viz., "that all his substance should be forfeited." The Hebrew for "forfeited" here is in the margin construed "devoted," which suggests that it should be given to the sacred uses of the temple. This was fitting where civil and ecclesiastical laws were the same; but here is no justification for the infliction of civil penalties by ecclesiastical authority under the gospel.

II. THE APPEAL (vers. 10, 11). 1. *The people were prepared to hear it.* (1) The fear of God was upon them. "All the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter." The Spirit of God had wrought this conviction in their hearts in answer to Ezra's prayer. (2) They were also terrified because of the rain. This rain may have been natural and seasonable, for it was then December, and the Septuagint construes the word for "rain" by *winter*. It was probably miraculous (comp. 1 Sam. xii. 18). This agrees best with the terror it occasioned. 2. *It urged upon them the duty of reformation.* (1) It brought home to them their sin. Simply the heads of the discourse are given here; but many arguments were doubtless used to force home conviction. (2) It urged them to make full confession to God. Where conviction is deep and real there will be full confession. God requires this (Prov. xxviii. 13; 1 John i. 9). (3) It moved them to forsake their sin. There is an impudent confession of sin which aggravates its turpitude. Sincere confession leads to reformation.

III. THE RESPONSE. 1. *The people consented to the reformation.* (1) The consent was emphatic. "As thou hast said, so must we do." We must do it, or we are undone. (2) It was hearty. They said this "with a loud voice." It is well to pronounce ourselves against our sins. It strengthens our courage for God. (3) It was unanimous. "All the congregation answered." There is a wonderful unanimity in seasons of religious revival. God uses the sympathy of numbers. 2. *They suggested measures for carrying it on.* (1) The business was too heavy to be finished in a day. Nice points might arise to be considered. For example, some of the reputed strange wives may have become Jewish proselytes. (2) The rulers of all the congregation were to be represented by the elders of every city and the judges. Before these local courts justice might be carried out with reasonable expedition. 3. *Ezra consented to their proposal.* (1) Three months were accordingly occupied with this business (vers. 16, 17). During this time 113 delinquents were convicted (vers. 18—44). (2) Amongst these were members of the high priest's family. They gave their hands in token of their submission (see 1 Chron. xxix. 24, margin) to put away their wives. They also offered a ram for their trespass. This example was doubtless followed by the people, for everything was to be done according to the law (ver. 3; also Lev. vi. 4, 6). (3) In these sacrifices the gospel was foreshadowed. Note—"All the children of the captivity" appear to have been settled "in Judah and Jerusalem," which suggests that there were but few of the "ten tribes" among them, who would naturally seek their inheritance in other parts of Palestine. Agreeably to this, the people who assembled in response to the proclamation are described as "all the men of Judah and Benjamin."—J. A. M.

Vers. 9—44.—*Sin and repentance.* A very memorable scene was witnessed that day, the twentieth of the ninth month, in the year of Ezra's return. All the Israelites of Judah and Benjamin assembled together in the courts of the temple, shaken, troubled, trembling for fear of the anger of an offended God, ready to yield to the demands of his faithful servant who spoke in his name, even to the breaking up of their domestic ties; it was an hour when sin was coming out into the light, and was to be sternly cast out from the midst of them. We look at—

I THE CHARACTER OF THEIR SIN, AND OF ALL SIN. It was (a) *widespread* (vers. 18,

23, 24), not touching the top only, or only sinking to the bottom of their society. It went quite through the whole mass. Among them that had taken strange wives were "sons of the priests" (ver. 18); "also of the Levites" (ver. 23); "of the singers also, and of the porters" (vers. 23, 24). No class or grade was free from its infection. It was something (*β*) *that struck home*; it was not a mere political offence; it invaded their family life; it was under their roof; it concerned their dearest affections, their tenderest ties, their brightest hopes; it was a matter with which their own wives and their children had closely to do. Moreover, it was (*γ*) *a radical fault*. They existed, as a nation, on purpose that, being separated from the surrounding people by very distinct lines drawn by the hand of the Supreme, they might bear witness to certain great truths in the preservation of which lay the one hope of the race. But by this step they were becoming mixed up with the heathen world; their one characteristic was being lost; their virtue was being assailed; their very life was at stake. Their separateness gone, everything for which they existed would be gone too; they might perish, for they answered no end. The salt would have lost *its* savour; let it be cast out and trodden underfoot of men. This is the character of all sin. (*α*) It is *widespread*. As the leprosy, which was the chosen picture and type of it, spreads over the whole body, so sin spreads over all the nature, poisoning every faculty and instinct of the soul; communicating itself from one member of society to another, till the whole social body is covered with its loathsome and deathful malady. (*β*) It is something *that strikes home*; it works discord in the family circle; it introduces strife and contest into the sanctuary of a man's spirit, making it the arena on which conscience and passion, heavenly wisdom and worldly ambition, voices of good and voices of evil, continually and fiercely battle. Moreover, (*γ*) it is *a radical fault*. It is the soul turning away from the purpose for which it was created, failing to be and to do that for which its Creator brought it into being.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THEIR REPENTANCE, AND OF ALL REPENTANCE. It included (*α*) contrition—"We are many that have transgressed" (ver. 13); and (*β*) amendment—"They gave their hands that they would put away their wives" (ver. 19). The Jews who had offended saw that they were guilty; they freely acknowledged their fault, and, what was the best sign and proof of their shame, they resolved to put away the evil; they set about it vigorously and methodically, as men that seriously meant to do that to which they "gave their hands," to which they solemnly pledged themselves (vers. 13, 14, 19). All repentance is of this character. Its essentials are—(*α*) *Contrition*. There must be a real recognition by the soul of the evil of sin. Something more than mere catching up and repeating the formulæ of repentance; the falling into the ruts of expression made by those who have gone before us. Not, necessarily, the violent, pungent, overwhelming feelings which have shaken some souls, and found vent in agonising utterances; but a genuine and deep regret and shame, more or less agitating, under a sense of wrong-doing in the past life and of sin within the soul. (*β*) *Confession and amendment*. There must be a solid and living determination to "put away the evil thing," whatever it may be; to surrender the long-cherished and perhaps much-loved habit which is hurtful and injurious; to turn from selfishness and from worldliness and from pride; to *separate* the soul from all that offends God, that corrupts the nature, that works mischief; and to walk in purity of heart and blamelessness of life *before* God, the heavenly Father; *unto* Christ, the Divine Redeemer; *by help* of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier.—C.

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