

THE  
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EDITED BY THE

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AND BY THE

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N E H E M I A H.

*Exposition*

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*Homilies by Various Authors:*

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# THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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### 1. SUBJECT OF THE BOOK.

THE Book of Nehemiah is, in the main, a personal narrative, containing an account of Nehemiah himself, and of certain proceedings in which he was engaged, between the twentieth year of Artaxerxes Longimanus (or B.C. 444) and his thirty-second or thirty-third year (B.C. 432—1). It is a natural sequel to the Book of Ezra, with which it has always been united in the Jewish canon, though recognised as a "Second Part" of the Book. The principal object of the writer is to describe the circumstances attending the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem in B.C. 444, and its dedication, some years later, with great pomp and ceremony. To explain the part which he himself took in these transactions, he has to preface his account with a purely personal sketch, descriptive of the circumstances under which he became engaged in the work as its director and superintendent. This sketch occupies the first two chapters. The main narrative then commences, and is carried on uninterruptedly to the fifth verse of ch. vii., when it is broken in upon by the introduction of a list, identical (or nearly so) with one given by Ezra in the second chapter of his Book—a list of the families which returned from the Babylonian captivity under Zerubbabel, with the number of each family, and the names of the principal chiefs. This occupies ch. vii. from verse 6 to the end. The narrative is then resumed, and continued through three chapters (chs. viii.—x.), the principal subject-matter in this part being the religious instruction of the people, their celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, and the voluntary covenant with Almighty God into which they entered, by the advice of the Levites. After this, the sequence of the history is again interrupted—this time by the insertion of six distinct and independent lists, which occupy a chapter and a half (chs. xi. and xii. 1—26). The dedication of the wall is then related (ch. xii. 27—43). In conclusion, an account is given of certain religious arrangements and reforms which Nehemiah effected (ch. xii. 44—47, and ch. xiii.).

## § 2. AUTHOR.

There can be no doubt that Nehemiah himself is the author of those portions of the work which are of most interest, and give it its distinctive character. The initial sentence—"The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah"—applies beyond all question to the parts which are written in the first person (chs. i.—vii.; xii. 27—47; xiii.). So much is generally allowed. It is argued, on the other hand, that the parts where Nehemiah is spoken of in the third person—notably, chs. viii., ix., and x.—are not from his pen; and their authorship has been attributed to Ezra.\* It may be admitted that the internal evidence of style and manner favours strongly the view that this section is not the original composition of Nehemiah.† There is nothing, however, to militate against the supposition that it was drawn up by his authority, and received the sanction of his approval. Ezra's claim to have written it cannot be substantiated; on the contrary, a careful analysis of the language leads to the very opposite conclusion. We must regard it as an anonymous work, which, however, Nehemiah probably saw, and placed in its present position. With respect to the lists, which make up the remainder of the Book, that of ch. vii. is probably an official document, drawn up in the time of Zerubbabel, extracted by Nehemiah from the national archives; that of ch. xi. is the official account of his own census; those of ch. xii. cannot have taken their present shape much before the time of Alexander the Great, since Jaddua (vers. 12 and 22) was his contemporary; but it is quite possible that Nehemiah may have originated them, and that certain additions may have been made to them subsequently. In this case Nehemiah would be, either as original composer or as compiler, the responsible author of the whole Book, with the exception of a few verses.‡

## § 3. DATE.

The earliest date at which Nehemiah can have composed the last section of the work (ch. xii. 27—xiii. 31) is B.C. 431, the year in which, after visiting Babylon, he came to Jerusalem the second time (ch. xiii. 6). *Probably* he wrote very soon after carrying through his reforms, since he expresses himself with a warmth only natural if the struggle had been recent.§ These considerations limit the date of the original work to about B.C. 431—430. The final recension may have been made about a century later.

## § 4. GENERAL CHARACTER.

In general character the Book of Nehemiah very much resembles that of Ezra. It is a plain, straight-forward, simple history of a short period of the

\* Hävernick, 'Einleitung in d. Alt. Test.,' § 305; Bishop A. Hervey in Dr. Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' vol. ii. p. 494.

† See the 'Speaker's Commentary,' vol. iii. p. 426, note 2.

‡ To wit, vers. 11, 22, and 23 of ch. xii.

§ See especially ch. xiii. 8, 25, and 28.

Jewish state, containing in it nothing miraculous, nothing particularly exciting or extraordinary. The Jewish community is in a depressed condition; and though external adversaries are resisted, and, on the whole, resisted with success, no great triumph is achieved, no very remarkable deliverance effected. At the same time, the internal condition of things is far from satisfactory; the evils which Ezra had resisted have recurred, and brought others in their train, which cause those who are at the head of affairs much anxiety. Nehemiah writes in a depressed tone, like a man who is not appreciated by his generation, and who is unhappy. The language which he uses is simple, and somewhat rough, as if he had not enjoyed the advantage of much education. Like that of Ezra and of the writer of the Book of Esther, it contains a good many Persian words. It is, however, Hebrew throughout, with no intermixture of Chaldee. The style, as might be expected from the diversity of source already noticed, is far from being uniform. The lists are bald and dry, as was natural with official documents. The section extending from ch. viii. to the end of ch. x. is free and flowing, betrays the hand of a practised writer, but is not characterised by much originality. On the other hand, the parts written by Nehemiah himself are quite peculiar. Vigorous, rough, strikingly dramatic, and markedly devotional in their tone, they show us an author of an original turn, who thought for himself, felt strongly, and expressed himself tersely and aptly, if with some rudeness. There is no portion of Scripture on which individuality is more impressed than the opening and concluding sections of this composite "Book," which are evidently the direct work of Nehemiah.

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

Nehemiah was the son of Hachaliah, of the tribe of Judah.\* He belonged, apparently, to the "Jews of the dispersion,"† and, while still a youth, became attached to the Persian court, where his merit, or his appearance, enabled him to obtain the "important and lucrative office of a royal cupbearer."‡ This position brought him into direct contact with the king and queen of the time, who were Artaxerxes Longimanus and Damaspia. Longimanus had already shown himself friendly to the Jews, and being of a kindly and affable temper, appears to have become attached to his attendant, and to have been on terms of familiarity with him which we should scarcely have expected. Nehemiah relates how, while he was in attendance on the court at Susa, the chief royal residence, he heard of the desolation of Jerusalem through his brother, Hanani, who had recently visited the holy city and seen its sad condition (ch. i. 1—3). Pierced to the heart by the description, he gave himself up for many days to fasting and mourning and prayer. The king for some time did not observe his grief; but after three or four months it had so altered him, that, on his appearance one day to take up his term of service, Artaxerxes noticed the change,

\* See ch. ii. 3, and the comment on it.

† Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. v. p. 159, E. Tr.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 143

and asked for an explanation. Nehemiah upon this unbosomed himself, and finding the king sympathetic, obtained leave of absence from the court, an appointment to be governor of Jerusalem, and permission to rebuild the wall, to restore the temple fortress, and to repair the residence of the governor, of which he was to take possession. With these instructions, and with letters to the satraps of the provinces through which he had to pass, Nehemiah quitted Susa, accompanied by a strong escort, in the spring or early summer of B.C. 444. We are not told how much time was occupied by his journey; but having arrived in safety at Jerusalem, he, like Ezra, rested "three days" (comp. Ezra viii. 32 with Neh. ii. 11). He then proceeded, under cover of night, to make a survey of the wall. It was well known to him that any attempt to put the city into a state of defence would meet with a formidable opposition on the part of powerful persons in the neighbourhood.\* He therefore kept his commission secret, effected his survey of the wall secretly, and let no word of his intentions go forth, until he had made such preparations that the whole work might be begun and ended within a few weeks. The essence of his arrangement was the partitioning out of the task among a large number of working-parties,† all prepared to act simultaneously, and each completing its own portion of the wall without reference to the remainder (ch. iii.). The plan succeeded. Though opposition of various kinds was made, and open violence threatened, no actual collision took place between the Jews and their adversaries; and in little more than seven weeks the entire wall was repaired and restored to its full height (ch. vi. 15). Solid folding-doors were then placed in the gateways, guards established, and a rule laid down that the gates should be closed at nightfall, and not opened in the morning "until the sun was hot" (ch. vii. 3). Thus the main work which Nehemiah had set himself to do was accomplished within six months of the day that he obtained his commission from Artaxerxes.

His administration during the remainder of the time that he governed Judæa, which was certainly not less than thirteen years, was characterised by the same vigour, promptness, and energy which had marked its opening months. It was also remarkable for the consideration which he showed for those under his rule, and for the noble hospitality which he dispensed both towards natives and towards foreigners (ch. v. 14—18). He augmented the population of Jerusalem, too scanty for the size of its walls, by bringing men in from the country districts (ch. xi. 1); redeemed large numbers of Jews, who had been sold into slavery among the heathen, and restored them to their native land (ch. v. 8); put an end to a system of borrowing money upon mortgage, or raising it by selling sons and daughters into servitude, which was reducing the lower class of Jews to the condition of the poor Roman plebeians of the early commonwealth (*ibid.* vers. 1—13; ch. x. 31); restored the strict observance of

\* This knowledge is indicated by the mention of Sanballat and Tobiah, before they come naturally upon the scene, in ch. ii. 10.

† Thirty-seven at the least; forty-two, according to Ewald ('History of Israel,' vol. v. p. 158, E. Tr.).

the Sabbath, and of the sabbatical year (ch. x. 31 ; xiii. 15—22) ; established the annual payment of one-third of a shekel by each adult male towards the temple service and fabric (ch. x. 32), together with a system for supplying the wood necessary for the sacrifices (*ibid.* ver. 34) ; prevented the temple from being polluted by the heathen, and profaned by being used for secular purposes (ch. xiii. 4—9) ; enforced the payment of tithes, which was falling into disuse (ch. x. 37 ; xiii. 10—13) ; and, like Ezra, compelled all those who had married foreign wives to divorce them, and send them back, with their children, to their own people (ch. xiii. 1—3, and 23—28). His efforts to effect these reforms were thwarted and resisted by an important party among the priests and nobles, which leant towards secularism, was addicted to intermarriage with the heathen, and desirous of fusion with the surrounding nations. An ordinary man might have shrunk from affronting the views of a party so strong and so powerful, one supported by neighbouring princes, and upheld at Jerusalem by the high priest of the time, Eliashib. Nehemiah set himself to “contend with the rulers” (ch. xiii. 11) and the “nobles” (*ibid.* ver. 17) ; “chased from him” the grandson of the high priest (*ibid.* ver. 28) ; “cursed,” or at any rate “reviled,” those who had married the foreign wives, and even “smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair” (*ibid.* ver. 25). When Eliashib himself, the natural guardian of the temple, disregarding its sacredness, assigned one of the chambers within its precincts to Tobiah the Ammonite, who furnished it and made it into a residence, Nehemiah of his own authority turned all the furniture out of doors (*ibid.* ver. 8). Strict, zealous, prompt, uncompromising, he would allow no relaxation of the old law, no departure from primitive custom, no consorting with foreigners. Not only did he re-establish the walls of Jerusalem on their ancient foundations, but he built up the state too on the old lines, “supplementing and completing the work of Ezra,” and giving it “internal cohesion and permanence.” \*

There was one day in the latter part of his administration which must have been to him a day of exquisite pleasure, and have almost repaid him for all the anguish that he had endured from the perversity of the people and the opposition of the nobles. After holding office for twelve years, he had had occasion to visit the court, either to make some special report, or because “his leave of absence had expired.” † While there, he had perhaps obtained permission to conduct a ceremony which he must have long had in his mind, but which he may have been afraid to venture on without the king’s express sanction. This was the dedication of the wall. On returning to Jerusalem, in Artaxerxes’ thirty-third year, B.C. 431, he felt that the time was come to inaugurate his great work with appropriate pomp and circumstance. By his arrangement, “two vast processions passed round the walls, halting at one or another of those venerable landmarks which,” twelve years before, “had signalled the various

\* Ewald, p. 161.

† *Ibid.* p. 160

stages of their labour; whose shadows had been their daily and nightly companions for such weary weeks of watching and working. The Levites came up from their country districts, with their full array of the musical instruments which still bore the name of their royal inventor; the minstrels, too, were summoned from their retreats on the hills of Judah and in the deep valley of the Jordan (¶). They all met in the temple court. The blast of the priestly trumpets sounded on one side; the songs of the minstrels were loud in proportion on the other. It is specially mentioned (ch. xii. 43) that even the women and children joined in the general acclamation, and 'the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.' Perhaps the circumstance that leaves even a yet deeper impression than this tumultuous triumph is the meeting, which on this day, and this day alone, Nehemiah records in his own person, of the two men who in spirit were so closely united—himself as heading one procession, and 'Ezra the scribe' as heading the other." \*

It is impossible to determine the time at which Nehemiah ceased to be governor of Judæa, or to say whether he was recalled, or died at his post. We may gather from his last chapter that, at the time when he wrote it, he still retained his office; but, as we have seen that he probably completed his "Book" about B.C. 431, or 430, we cannot positively assign a longer duration to his governorship than fourteen or fifteen years. Jewish tradition does not help us in the matter, for Josephus adds nothing to what we know from Scripture, beyond the statement that Nehemiah lived to a good old age.

The character of Nehemiah is sufficiently clear from his writings. "He resembled Ezra in his fiery zeal, in his active spirit of enterprise, and in the piety of his life;"† but he was of a bluffer and a fiercer mood; he had less patience with transgressors; he was a man of action rather than a man of thought, and more inclined to use force than persuasion. His practical sagacity and high courage were very markedly shown in the arrangements by which he carried through the rebuilding of the wall, and baulked the cunning plans of the "adversaries." The piety of his heart, his deeply religious spirit, and constant sense of communion with and absolute dependence upon God, are strikingly exhibited, first, in the long prayer recorded in ch. i. 5—11; and secondly, and most remarkably, in what have been called his "interjectional prayers"—those short but moving addresses to Almighty God which occur so frequently in his writings—the instinctive outpouring of a heart deeply moved, but ever resting itself upon God, and looking to God alone for aid in trouble, for the frustration of evil designs, and for final reward and acceptance. At the same time, there is no fanaticism in his religion; while trusting in God for the issue, he omits no necessary precaution. "Nevertheless," he says, "we made our prayer unto our God, *and set a watch against them day and night*" (ch. iv. 9). Nor does he trust to faith alone, without works. He is self-denying, hospitable

\* Stanley, 'Lectures on the Jewish Church,' Third Series, pp. 128, 129.

† Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. v. p. 147, E. Tr.

active in deeds of mercy (ch. v. 8, 14, 17), unresting, indefatigable. Many are the "good deeds" which he does for the house of his God, "and for the offices thereof" (ch. xiii. 14). And, besides his heavenly, he had an earthly reward. His memory remained fresh for a long term of years in the minds of his countrymen, who "glorified him in their traditions," and for a time set him even above Ezra. He finds a place, where Ezra has none, in the heroic catalogue of the son of Sirach (Ecclus. xlix. 13). He was believed in the next age to have rebuilt the temple and the altar (2 Macc. i. 18). It was even reported of him that he founded a library in Jerusalem, collected the acts of the kings, and gathered the holy books into a volume (*ibid.* ii. 13). The place of his death and burial seems to have been unknown. No tomb is spoken of as raised in his honour. Such a memorial was perhaps felt to be unnecessary; for, as Josephus observes, "the wall of Jerusalem constituted his best and most enduring monument." \*

#### LITERATURE OF NEHEMIAH.

Bertheau's work on the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther contains the fullest commentary on Nehemiah as yet published. Valuable contributions to the history of the period will be found in Ewald's 'Geschichte Volkes Israel' (vol. v. of the English translation, by Estlin Carpenter), and in Dean Stanley's 'Lectures on the Jewish Church,' Third Series. The articles on 'Nehemiah' in Kitto's 'Cyclopædia,' Dr. W. Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' and Winer's 'Realwörterbuch' may also be studied with advantage.

#### ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOK IN SECTIONS.

The following will be found the most convenient arrangement of Nehemiah:—

Part I. (chs. i.—vii.). Nehemiah's account of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, and of the register which he found of those who had returned with Zerubbabel.

##### *Subdivisions.*

Section 1 (chs. i., ii.). Introductory. Circumstances under which Nehemiah obtained his commission, and steps which he took preliminary to the building of the wall.

Section 2 (ch. iii.). Commencement of the work. Arrangement of the working parties.

Section 3 (ch. iv.). Open opposition offered to the work by Sanballat and Tobiah, with Nehemiah's counter-arrangements.

Section 4 (ch. v. 1—13). Internal difficulties, and the manner in which Nehemiah overcame them.

Section 5 (ch. v. 14—19). General account of Nehemiah's government.

Section 6 (ch. vi.). Secret proceedings of Sanballat and his friends, with their failure.

Section 7 (ch. vii. 1—5). Completion of the work, and arrangements for guarding the gates.

Section 8 (ch. vii. 5—73). Register of those who returned with Zerubbabel.

\* 'Ant. Jud.,' xi. 5, § 8, *ad fin.*



Part II. (chs. viii.—x.). Account of the state of religion among the Jews under the administration of Nehemiah.

*Subdivisions.*

Section 1 (ch. viii.). Religious instruction of the people by Ezra, and celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Section 2 (ch. ix.). Solemn fast kept, with confession of sin; and voluntary covenant entered into with God by the people, and sealed to by the princes, priests, and Levites.

Section 3 (ch. x.). Names of those that sealed, and terms of the covenant.

Part III. (chs. xi., xii. 1—26). Enlargement of the population of Jerusalem; number of the adult male inhabitants, and names of the chiefs. Various lists of priests and Levites at different periods.

*Subdivisions.*

Section 1 (ch. xi. 1, 2). Artificial enlargement of the population of Jerusalem.

Section 2 (ch. xi. 3—19). Number of the adult male inhabitants, and names of the chiefs.

Section 3 (ch. xi. 20—36). Geographic disposition of the rest of the population.

Section 4 (ch. xii. 1—9). List of the priestly and Levitical houses which returned with Zerubbabel.

Section 5 (ch. xii. 10, 11). List of the high priests from Jeshua to Jaddua.

Section 6 (ch. xii. 12—21). List of the heads of the priestly courses under Joiakim.

Section 7 (ch. xii. 22—26). List of the chief Levitical houses at this period and afterwards.

Part IV. (ch. xii. 27—47, and ch. xiii.). Dedication of the wall of Jerusalem under Nehemiah and Ezra, with Nehemiah's arrangement of the temple officers, and his efforts for the reform of religion.

*Subdivisions.*

Section 1 (ch. xii. 27—43). Dedication of the wall.

Section 2 (ch. xii. 44—47). Arrangement of the temple officers.

Section 3 (ch. xiii.). Religious reforms carried into effect by Nehemiah.

# THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH.

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## PART I.

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INTRODUCTORY SECTION. CHAPTERS I., II. 1—11.

### EXPOSITION.

#### CHAPTER I.

CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH NEHEMIAH OBTAINED HIS COMMISSION TO REBUILD THE WALL OF JERUSALEM (chs. i., ii. 1—8). Living at the Persian court, far from the land which he looked on as his true country, though perhaps he had never seen it, Nehemiah seems to have known but little of its condition and circumstances; and it is quite possible that he might have remained in his ignorance during the term of his natural life but for an accident. Some event—we do not know what—called his brother Hanani to Jerusalem; and on his return to Susa this brother gave him a description of the dismantled state of the holy city, and the “affliction and reproach” of the inhabitants consequent thereupon, which threw him into a paroxysm of grief. With the openness and passion of an Oriental, he abandoned himself to his feelings; or, in his own words, “sat down and wept, and mourned for days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven” (ch. i. 4). Whether he was in regular attendance at this time upon the king does not appear. Perhaps the court was absent, wintering—as it sometimes did—at Babylon, and he had not accompanied it; perhaps it was at Susa, but the office of cupbearer was being discharged by others.

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At any rate, more than three months had elapsed from the time when he heard of the affliction of Jerusalem before his changed appearance was noted by the king. It was the month Nisan, that which followed the vernal equinox, the first of the Jewish year, when Artaxerxes, observing the sadness of his attendant, inquired its cause. Nehemiah revealed it, and the king further inquired, “For what dost thou make request?” This was the origin of Nehemiah’s commission. He asked and obtained permission to quit the court for a definite time (ch. ii. 6), and to go to Jerusalem with authority to “build” the city. This was understood to include the repair of the governor’s house, of the fortress which commanded the temple area, and of the city wall (*ibid.* ver. 8). It necessarily involved Nehemiah’s appointment as governor, and the notification of this appointment to the existing satraps and pashas. Leave was also given him to cut such timber as was needed for the work in the “king’s forest” or “park,” a royal domain situated in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. Nehemiah, having obtained this firman, left Susa early in the spring of B.C. 444, accompanied by an escort of Persian troops (ver. 9), and reached Jerusalem in safety, having on his way communicated his appointment to the officials of the Syrian province.

B

Ver. 1.—**The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.** Compare Jer. i. 1; Hosea i. 2; Amos i. 1, &c. No other *historical* book commences in this manner, and we may best account for the introduction of the clause by the consideration that "Nehemiah" having been originally appended to "Ezra," it marked the point at which a new narrative began by a new author. **The month Chisleu.** The word Chisleu, or rather Kislev, is probably Persian. It was unknown to the Jews before the captivity, and is found only in this passage and in Zech. vii. 1, where Kislev is said to be "the ninth month," corresponding nearly to our December. **The twentieth year.** The twentieth regnal year of Artaxerxes (Longimanus) is intended (see ch. ii. 1). This began in B.C. 445, and terminated in B.C. 444. **Shushan the palace,** where Daniel saw the vision of the ram with two horns (Dan. viii. 2), and Ahasuerus (Xerxes) made his great feast to all his princes and servants (Esther i. 3), is beyond all doubt Susa, the capital city of Kissia, or Susiana, one of the most ancient cities in the world, and the place which, from the time of Darius Hystaspis, was the principal residence of the Persian court. It was situated in the fertile plain east of the Lower Tigris, and lay on or near the river Choaspes, probably at the spot now known as *Sus*, or *Shush*. Remains of the palace were discovered by the expedition under Sir Fenwick Williams in the year 1852, and have been graphically described by Mr. Loftus ('Chaldaea and Susiana,' pp. 373—375).

Ver. 2.—**Hanani, one of my brethren.** Afterwards given the charge of the gates of Jerusalem by Nehemiah (ch. vii. 2).

Ver. 3.—**The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down.** It has been supposed, either that the demolition of the wall here referred to was quite recent, having occurred during the space of twelve years which intervenes between the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, or else that it belonged to a time of depression which followed shortly after the completion of the temple by Zerubbabel (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. v. pp. 120, 121, and 148, note 3, E. Tr.); but there is really no reason to believe that the demolition effected under the orders of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings xxv. 10) had ever hitherto been repaired, or the restoration of the wall even attempted. The Samaritan accusation in Ezra iv. 12 falls short of a statement that the wall was restored, and, if it asserted the fact, would be insufficient authority for it. The supposition of Ewald, that "as soon as the city was rebuilt, the attempt would be made to fortify it" (p. 121, note 3), ignores the jealousy of the Persians and their power to step in and prevent a subject town from fortifying itself.

Ver. 4.—**When I heard these things, I sat down and wept.** The revelation of the actual condition of Jerusalem came upon Nehemiah with a shock. He had perhaps not thought much upon the subject before; he had had no means of exact information; he had supposed the city flourishing under the superintendence of Ezra, whose piety and patriotism were no doubt known to him. It was a bitter grief to him to find that his people were still "a reproach to their neighbours," laughed to scorn by those whose walls had never been destroyed, or who had been allowed to rebuild them. And he may have felt that his city, under the circumstances of the time, was in real danger. As Dean Stanley observes: "In those days, rather one may say in those countries of disorder, a city without locked gates and lofty walls was no city at all" ('Lectures on the Jewish Church,' Third Series, p. 124). A few years previously Egypt had been in revolt; she might revolt again, and carry her arms into Syria. Arab tribes from the desert might extend their raids into Judaea, and be tempted by the known value of the temple treasures to swoop upon the unwall town. Such thoughts occurring to an excitable Oriental, produced not grief and anxiety merely, but a flood of tears (comp. Ezra x. 1). **And fasted.** Fasting had become a frequent practice among the Jews during the captivity. Solemn fasts had been introduced on the anniversaries of the taking of Jerusalem, the burning of the temple, and the murder of Gedaliah (Zech. viii. 19). Fasting had also taken a prominent place in the devotions of individuals. Daniel fasted (Dan. ix. 3; x. 3); Esther fasted (Esther iv. 16); Ezra fasted (Ezra x. 6); and now Nehemiah fasted. On the grounds of natural piety out of which the practice arises, see the comment on Ezra x. 6. **The God of heaven.** See the comment on Ezra i. 2.

Ver. 5.—**And said, I beseech thee.** The opening of Nehemiah's prayer follows so closely the thoughts and words of Daniel's (Dan. ix. 4), that it is almost impossible to suppose that one of the two writers had not the words of the other before him. As there are no sufficient grounds for questioning the generally received date of Daniel's prophecy (B.C. 523), we must suppose Nehemiah familiar with his writings, and an admirer of their tone and spirit. In this verse he differs from Daniel only in substituting "Jehovah" for "Lord" (*Adonai*), and introducing his own favourite phrase "God of heaven."

Ver. 6.—**Both I and my father's house have sinned.** Ewald well observes, "In the prayer of Nehemiah the keynote is struck in the words, 'I and my father's house have sinned'" ('History of Israel,' vol. v. p. 149, note 1). The desolation which he mourns is

the result of the people's sins, and in those sins are included his own, and those of his ancestors. His own may not have been very grievous, but those of his fathers weigh upon him as if his own, and oppress his spirit.

Ver. 7.—**We have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments.** The ordinances of the Law are frequently summed up under these three heads (Deut. v. 31; vi. 1; xi. 1, &c.); but it would be a mistake to regard them as constituting a logical division of the various precepts contained in the Pentateuch, or to suppose that every precept is to be referred absolutely to one or other of the three.

Ver. 8.—**If ye transgress, &c.** This is not a quotation, but a reference [to the general sense of various passages, as, for instance, Lev. xxvi. 27—45; Deut. xxx. 1—5, &c. The sacred historians habitually refer to the older Scriptures in this way, quoting them in the spirit rather than in the letter.

Ver. 10.—**Thy people whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power.** It would be better to translate, "Whom thou didst redeem." The reference is especially to the deliverance from Egypt, which is so con-

stantly spoken of as effected "with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm" (Deut. ix. 29; xxvi. 8, &c.).

Ver. 11.—**Prosper thy servant this day.** "This day" does not perhaps mean more than "at this time"—in connection with this matter which is now in my thoughts. **And grant him mercy in the sight of this man.** "This man" is, of course, Artaxerxes, though as yet he has not been named. Nehemiah's thoughts have far outstripped his words. He has made up his mind that, in order to remove the reproach of Jerusalem, he must go there in person; that, to do so, he must obtain the king's permission; and that, to get his permission, he needs to be in very special favour with him. All depending on one man only, he has one man only in his mind, who becomes to him, therefore, "this man." **I was the king's cupbearer.** Literally, "I was cupbearer to the king." Not his sole cupbearer, but one of many. He mentions the fact here, partly to explain the meaning of "this man" to the reader, partly because it was his office which would give him access to Artaxerxes, and enable him to profit by the royal "mercy" or favour.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*A godly patriot's sorrow.* Israel was both a nation and a Church; a sacred nation representing and embodying the kingdom of God on earth. Hence such men as Nehemiah may be regarded as examples either of patriotism or of zeal in the service of God and his Church. The latter aspect of their character is most suitable, as a rule, for exhibition in the pulpit. Viewing Nehemiah in this light, observe—

I. HIS SECULAR POSITION. Prosperous, rich, occupying high office in the court of the Persian monarch, he nevertheless felt a deep interest in the condition of his brethren at Jerusalem. His worldly good fortune did not quench the flame of his piety or deaden his sympathies with God's people. Rather was he the more impressed with a sense of his obligation to aid them; which he was willing and even eager to do at the cost of much trouble, self-denial, pecuniary expense, and even peril to himself. An example to the rich and influential, who are not always the most ready to serve Christ and his people.

II. THE INTEREST HE DISPLAYED IN THE WELFARE OF ISRAEL. Shown by—1. *Inquiry* as to their condition. Concern for the prosperity of the Church of Christ will prompt to similar inquiries when like opportunities present themselves. 2. *Sorrow* over their calamities. Public-spirited men have sorrows which others escape. Blessed are such sorrows. There is often much in the state of religion to grieve zealous Christians: coldness, indifference, inconsistencies, divisions, errors, opposition, reproach; "broken walls" through which the Church's foes enter to injure, to scatter, and destroy. These evils must awaken sorrow in the godly, on account both of the dishonour they do to God and the damage they inflict on men. 3. *Prayer* for their deliverance. Genuine interest in the welfare of the Church cannot but express itself in prayer. The weakest can pray; the most powerful need to begin, continue, and end their plans and labours for the good of God's people with prayer. 4. *Determination* to assist them, if possible (ver. 11). It is a worthless sympathy which only prays when it has power to help. That which is real will move the hands as well as the feelings and the lips.

From the whole let us learn to recognise and thankfully acknowledge God's care

for his Church in the care he awakens in the hearts of such as are able to render her valuable service. Especially let us be grateful for and to the Lord Jesus, who from an incalculably loftier position than Nehemiah's regarded us in "our low estate" with love and pity, and came down to save us by the sacrifice of himself.

Ver. 5.—*Love and obedience.* "God that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments." We have here—

I. TWO CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD'S PEOPLE. 1. *Love to God.* Old Testament piety is sometimes wrongly represented as though it consisted mainly in a strict observance of outward rules, from fear, with little or no love. The "first commandment," and many of the Psalms, not to speak of other Scriptures, should have precluded such an idea. A just conception of Old Testament religion is not to be obtained from the Pharisees. God is presented in the Old Testament as an object of love on account of (1) his character; (2) his works of creation and providence; (3) his redemption of Israel from Egypt, and constant goodness to them; (4) his special favour to the true Israel, "those who love him," &c. Much more, doubtless, are the manifestations of God in Christ adapted to awaken and nourish love to him. 2. *Observance of his commandments.* This includes obedience and watchful care ("observe") to obey; and therefore to obtain the knowledge of them, avoid or overcome temptations to neglect or disobedience, and to secure the grace needful for knowing and doing them (see Ps. cxix., *passim*). 3. The *combination* of the two. They are essential to each other, and act and re-act for each other's growth. Obedience without love is as nothing. (1) Love to God necessarily produces obedience. It includes delight in his rule, reverence for his authority. It is love for his character, and therefore for those excellences which are "commanded because they are right." It will work confidence in the wisdom and goodness of such laws as rest simply on his authority, "right because they are commanded." The obedience of love will be spiritual—not the mere service of the letter—prompt, joyful, universal, constant, and persevering. Love will give strength for difficult duties, and to overcome all temptations to disobey. (2) Obedience is a necessary evidence of love. No professions, knowledge, orthodoxy, devotional excitements, or gifts of money are sufficient without it (Matt. vii. 21; John xiv. 21; 1 John v. 3).

II. THEIR BLESSEDNESS. 1. They enjoy the *friendship* of "the great and terrible God." 2. They experience his *mercy and faithfulness*. To keep his covenant with them is to keep mercy.

Vers. 5—11.—*A godly patriot's prayer.* Nehemiah's prayer; the substance of the prayers which he offered day and night for a considerable period. It is in various respects a model for our intercessions. In it are—

I. Lowly and trustful ADORATION. He addresses God as "Jehovah," the self-existent, immutable, and everlasting, the God of Israel; "God of heaven," he who dwells and reigns in heaven, and thence rules the earth; "the great God," infinite in all his perfections, filling heaven and earth with his presence, exalted above all; "the terrible God," to be dreaded by his foes and revered by his friends; "that keepeth," &c., faithful to his engagements, merciful, and kind; yet discriminating, showing his truth and mercy to those who love and obey him. By these representations Nehemiah at once expresses and increases his own reverence and confidence in approaching God on behalf of his people.

II. Earnest ENTREATY (vers. 5, 6, 8, 11). "I beseech thee." "Let thine ear be attentive," &c. Earnestness and importunity necessary to success in prayer (Luke xi. 8).

III. Humble CONFESSIONS (vers. 6, 7). Of the sins not only of the people in general, but of his family and himself. It is easy to confess the sins of others, but may conduce to self-flattery. The holiest men will be deeply conscious of their own sins, and of their part in the sins of the community, and ready to associate themselves with others in the confession of sin. In his confessions Nehemiah mentions the aggravations of the guilt of Israel's sins. They were committed—(1) By Israel, a people so favoured. (2) Against God. (3) Against specific commandments, statutes, and judgments, (4) given by Moses, so distinguished a "servant" of God,

and under circumstances so impressive. Observe, that in seeking God's mercy towards sinners we ought ever to acknowledge their ill deserts, and his justice in the punishment of their sins.

IV. POWERFUL PLEAS. 1. The *name* of God (ver. 5). The representation of God with which he commences is virtually a plea. "Thou hast shown thyself to be all-powerful, faithful, merciful; act once more according to thy nature, and thy regard for thy servants." 2. The *promise* of God (vers. 8, 9). Nehemiah recognises that the threat to scatter the people had been fulfilled, and in effect prays that the promise to restore may be fulfilled also. "Do as thou hast said." 3. The *relation* of Israel to God. "Thy servants," "thy people." 4. His *former exercise of power* on their behalf. "Whom thou hast redeemed," &c. Referring to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (comp. Isa. li. 9—11, and the Christian parallel, Rom. viii. 32). 5. The *description of persons uniting* in the prayer (ver. 11). Not only Nehemiah, but many others were praying for the returned Jews. It was (1) united prayer (2) of godly men—"thy servant," "thy servants, who desire [delight] to fear thy name." 6. Nehemiah's own *perseverance* in the prayer (ver. 6). "The prayer which I pray before thee now, day and night."

V. A PARTICULAR REQUEST (ver. 11). Purposing to apply to the king for a commission and all facilities for leading his brethren out of their difficulties, and feeling how much depended on his obtaining his request, he begs him in whose hand is the heart of kings (Prov. xxi. 1) to grant success. It is remarkable that this is the only specific request. The prayer he and all good Jews were offering (vers. 6—11) is not set forth. For his own part, he may have seen that the one thing needed for the relief of his brethren was a ruler and leader of character, authority, and capacity, armed with sufficient powers from the monarch, and that this was the one thing to pray for at present. His willingness to be their leader evinced the sincerity of his concern for them. His prayer made manifest the humble dependence on Divine aid with which he was looking forward to the responsibilities of the enterprise he hoped to undertake.

Ver. 10.—*A powerful plea with God.* "Now these are thy servants," &c.

I. When such an appeal is SUITABLE. When praying for a Church—(1) declining (2) divided, (3) distressed, or (4) persecuted.

II. The NATURE of the appeal. It is an appeal to God's (1) relation to his people—a relation he has himself established; (2) love for them; (3) regard for his own honour as involved in their welfare (Deut. ix. 26—29; Jer. xiv. 21); (4) pity in view of their condition; (5) past deeds on their behalf—showing kindness; a pledge of more; manifesting purposes not yet completed. The appeal is suitable for individual Christians, praying for themselves (see Ps. cxix. 94).

Ver. 11.—*Delight in fearing God.* "Thy servants, who desire [delight] to fear thy name." If the English version be correct, this description of God's servants reminds us how largely their religion in this world consists of "desire." They have real piety, but are dissatisfied with their attainments, and aspire to better things. Their desire is, however, to be carefully distinguished from that of many who substitute occasional good wishes for actual piety. The real Christian's desire impels him to the diligent use of all those means by which a higher life is reached. He "exercises himself unto godliness;" and what he attains he employs in spiritual and moral living. But the word used rather signifies "delight," expressing the pleasure which God's servants feel in their religion. The text then indicates—

I. The NATURE of their fear of God. Such fear as is a delight. Not, therefore, mere dread—the fear which "hath torment" (1 John iv. 18). Not the fear of a slave, not the dread of the feeble towards a capricious mighty tyrant, or of the guilty towards a just ruler; but reverence—that fear which consists with confidence and love, and is blended with them.

II. The OBJECT of their fear. "Thy name." The manifested nature of God. God as revealed by his works and word; his perfections; his relations to the universe—to good men and bad; his authority. All are adapted to awaken reverence, and do awaken it in his servants.

III. Their PLEASURE in its exercise. 1. *Whence* it arises. From the felt rightness and harmony of such fear with their position towards God; the satisfaction it imparts to their conscience; the evidence and promise which it gives of Divine favour; the elevating and sanctifying power it exerts; the defence it supplies against sin and its consequences. 2. *How* it will be shown. By frequent conscious exercise of such fear in devout thought and acts of worship; by yielding to its practical influence, in producing a service abundant, joyous, and persevering. When religion is a delight it will not be stinted, nor likely to decline. Finally, if the fear of God's name be delightful, how much more the faith, hope, and love which the gospel inspires.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Piety in a palace.* I. PIETY and POSITION. "As I was in Shushan the palace." Piety tends to prosperity; it inculcates habits favourable to advancement; it imparts graces calculated to attract. Goodness is often rewarded; it will dwell in a better palace in the life to come.

II. PIETY and PURITY. Nehemiah was humble amidst the pride of the palace; he was pure amidst the luxury of the palace; he was faithful to his Jewish faith and to his God amidst the heathenism of the palace; he was sympathetic amidst the conventionality of the palace; he was prayerful amidst the levity of the palace; he was pious amidst the anxieties of the palace life.

III. PIETY and PATRIOTISM. 1. *Inquiring.* Nehemiah asked concerning the welfare of his brethren; his own comfort did not render him indifferent to the suffering of others. 2. *Sorrowful.* He wept because the wall of Jerusalem was broken down; his patriotism was manifested in holy grief. 3. *Prayerful.* See here the prayer of the patriot.

IV. PIETY and PROVIDENCE. Nehemiah in the palace was able to render effective aid to Israel; God places his instruments where they can best serve his purpose. Christ in heaven pleads the cause and helps the service of the good.—E.

Vers. 1—4.—*Prosperity and adversity.* It is a fact of no small significance that the Hebrew author of this book was in the palace at Susa. "I was in Shushan (in) the palace" (ver. 1). The Jewish captives in Persia were by no means all in a forlorn or destitute condition. We find them filling honourable offices—Nehemiah was cup-bearer to the king—and even attaining to the highest posts in the state, as in the case of Daniel. We are reminded that—

I. WE MAY FIND SOME MITIGATION IN OUR EVIL CONDITION. We have evidences enough, both in the Bible and in secular history, of the evils of absolutism, of intrusting the power of life and death, of prosperity and adversity, to one man; but we have proof that in Persia men of humble station could rise to exalted position. Here was "a career open to ability." Seldom an evil estate without one mitigating feature; seldom a cloudy day without an interval of blue sky; few lives without some sources of happiness. Obscurity, with all its dulness, has freedom from the glare and hatred of public life. Hard work knows, as luxury and indolence cannot, the enjoyment of repose.

"Not always fall of leaf, nor ever spring;  
No endless night, nor yet eternal day.  
The saddest bird a season finds to sing,  
The roughest storm a calm may soon allay.  
Thus, with succeeding years, God tempers all,  
That man may hope to rise, yet fear to fall."

II. WE SHALL REAP SATISFACTION IF WE SOW PIETY AND VIRTUE. Wherever the Jew has gone, whether forcibly deported or whether he has voluntarily migrated, he has carried with him the virtues of his race. Beyond question the law of Moses trained a people to the practice of a severe morality. Purity, temperance, industry, and frugality have been the characteristics of the race in every land and age. And these have placed them everywhere in positions of honour and of trust. Thus

Nehemiah comes from the king's presence to see his countrymen from Jerusalem. Under the righteous government of God we shall find that the same virtues will conduct us to sufficiency, contentment, honour, prosperity.

III. WE HAVE ONE UNFAILING RESOURCE IN TIME OF TROUBLE (vers. 2, 3). Evil tidings come to Nehemiah in his prosperity and cloud his life (vers. 2, 3). Certain of his countrymen bring tidings from Jerusalem which are most distressing to him. The city of God is "in great affliction and reproach" (ver. 3); its "wall is broken down;" its "gates are burned with fire" (ver. 3). There are those who would hardly allow their day's enjoyment to be disturbed if they heard of the most terrible calamities. In nothing is our spirit more clearly shown than in the way in which we receive tidings of the welfare or misfortune of others. Nehemiah was a large-hearted, sympathetic man. He entirely forgot his own comfortable prosperity in the adversity of his race; to him the sufferings of his people were his own misfortunes. Under these circumstances Nehemiah had recourse to (1) *two Oriental sources of relief*: he (a) gave himself up to formal lamentation—he "sat down and wept, and mourned certain days" (ver. 4); and (b) he fasted (ver. 4). These expressions of grief were national, Oriental; to him they were therefore natural and helpful. We may weep, we may abstain from food because appetite is killed by sorrow; but it is not natural, and therefore not right, for us to affect the tokens of grief which belong to other times or other peoples. But Nehemiah had also recourse to (2) *one universal source of comfort*. He "prayed before the God of heaven" (ver. 4). He took his sorrow to the throne of grace, to the "God of all comfort;" he presented himself with aching heart to him who alone can "bind up the broken heart." This refuge in time of trouble is not Jewish, nor Oriental; it is human, universal, unfailing. In every clime and every age the stricken spirit can go to God, pour out its woe to heaven, and find calm and comfort in the sympathy of the unchangeable Friend. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. xli. 1). "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28).—C.

Vers. 1—11.—*God and his people*. We may notice here four things:—The state of the Jews that had escaped who were left of the captivity. The position and character of Nehemiah. The prayer which was mingled with the lamentation. The practical aim and purpose which followed the prayer. All are based upon the one foundation of the special gracious relation of God to his covenant people. We may therefore distinguish the following practical points in this chapter:—

I. An illustration of THE DIVINE METHOD and character in dealing with those who are the objects of special regard. 1. *Faithfulness*. The Jews suffered because they rebelled. They suffered still because they still needed discipline. They were "in great affliction and reproach" that they might be taught to seek help of God. They had no walls to their city that they might be labourers together with God in rebuilding them. They were surrounded with opponents that their holiness might be maintained, their zeal and constancy developed and tried, their victory made manifest. 2. *Forbearance and compassion*. A remnant left. The burning bush unconsumed. The "day of small things" in which the Spirit of God reveals his might, full of promise. Eminent saints are more sought after and more appreciated at such times.

II. A conspicuous example of RELIGIOUS CHARACTER. Nehemiah. 1. Found in a palace, in a heathen palace, in a king's cupbearer. *Resistance to temptation*. Cultivation of faith in unfavourable circumstances. A friend made of the mammon of unrighteousness. A testimony borne to the superiority of the man of God, as in the case of Daniel and his associates. Mercy granted in the sight of the heathen. 2. Deep feeling of *brotherhood with God's people*. A tender heart. An inquiring mind. An unselfish regard for the condition of those afar off. Anxious concern that God's glory should be seen in his Church. 3. *Strong faith*. Keeping hold of Divine promises, looking for their fulfilment, troubled by delay, turning from external facts to God. 4. *Prayerfulness and humiliation before God*. "He sat down and wept, and mourned for days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." There is no emergency in which the man of faith loses sight of his great resource in setting himself and his desires before God. When he does so, he will not be



ashamed of his tears. To the true heart the condition of the Church is a personal sorrow or a personal joy. 5. The *practical aim* mingled with the supplications. The faith which prays is the faith which works. When we ask God for help we should be ready for service. Nehemiah did not satisfy himself with weeping and praying. He said, "Here am I, send me." The true prayer is always consecration.

III. An eminent instance of PRAYER AT A GREAT CRISIS. The characteristics of Nehemiah's prayer were—1. *Adoring faith*. He believed that God was God. 2. *Remembrance* of the word of God, and his gracious revelation of himself in keeping covenant and mercy. 3. *Confession of sin* and acknowledgment of God's righteousness. 4. *Humble boldness* in appealing to him who has given his word to fulfil it. 5. *Spiritual insight and foresight*. Looking on the world and its rulers and all its affairs as in the hand of him whose throne is the throne of grace, to which his people can come at all times. To such a faith the Persian monarch is only "this man," a mere instrument in the hands of God. 6. Identification of the personal life and feelings with the interests and doctrines of God's Church. "Prosper thy servant." Not for his own sake, but for thy people's sake. "I was the king's cupbearer;" but I was the representative of Zion, and the intercessor for Jerusalem.

IV. A GREAT ENTERPRISE undertaken in dependence upon God. 1. The *foundation* was sure. It was an enterprise on which God's blessing could be sought. 2. The *instrument* was fit. Nehemiah was conscious both of intense desire and consecration, and of personal quality by which he was adapted to the work. 3. The *method* was wise. He did not break away from his connection with Persia, but sought to use the earthly power for the heavenly purpose. 4. The *spirit* was truly religious. "Prosper thy servant this day." Without God nothing is strong. With his help all things are possible. He rules both men and things for his people.—R.

Vers. 4—11.—*Piety and prayer*. I. The SORROW of prayer (ver. 4). Prayer was designed to be a glad communion with God; but sin has embittered it. Now it is often suffused with tears; but it will soon rejoice in God. Hannah's prayerful sorrow soon became her prophetic song. The sorrows of prayer are more joyous than the rejoicings of sin.

II. The IMPORTUNITY of prayer (ver. 5). Nehemiah besought God to hear his prayer; his whole being was engaged in his devotion. Sorrow makes men earnest; things spiritual must be earnestly sought.

III. The THEOLOGY of prayer. True prayer has a right conception of the Divine character; it will see in God—1. The Divine. 2. The exalted. 3. The faithful. 4. The powerful. All true prayer is based on a right conception of the Deity; the more we know of God, the more true and acceptable will our worship become.

IV. The DURATION of prayer (ver. 6). Nehemiah prayed day and night. We must pray without ceasing. "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. xxxii. 26).

V. The CONFESSIONS of prayer (vers. 6, 7). 1. Personal. 2. Domestic. 3. National. 4. Unreserved.

VI. The SUPPLICATION of prayer. Prayer generally has some specific request to urge. 1. The Divine promise (vers. 8, 9). 2. The Divine mercy. 3. The Divine aid in the past.—E.

Vers. 5—11.—*A prayer: its characteristics*. We have many recorded prayers in the sacred Scriptures. They have various characteristics, as we should expect they would have; for our individuality—that in which God has made us to be different from every one else—should appear in prayer as much as in any other act. More rather than less, for if there be one thing more especially in which we should "be ourselves," it is when we approach him who requires "truth in the inward parts." Nevertheless, we shall find in the prayer of Nehemiah those characteristics which we should expect to find in any address to God from a holy man, and which should mark our devotion.

I. REVERENCE. "I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God" (ver. 5). "Let thine ear be attentive, and thine eyes open" (ver. 6). Nehemiah speaks as one who feels that it is an infinite condescension for the Majesty

on high to "humble himself to behold the things which are done upon the earth." In our "access with boldness" there is danger lest we run into irreverence. Who can help marking a painful familiarity in the addresses of some men to the Saviour of mankind? If we feel that our Maker is our friend, we must never forget that our friend is our Maker.

II. ADORATION. "Thou keepest covenant and mercy," &c. (ver. 5). Critics who raise an easy sneer about our "telling God the truth concerning himself" must not be allowed to deprive us of the privilege and drive us from the duty of adoration. It is a fitting thing, well sanctioned in Scripture, fruitful of humility and sacred joy, to ascribe in prayer "the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty" to our God (1 Chron. xxix. 11; Rev. iv. 11, &c.).

III. CONFESSION. "The sins which we have sinned against thee," &c. (vers. 6, 7). Here is confession of national sin. Our consciousness tells us of our own guilt, and should lead us to confess (a) *our transgressions* ("we have dealt corruptly") and (b) *our shortcomings* ("we have not kept," &c.). Our confession of sin should be simple and natural, not conventional or ostentatious. The truer, the more acceptable. Beside the acknowledgment of our own personal faultiness, our sympathy with our fellows (of the same family, Church, nation) will lead us to confess our sins as members of a community.

IV. SUPPLICATION, PLEADING (vers. 8, 9, 10). Nehemiah pleads with God his ancient promises, and he reverently affirms that they for whom he is making intercession are such as these promises included. We cannot do better than plead (a) God's word of promise, and (b) his past deliverances (ver. 10): "Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling?" (Ps. lvi. 13).

V. EARNESTNESS. In verse 11 Nehemiah urges his petition: "O Lord, I beseech thee," &c. Earnestness is not content with one clear utterance. It returns and repeats. The language of entreaty is naturally redundant. It does not spare words; it pleads and pleads again.

VI. DEFINITENESS. "Prosper thy servant . . . and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer" (ver. 11). Nehemiah prays not only generally for God's merciful regard to be given to his people, but he asks especially that the mind of the king, Artaxerxes, may be favourably disposed towards himself. We should consider what we urgently require when we draw nigh to God in prayer, and ask him for those special and definite favours which are most calculated to meet the need of our circumstances and life. Only, as here, we must be unselfish and high-minded in the desires we cherish.—C.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1.—*In the month Nisan.* The fourth month after Chisleu, corresponding nearly to our April. How it came about that Nehemiah did not put the king's favour to the proof until more than three months had gone by we can only conjecture. Perhaps the court had been absent from Susa, passing the winter at Babylon, as it sometimes did, and he had not accompanied it. Perhaps, though present at the court, he had not been called on to discharge his office, his turn not having arrived. Possibly, though performing his duties from time to time, he had found no opportunity of unbosoming himself, the king not having noticed his grief. He may even have done his best to conceal it, for Persian subjects were expected to be perfectly happy in the presence of their king. He had probably formed no plan, but

waited in the confident hope that God's providence would so order events, that some occasion would arise whereof he might take advantage. *In the twentieth year of Artaxerxes.* Like Daniel, Zechariah, Haggai, and Ezra, Nehemiah dates events by the regnal year of the existing Persian king. His Artaxerxes is, by common consent, the same as Ezra's, and can scarcely be supposed to be any monarch but Longimanus, who reigned from B.C. 465 to B.C. 425. *Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.* Other renderings have been proposed, but this is probably the true meaning. Hitherto I had always worn a cheerful countenance before him—now it was otherwise—my sorrow showed itself in spite of me.

Ver. 2.—*The king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad?* This "kindly question" put by the great king to his humble retainer is his best claim to the favourable

judgment of later ages. History puts him before us as a weak monarch, one who could compromise the royal dignity by making terms with a revolted subject, while he disgraced it by breaking faith with a conquered enemy. But if weak as a king, as a man he was kind-hearted and gentle. Few Persian monarchs would have been sufficiently interested in their attendants to notice whether they were sad or no; fewer still would have shown sympathy on such an occasion. A Xerxes might have ordered the culprit to instant execution. Longimanus feels compassion, and wishes to assuage the grief of his servant. **Then I was very sore afraid.** Notwithstanding the king's kind and compassionate words, Nehemiah feels his danger. He has looked sad in the king's presence. He is about to ask permission to quit the court. These are both sins against the fundamental doctrine of Persian court life, that to bask in the light of the royal countenance is the height of felicity. Will the king be displeased, refuse his request, dismiss him from his post, cast him into prison, or will he pardon his rudeness and allow his request?

**Ver. 3.—May the king live for ever.** A common form of Oriental compliment (1 Kings i. 31; Dan. ii. 4; iii. 9, &c.), but said now with special intention to conciliate, and meant to express a deep interest in the royal life and person. **The city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres.** We see by this that Nehemiah's family must have belonged to the capital. The Persians, like the Jews, had a great respect for the tomb, and regarded its violation with horror. Artaxerxes would naturally sympathise with the wish of his follower to give security to the city where his ancestors were interred. It would seem that the Persians generally at this time (Herod., i. 140), the kings certainly ('Ancient Monarchies,' vol. iii. p. 231, second edition), buried their dead. **Lieth waste.** Nehemiah's warmth of feeling exaggerates the fact; but he may have been unconscious of the exaggeration. He repeats the phrase to the chief men of Jerusalem after making his survey of the wall (ver. 17).

**Ver. 4.—Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request?** Artaxerxes understood that a complaint was contained in Nehemiah's speech, and that he must have a request to make. With gracious kindness he facilitates its utterance. **So I prayed to the God of heaven.** Nehemiah was emphatically a man of prayer. In every danger, in every difficulty, still more at any crisis, prayer rose to his lips (see ch. iv. 4, 9; v. 19; vi. 9, 14; xiii. 14, &c.). Sometimes, as now, the prayer was offered silently and swiftly.

**Ver. 6.—The queen.** It appears from Ctesias ('Exc. Pers.,' § 44) that Artaxerxes Longimanus had but one legitimate wife—a certain Damaspia. Nothing more is known of her besides this mention, and the fact that she died on the same day as her husband. (The Septuagint rendering of *hasegal* by *ἡ παλλακή* is wrong.) **Sitting by him.** Not an unusual circumstance. Though, when the monarch entertained guests, the queen remained in her private apartments (Esther i. 9—12), yet on other occasions she frequently took her meals with him ('Ancient Monarchies,' vol. iii. p. 214). **I set him a time.** Nehemiah probably mentioned some such time as a year, or two years—such a space as would suffice for the double journey, and the restoration of the fortifications. He stayed away, however, as he tells us (ch. v. 14), twelve years, obtaining no doubt from time to time an extension of his leave (Bertheau).

**Ver. 7.—Let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river.** It is not quite clear why no letters were needed to the governors between Susa and the Euphrates. Perhaps, while travelling was safe, at any rate *with an escort*, in the more central provinces, beyond the river it became unsafe (see Ezra viii. 31).

**Ver. 8.—The king's forest.** Patrick supposes the forest on Mount Lebanon to be intended; but Nehemiah would scarcely have desired to transport timber for ordinary building purposes from such a distance. Moreover, the word used is one not applicable to a natural forest, but only to a park, or pleasure-ground planted with trees, and surrounded by a fence or wall. The word is *pardes*, the Hebrew representative of that Persian term which the Greeks rendered by *παράδεισος*, whence our "paradise." We must understand a royal park in the vicinity of Jerusalem, of which a Jew, Asaph, was the keeper. **The palace which appertained to the house.** The "house" here spoken of is undoubtedly the temple; and the *birah* appertaining to it is, almost certainly, the fortress at the north-west angle of the temple area, which at once commanded and protected it. Josephus says ('Ant. Jud.,' xv. 11, § 4) that this fortress was called *Bâris*; originally. In Roman times it was known as the "Turris Antonia." **The house that I shall enter into.** The governor's residence. Nehemiah assumes that the powers for which he asks involve his being appointed governor of Judæa. **The king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.** Through God's special favour towards me, the king was induced to grant my request.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Prayer answered.* Three or four months had passed since Nehemiah first heard of the distressed condition of his brethren at Jerusalem, and began to pray for them, and that he might be permitted to visit and relieve them. So long the answer to his prayer was delayed. But he doubtless continued to pray, and at length the answer came. Meanwhile, he would be able to ripen his plans, and prepare himself for his enterprise. Notice—

I. THE OPPORTUNITY AT LENGTH AFFORDED HIM. Arising from—1. His access to the king. 2. The king's notice of his sadness and kind inquiry respecting it (ver. 2). An example to superiors in relation to inferiors; to masters and mistresses in respect to their servants. The highest are liable to suffer, and may be glad of the sympathy and services of those beneath them, who will render them all the more cheerfully if kindness has been shown to them. God intends the relationships of life for *mutual* comfort and benefit. Sympathy benefits alike the giver and receiver. Sympathy is as oil to the machinery of life. It unites classes in bonds more sacred, happy, and lasting than laws or self-interest. Every one has it in his power, by cherishing and displaying it, to render invaluable service to society. Sympathy between employers and employed is one of the greatest wants of England. 3. His reply. Describing the sad condition of Jerusalem, and intimating its preciousness to him as "the place of his fathers' sepulchres" (ver. 3). 4. The king's encouragement to him to present his request (ver. 4). A kind word will do much to alleviate sorrow; a readiness to give practical relief more. The king encouraged Nehemiah to hope for this; nor was the hope disappointed.

II. THE USE HE MADE OF HIS OPPORTUNITY. 1. It filled him with fear (ver. 2). The moment he had so long desired had come; but at first its arrival only made him "very sore afraid." So much depended on it; so uncertain was he of his power to produce the right impression on the king, whose will would determine whether his plan should be executed. 2. It led him to prayer (ver. 4). As he stood before the monarch, embarrassed and trembling, he lifted up his heart to God, imploring assistance and success. The best thing he could do. Prayer calms the anxious (Phil. iv. 6, 7), gives the soul possession of itself, brings God to the help of man. In the strength of God Nehemiah could address the king. 3. He presented his petition to Artaxerxes (ver. 5). Humbly and courteously, as became him, and was best adapted to secure his object. 4. He made further and larger requests when the first was granted (vers. 7, 8). The general lesson is, Seize your opportunities, whether for getting or doing good. "There is a tide in the affairs of men," &c. The impression made by a young man in a short interview may determine the complexion of the whole of his after life. Failure is often only lost opportunities avenging themselves. It is so not only in secular matters, but spiritual. "The golden moments in the stream of life rush past us, and we see nothing but sand; the angels come to visit us, and we only know them when they are gone" (G. Eliot).

III. HIS SUCCESS. The king not only granted him his requests, but gave him apparently more than he asked for (ver. 9).

IV. HIS PIOUS ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF ITS SUPREME SOURCE. "According to the good hand of my God upon me" (ver. 8). Many fail in this. Even those who have prayed for what they have received do not always make due acknowledgment. Thanksgivings are not so plentiful as prayers.

In conclusion, observe—1. Christians always have access to the throne of the King of kings. He feels deep interest in them, sympathy with them; encourages them to tell him their sorrows and present their petitions. They may come to him not only at stated periods, but at any moment, through the mediation of the Lord Jesus. 2. They should avail themselves of this privilege not only for their own advantage, but for the good of others. They should pray constantly "for the peace of Jerusalem," for the "good estate of the Catholic Church." God purposes and promises good to his Church, but enjoins prayer for what he has promised (see Ezek. xxxvi. 37). Our Lord teaches us, in the model prayer he has given us, to pray first for the hallowing of God's name and the coming of his kingdom. Yet many Christians are selfish in their prayers, and thus nourish their selfishness. 3. They may ask for great things.

He to whom they come is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," and has done great things in answer to prayer. 4. Past answers to prayer should embolden to further and larger requests.

Ver. 2.—*Sorrow and its Consoler.* "This is nothing else but sorrow of heart."

I. SORROW OF HEART MAY CO-EXIST WITH EXTERNAL WELL-BEING. Nehemiah was healthy, honoured, rich, yet sad. So are many in similar circumstances. The sorrows of sympathy, patriotism, and piety, as Nehemiah's were; those of penitence or remorse; of wounded affection or disappointed confidence; those occasioned by family troubles, &c., may invade the hearts of the most prosperous. And it is well that they should. Prosperity without sorrow tends to moral ruin.

II. SORROW OF HEART IS GRACIOUSLY NOTICED AND ASSUAGED BY THE KING OF KINGS.

1. He observes the sorrowful heart. It will commonly reveal itself in the countenance; but if not, God sees it (Ps. xxxi. 7; xxxviii. 9). 2. He delights to comfort the sorrowful heart. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." He sent his Son "to heal the broken-hearted." The Spirit whom he sends is "the Comforter." By his providence, by the revelation he gives of his fatherly pity and the benevolent ends of affliction, by his assurances of favour and love, by his promises, by human sympathy and solace, he comforts now his children; and ultimately he will wipe all their tears away.

III. SORROW OF HEART SHOULD RECEIVE TENDER HUMAN SYMPATHY AND SUCCOUR.

We should be sensitive to its signs, and prompt to feel with and for it, and to proffer consolation and relief. This course is—1. Prompted by nature. To decline this duty is to do violence to ourselves. It is to "shut up our bowels of compassion" (1 John iii. 17), unless, indeed, we are so far below the level of humanity as to have none. 2. Enjoined by religion. The law and the gospel coincide here. 3. Required by our relation to sufferers. The brotherhood of man to man, of Christian to Christian. 4. Enabled by our possession of the gospel. Which is a collection of cordials for all varieties of human sorrow. He who has this, though he has little besides, may be a comforter of many. 5. Illustrated by Divine example (see II.). 6. Enforced by the revelation of the last judgment (see Matt. xxv. 35—45; 1 John iv. 17). Finally, there is sorrow coming on the impenitent which will receive no comfort from God, angel, or man (see Luke xvi. 24—26).

Ver. 3.—*Sadness, when and how far justifiable.* "Why should not my countenance be sad?"

I. SADNESS IS OFTEN JUSTIFIABLE, OR EVEN COMMENDABLE. 1. Under great troubles. Stoicism is neither natural nor Christian. *Troubles* are meant to *trouble* us. If they do not, they afford no trial to faith and patience, and cannot effect their purpose for discipline and improvement. 2. Under the consciousness of sin. In view of its essential evil as committed against God, his rights, laws, and goodness; its injuriousness to ourselves and to others; its final consequences unless forgiven. 3. In sympathy with the troubles of others. Which makes them our own. Christian fellowship includes community of suffering. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." 4. On account of the sins of others (Ps. cxix. 136, 158; Ezek. ix. 4; Phil. iii. 18). 5. On account of the troubles of the Church. Nehemiah's sadness was honourable to him.

II. YET SADNESS SHOULD NOT BE INCONSOLABLE. 1. It need not. For a sure remedy is furnished in the truths and promises of the gospel, and the ever-available aid of the Holy Spirit. 2. It ought not. For faith and prayer, opening the heart to the Divine consolations, and securing the Divine aid, would turn sadness into peace, if not joy. Those cases are, however, to be excepted where melancholy springs from physical causes, and needs bodily rather than spiritual treatment.

III. SADNESS SHOULD NEVER BE PREDOMINANT IN THE CHRISTIAN. For his habitual sadness of spirit, countenance, or speech—1. Dishonours God. 2. Robs himself. Counteracting the design of our religion, everywhere prominent in the New Testament. "That they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer." "The kingdom of God is . . . joy in the Holy Ghost." "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy," &c. "These things write

we unto you, that your joy may be full." 3. Hinders Christian service. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." 4. Retards the progress of religion. Discouraging inquirer, and giving occasion to adversaries to speak ill of the religious life.

Ver. 4.—*Ejaculatory prayer*. "So I prayed to the God of heaven." Nehemiah, saddened by the report he had received of the condition of the Jews who had returned to their land, had formed a purpose to visit them, that he might encourage them, and take the lead in fortifying the city, and putting affairs into a more hopeful condition. His doing so depended on the consent of the monarch whose cupbearer he was, and his obtaining a commission from him. Already he had prayed for success in his intended application, and now that the desired opportunity presented itself he felt the importance of the moment, and in the king's presence sent up mentally another prayer. We have here—

I. PRAYER BY A GREAT AND WEALTHY MAN. Such have many temptations to neglect prayer; temptations to *pride* and self-dependence, to *worldliness* and self-indulgence, tending to the loss of all sense of their need of God and spiritual good; to entire *absorption* in the cares of their position; to false *shame* before their equals, &c.; yet they need prayer as much as the poorest, and in some respects more. They equally need Divine mercy as sinners, and Divine help and guidance; and they have special responsibilities, temptations, and power for good or evil, and so need special grace. In undertaking such a work as Nehemiah proposed to himself, the greatest may well feel their need of Divine aid. It is pleasing to contemplate such men when they are men given to prayer. Many instances in the Bible: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Daniel, Cornelius.

II. PRAYER AT AN UNUSUAL PLACE AND TIME. Not in temple or synagogue or secret chamber; but in the presence of a king and queen, and while engaged in ministering to them. Learn that no place is unsuitable, no time unseasonable, for prayer; for God is everywhere, and his ear always open.

III. SILENT PRAYER. Was perhaps an exercise of mind and heart, unknown to the king. Prayer is not confined to audible utterance. This is *desirable* where practicable, even in private worship; for utterance aids thought and feeling; and it is *indispensable* to common prayer. One must speak that all may unite. A silent meeting, as amongst the Friends, may be a true prayer-meeting to individuals, but hardly a meeting for united prayer. But in Nehemiah's circumstances audible words would have been unsuitable: and always the worth and efficacy of prayer spring not from the words, but the principles and feelings they represent. It is ever what passes in the mind and heart which makes prayer to be prayer. As much as there is of *desire*, directed to God in *faith*, so much is there of prayer.

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Uttered or unexpressed,  
The motion of a hidden fire,  
That trembles in the breast."

Much of the truest prayer cannot be spoken. "Groanings which cannot be uttered."

IV. A SHORT PRAYER. *Length* is in some measure, and under some circumstances, an element of true prayer. He who satisfies himself, in his regular seasons of worship, with a sentence or two, is guilty of irreverence, and shows that he has no delight in communion with God. But on such an occasion as that in the text, only brief prayer is possible or needful. And how much may be expressed or implied in a few words; how much love, or trust, or longing! In like manner much meaning may be in a short prayer. Instances: the Lord's prayer; the publican's; that of the thief on the cross.

V. AN EJACULATORY PRAYER. A short, fervent prayer "darted" upwards on a sudden occasion, when special need of God's help was unexpectedly felt. The habit of thus praying is much to be desired. 1. *Occasions* for such prayers are as numerous as the varying exigencies of life, especially the sudden and unanticipated, and when longer prayer is impossible. (1) On receiving some great, unexpected blessing, or becoming suddenly conscious of preservation from imminent peril. To cry, "Bless the Lord!" in the hearing of others may often be inexpedient; but in the heart

is always suitable. (2) When involved in unexpected perplexity. "Lord, guide me." The "cry" of Moses at the Red Sea, referred to in Exod. xiv. 15, may have been a mental ejaculation. (3) When suddenly exposed to obvious danger. Bodily, as the disciples in a storm: "Lord, save us; we perish." Peter sinking: "Lord, save me." Or moral and spiritual: sudden assaults of fierce temptation. "Lord, help me." (4) When suddenly betrayed into sin. Wait not for the hour of prayer before seeking pardon, but lift up your heart at once in a "Lord, have mercy upon me." (5) When any special demands on Christian principle are unexpectedly made, and the consequent special need for Divine assistance is felt. (6) In connection with any important and difficult duty. In business, family life, Christian activity, (visiting the poor, distributing alms, seizing an opportunity for giving religious counsel). On entering church; before sermon (short prayer for the preacher and yourself); on leaving church, &c. (7) Under all varieties of feeling. When the heart is touched and tender towards God (gratitude, admiration, penitence, love, desire) or towards men (affection, solicitude, &c.—Gen. xliii. 29). When pleasure is felt at the sight of happiness or goodness, or pain at sight of misery or sin. (In walking through the streets; prayer for those you feel you cannot help or save.) 2. The *value* of such prayers. (1) As evidencing and cultivating the devout spirit. Those who have the spirit of prayer can hardly be content with stated times, or fail to look to God in unexpected necessities, or praise him at once for unexpected blessings. And thus the spirit of prayer is cherished and maintained. Is one way of fulfilling the command, "Pray without ceasing." (2) As maintaining habitual converse with God. We should esteem it a calamity if he were to restrict our approaches to him to certain hours; let us not limit ourselves in a similar manner. (3) As aiding to sanctify the whole life. By blending worship and devout sentiment with every part of it. (4) As securing constant Divine assistance. Nehemiah's prayer was heard; so will ours be.

Ver. 8.—*Success ascribed to God.* "And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me." Nehemiah, like Ezra before him (Ezra vii. 6), ascribes the success of his application to the king to the "good hand of God;" which had, indeed, been conspicuous. The circumstances which had paved the way for the presentation of his petition, the readiness of the king's consent to his requests, the largeness of the facilities granted him, all indicated that his God, whose aid he had sought, had ordered events and influenced the monarch's heart.

I. THE GOOD HAND OF GOD IS IN ALL THE SUCCESSES OF HIS SERVANTS. The hand of God is, indeed, in the successes of all; and in their failures and reverses too; and it is always a good hand. For it is the hand of him who is good, who seeks the good of his creatures, and will surely "do good unto those that be good" (Ps. cxxv. 4). Nor is it easy to say whether the goodness of God's hand is most shown in successes or reverses. It is of success, however, that the text speaks; and this comes from God, as he—1. Arranges the events which conduce to success. 2. Supplies the qualities which contribute to it. Wisdom, power, goodness, in ourselves or others. 3. Overrules adverse circumstances or endeavours. 4. Works in ways inconceivable and indescribable to render all efficient.

II. THE GOOD HAND OF GOD IS ESPECIALLY CONSPICUOUS IN SOME SUCCESSES. We pass over those effected by the display of Divine power in miracles. Nehemiah records no miracle. The hand of God is especially apparent in successes obtained where (1) great difficulties are surmounted, or (2) strenuous opposition is overcome, or (3) feeble instruments have been employed, or (4) unexpected valuable help arises, or (5) many unlikely conditions concur, and (6) signal good is accomplished. All these were combined in the successes of the gospel in early times, and in many a revival, reformation, or deliverance in later days.

III. THE GOOD HAND OF GOD SHOULD EVER BE DEVOUTLY RECOGNISED AND ACKNOWLEDGED. With admiration, gratitude, and praise. This is meet and right and profitable. To be unable to see God's hand is to be in the condition of a brute. To shut our eyes and refuse to see it is the part of a determined infidel. To see, and not in suitable ways to acknowledge, is at least to be guilty of impiety, ingratitude, and cowardice.

IV. THE GOOD HAND OF GOD WILL BE RECOGNISED AND ACKNOWLEDGED BY GODLY MEN. They have the faith which discerns it, the love which delights to trace its operation, the gratitude which impels to the acknowledgment of it. Especially will this be the case when the success achieved is a manifest answer to their prayers.

#### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Sadness.* I. THAT IT WAS THE OUTCOME OF A TRUE PATRIOTISM (ver. 2). This sadness was not occasioned by temporal loss, by domestic bereavement, or by unfaithful friendship, but by the desolated condition of Jerusalem. The city was "waste." Many cities of our own country are laid waste by sin; the good man cannot be indifferent, he must sympathise with and help the work of moral restoration. If men are anxious about the walls, they ought to be much more so about the morals of a city; if for the tombs of the dead, much more for the welfare of the living. Sin consumes a city as by fire. The desolation wrought by sin, in commerce, in society, in the home, and especially amongst the young, cannot but awaken deep sorrow of heart.

II. THAT IT WAS EXPERIENCED IN THE COURSE OF HIS DAILY AVOCATIONS. "And I took up the wine, and gave it to the king" (ver. 1). How many men go to their daily toil with a heart sorrow which occupation and industry cannot make them forget. Nehemiah was wont to be cheerful before the king; business should be done in joyous mood; but there are times when sorrow will prevail.

III. THAT IT WAS MANIFESTED IN THE APPEARANCE OF THE PHYSICAL FRAME. "Why is thy countenance sad?" (ver. 2). How much of the world's sorrow is concealed. In a very true sense it is sorrow of heart; it is never vocal in explanation or complaint. But such sacred grief is not hidden from God. The face reflects the emotions of the soul; it revealed the sorrow of Nehemiah, the joy of Stephen. How many sorrowful faces do we meet in a day. A sad countenance should awaken tender inquiry, wise consideration, and willing aid. Let us not be heedless of the world's sorrow. Christ is only true consolation.

IV. THAT IT WAS AIDED BY SECRET COMMUNION WITH THE DIVINE. "So I prayed to the God of heaven" (ver. 4). 1. Sorrow often has great opportunities opened up to it. "For what dost thou make request?" Nehemiah's sorrow opened up the king's resources to him. Our sorrows often make heaven rich to us. 2. Sorrow needs guidance, so as to make good use of the opportunities presented to it. 3. Sorrow finds in prayer the guidance and culture it needs to use aright its opportunity. (1) Memory is aided; (2) difficulty is anticipated; (3) preparation is accomplished (ver. 7); (4) agencies are perfected (ver. 8).

V. THAT IT WAS EMPLOYED IN THE WONDROUS PROVIDENCE OF HEAVEN. "And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me" (ver. 8). 1. The sorrow of Nehemiah was allied to the *welfare of his people*. It led to the rebuilding of the broken wall of Jerusalem. Our trials are often the means of promoting the welfare of others. Christ's sufferings are allied to our best delights, and to our noblest achievements. It is indeed true that others build because we have suffered. 2. The sorrow of Nehemiah was allied to the *beneficence of the king*. It awakened the monarch's sympathy and help. The sorrows of men awaken loving ministries. 3. The sorrow of Nehemiah was allied to the *providence of God*. By its means Heaven opened the heart of the heathen king in sympathy and his hand in help. The pain of the world is made to achieve high moral ends; a wise providence employs it in the building of broken walls.—E.

Vers. 1—8. *Gaining the cause.* It was a time of great suspense, hardest of all things for human hearts to bear. The future of Jerusalem now hung on the building of the wall, and this depended on Nehemiah's personal interposition and upon Artaxerxes' pleasure. When great events depend on a single circumstance, issues deep and grave on the charge of a regiment, on the skill of a statesman, on the caprice of a king, we may well wait in anxiety. Nothing could be done now for Jerusalem, speaking humanly, without this Persian sovereign's consent. There was—

I. ABSENCE OF OPPORTUNITY. More than three months intervened between Nehe-



miah's receiving the tidings and his appeal to Artaxerxes. Whence this delay? Undoubtedly the actual or virtual inaccessibility of the king. Either he was not called to the royal presence, or the sovereign was obviously not in the mood. How unlike this to the ever-open throne of grace to which at any time, and in any place, we may go, sure of an attentive hearing from "him who giveth liberally and upbraideth not."

II. DIPLOMACY. Nehemiah showed great skill—1. *In the introduction of his cause.* How should he ask to be sent elsewhere when he was already "standing before the king"? This was regarded as the height of a man's ambition, as our Scriptures plentifully intimate. To "stand before kings," to stand in the "king's presence," "before his face," was the acme of hope and satisfaction. To ask to be dismissed was discourteous and dangerous. It was, indeed, going in this direction, to seem otherwise than joyful (vers. 1, 2). But Nehemiah ventured thus far; he did not disguise or restrain his sorrow; it was evident in his countenance. This would be a forceful appeal to the king, and still more so to the queen, who was present (ver. 6). 2. *In his lament.* It was the "one touch of nature that makes the whole world kin," to allude to "the city of his fathers' sepulchres lying waste" (ver. 3); this would strike a chord in any human heart; it did within the king. 3. *In his request.* He was mentally prepared for utterance; he had even calculated the necessary time (ver. 6), and the materials, &c. he required for the work (vers. 7, 8). We must not expect to succeed in any delicate enterprise unless we enter upon it with calculation and care. There are things to be done for God which may be wrought by sheer and simple earnestness; but there are times when, if we cannot furnish it ourselves, we must give place to the man who can bring to the task refinement, delicacy, tact. We must give way to the Nehemiah of our Church or society; he will succeed admirably where we should fail ingloriously.

III. PRAYER. "So I prayed to the God of heaven" (ver. 4). This is a beautiful and suggestive parenthesis. Between the king's question and the courtier's reply there was a momentary appeal to heaven. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as rivers of water, he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. xxi. 1). An excellent thing is it for a man so to walk with God, to live so near to him, that at any moment, and at any time of special need, he can ejaculate a prayer; so that it will be natural for him to withdraw for a brief interval from this world and from man, and lift up the heart to heaven. This is one way in which we may be "praying always" (Eph. vi. 18), "without ceasing" (1 Thess. v. 17).

IV. GRATITUDE FOR SUCCESS. "The king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me" (ver. 8). Nehemiah, like all praying men, was grateful. He ascribed success not to his own ingenuity, but to the "good hand of God." Men that are undevout are necessarily unthankful and self-complacent; they congratulate themselves instead of blessing God. Far more beautiful and appropriate is it to realise that the hand of the Supreme is controlling all issues, and thus conferring all good. With some prosperity leads to pride and spiritual injury, while in others it inspires gratitude and devotion.—C.

VERS. 1—8. These verses describe the circumstances in which Nehemiah obtained his commission as restorer of Jerusalem. They show that he was prospered, and that his prosperity was due to the blessing of God. We may notice—

I. THE REWARD OF FAITH IN THE ANSWER TO PRAYER. 1. The faith was tried by *waiting*. Opportunity must not be made by hasty, presumptuous attempts to command events, but by watching Providence. Nehemiah still prayed, and then on a certain day he could say, "It came to pass." 2. The Divine interposition was manifested in the *control of the monarch's thoughts and disposition*. It might easily have been otherwise. A suspicious Eastern despot might have been jealous and angry. When it is the purpose of God to help, even the secrets of the inner man are swayed by it. We must leave it to him to answer the prayer when and as he pleases. 3. There was a special *bestowal of grace upon Nehemiah himself*. He needed self-command, prudence, boldness, adroitness. And when challenged to disclose what was in his heart, making his countenance sad, he must depend upon inspiration to be able to say exactly the right thing, and to say it so as to obtain his desire. His patriotism, his purity of motive, his confidence in his own vocation to fulfil so great

a commission, all required at that moment to be sustained. He "prayed to the God of heaven." The answer was immediately sent, in the courage, the wisdom, the self-devotion, the simplicity of the cupbearer in the presence of an Eastern despot, asking to be intrusted with power that he might use it for God and his people. 4. There was a *Providential conjunction of circumstances*, both in the past and present. Nehemiah was already in the palace to aid the important work of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. How little we can follow the working of the Divine hand! The answer to our prayer may be already provided, even before we present the petition. What seems hard to obtain is not hard for God to give.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAPACITY ON THE BASIS OF RELIGION. 1. The beginning of all, *devoutness, intercourse with God*, spirituality of aim and motive, large desires for the welfare of God's people, and so of the world. 2. On this is built the *purity, and strength, and unselfishness* which so wins confidence in others. Nehemiah found favour with Artaxerxes because there was that in his very countenance which the monarch delighted to look upon. We should recommend religion by transparent honesty, cheerfulness, and unselfishness. 3. *Intellectual power rests upon moral, and both upon spiritual*. The cupbearer could not have undertaken to be a ruler and leader of men in most difficult circumstances unless there had been the making of a ruler in him. Some of our greatest statesmen have owed much of their superiority to their religion. "The entrance of thy word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple." 4. One who places himself in a position of great responsibility requires a *far-seeing eye and a strong will*. These are wonderfully helped by the cultivation of a deeper nature. Nehemiah knew what to ask for, materials and men; foresaw the demands of the work and its dangers; with steadfast confidence in himself, and fearless trust in his influence over the king, he made great requests, and they were "granted, according to the good hand of his God upon him." The root of all his strength was his entire dependence upon God. 5. In the character of Nehemiah there is an illustration of the effect of religion in cherishing the higher elements of the nature, and keeping them in beautiful and powerful harmony. He loved "the place of his fathers' sepulchres," he loved his nation; but above all, he loved the Church of God. Personal feeling, patriotic enthusiasm, and religious faith, when they all unite together as active principles in one man, produce a loftiness and heroism which prepare him for the greatest efforts and successes.—R.

## EXPOSITION.

NEHEMIAH'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM (ch. ii. 9-11). On his way to Jerusalem, Nehemiah would pass through the provinces of various Persian satraps and governors. To those beyond the Euphrates he carried letters, which he took care to deliver, though by doing so he aroused the hostility of Sanballat. Being accompanied by an escort of Persian soldiers, he experienced neither difficulty nor danger by the way, but effected his journey in about three months.

Ver. 9.—I came to the governors beyond the river. Josephus gives the name of the satrap of Syria at this time as Adæus ('Ant. Jud.' xi. 5, § 6, *ad fin.*), but it is uncertain on what authority. The other "governors" he calls Hipparchs.

Ver. 10.—Sanballat. According to Josephus, Sanballat was "satrap of Samaria" under the Persians, and by descent a Cuthean ('Ant. Jud.' xi. 7, § 2). He was probably included among the "governors" to whom Nehemiah had brought letters, and learnt

the fact that "a man was come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel" by the delivery of the letters to him. The Horonite, Born, i. e., at one of the two Beth-horon, the upper or the lower, mentioned in Joshua (xvi. 3, 5) as belonging to Ephraim, and now under Samaria. Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite. It has been usual to regard Tobiah as a native chief of the Ammonites, who, after having been a page or other servant at the Persian court, had been made head of the nation. But it seems to be quite as likely that he was a servant of Sanballat's, who stood high in his favour, gave him counsel, and was perhaps his secretary (ch. vi. 17, 19). It grieved him exceedingly. From the time that Zerubbabel rejected the co-operation of the Samaritans in the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra iv. 3), an enmity set in between the two peoples which continued till the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. The two capitals were too near not to be rivals; and the greater (general) prosperity of Jerusalem made Samaria the bitter adversary.

Ver. 11.—**I . . . was there three days.** Compare Ezra viii. 32. After the long journey, three days of rest were necessary.

**STEPS TAKEN BY NEHEMIAH PRELIMINARY TO HIS BUILDING OF THE WALL, AND FIRST APPEARANCE OF OPPOSITION** (ch. ii. 12—20). Hitherto Nehemiah had communicated his purpose to no one but the king and queen of Persia. He expected opposition, and resolved to baffle his opponents, as long as possible, by concealing his exact designs. Even when further concealment was on the point of becoming impossible, he made his survey of the wall by night, that it might escape observation. At last, the time for action being come, he was obliged to lay the matter before the head men of the city (ver. 17), whom he easily persuaded when he assured them of Artaxerxes' consent and goodwill. Preparations then began to be made; and immediately murmurs of opposition arose. Three opponents are now spoken of—Sanballat, Tobiah, and an Arabian, Geshm, or Gashmu, not previously mentioned. These persons appear to have sent a formal message to the authorities of Jerusalem (ver. 19), taxing them with an intention to rebel. Nehemiah made no direct reply to this charge, but boldly stated his resolve to "arise and build," and denied Sanballat's right to interfere with him (ver. 20).

Ver. 12.—**Some few men with me.** All the arrangements are made to avoid notice. Nehemiah goes out *by night*, with *few attendants*, and with only *one* beast. He is anxious to see with his own eyes what is the extent of the repair needed, but wishes as few as possible to know of his proceedings.

Ver. 13.—**The valley gate.** A gate on the western or south-western side of Jerusalem, opening towards the valley of Hinnom. There are no means of fixing its exact position. It was one of those which Uzziah fortified (2 Chron. xxvi. 9). **The dragon well.** Dean Stanley suggests that "the dragon well" is the spring known generally as "the pool of Siloam," and that the legend, which describes the intermittent flow of the Siloam water as produced by the opening and closing of a dragon's mouth, had already sprung up ('Lectures on the Jewish Church,' Third Series, p. 125); but the Siloam spring seems to lie too far to the eastward to suit the present passage, and is most likely represented by the "king's pool" of ver. 14. **The dung port.** "The gate outside of which lay the piles of the sweepings and offscourings

of the streets" ('Stanley,' l. a. c.); situated towards the middle of the southern wall.

Ver. 14.—**The gate of the fountain.** A gate near the pool of Siloam (which, though bearing that name in ch. iii. 15, seems to be here called "the king's pool"); perhaps the "gate between two walls" of 2 Kings xxv. 4. **There was no place for the beast that was under me to pass.** The accumulated rubbish blocked the way. The animal could not proceed. Nehemiah therefore dismounted, and "in the night," dark as it was, pursued his way on foot.

Ver. 15.—**By the brook.** "The brook Kidron," which skirted the city on the east. From this he would be able to "look up at the eastern wall" along its whole length, and see its condition. Following the brook, he was brought to the north-eastern angle of the city; on reaching which he seems to have "turned back" towards the point from which he had started, and skirting the northern wall, to have re-entered by the gate of the valley.

Ver. 16.—**The rulers.** On Nehemiah's arrival at Jerusalem he found no single individual exercising authority, but a number of persons, a sort of town-council, whom he calls *khōrim* and *saganim*. It is not clear that he made his commission known to them at first, or indeed that he divulged it before the interview mentioned in vers. 17 and 18. **The rest that did the work.** This seems to be said by anticipation, and to mean those who subsequently built the wall.

Ver. 17.—**Then said I unto them.** Ewald boldly assumes that this happened the next day; but there is nothing to show that it was so soon. The original contains no note of time—not even the word "then." Nehemiah simply says, "And I said to them." **The distress.** Or "affliction," as the word is translated in ch. i. 3. No special suffering seems to be intended, beyond that of lying open to attack, and being a "reproach" in the sight of the heathen. **Lieth waste.** On this hyperbole see the comment upon ver. 3.

Ver. 18.—**Then I told them of the hand of my God.** Nehemiah sketched the history of his past life, and showed how God's providence had always shielded him and supported him. This, however, would scarcely have had any great effect had he not been able to appeal further to the **king's words that he had spoken.** These words clearly contained permission to rebuild the wall, and took away the danger of their so doing being regarded as an act of rebellion by the Persians. What others might think was not of very much account. **And they said, Let us rise up and build.** Nehemiah's address had all the effect he hoped for from it. He was anxious to carry the nation with him, and induce them, one and all, to

engage heartily in the work, which must be accomplished, if it was to be accomplished at all, by something like a burst of enthusiasm. Such a burst he evokes, and its result is seen in the next chapter. Almost the whole people came forward, and set to work with zeal. **So they strengthened their hands for this good work.** The original is briefer, and more emphatic—"And they strengthened their hands for good." They embraced the good cause, took the good part, set themselves to work heartily on the right side.

Ver. 19.—**Geshem the Arabian**, elsewhere called Gashmu (ch. vi. 6), may have been an independent sheikh possessing authority in Idumea, or in the desert country adjoining upon Ammon; but it seems quite as likely that he was merely the head of a body of Arab troops maintained by Sanballat at Samaria (ch. iv. 7). Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem are united so closely, and act so much together (ch. iv. 1—7; vi. 1, 2, 6, 12, 14), that it is difficult to suppose them to be three chieftains residing on three sides of Judæa, the north, the east, and the south, merely holding diplomatic intercourse with each other, which is the ordinary idea. Note that Tobiah is present with Sanballat in Samaria on one occasion (ch. iv. 3), and that Geshem and Sanballat propose a joint interview with Nehemiah on another (ch. vi. 2). **They laughed us to scorn, and said.** Either by messengers, like Sennacherib (2 Kings xviii. 17—35), or by a formal written communication, as Ewald supposes ('History of Israel,' vol. v. p. 154, E. Tr.). **Will ye rebel?** Compare ch. vi. 6; and see also Ezra iv. 12—16. Had Artaxerxes not

granted permission, Nehemiah's proceedings might naturally have borne this interpretation.

Ver. 20.—**Then answered I.** It is remarkable that Nehemiah takes no notice of the serious charge brought against him, does not say that he had the king's permission, but rather leaves the "adversaries" to suppose that he had not. Perhaps he thought that to reveal the truth would drive them to some desperate attempt, and therefore suppressed it. **The God of heaven, he will prosper us.** Instead of a human, Nehemiah claims a Divine sanction for his proceedings. He and his brethren will build *as servants of the God of heaven*. Compare the answer made to Tatnai in Zerubbabel's time—"We are the *servants of the God of heaven and earth*, and build the house that was builded these many years ago" (Ezra v. 11). **Ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.** As the claim of the Samaritans to interfere in the affairs of the Jews had been disallowed when they came with an offer of aid (Ezra iv. 2, 3), so now, when their interference is hostile in character, it is still more fiercely and indignantly rejected. They are told that they have no part in Jerusalem, no right, not even so much as a place in the recollections of the inhabitants. Their interference is officious, impertinent—what have they to do with Nehemiah, or the Israelites, or Jerusalem? Let them be content to manage the affairs of their own idolatrous community, and not trouble the worshippers of the true God. Nehemiah avoids opposition by concealment as long as he can; but when opposition nevertheless appears, he meets it with defiance.

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 9—20.—*Preparation for a great work.* A record of the first steps taken by Nehemiah in the execution of his commission.

I. **HIS JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM** (vers. 9, 11). He no doubt lost no time in setting out; and he made the journey with suitable dignity, and in safety, owing to the escort granted by the king, and the obedience of the "governors beyond the river" to "the king's letters."

II. **HIS PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION** (vers. 12—15). This was—1. Personal. He would see with his own eyes the condition of the wall, so as to judge of the practicability of his plan for restoring it. 2. Secret. Perhaps that foes without might not be able to hinder him, nor their partisans within inform them of his movements. 3. Thorough. Notwithstanding the difficulty of completing it. In all enterprises careful inquiry must precede action if they are to prosper. Our Lord enjoins those who are thinking of becoming his disciples to "count the cost;" and a similar previous consideration is necessary in endeavours to advance his kingdom. Whoever would revive, reform, or restore, must first ascertain the existing state of things, and reckon up his resources for effecting his object. "The knowledge of a disease is half its cure." Rash zeal is likely to end in failure. Only we must take heed of putting consideration in the place of action; of "thinking about" decision in religion instead of deciding; of "considering" how we can do good until the opportunity of doing it is gone.

III. HIS SUCCESSFUL APPEAL TO THE PEOPLE. Notwithstanding the ruinous condition of the wall, and the feebleness of the Jews—1. He was confident and resolute himself. Assured that the work could be done, and prepared to do his part, and more. 2. He infused his spirit into the people. (1) He appealed to all classes: rulers, priests, nobles, working-men. The co-operation of all was essential. (2) His appeal was to all assembled together. Thus insuring the enthusiasm generated by numbers. (3) His appeal was forcible. (a) Reminding them of the present condition of the city. Ruinous, defenceless, exciting contempt. (b) Informing them of the favourable turn which affairs had taken. God's kind interposition. The king's commission to him, and gracious words. (c) Summoning them to join him in building the wall. (4) His appeal was successful. It roused them to—(a) Prompt and determined resolve. (b) Mutual incitement. (c) Confidence and courage. "So they strengthened their hands for the good work." Observe—1. The worth of competent leaders. The multitude helpless without them. One man, able and resolute, may turn weakness into strength, and depression into prosperity. In the work of Christ good leaders are of incalculable value. The advent of such often changes the whole aspect of things. 2. The duty of those who are fitted to be leaders. A great responsibility rests on them. Let them not decline the posts for which they are fitted on account of the expense or self-denial involved in filling them. Let them study to lead well, not for the sake of their own honour, but for the glory of Christ and the good of their brethren. Let them lead by their example as well as their speeches; so that they can say with Nehemiah, "*Come, and let us build,*" &c. 3. The duty of the people towards them. To recognise them, welcome them thankfully, co-operate with them heartily. If the people are weak without good leaders, these are equally weak without the people. But both uniting heartily, they may work wonders.

IV. HIS TREATMENT OF ILL-DISPOSED NEIGHBOURS. 1. How they regarded his proceedings. (1) With great displeasure and mortification (ver. 10). (2) With undisguised contempt (ver. 19). "Will ye rebel against the king?" is perhaps to be viewed as ironical rather than as insinuating a serious charge. "Ye puny Jews, do you imagine you can defy the power of Persia to which you are subject?" Otherwise we may add—(3) With misrepresentation. 2. How he dealt with them. (1) He addressed them seriously, expressing his confidence in God; his determination, in common with his brethren, to proceed with the enterprise; his rejection of their unjustifiable interference. (2) He just went on with the work. Observe—1. Every good work will meet with opposition, if not with contempt. 2. Such opposition is best met by trust in God, earnest resolution, and increased activity.

Ver. 10.—*Seeking the welfare of the Church.* "There was a man come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel." Thus, with some contempt, Sanballat and Tobiah thought and spoke of the coming of Nehemiah to Palestine. But if meant as a scoff, it may be accepted as a eulogium: like "a friend of publicans and sinners." Nehemiah is correctly described in the words. They set before us conduct to be imitated by citizens and statesmen in respect to the general community, by Christians in respect to the Church, and to the world at large.

I. TO SEEK THE WELFARE OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS INCUMBENT ON ALL CHRISTIANS. The maintenance of religious ordinances, the spread of Christianity, the increase and prosperity of the Church, the benefit of its individual members, are the concern of every Christian, and ought not to be left to a few. The efforts of all are needed; each can do something, and should do it heartily and cheerfully. The great motives to zeal apply to all, as really as to the few who feel their power. When the many can be described as those who with all their might "seek the welfare" of the Church and kingdom of God, a new era in the history of Christianity will begin. 1. How we should seek the welfare of the Church. By our exertions, gifts, prayers. 2. Why we are bound to do so. The nature of our religion, which is love; the purpose of our calling as Christians—to be "lights in the world;" the express commands of our Lord; the Divine examples and many human; the blessings we have received from the gospel and the Church; the blessings we may impart; the nobleness of the unselfish spirit and pursuits, and the increase they secure to the true wealth and blessedness of our own being—all are powerful reasons why we should

interest ourselves in the good of the Church, and so of the world, and do all we can to promote it.

II. IT IS ESPECIALLY INCUMBENT ON THOSE WHO HAVE SPECIAL TALENTS. All talents can find employment in this service; all should be consecrated to it. The more we have of faculty and aptitude, the more we are bound to employ them. Bodily energy, mental power and culture, spiritual attainments, wealth, social position and influence, should all be cheerfully devoted to Christ and the good of men. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

III. THE PUBLIC SPIRIT SHOWN BY ANY WHO ARE SPECIALLY QUALIFIED TO DO GOOD SHOULD AWAKEN THANKFULNESS, AND THEIR SERVICES BE GLADLY ACCEPTED. Because such men are greatly needed, and if well supported can do much more good than ordinary men; and because the number of such is comparatively small, so strong are the temptations to a lower style of life. Yet even in a time of depression, the appearance on the scene of a man of unusual ability and resources, willing to devote himself to the general good, is not always welcomed by all. Not only, outside, the Sanballats and Tobiahs are grieved and angry, but within are found some who feel their own importance in the community threatened, and allow jealousy, envy, and uncharitableness, culminating perhaps in open hostility, to prevail over such faint love for Christ, his cause and people, as they may possess.

IV. THE MISSION AND WORK OF NEHEMIAH MAY WELL REMIND US OF HIS WHO IN LOVING SERVICE IS "HIGHER THAN THE HIGHEST." He came "to seek the welfare" not of "the children of Israel" only, but of the world. He came with the commission not of an earthly monarch, but of the Father in heaven. His personal qualifications were not simply those of an excellent and able man, but of perfect humanity united to perfect Deity. His compassion for men was that of incarnate love. His toils and sufferings, ending in a death of agony and shame, surpass incalculably all that the best men have ever endured in serving their fellows. His resources are those of the universe—"all power in heaven and earth." The benefits he confers are of corresponding magnitude and duration. Yet men viewed him with hate and envy, and still turn away from him; and his people render him a love and co-operation miserably small, far inferior to what Nehemiah received from his fellow Jews. Let us be careful to receive him with hearty faith and submission for our own salvation; and then consecrate our all to his service, counting nothing too great to do for him, no sacrifice too painful to make in promoting his designs for the present and eternal welfare of men.

Ver. 12.—*God-given thoughts and impulses.* "Neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem."

I. WHEN WE MAY SAFELY ASCRIBE TO GOD WHAT HAS ARISEN IN OUR HEARTS. There is a danger, to which fervent religiousness exposes men, of delusion, fanaticism, and impiety in ascribing their thoughts, feelings, or purposes to God. When may we safely say, "God put it into my heart"? 1. When the thought, feeling, or purpose is manifestly good. God is the author of all good, and only of good. He cannot put evil into the heart. To ascribe it to him is blasphemy. Hatred, malice, uncharitableness, misrepresentation, injustice, cruelty, even though they assume the garb of piety, cannot be from him. They bear upon them the stamp of their father, the devil. Let furious bigots, calumniators of their Christian brethren, and persecutors, lay this to heart. Before ascribing to God what is in our heart, we must compare it with what we know to be from him—the teaching of our Lord, his character, the enumerations of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. v. 22, 23; Eph. v. 9). Whatever corresponds with these we may safely conclude to be from God. And the closer the correspondence, the more certain the conclusion. 2. When it issues in great good. Nehemiah, writing after he had executed his purpose and seen its beneficial results, could speak confidently as to its source. This rule for determining the Divine origin of our mental operations must, however, be applied with caution. It is only subordinate, not sufficient of itself. For (1) God brings good out of evil. Sin and Satan, and bad men, evil in themselves, are God's slaves to work good (comp. Gen. i. 20; Acts ii. 23, *seq.*). (2) Good desires are not always accomplished. David purposed to build the temple; his purpose is pronounced good, and therefore

from God, although it was not the will of God that he should execute it. Still, when our thoughts, &c. are carried into action and produce great and lasting good, our confidence is rightly increased that they were from him.

## II. WHY WE SHOULD ASCRIBE TO GOD THE GOOD WHICH ARISES IN OUR HEARTS.

1. It is manifestly according to truth. 2. It is required by gratitude. A great benefit and honour is thus conferred upon us. 3. Humility demands and is promoted by it. Yet the human heart is so deceitful, that under a show of humility pride and self-complacency may hide, and be fostered by the thought of the distinction thus enjoyed. 4. Due regard for the glory of God will induce us to do this. 5. It is acceptable to God, who will reward by "more grace."

III. THE PROPRIETY AND WISDOM OF SOMETIMES CONCEALING FROM MEN WHAT GOD HAS PUT INTO OUR HEARTS. There is "a time to be silent;" yet there is also "a time to speak." 1. Reticence as to our pious thoughts, emotions, and purposes may be right. As for instance when indulged—(1) From a sense of their sacredness. (2) To test their goodness. In the case of the emotions of personal religion, to ascertain their genuineness. In the case of plans of usefulness, to determine their practicability. So Nehemiah. (3) To promote their maturity. 2. Reticence may be, or become, wrong. It is so—(1) When cowardice produces it, and the confession of Christ is thereby evaded. "A secret disciple" may be borne with at first, but Christ requires confession on pain of rejection. (2) When others are thereby deprived of help and encouragement. (3) When the course of action to which what is put in our hearts points is unreasonably delayed. Nehemiah soon revealed his plans to others, that he might through their co-operation accomplish them.

Ver. 18.—*Mutual encouragement.* "And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work." Narrates the effect produced on all classes at Jerusalem by Nehemiah's address.

I. WHAT MOVED THEM. 1. There was a plain need for energetic and united action. 2. They had a good leader. Competent, resolute, courageous, generous, devoted, self-denying; and withal having authority. 3. There were many encouragements and helps. 4. In all, the will and favourable providence of God seemed manifest.

II. TO WHAT IT LED THEM. 1. Ardent enthusiasm. 2. Resolute determination. 3. Mutual exhortation. "Let us rise up and build." 4. Confidence and courage. 5. All combining to impart vigour for the work. "They strengthened their hands," braced themselves "for the good work." Note throughout that Christians have similar incentives to their work, and should be similarly affected by them. There is sadder and more wide-spread ruin to move our hearts; we have a Divine leader; the word, the grace, and the providence of God combine to urge and encourage us. Let us "provoke" one another "to love and good works," and give ourselves to them with unanimous zeal, resolution, and confidence; thus "strengthening our hands for the good work."

Ver. 20.—*Assurance of Divine co-operation.* "The God of heaven, he will prosper us," &c. Nehemiah's reply to opponents who wished to deter him from the work he was undertaking.

I. WHEN WE MAY CHERISH THE ASSURANCE OF DIVINE AID AND BLESSING IN OUR ENDEAVOURS. In general when our endeavours are in accordance with the will of God—in the line of his plans and purposes. And this is the case when—1. The work is good. 2. The Divine call to it is clear. This is ascertainable from (1) the word of God, its revelations, commands, promises. (2) The grace of God, producing desire and willingness in our hearts; or in some cases placing us in such relation to his Church as gives us the right to act. (3) The providence of God, giving ability, opportunity, and facilities. 3. Our motives are pure and Christian. 4. Our methods right. Being according to the directions and in harmony with the spirit of Christ. 5. The blessing of God is relied upon and earnestly sought.

II. THE EFFECTS WHICH SUCH ASSURANCE WILL PRODUCE. 1. Confidence of success. Notwithstanding difficulties, misrepresentation, contempt, opposition (see ver. 19), and occasional desponding thoughts. 2. Strenuous exertion. "Therefore," &c., not, "Therefore we need not work, or may be lax in our endeavours." Confidence which thus operates is presumption. God will do most when men do their best.

3. Rejection of alien interference. This took the form of opposition in the case of Sanballat, &c. Yet Nehemiah's language seems to imply that these objectors would have co-operated, if allowed to do so, on terms acceptable to them. "*We his servants will arise and build; but ye have no portion,*" &c. So it was at least as to the erection of the temple (Ezra iv. 1—3). And in our day many who are "of the world" are willing to unite with the Church in her works. The peril is that in welcoming their aid the Church should imbibe their spirit, and so lose her own proper strength. We cannot, it is true, draw as sharp a line between the Church and the world as Nehemiah between Jews, and not-Jews. But we have great need to be on our guard against the insidious influence of the worldly spirit, and the adoption of worldly means, of doing what professes to be, but then ceases to be, Christ's work. We may not be justified in rejecting the material aid of worldly men when proffered without conditions (Nehemiah had accepted that of Artaxerxes), but we must never accept their counsels. The world is more dangerous within the Church than in open opposition. Faith in Divine aid will preserve from such a policy. Cherishing this, we shall feel that whether the world smile or frown we shall succeed in the end; but that if God were to withdraw his help we must fail (however we may for a time appear to succeed); and that he is likely to abandon us if we so rely on others as to be unfaithful and disobedient to him, by surrendering our distinctiveness as the disciples of Christ.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 9—11.—*Ungodly (unchristian) jealousy.* Nehemiah, attended by a Persian escort, came safely to Jerusalem. The king had dealt liberally with him; he provided him with a military guard to protect him from the dangers of the road, and with letters of instruction to use at his journey's end (ver. 9). But the prophet soon found—what we all find soon enough—that the work we attempt for God can only be accomplished by triumphing over difficulty. The path of holy service lies over many a scorching plain, up many a steep mountain, along many a "slippery place." Nehemiah's great obstacle was to be found in the virulent enmity of Sanballat and Tobiah. When these men heard of his arrival, "it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel" (ver. 10). Looking at this statement concerning these men, we notice—

I. THEIR COMPARATIVE INNOCENCY WHEN JUDGED BY HUMAN STANDARDS. At first thought it seems almost incredible that they should have been "grieved exceedingly" because a man had come to seek the welfare of their neighbours. But when we ask if Sanballat and Tobiah were so very much worse than mankind in general, we are compelled to own that theirs was but an instance of ordinary human selfishness. In every land and through every age men have been jealous of their rivals' prosperity. These men concluded that the elevation of Jerusalem virtually meant the depression of Samaria; that, indirectly, Nehemiah had come to lower the dignity if not to lessen the prosperity of their state, and they counted him an enemy. So have men argued everywhere even until now. Wars that were avowedly waged on some small pretext were really fought because one strong nation was jealous of the growing vigour of some neighbouring power. Not only nations, but tribes, families, societies, and (it must be sorrowfully admitted) Christian Churches have allowed themselves to be jealous of the growth of other nations, other tribes, other Churches, and have been grieved when men "sought" and promoted "their welfare." So general and widespread is this selfishness, taking the form of jealousy of the prosperity of others, that it is not for us to "cast the first stone" of bitter reproach. But we must see—

II. THEIR ACTUAL GUILT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. A selfish jealousy like this of Sanballat and Tobiah, a grief at the prosperity of neighbours and competitors, whether in the civil or religious world, is in the sight of God (*a*) *unrighteous*. Our neighbours have every whit as much right to make the most of their powers and opportunities as we have of ours; to rise above us by lawful means as we to remain above them. We, as well as they, have received our heritage from men and from God, and we have no moral right to limit their success, or to object to their power, or be offended at their superiority. (*β*) *Short-sighted*. We ought to understand



that we are enriched by one another's prosperity. "We are members one of another," and should rejoice in one another's welfare. This is so with (1) neighbouring nations; (2) sister Churches; (3) capital and labour; (4) various contemporary industries. The more one prospers, the more another will prosper too. If a man comes to "seek the welfare" of any "Israel," we should not be "exceedingly grieved," but heartily glad. (7) *Sinful*. Though we may not denounce one another, we are all, together, under the condemnation of God. How can he be otherwise than grieved with us when we envy the welfare of our own brethren? That those who are children of the same Divine Father and members of the same family should wish ill to one another must vex his loving spirit. (8) *Something of which we shall live to be utterly ashamed*. How many have to remember with shame that when men "came seeking the welfare of God's people," they were antagonistic when they should have been friendly.—C.

Vers. 10—20. — *True work Divinely succeeded*. Here is the enterprise briefly sketched out: the ruin to be built up; the surrounding sea of scorn, hatred, and opposition to be kept back; the co-operation of rulers and people to be maintained. One man evidently to be the life and soul of the whole work. "I told not a man what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem."

I. All truly religious work should be accomplished in the spirit of UNCOMPROMISING FAITHFULNESS. 1. Complete *independence* of those who have no heart to "seek the welfare of the children of Israel." 2. *Fearlessness* of opposition, whether open or treacherous. 3. *Wise discretion* in the use of methods. The less confident must be held up by the men of stronger faith. It is well sometimes to commit the energies of good men to a worthy enterprise before they calculate too much, lest their hearts should misgive them. 4. The true leader must not wait for others. *Promptitude* is the soul of activity and the seal of success. Nehemiah begins with his night expedition of survey: "I and some few men with me."

II. REALITY AND TRUTH is the basis of all faith and zeal for God. Look at the facts. "Ye see the distress." Jerusalem lying waste; its gates burned with fire; actual reproach on the people of God. Whatever we attempt to build up, whether the edifice of our own religious life, or the prosperity of the Church, or the structure of Christian evidence, let us be sure that we understand the real state of the case; what is in ruins, what remains unshaken, what will be expected of us, what is the reproach which has to be wiped away; we must neither extenuate nor exaggerate.

III. FELLOWSHIP and CO-OPERATION the hope of a revived Church. "*Come and let us build.*" However needful that good men should, in some respects and for a time, work alone (Nehemiah told nothing at first to the Jews—"priests, nobles, rulers, and the rest"), when the great effort has to be made, it should be made in the spirit of union and *brotherly love*. "I told them." "And they said, Let us rise up and build." The true co-operation will not be a mere association of individuals, but a spiritual brotherhood, a covenant with God and with one another, recognising the "hand of God," and the "good work," and the Divinely-appointed ministry, and the special guidance and grace, both already bestowed and promised.

IV. All success, as against the world and its enmity, in face of scorn, contumely, falsehood, and evil devices, MUST COME OUT OF THE HARMONY BETWEEN GOD'S PURPOSES AND OUR WILL. He will prosper. We will arise and build. We must look to it that our portion, our right, our memorial are in Jerusalem. There are the three great supports to every earnest worker's confidence and hope. He has cast in his lot with God's people; he has entered into covenant relation with God, and has therefore a right in Jerusalem; it is the seat and fountain of his most blessed memories. "There his best friends, his kindred dwell; there God his Saviour reigns." All happy, successful work in the Church of Christ will be work done by spiritual men, actuated by spiritual motives, and depending on spiritual strength. The greatest hindrance to the progress of true religion has been the meddling with its operations by those who "have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem."—R.

Vers. 11—20. — *Wise procedure in presence of a great work*. Nehemiah before Jerusalem, the earnest patriot prophet before the city of God, lying waste and exposed, suggests to us—

I. THE PRESENCE OF A GREAT WORK AWAITING US. "So I came to Jerusalem" (ver. 11). There are to-day many Churches, societies, interests, more or less dear to God, which are "in distress" (ver. 17), urgently needing restoration and defence, that they be not open to attack, and that they may "be no more a reproach" (ver. 17) to the people of God. Our work, like that of Nehemiah before Jerusalem, may be great, inasmuch as (1) it will be costly, demanding time and treasure; (2) it will be delicate and difficult, requiring the co-operation of men of many minds and various interests; (3) it will have large issues, the end being either a sad and humiliating collapse or a noble and useful triumph. The steps which Nehemiah took to carry out his great project suggest points in a—

II. WISE PROCEDURE IN OUR WORK. The first and very essential point is—1. *Full consideration in private before making proposals in public.* Nehemiah "was there three days" (ver. 11) before taking action. Instead of illustrating the maxim, "More haste, worse speed," he acted on another and better one, "Quickly enough if well enough;" indeed, on another and better still, "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. xxviii. 16). After waiting three days at Jerusalem, he made a very careful inspection of the city, going all round and examining it thoroughly (vers. 12—15). He "went out by night" (ver. 13), in order that he might be the more unobserved, and he took care that "the rulers knew not whither he went, or what he did" (ver. 16); nor did he tell any one, priest, ruler, noble, or workman (ver. 16), what he was about. First he took, as we should, "counsel with himself;" he examined searchingly, considered fully, went into and went round the matter in his own mind. A little time spent in earnest, devout meditation beforehand will often save an "age of care," and a "world of trouble" afterwards. Then Nehemiah spake. 2. *Free consultation before other action.* "Then said I unto them," &c. (ver. 17). Evidently he made a full statement to them "in public meeting assembled." He called them together, no doubt using the king's commission. He took counsel with the leaders (those specified in ver. 16). Consultation is wise, just, with a view to co-operation. It (a) conciliates those whose goodwill we need. Men do not like to be treated as if their judgment were worthless and their consent unnecessary. (b) Brings out valuable suggestions. The wisest man overlooks some things, and they who devote all their powers to particular industries, obtain a knowledge and can furnish help in council in matters relating to their own department which others cannot contribute. 3. *Forceful presentation of motives.* Nehemiah laid the whole case before them, and appealed to—(a) The urgency of their need: the distress they were in; Jerusalem waste; the gates burnt (ver. 17). (b) The sign of God's favour resting upon them. "The hand of my God which was good upon me" (ver. 18). (c) The encouragement they had from man as well as God. "The king's words" (ver. 18). (d) The need there was to regain the honour they had lost among the nations. "That we be no more a reproach." (1) Necessity, (2) God's manifest presence, (3) available human help, (4) our reputation (and therein the repute of God's work), will often be leading motives with us. We should omit none that can be brought, for all are helpful, and one will avail with one man, and another with another. 4. *Energetic resolution.* "They said, Let us arise and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work" (ver. 18). Zest at the commencement is not everything, but it is much. It is vastly better than contention or cold-heartedness. Let us gird ourselves to the fight with energy of soul, and the battle is half won already. 5. *Disregard of ridicule* (vers. 19, 20). Zeal is deaf to sarcasm; it brushes aside the spears of scorn; it turns the idlers out of the field.—C.

Vers. 12—20.—*The way to view and repair ruined fortunes.* I. The way to view ruined fortunes. "And viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down" (ver. 13). There are broken fortunes in the Church, in business, and in the home; let us see how we are to regard them. 1. Thoughtfully. Nehemiah made a careful inspection of the ruined city. 2. Religiously. "What God hath put in my heart to do at Jerusalem" (ver. 12). 3. Conscientiously. "Which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire" (ver. 13). Nehemiah did not try to persuade himself that the city was in a better state than it really was; he saw things in their right aspect. 4. Independently. "And the rulers knew not

whither I went" (ver. 16). Nehemiah was animated by a strong purpose. 5. Cautiously. "And I arose in the night" (ver. 12). 6. Reproachfully. We must look on our broken fortunes as a reproach to us. 7. Hopefully.

II. The way to REPAIR ruined fortunes. 1. Energy must be awakened. "Come and let us build up the wall." 2. Providence must be recognised. "The hand of my God which was good upon me." 3. Circumstances must be utilised. "As also the king's words that he had spoken unto me." 4. Mutual co-operation must be effected. "So they strengthened their hands for this good work." 5. Scorn must be withstood (vers. 9—20).—E.

Vers. 19, 20.—*Religion and ridicule.* I. That religion is often made the subject of RIDICULE. "They laughed us to scorn." 1. Its doctrines are ridiculed. Men laugh at the supernatural. 2. Its enterprise is ridiculed. Men scorn the idea of a world-wide moral conquest. 3. Its agencies are ridiculed. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" 4. Its experiences are ridiculed. "Much learning doth make thee mad." This ridicule is (1) envious; (2) imbecile; (3) contemptuous; (4) ignorant; (5) libellous. "Will ye rebel against the king?" Christ was despised and rejected of men.

II. THE REPLY which religion should make to ridicule. 1. That it is often wise to reply to ridicule. "Then answered I them." 2. That religion must meet ridicule by expressing confidence in God. "The God of heaven, he will prosper us." 3. That religion must meet ridicule by determination which cannot be moved by it. "Therefore we his servants will arise and build." 4. That religion must meet ridicule by denying its right or ability to interfere. "But ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem." 5. That religion must meet ridicule by declaring it alien to the high privileges of the truth. It has no portion in Jerusalem. This is the ideal reply to derision.—E.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER III.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE WORK, AND ARRANGEMENT OF THE WORKING PARTIES, WITH THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO SUPERINTENDED THE BUILDING (ch. iii.). The especial object of this chapter seems to be the rendering of honour where honour was due—the putting on record of the names of the men who boldly came to the front on this occasion, sacrificed their ease to their duty, and exposed themselves to a threatened hostile attack (ch. iv. 8—20). Though Nehemiah's eloquence had carried over to him the bulk of the nation (ch. ii. 18), it had not carried the whole. There were those who refused to take any part in the work—even though it was "the work of their Lord" (ch. iii. 5)—and these laggards were of the "noble" class. The more credit was therefore due to the head men who chose the better part, supported Nehemiah with zeal, and, sword in hand (ch. iv. 17), either worked themselves or superintended the workers. Nehemiah records the names of thirty-eight such persons, and in thirty cases adds to the name of the individual that of his father. Where

this designation is wanting, he for the most part supplies its place by some other, so as definitely to mark out the person intended. With this general purpose of doing honour to the deserving is combined the wish graphically to place the whole scene before the reader. This is done by means of a profusion of topographical details. Nehemiah takes us along the entire circuit of the wall—shows us "the tower of Meah," "the tower of Hananeel," "the fish gate," "the old gate," "the throne of the governor," "the broad wall," "the tower of the furnaces," "the valley gate," "the dung gate," "the gate of the fountain," "the pool of Siloam," "the king's garden," "the stairs," "the sepulchres of David," "the pool that was made," "the armoury," "the tower that lay out," "Ophel," "the horse gate," "the gate Miphkad," "the sheep gate," and "the ascent of the corner"—exhibits to us the party at work in each place, repairing a portion of the wall, or rebuilding a gateway—notes the zeal of those who, completing the piece first assigned to them rapidly, then undertook a second piece (vers. 11, 19, 21, 24 &c.), and altogether gives us a

description which is full of life and activity. The passage is invaluable to the topographer, and though not resolving all the difficulties with which he meets in his attempts to reproduce the plan of the ancient city, furnishes more effectual help than all other existing notices on the subject put together.

Ver. 1.—**Then Eliashib the high priest rose up.** It is satisfactory to find Eliashib the high priest taking the part which befitted him on this occasion. Subsequently we find him "allied" by marriage to Tobiah (ch. xiii. 4), and guilty of a profanation of the temple (*ibid.* ver. 5). By the line of high priests given in ch. xii. 10, 11, it appears that Eliashib was the son of Joiakim, and the grandson of the Jeshua who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel (Ezra ii. 2; iii. 2). **With his brethren.** The priests generally. Compare ver. 28, which shows that the priests undertook a portion of the eastern wall, besides the work here mentioned. **Built the sheep gate.** The "sheep gate" appears to have been a gate in the eastern wall, the *προβαταριή* of St. John (v. 2), which was close to the pool of Bethesda. By this gate were brought in the sheep needed for sacrifice, which were then washed in the adjoining pool, and conveyed from it into the temple area, whereon the pool abuts. The priests dwelt principally in this portion of the city. **They sanctified it.** This appears to have been a dedication quite distinct from that which is described in ch. xii. 27—43. The priests, having completed the rebuilding of the sheep gate, and of the wall extending from it northwards as far as the tower of Hananeel, anticipated the general dedication by a special one, which "sanctified," or consecrated, their own portion of the wall. Thus a sacred character was impressed on the work at the earliest possible moment, and it was placed under the protection of the Almighty. **The tower of Meah** (or rather Hammeah, *i. e.* "the Hundred") and **the tower of Hananeel** appear to have been situated almost at the same point of the wall. Perhaps they were opposite each other, like the towers in the walls of Babylon (Herod., i. 179).

Ver. 2.—**Next to Eliashib built the men of Jericho,** who were assigned the north-eastern corner of the wall, as the part nearest to their own town. The inclusion of Jericho in the restored Judæa had appeared from Ezra ii. 34.

Ver. 3.—It is strange that the sons of **Hassenaah**, who built the fourth piece of wall, are not mentioned by name. There is no other similar omission. **The fish gate,** which they built, was in the northern wall, towards its eastern extremity, and not far

from the modern "Damascus gate." It is thought to be so called from being the gate through which fish were brought in from the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee. **The locks thereof** should rather be "the bars thereof"; and **the bars,** "the sockets," or "catches," which held the bars. The gates of towns in ancient times were almost always secured in this way.

Ver. 4.—**The son of Koz.** Rather "the son of Hakkoz." **Meshullam the son of Berechiah** is mentioned again in ch. vi. 13.

Ver. 5.—**The Tekoites** are the people of Tekoah, whence came the "wise woman" whom Joab sent to incline David to fetch home Absalom (2 Kings xiv. 2, 3). It was a small place, and does not appear, either in the catalogue of those who returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra ii. 20—35; Neh. vii. 25—38), or in the census list of Nehemiah (ch. xi. 25—35). **Their nobles put not their necks to the work.** This imputation of blame has been thought out of harmony with the general narrative contained in the chapter, and various emendations have been proposed to remove the so-called difficulty. But it has really first to be shown that a difficulty exists. Surely it would have been more strange if there had been no opposition to Nehemiah's wishes—no withdrawal from the work, than if there were the amount of opposition that is recorded. And supposing opposition to be made, why should Nehemiah not notice it? In music, the force and value of harmonious notes is brought out by an occasional discord. A desire to do honour to those who deserved it would be quite compatible with a determination to brand with disgrace the undeserving. And the contrast would enhance the value of the praise. Thus, there is no reason for disturbing the existing text, nor for questioning its plain meaning. The upper classes at Tekoah, the *adrim* or "exalted," withdrew from the work, like oxen withdrawing their necks from the yoke, and stood aloof, leaving it to the common people to engage in it, or not, as they pleased. The common people were perhaps moved to the greater zeal by the defection of their natural leaders. They were among those who accomplished a double task, repairing a second portion of the wall (ver. 27) after having finished their first.

Ver. 6.—**The old gate** must either have corresponded to the modern "Damascus gate," or have been in its near neighbourhood. It is not mentioned elsewhere.

Ver. 7.—**Gibeon and Mizpah** lay due north of Jerusalem, at the distance respectively of about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles. The inhabitants were set to repair the middle part of the north wall. **Unto the throne of the governor on this side the river.** So the Septuagint; and, among moderns, Michaëlis, Pool, and

A. Clarke. Others translate—"the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, who belonged to the jurisdiction of the governor across the river." But this can scarcely have been the fact, since Gibeon is mentioned among the re-occupied cities in ch. vii. 25, and if Bethel was Jewish, as we know that it was from ch. xi. 31, Gibeon and Mizpah, which were nearer Jerusalem, cannot have remained Syrian. Altogether, there is no reason to dispute the commonly received rendering, since Nehemiah again uses  $\text{בְּ}$  for  $\text{וְ}$  in ver. 32, and the governor of Syria may well have had a "throne," or tribunal, at Jerusalem, which was usually under his jurisdiction, though exempted from his authority under the existing régime.

Ver. 8.—**Hananiah the son of one of the apothecaries.** Or "the son of Harak-kashim." They fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall. The Septuagint has  $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$ , "they left," and the Vulgate *dimiserunt* in the same sense, which is given also as an alternative rendering by our translators, in the margin. And no doubt the verb  $\text{בָּנָה}$  has this for one of its meanings. But the clause has thus no satisfactory sense. That  $\text{בָּנָה}$  is used for "to fortify" by Nehemiah is plain from ch. iv. 2, and we may therefore well understand it in this sense here. Why he uses  $\text{בָּנָה}$  here and  $\text{בָּנָה}$  in every other place is difficult to explain, unless we suppose, with Pool, that the wall did not need regular repairs in this part, but only a little strengthening.

Ver. 9.—**The ruler of the half part of Jerusalem.** Compare verse 11. The city itself does not seem to be intended, but rather the territory outside which was considered to belong to the city. This was divided into two portions, under two "princes" or "rulers," Bephaiah and Shalum.

Ver. 11.—**Malchijah and Hashub, who are here said to have repaired, not the other piece, but "a second piece" of the wall,** have not been previously mentioned in our present text; whence it has been concluded with reason (Bertheau) that the text is defective, some whole verses having fallen out (comp. ver. 20). **The tower of the furnaces** is mentioned again in ch. xii. 38. Its exact position cannot be fixed.

Ver. 12.—**He and his daughters.** It seems to be almost impossible that women were pressed into the service, especially when it was one of so much danger (ch. iv. 13-21). By "daughters" we must therefore understand the villages contained in Shallum's district, which is agreeable to the use of the term in ch. xi. 25, 27, 28.

Ver. 13.—**The valley gate.** A gate in the western wall. (See the comment on ch. ii. 13.) **Zanoah was situated to the west of**

Jerusalem at the distance of some nine or ten miles. It is mentioned in Josh. xv. 34 as a city of Judah, but was not a place of much importance. We can scarcely suppose that the inhabitants had as much as a thousand cubits of the wall assigned to them, since that is more than a quarter of a mile, and the entire circuit was under four miles. Bertheau suggests that Nehemiah merely means to note that the distance between the two gates, the Valley and the Dung gate, was a thousand cubits, and that he says nothing of the repairs because no repairs were needed.

Ver. 14.—**The dung gate.** See the comment on ch. ii. 13. **The ruler of part of Beth-haccerem.** Rather "ruler of the district of Beth-haccerem," or head man of the region within which Beth-haccerem, was situated. This was a district in the neighbourhood of Tekoah (Jer. vi. 1).

Ver. 15.—**The gate of the fountain.** See the comment on ch. ii. 14. **The ruler of part of Mizpah.** Rather, "ruler of the district of Mizpah," which is distinguished from the town of Mizpah (vers. 7, 19), and shown to have furnished a distinct working party. **The wall of the pool of Siloah** was probably an outwork designed to protect those who at a time of siege frequented this fountain. The pool must always have been outside of the main wall of the city. It furnished water to the royal garden, which was at the junction of the Kidron and Hinnom valleys (Joseph. 'Ant. Jud.,' vii. 11; 2 Kings xxv. 4). **The stairs that go down from the city of David** may well be the flight of stone steps cut in the rock which is still to be seen on the western flank of Ophel, leading from the valley of the Tyropæon in the direction of the temple (see Stanley, 'Lectures on the Jewish Church,' Third Series, p. 126; Tristram, 'Land of Israel,' p. 190).

Ver. 16.—**Nehemiah the son of Azbuk.** Not the writer, who was "the son of Hachaliah" (ch. i. 1), but another person of the same name. It was the frequent bearing of the same name by two or more contemporaries which made it necessary to designate men generally by their own names and the names of their fathers. **Bethzur** ("House of the Rock") is now Beit-Sur, and lies on the ordinary route from Jerusalem to Hebron, about fifteen miles south of Jerusalem. It is mentioned in Josh. xv. 58 among the cities of Judah, and appears to have become a place of considerable importance under the Maccabees (1 Mac. iv. 29; vi. 31-50; xiv. 7; &c.). **The sepulchres of David and the kings, his descendants,** to the time of Hezekiah, were excavated in the rock upon which the temple stood (Ezek. xliii. 7-9), apparently on its western side. They have not

hitherto been discovered. Here too was the pool that was made by Hezekiah when he was about to be besieged by Sennacherib (2 Chron. xxxii. 30; Isa. xxii. 9—11). The house of the mighty—the Gibborim, or “mighty men” of David (2 Sam. xxiii. 8; 1 Chron. xi. 10)—is not elsewhere mentioned. It was no doubt the barrack where, according to tradition, David had quartered his best troops.

Ver. 17.—**The ruler of the half part of Keilah.** Rather, “ruler of one-half of the region of K.” The district within which Keilah stood was divided into two parts, one of which was under Hashabiah and the other under Bavai (ver. 18). Both took part in the work of restoration, and the two working-parties were assigned adjacent portions of the wall. In his part. Rather, “for his part”—*pro tractu suo*, as Rambach renders.

Ver. 18.—**Keilah** is probably the modern *Kila*, which is situated about twelve miles S.S.W. of Jerusalem, in the Shephelah, or low plain of the Philistines (1 Sam. xxiii. 1—3). It was assigned to Judah by Joshua (Josh. xv. 44), threatened with capture, but “saved” by David (1 Sam. xxiii. 5), and apparently reoccupied on the return from the captivity.

Ver. 19.—**Another piece.** Ezer has not been previously mentioned as repairing any portion of the wall; but “the men of Mizpah” have been mentioned as so doing (ver. 7). Ezer had apparently succeeded to “Jadon the Meronothite,” as the superintendent of the Mizpah working-party. The going up to the armoury at the turning of the wall. [Literally, “the ascent to the armoury of the corner.” There were probably several armouries in Jerusalem (see Isa. xxiii. 8). This one was called “the armoury of the corner,” being situated at the north-western angle of the special wall of the city of David. There was an “ascent” to it, either by steps, or by a steep pathway, from the Tyropœon valley.]

Ver. 20.—**Earnestly repaired.** So Gesenius, Pool, and Bertheau. The construction is not free from difficulty, and the reading is somewhat doubtful (the Vulgate “in monte” showing a different one); but on the whole the translation of the A. V. may stand. Baruch has the high honour of being singled out for special praise, as having shown a burning zeal which deserved this recompense. He rapidly accomplished the task first set him, the mention of which must have accidentally fallen out (see the comment on ver. 11), and now undertook a “second piece,” which extended from the north-western angle of the inner wall to the door of the high priest’s house. It would seem that this door was in the wall, upon which the house must have abutted (see the next verse).

Ver. 21.—**Meremoth’s first piece** is mentioned in ver. 4. The second piece cannot have been very long, since it only extended along a portion of the high priest’s house.

Ver. 22.—**The priests** who had lands in the Jordan valley seem to be intended by the men of the plain, *hak-kikkar*, “the plain,” without further addition, having always that meaning in Scripture. We have already heard that the men of Jericho were engaged in the work (ver. 2).

Ver. 24.—**After him repaired Binnui the son of Henadad another piece.** The name, Binnui, has not occurred previously, but probably ought to be substituted for Bavai (בניי for בוי) in ver. 18. He was a Levite (ch. x. 9), of the important Levitical family of Henadad, mentioned in Ezra iii. 9. **Unto the turning of the wall, even unto the corner.** As far as the north-east angle of the special wall of the city of David, which here adjoined the main wall of Jerusalem. A tower here stood out (ver. 25), and the wall turned at a right angle, both northward and southward.

Ver. 25.—**The tower which lieth out from the king’s high house.** In the original it is uncertain whether the word translated “high” belongs to “tower” or “house.” Most commentators attach it to “tower.” The “king’s house” of this place can be nothing but the old palace of David, which was in this quarter, while Solomon’s was on the opposite, or western, hill. This palace, like Solomon’s (Jer. xxxii. 2), would naturally have its prison, which would stand in its own court. From this prison, the “prison gate” of ch. xii. 39 took its name.

Ver. 26.—**The Nethinims dwelt in Ophel.** Ophel was “the long, narrowish, rounded spur or promontory which intervenes between the central valley of Jerusalem (the Tyropœon) and the Kidron, or Valley of Jehoshaphat” (Grove). The Nethinims, who had their dwellings on this spur, were set to fortify a portion of the eastern circuit, but apparently restored not so much their own wall as that which lay north of it, at the edge of the present Haram area. Here must have been the water gate, which carried off the superfluous water from the temple reservoirs; and here was the great tower that lieth out, whose foundations have been recently discovered. It stood at the south-eastern angle of the great platform on which the temple was built.

Ver. 27.—**The Tekoites repaired another piece.** Compare ver. 6. Their “second piece” appears to have extended from the “great tower” to the wall built by Shallum on the western side of the spur which reached as far as the pool of Siloam (ver. 15). This is here called “the wall of Ophel.”

Ver. 28.—**From above the horse gate.**

This was a gate in the eastern wall (Jer. xxxi. 40) through which horses could enter the city. It probably adjoined the old palace, being at or near the "turning of the wall" mentioned in vers. 24, 25. Nehemiah seems here to return to the point quitted in ver. 26, and to proceed thence northwards in order to complete the entire circuit.

Ver. 29.—**Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah** is very possibly the descendant of David mentioned in 1 Chron. iii. 22. He must have been an old man, as his son, Hattush, had returned to Jerusalem with Ezra (Ezra viii. 2, 3); but still he may have taken part in the work. That he was **keeper of the east gate** does not militate against this hypothesis, for that post was an honourable one, and it is not to be supposed that all the descendants of David were in flourishing circumstances. By "the east gate" we are perhaps to understand "the water gate towards the east" of ver. 26.

Ver. 30.—**After him.** The traditional text gives "after me;" and it has been supposed that Nehemiah assigned himself a certain portion of the wall and repaired it, but suppressed his own name through modesty. But, as general superintendent of the whole (ch. iv. 13—23), he could scarcely take any special work; and the argument that might have been founded upon a single occurrence of the expression "after me" is deprived of all force by its double occurrence, here and in ver. 31. **Another piece.** A Hanun has

been mentioned (ver. 13) among the leaders of the working parties, and also a Hananiah (ver. 3); but they were not coupled together; and it may well be questioned whether either is identical with his namesake of this verse. Probably we have here another instance of the incompleteness of our present text of this chapter (see the comment on ver. 11).

Ver. 31.—**Malchiah the goldsmith's son.** Or "the son of Hazzorephi." But the mention of goldsmiths (*zorephim*) in ver. 32 lends support to the rendering of the A. V., which is accepted by most critics. **Unto the place of the Nethinims.** Rather, "the house." The exact position cannot be fixed; but the gate **Miphkad** must have been situated in the east wall, a little to the south of the sheep gate. **The going up of the corner** may have been an "ascent," like Solomon's (2 Chron. ix. 4), which was probably a flight of steps; or the word translated "going up" may mean "an upper chamber" (*ὑπερσώρον*)—a chamber situated over the gate.

Ver. 32.—**Unto the sheep gate.** Compare ver. 1. The circuit is completed, and the point reached from which the commencement was made. **The goldsmiths and the merchants** were required to repair the piece of wall immediately to the south of the sheep gate, for which no individual had volunteered. Probably they had houses in the neighbourhood. They consented; and thus the entire wall was taken in hand, and the great work, which Nehemiah had conceived in his heart while still in Susa, was inaugurated.

## HOMILETICS.

Ch. iii.—**An honourable record.** In the preceding chapter the good resolutions of the people are recorded; here, what is more satisfactory, their performances. It is a record of those who united to restore the wall of Jerusalem, and the part which each principal person, or group of persons, took in the work. The account may appear of little interest for us; but it would be of much to the Jews, especially the descendants of those whose names are so honourably recorded, as long as they preserved their genealogies. To us also it need not be barren of interest or profit.

I. **THE WORKERS AND THEIR WORK.** A very great undertaking carried through rapidly (ch. vi. 15) and successfully; because—1. A voluntary work. All animated with zeal, and labouring heartily, not of compulsion. What is especially reported of one (ver. 20) was doubtless true, in good measure, of all: they "earnestly repaired." 2. By a united people. With a few exceptions (ver. 5), all appear to have done their part. Priests, nobles, merchants, tradesmen, working-men; dwellers in the city and dwellers in the country (for the welfare of the metropolis, with its temple, &c., was felt to be of common concern), all combined their energies. 3. By a people acting in orderly co-operation. Without this, their number and zeal would have availed little. The work was distributed into many parts, and each individual and group took the part assigned them by those at the head of affairs. Each band of men repaired that part of the wall which fell to its lot; and of each band the various classes did what they were best fitted for; some finding means, some superintending, some clearing away rubbish and picking out serviceable stones, others doing the masonry. Hence confusion was avoided, and the time and labour of none wasted. Many a good undertaking is rendered abortive, or much hindered, for the want of

such willing order and subordination, which cannot be secured because of the pride, self-will, jealousy, &c. of those who should co-operate. 4. With religious services (ver. 1). The high priest and his fellow-priests led the way, and "sanctified" (dedicated) their work to God; most likely having regard, in this solemn act of piety, to the whole work. The account is instructive, as showing how much may be done by even a feeble people when united, zealous, and willing each to do the part allotted to him, and offering all to God in dependence on his aid and blessing.

II. THE RECORD. May be of use as—1. An example. The names and works of those who have done good service to the nation, the city, or the Church should be commemorated—(1) For the glory of God, whose product and gift good and useful men are. (2) For the honour of the workers. (3) As an illustration of great principles. Their nature, operation, worth (comp. Heb. xi.). (4) As a stimulus and encouragement to others. The young should be familiarised with the names and deeds of the noblest men and women, and the principles which formed their character, that they may imbibe their spirit and imitate their nobleness. Hence the value of history and biography, whether sacred or ordinary. 2. A reminder. There is a record of good men and good deeds in another book—the memory of God (Heb. vi. 10), a record which is—(1) Exact. Excluding many who receive honour from men, but including *all* who have served God and their brethren with sincere piety and love. Only the few can be mentioned by name in human records; but all are "in the book of life" (Phil. iv. 3). Many who are of little account here stand high there. And small services as well as great find a place in that record (Matt. x. 42). (2) Indelible. No names or deeds registered there drop out, or are erased, or fade away. (3) To be published. At the great day, when many who are now obscure and thinking little of themselves will become famous. (4) To be the guide in conferring rewards. Every man according to his works (comp. Luke xix. 15—19; 2 Cor. ix. 6). The thought of this record should—(1) Incite us to active and devoted service, leading us to do our part, and do it well, aspiring to "honourable mention" in the Divine record and at the last day. (2) Encourage us under undeserved neglect, misrepresentation, or censure. So Nehemiah again and again beseeches God to remember his good deeds, as if despairing of due estimation or recompense from men. (3) Nourish joyful expectation. Another record is kept, of evil-doers and their works, and all hypocritical pretenders to Christian zeal and faithfulness. This also will be published. Hence "some will rise to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. xii. 2; comp. 1 Cor. iv. 5).

Ver. 5.—*Indifference in high places.* "But their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord." Nehemiah, or other human ruler, is supposed by some to be meant by "their Lord." Better, as our translators evidently understood it, "God." The word translated "work" means the work of a servant = "service."

I. THE WORK OF THE CHURCH IS THE LORD'S SERVICE. All work is to be so regarded, and cannot be done rightly otherwise. But the work of the Church is emphatically the service of God; whether the directly spiritual (evangelisation, instruction of Christians and their children), or the provision and maintenance of whatever is needful for it (ministers, teachers, buildings, &c.), or charitable aid to the poor. 1. God has redeemed and constituted his Church for these very ends. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price," &c. (1 Cor. vi. 20). 2. He has committed the work to his people. 3. He has given them directions for its fulfilment. 4. Hence loyalty to him requires them to do it. And only those who have faith and love towards him can do it truly and acceptably. We may judge of any work by this test: Can it be described as "the service of the Lord"? Much which goes by that name is misnamed, either because it is not of his appointment, or is not done in the spirit of love and obedience to him.

II. This service CALLS FOR STRENUOUS EXERTION. Like that of draught-oxen "putting their necks" to their work. The Christian's work is worthy of earnest effort, and cannot be well done without it. His "Lord" has a right to expect it.

III. SOME WHO PROFESS TO BE SERVANTS OF GOD DECLINE THIS PART OF HIS SERVICE. Even amid general enthusiasm they remain unmoved. 1. The causes of their refusal. May be a total want of the piety they profess; or the dominance of indifference,



selfishness, indolence, or pride (towards God, or those who would be their fellow-labourers). 2. Its guilt. To refuse to take part in a common work is (1) injustice to others, who have thus an undue burden cast upon them; and (2) rebellion against God. 3. Its consequences. Loss of great honour and blessing, now and hereafter. Punishment for unfaithfulness (Matt. xxv. 26—30).

IV. SUCH NEGLECT IS OFTEN FOUND AMONGST THOSE WHO SHOULD BE LEADERS OF OTHERS. "The nobles." The higher and richer classes have special gifts for the service of the Lord; but also special temptations to neglect it, from their position, education, habits of luxury and self-indulgence, sense of superiority, &c.; and too often they succumb to such temptations. They are reminded here that, however exalted they may be above their fellow-men, God is "their Lord," their Owner and Master, and has a right to their service equally with that of their social inferiors. The example of these should stimulate them. And great as their earthly dignity may be, it is not comparable to the honour of being humble and devoted servants of God.

V. PIOUS ZEAL AND LABOUR ON THE PART OF THE COMMON PEOPLE IS THE MORE COMMENDABLE WHEN THEY ARE DEPRIVED OF THE CO-OPERATION OF THEIR NATURAL LEADERS. "The Tekoites," instead of imitating their nobles, repaired two lengths of the wall (see ver. 27). The middle and lower classes not unfrequently outstrip in godly and benevolent works the great of the earth, and make up in a measure for their indifference. It is not well, however, to waste time in reflecting upon others. Let each consider whether he is taking his own part in works of piety and charity, according to the measure of his ability and opportunities. "Every one of us shall give account of *himself* to God."

Ver. 12.—*Family zeal in good work.* "He and his daughters." Some take "daughters" here in the sense which it bears in ch. xi. 25, 27, viz., "villages" (regarded as the daughters of the town or district to which they belong), and would read, "it" (*i. e.* the half-part, or district, of Jerusalem) "and its villages." If, however, we take the word "daughters" in the sense of women, they present us an instance of a father and his daughters uniting in a good work. Probably the daughters had independent means. They remind us of the numerous instances in which piety and public spirit animate *families*—parents and their sons and daughters uniting in works of Christian usefulness. Such families are the strength of congregations. Union of a family in Christian work—

I. INDICATES GOOD AND EFFECTUAL EDUCATION. It shows that the parents have trained their children in piety and zeal, taught them to take an interest in the work of the Lord, and set them the example; and that the children have yielded to the influence thus exerted, imbibing the spirit of their parents, and imitating their deeds. Parents should early associate their children with them in good works, teaching and enabling them to give to the cause of Christ and to the poor, &c. Young people, who have if only a small income of their own, should devote part of it to the good of others, and should employ part of their time in doing good.

II. FORMS A SACRED FAMILY BOND. Sanctifies the natural ties; binds parents and children in a holy fellowship.

III. ELEVATES FAMILY LIFE. Supplying objects of common interest, topics for conversation, subjects for prayer, employments, occasions of mutual encouragement and help, all tending to uplift the thoughts, affections, motives, and aims above the region of self-interest, worldliness, and vanity: and thus form noble characters.

IV. INCREASES AND EXALTS FAMILY HAPPINESS. No other pursuits in common, however innocent or laudable, can supply pleasures equal to those which spring from common consecration to the service of God and man.

V. PREPARES YOUNG PEOPLE FOR HIGHER AND LARGER SERVICE. Thus supplying the Church with a succession of well-qualified workers. Such families are the best nurseries, not only for the Church, but for the ministry and the missionary work.

VI. AIDS IN INSURING AND PREPARING FOR FAMILY REUNION IN THE HEAVENLY HOME. Let parents then resolve with Joshua, "As for me *and my house*, we will

serve the Lord." Let sons and daughters heartily co-operate with fathers and mothers in executing this resolution.

Ver. 20.—*Earnest work.* "Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired another piece." It is singular that this word "earnestly" should be used of Baruch and of none else. Perhaps it is a mis-reading. Or quite as likely it alludes to circumstances unknown to us. The word signifies "burning," and is commonly used of anger; here, however, of zeal, or perhaps emulation. Baruch is set before us as "an earnest worker." Such should all Christians be. It is one of the marks of the "peculiar people" of Christ whom he has redeemed by giving himself for them, that they are "zealous of good works" (Titus ii. 14). The subject then is—earnestness in Christian work.

I. WHAT IT IS. Not zeal without knowledge, nor zeal fed by worldly motives, nor the ardour of a bigoted sectarianism, nor yet the warmth of transitory emotion, excited by speech or sermon or passing incident; but a steady flame of pious zeal, springing from Christian knowledge, faith, and love, and sustaining resolute purpose and endeavour. It is the life of God in the soul, in a state of vigour and animation, directed to practical service.

II. ITS CAUSES. 1. Ardent gratitude for blessings received. It does not spring from a desire or expectation of *earning* or deserving salvation by diligent works, but from the experience and hope of salvation freely bestowed, and realisation of the manifold benefits included in it. Its language is, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" 2. Love to God and Christ and men. It is—love in action; love to God and the Saviour, inciting to obedience and making service a delight; love to men, impelling to the effort to do them good. 3. Contemplation of the condition and prospects of mankind. 4. Faith in the Divine remedies for human sin and misery. 5. The example of others. Of such men as St. Paul. Pre-eminently of the Lord Jesus Christ, "who went about doing good," and could say, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." The example of known living Christians eminent for zeal has a mighty influence in producing like characters. Earnestness of men in other pursuits. 6. The very indifference and neglect of which some are guilty. Stirring the heart to excusable, if not holy indignation; fear lest the work should suffer in consequence, and determination that it shall not. 7. Anticipation of the final account. 8. Fervent prayer. For pure Christian earnestness, by whatever means excited, is a gift of the Holy Ghost.

III. ITS SIGNS AND EFFECTS. 1. Generosity of gift and labour. Not meting these out according to a careful calculation of our share, or of what is "necessary" in order to retain a hope of eternal life, but delighting to do all that is possible. 2. Ready self-denial. 3. Courage in facing difficulty and opposition. Earnestness is slow to believe in impossibility. 4. Thoroughness of work. Doing our best as alone in any sense worthy of the Lord and his work. 5. Constancy and perseverance. Superiority to the influence of bad examples, and all other temptations to remissness in, or abandonment of, the service.

IV. ITS BLESSEDNESS. 1. As a clear and abiding evidence of true faith and love. Giving "assurance of hope," which without practical and benevolent earnestness is unfounded, if it exist. No strictness of orthodoxy, or raptures of religious emotion, are sufficient without it. 2. As making the Christian's work happy. 3. As securing the Divine approval and blessing. 4. As insuring success. 5. As anticipating abundant recompense.

Ver. 28.—*Doing good near home.* "Every one over against his house." The priests and others (vers. 10, 23, 29, 30), whose houses were near the wall, repaired that part of the wall which was opposite each of their dwellings. This suggests an important rule for Christian workers.

I. THE ORDER TO BE OBSERVED IN SEEKING THE GOOD OF OTHERS. Let every one do the work which lies nearest to him. Let him begin with his own family. No amount of good work elsewhere will compensate for neglect there. Christian parents can do most good to the community by training well their children. Then, as ability and opportunity permit, let each seek the good of his dependents, friends, neighbours,

the congregation with which he worships, the city or town, the country, the Church at large, the world.

II. REASONS FOR ADOPTING THIS ORDER. 1. That which is nearest is usually best known. Its needs can be best perceived, and how to meet them. 2. It appeals most powerfully to our hearts. Partly because best known. The eye affects the heart (Lam. iii. 51). Partly because of the natural affections which belong to the closer relationships. Now the emotions of the heart are both a call to duty and a qualification for its efficient performance. Words spoken, gifts bestowed, with feeling, are most powerful for good. 3. It has the first claim upon us. God has placed men in close relationships and proximity in order that they may be mutually helpful as occasion arises. We violate the Divine order when we care for the distant to the neglect of the near. 4. We can most easily reach it. 5. We may hope for more success in dealing with it. Because our work will be with more knowledge and more heart, and less waste of resources; and will carry with it the weight of known character, of personal sympathy, and the thousand influences which spring from family life, friendship, neighbourhood, &c. A man can nowhere work with so much effect as "over against his house." 6. In caring for it we may be most effectually protecting our houses. As those priests and others who built up the piece of wall nearest them. There are perils to us and our families which may be averted by doing our duty to those nearest to us; perils from the sullen enmity which indifference and neglect may generate in them; perils from their ignorance, grossness, or vice; perils from their diseases, &c. 7. When each does the work nearest to him, the whole work will be most surely and rapidly done. Christians have yet thoroughly to follow this order. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that there is much to be done which cannot thus be reached. There were many parts of the wall at Jerusalem which were opposite the house of no one, or of none able to repair them; and there were many able and willing to assist in the work whose dwellings were not in Jerusalem, or, if in the city, not near the wall. And so they had to labour at a distance from their houses. In like manner, there is much Christian work to be done where no Christians exist, or none capable of doing it; and so there is ample room for those organisations which enable the benevolent to do good at a distance, and even in far-off lands.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ch. iii.—*The Church engaged in a work of moral repair.* I. THAT THE CHURCH IS ENGAGED IN REPAIRING MORAL RUIN. "And next unto them repaired Meremoth" (ver. 4). Jerusalem was once a strong and beautiful city; now it is in ruins. Society has not always been a ruin. Man has not always been a wreck. 1. The desolation was extensive. The entire city was waste; not a wall or gate remained intact. And man's entire intellectual and moral nature is laid waste by sin; he has no unfallen faculty. 2. The desolation was varied. The sheep gate, the doors, the beams, the locks had all been destroyed; and so all the manifold capabilities of man have been injured by sin. 3. The desolation was pitiable. It was sad to see Jerusalem in ruins; but much more so to see the ruin of the human soul. 4. The desolation was visible. Travellers saw the ruined city; the fallen condition of man is evident to all.

II. THE METHOD WHICH THE CHURCH SHOULD PURSUE IN ITS WORK OF MORAL REPARATION. 1. There must be good official leadership. "Then Eliashib the high priest rose up" (ver. 1). 2. There must be a wise use of individual talent. "Goldsmiths," "apothecaries" (ver. 8). 3. There must be pursued a common purpose through a variety of tasks. 4. There must be a recognition of the power of the domestic affections (ver. 29). 5. There must be a strict attention to the minute detail of the work. "And set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof" (ver. 6). 6. There are always those in the Church who refuse to aid in its enterprise.—E.

Ch. iii.—*Doing God's work.* Under Nehemiah's direction, and inspired with his own earnestness, the children of Israel gave themselves to the good work of encir-

clinging the city of God with walls. The account of their building in this chapter reminds us—

I. THAT ALL WORK WE DO FOR GOD IS CONSIDERED IMPORTANT AND IS RECORDED BY HIM. We should hardly have expected, judging antecedently, that all these names would have appeared in the sacred Scriptures with the posts assigned them. We should have thought that the space thus taken would have been better occupied with more of the miracles or parables of our Lord, or of the acts of the apostles. The fact that these names are inserted in this book, which is to go over all the world and down all the ages, is evidence that God counts of importance all work done for him, and that he records it. Other books of remembrance he has (Mal. iii. 16. Cf. Ps. xl. 7; lvi. 8; cxxxix. 16; Rev. xx. 12) in which the endurances and the actions of his people are written. All is recorded there—the work in building the city wall, the offering the cup of cold water, the kind word of encouragement or sympathy. Our record is on high. The notable and famous deeds of wickedness will be forgotten; when humblest actions of devout usefulness are immortalised in one or other of the books of God.

II. THAT IF DONE RAPIDLY, GOD'S WORK SHOULD BE DONE REGULARLY AND DISCERNINGLY. They proceeded with all speed, losing no time, but everything was done in order. There was no hurry. Every man had his proper post, and took it without interrupting his neighbour. The priests "builted the sheep gate" (ver. 1). "Next came the men of Jericho" (ver. 2); . . . "but the fish gate did the sons of Hasse-naah build" (ver. 3), &c. Certain priests and other individual workmen had assigned to them the wall "over against their house" (vers. 10, 23, 28—30), where they would least interfere with others, and in which they would naturally take the greatest interest. So also the Levites had for their share the part nearest the temple (ver. 17), where they would work with the greatest zeal.

III. THAT IT SHOULD BE DONE RELIGIOUSLY. It is only too possible and too common to do religious work in an *unreligious*, if not positively *irreligious*, spirit—mechanically and thoughtlessly, if not sullenly and selfishly. Three things in this record point to religious earnestness. (a) The ministers of God took the lead. "The high priest rose up with his brethren the priests" (ver. 1). When the leaders of religion take the front posts of danger, difficulty, and toil, there is a guarantee of some spiritual zest in the work. (b) They stopped to dedicate the work they had done. "They sanctified it" (ver. 1). (c) Of one of them we read, that "Baruch earnestly repaired," &c. He was conspicuous for the zest with which he laboured, outstripping and inciting the others. Workmen in the vineyard of Christ should often remind themselves *why* it is they labour, *what* it is they aim to do, for *whom* they are employed.

IV. THAT THE CO-OPERATION OF ALL WHO WILL HEARTILY HELP SHOULD BE CHEERFULLY ACCEPTED. Here we have in united labour—(1) priests (vers. 1, 22), (2) Levites (ver. 17), (3) Nethinims (ver. 26), (4) outsiders (vers. 2, 5, 7), (5) rulers (vers. 16, 17, 19), (6) tradesmen (vers. 31, 32), (7) women—"he and his daughters" (ver. 12). All can lend service; what one cannot do another may. No sincere helper is to be despised. In crises, especially such as this, when great things depend on the success of a few days' labour, all distinctions should be laid aside. By those who have the kingdom of Christ at heart they *will* be laid aside, and all will join hands, not only consentingly, but enthusiastically.

V. THAT NEGLIGENCE IS NOTED AND RECORDED BY THE DIVINE MASTER. "Their nobles (of Tekoah) put not their necks to the work of their Lord." Whether it was from indolence or pride, whether they were unwilling to task themselves with unusual labour, or whether they shrank from associating with their social inferiors, we cannot tell. We know, however, that both indolence and pride do keep many from the work of the Lord, and we know that such refusal of help is both unwise and guilty. It is to withhold the hand from that which is worthiest and most enduring; it is to stand outside the blessing of those whom God most honours. It is to invite the curse of Meroz (Judges v. 23), the condemnation of the Son of man at the day of judgment (Matt. v. 45).—C.

Vers. 1-32.—*Church-work.* Notice several points in this record of the labour and the distribution of their work.

I. Devotion and effort in the cause of God are worthy of **DISTINCTION AND REMEMBRANCE**. Names have great power, both among contemporaries and successors. We are stimulated by individual examples. 1. The *priests are mentioned first*; and God's ministers should be first and foremost in every good work, especially that which is most closely connected with his house. 2. Not only individuals are honoured in this record, but families. Our household life should be intimately bound up with our Church life. The best family title is that which is won in the field of holy enterprise. 3. While all were invited, *some refused*. The "nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord." But over against that disgraceful idleness we can place the superabundant zeal of others, who not only did their own work, but the work of others as well.

II. **EVEN THE WOMEN WERE READY TO DO THEIR PART**, and, understanding "daughters" in the sense of women, the daughters of Shallum, "ruler of the half part of Jerusalem," not too high or too weak to unite in such a cause. In the building of the spiritual Jerusalem the "daughters" contribute no mean portion.

III. **SOME UNDERTOOK THE WORK "OVER AGAINST THEIR OWN HOUSE."** We may find the opportunity close at hand. No greater honour can we attach to our own house than to connect it with the praise and glory of Jerusalem.

IV. **THE EFFECT** of this general and contemporaneous effort of all the Lord's people to repair the ruins of their city in uniting them, effacing wrong distinctions, developing great qualities, lifting up their faith to a higher platform. *Reformation* both effect and cause of *revival*.—R.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER IV.

OPEN OPPOSITION OFFERED TO THE WORK BY SANBALLAT AND TOBIAH, AND ARRANGEMENTS MADE BY NEHEMIAH TO MEET IT (ch. iv.). It would seem that Sanballat and his friends, when they first heard that the wall was actually being restored, the working parties formed, and the work taken in hand, could scarcely bring themselves to believe it. "What! These feeble Jews undertake so heavy a task, attempt a work that must occupy so long a time, and for which they had not even the necessary materials? (ch. iv. 2). Impossible! Such a wall as they could build would be so weak, that if a fox tried to get over it he would break it down" (ver. 3). But when, despite their scoffs, the working parties laboured steadily, and the whole wall was brought to half the intended height (ver. 6), and the gaps made in it by the Babylonians were filled up (ver. 7), they changed their tone, admitted the seriousness of the undertaking, and the probability that it would succeed unless steps were taken to prevent it. The natural course to pursue, if they really believed that rebellion was intended (ch. ii. 19), or that the permission of Artaxerxes had not been obtained, was to

act as Rehum and Shimshai had acted in the time of the Pseudo-Smerdis, and address a letter to the king informing him of Nehemiah's proceedings, and recommending that a stop should be put to them (see Ezra iv. 11-22). But probably they had by this time become aware that Artaxerxes was privy to the proceedings of his cupbearer, and would not easily be induced to interfere with them. The letter to Asaph which Nehemiah had obtained (ch. ii. 8) must have been delivered to him, and would become known; the fact that the king had sanctioned the restoration of the wall would be apparent; and all hope of a check from this quarter, if it ever existed, would be swept away. Besides, at the rate at which the work was progressing under Nehemiah's skilful arrangements, it would be accomplished before the court could be communicated with, unless other steps were taken. Accordingly, it was resolved to stop the building by main force. Sanballat and Tobiah, his Ammonite hanger-on, entered into a league with the neighbouring peoples, the Philistines of Ashdod, the Ammonites, and some Arab tribe or tribes, and agreed with them that a conjoint attack should be made upon Jerusalem by a confederate army (ch. iii. 7, 8). It was hoped to

take the working parties by surprise, and to effect their complete destruction (*ibid.* ver. 11). But Nehemiah, having learnt what was intended, made preparations to meet and repulse the assailants. He began by setting a watch day and night (ver. 9) on the side on which the attack was expected. When an assault seemed imminent, he stopped the work, and drew up the whole people in battle array, with swords, spears, and bows, behind the wall, but in conspicuous places, so that they could be seen from a distance, and in this attitude awaited the enemy (ver. 13). The result was that no actual assault was delivered. Sanballat and his allies, when they found such preparations made to receive them, came to the conclusion that discretion was the better part of valour, and drew off without proceeding to blows (ver. 15). The work was then resumed, but under additional precautions. The labourers were compelled to work either with a weapon in one hand, or at the least with a sword at their side (vers. 17, 18). Nehemiah's private attendants were armed and formed into two bands, one of which worked on the wall, while the other kept guard, and held the arms, offensive and defensive, of their fellow-servants (ver. 16). At night the working parties retired to rest within the city, but Nehemiah himself, his brothers, his servants, and his body-guard, remained outside, keeping watch by turns, and sleeping in their clothes, until the wall was finished (vers. 22, 23).

Ver. 2.—**Before his brethren.** By "his brethren" would seem to be meant his chief counsellors—probably Tobiah among them. **The army of Samaria.** Some understand by this a Persian garrison, stationed in Samaria under its own commander, with which Sanballat had influence (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. v. p. 153), but there is no real ground for such a supposition. Ps. lxxxiii. belongs probably to David's time; and as Samaria had doubtless its own native force of armed citizens, who were Sanballat's subjects, it is quite unnecessary to suppose that he addressed himself to any other "army" than this. The Persians would maintain a force in Damascus, but scarcely in Samaria; and Persian soldiers, had there been any in that city, would have been more likely to support a royal cupbearer than a petty governor with no influence at court. We can really only explain the disturbed state of things and approach to open

hostility which appears in Nehemiah's narrative, by the weakness of Persia in these parts, and the consequent power of the native races to act pretty much as they pleased—even to the extent of making war one upon another. **Will they fortify themselves?** No other rendering is tenable. Ewald ('History of Israel,' vol. iii. p. 154, note 5) defends it successfully. **Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day?** The meaning seems to be, "Will they begin and make an end in a day?" It is assumed that they will begin by offering a sacrifice to inaugurate their work. **Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?** Rather, "Will they revive the burnt stones (the stones that are burned) out of the heaps of the rubbish?" Will they do what is impossible—solidify and make into real stone the calcined and crumbling blocks which are all that they will find in the heaps of rubbish? If not, how are they to procure material?

Ver. 3.—**Tobiah the Ammonite was by him.** The presence of Tobiah on this occasion, before the alliance was made with the Ammonites (ver. 8), is a strong indication that his position was not one of independent authority, but of dependence upon Sanballat. There is nothing to show that he was more than a favourite slave of the Samaritan governor. **A fox.** Or, "a jackal," which would be more likely than a fox to stray over a ruined wall into a town.

Ver. 4.—**Hear, O our God.** Compare Ezra's parenthetic burst of thanksgiving (Ezra vii. 27, 28). That which in Ezra was a sudden impulse has become a settled habit with Nehemiah (comp. ch. v. 19; vi. 9, 14; xiii. 14, 22, 29, 31). **Turn their reproach upon their own head.** The imprecations of Nehemiah are no pattern to Christians, any more than are those of the Psalmists (Ps. lxxix. 22—28; lxxix. 12; cix. 6—20, &c.); but it cannot be denied that they are imprecations. Before men were taught to "love their enemies," and "bless those that cursed them" (Matt. v. 44), they gave vent to their natural feelings of anger and indignation by the utterance of maledictions. Nehemiah's spirit was hot and hasty; and as he records of himself (ch. xiii. 25) that he "cursed" certain Jews who had taken foreign wives, so it is not to be wondered at that he uttered imprecations against his persistent enemies.

Ver. 5.—**Cover not their iniquity, &c.** Some of David's imprecations are very similar (Ps. cix. 7, 14, 15, &c.), as also some of Jeremiah's (Jer. xviii. 23). **They have provoked thee to anger before the builders.** It is not as if they had merely "thought scorn" of thee or insulted thee before one

or two. They have uttered their insult publicly, so that it is known to the whole body of the builders. Therefore they deserve not to be forgiven.

Ver. 6.—**So built we the wall.** Rather, "and we (still) built the wall." Insults and gibes had no effect on us—did not touch us. Despite of them we steadily kept on our building, and the result was that

soon all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof—the whole continuous line of wall was completed to half the contemplated height. **For the people had a mind to work.** Literally, "there was a heart to the people to work." They wrought, as we should say, "with a will"—they had their heart in the work. Insult and gibe rather stimulated than daunted them.

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Ridicule of a good work.* Sanballat and his friends had at first thought it impossible that Nehemiah would attempt to repair and restore the wall of Jerusalem. But when they found that the work was actually begun, and making good progress, their anger was equalled only by their astonishment, and they gave vent to their wrath in scoffs and ridicule. Happily they seem to have been so misled by their contempt for the feebleness of the Jews as to have deemed it impossible that they could really complete the undertaking; and so they contented themselves with ridicule until the work was so far advanced, and the people so organised and inspirited, that more formidable measures were unavailing. Nehemiah, however, was much wounded by their scorn, expressed as it was not only before "the army of Samaria" (ver. 2), but "before the builders" (ver. 5), and adapted to discourage them; and he expressed his feelings strongly in prayer to God. But he and the people, so far from being disheartened, had only the greater "mind to work," and speedily completed the restoration up to half the height of the wall. Note—

I. THE CONTEMPT AND RIDICULE WHICH GOOD WORKS HAVE OFTEN TO ENCOUNTER, ESPECIALLY AT THEIR COMMENCEMENT. Many discoveries and inventions of a secular character might be cited in illustration. The Copernican system. Gas. Railways, and the speed of travelling expected on them. Ocean steam-ships. But, confining ourselves to Christian enterprises, the first preaching and avowed aims of the gospel, the efforts of Christian reformers and evangelists, the work of modern missions, may be referred to; and many an effort on a smaller scale to evangelise a dark and godless population. 1. The circumstances which are thought to justify contempt and ridicule. (1) The supposed impossibility of accomplishing the proposed object. "Will they revive the stones," &c. (2) The feebleness of those who undertake it. In number, wealth, mental capacity, and culture, &c. "What do these feeble Jews?" (3) Their expectation of Divine aid. "Will they sacrifice?" Thus "the preaching of the gospel is to them that perish foolishness;" and those who preach it are sometimes regarded as either knaves or fools. 2. Their actual causes. (1) Dislike of the work and anger against the workers (ver. 1). These help to produce blindness as to the real facts of the case. (2) Ignorance and unbelief. The world knows not the real resources of Christians, and cannot understand their motives. It has no faith in the gospel or the Holy Ghost, in the precepts or promises which impel and inspirit Christian workers, or the Divine love which constrains them. Hence cannot rightly estimate their conduct or the probabilities of their success. What the world can see is manifestly insufficient, and it cannot see what renders success certain. (3) Felt paucity of solid grounds of objection. Ridicule often used as a substitute for argument.

II. THE EFFECT WHICH CONTEMPT AND RIDICULE SHOULD HAVE ON THOSE ENGAGED IN GOOD WORKS. 1. Care not to deserve them. It must be confessed that sometimes those engaged in religious enterprises invite ridicule, if not contempt; by manifest ignorance, by cowardly fears of advancing science, by clap-trap and worldly policy, by cant or weak sentimentalism, by glaring inconsistencies between their lofty professions and their actual conduct, &c. It is one of the wholesome functions of raillery to banish such follies from good undertakings, and thus make the work truer and stronger. 2. Prayer. Not like Nehemiah's, for vengeance on the despisers; but forgiveness, and that God would "turn their reproach on their head" by granting signal success to the work. 3. Calm confidence. In the assurance of that Divine

favour and assistance of which the world takes little account, and thus of good success. 4. Steady, persevering toil. All the more vigorous because of the opposition. Thus Christian workers will live down contempt, even if, as in this case, it give place to violent hostility. It may, however, be followed by applause when the work has proved itself good by results which even the world can appreciate.

Ver. 4.—*Despising the godly.* "Hear, O our God; for we are despised." The contempt of many for sincere and earnest Christians has respect not only to their undertakings, as here, but their whole religious life. Taking this more general subject, notice—

I. THE TREATMENT LAMENTED. "We are despised." How is it that Christians are ever despised? Sometimes, doubtless, they have themselves to blame (see, on the whole paragraph, II. 1). Thoroughly consistent Christians often obtain high respect from men of the world. But the feeling of others is that of contempt. 1. What they despise. (1) Religion itself. Rejecting and disliking it, men persuade themselves that it is not worthy of serious regard; it cannot be, or persons so enlightened as they would be sure to recognise its worth. Hence they affect to think serious Christians credulous and foolish; believing what is unworthy of faith, spending thought, feeling, energy, money for that which is nought, and giving up real advantages and pleasures for phantoms; solid treasures for an estate in the clouds. Gradually they come to believe seriously what first they affected to believe, until all earnest Christians are regarded as ignorant fanatics. (2) The contempt is sometimes increased by the circumstances with which religion is associated. Some Christians have so much which the world esteems as respectable, that their religion is overlooked or condoned. It may excite a smile, but does not awaken contempt. But when such things are wanting, and the one thing most prominent is piety, it is more apt to awaken feelings of hostility, and these to become contemptuous. These poor and ignorant folk, what right have they to deem themselves wiser and better than "their betters"? (see John vii. 48, 49). (3) In some cases it is the form which religion assumes that awakens or intensifies contempt. A large part of the world, in a Christian country, deems it quite right to have a religion, but it must be that of the wealthy, respectable, and fashionable classes: all other it denounces, or with proud superciliousness ignores as unworthy of serious notice. 2. The real causes of their contempt. (1) Unbelief. This the main cause. They do not really believe the truths of Christianity, faith in which is the mainspring of the Christian life. The Divine estimate of the relative worth of men and things is not accepted. (2) Ignorance. Men highly intelligent in other departments—men of science, whose judgment is worthy of all respect in their own sphere—are often profoundly ignorant of the Christian religion, and the actual principles and motives which animate the Christian; yet "speak evil of the things which they understand not." (3) Worldliness. Estimating all things by the worldly standard, "the things of the Spirit of God" are "foolishness unto them." (4) Conceit of superiority. Pride of intellect, rank, &c., blinds them, and produces disdain of those whom they deem inferior to them. Hence they become "despisers of those that are good." It does not, however, require actual superiority to produce this effect; the conceit of it is enough.

II. THE FEELING WHICH SUCH TREATMENT AWAKENS. The feeling expressed in the text is evidently that of pain. It is singular that to be despised is harder to bear than any other kind of ill-treatment. It wounds self-respect more, perhaps pride. It is felt most keenly by those whose knowledge, or refinement, or position enables them best to appreciate the feelings which prompt it. St. Paul found it harder to bear the scorn of educated men than St. Peter. To be deeply affected by it, is in all cases a sign of too great regard for the good opinion of men. Habitual supreme regard for "the praise of God" would raise us above it.

III. THE CONSIDERATIONS WHICH WILL SUPPORT US UNDER IT. Let good men bear in mind—1. Who it is that despise them. Those whose judgment, for the reasons given above, is of little account. 2. For what they are despised. For that which they *know* to be wise, noble, substantial, worthy of all honour. 3. With whom they are despised. God (1 Sam. ii. 30; Ps. x. 13). Our Lord Jesus (Isa. liii. 3). Apostles, martyrs, saints in general, "the excellent of the earth." 4. The estimation in



which they are held by the wisest and best beings. God esteems and treats them as especially his "sons and daughters." Christ "is not ashamed to call them brethren." Angels are "ministering spirits" to them, and rejoice when even "one sinner repents" and is added to their number. 5. The vindication of themselves, and the confusion of their despisers, which will take place at the last day.

IV. TO WHAT WE SHOULD RESORT WHEN SUFFERING FROM IT. Prayer for those who despise us. "Pray for them which despitefully use you." "Being reviled, we bless." Prayer for ourselves; for needful strength to bear contempt meekly yet manfully. "Strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man," we shall not heed it.

Ver. 6.—*A mind to work.* "The people had a mind to work." In our age the calls and opportunities for Christian work are numerous and urgent. The prevalence of "a mind to work" is therefore of great importance; its existence throughout any Christian community is matter for thankfulness, when at least it springs from Christian principle, and is directed wisely to valuable ends.

I. WHENCE A TRULY CHRISTIAN "MIND TO WORK" SPRINGS. 1. Sense of necessity. Perception of evils needing to be removed; of good requiring to be done. 2. Sense of duty. 3. Gratitude and love to God and the Redeemer. 4. Benevolence. 5. Hope. Of accomplishing good; of obtaining good. 6. All these may be excited and guided by good leaders. Such as Nehemiah.

II. HOW IT WILL SHOW ITSELF. In actual work. 1. Prompt. 2. Hearty. 3. Happy. 4. Abundant. 5. Steady and persevering. Notwithstanding scoffers, difficulties, &c.

III. WHAT IT WILL SECURE. 1. Freedom from fruitless speculation and unhealthy controversy. 2. Growth in true Christian life. 3. Success in doing good.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Derision and devotion.* Not the first nor the last instance was this one here recorded of—

I. DEVOTION ASSAILED BY DERISION (vers. 1—3). Sanballat and Tobiah were contemptuously angry when they heard that the Jews had actually begun to build: they "took great indignation, and mocked the Jews" (ver. 1). "What do these feeble Jews?" said Sanballat (ver. 2). "If a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall," said Tobiah (ver. 3), using the strongest language of derision. Here was (1) *misplaced contempt*. A very ridiculous thing it must have seemed to Noah's contemporaries for him to be building a great ship so far from the sea; but the hour came when, as the waters rose, the scorers who had laughed at him knew that he was the one wise man, and they the fools. A pitifully ruinous thing the ministers of Pharaoh's court must have thought it in Moses to sacrifice his princely position in Egypt, and choose to "suffer affliction with the people of God" (Heb. xi. 25). We know now how wise he was. Many others beside Festus thought Paul mad to relinquish everything dear to man that he might be a leader of the despised sect, "everywhere spoken against." We understand what he did for the world, and what a "crown of righteousness" he was winning for himself. To the shallow judgment of the Samaritans, Nehemiah and his workmen seemed to be engaged in a work that would come to nought—they would "have their labour for their pains;" but their contempt was wholly misplaced. These men were earnest and devout workmen, guided by a resolute, high-minded leader, who had a plan in his head as well as a hope in his heart; they were to be congratulated, and not despised. So now (a) *fleshy strength*, a tbing of muscle and nerve, may despise the *mind* with which it competes; or (b) *material force* (money, muskets, arms) the *spiritual strength* against which it is arrayed; or (c) *mere numbers*, without truth and without God, the feeble band which is in a small minority, but which has truth, righteousness, God on its side. Very misplaced contempt, as time will soon show. Sanballat and Tobiah, in their superciliousness, used (2) *an easily-forged weapon*—ridicule. Nothing is easier than to turn good things, even the very best things, into ridicule. It is the favourite weapon of wrong in its weakness. When men can do nothing else, they can laugh at goodness and virtue. Any sim-  
pleton may make filial piety seem ridiculous by a sneering allusion to a "mother's

apron-string." The weakest-minded man can raise a laugh by speaking of death or of devotion in terms of flippancy. There was but the very smallest speck of cleverness in Sanballat's idea of turning ashes into stones (ver. 2), or in Tobiah's reference to the fox breaking down the wall (ver. 3), but it probably excited the derisive laughter of "the brethren and the army of Samaria" (ver. 2). Let those who adopt the rôle of the mocker remember that it is the weapon of the fool which they are wielding. But though easily forged, this weapon of ridicule is (3) *a blade that cuts deeply*. Nehemiah felt it keenly. "Hear, O our God; for we are despised" (ver. 4). And the imprecation (ver. 6) that follows shows very deep and intense feeling. Derision may be easily produced, but it is very hard to bear. It is but a shallow philosophy that says "hard words break no bones:" they do not break bones, but they bruise tender hearts. They crush sensitive spirits, which is more, and worse. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" (Prov. xviii. 14). The full force of a human soul's contempt directed against a sensitive spirit, the brutal trampling of heartless malignity on the most sacred and cherished convictions of the soul, this is one of the worst sufferings we can be called to endure. But we have—

II. DEVOTION BETAKING ITSELF TO ITS REFUGE (vers. 4, 5). Nehemiah, as his habit was, betook himself to God. He could not make light of the reproaches, but, smarting under them, he appealed to the Divine Comforter. "Hear, O our God," &c. (ver. 4). In all time of our distress from persecution we should (1) *carry our burden to our God*; especially remembering "him who endured such contradiction of sinners" (Heb. xii. 3), and appealing to him who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. iv. 15), having been himself tried on this point even as we are. (2) *Ask his interposition with our enemies*; only, as we have learned of Christ, asking not for retaliation (ver. 5), but for the victory of love, for their conversion to a better mind.

III. DEVOTION DRIVEN TO DO ITS BEST (ver. 6). Under the inspiration of an attack from without, Nehemiah and his brethren went on with their work (1) *with redoubled speed*. "So built we the wall . . . unto the half thereof." It grew rapidly under their busy hands, nerved and stimulated as they were to do their best. (2) *With perfect co-operation*. "All the wall was joined together." There was no part left undone by any idlers or malcontents: each man did the work appointed him. The reproaches of them that are without knits together as one man those that are within. (3) *With heartiness*. "The people had a mind to work." No instruments, however cunningly devised and well-made, will do much without the "mind to work;" but with our mind in the work we can do almost anything with such weapons as we have at hand. Pray for, cherish "the willing mind" (2 Cor. viii. 12) in the work of the Lord, and then the busy hand will quickly "build the wall."—C.

## EXPOSITION.

Ver. 7.—It came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, at Samaria, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, in their respective residences, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, or "that the (entire) wall of Jerusalem was of a (good) height," they were wroth. Observe that Tobiah is here quite separated from the nation of the Ammonites, and in no way represented as their leader. Jealousy of Jerusalem on the part of the Ammonites and Philistines is quite natural; and, if the Arabs are the Edomites, their opposition would be equally a matter of course (Ps. cxxxvii. 7; Ezek. xxv. 12; Amos i. 11; Obad. 10, 14); but the Edomites are not called Arabs in Scripture, nor do Arabs appear very often among the enemies of the Jews. It has been suggested that the

"Arabians" here mentioned are the descendants of a colony which Sargon planted in Samaria itself. This, of course, is possible; but they may perhaps have been one of the desert tribes, induced to come forward by the hope of plunder (Ewald), and influenced by the Ammonites, their neighbours.

Ver. 8.—To hinder it. Rather, "to do it hurt." The word used is a rare one. According to Gesenius, it has the two senses of "error" and "injury."

Ver. 9.—We . . . set a watch against them day and night, because of them. Rather, "over against them," "opposite to them"—opposite, that is, to the point from which they were expected to make their attack.

Ver. 10.—The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed. The complaint seems to be, that by the drawing off of men from

the working parties to act as guards, those parties were so weakened that they could not continue the work, the quantity of rubbish being so great.

Ver. 12.—If the text is sound, it can only mean that the Jews who dwelt in the outlying towns, in the neighbourhood of Ammon, Samaria, Ashdod, &c., came repeatedly to Jerusalem, and tried to draw off their contingents, saying to them, "You must return to us." But it is suspected that there is a corruption of the original words of Nehemiah, and that what he wrote was, that these Jews came repeatedly to Jerusalem and warned him of the enemy's designs. (So Ewald, Houbigant, Dathe, A. Clarke, and others.)

Ver. 13.—**Then set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places.** There is no "and" in the original. Nehemiah means that in the less elevated places, where the wall was least strong by nature, he had his men posted on conspicuous spots within the walls, where they could be seen from a distance, and so deterred the enemy from advancing. He drew them up after their families, that each man might feel he was fighting for his brethren, sons, &c. (ver. 14).

Ver. 14.—**And I looked, and rose up, and said.** A particular occasion seems to be spoken of. The allies had joined their forces; the army was advancing; Nehemiah had obtained information of the quarter from which the attack was to be expected; he had posted his men (ver. 13); when he "looked, and rose up," and spoke, it was probably as the enemy was coming up to the attack; he then made this short but stirring appeal. That no conflict followed would seem to show, that "when the enemy approached, and saw from a distance the whole people awaiting them in perfect equipment, order, and spirit," they lost heart and "turned back" (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. v. p. 155). **The Lord, which is great and terrible.** See the comment on ch. i. 5.

Ver. 16.—**The half of my servants wrought in the work.** Nehemiah divided his "servants" or slaves into two bodies, one of which laboured at the wall, while the other kept guard, fully armed, and held the spears, bows and arrows, shields, and corselets of their fellows. **The rulers were behind.** The "rulers" or "princes" did not labour, but stood behind the labourers, directing them, and ready to lead them on if the enemy ventured to come to blows.

Ver. 17.—**And they which bare burdens, with those that laded.** Rather, "*both* they which bare burdens, *as they* laded." The builders, or those engaged upon the work, are divided into two classes—(1) actual

builders, and (2) those who carried the materials. Of these, the latter did their work with one hand, while in their other hand they held a weapon; the former needed both hands for their employment, but even these wore swords in their girdles.

Ver. 18.—**For the builders.** Rather, "and the (actual) builders"—masons, bricklayers, and the like, as distinct from the bearers of burthens, or carriers of material. **He that sounded the trumpet.** The signalman. Trumpeters appear both in the Egyptian and the Assyrian sculptures (see 'Ancient Monarchies,' vol. i. p. 539, second ed.; Wilkinson, 'Ancient Egyptians,' vol. ii. p. 260).

Ver. 21.—**So we laboured: and half of them held the spears.** This is a summary of the main points previously related: "So we continued to work; and one-half of my personal followers continued to keep watch, and to hold the spears" (ver. 16). **From the rising of the morning, &c.** This is additional, and shows how early the work commenced each morning, and how late it continued.

Ver. 22.—**Every one, with his servant.** The material condition of the people had much improved since the return under Zerubbabel. Then there was only one slave to every six Israelites (Ezra ii. 64, 65); now every Israelite had his slave, and many no doubt a large number. **Lodge within Jerusalem.** I. e. "sleep" or "pass the night" there, instead of returning to their several villages or towns. **That in the night they may be a guard to us.** The very fact that they were in Jerusalem, and known to be there, would tend to prevent an attack; and if the enemy assaulted by night, they would be at hand, and able to take their part in guarding the work.

Ver. 23.—**My brethren.** Actual brothers probably. That Nehemiah had brothers appears from ch. i. 2; that one of them, Hanani, had accompanied him to Jerusalem is evident from ch. vii. 2. **My servants.** See above, ver. 16. **The men of the guard that followed me.** As governor, Nehemiah would maintain a body-guard, in addition to his band of slaves. **Saving that every one put them off for washing.** So the Vulgate: "*Unusquisque tantum nudabatur ad baptismum;*" but it is at least doubtful whether the Hebrew words can possibly have this meaning. The most natural and literal sense of them is that given by Maurer and Rambach—"Each man's weapon was his water;" the supposed connection of the clause with the preceding being, "No one took off his clothes," not even for the bath—no one bathed; "a man's only bath was his weapon." Some critics, however, defend the rendering of the A. V.; others take the

words in the same way, but explain the term "water" differently, of a natural want (Ewald, Stanley); while many regard

the text as unsound, and propose emendations. None, however, that has as yet been proposed is satisfactory.

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 7—15.—*Armed opposition.* Ridicule failing and the work progressing, the enemies of the Jews, more angry than ever, conspire to stop it by force of arms. We have here—

I. ENEMIES WITHOUT. 1. Various (ver. 7). 2. Combined (ver. 8). 3. Angry (ver. 7). 4. Wily (ver. 11). 5. Ruthless (*ibid.*). 6. Determined to stop the work.

II. DIFFICULTIES WITHIN. 1. The weariness and discouragement of the labourers (ver. 10). 2. Pressing and repeated messages to those of them who came from the country to return to their homes. Such seems the meaning of ver. 12. Their neighbours and friends, aware of the designs of the foe, were anxious for their safety and that of their families whom they had left behind.

III. NEHEMIAH'S MEASURES. As difficulties thickened his courage rose, his capacity became more evident, and his ability to sway the many. Full of confidence and resolution, he inspired others with like feelings. 1. Prayer (ver. 9). 2. Setting a watch. 3. Subsequently a general arming (ver. 13). 4. Spirit-stirring address (ver. 14).

IV. THEIR RESULTS (ver. 15). 1. Determent of the adversaries. 2. Resumption of the work.

Lessons:—1. For national life. (1) Wars of defence are lawful when necessary, and should be waged bravely for the sake of homes, wives, and children. (2) Preparation for war is a security for peace. 2. For the religious life. (1) Christians must be prepared to fight as well as work. The enemies of their souls and of their Lord are various, numerous, and determined, and must be encountered. (2) Prayer, watchfulness, and courage must be combined in the Christian warfare (comp. Eph. vi. 10—18). (3) Faith in God and fear of him will conquer the fear of our adversaries, human or diabolic. (4) Regard for the highest welfare of their families should inspire Christians in opposing the enemies of religion.

Ver. 9.—*Prayer and watchfulness.* "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto God, and set a watch," &c.

I. The Christian's PERILS. His enemies are—1. Numerous. Satan and his angels, his own corruptions, the world. 2. Diverse. Different in nature, and mode of attack; assuming different forms; appealing in turn to every passion and principle of our nature. 3. Insidious. "The wiles of the devil." He can take the form of "an angel of light." Evil often appears as good. Danger lurks where we should least suspect it: in needful occupations, in lawful pleasures, in the society and influence of dearest friends. 4. Intent on our destruction. "Seeking whom he may devour." Our highest interests, our eternal well-being, are imperilled.

II. The Christian's SAFEGUARDS. 1. Prayer. To him who is mightier than our mightiest foes; who has a perfect knowledge of them, and of our weaknesses; whose eye is ever upon them and us; who loves us and desires our safety; who has promised help and victory to those who call upon him. In his strength alone can we conquer. 2. Watchfulness. *Habitual* vigilance, for our foes may spring upon us from unexpected quarters; *special* watchfulness "over against them" (as the last words of the text should be rendered). Where from experience we have learned that our weakness and the enemy's strength lie. 3. The two combined. God will protect those who watch as well as pray. Prayer aids watching, and watching prayer. "Watch unto prayer." Prayer without watchfulness is presumption. Watchfulness without prayer, sinful self-confidence. Each without the other is sure to fail. Both together will insure deliverance.

Ver. 14.—*Courage in the Christian war.* "Be not ye afraid of them," &c. A stirring battle-cry. Suitable in the Christian warfare.

I. THE CHURCH'S WARFARE. Each for himself and his family; all for the common

good. Against the world, the flesh, and the devil, in all the forms they assume: infidelity, heresy, ungodliness, wickedness of all kinds. The war is—1. Defensive. To preserve themselves, and their households and Churches, from spiritual and moral evil. 2. Offensive. To subdue the world to Christ. Destroying the errors and sins which prevail in it, and rescuing their victims.

II. THE CHURCH'S LIABILITY TO FEAR. On account of the number, and power, and subtlety of her enemies, and the hardships and perils of the war. There is a fear which is good. "Happy is the man that feareth alway." But not the craven fear which shuns the fight.

III. THE CHURCH'S REMEDY AGAINST FEAR. 1. Remembrance of God. (1) His greatness. "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." He has all power to sustain his servants, give them the victory, and reward the victors. (2) His terribleness. To his enemies to subdue them; to his professed friends if they decline to do battle for him.

"Fear him, ye saints, and you will then  
Have nothing else to fear."

2. Thought of the interests involved. As here, of brothers, sons, daughters, wives, and houses. 3. Mutual encouragement. "Be not afraid," &c.

Vers. 16—23.—*Armed workers.* The enemies of the Jews, who meditated an attack upon them, finding that they were aware of their design and well prepared to receive them, withdrew their forces, and the work of restoring the wall went on again. Nehemiah, however, thought it necessary that the people should be prepared for resistance at any moment. He therefore kept half his own retinue always on guard, well armed, while the other half worked; he appointed that every labourer should work armed; those whose work permitted, holding a weapon in one hand while labouring with the other; the masons, whose work required both hands, having a sword by their side; he placed the rulers behind the people, to direct the work and, if need were, to lead the fight. He himself was everywhere, overlooking the workmen, and on the alert for the enemy; having a trumpeter by his side to summon all the people together to resist any assault that might be made. As an additional precaution, he ordered those of the people whose dwellings were elsewhere to lodge by night in the city; while he, his relatives, slaves, and other attendants, though compelled to sleep, never put off their clothes (unless the last very obscure words of the chapter state an exception) until all danger had passed.

The lessons from this paragraph for any Christian Church or society, and indeed for any community, are, the importance of—1. Diligence in work, combined with readiness for contest. It is work that secures prosperity, but conflict may be necessary for the work's sake. 2. Thorough union. 3. Division of duties. Each taking what he is best fitted for, or is thought to be by those in authority. 4. Good organisation. 5. Good rulers. 6. Obedience to them. 7. Self-denial. In all—those highest in authority the most careful to practise it.

Vers. 17, 18.—*Building in readiness to fight.* "They which builded on the wall, &c. For the builders . . . so builded." Regarding the work of building the wall of Jerusalem as an image of Christian edification, whether of the individual or of the Church, notice—

I. THE NEED WHICH CHRISTIANS HAVE OF PREPARATION FOR COMBAT WHILE ENGAGED IN BUILDING. 1. In seeking each his own spiritual profit. Must be intent on improvement and growth, but at the same time ready to fight. For his spiritual foes are near, and may make their onset at any moment and from any direction. 2. In seeking to profit others. Instruction in the truth is of primary importance; but there must be preparedness to meet objections and reprove or warn against errors and sins. Applies peculiarly to Christian ministers. Their main work is to "edify;" but in doing so they must not only be ready for but actually do battle against iniquity and false teaching. Besides which, they, like Nehemiah and his retinue, must especially mount guard for the protection of the whole community against threatened assaults of unbelief, superstition, immorality, &c., and be ready, if necessary, to summon all to fight against them (see Ezek. iii. 17, seq.; xxxiii. 7, seq.).

II. THEIR RELATION TO EACH OTHER. 1. They are mutually helpful. Fighting, or readiness for it, renders building possible. If infidelity or sin get the upper hand, "edification" ceases. Building aids fighting. Gives strength for it, supplies with strongest motives to it. He who is well "built up" in Christian faith and life has an experience of the preciousness of that which the enemy assails which will make him earnest and bold in contending for it. So with a Church established in all goodness, and richly enjoying the privileges of the gospel. In the end, however (as when the wall was finished), building may render preparation for fighting unnecessary. The Christian who has arrived at great maturity becomes unassailable by either serious error or temptation to sin. Growth in grace renders the disciple more and more like his Master, who could say, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." After many a conflict, he settles down in quiet enjoyment of what he has won; his walls so strong, his gates so secure, that no enemy can enter, even if he do not cease the vain attempt. A Church, also, well built up at once in Christian life and character and in numbers, needs not take much heed of enemies without. Her life and works speak for her more powerfully than arguments. 2. Readiness for fighting may hinder or stop building. The attitude of mind favourable to the former is in no small degree unfavourable to the latter. Besides, when men are armed for conflict they may come to prefer it, and engage in it needlessly or excessively, to the neglect of edification. But no Church (or state) can live by fighting. This is partly true of direct battling with evil tendencies and habits in ourselves and others; let good be nourished and strengthened, and evil will decay. It is especially true of religious controversy. It is very apt to injure Christian life and character. The antagonistic spirit which it engenders is unfavourable to meekness and charity, and even justice and truthfulness. A Church must be militant and ever ready to fight; but a Church mainly militant will effect little good.

The lessons are—1. Be "ready, aye, ready" for battle. With the "whole armour of God" about you, and trained to the use of your weapons. But—2. Be mainly intent on building.

Ver. 20.—*God fighting for his people.* "Our God shall fight for us." An inspiring assurance. Grounds of it in the case of Nehemiah and the Jews.

I. WHEN WE MAY CHERISH THIS ASSURANCE. When we fight for God; which we do—1. When we contend in and for his cause. When our contest is against Satan, sin, and error; and on behalf of Christ and truth and righteousness and souls—our own and others. 2. When we are actuated by sincere and supreme regard for him. Desiring his glory, and trusting him for strength and victory. 3. When we employ the weapons which he has given us. Not using Satan's arms, but the weapons of truth and love (see 2 Cor. x. 4). 4. When we fight in the spirit which he prescribes and imparts (2 Tim. ii. 25; James i. 20). 5. When we battle with all our power.

II. THE GROUNDS OF THIS ASSURANCE. 1. The relation of God to us. "*Our God.*" 2. His interest in the contest. It concerns his "great name," the accomplishment of his purposes of love to mankind in Christ, the destruction of his enemies. 3. His summons to it. 4. His promises.

III. THE EFFECTS OF SUCH ASSURANCE. 1. Alacrity to engage in the combat. 2. Courage. 3. Confidence of victory. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Finally, take heed lest any of you fight *against* God. "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker."

## HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 7—23.—*The wisdom of the Christian workman in the hour of peril.* We are reminded here of—

I. THE PROGRESS OF SIN IN ITS COURSE (ver. 8). From sneers the enemies of Israel passed on to plots; from taunts to a mischievous conspiracy. They "conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it." This advance of theirs was brought about by their hearing that the walls of Jerusalem were "made up." The steadfast labour of the good led, incidentally, to the development of evil in the unholy. The relations of David with Saul, and of the Apostle Paul with his

unbelieving countrymen, and, indeed, those of our Master himself with the religious leaders of his day, show that speaking the truth or doing the work of God may prove the occasion of the growth and outbreak of sin—the *occasion*, but not the responsible *cause*. We must not be deterred from speaking or doing the will and work of God by fear about incidental consequences on the part of the great enemy.

II. THE PERIL TO THE WORK OF THE CHURCH (vers. 10, 11, 12). The good work of Nehemiah was in serious danger from two causes:—1. *The craft and violence of its foes*. The enemy said, "They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease" (ver. 11). Here was force combined with subtlety; the enemy would surprise and slay them. 2. *The faint-heartedness of its friends*. Judah, from whom better things might have been expected, said, "The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed," &c. (ver. 10); and the neighbouring Jews who had come in to help kept saying ("ten times," ver. 12) that they must return, fearing the wrath of the Samaritans. In every work of God there are sure to be *some* if not "*many* adversaries" (1 Cor. xvi. 9). This we must expect whenever we "put our hand to the plough" in the field of Christian labour. And happy shall we be if we have not to contend with the feebleness and pusillanimity of our friends, fainting long before reaping-time (Gal. vi. 9), or even shrinking at the first alarm, and talking about "giving up."

III. THE WISDOM OF THE CHURCH IN THE HOUR OF DANGER. The first thing to do when the work of the Lord is threatened is that which Nehemiah did. 1. *Mindfulness of God*. "We made our prayer unto our God" (ver. 9). "Remember the Lord, who is great and terrible" (ver. 14). An appeal to him for help, and the recollection of the fact that "greater is he that is for us than all they that are against us." "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee," &c. (Ps. l. 15). 2. *Realisation of the great issues which are at stake* (ver. 14). "Fight for your brethren, your sons," &c. When we are working or fighting for the cause of God we are engaged on behalf of the truest, highest, and most enduring interests of those who are dearest to us, and of our own also. The cause of Christ is the cause of ourselves, of our families, of our country, as well as of our race. 3. *Defence* (vers. 16-18). We must fight as well as pray and work. Nehemiah's servants wrought with their weapon of defence in one hand and their instrument of labour in the other (ver. 17). Or, while one was building, his fellow stood ready behind with a spear to put at once into the labourer's hand. Usually our work is rather to build than to strike, but there are times when we must be ready to fight our foes or aid those who are engaged in conflict. In the wide field of the Church's work there is always some work for the Christian soldier as well as for the Christian labourer. Let the one be the cheerful and appreciative co-operator with the other. The spear and the trowel are both wanted. The apologist and the preacher, the theologian and the evangelist, are both accepted servants of Christ. 4. *Vigilance* (ver. 9). We "set a watch against them day and night." The Christian motto must ever be the memorable words, "Watch and pray." 5. *Industry*. Patient (ver. 21): "We laboured in the work . . . from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared." United (ver. 15): "All of us, . . . every one to his work." Self-forgetting (ver. 23): "None of us put off our clothes," &c. 6. *Order* (vers. 13, 19, 20). Everything was done in perfect order. Men were placed where most required (ver. 13); those whose homes were outside came in (ver. 22); arrangements were made to concentrate in case of attack (vers. 19, 20). All must work cordially under the human as well as under the Divine leader.—C.

VERS. 1-23.—*The work and warfare of the Church*. 1. The WORK of the Church. 1. *Derided*. "And mocked the Jews" (ver. 1). 2. *Under-estimated*. "These feeble Jews" (ver. 2). 3. *Misrepresented*. "If a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (ver. 3). 4. *Prayerful*. "Hear, O our God" (ver. 4). 5. *Hearty*. "For the people had a mind to work" (ver. 6). 6. *Advancing*. "Heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped" (ver. 7).

II. THE WARFARE of the Church. 1. *Defensive*. "And conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it" (ver. 8). 2. *Watchful*. "Set a watch against them day and night" (ver. 9). 3. *Judicious*. "I even set the people with their families" (ver. 13). 4. *Courageous*. "Be not ye

afraid" (ver. 14). 5. Religious. "Remember the Lord" (ver. 14). 6. Self-denying (ver. 23).—E.

Vers. 1—23.—This description of the building of the wall of Jerusalem may be taken as representing the life of the Church militant. The chief points are these:—

I. THE SPIRIT which pervades and actuates it. "The people had a mind to work." Activity, self-denial, fellowship, and fortitude.

II. THE METHOD. Division and distribution of the work. Builders, fighters, burden-bearers. Some in command, others waiting upon their word. A place for every one in which to work, and every one keeping his place, and doing his utmost in it.

III. THE DIFFICULTY. To do the work surrounded by enemies. Their mockery, their defiance, their active opposition. Every earnest labourer must be *prepared* to resist. There are special defenders of the faith, champions of truth, those who "hold the spears and the shields and the bows and the corslets, and the captains behind all the house of Judah." But beside these special fighters, the "builders had every one his sword girded by his side, and built." All the people of God should regard the defence of his truth and the protection of the life of his Church as their vocation. We cannot know at what point the attack will be made. Let all put on the armour.

IV. THE GROUND OF CONFIDENCE. "We made our prayer unto our God, and we set a watch against them day and night because of them." Watch and pray. The true dependence is that which looks up to heaven, and at the same time lifts up the hands, ready for activity.

V. THE VICTORY OVER HUMAN INFIRMITY. Some were discouraged. Judah said, The strength faileth, there is much rubbish, we are not able to build. The Jews nearest the danger were afraid. There will always be the discontented and the fearful ones to provoke discouragement. But there are the Nehemiahs, who "look, and rise up, and speak." The true leaders "remember the Lord." They get courage for themselves and for their brethren from the high places of faith and fellowship with God. The Church should keep its eye upon such men, and its ear open to them.

VI. THE TRUMPET-CALL. "In what place ye hear the sound of the trumpet, thither assemble yourselves unto us. Our God will fight for us." There are times and places which rally God's people. They must draw together. They must forsake for a while their special, individual appointment. They must obey the trumpet which summons them to united effort against a desperate assault. This especially true in connection with the attacks of infidelity and superstition.

VII. THE UNIVERSAL REQUIREMENT. Unpausing, unresting toil and vigilance till the work is done. "Night and day." "None of us put off our clothes." The Church must endure hardness if it will accomplish its mission to build the wall of Jerusalem. Special need at times to guard against the growth of the spirit of self-indulgence, sloth, and compromise. Too much of the work is committed to the few willing labourers. All should be doing, and always doing, and doing their all.—R.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER V.

INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES, AND NEHEMIAH'S MODE OF MEETING THEM (ch. v. 1—13). While the building of the wall was in progress, but not, so far as it is stated, in direct connection with the employment of the mass of the people in unremunerative labour, internal evils showed themselves which demanded prompt attention and remedy. Complaints were made

to Nehemiah by large numbers of the lower orders, both men and women—the shrill voices of the latter rising to the intensity of a "great cry" (ver. 1)—to the effect that the oppression of the rich and great, combined with some other permanent or temporary causes, was depriving them of their houses and plots of land, and forcing them to sell their sons and their daughters into slavery (vers. 2—5). According to the existing text, the primary causes of the general



poverty were three:—1. Over-population (ver. 2); 2. A recent famine (ver. 3); and, 3. The weight of taxation, arising from the large amount annually demanded from the province by the Persians in the way of tribute (ver. 4). As there is no reason to suppose that the tribute had been augmented recently, this cause must be viewed as constant. The over-population may have arisen, in part, from the influx of immigrants, in part from the narrow extent of the territory which the returned tribes had been allowed to occupy (Ewald, 'History of Israel,' vol. v. pp. 80, 115, &c.). The famine, which has been attributed to the calling off of the people from their ordinary employments (*ibid.* p. 152), can scarcely have had this as its main origin if the whole work was begun and ended, as Nehemiah tells us it was (ch. vi. 15), in less than two months; but supposing that already there was a scarcity produced by bad harvests, as in Haggai's time (Haggai i. 9—11), it may have been aggravated by this circumstance. The entire result was that the poorer classes were compelled, first of all, to mortgage their houses and such lands as they possessed (ver. 3), and secondly to pledge the persons of their sons and daughters (ver. 5), in order to raise money, with the near prospect of having to allow them to become slaves if they were unable to repay their creditor at the time appointed. Under these circumstances they appealed to the new governor, probably not long after his arrival, for relief. The appeal placed him in a position of great difficulty. He was not rich enough to take upon himself the whole burthen; and though he himself, and also his brothers and personal attendants, did lend freely, out of their private store, money and grain (ver. 10, with comment), yet this was far from being enough—it did not go to the root of the evil. Had he stopped at this point and done no more, the distress would have continued, and with it the discontent—the mass of the population would have held aloof from him in sullen anger, and his whole undertaking might have been frustrated. On the other hand, it was impossible for him, under the Persian system of government, to carry matters with a high hand, as a Grecian lawgiver might have done, and order a general cancelling of debts. He could only have

recourse to persuasion, argument, and personal influence. He therefore, first of all, spoke to the "nobles," who were the money-lenders, rebuked them, and endeavoured to induce them to desist from their malpractices (ver. 7); but failing to produce in this way any considerable effect, he brought the matter before an assembly of the people (*ibid.*). There, he first shamed the nobles by alleging his own contrary example, and then called on them, "for the fear of God and because of the reproach of the heathen," to restore the forfeited lands and houses to their former owners, repay all that they had received in the way of interest on the money lent, and give up the entire practice of lending money upon pledge or mortgage (vers. 7—11). Moved by this public appeal, the nobles intimated their consent, whereupon he made them clench their promise by an oath (ver. 12), adding on his own part a malediction if the oath were not observed, which was hailed with acclaim by the people. Thus the whole matter was brought to a happy conclusion—the promise made was kept—"the people," *i. e.* the whole nation, nobles included, "did according to this word" (ver. 13).

Ver. 1.—**A great cry.** Compare ver. 6, where the "cry" is distinguished from the "words." The Oriental habit of shrill lamentation must be borne in mind—it is always shrillest when the women have a part in it, as on this occasion. **Their wives.** Mothers, whose children had been sold into slavery, or who anticipated losing them in this sad way speedily (ver. 5). **Their brethren the Jews.** *I. e.* the richer Jews, who had adopted the practice of lending upon pledge.

Ver. 2.—**There were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many.** Those who had large families were foremost in making complaint. They found their numerous progeny not the blessing that abundant offspring is ordinarily reckoned in Holy Scripture, but a burthen and an anxiety. **Therefore we take up corn for them.** We are obliged to get corn for them, or they would die, and have to run in debt for it. Corn, wine, and oil seem to have been lent, no less than money (ver. 11).

Ver. 3.—**Because of the dearth.** Some, who could not say that their families were large, claimed relief on account, as it would seem, not so much of a present as of a past famine, which had forced them to mortgage their fields, vineyards, and houses. That

Judæa was liable to famines about this time appears from Haggai i. 6, 9—11; ii. 16—19.

Ver. 4.—**The king's tribute.** Judæa, like other Persian provinces, had to pay a tribute, partly in money and partly in kind, yearly to the Persian monarch (see the comment on Ezra iv. 13); but there is no reason to believe that this burthen was generally felt as oppressive, nor that it was heavier in Judæa than elsewhere. But by the very poor even a small amount of direct taxation is felt as a grievance; and the necessity of meeting the demands of the tax-gatherer was in the ancient world often the turning-point, which compelled the contracting of a debt (Liv., ii. 23); and so it seems to have been with these complainants.

Ver. 5.—**Our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren.** We love our own flesh and blood, poor as we are, just as much as do our richer brethren; our children are as dear to us as theirs to them. The necessity which compels us to bring into bondage our sons and our daughters is therefore most grievous to us. Some of our daughters are brought into bondage already. On the power of fathers to sell their daughters, see Exod. xxi. 7. Neither is it in our power to redeem them. Literally, "nor is aught in the power of our hands" (see Gen. xxxi. 29). We have no remedy; it is not in our power to effect any change.

Ver. 6.—**I was very angry.** It is not clear that the letter of the law was infringed, unless it were in the matter of taking interest (ver. 11), of which the people had not complained. That men might sell their daughters to be concubines or secondary wives is clear from Exod. xxi. 7; and it is therefore probable that they might sell their sons for servants. But the servitude might only be for six years (Exod. xxi. 2); and if a jubilee year occurred before the sexennial period was out, the service was ended (Lev. xxv. 10). Land too might be either mortgaged or sold (*ibid.* vers. 14—16), but under the condition that it returned to the seller, or at any rate to his tribe, in the jubilee year (*ibid.* vers. 10, 13). The spirit, however, of the law—the command, "Ye shall not oppress one another" (*ibid.* vers. 14, 17)—was transgressed by the proceedings of the rich men. It was their duty in a time of scarcity not to press hard upon their poorer brethren, but freely to alleviate their necessities. Nehemiah, his near relations, and his followers had done so to the utmost of their power (ver. 10, with the comment). The rich men had acted differently, and made all the profit that they could out of the need of their fellow-countrymen. Hence Nehemiah's anger.

Ver. 7.—**I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury.**

NEHEMIAH.

So the Vulgate, and most commentators; but Bertheau has shown that the expression used, which is peculiar to Nehemiah, cannot have this meaning, since it is not the taking of usury that has been complained of, or that Nehemiah is especially anxious to stop, but the lending of money upon the security of lands, houses, or children, with its consequences, the forfeiture of the lands and houses, with the enslavement of the children. He therefore translates, "I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye lend upon pledge." **I set a great assembly against them.** It is evident that Nehemiah's rebuke had no effect. The nobles gave him no reason to think that they would change their conduct. He was therefore compelled to bring the matter before the people; not that they had any legal power, but he felt that the nobles might be ashamed or afraid to continue their oppression when it was openly denounced by the chief civil ruler in the hearing of a great assembly of their countrymen.

Ver. 8.—**We after our ability have redeemed our brethren.** "We," here, may be either "we Jews of the captivity," in contrast with "you who have long returned from it," or "we of my house and household" (equivalent to the "I, my brethren, and my servants" of ver. 10), in contrast with "you rich Jews not of my household." Nehemiah must appeal to a well-known fact, that he and others had been in the habit of redeeming enslaved Jews among the heathen. **Will ye even sell your brethren?** An *argumentum ad verecundiam*. Will ye do the exact opposite? Cause your brethren to be sold into slavery? And not to heathen masters, but to men of their own nation, unto us? Roman creditors, if they sold their debtor slaves, were required by law to sell them across the Tiber—to men of a different race. It was felt to add to the indignity of the slave condition that one should have to serve one's own countryman, recently one's equal and (perhaps) acquaintance. **They held their peace, and found nothing to answer.** Or, "found never a word." The argument told. It admitted of no reply. The nobles were ashamed, and had not a word to say.

Ver. 9.—**Also I said.** To silence the nobles was not enough. To shame them was not enough. What was wanted was to persuade them. Nehemiah therefore continued his address. **It is not good that ye do.** It is not good in itself, apart from any contrast with what I have been doing. **Ought ye not to walk—or, literally, "will ye not walk"—in the fear of our God?** Will ye not really "fear God and keep his commandments," not in the letter only, but in the spirit? Will ye not cease to oppress

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your brethren? Will ye not deal kindly and gently with them? **Because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies.** If the mere fear of God, the desire to escape his displeasure and win his approval, is not enough, will not the thought of the light in which you will appear to the heathen influence you? You make a profession of religion; you claim to be actuated by high motives; to be merciful, compassionate, and self-denying. If they see you as keen after gain as any of themselves, as regardless of others, as pitiless and oppressive, what a reproach will not this bring on your religion! What a proof will it not seem to be that you are no better than your neighbours, and your religion, therefore, no whit superior to theirs!

Ver. 10.—**I likewise . . . might exact of them.** Rather, "have lent them." I and mine have advanced to the poorer classes, in this period of their distress, **money and corn**; but not as you have, not upon security. Let us then, all of us, you as well as I, henceforth relinquish this practice of mortgaging and pledge-taking.

Ver. 11.—**Restore, I pray you, &c.** Nay, more. Let us not only give up this practice in the future, but let us remedy its evils in the past. You are in possession of lands and houses that have become yours through these mortgages, and you have received a heavy interest on the sums of money, or on the **corn, wine, and oil** that you have advanced. I bid you restore it all. Give back at once the houses and the lands that you will in any case have to restore in the year of jubilee. Give back the interest that you have illegally taken, and so, as far as is possible, undo the past; make restitution of your ill-gotten gains, relinquish even your legal rights, and become self-denying patriots, instead of tyrants and oppressors.

Ver. 12.—**Then they said, We will restore them.** Nehemiah's eloquence prevailed, and brought about a "day of sacrifices." The nobles, one and all, agreed not only to give back the interest that they had

illegally received on the corn and money borrowed of them, but to restore the forfeited lands and houses, which must have been of far greater value, and to which they were by law fully entitled. "We will restore them," they said, **"and will (in future) require nothing of them, neither interest nor security, but will do as thou sayest."** The promise was sweeping in its terms, and probably not insincere; but Nehemiah mistrusted all sudden impulses. He would have something more than a promise. **Then called I the priests, and took an oath of them (the nobles), that they should do according to this promise.** *i.e.* he swore the nobles, in the sacred presence of the priests, to the performance of the promise which they had made.

Ver. 13.—**Also I shook my lap.** Even the taking of the oath did not seem sufficient to the prudent governor. He would strengthen the oath by a malediction, and a malediction accompanied by a symbolical act, to render it the more impressive. Among the nations of antiquity few things were so much dreaded as falling under a curse. The maledictions of Deut. xxviii. 16—44 were the supreme sanction which Moses devised for the Law, whereof he was the promulgator. Curses protected the tombs and inscriptions of the Assyrian and Persian kings, the contracts of the Babylonians, and the treaties of most nations. Nehemiah's curse is an unusual one, but very clear and intelligible. He prays that whosoever departs from his promise given may be cast forth a homeless wanderer, emptied of all his possessions, as empty as the fold in his own dress, which he first gathers into a sort of bag or pocket, and then throws from him and so empties out. To this the assembly responded by a hearty "Amen," and then **praised the Lord** for the happy ending of the whole affair; in which they piously traced the directing and over-ruling hand of God, "restraining the fierceness of men," and "turning it to his praise" (Ps. lxxvi. 10—Prayer-Book version).

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—13.—**Extortion rebuked.** Rulers of men have no easy task. No sooner have they provided a remedy for one evil than another presents itself. Nehemiah found this to be the case. He had preserved the city from the enemies outside, and was fast proceeding with the fortifications which would be a permanent protection; but before they were completed a cry arose within which called his attention to dangers quite as threatening. Of what avail to have secured the people from the foreign foe if they were to destroy one another by extortion and dissension? The wisdom and courage of the governor, however, proved equal to the occasion. Observe—

I. **THE LOUD COMPLAINT MADE** (vers. 1—5). A large number of the people "and of their wives" came to Nehemiah and complained bitterly of their condition, and of the extortion to which they were subjected by their rich and noble brethren. The

complainers were of three classes. Some who were originally poor found themselves, with large families, unable to obtain food for them on account of the pressure of the times. They desired that corn might be distributed among them. Others had borrowed money to obtain food, and given up their lands and houses in pledge. A third class had taken a like course to enable them to pay the taxes of the Persian monarch. Some (of each class probably) had already been compelled to obtain supplies by selling sons, and even daughters, as servants, and saw no resource but to sell others of their children. Moreover, contrary to the Mosaic law, heavy interest was being charged for the loans. The rich were taking advantage of the necessities of their poorer brethren to enrich themselves yet more, regardless of the suffering and humiliation they were inflicting. The sufferers felt and said that they were of the same flesh and blood as their rich oppressors, and their children as dear to them.

II. THE EFFECT ON NEHEMIAH OF THIS COMPLAINT. "I was very angry" (ver. 6). A very just anger; the anger of a righteous man at flagrant wrong; of a noble and generous spirit at base rapacity; of a lover of the people, who was making great sacrifices for their good, against those who cared not for the welfare of the community, so that they could accumulate wealth for themselves and their families; of one who feared God, that his name should be dishonoured by the very people whose mission was to exalt it.

III. THE COURSE HE TOOK. 1. He carefully considered the matter (ver. 7). 2. He rebuked the offenders (ver. 7). 3. He called an assembly upon the case. 4. He publicly remonstrated with the offenders. (1) Contrasting their conduct with that of himself and his immediate friends (vers. 8, 10). He and others like-minded had bought Jews out of slavery to the heathen, while these were selling, or causing to be sold, into slavery to Jews their brethren around them. He, his brothers and servants, had also lent money and corn to the needy, but without exacting pledge or interest. (2) Reminding them of the reproach they were bringing on the Jewish name and religion, and which the fear of God should have prevented their incurring. (3) Entreating them to give up to their owners the property they held in pledge, and cease to require interest on the money due to them (ver. 11).

IV. THE RESULTS. 1. The self-conviction of the offenders (ver. 8). 2. Their promise to comply with his proposals (ver. 12). A promise solemnly ratified by—(1) An oath administered by the priests. (2) A malediction pronounced by Nehemiah, with a significant ceremony (ver. 13). 3. The joy and thankfulness of the people (ver. 13). They responded "Amen" to the malediction, and "praised Jehovah." 4. The performance of the promise (ver. 13).

Lessons:—1. The hideousness of avarice. "The love of money is the root of all evil." It here appears as inhumanity, oppression, violation of Divine law, disregard of the claims of patriotism. Especially odious and injurious in nobles and rulers, who ought to be examples of generosity, protectors of the poor, and promoters in every way of the general good. 2. The duty of discountenancing and suppressing this vice. Rulers and magistrates are peculiarly bound to do so. 3. The power of good example. Gives confidence in reproofing iniquity and urging amendment, and force to reproofs and appeals.

Ver. 5.—*Human equality*. "Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children." The doctrines of the kinship and equality of all classes of men have a terrible sound when they come from the lips of a starving multitude in times of general distress, and are likely to assume in their minds an exaggerated form, and be pushed to dangerous extremes; but they contain substantial truth, notwithstanding, which, in order that it may not be perverted to evil in troublous times, should be well learnt, and pondered, and applied to practice in quiet times by those who are raised above their fellows in wealth and position.

I. THE ESSENTIAL EQUALITY OF MEN. 1. In nature. (1) They have like bodies. "Our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren." Similar in origin, composition, organisation, needs, susceptibilities; equally feeling pains and pleasures. (2) They have similar minds. With like faculties, capacities, &c.—intellectual, emotional, moral, spiritual. If Christians, are alike "partakers of the Divine nature." 2. In relation-

ships. (1) Divine. They have the same Maker (Job xxxi. 15; Prov. xxii. 2), the same Redeemer. Equally as sinners need salvation. (2) Human. The family ties as real and valuable. "Our children as their children." Are similarly related to the state, and of equal worth to it. If Christians, are alike children of God, members of Christ, "brethren" to each other. 3. In affections. (1) Have the same natural affection. "Our children as their children," equally beloved. The poor equally with the rich rejoice in their children's joys, grieve over their sorrows, are pained at their degradation. (2) Are alike, when regenerate, in religious affections. 4. In prospects. Must alike die and appear before the bar of God. Will, if accepted, occupy the same heaven; if condemned, be consigned to the same hell. 5. In rights. Which follows from what has been said. The poor and the rich should be "equal before the law," as they are in every well-governed community, civil or ecclesiastical. They are entitled to equal social justice; they should receive like sympathy and brotherly consideration and help in times of loss and suffering.

II. THE DUTIES WHICH ARISE FROM IT. 1. What they are. (1) Mutual respect and good will. "Honour all men," as human beings. "Love the brotherhood," as fellow Christians. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," for he equally deserves love. (2) Mutual consideration and sympathy. Men the most unlike in many respects ought to be able, much better than they often do, to understand each other, and enter into each other's feelings, because of their essential likeness. And they should consider one another, that they may appreciate and sympathise with each other. These rich creditors would not have dealt so hardly with their poor debtors if they had tried to realise what the loss of all property and the sale of their children would have been to themselves. (3) Mutual helpfulness. Men are made of various capacities and conditions that they may form in society a more perfect unity, and be able to serve one another the better (comp. 1 Cor. xii. 14—26). 2. By whom owing. The poor are bound thus to feel and act to the rich, as well as the rich to the poor; the employed to the employer, as well as the employer to the employed, and the former are as likely to neglect these duties as the latter. Selfishness is not confined to any class. Those, however, who from their circumstances have acquired most of intelligence and culture, and have most power individually, may be expected to take the lead in the understanding and practical application of the truths and duties just stated. In doing so they will show a tender consideration for the feelings of the poor; they will be concerned for their elevation, improvement, and salvation; they will not use their advantages selfishly or hardly (even though legally); they will not push too far the doctrines of political economy, and feel quite content to swell their own fortunes by giving helpless people starvation wages, or lending money at rates ruinous to the borrower, merely because the law of "supply and demand" justifies them; their power will be used to rebuke, restrain, and remedy oppression; to protect and aid the weak; to soften the inequalities of life by kindness and thoughtful charity; and, generally, to bless others rather than aggrandise themselves. In thus acting they will obey the dictates of prudence as well as those of Christianity, and will aid in uniting society by bonds stronger far than Acts of Parliament, armies, or police regulations—bonds which the strain of the most calamitous times will not burst asunder.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Righteous anger*. "And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers." Anger is always dangerous, often evil. The anger is sinful which has its root in selfishness, which is excited by slight causes, or is blended with hatred, or issues in malice or revenge, or lasts long in any form. But there is an anger which is righteous, and the absence of which, so far from being a commendable meekness, may be occasioned by indifference to great principles, and to the general welfare of men. The text illustrates—

I. THE NATURE OF RIGHTEOUS ANGER. 1. Whence it springs. Love to God and man; love to righteousness, hatred of sin. 2. By what it is excited. (1) Flagrant wrong-doing, (2) consequent injury to society, and (3) counteraction of efforts for 'is good.

II. ITS USES. To stimulate to—1. The rebuke and restraint of evil-doers. 2.

Efforts for their reformation. 3. The discovery and application of remedies for the mischief they have wrought.

III. ITS BEST PRESERVATIVE FROM EVIL. Reflection before acting. "I consulted with myself." No passion more demands self-control, that it run not to excess, nor hurry into unwise and sinful words and deeds. A pause to consider, and the exercise of reflection itself, will supply the needful corrective, and enable us so to govern and guide our anger that it may subserve the ends for which this passion was given.

Ver. 7.—*Self-consultation*. "Then I consulted with myself." The power of consulting with himself is one of the chief things which distinguish men from brutes. A man can be both the subject and the object of his own thought; as if there were in him two persons—one thinking, feeling, suggesting, &c.; the other observing the processes, judging of their worth, and determining accordingly. "My heart consulted with me," says Nehemiah (translating literally). "Commune with your own heart," says the Psalmist (Ps. iv. 4). The exercise of this power of self-consultation, or reflection, is of the utmost importance to the wise direction of our lives. "A reflecting mind," says an ancient writer, "is the spring and source of every good thing;" although it must be acknowledged that it may become the source of the worst wickedness. For the evil which is deliberately planned is far worse than that which is unpremeditated.

I. ON WHAT WE SHOULD CONSULT OURSELVES. 1. With respect to personal religion. Our condition before God, and in view of eternity. Our sins—their peculiar nature, aggravations, &c. Our duty to God and ourselves in view of them—repentance, confession of sin, faith in Christ, self-surrender to God, a new life. Or, again, a higher and fuller Christian life than we have hitherto lived. What we must encounter if we adopt the better course. A Christian life growing out of reflection will be richer, nobler, more decided, and more stable than one which springs merely from emotion. 2. With respect to our work. What we are best fitted for, and have opportunity to do. How it can be best done. What are its difficulties, and how they can be surmounted. Motives to its performance. Work thus begun and conducted will be done wisely and confidently, and be likely to succeed.

II. THE CONDITIONS OF SUCCESSFUL SELF-CONSULTATION. 1. That it be conducted with the aid of the best advisers. The two within us consulting must call in a third—the all-wise God (comp. Ps. xxv. 4, 5; cxxxix. 23, 24). And all that can help us to the understanding of his will should be welcomed. 2. That it be accompanied with serious purpose. To do what is seen to be right and wise. "If any man wills to do his will, he shall know," &c. 3. That it be followed by corresponding practice. Consideration may be too prolonged. Some go through life "considering," or pretending to do so, as to the plainest duties; perhaps also they "resolve and re-resolve," yet "die the same."

Ver. 9.—*Avoidance of reproach*. "Ought ye not to walk?" &c. The "reproach" spoken of here is supposed by some to be that arising from the feeble condition of the Jews, which the conduct of these extortioners was likely to perpetuate and increase. Better, however, to interpret it of the just reproach which such conduct would occasion.

I. REPROACHES OF MEN WHICH ARE NOT TO BE REGARDED. Those which are directed against—1. The Christian faith. 2. Christian confession. The bold acknowledgment of Christ. 3. Christian life and work. "Fear ye not the reproach of men," &c. (Isa. li. 7. See also Rom. xv. 3; Heb. xi. 26).

II. REPROACHES THAT SHOULD BE REGARDED. Those which are directed against manifest inconsistencies between our faith and our life, our professions and our practices. Men of the world can understand our religion sufficiently to discern wherein we fail. Their judgment of some things in our conduct may be just, and is then fitted to quicken our consciences and lead us to improvement. "Fas est et ab hoste doceri." We should be careful not to give just "occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," for the sake of the credit of religion, the good of enemies themselves, and of other men who may be well disposed, but to whom our inconsistencies

are a stumbling-block. Amongst the occasions of just reproach may be named—  
 1. Untruthfulness and dishonesty in worldly transactions. 2. Insincerity and cant in religious utterances. 3. Selfishness and self-indulgence. 4. Dissension and contention among Christians. 5. Censoriousness. 6. Gloominess. As contrasted with our representations of the happiness of religion. 7. Worldly ambition or policy in Church life and work.

III. THE SUREST WAY TO AVOID JUST REPROACH. "Ought ye not to walk in the fear of God." Genuine, habitual piety, actuating our whole life, will produce such fruits as will commend themselves even to the irreligious who are not malignant foes of what is good, and "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Thus fearing God we shall not need to be much concerned about the judgment of men. Finally, those who reproach Christians with their inconsistencies condemn themselves. The light by which they do so reveals their own duty. They are as really bound to be genuine and consistent Christians as those whom they reproach. The obligation to piety and goodness does not spring from the profession of religion, though this may add strength to it; it rests on all to whom the gospel is known, and if you know enough to condemn others, you know enough to teach you what you ought to be, and to leave you without excuse.

Ver. 13.—*Promise-keeping.* "And the people did according to this promise." Nehemiah wrote this, we may be sure, with peculiar satisfaction. It would be well if the history of all promises of amendment, &c. could be thus concluded. But it is far otherwise. Men often "say and do not." Even vows made to God in secret or before the Church, and with solemnities resembling those recorded here, are, alas, often broken. In view of such failures it may be profitable for those who are contemplating a solemn profession of religion to consider how they may best secure that they shall fulfil their vows.

I. BY CARE IN MAKING THEM. 1. With right understanding of their import. 2. With deep conviction of the truths and duties to which they relate. 3. With due deliberation. Not hastily, under the influence of passing emotion, but carefully considering what they involve, and counting the cost of keeping them. 4. Of free and hearty choice. Not merely because of pressing solicitations from others. 5. In dependence on the grace of the Holy Spirit. With consciousness of weakness, and humble reliance on God and prayer to him.

II. BY FREQUENT REMEMBRANCE AND RENEWAL OF THEM. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord." "Thy vows are upon me, O God." "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." Such exercises are especially suitable: 1. In anticipating and celebrating the Lord's Supper. 2. When assailed by powerful temptations. 3. When called to difficult duties. Such as, though requiring toil and self-denial, are involved in our professed consecration to God.

III. BY CONSTANT WATCHFULNESS AND PRAYER. In conclusion, notice—1. The blessedness of those who do according to their promises to God. He will fulfil his promises to them. 2. The guilt of unfulfilled promises. 3. The comfort, under the sense of partial failure, which arises from the Divine compassion and readiness to forgive. "For in many things we offend all." But our God knows and values sincere purpose and endeavour. He knows also our weakness. He accepts imperfect service, and forgives the imperfections of his true-hearted servants. 4. Obligation to piety and holiness is independent of our promises. These recognise obligations, do not create them. Those who "make no profession" must not, therefore, console themselves as if they were guiltless.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—13.—*The rich rebuked for taking advantage of the poor.* I. THE POOR. 1. Numbers tend to poverty. "We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live" (ver. 2). 2. Borrowing tends to poverty. "We have mortgaged our lands" (ver. 3). 3. Taxation tends to poverty. "We have borrowed money for the king's tribute" (ver. 4). 4. Poverty

may sometimes have cause for protest against injustice. 5. Poverty is experienced by the people of God who are engaged in holy toils.

II. THE RICH. 1. The rich must not take undue advantage of calamitous circumstances. "Because of the dearth" (ver. 3). 2. The rich must not be inconsiderate. "Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren" (ver. 5). 3. The rich must not be cruel. "Our daughters are brought unto bondage" (ver. 5). 4. The rich must not violate the law of God. "Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God?" (ver. 9).

III. THE REBUKE. 1. Angry. "And I was very angry." 2. Reflective. "I consulted with myself" (ver. 7). 3. Impartial. "The nobles and the rulers." 4. Sustained. "And I set a great assembly against them." 5. Argumentative (ver. 8). 6. Unanswerable. "They held their peace, and found nothing to answer." 7. Successful. "We will restore."—E.

Vers. 1-13.—*Error and return.* In the very midst of apparent success, when the Church is building its walls and seems likely to be triumphant and secure, there may be an aggravated evil springing up and spreading to its very heart. Such was the case at Jerusalem when the walls of its defence were rising. When priests and people were repairing the defences, there was circulating a deadly mischief within the whole body. We look at—

I. THE WORST EVIL FROM WHICH THE CHURCH OF CHRIST CAN SUFFER (vers. 1-5). 1. *An internal evil*, always more dangerous and deadly than an external one. Better a hundred carping or even conspiring Samaritans than ten Jews inside the walls carrying a curse within their breast. Better an army of Canaanites in battle array than one Achan in the camp. 2. The evil of *discord*. One Jew was complaining of another, one class of another class; seeds of dissension and strife were springing up and bearing bitter fruit. Internal evil in a Christian society may take many forms—error, sloth, pride, &c.—but the worst of all is discord. The Master is never so grieved as when his first commandment is broken, and when they who are specially bound to love one another are indulging in "bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, malice." 3. Discord springing from *oppression*. The richer Jews had made use of a time of want, arising from dearth (ver. 3), to compel the necessitous to (a) mortgage their children (ver. 2) and (b) their ancestral property (ver. 3) in order to save themselves and their families from starvation (vers. 2, 3), as well as to pay the tribute to the king of Persia (ver. 4). What naturally afflicted them the most was, that through the cupidity and hardness of the wealthy they had been obliged to sell into servitude their own sons and daughters; said they, in their forcible lament, "Yet our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children" (ver. 5). Nor were they able to redeem them (ver. 5). There is great bitterness of soul when one member of a Christian Church is heedless of the natural human affections of any of his brethren: guilt can hardly go further.

II. ITS DEPLORABLE CONSEQUENCES (vers. 1, 9). 1. *Misery* (ver. 1). "There was a great cry of the people and of their wives" (ver. 1). When one part of a society is sinning and the other part "sinned against," when the Church is divided into wrong-doers and wrong-sufferers, misery sinks to its depth. There is no gladness of heart so great as when harmony and love prevail; so, there is no wretchedness of soul so complete as when hatred and injury abound. 2. *Reproach* (ver. 9). "It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?" It is our primary duty, and should be our most earnest desire, so to let our light shine that men may glorify Christ, to "adorn the doctrine" of our Saviour; when we so act as to cause the enemy of God to blaspheme, we are "verily guilty before God."

III. THE WAY OF ESCAPE AND RECOVERY (vers. 6-13). Happily, in this instance, it did not go too far, because it was not allowed to do its work too long. There was—1. *An appreciation of its enormity* (ver. 6). Nehemiah was "very angry when he heard their cry and these words." Angry, but certainly not sinful (Eph. iv. 26); angry with a holy wrath, roused by a profound sense of the magnitude of the guilt and the danger. 2. *Self-control* (ver. 7). He "consulted with himself." Instead of acting with injurious haste, he waited till he had well considered the best course to take. When wrath is roused, it is well indeed to "consult with ourselves" before we speak



to others or act on others. 3. *Concerted action* (ver. 7). "I set a great assembly against them." Nehemiah directed against the evil the full force of public sentiment—the national conscience. 4. *Boldness on the part of the leader*. There is a time for decided speech and action. "I rebuked the nobles" (ver. 7). "We . . . have redeemed our brethren; . . . and will ye even sell your brethren?" (ver. 8). "Restore their lands, their vineyards," &c. (ver. 11). "I shook my lap," &c. (ver. 13). In times of great defection or oppression, when things are going ill with the cause of God, it is not honied words, but the language of reproach that is wanted. "Reprove, rebuke, exhort," though "with all long-suffering" (2 Tim. iv. 2). 5. *Repentance on the part of the erring*. This includes—(a) Conviction of sinfulness—having "nothing to answer" (ver. 8), under a sense of guilt. (b) Acknowledgment and promise of reform (ver. 12). This may well be accompanied by the most solemn vows uttered before God (ver. 12). (c) Amendment (ver. 13). And the people did according to this promise. (1) Conviction, (2) confession, (3) the solemn vow, (4) the homeward step—this is to walk in the way of recovery.—C.

Vers. 1—19.—*An example of successful activity for God*. A great practical reformation carried out by a religious ruler on the highest religious principles, and by the strength of religious character. No more difficult task than to deal successfully with such circumstances in which men's selfish interests were involved, and the monied classes would be against reform. Nehemiah, by his wisdom, boldness, and simple-minded appeal to God, achieved a marvellous success. Notice—

I. The direct appeal to great MORAL AND RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES. We cannot do better than bring men face to face with conscience. 1. *Humanity*. 2. *Patriotism*. They are brethren. 3. *Fear of God*, who is no respecter of persons. The Jews all professed to be fearers of God. All civil law and common life were based upon the Divine law. That which was manifestly displeasing to God could not be legally right. We acknowledge the same principle. All human law rests on the word of God. We cannot directly appeal to the letter of Scripture in dealing with ungodly men, but we may use it to make the law of nature clearer. 4. *The universal conscience*. "I set a great assembly against them." No wrong-doers can withstand the appeal to the common sentiment of right. Educate the moral sentiment of society, and it becomes a protection against the self-will of individuals. *Vox populi* should be *vox Dei*. In a truly progressive society it will be more and more so. The great leaders of thought and action should not be afraid of making their appeal to great assemblies, in Nehemiah's spirit.

II. AN EXAMPLE OF WISE METHOD. Much depends on method in every successful reformation. 1. *The means used were moral*. Remonstrance, persuasion, appeal to the heart and conscience. No violence. No craft. No resort to mere worldly expediency. No compromise of religious position. No truckling to rich men. 2. *Personal character* was brought to bear upon those whose conduct must be changed. Nehemiah's moral indignation had great influence. His bold challenge of the wrong-doing. His appeal to his own example and that of others. His tender interest in the poor, and imploring earnestness in their cause. 3. While acting as a ruler, and with a ruler's authority, the *public feeling* is enlisted in support of reform. It is a great matter to enlist the sympathy of the majority. 4. In all practical measures and social reformations we should endeavour to *unite the two forces of religious and civil law*. "I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise." With solemn appeal to God, and in the presence of all the congregation, who "said Amen, and praised the Lord," Nehemiah bound the wrong-doers to carry out their word.

III. An illustration of the BENEFICIAL EFFECT of decisive and speedy reform when effected on religious principles and by wise methods. 1. *Liberation of human energy*, both for the Church and for the state. What could the people do when they were so oppressed? How could they work with men who treated them so cruelly? All real reformation is the setting free of power for the future. We must not look at temporary inconveniences, but at permanent benefits. 2. The value of great moral and political *precedents*. Such an instance of heroic championship in the cause of God and humanity becomes an inestimable treasure for future generations. What

power there is in the histories of all great reformati<sup>o</sup>ns! 3. We cannot doubt that, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, the moral and social work which Nehemiah accomplished was intended to prepare the way for that more directly religious work which followed. All true reformation is a preparation for advancement. John the Baptist heralds the kingdom of God. 4. An immense service to the cause of righteousness when governors and statesmen identify their names with great movements for the lifting up of the people. Their self-sacrifice, their faithfulness, their victory become part of God's word. God thinks upon them for good, and will make the world think of them. The best monument to a great man is "what he has done for the people."—R.

### EXPOSITION.

GENERAL ACCOUNT OF NEHEMIAH'S GOVERNMENT (vers. 14—19). Having given this account of the internal difficulties which threatened to put a stop to the building of the wall before it was well begun, and been led in the course of it to speak of the poverty and sufferings of the common people, Nehemiah not unnaturally goes on to inform us of the methods by which in his general government he endeavoured to alleviate the distress, or at any rate to avoid adding to the burthens which pressed upon the poorer classes. From the time that he entered upon his office, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, B.C. 444, to the time of his writing this portion of his Book, in the thirty-second year of the same king, B.C. 432, he had lived entirely at his own expense, requiring no contributions from the people, either in provisions or money, for the support of himself or his court (ver. 14). This was quite contrary to the previous practice of Jewish governors (ver. 15), and indeed of Oriental governors generally, whether under the Persian system or any other, such persons almost universally taxing their provinces, sometimes very heavily, for their current expenses, and often accumulating princely fortunes by their exactions. Nehemiah had also maintained a noble hospitality, of which he may be excused for being a little proud, during these twelve years of his governorship, entertaining daily at his table 150 of the chief inhabitants of Jerusalem, besides many foreign Jews who from time to time came on visits to the Judæan capital (vers. 17, 18). It is conjectured that he was able to take this course, and spend so largely without receiving any income from his province, because he retained his place of cupbearer, and as such drew a large salary from the Persian court (Ewald, History of Israel,

vol. v. p. 150, E. Tr.). However this may have been, he certainly disbursed large sums of money in Jerusalem, and must have done something to alleviate the general poverty by his lavish expenditure. He takes credit, further, for giving the services of his private attendants to the work of the wall during the whole time that it was in building (ver. 16), and for having abstained from the purchase of any land, when, through the general poverty, it might have been bought at a low price from those who were anxious to part with it (*ibid.*). His conduct beyond a doubt stood in the strongest contrast with that of the ordinary Persian satrap, or other governor, and we cannot be surprised that he looked on it with some complacency. He felt that he had done much for his people. He looked, however, for his reward not to them, not to man, but to God; and desired that his reward should be not present gratitude and thanks, not even posthumous fame, but God's approval and remembrance only (ver. 19). "Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people."

Ver. 14.—**From the day that I was appointed.** Literally, "from the day that he (*i. e.* Artaxerxes) appointed me." **From the twentieth year.** See above, ch. ii. 1. The appointment, having taken place in Nisan, was in B.C. 444. **Unto the two and thirtieth year.** We see here that this chapter, and therefore, probably, the entire first section (chs. i.—vii.) of this Book, was not written until B.C. 432, the year in which Nehemiah returned to the Persian court from Jerusalem (ch. xiii. 6). **I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor.** *I. e.* "have not lived at the expense of our subjects, as Persian governors do ordinarily." Nehemiah's brethren here are probably not his brothers only, but his entire court.

Ver. 15.—**The former governors that had been before me.** Of these, two only are known to us, Zerubbabel and Ezra; but it is probable that there had been others. **Were chargeable unto the people.** The words of the original are stronger, and should be rendered “had oppressed the people” (*išāpuvar*, LXX.), “had been heavy upon them.” **Had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels.** Rather, “had taken from them, *for* bread and wine, *above* forty shekels.” (So Ewald and Bertheau.) Forty shekels a day from the whole people would seem to be intended—not forty shekels a year from each person, as some explain. **Even their servants bare rule.** The oppression exercised by the domestics and other hangers-on of rulers is often worse than their own. This is especially the case in the East, where eunuchs and other domestics have been the most fearful tyrants. Haman under Xerxes, Sejanus under Tiberius, Narcissus under Nero, are examples. **So did not I.** I neither exacted money, nor allowed my servants to bear rule. **Because of the fear of God.** Because I felt that it would be wrong, either absolutely or under the circumstances.

Ver. 16.—**I continued in the work of this wall.** Literally, “*I repaired*,” like the others (ch. iii. 4—31). I employed myself not in buying up men’s fields at low prices, and so enriching myself, but in the restoring and repairing of the wall, over which I exercised a constant superintendence. **All my servants were gathered thither.** See ch. iv. 16.

Ver. 17.—**An hundred and fifty of the**

**Jews and rulers.** The “hundred and fifty” were, all of them, “rulers.” Nehemiah means to say that he entertained continually at his table 150 of the Jewish chief men or “rulers” (*segdnim*), and also an indefinite number of foreign Jews, who came on short visits to Jerusalem.

Ver. 18.—**Once in ten days store of all sorts of wine.** Literally, “all sorts of wine in abundance.” Wine was probably drunk every day, but laid in every ten days. **Yet for all this.** Or, “*with* all this”—notwithstanding this great expenditure, I took no allowance as governor. **Because the bondage was heavy upon this people.** The bondage intended must be that under the Persian crown, since neither the labour at the wall nor the oppression of the creditors lasted during the twelve years that Nehemiah was governor. It would seem that the tribute, already complained of in ver. 4, must have been felt as a heavy burthen at this period.

Ver. 19.—**Think upon me, my God.** Compare ch. xiii. 14, 22, 31. This is no “prayer for posthumous fame” (Stanley, ‘Lectures on the Jewish Church,’ Third Series, p. 135), but simply an appeal to God, beseeching him to bear in mind the petitioner’s good deeds, and reward them at his own good time and in his own way. As Butler observes (‘Analogy,’ Part I. ch. iii.), the sense of good and ill desert is inseparably connected with an expectation of reward or punishment, and so with the notion of a future life, since neither are the righteous adequately rewarded nor the wicked adequately punished in this life.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 14—19.—**An example of disinterestedness.** In contrast with the selfishness of others Nehemiah sets his own generous conduct.

I. HIS NOBLE CONDUCT. 1. He forewent the usual allowances to the governor, for twelve years ruling without charge for his services (vers. 14, 15). 2. He restrained those under him from oppressive and extortionate rule (ver. 15). Although preceding governors had permitted such rule on the part of their servants. 3. He and his assisted the needy without exacting possession of their land (ver. 16). Such is perhaps the meaning of the words “neither bought we any land” (comp. ver. 10). 4. He and his servants did their full share of work at the wall (ver. 16). 5. He kept open table at great expense to himself (vers. 17, 18). Thus, not only did he take nothing from the people, but he spent his own fortune freely in their service. That he had the means for so large expenditure makes the more conspicuous his piety and patriotism in leaving the court of Artaxerxes, and undertaking work so arduous for the benefit of his fellow Jews.

II. THE PRINCIPLES ON WHICH HE ACTED. 1. The fear of God (ver. 15). 2. Pity for the overburdened people (ver. 18). 3. Hope of Divine recompense (ver. 19).

Ver. 15.—**The practical power of the fear of God.** “But so did not I, because of the fear of God.” “The fear of God,” as a description of piety, is more common in the Old Testament; “faith” and “love” in the New. But each includes the other. For this fear is not mere dread, but reverence.

I. THE FEAR OF GOD IS A PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE. It rules the life. 1. As a motive. He who fears God must be concerned to please and obey him. All that is included in such fear tends to this result. (1) Reverence for his glorious perfections, his infinite power, his omniscience and omnipresence, his holiness, justice, loving-kindness. His infinite excellences, known, admired, revered, will impress their image on the heart and life. The sense of his presence, his knowledge of the heart, his power to bless and to curse, must stimulate to the avoidance of sin and the practice of righteousness. (2) Reverence for his authority. As Creator, Lawgiver, Ruler, Judge. (3) Reverence for his laws. (4) Dread of his displeasure. 2. As it will secure Divine assistance.

II. THE FEAR OF GOD AS A PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE IS SUPREME AND PREDOMINANT. It recognises God as supreme, regards his favour as most to be desired, his displeasure as most to be dreaded. Hence it raises at once above self-will, the desire to please men, and the influence of human examples and customs. It follows that it will—1. Rule those whose position renders them largely independent of men. Well is it for the feeble when the mighty govern themselves by this fear; well for nations when their rulers, especially where despotic government prevails, answer to the description of a good sovereign given in the last words of David (2 Sam. xxiii. 3). 2. Restrain from common sins. Such as are not generally condemned, or are very leniently regarded by society. 3. Incite to uncommon virtues. Nehemiah's conduct supplies an illustration and proof of all three propositions.

III. THOSE WHO ARE GOVERNED BY THE FEAR OF GOD WILL ENJOY HAPPY REMEMBRANCES. Nehemiah records with emphasis and evident pleasure, "So did not I," &c. Such remembrances are pleasant, as they—1. Give satisfaction to the conscience, which pronounces the conduct right and good. 2. Afford evidence of sincere piety. 3. Strengthen the hope of future acceptance and recompense. 4. Awaken thankfulness to God. Let the young begin early to live in the fear of God, and they will live pure and noble lives, on which, in old age and in the prospect of death, they will be able to look back with satisfaction.

Ver. 19.—*Prayer for Divine remembrance.* "Think upon me, O my God," &c. This and other similar prayers of good Nehemiah strike us at first as unseemly; and certainly they are more consonant with the spirit of the Old Testament than that of the New. Our Lord teaches us to say after our best works, "We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do." Besides which, the sense of sin on the one hand, and of entire indebtedness to Divine grace for all the good we have and do on the other, foster a humility which prevents the complacent thought of our good deeds, especially before God. Still the doctrine of reward according to works belongs to the Christian equally with the Mosaic religion. We are taught to hope for future recompense of the good we have done; and there can, therefore, be no essential impropriety in at times praying for it. It is a probable supposition (Ewald) that Nehemiah wrote these prayers after he had learned by painful experience how little of appreciation, gratitude, or reward he could expect from men. "They forget or neglect me, or requite me evil, but do not thou be unmindful."

I. WHO MAY OFFER SUCH A PRAYER. Those who have served God's people, and therefore God himself—1. With sincere regard for God. His will, approval, recompense. They whose good works are done "to be seen of men" "have their reward," but may not look to God for it. 2. Disinterestedly. Not from selfishness or ambition. 3. Devotedly. With great zeal. 4. Abundantly. Rendering great service. 5. Self-denyingly. At considerable sacrifice of ease, time, strength, substance, &c. 6. Unweariedly.

II. WHEN SUCH A PRAYER IS SUITABLE. 1. When reward cannot be expected from men. Either on account of their want of appreciation of what is done for them, or inability from poverty or otherwise to requite it suitably. 2. When men show positive ingratitude, or return evil for good. 3. Even when men remember and reward. For the godly man feels that without the Divine favour all that man can give will be vain and unsatisfying.

III. WHY A FAVOURABLE ANSWER MAY BE EXPECTED. Because of—1. The relation of God to his praying servant. "My God." 2. The Divine character. Righteous,

and loving righteousness; good, and approving the good (see Heb. vi. 10). 3. The union which exists between God and his people. So that he regards what is done to "this people" as done to himself. 4. The Divine promises. Such as Matt. x. 42. xxv. 34—40.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 14—19.—*Self-regard and magnanimity.* In each one of these verses Nehemiah makes a personal reference. He, the writer, is the theme of his narrative. He writes of himself more than is customary with the sacred authors. We consider—

I. THE SELF-REGARD WHICH IS NOT SELFISHNESS. Though Nehemiah writes about himself, there is no painful egotism in his record. He does not obtrude himself. There is a self-regard which is not selfishness. It is right and needful that we should (a) *think* much and highly of our spiritual nature. Not to do this is the sin of the thoughtless multitude. Every man's first duty is to consider how he himself stands before God, and whether he is entering in activity and life into all the holy possibility of moral character. It is sometimes right that we should (b)  *speak* or write about ourselves. Our Divine Master without egotism spake much concerning himself. He could not possibly have wrought his redeeming work with any completeness had he not so done. His great apostle had occasion to write much about himself in order to make clear the truth, and "for the furtherance of the gospel." So Nehemiah writes, using often the first person singular, but in no egotistic vein. We may sometimes aid the cause of Christ and serve our fellow-men by an effective personal narration of motive, experience, and work. Only we must remember that this is an alluring path, and we may easily go too far in it. It is not every one who can be as autobiographic and as unselfish as Nehemiah. Often it is our duty to (c) *pray* for ourselves (ver. 19). Often should we utter such a prayer as "Think upon me, my God, for good." Though assured that "the Lord thinketh upon us in our poverty" (Ps. xl. 17), and greatly encouraged thereby, we must ask him to have us in his gracious and bountiful remembrance. And it is right that we should (d) *hope* for a personal reward for our labours (ver. 19), "according to all that I have done for this people." We cannot be more evangelical than Paul, but with him we may hope that after the "fight is fought" and the "course is finished," the "righteous Judge" will give the "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. iv. 7). Like Moses, we may "have respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. xi. 26). But we have our attention called also to—

II. THE MAGNANIMITY WHICH IS CHRISTIAN (vers. 14, 15, 16, 17). Nehemiah was totally unlike those governors who had regarded their office as a means whereby to secure emolument. His thoughts rose high above the line of the mercenary and the perfunctory. There was a large-mindedness, and therefore an open-heartedness about him worthy of all admiration and imitation. He not only did his own appointed work faithfully and energetically (ver. 16), but he declined to receive the usual remuneration. For twelve years he "did not eat the bread of the governor" (ver. 14). Beside this, he kept a very hospitable table, entertaining daily "an hundred and fifty of the rulers of the Jews, beside those that came from the heathen" (ver. 17). Generosity may be shown in many ways: (1) in large and costly gifts, (2) in free expenditure of time and strength, (3) in a noble overlooking of injury, (4) in refusal to claim what is justly due. It is sometimes (a) the overflow of *natural disposition*. We find in some ungodly men this open-heartedness and nobility of conduct. With Nehemiah it was partly, indeed largely, (b) the outcome of *genuine godliness* (ver. 15). "So did not I, because of the fear of God." If animated by this motive, we shall not live to ourselves, but shall (1) *give freely*, and (2) *forego gladly*, that God may be glorified, and the welfare of his people promoted.—C.

Vers. 14—19.—*A man of public spirit.* I. THAT HE HAS MORE REGARD FOR THE PUBLIC WELFARE THAN FOR PERSONAL REMUNERATION. "Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year

even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor" (ver. 14).

II. THAT HE HAS MORE REGARD FOR NECESSARY REFORMS THAN FOR TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS. "But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people" (ver. 15). Men are chargeable to their fellows—1. In the state. 2. In morals. 3. In society. 4. In the family. 5. In the Church. Men have often to pay and suffer for their governors.

III. THAT HE HAS MORE REGARD FOR POPULAR LIBERTY THAN FOR OPPRESSIVE EXACTIONS. "Yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God" (vers. 15, 18). Nehemiah would not allow the few to oppress the many; he made his servants work (ver. 16).

IV. THAT HE HAS MORE REGARD FOR EARNEST INDUSTRY THAN FOR LUXURIOUS INDOLENCE. "Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall" (ver. 16). 1. Personal work. 2. Continuous work. 3. Effective work. 4. A good example.

V. THAT HE HAS MORE REGARD FOR WISE BENEFICENCE THAN FOR A MEAN POLICY. "Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people" (ver. 18).

VI. THAT HE HAS MORE REGARD FOR THE DIVINE BENEDICTION THAN FOR HUMAN PRAISE. "Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people" (ver. 19). 1. The Divine contemplation of man. 2. The beneficent regard of God for man. 3. God will reward those who aid his people. 4. The measure of the Divine favour not according to what we have done, but according to what Christ has done in, by, and for us.—E.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER VI.

SECRET PROCEEDINGS OF SANBALLAT AND HIS FRIENDS TO HINDER THE BUILDING OF THE WALL, AND THEIR FAILURE. THE WALL COMPLETED (ch. vi.). When the open opposition failed, when it was found that Nehemiah's arrangements for guarding the wall (ch. iv. 13—23) were such that success was not likely to attend the employment of force by the confederates, with such resources as they had at their disposal, and the idea of an assault was therefore given up, recourse was had to artifice and intrigue. First of all, Sanballat sent to propose a meeting between himself, Geshem, and Nehemiah in the open country about Ono, twenty-five or thirty miles from Jerusalem, hoping thus to draw him to a distance from his supporters, and intending to "do him a mischief" (ver. 2). Nehemiah, who perceived the snare, declined; but Sanballat persisted, and made four other proposals for conferences, probably varying the place, but all without avail. On the fifth and last occasion the letter sent to Nehemiah was an open one, and taxed him with an intention to rebel and make himself king, an intention

which was sure to come to the ears of Artaxerxes, and would bring the Jews into trouble. An open letter on a delicate subject is in the East an insult, and this step of Sanballat's could only have been taken in order to excite the mind of Nehemiah's subjects, and to bring pressure to bear on him from them. Nehemiah, however, was not to be intimidated, or diverted from his purpose. He protested that the charge made against him was a pure calumny, invented by Sanballat himself, and still declined a conference (ver. 8). Hereupon intrigues began between Sanballat and Tobiah, on the one hand, and some of Nehemiah's subjects, on the other. Tobiah was connected by marriage with Jews of high position in Jerusalem (ver. 18), and had thus an excuse for holding frequent correspondence with them (ver. 17). His letters seem to have been allowed free admission into the Jewish capital, and he was thus enabled to cause serious trouble. At one time he addressed Nehemiah himself, and tried to intimidate him (ver. 19). At another he worked upon certain members of the prophetic order, and by bribes or promises induced them to become his aids

and abettors. A certain Shemaiah, who appears to have been at once a prophet (ver. 12) and a priest (ver. 11), allowed himself to be "hired" by Tobiah and Sanballat, and laid a plot to bring Nehemiah into discredit. He sought an interview with the governor, and told him that his life was in danger—he knew by his prophetic gift that on the very next night an attempt would be made by some one, and Nehemiah would be murdered—that is to say, unless he took precautions. And he had a plan to propose. As a priest, he had free access to the temple building; he would take Nehemiah with him, at some risk to himself, for a bodily impurity made it illegal for him to enter the holy place, and they would pass the night together in the sanctuary. So Nehemiah's life would be preserved (ver. 10). The object was to induce Nehemiah, though a layman, to enter the sanctuary, and so break the law (ver. 13). But the simple manliness and straightforward piety of the governor frustrated this plot also. "Should a man in my position run away from danger and hide?" he said. "And if so, should a layman enter the temple? I will not enter" (ver. 11). It was not till afterwards that he found out that the prophecy was a fiction, and the prophet a bribed liar (ver. 12). Other similar attempts seem also to have been made, about the same time, by other members of the prophetic order, among whom one only is particularised—the prophetess Noadiah (ver. 14). Nehemiah, however, stood firm as a rock throughout; and he is able to boast that "in fifty and two days, on the 25th of Elul, THE WALL WAS FINISHED" (ver. 15). It was a proud moment for the indefatigable and stout-hearted governor, who saw his dearest wish accomplished, and must have known that the accomplishment was mainly due to his own untiring efforts. But he does not claim the glory for himself. "When the enemies (*i. e.* Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem) heard of it," he says, "and the heathen round about us saw it, they were much cast down." And why? "They perceived that this work was wrought of our God."

Ver. 1.—When Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian heard. Literally, "When it was heard by Sanballat and Tobiah,

and by Geshem the Arabian." The proposition 5 is repeated with Geshem, but not with Tobiah, probably because Tobiah was Sanballat's subordinate, but Geshem an independent chief. Hence, too, it was not proposed that Tobiah should be at the conference. At that time I had not set up the doors. This may appear to contradict ch. iii. 1, 3, 6, 13, &c. But the account of the building in ch. iii. is carried on to the completion of the whole work, the object there being to state by whom the different parts were done, and not at what time. Chronologically, chs. iv., v., and vi. are parallel to ch. iii., relating events that happened while the wall was being built. The hanging of the doors in the gateways was, naturally, the last thing done. Upon the gates. Rather, "in the gateways."

Ver. 2.—In some one of the villages. The Hebrew has "in the villages," which seems too vague. Bertheau therefore suggests, "in Hakkiphirim," taking the word as the name of a particular village, which is probably right. Ono was near Lydda, in the plain country bordering on Philistia. They thought to do me mischief. A euphemism for "they thought to murder me."

Ver. 5.—An open letter. Letters in the East are usually placed in silken bags, which are then tied up and carefully sealed. An "open letter" invited perusal; and the object of sending this one "open" must have been to create alarm among the Jews, and to excite them against Nehemiah. Compare the conduct of Sennacherib's ambassadors (2 Kings xviii. 27—33).

Ver. 6.—Gashmu saith it. "Gashmu" is probably the native Arabic form of the name which in a Hebrew mouth commonly became "Geshem." Thou and the Jews think to rebel. Compare ch. ii. 19, and Ezra iv. 13, with the comment. According to these words. *I. e.* "Agreeably to what is reported."

Ver. 7.—Thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah. Expressions of the religious teachers of the time, parallel to that of Zechariah,—"Behold, thy king cometh" (Zech. ix. 9),—may have been reported to Sanballat, and misunderstood or purposely misinterpreted.

Ver. 9.—They all made us afraid. Rather, "sought to affright us." Their attempts did not succeed. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. "O God" is not in the original; whence some critics do not see in the words used a prayer, but only a statement—"But I now strengthened my hands" (so the Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, and Arabic versions). This meaning, however, cannot be obtained from the present text.

Ver. 10.—A Shemaiah appears in the list

of priests who afterwards signed the covenant (ch. x. 8); but the names in that list do not appear to be personal. There is a Shemaiah also among the priests who took part in the dedication of the wall (ch. xii. 42); he is not said, however, to be "the son of Delaiah." **Shut up.** Prevented, *i. e.*, by some legal impurity from taking part in the temple service, or even entering the temple. **In the house of God, within the temple.** Rather, "within the sanctuary." The *heykal* was the same as the holy place, and meant that part of the temple building which intervened between the porch and the holy of holies. It corresponded, as Gesenius observes, to the body or nave of modern cathedrals. **Let us shut the doors.** Folding doors of fir wood separated the holy place from the porch in the temple of Solomon (1 Kings vi. 34); and these had no doubt their counterpart in the restored temple. Shemaiah suggested the shutting of these doors for greater security.

Ver. 11.—**Should such a man as I flee?** *I. e.* Should a man in my position, the head of the state, bound to set an example to others, fly from danger and hide myself? Surely not. **And who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life?** Rather, "could go into the temple and live?" Dean Stanley compares Becket's noble words,—"I will not turn the cathedral into a castle,"—but the parallel is not close. Nehemiah feels, not that he would profane the temple by making it into a place of refuge, but that he would break the law by simply entering it. Ewald shows that he has caught the point of the objection when he says, "Nehemiah thought that, as a *layman*, he must not break the Divine command by entering the sanctuary itself" ('History of Israel,' vol. v. p. 157).

Ver. 12.—**And, lo, I perceived, &c.** Rather, "And I considered; and lo! God had not sent him." I reflected on the whole matter, and came to the conclusion that, though he might be a prophet, he had not on this occasion exercised his prophetic office—he had not declared to me God's will (compare the case of the "old prophet," 1 Kings xiii. 11-18). And I was right, "for (in fact) he had pronounced this prophecy against me, because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him." "Tobiah and Sanballat" here—not "Sanballat and Tobiah," as elsewhere (ch. ii. 10, 19; iv. 7; vi. 1), because Tobiah was no doubt the immediate briber, Sanballat merely furnishing the funds.

Ver. 13.—**Therefore was he hired, &c.** Their motive for bribing him was, that I might be induced by fear to do as Shemaiah suggested, and so to commit sin; whereby they would have a just ground for spreading an evil report concerning me, and making

my misconduct a constant reproach to me. Nehemiah's influence depended greatly on the weight of his moral character. One false step, and he would have been lost; his influence would have been gone; and the work on which his heart was set would have come to nought.

Ver. 14.—**Tobiah and Sanballat.** See ver. 12, with the comment. The prophetess Noadiah is not elsewhere mentioned. She has been supposed to have succumbed to a bribe, like Shemaiah (Ewald); but this is wholly uncertain. We only know that, together with certain *soi-disant* prophets, she endeavoured to "put Nehemiah in fear." It is clear that she was unsuccessful.

Ver. 15.—**So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days.** According to Josephus ('Ant. Jud.' xi. 5, § 8), the work of restoration occupied two years and four months, or 840 days, instead of fifty-two. And this period has been thought so much more probable than the smaller one, that moderns generally have accepted it, while some have even proposed to alter our present text of Nehemiah by the insertion of *u-shnâthayim*, "and two years," at the end of this verse (Ewald). But the authority of Josephus on matters of remote history is so small, and the whole account of Nehemiah is so harmonious and consistent with itself, that alteration seems quite unnecessary. Nehemiah leaves Susa in Nisan, probably towards the middle or close of the month, for his preparations must have taken him some time. He would be likely to be nearly three months on his journey, and would thus reach Jerusalem about the middle of July—say July 15. He then rested three days, surveyed the wall, laid his plan before the nobles, arranged the working parties, and set to work. It was his object to hasten matters as much as possible; and he may well have commenced the rebuilding within ten days of his arrival. Fifty-two days from July 25 would bring him to Sept. 15, which corresponds, as nearly as may be, to the 25th of Elul. There is no difficulty in supposing that the wall could have been repaired in this space. The materials were ready at hand; the working parties were numerous; the workmen full of zeal. If we estimate the circumference of the wall at four miles, which is probably beyond the truth, and the working parties at forty-two (Ewald), it will follow that each party had, on the average, to repair 168 yards, or at the rate of between three and four yards a day. There was probably no work done on the sabbaths, and there may have been one or two days of interruption, when attack seemed imminent (ch. iv. 13-15); but otherwise the work was carried on without pause from early dawn



to dark (*ibid.* ver. 21). The wall attained to half its height in a very short time (*ibid.* ver. 6),—there was then a brief interruption,—after which came the main work of completing the entire circuit to its full height. It is possible that the fifty-two days are counted from the “return to work” (*ibid.* ver. 15).

Ver. 16.—**Our enemies.** The Samaritans, the Ammonites, the Ashdodites, and the Arabians under Geshem are the special “enemies” here spoken of. The Phœnicians, Syrians, Moabites, &c. are the other “heathen round about” the Jews. Even these last were unfriendly, and disliked any increase of Jewish power and prosperity. **They perceived that this work was wrought of our God.** They could not but recognise a special Providence as befriending and protecting the Jews, who, after having been utterly crushed and rooted out by Nebuchadnezzar, were now re-established in a commanding position in Palestine, and allowed to make their city once more an almost impregnable fortress.

Ver. 17.—**Moreover in those days.** Ewald supposes that the circumstances here related (vers. 17—19) were subsequent to the completion of the wall (‘History of Israel,’ vol.

v. p. 157); but the expression “in those days” seems rather to throw back the events into the time during which the wall was in building. The passage is a sort of explanatory note, showing us how Tobiah came to be able to raise those intrigues inside Jerusalem which have been mentioned in vers. 12—14. **And the letters of Tobiah came unto them.** Rather, “and many were the letters of Tobiah which came to them.”

Ver. 18.—**He was the son-in-law of Shechaniah.** Rather, “related by marriage to Shechaniah”—perhaps, but not certainly, by having married his daughter. **Son of Arah.** Member, *i. e.*, of the family, called the Beni-Arah, which had returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra ii. 5; Neh. vii. 10). **Meshullam the son of Berechiah** is mentioned in ch. iii. as repairing two portions of the wall (vers. 4, 30).

Ver. 19.—**Also they reported his good deeds, &c.** Rather, “they even reported”—they went so far as to speak to me of his good actions, perhaps representing the bribes which he dispensed (ver. 12) as given from charitable motives. **And they uttered my words, or “communicated my affairs,” to him.** They made him acquainted with all my proceedings.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—**Craft detected and baffled.** The enemies without make cunning proposals in vain.

I. **THE OCCASION OF THEIR INTERFERENCE.** They heard that the wall was completed, though the gates were not yet set up; and, thinking that further open opposition would be useless, adopted craft.

II. **THE MANNER OF THEIR INTERFERENCE.** 1. They repeatedly proposed a conference. Pretending probably that they wished to come to a good understanding with Nehemiah, but really intending to get him into their power, that even now, their leader being gone, the Jews might leave undone the rest of the work, or that in the confusion thus caused they might march on the city and take possession of it, or undo what had been done. But Nehemiah was too wise to be thus caught. Without letting them know that he saw through their cunning design, he replied truly enough, though not the whole truth, that he could not leave the great work he was doing, and let it cease, to come down to them; and as often as they repeated their proposal he sent the same answer. 2. They endeavoured to induce him to comply with their proposal by sending openly a false accusation against him. What they had insinuated before (ch. ii. 19) they declare now to be matter of common report, viz., that he and the Jews had fortified Jerusalem with the intention to rebel against the Persian monarch, adding that the report was also that Nehemiah was purposing to be king, and had indeed induced certain prophets to proclaim him king. And as these reports must needs reach the ears of Artaxerxes, they begged him to come to consult with them, wishing him apparently to understand that they would take such steps as might be agreed upon to prevent any ill consequences to himself, should this prove to be the case. The letter containing these accusations and proposal was sent “open,” that the people at Jerusalem might know them, and be intimidated, and decline to put the finishing stroke to the work. Nehemiah, however, strong in the consciousness of rectitude, not only denied the truth of these pretended reports, but charged Sanballat with inventing them.

III. **NEHEMIAH’S RESOURCE IN HIS DIFFICULTIES.** He prayed God to strengthen

his hands, *i. e.* to give him vigour and courage to complete his undertaking, and keep the people steadfast in the work until it was done. The paragraph suggests—

1. The persistence of the enemies of Christ in their opposition to his cause. His work in the individual, or in the Church as a whole. Now violence, and now craft is used; at one time flattery, at another calumny; now open enmity, and then pretended friendship; to-day appeal to hopes, to-morrow to fears. Leaders in the Church are particularly assailed, as the officers of an army in battle.
2. Their frequent unscrupulousness. Inventing, for instance, as here, false reports, and sometimes repeating them until they believe them. But we need be the less surprised at this when we watch controversies amongst Christians themselves, and observe how ready they are to believe and repeat any slander concerning those they oppose, and to put obviously false constructions on their words and deeds.
3. The manner in which they are to be met. (1) By simplicity and godly sincerity. "Harmless as doves." (2) By wariness and wisdom. "Wise as serpents." (3) By firm refusal. (4) By steady persistence in Christian life and work, every fresh stage of which, as here, furnishes additional defence against the foe. (5) By prayer.
4. The liability of the best men to be slandered. Even in respect to their noblest actions; for many cannot understand nobleness, and enemies will not believe it of those they hate. Hence the best deeds may be ascribed to the worst motives. We should, therefore, be slow to believe evil reports, especially respecting men otherwise irreproachable. Rather than hastily receive them as true, we should suspect that they have originated in ignorance or malice.

Ver. 3.—*Hindrances repelled.* "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." This reply of Nehemiah to his subtle enemies is worthy of adoption by us in relation to all that would hinder us in Christ's service. In giving them this turn, we may employ the words "come down," used here of locality, in the sense of descending to a lower mental or moral level.

I. WHO MAY WELL ADOPT THESE WORDS. 1. All Christians. (1) In relation to their spiritual culture, the working out of their own salvation, which is indeed "a great work." (2) In relation to their special calling in life. Which is to each his "great work"—that which must occupy most of his time and thought and toil; that in which he is especially to glorify God. (3) In relation to any work of Christian benevolence in which each may be engaged. 2. Those who occupy positions of peculiar responsibility. Whether in secular life or in the Church. Statesmen; parents, the nurture and training of whose families is "a great work;" ministers of religion; all on whom others depend for guidance, &c.

II. TO WHOM, AND OF WHAT, THEY MAY BE EMPLOYED. To all who would tempt us—1. Into obvious sin. 2. Into whatever practice would hinder us in our duty. What is right for one may be wrong for another, because it would hinder him in his Christian life or work. Each must judge for himself what would be a hindrance to him. Let every one "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," intent supremely on serving God and serving his generation according to the will of God, and all inferior things will be seen in their true light, and take their proper place. Let every one also leave his fellow Christians to order their lives according to their own judgment of what is right and good for them. He, however, who would live greatly for great ends must often say as to pursuits, amusements, gratifications of taste, social intercourse, &c., lawful or laudable in others, "I am doing," &c.

III. THE REASONABLENESS OF THE WORDS AS THUS EMPLOYED. Concentration of mind and energy is essential to success in all important pursuits, and is adopted by all who determine to succeed. Whatever would hinder, however tempting, has to be resolutely renounced. The same concentration and self-denial are required in the Christian life, and are the more imperative and reasonable on account of the greatness of its aims and the peculiar perils which attend it. In conclusion—1. The sentiment of the text may be misapplied. As when (if such cases may be supposed possible) a pastor "cannot come down" from his studies to visit the sick or the poor, or to give counsel to the inquiring or the perplexed; or parents "cannot come down" from any other employment, secular or spiritual, to care properly for the good of their children; or the contemplative and studious Christian "cannot come down" to

works of active benevolence, or even to diligence in his secular calling. 2. The sentiment may be pushed too far. Human nature cannot bear a perpetual strain; is not the better for incessant concentration on even the highest subjects and pursuits. We need variety. Recreation (truly such) is as much a duty as serious occupation. Sin is always to be renounced, but not always are we to refuse to "come down" to lighter matters than those of our main business in life. The highest life we can reach will be not hindered, but promoted, by a wise descent to lower things; and that not only because of the relief thus gained, but because the highest principles can be exercised and nourished by employment in the smallest matters. 3. To all temptations to real neglect of our work the words of the text should be perseveringly applied. Like Nehemiah, let us to every renewed temptation "answer after the same manner."

Ver. 9.—*Prayer for strength.* "Now therefore, O God,\* strengthen my hands." Another instance of Nehemiah's prayerfulness. In every difficulty he calls upon God, and not in vain. Thus he obtains strength, and teaches us where to seek it, with assurance of finding it. The manner in which the prayer is recorded is noticeable. He does not say, Then I offered this prayer, &c., but abruptly writes down the prayer itself. It seems as if, while recording the events of those times, he lived them in imagination and feeling over again; and so, experiencing the old anxiety, he half unconsciously prayed and wrote the old prayer as a present supplication to God.

I. WHAT WILL INCITE THE CHRISTIAN TO SUCH A PRAYER. 1. A great and good undertaking. Such as God approves. 2. Dependence of others engaged in the enterprise on our lead and spirit. Influence which our weakness would have on them. 3. Great difficulties in the work. 4. Great opposition to it. 5. Feebleness of fellow workers. In numbers, ability, zeal, courage. Fear of their defection. 6. Depression of spirit arising from these or other causes. 7. Strong desire to accomplish the work notwithstanding.

II. HOW THE PRAYER MAY BE ANSWERED. 1. By the gift of internal strength (see Ephes. iii. 16). This may be given direct from heaven, or through the medium of encouragement from men (see ch. ii. 18). 2. By affording better external assistance. More and better helpers, or more favourable circumstances. Finally, some have good reason to offer this prayer with special emphasis on its last two words. They are strong in the head, and have strong emotions, but are weak in the *hands* for giving or doing. Unhappily, those who most need thus to pray are least disposed to do so.

Vers. 10—19.—*Enemies within.* I. FALSE PROPHETS. Who prostituted their office by hiring themselves to the enemies without. For they "loved the wages of unrighteousness." 1. One tempted him to break the law by fleeing into the holy place, and shutting himself up there, where no one but a priest or Levite might enter. This he did on the pretence that Nehemiah's life was in danger (ver. 10); and he hoped that the governor, consenting to the proposal, would bring himself into disgrace with the people, and so lose his influence with them (ver. 13). Nehemiah was preserved from this peril at once by his magnanimity and his reverence for the law (ver. 11). And if not immediately, he afterwards perceived the true source and motives of the proposal (vers. 12, 13). 2. Others, by other unrecorded means, endeavoured to excite his fears (ver. 14). Perhaps by pretended messages from heaven.

II. TREACHEROUS NOBLES (vers. 17—19). These, some of whom were allied to Tobiah by marriages, maintained an active correspondence with him, and sought to influence Nehemiah in his favour. They had many confederates. Probably Nehemiah's reforming zeal, which had already restrained their avarice, and was likely to proceed to other measures distasteful to them, fostered their disaffection.

III. THE RAPID COMPLETION OF THE FORTIFICATIONS, NOTWITHSTANDING ALL OPPOSITION (ver. 15).

IV. THE IMPRESSION WHICH THIS MADE ON THE EXTERNAL FOES, AND OTHER PEOPLES AROUND (ver. 16). 1. Great mortification. Disappointment, envy, despair of the success of further opposition. 2. Perception of God's hand.

From this paragraph we learn—1. The peculiar danger to any community of internal

disaffection and division. 2. The baseness of treachery. 3. The heinous wickedness of those who from worldly motives prostitute sacred functions. 4. The duty and wisdom of private judgment (see 1 John iv. 1). Spiritual teachers, not only through love of money, but from other motives and influences, or from incapacity, may give counsel which our own sense of truth and right may pronounce evil. In such case we must follow our own convictions, although they may possibly be mistaken (see Jer. v. 30, 31; xxiii. 31, 32; Micah iii. 11). 5. The insight and safety against temptation of a devout, pure, and manly heart. 6. The evil influence of close alliances between God's people and his enemies. 7. The propriety of due regard for our reputation. Our character is not only precious to ourselves, but an invaluable element of usefulness. Injury to the reputation of a Christian is injury to the Church. Care for our good name is a help against temptation. 8. The active providence and grace of God. Preserving his servants from evil, and giving success to their pious endeavours. Finally, we are reminded by this chapter of the conflicts and victories of a greater than Nehemiah, in whose conquests as our Leader we are more nearly interested.

Ver. 11.—*Regard for special obligations.* "Should such a man as I flee?" Thus magnanimously Nehemiah gave one reason for not following the counsel of the lying prophet. The words remind us of the special obligations under which some are laid to avoid evil and practise good. Indeed every one of us has some specialty in his case which he should feel as binding him peculiarly to a right course.

I. SOME SPECIAL OBLIGATIONS TO CHRISTIAN CONSISTENCY. May be expressed thus: "Should such a man as I?"—1. So greatly favoured. By the providence or by the grace of God—forgiven so much, so richly endowed, &c. 2. Occupying such a position, to which I have been so manifestly called. Position in the family, the Church, the world. 3. Who have made such professions. 4. Who have served the Lord so long, and done so much. 5. Whose influence is so great, for good or evil, upon others.

II. SINS AGAINST WHICH THE THOUGHT of such obligations should be a defence. "Should such a man as I?"—1. Flee. From Christ. From his post of duty. 2. Act unworthily. By inconsistencies of any sort—indifference, sloth, self-indulgence, intemperance, cowardice, parsimony, &c. Temptations to each and all may be met by this thought: "Should such a man as I be guilty of this sin?"

III. CONSIDERATIONS WHICH SHOULD DEEPEN THE SENSE OF OBLIGATION. If "such a man as I" fall, then I shall—1. Incur deserved disgrace. 2. Bring reproach on the name and cause of Christ. 3. Give joy to his enemies. 4. Discourage and enfeeble his friends. 5. Cause injury and ruin to others. "Such a man as I" cannot fall alone. 6. Inure a heavier doom.

Ver. 16.—*God's work recognised.* "They perceived that this work was wrought of our God." The work which had been done was so great; it had been accomplished by so feeble a people, in spite of so much opposition and so many obstacles, and in so short a time, that the people around, even those most opposed, could not but recognise that the God of Israel had wrought with his servants. The work of Christ's servants may produce a similar impression on others, not only fellow Christians, but those without. It is much to be desired that our work should be of such a kind, and so favoured of God, as to make such an impression.

I. WHEN IS GOD'S HAND APPARENT IN THE WORK OF HIS PEOPLE? 1. When the work done is manifestly good in itself. This can hardly be said of the merely outward: of the erection of churches, however grand and beautiful; of the maintenance of imposing services; of the gathering of great crowds, or the making of mere proselytes. Such work *may* spring from good and tend to good; but it may *not*. Merely human motives and impulses, perhaps quite unchristian, may explain all. But when the bad become good, and the good become eminently so; when through Christian teaching and influence the licentious become pure, drunkards sober, the proud humble, the selfish benevolent, the harsh kind; when a Christian people shines in the beauty of the loftiest Christian holiness and love, and especially in those practical virtues which all can appreciate, then the conviction is likely to be pro-

duced on others that God is working in and by them. 2. When the work done is extensive. Whole neighbourhoods, a whole class of irreligious and morally degraded men, have sometimes been transformed by the preaching of the gospel; even a nation to a great extent quickened and elevated. He must be blinded by sin or the worst bigotry who fails to see in such changes the agency of God. 3. When such beneficial changes are wrought very rapidly. As the work to which the text refers. 4. When serious difficulties and formidable opposition are overcome. 5. When the work proves lasting. 6. When the human instrumentality is manifestly insufficient to account for the results.

II. THE EFFECTS WHICH THE PERCEPTION OF GOD'S HAND IN SUCH WORK WILL PRODUCE. 1. On the workers. Gratitude, humility, encouragement to labour on. 2. On fellow Christians. Praise to God. Recognition of the workers as their brethren. Prayer for them. Congratulations and good wishes. Co-operation if practicable. At least respect, and the withholding of censorious criticism. 3. On those desiring good for themselves. Attraction toward such people. "We will go with you, for we have heard"—nay, we see—"that God is with you." 4. On enemies. Discouragement, mortification, perhaps abandonment of active opposition (see Exod. xiv. 25); perhaps transformation into friends and fellow workers, which is best of all.

In conclusion—1. The evidences of Divine agency in Christianity and its effects should be seriously pondered by unbelievers. 2. Blindness to God's agency in the work of Christians is a fearful symptom. Yet it is found in some who profess to be Christians in respect to the work of those who "follow not with" them. Let them beware lest they become partakers of the guilt of those highly religious men of our Lord's day who saw not God in the works of Christ, but ascribed them to the agency of the devil, and whom he warned against, if he did not pronounce guilty of the unpardonable sin of "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost." 3. Let all Christians pray for such manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church as shall produce general conviction of his agency. The ordinary condition of our Churches, and results of their work, are, alas, little fitted to produce such a conviction. "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old."

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—9.—*The Christian workman.* Nehemiah was an instance, and will ever be the type, of a faithful workman in the cause of God; from his conduct and career we may learn—

I. HOW VALUABLE ONE WORKMAN MAY PROVE (vers. 1, 2). Sin sometimes pays an unconscious tribute to integrity and worth. It acts on the assumption that righteousness is more than equal to its energy, and that, to gain its evil end, it must have recourse to "poisoned weapons." Thus, *e. g.*, Philip of Spain, striving vainly to extinguish Protestantism in Holland, concluded that it could only be done by "finishing Orange," and set plots on foot to murder that noble patriot. Sanballat concluded that he could not accomplish his evil designs until Nehemiah was subdued; hence his murderous plans. What a tribute to one man's influence! Men "full of faith" are also "full of power" (Acts vi. 8). One single soul, animated by faith, love, and zeal, may defeat all the agencies of evil.

II. WHAT NEED HE HAS OF WARINESS (vers. 2, 4). "They sought to do me mischief" (ver. 2); "they sent unto me four times after this sort" (ver. 4). The enemies of God endeavoured, with a persistency worthy of a better cause, to entrap Nehemiah and despatch him. But he, fearless as he afterwards proved, was not to be taken by their craft. Heroism is unsuspicious; but it is not, therefore, credulous. It can distinguish between the overtures of a friend and the machinations of an enemy. We read of "the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. iii. 13); and both in the guarding of our own personal integrity, and in the defence of the Church of Christ, we must be on the alert against the enemy, who after the failure of open assault will probably resort to stealth.

III. WHAT NEED HE HAS OF COURAGE (vers. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). Sanballat, failing to

impose on the charity of Nehemiah, adopts another course : he intimates in an open letter which every one may read, that, if the interview be not given him, he will send an evil report to the king of Persia, putting the worst construction on the proceedings at Jerusalem (vers. 5, 6, 7). Nehemiah, feeling that ceremony would be out of place, charges Sanballat with direct falsehood (ver. 8). "Thou feignest them out of thine own heart." There are times when softness of speech is not courtesy, but weakness ; when hard words are not rudeness, but faithfulness. But this *ruse* of the enemy threatened to succeed, notwithstanding the governor's unvarnished retort. "For they all made us afraid" (ver. 9). Fear seems to have possessed the minds of many, and Nehemiah was driven to prayer. "Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands." When other hearts are trembling, and timidity is within us, we must seek, and we shall gain, renewed courage at the throne of grace. "In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul" (Ps. cxxxviii. 3). "For this cause I bow my knees . . . to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. iii. 16).

IV. HOW EXCELLENT IS DEVOTEDNESS TO WORK (ver. 3). An admirable message was that of the patriot : "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down," &c. His place was amongst his friends, encouraging and helping them to build, not outside, parleying with the enemy. To have left his post of active duty, of useful work, for such discussion would have been to "come down" indeed. To forsake the good and great work of building for Christ in order to debate with those who are hostile to it is to "come down," is a descent from devotion to danger. We are safer and better employed in the high places of prayer and activity.—C.

Vers. 1—14.—"*God with us.*" The true safety of God's people in the midst of the world's opposition. Nehemiah represents the spirit of consecration, zeal, single-mindedness, dependence upon God, personal responsibility, and confidence in final issues, which should be the spirit of all God's people, and especially of those who hold prominent places in the Church.

I. THE FACT OF OPPOSITION. 1. It is a *constant fact*. The form may change, but the substance is the same. Sleepless vigilance is necessary. When violent assault is out of the question, we must fear treachery. "Come, and let us meet together" is the most dangerous shape of the world's mischievous attempt. Special watchfulness required in times like these, lest we forsake our work and put ourselves into the hands of the enemies of Christ and his people. 2. We must expect that times of *special success* and rapid advancement will be the times when we have most to encounter from the world. When the work of God is making no way his enemies will leave it to itself. When they see that it approaches completion ("the wall built, and no breach therein"), then they will make desperate efforts to circumvent us, and to overthrow our work ; and the more open our success, the more crafty will be their schemes. 3. In appreciating the dangers of our position, we should not be content with looking outside the Church ; *look within it too*. There will be traitors among the Lord's people. There will be lying prophets, timid friends, worldly-minded fellow labourers. The true heart must be strong in God.

II. THE VICTORY OF FAITH IN THE TIME OF SPECIAL TEMPTATION. 1. It was a victory obtained by *the Spirit of God in the spirit of man*. What Nehemiah needed was penetration, wisdom, self-control, fortitude, fearlessness, devotion to his work. All these qualities are given by the Spirit of God and maintained by his grace. So long as they were uppermost in the individual man, the enemies had no chance. 2. It was a victory which was bestowed as a reward of faith, and *in answer to prayer*. The whole attitude of Nehemiah was that of dependence upon God. "My God, strengthen thou my hands." 3. It was a very *decided* and definite faith which gained the victory. "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down." The best defence against temptation is to be pledged to a positive public life of active service. The spirit of work should be set against the spirit of compromise. To leave duty unfulfilled is always to come down, and to come down is to be in the hands of enemies. 4. The victory was *renewed many times*. Each occasion added strength to the true heart. If God helps us to say *No* once, we shall find it easier each time afterwards. Courage grows by action. The conscious resistance of evil is both the best pre-

paration to detect its presence, and the best uplifting of the heart above actual fears for life and safety.—R.

Vers. 1—16.—*The temptations of earnest moral life and service.* I. THE WAY IN WHICH THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF EARNEST MORAL LIFE AND SERVICE ARE MADE KNOWN TO WICKED MEN. "Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Gesheh the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein" (ver. 1). Christian life and service will make themselves known—1. Naturally. The finished walls must be seen. 2. Influentially. The rising walls affect other peoples; Christian life reveals itself in the moral influence it wields. 3. Rumour. The enemies of the good soon hear of the wall that has been built. 4. Vigilance. The wicked watch the activities of the good. The service of the good man must be thorough; there must be no "breach" left in it, though oftentimes it is incomplete; its "doors" are not set upon the gates (ver. 1). Piety, truth, earnest toil cannot be hid.

II. THE WAY IN WHICH EARNEST MORAL LIFE AND SERVICE ARE SURE TO BE TEMPTED BY WICKED MEN. The temptations to which Nehemiah was exposed were—1. Subtle. "Come, let us meet together" (ver. 2). 2. Persistent. "Yet they sent unto me four times" (ver. 4). 3. Intimidating. "The fifth time with an open letter in his hand" (ver. 5). 4. Calumnious. "That thou and the Jews think to rebel;" "That thou mayest be their king" (ver. 6). 5. Allied. A faithless prophet lends himself to the cause of the enemy (vers. 10—13).

III. THE WAY IN WHICH EARNEST MORAL LIFE AND SERVICE MUST MEET TEMPTATION. 1. With discernment. "But they thought to do me mischief" (ver. 2). 2. With industry. "I am doing a great work" (ver. 3). 3. With determination. "And I answered them after the same manner" (ver. 4). 4. With exposure. "But thou feignest them out of thine own heart." 5. With prayer. "Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands" (ver. 9). 6. With courage. "Should such a man as I flee?" (ver. 11).

IV. THE WAY IN WHICH EARNEST MORAL LIFE AND SERVICE COMPLETE THEIR TASK NOTWITHSTANDING SEVERE TRIAL. "So the wall was finished" (ver. 15). 1. The end of the task. "So the wall was finished." 2. The time of the task. "In fifty and two days." 3. The effect of the task. "Were very much cast down in their own eyes." 4. The praise of the task. That it was completed under such difficult circumstances.—E.

Vers. 10—19.—*Trial and victory.* Defeated again, the enemy has recourse to other schemes. It would be interesting to know what were the expectations with which Nehemiah set out from Susa to enter upon the work before him. If we could tell what was then in his mind, we should probably find there anticipations very unlike indeed to his actual experiences. Probably, if he could have foreseen his difficulties, he might have shrunk from the task. Happily we do not foresee the perplexities of Christian toil; seen as by a prophetic glance, they would overwhelm us; but coming upon us one by one, they can be met bravely, and conquered successfully. We look now at—

I. THE TRIAL OF FAITH IN THE WORK OF GOD. 1. Their former plots failing, another yet more subtle is tried. Sanballat and Tobiah induce a prophet, Shemaiah (ver. 10), and a prophetess, Noadiah (ver. 14), to urge Nehemiah to take refuge from assassination in the temple; to hide himself unlawfully, lest he should be smitten at his post of duty; in fact, "to be afraid, and sin," and thus give occasion for "an evil report, that they might reproach" him (ver. 13). The insidiousness of the temptation may be gathered from the words of indignation in which Nehemiah invokes the Divine reprobation on the guilty tempters (ver. 14). But, 2. Nehemiah is yet further tried. His own people are keeping up a correspondence with the enemy. Nobles of Judah are writing to and hearing from Tobiah (ver. 17). A dangerous alliance led to intimacy, to perversion, to conspiracy (ver. 18). These men who should have been the first and the strongest to help are those who come to hinder; praising the man who was doing his utmost to overturn and ruin everything (ver. 19), and carrying back to the enemy the words of the governor (ver. 19). When we are doing our

best to serve our Master and our fellows, and are naturally looking to those who are bound in the same holy bonds with ourselves, more especially to those who are as "prophets" or "prophetesses" in our ranks, or to those who are as "nobles" amongst us, to stand by our side and aid us in our toil, and when, instead of succour, we find them undermining our influence, we are tempted to despair, so keen is the trial of our faith. Yet we may win—

II. THE VICTORY OF THE BRAVE AND TRUE (vers. 11, 15, 16). Here we have—1. *The fact of success.* The wall was built: it was "finished in fifty and two days" (ver. 15). Neither open threats nor secret plots weakened the strength or lessened the labour of the busy workmen, and the good work was accomplished. 2. A powerful *incentive leading to victory.* Nehemiah made an excellent appeal to himself. He considered who he was, and what was worthy and unworthy of the post he held. "Should such a man as I flee?" (ver. 11). 3. *The fruits of victory* (ver. 16). The enemy and all the heathen "were much cast down in their own eyes," and they "perceived that this work was wrought of our God." Their humiliation was an excellent thing for them, and the name of God being glorified was a source of joy and gratulation to the good. There is victory to be won under the fiercest temptation if we only be true to all we know. Let us, in the dark hour of the trial of faith—1. Consider what is worthy of the position we hold. Should such as we are—missionaries, ministers, evangelists, teachers, leaders, members of the Church of Christ—*flee* from the post of duty or danger?

"Put on the gospel armour, and, watching unto prayer,  
Where duty calls, or danger, be never wanting there."

The "guard" in *his* army "dies, but does not surrender." 2. Consider what will redound to the glory of Christ. If only we hold on, "faint yet pursuing," fighting till the day is won, the enemy will be humiliated, and his holy name be honoured. Our once crucified Saviour shall be "exalted and extolled, and be very high" (Isa. lii. 13).—C.

Vers. 15—19.—*The good work finished in spite of man by the power of God.*  
I. A great MANIFESTATION OF DIVINE POWER is a great casting down of God's enemies. 1. There is *real weakness in all sin.* "In their own eyes" defeat meant shame and confusion; but the true heart never doubts that its cause is right, even when success is delayed. 2. *The world will perceive God's hand.* When the finished work is before them they will not dare to deny who has accomplished it. Therefore we should hasten it on, and be more eager to bring it to completion. 3. The great facts of Divine grace spread their message not only among the enemies of the Church, but among the heathen, who have been sitting in darkness. A revived zeal and energy in God's people will have a mighty effect in casting down the imaginations which exalt themselves against the name of Christ.

II. The best preparation of the true Church against discouragements, both from without and from within, is to know that ITS WALLS ARE BUILT UP, AND ITS GATES IN THEIR PLACES. 1. That will put a stop to the *corrupting intercourse* between the Church and the world. 2. It will help the people of God to know their *true leaders.* The nobles were traitors; but henceforth men after the example of Nehemiah will be the defenders of Judah. 3. In the sight of the finished work the hearts of God's people are strong. In the best sense success makes success. "Tobiah's letters" will do no harm, for there are the walls speaking in the name of God, "epistles written by the Spirit of God, known and read of all men." Let the world trust as it may in its devices, we rejoice in "the walls of Jerusalem," which are "salvation," and "her gates" "praise."—R.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER VII.

COMPLETION OF THE WORK, AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR GUARDING THE GATES (ch. vii.

1—5). The wall and gate-towers being completed, nothing remained but to hang the doors in the gateways, and to arrange for the guard of the gates and the general



security of the fortress. Nehemiah speaks here of *his* having set up the doors (ver. 1); but it appears from ch. iii. that the actual work of so doing was intrusted, like the repairs of the wall, to the various working parties. Eliashib, with his brethren the priests, set up the doors of the sheep gate (ch. iii. 1); the sons of Hassenaah those of the fish gate (*ibid.* ver. 3), &c. Nehemiah had only the general superintendence, and saw that all was properly executed. But the entire work being at length accomplished, it devolved upon him to make the necessary arrangements for the security of what had now become a first-rate fortress. Accordingly, he seems himself to have assigned the guard of the gates to certain bodies of Levites (ver. 1), as being experienced in the business of keeping watch; after which he committed the task of appointing other guards to his brother Hanani, and to a certain Hananiah, already the commandant of the Birah, or temple tower (ver. 2). They devised a system by which the adult male inhabitants were made to partition the watch of the wall among themselves, each on the part which was nearest to his own house (ver. 3). At the same time, it was ordered, for greater precaution, that all the gates should be closed at night, and none of them opened "until the sun *was* hot" (*ibid.*), *i. e.* until some hours after sunrise. The city was thus made as secure as the circumstances admitted; but in the course of the arrangements it became clear, at any rate to Nehemiah, that the population of the city was too scanty for its size (ver. 4), and that some steps ought to be taken to augment the number of inhabitants. As a first step, a necessary preliminary before he could lay any definite proposal before the "rulers," the governor thought it necessary to make a census of the entire people (ver. 5). It seems to have been in the course of his preparations for this purpose that he "found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first." The list in vers. 7—69 has been regarded as the result of his own census; but reasons have been already given against this view in the comment upon Ezra; and it would seem to be most probable that we have the actual result of Nehemiah's census, so far as he thought fit to give it to us, in ch. xi. 3—36.

**Ver. 1.—The porters and the singers and the Levites.** The porters and the singers were themselves Levites, but are often distinguished from their brethren, who had no such special office (see Ezra ii. 40—42, 70; vii. 24; x. 23, 24; Neh. vii. 43—45, 73; x. 28, &c.). Nehemiah's choice of Levites to guard the gates of Jerusalem may seem strange; but we must remember—1. That the priests and Levites formed nearly one half the population of Jerusalem (ch. xi. 6—19 compared with 1 Chron. ix. 9—22). 2. That the office of guarding the temple gates had always been discharged by Levites (1 Chron. ix. 17—22; xxvi. 12—19).

**Ver. 2.—Hanani and Hananiah.** This appointment of two municipal officers to have charge of Jerusalem recalls the mention of two "rulers" in ch. iii. 9, 12, each of whom had authority over half the district dependent on Jerusalem, and amounts to an "undesigned coincidence." **The ruler of the palace.** Rather, "the commandant of the fort," *i. e.* the officer in charge of the temple fortress (see above, ch. ii. 8).

**Ver. 3.—Let not the gates be opened until the sun be hot.** The gates of towns in the East are usually opened at sunrise; but this cannot be the intention here. Some extra precaution is signified—not, however, so much as Dathe supposes, who renders *ante tempus meridianum*, "before noon;" but rather something intermediate between this and the ordinary practice.

**Ver. 4.—The city was large.** Literally, "broad every way." **The houses were not builded.** Much of the city consisted of open spaces, in which no houses had been as yet built.

**Ver. 5.—And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, &c.** As Nehemiah contemplated the vast empty spaces within the city walls, and considered with himself how they might best be peopled, the thought came to him—and he hailed it as a Divine inspiration—that by taking a census of the people he might pave the way for some transfer of the inhabitants of the country districts into the capital, which would at any rate strengthen the latter, and lessen the desolate appearance of its streets and squares, which had so pained him. The census would show what proportion the country and town populations bore to each other, and would point out which were the places in the country districts that could best afford to lose a portion of their inhabitants. A census, therefore was resolved upon, and, according to ordinary Jewish usage (Num. i. 17—47; 1 Chron. xxi. 5, 6; Ezra ii. 3—62), it was genealogical. The tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi were numbered separately (ch. xi. 4—19); and in the tribe of Judah the children of Pharez were reckoned

apart from those of Zerah (1 Chron. ix. 4, 6). No doubt the genealogical principle was acted upon throughout, but further evidence upon the point is wanting. It would seem to have been in the course of his pre-

parations for this census, perhaps in searching for precedents, that Nehemiah found the "register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first," which is the subject of the next section.

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Provision for safety and numerical increase.* The wall being completed and the gates set in their places, Nehemiah takes measures for the regular defence of the city, and for increasing its population.

I. THE GUARDING OF THE CITY-GATES he assigns to the gate-keepers of the temple, the singers, and the other Levites; "that of the walls," to the general inhabitants in turn, some to keep watch at certain appointed posts, others before their own houses; not only perhaps to be ready to rouse the city and rush to the walls or gates in case of attack from without, but to act as police against thieves or disorderly persons within. Over the whole he placed his brother Hanani, and Hananiah, who, as commander of the citadel, had had experience in managing similar matters. Of the latter he records, in explanation of his choice, that he was a faithful man who feared God more than many.

II. THE INCREASE OF THE POPULATION of the city was a matter of pressing importance; for the ample space within the walls was very sparsely occupied with houses, and thinly inhabited. Before resolving, however, on the steps to be taken, it occurred to Nehemiah (and he regarded the suggestion as from God) to call a general assembly, that he might make a census of the population, as a basis for further measures. The result does not appear until ch. xi.

Lessons:—1. The strength and worth of a community lies in its living members. Walls are useless without men to defend them; a city feeble, though spacious, whose inhabitants are few. So a religious community may extend itself over a wide space, and erect numerous and costly places of worship, without adding to its real strength. Increase of converts should, therefore, be the chief aim of those who seek its good. 2. All the members of a community should be willing and ready to exert themselves for the common good. Each according to his capacity and opportunity. Nor in times of pressure should any refuse to act because the duties assigned him do not belong to his ordinary functions. These porters, singers, and Levites undertook for the protection of Jerusalem duties quite outside their respective offices. It was not a time to stand upon their dignity or rights. For some reason they could best be spared for the work, and they did it. 3. Organisation, including rule and subordination, is essential to the welfare of a community. 4. It is a happy thing when men eminently God-fearing can be found for offices of trust and authority. In secular life such men are invaluable. In the Church essential.

Ver. 2.—*Uncommon excellence.* "He was a faithful man, and feared God above many." Nehemiah records this of Hananiah as his reason for giving him, with Hanani, his own brother, "charge over Jerusalem." Perhaps he felt it necessary, on some account not specified, thus to justify the selection.

I. THE CHARACTER HERE DESCRIBED. 1. Its elements. (1) Faithfulness. Uprightness, integrity, strictness in performing promises, truthfulness. (2) Unusual piety. These two are closely related to each other. He who greatly fears God will be eminently faithful both to God and man. The piety which does not produce uprightness is good for nothing. On the other hand, uprightness towards man, if allowed its proper development, will lead to uprightness towards God, and so to piety in all its branches. Where this is not the case (of which the instances are innumerable) the quality of the uprightness is questionable. It can hardly include a love of righteousness for its own sake. Rather is its basis the desire to stand well with men; and as it regards not God, it has no claim upon him. 2. How it is produced. As all piety and goodness are due to the grace of the Holy Spirit, unusual measures of them are to be ascribed to greater abundance of his sacred influences. But it is the human history of eminently godly men to which we now refer. To what, humanly

speaking, may marked superiority in godliness and goodness be traced? Amongst their causes may be mentioned—(1) The careful teaching, the excellent example, and holy influence of devotedly Christian parents. The noblest men of the Church have generally sprung from homes of which piety was the pervading spirit; often from very pious mothers. Let parents who profess godliness think of this. The Church looks to them to train for her Nehemiahs and Hananiahs. (2) Early religious decision. Those who begin to serve God late in life are little likely to attain to special excellence. (3) Diligent spiritual self-culture. In reading, meditation, prayer, watchfulness, the practice of all good. (4) Early consecration to some special service. (5) Overwhelming sense of gratitude for conversion and forgiveness after many years of godless living. 3. When such a character is especially interesting. When, as here, seen in men of high worldly position and command, much occupied with secular affairs, and thrown much into the society of men of another spirit.

II. THE EFFECTS WHICH SUCH A CHARACTER SHOULD PRODUCE. 1. Admiration. 2. Praise to God. 3. Confidence. Which should be shown, as by Nehemiah, in placing those who possess it in responsible positions. It is well when such men can be found for important posts, and are placed in them by those with whom the appointment lies, instead of unworthy motives leading to the selection of less desirable men. 4. Imitation. To have such men within our sphere of observation increases our responsibility. We ought to be as they are. They show us what is attainable. 5. Commemoration. In some cases, at least. That their example may stimulate and encourage many to whom it would be otherwise unknown.

#### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Moral guardianship.* I. THE THINGS IN THE CHURCH WHICH NEED TO BE GUARDED. "Charge over Jerusalem" (ver. 2). 1. The doctrines of the Church. 2. The members of the Church. 3. The temporal interests of the Church. 4. The work of the Church. 5. The reputation of the Church. 6. The civil privileges of the Church. 7. The discipline of the Church. This defence is needed because infidelity, slander, bigotry, and laxity threaten to lay waste the Church.

II. THE MEN WHO SHOULD BE THE GUARDIANS OF THE CHURCH. "For he was a faithful man, and feared God above many" (ver. 2). 1. They must be duly appointed. "And the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed." "That I gave" (ver. 2). 2. They must be truly sympathetic. The men who had helped to rebuild the city would be the most likely to defend it. 3. They must be wisely cautious. "Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot" (ver. 3). 4. They must be sufficiently numerous. "And appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (ver. 3). 5. They must be eminently pious. "And feared God above many" (ver. 2). 6. There is a sense in which all good men ought to be guardians of the Church.

III. THE WAY IN WHICH THE CHURCH MAY BEST BE GUARDED. 1. By having regard to the Church in times of special danger. "Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot" (ver. 3). The Church stands in need of watchful care during the night of error and sin; then its gates must not be opened. 2. By having regard to the Church at points where it is most liable to attack. "Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened." 3. By having regard to mutual co-operation amongst the watchers. 4. By putting our trust in God to supply the necessary lack and imperfection of human vigilance.—E.

Vers. 1—5 (for rest see Ezra ii.).—*Israel within the walls.* In less than two months, notwithstanding the undisguised hostility of the Samaritans, and the covert disloyalty of some of the inhabitants, the sacred city was surrounded with a wall of protection; and with supreme satisfaction and profound thankfulness the gates were closed and the doors were shut. Jerusalem was secure. But Nehemiah was not the man to settle down into passive complacency. The accomplishment of one duty meant the undertaking of another. His conduct suggests—

I. THE NEED OF THE HUMAN (AND SPIRITUAL) ELEMENT TO GIVE WORTH TO THE MATERIAL (vers. 1, 2, 3). It was well indeed to have the wall, but that was worthless without men to guard it. Immediately the circle was complete and the "doors were set up," the three classes of porters, singers, and Levites were appointed (ver. 1). Charge of the city was given to two capable and trustworthy men (ver. 2), and directions were given that the gates should not be opened till long after sunrise, "till the sun was hot," and not until the watches were all on guard, every man in his place (ver. 3). Behind the stone wall were to be the *living men*, quick of eye, strong of arm, bold of heart. Not a little reliance on the bulwark they had raised, but much more on the steadfastness and alertness of the patriots within them. It is well, indeed, to have the "new and beautiful" sanctuary, the well-appointed schools and classrooms; but these will avail us nothing if within them there be not (1) minds alight with redeeming truth, (2) hearts aglow with holy love, (3) souls aflame with fervent zeal.

II. THE DESIRABLENESS OF DOING RIGHT THINGS RELIGIOUSLY (vers. 1, 5). With the porters were associated "the singers and the Levites" (ver. 1). "It is probable that the opening and shutting of the temple gates was made with song." If with song, certainly with *sacred* song. Thus the manual labour of opening and shutting the city gates was associated with men of a sacred office, and with words and sounds of devotion. We read also (ver. 5) how "God put it into the heart" of Nehemiah to gather the people, and take a census. This thought, which in another and less godly man would have been complacently referred to his own sagacity, is ascribed by him to Divine instigation. As servants of God, it is not only needful to do the right things, but to do them in a religious spirit. The secular is to be most intimately associated with the sacred. Things done with ordinary prudence, in daily occupation, are to be done as unto Christ. "Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do,"—plant or build, buy or sell, read or write, work or play,—we must do all, realising that the power to do them is from him, and endeavouring to please him in all things—rightly because religiously.

III. THE PLACE OF SPECIAL PIETY (ver. 2). "I gave . . . Hananiah . . . charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many." The best place for those who are eminently godly men is not the cloister or chamber, but the more influential posts in the kingdom. They who most honour God in their heart honour him most and serve him best when they occupy busy and important spheres. Piety, wisely employed, and powerful, in the chamber of commerce or in the House of Commons, is at least as pleasing to God as piety in the house of prayer; but to be at its best at either it should be found sometimes at both.

IV. THE SPACIOUSNESS OF THE CITY OF GOD (ver. 4). "The city was large and great: but the people were few." 1. There is ample room within the Church of Christ for the multitudes outside. Many are within its walls, but "yet there is room;" we must go out and "compel them to come in," with a persuasiveness that will not be denied. 2. There is building to be done within the Church. "The houses were not builded." There is much room for edification within its walls.—C.

## EXPOSITION.

THE REGISTER OF THOSE WHO RETURNED UNDER ZERUBBABEL, WITH THE NUMBER OF THEIR SLAVES, BEASTS, AND OBLATIONS (ch. vii. 6-73). It is no doubt a curious circumstance that this list should occur twice, with no important differences, in the two Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Perhaps it was not in the original Ezra, that writer not having had the good fortune to "find" the document; but Nehemiah having "found" it and inserted it here, in connection with its discovery, a later arranger (Malachi?) re-

moved it to the early part of Ezra, because it belonged to that portion of the Jewish history chronologically. The double record enables us to make out a more perfect catalogue than we could have obtained from either separately, since there are corruptions in each which may be corrected by means of the other. See the comment which follows.

Ver. 7.—*Jeshua, Nehemiah, &c.* To the eleven names given by Ezra, Nehemiah adds one, "*Nahamani*," the sixth. He gives

the others in the same order as Ezra, but spells some of the names differently—e. g. "Azariah" for "Seraiah," "Raamiah" for "Reelaiah," "Mispereth" for "Mizpar," and "Nehum" for "Rehum."

Ver. 15.—**Binnui.** Ezra has "Bani," which receives confirmation from Neh. x. 14 and 1 Esdras v. 12.

Ver. 21.—**The children of Ater.** Up to this Nehemiah observes the same order as Ezra; but the remaining personal names (three) are placed differently.

Ver. 24.—**The children of Hariph.** Ezra has "Jorah" instead of Hariph (Ezra ii. 18); but "Hariph" is confirmed by Neh. x. 19.

Ver. 25.—**The children of Gibeon.** For "Gibeon" Ezra has "Gibbar"—a name otherwise unknown to us. "Gibeon" should probably be read in both places.

Ver. 33.—**The men of the other Nebo.** No Nebo has as yet been mentioned, which makes it unlikely that the text is correct here. Apparently the word translated "the other" (*acher*) has been accidentally repeated from the next verse. Ezra has "the men of Nebo" simply.

Vers. 39—42.—This section exactly reproduces Ezra ii. 36—39.

Ver. 43.—**The children of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, and of the children of Hodevah** may be corrected from Ezra ii. 40 and iii. 9. It should be "Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodevah." This ancestor of Jeshua and Kadmiel appears under the three forms of Hodevah, Hodaviah (Ezra ii. 40), and Judah (Ezra iii. 9).

Ver. 46.—**The Nethinims.** The list which follows is very close to that of Ezra (ch. ii. 43—54). A few names are differently spelt, and one of Ezra's names (Akkub—ch. ii. 45) is omitted.

Vers. 57—62.—**The children of Solomon's servants.** This section and the section which follows (vers. 63—65) are nearly identical in Ezra and Nehemiah. A few names only are slightly different.

Ver. 66.—**The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore.** It makes against the view of Bishop Patrick and others, who regard Ezra's list as made at Babylon, some time before the final departure, and Nehemiah's as made at Jerusalem, after the arrival of the exiles, that the sum total is in each case the same (see Ezra ii. 64). Bishop

Kennicott's theory, that the three lists—that of Ezra, that of Nehemiah, and that in the first of Esdras—had all one original, and that the existing differences proceed entirely from mistakes of the copyists, is the only tenable one. It is especially remarkable that the differences in the numbers of the three lists consist chiefly in a single unit, a single ten, or a single hundred—or in a five; less often in two units, or two tens, or two hundreds, or in a six—differences probably arising from the obliteration of one or two signs in a notation resembling the Roman or the Egyptian, where there are special signs for a thousand, a hundred, ten, five, and the unit, complex numbers being expressed by repetition of these, as 3438 in Latin inscriptions by MMMCCCCXXXVIII. Any fading of a sign in such a notation as this causes a copyist to diminish the amount by one, five, ten, a hundred, a thousand, &c. A fading of two signs may produce a diminution of two thousand, two hundred, twenty, two; or again of eleven hundred, one hundred and ten, one hundred and five, fifteen, eleven, six, and the like.

Ver. 67.—**Two hundred and forty-five singing men and singing women.** Ezra says 200; but this must be a round number. 1 Esdras confirms Nehemiah (ch. v. 42).

Vers. 68, 69.—**The numbers of the animals** are identical in Ezra and Nehemiah. The apocryphal Esdras has an enormous and most improbable augmentation of the number of the horses (7036 for 736).

Ver. 70.—**The Tirshatha gave.** This is additional to the information contained in Ezra, who does not separate Zerubbabel's offering from that of the other heads of families (ch. ii. 69). The account of the oblations is altogether more exact in Nehemiah than in the earlier historian. For the value of the contributions made, see the comment on Ezra (l. s. c.).

Ver. 73.—**And all Israel dwelt in their cities.** The document found by Nehemiah (ver. 5) probably ended with these words (comp. Ezra ii. 70); and ch. vii. should here terminate, as it does in the Septuagint. Having completed the account of what happened in the sixth month, Elul (ch. vi. 15), and transcribed the register which he had the good fortune to discover at that date, Nehemiah proceeds to relate events belonging to the seventh month.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 5—69.—**An honourable register.** Account of those who had returned to the Holy Land under Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and other leaders; found by Nehemiah when seeking guidance in making a general census of the people. In reading this record, the following observations suggest themselves:—

I. THE COMPARATIVE FEWNESS AND GENERAL POVERTY OF THE RETURNING PEOPLE. The majority of their brethren preferred their position among the heathen to the honour and peril of aiding to re-establish their nation in their own land. The temptation to this course was greatest in the case of men of substance, and most of them appear to have yielded to it. We are reminded that of professing Christians a large number, perhaps the majority, do not really accept the invitation pressed continually upon them to undertake the journey to heaven, and that still the rich find it hard to enter the kingdom of heaven.

II. Although few and poor, THE RETURNING PEOPLE INCLUDED ALL THE ELEMENTS NEEDFUL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A REGULARLY ORGANISED JEWISH STATE. They were not a mere rabble. There was the civil governor, Zerubbabel; the high priest, Jeshua; a considerable number of ordinary priests; there were Levites and other temple servants, even singers; besides the body of the people.

III. THEIR FAITH, ZEAL, AND COURAGE ARE TO BE NOTED AND ADMIRABLE. All left some sort of settled home to which they were accustomed; some, businesses more or less lucrative; a few, the positions which wealth or talent affords. They encountered certain, though untried, privations, struggles, and dangers, the end of which to each one was very uncertain. But they were men "whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra i. 5). They believed the prophets, and anticipated a glorious future for their nation. They loved their God, their nation, and their country, though to the last most of them were strangers. The priests particularly distinguished themselves, as is shown by the number of them who returned, as compared with that of the people. They surpassed the Levites, who, both under Zerubbabel and Ezra, showed backwardness. Yet this class had formerly been more zealous than the priests (2 Chron. xxix. 34). The leaders are especially worthy of commendation. Their sacrifice must have been greater, and the cares and responsibilities they undertook were much heavier. Numbers followed at subsequent periods, after the first difficulties had been overcome and a settlement effected; but they could not attain to the honour of those who led the way.

IV. The failure of some who accompanied the expedition to prove themselves by genealogy Israelites, of others to prove themselves priests, suggests THAT GOD'S TRUE ISRAEL AND PRIESTHOOD REQUIRE NO GENEALOGY. They belong to a higher order of things, not regulated "after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life" (Heb. vii. 16). God's spiritual Israel become such by faith; each one belonging to it is "born not of blood, but of God" (John i. 13). And while it is a blessed thing to have a pious ancestry, those who have it not are admitted as freely and fully into all the privileges of citizenship, on their acceptance of Christ, as those who have it. One of these privileges is that of being "priests unto God." Nor is special ministry in the Church inherited; it is the privilege of those who are fitted for it, and called to it by the Holy Ghost, who distributes his gifts "to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. xii. 11).

V. THE LACK IN THE NEWLY-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY OF SOME PRIVILEGES ENJOYED BY THEIR FOREFATHERS is seen in the absence of "a priest with Urim and Thummim." The time was eagerly expected when this and other like advantages would be restored, but in vain. For a while the gift of prophecy lingered, and then passed away. The losses were deplored, but proved to be gains. The guidance withdrawn belonged to the period of childhood. God's people were more and more to be prepared for the time of moral manhood, when they would realise the guidance and help of God in the exercise of their own spirits in connection with the written word remaining as a permanent legacy from the past. One more outburst of the miraculous, the grandest and most fruitful of all, and then the Spirit of God would abide with the Church as never before, its permanent Teacher and Guide through the at length completed word; but the miraculous would cease. We long at times for the return of "signs from heaven," but "it is expedient" for us that we should be without them.

VI. The variations in the several copies of this document suggest that happily THERE ARE, AND CAN BE, NO MISTAKES IN GOD'S REGISTER OF HIS SPIRITUAL ISRAEL.

Finally, the perusal of this and similar lists may well lead us to exclaim with good

Matthew Henry, "Blessed be God that our faith and hope are not built upon the niceties of names and numbers, genealogy and chronology, but on the great things of the law and gospel."

Vers. 70—73.—*A good collection.* The conclusion of the document found by Nehemiah, being chiefly an account of the gifts of the returned people towards the cost of rebuilding the temple and restoring its services.

I. THE OBJECT OF THE COLLECTION. The restoration of the temple and its services lay very near their hearts. It was the chief object of their return to Palestine (Ezra i. 5), and would be regarded by them, and justly, as the surest foundation, under God, of their unity and prosperity—of their welfare at once as individuals, families, and a state. Equally concerned should we be for the erection of churches and the maintenance of public worship, and for like reasons.

II. THE LIBERALITY DISPLAYED. Very considerable, if we bear in mind their general poverty, the recentness of their return, and the many demands upon their resources which their re-settlement in the land would make.

III. THE UNION OF ALL CLASSES IN CONTRIBUTING TO THE COLLECTION. They were well led by the Tirshatha, Zerubbabel, who was well followed by "some of the chief of the fathers." The rest of the people contributed according to their means. It seems, however, from the words "some," &c., that, as usual, there were some that did not contribute; yet these may have been among the loudest to express their pleasure that so good a collection had been made. With this exception, we have here a model collection. 1. It was well started. Much depends on this. The many take their ideas of what is needful and fitting from their leaders, and are fired by their ardour, or chilled by their coldness. 2. All classes contributed. The rich as well as the poor, the poor as well as the rich. Neither can be spared, neither should be passed over. Not the rich, for a few of them can easily give as much as all the rest, and for their own sake they need to be generous in their gifts (1 Tim. vi. 17—19). Not the poor, for to give to God's cause is a privilege which they should delight to share, and the aggregate of their smaller gifts may equal or exceed that of the larger contributions of the wealthy. 3. All contributed voluntarily (see Ezra ii. 68—"freely"). 4. All appear to have contributed liberally.

IV. THEIR SUBSEQUENT SETTLEMENT IN THEIR RESPECTIVE CITIES. Which they could effect with a good conscience and cheerful hope of God's blessing, after having first shown their zealous care for the establishment of his worship.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 6—73.—*The true method of prosperity.* Here are the three great aims of God's people distinguished. The walls of the city are built. The place of habitation is prepared. The doors are fixed. Then the true citizens of Zion will see to it; God will put it in their hearts.

I. TO PROVIDE FOR THE SAFETY OF THE CITY. There must always be the possibility of attack from without. Watch the walls and the gates. 1. *The leading men of the Church should be faithful, and fearers of God above many.* It is a terrible danger when prominent men are not examples of piety. Those who have a great charge should be above suspicion. 2. *The gates must be specially watched,* and their shutting and opening special matter of anxious care. When Churches are indifferent as to the admission of members they are doing incalculable harm to the cause of their religion. Wide and unwatched gates mean an unsafe city, an approaching ruin. 3. *Let every one take part in the guardianship of Jerusalem.* "Every one over against his own house." There are eminent men who occupy prominent posts, but the humblest believer has his part in the work of defending truth and guarding the spiritual prosperity of Zion. It was a good regulation which Nehemiah made: "Let not the gates be opened till the sun be hot." Do nothing in the dark. See the men who ask for admission in the clear daylight; know who they are, and what they mean. It is the multitudinousness of the Church which endangers it. If there be no light at the gates there will soon be enemies within the walls, traitors in the camp, and the safety of the Church will be undermined.

II. Those who seek the welfare of Zion will desire INCREASE OF NUMBERS. The large city and the great walls are no honour to God without many people therein. "The houses not built" represent the lack of individual and family life. It is the living souls that are the city's glory.

III. The TRUE METHOD OF ESTABLISHING THE PROSPERITY OF JERUSALEM is to LOOK WELL TO THE PURITY of its inhabitants. God put it into Nehemiah's heart to search for the genealogy, to distinguish the true Israel from the false. 1. The variety of office and degrees of honour quite consistent with unity of origin and community of spirit. It is better to have a place in the genealogy of God's people than to be high in this world's rank. 2. The preservation of the record was a help to subsequent generations to maintain the cause of Zion, and to tread in the footsteps of the fathers. 3. The position of absolute, uncompromising purity and faithfulness to God is the only ground upon which discipline can be maintained. In the case of the priests, if the register could not be found "they were, as polluted, put from the priesthood." 4. The mere external purity of ritual is insufficient; the great requisite is direct intercourse with God. In all difficult cases the Urim and Thummim of immediate revelation must be sought. What is the mind of God? How little would the Church have erred if it had followed this rule: to suffer no caprice, no departure from principle, no compromise, but depend upon the word of God.—R.

## PART II.

### ACCOUNT OF THE STATE OF RELIGION AMONG THE JEWS UNDER THE ADMINISTRATION OF NEHEMIAH.

#### EXPOSITION.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION OF THE PEOPLE BY EZRA, AND CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES (ch. viii.). It can scarcely be imagined that Ezra had been present in Jerusalem during the exciting scenes which have been enacted in the first part of this Book, and had never come forward in such a way as to obtain notice from the historian. Nehemiah entertained no jealousy of him, and when the time came for the great ceremony of dedicating the wall, assigned him the second part in it (ch. xii. 36). We must therefore suppose either that accidental circumstances had caused his temporary absence from Jerusalem during the summer of B.C. 444, or that, having quitted the city soon after the proceedings narrated in the last chapter of the Book which bears his name, he now resumed his residence after having lived elsewhere for nearly thirteen years. If Nehemiah's work had been a continuous history composed throughout by himself, it would have been strange that this doubt should not have been cleared up,

and that Ezra's name should have been introduced so suddenly and without explanation, as it is in ch. viii. 1. But the narrative in this place, as already observed (Introduction, § 2), is by another hand, and is a particular relation of certain events which the writer was probably set to describe, rather than a chapter on the general history of the Jewish people. It was not written with any knowledge of what exactly was to precede it, and so does not fit on very neatly to the previous section. We are left to conjecture Ezra's personal history between March, B.C. 456, and September, B.C. 444. Now the condition in which Nehemiah found Jerusalem—the oppression of the rich men (ch. iv.), the prevalence of mixed marriages (ch. vi. 18; x. 30; xiii. 23—30), the desecration of the Sabbath (ch. x. 31; xiii. 15—18), the negligence with respect to tithes and offerings (ch. x. 33—39)—is almost incompatible with the supposition that Ezra's ministry had been continuous during these years, or only interrupted by brief absences, like that of Nehemiah in B.C. 433—432 (ch. xiii. 6). It seems,



therefore, to be most probable that he had been recalled to the court early in B.C. 456, and that he was only now in the summer of B.C. 444 allowed to return, perhaps at his own instance. If, at the beginning of the seventh month, Tisri, the most sacred of the year, Ezra had just come back to Jerusalem from a prolonged absence, it would be most natural that he should be asked to resume his work of instruction by reading and expounding the law of Moses to the people (ch. viii. 1). The people's marked "attention" (ver. 3) would also be natural; and such a reading and expounding, after such an interval, would naturally have a great effect. It would stir penitence; it would wake thought; it would lead to greater exactness in observing the law. These are the results which seem to have followed. Ezra's reading was on the first day of the month (ver. 2), the "feast of trumpets," as the day was called. It led to a great weeping—"all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law" (ver. 9). As, however, the day was one of the chief festivals of the year, and therefore the display of grief was unfitting, Ezra checked it for the time, and recommended liberal almsgiving in the place of tears (ver. 10). His advice was taken (ver. 12); and an increased desire to hear the law having been produced by hearing it, the people met again on the second of Tisri, to be present at a second reading. Ezra thereupon directed their attention to the impending "feast of tabernacles," which had not now for some considerable time been celebrated with the proper solemnities, and read to them the portions of the law which bore upon it (ver. 14). A much more exact and scrupulous observance of the legal regulations was the consequence—the dwelling in booths, which had been given up, was revived (ver. 17); the feast was continued during the full eight days (ver. 18); the solemn assemblies on the first day and the eighth were held (*ibid.*); and, above all, "day by day, from the first day unto the last day," Ezra took care to "read in the book of the law of God" before the people, thus bringing before them their practical duties in the most solemn and effective way, and stirring them up to holiness and repentance. The

good effect of these proceedings on his part appears in the next two chapters.

Ver. 1.—The chapter should commence, as in the Septuagint, with the last two clauses of ch. vii., and should run thus:—"And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in their cities, all the people gathered themselves together, as one man, into the court that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe," &c. The "court" (*rehob*) spoken of appears to have been situated between the eastern gate of the temple and the city wall, at the point where it was pierced by the "water gate." **They spake unto Ezra.** It is remarkable that the people *ask* for instruction. Though they do not keep the law, they have a yearning after it. They are not contented with their existing condition, but desire better things, and they have an instinctive feeling that to hear God's word will help them.

Ver. 2.—**Ezra the priest brought the law.** Ezra, God's true priest, at once responded to the call. He did not say, "The law is difficult, hard to be understood, might mislead you, should be reserved for the learned;" but at once "brought it," and "read therein" before the congregation both of men and women, and of all that could hear with understanding, i.e. of all (youths and maidens) that were old enough to understand the words.

Ver. 3.—**From the morning until mid-day.** Or, "from daylight." He began as soon as it was light enough, and read on (he and his assistants—ver. 7) till noon, that is, for six hours or more. The reading appears to have been varied by occasional exposition (vers. 7, 8). **The ears of all the people were attentive.** Though there is no word in the Hebrew for "attentive," yet the meaning is quite correctly given: "the ears of all the people were to the book"—fixed on that, and on nothing else.

Ver. 4.—**Ezra . . . stood upon a pulpit of wood.** Compare 2 Kings xi. 14; xxiii. 3, where, however, the term used is מִנְּבֵל, "stand," and not מִגְדָּל, "tower." In either case an elevated platform seems to be meant. **Mattithiah, and Shema.** These persons are commonly supposed to have been priests, but there is nothing to prove it. They need not even have been Levites, since they were there not to teach, but only to do honour to Ezra.

Ver. 5.—**All the people stood up.** The Jews commonly sat to hear and stood up to pray; but in hearing they occasionally stood up, to do greater honour to the person or the occasion (see Judges iii. 20). It is

not to be supposed that they stood during the whole of the six hours that Ezra's reading lasted.

Ver. 6.—**Ezra blessed the Lord.** Ezra began by an ascription of praise to Jehovah, as the Levites, probably under his direction, begin in ch. ix. 5, and as David began his last address to the congregation (1 Chron. xxix. 10). **The great God.** The epithet belongs to the writer rather than to Ezra himself, who in his own book never uses it. It recurs in this section (ch. ix. 32), and is also employed by Nehemiah (ch. i. 5). **Amen, Amen.** The repetition marks intensity of feeling, as does the **lifting up their hands**. Compare 2 Kings xi. 14; Luke xxiii. 21; and for the lifting up of the hands, so natural in prayer, see Ps. cxxxiv. 2; 1 Tim. ii. 8, &c. **Worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.** Compare 2 Chron. vii. 3; Ezra x. 2.

Ver. 7.—**Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, &c.** Levitical families, not individual Levites (see ch. ix. 4, 5; x. 10—13; xii. 8, &c.). **And the Levites.** *I. e.* "the rest of the Levites." **Caused the people to understand the law.** Expounding it, during pauses in the reading. **The people stood in their place.** Rather, "were in their place"—remained throughout the whole of the reading and exposition without quitting their places. It is not probable that they stood.

Ver. 8.—**They read in the book in the law of God distinctly.** That is, so that every word could be distinctly heard. Compare Ezra iv. 18, where a cognate word is translated "plainly." **And gave the sense.** Translated the Hebrew words into the popular Aramaic or Chaldee. **And caused them to understand the reading.** Literally, "in the reading." In the course of

the reading they caused the people to understand by explaining the meaning of each passage.

Ver. 9.—**Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha.** The term "Tirshatha" had previously been applied only to Zerubbabel (Ezra ii. 63; Neh. vii. 65), but it was applicable to any governor. The writer of the section, introducing Nehemiah here for the first time, naturally gives him a title of reverence. Nehemiah's modesty had made him content to describe himself by the general and comparatively weak term *pechah*. **Said unto the people. . . Mourn not.** A combined remonstrance is made against the open grief of the people by the civil and ecclesiastical rulers, and by the order of Levites. Mourning was unsuitable for a day of high festivity, the opening day of the civil year and of the sabbatical month, itself a sabbath or day of rest, and one to be kept by blowing of trumpets (Lev. xxiii. 24, 25; Num. xxix. 1—6).

Ver. 10.—**Then he said.** Either Ezra or Nehemiah, but probably the former, to whom it appertained to give religious directions. **Eat the fat and drink the sweet.** *I. e.* "Go and enjoy yourselves, eat and drink of the best—let there be no fasting, nor even abstinence, on such a day as this." But at the same time **send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared.** Make the poor partakers of your joy. "The stranger, the fatherless, and the widow" should have their part in the feast (Deut. xvi. 14). And for yourselves, remember that the joy of the Lord, *i. e.* religious joy, constitutes your strength.

Ver. 12.—**To make great mirth.** Or "great rejoicing," not "mirth" in the sense which the word now commonly bears.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—12.—*Religious instruction.* "And when the seventh month came," &c. To the well-being of a people the labours of the religious teacher are as necessary as those of the statesman. Nehemiah having provided for the safety of the Jews against their enemies, Ezra, the priest and scribe, steps forward to instruct them in the law of God. Of the manner in which he did this, and the reception his instructions met with, we have a specimen in this narrative.

I. The TIME of the meeting. "The first day of the seventh month" (ver. 2), the commencement of the civil year, the feast of trumpets. It was also the anniversary of the restoration of the altar (Ezra iii. 1—3), and as such would be regarded with special interest. And it was the first day of the month which abounded in religious solemnities.

II. The PLACE. The open space before the water gate (ver. 1).

III. The CONGREGATION. 1. Of whom it consisted. "All the people" . . . "men and women, and all that could hear with understanding" (vers. 1, 2). Parents brought those of their children who could understand. 2. Their unanimity. "As one man" (ver. 1). 3. Their eagerness to learn. "They spake unto Ezra," &c.

IV. The READING AND EXPLANATION OF THE LAW. By Ezra and a number of

Levites who assisted him (ver. 7). Ezra probably read the Hebrew text, and the Levites translated where necessary, and expounded, each perhaps to a different group. These exercises were—1. Commenced with worship (ver. 6). 2. Conducted with great care. From an elevated platform (ver. 4). The reading distinct, the exposition intelligible and painstaking (ver. 8). 3. Long-continued (ver. 3).

V. The BEHAVIOUR OF THE PEOPLE. 1. Reverent (vers. 5, 6). "All the people stood up . . . bowed their heads," &c. 2. Attentive (ver. 3). 3. Persistent. For some six hours they all kept their places (ver. 7).

VI. The EFFECTS produced upon them. 1. Sorrow (ver. 9). So Josiah rent his clothes when the law was read to him (2 Kings xxii. 11). The precepts of the law, so greatly in contrast with the conduct of the nation; its promises, of blessings once largely enjoyed, but forfeited by sin; its threatenings, the fulfilment of which the hearers so painfully experienced, would all tend to produce grief. "All the people wept," and the proper character of the festival seemed likely to be marred. But the instructions and exhortations of Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites prevailed to assuage their sorrow, and induce them to celebrate the festival in accordance with its design. Thus the sorrow was turned into—2. Joy (ver. 12). Which they indulged not simply because of the exhortations to joy addressed to them, but "because they had understood the words that were declared unto them," i. e. the words of the law. For such a statement would hardly be made of the addresses referred to in vers. 9—11, since there was no difficulty in understanding these. The fact that such teaching of the law was once more enjoyed by them filled their hearts with thankfulness; and although much which they had heard excited their sorrow, there was much also to awaken gladness. The law itself, and the whole history of their fathers, showed that their God was gracious and forgiving; and the promises interspersed among the precepts and threatenings (such, for instance, as those referred to in ch. i. 8, 9) would encourage their hopes.

Lessons:—1. The worth and power of the word of God, as the ever-enduring spring of new religious life. All true and solid reformation and revival arise from the earnest republication of its truths. 2. The necessity and value of enlightened and zealous teachers of the word. Such as aim to give the people a right understanding of it, and thus to quicken them to godliness and holiness. Without good teachers, the book, even when possessed, remains comparatively a dead letter. 3. The obligation and importance of public assemblies for instruction and worship. All ought to attend them, and bring such of their children as can "hear with understanding," in however small a measure. 4. The conditions of obtaining benefit at such meetings. Desire to learn, reverence, attention, surrender of the heart to the power of the truth. 5. The mingled and conflicting emotions awakened by Divine truth. Sorrow and joy. Place of each in the Christian life. Special suitability and worth of religious joy. "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

Ver. 3.—*Attentive hearers.* "The ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." Literally, and more expressive, "were unto the book of the law," as if their ears had been directed towards the book. A state of things very different from that which prevails in many congregations, especially during the reading of the Scriptures. It is worth considering how devout attention may be secured. Doubtless much depends on the reader or preacher. It is impossible to attend to some men. Those who officiated on the occasion referred to in the text are good models, as to the distinctness of their utterance and the pains they took to give the sense, &c. As to the hearers, they will acquire the habit of fixed and sustained attention by care in reference to the following particulars:—

I. PREVIOUS PREPARATION. Not waiting until within the walls of the sanctuary before seeking to be fitted for the service, but by definitely laying aside the world's business on Saturday night, and by religious exercises at home, and devout thought and feeling on the way to church, cultivating a state of mind and heart suitable for public worship. Yea, the whole life will be a preparation if spent earnestly in God's service.

II. SERIOUS INTENTION. The earnest desire and purpose to obtain spiritual good at the service.

III. CONSIDERATION OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD. Active faith in him as near, inviting to communion with himself, observing the state and conduct of each professing worshipper, speaking in the word and by the preacher, claiming a reverent regard to his declarations, ready to bless and save.

IV. SELF-CONTROL. Over the thoughts; swiftly banishing such as would divert from the sacred business in hand. Over the eyes, lest they conquer the ears.

V. WITHAL, PRAYER. The Divine assistance being invoked in momentary silent ejaculations, whenever the attention flags or wanders. In conclusion, let the habitually inattentive bear in mind that—1. They are necessarily great losers. Attention is the first condition of gaining good from public teaching. The loss thus sustained is of the highest and most lasting blessings. It is likely to include the loss of their souls. 2. They are guilty of great sin.

Ver. 9.—*Penitential sorrow.* "All the people wept when they heard the words of the law."

I. A NATURAL SORROW. "By the law is the knowledge of sin," and this knowledge cannot but awaken sorrow as to—1. Guilt contracted. The law is seen to be "holy and just and good;" the Lawgiver righteous and benevolent; and so sin appears "exceeding sinful." It is rebellion against authority the most just; hatred of the infinite Excellence; base ingratitude towards our best Benefactor; disregard of the rights and welfare of our brethren. 2. Good forfeited. Physical, moral, spiritual, eternal; in this case, national. The thought of what Israel would have been but for disobedience to the law would be most distressing to the Jews. So when we think of all we have lost through sin we may well grieve. 3. Evil incurred. Condemnation, remorse of conscience, degradation of nature, separation from God, shame and sorrow, diseases and death, the miseries of hell. What anguish and tears is the thought of the consequences of sin fitted to produce!

II. THE PROPER EFFECTS OF SUCH SORROW. 1. Confession. "I will arise and go to my Father," &c. 2. Repentance. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance," &c. 3. Eager acceptance of the gospel. Revealing as it does the Divine and complete remedy for all that gives the conscious sinner pain—a glorious Saviour, a perfect atonement for sin, the Almighty renewing and sanctifying Spirit; and thus a free and full pardon, restoration to the Divine favour, renewal unto holiness, peace, hope, ultimate perfection in body and soul, eternal glory and blessedness. 4. Watchful obedience. 5. Joy. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." But, on the other hand, "Woe unto you that laugh now," careless and impenitent, "for ye shall mourn and weep."

Ver. 10.—A CHRISTMAS HOMILY.—*The joy of the Lord.* "Go your way, eat the fat . . . for the joy of the Lord is your strength" [stronghold]. The common opinion that the Jewish religion was gloomy and austere is erroneous. Its ritual and ceremonial observances were indeed minute, and in some respects burdensome, but there was much that was joyous. The private observance of religion consisted a good deal in offering sacrifices of thanksgiving, of which the larger portion was eaten by the offerer and his friends in a social festal meal (Deut. xxvii. 6, 7 expresses the spirit of the Mosaic law). The Sabbath day, as originally instituted, was far from being the gloomy season which some represent; and of the other seasons set apart for special religious observance, only one was a fast, all the rest were festivals for the commemoration of God's goodness, and the offering of praise to him. The three occasions on which all the males were required to appear at the temple were all festivals, and how the festivals were to be kept our text shows. It relates to the feast of trumpets—the new year's festival—as observed by the Jews after their re-settlement in Palestine (for the law, see Levit. xxiii. 23). On this occasion the people were more disposed to mourn than rejoice, for the law had been read and expounded to them, and they were reminded by it of the nation's sin and deserved punishment. But Nehemiah bids them not mourn, but rejoice, adding that the joy of the Lord would be as a stronghold to them. We may gather from his words hints on Christian joy and feasting.

I. THE JOY WHICH GOD'S PEOPLE SHOULD INDULGE. "The joy of the Lord." Holy, pious joy. It is joy—1. In God—his existence and perfections; his relation to

believers; his works and government (in creation, providence, and grace); his special interpositions—for Israel, for mankind, especially in and by the Lord Jesus; his word and the understanding of it (ver. 12); his operations in each heart and life. 2. From God. All joy which is his gift has his stamp of approval: innocent pleasures of sense, reason, social affection, as well as the higher spiritual joys. But these last are specially “the joy of the Lord,” which is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. v. 22). 3. With God, as he rejoices in his works (Ps. civ. 31), in the repentance of sinners (Luke xv.), and in the character and welfare of his people (Ps. cxlvii. 11; Isa. lxii. 5; lxxv. 19; Zeph. iii. 17). We are capable of fellowship with him in his joy. 4. Directed to God. In gratitude and love, in praise and in cheerful service. Natural joys regulated by and culminating in religion, in thankfulness, &c., become thus “the joy of the Lord.” Such joy, not sorrow, should be the predominant feeling of Christians, although sorrow has also its place. The consciousness of redemption, of pardon, peace with God, sonship, &c., should produce joy. Such joy, not sinful mirth, should Christians indulge.

II. WHY SUCH JOY SHOULD BE CHERISHED. “The joy of the Lord is *your strength*.” Literally, your stronghold, fortress. For the Jews at this time, feeble as they were, the joy of the Lord would be safety against enemies. It would unite them, inspirit them, make them brave, stimulate them in God’s service, which was their safety, as it would secure his protection and blessing. And in all times religious, holy joy is a defence against evil. It imparts “strength” in another sense—inward power to do and endure the will of God, and overcome temptation, and thus become a stronghold—1. Against discouragement and despondency in trying times. 2. Against sin. Making God’s service a delight, it counterweights the attractions of sinful pleasure. He who is happy in God is raised above them. 3. Against infidelity. For it gives an experimental proof of the reality and worth of religion which no mere argument can shake. And as it is with individuals, so with families, Churches, nations, the joy of the Lord is strength, gloomy religion weakness, sinful joy more so.

III. WHEN IT SHOULD BE INDULGED. On days “holy to the Lord,” which every day should be. Then on days specially set apart for religious services—the Lord’s day, Easter, Christmas. Our special commemoration of God’s works should be with holy, not sinful, joy.

IV. HOW IT SHOULD BE EXPRESSED. 1. It *may* be expressed by *feasting*. So here, and in Jewish religious observances generally. Two things secured by such association of religion and feasting. It makes religion social, cheerful, and attractive, and it elevates and sanctifies feasting itself, consecrating it to God, and preserving its purity by associating it with thoughts of him. *We* should deem it singular to hear the ministers of religion say, “Eat the fat and drink the sweet, for this day is holy to the Lord.” Yet primitive Christianity had this element, in dropping which we have lost much good, if also much evil. At Christmas time we in a measure associate feasting with religion. Let us endeavour so to unite them that our joy may be “the joy of the Lord.” Let us blend with our festivities gratitude for Christ and Christianity. Let us invite Jesus to our feasts, and enjoy ourselves as in his presence. It is easier to mix religion with feasting at this time, because of the occasion, and the family character of the feast, the children uniting. 2. It should always overflow in *charity*. “Send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared” (see Deut. xvi. 11, 14). Special suitableness of this at Christmas time, not only on account of the time of year, when the poor have to bear peculiar hardships, but on account of the event celebrated. The incarnation sanctifies human nature, uniting it to the Divine; teaching us to reverence, respect, care for all; furnishing a new and sacred bond of unity and brotherhood. It sanctifies poverty, as Christ was born of a poor woman, in a very humble lodging. He chose to be a poor man, and esteems kindness to the poor as kindness to himself, and *vice versâ*. It affords us all ground for utmost thankfulness, which we should express by charity. Even selfishness might prompt benevolence at this season, for it will give zest to our own feasting to be conscious that others are sharing it through our gifts. Even if we must curtail our own feast somewhat in order to give to others, we shall be thus repaid. Finally, all joy should, and may, be a joy of the Lord. That which cannot be unworthy a Christian, and will lead to ultimate sorrow.

Ver. 11.—*Comfort for penitents.* “Neither be ye grieved.” God’s word grieves, yet soon says, “Be ye not grieved.”

I. TO WHOM THIS MAY BE SAID. 1. To true penitents. Such as mourn over sin with a “godly sorrow,” and seek mercy through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ; whether sinners first awakened, or Christians conscious of recent sin. 2. To all such. Even the chief of sinners, the worst of backsliders.

II. ON WHAT GROUNDS IT MAY BE SAID. 1. The assurance of forgiveness. “Though your sins be as scarlet,” &c. “He will abundantly pardon.” 2. The certain results of forgiveness. Adoption into the family of God. The enjoyment of his favour. The constant aids of the Holy Spirit. Support in conflict and trouble. The co-operation of all things for good. Life everlasting. In a word, salvation now and for ever. 3. The many injunctions to rejoice. 4. The injurious influence of over-much and over-prolonged sorrow. On him who cherishes it. Christian graces thrive best in an atmosphere of confidence and joy. Much sorrow blights them. On others. Discouraging inquirers. Repelling unbelievers. Bringing discredit on religion.

III. BY WHOM IT SHOULD BE SAID. By ministers of the gospel, and by the Church in general. We should not be afraid to comfort mourning sinners. To others our exhortation should be, “Be ye grieved.” “Be afflicted, and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.” (See more under ch. ii. 3; viii. 10.)

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The word of life.* The public reading and exposition of the law of Moses in the presence of all the people as soon as possible after their settlement in their cities and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

I. THE PEOPLE WANT, and must have, THE SCRIPTURES BOTH FAMILIARISED BY REPETITION AND EXPOUNDED, that they may “have the sense, and understand the reading.” 1. *As individuals.* The law of God the true foundation on which the life must be built up. In that law is not only the will of God, but his mercy. The Scriptures make wise to salvation. The law was the root out of which the gospel came. 2. *As a commonwealth.* The Bible the true law of nations and communities. 3. *As families.* The men, women, and children were there together. God has provided his word for our household life. Those who neglect its reading in the house neglect the best support of parental authority, the truest bond of love, and the fountain of consolation and joy. The only real education is that which acknowledges the Scriptures as its basis. All popular reformation and advancement has been achieved with the written word as the instrument.

II. GREAT GATHERINGS ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GREAT IMPRESSIONS, AND LARGE RESULTS MAY BE OBTAINED BY THEM. Street preaching may effect more than any other on some occasions. The great reformers of Israel were too much in earnest to pay much heed to sanctities of place. They wanted a large enough assembly to be a true representation of the people. The reading and preaching of God’s word can never be dispensed with.

III. MINISTERS MUST BE MEN WHO CAN HELP THE PEOPLE TO HEAR ATTENTIVELY AND UNDERSTAND THE WORD OF GOD. They have no right to occupy Ezra’s place unless they have Ezra’s qualification, and they should be both literally and figuratively “above all the people.” There were many with the chief reader who doubtless read and expounded in their turns. What is wanted is not that official dignity should be saved at any price, but that the people should hear and understand. We want more good readers and preachers.

IV. When we call the people together in the spirit of faith, “blessing the Lord, the great God,” and putting truth before them in his name, THERE WILL BE A READY AND HEARTY RESPONSE. The people said, Amen, Amen; lifted up their hands, bowed their heads, worshipped with their faces to the ground. We should expect such response.—R.

Vers. 1—8.—*The word of God and the ministry of man.* One of the most affecting scenes depicted in Holy Writ here invites our thought. Our imagination delights

to dwell upon it. The sacred and beloved city of God is now secure, its walls are rebuilt, its gates replaced and shut; its inhabitants are no longer struggling with hope and fear,—a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other,—but rejoicing in their strength and peace; internal discords are now arranged, and brethren are dwelling together in unity. With one accord they now come—all the multitude of them, men, women, and children, as many as “could hear with understanding” (ver. 2)—to one large square (ver. 1). In the midst of this square is erected a broad and high platform, a pulpit, on which several men may stand. Room is made through the crowd for Ezra (who now again appears on the scene) and a few accompanying ministers; they ascend the pulpit. As Ezra opens the book of the law of the Lord, with spontaneous reverence the whole company rises to its feet. As the great Scribe, before he begins to read, utters a few words of thanksgiving, “blessing the Lord, the great God,” all the people answer, “Amen, Amen,” bowing their head, and lifting their hands in reverent joy (ver. 6); and as Ezra reads and explains, speaking in their own language the ancient law which God gave to Moses, and as their country’s early history is unrolled before their eyes, and old and hallowed memories are vividly recalled, the strong men as well as the women and the children yield to their emotion, and tears stream down their faces. “All the people wept when they heard the word of the law” (ver. 9).

I. TWO FEATURES OF THIS SCENE WE SHALL BE WISE TO DWELL UPON. 1. The popular appreciation of the word of God. “All the people . . . spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law” (ver. 1). So far was Ezra from being obliged to urge the people to gather together and listen to the law, that they themselves called for its production, and demanded that it should be read to them. They hungered for the bread of life; they craved to hear the word of the living God. And when their wish was granted they showed themselves in real earnest, for they remained six hours eagerly listening as the law was read and expounded. Ezra “read therein from morning until midday . . . and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law” (ver. 3). 2. The ministerial function in regard to it. “Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood . . . and beside him stood Mattithiah and Shema,” &c. (ver. 4); “also Jeshua and Bani,” &c. (ver. 7); and “they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (ver. 8). Here were two valuable things: (1) the distinct reading of the word of God; (2) the explanation of any obscure words or sentences, or, as we have it, “giving the sense,” or “causing the people to understand the law.”

II. TWO INFERENCES THEREFROM WE MAY SAFELY DRAW. We may safely reason—1. *That we now should show a still greater popular appreciation of the word of God.* For we must consider how much more we have than they had, or than David had when he exclaimed how he “loved the law,” and when he preferred it to bodily gratification and worldly treasure (Ps. xix.). We have not only more in quantity, but much of that which ought to be to us more deeply interesting. We have, beside the “law of Moses which the Lord had commanded to Israel” (ver. 1), (1) the history of the Jews in the land of promise; (2) the Psalms of David; (3) the wisdom of Solomon; (4) the inspired utterances of many prophets; (5) the letters of apostles; and above all, (6) the very word of Jesus Christ himself, and the story of his redeeming love, with (7) the revelation of the golden city of God. How should we hunger and thirst for this bread, for these waters of life; how should we be “very attentive to hear him!” 2. *That there is as much need now as ever of the ministerial function.* For though indeed we have the word of God written in our own tongue, in our own home, and under our own eyes, there remains, and will remain, the important function of (1) *expounding the sacred word.* There are words and sentences, chapters and books, “hard to be understood;” there are now more things than there were then to harmonise; there is the connection between the two Testaments to explain; and there are heights which only some can climb, depths to which only a few can dig, treasures which only “the ready scribe” can reach, and these it is well to bring forth that all may be enriched. Moreover, the ministers of Christ, like Ezra and his companions on this eventful day (ver. 6), have the high and noble function of (2) *leading the people in prayer and in thanksgiving;* reverently addressing God, carrying the hearts of all with them, bearing on the wings of their earnest words the thoughts

and feelings of the people heavenwards to the very throne of God, so that "all the people shall answer, Amen, Amen," and "worship the Lord" in spirit and in truth (ver. 6). There is no higher or greater service man can render man than that of helping him to come into close and living fellowship with the Father, the Saviour, the Sanctifier of his spirit.

III. ONE ABIDING FACT. The fitness of the sacred Scriptures for every child of man. Men, women, and children, "all that can hear with understanding," gather still to hear the word of God. There is not, nor will there ever be, a book inspired of man that can interest and instruct, comfort and guide, our race like this book "given by the inspiration of God." Childhood will never read with such devouring eagerness such stories elsewhere as those of Joseph and Moses and Daniel, and of the babe that was cradled in the manger at Bethlehem. Youth will never learn elsewhere to remember its Creator as it learns here in the stories of Samuel and Josiah, and of him who "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man;" here prime will learn, as nowhere else, that man cannot "live on bread alone," or grow rich only by making money and building fortunes; here sorrow will ever find its sweetest solace, its best and holiest balm, and sickness its one untiring Companion; and here death itself loses its darkness and its sting, as these pages speak to it of him who is "the Resurrection and the Life."—C.

Vers. 1—18.—*The word of God in a threefold relationship.* I. THE WORD OF GOD AND POPULAR DESIRE. "And they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel." 1. The desire of the people for the word of God. (1) Natural. It was interesting as their national history. (2) Wise. The word of God is of the highest value to the human soul. (3) Prophetic. The word of God shall one day be the delight of a sanctified humanity. 2. The attitude of the people toward the word of God. (1) Attentive. (2) Intelligent. (3) Persevering. (4) Reverent. (5) Prayerful.

II. THE WORD OF GOD AND SPIRITUAL EMOTION. "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law" (ver. 9). There is much in the word of God to awaken human emotion; its record of sin must inspire grief; its tidings of Divine mercy should beget joy. The emotions awakened by the word of God must be—1. Enlightened. 2. Appropriate (ver. 11). 3. Benevolent (ver. 10).

III. THE WORD OF GOD AND CHURCH ORDINANCE. 1. Church ordinances should be remembered. 2. Church ordinances should be Scriptural. 3. Church ordinances should be joyous. 4. Church ordinances should not be exclusive.—E.

Vers. 8—12.—*Penitence turned into praise.* I. ALL TRUE REJOICING MUST BE FOUNDED ON RECONCILIATION WITH GOD. 1. The righteousness of God in his law, while it condemns man, and makes the people to weep when they see their sin in its light, is yet declared not for condemnation, but for reconciliation. 2. The true ministers of God will proclaim mercy, not judgment, as the substance of their message. "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep." There is a time to weep, but there is a time to turn tears to praise. 3. *The joy of the Lord* which is *our strength* will be expressed in no mere selfish forgetfulness of him and of our neighbour, but in cheerfulness and beneficence; our own portions will be the sweeter when we send help to those for whom nothing is prepared.

II. THE CONVERSION AND REFORMATION OF A PEOPLE MUST BE EFFECTED THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD. They "understood the words which were declared unto them." A ministry which leaves the people either without the word or without understanding the word is no ministry of God.—R.

Vers. 9—12.—*Religious emotion.* The scene through which the redeemed and now secured nation was passing was fruitful of excitement. Everything conspired to affect the minds and stir the souls of the people. Large multitudes are soon wrought into intense feeling; and all that the assembled Israelites were then seeing, hearing, and doing,—this, taken with all they recalled of old scenes and past glories, and these experiences and recollections mingled with reviving hopes of future



freedom,—all together moved and swayed their souls with powerful emotion; and “all the people wept” (ver. 9). It was an interesting instance of religious emotion, and what followed teaches us—

I. THAT RELIGIOUS EMOTION MUST BE MANFULLY CONTROLLED (ver. 9). Nehemiah and Ezra, and “the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep” (ver. 9). “So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved” (ver. 11). Emotion needs control and correction when—1. It is in danger of being carried to *excess*. Under some circumstances, such as these of the text, when a very large number of people were all agitated by the same feelings, and each communicated something of his own enthusiasm to his neighbour, it is in serious danger of running into mere physical excitement. Such nervous excitement is perilous, for—(1) It deludes the hearts of men with the idea that they are intensely religious when they are the subjects of a bodily rather than a spiritual affection. (2) It often carries its subjects to religious and even bodily excesses, which are both guilty and harmful. All religious emotion is, on this ground, to be carefully controlled. It has its place and its use in the Church of Christ, in the spreading of the kingdom; but it is a thing to be watched and guarded in the interests of morality and religion. It needs correction when—2. It takes a *wrong direction*. Weeping was ill-timed on this occasion. It was a “day holy unto the Lord” (ver. 9); they were “not to mourn nor weep.” It was unbecoming the occasion. At such a time the air should not be burdened with sighs and groans; it should be resonant with shouts and songs. Often our religious emotion is misplaced, ill-timed: we lament when God would have us “sing with joy,” or we make ourselves merry when we have reason to humble ourselves in the dust.

II. THAT JOY SHOULD BE THE PREVAILING NOTE IN OUR RELIGIOUS EMOTION (ver. 10). “This day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (ver. 10). It was not in accordance with the law and the will of God that sorrow should be associated with a holy day. The high priest, with “holiness to the Lord” on his mitre, was not allowed to mourn as others might, or when others did (Lev. x. 6; xxi. 10). Sin and sorrow, holiness and joy, these are the right companions. “With the voice of joy and praise” we should “keep holyday” (Ps. xlii. 4). With rejoicing hearts, full of the joy of thankfulness and hope, we should sit down to the table of the Lord. “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil. iv. 4). Joy, one of the “fruits of the Spirit,” is commended to us with a fulness and frequency in the word of God which may well make us ask ourselves whether we are not negligent in this matter. Joy in Christ Jesus is a grace (1) which we are repeatedly summoned to show; (2) which makes us resemble him as he is, crowned with glory and joy; (3) desirable for its own sake, as obviously, intrinsically better than either sorrow or apathy; (4) which is a sign and source of spiritual strength. “The joy of the Lord is our strength” (ver. 10). It is so, for it is both the *sign* and the *source* of it. 1. It is the utterance of our spiritual nature; not when it is weak through sin, but when made whole through the power of Christ, and when the “power of Christ” most rests upon us. 2. It is an incentive and encouragement to ourselves to proceed in the path of heavenly wisdom. The Christian man of downcast spirit and dreary views must be under a constant temptation to leave the path; but he who finds not only rest and peace in Christ, but also “joys in God,” and delights himself in the service of his Saviour, has the strongest inducement to walk on in the way of life. 3. It is the means of usefulness to others. They who are “in Christ” would be “strong in the Lord,” and they would be strong *in* him that they may be strong *for* him, extending his kingdom, and winning souls to his side. But how become thus strong for him? By the simple, natural exhibition of a joyous spirit in all spheres and relationships; by constraining the wife, the husband, the children, the servants, the fellow-workmen, &c., to feel that the knowledge of God as a heavenly Father reconciled in Christ Jesus,—the trust, the love, the hope which are in him,—that this does gladden the spirit and brighten the life as nothing else can. By so doing we shall be *strong for Christ*. The joy of the Lord will prove to be our strength.

III. THAT STRONG RELIGIOUS FEELING FINDS AN ADMIRABLE VENT IN PRACTICAL

KINDNESS. "Go your way," &c. (vers. 10, 12). 1. A *right* channel it finds in "eating and drinking fat and sweet things," so that this be characterised by (1) moderation, self-restraint, and (2) thankfulness—the recognition of the hand of the great Giver of all good. But, 2. A *better* channel in "sending portions to them for whom nothing is prepared" (ver. 10). Better far to feel that we are loading another's table with sweet things where they are seldom found than to be helping ourselves to the most delicious morsels from our own; no source of happiness at once so sure and so pure as in being like the bountiful Father, and opening the hand to satisfy the wants of those who are in need.—G.

### EXPOSITION.

Ver. 13.—**And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers.** At times it is true that "increase of appetite doth grow by what it feeds on." Once let the sweetness of the Divine word be tasted and appreciated, and there springs up in the heart instantly a desire for more—a wish to continue in the study—a feeling like that of the Psalmist when he said, "Lord, what love have I unto thy law: *all the day long* is my study in it" (Ps. cxix. 97). The Jews, taught by Ezra in the law of God on the first day of the month, return to him on the second, desirous of hearing more, hungering and thirsting after the word of life, of which they have felt the power and the excellency. **To understand.** Rather, "to consider," as in Ps. xli. 1.

Ver. 14.—**And they found written.** The practice of "dwelling in booths," commanded in Lev. xxiii. 42, had fallen into disuse, probably during the captivity, and though the feast itself had been revived by Zerubbabel (Ezra iii. 4), yet this feature of it, from which it derived its name, had remained in abeyance. **In the feast of the seventh month.** Though the "feast of trumpets" was also a feast of the seventh month, that of tabernacles was "*the feast*," being one of those which all Israelites not reasonably hindered were bound to attend (Exod. xxiii. 14—17; Deut. xvi. 16), and which was placed on a par with the Passover and Pentecost.

Ver. 15.—**And that they should publish.** See Lev. xxiii. 4. **Saying, Go forth,** &c. These words are not found in any existing Scripture, and some corruption of the present text may therefore be suspected. The Septuagint interposes, between "Jerusalem" and "Go forth," the words "And Esdras said," which would remove the difficulty; but it is difficult to understand how Ezra's name should have fallen out. Perhaps Houbigant is right in his suggestion of an emendation, by which the verse would run thus:—"And when they heard it, they proclaimed in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth," &c. **Into the mountain.** *I. e.* the neighbouring mountain, the Mount of Olives. **Pine branches.**

Rather "*oleaster* branches." **Branches of thick trees.** The same expression is used in Lev. xxiii. 40, the meaning in each place being uncertain. Perhaps trees with thick, viscous leaves are intended. It is remarkable that two of the trees commanded in Leviticus are omitted, viz., the *hadar* and the "willow of the brook," while three not mentioned in Leviticus—the olive, oleaster, and myrtle—are added.

Ver. 16.—**The flat roofs of Oriental houses, and the court round which they were commonly built, furnished convenient sites for the booths, and would be preferred by the inhabitants of Jerusalem.** The incomers from the country districts (ver. 15) would have to occupy the open places or "squares" of the city, and the temple courts, which would accommodate large numbers. **On the street of the water gate** see the comment on ver. 1. **The street of the gate of Ephraim** was probably a similar *square*, inside the great northern gateway.

Ver. 17.—**Jeshua the son of Nun.** "Jeshua" and "Joshua" are two modes of contracting the full name of Jehoshua, the latter prevalent in early, the former in later times. The Grecised form of Jeshua was "Jesus" (see Acts vii. 45; Heb. iv. 8). When it is said that since the days of Jeshua **had not the children of Israel done so**, we must understand, not that there had been no celebration of the feast of tabernacles since that time—not even that there had been no celebration accompanied by "dwelling in booths," but only that there had been *no such joyous and general celebration* of the festival (comp. what is said in 2 Kings xxiii. 22 and 2 Chron. xxxv. 18 of the passover kept in Josiah's eighteenth year). It is the **very great gladness** that is especially insisted upon.

Ver. 18.—**Also day by day . . . he read in the book of the law.** Ezra must be intended in the form "he read," though there has been no mention of him since verse 13. The continuous and systematic reading seems to imply that the year was a Sabbatical one, and that the rehearsal commanded in Deut. xxxi. 10—13 now took place. The observance was perhaps a new thing to

the newly-formed community, and is therefore recorded with so much emphasis. **They kept the feast seven days.** See Lev. xxiii. 34; Num. xxix. 12—34; Dent. xvi. 13. **On the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according to the manner.** Such a mode of solemnising the octave was commanded in

Lev. xxiii. 36 and Num. xxix. 35. By "according to the manner" seems to be meant "according to the regularly established custom"—one proof out of many that the feast had been constantly observed, though not perhaps with all the proper ceremonies (see the comment on ver. 17).

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 13—18.—*An influential congregation.* Account of a smaller gathering than that recorded in the first part of the chapter, but likely from its character to be equally or more fruitful of good.

I. THE MEETING CONVENED (ver. 13). 1. The congregation. Select; consisting of the principal heads of houses, priests, and Levites. 2. Their design. To study the law with a view to the better understanding of it. 3. Their teacher. The ablest doctor of the day.

II. THE DISCOVERY MADE (vers. 14, 15). The law of the feast of tabernacles. Perhaps, although it had been kept on the first return from Babylon, it had been omitted in recent troublous times, or some important particulars had been neglected for want of instruction in the law. Now they come face to face with the original precepts.

III. THE OBEDIENCE RENDERED (vers. 16—18). The chiefs doubtless proclaim the law to the people (ver. 15), and these obey it. So the feast was kept—1. By each and all. 2. With exactness. Such as had not been known since the days of Joshua. 3. With gladness. 4. With daily reading of the book of the law. It was thus a very pleasant and profitable week.

Lessons:—1. The value of well-instructed rulers and ministers of religion. Especially of such as are well instructed in Holy Scripture. An ignorant clergy is one of the greatest evils, and scarcely less a clergy learned in everything but the Bible, the teaching of whose truths is their main business. "They be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." But it is an omen of good when pastors and teachers are diligent students of the word, availing themselves of the assistance of the ablest scholars of the time, and thus becoming "instructed unto the kingdom of heaven," "able to teach others also." 2. The careful student of God's word is rewarded by important discoveries. He will find truths, precepts, and promises which are new to him, or come with all the freshness and force of a new revelation, to correct his beliefs or his conduct, or to give him new comfort and joy. The Bible is an inexhaustible mine of eternal treasures. It will repay the constant study of a life. 3. A condition of external peace and settlement is eminently favourable to the study and general practice of God's law. These Jews could turn their serious attention to the instructions and ordinances of their law now that they were safe from the assaults of their enemies. We cannot be too thankful in this view for the quiet times we enjoy, nor too earnest in promoting to the utmost of our power the peace and mutual good will of all nations. 4. God is to be worshipped and his ordinances observed according to his own directions. 5. The celebration of Divine ordinances promotes, and should be with, gladness. The gladness of gratitude for Divine favours, the joy of a good conscience which obedience brings, the joy of mutual love and fellowship, the joy of hope, &c. Happy the people who thus unite in the service of God.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 13—18.—*Keeping the feast.* "On the second day," the day after the great and affecting assembly of all the citizens, came together a representative company, "the chief of the fathers of all the people" (ver. 13), beside the priests and Levites, to "understand" or consider the law, that they might encourage all the children of Israel to a regular and faithful observance of it. This gathering led at once to—

I. AN ACT OF REVIVED AND REJOICING OBEDIENCE. For "they found written in the law

... that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month" (ver. 14). They came upon the commandment recorded in Levit. xxiii., enjoining the observance of the feast of tabernacles or booths. This must have fallen partially, if not wholly, into disuse, though we know from Ezra iii. 4 that this feast was celebrated as late as the time of Zerubbabel. Now, however, under the impulse of Nehemiah's and Ezra's faithful ministry, and in the glow of a religious revival, they returned to a complete and hearty observance of the ancient festival. The law required that the sacred feasts should be "proclaimed" (Levit. xxiii. 4). Giving a broad sense to the term, they took pains to proclaim it with all particularity. "In all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount," &c. (ver. 15). And there was a general and hearty response. "The people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths" (ver. 16); "all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under them" (ver. 17). Moses commanded that once in seven years the law should be read "before all Israel in their hearing" (Deut. xxxi. 11). Whether this was the seventh year or not, the injunction of Moses was obeyed. They were in the mood to do all—more rather than less—that was enjoined, and "day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he (Ezra) read in the book of the law of God" (ver. 18). There had been no such celebration of the feast since the days of Jeshua (ver. 17), "and there was very great gladness." Now we learn from this that—1. It is possible for a nation (or a Church) with the Bible in its keeping to allow plain duties to fall into disregard. 2. That this negligence is due to a blameworthy inattention to the word of God. The Bible is too much on the shelf, too little in the hand. 3. That a return to obedience, especially to a hearty and general (unanimous) obedience, is attended with great gladness of heart. (1) Devout study, (2) earnest obedience, (3) reverent joy—these are successive steps in a true revival.

II. A COMMEMORATIVE SERVICE. The feast of tabernacles was essentially commemorative. "That your generation may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths when I brought them out," &c. (Levit. xxiii. 43). It was well indeed that the children of the captivity should have their attention called to past days of exile. It would do them good, as it did their fathers, to look back and think what God had done *unto* them and *for* them. How he had humbled them, and how he had redeemed them. Thus they would think of two things—(1) past sorrows, not to be renewed, from which God had graciously delivered them; and (2) past sins, never to be repeated, which God had mercifully forgiven them. One thought would lead to thankfulness, and the other to consecration; both to sacred joy. The recalling by our minds of past evils out of which God has led us, and past errors and wrong-doings which he has blotted out, will confirm our hearts in their gratitude and devotion.

III. AN OPPORTUNITY OF INSTRUCTION IN SACRED THINGS. Whether the Jews felt bound to observe Deut. xxxi. 10, or whether the reading of the law from day to day was optional on their part (the latter is the more probable), we have them associating *instruction* with ceremonial observance. We should turn all occasions into opportunities of "inquiring the way of the Lord more perfectly," of becoming "*filled* with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding . . . increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. i. 9, 10).—C.

Vers. 13—18.—*Restoration of the feast of tabernacles in its plenitude.* I. A NOTABLE INSTANCE OF NEGLECT. The commandment was plainly written, but "since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun the children of Israel had not done so." How much they lost!—gladness, fellowship, help to their remembrance of Divine mercy, food of faith. We should follow the directions of God's book without question. Much yet to break forth from the written pages.

II. An illustration of the DEPENDENCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE ON ONE ANOTHER. The council of "fathers, priests, Levites, and Ezra the scribe gathered together to understand the words of the law." All cannot pursue the same inquiries. The progress of the Church is greatly advanced by the consecration of some to the study of the Scriptures. All councils and conferences should be held with a practical end in view, to understand in order to reformation of life and manners. Much of the deliberation

of learned men has failed of God's blessing because it has been merely speculative or controversial. We can scarcely doubt that Ezra was the leading spirit. One eminent man of God can wonderfully animate and direct his Church in great crises. The true leader will never despise counsel, but be only *primus inter pares*.

III. A TYPICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE BELIEVING LIFE OF GOD'S PEOPLE. The festival in the green booths fetched from the mount. 1. Grateful memory and pilgrim expectation. 2. Free fellowship and happy intercourse, with Jerusalem as the centre. Church life ought to be real root of all other life. We go from our own cities to Jerusalem, and return with the sanctity of the feast, to be distributed over all the common ways and facts of an every-day existence. 3. Consecrated seasons, festival times, needed in all service of God. For the heart must be lifted up that the hands may be kept busy. Function of praise in the life. They of the captivity do well to recognise one another in their freedom. God invites us to turn nature into joy. Consecrate the very trees to him. Rejoice under the open heaven in his loving-kindness. Connect his holy mount with the simple tent that covers our head. He waits not for splendid ritual or temple, but delights in the homely praise of those who spread the beauty of his name over all the earth.—R.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER IX.

SOLEMN FAST KEPT, WITH CONFESSION OF SINS; AND VOLUNTARY COVENANT WITH GOD ENTERED INTO BY THE PEOPLE, AND SEALED TO BY THE PRINCES, PRIESTS, AND LEVITES (ch. ix.). When the law was first read to them on the opening day of the seventh month, the people had shown strong feelings of compunction, an earnest desire to return to God by the thorny way of repentance. In checking this feeling on that particular day, Ezra and Nehemiah had conformed to prevalent ideas on the subject of festival observance, but had not intended to thwart the popular desire for some distinct penitential action, some marked public proceedings, which should at once furnish a vent to pent-up feeling, and serve as a starting-point from which individuals, or even the nation, might enter upon a new career. It is a very curious circumstance, and one not easy of explanation, that they did not fix on the 10th of the month—the “great day of atonement”—as the most appropriate day of national humiliation and of general self-abasement. The proximity of that occasion would naturally and almost necessarily suggest it to them, and nothing could well exceed its intrinsic fitness. On that day, and that day only in the whole of the year, every soul was to afflict itself, and whatsoever soul did not do so was to be cut off and destroyed from among the people (Levit. xxiii. 27—29). It can scarcely be that the observance of the

day had ceased. Perhaps the time for preparation which the selection of this “feast of sorrow” would have allowed seemed too short. Perhaps it was thought undesirable to select for an extraordinary national act of self-humiliation a day which already possessed its own routine, and possibly its own ritual, of repentance. In any case, the fact was that the civil and ecclesiastical authorities came to the determination not to make any special use of the regular annual fast day, but to leave the observance of that occasion to the people's natural bent, and appoint a different day—one which had no traditional customs attached to it—for the solemn act of penitence on which the heart of the nation was set. As the feast of tabernacles lasted from the 15th of Tisri to the 22nd, it was necessary either to select a day before that holy week or after it. A day between the 10th and the 15th would have followed too close upon the day of atonement; a day, therefore, was appointed after the festival was over. Not, however, the very next day—the transition from joy to sorrow would in that case have been too abrupt—but the next day but one—the 24th (ch. ix. 1). Then, the multitude that had come up for the feast being still present, a great fast was kept—sackcloth was worn, dust was sprinkled on the head; for half the day the vast assembly remained in the great court of the temple, listening to the words of the law for three hours, and for three hours confessing their sins (ver. 3); after

this the Levites took the word, and, in the name of the whole people, blessed God, acknowledged his gracious providence and special goodness towards Israel throughout the entire course of their history (vers. 5—25), confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers (vers. 26—35), admitted the justice of their present low estate (vers. 36, 37), and finally brought forward a written bond or covenant, whereto they invited those present to set their seals (ver. 38), pledging them to “walk in God’s law, and observe and do all his commandments,” and to make a perpetual provision for the priests and for the temple service (ch. x. 29—39). The words of the formula were, no doubt, carefully prepared beforehand, and show traces of the influence of Ezra, to whose prayer (Ezra ix. 6—15) they bear a great resemblance. We may perhaps assume that they were his composition, and that, though he is not mentioned, he was present, directing all the proceedings, instructing and animating the Levites, and exercising an influence for good over all grades of the people. (The present chapter is closely united with that which follows, and must be studied in connection with it.)

**Ver. 1.—With sackclothes, and earth upon them.** On the use of sackcloth in mourning see Gen. xxxvii. 34; 2 Sam. iii. 31; xxi. 10; 1 Kings xxi. 27, &c. Putting earth or dust on the head was less common; but mention of it is made in 1 Sam. iv. 12; 2 Sam. i. 2; and Job ii. 12.

**Ver. 2.—The seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers.** Compare ch. x. 28, by which it appears that the “strangers” are “the people of the lands,” or neighbouring heathen, of whom there were at all times considerable numbers in Jerusalem (comp. ch. xiii. 16). It was not fitting that these aliens should take part in a ceremony of which the main object was that the special people of God should renew their covenant with him. **Stood and confessed.** Attitude is perhaps scarcely intended here, since the Jews confessed their sins kneeling (Ezra ix. 5), or prostrate (*ibid.* ch. x. 1). Hence we hear in the next verse that they “stood up,” or “rose up” (*con-surrexerunt*, Vulg.).

**Ver. 3.—In their place.** See above, ch. viii. 7. The people and the ministers had their appointed “places” in every gathering of a religious character. The former now “stood up” in their proper place, and read, &c. “engaged in the reading of the law;”

not, however, as actual readers, but as listeners. The readers would be the Levites (see ch. viii. 7, 8). **One fourth part of the day.** The day and the night were alike divided by the Jews into four parts, each of three hours duration. The nocturnal divisions are frequently alluded to in the New Testament (Mark xiii. 35; John xviii. 28, &c.). **Worshipped.** Literally, “bowed themselves down,” or “prostrated themselves.”

**Ver. 4.—Upon the stairs, of the Levites.** Rather, “upon the platform of the Levites,” the same probably as the “pulpit” of ch. viii. 4. **Bani.** Rather, “Binnui” (see ch. x. 9; xii. 8), the representative of the “sons of Henadad.” Jeshua, Binnui, and Kadmiel are the three principal families of the Levites (comp. Ezra ii. 40; iii. 9; Neh. iii. 24; viii. 7, &c.). **Sherebiah** was the head of a family which returned with Ezra (Ezra viii. 18). **Chenani** is probably the “Hanan” of chs. viii. 7, and x. 10.

**Ver. 5.—Stand up.** The people had prostrated themselves (see the comment on ver. 3) for confession and prayer; they are now bidden to “stand up” for praise. Compare the practice of the Christian Church. **Blessed be.** Literally, “let them bless.” The Levites turn their address, after its opening clause, from the people to Jehovah himself, who henceforth becomes the subject of it. **Thy glorious name.** The high honour due to the “name” of God is taught by the sacred writers with one uniform voice from Moses (Exod. xx. 7) to the last surviving apostle (Rev. xv. 4). The “glorious name” of God is an expression which occurs four times in our version of the Old Testament; but the exact phrase here used is found only in Ps. lxxii. 19.

**Ver. 6.—Thou art Lord alone.** Compare Ps. lxxxvi. 10 and Isa. xxvii. 16. In the latter passage the phrase used is almost identical. **The heaven of heavens.** Compare Deut. x. 14; 1 Kings viii. 27; Ps. cxlviii. 4. The expression has been explained as—1. The very highest heaven; 2. The heavens in all their infinity. The latter sense best suits the various passages where the phrase occurs. **With all their host.** The “host of heaven” has been taken to mean—1. The angels; 2. The stars. By the immediate context the stars would seem to be here intended; but the last clause of the verse is more properly applicable to the angels. Still, it must be remembered that, according to H. S. (Ps. cxlviii. 3), even the stars “praise” God. **Thou preservest them all.** The preservation of all created things by him who called them into being is scarcely taught in the Old Testament elsewhere than in this passage. The Psalmist says in one place, “Thou preservest man and beast”

(Ps. xxxvi. 6); but this acknowledgment falls very far short of the universality of the present passage. Man naturally, but foolishly, fancies that things once created are able to preserve themselves. Exact thought sees, that if all things have been produced *from nothing*, it requires precisely the same power to sustain as originally to produce them. Hence "preservation" has been called "a continual creation."

Vers. 7—31.—Compare with this long historical *resumé* the still longer ones in Ps. lxxviii. 5—72 and Acts vii. 2—47. God's dealings with his people furnished a moral lesson of extraordinary force, and moral teachers, naturally, made frequent reference to them. But it is not often that we have so complete and elaborate a recapitulation as the present, which, beginning with the call of Abraham, brings the history down to the time of the Persian servitude. God's goodness and his people's ingratitude form the burthen of the whole.

Ver. 8.—**Canaanites, &c.** The nations driven out were actually *seven* (Deut. vii. 1), but it is a common figure of speech to put the part for the whole. In the present enumeration the Hivites are omitted. **Hast performed thy words.** Though for a time remnants of the accursed nations were left in the land, "to prove Israel" (Judges iii. 1), yet ultimately all were either driven out or reduced to the condition of slaves (see the comment on Ezra ii. 55).

Ver. 10.—**They dealt proudly.** The "proud dealing" of the Egyptians is spoken of in Exod. xviii. 11. That God "got himself a name" by the signs and wonders shown in Egypt is often declared (see Exod. ix. 16; xiv. 17; xv. 14—16, &c.).

Ver. 11.—**As a stone.** This phrase is taken from the "song of Moses" (Exod. xv. 5). The composer of the address has also in his mind Exod. xv. 10. The epithet given to the "waters" is not, however, the same, as might appear from the A. V.

Ver. 13.—**Right judgments, true laws, good statutes, &c.,** are expressions which imply an immutable morality, a standard of right and wrong antecedent to command or precept, which standard is doubtless the eternal goodness of God himself. The repetition of the epithets here shows the composer of the form to be penetrated with the spirit of admiration for God's commandments which breathes so remarkably through the whole of Ps. cxix.

Ver. 14.—**Madest known unto them thy holy sabbath.** The anterior existence of the sabbath to the law is here implied, which accords with Gen. ii. 2, 3, and Exod. xx. 11. **Precepts, statutes, and laws.** Rather a periphrasis for "the law" generally, than a logical division of the law into distinct parts.

Ver. 15.—**Bread from heaven.** The manna had been already called the "bread of heaven" (Ps. cv. 40) and the "corn of heaven" (Ps. lxxviii. 24) by the national psalmists. The composer of this prayer now for the first time calls it "bread *from* heaven"—a phrase consecrated to Christians by its employment in John vi. (vers. 32, 51, 58).

Ver. 16.—**They and our fathers.** Rather, "they, our fathers." The *vau* is used exegetically. **Dealt proudly.** *I. e.* "acted insolently." Compare Deut. i. 43, where the same verb is translated "were presumptuous" (*marg.*). **Harden their necks.** So in 2 Kings xvii. 14.

Ver. 17.—**In their rebellion.** Several MSS. have *b' Mizraim* for *b' miryam*, which would give the sense "appointed a captain to return to their bondage in Egypt." So the Septuagint. **Appointed a captain.** The reference is to Num. xiv. 4, where we are told that the Israelites "said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." The Levites speak as if the appointment had been made, perhaps regarding the intention as morally equivalent to the act. **A God ready to pardon.** Literally, "a God of pardons." The word used is a rare one, occurring only in Dan. ix. 9 and Ps. cxxx. 4, besides the present passage. **Gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.** This is quoted from Joel ii. 13, which is perhaps a conscious reproduction of Jonah iv. 2.

Ver. 18.—**Great provocations.** Or "great blasphemies," as the same word is rendered in Ezek. xxxv. 12.

Ver. 20.—**Thou gavest them also thy good Spirit to instruct them.** The "good Spirit" of God is mentioned in Ps. cxliii. 10; and the fact of God's "instructing and teaching" men in Ps. xxxii. 8. But instruction by God's Spirit is nowhere else distinctly mentioned in the Old Testament.

Ver. 22.—**Thou didst divide them into corners.** *I. e.* "didst plant them in every corner of the Holy Land,"—"gave them to possess the whole of it,"—ultimately, that is, not at first (see the comment on ver. 8). **The land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon.** The Levites must have known that Sihon was king of Heshbon, and (if the text is sound) must have expressed themselves as they did, by way of rhetorical amplification; perhaps, however, the *vau* after "Sihon" is the mistake of a copyist.

Ver. 23.—**As the stars of heaven.** There is a reference here to the promise made to Abraham (Gen. xv. 5; xxii. 17): On the great multiplication which took place in Egypt see Exod. i. 7, 12.

Ver. 24.—**The Canaanites.** Sometimes

as in ver. 8, the Canaanites are spoken of as one of the nations cast out; sometimes the word is used in a larger sense, and includes the other six nations. Here we have the wide sense.

Ver. 25.—**They took strong cities.** As Jericho, Ai, Libnah, Lachish, Hazor, Hebron, &c. **A fat land.** Compare Num. xiv. 7, 8; Deut. viii. 7—9; 2 Kings xviii. 32. **Houses full of all goods.** See Deut. vi. 11. **Fruit trees in abundance.** The fruit trees of Palestine are, besides the vine and the olive, the fig tree, the carob or locust tree (*cerconia siligua*), the quince, the apple, the almond, the walnut, the peach, the apricot, the mulberry, the sycamore fig, the prickly pear, the pomegranate, and the orange. Date-palms also were anciently abundant in the valley of the Jordan. **They . . . became fat.** Compare Deut. xxxii. 15 and Jer. v. 28, the only other places where the expression here used occurs. The comparison will show that dispraise is intended—"they grew wanton and self-indulgent." **Delighted themselves.** Rather, "luxuriated" (*irpú-φασαν*, LXX.).

Ver. 26.—**They . . . slew thy prophets.** Compare Matt. xxiii. 37; Luke xi. 47. Jewish tradition states that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were murdered. Many prophets were slain by Jezebel, with Ahab's sanction (1 Kings xviii. 4). Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, was put to death by Joash (2 Chron. xxiv. 22).

Ver. 27.—**Thou gavest them saviours.** *E. g.* Othniel and Ehud (who are called "saviours," Judges iii. 9, 15), Shamgar, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Saul, David, &c. The writer seems to have the history of "Judges" especially in his mind (see the next verse).

Ver. 28.—**After they had rest.** See Judges iii. 11, 30; v. 31; viii. 28.

Ver. 29.—**Withdrew the shoulder.** Compare Hosea iv. 16 ("Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer") and Zech. vii. 11. The metaphor is taken from the action of a beast of burthen which, when required to draw, shrinks from the yoke and starts back.

Ver. 30.—**Many years didst thou forbear them.** The ten tribes for 260 years from the revolt of Jeroboam, the remaining two tribes for 135 years longer. **Testifiedst against them by thy Spirit in thy prophets.** Compare 2 Kings xvii. 13, where the phrase used is nearly the same, and see also 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, 16. There was a continual succession of prophets from the time of Solomon to, and through, the captivity. Besides those whose writings have come down to us, we find mention of Ahijah the Shilonite, Iddo the seer, Shemaiah the prophet, Hanani, Jehu the son of Hanani, Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah the son of Imlah, Zechariah the

son of Jehoiada, Huldah, and (perhaps) Hosai. The guilt of the Jewish people was enormously increased by the fact that **they would not give ear** to the exhortations constantly addressed to them by the messengers of God. Therefore they were delivered into the hands of the heathen, or people of the lands.

Ver. 32.—**Our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible.** Compare ch. i. 5, with the comment. **Who keepeth covenant and mercy.** This phrase, which occurs also in ch. i. 5, has apparently been derived from the Psalmist's words—"My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him" (Ps. lxxxix. 28). **All the trouble.** Literally, "the weariness;" but the word is clearly used here for "suffering" generally. **Since the time of the kings of Assyria.** The kings of Assyria, in the strictest sense of the word, had been God's original instrument for punishing his rebellious people. A king not mentioned in Holy Scripture tells us that he defeated Ahab, and forced Jehu to pay him tribute. Another (Pul) took tribute from Menahem (2 Kings xv. 19, 20). A third (Tiglath-Pileser) carried two tribes and a half into captivity (*ibid.* ver. 29; 1 Chron. v. 26). A fourth (Shalmaneser) laid siege to Samaria (2 Kings xvii. 5), and a fifth (Sargon) took it. A sixth (Sennacherib) took all the fenced cities of Judah from Hezekiah, and forced him to buy the safety of Jerusalem (*ibid.* ch. xviii. 13—16). A seventh (Esar-haddon) had Manasseh brought as a prisoner to Babylon (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11). Hence Isaiah calls the Assyrian monarch "the rod of God's anger" (Isa. x. 5).

Ver. 34.—**Thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them.** *I. e.* the testimony borne by the prophets (see ver. 30).

Ver. 35.—**They have not served thee in their kingdom.** There is no need of altering the reading here. "In their kingdom" means, "while they had a kingdom of their own, and were not subjects, as now, to a foreign power." **Thy great goodness.** See above, ver. 25. **The large and fat land.** Compare Exod. iii. 8. Although the limits of Palestine are narrow, yet the land which God gave to his people, extending as it did from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt (Gen. xv. 18), might well be termed a "large" or "broad" land.

Ver. 36.—**We are servants this day.** *I. e.* we have now no kingdom, we are slaves—the Persian is our master. As we would not be God's servants, we are handed over to him (comp. 2 Chron. xii. 8, where "the service of God" and "the service of the kingdoms of the countries" are contrasted).

Ver. 37.—**It yieldeth much increase unto**



the kings. "The Persian monarchs derive a large revenue from our territory." The amount paid by Judæa is not known; but Syria, in which Judæa was included, paid annually in money 350 talents of silver (Herod. iii. 91), or about £90,000. There was also a further contribution in kind. **They have dominion over our bodies.** They can impress us either as soldiers or sailors, and make us fight their battles for them. Jews probably took part in the expedition of Xerxes against Greece. **And over our cattle.** They can impress our cattle for their baggage-train.

Ver. 38.—**Because of all this.** Because

of our past sins and their punishment—to prevent a recurrence of similar conduct and similar afflictions. **We . . . seal unto it.** In the East it is always the seal that authenticates a document. Babylonian documents were often stamped with half a dozen seals or more. These were impressed upon the moist clay, and then the clay was baked. Sometimes each party to the contract stamped his seal upon a separate piece of sealing clay, which he then attached to the document by means of a string (Layard, 'Nineveh and Babylon,' p. 154). Any number of seals could be attached in this way.

## HOMILETICS

Vers. 1—3.—*A special Fast day—how spent.* This chapter and the next contain an account of the proceedings of a day set apart for special fasting and humiliation. These three verses give a general description of the proceedings.

I. The DATE. The 24th day of the month Tisri; only one clear day having passed since the rejoicings of the feast of tabernacles. So joy and sorrow succeed each other in life; in the religious life also. No inconsistency in the indulgence of each in turn. The people had shown a preparedness for special humiliation at the beginning of the month, at the feast of trumpets, when, the law being read to them, they wept. But they were bid to restrain their grief at that time because they were keeping a festival. Since then, on the tenth of the month, the day of atonement, the only fast day prescribed by the law, had doubtless been observed. But services of a more special kind were felt to be desirable, in which, by the united expressions of repentance and renewed covenant with God, the foundation should be laid for a life more in harmony with the law.

II. The SEPARATION from aliens effected. The meeting and its exercises were to be strictly for "the seed of Israel." Others could not really have fellowship with them in their recital of God's dealings with their fathers and their nation, nor share their sorrow or new resolutions. The Jews therefore "separated themselves from all strangers" for the time, and held a meeting of Jews only. Such seems to be the meaning of the words. Observe that community of faith and feeling is essential to united worship, and the deeper and fuller it is, so much the more real and profitable will the united worship be. The mixed congregation has its advantages, but earnest Christians will desire a closer fellowship than it affords, and which can be found only in meetings of those like-minded, apart for a time from the formal and half-hearted.

III. The EXTERNAL SIGNS of humiliation adopted. Fasting, abstinence from food, more or less rigid. A practice sanctioned by our Lord, and employed not only as an expression of humiliation, but as an aid to intense devotion (see Matt. iv. 2; xvii. 21; Acts xiii. 2, 3). Whether its very general disuse amongst Western Protestant Christians is to be attributed to a decreased devoutness, or an increased spirituality to which such methods and instruments of piety are alien, or to the experience that in Western climates fasting does not aid devotion, is worthy of consideration. What is certain is, that it is of no worth as a religious observance except as it promotes or expresses spiritual religion. In addition to fasting, these Jews wore sackclothes, and put earth on their heads—usages not uncommon with them in similar circumstances. Such signs of humiliation as these are, however, distinctly forbidden by our Lord, at least in the case of private devotion (Matt. vi. 16), as savouring of ostentation; and, doubtless, the more the spirit of the gospel prevails, such external signs become distasteful. And at any period they were valuable only as expressing and promoting real feelings of penitence. We can easily imagine how, where they were recognised signs of mourning, a whole assembly appearing in them would excite each other to deeper

grief, as in fact among ourselves is done when hundreds or thousands meet, on some occasion of general sorrow, all clothed in black.

IV. THE RELIGIOUS EXERCISES of the day. 1. The worship of God. Including—(1) Praise. Declarations of the Divine glory, and recitals of his wondrous works, in creation and in their national history. (2) Confession of sins. Their own sins and those of their fathers. The substance of the confession made is given in vers. 7—35. Confession of one's own sins is not only appropriate, but is a condition of forgiveness (Prov. xxviii. 13; 1 John i. 9). But why confess the sins of their fathers? It is to be remembered that this was a national gathering for national humiliation, introductory to a better national life. In such an assembly a review of the nation's sins would be very appropriate and profitable. It recalled the great cause of past national suffering, and of present degradation and subjection. It brought into light what must be avoided if better times were to arise. It produced the personal conviction of participation in the sins of those gone before, and the necessity of abandoning them. It enhanced the feeling of the great forbearance and mercy of God towards their nation, which at once deepened repentance and encouraged hope. (3) Prayer (ver. 32). 2. Reading of the law. This had held a prominent place in the celebration of the feasts both of trumpets and of tabernacles (see previous chapter), and had been the chief means of awakening that general sorrow for sin which had prepared the people for this special fast day. It would seem that they had been heretofore unfamiliar with "the book of the law," and that what they had recently heard had excited a hunger not easily satiated. On this occasion half the time was spent in reading and hearing portions of the book. Its precepts and histories would increase their penitence; the declarations which, amidst its legal enactments, it contained of the pardoning mercy of God, and the instances of its exercise which it recorded, would assure them that their repentance would not be in vain; and the whole would guide and stimulate their praises and confessions, supplications and good resolutions.

V. THE TIME OCCUPIED (ver. 3). It was a "protracted meeting." For six hours the congregation kept together. Half the time was employed in the reading of the law, doubtless with explanations similar to those recorded in ch. viii. 7, 8, and half in worship. Perhaps the two alternated with each other throughout the service. In times of general religious feeling very long services may be held without weariness; ordinarily they are undesirable; but the demand for very short ones is usually a sign of the decay of spiritual life. In conclusion—1. The foundation of a new or improved religious life must be laid in genuine repentance. 2. Knowledge of God's word is essential to an intelligent, acceptable, and lasting piety. The reading and exposition of Holy Scripture should therefore be prominent in public worship. 3. The reality and worth of our religious knowledge is to be estimated by its influence on our heart and life. Does it work in us repentance and a more godly and righteous life?

Vers. 4—6.—*United praise.* Commencement of the worship and confessions with general praise. I. THE LEADERS OF THE WORSHIP. An honourable and responsible office.

II. THEIR EXHORTATION TO THE PEOPLE. 1. As to the attitude in which they were to offer praise. "Stand up"—the fitting posture for this part of Divine worship. 2. As to the praise they were to offer. (1) To whom. "Jehovah your God." The true and living God, eternal and immutable; the God of Israel—he who revealed himself specially to them, took them into peculiar relation to himself, made them the objects of special care and discipline, gave them special promises. Christians have still greater reasons for calling Jehovah their God, and giving him praise. (2) How long. "For ever and ever." Indicates that God will for ever exist, and be worthy of praise, and actually praised; and that we should aspire and may hope to be eternally his worshippers.

III. THE UNITED PRAISE. 1. Introductory. (1) Praise of God's name. Of God as revealed and declared by his works and word. (2) Declaration of the inadequacy of all praise of God. "Which is exalted," &c. Not only can no words sufficiently express his majesty and infinite excellency, but no thoughts, no emotions (which often transcend thought as well as language; see Rom. viii. 26) are worthy of them.

And not only is *our* praise inadequate, but "*all* blessing and praise." This is not a reason for withholding our worship, for then no praise would be offered in heaven or earth, but for striving after nobler thoughts and feelings and language, and offering all with deepest humility. God condescends to accept the poorest worship, if sincere, and the best we can present. 2. Praise of God as "Jehovah alone." 3. Ascription to him of the creation of all things (ver. 6). A great truth not only unknown to most of the heathen, but given up by many cultivated men in Christian lands. In the praise of God the display of his power, wisdom, and goodness in the work of creation should hold a prominent place. He who made all should receive homage from all his intelligent creatures.

IV. THE RECOGNITION OF OTHER WORSHIPPERS. "The host of heaven worshippeth thee." It is inspiring, when uniting in Divine worship, to remember our fellow-worshippers, and thus cultivate fellowship with them (compare the beginning of the *Te Deum*). The Jews had not this satisfaction in respect to any other people. They alone worshipped the true God, and they had not learned to think and feel as to heathen worship that it was about equivalent to their own. All the more gladly did they recognise that their God, unknown and unworshipped by the rest of the world, was adored and praised and served by hosts of exalted intelligences in other worlds. To us, also, this is an inspiring truth, adapted to stimulate and elevate our worship. The greatest beings God has made bow down with lowliness before him, and with all the ardour of their seraphic nature celebrate his praise. We need not be ashamed to be like them, but should seek to make our worship resemble theirs as nearly as possible, and be thankful that, through the mediation of our Redeemer, in whom heaven and earth are united, it is as acceptable to God. They praise the Saviour as well as the Creator; we praise him with a feeling they cannot share; for he redeemed *us* by his blood, not them.

Vers. 7, 8.—*God's favour to Abraham*. The multitude, led by the Levites, now begin the recital of God's gracious dealings with their race; and, first, with their great ancestor, Abraham. By the words, "Thou art Jehovah God," they allege that it was the only living and true God, the Creator of all things, who distinguished Abraham, and through him their nation, by his favour. They then recount—

I. His CHOICE of Abraham. Of his own gracious will separating him from others, to preserve the knowledge and worship of himself, and to be the Father of the people whom he appointed to be peculiarly his own.

II. His LEADING him from Chaldæa to Canaan.

III. His CHANGE of his name from Abram to Abraham. Thus promising him a numerous posterity.

IV. His RECOGNITION of his faithfulness. A reference to Gen. xv. 6, where "believed" is part of the same verb as the word "faithful" here (comp. Gal. iii. 9—"faithful Abraham"). Abraham was faithful in heart, and that before God. He trusted God, and continued to trust him through all trials of his faith. He was faithful in maintaining the worship of God in the midst of idolaters, and in teaching his household to "keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment" (Gen. xviii. 19). And God marked and rewarded his fidelity.

V. His COVENANT with him. Gen. xv. 18—21 seems especially referred to. The larger promises, that Abraham and his posterity should be a blessing to all men, do not here come into view.

VI. His PERFORMANCE of the covenant. In which God's righteousness is recognised (ver. 6).

*Reflections*:—1. All blessings enjoyed by men have their origin in the free grace and choice of God. 2. Yet God in his treatment of men has regard to their faithfulness to him. 3. The righteousness, as well as the goodness, of God assures us that he will fulfil all his promises. 4. We as well as the Jews have reason to praise God for the grace shown to Abraham. For he is our spiritual ancestor, "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. iv. 11).

Ver. 8.—*Faithfulness of heart*. "And foundest his heart faithful before thee." We have here—

I. A PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTIC OF A GODLY MAN. 1. Its seat. The heart. No

merely outward practices constitute faithfulness before God. 2. Its reality. It is faithfulness "before God," such as he who searches the heart can see to exist; not merely what men might from outward appearances erroneously think to exist. 3. Its principle. Faith in God (see above, IV.). 4. Its manifestations. (1) Confession. Open acknowledgment of God, and testimony for him. (2) Worship. (3) Obedience. (4) Fidelity in use of talents for God. (5) Constancy and perseverance in all. Notwithstanding temptations, difficulties, opposition, persecution, defections of others.

II. THE DIVINE RECOGNITION OF IT. 1. He knows and marks it. "Foundest," &c. "The Father seeketh such," and rejoices to find them. If unobserved by men, not by him. 2. He accepts it. Though it be accompanied with imperfections, as in the case of Abraham. 3. He honours and rewards it. With gracious assurances, and the fulfilment of them. To the faithful he will show himself faithful. They shall at length be addressed, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." In conclusion, God sees all hearts; what does he find in ours?

Vers. 9—11.—*Redemption from Egypt.* The people proceed to celebrate the power and goodness of God as displayed in the deliverance of their ancestors from Egyptian bondage.

I. THE CONDITION FROM WHICH THEY WERE DELIVERED. It was one of—1. Cruel oppression. "They dealt proudly," insolently and cruelly, "against them." 2. Misery. "The affliction of our fathers."

II. THE SUCCESSIVE STEPS OF THEIR DELIVERANCE. 1. The Divine notice of their condition. "Didst see," &c., "thou knewest," &c. God seemed to have forgotten them, but he had not. His eye was on them; their condition interested him; and at length, in the fulness of time, he interposed to rescue them. 2. The plagues inflicted on the ruler and people of Egypt. 3. The wonders wrought at the Red Sea. In utmost apparent peril, the people and Moses cried unto God; he heard "their cry" (ver. 9), divided the waters, led the Israelites safely through, and overwhelmed their "pursuers."

III. ONE GREAT RESULT OF THEIR DELIVERANCE. "So didst thou get thee a name," &c. (comp. Exod. ix. 16). Jehovah secured for himself a name for power, terrible-ness, special favour to Israel; a name widespread, lasting ("as it is this day," and still in our day); a name to be revered, trusted, loved, rejoiced in, praised, published. The Jews never wearied of proclaiming in their Psalms the name of him who redeemed them from Egypt so marvellously; and, in recalling this great redemption to mind, renewed from time to time their confidence that God who had done so much for them would not forsake them. Notice—1. The importance of these events for the Israelites. Not only for their immediate effects; but they gave the nation birth, separated them from the spiritual perils of Egypt, its idolatry, &c. Their passage through the Red Sea was their national baptism unto Moses, and unto God by him (1 Cor. x. 2), consecrating them to be the people of God, to learn and practise his laws, maintain his worship, preserve the knowledge of him for the benefit ultimately of the world. 2. Their significance for us. (1) Direct. As a display of the power and goodness of our God, his mindfulness of his people in their sorrows, and sure deliverance of them, though they may long have to "wait for him." As a pledge of the final triumph of his Church over all its enemies. And as one of the most marvellous of that series of interpositions which had for their object the enlightenment and salvation of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. (2) Typical. Of the great redemption wrought for us in Christ by his death and the power of the Holy Ghost. The creation and consecration of a new and larger "Israel of God." This redemption is, like that of the Israelites, a deliverance from slavery into freedom, from degradation into honour, from misery into happiness, with the prospect of a settled and blessed rest; but vastly superior in respect to the marvels by which it was, and is, wrought, the evils from which it saves, and the blessings to which it introduces. Estimating these aright, we shall be prepared and impelled to "sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Rev. xv. 3).

Ver. 10.—*The Divine self-made name.* "So didst thou get [make] thee a name, as it is this day." "What is thy name?" is a question asked of God by thoughtful men in all ages. How shall we conceive and speak of God? The answer is found

in the various manifestations he has made of himself. He is the maker and publisher of his own name.

I. THE WAYS BY WHICH GOD HAS MADE FOR HIMSELF A NAME. 1. By his works. Of nature, providence, miracle, grace. 2. By his word. Directly instructing men how to think and speak of him, and enabling them to interpret his works. 3. Pre-eminently by the manifestation of himself in his Son. The character, teaching, and works of Christ present a perfect revelation of the invisible God. "I have declared thy name, and will declare it" (John xvii. 26).

II. THE NAME HE HAS THUS MADE FOR HIMSELF. The Almighty, All-wise, All-good, the Holy, Just, Faithful, Merciful, Terrible, Father and Saviour of all, especially of believers, LOVE, &c.

III. ITS ENDURANCE. "As it is this day." He remains the same; his name is so written that it can never be blotted out, so proclaimed that it shall resound through the world, through the universe, for ever.

IV. WHY HE HAS MADE HIMSELF SUCH A NAME. For his own glory, and for the benefit of his creatures; that they may fear, trust, love, worship, and obey him, and thus be saved and blessed. Finally, we shall at length in our own personal experience know and illustrate the name of God. Which part of his name? This depends on how we are affected by and towards it now.

Vers. 12—21.—*Israel in the desert.* The people now recount the mercies of God to their fathers in the desert, and confess the sins of which they were guilty there. After deliverance from Egypt, the desert had to be passed before Canaan could be reached; and there the people were instructed and organised, tried and proved, disciplined and chastised, and thus prepared for orderly settlement as a nation in the promised land.

I. THE DIVINE FAVOURS BY WHICH THEY WERE DISTINGUISHED. 1. Miraculous guidance (vers. 12, 19). 2. Miraculous provisions (vers. 15, 20, 21). 3. Miraculous legislation (vers. 13, 14). (1) How the laws were given. Partly by the voice of God from Sinai (ver. 13), chiefly by the mediation of Moses (ver. 14). (2) Of what they consisted. In general they are described as "right judgments and true laws," &c. (vers. 13, 14). In particular, the institution of the Sabbath is mentioned (ver. 14)—one of the greatest and best gifts of God to them. 4. The gift of God's "good Spirit" (ver. 20). Reference may be made to the Spirit of God as given to Moses, and to the seventy elders (Numb. xi. 17, 25), or even Bezaleel and Aholiab (Exod. xxxv. 31—35). But looking at such passages as Ps. li. 11; cxliii. 10, it is quite as possible that the enlightening influence of the Spirit on the minds and hearts of the people in general may be referred to. 5. The command to enter Canaan. Ver. 15, where "promisedst them" (lit. "saidst to them") should probably be "commandedst them." The command, however, virtually included a renewed promise. God had "sworn to give them" it; now they are bid to go in and take possession of it; implying that God would give them possession if they obeyed his call.

II. THE GROSS INIQUITIES BY WHICH THEY DISTINGUISHED THEMSELVES. Notwithstanding the wonderful manifestations of God amongst them, and his great kindness. 1. "Proud and stubborn disobedience" (vers. 16, 17). 2. Purpose to return to Egypt (ver. 17; see Numb. xiv. 1—4). Just on the borders of the promised land they refused to advance into it, terrified by the report of most of the spies, and not exercising faith in his power who had wrought for them so mightily. Yea, they proposed to return to the land of bondage, and "appointed a captain" to lead them thither. 3. Idolatry (ver. 18). A violation of the fundamental principle of their law.

III. THE DIVINE FORBEARANCE, MERCY, AND CONSTANCY (vers. 17, 19, 20). They "wrought great provocations," and numbers of them were heavily punished; yea, all who came out of Egypt, except two, were forbidden to enter Canaan, and died in the wilderness; yet even these continued during their lives to enjoy Divine guidance and sustenance, so that "they lacked nothing." God showed himself "ready to pardon," &c. (ver. 17), and displayed his "manifold mercies," and did not forsake them. To the children he fulfilled the promises, the benefit of which the fathers had forfeited.

IV. THE LONG DURATION OF HIS MIRACULOUS SUSTENANCE OF THEM (ver. 21).

LESSONS:—1. The goodness of God and the depravity of man. The history of Israel is full of both. So is all history. "The earth is full of the goodness

of the Lord," and also full of human wickedness. Each is rendered more conspicuous by the other; and the contrast makes one appear more glorious, the other more hideous. 2. As, after deliverance from Egypt, the desert had to be traversed before Canaan could be enjoyed, so is it in the Christian life. This world is a desert in comparison with heaven, and the journey through it is difficult and perilous. But it lies between conversion and heaven, and must be crossed. 3. Through this desert, however, God conducts his people. He guides, provides, protects, instructs, governs, and thus trains and prepares them for the promised inheritance. This is our comfort amid all the discomforts and dangers of the journey. 4. In ordinary mercies the agency of God is as real as in the miraculous. Our food, drink, clothing, &c. are as truly his gifts as the manna, &c. which he bestowed on Israel. His power, wisdom, and goodness are as really displayed in them, and both more extensively and more marvellously. 5. Amongst God's best gifts are his revelations of himself and his laws; his crowning gift is his Spirit. Under the Christian dispensation all these are far superior to the similar blessings vouchsafed to Israel. Our responsibilities are, therefore, greater; our moral and spiritual state should be far higher, our thankfulness more ardent. 6. We have a promise of a better inheritance than Canaan, with a command to journey steadily towards it; let us beware lest we come short of it through unbelief and disobedience.

Ver. 20.—*The Holy Spirit as a Teacher.* "Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them." This assertion is more emphatically true of Christians than of Israel. We live under "the dispensation of the Spirit," when the "promise of the Spirit" is more abundantly fulfilled. We have here—

I. A WONDERFUL DISPLAY OF DIVINE MERCY. It is in the midst of the narration of Israel's pride and stubbornness that this statement is made. So it is to a rebellious world that God's Spirit comes to instruct, restore, and save.

II. AN INVALUABLE GIFT. 1. Its nature. Special Divine influence and operation—the Holy Spirit acting on and in the minds and hearts of men. (1) In and through inspired men and their utterances by speech or writing. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." By such inspiration what might have been otherwise learned is taught more clearly and authoritatively, and the truths which especially relate to salvation, which could not have been otherwise known, are revealed. (2) In the hearts of men generally. Those especially to whom the gospel comes enjoy this great blessing, for their enlightenment, conviction, conversion, regeneration, and sanctification. (3) Through the Church. That is, through the speech and life of Christians, and in connection with Christian fellowship, worship, and ordinances. Not, however, as a magical influence to be dispensed at the will of men. 2. Its goodness. "Thy good Spirit." Intended not to describe the personal goodness of the Holy Spirit, but the value of his influence to men. Amongst the gifts of God to Israel named in the context, this was incalculably the best. The gifts of God which we call providential are invaluable; those of his grace are of far higher value, and of these this is the greatest. Without the Spirit no other Divine gift would avail for our highest and everlasting well-being. This renders all other blessings truly blessed. The good Spirit makes all things good to us, even those which we call evil, yea, those which in themselves are evil.

III. A GRAND OPPORTUNITY. "To instruct them." Each one of us may have the inestimable advantage of a Divine Teacher who not only speaks to the ear, or the eye, but enters the heart, and whose instructions are the most essential to our welfare. He makes "wise unto salvation." The only conditions are faith in him and his teaching, willingness to learn and practise his lessons, and prayer for his influences.

IV. A HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY. In proportion to the value of God's gifts are the responsibilities they impose. No responsibility can, therefore, be so heavy as that which arises from the gift of the Holy Ghost; the presence amongst us, the influence upon us, of a Divine Person proffering and pressing his aid to lead us to God, goodness, and heaven. Happy those who receive him into their hearts as a permanent guest and guide—the life of their life, the soul of their soul. But let us take heed lest we "grieve the Holy Spirit of God," or "do despite unto the Spirit of grace," and he depart from us utterly and for ever, leaving us to the "sorer punishment"

which falls on those to whom God comes most nearly and graciously, and is rejected by them.

Vers. 22—25.—*Canaan conquered and possessed.* Continuing the recital of the goodness of God to their nation, the people narrate how their fathers obtained possession of the promised land. All is ascribed to God.

I. HE PRESERVED THE NATION to enter the land (ver. 23). Although those who left Egypt died, two excepted, in the desert, their children were multiplied “as the stars of heaven.”

II. HE CONQUERED THE COUNTRY, AND GAVE THEM POSSESSION OF IT. First, kingdoms east of the Jordan (ver. 22), then the rest of the land (ver. 24). Although the inhabitants were numerous and valiant, he subdued them; through his might they took even “strong cities” (ver. 25).

III. THE LAND HE GAVE THEM WAS OF GREAT VALUE, AND AFFORDED THEM MUCH ENJOYMENT (ver. 25).

IV. HE THUS FULFILLED HIS PROMISES (ver. 23).

*Reflections:*—1. The perpetuation of the nation of Israel reminds us of the perpetuity of the Church of Christ. Notwithstanding the death of successive generations of Christians, the ravages of error, worldliness, &c., its continuance is guaranteed by the promise, “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” 2. The fulfilment of the promise of Canaan, after so long a period, should assure us of the fulfilment of all the promises of God. “He is faithful that promised,” and he is almighty to overcome all obstacles and opposition. 3. The possession of a good land should excite our gratitude and praise. Our land is superior to Canaan in many respects, supplied with all kinds of advantages which the labours of others have created for us; and, like later generations of Israelites, we inherit it without conquest, and with far less peril of invasion than they experienced. God is the Giver of all, and should ever be praised for all; and we should be concerned lest by godlessness and unrighteousness we forfeit our inheritance. 4. Christians are heirs of “a better country.” Heaven is like Canaan, as the gift of God, according to his promises; as a “rest” after much wandering and unrest, and as abounding in whatever can minister to enjoyment, and cause its inhabitants to “delight themselves in God’s great goodness.” But it is vastly superior, as a country never polluted by idolatry and wickedness; whose inhabitants are all holy; which no foe can invade, no sin, suffering, or death can enter; whose enjoyments are all pure, spiritual, and without peril; and from which is no expulsion. It is “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and which fadeth not away”—an eternal possession.

Vers. 26—31.—*Israel’s wickedness and God’s goodness.* A summary of the national history from the entrance into Canaan to the captivity. A dismal story; but, as was natural and suitable in a confession of sin, the more pleasing facts are omitted.

I. THE GREAT AND INVERTEBRATE WICKEDNESS OF THE PEOPLE. This is described by various terms and phrases, and its heinousness exhibited in many particulars. 1. Flagrant disobedience to the Divine laws. Although so good and so adapted to promote their welfare, “which if a man do, he shall live in them” (ver. 29). 2. Proud and stubborn disregard of the Divine remonstrances and warnings. 3. Persecution even unto death of God’s inspired messengers (ver. 26). 4. Repeated relapses after partial reformation. Notwithstanding—(1) The severity of the chastisements which produced it. (2) The fervour of their prayers for deliverance, and promises of amendment. (3) The signal and numerous deliverances effected for them in answer to their prayers. 5. The persistence of their disobedience.

II. THE MARVELLOUS AND LONG-CONTINUED GOODNESS OF GOD. 1. In sending them successive messengers to warn them and lead them to repentance. Even when they slew some, he sent others. 2. In inflicting punishment upon them for the same end. 3. In repeatedly answering their prayers for deliverance. 4. In bearing with them so long, although “they wrought great provocations.” 5. In preserving a remnant when at length he scattered the nation (ver. 31). Showing himself throughout “a gracious and merciful God.”

*Reflections:*—1. Sin and suffering are indissolubly linked together. 2. Suffering

is inflicted that sin may be subdued. 3. Amendment produced by suffering is often only temporary. 4. Persistence in sin insures ultimate ruin. 5. The goodness of God is shown in the testimony he maintains against sin, and the chastisements he inflicts on the sinner. 6. God is faithful to his promises, although men prove unfaithful (ver. 31). 7. The history of Israel is a mirror in which all may see their own likeness. Nations and individuals; some more, some less. Even sincere Christians in a measure. Many can say with good George Herbert—

“Lord, with what care hast thou begirt us round!  
 Parents first season us; then schoolmasters  
 Deliver us to laws; they send us bound  
 To rules of reason, holy messengers,  
 Pulpits and Sundays, sorrow dogging sin,  
 Afflictions sorted, anguish of all sizes,  
 Fine nets and stratagems to catch us in,  
 Bibles laid open, millions of surprises,  
 Blessings beforehand, ties of gratefulness,  
 The sound of glory ringing in our ears;  
 Without, our shame; within, our consciences;  
 Angels and grace, eternal hopes and fears:  
 Yet all these fences and their whole array  
 One cunning bosom-sin blows quite away.”

Ver. 29.—*The Divine testimony against sin.* “And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law.” The Divine testimony against sin and sinners is repeatedly mentioned in this confession (see vers. 26, 30). We may take a general view of it.

I. THE WITNESS OF GOD AGAINST SIN AND SINNERS. 1. In his holy laws. Declaring his will, denouncing disobedience, and warning against its consequences. 2. In his revelations of eternity, judgment, hell, heaven. “There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth.” 3. In the nature of man. The testimony of conscience; the evil effects of sin on the body (diseases, death) and the soul, disordering, debasing, blunting the conscience, hardening the heart, &c. 4. In the effects of sin on the circumstances of the sinner. 5. In the effects of sin on society. Destruction of mutual esteem and confidence. Disorders, divisions, miseries. 6. In the methods of salvation from sin. The sufferings borne by our Lord in atoning for sin. The pains of conviction, penitence, &c. produced by the word and Spirit of God. 7. By the Church. Its constitution as a society avowedly renouncing sin, and called to battle against it everywhere. Its ministry, ordinances, examples of holiness, discipline on offenders.

II. ITS DESIGN. 1. To deter from sin. 2. To produce repentance. “That thou mightest bring them again unto thy law.”

III. THE REVELATION OF GOD WHICH IS THUS MADE. Manifestations of—1. His hatred to sin. Which his permission of its prevalence might seem to put in question. 2. His benevolence. His testimonies against sin are so many entreaties that men would not injure themselves, so many safeguards against their doing so, so many strong reasons for turning from sin to holiness, and thus from misery to blessedness. 3. His justice in condemning the impenitent. Disregard of the Divine testimony against sin will work final ruin, but the lost sinner will have only himself to blame. “To-day,” then, “if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.” Let it not be said of you, “Yet would they not give ear” (ver. 30).

Vers. 32—38.—*A sorrowful appeal to the Divine compassion.* The conclusion of the public united confession. It contains—

I. AN APPROPRIATE INVOCATION. Similar to that of Nehemiah (ch. i. 5), and which would be felt as suitable after the preceding recital of the Divine proceedings.

II. AN APPEAL TO THE DIVINE PITY. In view of—1. The greatness of their past troubles (ver. 32). “Let not all the trouble seem little.” “Do not regard it as too little to require notice and relief. Rather see how great it is, and bring it in mercy to an end.” Perhaps, however, the meaning is, “Let it be deemed sufficient to



answer the design of punishment, and therefore be now terminated" (comp. Isa. xl. 2). 2. Their present depressed condition (vers. 36, 37). A condition of subjection to the Gentiles, of spoliation, and of "great distress."

III. AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE IN THEIR TREATMENT (vers. 33—35).

IV. A DECLARATION OF THEIR MAKING A SOLEMN AND FAITHFUL UNITED COVENANT. A fitting conclusion of the day's proceedings. In conclusion—1. The justice of God in inflicting chastisement should be heartily acknowledged by those who implore its cessation or mitigation. 2. Review of our past lives is adapted to and should excite humiliation, penitence, and resolutions of amendment. Therefore—

"Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours,  
And ask them what report they bore to heaven,  
And how they might have borne more welcome news."

Ver. 33.—*The justice of God in punishing sinners.* "Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly." The words express a just and salutary conviction, and make an acknowledgment suitable to accompany an appeal to the Divine compassion.

I. THE CONVICTION EXPRESSED. Of very great importance that we should not only verbally utter it, but sincerely feel it. How may we arrive at this conviction? 1. By faith in God's essential rectitude. That he cannot be unrighteous in any of his proceedings (see Deut. xxxii. 4). 2. By considering the rectitude and goodness of the laws against which we have sinned. 3. By remembering all that God has done to guard us against sin (see on ver. 29). If we sin notwithstanding, we are justly punished. 4. By calling to mind our sins. Their essential evil, their number and magnitude, and the circumstances which aggravate their guiltiness (God's varied kindness, our opportunities, advantages, knowledge, convictions, good resolutions, &c.). Such a review will lead us to exclaim with Ezra, "Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve" (Ezra ix. 13). 5. By comparing what we endure with the Divine threatenings. The Israelites had been warned of the consequences of their rebellion against God. He was only fulfilling his word. So it is with us. What we suffer is no more, is indeed less, than we were warned to expect.

II. THE BENEFITS OF SUCH A CONVICTION. 1. It will prevent our murmuring at our sufferings. "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" (Lam. iii. 39). 2. It will greatly aid in producing repentance. Suffering is likely to do its proper work in humbling us and making sin odious when we recognise the justice of God in inflicting it. 3. It will lead to an appeal to the mercy of God for deliverance. Such an appeal, made through Christ, will be regarded, while an appeal to justice would be as futile as groundless. Finally, observe that the goodness of God is as conspicuous as his justice in the sufferings he inflicts in this life. They have in view "our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness," and so of true and everlasting blessedness. But if through our perversity they fail of this result, they are followed by the penalties of "judgment without mercy."

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5, 16—18, 26, 28—30, 33—35.—*Confession.* The feast of tabernacles, held in such wise as Israel had not known since the days of Joshua (ch. viii. 17), concluded, "according unto the manner" of that festival, with a "solemn assembly" on the eighth day (ch. viii. 18)—"the last day, that great day of the feast" (John vii. 37). After one day's interval, when nothing unusual was done, "on the twenty-fourth day of the month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting" (ver. 1), and a very great day was held of confession, adoration, and prayer. This was entirely an optional act on their part; it was not done to conform to any injunction—it was felt to be a suitable and desirable thing. Under the law there was some—under the gospel is more—*room for spontaneous service.* Not only the ordinances and services that are prescribed, but such and so many as the cultivation of our spiritual life requires, are what the wise and the good will practise. These should not be

(1) *so many* as to keep us from taking a fair share in the duties of daily life and of citizenship, or as to lead insensibly to formality and ceremonialism; nor should they be (2) *so few* as to starve the soul or withhold from it the full nourishment it needs. Ezra and Nehemiah may have felt that the intense and prolonged exaltation of heart in which they had been luxuriating was not without its dangers, and would be wisely followed by a calmer service. In the cultivation of our religious character, *one kind of service should alternate with another*—the contemplative with the social, the spiritual with the practical, and the joyous and congratulatory with the penitential. Confession of sin was the key-note of this entire service. It found utterance in two ways.

I. OUTWARD SIGNS OF HUMILIATION (ver. 1). "The children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackcloth and earth upon them" (ver. 1). They took those measures to indicate humility which in their age and land were natural to them: (1) fasting, (2) wearing sackcloth, (3) putting earth or "sprinkling dust" (Job ii. 12) on their head. Whenever outward manifestations of this kind—"bowing down the head as a bulrush, or spreading sackcloth and ashes" (Isa. lviii. 5), or fasting—become purely formal or simply ostentatious (Matt. vi. 16), they become unacceptable or even positively repugnant to him who demands sincerity and spirituality (Ps. li. 2; John iv. 24). But the bent head, the downcast eye, the uncontrollable tear, the unconscious sigh—these are often the inarticulate but eloquent utterances of contrition which the eye of the all-seeing, the ear of the all-hearing Father fails not to see and hear.

II. WORDS OF PENITENCE. One "fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the Lord their God" (ver. 3). "With a loud voice" (ver. 4) the eight Levites led their devotions, calling on them to "stand up and bless the Lord their God for ever and ever" (ver. 5), and then the people followed them in their confession; thus:—"Our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, and refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them" (vers. 16, 17); they "wrought great provocations" (ver. 18); "they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs" (ver. 26); "they did evil again before thee" (ver. 28); "they dealt proudly, and sinned against thy judgments, . . . they withdrew the shoulder" (ver. 29). "We have done wickedly: neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, or our fathers kept thy law; . . . they have not served thee . . . in thy great goodness." Here is ample and unreserved confession of their own and their fathers' guilt:—1. *Manifest* shortcoming—not hearkening to commandments, being unmindful of wonders, not serving God in his great goodness. 2. *Positive and aggravated* transgression—dealing proudly, working great provocations, rebelling against God, casting law behind them, &c. 3. *Backsliding*—"withdrawing the shoulder" that had been given to the yoke. We are summoned to "take with us *words* and turn to the Lord" (Hosea xiv. 2). "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. x. 10). Our confession should be (1) ample and unconstrained, including (a) shortcoming, (b) transgression, and, if called for, (c) backsliding; it must be (2) sincere—not a mere repetition of becoming words which other penitents have employed, but the utterance of what our own heart feels.—C.

Vers. 1—29.—*A prayerful review of Divine goodness as manifested in the facts of human life.* I. This is a prayerful review of the Divine NAME. "And blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise" (ver. 5). 1. It views God as the Creator of all things (ver. 6). 2. It views God as electing his people (ver. 7). 3. It views God as covenanting with the faithful (ver. 8). 4. It views God as delivering his people in the time of sore affliction (vers. 9, 10).

II. This is a prayerful review of the Divine ACTION. "And thou didst divide the sea before them" (ver. 11). 1. The act of deliverance (ver. 11). 2. The act of guidance. "Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar" (ver. 12). 3. The act of instruction (vers. 13, 14). 4. The act of provision. "And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger" (ver. 15). 5. The act of forbearance (ver. 17). 6. The act of conquest (ver. 24). 7. The act of retribution (ver. 27).—E.

Vers. 1—38.—*The solemn fast of assembled Israel.* Notice three features in the people's religious life. 1. Their confession of sin. 2. Their external reformation. 3. Their solemn adoption of the written word of God as the law of their life. Take these as representative, universal.

I. HUMILIATION AND CONFESSION. 1. *Public and united* as well as *private and solitary*. Great impressiveness in numbers. The heart needs the stimulus of contact with great waves of feeling. There is much in the expression of religious emotion to feed and sustain it. 2. The sense of sin should not be merely the acknowledgment of individual transgressions, but of *moral helplessness*. "They confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers." They recounted the history of Divine grace and the backslidings of his people. It kept alive in their hearts the sense of their utter dependence on the free, unmerited mercy of Jehovah. 3. The penitential spirit will clothe itself in an appropriate dress. The people fasted and put on sackcloth and earth, as signs of mourning and self-humiliation. We are not enjoined to adopt their religious customs, but there is a natural expression of penitence which is not formality or self-righteousness. Self-denial, simplicity of life and manners, practical remembrance of the nothingness of earthly things. "Moderation known unto all men."

II. THE REFORMATION OF THE OUTWARD LIFE. There are external conditions under which alone the true service of God can be fulfilled. Such are—1. *Complete separation* from alliance with ungodly strangers. The uncompromising purity of our conversation is our only safeguard. The truly consecrated heart will renounce all for God. Often a sacrifice will be involved, but to give up the old life is to save the new. 2. Attention to the *public observance of religious ordinances*. The most humble and sanctified natures appreciate such opportunities the most. Neglect of the house of God is a sure sign of decay of the spiritual life. Nothing can be substituted for it. Solitary religion may be sincere, but it cannot be entirely healthy, and is generally apt to grow morbid. The consecrated gifts of God's people are placed at our disposal by the mingling together of hearts and voices, and the use of a prepared expression of religious feeling. 3. *The service of God in the daily life*. "In the land which thou gavest unto our fathers;" "behold, we are servants in it." Religion must be made a reality, not only in the public assembly, but in the household, in the place of business, in the relations we sustain to fellow-men, in national life, in all the land.

III. THE SOLEMN COVENANT SEALED BY GOD'S PEOPLE, ADOPTION OF HIS WORD AS THE ONE ONLY LAW TO BE OBSERVED. "We make a sure covenant, and write it." 1. The covenant rests upon a covenant. We stand upon the ground which God himself has prepared for us—the history of his faithfulness and love in the past. We dare not undertake to live by the law of God except we have the assurance of his grace. The Old Testament is the precious support of our faith as we pledge ourselves to Christ in the new covenant of the gospel. We are able to surround ourselves with the cloud of witnesses. 2. The fellowship of faith our help. Those who have set their seals to the same writing hold up each other's strength in the fulfilment of the vow. Princes, Levites, priests, with the people. God is no respecter of persons; but when all ranks and offices are united in his service, the confidence of all is maintained, and the spirit of brotherhood feeds the spirit of self-sacrifice. 3. Public consecration and profession of obedience should be the *result of a deep, inward work of God's Spirit*, in the renewal of the heart and life. All rash vows are wrong; how much more those made in the name of religion! Because we repent and return to the Lord, we may safely make a covenant of faithfulness; but a mere sealing of the outward man, without a spiritual renovation, is a mockery and a snare. 4. *Enlightenment* should accompany all public religious acts. The people heard the word and understood it before they solemnly pledged themselves to keep the law. There can be no healthy revival of religion which is not founded on enlightenment. The great assemblies are easily moved to common action; but the preparation for it should be the clear, full, simple announcement of the gospel. We can never take too much account of the fact that the human heart deceives itself, that ignorance blinds, that selfishness and slothfulness hide the wonders of the past and the dangers of the future. The *whole* word of God should be the foundation on which religious life is built up.—R.

Vers. 2, 31—33, 36—38.—*Appeal*. It has been remarked that there is no prayer in this lengthy address to God. And the absence of direct supplication is certainly very noticeable. But it must be remembered that we may make our appeal to God in more ways than by directly asking him for the blessings we desire at his hand. The comparative and almost complete absence of formal petition from this address suggests to us that we may go far towards winning our cause by—

I. PRESENTING THE SOUL BEFORE GOD IN A RECEPTIVE SPIRITUAL STATE. It is only in some spiritual conditions that we can expect to be recipients of his bounty. Not to be in the right state is to lock the door at which we stand. By such an address as this the Jews either showed themselves to be in, or brought themselves into, an acceptable recipient condition. There were—1. The solemn recognition of God's excellency; of his greatness—"Our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God" (ver. 32); of his goodness—"thy great mercies' sake;" . . . "thou art a gracious and merciful God" (ver. 31); of his faithfulness—"who keepest covenant and mercy" (ver. 32); of his justice—"thou art just in all that is brought upon us" (ver. 33). 2. Sense of their own ill-desert. "Thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly." 3. Readiness to separate from sin. "The seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers" (ver. 2). "If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us" (Ps. lxvi. 18; Isa. i. 15). 4. Preparedness to pledge themselves to his service. The Jews were prepared to "make a sure covenant, and write it and seal it" (ver. 38). Thus, on this occasion, the children of Israel presented themselves before God, and not only showed, as they began to speak reverently and humbly to him, but gained more as they proceeded, a fitting spiritual condition for receiving his Divine communications. It is not by "loud speaking," nor by "much speaking" (Matt. vi. 7), but rather by asking in a right temper and mode, that we make a forcible and prevailing appeal to the Divine Helper; presenting ourselves before him as suppliants in the spirit of (1) profound reverence, (2) deep humility, (3) genuine consecration.

II. REQUEST IN WORDS (vers. 32, 36, 37). "Now therefore, our God, . . . let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, and on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day" (ver. 32). "Behold," continues this appeal, "we are servants, and the land thou gavest unto our fathers, . . . we are servants in it: and it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us: . . . they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress" (vers. 36, 37). This is (1) a direct appeal to the pitifulness of Jehovah that he would have compassion on them who were slaves in their own land—their persons and their property being at the mercy of a foreign prince; it was also (2) an indirect appeal to his faithfulness and justice. For had not God chastened them very long and very sore?—he who had promised to forgive them their iniquities when they returned unto him; he who would not make his punishment to be out of proportion to their offence. They desired to "see the beauty of the Lord" (his righteousness, his equity), that they might be "made glad according to the days wherein he had afflicted them, and the years wherein they had seen evil" (Ps. xc. 15, 17). In making our appeal to God there are two things which will ever be the substance and burden of our plea:—(1) the soreness of our necessity: our weakness, our want, our trouble, our humiliation, our darkness and ignorance, our repeated failure, our distance from the goal and the prize; (2) the greatness of his goodness: his pitifulness, his patience, his considerateness, his promised mercy, his faithfulness. We may come hopefully to his throne because he is "a gracious and merciful God," pleading his "great mercies' sake" (ver. 31). But more than that, we may come "boldly" to the throne of his grace, because he is One that "keeps covenant" (ver. 32) as well as "mercy," because he has pledged his word to us in Christ Jesus, and he will be "faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."—C.

Vers. 6—15, 19—25, 27—31.—*Adoration and thanksgiving*. At this great and solemn gathering, which followed the feast of tabernacles, Ezra and eight Levites led the whole assembly in a reverent address and appeal to God. It is thought by some

that the record of it in this chapter (vers. 6—38) is the exact copy of it as then written down for the use of the Levites; or it may be the leading topics of it as afterwards recollected and recorded. We have seen that confession of sin is the groundwork and substance of it. But it includes *adoration and thanksgiving*, for the grateful recital of the excellences of God's character and the graciousness of his dealings would be the very thing to deepen and to quicken penitence for their sin. A realisation of God's holiness and a remembrance of his kindness are inseparably connected with the sense of our own guilt. This recital of the goodness of God, both general and particular, contains reference to—1. The essential greatness of God: as the one Lord; Creator and Preserver of men; Maker of heaven, "with all their host;" . . . whom "the host of heaven worshippeth" (ver. 6). 2. His distinguishing goodness to Israel: choosing Abraham (ver. 7), working great wonders on behalf of the race (vers. 10, 11), giving them a day of rest and a human leader (ver. 14), establishing and enriching them in the land of promise (vers. 22—25). 3. His miraculous and his abiding care for their wants: giving them "bread from heaven for their hunger," and bringing forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst (ver. 15); forty years sustaining them in the wilderness (ver. 21). 4. His faithfulness: "performing his words, for he is righteous" (ver. 8). 5. His pitifulness, and mercy, and patience: seeing their affliction and hearing their cry (ver. 9); "ready to pardon, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (ver. 17); "many times delivering them" in answer to their cry (ver. 28); "not utterly consuming nor forsaking them" (ver. 31). 6. His guidance and teaching: giving them the cloudy pillar and the pillar of fire (ver. 12); speaking to them from heaven and giving them judgments and true laws, &c. (ver. 13), and his "good Spirit to instruct them" (ver. 20). 7. His chastening love (vers. 28—30). Let us consider—

I. THE ABUNDANT GROUND FOR GRATITUDE ON THE PART OF EVERY ONE OF US. *We* worship and bless God as (1) our Creator: "it is he that hath made *us*, and not we ourselves;" it is he who breathed into *us* "the breath of life," and made us "living souls;" as (2) our Divine Preserver and Sustainer, whose visitation has preserved *our* spirit; as (3) One who has shown many peculiar and especial favours to us which he has not bestowed on others; as (4) One who has been opening his hand and satisfying our daily want—"daily loading us with benefits;" as (5) One who has been faithful in all his dealings with us; who (6) has borne much and long with our waywardness, our fruitlessness, our imperfection; as (7) One who has been guiding us continually, "ordering our steps," leading us by a way we knew not, by a right and a wise way; (8) teaching us his holy will, acting on us by his "good Spirit," and (9) blessing us by that which we may have least appreciated, but which has been the truest instance of his love—by chastening us, correcting us, "leading us into the wilderness, humbling us," weakening us, impoverishing us, taking from us the "light of our eyes," "breaking our schemes of earthly joy," that we might return unto him, to find our rest in his love, our portion in his service.

II. GOOD REASONS WHY WE, AS ERRING BUT ENDEAVOURING SOULS, SHOULD RECALL AND RECOUNT IT. There are four very strong reasons why, in the presence of God and of one another, we should recall his past loving-kindness and his everlasting goodness. 1. It is in accordance with his will, and will give pleasure to him when we do so reverently and gratefully. 2. It will deepen our sense of sin; for we shall feel that it is against all this goodness and mercy we have rebelled. 3. It will give spirituality and intensity to the voice of our praise. Such recollections will constrain us to "make melody in our heart" when we make music with our voice. 4. It will give depth to our abiding gratitude—that sense of unbounded indebtedness which we carry with us from the sanctuary, and hold in our hearts everywhere.—C.

Vers. 19—27.—*The Divine description of a sinful life.* I. THAT THE SINFUL LIFE IS FAVOURED WITH THE DIVINE FORBEARANCE. The sins of the people were pride (ver. 16), disobedience (ver. 17), idolatry (ver. 18), murder (ver. 26), provocation, obduracy. "Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness" (ver. 19). 1. This forbearance is merciful. 2. This forbearance is considerate. In the wilderness it is so much needed. 3. This forbearance is unrecognised. See the obduracy of sin.

II. THAT THE SINFUL LIFE IS FAVOURED WITH ALL THE BENEFICENT MINISTRIES OF HEAVEN. "The pillar of the cloud departed not from them" (ver. 19). 1. The sinful life has light. 2. The sinful life has guidance. 3. The sinful life has spiritual instruction (ver. 20). See the ingratitude of sin.

III. THAT THE SINFUL LIFE IS SUSTAINED BY THE KIND PROVIDENCE OF GOD (ver. 21). 1. Suitable. 2. Continuous. 3. Sufficient. 4. Various. See the wilful blindness and ingratitude of sin.

IV. THAT THE SINFUL LIFE OFTEN EXPERIENCES GREAT TEMPORAL PROSPERITY AT THE HAND OF GOD (ver. 22). 1. Possession. 2. Multiplication. 3. Conquest. 4. Plenty. Yet the goodness of God does not lead to repentance.

V. THAT THE SINFUL LIFE IS ALSO DISCIPLINED BY AFFLICTIVE PROVIDENCES (ver. 27). In all this see the Divine effort to awaken the sinner.—E.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER X.

THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO SEALED, AND THE TERMS OF THE COVENANT (ch. x.). The covenant which the Levites had recommended, probably at the suggestion of Nehemiah and Ezra, whose hand may perhaps be traced in the long address of the preceding chapter (vers. 6—38), was at once accepted by the heads of the nation in Church and State, and was "sealed to" by Nehemiah, by his secretary, by the heads of the priestly and Levitical families, each sealing for his house, by the heads of various lay families or communities, and by a certain number of individual laymen, sealing (as it would seem) for themselves only. The rest of the people, those who did not actually seal, still "clave to their brethren," *i. e.* agreed with them, and accepted the obligations of the covenant as fully as if they had put their seals to it. There was no opposition, no dissentient voice, no party even which stood sullenly aloof. That sort of enthusiasm had come upon the nation which carries everything before it, and causes a whole multitude to become "as one man" for good or for evil. This time it was for good. The people bound themselves, first of all, in general terms, to keep the whole law, "to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord their Lord, and his judgments and his statutes" (ver. 29); after which they went on to particularise certain special points of the law, recently infringed upon, which they bound themselves to observe in future. These were chiefly the following: — 1. The prohibition of inter-marriage with the neighbouring idolatrous

nations (ver. 30); 2. The command to hallow the sabbath; 3. The law concerning the sabbatical year (ver. 31); 4. The law of first-fruits (vers. 35—37); 5. The obligation to pay tithes to the sacerdotal order (vers. 37, 38). Finally, they undertook certain new obligations, not expressly contained in the law, but perhaps regarded as flowing from it by way of natural consequence, or else as desirable modes of carrying out its provisions. These were three in number, *viz.* — 1. The entire abolition of the custom which had grown up of lending money to their brethren *upon pledge* (see ch. v. 3—13); 2. The support of the temple service by an annual tax upon each adult male, which was fixed for the present at the rate of one-third part of a shekel (ver. 32); and, 3. The supply of the wood requisite for keeping the fire alight upon the great altar, and for consuming the various offerings (ver. 34). It is remarkable that these two latter regulations became permanent national institutions, maintaining themselves into Roman times, when we find them still continuing (see Matt. xvii. 24; Joseph., 'Bell. Jud.' ii. 17, § 6).

Ver. 1.—Nehemiah, as Tirshatha, or civil ruler, naturally appended his seal first of all. He was followed by Ziddikjah, or Zadok, probably his secretary (ch. xiii. 13).

Vers. 2—8.—The heads of the priestly houses attached their seals next; and among these the high-priestly house of Seraiah had, very properly, the precedence. The other names of this list recur for the most part in ch. xii. 1—6, where they designate "priests" (*i. e.* priestly houses) "which went up with Zerubbabel." Eliashib, the high priest of the time, probably appended the seal of the house of Seraiah.

Vers. 9—13.—**Jeshua, Binnui, and Kadmiel** represent the three chief families of returned Levites (see Ezra ii. 40; iii. 9; Neh. vii. 43, 44; ix. 4, 5, &c.). Binnui, it may be remarked, has now supplanted Kadmiel, and stepped into the second place. Of the remaining names, those of **Hashabiah** and **Sherebiah** designate families which returned with Ezra (Ezra viii. 18, 19). The remaining names are probably also those of families.

Vers. 14—27.—**The chief of the people.** Down to Magpiash the names correspond to those of lay families which returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra ii. 3—30; Neh. vii. 8—33), the first eighteen being personal, and the last three names of localities. **Nebai** is the same as "Nebo" (ch. vii. 33), and **Magpiash** the same as **Magbish** (Ezra ii. 30). From **Meshullam** to **Baanah** (vers. 20—27) the names seem to be again personal; but they are new, and therefore probably those of individuals who were not authorised to represent either clans or localities. In ver. 17, the two names **Ater** and **Hizkijah** should be united by a hyphen, since it is clear that they represent the single family, **Ater of Hezekiah**, mentioned in Ezra ii. 16 and Neh. vii. 21. "**Hizkijah**" and "**Hezekiah**" are in the original identical.

Ver. 28.—**The rest of the people.** *I. e.* those who had not appended their seals, whether others had sealed for them or no. The writer makes no exception, and thereby indicates a very general, if not a universal, concurrence on the part of the nation. His enumeration of classes is the same as Ezra's (Ezra ii. 70). **All they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God.** Such proselytes from the heathen as had joined themselves to the Jewish people since their return from the captivity (comp. Ezra vi. 21). **Every one having knowledge, and having understanding.** All who were of age to understand the nature of the covenant and what was meant by sealing to it—not a specially "intelligent" or "learned" class, as Ewald supposes ('Hist. of Israel,' vol. v. p. 144, note 4).

Ver. 29.—**They clave to their brethren, their nobles.** They gave their support and adherence to their more distinguished brethren who had attached their seals to the document, approving what they had done, and ratifying it. **Entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law.** Something of this kind seems to have occurred in the wilderness, when God's law was first given to his people (Deut. xxix. 12); and therefore, when renewals of the covenant were made, and the people were required to ratify the act, it was natural to recur to the old sanction. An oath was probably taken

of the people in the time of Josiah (2 Kings xxiii. 3), when they are said to have "stood to the covenant." **Moses the servant of God.** The epithet "servant of God," or "servant of the Lord," attaches to Moses in a peculiar way. God called him (Num. xii. 7) "my servant Moses, who is faithful in all my house;" and henceforward "servant of God" was his *epitheton usitatum* (see Josh. i. 1; viii. 31, 33; 1 Chron. vi. 49; 2 Chron. xxiv. 9; Dan. ix. 11; Heb. iii. 5; Rev. xv. 3). St. Paul contrasts "Moses, the servant" with "Christ, the Son" (Heb. iii. 1—6).

Ver. 30.—**That we would not give our daughters, &c.** On the recurrence of the mixed marriages so soon after the reformation of Ezra, see the comment on ch. xiii. 23.

Ver. 31.—**If the people of the land bring ware . . . on the sabbath.** If the heathen of this region will insist on bringing their wares into our cities and offering them for immediate sale on the sabbath, we Jews bind ourselves not to deal with them on that day. Subsequently, Nehemiah carried out more stringent regulations (ch. xiii. 15—22). **Or on the holy day.** Rather, "or on a holy day." The people bind themselves to abstain from trade not only on the sabbath, but on any holy day. **That we would leave the seventh year.** By "*leaving* the seventh year," leaving the lands untilled every seventh or sabbatical year is meant. This precept of the law had been frequently neglected during the times of the monarchy, and its neglect was one of the sins which the captivity was expressly intended to punish (2 Chron. xxxvi. 21). It now appears that after the return the precept had been again disobeyed. **The exaction of every debt.** Literally, "the pledge of every hand." Compare ch. v. 2—13, and note that, notwithstanding Nehemiah's curse and the people's assent to it (ver. 13), the practice of lending upon pledge had recommenced.

Ver. 32.—**To charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel.** Hitherto the Jews had had no impost analogous to our "church-rate." The "half-shekel of the sanctuary," as it is called, being only payable on the rare, and forbidden, occasion of a census of the whole people (Exod. xxx. 13—16), could not possibly have served for the ordinary support of the temple service; but it was calculated to suggest to thoughtful minds the need of some regular fund, and the persons on whom the obligation lay to provide it. While the Jews were an independent nation, with their own kings and their own revenue, no difficulty had been felt in keeping up the service, since the kings easily provided for it; but in the existing condition of affairs the case was different. A "governor" was not like a king; he was

responsible; he was removable; he was bound to remit the great bulk of the taxes to the court. Under these circumstances, and probably in connection with an immediate need, the idea arose of a special (voluntary) tax, to be paid annually by all adult males, for the support of the service, the continual provision of the morning and evening sacrifice, the incense, the shew-bread, the red heifers, the scape-goat, the numerous victims, and the numerous meat and drink offerings required on various occasions, and especially at each of the great festivals. It was felt that the provision in the law ruled two things—1. The uniformity of the tax; and, 2. The sphere of its incidence—that it should be paid by *all* adult males. With regard to its proper amount, *that* had to be fixed by a consideration of existing needs in comparison with existing means. The third part of a shekel was determined on, as sufficient at the time; but it was not long ere for the third part the half-shekel was substituted, a return being thus made to the standard fixed by the law, and an ample provision made for the maintenance of the established rites in full completeness and efficiency (comp. Matt. xvii. 24—27).

Ver. 33.—**For the shew-bread.** See Levit. xiv. 5—8. Small as the cost of the shew-bread was, consisting, as it did, of no more than twelve cakes of fine flour weekly, it is yet placed first on account of its importance, being the bread of God's presence, the type of the sacramental bread of the new covenant. **The continual meat offering** is that offering of flour mingled with fine olive oil which God had required to be offered twice a day, at morning and at evening, in conjunction with the two lambs, which constituted the continual burnt offering (Num. xxviii. 5). **Of the sabbaths.** *I. e.* "for the offering of the sabbath days," which consisted of two lambs with appropriate meat and drink offerings, in addition to the offering of every day (Num. xxviii. 9, 10). **Of the new moons.** Two bullocks, one ram, seven lambs, with appropriate meat and drink offerings (*ibid.* vers. 11—14). **For the set feasts.** The passover, the feast of Pentecost, the feast of trumpets, and the feast of tabernacles. The offerings required at each are given with great exactness in Num. xxviii. and xxix. **The holy things.** "Wave-offerings" and "peace-offerings" (Lev. xxiii. 10, 17, 19) are probably intended. They were "holy to the Lord for the priest" (*ibid.* ver. 20). **The sin offerings** are those commanded in Num. xxviii. 15, 22, 30; xxix. 5, 11, 16, 19, &c. **And for all the work of the house.** The internal "work" of cleansing and keeping in proper order the apparatus of worship is probably intended, not external repairs.

Ver. 34.—**We cast the lots for the wood offering.** The "wood offering" is now first heard of. Fuel had probably been more plentiful in the times of the monarchy than it had now become, and the temple treasury had been rich enough to provide what was needed in order to keep the altar fire perpetually burning (Levit. vi. 13). But times had changed. The hill-country of Judæa had gradually been stripped of its forests. The temple was, comparatively speaking, poor, and some permanent arrangement for the supply of the required fuel had become necessary. It would seem, from the present passage, that the arrangement actually made was one by which different families or districts undertook the duty of furnishing the wood in turn, and lots were cast to determine the order in which they should discharge the office. According to Josephus ('Bell. Jud.' ii. 17, § 6), the wood needed for a year was brought in on a particular day—the fourteenth day of the fifth month—which was kept as a festival, and known as the "Xylophoria." **At times appointed year by year.** It may be gathered from this that, originally, no single day was selected for bringing in all the wood; much less one and the same day appointed for every year. The original system was variable and elastic; but in course of time a rigid uniformity was introduced and established. **As it is written in the law.** See Levit. vi. 12.

Ver. 35. **And to bring the first-fruits . . . unto the house of the Lord.** The idea of offering "first-fruits" may be ascribed to natural piety. They were well known to the Greeks and Romans (*ἀπαρχαί, primitiæ*). But in the Mosaic law they were commanded (Exod. xxii. 29; xxiii. 19; Levit. xxiii. 10, 17, &c.), and thenceforth became a matter of religious obligation. The present passage furnishes, however, distinct evidence that the obligation had now for some time been disregarded. **The first-fruits of all fruit.** First-fruits were required not merely of wheat and other grain, but also *expressly* of wine and oil, the produce of the vine and olive, and by implication of all other fruit trees (see Num. xviii. 12; Deut. xviii. 4, &c.).

Ver. 36.—**The first-born of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the law.** See Exod. xxii. 29; xxxiv. 19. The first-born children were to be "redeemed."

Ver. 37.—**The first-fruits of our dough.** See Num. xv. 18—21. **And our offerings.** Literally, "our heave offerings" (Num. xv. 20; Levit. xxiii. 11, 17). **To the chambers of the house.** The store-chambers attached to the temple-building (see ch. xiii. 4, 5). **The tithes of our ground.** As with the law of first-fruits, so with that of tithes (which was more burthensome), there had grown up



a practice of neglecting it on the part of many, if not of all. The natural result would be the non-attendance of Levites at Jerusalem, and so a falling-off in the solemnity and grandeur of the temple-worship (comp. ch. xiii. 10). It was now covenanted afresh on the part of the people that they would resume the legal practice, at any rate to the extent of paying what has been called "the first tithe," or that due to the Levites for their sustentation. In all the cities of our tillage. The Levitical tithe was not taken to Jerusalem, but stored up in some neighbouring, generally Levitical, city.

Ver. 38.—The priest . . . shall be with the Levites when the Levites take tithe. Some representative (or representatives) of the priestly order was to be present whenever the Levites received their tithes, to take note of the quantity, and prevent the Levites from depriving the priests of their due share—the tithe of the tithe. This tenth, being thus ascertained, was to be conveyed to Jerusalem at the expense of the Levites, and deposited in its appropriate store-chamber.

Ver. 39.—The children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering. The priests were not to be troubled with the conveyance of any of the offerings. The first-fruits and other oblations of the people were to be brought to the temple by the people themselves; and the "tithe of the tithe," which was the priests' due, by the Levites. Thus the priests would not be drawn away from their duty of ministering in the temple by secular employments and matters of mere worldly business. We will not forsake, or neglect, the house of our God. We will not suffer, that is, any interruption of the continual service of the temple, we will not be parties to any neglect or slovenliness in the conduct of it. So far as we are concerned, everything shall be done to enable the priests and Levites to remain constantly at Jerusalem in full numbers, and to devote themselves wholly to their sacred duties in God's house. With this emphatic declaration of their intentions the people concluded the engagements by which they voluntarily bound themselves.

### HOMILETICS.

Ch. x.—*A solemn covenant.* The public confession and recital of God's dealings with Israel, recorded in the previous chapter, concluded with a declaration of the making of "a sure covenant," written and sealed. This chapter contains a particular account of the transaction.

I. WHY THE COVENANT WAS MADE. 1. For the reasons contained in the previous confession. "Because of all this" (ch. ix. 38). (1) The covenant of God with their fathers, and his faithfulness to it. They had been chosen as his people, and now felt they ought to act accordingly. They held the land again by virtue of his covenant and promises, and would forfeit it by unfaithfulness. (2) The manifold goodness of God to them as a nation throughout their history. "The goodness of God leadeth to repentance," and they felt its influence for this end, as they recalled the displays of it to their fathers and themselves. (3) The long succession of their national departures from God. Showing how prone they were to evil; how much they needed every safeguard against it. (4) The successive punishments inflicted upon them. Impressing them with the evil of sin, and the necessity of godliness and righteousness to their happiness. 2. In the hope that so solemn an engagement would greatly aid in insuring their future obedience. Feeling that all that had been said consisted of so many reasons for conformity to the Divine law, they are concerned to adopt whatever means were likely to secure it. To this end they unite in a solemn public vow, written and sealed, by which they engage, not only to God, but to each other, to obey the Divine laws and maintain the Divine worship. And doubtless such a transaction was adapted to strengthen their good resolutions, and promote the fulfilment of them.

II. BY WHOM IT WAS MADE, AND IN WHAT MANNER. By all the assembly—priests, Levites, &c., and the whole body of the people, men and women, and their sons and daughters who were of understanding. Included amongst them were "they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God," partly, perhaps, proselytes from the heathen, but including probably the descendants of Israelites who had been left in the land by the Assyrians and Chaldeans, and had become much mixed up with the heathen (see Ezra vi. 21). 1. The chiefs of the people affixed their seals to the document (vers. 1—27). At their head was Nehemiah himself, as governor; then follow the heads of the priestly and Levitical houses, and after them the chiefs of the laity. 2. The rest of the people signified their solemn assent by an oath with a curse.

III. THE PROMISES OF WHICH IT CONSISTED. 1. A general comprehensive promise of obedience to all the law of God (ver. 29). 2. Certain special promises. (1) Not to intermarry with the heathen (ver. 30). A matter about which both Ezra and Nehemiah were very much concerned (see Ezra ix. 10; Neh. xiii. 23—30). Laxity in this respect threatened to destroy the distinctiveness of Israel in respect both to race and religion. (2) To observe strictly the sabbath and other holy days, and the sabbatical year, including the remission of debts (ver. 31; see Deut. xv. 2). (3) To contribute to the support of the temple, its ministers and services (vers. 32—39). The promised contributions included an annual money payment of one-third of a shekel each towards the expense of the ordinary services; the bringing up in turn to the temple of the wood required for the altar fire; the offering of the first-fruits of all produce, the firstlings of cattle, and the first-born children (*i. e.* the redemption money for them); and the payment of tithes to the Levites, who on their part would pay “the tithe of the tithes” unto the priests. (4) Not to forsake the temple. They would continue to support it, and attend its services at the appointed times.

*Reflections*.—1. The review of the past is adapted to impress on our hearts the duty and wisdom of serving God. 2. In the service of God, the observance of the sabbath and the maintenance of public worship are of the greatest importance. As Divine ordinances, and for the well-being of individuals and families, the Church and the State. 3. All should unite in supporting the worship of God. By contributions, attendance, and endeavours to induce others to attend. 4. Solemn definite engagements are aids to the cultivation and practice of religion. The impressions and purposes of times of peculiar religious feeling may thus become of permanent value. Obligations thus recognised and adopted are more likely to be called to mind in times of temptation. The Christian settles it thus with himself that he is the Lord's, and must not, will not, depart from him; must and will serve him in all things. In such a definite settlement are peace and safety. Hence the worth of those ordinances by which a profession of piety is made, and from time to time renewed. To these some have added forms of “covenanting” more resembling that recorded in this chapter. They have put hand and seal to a written document. Dr. Doddridge did this, and in his ‘*Rise and Progress*’ recommends the practice and supplies forms for the purpose. The Scottish Covenants present probably the most memorable instances of documents of this kind publicly agreed to, signed by thousands of all classes, and exercising a great and lasting influence on the course of affairs. A definite promise is specially appropriate and useful in respect to outward practices, such as the devoting of a certain proportion of income to religion and charity. The demands for money for the ordinary purposes of life are so numerous and urgent, that the claims of God's cause and of the poor are likely to be very insufficiently met, unless some specific portion be distinctly devoted to them. When this is done, the other branches of expenditure adjust themselves to the income as thus diminished. Care, however, needs to be taken lest vows are made which cannot be kept, and so become a snare and burden to the conscience. They should for the most part be simply promises to do what, apart from them, is incumbent upon us, or to avoid what, apart from them, is wrong, or commonly, if not uniformly, leads us into wrong-doing. 5. It is pleasing when all classes of society unite in solemn acts of dedication of themselves and their property to God, and in arrangements for the maintenance of religion amongst them. 6. General religious excitement and professions are, however, often deceptive. The solemn covenant recorded in this chapter was soon violated (see ch. xiii. 10—29).

Ver. 32.—*Divine service*.—“The service of the house of our God.” Difference between this in the temple at Jerusalem and in Christian sanctuaries. Superiority of the latter. In remarking upon it, while chiefly thinking of the part taken by ministers, we have in view also the “service of song,” and all else that is needful for suitably conducting the worship of God. Note, then, that the service of God's house—

1. IS PECULIARLY SACRED. It has *immediately* to do with God, and Christ, and the souls of men. Should, therefore, be attended to with reverence, devoutness, purity of motive. Frivolity, selfishness, covetousness, and worldly ambition, wrong every-

where, are flagrantly wrong here. Every part of the service should have a distinctively religious aim, and should be done in a religious spirit.

II. SHOULD BE CONDUCTED ACCORDING TO DIVINE DIRECTIONS. Not only to act in opposition to these, but to go beyond them into "will-worship," is impious and perilous.

III. SHOULD ENGAGE THE BEST ENERGIES OF THE BEST MEN. Requires, doubtless, first good men, but furnishes scope for the talents of the ablest; and all engaged in it should do their best. To leave this work to the feeble, or do it in a perfunctory or slovenly manner, is disgraceful and sinful.

IV. IS ENCOURAGED BY SPECIAL DIVINE PROMISES. The preaching of the gospel, united prayer, united praise, the celebration of the sacraments, all are thus encouraged.

V. IS FRUITFUL OF BLESSING. To those active in it, to those uniting, to society, &c. Of blessing in this life and for ever.

VI. SHOULD BE GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY ALL. In many, the sense of obligation to render such support is of the feeblest.

Ver. 39.—*Cleaving to the house of God.* "We will not forsake the house of our God." Introduce, by reference to the context—

I. THE PLACE. "The house of our God." The temple thus designated in a sense quite peculiar. In a deeper sense, however, the Christian Church is God's house, and each member of it (1 Cor. iii. 16; vi. 19; Ephes. ii. 21, 22; 1 Tim. iv. 15). In a lower sense, the name may be given to buildings set apart for Christian worship. In the Old Testament seems to be used of synagogues (Eccles. v. 1). Such buildings may be called houses of God because—1. Devoted specially to him. There is a sense in which all buildings should be devoted to God (motto over the Royal Exchange); but the meeting-houses of the Church are peculiarly consecrated to him, his worship; the publication of his great name, his laws, invitations, promises, threatenings; endeavours to promote his kingdom. Yet places of worship are not always devoted to God, and never perfectly. 2. Blessed and honoured by him. By his presence, and gracious operations, in the enlightenment, conversion, sanctification, consoling, strengthening, &c. of the worshippers. God's works in the sanctuary are amongst his greatest and best—better than the turning of the material chaos into κόσμος.

II. THE RESOLVE RESPECTING IT. "We will not forsake," &c. (see also ch. xiii. 10, 11). The declaration means more than it expresses. It is equivalent to saying, "We will interest ourselves in it, support it, promote its prosperity." 1. By our gifts. The main point here. See preceding verses. 2. By attendance on its services. Temptations in the present day to a total or partial neglect of public worship, or a wandering which is almost as injurious. Temptations from unbelief, worldliness, perpetual or occasional want of interest in the services, poverty, even sorrow. 3. By effort and prayer for its prosperity.

III. REASONS FOR MAKING IT OUR OWN. 1. Because it is God's house—"the house of our God." 2. Because of the pleasure to be there enjoyed. 3. Because of the profit to be there gained. 4. Because of attachment to the people who meet there. 5. Because of the good of others which is there promoted. The highest welfare of individuals and of society is bound up with the maintenance of public Christian worship and instruction. 6. Because of what has been already expended upon it. Love, zeal, contributions, work. They who have done most for their place of worship will be most attached to it. Let the young make and keep this resolution. Especially let those who have left home and the minister and friends of their early life be careful not to forsake the house of God. They will thus be preserved from temptation, secure new friendships helpful to their character and happiness, and, if sincere in their worship, the guidance and blessing of God, and eternal salvation.

#### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ch. x.—*Entering into covenant.*—Nehemiah and Ezra, and those who acted with them, showed true insight into character when they provided—

I. THAT STRONG RELIGIOUS FEELING SHOULD TAKE DEFINITE FORM. "Because of all

this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, set their seal unto it" (ch. ix. 38). And Nehemiah and Zidkijah (Zadok), and many others, priests, Levites, and heads of families, formally signed and sealed a solemn covenant, pledging themselves and the people generally to a purer and more loyal service of the Lord. Feeling was running strong in Jerusalem. Many things concurred to call it forth. At the great gathering which followed the feast of tabernacles it rose to its height; the multitude had to be calmed by the leaders (ch. viii. 9); then followed a day of fasting and confession, when all the people drew very near to God in humiliation. In what should it all end? Should it pass off in emotion, in religious excitement? That would have been a serious mistake. Nehemiah wisely provided that they should formally and solemnly pledge themselves to the purer and worthier service of Jehovah, turning from evils which had grown up, and returning to duties which had been neglected. He was well sustained by all in this movement, and we have a long list of the influential men who added their seals to his, committing themselves and all whom they represented to a renewed and revived national holiness. Let strong feeling in (1) the individual, in (2) the Church, in (3) the society or community pass soon into some definite shape; let it take tangible form; let it come to some deliberate resolution that can be formulated and written down, or it may pass away, leaving nothing but spiritual lassitude and demoralisation behind. We learn further—

II. THAT A RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT SHOULD BE HEADED BY A FEW, BUT SHOULD HAVE THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF ALL (vers. 1—29). "Those that sealed" were less than a hundred (vers. 1—27); these were leading men, "nobles," few enough for their names to be attached to the roll and to be entered in our sacred Scriptures, there enjoying an honourable immortality which many that have taken great pains to secure it will assuredly miss; but "the rest of the people," including "porters, singers, Nethinims," . . . "their wives, their sons, and their daughters" (ver. 28), *all* these "clave to their brethren, the nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath" (ver. 29). They publicly and audibly swore to "walk in God's law," thus sustaining all that the leaders initiated. All movements of revival, and indeed of any religious action or undertaking, must be orderly; there must be leaders who will give direction and counsel; also general followers who will give practical and cordial concurrence. God would not have an ill-regulated service, in which is confusion and haphazard, nor yet does he desire a mere representative service, in which a few act for the many without their sympathy. All must join—(1) the humblest classes—porters, Nethinims, &c.; (2) the weaker sex—the wives, the women; (3) the young—"the sons and daughters," "every one that has understanding" (ver. 28); for the service of God should be intelligent as well as general and orderly. We must serve him "with the understanding" (1 Cor. xiv. 15).

III. THAT THE "VOWS OF GOD" SHOULD BE NOT ONLY GENERAL, BUT PARTICULAR. These Jews vowed "to walk in God's law, . . . to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our God, and his judgments and his statutes" (ver. 29); but they were not content with such a general covenant: they undertook to refrain from particular evils—from forbidden marriage alliances (ver. 30), sabbath breaking, usury (ver. 31); and also to discharge particular obligations—they charged themselves with (1) payment of money for the temple service (vers. 32, 33), with (2) provision of wood for the fire that never went out (ver. 34), (3) with rendering the first-fruits and tithes according to the law (vers. 35—39). There are times of revival and reconsecration in the lives of men and the history of Churches. These are *irregular*, coming in the grace of God we know not when or whence. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," &c. (John iii. 8). And *regular*: anniversaries, festivals, &c.—times when we are moved to consecrate or reconsecrate ourselves to the service of the Saviour. These should be used for a solemn and thorough devotedness of ourselves and our possessions; and they should comprise the deliberate separation of ourselves from worldly entanglements (ver. 30), from neglect of ordinances (ver. 31), from injustice and hardness, from all pressure of legal right which is indistinguishable from unchristian severity (ver. 31), and the deliberate resolution to worship the Lord and dedicate a good share of our material resources to his service and the glory of his name.—C.

Vers. 1—39.—*Solemn engagement to maintain the house of God.* I. ALL SHOULD PLEDGE THEMSELVES “not to forsake the house of our God.” Those who are first in position, influence, capability should be leaders in caring for God’s house. Distinction of rank is lost in the unity of dedication. The service of God will call to itself all the variety of human faculty. Where there is the heart “to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our God,” there will be found an office or a post for each one, from the nobles to the children.

II. THE BOND WHICH BINDS US TO THE HOUSE OF GOD AND HIS SERVICE should be regarded as THE MOST SOLEMN AND IRREVOCABLE. 1. We should be ready to give our name and take upon us the vow of a public profession. The Jew placed himself under the oath and curse. We are in a dispensation of liberty, but our liberty is not license. The bond of love is the strongest of all bonds. We are made free by the Son of God; but our freedom is the surrender of our all to him, that we may take his yoke upon us, and bear his burden. 2. We shall separate ourselves from the world that we may be faithful to God. We cannot serve God and mammon. We must be free from entanglements, that we may be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, enduring hardness. 3. Our consecration to God will include the consecration of our substance. With ungrudging liberality we shall fill the “treasure house of our God,” that there may be no lack in his service, that every department of Divine worship may be praise to his name. While the proportion of contributions was a matter of written prescription under the law, for the guidance of the people in their lower stage of enlightenment, let us take care that with our higher privilege, and our larger knowledge, and our more spiritual principles, we do not fall below their standard. Our hearts should not require any formal rule; but it is well to systematise our giving for our own sake, for human nature requires every possible assistance, and habit holds up principle and fortifies feeling. The effect of a universal recognition of duty in giving to God’s house would be immeasurable. Any true revival of religion will certainly be known by this test. The larger hearts will secure a larger blessing in the future.—R.

## PART III.

ENLARGEMENT OF THE POPULATION OF JERUSALEM, WITH THE NUMBER OF THE ADULT MALES, AND THE NAMES OF THE CHIEFS. VARIOUS LISTS OF PRIESTS AND LEVITES AT DIFFERENT PERIODS (CH. XI., XII. 1—26).

### EXPOSITION.

#### CHAPTER XI.

THE *nexus* of ch. xi. is with ch. vii. 4, 5. Having spoken in that place of the insufficiency of the population of Jerusalem, Nehemiah now proceeds to explain the steps which he took to remedy it. He made, it would seem, a census of the entire nation, and required each town and district to transfer one-tenth of its population to the capital. The men in the various localities determined among themselves by lot who should stay and who should go, and Nehemiah no doubt made the necessary arrangements for the reception of the newcomers at Jerusalem. Forced enlargements

of capitals by transfers of this kind were not uncommon in the ancient world, where the strength of states was considered to depend very greatly upon the size and predominance of the capital. Thucydides attributes the greatness and prosperity of the Athenian community to an artificial enlargement of the population of Athens which he ascribes to Theseus. Other notorious instances are those of Syracuse, Megalopolis, and Tigranocerta. In Jerusalem at this time the special need of an increase in the number of the inhabitants was probably the defence of the walls. These had been rebuilt on the ancient foundations,—their circuit was not much less than four miles,—and to man

them in case of attack, a large population was necessary. From a comparison of the numbers given in this chapter (vers. 6—19) with those of 1 Chron. ix. 9—22, it may be gathered that the result of Nehemiah's arrangements was to give Jerusalem a population of about 20,000 souls.

Having been led, in speaking of this matter, to give a sort of catalogue of the chief dwellers at Jerusalem (vers. 4—19), and another of the country towns and villages occupied at this time by those Israelites who had returned from the captivity (vers. 25—36), Nehemiah is induced to insert, at this point, certain other lists or catalogues which he regards as worthy of being put on record. These lists are four in number, and occupy ch. xii. as far as ver. 26. They comprise—1. A list of the priestly and Levitical houses which returned with Zerubbabel (vers. 1—9); 2. A list of the high priests from Jeshua to Jaddua; 3. A list of the heads of the priestly courses in the time of the high priest Joiakim; and, 4. A list of the chief Levitical houses at the same period and afterwards. Such lists possess at the present day but a very slight and secondary interest. Their formation, however, and safe preservation were, at the time, essential for the continuity of the nation's history, and the maintenance of the priestly order in purity, and without admixture of laic elements. On the genealogy of the high priests more will be said in the special comment on the passage.

**Ver. 1.—The rulers of the people dwell at Jerusalem.** Jerusalem was the residence of all the nobles from the first (see ch. ii. 16); no increase could be made in this element of the population. Nehemiah had to look lower, and to obtain his new settlers from the ranks of the "people." **The people . . . cast lots.** No doubt under direction. The Jews had frequent recourse to the lot for the determining of doubtful matters, believing, as they did, that "the whole disposing thereof was of the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 33). Divine sanction had been given, in the course of the Jewish history, to the use of the lot for the selection of persons (Josh. vii. 16—18; 1 Sam. x. 19—21), for the distribution of lands (Num. xxvi. 25, 26), and for the determination of the order in which different bodies should execute an office (1 Chron. xxiv. 5; xxv. 8). In the democratic states of Greece it was used widely to

determine between candidates for an office. **One in ten.** Ewald supposes that this was to be the proportion between the population of Jerusalem and the whole population of the country, and ascribes the fixing of the proportion to Zerubbabel ('History of Israel,' vol. v. p. 159). But there is no statement to this effect in either Ezra or Nehemiah, and the brief narrative of this verse seems to imply the addition of a tenth part of the country population to the previous population of Jerusalem, rather than the establishment of any definite proportion between the two. **Nine parts.** Literally, "nine hands," as in Gen. xliii. 34; xlv. 24.

**Ver. 2.—The men that willingly offered themselves.** Besides those on whom the lot fell, a certain number volunteered to change their residence and to transfer themselves and families from their country homes to Jerusalem. The people called down blessings upon them for their patriotism.

**Ver. 3.—These are the chief of the province.** A comparison is in the writer's mind between the Jews of Palestine and those of the great Persian capitals, Babylon and Susa, to which, as a Persian official, he himself properly belongs. Compare ch. i. 3 and Ezra ii. 1. **That dwelt in Jerusalem.** *I.e.* "that were entered in Nehemiah's census among the inhabitants of Jerusalem after the transfer of population had been made." The names which follow appear in most cases to be personal, but a certain number of them are names of families. **In the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession.** It follows that those who removed from the country districts to Jerusalem quitted their "possessions," often, it may be, exchanging riches for poverty, a comfortable house for one half in ruins (ch. vii. 4), and the life of a small landed proprietor for that of an artisan or hired labourer. Hence the "blessings" called down by the people on those who volunteered (ver. 2). **Israel.** Compare 1 Chron. ix. 3, where we find that among those who had returned were members of the two great Israelitish tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim. **On the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants,** see the comment on Ezra ii. 43, 55.

**Ver. 4.—At Jerusalem dwell certain of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin.** It is not meant that *all* the dwellers in Jerusalem were of these two tribes, since among them were certainly Levites (vers. 10—19), Ephraimites, and Manassites (1 Chron. i. s. c.), together with Nethinims (ver. 21) who were of no tribe, and probably some representatives of all or most of the other tribes (see the comment on Ezra ii. 70). But the present purpose of Nehemiah is to mention especially the Jewish

and Benjaminite chiefs. **Athaiah**, or **Uthai**, as the name is given in 1 Chron. ix. 4. **The son of Uziah.** The ancestors assigned to Athaiah here and in 1 Chron. ix. are wholly different, with the single exception of Pharez or Perez, the son of Judah. Both lists are of course abbreviations of a far longer one, and it has happened that the two writers have in no case selected for mention the same name.

Ver. 5.—**Maaseiah** is called “**Asaiah**” in 1 Chron., and designated simply as “the Shilonite,” or descendant of Shelah, the youngest son of Judah. **Zechariah, the son of Shiloni.** Rather, “the Shilonite.” The word *ben*, “son,” has been intruded into the text by a copyist, who thought that “Shiloni” was a personal name.

Ver. 6.—**Valiant men.** Or, “fighting men”—men able to bear arms and serve in the wars.

Ver. 7.—**And these are the sons of Benjamin.** A verse equivalent to 1 Chron. ix. 6 would seem to have fallen out here. Nehemiah cannot have intended to leave out the descendants of Zerah, who formed more than one-half of the Jewish element in the population of Jerusalem, and furnished 690 fighting men. **Sallu the son of Meshullam.** Compare 1 Chron. ix. 7. The other names in the genealogy are different, the two writers singling out for mention different ancestors.

Ver. 8.—Neither **Gabbai** nor **Sallai** is mentioned in Chronicles, where the Benjaminite chiefs inferior to Shallu are Ibneiah, Elah, and Meshullam (1 Chron. ix. 8). **Nine hundred and twenty-eight.** Nine hundred and fifty-six, according to Chronicles (1 Chron. ix. 9). Probably in one place or the other the figures have suffered corruption.

Ver. 9.—**Their overseer.** Probably the commandant of the city under Nehemiah. See 2 Kings xxv. 19, where *pakid* has this sense. **Judah . . . was second.** Next in authority to Joel.

Ver. 10.—**Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin.** Rather, “Of the priests, Jedaiah, Joiarib, Jachin.” The word *ben*, “son,” has once more accidentally crept in (comp. 1 Chron. ix. 10). The writer here passes from personal to family names. Jedaiah and Joiarib were two of the chief priestly families, and are usually mentioned together (1 Chron. xxiv. 7; Neh. xii. 6, 19, &c.). Jachin was a priestly family of much less distinction, descended probably from the head of the twenty-first course in David's time (1 Chron. xxiv. 17).

Ver. 11.—**Seraiah** (called “**Azariah**” in 1 Chron. ix. 11) designates the high priestly family of this time, as in ch. x. 2; xii. 1, 12. The “**Seraiah**” who gave name to it was probably the high priest taken prisoner by Nebuzaradan, and put to death (2 Kings xxv. 18—

21). **The son of Hilkiah.** Really the grandson (Ezra vii. 1). **The son of Meshullam.** Or “**Shallum**” (*ibid.* ver. 2). **The ruler of the house of God.** *I. e.* the high priest; or, rather, the family which furnished the high priests at this time. The actual high priest was Eliashib, the son of Joiakim, and grandson of Jeshua (see ch. xii. 10; xiii. 4).

Ver. 12.—**Their brethren that did the work of the house.** The priests of ordinary rank, who—divided originally into twenty-four, but now apparently into twenty-two, courses (ch. xii. 2—7)—had the care of the temple service in turn, amounted to the large number of (822 + 242 + 128 =) 1192 persons, of whom between fifty and sixty would be employed in some work connected with the service at one time. (The parallel passage of Chronicles raises the total to 1760.)

Ver. 14.—**Their brethren, mighty men of valour.** Not “men of great courage,” as Bp. Patrick explains, but “very able men for the work of the service of the house of God,” as our translators render the parallel passage of Chronicles (1 Chron. ix. 13). **Zabdiel, the son of one of the great men.** Rather, as in the margin, “the son of Haggadolim.”

Ver. 15, 16.—**Also of the Levites: Shemaiah.** Compare 1 Chron. ix. 14. Shemaiah was a descendant of Merari. Together with **Shabbethai** and **Jozabad** (ver. 16), he had the superintendence of the outward business of the house of God; or, in other words, of its worldly affairs and money matters. As in the Christian Church a special order was appointed “to serve tables” (Acts vi. 2—5), so in the Jewish the secular business of the temple was intrusted to a few carefully-selected persons of the inferior order of the ministry, who were known to have a special capacity for such matters (see 1 Chron. xxvi. 29).

Ver. 17.—**Mattaniah . . . was the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer.** *I. e.* the “leader of the choir,” or “precentor.” **Bakkukiah was second to him among his brethren;** *i. e.* was his chief assistant. **Abda** (or “**Obadiah**,” 1 Chron. ix. 16) held the third place.

Ver. 18.—**All the Levites . . . were two hundred fourscore and four.** The small proportion borne by the Levites to the priests, which has been already noticed (see comment on Ezra viii. 15), is here again apparent. They do not quite amount to one-third of the priests.

Ver. 19.—**The porters, Akkub, Talmon.** On these familiar names, see the comment upon Ezra ii. 42. **An hundred and seventy-two.** In 1 Chron. ix. 22 the number is said to have been 212.

Ver. 21.—**The Nethinims dwelt in Ophel.** See above, ch. iii. 26. Ophel, the southern

prolongation of the temple hill, was a sort of suburb of Jerusalem, sometimes reckoned as part of the city, sometimes as distinct from it. It was a convenient position for the Nethinims, who were employed in menial offices about the temple. **Ziha** seems to represent the leading Nethinim *family* (Ezra ii. 43; Neh. vii. 46).

Ver. 22.—Properly, the whole of this verse forms a single sentence, and should run as follows:—"And the overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem, **Huzzi**, the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha, of the sons of Asaph the singers, was over the business of the house of God." As **Shabbethai** and **Jozabad** "had the oversight of the outward business" (ver. 16), so the internal business was under the superintendence of **Huzzi**, or **Uzzi**. **Uzzi** appears as taking part in the dedication of the wall (ch. xii. 42).

Ver. 23.—For it was the king's commandment concerning them. **Artaxerxes**, it appears, had assigned a certain stipend from the royal revenue for the support of such Levites as were singers, and this stipend had to be paid to them day by day. It is suggested as the grounds for this special favour—1. That the Levites engaged in the choral service were regarded as those especially who prayed "for the life of the king and of his sons" (Ezra vi. 10); and, 2. That the singing Levites who returned from Babylon, being so few in number (128), had to be constantly on duty in the temple, and so needed a regular daily stipend. The *nexus* of this verse with the preceding one implies that the payment in question was an important part of the internal business of the house committed to **Uzzi**.

Ver. 24.—**Pethahiah** . . . of the children of **Zerah**. We have here an indication of the imperfection of the preceding catalogue, which has mentioned no descendants of **Zerah** among the Jews dwelling in Jerusalem, but made them "all sons of **Perez**" (ver. 6). As already observed, a verse equivalent to 1 Chron. vi. 9 must have fallen out between vers. 6 and 7 of this chapter. The exact office borne by **Pethahiah** cannot be determined; but he evidently held a confidential position, which made him an intermediary for certain purposes between the Persian king and the Jewish people. Perhaps he received and forwarded petitions and complaints.

Ver. 25.—And for the villages. Or, "And, as regards the villages." The writer here at last passes away altogether from Jerusalem, and proceeds to speak of the country population of Judæa. This was chiefly located in villages or hamlets, to each of which was attached a territory suitable for cultivation. The principal of these settlements are now enumerated, and will be found

to comprise seventeen places belonging to Judah, and fifteen belonging to Benjamin. Of these thirty-two, a considerable proportion had subordinate hamlets attached to them. **Kirjath-arba**, or **Hebron**. During the captivity the old name had reasserted itself (see Josh. xiv. 15). **Dibon** is not the important Moabite town whence came the famous "Moabite Stone," but the city anciently called "**Dimonah**," which is coupled with "**Kabzeel**" and "**Moladah**" in Josh. xv. 21—26. **Jekabzeel** is no doubt the ancient "**Kabzeel**" (Josh. xv. 21).

Ver. 26.—**Jeshua** is a place not mentioned anywhere but here. **Moladah** occurs in Josh. xv. 26; **Beth-phelet**, no doubt the same as **Beth-palet**, in Josh. xv. 27.

Ver. 27.—**Hazar-shual** and **Beer-sheba** are united in Josh. xv. 28, and were no doubt near together. **Hazar-shual** means "the village of foxes."

Ver. 28.—**Ziklag** is celebrated as the town given to **David** by **Achish** king of **Gath** (1 Sam. xxvii. 6), and soon afterwards taken by the **Amalekites** (*ibid.* xxx. i). **Mekonah** is a name which occurs only in this place.

Ver. 29.—**En-rimmon**, "the spring of **Rimmon**," is to be identified with the "**Ain and Rimmon**" of Josh. xv. 32—two neighbouring villages, which ultimately grew into one. **Zareah** is no doubt the "**Zoreah**" of Josh. xv. 33, which was in the **Shephelah**, or low coast tract. **Jarmuth** is the town of **Piram**, who warred with **Joshua** (Josh. x. 3—27). Like **Zareah**, it lay in the low coast tract (*ibid.* xv. 35).

Ver. 30.—**Zanoah** and **Adullam** appear in close connection with **Jarmuth** in Josh. xv. 34, 35. **Zanoah** was not a place of any importance, but **Adullam**, near which was **David's** cave, is often mentioned. It had its own king in the time of **Joshua** (Josh. xii. 15), was fortified by **Rehoboam** (2 Chron. xi. 7), and remained a city of some strength under the **Maccabees** (2 Macc. xii. 38). **Lachish** is a place even more celebrated than **Adullam**. Its king, **Juphia**, warred with **Joshua** (Josh. xii. 3—16). It was fortified by **Rehoboam** (2 Chron. xi. 9). **Amaziah** took refuge there when conspiracy threatened him at **Jerusalem** (2 Kings xiv. 19); and **Sennacherib** "besieged it with all his power" (2 Chron. xxxii. 9). **Azekah** is joined with **Jarmuth** and **Adullam** in Josh. xv. 35. Like **Adullam** and **Lachish**, it was fortified by **Rehoboam** (2 Chron. xi. 9). They (*i. e.* the children of Judah) dwelt from **Beer-sheba** to the valley of **Hinnom**. The southernmost and the northernmost parts of Judæa are here mentioned.

Ver. 31.—The children also of Benjamin from **Geba** dwelt at **Michmash**. Rather, "Also the children of Benjamin dwelt from **Geba** to **Michmash**, and **Aija**, and **Bethel**,"



&c. Geba was reckoned an extreme city of Benjamin towards the west, and consequently occurs last in the first list of Joshua (ch. xviii. 24). Its proximity to **Michmash** and **Aija** (Aiath) appears in Isa. x. 28, 29. All three places were in the near vicinity of Bethel.

Ver. 32.—**Anathoth** was on the road from Geba to Jerusalem (Isa. x. 30), and was a Levitical city (Josh. xxi. 18). **Neb** was still nearer to the capital, which could be seen from it (Isa. x. 32). It was famous for the massacre of the priests by Doeg (1 Sam. xxii. 18, 19). **Ananiah** is mentioned only in this place.

Ver. 33.—**Hazor** occurs as a Benjamite city here only. **Ramah** is the famous town, now *er-Râm*, so often mentioned as a little to the north of Jerusalem (Josh. xviii. 25; Judges iv. 5; 1 Kings xv. 17; Isa. x. 29; Jer. xxxi. 15). **Gittaim** is mentioned as a Benjamite town in 2 Sam. iv. 3.

Ver. 34.—**Hadid** is joined with **Lod** and **Ono** in Ezra ii. 33 and Neh. vii. 37. It is probably the modern *Haditheh*, three miles east of **Ludd** or **Lod**, in the Shephelah. **Zeboim** is not elsewhere mentioned as a town,

but we hear of a "valley of Zeboim" in 1 Sam. xiii. 18, which seems to have lain east of Michmash, in the bleak country towards the Jordan. **Neballat** is not elsewhere mentioned.

Ver. 35.—**Lod**, now *Ludd* (called in the Acts of the Apostles *Lydda*), was at the eastern edge of the Shephelah, or low maritime plain, and about nine miles to the S.E. of Joppa. Unimportant during the early times, it became a place of considerable note under the Maccabees (1 Macc. x. 30, 38; xi. 28, 34, 57, &c.), and so continued till the taking of Jerusalem by Titus, soon after which its name was changed to *Diospolis*. **Ono** is first mentioned in 1 Chron. viii. 12 in combination with **Lod**, with which it is also joined in Ezra ii. 33 and Neh. vii. 37. We do not know how it came to be called "the valley of craftsmen."

Ver. 36.—**Of the Levites were divisions in Judah and Benjamin**. The exact sense is obscure, but we may gather from the passage that a certain number of Levites were dispersed among the Benjamite cities. They were not now numerous enough to have any cities to themselves.

## HOMILETICS.

Ch. xi.—*Town and country. Variety in unity.* Nehemiah had been some time before (see ch. vii. 4, 5) impressed with the necessity of increasing the population of Jerusalem, and had taken preliminary steps; but other more pressing matters had intervened. He now proceeded with his design. His purpose was, that of the whole population one-tenth should inhabit the metropolis, and he arranged that the additional families to dwell there should be determined by lot. First, however, opportunity was given for volunteers to offer themselves, and many appear to have done so (ver. 2), and gained for themselves the blessing of the people, who would have to supply a proportionately smaller number by the determination of the lot, each one's chance of being called upon to break up his home and remove to Jerusalem being consequently lessened. It is difficult to understand how such an artificial increase of a city's inhabitants could be successfully and permanently accomplished; how, for instance, people from the country, chosen promiscuously, could accommodate themselves to life in the city; how suitable employments could be found for them, and how they could be supported during the period of transition. But this is not a solitary instance of the kind in ancient times (see note in 'Speaker's Commentary'). The necessity of increasing the population of Jerusalem appears from what is said in ch. vii. 4, and the building of the wall would have been of little value otherwise. As the metropolis, and as "the holy city," it was alike important that it should be well peopled. Following the brief notice in vers. 1 and 2 of the steps taken for this purpose, we have in the rest of the chapter an account of the inhabitants, first of the city, and then of the country. It sets forth the variety in condition, avocations, &c. of the people, who yet were one both as a civil and a religious community; and may be employed as suggesting to us the *variety in unity* of the Christian Church.

I. There is **VARIETY**. 1. As to locality. As here some dwelt within the walls of Jerusalem, near the temple, the rest were scattered about the country; so the Church is scattered throughout the world, in every variety of situation, and comprises people of almost all languages, &c. 2. In occupations and functions. In Israel, the rulers and the ruled, craftsmen and agriculturists; and about the temple itself, priests, Levites, and Nethinims; singers, gate-keepers, &c. So in the Church. Every separate Church,

which is really such, has its own special work; and within each Church every member has his own aptitudes and functions (see Rom. xii. 4—8), arising from the diversities of nature, education, grace, and office. 3. Of advantages and disadvantages. For livelihood, culture, religion. The city, the country town, the village, the mansion and the cottage, all present a mixture of both. Nearness to the house of prayer and religious instruction is one of the greatest advantages, and should be more considered than it often is by those who are choosing a residence; but when duty calls to a different position God can afford compensations for the loss. In like manner, of the various forms of Church order and life, no one monopolises all advantages, no one is without some special function. 4. Of characteristics. Every nation, every class in each, has its own peculiarities; every kind of employment stamps those engaged in it with some speciality of body or mind; yea, every individual differs from every other. We need not, then, be surprised that in religion there should be so many varieties; that even the members of the one Church of Christ should differ so widely. Differences in nature, education, social position, the time and manner in which the religious life is awakened, the influences under which it comes, the peculiarities of the Church, the minister, &c., all have their part in producing and perpetuating diversities of thought, life, &c. But notwithstanding so great diversity—

II. There is UNITY. 1. Of race. All Israelites were of one family, descended from common ancestors. So all Christians have one Father, and have been born again by one Spirit. 2. Of faith and life. The Jews, when worthy of the name, were one in their religion, trusting and worshipping the same God, living according to the precepts of the same law. In like manner all true Christians are essentially alike in faith and character. The family features may be detected, notwithstanding their unlikeness in many respects. Genuine Christians of very different and possibly opposing Churches are more like each other, and more really united, than each is like, or united to, the untrue members of his own Church. 3. Of relationships. The Jews in city, town, or village were bound together by their common relation to their civil and religious rulers, their temple and their God, and their mutual relations and dependence as parts of one nation. So Christians are all one in Christ Jesus, having one God, one Saviour and Lord, living under the same rule and the same system of laws, enjoying the same care and protection, forming, whether they will or not, one body, the body of Christ, in which every member is joined to and dependent upon every other. 4. Of end. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." Such was the Divine purpose in respect to Israel; and such it is in respect to Christians. All are called to accomplish this end, and in their various ways they subserve it (see 1 Pet. ii. 9).

III. THERE ARE DUTIES ARISING FROM THIS VARIETY IN UNITY. 1. Contentment of each with his own position. Whether in the city or the country, every Israelite might feel himself one of the Divinely-favoured people, a valuable member of the community if honestly doing his duty, and able to attain the great ends of life. Similarly, Christians may well be content with their various lots within the Church. Not, indeed, with a contentment that forbids inquiry and aspiration after fuller light and higher privilege, or such changes as may result therefrom; but with a contentment which will prevent repining and restlessness, and secure the fulfilment of the duties and the enjoyment of the advantages within reach. Each should love his own branch of the Church, seek to be a good member of it, and gain all the good he can from it. In respect to locality too, the dwellers in cities and towns and those in the country need not envy each other. God can be found and salvation realised everywhere. God's temple is wherever is the contrite, believing, and praying heart; and wherever two or three meet in the name of Christ (Isa. lvii. 15; Matt. xviii. 20).

"While place we seek, or place we shun,  
The soul finds happiness in none;  
But with my God to guide my way,  
'Tis equal joy to go or stay.  
Could I be cast where thou art not,  
That were indeed a dreadful lot;  
But regions none remote I call,  
Secure of finding God in all."

2. Mutual esteem and affection. Christians should recognise that they belong to one great society, of which every true Christian is a member; and learn to detect the essential features of a Christian, and honour all who possess them, whatever their subordinate peculiarities. He is a poor Christian who cannot say with St. Paul, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." 3. Mutual helpfulness. The country is as essential to the town as the town to the country. "The king himself is served by the field." The peasant can even teach the citizen much of which he is ignorant. So Christians (individuals and Churches) can and ought to be helpers of each others' knowledge and faith, holiness and joy; and none should be above receiving the assistance which others can render. 4. United action. As the people of Israel, from town and country alike, united to build the wall of Jerusalem, and repel the common enemies, so should Christians of every name be ready to unite in all ways possible and expedient, in order to promote the common good, to defend and propagate the common faith, and subdue all that is opposed to it; and thus to increase the one glorious kingdom to which they all belong, and magnify him whom they all alike adore and love. 5. Willingness of individuals to undertake more than their obvious share in labours or sacrifices for the common good. Like those who "willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem" (ver. 2). 6. Finally, let us each take heed that he really is one of "the Israel of God," to whichever tribe or section he may belong, and wherever his lot may be cast.

Ver. 2.—*Volunteers*. "And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves," &c. A large part of the work done for the good of the community is done by volunteers—men and women who "willingly offer themselves" to do what in the abstract has no more claim on them than on others; and do it gratuitously. This is especially seen in the various departments of service in connection with religion and charity. Church officers, Sunday-school teachers, visitors of the poor, &c. Amount and value of their labours. Imagine them to cease! Notice—

I. WHENCE VOLUNTARY DEVOTEMENT TO PARTICULAR CHRISTIAN SERVICES SPRINGS. It may, doubtless, arise in some cases from unworthy motives; but we speak of true Christian willingness as directed towards this or that branch of service. 1. Earnest piety and benevolence in general (see on ch. iii. 20). Without which no service is truly Christian. 2. Felt aptitude and ability for the work chosen. Well is it when this feeling is not a delusion, and the willing are really the able; well also when the able are the willing, and so the work is not left to pious incompetence. 3. Special inclination for it. Which may arise from the congenial nature of the work, or the associations to which it introduces, or the special opportunities it is believed to afford for getting as well as doing good.

II. THE REWARD OF THOSE WHO DISPLAY IT. 1. The commendation of others. "The people blessed," &c. The expectation of this should not be a principal motive, if only to prevent disappointment. For though a measure of it is usual, it is not always bestowed; and the opposite treatment is possible. Some who will do nothing themselves occupy themselves in reflections on those who are employed in good works. Others, however, will commend; some from hearty appreciation—the appreciation of gratitude from those who receive benefit, of sympathy from those of like mind, who are themselves at work, or who would, but cannot, devote themselves to such service, and rejoice that others both can and will. Commendations of less value will perhaps come from another quarter, *i.e.* from some who are too selfish or indolent to do their part, but feel more at ease in their negligence from knowing that others are generous and active. To praise them is felt as all but equivalent to co-operating with them, and it is a great deal cheaper. If commendation from others is altogether wanting, there will be—2. The pleasure of doing good. That satisfaction which springs from a sense of doing our duty, that delight which is inseparable from the exercise of benevolent affections, and that which arises from the perception of good done. 3. Personal benefit. Growth in goodness and nobleness. Increased likeness to Christ and to God. 4. The Divine commendation and recompense.

Ver. 16.—*Church officers*. "The oversight of the outward business of the house of God." What this business was in and about the temple. What it is in Christian

Churches: care of the buildings, management of the finances, &c. The "oversight" is now exercised by church-wardens, deacons, treasurers, &c., according to the customs of each Church.

I. THE POSITION WHICH THIS "OUTWARD BUSINESS" OCCUPIES. 1. It is *subordinate* to the spiritual. For the sake of the latter it exists, and in order to its promotion should always be managed. 2. It is *essential* to the spiritual. As in this world the body to the action of the soul, or food and raiment to piety and virtue. Preachers must be fed and clothed and housed; congregations cannot meet at stated times without buildings, nor in comfort unless the buildings are cared for and money spent on them. Neglect of the outward will tell unfavourably on spiritual life and growth. Due care for it is promotive of these, as it enables ministers to preach, and congregations to hear and worship, with undisturbed minds. Very useful and honourable, then, is their office who have "the oversight of the outward business of the house of God."

II. THE QUALITIES REQUIRED FOR THE DUE DISCHARGE OF ITS DUTIES. Besides the uprightness required in every kind of business. 1. Devoted love for the house of God. Awakening the desire to do all that is possible to secure the due order and the effectiveness of its services, and producing the conviction that it is an honour to be employed even in its humblest ministrations (see Ps. lxxxiv. 10). Such love will make the officers of a Church examples to others (as they should be) of generosity and activity. 2. Sympathy with, and kindly regard for, those engaged in spiritual ministrations. Arising from a high esteem of their work as well as their character, and impelling to every effort to facilitate their labours, and secure them such honourable and sufficient maintenance as will free them from all anxiety about worldly matters, and enable them to give themselves with undivided heart to their work. Inducing also care to maintain a good understanding between the pastor and the flock, and preserve the former from annoyance and needless interruption. 3. Diligence and fidelity in their work. The contrast between the style in which men holding office in the Church transact their own business, and that in which they transact the business of God's house, is often very striking and discreditable. 4. The capacity for leading and stimulating their fellow-worshippers. There is often in a congregation much latent ability, and willingness too, to serve the Church by gift or labour, which need only to be called forth. One man with the power to call them forth may totally change for the better the condition of affairs. 5. Withal, indisposition to magnify their office unduly, or go beyond its bounds (see Rom. xii. 3 *seq.*). Finally, ministers and congregations enjoying the services of such officers have much reason for thankfulness and praise.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—36.—*The true centralisation.* We separate the nation from the world not to surround it with a false patriotism which means self-interest, but that in the fulfilment of the Divine purpose and law we may be the greater blessing to mankind.

I. The true centre of the life of the community is THE RELIGIOUS CENTRE. Jerusalem as the sacred city. The secular and religious are not opposed. The man of God is the true man. There is no true strength and prosperity where there is an inversion of the Divine order. Put the centre where it ought to be. There have been men who have sanctified the earthly life in its highest forms by their recognition of the supreme claim of religion.

II. WILLINGNESS is the only sure foundation on which the Church's glory can rest. We may appeal to Divine direction in the selection of our spiritual leaders; but it is those who willingly offer themselves who should be called to occupy the foremost places at Jerusalem.

III. While there is a boundless variety in human capability, there is a possibility of DISTRIBUTION which shall find room for all. The highest wealth and faculty should be gathered to the centre. The Church of God should present to the world the most conspicuous examples of sanctified genius and faithfully-used opportunity.—R.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Duty: its peril, its excellency, and its reward.* We learn from Neh. vii. 4 that "the city was large and great, but the people were few therein." Less than 50,000 inhabitants were scattered over Judæa; but these would not have been too many to have occupied Jerusalem itself. It was a matter of the first importance that the metropolis should be well supplied with those who would worship in her courts, and with those who would guard her walls. It was therefore the aim of Nehemiah and other patriotic men to promote a migration from the outlying towns and villages to Jerusalem. "The rulers dwelt there," and they were anxious that many more should come in to swell the population. This ingathering supplies us with three lessons.

I. THAT THE PLACE OF PRIVILEGE IS THE POST OF DUTY AND OF DANGER. Jerusalem was "the holy city" (ver. 1). It was "the city which God had chosen;" the place of his special manifestation; the spot where, as nowhere else, he could be approached and worshipped. Thither all who feared his name and sought his favour came with their offerings; there they presented the best they could bring on his altar, and bowed before his face. But this "holy city," where the holy people might be well pleased and be rightly proud to dwell, was (1) the place where special duty awaited the inhabitants. "The houses were not builded" (ch. vii. 4); the ground was waste; ruins were everywhere about; there was hard work to be done from centre to circumference. Moreover, the walls had to be guarded; probably night and day there was vigilant watching to be observed, that there might be no possible surprise. It was also (2) the post of special danger. Other places would be too insignificant to be attacked. If the enemy struck at all, Jerusalem would be his mark. So is it ever. The great city has many special privileges, but it has many peculiar perils, and some duties which are all its own. They who minister unto the Lord find even in their holy office obligations which impose the most serious responsibilities, and subtle spiritual dangers which call for unusual vigilance and prayer. It is well, indeed, to belong to those to whom God is near, with whom he dwells; but it is necessary to remember that side by side with special privilege there is always found (a) some special obligations, and (b) some peculiar perils.

II. THAT DUTY MAY BE DONE WITH VARIOUS DEGREES OF WORTHINESS AND ACCEPTABLENESS. There were two ways by which Jerusalem was replenished. They "cast lots to bring one of ten to dwell" there (ver. 1); others "willingly offered themselves" (ver. 2)—they volunteered without being drawn. Looking at this procedure as a matter of morals, we should certainly estimate the action of the latter more highly than that of the former. These did well, but those did better. It was a right and an acceptable thing for men with their wives and families to leave their homes where they were doing well, and where they preferred to stay, in order to act up to their agreement with their fellows; it was a worthier and a more acceptable thing for others not to wait for this moral compulsion, but to offer themselves, and go of their own accord from the village where they were prosperous, comfortable, and out of the reach of attack, to live in the city where hardship and danger might look them in the face. With us, as with them, duty is done with different degrees of Divine approval. Secular duty, that of the business or the home, may be done faithfully but unreligiously, or it may be done conscientiously because religiously, all being done not as unto man only or chiefly, but "unto the Lord" (Eph. vi. 7). Sacred duty may be done as a matter of obligation only, or it may be discharged with willingness, even with an eager delight, because the purest and highest aims are kept well in view of the soul. The same acts, outwardly measured, are of very different weight in worthiness, tried in the balances of God. And sometimes of men, for it is true—

III. THAT DISINTERESTED DEEDS WILL OFTEN DRAW DOWN THE BENEDICTION OF OUR KIND. "And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves," &c. (ver. 2). The inhabitants of Jerusalem evidently discriminated between those who were actuated by the more, and those governed by the less, generous inducements; and to the former they accorded hearty thanks—they "blessed them." Concerning popular appreciation, it is well to learn from the experience of the past, or we shall suffer injury and loss. We must (1) neither reckon upon it as certain, nor (2) despise it as worthless. We should (a) pitch our life so high that, if needful we can

do without it, "seeking the honour that cometh from God only," and satisfied with that.

"Men heed thee not, men praise thee not;  
The Master praises;—what are men?"

And yet we should (b) so live that we may fairly hope to earn the benediction of our kind. While some skilful, selfish men have reaped the honours due only to disinterestedness, more often selfishness shows its cloven foot, and is contemned. And while some generous souls have lived and died unappreciated, more often kind-heartedness and self-forgetting love win an answering affection, and draw down the blessing of those who are enriched. For good as well as evil, "with what measure ye mete," &c. (Matt. vii. 1). "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure," &c. (Luke vi. 38). Live a life like that of Job, and you will be able to say as he said, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me" (Job xxix. 11).—C.

Vers. 3—36.—*Three elements in the Church of Christ.* In the first verse of this chapter Jerusalem is called "the holy city;" as such it was the type of the Church of Christ. In three respects it bore to the Christian Church a real and close resemblance. 1. It was a separated city; separated and fenced from surrounding idolatries and immoralities. 2. It was a distinguished city; distinguished by (1) the manifested presence of God, and by (2) the knowledge of his holy will. 3. It was a commissioned city; charged to hold and preserve a certain deposit of sacred truth against all the world. The Church of Christ is a body (1) separated from surrounding irreligion, error, and folly; (2) distinguished by the presence of the indwelling Spirit of God, and the graces he communicates; (3) commissioned to carry the gospel of the grace of God to the utmost ends of the earth. There are to be in the Church what there were in the city, three things, viz.—

I. THE ELEMENT OF ORDER. There were dwelling in Jerusalem "the rulers of the people" (ver. 1). Concerning these rulers, we are told who was "overseer" of the "sons of Benjamin" (ver. 9); who was "overseer" of the priests (ver. 14); who also of the Levites (ver. 22); we are told who was precentor, "the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer" (ver. 17); who had "the oversight of the outward business of the house of God" (ver. 16), and who of the internal business (ver. 22). Everything was obviously ordered most carefully, and every one had his post at which to rule or serve. The "order" of the Church of Christ is something which has given rise to most serious differences and disputes—alas! to much bitterness and bloodshed. There are advocates of (1) one universal visible Church, (2) national Churches, (3) large closely-confederated Christian communities, (4) separate societies united only by occasional non-legislative councils or unions. But whatever the form which the Christian Church may take, whatever its method of organisation, order should always be conspicuously present. "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all Churches of the saints" (1 Cor. xiv. 33). Everything is to be done "in order" (1 Cor. xiv. 40). There are two complementary duties a Christian man may set before him: one,—the bringing about, in an orderly way, that form of Church organisation which, after diligent study and patient observance, he considers to be after the will of Christ; the other,—the taking his place in that particular Church of which he is a member, and filling it faithfully and peacefully. He who, in the name of order, brings about contention brings down on himself the condemnation of his Master (1 Cor. xi. 16).

II. THE ELEMENT OF VARIETY. Beside the governor were "rulers of the people" (ver. 1) generally; and, particularly, priests (ver. 10), and Levites (ver. 15), and porters (ver. 19), and singers (ver. 22); and, still more particularly, (1) those who were engaged in the "outward business of the house of God" (ver. 16), and (2) those who were occupied with the internal arrangements (ver. 22). All these various classes had their work to do; not one was redundant. Some were much higher than others, and did a work of a more valuable and a higher kind, but every one was needed in his place, and the security of Jerusalem, as well as the worship of God, would have been incomplete if all had not done their work at the appointed

time and place. In the Christian Church are many services to be rendered, and many orders of servants. Some are higher, others lower. But from the man inspired of God to teach and kindle thousands of human souls, to "the doorkeeper of the house," every one has his work to do for Christ and for man. One workman needs the other, and the world needs them all; and the eye cannot say to the foot, "I have no need of thee," &c. If we "magnify our own office" that we may be found faithful therein, let us not disparage that of others, lest we be counted self-important by our brethren, and injurious by our Lord.

III. THE ELEMENT OF UNSUSPECTED STRENGTH. To the eye of flesh Jerusalem seemed weak enough at this time. If we include "the residue of Israel" that were "in the cities of Judah" (ver. 20), and those in the "villages with their fields" (ver. 25), all in the outlying provinces of Judah and Benjamin, they make but a very feeble band compared with other places then or with other communities now. How easily might they have been crushed and extirpated by the Persian power, so far as human calculations go. Yet they were the Church of God on earth, the custodians of his holy oracles, the chosen company from which should come forth the Divine Redeemer, and from which should go forth the Divine mission that is to transform the world. The Church of Christ may still seem small as compared with the "unpossessed land" of heathendom; individual Churches may seem weak in the midst of an all-surrounding and overtowering iniquity; but "God is in the midst of her;" his "right hand" is on her side. There is an unsuspected strength in the truth she holds, in the weapons she wields, in the cause of which she is the champion. In ways and by means quite unsuspected by her enemies, and equally unexpected by herself, God will make his Church his agent for the redemption of the world.—C.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER XII.

LIST OF THE LEVITICAL AND PRIESTLY FAMILIES WHICH RETURNED FROM BABYLON WITH ZERUBBABEL (ch. xii. 1—9). This list receives elucidation and, to some extent, correction from two others:—1. That of the priestly families whose seals were set to the covenant (ch. x. 2—8); and, 2. That of the heads of the priestly courses under the high priest Joiakim (ch. xii. 12—21). The number of the names in each of the three lists is almost exactly the same (twenty-two or twenty-one); the names are for the most part the same; and they are given nearly in the same order. That they are the names of families appears most distinctly from the third list (ch. xii. 12—21).

Ver. 1.—**Zerubbabel**, the son of **Shealtiel**. See the comment on Ezra iii. 2. **Jeshua**. The high priest of Zerubbabel's time. **Seraiah**. Compare ch. xi. 11 with the comment on that place. The original **Seraiah** was the high priest murdered by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings xxv. 18—21). **Jeremiah** and **Ezra**, who gave name to the second and third course, must not be regarded as the prophet or the scribe so named, but as persons of whom nothing more is known to us.

Ver. 2.—**Malluch** is called "**Melicu**"

below, in ver. 14; but the reading of "**Mal-luch**" is confirmed by ch. x. 4. **Hattush**. It is curious that **Hattush** is omitted from the third list (*infra*, vers. 12—21). He appears, however, in the first (ch. x. 4), as well as here.

Ver. 3.—**Shechaniah**. Rather, "**Shebaniah**," as the name is given in ch. x. 4 and xii. 14. **Behum**. Rather, "**Harim**," which is found in ver. 15, and also in ch. x. 5. Compare, moreover, Ezra ii. 39; Neh. vii. 42. **Meremoth** is probably correct, though altered to **Meraioth** in ver. 15, since we find **Meremoth** in ch. x. 5.

Ver. 4.—**Iddo** is probably correct, rather than "**Obadiah**," which we find after **Meremoth** in ch. x. 5, since "**Iddo**" recurs in ver. 16. **Ginnetho**. Rather, "**Ginnethon**" (see ch. x. 6; xii. 16). **Abijah**. This would seem to be the course to which **Zacharias**, the father of **John the Baptist**, belonged (Luke i. 5).

Ver. 5.—**Miamin** is confirmed by ch. x. 7, and is therefore to be preferred to the "**Miniamin**" of ver. 17. **Maadiah**, "**Moaddiah**" (ver. 17), and "**Maaziah**" (ch. x. 8) are not so much different names as different ways of spelling the same name. The same may be said of **Bilgah** and "**Bilgai**" (ch. x. 8).

Ver. 6.—**And Joiarib**. The introduction of the conjunction "**and**" here, and here only, in this list separates off very markedly the last six names from the first sixteen. A

similar division is made in ver. 10. The reason for the division seems to be that these last six courses, though including some of the very highest priestly families, as those of Joiarib and Jedaiah (1 Chron. xxiv. 7; Ezra ii. 36; Neh. vii. 39; xi. 10), for some reason or other, did not seal to the covenant, whereas the other sixteen courses did so. **Jedaiah.** The double occurrence of this name (in vers. 6 and 7) would naturally raise a suspicion of corruption; but the two Jedaiahs are confirmed by vers. 19, 21.

**Ver. 7.—These were the chief, &c.** It may be suspected that this is properly the heading of another list, parallel to that in vers. 12—21, which gave the names of the actual heads of the courses in Jeshua's time.

**Ver. 8.—Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, &c.** Here again families are probably intended, as in Ezra ii. 40; iii. 9; Neh. ix. 4, 5, &c., though it is possible that the founders of the families actually returned with Zerubbabel. Jeshua, Binnui, and Kadmiel appear as the leading Levitical families at the sealing of the covenant (ch. x. 9). On Mattaniah see the comment upon ch. xi. 17.

**Ver. 9.—Bakbukiah and Unni.** Bakbukiah's position with respect to Mattaniah has been already mentioned (ch. xi. 17). "Unni" appears, in this place only, as a Levite of Zerubbabel's time. **Were over against them in the watches.** *I. e.* "ministered in their courses, as the others did, and kept their stations over against them in their turns of attendance, which are called their 'watches' or 'wards'" (Bp. Patrick).

**LIST OF THE HIGH PRIESTS FROM JESHUA TO JADDUA** (ch. xii. 10, 11). That this is the line of descent in the high priestly family of the time sufficiently appears both from the names themselves, and from the position assigned to those who bore them in vers. 22, 23, 26. Whether all of them actually exercised the high priest's office is left uncertain in Scripture, but satisfactorily established by Josephus. The six names cover a space of at least 205 years—from the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, B.C. 538, to the submission of Jerusalem to Alexander the Great, B.C. 333, which gives very long generations, but still such as are historically possible. Jeshua was certainly high priest from B.C. 538 to B.C. 516. He may have been succeeded by his son, Joiakim, about B.C. 490. Joiakim had certainly been succeeded by his son, Eliashib, before B.C. 444 (Neh. iii. 1); and Eliashib was probably succeeded by Joiada about B.C. 420. Joiada's

high priesthood may be assigned to the period between B.C. 420 and 380; Jonathan's to that between B.C. 380 and 350. Jaddua might then hold the dignity from B.C. 350 to 330, or later, and so be brought into contact with Alexander the Great. It is questioned whether in that case Nehemiah can have written the present passage, and certain that he cannot have done so unless he lived to be at least 131 years of age. As this is exceedingly improbable, it is best to suppose, either that the whole list was placed here by Malachi, or at any rate that that prophet added the clause, "and Jonathan begat Jaddua."

**Ver. 10.—Jeshua.** The "Jeshua" of ver. 1, not of ver. 8—the high priest of Zerubbabel's time (Ezra iii. 2, 8; iv. 3; v. 2, &c.). **Begat Joiakim.** The high priesthood of Joiakim falls into the interval between the first part (chs. i.—vii.) and the second part (chs. vii.—x.) of Ezra. He is only mentioned in this chapter (vers. 12, 26). **Eliashib** is first mentioned in Ezra x. 6, but he does not appear as high priest until after Nehemiah reaches Jerusalem (Neh. iii. 1). On his close connection with Tobiah see ch. xiii. 4, 5, 28. **Joiada** is called Judas by Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' xi. 7, § 1). His term of office lasted, according to Syncellus and the Paschal Chronicle, thirty-six years.

**Ver. 11.—Jonathan, or "Johanan,"** as the name is given in vers. 22, 23, became high priest about B.C. 380, according to Syncellus and the Paschal Chronicle, and held the office for thirty-two years. Josephus, who calls him "Jannæus" (= John), says that he murdered his own brother, Jeshua, in the temple, because he was endeavouring to supplant him in the high priesthood through the influence of the Persians. **Jaddua** is mentioned as high priest at the time of Alexander's entrance into Jerusalem by Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' xi. 8, § 5) and Eusebius ('Chron. Can.,' ii. p. 346). The story of Alexander's having previously seen him in a dream is not generally credited. He is said to be high priest for twenty years, and to have outlived Alexander.

**LIST OF THE HEADS OF THE PRIESTLY COURSES IN THE TIME OF THE HIGH PRIEST JOIAKIM** (ch. xii. 12—21). Joiakim must have been contemporary with Xerxes, and consequently have been high priest at the time when the very existence of the Jewish people was threatened by Haman. It is curious that we have no record of his high priesthood, nor of the condition of the



Palestinian Jews at the time, beyond the slight hints furnished by this chapter. These hints seem to imply that under him special attention was paid to the formation of lists, especially of the chief priests and Levites, and that the temple service was celebrated with great exactness and regularity (vers. 24—26). The present list is particularly valuable, as enabling us to check that with which the chapter opens, and as establishing the *family* character of the names whereof that list is made up.

Ver. 12.—*Of Seraiah, Meraiah.* It will be observed that the family names of the priestly courses follow the order of the same names in vers. 1—7, and exactly accord with them, excepting in minute differences of spelling, and in one omission—that of the name of “Hattush.” It might be supposed that the family of Hattush had died out; but this is contradicted by its reappearance among the signatures to the covenant (ch. x. 4); the omission here would therefore appear to be accidental.

Ver. 17.—*Of Miniamin.* Rather, “of Miamin” (see ver. 5). The name of the head of the course in Joiakim’s time has, by the carelessness of a copyist, fallen out.

Ver. 19.—*And of Joiarib.* The conjunction “and” occurring here, exactly as it does in ver. 6, once only in the whole list, and before the same name, shows that the two documents (ch. xii. 1—7, 12—21) are from the same hand. That the hand is that of Nehemiah, or a contemporary, seems to follow from the fact that no reason can be assigned for the division, or for the low place in the lists of the names Joiarib and Jedaiah, except the failure of these families to set their seals to the covenant (see the comment on ver. 6).

PARENTHETIC STATEMENT OF THE TIME DOWN TO WHICH EXACT LISTS OF THE LEADING PRIESTS AND LEVITES WERE KEPT (ch. xii. 22, 23). These verses appear to constitute a late insertion. They interrupt the list of high church officers in the time of Joiakim, which is commenced in ver. 12 and not concluded till ver. 26. By their mention of Jaddua as high priest, and of “Darius the Persian” as contemporary king, they betray a writer who lived at least as late as B.C. 336, or nearly a century after the time of Nehemiah’s religious reforms. The facts put on record by this writer are not of very much importance. They seem to be simply these:—1. That the practice of accurately

recording the heads of the priestly and Levitical courses, which Nehemiah has noted as belonging to the days of Joiakim, was continued under his successors, Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, down (at any rate) to the accession of Darius Codomannus; and, 2. That in the case of the Levites the lists were inserted into the book of the chronicles—not our “Book,” but that larger one, of which ours is in the main an abbreviation—down to the time of Johanan, the son (or, rather, grandson) of Eliashib. It has been supposed that the writer originally accompanied these statements with lists that have been lost, but this does not appear to be probable.

Ver. 22.—*In the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua.* See comment on vers. 10, 11. In the reign of Darius. Rather, “to the reign.” The “Darius” intended is beyond all doubt Codomannus, the adversary of Alexander the Great, who was contemporary with Jaddua. The lists went on under the four high priests down to the time when Darius Codomannus was king of Persia. It is not said that they then ceased. The Persian. Some suppose an antithesis here between this Darius and “Darius the Mede” of Daniel (v. 31; xi. 1). But this is unlikely, since there was nothing to recall that unimportant personage to the thoughts of the writer. Others, with better reason, suggest a tacit allusion to the transfer of empire from Persia to Macedon, and think the date of the passage must be subsequent to B.C. 331, when the kingdom passed away from Persia.

Ver. 23.—*Even until the days of Johanan.* Why the practice of inserting the names in the book of the chronicles ceased at this date it is impossible to say, unless it was that the chronicles themselves ceased to be compiled. There certainly appears to be a long gap in the authentic Jewish annals between the close of the Old Testament canon and the composition of the First Book of the Maccabees. Johanan, the son of Eliashib. The “grandson” really, as appears by vers. 10, 11.

LIST OF THE CHIEF LEVITICAL FAMILIES IN THE TIME OF JOIAKIM AND LATER (ch. xii. 24—26). That family, rather than personal, names are here intended is sufficiently shown in the final summary of ver. 26, since the same individuals cannot have flourished under Joiakim (B.C. 490—460) and also under Nehemiah (B.C. 444—430). The actual names—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Hashabiah, Sherebiah, &c.—are all found as family names.

Ver. 24.—**Hashabiah**. See above, ch. ix. 5; x. 11. **Sherebiah**. Compare ch. ix. 4, 5; x. 12; xii. 8. **Jeshua, the son of Kadmiel**. For *ben*, “son,” we should probably read “Bani,” a common Levitical name (ch. ix. 4, 5; x. 13), in which case the passage would run as follows:—“And the chief of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, with their brethren,” &c. **To praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David**. Compare 1 Chron. xv. 16; xxiii. 5; xxv. 3, &c. **Man of God** is an epithet not often applied to David. It occurs, however, again in ver. 36, and also in 2 Chron. viii. 14. **Ward**

**over against ward**. Antiphonically—division over against division.

Ver. 25.—**Meshullam** and **Obadiah** are new as Levitical names; but the remaining names of the passage are well known. **Talmon** and **Akkub** are among the porters of David's time (1 Chron. ix. 17), and are mentioned in Ezra ii. 42; Neh. vii. 45; xi. 19. **Bakbukiah** and **Mattaniah** occur in ch. xi. 17 and xii. 8, 9; but as families of singers, rather than of porters, in those places. **Keeping the ward at the thresholds of the gates**. Rather, as in the margin, “at the treasuries.” It is thought that the chambers above the gateways may have been used as storehouses or treasuries.

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—26.—*Ministers in God's temple*. These lists, once so important, are to us little more than fragmentary relics of a vanished system. They remind us how all that is external decays and passes away. They may, however, also suggest to us truths which abide and retain their worth throughout all ages.

I. THE VARIETIES OF MINISTRY IN THE HOUSE OF GOD. Here, high priests, priests, Levites; chiefs and subordinates; singers and musicians; gate-keepers and guards of treasure-houses. In the Christian Church, pastors, preachers, evangelists, deacons, teachers of the young, &c. In the Church, in the wider sense, all are to minister in some way; secular relations and employments are to be deemed sacred; “*Holiness to the Lord*” stamped on everything (see Zech. xiv. 20). In all, God may be served more really than by the high priest of the old covenant, if he were content with only outward ministration. And each, performing his appointed ministry faithfully, is acceptable to God.

“All works are good, and each is best  
As most it pleases thee;  
Each worker pleases when the rest  
He serves in charity;  
And neither man nor work unblest  
Wilt thou permit to be.”

II. THE RIGHT OF MINISTRY. In the case of the ministers of the temple this was hereditary. Hence the importance of the genealogies. Under the gospel, as the service is spiritual, the ministers must be spiritual also. No ordination or appointment can make an unregenerate man a true minister of Christ, though it may give him authority to take part in the external services of the Church which appoints him. Such a man may, indeed, do good; but so does the devil, through the overruling power and grace of God. In like manner, all who would employ themselves in spiritual ministration of any kind, in the Church or in private life, should seek first to have the Spirit in their own hearts; and all who have the Spirit are priests of God for some service.

III. THE SHORT DURATION OF EACH MINISTER'S WORK ON EARTH. If no other cause bring it to an end, death will. A motive to diligence and fidelity. “Work while it is day.” A motive also for care to obtain, and to exercise in the earthly ministry, those spiritual qualities which insure an eternal sacred service in the heavenly temple.

IV. THE SUCCESSION OF MINISTERS. If “one generation passeth away,” “another generation cometh.” The Jewish priesthood was perpetuated by the natural processes. More worthy of note and of thanksgiving is the unbroken succession of godly men from age to age in such a world as this, and of men qualified and willing to undertake the more difficult and arduous ministries. The One ever-living Head of

the Church, the One ever-abiding Comforter, assure us that this will ever be the case. Still "the labourers are few," and constant prayer should be presented to "the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."

V. THE UNCERTAINTY OF FAME. Many of the most excellent live and die unnoticed, and their names are found in no record; and many of the recorded names are not of the most worthy—they may be in the register for quite other and inferior reasons. Besides, the recorded names soon become little more than names; and when it is otherwise, those who once owned them are not benefited by the distinction. The honour which comes from men cannot then be the chief reward of good service. Let us not seek it, but seek to act our part well, looking for the unfailing rewards which God bestows.

VI. THE GREAT INFERIORITY OF THE MINISTRIES OF THE TEMPLE IN COMPARISON WITH THOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. "The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than" the greatest prophet; but prophets were superior to priests, and the humblest Christian is, therefore, superior to the greatest priest of the Old Testament, as he is, indeed, to the greatest mere official in the Christian Church. He is a priest of a higher order; has greater privileges, approaches nearer to God, can offer really "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," and has the true qualification for spiritual service to his brethren. For he has that "unction from the Holy One," without which, whatever external office is filled, no spiritual functions can be exercised. But high above all others is the one great High Priest of our religion. All, and surpassingly more than all, that the whole order of priests of the law were in the national, external sphere, Christ is in the spiritual and eternal. All that they and their ministrations represented as types, he has become and accomplished. What they could not effect by the whole of their sacrifices from age to age he effected by the one offering of himself. In his qualifications for priesthood, combining sinless holiness and tenderest sympathy with sinners; in his nearness to God; in the efficacy of his priestly acts, he stands alone. He offered once for all the only atoning sacrifice; and by fulfilling all that was typified by the old sacrifices and priesthood he abolished them.

Vers. 9, 24.—*Sacred singing.* Its place in public worship at the tabernacle and the temple, from David onward, if not earlier. The careful arrangements made for conducting it. Its place in the Christian Church, in which it was prominent from the first. Pliny's testimony.

I. ITS DESIGN. Not the glorification of poets, organists, or choirs, or the musical entertainment of the people; but—1. The united praise of God. Of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. This chiefly, not this only, or many of our best hymns would have to be condemned. 2. The benefit of the congregation. Of the Christians worshipping, and of others present. Promoting devout feelings, and impressing great truths on the heart. In Ephes. v. 19; Col. iii. 16, a distinctly didactic purpose seems, notwithstanding adverse criticism, to be recognised.

II. THE QUALIFICATIONS IT REQUIRES. Besides the physical and the musical, and far above them in nature and importance. 1. Understanding of what is sung (1 Cor. xiv. 15). 2. Faith. In the object of worship, the truths uttered, the Mediator (Heb. xi. 6; xiii. 15). 3. Devout feelings. Reverence, humility, gratitude, love, joy in God. 4. Unity with fellow-worshippers (Rom. xv. 5, 6). Mutual harmony is essential to harmonious praise. Anger, envy, alienation, hinder united worship, spoil the best singing.

III. THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO PROVIDE FOR OR CONDUCT IT. Such as (ver. 12) are "over the thanksgiving" are to regard themselves not as performers exhibiting their own skill, but as ministers of Christ and the congregation, to worship with their brethren, and aid them in worshipping God. The composition and choice of hymns and tunes, and the style of playing and singing, are all to be subordinate to this end. If this seem to require of composers, organists, and choirs some sacrifice of credit, it confers on them a far higher dignity than they could otherwise reach, and secures them a richer recompense now and hereafter.

IV. THE DUTY OF CONGREGATIONS IN RESPECT TO IT. 1. To take part in the worship. In heart, if not with voice. 2. To unite, if capable, in the singing itself.

The singing at the temple appears to have been chiefly choral; that of the Christian Church should be congregational. All are as Levites, "to praise and to give thanks," unless physically incapacitated. The benefits of the service depend much on the union of the many in it. 3. To qualify themselves, therefore, as far as possible for the exercise. That "with one mouth" (Rom. xv. 6), as well as "one mind," all may "glorify God." The subject requires more thought and care by ministers and congregations than it sometimes receives.

## HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—26, 44—47.—*Ministers of the Lord.* Twenty-six verses of this chapter are given to the record of the names of priests and Levites. That fact itself is suggestive. It is indicative of the high place which the ministers of God held in the national estimation. We meet in these chronicles with the names of few men of comparative wealth, or rank, or soldierly ability; but the names of the ministers of religion are recorded, and are thus immortalised. Concerning these we may learn—

I. THEIR RELATIVE VALUE IN THE STATE. "Judah rejoiced in the priests and Levites that waited"—stood at their posts (ver. 44). The worth of the "non-productive classes" of the community, however high their social position, has been said to be less than that of the man who "makes two blades of grass to grow where only one grew before." But the worth of this last is surely less by far than that of him who makes a true thought to live and grow in the mind where one false fancy thrived before, who plants right principles in the soul, who is the means of cultivating fruits of righteousness in the hearts and lives of men. A number of men scattered all over the land who live to circulate that sacred truth which leads men into and along the way of wisdom, and to draw the hearts of men into fellowship with a holy God, must be doing a work of truest patriotism, second to none that can be mentioned. Well might "Judah rejoice in the priests and Levites that stood at their posts" (or that waited), and treasure their names in her archives. Well may England rejoice in her ministers of Christ who stand at their posts and do the work he has placed in their hands.

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF THEIR APPOINTMENT (ver. 10). We are naturally struck with the expression (ver. 10), "And Jeshua begat Joiakim, Joiakim also begat Eliashib," &c. It brings before us—as indeed all these family names do—the hereditary principle adopted by God in the appointment of his ministers. The priestly and the Levitical office went from father to son. In that age, and under the system of religion appointed of God, there can be no doubt that this was the best possible principle. We have sad and striking instances, indeed, of its failure to secure purity and integrity. The cases of Eli and Samuel, whose sons "walked not in their fathers' ways," immediately suggest themselves. Yet there was an unquestionable spiritual force in this family arrangement. The sons and grandsons who looked back to their fathers, to their ancestors, as men that stood before God in his near presence, as men that taught Israel the sustaining, reviving, saving truths of religion, would gain a powerful incentive from the thought; and as they looked forward to their sons and their grandsons, to a remote posterity discharging the same sacred offices, a holy anticipation would join with a holy pride to keep them loyal to their faith and to their functions. With the Christian ministry the hereditary principle is in the background; it is a secondary, not primary, consideration. The first thing is fitness for the work, and the conviction that a man is personally called thereto by God's own Spirit. "Aptness to teach" (1 Tim. iii. 2) and to serve in the various offices of the ministry of Christ, with that earnest desire to "do good and to communicate" which argues a heaven-born inspiration, must be the decisive thing. Nevertheless, there is room for the influence of the family principle here. Many of the very best ministers of Christ are sons and grandsons of those who thus served their God and their generation before them; and these have been worthier and abler servants of their age because they have drawn inspiration from their fathers' lives and labours. In this our time there is much of holy influence and power to *gain* from those who have gone before us, and much to *give* to those who shall come after us. We should aim to (1)

be worthy of our ancestors, and to (2) supply an incentive and example to our posterity.

III. THEIR RECOMPENSE (vers. 44—47). So much did "Judah rejoice for (in) her priests and Levites" (ver. 44), that men had to be appointed "over the chambers for the treasures," first-fruits, tithes, and free-will offerings which the people freely brought to them. All those who held any sacred office—including those of the Levites who were singers and porters, and "who kept the ward," *i. e.* did their work (ver. 45)—received their recompense, and the people "sanctified" (set apart) "holy things" (their offerings to the Lord) to the Levites, and these gave their tenth to the "children of Aaron" (ver. 47). The Christian minister has his recompense, which is threefold. 1. It is *present and temporal*. "Sowing spiritual things," he expects to "reap carnal things" (1 Cor. ix. 11). He that is "taught in the word is to communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. vi. 6). 2. It is *present and spiritual*. In the approval of Christ his observant Lord; in the gratitude and affection of those whom he serves; in the excellency and success of his work—intrinsically the highest and best of all works; and in the opportunities it provides for his own spiritual culture. 3. It is *future*. The smile of the Master in the day when "every man has praise of God;" the greeting again of those rescued and strengthened on earth; the "rule over many cities" to be enjoyed by those who wisely employ their talents here.—C.

## PART IV.

DEDICATION OF THE WALL OF JERUSALEM UNDER NEHEMIAH AND EZRA, WITH NEHEMIAH'S ARRANGEMENT OF THE TEMPLE OFFICERS, AND HIS EFFORTS FOR THE REFORM OF RELIGION (CH. XII. 27—47, AND CH. XIII.).

### EXPOSITION.

DEDICATION OF THE WALL (ch. xii. 27—43). It is supposed by some that the author has here departed from the chronological order, and gone back to a date not much subsequent to the completion of the wall in September, B.C. 444, since the dedication of a work under ordinary circumstances follows closely upon its accomplishment. But no reason has been shown for the actual place held by the narrative in the Book upon this supposition, nor is it easy to imagine that the author would have separated the dedication of the wall from its completion by five chapters and a half, unless they had been separated in fact by an interval of some duration. The interval seems, by the notes of time contained in chs. xii, xiii, to have been one of nearly thirteen *years*. Nehemiah's religious reforms were certainly subsequent to the visit that he paid to the Persian court in B.C. 432 (ch. xiii. 6). These reforms grew out of a reading of the law which took place at the time when Nehe-

miah appointed the temple officers (ch. xiii. 1), and that appointment followed closely on the dedication (ch. xii. 44). We may account for the long delay by supposing that Nehemiah was afraid of offending Artaxerxes if he ventured on a ceremony, to which the superstition of the surrounding heathen may have attached extreme importance, without his express permission, and that to obtain this permission his personal influence was necessary.

The dedication of a city wall was, so far as we know, a new thing in Israel; but it had been customary from a remote time to dedicate houses (Deut. xx. 5); and natural piety extended this practice to aggregations of houses, and to the limit or fence by which they were practically made one. The priestly order had shown its sense of the fitness of such a consecration when they raised their portion of the wall, and had at once "sanctified it" (ch. iii. 1). Nehemiah now, by the ceremony which he planned and carried out,

placed the whole circuit of the wall under the Divine protection, confessing in this solemn act the intrinsic worthlessness of mere walls and bulwarks, unless God lends them strength and makes them a protection against enemies.

Ver. 27.—**And at the dedication . . . they sought the Levites.** The *nexus* of this passage seems to be with ch. xi. 36; and we may suppose that originally it followed immediately on ch. xi.—the lists (ch. xii. 1—26) being a later insertion. The author, having (in ch. xi. 36) told us of the wide dispersion of the Levites, now notes that they were summoned from all the places where they dwelt, and brought (one and all) to Jerusalem for the solemnity of the dedication. To keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgiving and with singing, &c. Solomon's dedication of the temple was the pattern followed. As he had made the service altogether one of praise and thanksgiving (2 Chron. v. 13), and had employed in it cymbals, trumpets, psalteries, and harps (*ibid.* ver. 12), so Nehemiah on the present occasion.

Ver. 28.—**The sons of the singers.** *I. e.* the Levites who belonged to the class of singers (1 Chron. xv. 16—22; Neh. vii. 44, &c.). The plain country round about Jerusalem. Dean Stanley understands by this "the Jordan valley" ('Lectures on the Jewish Church,' Third Series, p. 129); but that is a district too remote to be intended by the words "round about Jerusalem." The valleys of Hinnom and Jehoshaphat better suit the description. **The villages of Netophathi.** Rather, "of the Netophathites" (see 1 Chron. ix. 16), or people of Netophah, which was a country town not far from Bethlehem.

Ver. 29.—**From the house of Gilgal.** Rather, "from Beth-Gilgal," which was the name now borne by the Gilgal due north of Jerusalem. **Out of the fields of Geba.** See above, ch. xi. 31. **And Azmaveth.** Compare Ezra ii. 24; Neh. vii. 28. Azmaveth was a Benjaminite town, not far from Anathoth. **The singers had built themselves villages round Jerusalem.** Such of the singers as were not located in Jerusalem itself fixed their dwellings in the immediate neighbourhood, in order the more readily to attend the temple service.

Ver. 30.—**The priests and the Levites purified themselves.** On this occasion there is no preference of the Levites over the priests, as in 2 Chron. xxix. 34 and Ezra vi. 20. Both classes were, it would seem, equally zealous, and equally forward to purify themselves. **And the gates and wall.** Inanimate things might contract legal defilement (Deut.

xxiii. 14; Levit. xiv. 34—53). In case either the wall or the gates should be in any such way unclean, they were made to undergo a legal purification before the ceremony of the dedication began.

Ver. 31.—**I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies.** Nehemiah caused all the chiefs of the nation, both lay and clerical, to mount upon the wall, and there marshalled them into two companies, composed of clergy and laity intermixed, one of which he placed under the direction of Ezra (ver. 36), while of the other he took the command himself (ver. 38). The place of assemblage must have been some portion of the western wall, probably the central portion, near the modern Jaffa gate. From this Ezra's company proceeded southward, and then eastward, along the southern wall, while Nehemiah's marched northward, and then eastward, along the northern wall, both processions meeting midway in the eastern wall, between the "water" and the "prison" gates. **Toward the dung gate.** On the position of this gate, see the comment on ch. ii. 13.

Ver. 32.—**After them.** After the singers, who in each procession took the lead. **Hoshaiah** is perhaps the "Hoshea" of ch. x. 23, who "sealed to" the covenant. **Half the princes of Judah.** The other half were with Nehemiah in the other "company" (ver. 40).

Ver. 33, 34.—**Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam.** Next to the "princes" came two priestly families—those of Azariah (or Ezra) and Meshullam (ch. x. 2, 7); then Judah and Benjamin, or certain lay people of those tribes; after them two other priestly families—those of Shemaiah and Jeremiah (ch. x. 2, 8; xii. 1, 6).

Ver. 35.—**Certain of the priests' sons with trumpets.** Compare ver. 41. A body of priests, who blew trumpets, accompanied each procession, following closely upon the "princes," and followed by a body of Levites. **Namely, Zechariah.** There is nothing corresponding to "namely" in the original; and it is clear that Zechariah was not a "priest's son," but a Levite, since he was descended from Asaph. Probably a *vau* conjunctive has fallen out before his name.

Ver. 36.—**The musical instruments of David.** Cymbals, psalteries, and harps. See above, ver. 27, and comp. 1 Chron. xv. 16, 19—21. The Jews had become acquainted with a great variety of musical instruments during the captivity (Dan. iii. 7; Ps. cl. 4, 5), but rigidly excluded all except the old instruments from the service of religion. **Ezra the scribe before them.** As their leader. It is interesting to find no jealousy separating Ezra from the governor who had superseded him. As the two conjointly had

addressed the people on a former occasion (ch. viii. 9), so now they conjointly conducted the ceremony of the dedication.

Ver. 37.—**At the fountain gate.** See above, ch. ii. 14 and iii. 15. **Which was over against them.** There is no "which was" in the original; and it was clearly not the gate, but the steps, that were "over against them." They came to the fountain gate in the course of their perambulation of the wall, and there saw, "opposite to them," the steps that led up to the city of David. By these they ascended the eastern hill, and mounting upon the wall once more, followed its course until they reached the "water gate," which overlooked the Kidron valley (ch. iii. 26), where they stopped. **Above the house of David.** See the comment on ch. iii. 25.

Vers. 38, 39.—**And the other company.** Nehemiah now proceeds to trace the course of the other choir or procession—the one which he himself accompanied. Starting from the same part of the western wall as the other, its course was northward to the N.W. angle of the city wall, after which it was eastward to the "sheep gate," and then southward to the "prison gate." In this part of his description Nehemiah traces the same portion of the wall as that which had engaged his attention in ch. iii. 1—11, and mentions almost exactly the same features, but *in the reverse order*. For the tower of the furnaces see ch. iii. 11; for the broad wall, ver. 8; for the old gate, ver. 6; for the fish gate, ver. 3; for the tower of Hananeel, the tower of Meah, and the sheep gate, ver. 1. The gate of Ephraim is not mentioned in ch. iii. It must have been in the north wall, a little to the west of the "old gate." The prison gate, also omitted in ch. iii., was probably in the east wall, a little north of the "water gate."

Ver. 40.—**So stood the two companies.** Having performed their respective portions of the perambulation, and reached the central portion of the eastern wall, opposite the temple area, the two companies came to a stand, one over against the other, not in the house of God, but *by it*, or *near it*, which is a meaning that the preposition *ב* often has. **The half of the rulers.** Compare ver. 32.

Ver. 41.—**And the priests, Eliakim, &c.** These names are probably personal. With a single exception, they are absent from the lists of priestly families (ch. x. 2—8; xii. 12—21).

Ver. 42.—**And Maaseiah, &c.** It may be suspected that these are Levitical names, and correspond to the nine Levites mentioned as accompanying Ezra in vers. 35, 36. The chief difference seems to have been that Ezra's Levites played on instruments, while Nehemiah's were "singers."

Ver. 43.—**Also that day they offered great sacrifices.** David had inaugurated the "tabernacle" which he made for the ark of the covenant at Jerusalem with sacrifice (2 Sam. vi. 17), and had consecrated the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite in the same way (*ibid.* xxiv. 25). Solomon, at his dedication of the temple, had sacrificed sheep and oxen "that could not be numbered for multitude" (1 Kings viii. 5). Zerubbabel had followed this example at the dedication of the second temple (Ezra vi. 17); and we may presume that it was with victims that Eliashib and his brethren the priests had "sanctified" their portion of the wall soon after they completed it (Neh. iii. 1). Nehemiah now completed the dedication of the entire circuit of the walls by sacrifices on a large scale. **God had made them rejoice with great joy.** It is characteristic of Nehemiah to ascribe the universal joy, which another might well have claimed as his own work, to the Divine mercy and forethought, which had brought the matter of the wall to a prosperous and happy issue. **The wives also and the children rejoiced.** It is seldom that the Jewish women are mentioned as taking that prominent position in joy, which naturally belonged to them in sorrow (Judges xi. 40; Jer. xxxi. 15; xlix. 3; Joel i. 8, &c.). There is, however, one remarkable example of the kind, besides the present one—the rejoicing of the women after the passage through the Red Sea, under the leadership of Miriam (Exod. xv. 20). The joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off. See Ezra iii. 13, and comp. 1 Kings i. 40; 2 Kings xi. 13.

NEHEMIAH'S ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE TEMPLE SERVICE, AND APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS (ch. xii. 44—47). The good resolutions of the people at the time of the renewal of the covenant (ch. x. 28—39) would have borne comparatively little fruit had they not been seconded and rendered effective by formal action on the part of the civil authority. The people, in the first flush of their zeal, had bound themselves to undertake the conveyance of the tithes, first-fruits, and free-will offerings from the country districts to Jerusalem, and the deposition of them in the temple treasuries (ch. x. 37—39). But in practice this was found too great a burthen (ch. xiii. 10). Nehemiah therefore appointed special officers to collect the tithes and other dues throughout the entire territory, and to bring them to Jerusalem, and lay them up in the proper chambers (ch. xii. 44). Over the chambers he appointed trea-

surers, whose duty it was, not only to collect the ecclesiastical dues, but also to distribute the proceeds among the individuals entitled to share in them (ch. xiii. 13). Having in this way provided for the sustenance of the clerical body, he was able to insist on their regular performance of all their duties; and the success of his arrangements was such, that under him the temple service was restored, not merely to the condition established by Zerubbabel (ch. xii. 47), but to one not markedly different from that which had been attained in the time of David and Asaph (*ibid.* ver. 46). The priests, Levites, singers, and porters respectively performed their duties to his satisfaction, purifying themselves, and taking the service in their turns, "according to the commandment of David and Solomon" (*ibid.* ver. 45).

Ver. 44.—**At that time.** Literally, "On that day;" but a certain latitude must be allowed to the expression. **The chambers for the treasures.** On these adjuncts of the temple, see the comment on ch. x. 37. The "treasures" themselves consisted chiefly of tithes (including corn, wine, and oil), first-fruits, and free-will offerings. They also included frankincense (ch. xiii. 5), and probably other spices. **The portions of the law.** *I. e.* the proportion of the produce required by the law to be set apart for sacred uses. These were to be gathered by the officers out of the fields of the cities, that is, out of the portions of cultivable soil attached to each provincial town (ch. xi. 25). **For Judah rejoiced.** The general satisfaction of the people with their spiritual guides led them to increase their contributions beyond

the requirements of the law; whence there was at this time special need of treasurers and treasuries—abundant occupation for the one, and abundant material requiring to be stored in the other.

Ver. 45.—This verse is wrongly translated in the A. V. It should be rendered, as in the Vulgate and the Septuagint—"And they (*i. e.* the priests and Levites) maintained the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, and the singers, and the porters (*i. e.* the institutions of singers and porters), according to the ordinance of David and of Solomon his son." Maintaining the ward of their God is serving regularly in the temple at the times appointed; maintaining the ward of the purification is observing the rules for the purifying of the holy things which had been laid down by David (1 Chron. xxiii. 28).

Ver. 46.—**For in the days of David.** This verse is exegetical of the clause in ver. 45, "according to the commandment of David." The writer justifies his reference to that "commandment" by reminding his readers that the whole musical service—the singers themselves, and their "chiefs," together with the "songs of praise" and the "thanksgiving songs"—had descended to the Jews of his day from David and Asaph.

Ver. 47.—**In the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah.** *I. e.* "In the days of Nehemiah, no less than in those of Zerubbabel." **Gave the portions.** Paid their tithes, and other dues, regularly, so that the portions were forthcoming. **Every day his portion.** Compare ch. xi. 23. **They sanctified holy things unto the Levites.** They, *i. e.* the people, "set apart" for the Levites all that the law required; and the Levites set apart for the priests their due share—"the tithe of the tithe" (Num. xviii. 26).

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 27—43.—*The dedication of the wall.* As soon as possible after the completion of the wall, a joyful celebration of the event was made, in which all the people participated. As Jerusalem was "the holy city," this took the form of a "dedication."

I. THE SOLEMNITIES WITH WHICH THE DEDICATION WAS MADE. 1. The preparations. The gathering of the Levites, especially the singers and musicians, who were to take a leading part in the ceremonies (vers. 27—29). 2. The purifications (ver. 30). The priests and Levites first purified themselves, and then the people, the gates, and the wall. By what rites is not recorded. 3. The processions (vers. 31—42). Two processions were formed, Ezra accompanying one, and Nehemiah the other. One company marched on the wall to the right, the other to the left, both to the sound of trumpets, singing, and instruments of music; and meeting over against the temple, they united their praises. 4. The universal rejoicing (ver. 43). Many sacrifices of thanksgiving were offered, of which the people, men, women, and children alike, partook with many and loud expressions of joy.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE SOLEMNITIES. They were—1. An expression of ardent gratitude to God. He "had made them rejoice with great joy," and it was



meet and right that they should praise him for—(1) The wall itself, so strong a defence against their enemies; within which the citizens, with the temple and religious services, would be secure. (2) The wonderful way in which they had been led and prospered in the work. (3) The conquest effected over great obstacles, and powerful, cunning, and resolute opponents. (4) The rapidity with which the work had been done. 2. A consecration to God's service of the wall and all it was to guard. 3. A committal of all to his care and protection. As conscious that without him strong walls are vain. They may well have remembered—it is not unlikely that they sang—the song in Isa. **xxvi.** 1, or the promise given in Zech. **ii.** 5.

Lessons:—1. For success in every good work praise should be offered to God. The joy it awakens should be directed heavenwards in thanksgiving. For however active we and others may have been, it is to God the good issue is to be ascribed. The power and the will to work, the favouring circumstances, the assistance of others, &c., all are from him. 2. All should join in thanksgiving for mercies common to all. For signal national blessings, national thanksgiving should be rendered. 3. The best expression of gratitude for Divine gifts is to dedicate them to the Divine service. All that we are and have should be thus devoted to God. 4. Purity is necessary for, and may be secured by, those who engage in religious services (Prov. **xv.** 8; Isa. **i.** 15, 16; 1 Tim. **ii.** 8; Heb. **x.** 22). The last-quoted passage, with the previous verses, shows how the needful purification is to be obtained. Not from merely human priests, but from the great High Priest, who needed not, like the priests mentioned in ver. 30, to purify himself before purifying others (see Heb. **vii.** 26, 27). 5. Children should be associated with their parents in the worship of God.

Vers. 44—47.—*Joy of the Church in her ministers.* In these verses an account is given of the measures taken for the full and regular supply of the wants of the priests and Levites, and the readiness with which the people did their part, because "Judah rejoiced for the priests and Levites that stood [before God]; and they [the priests and Levites] kept the charge of their God, and the charge of the purification; and the institutions of the singers and the porters, according to the commandment of David," &c. (vers. 44, 45).

I. WHENCE JOY IN MINISTERS ARISES. 1. On the part of ministers, from consistent lives and diligent attention to their duties. Israel felt satisfaction with the priests, &c. because they did their work well (vers. 44, 45), and because they were upright (ver. 47). As the people consecrated of their substance to the Levites, so did the Levites to the priests, according to the law. If ministers are negligent, and show no interest in their work, or if their conduct be inconsistent, they need not be surprised that the people become indifferent to them and their ministrations. But consistent, earnest, faithful, loving, diligent ministers go the way to secure the affections of their congregations and give them pleasure. 2. On the part of the people, the ability to appreciate good ministers. The best ministers fail to give satisfaction to many. They cannot appreciate them, owing to want of piety, the absence of earnest desire for instruction and salvation, love of novelties, "itching ears," a censorious spirit, self-conceit, carnality of mind, &c. Some may hate them because of their faithful reproofs of their beloved sins. Thus the very excellences of a minister may prevent joy in him in some quarters. But where a true-hearted minister has the happiness to labour amongst an earnest, godly people, he will be their joy, as they will be his.

II. HOW JOY IN MINISTERS SHOULD BE EXPRESSED. Not by mere words, not merely by praise to God for them and prayer on their behalf, but (as in the case of Israel and the ministers of the temple) by making suitable provision for their sustenance. This is according to the law of Christ no less than that of Moses (1 Cor. **ix.** 13, 14; Gal. **vi.** 6; 1 Tim. **v.** 17, 18), and will be cheerfully done by such as rightly rejoice in their ministers. Such provision should be, as in the text, (1) liberal, (2) systematic and regular.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF SUCH JOY SO EXPRESSED. 1. To the happiness and vigorous labours of ministers themselves. If good ministers make satisfied and generous congregations, they are also to a great extent made by them. The influence is reciprocal. The mental and spiritual powers of a minister cannot develop and exercise themselves to the full in an atmosphere of coldness, suspicion, dissatisfaction, or

illiberality; his physical and mental energies will alike be impaired if he is scantily furnished with material supplies. 2. To the spiritual profit of hearers and their families. The teaching of a pastor in whom lively interest is felt, and to whom generosity is shown, will be listened to with the attention and confidence needful for profit. Children will be taught to respect and love him, and so will be likely to accept him as their guide and friend. But an opposite state of things will produce opposite results. Even satisfaction which expresses itself in words only, where deeds are needful and possible, will tend to give an unreality to the whole religious life, and prevent any real and lasting good.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—47.—*Joy of Jerusalem.* "That day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off" (ver. 43).

I. THE CONSTITUENTS OF TRUE JOY. These are—1. *Thankfulness and praise* in the remembrance of the past and in confident anticipation of the future. The people recounted the mercies of the Lord. Their dedication of the completed walls represented their preparation by the grace of God for his worship and service; their defence against assaults from without; their unity and order as a people. So ought all rejoicing to be well founded on the faith which has full possession of our hearts, and the consecrated religious life which maintains that faith in practice. 2. *Purification.* We should keep our religious joy separate from the joy of this world, which is deceit and corruption. Our rejoicing must be "in the Lord." Nor should we forget that the pleasantness of God's house should be the chief support of a cheerful spirit. "They offered great sacrifices and rejoiced." The giving out of the heart in religious worship uplifts the whole strain of the life. A great expenditure of feeling in the pleasures of this world is exhausting to the nature, but religious emotion both purifies and exalts. 3. *Fellowship.* All rejoiced together—high and low, rich and poor, the strong men, the wives and children. The true joy is not solitary and selfish, but reveals the unity of kindred minds and sympathising hearts. Family life is elevated by the cultivation of the spirit of social worship and praise, both in the larger circle of the congregation and in the smaller of the household. All joys brighten in the atmosphere of religious joy. Salt of faith should be mixed with the various elements of earthly life to keep them from corruption.

II. A few hints to be gathered on THE METHOD OF PRAISE. 1. *The gifts of nature* should be sanctified and dedicated to religion. Possibility of a much higher development of the capacity of the Christian community. Musical ability a great responsibility. Importance of lifting up the expression of religious joy to a much higher stage, not by the increase of the sensuous element and mere ritualism, but by the thoughtful adaptation of the talents and acquirements of God's people to give a pure and beautiful form to the spirit of praise. 2. The element of *worship* must always be supreme. *They offered sacrifices and rejoiced.* Music must not usurp the place of higher things. Mere enjoyment must never be the motive. Nor is praise the only attitude of the believer's life. He appears in the temple as himself a sacrifice—body, soul, and spirit—unto God. 3. We must depend more or less upon the *separation of individuals* to be the leaders and helpers in giving expression to praise. Their support should be generous; their sanctification should be real. As much as possible the people of God should be independent of alliance with those whose dedication is not spiritual, but a mere secular engagement. 4. There was a recognition at Jerusalem of the labours and aims of holy men of former times. We should listen for the voice of the universal Church in our praise; then while it leads our chanting it exalts our ideal, and gives a wise variety to the form of our worship, keeping up the vitality and cheerfulness.—R.

Vers. 27—43.—*A joyous dedication.* Knowing all that we do know of God's ancient people, of the devoutness of their spirit, and their disposition to connect closely the human and the Divine, we should expect that the building of the wall round the sacred city would be followed by some religious service. The verses of

the text give a graphic description of this interesting scene. The Levites who had been dispersed through the province were "sought out of all their places" (ver. 27), and the "sons of the singers gathered themselves together" (ver. 28) from "the villages round about Jerusalem" (ver. 29). It was a day of sacred joy, when gladness in the Lord rose to enthusiasm, and could only be poured forth in song and shouting. First, however, came the solemn ceremony of purification (ver. 30), the sprinkling of "water of separation"—a "purification for sin" (Num. xix. 9—13). This was sprinkled on the (1) priests and Levites themselves, (2) on the people, and (3) on the wall: everything was to be "clean" and "holy unto the Lord." Then came the twofold procession (vers. 31—40). In two divisions, starting from the same point, and going in opposite directions, they traversed the walls, Nehemiah heading one half of the princes of the people, and Ezra the other half; in both cases preceded by the "thanksgiving companies" (ver. 31), which played and sang as they marched. They met near the entrance to the temple (ver. 40), and there joined in the utterance of public praise, singing "loud thanksgivings to their God" (ver. 42). Then came "great sacrifices" (ver. 43) offered on the brazen altar by the priests, the people, during the procession and after the sacrifices, rending the air with shouts of great joy, women and children joining in the general gladness, "so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off" (ver. 43). The whole scene suggests thoughts to us of—

I. OUR PURIFICATION OF OURSELVES. If we ask, What is there in Christianity that answers to the purification of themselves and of the people by the priests under Judaism? (ver. 30), we answer that there are two ways in which we are now made clean. 1. "By the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" we are "cleansed from all iniquity." We are "justified by his blood" (Rom. v. 9). Applying to our own souls' need the propitiatory work of our Redeemer, we ourselves are "made whole" in the sight of God; "we are washed, . . . we are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. vi. 11). 2. By deliberate separation of ourselves to the service of God. Not the withdrawal of ourselves from the relationships in which we are called to stand or from the active duties which await our energy and skill, but the separation of our souls from the evil which is in the world, and a full dedication of our powers and our lives to the service of our Saviour. Thus are *we* purified.

II. THE ACCEPTABLENESS OF OUR WORK. The wall which had been built was purified as well as the builders (ver. 30). Our work which we have wrought for God and man needs to be made clean, pure, acceptable. It is thus rendered—1. Through the work of the Divine Mediator. We ask acceptance of all we have done for Jesus' sake. 2. By the spirit of consecration we show in its execution. (1) By entering upon it with a pure desire to honour Christ and bless our brethren. (2) By doing it in a spirit of thorough loyalty to him and sympathy with them. (3) By ascribing its success, when completed, to his gracious guidance and help.

III. OUR JOY. The joy of the Jews on this occasion was (1) occasioned by a sense of deliverance and security; was (2) sanctified by gratitude and devotion: they "gave thanks in the house of God" (ver. 40), and "offered great sacrifices" (ver. 43); and it was (3) general and contagious: it extended to all classes and ages, and went far and wide beyond the city walls—it was "heard afar off" (ver. 43). Such should be the characteristics of our Christian joy; it also should—(1) Be kindled in the heart by our deep sense of redemption and security through Jesus Christ our Saviour. (2) Be sanctified by much thanksgiving and devotion. Gladness is never so pure and safe as when it takes the form of gratitude, and goes into the house of God to worship there. (3) Extend to all those *below us*—the children, the servants, &c.; and all *around us*—be felt "afar off."—C.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER XIII.

NEHEMIAH'S EFFORTS FOR THE REFORM  
OF RELIGION (ch. xiii. 1—31). After having

exercised the office of governor for twelve years, from B.C. 444 to B.C. 432, Nehemiah had had occasion to visit the Persian court either to consult Artaxerxes personally on

certain matters connected with his province, or for some other reason unknown to us. During his absence various evil practices, to which some reference has been already made in connection with the renewal of the covenant (ch. x. 30—39), acquired so much strength, and came to such a head, that, on Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem at the expiration of a year (ver. 6), he felt it necessary to take active steps to put an end to them. In the first place, intermarriages between the Jews and the neighbouring heathen, like those which Ezra had dissolved twenty-five years previously (Ezra x. 16—44), had again occurred, and a new generation was growing up which could not speak its own language correctly (ver. 24). The family of the high priest, Eliashib, shared in this trespass. He himself was allied by marriage to the Ammonite chief, Tobiah (ver. 4), and one of his grandsons had taken to wife a daughter of Sanballat, the Samaritan (ver. 28). Secondly, through the growing influence of the heathen, and their intermixture with the Jews in Judæa and Jerusalem, the strict observance of the sabbath had fallen into disrepute. Trade was carried on upon the sabbath in Jerusalem itself; in the country wine-presses were at work, and farming operations continued, without the observance of any day of rest (vers. 15, 16). Further, the payment of the tithes was very irregular; and the Levites, who ought to have found their daily food provided for them in the temple, not receiving their "portions" there, were forced to absent themselves from the daily service, and to support themselves by cultivating their own plots of ground (vers. 10, 11). Finally, the temple had ceased to be regarded as sacred to the Almighty; a portion of it had been converted into a dwelling-house by the order of the high priest himself (ver. 5), and the Ammonite, Tobiah, had been allowed to take possession of it. Nehemiah tells us in this chapter the mode wherein he dealt with these various evils, treating of the mixed marriages in vers. 1—3 and 23—28; of the profanation of the sabbath in vers. 15—22; of the non-payment of the tithes in vers. 10—13; and of the desecration of the temple in vers. 4—9. The chapter is remarkable for the number of "interjectional prayers" which it contains

(vers. 14, 22, 29, 31), and for the plainness and roughness of the language (see especially vers. 9, 17, 21, 25, 28). The authorship of Nehemiah is universally admitted.

Ver. 1.—**On that day.** See ch. xii. 44. The phrase seems to mean, in Nehemiah, "About that time." They read in the book of Moses. It is uncertain whether this was a casual reading, like that of Ezra's, recorded in ch. viii. 1—8, or whether it was the prescribed reading (Deut. xxxi. 11) at the time of the feast of tabernacles. Therein was found written. See Deut. xxxiii. 3—5. It seems to be implied that the nation at large had no knowledge of the law, except that which they derived from the occasional public reading of the Pentateuch, or portions of it. Copies of the law were extremely scarce; and even if an ordinary Jew possessed one, he would not have been able to understand it (comp. above, ch. viii. 8).

Ver. 2 follows closely Deut. xxiii. 4, 5, merely substituting the third for the second person, and abbreviating a little. On the turning of Balaam's proposed curse into a blessing see Num. xxiv. 10.

Ver. 3.—**They separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.** Some lengthy process, like that pursued by Ezra (Ezra x. 10—19), is probably glanced at in these words, and again in the opening words of ver. 30—"Thus cleansed I them from all strangers." The rebukes of Nehemiah (vers. 25—27) did not suffice to produce a voluntary putting away of the foreign wives. Judicial proceedings had to be taken, and the "mixed multitude" separated off by authority.

Ver. 4.—**Eliashib the priest.** It is questioned whether the high priest of ch. iii. 1 is meant, and noted that the expression used—"the priest"—does not always designate "the high priest" (see ver. 13); but the important charge said to have been assigned to him, the alliance with so great a man as Tobiah, and the important step taken, the assignment to a heathen of a residence within the temple precincts, imply a man of high authority, and suit better with the high priest than with any one of lower rank. Moreover, the fact that Eliashib's leanings were towards the enemies of Nehemiah accounts for his disappearance from the history from ch. iii. 1 to ch. xiii. 4. **Having the oversight.** Literally, "being set over"—perhaps by Nehemiah, who seems to have claimed the appointment to all offices about the temple which were not purely spiritual. (see ch. xii. 44; xiii. 13). **Of the chamber.** The word "chamber" (*lishkah*) is here used in a collective sense of the entire building containing the many "chambers" or "treasuries" of ch. xii. 44; xiii. 9, 12, 13. **Was allied unto Tobiah.** *Karôb*,

the word translated "allied," means "a relation," either by blood or marriage. In the present case the relationship *must* have been by means of a marriage.

Ver. 5.—**He had prepared for him a great chamber.** He (Eliashib) had prepared (or made) for him (Tobiah) a great chamber—probably by throwing into one several of the old store-chambers. **The meat offerings.** The *minchah* consisted of fine flour seasoned with salt, and mixed with oil and frankincense. It was made into a sort of cake, but without leaven, and formed part of the daily morning and evening sacrifice, the Sabbath offerings, and most others. **The frankincense.** Frankincense was a necessary ingredient in the incense which was offered twice a day on the "altar of incense" in the holy place (Exod. xxx. 34). As a rare foreign product, it had necessarily to be kept in store. **The vessels.** Sacred vessels, basins, and the like, not needed except on occasion of great gatherings. **The offerings of the priests.** The portion of the offerings which belonged to the priests—"the tithe of the tithes."

Ver. 6.—**In all this time.** Literally, "during all this"—while all this was being done. The reference seems to be solely to the affair of Eliashib and Tobiah. **Artaxerxes, king of Babylon.** The title "king of Babylon," which was certainly borne by Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius Hystaspis, may have continued in use down to the time of Nehemiah, or even later. If he visited Artaxerxes at Babylon, the court happening to be there at the time, he would naturally think and speak of him as "king of Babylon." **After certain days.** Literally, "at the end of days," which is thought to mean "at the expiration of a year." **I obtained leave of the king.** Gesenius and Professor Lee render, "I asked leave of the king;" Houbigant, Rambach, and others, "I was asked for from the king," i. e. "the Jews asked to have me sent back to govern them."

Ver. 7.—**A chamber in the courts of the house of God.** It would seem by this expression that the chamber made over to Tobiah was not part of the main building of the temple, but a portion of some detached building belonging to the "courts." This, no doubt, made the desecration less flagrant, but was far from justifying it.

Ver. 8.—**Therefore cast I forth all the household stuff.** Tobiah had furnished his "chamber" as a dwelling-house, filling it with "household stuff" of various kinds. Nehemiah, of his own authority, had the whole of it turned out of doors.

Ver. 9.—**I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers.** Regarding the sacred place as polluted by its conversion to secular uses,

Nehemiah had it purified, and so reconsecrated. He then ordered the restoration to their former place of the various stores which had been removed to make room for Tobiah's furniture.

Ver. 10.—**I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites . . . were fled.** What Nehemiah saw was that the Levites were absent, and "the house of God forsaken" (ver. 11). On inquiry, he found that the reason of their absence was the non-payment of the tithes. **That did the work.** I. e. whose business it was to do the work of the house, or, in other words, conduct Divine service. **Every one to his field.** Every Levite had a plot of ground, which he cultivated when not engaged in the work of the temple (see Num. xxxv. 2; Josh. xxi. 3).

Ver. 11.—**Then contended I with the rulers.** While the guilt of profaning the temple lay especially with the priestly class, that of withholding the tithes was mainly chargeable on the "rulers," or "nobles." These persons, as wealthy landowners, had of course a pecuniary interest in keeping back the tithe. When they felt the control of a strong hand they made the payments regularly enough (ch. xii. 47; xiii. 12); but no sooner was this control removed by Nehemiah's departure than they relapsed into the covetous habits in which they had indulged before he was made governor (ch. x. 37). The Church in all ages has suffered wrong from the cupidity of wealthy men among its members. **Why is the house of God forsaken?** Why, contrarily to the distinct pledge given at the time of the renewal of the covenant (ch. x. 39), have you suffered the house of God to become a solitude, driving the Levites away from it by depriving them of their legal sustenance? **I gathered them together.** Nehemiah brought the Levites back to the temple from their country residences, and re-established them in their proper offices.

Ver. 13.—**And I made treasurers.** It was perhaps now for the first time that special treasurers were provided to have the charge of the temple store-chambers, these having hitherto been under the superintendence of the high priest (ver. 4). The appointment mentioned in ch. xii. 44 is probably the same with this; and the entire duty of the treasurers is to be learnt by combining that passage with the present. They were to be both the collectors and the dispensers of the tithes. Of the four treasurers, one was a priest, one a Levite, one a layman of rank (see ch. x. 22), and one a professional scribe. This last, **Zadok**, is perhaps to be identified with the "Zidkijah" of ch. x. 1, who appears to have been Nehemiah's private secretary (see the comment

*ad loc.*) Unto their brethren. *I. e.* to the priests and Levites, brethren of Shelemiah and Pedaiah.

Ver. 14.—Remember me, O my God, Or, "Think upon me, my God," as the same words are translated in ch. v. 19. **Wipe not out my good deeds.** *I. e.* "Blot not my good deeds out of thy remembrance"—forget them not, let them be remembered in my favour. **For the offices thereof.** Rather, as in the margin, "for the observances thereof"—*i. e.* for the maintenance of the rites, ceremonies, usages, &c. of the temple, which I have done my best to continue on the ancient footing.

Ver. 15.—In those days. A note of time even vaguer than that of ch. xii. 44 and ch. xiii. 1, but pointing certainly to a date later than Nehemiah's return from the Persian court. **Saw I some treading wine-presses on the sabbath.** On the treading of grapes in the wine-press, as the first step towards the production of wine, see Job xxiv. 11; Isa. lxiii. 2, 3, &c. The performance of this work on the sabbath was a flagrant breach of the fourth commandment. **Bringing in sheaves and lading asses.** Scarcely "sheaves" in our sense of the word, since corn was not stored in sheaves. Rather, "bringing grain and loading it upon asses." **As also.** Rather, "and even." It might be pleaded that the transport of grain was a necessity; but there could be no absolute need of a supply of wine, grapes, or figs. **I testified against them in the day in which they sold victuals.** Rather, "I testified against them in respect of the day on which they sold provisions."

Ver. 16.—There dwelt men of Tyre also therein. It was not against the law that foreigners should dwell in Jerusalem. *Araunah the Jebusite* lived there in the time of David, and *Ebed-melech the Ethiopian* in the time of Zedekiah (Jer. xxxviii. 7). Nehemiah does not object to the Tyrians for being dwellers in Jerusalem, but for offering their wares for sale there on the sabbath, and inducing the Jews to buy of them. **Which brought fish.** Fish was always a favourite article of food with the Israelites (Levit. xi. 9; Num. xi. 5; Deut. xiv. 9; Isa. xix. 10; Matt. xiv. 7; xv. 34; Luke xxiv. 42, &c.). They derived it chiefly from the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean.

Ver. 17.—Then I contended with the nobles. In the desecration of the sabbath, as in the non-payment of tithes, the nobles were the chief offenders, being at once luxurious and latitudinarian. They desired the freshest food for their feasts, and encouraged both foreigners and natives to break the law for the gratification of their carnal appetites.

Ver. 18.—Did not your fathers thus? The desecration of the sabbath is among the

sins most strongly denounced by Jeremiah (ch. xvii. 21—27) and Ezekiel (ch. xx. 13; xxii. 8, 26, &c.). **And did not our God bring all this evil upon us and upon this city?** God had said by Jeremiah, "If ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jer. xvii. 27). The burning of the city by Nebuzaradan was the performance of this threat.

Ver. 19.—When the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath. The Jews have always reckoned their days from sunset to sunset, grounding their practice on the account of the Creation given in the first chapter of Genesis, where "the evening and the morning" are said to constitute each of the six days. There was also a special command that the "sabbath" of the great day of atonement should be kept "from even to even" (Levit. xxiii. 32). **I commanded that the gates should be shut.** The gates would as a matter of course have been shut at sunset. Nehemiah required that the closing should take place some half-hour earlier, when the shadows were lengthening, and the day was drawing towards a close. He regarded it as a sort of desecration of the sabbath to carry on secular work to the last allowable moment. **Some of my servants.** Compare ch. iv. 16; v. 16. **That there should be no burthen brought in.** Foot passengers were no doubt allowed to enter and leave the city on the sabbath, Nehemiah's servants being set to see that under no pretence should merchandise be allowed to enter.

Ver. 20.—The merchants . . . lodged without. The merchants could not leave their wares unguarded; and the wares not being admitted into the town, they were obliged to camp out. Thus a crowd was collected about the gates, and a disturbance and excitement caused, which was unsuitable for the sabbath. To prevent this, Nehemiah threatened to arrest the merchants, whereupon the practice was given up (ver. 21).

Ver. 22.—And I commanded the Levites . . . that they should come and keep the gates. Assigning the duty to his servants was probably a temporary arrangement. The permanent charge was committed to the Levites, who had been intrusted with the duty when the gates were first set up (ch. vii. 1). They were to "cleanse," or purify, themselves, because the charge was considered a sacred one. **Remember me, O my God, concerning this also.** Compare ver. 14. **And spare me.** It is worthy of notice

that Nehemiah does not regard his good deeds as sufficient for his justification, but throws himself unreservedly on God's mercy.

Ver. 23.—**In those days.** *I.e.* "About this same time." Compare ver. 15. **Saw I Jews.** Rather, "looked I after the Jews." There is a reference to the first three verses of the present chapter, which had introduced the subject of the mixed marriages. Nehemiah wishes to put on record the part which he had taken in the matter, and begins by observing that it had not escaped him—he had had his eye on the transgressors, and had noted their misconduct, and the evils whereto it led. **Wives of Ashdod.** Philistine wives, of a race always hostile to Israel, and natives of a city which had recently taken part with Nehemiah's bitter enemies (ch. iv. 7). **Of Ammon and of Moab.** Compare Ezra ix. 1, and Neh. xiii. 1.

Ver. 24.—**Their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod.** Some understand the writer to mean that half of the children in a family spoke the tongue of the father, and half that of the mother. But many of the best Hebraists prefer the sense expressed by our translators, viz., that all the children spoke a jargon half Ashdodite and half Aramaic. The Philistine language is said to have resembled the Egyptian (Hieronym., 'Comment. in Esaiam,' xix. 18).

Ver. 25.—**I contended with them, and cursed them.** Or, "reviled them," as Gesenius and Professor Lee explain. **And smote certain of them.** *I.e.* "had some of them beaten." Some understand by this that the offenders underwent the bastinado by sentence of a court (Deut. xxv. 2); others think Nehemiah had them struck informally by his attendants. This latter explanation is supported by the following clause, since "plucking out the hair" was never a legal punishment. **Made them swear by God.** Literally, "swore them by God," *i.e.* dictated the words, and made them repeat the formula and accept the oath. **Saying, Ye shall not give.** Literally, "If ye shall give," &c. Nehemiah made them swear that if they should intermarry with the heathen the curse of God should fall upon them.

Ver. 26.—**Did not Solomon . . . sin by these things?** The example adduced was more apt than any other to move Jews. Israelites might have felt more deeply the case of Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 25). Solomon's sin in "going after strange wives," and its punishment, are set forth very fully in 1 Kings xi. 1—40. **Among many nations there was no king like him.** The reference is not so much to particular texts (*e.g.* 1 Kings iii. 13; 2 Chron. i. 12) as to the general description of Solomon, his glory, and his greatness (1 Kings iv. —x.; 2 Chron. i.—ix.),

which set him above all other earthly monarchs. **Who was beloved of his God.** See 2 Sam. xii. 24. **And God made him king over all Israel.** See 1 Kings iv. 1.

Ver. 27.—**Shall we then hearken unto you?** Shall we give way to you, and adopt the practice which you recommend, thus transgressing against God, and provoking him to destroy us? Surely not. Solomon's example is enough to deter us.

Ver. 28.—**One of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib.** See ch. xii. 10. Eliashib seems to have been still living, though one of his grandsons was of age to contract a marriage. **Was son-in-law to Sanballat, the Horonite.** Had therefore married one of his daughters, while Eliashib himself was connected by marriage with Tobiah. The defection of the high priestly family from those principles which Ezra and Nehemiah regarded as vital is only too apparent. **I chased him from me.** *I.e.* I forced him to quit the country and become an exile. We may suppose that he refused to repudiate his foreign wife, and preferred to take refuge with Sanballat in Samaria.

Ver. 29.—**They have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.** We look in vain for any distinct "covenant" which the priestly order broke by allying itself with the heathen, or indeed for any special law forbidding the priests to take heathen wives, which was not equally binding upon laymen. But Nehemiah feels that every sin is worse in a priest than in one who is not a priest; that a priest who contracts a pollution "pollutes the priesthood;" and that there is a tacit covenant by which priests and Levites bind themselves to holiness of life more absolutely and definitely than others.

Ver. 30.—**Thus cleansed I them.** Rather, "And I cleansed them." The process of cleansing touched on in this verse, and also in ver. 3, is not described. It probably resembled the process adopted by Ezra (Ezra x. 5—17). **And appointed the wards.** *I.e.* "assigned their offices to the various priests and Levites" (see ch. xi. 11—24; xii. 44; xiii. 13).

Ver. 31.—**And for the wood offering.** *I.e.* "I appointed persons to look after the collection of the wood offering (ch. x. 34) and of the first-fruits" (*ibid.* vers. 35—37). **At appointed times.** Compare the expression in ch. x. 34: "At times appointed year by year." **Remember me, O my God, for good.** A characteristic termination of a book whereof one of the main features has been a constant carrying to God of all the author's cares, troubles, and difficulties (see ch. i. 4—11; ii. 4, 20; iv. 4, 9, 20; v. 15, 19; vi. 9, 14; xiii. 14, 22, 29).

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Separation from Israel of foreigners.* In the public reading of the law, the command was met with to keep the Ammonite and the Moabite out of the congregation of God for ever. Upon this, interpreting the precept apparently as applicable to all strangers, the people separated from them “the mixed multitude” (for the phrase see Exod. xii. 38). To what extent these had been united with Israel before, and how far the separation was carried, does not appear. The law (Deut. xxiii. 3) seems clearly to mean that even if an Ammonite or Moabite became converted from heathenism to the faith of the Israelites, neither he nor his descendants, to the tenth generation, should be allowed to unite in their worship, or be capable of naturalisation. Was *this* law rigidly carried out in the case of proselytes from the heathen? But if “the mixed multitude” had not been fellow-worshippers, from what were they now excluded? Were they expelled from the city? Without attempting an answer to such questions, we may take the passage as suggesting the duty of the Christian Church to keep itself pure from alien elements. This duty is clearly set forth in not a few passages in the New Testament, which, when they are read in public in some Churches, must surely be at times felt as protesting against the existing state of things.

I. WHOM CHRISTIANS ARE TO EXCLUDE FROM THEIR FELLOWSHIP. None are to be separated, as under the law, on account of nationality. “There is neither Jew nor Greek,” &c. (Gal. iii. 28). None because of the faults of their parents, still less of their remote ancestors. But—1. Total unbelievers in Christianity. This is implied in Matt. xviii. 17, and clearly included in the prohibition in 2 Cor. vi. 14—17. But it needs no express precept; it is evident from the nature of the case that a Christian Church must be composed of professed Christians. 2. Rejecters of essential truths. Especially the *teachers* of serious error (see 1 Tim. i. 20; 2 John 10; Rev. ii. 14, 15). 3. The immoral (see 1 Cor. v.). 4. Impenitent offenders against a fellow-member of the Church (see Matt. xviii. 15—17). 5. Disturbers of the peace and unity of the Church (Rom. xvi. 17).

II. TO WHAT EXTENT THE SEPARATION IS TO BE MADE. 1. From Church communion. 2. From the intimacies of private life. The main ends of the separation cannot be secured if those who are excluded from Church ordinances are freely admitted to friendship and family life. “With such an one no not to eat,” is the language of St. Paul as to certain classes of offenders (1 Cor. v. 11). Avoidance of private friendship is even enjoined towards some who are yet to be regarded as brethren (2 Thess. iii. 6, 14, 15).

III. WHY IT IS TO BE MADE. It is required by—1. The laws of Christ. 2. The idea and design of the Church. As a community consecrated to God; baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; instituted to witness for truth and holiness, to maintain the worship of God, to promote his kingdom, which is righteousness; constituted the visible body of Christ, to speak his words, do his work, for conversion of sinners and spiritual improvement and comfort of saints. Christian communion is impaired, the power of Christian ministry and ordinances lessened, when the Church is itself palpably “a mixed multitude” of believers and unbelievers, righteous and unrighteous. 3. The safety of individual and family Christian life. 4. The benefit of the separated themselves. That unbelievers may be impressed with the reality and importance of Christian faith and holiness, and their own lack of them. If treated as Christians, they will come to regard themselves as Christians, much to their own injury. So in the case of such as are guilty of immorality; their expulsion from fellowship is to be with a view to their repentance and restoration (see 2 Cor. ii. 5—8).

In conclusion—1. The exercise of such discipline doubtless requires much wisdom and charity. It is vain to hope for, it is wrong to attempt, a perfect separation between the true and the false, the wheat and the tares. It is possible to be too rigid; it is more easy to err on the side of laxity. There is danger on one side of Pharisaism and narrow bigotry; on the other, of growing indifference to truth and righteousness, the welfare of souls and the glory of Christ. Christian intelligence, piety, and love



—rather, the Spirit of Christ—in the Church can alone preserve from these opposite evils, and guide in a course harmonising at once with the purity and the charity which are united in the gospel, and ought never to be dissevered in the practice of Christians. But, in the face of the teaching and injunctions of the New Testament, it can never be right to seek to escape difficulty by abandoning Church discipline altogether. 2. The narrative shows the value of the written word, and the importance of the reading of it. It preserves the truth during periods of neglect and disobedience; and when studied afresh brings it to light again, for conviction and reformation. 3. The Divine law, though neglected and disobeyed, is not thereby abolished. It endures as a witness against those who disobey, and the standard by which they will be judged.

Ver. 2.—*Foes turned into friends.* “Our God turned the curse into a blessing.” Balaam, who was hired to curse Israel, and desired to do so, was compelled to bless them. A unique instance; but suggesting the general truth that God makes the efforts of men to injure his people a means of doing them good, and of doing good to others through them, which is also a mode of blessing them. How does he effect this?

I. BY HIS OVERRULING PROVIDENCE. The case of Joseph is a notable instance (see Gen. xlv. 5—8; 1. 20). The enmity and cruelty of his brothers, the anger of Potiphar's wife, issuing in his own exaltation, the preservation of his family, and their settlement in Egypt.

II. BY THE POWER OF HIS SPIRIT. 1. On those desiring to injure good men. Sometimes turning their hearts to friendship. Paul going to Damascus to persecute the Christians, but arriving to co-operate with them. 2. On those whose injury is sought. Turning the enmity of men, and even of Satan, into means of grace to his people; promoting in them—(1) Compassion and good-will towards their enemies. So that they bless those who curse, pray for them, forgive them. (2) Trust in God, and experience of his supporting grace. (3) Patience and resignation. (4) Power to overcome temptation. (5) Christian character in general. And, as the result of all—(6) Power to do good. 3. On the hearts of others. The example and the utterances of Christians thus exercised and thus blessed being made more influential (1) to encourage and strengthen their fellow-Christians and (2) to promote the salvation of sinners. Illustrations abound in Scripture, biographies of Christians, and ordinary Christian life. David was fitted for the throne by the discipline which the enmity of Saul afforded; and by the experience of varied trials was so enriched in spiritual life as to be able to write psalms meeting the wants of godly men throughout the ages. We owe the sublime death of Stephen to the rage of his malignant foes. If St. Paul had not been persecuted he would not have been so great in goodness, or effected so much good in life, or written epistles so full of inspiring thoughts and powerful consolations for the benefit of the Church for ever. St. John, banished to Patmos, sees heavenly visions, hears heavenly voices, and writes the Book of Revelation. And “the noble army of martyrs,” how much they owed, how much we owe through them, to their persecutions. But the grand instance is that of the Lord himself, made “perfect through sufferings,” and becoming thereby the Saviour of the world, the sympathising Friend and Consoler of his suffering people, the perfect example of meekness, resignation, and forgiveness of enemies. Note, however, in conclusion, that in the case of impenitent sinners blessings from God and man are turned into curses. What are meant for good—the gifts of Providence, enjoyments, sufferings, the gospel and the grace of God—all become evil.

Vers. 4—9.—*An intruder ejected.* In these verses we have an account of a gross abuse of authority by the high priest, and how it was corrected by Nehemiah.

I. THE OFFENCE. Turning rooms in the courts of the temple, intended and used as store-rooms for tithes and offerings, &c., into a residence for Tobiah on his visits to Jerusalem. In ver. 5 we read of “a great chamber;” in ver. 9 of “chambers.” Perhaps several rooms were thrown into one; or the word in ver. 5 may be, as in ver. 4, collective. 1. The perversion was itself disgraceful. It may have occasioned the neglect recorded in ver. 10. 2. The person for whom it was committed was not only

an alien, but an enemy. 3. The person who committed it was the appointed guardian of the rooms. As high priest, he should have been too jealous of the sanctity of the temple; as "having the oversight of the chamber of the house of God," he should have been too faithful to his duty; as head of the priests and Levites, too concerned for their rights and welfare, to be willing to permit, much less to perpetrate, such an abuse.

II. HOW THE OFFENCE CAME TO BE PERMITTED. 1. Nehemiah was absent. In his absence affairs fell rapidly into disorder again. A painful illustration of the superficiality of reforms wrought hastily under the influence of powerful leaders. 2. Tobiah was a great man. 3. He was a relative of Eliashib. 4. Eliashib was unworthy of his office. He was more concerned to stand well with Tobiah than to do his duty to God and his brethren. Probably he was disaffected towards Nehemiah and his reforms, and thought that now he was gone he could do as he pleased.

III. HOW THE OFFENCE WAS CORRECTED. Nehemiah, returning to Jerusalem, and being informed of what had been done, was very indignant, and at once took measures to put an end to the scandal. Under his direction—1. Tobiah's furniture was summarily ejected. 2. The rooms were purified from the ceremonial uncleanness they had contracted. 3. They were restored to their proper use. The narrative suggests—(1) The evil influence sometimes exercised in the Church by rank and wealth, or relationship to those in office. These sometimes go further than character and ability (which should be mainly regarded) to secure for their possessors positions of authority and power in the Church. And those who should protest silently acquiesce in the abuse, or basely connive at it, that they may live in friendship with the unholy intruders into God's temple, and promote their own worldly ends. (2) The feelings which such abuses will awaken in good men. (3) The duty of those who have the power to correct them.

Vers. 10—14.—*Suspended ministrations restored.* Nehemiah, on his return, soon discovers another serious evil which his absence had occasioned; and, with his usual promptness, ability, and energy, corrects it.

I. THE SERIOUS IRREGULARITY WHICH HAD ARISEN. The services of the temple, if not discontinued, had been deprived of much of their dignity and impressiveness by the withdrawal of the Levites, including the singers, from their duties. Their appointed daily allowances (ch. xii. 47) had been withheld, and they had retired to their fields to obtain a livelihood by other employments.

II. ITS CAUSES. 1. Nehemiah's absence. His presence and authority were as yet necessary to keep all classes to their duty. The reformation he had effected was not sustained by any vital change in the hearts of rulers or people. Their resolutions, so solemnly made under excitement (ch. x.), were superficial and short-lived. 2. The indifference and negligence of the rulers (ver. 11), who should have taken care that the regulations were observed. 3. The unfitness for his office of the high priest. He ought to have deemed as his own the interests of the inferior ministers of the sanctuary. But his misconduct, as related in vers. 4, 5—whether the lack of offerings gave opportunity for it, or was occasioned by it—shows how little likely he was to concern himself about them, so long as his own position and gains were not affected. 4. The covetousness of the people. They are reproved by Malachi about this time for robbing God by withholding the tithes and offerings (Mal. iii. 8). Had they furnished the means, the treasurers would hardly have failed to supply the Levites; or if these had proved unfaithful (as seems hinted in ver. 13), the people could surely have secured the substitution of others. 5. Probably the worldliness of the Levites themselves. If their hearts had been in their work it is likely they would have found means of continuing in it. A general declension had evidently taken place, and the various classes would act and react on each other to increase the degeneracy of all.

III. ITS CORRECTION. Nehemiah—1. Remonstrated with the rulers. 2. Gathered and reinstated the Levites. 3. Restored the general payment of tithes and offerings. 4. Appointed as treasurers men of good repute, to receive the contributions of the people, and thence "distribute unto their brethren."

IV. NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER THEREUPON. Is expressive of—1. Satisfaction with his work. Could think of it before God as an evidence of his love for God's house. 2

Confident expectation of Divine recognition, acceptance, and recompense of his work. He could expect little of these from the men whose disorders he had corrected. Enough if God approved. 3. Humility. "Wipe not out," &c., as he felt might justly be done. Comp. ver. 22: "Spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy." To interpret these appeals to God as "prayer for posthumous fame" (Stanley, 'Jewish Church,' iii. p. 135) is surely to miss their meaning.

In conclusion, notice—1. The duty of zealously maintaining the public worship of God. All combining according to their ability. Some ministering, others contributing money or money's worth; some faithfully using their talent for management, others exercising their authority to correct abuses and reprove negligence. Those who love God's house will deem such services a privilege and honour. Those who withhold support deserve reproof, and have no right to complain of defective ministrations. "A scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry." 2. The Divine recognition and reward of practical love to the house of God. 3. The worth to a Church of able, devoted, and noble-minded leaders.

Ver. 11.—*Forsaking the house of God.* "Why is the house of God forsaken?" The question addressed by Nehemiah to the rulers may well have had respect at once to their own neglect, the withholding of contributions by the people, and the consequent abandonment of the temple by the Levites. We may apply it to the neglect to attend and support public worship by a large proportion of the population of our country. It is—

I. A QUESTION FOR MINISTERS. They have the greatest power to attract to, or repel from, the house of God. Let them ask whether the house of God may not be forsaken on account of defects in—1. Their preaching. Let them consider whether it is what it ought to be in—(1) Substance. Consisting of the presentation of the great truths of the gospel in their varied application to the spiritual needs of men. (2) Intelligence. Addressing itself to the understanding as well as to the feelings. Not mere dogmatic utterance, unaccompanied by reasons. (3) Intelligibility. Not obscure through the effort to seem intellectual or original. (4) Adaptation. Suited to the mental condition of the hearers and those who might become hearers. (5) Fervour. Arising from sincere love to Christ and men, and desire to do good. 2. Their conduct. Inconsistencies of character, indolence, self-indulgence, unapproachableness, priestly pretensions, airs of infallible authority, mercenariness, all tend to alienate the people from the sanctuary. Neglect of pastoral visitation, whether through indifference, or indolence, or preference for other pursuits, or being too much occupied with the business of religion, may have a like effect. Or people may feel no interest in ministers and their teaching because ministers show no interest in their general well-being.

II. A QUESTION FOR CONGREGATIONS. Defects in those who do attend Divine service may have much to do with the absence of others. Let them consider whether they are wanting in—1. Due support and encouragement of their ministers. Pecuniary support; sympathy and co-operation in efforts for the good of those without; encouragement of a style of preaching adapted to interest them; avoidance of unnecessary demands on the time and strength of their pastors. A minister's power of usefulness depends largely on the temper and conduct towards him of his congregation. 2. Care to make the services attractive. By due attention to the building, the singing, &c. 3. Provision of sufficient and suitable accommodation. 4. Efforts to induce the neglecters of public worship to attend. 5. Hearty welcome of those who are induced to attend. 6. A life fitted to recommend religion. In their general conduct. In their families. In their relations to those around, as merchants, tradesmen, employers of labour, &c. In the Church: unity, peace, earnestness.

III. A QUESTION FOR THOSE WHO NEGLECT PUBLIC WORSHIP. 1. Partially. Why not regular and constant in attendance? If attendance be a duty at all, it must be a duty to be regular. If occasional attendance be good, constant would be better. Irregularity reveals want of religious principle in the matter, and that no spiritual profit has yet been received by attendance. It discourages ministers and congregations, hinders the salvation of those who are guilty of it, injures their families, and sets an evil example. 2. Wholly. Why do you forsake the house of God? Is it that you feel

no interest in what is said and done there? This reveals a state of heart deplorable and perilous; alienation from God, indifference to your highest welfare, unfitness for heaven. Is it that you prefer the society and habits of the ungodly, or fear their ridicule? But will you sacrifice your souls to them? Can you think with pleasure of sharing their future lot? Is it that, wearied with the toils of the week, you think yourself entitled to spend the Lord's day in idle repose? Its hours are sufficient for both rest and public worship, and the engagements of God's house are themselves restful. Is it that you dislike some who attend Divine worship, or think them to be hypocrites? But, supposing you to be right in your judgment, you ought not to condemn and separate from all on account of the faults of a few; and their wrong conduct in one direction is no excuse for your going wrong in another; and if sincere in worship, you will be blessed, whatever becomes of them. Do you say that you can read your Bible and worship God at home? It is to be hoped that you do; but if it were to good purpose, you would surely value the exercises of public worship, and the opportunities and helps which it affords. Do consider anew the reasons for not forsaking God's house. (1) The claims and commands of God. (2) The needs and worth of your souls. (3) The good of your families. (4) The good of society, so largely promoted by public worship and instruction. (5) The account you must give hereafter to God, and the awful issues in eternity of a godless life.

Vers. 15—22.—*Sabbath-breaking suppressed.* A promise to observe the sabbath was one of the articles of the solemn covenant recorded in ch. x. We read here how it was violated by some of the people, and how Nehemiah put a stop to their practices.

I. THE PROFANATION OF THE SABBATH WHICH PREVAILED. 1. Among country Jews (ver. 15). Nehemiah, visiting the country, saw the people labouring as on other days, and bringing their produce to Jerusalem for sale. That they actually sold it on the sabbath does not appear. The concluding sentence of ver. 15 seems to imply that they did not (see Bertheau *in loc.*). But they disobeyed the law by working themselves, and compelling their beasts of burden to work. 2. Among residents at Jerusalem. Tyrians dwelt there who traded in fish and other articles, and they carried on their business on the sabbath as on other days, the Jews encouraging the forbidden traffic by their purchases. Both violated the law; for the foreigner living amongst the Israelites was expressly named in it (Exod. xx. 10).

II. THE MEASURES BY WHICH NEHEMIAH PUT AN END TO IT. 1. He rebuked offenders. He visited the market when the country people were selling their produce, and rebuked them (ver. 15). He remonstrated with the nobles, who ought to have prevented the profanation (vers. 17, 18), charging them with *doing* what was done through their connivance, reminding them of the evil which such sins had brought heretofore on the nation, and warning them that renewed transgression was likely to bring down fresh punishment. He probably had Jer. xvii. 21—27 in his mind. 2. He had the gates kept closed during the whole of the sabbath, placing some of his own servants as guards. Not to prevent all ingress and egress, but "that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day" (ver. 19). 3. He threatened with punishment the dealers who persisted in lodging near the wall during the sabbath, and thus brought the practice to an end. While it lasted the Jews would be tempted to make purchases on the sabbath; and if not, yet the thing was unseemly. 4. He appointed Levites as permanent guards of the gates on the sabbath, bidding them purify themselves as for a holy service before taking their posts.

III. HIS SATISFACTION WITH HIS WORK. Addressing himself to God as on former occasions (see on ver. 14, and ch. v. 19), praying as before that he would remember him and his work; but more humbly than before appealing to the Divine mercy. In conclusion—1. To promote the due observance of the sabbath is a work both of piety, benevolence, and patriotism. 2. Those who have the right and the power to suppress evil practices, yet permit them, are partakers of their guilt (ver. 17). 3. The punishment of others for sins should deter us from committing them (ver. 18). If, instead of this, we follow the example of sinners, we must share their doom.

Vers. 23—29. — *Forbidden marriages.* This chapter might have been written to bring into pointed contrast the promises of the people (ch. x.) and their subsequent practice. In nearly every particular the covenant so solemnly made was broken. We have recorded in this paragraph—

I. A GREAT EVIL. 1. Marriages with foreign women. It is probable that the Jews referred to here lived near the territories occupied by the peoples from whom they took wives. Marriage with such was expressly forbidden by the law (Exod. xxxiv. 16; Deut. vii. 3, 4), and tended to destroy the distinctive character of the people as "holy to the Lord," and to frustrate the purposes of their national calling. Some of the marriages in this case were specially criminal, since Jewish wives had been divorced that heathens might take their place (Mal. ii. 11—16). 2. The effect of these upon the children. They learned the language of their respective mothers, and were ignorant of the Jewish tongue. Or the meaning may be that they spoke a corrupt dialect compounded of the languages of father and mother.

II. THE COURSE TAKEN BY NEHEMIAH TO SUPPRESS IT. 1. He rebuked the offenders, pronouncing a curse upon them. 2. He administered to them an oath not to continue the forbidden practice. 3. He reasoned with them. (1) As to the sinfulness of the practice (ver. 27). (2) As to the peril of it (ver. 26). This he showed by the example of Solomon, who, although so great and so beloved of God, was led into idolatry by his foreign wives. Enlightenment and conviction on these points would be more effectual in putting a stop to the practice than chastisement, or even the oath forced on them.

III. NEHEMIAH'S SPECIAL TREATMENT OF AN OFFENDING PRIEST (vers. 28, 29). Although he was grandson to the high priest, yet because he had married a daughter of Sanballat, who was not only a foreigner, but a bitter enemy of Israel—1. He banished him from his presence, perhaps from Jerusalem, or even the Jewish community. 2. He appealed to God to punish him and his supporters or companions in sin. The tone of this appeal seems to favour the view that, owing to his high connections, or perhaps because the civil governor did not think it expedient to interfere with the internal discipline of the priesthood, Nehemiah felt he could only forbid the offender's presence near himself, leaving his due punishment, and that of his favourers, to God. That they merited severer punishment than others who had similarly broken the law, Nehemiah intimates when he says, "They have defiled the priesthood," &c.

Lessons:—1. The evil of marriages between such as are and such as are not God's people. (1) They are contrary to the Christian law (1 Cor. vii. 39; 2 Cor. vi. 14). (2) They are incompatible with the closest union and communion. Difference in some respects may promote union; but serious difference on a matter so vital and all-pervading as religion must constantly hinder fellowship of heart and unity of purpose. (3) They are dangerous to the soul (ver. 26). The influence of wedded life in making the two like each other will more probably operate to injure piety in the one than to implant it in the other. The words of Tennyson are likely in this sense to be fulfilled in whichever of the parties is the better at first:—

"Thou shalt lower to his level day by day,  
What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathise with clay  
As the husband is, the wife is: thou art mated with a clown,  
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag thee down."

(4) They prevent consistent family government. (5) They operate to the serious injury of the children (ver. 24), and thus frustrate one Divinely-ordained end of matrimony (see Mal. ii. 15). (6) On these and other accounts they prevent the highest and purest happiness of married life. 2. The use to be made of the falls of others (ver. 26). Some quote the sins of such men as David, Solomon, Peter, &c. as excusing or palliating their own. The very opposite is the fact. With such beacons our guilt is increased, if we fall in like manner. 3. The greater guilt of some men's sins (ver. 29). Professed special consecration to God increases guilt. Sins in ministers of religion are not only more injurious to others, but more wicked in themselves. 4. The certainty of the Divine punishment of sinners, though they

escape the human (ver. 29). 5. The worth of those who are zealous in opposing and suppressing sin. They are among the best of patriots and philanthropists. For the perils of states, and the miseries of men in general, arise mainly from sin. How surpassingly worthy then of all praise and love is the Son of God, who "was manifested to take away our sins" and "destroy the works of the devil" (1 John iii. 5, 8).

Vers. 30, 31.—*Nehemiah: his character and works.* In these words Nehemiah briefly recalls the services he had recently rendered to the community, concluding with one more prayer that God would remember him. We may suitably conclude with a more general survey of his character and works.

I. HIS CHARACTER. His natural abilities were of a superior order: his sagacity, forethought, power of organisation and management, warmth of feeling, power to inspire and rule others, calm consideration in laying his plans, vigour and determination in executing them, &c. But in a homely we think rather of the moral and spiritual. The narrative presents him to us as eminent for—1. Piety. This was at the basis of his character, and guided and animated his whole life. It appears in his—(1) Habitual prayerfulness. From first to last this is conspicuous (ch. i. 4; ii. 4; iv. 4, 9; v. 19; vi. 9, 14; xiii. 14, 22, 29, 31). "In everything by prayer and supplication" he made his requests "known unto God" (Phil. iv. 6). (2) Practical fear of God (ch. v. 15). (3) Love for God's house and its services (ch. xiii. 14, and elsewhere). (4) Reverence for his law, and desire to bring all into harmony with it. (5) Confidence in God (ch. ii. 20; iv. 14, 20)—a confidence, however, which did not produce negligence in counsel or action, but stimulated to both. (6) Recognition of God's hand in all his successes (ch. ii. 8, 12, 18; iv. 15; vi. 16). Appointed the praise of God as the principal part of the dedication of the wall (ch. xii. 27, *seq.*). 2. Patriotism. An ardent longing for the welfare of Israel, and willingness to do and endure anything for its promotion (ch. ii. 10). In the case of an Israelite, piety and patriotism could unite in a degree difficult to maintain in the case of others; the nation being, as no other, God's people, owing to him its existence, laws, &c., and set apart by him as his special organ and for his special praise. 3. Disinterestedness. Seeking no personal end, receiving no salary as governor, but gladly devoting his own fortune to the service of the people (ch. v. 10, 14—18). 4. Impartiality. Rebuking wealthy men, rulers and priests, as freely as the common people; enforcing the rights of the latter as zealously as those of the former (ch. v. 7—13; xiii. 11). 5. Courage. In facing difficulties and opposition, and correcting offenders in high places (ch. iv. 9, *seq.*; vi. 11; xiii. 8, 28). 6. Perseverance. In prosecuting his work, and beginning again when it was partially undone through his absence.

II. THE SERVICES HE RENDERED TO HIS PEOPLE. 1. The strengthening of Jerusalem. He saw this to be the great necessity which must be supplied, if anything else were to be done effectually and permanently for the good of the nation. To this end he—(1) Had the encircling wall thoroughly repaired and its gates restored. Thus turning Jerusalem into a strong fortress, and making it possible for the people to develop into a nation again. (2) Organised its forces for defence. (3) Increased its population. 2. Reformation of religion and morals. He sought to reconstitute the nation on the basis of the Divine law. He believed that "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. xiv. 34). He therefore—(1) Suppressed extortion and oppression (ch. v.). (2) Separated the people from heathen alliances and friendships (ver. 30, and elsewhere). (3) Promoted the instruction of the people in God's word (ch. viii., &c.). (4) Resuscitated the great religious festivals. (5) Led the people to confession of sin and renewal of their covenant with God (chs. ix., x.). (6) Reorganised the services of the temple. (7) Revived the payment of tithes and other offerings for the support of its ministers. (8) Maintained its sanctity (ch. xiii. 8, 9). (9) Enforced the law for the observance of the sabbath (vers. 13—22). Altogether a remarkable man, raised up by God at a critical period to do a great work for Israel, and, through that nation, for mankind. Let us—(1) Glorify God in him. (2) Imitate him so far as our abilities and opportunities allow, and so far as is consistent with the more spiritual system under which God has placed us. (3) Pray God to raise up many such men for his service at home and abroad.

## HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—31.—*The blessing of God on an active life founded upon his word.* I. THE TRUE RELIGIOUS REFORMATION, both *negative* and *positive*. 1. *Abuses* must be vigorously attacked and cleansed away. The house of God has to be purified of strangers. The neglect of discipline a terrible evil. Unfaithful ministers the curse of the Church. The “mixed multitude” is no strength to Jerusalem, but weakness. The observance of the sabbath. To the Jew a typical commandment, which represented obedience altogether. While days cannot possess the same place under the new dispensation, there is guardianship of the day of rest which is absolutely necessary for the life of religion. In all active efforts of reformation personal caprice and mere self-assertion must be renounced. The open Bible must be the strong basis of operations, the unfailing armoury from which the weapons are taken. On that simply dependent, the true reformer can be bold, energetic, uncompromising, intolerant of evil, driving out the violators of God’s law and defilers of his temple. We have a great example of consuming zeal in the Lord himself. 2. All really religious reformation will be *constructive* as well as *destructive*. The evil driven away will come back finding “the house empty and garnished” unless it be possessed by the spirit of active obedience. The only principle upon which we can keep out abuse is that of the right use of the things before abused. This applies to the service of God’s house, to the observance of the sabbath, and to the purity of communion among God’s people. Nehemiah re-established the true order of religious life. The safety of the Church lies in its activity and development according to the word of God. All living growth is defence against attack and decay.

II. THE TRUE MEMORIAL BEFORE GOD AND MAN. “Remember me, Lord, for good.” 1. We should cast ourselves on the faithfulness of God. Men forget one another. God rewards his servants. 2. To hold a place among the honoured names of God’s word, to be in the line of the great succession, is more than all that this world can offer us. 3. God’s blessing descends to future generations. We build a monument in the characters and lives of those we leave behind us.—R.

Vers. 1—9.—*Reading, obeying, suffering, &c.* These verses record two cleansings—the one of the congregation, and the other of the sanctuary of the Lord; the one by the people, and the other by a single servant of Jehovah. Taking them together, we learn—

I. THAT THE BIBLE SHOULD BE READ WITH A SPECIAL VIEW TO ITS BEARING ON OUR OWN LIVES (ver. 1). “On that day they read in the book of Moses, . . . and therein was found written that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever;” . . . and “when they had heard the law they separated,” &c. (vers. 1, 3). The Israelites listened not only to understand and admire and be moved with joy and gladness, but to *learn what they should do*, that they might conform more perfectly to the will of God. We may read our Bible from (1) the antiquarian point of view, or (2) the poetical, or (3) the professional, or (4) perfunctorily, as a part of the day’s routine; but we shall not have treated it as it deserves to be treated, as its Divine Author would have us use it, as our own spiritual necessities demand that it should be approached, unless we come to it in the spirit of those old words, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” We must study it devoutly, to learn what there is *in* us to be uprooted, *about* us to be avoided, *absent* from us to be implanted and cultivated.

II. THAT PLAIN DUTY, HOWEVER PAINFUL, MUST BE DONE FORTHWITH (vers. 3, 7, 8, 9). It is very soon told that “it came to pass when they had heard the law that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.” But the act of separation, of expulsion, must have been an exceedingly painful one. The “mixed multitude” must have been closely allied to and inwoven with “the congregation,” and there must have been great rents and gaps made in families and connections and friendships for this excommunication to be thoroughly carried out. When, too, Nehemiah returned from Babylon, and found the house of the Lord used for an enemy’s storehouse, it must have “grieved him sore” (ver. 8), not only to find this fact in existence, but also to

have to put himself into direct antagonism with the high priest, and to reflect so sternly on his conduct as he did (vers. 8, 9). So Paul must have been troubled to withstand Peter to the face (Gal. ii. 11), and we know how "out of much affliction and anguish of heart" he wrote "with many tears" a letter of reproach to the Church at Corinth (2 Cor. ii. 4). We are told that we are to deal tenderly and graciously with offenders; those who are spiritual restoring such "in the spirit of meekness" (Gal. vi. 1); but when the integrity, the purity, the reputation of the family, the Church, the society absolutely demand severe measures, we *must* take them. We should in such cases act, (1) where possible, after remonstrance and giving opportunity for repentance; (2) with all possible regard to wounded feelings; (3) with manifest attention to the directions of Scripture; (4) thoroughly and speedily, lest slackness or delay should do as much harm as entire unfaithfulness.

III. THAT SIN HAS FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES IN ITS TRAIN. There was written in the law "that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever," &c. (vers. 1, 2). There is nothing so cruel in the end as undue leniency in the presence of sin; there is nothing so kind and wise, all things considered, as the manifestation of "righteous indignation" against iniquity. God's revealed anger at the transgressions of his people was one side of his mercy—the less pleasant to our view, but not the less necessary for our redemption. Hence, among other things, his severity and apparent harshness. Hence such an act of judgment as this against the Ammonite. An act of inhospitality, and then of seductive treachery, done a thousand years before, leading to exclusion from privilege now! What a long train of consequences has sin! How far in its injurious results may one guilty action reach!

"Oh, mortal man, beware  
Lest one wrong act should bring an age of care!"

IV. THAT INDIVIDUAL MEN HAVE A GREAT AND GRAVE POWER FOR GOOD AND EVIL (vers. 4, 5, 8, 9). One man, the high priest, had very gravely compromised the people by admitting Tobiah, the enemy, to a chamber of the house of the Lord. It is impossible to say how much evil might not have arisen from this foolish step had not Nehemiah come in time to take effective action against it. But it is not every Eliashib who has a Nehemiah to correct his follies and save his country from their consequences. One man in high office, or with great faculties, or with peculiar charms, may commit a large body of people to folly and sin, and may bring down on their head saddest visitations. On the other hand, one wise and strong man, acting energetically, may do as Nehemiah did—"cast forth" the evil (ver. 8), and "cleanse the chambers," and restore sacred places to a sacred use (ver. 9). Exalted station is much coveted by men, but it has grave responsibilities attached to it by God. We may be well content to be without its burden of obligation; or if, in God's providence, that should rest on us, it becomes our duty prayerfully and earnestly to rise to the height of our opportunity, and dedicate it to the service of our God and our race.—C.

Vers. 10—14.—*Practical Christian wisdom.* Nehemiah must have been shocked indeed to find on his return to Jerusalem (ver. 7) what a sad relapse had taken place during his absence from the city. Most painful of all must it have been to him to find that the service of Jehovah in his own house had been so scandalously neglected. He found not only that chambers of the temple were in the occupation of the enemy of the people of God (ver. 7), but that, the Levites being scattered abroad, because their portion had been withheld (ver. 10), the house of God was forsaken (ver. 11). We gather from the whole incident recorded in vers. 10—14—

I. THAT MATERIAL SUPPLIES AND SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY ARE IMPORTANTLY CONNECTED (ver. 10). "The portions of the Levites had not been given them," and, consequently, they had "fled every one to his field" (ver. 10). It may be open to question whether these Levites—singers and other officials—had shown as much disinterestedness and devotion as could have been wished. It might be argued that as servants of God they might have stood at their posts and starved rather than desert the field of sacred duty. Perhaps if they had been some degrees more heroic than they were they would



have risked and suffered all privations rather than forsake their work. But however this may have been, it is certain that the people had no right whatever to reckon on such heroism; they ought to have acted on the supposition that these were men of average piety, and that men of ordinary goodness will not continue to serve if they are not sustained in their service. The human nature which there is in every good man—and which will certainly be shown in every class and order of good men—is a factor which must not be disregarded. It is a feature that must be taken into account; a want that must be provided for. If it be left out of account, then, whatever the system or society may be, there will be found, as here, negligence, desertion, duty undone, God's house forsaken, a fleeing from the temple to the field. Material resources have their place in the prosperity of the best of causes.

II. THAT GOOD MEN AS WELL AS GOOD METHODS ARE NECESSARY FOR LASTING SUCCESS. Judging from the four concluding verses of the preceding chapter (xii. 44—47), we gather that a very satisfactory system for receiving and storing the offerings, and also for distributing them, had been devised and brought into action. Yet, in Nehemiah's absence, it failed to effect its purpose. When he returned and witnessed the failure, he immediately (1) set to work to reorganise: he "set in their place" (ver. 11) the Levites, who, at his instance, returned to Jerusalem, and he "made treasurers over the treasuries" (ver. 12); but besides this, he (2) appointed "faithful men" (ver. 12), on whom reliance could be placed, to do the work they undertook, infusing his own spirit into all the officers. He impressed on them all his own fervent and faithful genius. How long things went well we know not, but Nehemiah did the best he could do to provide for permanent prosperity: he associated good men with a good method. We should trust neither to one nor to the other. Again and again organisations have broken down in the Church (whether tithe-taking, money-getting institutions, or others) because, though the machinery was excellent, there was no steam to work the wheels; again and again there has been an excellent spirit, but all has failed for want of a wise method. We must (a) use our best judgment to perfect our system, and (b) pray for, and look out for, the wise and earnest-minded men to work it.

III. THAT INDIVIDUAL FIDELITY WILL SURELY MEET WITH ITS APPROPRIATE RECOMPENSE (vers. 13, 14). 1. Usually from man. "I made treasurers . . . Shelemiah," &c.: . . . "for they were counted faithful." Integrity, diligence, conscientiousness will generally be seen of man and receive its reward. It *may* indeed pass unnoticed, but as a rule it is recognised and rewarded. Be faithful, and you will be "counted faithful." 2. Certainly from God. "Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds," &c. (ver. 14). There are many motives, all good, but some higher than others, which should prompt us to diligent and faithful labour for our Lord and our race. We may work in the vineyard of the Great Husbandman because (1) he calls us, and it is our bounden duty to respond; or because (2) our zeal is called forth by the apparent and urgent necessity for our help; or because (3) we delight in holy activity, and are never so happy as when the weapon of usefulness is in our hand; or we may do so because (4) we have "respect unto the recompense of the reward"—we crave the "well done" of Christ; we would like to have "the prophet's reward;" we would "shine as the stars for ever;" we would "be remembered by our God for good;" we would that he should "not wipe out our good deeds" (ver. 14), but record them in his "book of remembrance;" and, not being "unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love" (Heb. vi. 10), reward every one according to his work. The truest humility (Luke xvii. 10) may characterise the same disciple that has the most earnest aspiration to receive his Master's commendation, and to have "rule given him over many things." We may turn this prayer into a prediction. God *will* remember us, and will suffer *nothing* to blot out our pure endeavours from his book. We shall surely meet them again. Our "works follow us," and will find us in his presence.—C.

Vers. 15—22.—*The sabbath day.* Among other deplorable departures from the law of the word, Nehemiah found on his return to Jerusalem that his countrymen had fallen into flagrant disregard of the sabbath. It was a most serious defection, demanding a most vigorous reform. We look at what he found and what he wrought.

I. A SERIOUS DELINQUENCY. The law of the sabbath (Exod. xx. 8—11; xxxi. 13—17; Num. xv. 32—36) was openly defied. Husbandmen were treading their wine-presses and were bringing corn into the city, and were lading asses on that day of sacred rest (ver. 15); all kinds of fruit were also carried in and sold (ver. 15). Tyrian traders were allowed to bring in and sell their fish and “all manner of ware” (ver. 16). The sacred character of the day was set at naught, and was fast disappearing. Persian rulers, Samaritan neighbours, Phœnician traders, had prevailed over Jewish principles, and the sabbath was most seriously threatened. There needed—

II. A VIGOROUS REFORM. Nehemiah set himself to change the whole aspect of affairs. He (1) remonstrated energetically—he “contended with the nobles of Judah” (ver. 17), charging them with bringing this about—“What evil thing is this *that ye do?*”—by their guilty connivance, and prophetically threatening them with the wrath of God for their sin (ver. 18); (2) caused the gates to be shut some time before, and to remain shut till some time after, the commencement and conclusion of the sacred day (ver. 19): he set his own servants (some of his own retinue), on whom he could most reckon, to see that this order was impartially carried out; (3) not only obliged those who came to sell to remain outside all the day, but threatened to apprehend them if they did this again (vers. 20, 21); and (4) enlisted the sympathy and aid of the Levites, that, when he was recalled and his own servants were withdrawn, they might maintain what he now instituted. These energetic measures succeeded; they had an immediate effect (ver. 21), and they appear to have had a permanent influence, as, from this time, we have reason to think that the Jews became scrupulous, even to a fault, on this question of sabbath observance. Nehemiah’s reform was admirable and effective because—(a) It was bold and impartial. He confronted and reproached the nobles as well as the traders and salesmen. (b) It was energetic and full of action. He used magisterial rights; not exceeding his authority, but using it, and acting in harmony with the powers of his commission and the law of God. (c) It was anticipative of future wants. He prepared for a time when he would not be there, and when other men like-minded would be prepared to continue his work (ver. 22).

Concerning the observance of the sabbath or the Lord’s day by ourselves, we may remark that it is—

I. OBVIOUSLY THE WILL OF GOD THAT WE SHOULD KEEP IT. We know that—1. It was sanctified from the very beginning of our race (Gen. ii. 2, 3). 2. It was included in the religious and moral statutes given by God to Moses, as if it belonged to that which is permanent and perpetual (Exod. xx.). 3. It was insisted upon by the prophetic voice, and declared to be decisive of national prosperity or decline (Jer. xvii. 19—27; Isa. lviii. 13, 14)—the prophets being the upholders of the moral in preference to the formal and ceremonial. 4. It was declared by the Lord Jesus Christ to be “made for man” (Mark ii. 27). 5. It was continued in the shape of the Lord’s day after the resurrection (Acts xx. 7; 1 Cor. xvi. 2; Rev. i. 10); these incidental notices pointing to a general apostolical observance.

II. MANIFESTLY REQUISITE FOR BODILY AND SPIRITUAL WELFARE. 1. *Bodily*; for man and beast live longer and work better with than without it. 2. *Spiritual*; for without the spiritual refreshment and revival of sabbath services, more especially in these days of absorbing work and care, the light of life would burn even more dim and faint, until it went out into darkness. All those who hate (spiritual) death may well love and guard and use it well. Our duty in regard to it is—(1) To avail ourselves of the bodily rest it brings, and to see that others have the same advantage—our children resting from their lessons, servants (domestic and public) resting from their toil. (2) To make it a day of special spiritual privilege, including (a) worship—drawing nigh to God; (b) instruction—enlightenment, edification, the “beholding the beauty of the Lord and *inquiring* in his temple;” and (c) inspiration—fresh determination, invigorated resolution that as for us and our household we will serve the Lord Christ.—C.

Vers. 23—31.—*Unholy alliances* (a lesson for the young). Beside the forsaking of the house of the Lord consequent on the neglect to pay tithes, and the disregard

of the sabbath, Nehemiah had to lament another grave evil which had grown up during his absence in Persia. In these verses we have—

I. A CASE OF ALARMING DEFECTION. "In those days" of his return some of the Jews had married "wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab" (ver. 23). Ezra had encountered the same evil, and vehemently and vigorously resisted it (Ezra ix, x.). But it had broken out again, to the sorrow and dismay of the faithful leader and "governor." It was an alarming defection because (1) it was an act of downright disobedience. God had said by Moses, "Thou shalt *not* make marriages with them (foreigners); thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son" (Deut. vii. 3 and ver. 25). The Divine law was therefore deliberately and openly defied. What but the Divine anger could they expect to reap? More especially when so prominent a man as a grandson of the high priest had wrought this sin in the eyes of the whole people, thereby "defiling the priesthood" (ver. 29). And because (2) it was surely conducting to fatal consequences. The great, the main mission of the Jewish nation was to be a sanctified or separate people unto the Lord, to preserve his name and truth intact; but the result of these marriages was a mongrel race, speaking a corrupt language: "their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod (Philistia), and could not speak in the Jews' language" (ver. 24). Not only would their national language be corrupted, but their national morals and religion too: they were on that downward course which led Solomon himself, "beloved of God" as he was (ver. 26), to sin and sorrow. The purity of their faith and the integrity of their national morality were seriously at stake.

II. AN INSTANCE OF VIGOROUS CORRECTION. Nehemiah (1) contended with the delinquents (ver. 25). He expostulated and reasoned with them (vers. 26, 27); he also (2) solemnly invoked condemnation and suffering on them in the event of impenitence: he "cursed them" (ver. 25); he even (3) caused some of them to be punished with bodily chastisement; he "smote certain of them" (ver. 25); he (4) summarily dismissed the high priest's grandson: "I chased him from me" (ver. 28); he (5) caused them to put away the strange wives and to take an oath not to continue the offence (vers. 25, 30). Nehemiah felt that the danger was so deadly that not only energy and vigour, but even vehemence and passion, were justified in putting it away. It wrought in him "indignation, . . . vehement desire, . . . zeal, . . . revenge," that his countrymen might "be clear in this matter" (2 Cor. vii. 11).

Here is a very serious lesson for the young. They who are members of the Church of Christ find themselves, like these Jews at Jerusalem, under a temptation to an un-*holy* alliance. The Church and the world are very closely intermingled, locally. They meet in the same street, in the same shop, under the same roof. They who would not choose to associate intimately with those that are servants of sin and sources of evil, come involuntarily into contact with companions who are devoid of Christian principle, but who are by no means wanting in other attractions. It may be personal beauty, or charm of disposition, or fascination of manner, or wealth, or some other worldly advantages which appeal to tastes and ambitions that are not of the highest order. Here is temptation to intimate friendship or even to lifelong alliance. But let the young remember what is (1) the will of Christ concerning them. Is there not an application we should make to ourselves in the injunction of the apostle, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers"? (2 Cor. vi. 14). And is there not an inference to be drawn from the same writer to our conduct when he speaks of marrying "in the Lord"? (1 Cor. vii. 39). It is surely not his will that one who has taken *his* vows upon him should enter into closest and even lifelong intimacy with another who has no interest in his truth, no love for himself. Let them also remember what are (2) the inevitable consequences. The result to themselves must be spiritual decline. So was it with Solomon, leading him to the verge of utter ruin, if not over the edge, and into the gulf of it; so has it been with many thousands of the children of men. The result to others is moral and spiritual deterioration. The children "speak half in the speech of Ashdod" (ver. 24): they inevitably catch something of the tone and strain of both parents. Their spirit and their language, themselves and their life, will not attain to perfect purity; they will bear about with them the mark of worldliness. The consequences of such union are evil, and they are irreparable. The choice of our intimate friends and of our one lifelong companion is much too lightly

regarded. On our wisdom or folly here hangs our weal or our woe for life, and the future of others too, even of those in whom we shall be most deeply interested. If there be one step which, more than any other, should be taken with profound and protracted care, with devout and religious thoughtfulness, it is this step of choosing our friends, most particularly *the* friend of the heart and for the life. If we let humour speak on this subject, as we commonly do, it should only be on sufferance. We should make it speedily retire, that sound sense, and solemn consideration, and religious duty may utter their voice, and be obeyed.—C.

Ver. 31 (see also v. 19; xiii. 14, 22).—*The appeal to God.* During the latter part of this book these words recur like the refrain of a psalm. They are an appeal to God—an appeal to God *from man*. There is something plaintive as well as supplicatory in their tone. We look at—

I. THE HUMAN NEGLIGENCE OF WHICH THEY ARE SUGGESTIVE. What! exclaims an earnest but inexperienced voice; is it meant that Nehemiah, the patriot prophet, who ventured so much in Persia for the people of God at Jerusalem; who, in the teeth of such dangers and difficulties, threw a wall of protection round Jerusalem, and made her safe and strong for centuries; who virtually re-peopled and largely rebuilt her; who reinstituted her sacred feasts, and re-established her temple worship in its regularity; who redeemed her children from bondage; who purified her domestic life; who put down her sabbath desecration; who refused to receive fee or payment for his services, all the while showing a princely hospitality,—is it meant that *he* had to appeal to God from the indifference, the negligence of man? Only too possible, is the reply. Do we not remember that the ancestors of these Jews wearied of the faithful Samuel, and preferred the weak and vacillating Saul; that Greece had her Socrates and Aristides, and Rome her Coriolanus, and Spain her Columbus, and England her William Tyndale? Nay! can we forget that once a greater than Nehemiah was “despised and rejected of men”? *He* was despised, and men esteemed *him* not. Nehemiah, to be the builder and restorer he was, had to be an ardent and energetic reformer, *i. e.* he had to come into sharp collision with the views and (what was more) the interests of his contemporaries, and to challenge and even denounce their doings. These words, “Remember me, my God,” follow his record of the vigorous part he took in the matters of (1) usury (ch. v.); (2) the non-payment of tithes (vers. 10—14); (3) sabbath desecration (vers. 15—22); (4) the work of cleansing (ver. 30). They speak of coldness, of suspicion, of disregard, of backbiting, on the part of some, if not many, of those he sought to serve. The strain is this: This people are overlooking my work for them, forgetting the sacrifices I have made, not sparing me their reproaches. Remember *THOU* me, O God, for good; wipe not *thou* out my good deeds, spare *thou* me in the greatness of thy mercy. We must not enter the field of Christian work only, or chiefly, for what man will give us as the reward of our labour. If we do, we may be miserably disappointed; we may reap more tares than wheat in the harvest-time; we may find more thistles on the ground than fruits on the tree; we may be like the Master, who had the crown of thorns pressed on his bleeding brow instead of the crown of honour laid lovingly on his head. It is not for us to “covet earnestly” the smile or praise or recompense of man. Doubtless it ought to be given in response to faithful work; it is better both for him that gives, as well as for him that receives, that it should be given; but as those that serve the Lord Jesus Christ, as those that follow the Son of man, we must be prepared to do without these things. And we can afford to do so, if needful, for there remains—

II. THE DIVINE FAITHFULNESS ON WHICH THESE WORDS ARE BASED. “Think upon me, my God, for good, *according to all that I have done*” (ver. 19). But dare we ask God to think on us according to what we have done? For him to deal with us after our actions and to reward us according to our doings, is not this for him to deal with us after our *sins* and reward us according to our iniquities? Dare we, sinners, make our appeal to the God of righteousness? Must we not address ourselves to him as the God of mercy, who *does* pass by, blot out, “remember no more” the things we had thought and said and done? Truly; yet this doctrine of grace and the doctrine that God will reward those who try to please and honour him stand well together. So Nehem’ah felt; for while asking God to remember him for “this also” (this good

deed), he asks him to "spare him according to the greatness of his mercy" (ver. 22). So Paul felt; for while speaking of those who "by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality," &c. (Rom. ii. 7), he speaks of "counting all things but dung to win Christ and be found in him, not having his own righteousness" (Phil. iii. 8, 9). The full truth on this subject is that (1) God's general acceptance or condemnation of us at the last will turn on our acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ in this life, but that (2) the character of his approval and the measure of his award will depend on the kind of Christian life we shall have lived. There will be an acceptance which will simply be a not being condemned, a "being saved as by fire," and there will be a cordial, hearty, emphatic "Well done." There will be, for some, fewer cities and narrower spheres; for others, more cities and broader spheres over which to rule. Many Christians live in practical forgetfulness of this, and make no effort to win a cordial approval and a large reward. Hence their Christian life is (a) indulgent, (b) negligent, (c) idle and unfruitful. Others, happily, are wiser than they. To such we say, Be faithful in every good word and work, like Nehemiah, and you may make a confident appeal to God for recognition, remembrance, recompense. Do not look anxiously *about* you for man's smile, but do look earnestly *above* you for Christ's approval, and *beyond* you for his reward. Do not think it wrong to gain incentive and inspiration from the hope of recompense because that may not be the very highest motive. It is not wrong to do so; it *is wrong not* to do so; for Christ calls you so to do. He calls you to put out all your talents, not only because you ought to put them out, but because, thus doing, you will be blessed hereafter; to run your race with patience (perseverance), not only because you ought to do this, but also that you may win the prize. So bear your witness bravely, live your life holily and blamelessly, do your work diligently and in the spirit of full consecration; be not dismayed, deterred, or even checked by the absence of man's appreciation; walk with elastic step, with psalms of hope upon your lip, the path of holy usefulness, because the Lord your Saviour *will* "remember you for good;" because he will *not* "wipe out" your efforts, but write them in a book of remembrance which no hand may touch to blot or to erase; because he will give you a large reward, "abundance" of eternal joy, in the day of his appearing.—C.

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