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EDITED BY THE

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LAMENTATIONS.

Exposition

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Homiletics

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Homilies by Various Authors.

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THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Book of Lamentations has no author's name attached to it in the Hebrew Bible, which, indeed, places it far away from Jeremiah in the so-called *K'thūbhīm* or Hagiographa, between Ruth and Kohéleth (Ecclesiastes). It is the Septuagint which, in some manuscripts, appends "of Jeremiah" to the descriptive title "Lamentations," at the same time grouping it with the prophecies of Jeremiah and the (apocryphal) Book of Baruch. But before we can form an opinion as to the justice of this view of the authorship, and the romantic tradition connected with it (see below), we must first of all take a general survey of the book and gather up all its internal evidence as to date and origin; and also we must illuminate this by the results of a critical study of the Old Testament.

One of the most interesting of these results is the discovery of a great lyric movement among the conquered Jews, as well those in Babylon as those who remained in their much-loved home. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem," was their dominant thought, even when surrounded by the wonders of Babylonian art; and it naturally expressed itself in lyric verse. Ewald has done much to enable modern students to realize the vast debt which we owe to the Captivity and the subsequent period for much of the most precious part of the Psalms, and, by including his translation of the Lamentations in the same volume with the Psalter (he even inserts the former as a portion of the sacred hymn-book), he has brought vividly before us the essential unity of the great lyric movement referred to. We have spoken of these psalms and lamentations as expressions of a mood; they are this most truly; but they are something more. Nursed up on the writings of the prophets, the authors of these lyric poems were in a sense prophets, just as the prophetic writings addressed to the later Jews may to a certain extent be classed with the lyric literature. The truths which the lyric or elegiac poets had imbibed from the prophets gave a colour even to the expressions of grief, and so, monotonous as the Book of Lamentations may be, it has justly been admitted as a sacred Scripture into the Old Testament canon. The authorship of Jeremiah may be doubtful, and yet we cannot fail to

recognize in this short elegiac book that peculiar quality which, in all its degrees of manifestation, the Jewish doctors agree with us in describing as inspiration.

The common theme of the Lamentations is the terrible fate which befell Jerusalem when the Chaldeans captured the city (B.C. 588) and carried away its inhabitants (less fortunate in one sense than those of the country districts) to Babylon. That they were all written at the same time is, however, to say the least, improbable; the third, and in a still higher degree the fifth, will be found to present some striking points of dissimilarity to the rest. Let us first of all endeavour to characterize the three which have most in common, and each of which begins with the word *ēchāh*, how! viz. the first, the second, and the fourth. Even in this narrower group, indeed, some divergences will strike the reader, but they are not sufficient to compel us to assume a diversity of authorship. Each elegy is in the strictest sense alphabetical (which means that every verse or half-verse or every group of verses begins with one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet; comp. Ps. ix., x., xxv., xxxiv., xxxvii., cxix., cxlv.), but with this difference—that whereas in the first the initial letters come in their usual order, in the second and fourth the letter *ḏ* (*pe*) precedes the letter *y* (*ayin*).¹ Another unimportant technical divergence is that the verses of ch. i. and ii. are in the original, as a rule, composed of three lines, and those of ch. iv. of four. It may seem strange, at first sight, that so artificial a form as the alphabetic should have been selected for elegies. But further consideration will show that it was really both natural and appropriate. These elegies were probably not so much intended for private use as for a liturgical purpose, for which the alphabetic form, so convenient for the memory, would be a great recommendation. It has for ages been the custom to read the Lamentations in the synagogues on the ninth day of Ab, the anniversary of the burning of the temple, and, as this is a very ancient fast-day (Zech. vii. 3), it is reasonable to conjecture that the Lamentations, or some of them, were from the first designed for this solemn occasion. The didactic element which now and then appears in the poems gives an additional appropriateness to the alphabetic form, as a reference to the alphabetic psalms will at once show.

The contents of these three elegies, in spite of their monotony, indicate a certain difference in the point of view of the writer or writers. The first directs the attention to the sorrow-laden Mater Dolorosa (if the application suggested by a living poet may be allowed), the widowed city, Zion. The cause of the catastrophe is but lightly touched upon, and the description

¹ This is in itself not more surprising than other irregularities of Hebrew poets in the handling of alphabetic versification. What is surprising is that the same violation of order should be found in one of the psalms which there is no ground for assigning to the author (or to any of the authors) of the Lamentations. For there can hardly be a doubt that Hitzig, Delitzsch, and Bickell are right in transposing vers. 15 and 16 (Hebrew, 16, 17) of Ps. xxxiv. Let any one try the two modes of reading these verses together with the following verse, and judge for himself.

cannot be said to maintain itself at the height of the opening verse. The second points out the true author of Zion's calamity; it is Jehovah, who has fulfilled his threats of old, and turned against his people like an angry warrior. The fourth has more touches than the rest which reveal (so far as picturesqueness of detail can be accepted as evidence) the hand of an eye-witness of the tragic events. The sufferings of various classes, due to God's anger at their sins, are affectingly described, and the malignant joy of the Edomites represented, not merely as a recollection (Ps. cxxxvii. 7), but as a present fact. The second and the fourth are generally considered the most striking of the elegies from a poetical point of view.

Before introducing the question of authorship, we have still to examine briefly the two remaining poems—the third and the fifth. The former agrees with the three elegies already considered in the technical respect of its alphabetic structure, and more particularly with the second and fourth (in the order of the chapters), inasmuch as the same two initial letters are transposed. It is, again, connected with the first and second by the subdivision of each of its verses into three lines. It differs, however, from all the other elegies in its peculiar exaggeration of the alphabetic form, since it not merely distinguishes a single verse by one of the Hebrew letters, but a whole triplet of verses. This evidently hampers the poet in the expression of his thoughts;—the third is the least rhythmical and the least poetical of all the Lamentations. In contents, too, it differs to a remarkable degree from the other elegies. Instead of describing the calamities of the nation, the writer points, or seems to point, to himself. "I am the man that hath seen affliction," he begins, and he continues to speak of himself as the great sufferer except in vers. 22—47, where he passes into a description of the circumstances of the nation, and only refers to himself as a member of the community ("Let us search and try our ways," etc.). His account of his own sufferings reminds us, by its highly coloured phraseology, of certain of the psalms which purport to be the utterances of an individual, but which contain many phrases which are hyperbolic in the mouth of an individual Israelite. In the case of this third Lamentation, as well as in that of this important group of psalms, we seem irresistibly driven to the inference that the writer (whether Jeremiah or another) adopts the rôle of a poetical representative of the Israelitish people, or at any rate of the pious believers who formed the kernel of that people.¹ This accounts for the curious alternation in ch. iii. of expressions which point to an individual Israelite with those which distinctly refer to the people, and for the seemingly extravagant character of the former, and also for the fondness which the author betrays for the great poem of Job, the hero of which is, in the intention of the writer (to be carefully distinguished from the intention of the traditional narrative), obviously a type of the righteous man in affliction.² Compare, for instance, ch. iii. 4 with Job xvi. 9, 10; ch. iii. 7, 9 with Job

¹ 'The Prophecies of Isaiah,' by the present writer, 2nd edit., vol. ii. pp. 188—190.

² Ibid., pp. 245—247.

xix. 8; ch. iii. 8 with Job xxx. 20; ch. iii. 10 with Job x. 16; ch. iii. 12, 13 with Job vii. 20 and xvi. 12, 13; ch. iii. 14, 63 with Job xxx. 9.

And if the writer of ch. iii. at one point does fall out of his assumed *role*, this too has to some extent a parallel in Job, for both Job and his friends now and then "fall into language which implies that Job is not an individual, but plurality of persons." Neither poet was able to keep up the personification, or representative symbol, with entire consistency.

Before passing on to the second of the elegies reserved, we may, it would seem, draw one definite inference from the preceding data, viz. that the third chapter of Lamentations is not by the author of ch. i., ii., iv. A similar result is obtained by an examination of the elegy which forms the fifth chapter. Turning to the Hebrew text, we are at once met by the fact that, unlike the companion elegies, it is not alphabetical, i.e. it does not make each of its verses begin with one of the Hebrew letters. Still, there is an approximation to the alphabetic form; the number of its verses (which are two-lined) is the same as that of the Hebrew letters, viz. twenty-two (comp. Ps. xxxiii., xxxviii., ciii.). It seems as if the close observance of the canons of alphabetic versification were too great a restriction for the writer of this elegy, just as some of the greatest English sonneteers have felt the laws of the Italian sonnet confine their freedom of thought and expression unduly. The treatment of the subject is slightly varied in this elegy, which is little more than an enumeration of the insults heaped upon the Jews by their enemies. The poet speaks near the end of the elegy (ver. 20) as if this sad state of things had already continued a long time, from which it has generally been inferred that the poem was composed rather later than the rest of the collection. We must remember, however, that, as J. H. Newman says—

" . . . time is not a common property;
But what is long is short, and swift is slow,
And near is distant, as received and grasped
By this mind and by that, and every one
Is standard of his own chronology."

(*'The Dream of Gerontius,'* p. 23.)

To extreme grief, a few years might appear an age, and the short, simple sentences of which the poem consists have the ring of such genuine feeling, neither diluted by reflection nor overlaid by rhetoric, that we may well be reluctant to assume a very late date. They may conceivably have been improvised in the midst of persecution by one of the scanty remnant which remained in Judah even after the third deportation of exiles. Some of the writer's friends have sought refuge in Egypt (i.e. on the north-east frontier of Egypt, whither Jeremiah himself was carried by force, see Jer. xlii., xliv.); others have submitted to Assyria (a conventional term for the great Mesopotamian empire); the remainder of them are tyrannized over by upstarts of servile origin, such as many a modern Turkish pasha, placed over the land of Judah by the Babylonian suzerain. Yet so much relaxed are the bands of order, that savage, nomad tribes can venture to

plunder them of their crusts of bread. Worse than all, Jerusalem is in ruins and uninhabited, and seems to have been so for an age, by the "pathetic fallacy" explained above.

We have seen that the fifth elegy in the collection can hardly be the work of the Prophet Jeremiah, who was probably already in Egypt when the poem was written. But we have also seen that, both in form and in contents, it differs from the other elegies, and we may now add that, linguistically, there is almost as little to connect it with its companions as with the Book of Jeremiah. The question, however, still remains whether at least some part of the Book of Lamentations (*viz.* either ch. i., ii., iv., or ch. iii. alone) may not be the composition of that gifted prophet.

Let us first of all consider the internal evidence, and let us test the theory of Jeremiah's authorship by its applicability to the third chapter of the book, as the part which, upon the face of it, can most easily be claimed as Jeremiah's. It will be readily admitted that, if we take the poem literally, it points to Jeremiah more distinctly than to any other known individual. The deep affection which the writer betrays for his people, his sensitive nature, and the bitter sufferings which he (apparently) describes himself to have undergone, correspond to peculiarities which we have already had to notice in the character and life of Jeremiah. Some of the characteristic expressions, thoughts, or images of Jeremiah's have also been pointed out in this chapter; compare, for instance, ch. iii. 47, 48 with Jer. iv. 6, 20, vi. 1, 14 ("breach" equivalent to "destruction"), ix. 1, xiii. 17, xiv. 17 (incessant tears); ch. iii. 64—66 with Jer. xi. 20 (appeal for vengeance). This comparison of expressions and ideas, however, is of very little worth. The parallels are but few in number, and, so far as they are valid (the last-quoted breaks down on examination), are easily accounted for on the theory of the writer's acquaintance with Jeremiah's prophecies, and they are altogether outweighed by the numerous expressions never found in the Book of Jeremiah (such will be found in all but three verses of the third chapter of Lamentations). As to the general suitability of this prolonged monologue to the character and life of the prophet, we need only refer to what has been said already in the Introduction to the Book of Jeremiah. Considering what a large body of literature there is, in which the spirit and even the expressions of Jeremiah may be recognized (*e.g.*, besides Lamentations, Deuteronomy, Kings, Job, Isa. xl.—lxvi., and certain of the psalms), it would be rash in the extreme to refer any part of it to that much-imitated prophet. There is certainly no direct statement in this elegy which compels us to regard either Jeremiah or any other prophet as the author.

The case for ascribing the remaining elegies to Jeremiah is proportionally weaker. There are, no doubt, expressions and ideas familiar to us in Jeremiah. Compare *e.g.* ch. i. 2, 19 with Jer. xxx. 14; ch. i. 11 with Jer. xv. 19; ch. i. 16 and ii. 11 with Jer. ix. 1, etc.; ch. i. 15 with Jer. xiv. 17 and xvi. 11; ch. ii. 14 and iv. 13—15 with Jer. v. 30, 31 and xiv. 13, 14; ch. ii. 11, 13, iii. 47, 48, and iv. 10 with Jer. iv. 6, 20 and xiv. 17, etc.

But these, again, are far outweighed by the expressions unknown to Jeremiah, which occur in almost every verse of these elegies (see the lists in Naegelsbach's 'Jeremiah,' Introduction, § 3), and at least three passages militate rather strongly against the authorship of that prophet, viz. ch. ii. 9 (where the writer regards the cessation of prophetic visions as a misfortune, contrast Jeremiah's denunciations in Jer. xxiii.); iv. 17 (where the writer speaks of having formerly expected help from Egypt, contrast Jer. ii. 18, 36); and iv. 20 (where Zedekiah is spoken of respectfully and hopefully as Jeremiah can hardly be supposed to have done).

The external evidence for the authorship of Jeremiah consists of a tradition, accepted, perhaps, by Josephus ('Antiquities,' x. 5, 1), and certainly by the Talmud ('Baba Bathra,' fol. 15, col. 1) and the later Jewish and Christian scholars. The earliest authority for it is a statement prefixed to the Septuagint (and repeated with a few additional words in the Vulgate) in the following terms:—"And it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremias sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said." This cannot, however, have formed part of the Hebrew text of Lamentations, else the Massoretic editors of the text (who beyond reasonable doubt believed Jeremiah to be the author of the book) would certainly have handed it on to us. It has, indeed, been suggested that the compiler of Chronicles attributed the book to Jeremiah, because he reports that "Jeremiah lamented for Josiah," and that his words (apparently) "are written in the Lamentations" (2 Chron. xxxv. 25). If this view is correct, the compiler of Chronicles interpreted the words, "the breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord" (ch. iv. 20), which really refer to Zedekiah, of Josiah. The view is not to be hastily rejected, although it is also possible that the statement in the Septuagint is due to a misinterpretation of the passage in Chronicles. In any case, the tradition cannot be traced up to the time of Jeremiah, and is too evidently fictitious—first, because Jeremiah was not an eye-witness of the sad circumstances described in the Lamentations; and secondly, because, even if he had been so, such a tender-hearted man (whose prophetic utterance is almost stifled by tears) cannot be imagined as amusing himself, amid the ruins of Jerusalem, with inditing these highly artificial, not to say rhetorical, compositions in a style absolutely new to him. No; poems like these cannot have been produced till the worst misery of conquest had been partly mitigated by time. They are (from a literary point of view) the efforts of highly educated men to relieve their feelings by the help of art. They are more than this, no doubt; they are an evidence of the working of the Spirit of God on the minds of the more spiritually minded Jews, leading them to contrition and repentance. But we must before all things adopt a purely literary point of view in an inquiry as to date and authorship, and then we cannot but recognize that the first four Lamentations (which are alone now in question) are too elaborately artificial to have been the work of "Jeremiah sitting amid the ruins of Jerusalem." There is genuine feeling in them, however, only it has

already been softened by time. To assert, with Dean Plumptre, that the horn poet "accepts the discipline of a self-imposed law just *in proportion* to the vehemence of his emotions," is incapable of proof from modern European poetry, and, if possible, still more opposed to the facts of Hebrew literature. Some of the examples which the dean adduces are merely the rhetorical exercises of poets learning their craft; others merely concessions to the taste which every now and then prevails for superfine elaboration in every branch of art; others, again (and these few examples are alone in point), the attempts of the artists to help Nature to recover her balance, when the recovery has already begun and emotion has already lost its overwhelming vehemence. Members of the much-suffering Jewish race have many a time, since the Lamentations were written, had recourse for comfort to similar styles of composition, and verified the words of a great French critic, "When the passion is sincere, even the most artificial form assumes something of beauty."

Before we conclude, let us briefly review our position. The first, second, and fourth chapters of Lamentations may conceivably be by the same author; and though that author is certainly not Jeremiah, yet he is probably acquainted, whether by the ear or by the eye, with the prophecies of Jeremiah. He was contemporary with the fall of Jerusalem, and indited these elegies not long after for a liturgical purpose. It is, however, equally possible that they are the work of different authors, belonging to the same circle or school of literary craftsmen. About the same time, or a little later, the fifth and last seems to have been written, and very certainly not by the author of any of the foregoing Lamentations. The date of the third elegy may have been as early as that of the others, or it may have been written at some later time;—the personification of the people is thought by many critics to be a characteristic of those quiet literary men among the Jewish exiles in Babylon, to one of whom they attribute most if not all of the second part of the Book of Isaiah. In any case the author of the third Lamentation must have been acquainted with the other elegies (except the fifth), as there is a general similarity in the diction of the first four chapters of the book.¹ There seems, in fact, to have been a peculiar and fixed vocabulary, traditional in this school of elegiac poets, just as there has been in other schools of writers. Jeremiah was probably the favourite book of these poets (next to the Psalter, so far as this book was in existence); and so, if a title must be given by way of defining the authorship, we might, perhaps, style the entire book, on the analogy of a portion of the Psalter, "The Book of the Lamentations of the sons of Jeremiah."

The elegies on which we have been engaged were the forerunners of a large body of synagogue poetry; many of the *kinôth* (as one large class of the post-canonical as well as the five canonical elegies were called) were suggested by passages of the Book of Lamentations. Most of them, indeed,

¹ See the third section of the Introduction to Naegelsbach's 'Commentary on Lamentations,' appended to the same writer's 'Jeremiah' in Lange's Old Testament series (translated).

were specially written for that very fast-day which we have already conjectured to have occasioned the composition of the canonical Lamentations. The most beautiful of the *kînôth* is probably that of Yehuda ben Samuel Halevi (twelfth century A.D.), which may be known even to some general readers by Heinrich Heine's poem in the 'Romanzero,' and which has been critically illustrated by A. von Oettingen, 'Die synagogale Elegik des Volkes Israel u. s. w.' (Dorpat, 1853), with which may be compared Delitzsch's delightful and instructive work, 'Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Poesie.' Lastly, for a comprehensive article on the Hebrew elegy (in its Biblical forms) see a paper by Professor C. Budde, of Bonn, which opens the second volume (1882) of Stade's *Zeitschrift* for Old Testament studies.

For the exegetical and critical literature on Lamentations, we need only refer to the list of works on Jeremiah in Vol. I., adding, however, Bickell, 'Carmina Veteris Testamenti Metricè,' Innsbruck, 1882 (a critically revised text of the chief poetical passages in the Old Testament, more to be trusted in the Lamentations than in the Psalms); Plumptre, 'Jeremiah and Lamentations,' in vol. iv. of Bishop Ellicott's 'Commentary,' London, 1884 (a truly popular and interesting work by a many-sided scholar).

THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I

Vers. 1—11.—A WAIL OF DISTRESS FOR JERUSALEM.

Vers. 1, 2.—The fate of Jerusalem is described in language which resembles here and there that used in Isaiah of fallen Babylon (Isa. xlvii. 1, 8). It is probably the finest passage in the whole book, and has inspired some grand lines in Mr. Swinburne's picture of the republican *mater dolorosa*—

"Who is she that sits by the way, by the wild wayside,
In a rust-stained garment, the robes of a cast-off bride,
In the dust, in the rainfall, sitting with soiled feet bare,
With the night for a garment upon her, with torn, wet hair," etc.?

Ver. 1.—How. The characteristic introductory word of an elegy (comp. Isa. i. 21; xiv. 4, 12), and adopted by the early Jewish divines as the title of the Book of Lamentations. It is repeated at the opening of ch. ii. and ch. iv. Sit solitary. Jerusalem is poetically personified and distinguished from the persons who accidentally compose her population. She is "solitary," not as having retired into solitude, but as deserted by her inhabitants (same word as in first clause of Isa. xxvii. 10). How is she become as a widow! etc. Rather, *She is become a widow that was great among the nations; a princess among the provinces, she is become a vassal.* The alteration greatly conduces to the effect of the verse, which consists of three parallel lines, like almost all the rest of the chapter. We are not to press the phrase, "a widow," as if some earthly or heavenly husband were alluded to; it is a kind of symbol of desolation and misery (comp. Isa. xlvii. 8). "The provinces" at once suggests the period of the writer, who must have been a subject

of the Babylonian empire. The term is also frequently used of the countries under the Persian rule (e.g. Esth. i. 1, 22), and in Ezra ii. 1 and Neh. vii. 6 is used of Judah itself. Here, however, the "provinces," like the "nations," must be the countries formerly subject to David and Solomon (comp. Eccles. ii. 8).

Ver. 2.—In the night. Not only by day, but even in the season of rest and unconsciousness. Her lovers . . . her friends; i.e. the neighbouring peoples, with which Judah had formed alliances, such as Egypt (Jer. ii. 36), Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon (Jer. xxvii. 3). This is a favourite phrase of Jeremiah's (comp. Jer. iii. 1; iv. 30; xxii. 20, 22; xxx. 14), but also of Hosea (ii. 5, 7, 10, 12, 13; viii. 9) and Ezekiel (xvi. 33, 36, 37; xxiii. 5, 9, 22). The national God was conceived of as the Husband of the nation; and the prophets retained this idea and elevated it, just as they did circumcision and many other Eastern traditions.

Ver. 3.—Is gone into captivity because of affliction; rather, *is gone into exile*, etc. The poet is not thinking of the deportation of the captives, but of those Jews who sought refuge for themselves in foreign lands (comp. Jer. xl. 11). An objection has been raised to this view that the number of fugitive Jews would not be large enough to warrant their being called "Judah." But we might almost as well object on a similar ground to the application of the term "Judah" to the Jews who were carried to Babylon. The truth may, perhaps, be that, after the fall of Jerusalem, the Jewish nation became split up into three parts: (1) the Jews who succeeded in escaping into Egypt or elsewhere; (2) those who were carried captive; (3) the mass of the common people, who remained on their native soil. Keil, however, retains the view of the Authorized Version, only substituting

"out of" for "because of." "Out of" the misery into which the Jews had been brought by the invasions of Necho and Nebuchadnezzar they passed into the new misery of captivity. Among the heathen; rather, among the nations. Between the straits. The phrase is peculiar, and reminds us of Ps. cxviii. 5, "Out of the strait I called unto thee." "A strait," or narrow place, clearly means adversity, just as "a large place" (Ps. cxviii. 5) means prosperity.

Ver. 4.—The ways of Zion do mourn. The roads leading to Jerusalem, usually so thronged with pilgrims, are desolate and "mourn" (comp. ch. ii. 8 and Isa. iii. 26; xiv. 31). All her gates are desolate. No one goes in or out of Jerusalem, and there is no concourse of citizens in the shady recess of the gates. The virgins are afflicted. So Zeph. iii. 18. The sorrow was on account of the cessation of the festival, in the music of which they took a leading part (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 25).

Ver. 5.—Are the chief; rather, are become the head. Comp. Deut. xxviii. 44, where, as a part of the curse of Israel's rebellion, it is foretold that "he [the stranger] shall become the head, and thou shalt become the tail." Before the enemy. Like a herd of cattle.

Ver. 6.—Beauty; rather, glory. Like harts that find no pasture; and therefore have no strength left to flee. An allusion to the attempted flight of Zedekiah and his companions (Jer. xxxix. 4, 5).

Ver. 7.—Remembered; rather, remembereth. Miseries. The Hebrew is difficult, and perhaps means wanderings. At her sabbaths; rather, at her extinguishment. The word has nothing to do with the sabbaths; indeed, a reference to these would have been rather misplaced; it was no subject of wonder to the Babylonians that the Jews celebrated a weekly day of rest, as they had one of their own (*sabbattu*).

Ver. 8.—Therefore she is removed; rather, she is become an abomination (literally, an impurity; comp. Lev. xv. 19). The poet leaves out the preliminary clause, "therefore she is grievously punished." It was the humiliation of Jerusalem, rather than her sin, which brought upon her the contempt of her neighbours. The destruction of a city is often compared to the ill treatment of a defenceless woman (Isa. xlviii. 3; Nah. iii. 5).

Ver. 9.—She remembereth not, etc.; rather, she thought not upon, etc. An allusion to Isa. xlvii. 7. O Lord, behold, etc. This is the language in which the "sigh" (ver. 8) finds expression.

Ver. 10.—Her pleasant things; or, her precious things; that is, the treasures of the

palaces of Jerusalem (2 Chron. xxxvi. 19), and still more those of the temple (2 Chron. xxxvi. 10); comp. Isa. lxiv. 11). For she hath seen; rather, yea, she hath seen. The heathen entered, etc. In Deut. xxiii. 3 only the Ammonites and Moabites are excluded from religious privileges; but in Ezek. xlv. 9 the prohibition is extended to all foreigners.

Ver. 11.—All her people sigh, etc. The sufferings of Jerusalem did not come to an end at the capture of the city. Some think that this verse relates solely to the miserable survivors. This is possible; at any rate, it includes the contemporaries of the writer. "Sigh" and "seek" are participles in the Hebrew. To relieve the soul; literally, to bring back the soul. The "soul," i.e. the principle of life, is conceived of as having for a time deserted the fainting frame. See, O Lord, etc. Another piteous cry of Jerusalem, preparing the way for the second half of the elegy.

Ver. 12—22.—The same subject; Jerusalem the speaker.

Ver. 12.—Is it nothing to you? The Hebrew is very difficult, and the translation therefore insecure. Keil, however, adopts a rendering very near that of the Authorized Version " (Cometh it) not unto you?" i.e. "Do ye not heed it?" Ewald supposes the phrase to be abbreviated from "Do I not call unto you?" (comp. Prov. viii. 4); but this would be a very harsh construction. The Septuagint has *Of πρὸς ὑμᾶς*; the Targum, "I adjure you;" the Vulgate, *O vos*;—all apparently pronouncing *lū* instead of *lō*. At any rate, the object of the words is to heighten the force of the appeal which follows.

Ver. 13.—Three figures—fire, a net, sickness, for the calamities which have come upon Jerusalem. From above; i.e. from heaven. Spread a net for my feet, as though I were a wild beast (comp. Jer. xviii. 22). Turned me back. The consequence of being entangled in the net was that he could go no further, but fell into the hands of his pursuers.

Ver. 14.—Is bound . . . are wreathed. The transgressions of Jerusalem are likened to a heavy yoke. So numerous are they that they are said to be "wreathed," or twisted together, like ropes. Into their hands. The Hebrew has simply "into hands;" following a suggestion of the Septuagint. Budde would read, "Into the hands of adversaries."

Ver. 15.—Hath trodden under foot; rather, hath rejected; i.e. hath punished. Comp. Ps. cxix. 118, 119, where "thou rejectest [same verb as here] all them that wander from thy statutes" is followed by "thou puttest away all the ungodly of the earth like dross." Hath called an assembly;

rather, *hath proclaimed a festival*. When Jehovah summons the instruments of his vengeance, the prophets describe it as the "proclaiming a festival." The Persians or Chaldeans, as the case may be, obey the summons with a holy glee, and destroy the enemies of the true God (comp. Isa. xiii. 3). *Hath trodden, etc.*; rather, *hath trodden the winepress for* (i.e. to the ruin of) *the virgin daughter of Zion*. The poet carries on the figure of the festival. It is a vintage which is to be celebrated, such a vintage as is described in Isa. lxiii. 3 (comp. Joel iii. 13). The choicest youth of Judah are to be cut off like grapes from the vine. "Virgin daughter" is a frequent figure to express inviolate security (so Jer. xiv. 17).

Ver. 16.—*For these things, etc.* After the reflections of vers. 13—15, the poet gives vent anew to his bitter grief. *Mine eye, mine eye*. A repetition quite in Jeremiah's manner; comp. Jer. iv. 19; vi. 14 (repeated viii. 11); xxii. 29; xxiii. 25. The Septuagint and Vulgate, however, have "mine eye" only once. *Believe my soul* (see on ver. 11).

Ver. 17.—Again the poet passes into the tone of reflection, thus relieving the strain upon the feelings of the reader. *Spreadeth forth her hands*. The gesture of supplication and entreaty (comp. Ps. xxviii. 2; lxiii. 4; Isa. lxxv. 2). *That his adversaries, etc.*; rather, *those who are about him are his adversaries*. The neighbouring peoples, who ought to be sympathetic and friendly, gloat over the spectacle of his calamities. They both hate and (comp. ver. 8) despise the fallen city.

Ver. 18.—*People*; render, *peoples*.

Ver. 19.—*For my lovers*; render, *to my lovers* (see on ver. 2).

Ver. 20.—*My bowels*. The vital parts, especially the heart, as the seat of the affections, like *σπλάγχνα*. *Are troubled*; literally, *are made to boil*. So Job xxx. 27, "My bowels boil" (a different word, however). *Is turned*; or, *turns itself*; i.e. palpitates violently. *At home there is as death*. So Jer. ix. 21, "For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces." By "death," when distinguished, as here, from "the sword," pestilence is meant; so e.g. in Jer. xv. 2; xliii. 11. But the poet says here, not that "there is death," but merely "as death," i.e. a mild form of pestilence, not the famine-typhus itself. Or, perhaps, he means "every form of death" (Virgil's "plurima mortis imago").

Ver. 21.—*Thou wilt bring*. The Hebrew has, "Thou hast brought;" it is the perfect of prophetic certitude, which represents an event certainly foreseen as if it had already taken place. Ewald, however, takes this to be the precativè, a variety of the perfect which certainly exists in Arabic, but has not been quite satisfactorily shown to exist in Hebrew (see Driver, 'Hebrew Tenses,' § 20 [13]). *The day that thou hast called*; i.e. foretold by the prophets (comp. Jer. xxv. 17—26). But very probably we should read, with the Septuagint, "Thou wilt bring the day; thou wilt call the fit time."

Ver. 22.—*For my sighs are many*. This is not mentioned as the reason why God should punish Jerusalem's enemies; we ought rather to understand, either from ver. 20, "Behold, my distress;" or simply, "Deliver me."

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*The solitary city*. The first elegy on the desolation of Jerusalem opens with a lament over her solitariness, widowhood, and humiliation.

I. THE SOLITARINESS. 1. *How it is to be measured*. (1) *By the nature of the place*. It is a city that is solitary. A deserted town strikes us as more lonely than the most dreary moor. We do not expect people in a wilderness; we look for them in a city. Streets which never echo to a footfall, windows which never brighten with a face, doors which are never opened, houses, palaces, shops, factories, markets, all silent and empty,—this is indeed a picture of desolation. It is contrary to experience, expectation, and purpose. (2) *By the former condition of the place*. It used to be populous. Jerusalem was no sleepy old provincial town, but a busy capital. Crowds would throng the streets, little children play, and old men stand gossiping at the corners, and hucksters set up their stalls, where now no live creature is to be seen, save, perhaps, a few lean dogs prowling after their unclean food. The contrast of the past thus aggravates the distress of the present. 2. *Why it is most sad*. The loss of men is the great trouble. Fine buildings have been thrown down, marble statues broken, gold and precious stones stolen. But these are not the worst evils. Had all remained untouched, still the trouble would have been heart-rending. The people are gone! Chicago rises out of her ashes in greater splendour because her people remain. Jerusalem is most desolate because her citizens have been carried into captivity. The strength of a city is its population. The power

of a nation is in its people. The vigour of a Church is in its membership. A splendid cathedral, with a rich full service, but no congregation, fails in comparison with the homeliest mission, if the latter gathers the people. Doctrine may be sound and "means of grace" abundant, yet we shall not advance except as we hold the people.

II. WIDOWHOOD. Unintentionally and perhaps unconsciously, the inspired poet uses an illustration to describe the desolate condition of Jerusalem, which may serve as a hint of her deeper distress. "She is become as a widow." Who had been her husband? The favoured city used to be regarded as the mystic bride of the Eternal. She had often been accused of unfaithfulness to her marriage vows. Now the faithless wife is punished by becoming the miserable widow. Jerusalem loses the presence and favour of God. It is said that the Shechinah was seen there no more. The greatest loss is to be bereft of God. They who are unfaithful to God will find that he will forsake them. Many would retain the privilege of blessings from God, while renouncing the obligation of fidelity to God. The unfaithful wife is loth to lose the support and position contributed to her by her husband. But this inconsistency cannot be allowed. Christ the Bridegroom remains faithful. But if his bride, the Church, dishonours his Name, she will lose her Lord and become as a widow.

III. HUMILIATION. The city had been the princess among the provinces. She now not only loses her dependencies; she loses her own independence; she becomes a vassal to a strange city. Humiliation will be the peculiar punishment of the great who abuse their rank. The doom of pride will be shame. Few troubles are more galling than to have to come down openly in the sight of those over whom a certain superiority had been maintained. 1. *Loss of position and character results in loss of influence.* When the Church falls, her power over the world will disappear. Christian elevation of character is essential to Christian influence among men. 2. *Loss of power entails loss of liberty.* Jerusalem weakened and conquered becomes a vassal. Only the strong can be free. Spiritual failings lead to the loss of spiritual liberty. 3. *When the Church ceases to influence the world she will become subject to the world.* The fallen suzerain becomes a vassal. The Church can only retain her liberty by maintaining her supremacy. This is the great truth the abuse of which has led to the monstrous pretensions of Rome. The lawful supremacy of the Church must be spiritual, and this may be lost and the Church subject to the spirit of the world, even while she is greedily grasping after temporal power, perhaps just because she does hanker after this lower advantage.

Ver. 2.—*Comfortless.* In her distress Jerusalem looks for comfort to those neighbouring nations which flattered her during her prosperity and behaved then as "lovers;" but she is disappointed in finding that they all desert her in the hour of her need.

L. IT IS NATURAL TO SEEK FOR COMFORT IN ADVERSITY FROM THE FRIENDSHIPS OF PROSPERITY. Jerusalem had her "lovers." This fact throws a significant light on the statement that she had "become as a widow" (ver. 1). What shame that she, the wife of the Eternal, should have to be spoken to of "lovers"! But having them she must find her comfort in them. She dare not look to her husband for comfort. In plainer language, the Jews had adopted the idolatry of neighbouring nations as well as renounced the exclusive and retiring position which had been required of them by their God. It was fitting that they should find their consolation from the Babylonian invasion in these foreign connections and religions. If we let our business, our pleasure, our ambition, or any other earthly thing usurp the place of God in our hearts, the time will come when we shall have to try what help we can get in trouble from our idol.

II. UNWORTHY CONNECTIONS WILL AFFORD NO COMFORT IN TIMES OF TROUBLE. The lovers are for pleasure; adversity dismisses them. How bitter is the disappointment! how mortifying is the revelation! The true husband could have been depended on, but the bad lovers for whom he was forsaken coldly turn from the piteous pleading of the sufferer. Thus must it be with every one who forsakes the one Friend and Comforter. No other balm of Gilead will heal the broken heart. What can the pleasures of society say to one who has failed and disgraced himself? What consolation can a materialistic philosophy whisper in the ears of the mourner by the grave? How will the science of the history of religion smooth the pillow of the dying man?

III. THE LAST DROP OF THE BITTER CUP IS TO BE COMFORTLESS. Mere formal consoling is a weariness when it is not an insult to grief. But the comfort of sympathy, the

soothing of love, and the cheering of congenial companionship are Divine remedies for sorrow. They are lights in the gloom, though they do not bring the day; gentle hands to wipe away the tears, the flowing of which they may not be able to stanch. The most desolate picture is that of one like Jerusalem in this elegy, weeping sore in the night, with no friendly ray to break the darkness, and no one to remove the tears that fall upon the cheeks unheeded and neglected, crying for comfort only to the pitiless silence. 1. Let us learn to dwell in faithfulness with God, that we may enjoy his unfailing sympathy. 2. Let us extend hands of brotherly compassion to the sorrowing, that, whatever be the grief, its last anguish may be spared; and then, through human comfort, we may lead up to the Divine consolations.

Ver. 4.—*The abandoned feasts.* Jerusalem was the religious centre of the nation. Thither the tribes came up to present themselves before the Lord. Great assemblies and joyous feasts were held there for the benefit of all the Jews. But after the Babylonian destruction all this was suspended. None now came to the solemn feasts. The high-roads which were wont to be thronged with pilgrims mourn for the lack of travellers; the gates through which they used to press are unused; priests sigh with weariness and distress, having no glad offerings to present; and the virgins who led the song and dance in honour of God are smitten with affliction.

I. IT IS A CALAMITY FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP TO CEASE. Some regard public worship as an onerous duty and others as a superfluous infliction. But they who enter into the privileges of it heartily and spiritually know that it is a boon to the worshipper. As the sabbath is made for man, so also is the institution of worship. To be deprived of it is to suffer loss. 1. The loss of the *joy of worship*. There is gladness in expressing love to earthly friends which should be found in the outpouring of our devotion to God. To mingle with the song of the angels is to taste the joy of the angels. 2. The loss of the *elevating influence of worship*. The soul rises on the wings of its own prayer. Worship is aspiration, and aspiration elevates. If we never worship we stagnate in worldliness. True worship is spiritual and may be enjoyed most in private. But public worship greatly helps this spiritual worship with most people. 3. The loss of the *social influence of worship*. Public worship affords mutual help in worship. Numbers give warmth and life to it.

II. IT IS A CALAMITY FOR JOYOUS FESTIVALS TO CEASE. The loss is twofold. 1. The loss of the *joy itself*. The gladness of worship is no small part of the brightness of a devout man's life. Rob him of this, and you darken his sky. There are clouds enough; we cannot afford to lose the sunlight which pierces and sometimes illumines them. 2. The loss of the *influence of the joy*. (1) This joy purifies. It keeps out unholy pleasures by satisfying the soul with its own blessedness. (2) This joy strengthens. In gladness we can serve God most earnestly. If, then, the unavoidable loss of joyous exercises of religion is a calamity, how great is the error of those who voluntarily convert religion into a thing of gloom!

III. IT IS A CALAMITY FOR RELIGIOUS INTERCOURSE BETWEEN MEN TO CEASE. The festival was an occasion for the meeting of Jews from all quarters. Townsmen met countrymen. Herdsmen from the south met agriculturists from the north. When this assembly was interrupted, the people suffered in many respects. 1. The loss of *brotherly association*. We are tempted to forget our brethren if we cease to see them. Solitary Christians tend to become selfish Christians. Brotherly sympathy is fostered by brother-fellowship. 2. The loss of *mutual stimulus*. The strong would urge on the weak, and the more spiritual inspire the less spiritual. There were prophets in these assemblies. 3. The loss of the *breadth of variety*. We become narrow by isolation. Intercourse broadens us. Christians should seek opportunities to meet with their fellow-Christians, to gain width and liberality of view.

Ver. 6.—*Her beauty departed from Zion.* I. ZION HAD A BEAUTY OF HER OWN. The dwellings of Zion shone splendid in cedar and gold. A softer beauty was shed over her from old memories and tender associations. The spiritual Zion has her beauty. It is not the magnificence of marble columns and gilded decorations. The beauty of Zion is the beauty of her worship and life. 1. *The beauty of holiness*. Purity is beautiful as impurity is ugly. This high spiritual loveliness is like the glory of God. 2. *The*

beauty of love. Zion was the place where the tribes assembled. Here all jealousies were to be laid aside and all quarrels healed. What is more beautiful than concession and forgiveness? This beauty should characterize the Church of Christ. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" etc. (Ps. cxxxiii.). 3. *The beauty of joy.* Zion was the centre of festive gatherings. The sacred hill used to echo with shouts of gladness; it was enlivened with the timbrel and song of happy maidens. The joy of Divine grace imparts a sweetness to the very countenance of the faithful servant of God.

II. ZION LOST HER BEAUTY. The fine city was sacked by ruthless soldiers; the splendid edifices rifled or fired; the pomp and pageantry dissipated by sword and axe. But the higher beauty of Zion was also lost, and lost before she was robbed of her external grandeur. Her holiness was corrupted. Sin destroys the spiritual beauty of the Christian. His white priestly garments are defiled when he descends into the mire of moral degradation. It is not only that sin will be visited with certain definite pains and penalties. Before that happens there is an indescribable loss in the tarnished character and marred beauty of the soul which, to one who is awake to the evil condition into which he has fallen, must be a shame and grief.

III. THE LOSS OF THE BEAUTY OF ZION WAS A MOURNFUL CALAMITY. This beauty is no idle ornament, to be put off and on at the caprice of the wearer and for objects of idle display. It is the pledge of her King's favour, the inspiration of her own best life, and the secret of her influence. 1. *Health is lost.* As when the sunlight which flashes on silvery lakes and mountain snows fades away, the chills and mists of night creep over the valley, so, when the glory of God departs from a soul, coldness, darkness, and death take its place. 2. *Influence is lost.* Christians are to be the light of the world. Losing their brightness, they cease to draw others to Christ. The fair countenance of the bride of Christ wins many guests to the wedding feast. Let her see that it is not marred, lest her Lord be dishonoured.

Ver. 7.—*Pleasant things in the days of old.* I. IN TIMES OF TROUBLE WE CALL TO MIND THE PLEASANT THINGS IN THE DAYS OF OLD. 1. *There have been pleasant things in the days of old.* Few lives, if any, are wholly joyless from cradle to grave. There are rifts in the clouds of the darkest lot. Indeed, for most of us, the pleasant things far outnumber the painful. 2. *These pleasant things are too often undervalued when in our possession.* The fact that they may become subjects of fond and sad regret should lead us to take more account of them while they are with us. Let us not add to the lamentations of the loss of them remorse for an ungrateful and depreciatory treatment of them. 3. *Trouble calls up the recollection of these pleasant things.* (1) It does this because it leads to reflection. We may observe a great contrast between the intellectual effects of joy and sorrow. Joy is usually thoughtless, sorrow meditative. When joy does stimulate the intellect, it urges it to look forward and inspires hope; but sorrow turns its gaze backward and contemplates the past. 2. It does this by the force of contrast. One experience suggests the thought of its opposite. Darkness makes us dream of light, silence of music, pain of joy. 4. *Such recollections are likely to exaggerate the pleasantness of the past.* Memory is not an even mirror. It is warped by prejudice and emotion. When we regret the loss of past happiness, we exalt that happiness in memory above what it ever was in experience. Unconsciously we drop that vexations out of notice. We remember the fine view, and forget the weary climb that preceded the enjoyment of it. The roses of a regretful memory have no thorns. The soft evening lights spread a glamour over the past which gilds its plain features and softens its rugged form and hides its ugly defects in a delicious haze of dreamy melancholy.

II. RECOLLECTIONS OF PLEASANT THINGS IN THE DAYS OF OLD EXAGGERATE THE DISTRESS OF TIMES OF TROUBLE. On the whole, it may be, life is prosperous. The balance is in favour of the pleasant things. But we cannot take life in the lump. We consume it piecemeal; and that portion which is with us at each moment is for us the life itself—the whole life. Our real living is in the present. It is true that "we look before and after," and hope may greatly lighten the burden of the present, but only by coming into the present as the twilight of dawn enters the world before sunrise—a real light. 1. This fact helps us to see a more even equalizing of lots than is obvious at

first. If man is born to trouble, he who seems at one time to have an unfair advantage will have to pay for it by the keener suffering of his adversity when that comes. 2. This fact should warn us against the folly of enjoying the present without preparing for the future. The more heartily we enjoy earthly treasures the worse will be our distress if we have no treasure in heaven to inherit. 3. *It is foolish to yield to fond regrets of the pleasant things in the days of old.* The past cannot be recalled. Let it die. The future is ours. The west will not brighten again with a return of the fading glow of sunset, but a new day will break in the east. 4. We may call to mind the happy things in days of old, not to increase our present distress, but to encourage hope. The sun did shine, then it may shine again. God is the same now as ever. If he blessed in the past he can bless in the future. Former mercies encourage us to hope for better things still to come.

Ver. 12.—*Sorrow unequalled, yet unheeded.* Jerusalem sits alone in her unparalleled grief, and the bitterness of it is intensified by the pitiless disregard of spectators. Bedouins of the desert pitch their tents in sight of her ruined towers, and merchants passing north and south see her deserted streets, and yet all gaze unmoved at the heart-rending picture.

I. THE SORROW WAS UNEQUALLED. 1. *Never was city more favoured than Jerusalem.* She was the chosen seat of Divine grace. In her temple stood God's mercy-seat. High privileges of revelation and spiritual blessings descended on her sons and daughters. The loss of these privileges brought a distress that men who had never enjoyed them could not feel. They who have tasted of the heavenly gift will find the outer darkness more terrible than those who have had no anticipation of the joys of the wedding feast. Apostate Christians will suffer agonies which the heathen and godless will not have to endure. 2. *Never was city more loved than Jerusalem.* This city of sacred memories and tender associations was dear to the hearts of her inhabitants. Her overthrow brought a grief that was proportionate to this love. The most fatal wound is one aimed at the heart. We are pained most cruelly when we are wounded in affection. What grief can be greater than that of parents for ruined children, and especially when the parents' sin has been the children's temptation? 3. *Never was city more visited by Divine wrath than Jerusalem.* Here is the secret of her deepest trouble. She is afflicted in the day of God's fierce anger. God is most angry with her because she has sinned against most light, most ungratefully, and most rebelliously.

II. THE SORROW WAS UNHEEDED. It would be thought that such unequalled grief would arrest the attention of the most hasty and strike pity into the hardest. But no; it seems that all will pass by with cold and stony indifference. 1. *Note the causes of this indifference.* (1) *Callousness.* Men look with the eye who do not feel with the heart. The very sight of misery often encountered hardens men's sensibilities. (2) *Selfishness.* People are self-absorbed. Sympathy requires effort, attention, self-renunciation. It costs more than the selfish will give. (3) *Contempt.* The worst trouble of Jerusalem was her humiliation. But humiliation leads to contempt. Now, it is hard to pity those who are despised. 2. *Consider the exceptions to this indifference.* (1) *Good Samaritans.* Thank God, such exist, though no synagogue honours them. One such is worth scores of priests and Levites who "pass by on the other side." (2) *The Divine compassion.* The sufferer looks down and looks around him and sees no pity. If he will look up, he will see that the very Being who smote in righteous wrath is waiting to heal in merciful forgiveness (Hosea vi. 1).

In conclusion, a parallel may be drawn between the sorrow of Christ and that of Jerusalem. The text cannot be understood to be written of our Lord. But it may illustrate that sorrow which far surpassed all other human grief. To how many is it as nothing! They pass the cross as Arabs and Phœnicians passed Jerusalem in her ruin. Yet, is it nothing to them? (1) Their sins caused Christ's sorrow. (2) Christ's sorrow can save their souls. (3) Christ's sorrow calls, not for pity, but for gratitude and faith.

Vers. 13, 14.—*Fourfold trouble from God.* I. THE TROUBLE IS FROM GOD. This is the characteristic of it that the writer dwells upon with most concern. 1. *We should recognize the Divine origin of trouble.* We miss the meaning and purpose of it if we do

not see the hand that sends it. Earthly means may be used, as the King of Babylon was the agent for the destruction of Jerusalem. But all punishment for sin is inflicted by the Judge of sin. 2. *We should remember that trouble from God is most terrible trouble.* It springs from that most fierce anger, the anger of outraged love. It is directed by almighty power and cannot be evaded or resisted. It stops the alleviation of the best consolations by flowing from the same source from which those consolations would come. 3. *We should observe the purpose of trouble from God.* He doth not willingly afflict. If he sends distress it is for an object. What is that object? It may be to punish sin; then let us search out the sin and repent of it. It may be to wean us from earth; then let us cease from the idolatry of carnal things. It may be to teach us our weakness; then let us learn humility in our trouble. It may be to train us in patience and faith and spirituality; then let these graces have their perfect work.

II. THE TROUBLE IS FOURFOLD. It is various in form, touching one in one way and another most in a different way. But for each it is complex. 1. *It burns as fire.* At once it is felt to be fierce, poignant, and consuming. Thus does God seek to burn the chaff out of us. 2. *It catches our feet like a net.* God arrests the headlong career of folly with the net of trouble. It flings the heedless man to the ground, entangles his feet, and vexes his feelings. But it saves him from rushing on to his ruin. We may thank God for the distresses which stop our course when that runs in a wrong direction. 3. *It gives us pain and faintness like a sickness.* Thus are we humbled and subdued. The faintness of heart that sorrow brings is the best remedy for headstrong self-will and pride. 4. *It burdens like a yoke.* The transgressions bound and wreathed by the hand of God press upon the neck of the guilty. Several points in the image of a yoke may be observed. (1) It is a weight oppressing and wearying; (2) it is a constraint, hindering free action and imposing irksome conditions of motion; (3) it is connected with other impediments; (4) it presses very close upon our person; (5) it is carried about with us wherever we go, burdening us in all scenes and all circumstances; and (6) it is so "bound" and "wreathed" that it cannot be shaken off. Nevertheless, this trouble is sent for our good. It will be removed in due time if we repent and seek the grace of God in Christ. After it has gone, the relief from the distress of it will heighten the enjoyment of forgiveness.

Ver. 18.—*The righteousness of God confessed.* I. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD AS A FACT. 1. *What it is.* In its fulness and breadth it is the goodness of God, his sinlessness, his pure and holy character. But it has characteristics of more special importance. Righteousness in God is conformity with truth, justice, and honour. It means that God has no subtle double-dealing, but acts in perfect integrity. He moves in straight lines. Further, it means that God is fair to all, doing, if not the same thing to each, which would often be unjust, that which is fitting for every one. It also includes God's regard for the standard of right in his government, his care to make his creatures righteous, and his determination to check all unrighteousness. 2. *Why we are to believe in it.* It is declared most forcibly by those who know God best. Sceptical strangers may doubt it; but they who have entered into the presence of God, whether in holiness or in inspiration, alike agree in testifying to the righteousness of God. The deeper our Christian experience the more shall we be brought to admit this great truth.

II. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD HIDDEN UNDER A CLOUD. There are times when it is hard to say from our hearts, "The Lord is righteous." Doubts and difficulties should be boldly faced, for God cares for no lip-service of unbelieving flatterers. 1. *Trouble darkens our vision of the righteousness of God.* We fail to see the object of the storm while the darkness of it lowers over us. It seems to be greater than it is, and more than just, because we cannot take a fair view of it. 2. *Our own trouble seems to be out of proportion to that of other people.* We feel the full weight of our own burden; our neighbour's burden is seen at a distance, and then only seen, not felt. In her grief Jerusalem feels that she is visited with a strange pre-eminence of sorrow. Never was sorrow equal to hers (see ver. 12). This appears to be unjust. 3. *Our trouble looks more than we deserve.* So we think till we see our sin. To the impenitent God must often seem unjust. 4. *God has many purposes in sorrow that are unknown to us.* Therefore we fail to see the justice of the blow. But part of the discipline of trouble depends on our

ignorance of its end. If we knew whither it was leading us we should not be led. Darkness is necessary for the training of faith.

III. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD CONFESSED. This is grand! In the midst of wailing and weeping Jerusalem confesses that the hand that dealt the blow was right. 1. *Faith is requisite for this confession.* The righteousness cannot be seen; it is still shrouded in darkness. But faith holds to it. Thus we must use in the darkness the knowledge which we have won in the light. 2. *Penitence is also necessary for this confession.* When we confess our guilt we are ready to confess God's righteousness, but not till then. Even Job had to abhor himself and repent in dust and ashes in order to see the righteousness of God (Job xlii. 6).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The contrasts of adversity.* The key-note of this strain of sorrow, this poetical and pathetic dirge, is struck in the opening words of the composition. The heart of the prophet laments over the captured and ruined city. How natural that the present should recall the past! Jerusalem, now in the hands of the Chaldeans, was once, in the days of David and of Solomon, the scene of glory and the seat of empire, the joy of the whole earth. So much the sadder is the contrast, the deeper the fall, the bitterer the cup of woe.

I. THE ONCE POPULOUS CITY IS SOLITARY. Not the walls, the streets, the palaces, the temples, but the inhabitants, are the true strength and glory of a city. Formerly Jerusalem was thronged with citizens who took pride in her majesty, of sojourners who came to gaze with wonder and admiration upon her splendours. Now her population has been reduced by famine, by exile, by war; and silence is in her streets.

II. THE CITY ONCE A PRINCESS IS TRIBUTARY. The time was when other cities acknowledged her sway, paid her their tribute, sent her of their produce and of the labour of their sons. Now she is reduced to subjection, yields her treasure to the foe, and the toil of her children is for the profit of the alien.

III. THE CITY THAT ONCE WAS JOYFUL WEEPS. Mirth and music have given place to mourning, lamentation, and woe. No longer are the sound of the viol and the harp, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride, heard in her dwellings. They resound with the cries of grief and anguish. She weepeth in the night, and her tears are on her cheek.

IV. THE CITY ONCE THE SPOUSE OF THE LORD IS WIDOWED. To Jerusalem it had been said, "Thy Maker is thy Husband!" But because of her unfaithfulness and apostasy the Lord has forsaken her; she is become as a widow, unprotected, deserted, solitary, and comfortless.

V. THE CITY ONCE RICH IN ALLIES AND HELPERS IS UNFRIENDED. Not only is she feeble within, she is friendless without. In prosperous days neighbouring nations sought her good will and alliance, and were forward with their offers of friendship and of help. All this is of the past; those who vowed faithfulness have proved treacherous, and have become the enemies of Judæa in the extremity of her desolation, forsaking, and woe.—T.

Ver. 4.—*The decline of national religion.* Nowhere has the great truth of the close dependence of national prosperity upon national religion been more plainly and emphatically taught than in the writings of the Hebrew prophets. Their spiritual insight detected the true cause of national degradation. Whoever looks below the surface may see that the decline and fall of nations may usually be traced to spiritual causes, to the loss of any hold upon eternal principles of righteousness and piety.

I. THE OPEN SYMPTOMS OF THE DECLINE OF A NATION'S RELIGION. Those here mentioned are in circumstances and colour local and temporary; they were determined, as a matter of course, by what was peculiar to the religion of the country and of the day.

1. *The roads of Zion are forsaken.* There is no concourse upon the roads leading up to the metropolis, as was the case in the days of Judah's prosperity. 2. *The gates are deserted and unentered.* There was a time when the busy population passed to and fro, when the people gathered together at the gates to discuss the news of the day, the affairs of the city, when the royal processions passed in splendour through the gates

leading to the country. It is now so no longer. 3. *The festivals are unfrequented.* Formerly, when the great and sacred national feasts were being held, multitudes of Israelites attended these holy and welcome assemblies to share in the pious mirth, the cheering reminiscences, the fraternal fellowship, distinctive of such solemn and joyous occasions. But now there are none to celebrate the mercies of Jehovah, none to fulfil the sacred rites. To the religious heart the change is not only afflicting, it is crushing. 4. *The ministers of religion are left to mourn.* The priests who are left, if permitted to fulfil their office, do so under the most depressing influences; and no longer are there virgins to rejoice in the dance. The picture is painted in the darkest, saddest colours. We feel, as we enter into the prophet's lamentations, how dreary and hopeless is the state of that nation which God gives over to its foes.

II. THE CAUSE OF THE DECLINE OF A NATION'S RELIGION. This ever begins in spiritual unfaithfulness and defections. The external observances of religion may be kept up for a season, but this may be only from custom and tradition. The body does not at once decay when the spirit has forsaken it. To forget God, to deny his Word, to break his laws, to forsake his mercy-seat,—such are the steps by which a nation's decline is most surely commenced, by which a nation's ruin is most surely anticipated.

III. THE REMEDY FOR THE DECLINE OF A NATION'S RELIGION. 1. Confession. 2. Repentance. 3. Prayer for pardon and acceptance. 4. Resolution to obey the Lord, and again to reverence what is holy and to do what is right. 5. The union of all classes, rulers and subjects, priests and people, old and young, in a national reformation.—T.

Ver. 7.—*Mournful memories.* The recollection of the past may be the occasion of the highest joy or of the profoundest sorrow. To remember former happiness is one of the great pleasures of human life, if that happiness did but lead on to its own continuance and increase. The first beginnings of a delightful friendship, the first steps of a distinguished career, are remembered by the prosperous and happy with satisfaction and joy. It is otherwise with the memory of a morning of brightness which soon clouded, and which was followed by storms and darkness. In the text the anguish of Jerusalem is pictured as intensified by the recollection of bygone felicity.

I. THE PRESENT CALAMITY EXCITES BY CONTRAST THE RECOLLECTION OF PROSPEROUS TIMES. 1. *Affliction, homelessness, and misery* are the present lot of Jerusalem. The city is in the hands of the enemy. The people have no longer a home which they can cling to, but face the prospect of exile, destitution, and vagrancy. 2. *Helplessness.* In times of prosperity neighbours were eager to offer aid which was not needed; in these times of adversity no friendly proffer of help is heard. 3. *Mockery.* The Jews are a people from the first separated from surrounding nations by their laws, their customs, their religious observances. As an intensely religious people, they have ever set their hearts upon their revelation, upon the God of their fathers and his ordinances. Consequently they are most easily and most deeply wounded in their religious susceptibilities. Strange that a nation condemned to defeat and capture for its unfaithfulness to Jehovah should yet observe the appointed sabbaths, and keenly feel the ridicule and the contempt incurred by such observance! Her adversaries mocked her sabbaths.

II. THE RECOLLECTION OF PROSPEROUS TIMES ENHANCES THE ANGUISH OF PRESENT ADVERSITY. Time has been when Jerusalem, her monarch, citizens, and surrounding population have enjoyed peace, plenty, respect from other nations, liberty of worship, and joyful solemnities. The force of contrast makes the memory of such time bitter and distressing. Their "crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

APPLICATION. Let present privileges and prosperity be so used that the memory of them may never occasion bitter regret and misery.—T.

Ver. 10.—*Spoliation and profanation.* The presence of a foreign foe in its capital has always been regarded, and is still regarded, as among the heaviest calamities that can befall a nation. In our own times, a neighbouring nation has been required to endure this humiliation and indignity, shocking its patriotism and its pride. We can understand how bitter must have been the anguish of the Jews when the Chaldean hosts patrolled their city, quartered themselves upon its inhabitants, appropriated its wealth, and violated the sanctity of its temple.

I. THE POSSESSIONS OF THE JEWS WERE FORCIBLY APPROPRIATED BY THEIR ADVERSARIES. The greed of the conqueror has ever been the theme of satire and reproach. *Væ victis!* "Woe to the conquered!" is an old proverb, founded upon an older propensity of human nature in its military condition. The pleasant and desirable things of a city are the spoil of the conqueror. It was so when the Chaldeans entered Jerusalem, sacked the city, and laid their hands upon whatever pleased their fancy.

II. THE HOLY HOUSE OF JERUSALEM WAS SACRILEGIOUSLY ABUSED BY THE HEATHEN CONQUERORS. The temples of their gods are always the object of a nation's reverence and sometimes of affection. But the Jews had especial reason for venerating their sanctuary; it was the scene of their sacrifices and offerings, the depository of their oracles, the spot where the Shechinah-glory was displayed. The more sacred portion of the edifice was reserved for the priests; even the devout Jews were not suffered to enter these consecrated precincts. What, then, must have been the disgust, the horror, with which the pious contemporaries of Jeremiah, and especially the prophet himself, witnessed the profanation of the sanctuary, as the Chaldean soldiers polluted it with their heathen presence and speech! Their feelings were injured in the most susceptible part of their nature.

APPLICATION. Retribution is not an accident; neither is it the mere outworking of natural laws. There is Divine providence superintending it; it has a meaning, for it witnesses to human responsibility and sin; it has a purpose, for it summons to repentance and newness of life.—T.

Ver. 12.—*Unparalleled woe.* The prophecy here rises into poetry. The captured and afflicted city is personified. Like a woman bereaved and desolate and lonely, bewailing her misfortunes, and pouring out the anguish of her heart, Jerusalem sits in her solitary desolation and contempt, and calls upon bystanders to remark her sad condition, and to offer their sympathy to unequalled anguish.

I. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SORROW, DESOLATION, AND SHAME. How extreme is the distress and humiliation here depicted is apparent from the fact that this language has been attributed to our Divine Saviour when hanging upon the cross of Calvary. If a city never endured sorrow like that of Jerusalem, certainly no human being ever experienced agonies so piercing as those which the Captain of our salvation willingly bore for our sake when he gave his life a ransom for many.

"All ye that pass by,
To the Saviour draw nigh;
To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?
For sins not his own
He died to atone;
Was pain or was sorrow like his ever known?"

II. THE ADMISSION THAT AFFLICTION IS OF DIVINE APPOINTMENT, THAT IT IS CHASTISEMENT. When Jerusalem came to herself she could not fail to recognize a Divine hand in the miseries which befell her. The scourge was the army of the Chaldeans, but the hand was the righteous and retributive hand of the Eternal. It is too common for those who are in trouble to murmur against Providence, to exclaim against the injustice of providential appointments. Yet true wisdom points out that the path of submission and resignation is the right path. When once the mind is brought to acknowledge, "It is the Lord!" there is a prospect of spiritual improvement.

III. THE ORY FOR SYMPATHY. By a striking figure of speech, Jerusalem is represented as calling upon surrounding nations for interest and compassion. "Is it nothing to you? . . . Behold, and see!" Human sympathy is welcome in seasons of sorrow. Yet true help and deliverance must be from God, and from God alone. It is better to call upon the Lord than to call upon man; for he is both ready to sympathize and mighty to save.—T.

Ver. 18.—"*The Lord is righteous.*" In nothing is the distinction more marked between religions of human origin and device and the religion which is the revelation of infinite Wisdom and Truth, than in the views they respectively afford of the moral character and attributes of Deity. Whilst the heathen irrely attribute to their gods qualities

which are detestable in man, the Scriptures represent the Supreme as perfectly righteous. The acknowledgment here made by Jeremiah was made by Moses, by Nehemiah, by Daniel, and indeed is virtually, if not verbally, made by the writer of every book of the Old Testament. And the new covenant is based upon the revelation of a righteous Ruler and Father.

I. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS IN HIS CHARACTER. It is certainly no progress, but a retrogression towards ignorance and barbarism, to represent the supreme Intelligence as destitute of moral attributes, exercised in the fulfilment of wise and benevolent purposes. Affliction and anguish sometimes obscure men's judgment of the character and the dealings of God. It was not so with Jeremiah, who, in lamenting the troubles of his nation and of himself, did not distort the representation he gave to his countrymen of the attributes of the Most High.

II. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS IN HIS LAW. The theocratic government of the Hebrews was based upon the just character and the holy Law of the eternal King. To some minds the reflection might have seemed inappropriate and unwelcome in the depth of disaster. But a true prophet, a true religious teacher, feels bound to set forth the fact that the rule under which men live as individuals and as communities is a righteous rule; the justice of the Law abides although that Law be broken, and although its penalties be incurred and endured.

III. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS IN HIS RETRIBUTION. This is probably the thought most prominent in the text. The fate of Jerusalem was a hard fate, a lamentable fate, but it was not an unjust fate. The people reaped as they had sown. An onlooker might readily have acknowledged this, but it was a merit in a sufferer so to do. For the chastened to confess the justice of their chastisement is a proof that already the chastening is not in vain.—T.

Ver. 20.—*The cry of the contrite.* Trouble, when it leads to an inquiry into its cause, when it prompts to submission and to repentance, proves a means of grace. The cry of suffering and distress may have no moral significance; the cry of contrition and of supplication is a sign of spiritual impression, and is a step towards spiritual recovery.

I. THE OCCASION OF AFFLICTION AND CONTRITION. This is here specified, and the reality and severity are manifest. Within, i.e. in the homes and streets of the city, there is dearth; without, i.e. in the field, there is destruction by the sword. Thus in two strokes national calamity and disaster are depicted.

II. THE TOKENS OF AFFLICTION AND CONTRITION. Man's bodily nature is expressive of his spiritual state. Severe suffering and distress display themselves in organic, physical disturbance. The prophet feels in his bodily frame the disturbing effects of the trials he has undergone, the lively sympathy he has experienced.

III. THE CONFESSION TO WHICH AFFLICTION AND CONTRITION LEAD. Identifying the nation with himself, the prophet exclaims, "I have grievously rebelled." There is candour and justice, there is submissiveness, there is spiritual discernment, in this outspoken acknowledgment. No excuse, no extenuation, no complaint, is here, but a plain confession of ill desert. Rebels against a rightful authority, against a just, forbearing Sovereign, what could the Jews expect but such humiliation as they actually experienced? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive."

IV. THE CRY OF AFFLICTION AND OF CONTRITION. 1. It is a cry unto the Lord. Judah had looked for earthly friends and helpers, and had learned by bitter experience the vanity of such expectations. And now Judah sought the Lord whom by sin and rebellion she had offended. 2. It is an entreaty for Divine regard and consideration. What had happened was indeed by permission of Heaven. But the regard implored was one of sympathy, commiseration, and kindness. 3. It is a cry for deliverance. It is dictated by the assurance that he and only he who wounded can heal and comfort and restore.—T.

Ver. 1.—*Widowhood—the emblem of loneliness.* I. THE FORCE OF THE EMBLEM. Another emblem might have been used. Or the statement as to loneliness might have been left in its simplicity without any comparison at all. Why, then, this particular emblem? Because it sets forth the separation between two parties to a peculiar connection—a connection intended to have all the permanence which anything in this

earth can have. Of the husband and wife it is to be said that "they twain have become one flesh," and when the wife becomes a widow she is left in a peculiar and irremediable loneliness, even though she be in the midst of kindred, neighbours, and friends. So also we may say that the inhabitants of Jerusalem, together with the place itself, its site, its houses, its streets, had become one great whole. The children of Israel wandered through the wilderness for forty years, but when at last they left it, it would not have been suitable to say that the wilderness had become as a widow.

II. A VIEW THUS SUGGESTED AS TO THE CAUSE OF SEPARATION. One kind of loneliness had come as a terrible visitation because another kind of loneliness had not been sought as an imperative condition of security. Had not Balaam said, "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Numb. xxiii. 9)? Israel was to dwell in safety *alone*. What could be expected if the people mixed again so recklessly with those from whom they had been separated by a course of Divine marvels? It may also be noticed that Jerusalem would not have been left as a widow if the people of Jerusalem and the country altogether had had in them the spirit which prompted to deal wisely and compassionately with every widow. The widow had been carefully provided for by Mosaic enactments, *e.g.* in the solemn feasts and in the time of harvest. Yet in the first chapter of Isaiah's prophecies we find him denouncing the princes of the once faithful city because the cause of the widow did not come unto them.

III. A GROUND OF HOPE. Widowhood is evidently a state on which the loving God looks down with infinite tenderness and desire to help. Jerusalem became as a widow, yet the separation was not for ever. Her exiled inhabitants returned. Yet this was a small matter compared with the greater truths taught alike by the separation and the restoration. Things nearest and dearest to us may have to be taken away for a time, but all that belongs to our real welfare and to our complete relation to even the whole universe will come back in due time. We must not mistake eclipse for destruction.—Y.

Ver. 2.—*Nights of weeping explained.* Nights of weeping and constant tears upon the cheeks. Thus the metaphor is kept up with which this first song of lamentation begins. The sensitiveness of the woman-nature helps to bring out the prostration of Jerusalem. It is not only that her *condition* is lamentable, but she herself, in all the feelings of her heart, is a prey to the keenest anguish. People do not always see their own sad state as others see it. There is either a shallowness of nature or something has happened to deaden the sensibilities. But in this verse we have both the mention of tears and of most sufficient causes for tears.

I. FIRST CAUSE: WANT OF SYMPATHY AND SOLACE. Jerusalem has no *comforters*. Not even Job's comforters. For, though Job's comforters were sufficiently irritating and mistook blisters for salves, yet comfort was their errand. Bad as Job's state was, it would have been worse still if in his time of sore trouble he had been left quite alone, especially if professed friends had not come near him. But here the widowed Jerusalem has no comforter; and yet she had had many lovers, many who had been drawn irresistibly by the charm of her attractions. Jerusalem was proud of these attractions, and yet they did not belong to the essence of her existence. The attractions perished, and with the perishing of them the lovers whom they drew became cold. The attractions perished, but Jerusalem herself remained with all her needs, and yet with none to minister. Where do we mean to look for comforters when our hour of deepest trouble comes? Many to whom we may look will be able to do nothing for us; some to whom we may look will not try to do anything: happy then shall we be if we have reason to say, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, *thy* comforts delight my soul" (Ps. xciv. 19).

II. SECOND CAUSE: FRIENDS HAVE BECOME ENEMIES. When the attractions of Jerusalem faded away, not only did the lovers depart, but they had to seek new satisfactions elsewhere, and for many selfish reasons they would act in sympathy with the conquerors of Jerusalem. When she was a strong city, it suited surrounding peoples to be friendly; but when she became desolate and the whole land was lost, then it seemed the interest of these peoples to be hostile to Jerusalem. Indeed, their connection with Jerusalem was really hostile even when they meant friendship. Their open and strenuous hostility from the first would have been a better thing. Professed friends,

without meaning it, may so mislead as to do more harm than the bitterest enemy could ever do. The real friend is he who, for the sake of truth and of the highest interests, is not afraid to be reckoned for the time an enemy.—Y.

Ver. 4.—*Zion forsaken as a religious centre.* I. THE PECULIAR GLORY OF ZION IN THE PAST. The ways of Zion mourned now, but the very fact that such a thing should be said showed that they had once been filled with rejoicing. The gates had been crowded with worshippers from every district of the land. Zion was glorified as the site of the temple, and the temple was glorified as holding within its imposing walls the ark of the covenant. Zion was the city of solemnities. Things were done there not according to will-worship or mere immemorial tradition, but according to Jehovah's definite instructions given in the wilderness through Moses centuries before. Praise continually waited for God in Zion. Jehovah loved the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. There was no day without its morning and evening sacrifice, and every sabbath and new moon brought their peculiar additions. Nor must we forget the Feast of the Passover, of the firstfruits, of the Pentecost, and the great feast of the seventh month. If, as nothing more than times of mirth and relaxation, these would play a large part in the life of the people, and true prophets and whosoever among the priests had deep reverence for God would get much strength out of these services, finding in them, according to the measure of their faith, zeal, and diligence, constant means of grace.

II. THE PECULIAR HUMILIATION OF ZION IN THE PRESENT. The thought of Zion probably carried to the Israelite more associations than did the thought of any other place. The great periodic assemblies at Zion manifested the history, the privileges, the strength, the unity, of the nation. There may have been intervals of comparative neglect, but we know that in the time of Hezekiah there was a great keeping of the Passover. Thus, so far as outward observances were concerned, the machinery of Divine service must have been in good working order. But it is also very evident that the nation at large got no real good out of the numerous and elaborate rites which Jehovah had commanded. We may quote words of Hosea which, while they show the prominent position occupied by Zion in the national life, also explain the reason why God brought such desolation to Zion. "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast-days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts" (Hos. ii. 11). Religion had been turned into mere merry-making. The house of prayer became a house of revelling. Jehovah had declared emphatically by his prophets that offerings had no value detached from righteousness and mercy. What wonder, then, that from condemning words he should advance to condemning deeds? Forsaken Zion itself spoke as if with a prophetic voice. It was when they remembered Zion that the exiles in Babylon wept, and when their masters wanted from them a song of Zion they could only reply that it was not possible to sing Jehovah's song in a strange land. There is warning in all this desolation of Zion as to how great discernment is needed to make sure that the elements of our worship are acceptable to God, edifying to ourselves, and not merely for self-pleasure.

III. We must not forget that BRIGHTER DAYS ARE PROPHESED FOR ZION. The same old Zion was again crowded, but of this we must not make too much. Jesus himself had to say that the rebuilt house of his Father had become a house of merchandise and even a den of thieves. There is the ideal Zion, part of the heavenly Jerusalem, where the holiest service will be the highest joy, where our religion will no longer be imperilled by formality, superstition, or superficiality.—Y.

Ver. 11.—*The real need of the soul made manifest.* I. REAL NEED CAN ONLY BE MADE MANIFEST BY PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE. The greatest need of the natural life is bread, taking the word "bread" as representative of all food. Clothing and shelter, while they may indeed be reckoned as needs, are not needs after the same imperative fashion as food; and every one, however easily his daily bread comes to him, will assent to this same general truth that food is the great need of natural life. But he will only really feel this in such circumstances as are indicated in this verse. For a long while these people of Jerusalem had found bread lying to their hands when they were hungry. They could buy it and have abundance of pleasant things beside. The feeling of their

hearts was that they could not do without these pleasant things, and when at last they gave them up to keep body and soul together, it must have been with terrible pain they made the surrender. And what is true of bread for the natural life is also true of the Bread coming down from heaven for the spiritual life. Christians, living in the midst of all manner of pleasant things of this world, with no lack of money to buy them and faculty to enjoy them, try to feel at the same time that more than all pleasant things are the grace, the life, the wisdom, the overflowing fulness of the Spirit, which come from Christ. But all the testimony of believers proves that the pleasant things need to be withdrawn before it can be apprehended that Christ is emphatically the Bread. It is when we lose relish of nature's best contributions to our happiness that Christ comes forward, confident as ever in his power to satisfy us.

II. THE VALUE OF TREASURES CAN ONLY BE KNOWN BY WHAT THE OWNER IS WILLING TO DO TO RETAIN THEM. All the pleasant things belonging to the *community* were already gone. The sanctuary had been desecrated and pillaged. Much private property had doubtless gone. But some the owners would be able to hide—jewels and such-like wealth as went into small compass. Among these pleasant things would be family heirlooms, loving gifts, possessions with respect to which the receiver had said to the giver, "I will keep this thing till I die." But now the great pressure comes, and one pleasant thing after another goes for a few handfuls of corn. The soul is threatening to depart from the body and it must be turned back; "for what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And now notice that there are treasures of the heart, such treasures as come from faith in Christ and fidelity to him, which are not given up even to preserve natural life. Multitudes have gone willingly to death that thereby they might testify to the truth as it is in Jesus. They have laid firm hold of his own word, "Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. xvi. 25).—Y.

Ver. 12.—*The observation of suffering.* I. A SEEMINGLY UNREASONABLE COMPLAINT. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" So speaks Jerusalem, personified under the guise of the weeping widow, with the tears on her cheeks and the beauty faded, deprived of all her pleasant things, and left in solitude so far as her familiar supports and consolations are concerned. She sits, as it were, by the highway, and the crowd passes on, taking no notice. Why, indeed, should it take notice? The spectacle of a conquered nation and a pillaged capital was not a rare thing. The nations asked to sympathize had been through the same experience themselves. We are all prompt to say, "Surely no trouble has been like our trouble;" and yet, as our observation of human affairs enlarges, we see how human nature, in every individual instance, is made to know its extraordinary capacity for suffering. Nevertheless, the piteous appeal here is not a baseless one. The trouble of the children of Israel had not come upon them after the manner of a common nation. They were peculiar in constitution, privileges, and history. If only there had been eyes to see it, there was something very significant to demand attention. But the thing to be seen did not lie on the surface, nor was it to be discovered save by faculties specially illuminated. The downfall and the sufferings of Israel, as they are to be seen both in the Scriptures and subsequent history, belong to the things that are to be spiritually discerned. Therefore this complaint, while superficially it may be called unreasonable, is yet reasonable enough, if we only consider the position and mission of Israel, and the work which, even in her degradation, she has done for the world.

II. THE NEED THERE IS TO MARK JEHOVAH'S SURE VISITATIONS ON THE DISOBEDIENT. This is the critical element in the appeal that widow-like Jerusalem makes to the passers-by: "Look at me as the greatest illustration of the certainty with which Jehovah punishes those who rebel against him." We must, of course, beware of the conclusion that suffering always means punishment; but where we can see that it is punishment we must mark it as such, so that we ourselves may be admonished and may also more effectually admonish others. Here was a nation that in obedience might have rested confidently and happily in Jehovah's promise. The power behind that promise was more than all the armies of the great empires round about. But when the power was withdrawn it meant not merely suffering; the withdrawing had in it the nature of a judicial, solemn sentence from Jehovah himself.—Y.

Ver. 18.—*The acknowledgment that suffering is deserved.* I. THE CLEAR RECOGNITION ON THE PART OF THOSE VISITED THAT THE SUFFERING WAS OF JEHOVAH'S BRINGING. Secondary causes were prominent, but behind them was a Divine cause most important to be perceived in all the intensity of its working. Those who desolated Jerusalem did so from the worst of motives, motives always to be condemned; and these motives, keenly inspiring as they were, would have ended in nothing save for the weakness in which Israel had been left by its apostasy from God. When we are suffering for our sin and folly it is good if we can recognize that the suffering is of God's producing. Because that which God produces God can remove in the hour of repentance. Whereas what man produces he may not be able to put right again, even when he is so disposed.

II. A REASON IS GIVEN FOR DECLARING JEHOVAH RIGHTEOUS. He has done righteously to those who have rebelled against his commandments. God has made us so that we can distinguish between the right and the wrong. We need ever to be on our guard against saying that a thing is right because God does it. What is admitted here is that it is a right thing for God to inflict chastisement on the disobedient. The greater the disobedience the severer must be the chastisement. The commandment of God was always a right thing in itself; and the prophets had again and again illustrated the righteousness of particular commandments and the evident miseries that flowed from neglecting them. Recollect that this great blow upon Israel came after many lesser ones. It was not as if Israel could plead that the commandments were dubious or the warnings scanty.

III. It must not be forgotten that JEHOVAH'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS EQUALLY SHOWN IN HIS TREATMENT OF THE OBEDIENT. It is of the greatest importance to recollect this, because unfortunately the disobedient are more noticeable than the obedient, and the treatment of the disobedient, by consequence, more noticeable than the treatment of the obedient. The spirit of our life determines, by a most fixed law, the way in which God will treat us. It is perfectly impossible for the disobedient to escape suffering. But it is equally impossible for the obedient to lose their reward. Joy and blessedness, the exquisite peace and rapture of holiness, must come to them by the very nature of things.—Y.

Ver. 21.—*A wicked gladness.* I. THE WRONG FEELING WITH REGARD TO SUFFERING FOR SIN. People are here represented as rejoicing over the sufferings of others. Not that they take delight in suffering as suffering, but those who suffered were their enemies. Those now suffering had once inflicted suffering on others. They had been a source of danger, provoking jealousy, and producing humiliation. Hence, when Israel fell into all this solitude and misery, other peoples not only failed to pity, but even positively rejoiced. This was just what might be expected, and even if some of the heathen nations said, "This serves Israel right for neglecting Jehovah," it was certainly nothing more than the simple truth. The wrong thing was the exultant feeling, the gladness of heart over all this suffering. There is no fear but what we shall sympathize with the suffering of the innocent, the pain coming from some accident or disease; but when it is an *evil-doer* who suffers, then we are only too easily betrayed into language expressing gladness of heart. And we should never be *glad* with respect to any suffering whatever. Let it be remembered, too, that gladness is only one out of several possible wrong attitudes with respect to suffering. If while others are suffering for their sins we allow ourselves to get into any of these wrong attitudes with respect to them, then our unchristian state of mind may prove a very serious obstacle in the way of their repentance and amendment. The censuring, lecturing spirit must be guarded against, and also the spirit that looks down as from a position of superior goodness. We must restore others in a spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted.

II. THE RIGHT FEELING WITH REGARD TO SUFFERING FOR SIN. The absence of the wrong feeling can only be secured by the presence of the right one. If selfish gladness, the gladness springing from envy and jealousy, is to be kept out, it must be by constantly cultivating pity for all suffering. Pity is to be the very first feeling with which all suffering is contemplated. Pity must, indeed, be well under control, and never allowed to open the way for a greater suffering by taking away a lesser one, but it must always be the prevailing feeling. Then also we must take care to rejoice with the rejoicing. It increases the happiness of others to know that we are glad because of their happiness.

Our work as Christians is only part done in removing the evil; our thoughts are to be chiefly fixed on producing and establishing the good with all its fruits so pleasant to the spiritual eye, so pleasant to the taste of the inner man. The enemies of Israel saw Israel fallen, and rejoiced that Jehovah had done this. When we see the fallen lifted up and walking along in the strength of Christ, let us rejoice exceedingly because of what the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has done. It is worth all our efforts to keep out of our hearts mean satisfaction because of the disappointments and confusion of others.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

ZION'S JUDGMENT IS OF GOD. LAMENTATIONS AND SUPPLICATIONS.

Ver. 1.—**Hath the Lord covered; rather, doth . . . cover.** The daughter of Zion; *i.e.* Jerusalem. Cast down from heaven. Here and in Matt. xi. 23 we have a parallel to Isa. xiv. 12, where the King of Babylon is compared to a bright star. "Cast down" whither? Into the "pit" or dungeon of Hades (Isa. xiv. 15). The beauty of Israel; *i.e.* Jerusalem, exactly as Babylon is called "the proud beauty [or, 'ornament'] of Chaldea" (Isa. xlii. 19). His footstool; *i.e.* the ark (Ps. cxxxii. 7), or perhaps the temple as containing the ark (1 Chron. xxviii. 2; Ps. xcix. 5).

Ver. 2.—**Habitations; rather, pastures.** The word properly means the settlements of shepherds in green, grassy spots, but here designates the country parts in general, distinguished from the "strongholds" of Judah. **Hath polluted.** So Ps. lxxxix. 39, "Thou hast profaned [same word as here] his crown [by casting it] to the ground." The wearer of a crown was regarded in the East as nearer to divinity than ordinary mortals; in some countries, indeed, *e.g.* in Egypt, almost as an incarnation of the deity. To discrown him was to "pollute" or "profane" him.

Ver. 3.—**All the horn; rather, every horn;** *i.e.* all the means of defence, especially the fortresses. **He hath drawn back his right hand; i.e.** he hath withdrawn his assistance in war. **He burned against; rather, he burned up.**

Ver. 4.—The beginning of the verse seems slightly out of order (see the Septuagint). And slew all that were pleasant, etc. The correct rendering is, *And slew all that was pleasant to the eye: in the tent of the daughter of Zion he poured out his fury like fire.* The Authorized Version (following the Targum) seems to have thought that the youth of the population alone was intended. But, though Ewald also adopts this view, it seems to limit unduly the meaning of the poet. By "tent" we should probably understand "dwelling," as Jer. iv.

LAMENTATIONS.

5, and often; Isa. xvi. 5, "the tent of David;" Ps. lxxviii. 67, "the tent of Joseph."

Ver. 5.—**Was as an enemy: he hath swallowed, etc.** The threefold division of the verse is, unfortunately, concealed in the Authorized Version, owing to the arbitrary stopping. The grouping suggested by the Massoretic text is—

"The Lord is become an enemy, he hath swallowed up Israel;
He hath swallowed up all her palaces,
he hath destroyed all his strongholds;
And hath increased in the daughter of Judah moaning and bemoaning."

The change of gender in the second line is easily explicable. In the first case the poet is thinking of the city; in the second, of the people of Israel. The rendering "moaning and bemoaning" is designed to reproduce, to some extent, the Hebrew phrase, in which two words, derived from the same root, and almost exactly the same, are placed side by side, to give a more intense expression to the idea.

Ver. 6.—**Violently taken away; rather, violently treated; i.e.** broken up. **His tabernacle; rather, his booth.** "Tent" and "dwelling" are interchangeable expressions (see ver. 4); and in the Psalms "booth" is used as a special poetic synonym for "tent" when God's earthly dwelling-place, the sanctuary of the temple, is spoken of (so Ps. xxvii. 5; xxxi. 20; lxxvi. 2). The Authorized Version, indeed, presumes an allusion to the proper meaning of the Hebrew word, as if the poet compared the sanctuary of Jehovah to a pleasure-booth in a garden. It is, however, more natural to continue, *as a garden*, the sense of which will be clear from Ps. lxxx. 12, 13. The Septuagint has, instead, "as a vine"—a reading which differs from the Massoretic by having one letter more (*kaggéfen* instead of *kaggan*). This ancient reading is adopted by Ewald, and harmonizes well with Isa. v. 1, etc.; Jer. ii. 21 (comp. Ps. lxxx. 8); but the received text gives a very good sense. "Garden" in the Bible means, of course, a plantation of trees rather than a flower-garden. **His places of the assembly; rather, his place of meeting (with God).** The

word occurs in the same sense in Ps. lxxiv. 9. It is the temple which is meant, and the term is borrowed from the famous phrase, *ohel mōēdh* (Exod. xxvii. 21; comp. xxv. 22).

Ver. 7.—**Her palaces**; i.e. those of the daughter of Zion, especially "high buildings" (this is the true meaning of *'armōn*) of the temple. **They have made a noise**, etc. Comp. Ps. lxxiv. 3, "Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy place of meeting." The passages are parallel, though, whether the calamities referred to are the same in both, cannot *a priori* be determined. The shouts of triumph of the foe are likened to the festal shouts of the temple-worshippers (comp. Isa. xxx. 29; Amos v. 24).

Ver. 8.—**He hath stretched out a line**. It is the "line of desolation" mentioned in Isaiah (xxxiv. 11; comp. Amos vii. 7; 2 Kings xxi. 13). Such is the unsparing rigour of Jehovah's judgments.

Ver. 9.—**Are sunk into the ground**; i.e. are broken down and buried in the dust. **The Law is no more**. The observance of the Law being rendered impossible by the destruction of the temple. Comp. this and the next clause with Ezek. vii. 26.

Ver. 10.—**They have cast up dust**, etc. A sign of mourning (Josh. vii. 6; 2 Sam. xiii. 19; Job ii. 12).

Ver. 11.—**My bowels are troubled** (see on ch. i. 20). **My liver is poured upon the earth**. A violent emotion being supposed to occasion a copious discharge of bile. **The daughter of my people**. A poetic expression for Zion or Judah.

Ver. 12.—**Corn**. Either in the sense of parched corn (comp. Lev. xxiii. 14; 1 Sam. xvii. 17; Prov. xxvii. 22) or a poetic expression for "bread" (comp. Exod. xvi. 4; Ps. cv. 40).

Ver. 13.—**What thing shall I take to witness for thee?** rather, *What shall I testify unto thee?* The nature of the testifying may be gathered from the following words. It would be a comfort to Zion to know that her misfortune was not unparalleled: *sola-men miseriis socios habuisse malorum*. The expression is odd, however, and, comparing Isa. xl. 18, A. Krochmal has suggested, *What shall I compare?* The correction is easy. **Equal**; i.e. compare (comp. Isa. xlv. 5).

Ver. 14.—**Thy prophets**. Jeremiah constantly inveighs against the fallacious, immoral preaching of the great mass of his prophetic contemporaries (comp. Jer. vi. 13, 14; xiv. 13—15; xxiii. 14—40). **Have seen vain and foolish things**; i.e. have announced "visions" (prophecies) of an unreal and irrational tenor. Comp. Jer. xxiii. 13, where the same word here paraphrased as "irrational" (literally, *insipid*) occurs. **Dis-**

covered; i.e. disclosed. **To turn away thy captivity**. The Captivity, then, might have been "turned away," if the other prophets had, like Jeremiah, disclosed the true spiritual state of the people, and moved them to repentance. **False burdens**. Suggestive references to these false prophecies occur in Jer. xiv. 13, 14; xxiii. 31, 32 (see the Exposition on these passages). **Causes of banishment**. So Jeremiah (xxvii. 10; comp. 15), "Thy prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land."

Ver. 15.—**Clap . . . hiss . . . wag their heads**. Gestures of malicious joy (Job xxvii. 23) or contempt (Jer. xix. 8; Ps. xxii. 9). **The perfection of beauty**; literally, *the perfect in beauty*. The same phrase is used in Ezekiel (xxvii. 3; xxviii. 12) of Tyre, and a similar one in Ps. l. 2 of Zion.

Vers. 16, 17.—On the transposition of the initial letters in these verses, see Introduction.

Ver. 16.—**Have opened their mouth against thee**. As against the innocent sufferer of Ps. xxii. (ver. 13). **Gnash the teeth**. In token of rage, as Ps. xxxv. 16; xxxvii. 12. **We have seen it** (comp. Ps. xxxv. 21).

Ver. 17.—**His word that he had commanded**, etc. "Commanded," i.e. given in charge to. Comp. Zech. i. 6, "My words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets." Zechariah continues, in language which illustrates the foregoing words of this verse, "Did they not take hold of [overtake] your fathers;" where the persons spoken of as "your fathers" are the same as those who are represented by the speaker of the elegy. "In the days of old;" alluding, perhaps, to such passages as Deut. xxviii. 52, etc. **The horn of thine adversaries**. "Horn" has a twofold meaning—"strength" or "defence" (comp. ver. 3), and "honour" or "dignity" (comp. 1 Sam. ii. 1). The figure is too natural to need explanation.

Ver. 18.—**Their heart cried unto the Lord**, etc. "Their heart" can only mean "the heart of the people of Jerusalem." For the expression, comp. Ps. lxxiv. 2, "My heart and my flesh cry aloud to the living God." To avoid the rather startling prosopœia in the next clause, Thenius supposes a corruption in the group of letters rendered "wall," and attaches the corrected word to the first clause, rendering thus: "Their heart crieth unto the Lord in vain; O daughter of Zion, let tears run down," etc. Another resource, which also involves an emendation, is that of Ewald, "Cry with all thy heart, O wall of the daughter of Zion." O wall, etc. The prosopœia is surprising, but is only a degree more striking than that of ver. 8 and ch. i. 4. In Isa. xiv. 31 we find an equally strong one, "Howl, O gate." Most probably, however,

there is something wrong in the text; the following verses seem to refer to the daughter of Zion. Bickell reads thus: "Cry aloud unto the Lord, O virgin daughter of Zion." Like a river; rather, *like a torrent*. Give thyself no rest. The word rendered "rest" means properly the stiffness produced by cold.

Ver. 19.—*In the beginning of the watches*. This would seem to be most naturally explained as referring to the first watch of the night. When most are wrapped in their first and sweetest sleep, the daughter of Zion is to "arise and cry." Others explain, "at the beginning of each of the night watches;" i.e. all the night through. Previously to the Roman times, the Jews had divided the night into three watches (comp. Judg. iii. 19). *Pour out thine heart like water*; i.e. give free course to thy complaint, shedding tears meanwhile. The expression is parallel partly to phrases like "I am poured out like water" (Ps. xxii. 14), partly to "Pour out your heart before him" (Ps. lxxii. 8).

In the top of every street; rather, *at every street corner* (and so ch. iv. 1).

Ver. 20.—*To whom thou hast donethis*; viz. to Israel, the chosen people. And children; rather, (*even*) children. The children are the "fruit" referred to. Comp. the warnings in Lev. xxvi. 26; Deut. xxviii. 56; and especially Jer. xix. 9; also the historical incident in 2 Kings vi. 28, 29. *Of a span long*; rather, *borne in the hands*. The word is derived from the verb rendered "to swaddle" in ver. 22 (see note).

Ver. 22.—*Thou hast called as in a solemn day*. The passage is illustrated by ch. i. 15, according to which the instruments of Jehovah's vengeance are "summoned" by him to a festival when starting for the holy war. *My terrors round about*. Almost identical with one of the characteristic phrases of Jeremiah's prophecies, "fear [or rather, 'terror'] on every side" (see on Jer. vi. 25). *Have swaddled*; rather, *have borne upon the hands*.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*God not remembering his footstool*. The ark was regarded as God's footstool; and the temple in which the ark was kept was also sometimes called the footstool of God. When the temple was destroyed and the ark stolen, or broken, or lost, it looked as though God had forgotten his footstool. The symbolism of the ark and the ritual connected with it give a peculiar significance to this fact.

I. GOD NO LONGER REMEMBERS THE PLACE WHERE HIS PRESENCE WAS MOST FULLY MANIFESTED. The Holy Land, Jerusalem, the temple, the holy of holies, the ark,—these are the sacred places, of increasing sanctity as the circle narrows, till the very footstool where God touches earth is reached. 1. The presence of God in our midst is *no guarantee against the natural consequences of our misdeeds*. On the contrary, if he is with us to protect in times of simple distress, he is with us as Judge to condemn when we fall and contract guilt. 2. The presence of God at one time is *no guarantee of its permanence*. The footstool may be God's no longer if it prove unworthy of him. The Church which was once the temple of the Holy Spirit may become deserted by its heavenly Guest. That we enjoy the communion of God now is no reason for being confident that we shall not lose that privilege through unbelief or other sin. 3. *We cannot assume that God will never reject us because he has once made use of us*. The footstool may be supposed to have been used by God as of some service to him. Nevertheless it was discarded. If the servant of God proved unfaithful, his Master's livery will not save him. He will be discharged and disgraced.

II. GOD NO LONGER REMEMBERS HIS MERCY-SEAT. The footstool of God's peculiarly manifested presence was also his mercy-seat. There the assurance of atonement was confirmed when the high priest entered with sacrificial blood and intercession. Yet even the mercy-seat can be forgotten in the day of God's anger. We trust that in wrath he will remember mercy. But there are clouds of anger too black for us to see the mercy that shines behind them. 1. *The mercy which is in the heart of God is not to be regarded as nullifying his wrath*. It is so represented by some who take one-sided views of the Divine character. But the All-merciful can be a consuming fire. 2. *If God has once been merciful to us we may not conclude that he can never be angry with us*. On the contrary, if we sin against light and love we provoke the greater wrath. The very fact that the footstool was privileged to be a mercy-seat will aggravate the wrath which must be poured upon it when it is disgraced.

III. GOD NO LONGER REMEMBERS THE PLACE OF PRAYER. At the footstool of God

the suppliant kneels pleading for deliverance. But his prayer is unheard. God may refuse to hearken to prayer. Where he is wont to stoop and listen to cry and sigh of burdened souls he may be regardless. 1. *Impenitence* will lead to God's disregarding our prayer. 2. When wrath is necessary, the *mere cry for escape must be unheard*. 3. When chastisement is for our good, *mercy itself will refuse to listen to the prayer for deliverance*. The surgeon must disregard the cries of his patient. He must harden himself to save the sufferer.

Vers. 4, 5.—*The Lord as an enemy*. I. THE LORD MAY BECOME TO US AS AN ENEMY. We must not suppose the relations of God to those who forsake him to be purely negative. He cannot simply leave them to their own devices. He is a King who must needs maintain order and restrain and punish rebellion, a Judge who cannot permit law to be trampled underfoot with impunity, a Father who cannot abandon his children, but must chastise them in their wrong-doing just because he is so closely related to them. Let it be well understood, then, that, in opposing ourselves to God, we run counter to a power, a will, an active authority. We provoke the anger of God. We do not simply strike ourselves against the stone, we cause the stone to fall upon us and grind us to powder.

II. NOTHING CAN BE MORE TERRIBLE THAN FOR THE LORD TO BECOME TO US AS AN ENEMY. The very thought of God as an enemy should strike terror into one who finds it is a fact. 1. *God is almighty*. It is at once apparent that the war must end in defeat for the rebel. 2. *God is just*. Then he must be in the right with the great controversy. We must be fighting on the wrong side when we are fighting against God. 3. *God is gracious*. How fearful must be the wrong-doing that provokes so kind a God to enmity! 4. *God is our Father*. Our Father become as our enemy! The unnatural situation proclaims its own horror. The nearness of God and his love to us make the fire of his wrath the more fierce. The wrath of the "Lamb" is more awful than the raging of him who goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

III. GOD DOES NOT BECOME TO US AS AN ENEMY UNTIL WE HAVE PROVED OURSELVES TO BE ENEMIES TO HIM. He has no wish to quarrel with us. He is changeless in his constancy of righteousness and love. It is we who break the peace. The declaration of war between heaven and earth is always issued by the lower world. It is not necessary, however, that our enmity should be overt in order that God may be seen as an enemy. Secret alienation of heart, quiet neglect of God's will, self-willed indifference to God, will constitute enmity. The fact that the enmity begins on our side will take away all excuse suggested by our feebleness in comparison with the greatness of God.

IV. THOUGH GOD MAY BECOME TO US AS AN ENEMY, HE WILL NOT REALLY BE AN ENEMY. He may act like an enemy, but he will not act in enmity. He will never hate the creature that he has made. His apparent enmity is very fearful because it results in actions of anger and punishment. Still behind all is the pitying heart of Divine love. God pities most when he strikes hardest.

V. THROUGH THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST GOD CEASES TO BE TO US AS AN ENEMY. Christ is our Propitiation. By the sacrifice of himself he makes peace. And he does not simply influence our hearts in reconciling us to God. There is a Godward aspect of the atonement. This is not to induce God to love us, since the love of God precedes and originates the very mission of Christ. But in the mysterious counsels of Divine wisdom the atonement of Christ is rendered necessary for the cessation of God's inimical action (1 John ii. 1, 2).

Vers. 6, 7.—*The rejected altar*. In the first elegy we read how the feasts are neglected by the people (ch. i. 4). Now we see that God himself has broken them up and cast off his altar. Thus we advance a stage in understanding the deplorable condition of Jerusalem. At first the human side only is seen and the visible facts are lamented over. Then the Divine side is discerned and the terrible cause of the cessation of the solemn festivals revealed. It is not simply that the people cease to present themselves before the altar. God has abandoned and rejected all the temple services.

1. HOW GOD REJECTS THE ALTAR. We must bear in mind that the altar belongs to

God and that all the ordinances of worship are his. Religion is not merely human and subjective. It relates to God and it goes out of the human world reaching up to the Divine. There is scope, therefore, for God's action in it. He may refuse his action. He may not hear the prayers, nor accept the offerings, nor employ the services, nor succour the needs of the worshipper. Then he rejects the altar. This is represented as being done with violence, destruction, and a Divine abhorrence. The desolation wrought by Babylon is traced up to the hand of God. So when our religious privileges are broken up by earthly means we should inquire whether God's displeasure is behind the calamity. It is not necessarily. But it may be.

II. WHY GOD REJECTS THE ALTAR. 1. Because *the worship is insincere*. If we practise the forms of devotion without the heart of it our hypocrisy will only insult God. 2. Because *the worshipper is corrupt*. Thus was it with the Jews in Isaiah's time. God says, "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth . . . when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Isa. i. 14, 15). So David says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. lxxvi. 18). 3. Because *the offering is unworthy*. The Israelite was to bring his best to God. No blemished sacrifice would be accepted. If we give less than the best in our power we make an unworthy offering. If only spare time and superfluous money are offered to God, how can we expect him to receive such mean and niggardly service? He will have our brightest hours, our richest devotion, our hearts and lives and all, or he will take nothing.

III. WITH WHAT RESULTS GOD REJECTS THE ALTAR. When once the altar is rejected by God all sacrifice and service are vain. It matters little that the enemy throw down the stones of it. If it remains intact it is worthless. We may have full assemblies of people and rich and elaborate services and all the pomp and ceremony of worship; and it will be for nothing if God reject the worship. We think too little of this Divine side of religion. We are too much inclined to rest in the decorum and grace of becoming human forms of worship. Let it be known that the one end of worship is to reach God. If he is met by the soul, it matters little what means be used in worship. If he refuses to accept us, the form of worship is a mockery and a delusion.

Ver. 9 (last clause).—"No vision." I. THE TEACHING AND VISION OF PROPHETIC TRUTH CONSTITUTE AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN RELIGIOUS LIFE. The writer laments the loss of teaching and vision as abnormal and disastrous. The vision of the prophets was not simply nor chiefly concerned with the distant future and recondite counsels of providence. It dealt with present facts and unveiled their true character. It guided in the present and with regard to the uncertainties of the very near future. The humbler office of teaching was associated with it. The prophet, a seer of visions in private and on special occasions, was a teacher among his fellow-men and under ordinary circumstances. It is important to see how essential the knowledge of truth is to a healthy spiritual life. Without it devotion becomes superstition. Religion is based on revelation. The school precedes the workshop. Teaching must prepare the way for service.

II. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN TEACHING AND VISION CEASE. The two may not fail exactly at the same time. But the stream will not flow long after the fountain is dried. The teaching that is continued after all inspiration has died out will be arid, formal, lifeless, unreal. Ideas will take place of facts, and words of ideas. Now, the vision, which is the starting-point of all knowledge of truth, is intermittent. There have been ages fertile in prophecy and there have been barren ages. In the days preceding the ministry of Samuel "the Word of the Lord was rare, and there was no vision scattered abroad" (1 Sam. iii. 1). After the roll of the Old Testament was complete, prophecy ceased. It revived in the apostolic age. Spiritual insight and Divine knowledge have been intermittent since then, sleeping in the dark ages, flashing out in the days of St. Bernard, dried up by the dreariness of scholasticism, swelling out in fresh energy with the Reformation, withering again at the end of the seventeenth century, and brightening once more from the close of the eighteenth. What shall be the next turn?

III. THE ABUSE OF PROPHETIC VISION AND TEACHING LEADS TO THE CESSATION OF THEM. The prophets prophesied falsely (ver. 14). They preached peace when there was no peace (Jer. xxiii. 17). As a penalty for their treason to their sacred trust of truth they lost the gift of spiritual vision. Disloyalty to truth warps our perceptions

of truth. False living hinders true thinking. There is nothing which so deadens and blinds the spiritual faculties as indifference to truth. Beginning with telling a conscious lie, a man comes at last to accept falsehood without knowing it.

IV. THE REJECTION OF PROPHETIC VISION AND TEACHING ALSO LEADS TO THE CESSATION OF THEM. The people were as guilty as their teachers. They refused to hear truth and asked for pleasant words. They declined to obey the truth which they had heard. The penalty of disobedience to Divine truth will be the loss of that truth. If we refuse to go as the vision of God in our souls directs, that vision will fade out, leaving us no light of heaven, but only gloom or false lights of earth.

Ver. 14.—*The vision of falsehood and folly.* Visions from the Lord have ceased (ver. 9). But the prophets continue to see visions of earthly limitation or even of diabolical delusion. These visions are false and foolish. Better have none than such.

I. PROPHECY IN ITS CORRUPTION SEES THE FALSE AND FOOLISH IN PLACE OF THE TRUE AND WORTHY. 1. *The mission of prophecy is to see and declare wisdom and reality.* The attractiveness of the teaching is a snare if the matter of it is vain. People naturally favour the pleasant utterance of pleasant things. Doctrines are sometimes chosen because they are liked rather than because they are known to be sound, or the style and language of the preacher are more heeded than the substance of his message. But, if we were in earnest, ugly truths would always be accepted in preference to specious falsehoods. 2. *The corruption of prophecy substitutes falsehood and folly for truth and wisdom.* This may be experienced unconsciously. The teacher may not know that he has fallen. It is not only that his tongue utters lies, his eye sees no truth. His vision is distorted and he knows it not. He is not aware that he sees men as trees walking. Nor does he know that his folly is not wisdom. The failing of spiritual vision and decay of wisdom are the more calamitous because they are unconscious. They are a sort of spiritual insanity. 3. *The evil of the corruption of prophecy is in the widespread delusion and degradation that it produces.* "Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee." The prophet is a teacher as well as a seer. When the teacher errs the scholars are misled.

II. THE FAILURE TO DISCOVER INIQUITY IS A PROOF THAT A PROPHET'S VISION IS FALSE AND FOOLISH. 1. *A prophet is required to see human as well as Divine truth.* It needs inspiration to read the secrets of the heart as much as to discover the mysteries of the unseen heavens or of the distant future. A prophet should be a discernor of spirits. If he cannot read the signs of the times he is a failure. 2. *The failure to see iniquity is one especial evidence of perverted prophetic vision.* The physician is first of all called upon to discover his patient's disease. If he cannot detect this the rest of his work is of little use. Prophets may dream of the millennium and discourse of the celestial spheres; but so long as they are blind to the sins that men around them are perishing in, their primary mission must fail. Now, it needs a Divine inspiration rightly to see iniquity. Conventionality of thought leads to a complacent satisfaction with the normal state of the world. We must be out of it and above it to observe how it has fallen. The preacher who cannot see the sins of his age is worse than useless. He is a deluding flatterer. The individual man who is blind to his own sin has not the first ray of spiritual light which may guide him aright.

III. THE FALSE AND FOOLISH VISION OF PROPHECY DOES NOT RESTORE PROSPERITY, BUT ON THE CONTRARY IT DIRECTLY LEADS TO RUIN. By vainly promising pleasant things it brings disastrous ones. The false prophets opposed Jeremiah and said the Captivity would not come. By that very falsehood they helped to hasten it. Had they preached repentance and warned of wrath, the doom might have been averted. None prepare souls for ruin more certainly than smooth-speaking flattering optimists. When danger is near, the warning prophet may be the deliverer of his hearers. If the preacher fail to produce conviction of sin he cannot lead to salvation in Christ. So long as men do not see their lost condition they are in danger of their soul's ruin. To them a pleasant religion is a fatal religion. A Jeremiah, a John the Baptist, and a John Knox are the best friends of their generation.

Ver. 16.—*The triumph of the foe.* I. THE TRIUMPH OF THE FOE OVER JERUSALEM. Strangers mock with scorn and derision, enemies vent their rage with hissing, gnashing

of teeth, and a spiteful satisfaction that the day they have looked for has come. Why should these cruel feelings be roused against the prostrate city? Her previous condition must have provoked them. 1. *Great prosperity.* This excites envy in the less prosperous, and envy soon sours into hatred. Jealous and selfish natures have a positive pleasure in seeing the loss of special privileges in the more favoured, although that loss may bring no advantage to themselves. 2. *High pretensions.* Jerusalem claimed to be especially favoured and blessed by God. She looked down with scorn on her neighbours. Such an attitude was galling to them and led to an outburst of delight when the proud city lay grovelling in the dust. Contempt provokes enmity. No calamity receives less pity than the downfall of pride. 3. *Reserved isolation.* Jerusalem kept herself apart from other cities. She felt that she had a peculiar vocation. Such exclusiveness would excite dislike. The unsocial are unpitied. It may be that the separation is inevitable or conscientious. Still, it incurs not the least aversion.

II. THE TRIUMPH OF THE FOE OVER THE CHURCH. The fall of Jerusalem was the fall of the Church. The enemies of the Eternal rejoiced in the destruction of his temple and the scattering of his people. There are always adversaries on the look out for disaster in the Church of Christ. The evil spirit of the world is vexed and shamed by the standing rebuke of a pure Church. Corrupt men see in her an example contrasting with their own conduct and thereby condemning it. Thus there arise dislike and enmity. The shame of the Church is a relief to this worldly opposition. There have been times when the Name of God has been insulted through this evil pleasure of the wicked in the shame that the sin and failure of his people have brought upon his cause. Here is a motive for preserving the sanctity of the Christian Church. The loss of it will not merely involve suffering to the Church herself; it will encourage the foes of Christ by giving them the elation of victory, and it will dishonour his Name by making his work appear to fail.

III. THE TRIUMPH OF THE FOE OVER A SOUL. There are spiritual enemies watching for every slip that a soul may make, enemies that are confounded by its growing purity and faithfulness, but rendered insolent and jubilant by its fall. Whenever we sin we afford a triumph to the evil one. We think that we are pleasing ourselves. But there must be some mistake or our sin would not give so much satisfaction to our enemy. The laugh of Mephistopheles should have been a warning to Faust. Perhaps the most stinging smart of future retribution will be the devilish glee with which the miserable lost soul will be welcomed into the place of darkness.

Ver. 17.—*Ruin from God.* In the fifteenth and sixteenth verses we find strangers and enemies indulging in unseemly jubilation over the fall of Jerusalem. Now, we see—what they do not see—that the cause of that fall was the direct action of God. This fact aggravates the dismay and wretchedness of the suffering city, for it signifies that her own King and Friend has brought about her ruin—not outsiders and antagonists. God himself has handed her over to the contempt and derision of the world. At the same time, the sight of God's band in the calamity reveals the folly of the world's triumph. How shallow and ignorant that appears to be directly the veil which covers the awful action of God is lifted! Man's spite and malice sink into insignificance before the awful wrath of God, as the growling of beasts of the forest is drowned in the dread roar of thunder. The triumph of man is also shown to be misplaced. Man has not done the deed. He is but a spectator. This is a dread work of God. Let human passion be hushed before the solemn sight.

I. GOD BRINGS RUIN. This is a terrible statement. Looking at the particulars of the action itself, we see only the more of its horrors as we observe: 1. God does it *deliberately*. He devises it—plans, considers, and calmly executes the ruin. 2. God does it *in fulfilment of his Word*. "In the days of old" the ruin is threatened. The storm is long in brewing. An ancient promise makes the coming of it certain. 3. God does it *by authority*. He "had commanded" it. With all the authority and power of divinity over innumerable agents bending in perfect compliance to his will, God executes his solemn threat. 4. He does it *destructively*. He throws down. This shows violence and hurt. 5. He does it, to all human appearance, *pitilessly*. There is nothing visible that might mitigate the blow. No acts of mercy are seen to alleviate the misery. 6. He does it *to the satisfaction of enemies*. "He hath caused

thine enemy to rejoice over thee," etc. This is the most sure sign that the ruin is complete.

II. THE FACT THAT GOD BRINGS RUIN IS NOT INCONSISTENT WITH HIS CHARACTER. It appears to be so, for it represents the Creator as a destroyer, and the God of love as a God of enmity. The difficulty should be examined. Then some light may break upon it.

1. *The goodness of God makes him the enemy of all evil.* He would cease to be good if he became universally complacent. As a righteous Judge he must condemn sin; even the Son of man, the Saviour of the world, had a mission of destruction. He came with fan to winnow out the chaff, and fire to burn it; he came to destroy the works of the devil.
2. *God makes external ruin that he may produce internal salvation.* He destroys the city that he may save the citizens. Jerusalem is overthrown in order that the Jews, through this chastisement, may be delivered from the ruin of their souls. So God breaks up a man's home and wrecks his hopes and flings him on the ash-heap of misery, in a merciful design to urge him to repentance and so to save the man himself.
3. *God is more concerned with the goodness than with the pleasure of his creature.* He certainly does not show the mild benevolence that characterizes some sanguine philanthropists. A safe house and abundance of bread are not the greatest things to be preserved, because pleasure and comfort are not the first requisites of the soul. Pain and loss may be blessings if they lead to purity and obedience. It is well for this life's pleasure to be ruined if thereby the soul is saved for life eternal.

Ver. 19.—*A cry to God in the night watches.* A fearful picture! Jerusalem is besieged. Famine is becoming fatal. Young children are seen fainting for hunger at the top of every street. The hearts of their parents are rent with anguish, as the little ones beg piteously of their mothers for food and drink (ver. 12), and none can be had, so that they swoon for very weakness. Suddenly a new turn is taken. The citizens have sunk down in sullen despair. Night has come like a cloak to cover the scenes of misery and death. Then a voice rings through the darkness, "Arise, cry out." This voice bids all hearers pour out their hearts in prayer to God.

I. THE CRY IS TO GOD. Hitherto we have had nothing but doleful lamentations. The language has been that of hopeless grief and bitter regret. No relief has been found or even sought. But there is one refuge in the direst trouble, and now that refuge is remembered. When we can do nothing else we can cry to God, for he is near though hidden from view, and merciful though striking in wrath, and able to save though no way of escape seems possible. It needs some rousing of the soul thus to seek God. We must "Arise." Spiritual lethargy is the worst consequence of sorrow. Let us beware lest our troubles paralyze our prayers. Prayer implies spiritual wakefulness.

II. THE CRY IS IN THE NIGHT.

1. *The time when trouble seems most hopeless.* It is in the night that the mourner weeps his most bitter tears.
2. *The time of reflection.* In lonely night watches the troubled soul has time for thought, and thought is then pain.
3. *The time of earthly darkness.* Then, perhaps, the spirit may feel most closely the nearness of the Father of spirits. The cry is to be in the beginning of the watches—either at the first watch or at the opening of each of the three watches. Let prayer come first. Let us not waste time in lamenting before we seek relief from God.

III. THE CRY IS HEARTFELT AND CONFIDENTIAL. "Pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord."

1. It comes from the heart. All real prayer must be the outcome of true and deep feelings.
2. It is a full and free confidence in God. The heart is poured out like water. This is in itself a relief. God expects our complete confidence and will hear prayer only when we give it to him.
3. It is no more than the pouring out of the heart before God. There is no definite request. Perhaps it is difficult to know how to ask for relief. Perhaps the grief is too overwhelming for any such thoughts of aid to be entertained. But it is enough that the whole trouble is poured out before God and left with him. Prayer is too often a dictating to God. It should be more of a simple confidence in God. It would be better if there were more confession and confidence, and less exact petition and definition of what God is to do in order to please us. We are to pour out our hearts and leave all with him. Then he will do the best for us.
4. In deep trouble heartfelt prayer is wrung out of the sufferer. Then he must be real. Sorrow melts the stony heart which has held itself in proud

reserve, and thus it pours out itself like water. We have the example of Christ, whose agony passed into prayer, to urge us to find the relief of confiding fully in God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The anger of the Lord.* Men have fallen into two opposite extremes of opinion and of feeling with regard to the anger of the Lord. There have been times when they have been wont to attribute to the Eternal the passions of imperfect men, when they have represented the holy God as moved by the storms of indignation, as subject to the impulses of caprice and the instigations of cruelty. But in our own days the tendency is the contrary to this; men picture God as all amiability and forbearance, as regarding the sinful and guilty with indifference, or at all events without any emotion of displeasure. Scripture warrants neither of these extremes.

I. THERE ARE OCCASIONS WHEN GOD IS ANGRY WITH EVEN THE OBJECTS OF HIS SPECIAL FAVOUR. Jerusalem was the "daughter of Zion;" the temple was "the beauty of Israel;" the ark was God's "footstool." But as even human love is not necessarily or justly blind to the faults of those beloved, so the Lord is displeased with those whom he has endowed with peculiar privileges and blessings, when they are unmindful of his mercies and disobedient to his laws. "As many as I love," says the Divine Head of the Church, "I rebuke and chasten."

II. FROM THE HEARTS OF THE DISOBEDIENT GOD HIDES HIMSELF AS IN A CLOUD. When the sun is concealed behind a cloud, nature is chill, dull, and gloomy. The Lord is the Sun in whose light his people find joy and peace; when he hides his face they are troubled, for no longer is it the case that "they look unto him and are lightened." The heart and conscience of those who have offended God are overcast with spiritual gloom and unhappiness. So Israel found it; and there are none who have known the blessedness of God's fellowship and favour who can bear without distress the withdrawal of the heavenly light.

III. UPON THE HEADS OF THE REBELLIOUS GOD HURLS THE BOLT OF HIS DISPLEASURE. The tempest long lowered over the doomed city; at last it broke in fury, and Jerusalem became a prey to the spoiler and was cast down to the ground. The prophet clearly saw, what in an age of ease and luxury men are prone to forget, that there is a righteous Ruler from whose authority and retributive power no state and no soul can escape. "God is angry with the wicked every day." Yet in the midst of wrath he remembers mercy, and the penalties he inflicts answer their purpose if they lead to submission and to sincere repentance.—T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Retribution in Church and state.* There are occasions when it is well to ponder seriously the calamities which befall a nation, to lay them to heart, to inquire into their causes, and to seek earnestly and prayerfully the way of deliverance, the means of remedy. "They that lack time to mourn lack time to mend."

I. IT IS WELL TO LOOK THROUGH NATIONAL DISASTERS TO THE PROVIDENTIAL RULE WHICH ALONE FULLY EXPLAINS THEM. The ruin which overtook Jerusalem and Judah was wrought by the armies of the Chaldeans. But the inspired prophet saw in the Assyrian hosts the ministers of Divine justice. The sufferings of the Jews were not accidental; they were a chastening, a discipline, appointed by the Lord of hosts, the King of kings. The Eternal had a controversy with his people. They had not listened to his Word, and therefore he spoke to them in thunder.

II. THE POLITICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITIES OF A NATION ARE ALIKE RESPONSIBLE FOR NATIONAL SINS. The kings and chiefs had sought their own honour and ease and prosperity. The priests and prophets had discharged their offices in a manner perfunctory and formal. Under their natural and appointed leaders the nation had erred, had lapsed into idolatry, into sensuality, into practical unbelief. Rulers had not ruled in equity; teachers had not taught with faithfulness and fearlessness. Like king, like subjects; like priest, like people. All were to blame, but those were most culpable whose responsibility was greatest.

III. CHURCH AND STATE ALIKE ENDURE THE PENALTIES OF TRANSGRESSION AND DISOBEDIENCE. 1. The picture of desolation, as regards the religious life of the people,

is a very dark and dreary picture. The religious celebrations and festivals fall into neglect; the very sabbath is all but forgotten; the sacrifices cease to be offered upon the altar; the sanctuary is no longer the scene of sacred solemnities; the priests are despised. 2. The case is equally distressing as regards the political situation. The walls of the palaces are either broken down, or, instead of housing the princes of the land, afford quarters to the troops of the enemy. The royal family are consigned to humiliation and to scorn. And the temple and the city resound no longer with the praises of Jehovah, but with the brutal shouts of the Chaldean soldiery.—T.

Ver. 9.—*Law and prophecy suspended.* Judah was professedly and actually a theocracy. The form of government was a monarchy, but the true Ruler was Jehovah. Spiritual disobedience and rebellion were Judah's offences; and it was the natural outcome of perseverance in these that the Lord should withdraw his favour, and leave his people to eat of the bitter fruit of their own misguided planting. And it was one consequence of the Divine displeasure that the highest privileges Jehovah had bestowed, the most sacred and precious tokens of his presence, should be for a season withdrawn. It is the climax, as Jeremiah conceives it, of Judah's misfortunes, that "the Law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the Lord."

I. THIS TEMPORARY PRIVATION WAS OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL PRIVILEGES. It was so far as the Law was Jewish, that it ceased to be observed in Jerusalem. When the city was in the possession of heathen troops, when the temple was in ruins, when the priesthood was in disgrace, there was no possibility of observing the ordinances which the Law prescribed. The sacrifices and festivals came to an end. There were none to observe them and none to minister. And it was so far as the prophet was a functionary of the time and place, that he ceased to utter the mind of the Eternal. There were prophets of the Captivity; but Jerusalem, the true home of this noble class of religious teachers, knew their voice no more. For them was no vision which they might see in the ecstasy of inspiration, and depict in glowing colours before the imagination of the attentive multitude.

II. THE ETERNAL LAW OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THE EVER-LIVING WITNESS OF SPIRITUAL PROPHECY, CAN NEVER CEASE. The words, the commandments and prohibitions, the outward ordinances, might pass away for a season of Divine displeasure, might be absorbed in the fuller revelation of the gospel. But the principles of the moral law, the obligations of unchanging righteousness, can never cease; for they are the expression of the mind and will of him whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. The vision may no longer be granted to the seer of Jerusalem; the city may stone her prophets or the Lord himself remove them. But every purified eye shall through all time behold God's glory, and the ear that is open to truth and love shall not cease to recognize the still, small voice of Heaven.—T.

Ver. 13.—*Commiseration.* The spirit of the prophet deserves our warm admiration. Jerusalem, its king and its citizens, had treated him with injustice and indignities. But in the day when his predictions were fulfilled and the city was overwhelmed by disaster and humiliation, so far from boasting over her, Jeremiah regarded her state with profoundest pity. Observe in this verse—

I. THE AFFECTIONATE AND ADMIRING LANGUAGE BY WHICH THE PROPHET DESIGNATES THE AFFLICTED CITY. Not a word of insult or of contempt, but, on the contrary, language evincing the deepest, the fondest interest. The population that had so despised his prophecy and had treated him so ill is here personified in language apparently more appropriate to times of prosperity. Jeremiah bewails the state of the daughter of Jerusalem, the virgin daughter of Zion.

II. THE TENDER COMMISERATION OF THE PROPHET WITH THE CITY'S WOES. 1. He pronounces the sorrows of Jerusalem *unequalled*. It is a common mode of expressing sympathy to assure the afflicted that others have the same griefs and trials to endure. No such consolation is offered here; the prophet looks around in vain for a case so distressing. The breach is "great like the sea." This is either a figure drawn from the vastness of the ocean, with which the great woe of Judah is compared; or it depicts the enemy as rushing in upon Jerusalem, as the sea in its fury makes a breach in the wall of a low-lying territory, and, sweeping the defences away by irresistible force,

creates a desolation, so that a waste of waters is beheld where villages and fruitful fields once smiled in peace and plenty. 2. He pronounces the sorrows of Jerusalem *irremediable*. A mortal wound has been inflicted, which no leechcraft can heal. If Jerusalem is again to flourish it must be by a revival from the dead. For nothing now can save her.

APPLICATION. 1. The captive city is a picture of the desolation and misery to which (sooner or later) sin will surely bring all those who submit themselves to it. 2. The commiseration shown by the prophet is an example of the state of mind with which the pious should contemplate the ravages of sin and the wretchedness of sinful men. 3. The gospel forbids despondency over even the most utter debasement and humiliation of man. "There is balm in Gilead; there is a Physician there."—T.

Ver. 15.—*The glory and the shame of Jerusalem.* Contrast with misery escaped heightens the joy of the rescued and the happy; and, on the other hand, contrast with bygone prosperity adds to the wretchedness of those who are fallen from high estate.

I. THE BEAUTY AND RENOWN OF JERUSALEM IN ITS PROSPERITY. Into these many elements entered. 1. Its *situation* was superb. Nature pointed out the heights of Zion for a metropolis. Especially when beheld from the brow of Olivet the city impresses every traveller with admiration. 2. Its *history* and memorable associations. Won by the valour of David, adorned by the magnificence of Solomon, the home of heroes and of saints, this city possessed a fascination with which few cities of the earth could compare. 3. Its *sacred edifice* ranked alone, far above all the temples of the ancient world. Not that its architecture was commanding or beautiful in the highest degree; but that its erection, its dedication, the presence of the Eternal, all lent an interest and a sacredness to the peerless building. 4. Its *sacrifices and festivals*, which were attended by hundreds of thousands of worshippers, were altogether unique.

II. THE DISGRACE OF JERUSALEM. This appears: 1. From its ruinous and almost uninhabitable condition. 2. From the slaughter or dispersion of its citizens. 3. From its degradation from its proud position as the metropolis of a nation. 4. From the hatred, scorn, and insults of its triumphant enemies.

APPLICATION. There is a day of visitation which it behoves every child of privilege and mercy to use aright. To neglect that day is surely to entail a bitter overtaking by the night of calamity and destruction.—T.

Vers. 18, 19.—*The entreaty of anguish.* This surely is one of those passages which justify the title of this book; these utterances are "lamentations" indeed; never did human sorrow make of language anything more resembling a wail than this.

I. THE SOULS FROM WHICH TEARFUL ENTREATIES ARISE. The true language of passion—this utterance is lacking in coherence. The heart of the people cries aloud; the very walls of the city are invoked in their desolation to call upon the Lord. Clearly the distress is that of the inhabitants of the wretched city, of those survivors whose fate is sadder than that of those who fell by the sword.

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT OCCASION THE ENTREATY. 1. Personal want, suffering, and distress. 2. The spectacle of the woes of others, especially of children. Literature has no more agonizing picture than this of the young children fainting and dying of hunger in every street.

III. THE BEING TO WHOM THE SUPPLICATIONS OF THE ANGUISHED ARE ADDRESSED. In such circumstances vain is the help of man. Upon whom shall Jerusalem call but upon the Lord, the King of the city, the great Patron and Protector of the chosen nation, who has forsaken even his own people because they have forgotten him, and in whose favour alone is hope of salvation?

IV. THE CHARACTER OF THE ENTREATY URGED. 1. It is *sorrowful*, accompanied by many tears, flowing like a river and pausing not. 2. *Earnest*, as appears from the description—heart, eyes, and hands all uniting in the appeal with imploring prayer. 3. *Continuous*; for not only by day, but through the night watches, supplications ascend unto heaven, invoking compassion and aid.—T.

Ver. 20.—*Consideration besought.* How truly human is this language! How real

was the eternal Lord to him who could shape his entreaty thus! As if to urge a plea for pity, the prophet implores him who has been offended by the nation's sins, who has suffered the nation's misery and apparent ruin, to consider; to remember who Judah is, and to have mercy.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT CALL FOR CONSIDERATION. 1. Famine and the inhuman conduct to which famine sometimes leads. 2. Death by the sword. 3. The privation of those religious offices which are the centre and inspiration of the nation's life. 4. The common suffering of all classes; prophet and priest, children and old men, virgins and youth, are alike overtaken by want, by wounds, by death.

II. THE GROUNDS UPON WHICH CONSIDERATION IS BEGGED FOR. 1. The main appeal is to Divine pity and benevolence. 2. The former mercies shown to Judah seem to be brought implicitly forward in this language. Israel has been chosen by God himself, favoured with privileges, delivered, protected, and blessed in a thousand ways. Will God cast off those in whom he has taken an interest so deep, for whom he has done so great things?

III. THE HOPE WITH WHICH CONSIDERATION IS ASKED. Hitherto the regard of God in recent events has been a regard of displeasure and of censure. But if the attitude of the stricken be no longer one of defiance, but of submission, it may be that the Lord will turn him again, will be favourable unto his afflicted people, will restore them to former prosperity, enriched with the precious lessons of their adverse experience.—T.

Ver. 1.—*The manifestation of Jehovah's wrath with Israel.* It will be noticed that the words "anger" and "wrath" occur again and again in these first three verses. Figure is heaped upon figure in order to bring out the practical effects of this anger. We need not pursue these figures into detail; each of them speaks for itself. Let us rather notice—

I. HOW THEY INDICATE THE EXTENT OF PAST FAVOUR. The very fact that, in order to show the character of Jehovah's anger, such strong figurative expressions are possible proves that in former days there had been many indications of his complacency with Israel. Not that Israel had been really better in the past than in the present, but she had to be dealt with in a long-suffering way, and the long-suffering of Jehovah is a quality which shows itself by abundance of most positive favours. God looked upon Israel according to the bright possibilities of excellence that lie in human nature. Israel did sink very low, but that was because she had the capacity of rising very high. Thus God heaped upon Israel favours, as if to show that he would not entertain any doubt as to her willingness to respond to his requests. And so the black anger-cloud resting on Israel's present looks blacker still when contrasted with the Divine brightness and clearness of Israel's past. God has cast down the beauty of Israel, and that casting is as from heaven to earth. That which God has not remembered in the day of his anger is something which he had reckoned useful to himself, even as the footstool is useful to the king seated on his throne. Thus the extent of present anger measures the extent of past favour.

II. HOW THESE FIGURES INDICATE THE REALITY OF JEHOVAH'S WRATH. The very heaping up of these strong figures should make us feel very deeply that God's wrath is not itself a figure. God's anger is not to be reduced to a mere anthropomorphism. We are misled in this matter, because human anger is never seen without selfish and degrading elements. An angry man, in all his excitement and violence, is a pitiable sight, but nevertheless it is possible for a man to be angry and sin not. The man who cannot understand the reality of God's anger will never comprehend the ideal of humanity. The sensitive musician would laugh to scorn any one who told him that, while he was pleased with harmony, he should not be disturbed by discord. Again and again Jesus was really and righteously angry, showing in this, not least, how he was partaker of the Divine nature. When we are in wrong ways and God is consequently against us, his opposition and displeasure must be shown in ways that cannot be mistaken.—Y.

Ver. 5.—*Jehovah reckoned as an enemy.* I. HOW FAR WAS THERE REALITY UNDER THIS APPEARANCE OF ENMITY? God might look like an enemy, but it did not therefore follow that he was one. But even if Jehovah behaved himself like an enemy, it must

also be asked whether there was not a necessity that he should do so. If Israel had to say, "Jehovah acts as an enemy towards us," Jehovah had to say, "My people act as an enemy towards me." These people had now for a long time been travelling in the wrong way, and it was in the very nature of things that the more they advanced the more opposition should multiply and become intensified. God not only appeared to be an enemy, but in certain respects he really was an enemy. He hated the evil that had risen to such a height among those whom he had taken for his own. Our love for evil is ever the measure of his hate of it; and the more determined we are to cling to it, the more his hostility will appear. God himself always keeps in the same path of law and righteousness and order. When we, according to our measure, follow in his footsteps, then real opposition there cannot be; but the moment we think fit to become a law to ourselves and do what is right in our own eyes, then inevitably he must oppose us.

II. **THIS ENMITY WAS LARGELY IN APPEARANCE ONLY.** When Israel said that Jehovah was as an enemy, they got their idea of enmity from the hostile proceedings of individuals and communities. But God cannot be the enemy of any man as men are enemies one to another. His motives are different and so are the results of all his opposition. One man forming hostile plans against another acts from malicious motives, or at all events from selfish ones. There is no basis of reason in what he does. He is not hostile to the lower in order that he may show himself friendly to the higher. Besides, we must not look merely at outward manifestations of enmity. There may be the deepest enmity and greatest power of inflicting injury where outwardly all looks harmless. Those who profess to be our friends and whom we reckon to be our friends may yet inflict worse injuries than all avowed enemies taken together. God is the true Friend of every man, however he may be thought at times to put on the appearance of an enemy.—Y.

Ver. 9.—*The prophetic office suspended.* There is something of a climax about this statement that the prophets find no vision from Jehovah. Jeremiah has already spoken of God destroying the outward resources and defences of Jerusalem. Next, he mentions the exile of the king and the chief men, and then, as if to hint that it was a still greater calamity, he tells us how the prophet had no longer anything to see or to say. He did well to magnify his own office; for no office could be more important than that of the man whom God chose to communicate needed messages to his fellow-men. Observe—

I. **THE NATURE OF THE PROPHETIC OFFICE AS HERE INDICATED.** A prophet was one who had a vision from the Lord. He was no prophet unless he could truly preface his address with "Thus saith the Lord." And must there not be something of this kind still? With respect to Divine things, what can any of us say that shall have power and blessing in it unless as we speak of what God has made us see? The prophetic office has ceased, but who can doubt that there must be some permanent reality corresponding with it? and therefore we should ever be on the look out for men who have had visions from the Lord. All advances in the interpretation of Scripture truth must come by revelation from on high. Otherwise the most diligent searching ends in nothing but pedantry and verbosity.

II. **NOTICE THE DEPRIVATION HERE SPOKEN OF.** What does it mean? How is it to be looked upon as part of Jerusalem's punitive visitation? The reply to this is that the institution of prophecy was part of the honour which Jehovah had put upon his people. The people could say that God was constantly raising up amongst them those whom he chose for a medium of communication. However unwilling they might be to listen to the real prophets, and however they persecuted them, still the fact remained that men like Jeremiah were rising again and again. For all we can tell, those whose written prophecies remain may have been a most minute portion numerically of the total company of the prophets. Now, if all at once the prophetic voice ceased or came at long intervals and with few words, this must have been most significant to those who had power to notice. It meant that God had little or nothing to say to the people. That he had communications with every individual willing to put himself in a right attitude there can be no doubt. Prophets who received nothing to give as a message would at the same time receive all they needed for their own edification and comfort, and now there is an abiding vision for all. God's communications to us are not after

the "sundry times and divers manners" mode referred to at the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Spirit of God revealing the uplifted Christ makes every one of us a prophet to himself.—Y.

Ver. 10.—*The silence of the elders.* I. THEIR FORMER SPEECH. They are said to keep silence now; this, of course, suggests that silence had not been their former habit. Old men have a peculiar right to speak, are often expected to speak, and can always plead that years have given them experience and many opportunities of observation, and with respect to these particular elders here it is not difficult to imagine what the topics and the manner of their former speech might be. For instance, imagine younger men going to them and asking what their opinion was as to the predictions of Jeremiah. They would not all have the same opinion, but many, it is to be feared, would make very light of what he said. Nor is it likely that they spoke of him in a very considerate way. The elders of Israel were, according to a national custom, largely the teachers of history. It was their business to tell their sons and their son's sons the great things that had been done in the days of old. And we know how easy it is to remember only success and forget disaster. Jeremiah coming in with his denunciations and threatenings would exasperate the elders not least. The chances are that again and again they had given advice at the foundation of which lay their unbelief in Jeremiah. Besides this, they would be advisers in general, and in particular matters would often be right enough. Thus when they cast discredit on a prophet of Jehovah others would take up their words as words of authority and soberness.

II. THEIR PRESENT SILENCE. They neither speak of their own accord nor do they answer when addressed. They keep silence. It is the silence of grief, humiliation, wounded pride, and shame. The only thing they could say, if they did speak, would be to confess in the amplest manner their sins, their blunders, their egregious self-confidence. But in truth their very silence spoke as if with loudest voice. It was as if they said, "We abdicate any right we have had to advise and lead. We admit to the full our responsibility in having done so much to bring disaster on the people." Old age is not necessary to bring wisdom and insight into the problems of life. Jeremiah, who had gone out to prophesy when little better than a lad, was right, and old men with an egotistical and absorbed confidence in their own opinions were wrong. If we would avoid being stricken with a shameful silence in our old age, it must be by listening obediently in earlier years to far other voices than those which come from the promptings of the natural man.—Y.

Ver. 12.—*The suffering of the children.* It must be noticed how the mention of the children follows on the mention of the elders. There is suffering at each extreme of life, and hence we are to infer that there is suffering all between. The elders suffer in their way and the children and the sucklings suffer in theirs. The elders are bowed down with confusion, shame, and disappointment. The children know nothing of this, but they are tormented with the pangs of hunger; and what a pathetic touch is that which represents them as breathing out their little lives into the bosom of their mothers! The sins of the parents are being visited upon the children. It has often been represented as a monstrous iniquity that things should be put in such a light, but is it not an undeniable fact that the little ones suffer what they would not suffer if progenitors always did what was right? These children were not clamouring for dainties and luxuries. Corn and wine, the common food, the pleasant grape-juice, what they had been used to and what all at once they began to miss. What is here said is a strong admonition to us to consider how the innocent and unsuspecting may be affected by our unrighteousness. All our conduct *must* affect others, and it *may* affect those who cannot lift a hand to avert ill consequences. The sufferings of children and infants, the immense mortality among them,—these are things awful to contemplate; and yet nothing can be more certain than that the clearing away of prejudice and ignorance and hurtful habits founded on bare tradition would bring into child-life that abundance of joy which a loving Creator of human nature meant children to attain. But even with all the suffering there are compensations. These hunger-stricken children cried for bread, and getting none they poured out their lives into their mothers' bosoms; but they had no self-reproach. Remorse did not add another degree of agony

to starvation. The suffering which touches the conscience is the worst, and the little ones escape it altogether.—Y.

Ver. 14.—*The share of the prophets in ruining Jerusalem.* I. WHAT THE PROPHET OUGHT TO BE. The prophet of those times was a man bound to say things having depth and substance in them. And though the prophet has ceased, so far as formal office is concerned, yet there are still Divine things to be seen, and, when seen, spoken about by those qualified to speak. There are the deep things of God to be penetrated and explored by those willing to receive the insight. The Holy Spirit of God, offered so abundantly through Christ, is a Spirit of prophecy to all who have it. They need no formal prophet, inasmuch as they have a word, living and piercing, to all who take a right relation towards it. God means us to be occupied with serious, substantial matters, so large and deep and fruitful that we shall never outgrow our interest in them. The heart of man in its meditating power was made for great themes. The heart can never be filled with mere trifles. That is good advice given to preachers of the gospel to speak most on the greatest themes, such as are set forth again and again in the Scriptures, and, whether these things be preached about or not, every individual Christian should think about them. For while we cannot secure the topics of preachers, the topics of our own thoughts depend upon ourselves. It is just those who concern themselves a great deal about dogmas who are also most interested in the details of life and conduct.

II. WHAT THE PROPHET MAY SINK TO BE. These prophets felt bound to magnify their office and say something. They ought to have spoken the truth; but for this they lacked inclination and perhaps courage. The next best thing would have been to remain silent; but then where would the prophet-reputation have been? and, more serious question still with some, what would have become of the prophet-emoluments? Hence we have here the double iniquity that the false was spoken and the true concealed. The prophets could only get credit for their falsehoods by a careful concealment of the truth. They had, as it were, to paste on truth a conspicuous label, proclaiming far and wide, "This is a lie." This verse suggests how they had the common experience of one lie leading on to another. The true prophet said that the burden Israel had to bear and the exile into which it had to go arose from its iniquities. Whereas the false, or rather the unfaithful prophet, having set iniquity as the cause of trouble altogether on one side, could only go on inventing explanations which explained nothing. Ezek. xiii. is a chapter which may very profitably be read in connection with this verse. The great lesson is to search for truth no matter with what toil, and keep it no matter at what cost.—Y.

Ver. 22.—*The completeness of Jehovah's visitation.* I. THE COMPARISON BY WHICH THIS IS SET FORTH. "Thou hast called as in a solemn day." At certain periods there were vast commanded gatherings of the people to Jerusalem. They came from far and wide and from all parts of the compass, and so, as they converged upon Jerusalem, they might be justly said to encircle it. And encircling it, they did so with a definite purpose. They were as far as possible from being a mere promiscuous crowd, in which each one could come and go at his own sweet will. At the centre of the circle stood Jehovah, giving the commandment to each which brought them all together. And we may infer from the use of the comparison here that the commandment must have been generally complied with. It was, indeed, a commandment not very hard to obey, requiring as it did mere outwardness of obedience. People living in quiet country places would be glad of the reason for occasional visits to Jerusalem. Well would it have been if the people had tried to carry their obedience a little further! if, when the solemn assemblies had gathered together, there had been in them the right spirit! A gathering of bodies is not so hard, but a gathering of hearts in complete union and sympathy, perfectly responsive to the will of God, who shall secure that?

II. THE ASSEMBLY OF TERRORS AT GOD'S COMMAND. God called together the people, and they came; but when they came, instead of attending to God's will, they pursued their own. But now God is represented as calling together all the agents that can inflict pain upon man and cause him terror; and they come with one consent, folding Israel round with an environment which cannot be escaped. There is no ultimate escape for

the selfish, sinful man. He may get the evil day put off; he may find gate after gate opening, as he thinks, to let him away from trouble and pain; but in truth he is only going deeper and deeper into the corner where he will be completely shut up. God can surround us with providences and protections if we are willing to trust him. No other power can surround us with causes of terror. Our own hearts may imagine a menacing circle, but it only exists in imagination. If we seek the Lord he will hear us and deliver us from all our fears (Ps. xxxiv. 4). But no one can deliver us from God's just wrath with all who are unrighteous. That God who breaks the circle with which his enemies seek to enclose his friends, also makes a circle in which those enemies must themselves be effectually enclosed.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1—21.—**MONOLOGUE SPOKEN BY AN INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER WHOSE FATE IS ROUND UP WITH THAT OF THE NATION; OR PERHAPS BY THE NATION PERSONIFIED** (see Introduction).

Ver. 1.—**Seen.** "To see" in Hebrew often means "to experience;" e.g. Jer. v. 12; Ps. xvi. 10; Eccles. viii. 16. "By the rod of his wrath. The idea is, not that Babylon has humbled Israel as Jehovah's instrument, but that God himself has brought these troubles upon his people. "He hath led me, hath hedged me about," etc.

Ver. 3.—**Is he turned; he turneth; rather, he turneth again and again.**

Ver. 4.—**Made old; more literally, worn away, as a garment** (comp. Isa. l. 9; li. 6). **Broken my bones.** So Job complains, "His wrath teareth and persecuteth me" (Job xvi. 9); and, a still closer parallel, Hezekiah, "As a lion, so will he break all my bones" (Isa. xxxviii. 13). Comp. Ps. li. 8, "The bones which thou hast broken."

Ver. 5.—**He hath builded against me, and compassed me.** A figure from the siege of a town. Gall. For the true meaning of the word, see on Jer. viii. 14. We need not trouble ourselves about it here, for the word is evidently used as a kind of "ideograph" for bitterness. **Travel; literally, weariness.**

Ver. 6.—**This verse is verbally reproduced in Ps. cxliii. 3. In dark places; i.e. in Hades** (comp. Ps. lxxxviii. 7). **As they that be dead of old.** A strange comparison; for what difference can it make whether the dead are men of the ancient or the modern world? The rendering, however, though perfectly admissible, is less suitable to the context than *as they that are for ever dead*; who have entered "the land from which there is no return" (an Assyrian title of Hades). Comp. "the everlasting house," i.e. the grave (Eccles. xii. 5), "the everlasting sleep" (Jer. li. 39, 57).

Vers. 7—9.—**Three figures, interrupted by a literal statement of the ill success of prayer. A traveller who finds himself suddenly caged up by a high thorn hedge**

(comp. Job iii. 23; Hos. ii. 6). **A prisoner with a heavy chain.** Again, a traveller suddenly shut up by solid stone walls (comp. Hos. ii. 8).

Ver. 7.—**My chain; literally, my brass** (comp. Judg. xvi. 21; 2 Kings xxv. 7).

Ver. 8.—**He shutteth out my prayer.** There is a kind of barrier through which these futile prayers cannot penetrate (comp. on ver. 44).

Ver. 9.—**Inclosed; or, walled up; the participle of this verb is rendered "masons" in the Authorized Version of 2 Kings xii. 12. Made my paths crooked; i.e. hath compelled me to walk in byways** (comp. margin of the Authorized Version, Judg. v. 6). But this hardly seems appropriate to the context. The *semitas meas subvertit* of the Vulgate is preferable. Render, therefore, *turned my path upside down* (comp. Isa. xxiv. 1). An analogous expression in Job xxx. 13 is rendered in the Authorized Version, "they mar my path." Thenius thinks that the destruction of a raised causeway is the figure intended; but the word is quite correctly rendered "paths;" see the note of Delitzsch on Isa. lix. 8.

Ver. 10.—**Was; rather, is.** As a bear . . . as a lion. The comparison of the enemy to a lion is not uncommon; see e.g. Jer. iv. 7; v. 6 (see note); xlii. 19; l. 44; Ps. x. 9; xvii. 12; Job x. 16. The bear is only once mentioned in such a context (Hos. xiii. 8). The two latter passages may possibly have been in the mind of the writer, as Jehovah is in both the subject of the comparison.

Ver. 11.—**Hath turned aside my ways; i.e. hath caused me to go astray.** Comp. Ps. cxlvi. 9, "The way of the ungodly he maketh crooked," i.e. he leadeth them to destruction. **Made me desolate; or, made me stunned** ("astounded," Ezra ix. 3 in our Bible). So ch. i. 13, 16.

Ver. 12.—**Set me as a mark.** Precisely as Job complains of Jehovah, "He hath set me up for his mark" (Job xvi. 13).

Ver. 13.—**This verse seems strangely short—it consists of only four words in the Hebrew. Probably something like "his**

weapons," or "the weapons of death" (Pa. vii. 13), has fallen out. Restore them, and the verse becomes a two-membered one, like its companions. To enter into my reins. So Job (xvi. 12), "He cleaveth my reins asunder." "Reins," equivalent to "inward parts," like "heart," with which it is often combined; e.g. Jer. xi. 20; xvii. 10; xx. 12.

Ver. 14.—A derision to all my people. If the text-reading is correct, these are the words of Jeremiah (or one like Jeremiah), describing the ill return accorded to his friendly admonitions. But the Massora mention Ps. cxliv. 2; 2 Sam. xxii. 44; ch. iii. 14, as passages in which "my people" is used, whereas we should expect "peoples." The Syriac Version of our passage actually translates "to all peoples," and the prefixed "all" certainly favours the plural, and so, in a far higher degree, does the view we have been led to adopt of the speaker of this Lamentation (see Introduction). The correction (*ammim* for *ammi*) has been received by Archbishop Secker, by Ewald, and by J. Olshausen. Their song. A reminiscence of Job xxx. 9.

Ver. 15.—With bitterness; literally, *with bitternesses*; i.e. bitter troubles. A reminiscence of Job ix. 18. With wormwood; i.e. with a drink of wormwood (comp. Jer. ix. 15; xxiii. 15). We are slightly reminded of Ps. lxix. 21, "They gave me gall for my meat."

Ver. 16.—He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones; i.e. he hath (unnatural as it may seem in Israel's Father) given me stones instead of bread (comp. Matt. vii. 9). The Jewish rabbi commonly called Rashi thinks that a historical fact is preserved in these words, and that the Jewish exiles were really obliged to eat bread mixed with grit, because they had to bake in pits dug in the ground. So too many later commentators, e.g. Grotius, who compares a passage of Seneca ('De Benefic.' ii. 7), "Beneficium superbè datum simile est pani lapidoso." He hath covered me with ashes; rather, *he hath pressed me down into ashes*. A figurative expression for great humiliation. So in the Talmud the Jewish nation is described as "pressed down into ashes" ('Bereshith Rabba', 75).

Ver. 17.—Thou hast removed my soul; rather, *thou hast rejected my soul*. The words look like a quotation from Ps. lxxxviii. 14 (Hebrew, 15), where they are undoubtedly an address to Jehovah. But there is another rendering, which grammatically is equally tenable, and which avoids the strangely abrupt address to God, viz. *My soul is rejected (from peace)*.

Vers. 19—21.—These verses prepare the way for a brief interval of calmness and resignation.

LAMENTATIONS.

Ver. 19.—Remembering; rather, *remember*. It is the language of prayer.

Ver. 20.—My soul, etc. This rendering is difficult. In the next verse we read, "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope," which seems inconsistent with ver. 20 as given in the Authorized Version. An equally grammatical and still more obvious translation is, *Thou (O God!) wilt surely remember, for my soul is bowed down within me*. The latter part of the line is a reminiscence of Ps. xlii. 5, at least, if the text be correct, for the closing words do not cohere well with the opening ones. The Peshito (Syriac) has, "Remember, and revive [literally, 'cause to return'] my soul within me," which involves a slightly different reading of one word. But more tempting than any other view of the meaning is that of Bickell, though it involves a correction and an insertion, "My soul remembereth well and meditateth on thy faithfulness."

Ver. 21.—This I recall to my mind, etc.; viz. that thou wilt remember me, or, thy faithfulness (ver. 20). Here again there appears to be a reminiscence of a passage in Ps. xlii. (ver. 4). Others suppose that "this" refers to the following verses; but in this case a new section would begin in the middle of a triad (the triad of verses beginning with *zayin*), which is certainly improbable.

Vers. 22—36.—RESIGNATION AND HOPEFULNESS.

Ver. 22.—It is of the Lord's mercies, etc.; literally, *The Lord's mercies that we are not consumed*. But the "we" is difficult, especially considering that in ver. 23 (which is clearly parallel) the subject of the sentence is, not "we," but "the Lord's mercies." Hence it is probable that the reading of the Targum and the Peshito (adopted by Thenius, Ewald, and Bickell) is correct, "The Lord's mercies, verily they cease not" (*tammū for tamnū*).

Ver. 24.—The Lord is my Portion. A reminiscence of Ps. xvi. 5 (comp. Ps. lxxiii. 26; cxix. 57; cxlii. 5).

Ver. 26.—Should both hope and quietly wait; rather, *should wait in silence*. "Silence" is an expression of the psalmist's (the Lamentations are psalms) for resignation to the will of God; comp. Ps. lxii. 1 (Hebrew, 2); lxxv. 1 (Hebrew, 2), and see Authorized Version, margin. The thought of the verse is that of Ps. xxxvii. 7.

Ver. 27.—In his youth. The thought of this verse reminds us of Ps. cxix. 71. Youth is mentioned as the time when it is easier to adapt one's self to circumstances, and when discipline is most readily accepted. The words do not prove that the writer is young, any more than vers. 9 and

100 of Ps. cxix. prove that the psalmist was an aged man (against this view, see vers. 84—87). There is no occasion, therefore, for the textual alteration (for as such I cannot help regarding it), "from his youth," found in some Hebrew manuscripts in Theodotion, in the Aldine edition of the Septuagint, and in the Vulgate. The reading was probably dictated by the unconscious endeavour to prop up the theory of Jeremiah's authorship. The scribes and translators remembered, inopportunately, that the trials of Jeremiah began in early manhood.

Vers. 28—30.—*He sitteth alone, etc.; rather, Let him sit alone . . . let him keep silence (ver. 28) . . . let him put (ver. 29) . . . let him give . . . let him be filled (ver. 30).* The connection is—since it is good for a man to be afflicted, let him sit still, when trouble is sent, and resign himself to bear it.

Ver. 28.—*Because he hath borne it; rather, when he (viz. God) hath laid it.*

Ver. 29.—*He putteth his mouth, etc.* An Oriental manner of expressing submission (comp. Micah vii. 17; Ps. lxxii. 9).

Ver. 30.—*He giveth his cheek.* Notice the striking affinity (which is hardly accidental) to Job xvi. 10; Isa. i. 6. The ideal of the righteous man, according to these kindred books, contains, as one of its most prominent features, the patient endurance of affliction; and so too does the same ideal, received and amplified by the greatest "Servant of Jehovah" (Matt. v. 39).

Vers. 31—33.—Two grounds of comfort: (1) the trouble is only for a time, and God will have compassion again (vers. 31, 32); and (2) God does not afflict in a malicious spirit (ver. 33).

Ver. 33.—*Willingly; literally, from his heart.*

Vers. 34—39.—These two triads form a transition to the renewed complaints and appeals for help in the following verses. The first triad is probably an amplification of the statement that "the Lord doth not afflict willingly." This being the case, the injustice which darkens human life cannot be approved by him.

Ver. 34.—*To crush, etc.* With manifest reference to the cruelties of the Babylonian conquerors of the Jews.

Ver. 35.—*Before the face of the Most High.* In ancient phraseology, to bring a case before the judges was to bring it "unto the deity" (*el hā-ēlōhīm*), Exod. xxi. 6; comp. xxii. 8; or (as the Septuagint in one passage paraphrases it, "unto God's judgment-place," i.e. to a sacred spot where judges held their session).

Ver. 36.—*Approveth not.* The sense is an excellent one, but it is very doubtful whether it can be obtained without altering one of the letters of the word in the text

(reading *rāḥāh* for *rā'āh*). The text-reading is, "the Lord seeth not." This may be explained either as "the Lord regardeth not (such things)," or as a question, "Doth not the Lord regard (this)?"

Vers. 37—54.—*EXHORTATION TO REPENTANCE; RENDERED, LAMENTATION.*

Vers. 37, 38.—True, God does not desire our misfortunes. But equally true is it that they do not happen without his express permission (comp. Isa. xlv. 7; Amos iii. 6).

Ver. 37.—*That saith, and it cometh to pass (comp. Ps. xxxiii. 9; Gen. i. 3, etc.).*

Ver. 39.—*Wherefore doth a living man complain, etc.?* The God of whom the poet speaks is the Searcher of hearts. Why, then, should a man complain when he knows that he deserves his punishment? The close of the verse should run, (*Let*) a man (*rather sigh*) over his sins.

Vers. 40—51.—Confession of sin, followed by sighs and groans.

Ver. 40.—*Let us search.* Our troubles being caused by our sins, let us search them out and correct them.

Ver. 41.—*Our heart with our hands.* It is to be sincere prayer; "spreading out the hands" is not enough by itself (Isa. i. 25).

Ver. 42.—*We . . . thou.* The pronouns are expressed in the Hebrew, and are meant to be spoken with emphasis.

Ver. 43.—*Thou hast covered with anger.* The clause seems imperfect; perhaps "thyself" has fallen out of the text (see next verse).

Ver. 44.—*That our prayer should not pass through.* So Isa. lviii. 4, "Ye do not so fast at this time as to make your voice to be heard on high;" Ps. lv. 1, "Hide not thyself from my supplication."

Vers. 46—48.—Here occurs a break in the alphabetic order, as these three verses begin, not, as they should, with *ayin*, but with *pe* (see Introduction).

Ver. 46.—This verse is almost a verbal repetition of the first line of ch. ii. 16.

Ver. 47.—*Fear and a snare.* An alliteration in the Hebrew, borrowed from Jer. xlviii. 43 (comp. Isa. xxiv. 17).

Ver. 48.—*Runneth down, etc.* (comp. ch. i. 16).

Ver. 49.—*TricklETH down; rather, poureth down.* Ceaseth not; literally, is not silent (comp. Jer. xiv. 17).

Ver. 51.—*Affecteth mine heart; rather, paineth me; literally, paineth my soul,* the soul being mentioned as the centre of the feelings and emotions. The daughters of my city. The sad fate of the virgins of Jerusalem oppressed the spirit of the writer (comp. ch. i. 4, 18; ii. 10, 21).

Vers. 52—66.—*THE SPEAKER'S SUFFERINGS; AN EARNESTLY BELIEVING PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE.* He speaks as a representative

of the nation; if we should not rather say that the nation itself, personified, is the speaker. In the first triad some have supposed a reference to the persecution suffered by Jeremiah at the hands of his countrymen. The "dungeon," or rather "pit," will in this case be the "dungeon" ("pit") mentioned in Jer. xxxviii. 6. But a "pit" is a figure in the psalms for destruction (Ps. xl. 2; lxix. 15), and there is nothing recorded in Jeremiah as to the "princes" having cast stones at Jeremiah, or rolled a stone on to the top of the "pit." Besides, the "pit" into which the prophet was cast had "no water, but mire."

Ver. 52.—*Mine enemies . . . without cause.* These words ought to be connected, as in the Hebrew.

Ver. 54.—*I am out off.* Some words have to be supplied, and Ps. xxxi. 22 suggests which these are:—"I am cut off from before thine eyes," i.e. from the region on which the eyes of God rest.

Ver. 55.—*I called.* Bunsen renders, "Then I called." But there is no connection indicated in the Hebrew between this and the preceding triad. Out of the low dungeon; literally, *out of the pit of the lower parts (of the earth)*—a phrase borrowed from Ps. lxxxviii. 6 (Hebrew, 7). Sheol, or Hades, is signified.

Ver. 56.—*At my breathing; rather, at my sighing; literally, at my relieving myself.*

Ver. 57.—*Thou drewest near, etc.* The sacred poet reminds Jehovah of his former gracious interpositions.

Ver. 58.—*Thou hast pleaded, etc.* The reference is still to a former state of things

which came to an end. It would make this plainer if we were to alter the rendering, *Thou didst plead . . . thou didst redeem.* The speaker likens his case to that of a poor man who is opposed at law by a rich oppressor, and who, for want of an advocate, will, to all appearance, become his victim. Suddenly Jehovah appeared and supplied this want. Such are God's "wonders of old time."

Ver. 59.—*Thou hast seen my wrong.* Here the speaker returns to the present. This is clear from the following words: *Judge thou my cause.*

Ver. 62.—*The lips stand here for "the fruit of the lips;"* and the verb which governs the nouns is "thou hast heard," in the preceding verse.

Ver. 63.—*Their sitting down, and their rising up.* Elsewhere the phrase is a comprehensive expression for all a man's occupations (comp. Ps. cxxxix. 2; Isa. xxxvii. 28). *I am their music; rather, their song;* i.e. the subject of their taunting songs, p. in the parallel passage, Job xxx. 9; compas Ps. lxi. 12 (Hebrew, 13).

Ver. 64.—*Render unto them, etc.* The sacred poet is familiar with the psalms; here we have a condensation of Ps. xxviii. 4. The tone of vers. 64—66 reminds us of passages in the Book of Jeremiah (see Jer. xviii. 23; xx. 12).

Ver. 65.—*Sorrow of heart; rather, a covering of the heart; spiritual blindness, like the "veil upon the heart" in 2 Cor. iii. 15. Thy curse unto them.* This should rather form a separate interjectional clause, "Thy curse upon them!"

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—"*The man that has seen affliction.*" In the first and second chapters of Lamentations the desolation of the city of Jerusalem is described and deplored. The third chapter brings the picture to a focus by giving us the plaint of a single individual—either one typical or exceptionally distressed citizen, or the city regarded imaginatively as an afflicted man. Our sympathy is most moved by individual appeals. We are horrified by disasters that affect thousands; but we are more touched by the details of the suffering of one person. Nearness is requisite for sympathy, a nearness of view, at least, that enables us to see the humanity of the sufferer. Statistics of public distress do not so affect us as the sight of a few severe cases that are brought under our own eyes. We cannot pity "the masses;" we pity this man and that woman. Therefore we should bring ourselves into contact with the sufferers of our own neighbourhood, and not be content to follow only such promptings of benevolence as may arise from a distant survey of large fields of distress afforded by the formal reports of charitable institutions.

I. **THE MAN THAT HAS SEEN AFFLICTION HAS CLAIMS UPON THE CONSIDERATION OF HIS FELLOW-MEN.** The sufferer of Jerusalem arrests our attention. He has a right to do so. Great distress is by itself sufficiently important to demand our notice. Moral merit will add to the force of the appeal of suffering. But even where the merit is lacking the suffering itself still has claims upon us. We must not roughly shake off the obligations of sympathy by the observation that the client is ill deserving. If the

ill desert mean that the complaint is false and the distress a sham, of course it is to be visited with contempt or punishment. But suppose, with evil character, there is also real distress. In such a case we should take the distress into consideration. We may not help in the same way in which we would assist a deserving case, for perhaps similar assistance would be wasted, or abused, or in some way harmful. But we must remember that charity is not limited by merit. Like the mercy of God to sinners, it should flow out to those whose only claim upon it is their want and woe. Great sorrow does not atone for sin, especially where it leaves the sufferer impenitent. But it does call for pity. Whether she were innocent or guilty, we feel deep compassion for such a victim of torture as Beatrice Cenci, and even imagine a certain sacredness about her solitary pre-eminence of distress that hushes all harsh judgments.

II. THE MAN THAT HAS SEEN AFFLICTION IS IN DANGER OF REGARDING HIS SUFFERINGS AS WITHOUT PARALLEL. He feels his own trouble more acutely than that of his neighbour. Thus he comes to regard himself as exceptionally distressed. Pain is a good school in which to learn sympathy with others in similar trouble. But the sympathy is commonly attained after one's own agony is lulled. It comes with the recollection of it called up by the sight of the present distress outside us. But while pain is being endured, especially if it is very acute, it tends to make the sufferer selfish for the time being. At least it wraps him up in himself and makes him magnify the severity of his own lot in comparison with that of other people. Let us be on our guard against this illusion, and the unkindness to others and murmuring and despair of ourselves which may come out of it.

III. THE MAN THAT HAS SEEN AFFLICTION HAS GAINED KNOWLEDGE OF SOME OF THE DEEPEST FACTS OF LIFE. We do not know life till we have felt pain. Buddha, while kept from all suffering in his palace, was ignorant of the world and of man. Suffering opens the eyes to the facts of life and breaks up many idle dreams. Mere show and pretence are then felt to be vain and mocking. True friends are discriminated from idle acquaintances. The value of inward things is discovered.

IV. THE MAN THAT HAS SEEN AFFLICTION HAS EXPERIENCED A VALUABLE DISCIPLINE. This is a useful "means of grace." It may be sent to punish sin and check the thoughtless sinner on his road to ruin. Or it may be to remind the careless Christian of his declension. Or it may be like the pruning of the fruitful branch, a stimulus to make the fruitful Christian more fruitful. Various ends may be served. But in all cases the suffering is meant for our good. Nevertheless, the enjoyment of the advantage aimed at in the providential arrangement depends on the use we make of our trouble. We may receive this grace in vain. If we harden our heart under it it will be useless to us. Such a result is doubly disappointing, for we do not escape the pain, yet we come out of the ordeal worse instead of better.

V. THE MAN THAT HAS SEEN AFFLICTION IS A TYPE OF CHRIST. Like "the Servant of the Eternal," in the latter part of "Isaiah," this unnamed sufferer of the Lamentations seems to foreshadow the unique distress of the Man of sorrows. Christ claims our attention by his suffering, and the more that he suffered for us. He did not simply imagine his distresses to be great. He never posed for pity. But never was sorrow like unto his sorrow. He entered deeply into human experience by his sufferings, and became a High Priest touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Made perfect by suffering, he gives to us the fruits of his cross and passion as more than a "means of grace"—as bread of life and blood of redemption.

Ver. 6.—"*Dark places.*" The sufferer feels, as though he were in the dark places of the dead, in the everlasting house which no tenant ever quits.

I. GOD SOMETIMES SETS HIS PEOPLE 'IN DARK PLACES. He permits the light of gladness to fade and the vision of truth to be dimmed and the conscious brightness of his presence to be lost, so that the soul is plunged in black depths of sorrow, doubt, and loneliness. Then the dismayed sufferer feels himself lost, well-nigh dead. But he is not dead, nor even deserted by God. The very fact that he admits that *God* has set him in the dark place is a confession that the hand of God has been with him. Real death and utter desolation come from the desertion of the soul by God; the chastisement that he directly imposes evidences his presence and energy, and it therefore promises life.

II. WHILE IN THE LIGHT WE SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR THE DARK PLACES. We stumble in the dark, and are terrified and confounded by it because we do not know it and are not in readiness for it. Like Adam in 'Paradise Lost,' we are surprised at the first coming on of light. Because we expect the night and know that a new day will follow, we can contemplate the deepening gloom of evening without apprehension. The miner, prepared for the darkness of his subterranean work, takes his lamp with him. Every soul should be warned that it is likely some day to be plunged into spiritual darkness. If ready with the quiet inward light of faith, it need fear nothing. While we know that God's rod and staff are with us to comfort us, we shall not be dismayed, though we shall be saddened, at being called to walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

III. SOULS LEARN LESSONS OF LIGHT IN DARK PLACES. In a deep well the stars above are visible at noon. In deep humiliation heavenly light is seen that is lost in the garish show of earthly commonplace life as well as on the heights of pride and presumption. Tears of sorrow purge the vision of the soul. It is well sometimes to be alone in the dark with God.

IV. THERE ARE DARK PLACES OF SPIRITUAL DEATH THAT ARE MORE AWFUL THAN THE ABODE OF DEPARTED SPIRITS. To the old-world view Hades was a realm of sinless gloom. But worse than the darkness of this Hades is the darkness of those who are dead in trespasses and sin. Such men carry hell within their own breasts. The blackness of death broods over their spiritual natures so that they feel no qualms of conscience, and are awake to no voices from heaven. These darkest places are never assigned by God to his creatures. If they are found in them it is because they have plunged into them of their own will.

Ver. 7.—Hedged about. I. EVERY LIFE IS SURROUNDED BY DIVINE LIMITATIONS. God hedges all of us about. Some have a narrow field of freedom and others a wider field. But every man's field is fenced in. Within certain limits we have scope for choice and will. Yet even there choice is fettered. For there is not only the hedge that bounds our area of action, there is the chain on our own person that hampers our movements. Free-will is far from being unlimited. Or, if the will is not fettered, the execution of it is. Note some of the things that make up the hedge which God plants about us. 1. *Physical limitations*, laws of nature, circumstances of our habitat, the measure of our bodily powers, special hindrances in external events that go contrary to us, and, with some, disease, maiming, or other bodily impediment beyond our control. 2. *Mental limitations*. There is a limit to what we can think of, imagine, or desire. Our knowledge is limited—both knowledge of ends and knowledge of means. As one who finds himself a stranger in a mountainous country is shut in on all sides because he does not know the passes, our ignorance fetters us and hinders us. 3. *Moral limitations*. God fences our way with his Law. There are forbidden fields which no material barrier shuts off, yet from which the mysterious, invisible bands of righteousness keep us back. Thus the man whose conscience is awake is often aware of being hedged in and chained down where one of duller spirituality feels free to roam at pleasure.

II. THESE DIVINE LIMITATIONS ARE FELT TO BE IRKSOME TO US WHEN OUR WILL IS IN CONFLICT WITH GOD'S WILL. All finite beings must be hedged about by their natural limits. Angels must be within the fence of their powers and rights. Pure spirits are under the law of God. But to these beings the barriers cannot be irksome. They must be submitted to with meek and happy complacency. No wistful gaze is cast beyond into forbidden pasture, no covetous greed vexes with longings for the unattainable or the unlawful. But we men on earth live in frequent conflict with our heavenly Father's will. We find the walls to be hard because we fling ourselves upon them. Our chain galls us because we chafe and fret ourselves against it. The wandering sheep is torn by the hedge, while the quiet obedient sheep knows nothing of the briars. When we rebel against God we murmur at his restraints. But, it is said, is not the bondage the same while unfelt? and is it not ignominious to be oblivious of it? and is there not something noble even in the hopeless blow that is struck for freedom? The most subtle spiritual temptation of the devil takes this form, and it tempts to the most wicked sin—rebellion against God for its own sake. And it is a delusion. For

the highest obedience is not the restraint of our will before God's will, but the assimilation of the two. We learn to will what God wills. Then we keep within the Divine limitations, and yet they cease to be limitations to us. They never touch us because we never attempt nor wish to cross them. Here lies the secret of peace as well as of holiness. So lofty an attainment can only be reached through that oneness with Christ of which he speaks when he prays that his disciples may be one with him and the Father, as he is one with the Father (John xvii. 21).

Ver. 18.—*Strength and hope perished.* The sufferer feels as though his strength, or rather in the expressive word of the Hebrew, his "sap" were destroyed, and with it his hope also; and he attributes this desperate condition to the action of God. It is a condition of spiritual affliction the pathology of which demands careful investigation, for it is symptomatic of a great progress of inward trouble.

I. IT INDICATES THAT EXTERNAL CALAMITIES HAVE PRODUCED INTERNAL DISTRESS. Every calamity assails the soul. But for a while the citadel holds out. Without the storm beats furiously. Within there is security and comparative quiet. At length, after a certain force of trouble is attained, in the addition of wave upon wave as in Job's case, or in the access of some one overwhelming disaster as in the destruction of Jerusalem, the defence fails, the enemy enters the breach and pours in a flood over the whole fortress. Sorrow of heart follows the loss of wealth, sickness, or other trouble of outer life.

II. IT INDICATES THAT DISTRESS OF SOUL HAS UNDERMINED THE POWERS OF ENDURANCE. The "sap" perishes. For a time a man holds on bravely, though with bleeding heart. But as the grief grows upon him he "breaks down," he can stand it no more, he says he cannot bear it. In one sense he can bear any amount of trouble that does not extinguish his being. He can pass through it and come out of it alive. But to bear trouble in the sense of keeping self-possessed and calm under it may be no longer possible. Wild and reckless anguish takes the place of sober, patient grief. The strength of soul is gone. The spirit that bore up against the blast is broken. Crushed and helpless, the sufferer no longer contends with the storm, but permits himself to be tossed and dashed about at the sport of the cruel waves.

III. IT INDICATES THAT THE LOSS OF STRENGTH HAS ENDED IN DESPAIR. Hope also perishes. A broad line must be drawn between sorrow that is lightened by hope and sorrow without hope. So long as the faintest ray still glimmers on the horizon the prospect is not utterly dark. When hope goes the soul is indeed abandoned to its distresses. The most acute pain may be borne with comparative equanimity so long as there is prospect of relief. Directly that prospect is destroyed a much smaller trouble becomes unendurable. Now and again we meet with a soul that has lost hope; we see it drifting on the wild sea of life without rudder or compass, a mere wreck of its former self.

IV. IT IS AN INTERNAL CONDITION THAT SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AS INDICATIVE OF CORRESPONDING EXTERNAL FACTS. We need not assume that there will be no bright future, for the desponding despair is not its own justification. It is often irrational, almost insane. It springs from grief that is big enough to hide all prospect of better things, but not to destroy the possibility of their ultimate arrival. The very fact that the trouble is traced to God—this trouble is "from the Eternal"—should help us to distrust the doleful prophecy of despair. If God our Father sends trouble, it is well. He will surely bring good out of it. For one who has faith in Christ no distress should be allowed to end in despair.

Vers. 19—21.—*God taking notice of man's affliction.* In his distress the sufferer cries to God, calling upon his great Helper to note his condition and remember it. Then he is calmed by prayer, and rests in the assurance that God does not forget his trouble. Recalling this thought to mind, he recovers hope.

1. THE CRY FOR GOD'S NOTICE. 1. *It is to God.* At first it seems as though God had forgotten his afflicted child. The vision of the Divine countenance is clouded; no voice speaks out of the darkness. Desolate and despairing, in misery that is bitter as wormwood and gall, the troubled soul seems to be deserted of God in the hour of greatest need. Then the sufferer cries out to God. Here is instinctive wisdom. We may or

we may not be observed by our fellow-men, and though human sympathy is a consolation, and indifference an additional bitterness, still in the heaviest trouble man can do little. It is not his notice that we should be most anxious to attract. The clamour of the afflicted for pity is an indication of weakness. But we do need God's sympathy; this is true healing balm. To him let the cry of trouble ascend. 2. *It is for God's notice.* It is not for relief, but for remembrance by God. There is good reason to trust that the remembrance will result in the relief. Nevertheless, the first and chief necessity is that God would take notice of us in trouble. If he do so we can leave the rest to him. It would be well if our prayers implied more simple reliance on the goodness of God, without perfect definitions of what we desire him to do for us.

II. THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S NOTICE. No sooner is the cry out of his lips than the sufferer comforts himself with the assurance that God does remember his affliction. Thus speedily is the prayer answered, even in the very act of uttering it. Nevertheless, it is not to be thought that God did not remember the affliction till he had been implored to do so. We should rather understand that it was always under the pitying eye of God, only the Divine compassionate recognition of it was not discovered until prayed for. Thus we often pray to God to do for us what he is already doing, and receive an answer to our prayers in the opening of our eyes to see the Divine action that has been hitherto unobserved. We pray that God *will* be merciful to us. He answers our prayer, not by becoming merciful, but by showing us that he is and has been merciful all along. This revelation comes to us in two ways. 1. *We are able to believe more in the character of God, in his love and mercy.* Then we can apply this faith to our present circumstances, and infer with confidence that such a God must be remembering us even when we see no proof of his notice, as a child when lost at first despairs, but, after reflecting on the love of his father and mother, comforts himself with the assurance that they will surely never desert him. 2. *We are able to see indications of God's notice.* Sometimes we can see how God is working for our deliverance when we shift our standpoint and regard our life from the footstool of prayer.

III. THE HOPE THAT SPRINGS FROM GOD'S NOTICE. This is enough. God observes us. Still the trouble is great and bitter. But we know that he will not permit us to perish. As the shipwrecked crew wave garments and make frantic efforts to attract the attention of a passing vessel, and recover hope directly they see indications that they are discovered, so troubled souls should lose all despair as soon as they learn that they are seen by God. It may still be impossible to see how God will save. But we can trust that to him. Now, that we may enjoy this hope, it is necessary for us to call to mind the fact that God is remembering our affliction. Much depends on the aspect of affairs on which we dwell. If we turn to the wormwood and gall our lot will seem to be bitter without mitigation. We must voluntarily direct our thoughts away to the unseen remembrance of God, that we may receive the comfort of hope.

Vers. 22, 23.—*The unceasing mercies of God.* It would seem, according to the best authorities, that we ought to read the first of these two verses thus: "The Lord's mercies, verily they cease not, surely his compassions fail not." Thus we are assured of the enduring character of God's mercies. How striking is this assurance, coming where it does after monstrous dirges of despair! In the Lamentations we meet with one of the richest confessions of faith in the goodness of God. The black clouds are not universal; even here there is a break, and the brightest sunlight streams through, all the more cheering for the darkness that precedes it. This is a remarkable testimony to the breadth and force of Divine grace. No scene is so terrible as absolutely to exclude all vision of it. Its penetrating rays find their way through chinks and crannies of the deepest dungeon. Were our eyes but open to see it, every one of us would have to confess to indications of its presence. Surely it is a great consolation for the desponding that even the exceptional sufferer of the Lamentations sees the unceasing mercies of God!

I. GOD'S MERCIES NEVER CEASE. 1. *We have no claim upon their continuance.* Mercies are to the undeserving. It is much that such as we receive any. We could have no right to complain if they all ceased. The least of them is beyond our merit. 2. *We have done much to provoke the cessation of them.* (1) By ungratefully accepting them; (2) by complainingly ignoring them; (3) by sinfully abusing them. 3. *They*

sometimes appear to cease. They are not always equally visible. But as the moon which seems to wax and wane never changes in itself, the grace which appears to us to fluctuate, and even at times to be extinguished, is never lessened, much less is it destroyed. 4. *They change their form.* The morning light varies from the evening light. Yet both come from the same sun. God's mercy is sometimes cheery, at other times it seems to frown upon us. But the wrath is mercy in disguise; and not only so, but under the circumstances that make it necessary it is more merciful than gentleness would be. There may be more mercy in the surgeon's knife than in the bed of down.

II. GOD'S MERCIES ARE CONSTANTLY RENEWED. The same mercies will not last for ever. They are gifts and acts for a definite time. What suits one age does not agree with another. God adapts his grace to the immediate needs of the hour. His mercies are not statuesque and immobile. They are living and suitable to need. They are never anachronous. They are never stale. God gives to each of us new mercies. He is living and acting in our midst every day and at each immediate moment. We read of God's mercies in writings of David and St. John. But we have not to exhume the antique mercies that were bestowed on these men of the olden times. Our own mercies are fresh to-day. As God keeps the old world green by renewing it every spring, so he refreshes and invigorates his people by spring-times of grace. Moreover, it is well to see how he does this daily, and to wake in the morning with a joyous thankfulness in prospect of the entirely new mercies of the new day.

III. THE CEASELESSNESS OF GOD'S MERCY IS A PROOF OF HIS FAITHFULNESS. 1. *It is the fulfilment of his promise that he will never leave nor forsake his people.* 2. *It is also a sign that he is still acting according to his ancient word.* For the mercy, being not only continued, but also renewed, shows us that God is fulfilling his promise in the immediate present. The friend who builds us a house may be considered to be faithful to his promise to shelter us as long as the house stands. But he who promises daily bread gives an additional proof of faithfulness by visiting us every day. The manna showed that God was daily present to fulfil his purposes of grace. Daily mercies are recurrent reminders of the faithfulness of God.

Ver. 24.—*The secret of hope.* The reader of the psalms is familiar with the utterance, "The Lord is my Portion." The characteristic peculiarity of the adoption of this confession of faith by the sufferer of the Lamentations is his taking it as a ground of hope. The present is so dark that he can have little joy even in God. Earthly things are so unpropitious that he can hope little from them. But with God for his Portion he can look forward from the troubles of the present and the threatenings of earthly calamities to an unearthly joy in the future. Let us endeavour to see how to have God for our Portion is the secret of hope.

I. GOD IS THE BEST OBJECT OF HOPE. 1. *Consider how God can be an Object of hope.* We hope in God when we hope to enjoy his presence, to bask in the sunshine of his love, to enter into the life of communion with him. To know God is satisfaction to the intellect. To have fellowship with God through love is to have rest and joy in the heart. To be reconciled to God is to have the trouble of conscience allayed. All the deepest longings of the soul find their end and satisfaction in God. 2. *Consider how God is the one perfect Object of hope.* The greatest disappointment of an earthly hope is when the thing anticipated is given to us and yet the joy expected from it is not forthcoming. We clasp our treasure and find it to be dross, or we see it to be gold and we find that it will not stay the hunger of our souls. We are larger than the biggest earthly hope. Our aspirations soar above the highest of them. But God is higher and deeper and greater than the largest desire of any soul. He is just what we all need for rest and gladness. He cannot disappoint us. If money is our portion it may be lost, or it may not buy ease of heart. If power, pleasure, success, or any other common end be our portion, we may be most wearied when we have gained most. God is the Portion to satisfy hope, and he only.

II. GOD IS THE BEST GROUND OF HOPE. We have most assurance that our hope will not fail us when we trust in him. Why? 1. Because he is *good*. Malignant beings take pleasure in frustrating hope; cruel people do it with indifference; and selfish and thoughtless men unwittingly. But God, who is love itself and who ever regards the

needs of his children with merciful consideration, is too gracious to disappoint the hope we have in him. 2. Because he is *faithful*. He has invited our confidence and promised his inheritance to his obedient and trustful children. Thus he has pledged his word. His honour is involved. He will never prove false to his promise. 3. Because he is *almighty*. With the best intentions a man may be compelled to disappoint the confidence reposed upon him through simple inability to meet it. The bankrupt cannot pay his debts, however honest he may be. But as there is no limit to the power of God, so there will be no failure of hope in him. 4. Because hope in God is *lawful and right*. We need not fear that the strictest judgment will condemn it. It is a holy hope, and it is therefore likely more and more to be satisfied, as the judgment of God condemns and destroys unworthy objects of ambition.

Vers. 25, 26.—*Quiet waiting*. We are here first reminded that God does not disregard those who seek him. Though his grace may be delayed, it will come in due time. Then we are told that this waiting for God's response to our prayers is for our good, provided it be patient.

I. GOD VISITS WITH GRACE THOSE WHO SEEK HIM, THOUGH THEY MAY HAVE TO WAIT FOR HIM. 1. *He expects to be sought after*. To wait for God implies attention and watchfulness. But direct effort to find grace in God is involved in seeking him. There are who say that this is a sign of distrust; that we should wait without seeking God; that to go after him implies impatience at his tarrying; and, in short, that all prayer which is positive petition, shows self-will, impatience, and distrust. But this hypercritical view of prayer is a delusion. For the act of seeking may develop a trustfulness and bring about a preparedness which would not be found without it. We have the invitation of Christ to "seek that we may find." 2. *He may delay his response to our appeal*. He may make us wait. The reason for this cannot be any reluctance or indifference on God's part. But it may be that the time is not ripe for our receiving the response, or that we shall be disciplined into preparedness by waiting, or that, other interests beyond our own being concerned, the answer must tarry on account of them. Be the reason what it may, we must be warned to expect this delay, or we shall be grievously disappointed, perplexed, and even thrown into doubt and despondency. 3. *He will surely respond in due time*. God is good to all who truly wait for and seek him. He is not a capricious, partial, respecter of persons. Nor does he require a certain amount of merit in the petitioner. Our want is our sole claim, and the most unworthy are the most needy. But observe: (1) we must truly seek God himself, and not merely pleasant things from God; and (2) though God is good to all who thus seek him, his goodness does not take the same form to each. To some it is healing balm, to others purging hyssop.

II. WAITING FOR GOD'S GRACE IS GOOD FOR THOSE WHO SEEK HIM, PROVIDED THAT THEY WAIT QUIETLY. 1. *God permits them to wait for their own profit*. Whatever other ends may be served by the delay, the good of the petitioner is aimed at in the providential arrangement. How? (1) By testing *faith*. Thus it is seen whether faith be real, enduring, and constant. (2) By requiring *submission*. One of the most essential conditions of profiting by Divine grace is willingness to submit to the will of God. (3) By exercising our own *spiritual powers*. If the timid swimmer were succoured the moment he cried for help, he would never gain confidence and strength. (4) By affording us opportunity for *consideration*. While we wait we can think. We may then measure our need and see what will supply it. Looking at the approaching salvation in the light of hope and imagination, we are better prepared to enjoy it. 2. *In order that this waiting may be profitable it must be quiet*. Impatience wrecks faith and submissiveness and obedience, and all the graces that are necessary for a right reception of Divine salvation. It is difficult to be quiet while waiting. We grow restless and fret ourselves as the weary hours drag past. It is harder to wait than to work, because work occupies us as waiting does not. Yet we lose much for lack of patience. We are not quiet enough to hear the still small voice that would bring salvation. In our patience we must possess our souls if we are to receive into them the richest gifts of the goodness of God.

Ver. 27.—*Youth*. I. THE YOKE BELONGS TO YOUTH. It is common to hear youth

spoken of as a time of pleasure. Older people do their best to damp the joyousness of the young by telling them that these are their happy days, soon will come the dark days of trouble, let them enjoy the bright time while it lasts. Even if such a view of life were correct, the wisdom of thrusting it forward is not easy to discover. Why spoil the feast by pointing to the sword of Damocles? Why direct the walk on a fair spring day to the graveyard? Surely it were wiser to say, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." But this view is false. It arises from the disturbed imagination of later years. Grown morose with care, men look back on the earlier days of their life and imagine them to have been far brighter than those they now enjoy; but they only do so by that common trick of memory that selects the pleasant pictures and drops the unpleasant ones. 1. Youth is a time of *restraint*. With all their lightness of heart, children feel the bonds of authority and long for the time when they shall be their own masters. It is difficult for grown men who have the free command of their own actions to understand the irksomeness of the necessary bonds of childhood. Restrained in the nursery and in the schoolroom under law and supervision, liable to ignominious rebuke, many children feel themselves in slavery. Wiser treatment gives more liberty; but still it necessarily continues many restraints. And in full-grown life, when the bondage is more galling, young men commonly have to obey and submit to direction more than older men. 2. Youth is a time of *toil*. Men generally have to work hard in their younger years. The hours of labour are longest; the tasks imposed are the most disagreeable; the wages paid are the lowest. Most men as they advance in years work for shorter hours at more agreeable tasks and for greater rewards.

II. THE YOKE IS GOOD FOR YOUTH. We have seen that it is incorrect to regard youth as a time of exceptional pleasantness. For a normal life the day brightens as it lengthens, at least till the meridian is attained, and even later the soft light of evening is to many a source of deep, calm joy unknown in the feverish excitement of youth (see Wordsworth's poem on the superiority of the quiet September songs of the birds to their wild, restless spring songs). Nevertheless, the very yoke of youth is good. 1. If it must be borne at all, *the yoke can be best borne in youth*. The mind is then most supple to shape itself to the unwonted burden and pressure of it. Then a man can yield to authority with most pliancy and face hard labour most confidently. 2. *The yoke is necessary for youth*. It is a good thing to bear it in youth. (1) *Restraint* is then necessary. Liberty would be abused. Until an independent conscience has been developed, instructed, and strengthened, the external conscience of authority is needed. (2) *Work* is also good for youth. Even the discipline of unpleasant tasks is wholesome. It conquers self-will and the idle love of pleasure, and trains in self-denial. 3. *Later years are benefited by the yoke of youth*. Even if the years during which it is borne are not so happy as they might be, the man himself is better in the whole of his life. He profits by the discipline. He learns habits of self-restraint and industry. He is able better to appreciate the privileges of advancing stages of life.

Vers. 31—33.—*Chastisement only for a season*. I. THE FACT THAT CHASTISEMENT IS ONLY FOR A SEASON. God does "cast off" and "cause grief." His love does not nullify his wrath. When grieved and disowned by God the soul feels utterly desolate. But the terrible judgment is only for a season. It will end in reconciliation and compassion. This great truth gives an entirely new complexion to our views of life and providence. We see at times the severe side. But we misjudge if we take that as a sample of the whole. Indeed the very severity prepares the way for mercy; for God can show compassion after chastisement to a degree that would not be good before the wholesome discipline. The sunshine, which would wither the plants before the storm, coming after it helps them to grow and flourish on the water it has brought to their roots. 1. *This fact is no ground for reckless indifference*. For (1) the wrath is terrible enough while it lasts; (2) it must endure as long as impenitent guilt is persisted in; and (3) sin that presumes on mercy is the most gross and culpable ingratitude. 2. *This fact should be a consolation in trouble*. Hope may buoy up the sufferer. And resort may be had to prayer. It seems as though the soul were abandoned. But if God has not cast it off for ever, he must still feel interest in it, and may therefore be appealed to for mercy. 3. *This fact is an encouragement to repentance*. Endless punishment discourages repentance. It acts in the opposite way from that of all useful punishment.

It tends to confirm sin. It is the prospect of mercy that softens the heart and prompts feelings of penitence.

II. THE REASON WHY CHASTISEMENT IS ONLY FOR A SEASON. This reason is to be found in the character of God. "He doth not afflict willingly," or rather, "from his heart." There is an essential difference between chastisement and mercy. Chastisement is necessary and sent reluctantly, but mercy springs from the heart of God and is given willingly. That is a false and libellous representation of God, according to which the theologian describes the outpouring of Divine wrath as though there were a real satisfaction to God in the process of causing pain to his creatures. The description of everlasting perdition as given to lost souls with a flood of wrath is more like the action of a malignant demon than that of a merciful God. It is sometimes so spoken of as though every attribute in God but mercy were eternal. Truth, justice, holiness, wrath, vengeance, are to endure for ever. Only mercy has its day. Only this one grace is short-lived and soon to be exhausted. The calumny is a direct contradiction to Scripture, which teaches over and over again that the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever. This attribute at least is eternal. This one springs most directly from the heart of God; for it is the fruit of love. While we say God is angry at times, we do not say God is anger, because anger is not of the essential nature of God. But we do say, not only God loves, but God is love. But it may be said, if God does not afflict "from his heart," why does he afflict at all? It must be because the circumstances of his children make it necessary. He does it not for his own sake. Then he must do it for their sakes. Seeing, however, that the chastisement is not agreeable to them, there must be some object in it, some result of it by which they are to profit. It must, therefore, cease in due time, that it may give place to that happy result.

Ver. 38.—*How evil and good both proceed from God.* The Hebrew prophets show no inclination towards Persian dualism. They never attempt to solve the mystery of evil by the doctrine of two principles in nature, a good and an evil principle, in any respect co-ordinate one with another. On the contrary, they emphasize the monism of their creed by ascribing sole supremacy and originating power to "the Eternal." Nevertheless, they do not teach that moral evil is caused by God. This they regard as springing from the heart of man. In the verse before us we have no question of this darkest kind of evil. It is not sin, but suffering, that is referred to, as the context clearly shows. We have just been told that God will not cast off for ever because he does not afflict from his heart. We are now reminded that it is not the less true that God sends adverse as well as pleasant things.

I. THE WHOLE OF OUR LIFE-EXPERIENCE IS UNDER THE DIRECTION OF GOD. Our conduct is in our own hands; but what is not thus immediately dependent on our own will is directed by God. Other men influence us, but they are overruled by the Most High. Chance and accident seem to strike us, but chance and accident only exist to our ignorance. They are not really, for Providence excludes them. We sometimes speak of visitations of God, as though he came and went. But that only means that we perceive his action at one time more than at another. God is ever working in us. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." Things great and small, pleasant and painful, spiritual and physical, eternal and temporal, are under the hand of God and regulated by his will.

II. GOD TREATS US IN VARIOUS WAYS. He sends both evil and good. He has not one unchanging method of action. He varies his treatment according to requirement. To one he sends more evil, to another more good. Yet to none does he send experience of one kind only. The hard lot has many mitigations. The pleasant places have their shadows. As we pass through life we see how God deals with us in wise suitableness, now sending most good, now most evil.

III. WE MUST NOT INFER THAT IF GOD IS WITH US NO TROUBLE CAN BEFALL. If evil as well as good proceeds from the mouth of the Most High, no assurance of the presence of the Author of both will justify us in disbelieving in the coming of either experience. We must be on our guard or we shall be disappointed. We must be prepared to expect evil things even while we are under the care of God.

IV. WE MUST NOT INFER THAT IF EVIL BEFALL US GOD CANNOT BE WITH US. This inference of unbelief is the natural consequence of disappointment in the presumption

that, if God is with us, we cannot suffer trouble. There is real comfort in the thought that evil is sent by God, if only by the removal of the common assumption that it indicates desertion by him.

V. WE MAY INFER THAT IF EVIL PROCEEDS FROM GOD IT IS PERMITTED FOR THE SAKE OF ULTIMATE GOOD. For God does not delight in sending evil. His heart is not in it. But his heart is in mercy. He may seem to send the two indifferently; but he does not bestow them with equal pleasure nor with similar results, for the good is sent for its own sake, and the evil only that it may lead to higher good in the future.

Ver. 40.—*Self-examination.* It is interesting to watch the progress of the thoughts and feelings of the writer who addresses us as a sufferer in the overthrow of Jerusalem. At first he bewails his lot, then he calls to God for assistance. After doing so he regains faith, and calls to mind the merciful kindness of God. This helps him to the assurance that the trouble is but temporary. He feels that since it comes from God it must not be complained of. It is rather a call to reflection and self-examination.

I. CHASTISEMENT SHOULD LEAD TO SELF-EXAMINATION. It does us little good until it makes us thoughtful. We must sit still under it and think. Then we should turn our thoughts in upon ourselves. We are inclined to look anywhere else, to discuss the justice of God, to complain of the conduct of men, to criticize the course of events. But the one thing necessary is to look within. This is difficult, as any one who has honestly tried it knows quite well. It is not necessary habitually. Too much introspection develops a morbid subjectivity. But there are special occasions for self-examination, and trouble is one of them.

II. SELF-EXAMINATION SHOULD INVESTIGATE CONDUCT. It is "our ways" that we are to inquire into. 1. The important question is as to *what we do and how we live*. People examine their feelings. The examination is delusive and unwholesome. They examine their opinions. But opinions should not be matters of moral trial so much as questions for calm intellectual testing. The chief point is as to our behaviour. 2. The most important questions of conduct are those which concern our *habitual actions*. "Our ways" are not isolated deeds, but courses of action. We may be surprised into a fall or spurred into a good deed. More significant is our normal, everyday conduct. This is what we should investigate most closely.

III. THE INVESTIGATION OF CONDUCT SHOULD BE SEARCHING AND JUDICIAL. 1. It should be *searching*. Evil is subtle. Plausible excuses cover bad deeds. We must not be content with condemning conscious and confessed wickedness. The hidden evil of our heart must be searched out. The detective must do his part before the magistrate does his. 2. It should be *periodical*. We must "try" our ways. It is unprofitable and demoralizing to conscience to confess guilt which we do not feel and see. Until we are convinced of it we are dishonest in attempting to blame ourselves for it. Conviction must precede the sentence. We should also be just to ourselves. Wholesale self-accusation is often dishonest and rarely profitable. We want point and specific charges in our judgment of ourselves—the Law of God, the voice of conscience, the example of Christian standards by which to try ourselves. If we find the process difficult, we may pray that God will carry it on for us (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24).

IV. THE CONVICTION WHICH FOLLOWS THE TRIAL OF OUR OWN CONDUCT SHOULD LEAD US TO REPENTANCE. It is of no use unless it does this. The mere sense of guilt is depressing and, left to itself, may lead us to ruin through despair. Repentance should follow. We are to know that we are in the wrong way only in order that we may turn from it to the right way. We all sin, and therefore self-examination should lead all of us through conviction of sin to repentance. Then we can return to God. He waits only for our confession of guilt. When we own to it he will pardon it.

Ver. 44.—*God covering himself with a cloud.* There are dark hours when God not only seems to be hidden from view, but to be so wrapped in thick clouds that even our prayers cannot penetrate to him. Let us consider when and how far this is really the case.

I. SOMETIMES IT IS ONLY APPARENT. We lose heart and confidence. Discouraged and saddened, we cease to believe that God is listening to our cry. We can never see God nor hear any audible response to our cry and must always pray in faith;

and therefore when faith fails we are ready to say that God does not hear us. We should remember that God's attention is not confined to the evidences of it that he may afford to us. He may hear us without telling us that he does, or he may simply delay the response for good and wise reasons. Let us, therefore, beware of the folly of judging of God's actions by our own passing moods.

II. SOMETIMES IT IS REAL, BUT MERCIFUL. God does not always accept our prayer even when he is regarding us favourably. 1. He may be *trying our faith*. It may be better for us that our faith should be tested and strengthened than that we should have the particular thing we desire. 2. We may be asking *unwisely*. Perhaps the greatest unkindness would be to answer our foolish prayer according to our wish. The mother must turn a deaf ear to the cry of her child for a poisonous fruit. It is hard thus to refuse. Nothing tries love more severely. It is a proof of the great love of God that he is firm in thus apparently treating us with indifference when all the while his heart yearns to comfort us.

III. SOMETIMES IT IS BOTH REAL AND WRATHFUL. God will not always hearken to prayer. There are circumstances that raise great banks of clouds between our souls and Heaven such as the most vehement petition cannot pierce. 1. *Unrepented sin*. If we have sinned ever so heavily and confess our iniquity, heaven is open to hear the faintest sigh of penitence. But against impenitence it is firm as brass. 2. *Self-will*. So long as we are praying, rebelliously demanding our own way and not submitting to God's will, no prayer of ours can reach his throne in heaven. We may dare to lay our wish before God in humility, but yet in frank expression of it. Nevertheless, it can only be entertained by God when we add in spirit, if not in words, "Not my will, but thine, be done." Thus may we cry to the void and have back only the mocking echo of our foolish prayer. We may send urgent requests towards heaven, and they will only lose themselves in the thick, black clouds of Divine disfavour which come between us and God. It is hopeful, however, for a soul to know this. When we see the cloud we are half-way towards the removal of it.

IV. IT IS THE WORK OF CHRIST TO DISSIPATE THE CLOUD THAT SHUTS OUR PRAYER OUT FROM GOD. 1. He permits us to pray *in his Name*, with his authority, and pleading his merit. 2. He teaches us to pray *in the right spirit* of penitence, submission, and faith.

Vers. 49, 50.—*Tears which only God can wipe away*. I. THERE ARE TEARS WHICH ONLY GOD CAN WIPE AWAY. Jerusalem is so desolate that one who mourns her sad estate weeps such tears. But in all ages there have been sufferers in similar grief. 1. When sorrow is *acute*. The lighter troubles may be patiently endured, or resisted, or mitigated, or driven away by sympathy and brotherly aid. There are troubles which no man can touch, sores which no balm of Gilead can ease, a secret bitterness known only to the heart of the sufferer. In such agonies of distress comfort is a mockery, to attempt to console is only to intrude into the sanctuary of sorrow and to harrow the wounds we cannot heal. 2. When sorrow is *chronic*. The sudden flood of tears may be quickly stanchd. There are people of mercurial temperament who seem to be in the depths of despair one moment and elated with pleasure the next. It is not difficult to stay the tears of these shallow natures. But when the tears flow on through the bright day as in the long night, this weeping without intermission passes the bounds of human aid. The broken heart, the ruined life, hopes shattered, and joys buried in the grave, open a fountain of grief that only God can stay. Now, it is important to recognize this fact. If we are only driven to see it by hard experience, we may lose ourselves in despair before we can find any consolation in God. It is well to know when we are in smooth water that storms are coming which our vessel cannot weather. Then we may be prepared to look for a haven.

II. THERE ARE NO TEARS WHICH GOD CANNOT WIPE AWAY. The sufferer weeps "till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven." But when God looks the tears will be dried. Relief comes from God. It comes in a look from God. It comes when heaven is open to the troubled soul. One look from heaven is enough. How is this? 1. When God looks from heaven *he manifests himself*. He is always regarding us. But at times it seems to us that we are forgotten and deserted by him. Then again we see that he is observing us. The newly manifested nearness of God is a consolation.

2. When God looks *he shows compassion*. We express compassion by the eye more than by the voice. The look of pity is its surest, gentlest, most touching expression. This is the look of God when he beholds distress. 3. When God looks at the sufferer *he sends help to him*. God is not one who can contemplate suffering and then "pass by on the other side." With him to see want is to aid it. It is therefore enough that God regards us. The rest must follow. 4. When God looks from heaven *he draws the sufferer up to himself*. He attracts by his wonderful look of loving-kindness. The revelation of heaven lifts the troubled spirit up to heaven. By communion with heaven earthly tears are wiped away.

Ver. 57.—"*Fear not!*" The recollection of how God has forbidden one not to fear in the past is a plea in praying that he will remove the ground of fear in the present.

I. WE MUCH NEED DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENTS TO OVERCOME FEAR. 1. *In real danger*. It is not only the coward who fears. Indifference often gets the credit of courage. Many fear not simply because they are blind. To see would be to tremble. For the great powers of the universe, "the terror by night and the arrow that flieth by day," and the spiritual temptations that threaten our souls, are too strong for us. 2. *In the threatening aspect of the future*. Heavy clouds will gather to windward. Storms are plainly brewing out at sea. Whether they will burst over our heads or not we cannot say. But the very uncertainty adds to the terror; for fear feeds on vague alarms and may be conquered when the worst is known. 3. *In the mystery of life*. Even when we see no threatening danger the awful unknown is peopled to our imagination with strange horrors. 4. *In the fears of others*. Nothing is so contagious as fear. Hence the madness of panics. It is hard to be brave among the timorous. 5. *In hours of weakness*. When we are weary courage flags. We can be brave at noon, but midnight awakens fear. Guilt is full of alarm.

II. WE HAVE MANY DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENTS TO OVERCOME FEAR. 1. *In directly urging us not to fear*. He has said, "Fear not!" He will not mock with empty words. 2. *In promises of help*. The Scriptures teem with words of grace for troubled souls, as when they are bidden to cast their burden upon God because he will sustain them, to call upon him in the day of trouble and he will hear them, etc. By the veracity and honour of God we have enough assurance in any one of these promises to dispel fear. 3. *In the fatherly character of God*. If we had no instruction not to fear and no promise of help, we might still know enough of God to rest confident that all must be well when we are in his hands. The child fears nothing when nestling on its mother's bosom. Who shall fear that leans upon the bosom of God? 4. *In our personal relations with God*. Let it be noted that everybody under all circumstances is not to be urged to cast fears to the wind. The guilty should fear. The impenitent have no excuse for abandoning fear. They who are at enmity with God should dwell in great trembling. It is when reconciled through Christ, forgiven and restored to our home, that as redeemed souls we can shake off fear.

III. DIVINE ASSURANCES AGAINST FEAR SHOULD INSPIRE OUR PRAYERS FOR HELP IN DANGER. We are to remember how God has bidden us not to fear. Here is a grand source of confidence when we cry for help. For it is the very Word of God that has led us to stand facing the storm. His action must be true to his Word. Nevertheless, we do need to pray for help in danger. God's promises are conditional. When he dissuades us from fear it is on the understanding that we seek refuge beneath the covert of his wings. To the storm-tossed soul he says, "Fear not!" but he expects that soul to welcome him as its Pilot. Then the storm will be weathered. God's assurance of safety is for those who turn to his protection. It is those who are "in Christ Jesus" for whom there is no condemnation, and who therefore need fear nothing.

Vers. 59—66.—*The great appeal*. We can see the advantage to justice of appealing from a lower to a higher court. Sometimes the process has to be repeated and the case tried again and again until the best attainable verdict is got from the very highest tribunal. In the East, where justice was commonly neglected by indolence, outraged by violence, or prostituted by bribery, men felt strongly the value of an appeal. To the believer in the supreme Judge it was a great satisfaction that he could turn from the corrupt and venal courts of human judicature to the high court of Heaven. It may

often be a relief to make this appeal. For absolute justice between man and man is rarely obtained. Three things are wanted to make the result satisfactory—clear evidence, a just verdict, and a firm execution of the sentence.

I. **CLEAR EVIDENCE.** It is difficult to make one's condition rightly apprehended by men. Frequently there are facts that cannot be explained, or the whole transaction stands on a different ground from what people imagine, or its features are warped by the atmosphere of prejudice through which it is regarded. But God sees clearly and knows all. "Thou God seest me" is the comforting reflection of the vexed soul. "Thou hast seen my wrong," "Thou hast seen all," is the first consolation. But for this assurance to give comfort it is necessary that our cause should be just. God sees truly both the merit and the fault. It is useless to appeal to God with a bad case. There is no deceiving him. Let us see that our cause is always one which we can refer to the thorough investigation of the all-seeing God.

II. **A JUST VERDICT.** The evidence may be clear, yet the decision may be unjust if the judge is partial or corrupt. It is the comfort of one who makes the highest appeal that God not only knows all, but will decide righteously. "Judge thou my cause," says the troubled soul. God will judge all causes at the great tribunal of the judgment-day. Injustice can only live till then. Should not the oppressed bear his brief wrongs with calmness when he knows that they will soon be righted? It is interesting to see that "the day of the Eternal," which the Jews anticipated as the great judgment-day, was not regarded by them with terror, as it is often regarded by Christians. This fact may be, perhaps, partially due to a duller sense of personal sin. But surely it is chiefly owing to the grand Hebrew love of righteousness. We see strange mysteries of inequality and injustice that are at times perfectly bewildering. The judgment of Heaven will set all right. And even now God may do much for his children by his providence.

III. **A FIRM EXECUTION.** The sufferer prays that God will "render unto them a recompense." A Christian spirit should deliver us from the thirst for vengeance that was too pronounced even in the most devout Hebrew. But we must beware of a weak quasi-humanitarianism that would sacrifice justice and wholesome retribution to a one-sided gentleness. 1. It is necessary that justice should be done in action as well as that a just sentence should be pronounced in word. 2. It is for the good of all concerned—the victim, the public, and even the wrong-doer, that guilt should be chastised. 3. It is well to transfer vengeful feelings which we cannot utterly destroy into a passive resignation of our case to God. We are not to avenge ourselves, if only because God has said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Afflicted by God.* Every child of God, nay, every son of man, has endured affliction. Jeremiah and the city which he here personifies and represents may be said to have experienced affliction in an extraordinary degree. A fact so universal cannot be without special significance in human life. But not all the afflicted discern this underlying and profitable meaning.

I. **AFFLICTION LEADS SOME TO DOUBT THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.** It is not uncommon for people to say in their hearts, what some even venture to say with their lips, "If there were a God, I should not be suffered to pass through misfortunes and sorrows so distressing and so undeserved."

II. **AFFLICTION LEADS SOME TO DOUBT GOD'S BENEVOLENCE AND KINDLY INTEREST IN HUMAN BEINGS.** Not denying the existence of Deity, these afflicted ones question his moral attributes. They ask, "If God were a Being of boundless benevolence, would he suffer us to go through waters so deep, flames so fierce? His kindness and compassion—were such attributes part of his nature—would interpose on our behalf and deliver us."

III. **SOME WHO BELIEVE THAT GOD PERMITS AFFLICTION MISINTERPRET IT AS A SIGN OF HIS WRATH.** This it may be; this it *was* in the case of Jerusalem. Yet God in the midst of wrath remembers mercy; he doth not keep his anger for ever. And there are instances in which no greater misinterpretation could be possible than the

view that suffering is mere penalty, that those who suffer most are necessarily sinners above all their neighbours.

IV. AFFLICTION SHOULD BE REGARDED BY THE PIOUS AND SUBMISSIVE AS A PROOF OF DIVINE MERCY AND AS MEANT FOR THEIR GOOD. Scripture represents suffering as the chastening of a Father's hand. The experience of many a Christian is summed up in the language of the psalmist: "It was good for me that I was afflicted."

V. AFFLICTION MAY THUS BECOME, IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PIOUS, THE OCCASION FOR DEVOTED THANKSGIVING. How often have mature and holy Christians been heard to say, "I would not, upon looking back, have been without the ruggedness of the road, the bitterness of the cup"—T.

Vers. 7—9.—*The way of life hedged and built up.* The man who enjoys prosperity seems also to enjoy liberty; his way lies straight and level and open before him. But it often happens in human life that liberty is changed into restraint, that every path that is smooth and peaceful is closed, that, in the figurative language of this passage, a hedge is planted, a fence is staked out, a wall is built across the traveller's way.

I. MAN'S DELIGHT IS NATURALLY IN LIBERTY AND PROSPERITY.

II. PROVIDENTIAL CIRCUMSTANCES SOMETIMES COMPLETELY DEPRIVE HIM OF SUCH LIBERTY AND PROSPERITY. 1. One may miss the object of his heart's earthly desire. He may have set his affection upon some object, he may have directed his aspiration towards some aim, he may have purposed some course in life; and all these expectations and hopes may come to nothing; circumstances may conspire against the fulfilment of such desires and intentions. 2. Another may find great delight in the service of God; and suddenly health may fail and such service may consequently be forbidden, or powers of mind may be enfeebled, or means may be reduced, or fellow-labourers, apparently necessary, may be removed by death.

III. THERE IS DANGER LEST IN SUCH A POSITION EVEN GOOD PEOPLE SHOULD BECOME IMPATIENT AND REBELLIOUS. Believing that the Almighty has power to remove every obstacle, and to make plain the roughest path, they are tempted to question the interest, the care, the benevolence of the Supreme, and to give way to fretfulness and murmuring, and to ask "Why should not God make light my heavy chain, pluck up the cruel hedge, break down the impenetrable wall?"

IV. YET IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES THE PATH WHICH GOD HAS APPOINTED SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED AS THE RIGHT PATH. Resignation to his will, waiting for his time of deliverance, confidence in his goodness,—such is the attitude of heart in which true consolation and ultimate prosperity will be found.—T.

Ver. 8.—*Unheard prayer.* There were seasons when it seemed to the prophet that God not only refused to interpose in his behalf, but refused even to listen to his prayer. In such faithless and yet not unnatural imaginations and fears many truly pious natures have participated. Complaints are made by the afflicted that they have prayed, but have prayed in vain; that God has "shut out" their prayer.

I. THERE IS PRAYER WHICH GOD DOES SHUT OUT, *i.e.* THE PRAYER OF SELFISHNESS AND SIN. Men ask and receive not, because they ask amiss. They ask for gifts which God has never promised to bestow and which he has never encouraged them unreservedly to desire. There are bad things which men ask God for and which it would harm the suppliants to receive. There are things not bad in themselves, the bestowal of which, however, upon certain persons and in certain circumstances would be spiritually harmful. Such gifts are withheld, not in malevolence, but in mercy.

II. THERE IS PRAYER WHICH IS NOT UNHEARD, BUT THE ANSWER TO WHICH IS NOT IMMEDIATE AND IS NOT JUST WHAT IS EXPECTED. Denial is one thing, delay is another. Perhaps it may be said that every true prayer is both heard and answered. For every acceptable petition takes the tone of our Saviour's ever-memorable and incomparable prayer, "Not my will, O my Father, but thine, be done." Misinterpretation is to be avoided. The reason of delay, of seeming denial, is to be sought in ourselves. God often withholds for a season, in order to awaken our faith and submission, what he intends eventually to confer.—T.

Ver. 17.—*Prosperity forgotten.* What a touching picture of extreme adversity and

distress do these words present: "I forgot prosperity"! Days of happiness are so distant that they have faded into oblivion; their memory is obliterated by recurring sorrows, by continuous misfortunes.

I. ADVERSITY DOES NOT FULFIL ITS INTENDED PURPOSE IF IT LEADS TO DESPAIR. There are natures in which a reverse of circumstances induces depression, which gradually deepens into despondency. Where this is the case there is ground for fearing that the affections and desires have been too much centred upon things earthly and perishable, that the gifts of a kind Providence have been regarded as possessions to which those who enjoy them have a right, that the higher purposes of this earthly discipline called life have been neglected.

II. ADVERSITY SHOULD BE REGARDED BY THE CHRISTIAN AS TEMPORARY, AND AS AN APPOINTMENT OF DIVINE WISDOM AND LOVE. To forget prosperity in the past is to forget that, for the devout, obedient, and submissive, there is prosperity in reserve in the future. The cloud comes over the sky, but the sunshine of the morning will be followed in due time by the brightness which shall close in glorious sunset. The disciple of Christ cannot lose sight of the fact that his Master was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," and that he assured his followers that "in the world they should have tribulation." But the voice that foretold conflict promised victory. To the faithful favour shall be restored and prosperity shall be renewed. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."—T.

Vers. 19, 20.—*Remembering affliction.* As the prophet entreats the Lord to remember the afflictions he and his countrymen have passed through, he records his own vivid recollection of bygone misery and humiliation. Now, the counsel of the world would be—Forget your troubles; they are past; why allow them to disturb and to distress the mind? There are, however, good reasons why this advice should be rejected, why the afflictions we have passed through should sometimes be recalled to mind.

I. THIS EXERCISE SERVES TO REMIND US OF THE UNCERTAINTY AND VICISSITUDES OF THIS LIFE. It is well that in days of prosperity men should not forget how soon the sky may be clouded, that in times of health liability to sickness and disease should be borne in mind, that the living and the active should hear a voice gently counselling them *Memento mori*!

II. THIS EXERCISE SERVES TO PRESERVE US FROM A DISPOSITION TOWARDS WORLDLINESS. In prosperity it is very common for men to cling to this world, to over-estimate its wealth, its pleasures, its honours. Let them remember days of adversity; let them consider how possible it is that such days may recur; and thus preserve themselves from the threatened sin of worldly mindedness.

III. THIS EXERCISE MAY LEAD US TO GLORIFY THE DIVINE DELIVERER. Affliction is to many a thing of the past; they have left the tempestuous seas and are in the quiet haven. Let such consider by whose great mercy such deliverance has been effected, to whom their gratitude is due. Who interposed upon their behalf and brought them into safety? Do they forget to sing, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles"?

IV. THIS EXERCISE MAY SUGGEST THE EXPECTATION OF HEAVEN, AND MAY LEND ATTRACTIVENESS TO THE PROSPECT. The past naturally suggests the future. In remembering the afflictions of earth we are reminded of that state where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."—T.

Ver. 21.—*Hope reviving.* At length the unmitigated anguish and desolation expressed in the previous parts of this book seem relieved. A ray of light breaks through the dense mass of clouds. Despondency gives place to hope.

I. FROM WHAT STATE THIS LANGUAGE BETOKENS A REVULSION, A REACTION. Jeremiah has, not unnaturally, been plunged into distress, dismay, despondency. The terrible calamities which have befallen his nation are sufficient to account for this. Yet, as a child of God and a believer in Divine providence, he could not remain in desolation, he could not abandon himself to despair.

II. THE ORIGIN OF HOPE. How was the prophet lifted out of the discouragement and despondency into which he had fallen? It seems that here, as so often, hope

sprang out of humility. When his heart was bowed and humbled within him, then he began to lift up his eyes unto the hills from whence alone his help could come.

III. THE GREAT OBJECT OF HOPE. The prophet saw nothing in existing circumstances which could afford a ground for anticipating better things and brighter days. But his hope was in the Lord, who listens to the lowly, the penitent, the contrite, and, in answer to their cry, delivers and exalts them in due time.

IV. THE EXPECTATIONS OF HOPE. When within the prophet's heart the star of hope arose, to what did it point, with its enlivening, cheering rays? To consolation, to deliverance, to revival of natural life, to renewal of Divine favour. No hope, based upon God's faithfulness and compassion, is too bright for him to fulfil and realize.—T.

Ver. 22.—*Sparing compassion.* At this point the meditations of the prophet take a turn. He looks away from his own and his fellow-countrymen's afflictions and directs his gaze heavenwards. The scene of his vision changes. No longer the calamities of Jerusalem, but the character and the purposes of the Most High, absorb his attention. There is a rainbow which spans even the stormiest sky. Earth may be dark, but there is brightness above. Man may be cruel or miserable, but God has not forgotten to be gracious.

I. THE LORD'S GRACIOUS ATTRIBUTES. These are described as (1) his mercies and (2) his compassions. It is the glory of revelation that it makes known a personal God, invested with the noblest moral attributes. The heathen saw in the calamities of cities and nations, either the caprice of angry deities or the working of inexorable fate. The Hebrews saw the presence, interest, and superintending providence of a God of righteousness, holiness, and grace.

II. THE UNFAILING EXERCISE OF THESE ATTRIBUTES FOR THE RELIEF AND SALVATION OF MEN. If "we are not consumed," it is not through any excellence or merit of ours, but because of the forbearance and pity of him who does not willingly afflict the children of men. We tempt the Lord by our ingratitude and rebellion to lay aside his compassion, but he is greater and better than our highest and purest thoughts of him: "His compassions fail not."

III. THE ADVANTAGES MEN ENJOY THROUGH THE EXERCISE OF THESE ATTRIBUTES. There is (1) a negative advantage—we are not consumed; and (2) a positive advantage—we are saved and blessed. The language of the prophet receives its highest illustration in the dispensation of the gospel. It is in Christ Jesus that the attributes here celebrated appear in their greatest glory, and secure the largest and most lasting results of good for men. Hence the privilege of listening to the glad tidings. And hence the obligation under which all Christians are laid to extol the mercies and compassions of God, revealed in his Son, and practically securing for all who believe the blessings of forgiveness, acceptance, and eternal life.—T.

Ver. 23.—"*New every morning.*" Human life abounds in novelties. It is made up of experiences which combine novelty and repetition. But the mercies of the Eternal are ever new; no day breaks which does not open up some new prospect of Divine faithfulness and loving-kindness towards the children of men.

I. THE SAME MERCIES ARE REPEATED AFRESH. Because a gift of God resembles a previous gift, it does not, therefore, fail in being a new proof of Divine beneficence and favour. The most necessary blessings are those which are most frequently bestowed, and are those which we are most likely to receive without attention and to undervalue.

II. NEW MERCIES ARE CONSTANTLY BESTOWED. The successive stages of our earthly pilgrimage reveal fresh wants, call for fresh supplies from the bounty and benevolence of our God and Father. With new needs come new favours. Varying duties, fresh relationships, and changing circumstances are the occasion of ever-renewed manifestations of Divine goodness. And our repeated errors and infirmities are the occasion of new manifestations of Divine forbearance and forgiveness.

III. NEW CLAIMS ARE THUS ESTABLISHED UPON HUMAN CONSECRATION AND OBEDIENCE. If a human benefactor who has upon some one important occasion come to our assistance deserves lifelong gratitude, how can the claims of God be justly conceived and practically acknowledged, seeing that the hours of every day are laden with his favours? If a motive is needed to a new life, a life of devotion and holy service, where can a more

powerful motive be found than here? Often as we have partaken of Divine goodness, often as we have enjoyed the assurance of Divine forgiveness, we are called upon by the favours which are new every morning to renewed devotion of ourselves to the God of all grace and forgiveness.

IV. NEW OCCASIONS ARE THUS AFFORDED FOR RENEWED PRAISES AND THANKSGIVINGS. With every new morning nature offers a new tribute of praise to Heaven. Shall man alone be silent and ungrateful? Shall the Christian, who is the chosen recipient of Divine favours, be slow to acknowledge their heavenly source, to praise the heavenly Giver?

“New mercies each returning day,” etc.

T.

Ver. 24.—*The Portion of the godly.* When the land of promise was divided among the tribes of Israel, no inheritance was assigned to one of the number, viz. the tribe of Levi. It appeared good to Divine wisdom that the consecrated and sacerdotal tribe should be distributed among the population, and that a regular provision should be made for their maintenance. To reconcile the Levites to their lot, it was declared to them by Jehovah himself that *he* was their Portion. The language here appropriated by the prophet, as his faith and hope revive, is language which every true servant of God may take to himself.

I. THE LORD IS AN INCOMPARABLE AND UNRIVALLED PORTION. Without the Divine favour, the greatest, the wealthiest, the most prosperous, are poor; with this favour, the lowliest and the penniless are rich. For that which pertains to the soul exceeds in value that which is external; circumstances are not unimportant, but to the just and reflective mind they are inferior to what is spiritual.

II. THE LORD IS A SUFFICIENT AND SATISFYING PORTION. With what jubilant, triumphant exultation did the psalmist exclaim, “The Lord is the Portion of mine inheritance, and my cup!” He who made and redeemed the soul can alone fully satisfy and supply it. Well might the apostle assure his Christian readers, “All things are yours;” and well might he reason for their encouragement, “Shall not God with Christ also freely give you all things?”

III. THE LORD IS AN ETERNAL PORTION. Whilst “riches take to themselves wings and fly away,” whilst “the bubble reputation” bursts, whilst death levels the kings of the earth with the beggars,—the spiritual possessions of the pious remain undiminished in preciousness. In fact, the true value of the Portion of the godly can only be known in eternity. Here the estate is in reversion; there it is fully possessed and everlastingly enjoyed.—T.

Vers. 25, 26.—*Waiting for salvation.* It is to most persons easier to work than to wait. Yet there are possessions, dignities, influence, which even here and now can only be attained by waiting. And religion, which is the highest discipline of the spirit, encourages this attitude and, indeed, in many instances demands it.

I. THE ATTITUDE OF THE PIOUS SOUL. He who is graphically described in these verses: 1. *Seeks God.* For we are not called upon to be utterly passive; we are not led to expect that blessings will come to us without any exertion upon our part. To seek God in our daily life, in the order of his providence, in the pages of his Word, is a reasonable and profitable exercise. 2. *Hopes for his salvation.* And why not? Has not the Most High revealed himself as a Saviour? And is not salvation the blessing we most urgently need? 3. *Quietly waits for it.* This beautiful expression implies that the word of promise is believed, and that without doubting the soul expects its fulfilment. A rebuke to those who think that seeking God is accompanied with noise and excitement.

II. THE REWARD OF THE PIOUS SOUL. 1. There is what may be called the reflex influence of waiting. The expectant seeker and suppliant finds the very posture he is led to assume good and profitable. “In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.” 2. The Lord is actually good unto such as wait for him. He is pledged to this. His servants have ever found this to be the case. For the expectation honours him from whom the blessing is expected. The patient are delivered from their troubles, and to those who seek the Lord his glory is unveiled.—T.

Ver. 27.—*The yoke in youth.* This is not a welcome lesson. It is natural to all, and especially the young, to resist authority, to defy restraint, to resent punishment. As the young ox has to be brought under the yoke, as the young horse has to be accustomed to the bit and the bridle, the harness and the saddle, so the young must learn the practical and valuable lesson of endurance and submission.

I. IN HUMAN LIFE A YOKE IS IMPOSED UPON ALL. In some cases it is easier and in others more galling; but there is no escape, no exception. Labour must be undergone, the daily burden must be borne, restraints must be endured for the sake of the general good, sacrifices must be made, patience must be called forth and cultivated.

II. WHEN FIRST FELT IN LATER LIFE, THE YOKE IS ESPECIALLY HARD TO BEAR. It sometimes happens that youth is sheltered from the storm of adversity, which beats fiercely upon the inexperienced and the undisciplined only in later years. It is well known how severely trouble is felt in such cases; for the back is not fitted to the burden, the neck is not bent to the yoke.

III. THE DISCIPLINE EXPERIENCED IN YOUTH FITS FOR THE TOIL AND SUFFERING OF AFTER LIFE. This is why it is "good" then to endure it. Many of the noblest characters have known trouble in early life, and have thus learned the wholesome lessons of adversity which have stood them in good stead in after years. They who are afflicted in their youth learn the limitation of their own powers, learn the inexorable necessities of human life, and become apt scholars in the great school of Divine providence.

IV. RESISTANCE TO THE YOKE IS WRONG AND FOOLISH, SUBMISSION IS RIGHT AND WISE. It is hard to kick against the goads; it is useless to resent the appointments of Divine wisdom. There are cases in which a rebellious spirit lasts all through life, and it is unquestionable that misery accompanies it. On the other hand, if the yoke be borne early and borne patiently, it becomes easier with custom. And those who are strong to suffer are also strong to serve.—T.

Ver. 30.—*The cheek to the smiter.* Probably these verses should be translated by imperatives. The prophet, profiting by his own experience and by that of his countrymen, admonishes all to meekness and submission. In resistance is neither peace nor deliverance; in patient subjection and waiting is true wisdom, for such is the way to contentment and to final salvation.

I. SUCH MEEKNESS IS CONTRARY TO NATURAL INCLINATION, AND IS INDICATIVE OF A CHASTENED SPIRIT. He who is smitten naturally smites again. But to act upon this principle is to perpetuate a state of war and strife. Revenge is indeed often honoured in the world, yet the world's records are records of the wretchedness which this habit produces. On the other hand, the Christian principle, commended by our Lord in language which seems borrowed from this passage, is a principle of forgiveness and meek submission, the prevalence of which does much to mitigate asperity and to check wanton injuries.

II. SUCH MEEKNESS IS INCULCATED BY THE LORD JESUS BOTH BY PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE. He was reviled, yet he reviled not again. And in taking without resentment or complaint the unjust stripes and blows and many indignities he endured, our Saviour has given the world the most glorious example of victory over self, of superhuman meekness.

III. SUCH MEEKNESS IS CONTRIBUTIVE TO THE HAPPINESS OF THOSE WHO EXHIBIT IT AND TO THE EDIFICATION OF THOSE WHO WITNESS IT. The meek and lowly in heart find rest unto their soul. And society is profited by every illustration of the power and beauty of self-government and self-control, of conciliation and patience.—T.

Vers. 31—33.—*Divine benignity.* It required great faith on the part of Jeremiah and his countrymen to think and to speak thus of God. It was easy for them to believe in the justice and in the power of God; their own affliction witnessed to these attributes. But it was a triumph of faith for those so afflicted to acknowledge the kindness and compassion of the supreme Ruler.

I. IT IS NOT INCOMPATIBLE WITH GOD'S GOODNESS TO AFFLICT MEN. He "causes grief." His providence appoints that human life should be largely a discipline of affliction, that human transgressions should be followed by chastisement. The Scrip-

tures teach us that we may look all the stern and terrible facts of human life full in the face, and yet retain our confidence in the infinite kindness of the Divine Ruler.

II. GOD OBSERVES A LIMIT IN AFFLICTING HIS PEOPLE. His chastening is for a time. He will not always chide. He will not cast off for ever. For it is not implacable revenge, it is fatherly discipline, which accounts for human griefs.

III. COMPASSION AND MERCY ARE DISCERNIBLE BENEATH DIVINE CHASTENING. It is benignity which delivers the children of men from the waters, so that they are not overwhelmed; from the flames, so that they are not consumed. But it is benignity also (although this is a hard lesson for the afflicted, and a hard lesson for the philosopher of this world) which appoints affliction and chastening. God does not allow our sufferings willingly, *i.e.* from his heart, as delighting in them. It is not for his pleasure, but for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. And herein we see, not only the highest wisdom, but the purest love.—T.

Ver. 38.—*The source of evil and of good.* This passage may easily be misunderstood. Some have attributed moral evil as well as moral good to the great Ruler of the universe, and by making God the author of sin have introduced confusion into the moral realm. The presence of sin in the world is by the permission of the Most High; but, whilst we cannot understand the reasons for this permission, we are not at liberty to represent him as sanctioning evil. The good and evil of this passage are natural, not moral.

I. THERE IS HERE AN ASSESSMENT OF UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE. The inequality of the human lot has ever been the theme of meditation, inquiry, and study. It has been attributed to chance, to men themselves, to the operation of law. But the enlightened and religious mind recognizes the voice and the hand of the Most High in human society, even when the immediate causes of what takes place are apparent. Nothing is so vast as to be above, and nothing is so minute as to be beneath, Providence. The afflictions and sufferings of life, as well as its joys and prosperity, are all allowed and all overruled for good to God's people. And all may become means of grace and blessing to such as receive them in a teachable and submissive spirit. Accordingly—

II. THERE IS HERE AN IMPLICIT SUGGESTION OF THE MANNER IN WHICH GOOD AND EVIL SHOULD BE RECEIVED BY MEN. This is not to be regarded as a speculative question merely, though it is a subject upon which thinking men must needs exercise their thoughts. But inasmuch as we all receive both good and evil in the course of our life, it cannot be other than a matter of supreme concern to us to decide in what spirit all that happens to us shall be accepted. 1. It will be well to remember that there is nothing purposeless; that there is intention, meaning, in all providential arrangements. 2. The devout mind will recognize benevolence in the "dispensations" of providence, will see the movements of a Father's hand and hear the tones of a Father's voice. 3. The Christian cannot overlook the obvious fact that the real good can only be acquired by those who receive the happiness of life with gratitude and bear the afflictions of life with submission and cheerfulness.—T.

Ver. 39.—*Why murmur?* The world is full of complaints and murmuring. It sometimes is observable that those whose lot is peculiarly fortunate, whose circumstances are peculiarly favourable, are foremost in complaint when anything occurs to them which does not fall in with their expectations, which does not correspond with their desires. On the other hand, we now and again meet with the poor, the suffering, the friendless, who display a cheerful, uncomplaining disposition.

I. ALL PUNISHMENT IS DESERVED BY THOSE UPON WHOM IT IS INFLICTED. Conscience testifies to this. God hath not "rewarded us according to our iniquities." No afflicted one can plead innocence, can justly affirm that he has been treated with undue severity. For this reason affliction should be endured in silence and with submission.

II. WHEN GOD CHASTISES HE DOES SO IN EQUITY, AND NOT IN INJUSTICE OR CAPRICE. The heathen attribute to arbitrary and fickle deities, even to malevolent deities, many of their misfortunes. But to us God is "righteous in all his works." To rebel against him is to question the wisdom of the only Wise, the justice of the supremely Righteous. The afflicted should look through the chastisement to the hand which inflicts it.

III. TO REBEL AGAINST GOD IS TO RESIST HIS PURPOSES OF COMPASSION WHICH INTEND

OUR GOOD. Observe that murmuring is not only wrong, it is most inexpedient. A complaining spirit is inconsistent with the disposition which alone can receive the wholesome lessons and discipline of sorrow and can turn them to highest and lasting profit.—T.

Ver. 40.—*Repentance*. Sin and suffering are the topic of much thought and inquiry and speculation. But it is of supreme concern to the sinner and the sufferer to *act* aright. He may or may not be able to explain the mysteries of the human heart, of the Divine government. But it is most important that he should repent and turn unto the Lord.

I. THE CONDITION OF REPENTANCE. The unreflecting and careless will not repent. There are two conditions necessary to such an attitude of mind. 1. Those afflicted because of sin should search themselves. To take a favourable view of self is natural; but truth and justice require that every man should look below the surface, should explore his inmost nature. Thus the springs of action, its hidden motives, will be brought to light. 2. They should consider against whom they have sinned. It was a profoundly just exclamation of David, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned!" We may indeed wrong our fellow-men, but we sin against our Creator and Lord. Conduct must be looked at in this light, in order that it may lead to repentance.

II. THE NATURE OF REPENTANCE. This exercise of the heart is accompanied with sorrow for sin, but it consists mainly (1) in turning away from sin, and (2) in turning unto the Lord. This involves the seeking of pardon and acceptance, and the acceptance by faith of the Divine terms of mercy.

III. THE PROOF OF REPENTANCE. This may be said to consist in: 1. The hatred and loathing of the evil in which the sinner in his impenitence took pleasure. 2. The love and pursuit of holiness as pleasing unto God.—T.

Ver. 41.—"*Sursum corda!*" Religion takes possession of the whole of our nature. A service professedly of the heart, and of the heart alone, is a hypocritical service, which because of its insincerity God cannot accept, inasmuch as it is contradicted by the life. On the other hand, how can the Searcher of all hearts be pleased with a service which is of the hands, the outward posture and actions only, in which the heart has no share? The true worship and homage consists in the combination of the spirit and the body.

I. HEART AND HANDS ARE LIFTED IN PENITENCE AND CONFESSION. It seems to this exercise that the prophet here admonishes and invites. The heart has been engrossed by earthly pursuits and pleasures; and these it now quits, directing its contrite sighs to heaven, and lifting with it the clasped hands of penitence.

II. HEART AND HANDS ARE LIFTED IN EARNEST ENTREATY. In its anguish, in its conscious helplessness, the heart seeks mercy and acceptance with God; the hands are raised as in supplication, to give expression to the imploring petitions.

III. HEART AND HANDS ARE LIFTED IN BELIEVING CONFIDENCE. There is encouragement to trust in the Lord. The repenting and confiding Church of the Redeemer is ever lifting holy hands to heaven, in expression of that sentiment which is the condition of all blessing. It is the attitude of hope. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills whence cometh my help." And as the eyes of faith behold the God of grace upon the throne of power, they draw the heart upwards; the hands follow, and the posture of the spiritual nature is becoming to man and honouring to God.—T.

Vers. 48—51.—*Sympathetic sorrow*. This passage is sufficient to justify the title prefixed to this collection of sacred lyrics. It is indeed a "lamentation." And, what is deserving of special notice, the lament is not for personal affliction, it is occasioned by the distress and woe of the fellow-countrymen of the prophet.

I. THE OCCASION OF THIS SYMPATHETIC SORROW. 1. The affliction of "the daughters of the city." Whether by this expression we are to understand dependent towns or literally the maidens of Jerusalem, in any case it is the calamities of his countrymen that awaken compassion. 2. This affliction is of the extremest kind, even "destruction." Some of those whose woes call forth the prophet's commiseration are homeless, some are wounded, and some are slain. A hard heart can witness the distresses of

fellow-creatures unmoved; but a sensitive nature views them with poignant sorrow. Our Lord wept over the same city when, at a later period, he foresaw a fate impending over Jerusalem even worse than that which occasioned the lamentation of Jeremiah.

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS SYMPATHETIC SORROW. 1. It is cordial; not the sympathy of words merely, but of the heart. Politeness may dissimulate; sincere pity will feel. The sorrows of the soul because of human sin and woe are prompted by sympathy and consecrated by religion. 2. It is manifested. In the East and among simple nations grief displays itself in a more demonstrative way than amongst ourselves. There was nothing extravagant or unmanly in the pouring down of tears, in the running down of rivers of waters from the eyes, described in these verses. The manner in which sympathy is exhibited may vary, but this passage may suggest to us that the expression of compassion ought not to be withheld. 3. It is unintermitted; it ceases not. Such sympathy is not a mere paroxysm of grief; it is constant, enduring whilst the occasion of it endures.

III. THE PURPOSE AND HOPE ACCOMPANYING THIS SYMPATHETIC SORROW. Men sometimes speak of the uselessness of tears, the vanity of grief, etc. The godly sorrow exhibited by the prophet was not of this order; it had an aim, and that aim was the relief of those who were commiserated. Penitence and supplication were regarded as means to procure the regard, the interposition, the delivering mercy of Jehovah. Help, and help from above,—this is the practical design which blends with the anguish and the tears of the Christian.—T.

Vers. 55, 56.—*The cry from the dungeon.* There seems every reason for believing that, in these words, the prophet is recording his own actual experience. Under the reign of Zedekiah, when the doom of Jerusalem was near at hand, the faithful Jeremiah prophesied to the people, and by his warnings and predictions so offended the princes who were in authority in the city that they cast him into the pit of the prison. By Divine goodness he was delivered from this misery by the agency of the eunuch Ebed-Melech. Like a truly godly man, he witnesses to that God who is ever the Hearer of his people's prayers.

I. THE CRY FROM THE DEPTH. It was indeed *de profundis* that Jeremiah raised his voice and called upon the Lord. From sorrow, suffering, destitution, desertion, misery, helplessness, let men cry unto the Lord. The evil condition that impels them to such a cry is not all evil; there is "the soul of goodness" in it. The dungeon of oppression, of persecution, thus becomes a church indeed.

II. THE WITNESS OF THE RESCUED. The prophet testifies that his cry had not been unheeded. Even when immured in a pit so deep that his voice could not reach his fellow-men, his entreaty had reached the ear and roused the pity of the eternal Lord. And he who had heard had answered too, and had sent his messenger to deliver his servant. Where is there a child of God who has not experienced the compassionate interposition of the Most High? The Church should be as one of those temples whose walls are covered with tablets and brasses testifying to mercies received at the hand of the All-gracious.

III. THE CONFIDENT PRAYER. All former troubles were as nothing compared to this disaster which now overtakes the city, the nation. Renewed calamity prompts to renewed entreaty, and the memory of compassionate interposition incites to faith and hope. "The Lord *hath* been mindful of us; he *will* help us."—T.

Vers. 57, 58.—*Prayer heard and answered.* How natural that the mind of a pious man should, in seasons of distress and calamity, revert to the bygone days, remember the clouds by which they were overcast, and take encouragement at the vivid recollection of gracious interposition and help!

I. THE DAY OF DELIVERANCE. 1. This was a day of need and of distress, of sore need and of bitter distress. 2. It was a day of prayer, a day in which Divine aid had been zealously and urgently implored.

II. THE VOICE OF THE DELIVERER. "Thou saidst, Fear not!" How often are these words represented by the prophets to have been spoken by Jehovah! How often by the evangelists to have been spoken by Christ! They seem to constitute a "note"

of Divine utterance. They are as reassuring and consolatory to man as they are appropriate and becoming to God.

III. THE FACT OF DELIVERANCE. Comforting words are welcome; how much more the exercise of mighty power! This passage depicts (1) the approach of the mighty One, and (2) the redemption of the captive's life. What was literally true of Jeremiah's bodily condition is true of the spiritual state of sinful man; and all temporal interpositions are an emblem of the delivering, the redemptive grace of God in Jesus Christ.

IV. THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF DELIVERANCE. The testimony of the prophet is an example to all who have experienced the blessedness of Divine love and grace. Such acknowledgment should be grateful, cordial, public, and everlasting.—T.

Vers. 59—63.—*The Lord's knowledge of his people's sufferings and wrongs.* The first thought which occurs to people when oppressed and afflicted is—The Lord takes no heed; he has no compassion; he will not help; my judgment is passed over from my God. But it is afterwards felt that such language is language of impatience and injustice. And the pious soul comes to rest almost satisfied beneath the blows and contempt of men, because a conviction springs up—It is all known to the omniscient and sympathizing Lord.

I. GOD, IN HIS PROVIDENCE, PERMITS HIS PEOPLE TO SUFFER AND ENDURE CALUMNIES, RETROACHES, AND WRONGS. Their endurance of such, now and again, is an unquestionable fact. And if there be a God, and such a God as revelation declares, it is certain that he suffers his people to pass through much that is painful to flesh and blood.

II. GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS AND AT ONCE REMEDY THE ILLS WHICH BEFALL HIS PEOPLE. The thought occurs to the oppressed and wronged—Can it be that he sees and hears all that is said and done to us, unmerited as it is on our part? If he does, how mysterious that he withholds his hands from avenging us, from discomfiting our cruel foes!

III. DIVINE DELAY IS NO PROOF OF DIVINE INDIFFERENCE. Christ stood upon the mountain-top, and by the misty moonlight watched his disciples tossed upon the lake, toiling in rowing, and sorely harassed. But he loved them, and if he did not come forthwith to their relief there was a good reason for his delay. So oftentimes men think God careless because their probation is prolonged; but in truth wisdom and love are the motives of all his acts and of even his apparent tardiness.

IV. GOD THUS TRIES HIS PEOPLE'S FAITH AND STEADFASTNESS AND PREPARES THEM FOR HIS SALVATION. After the stormy tempest how grateful is the rainbow! After the black night how welcome is the dawn! The mere contrast, however it might heighten joy, would not account for God's action in testing his servants. But there are moral ends to be secured. And the furnace alone can separate the dross from the gold. The storm alone can try, can elicit, can perfect, the faith of the mariner and his confidence in the Lord who seems to sleep.—T.

Vers. 64—66.—*Righteous recompense.* Our conscience requires and approves of justice. Our weakness is too often in danger of cherishing resentment and malevolence. It is not safe, on most men's part, to hope for retribution upon their personal enemies. Perhaps the record of Jeremiah's feelings is not intended to be taken for an inculcation, or even a permission, of such imprecations upon our foes.

I. THE GROUND UPON WHICH DIVINE JUDGMENT IS INVOKED. 1. It was not personal offence given which suggested such a cry for vengeance. 2. It was the overt, deliberate conduct of men who acted in disobedience and defiance towards God, and with inhumanity and barbarity towards their fellow-men.

II. THE TRIBUNAL TO WHICH THE CONDUCT OF THE WICKED IS REFERRED. 1. Not the fallible court of human justice or human requital. 2. But the court of Divine equity, in which none receives good for evil, in which every plea for mitigation of sentence is heard, and from which none can depart with a complaint upon the lips.

III. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH RETRIBUTION IS IMPOSED. 1. Not for the gratification of vindictive feelings. 2. Not for the exaltation of the oppressed at the expense of the oppressor. 3. But for the speedy deliverance of God's wronged and harassed people. 4. For the advancement of God's cause upon earth. For the honour of God's glorious Name. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"—T.

Ver. 18.—*The sum of a terrible experience.* This chapter must doubtless be taken as the utterance of Jeremiah's own feelings—feelings induced by the continual stress and difficulty of his life. Through the first seventeen verses he alludes to some opponent and tormentor continually thwarting his every purpose, not for a single moment leaving him free. Are we to suppose, then, that the prophet really believed all these untoward experiences to come from some one agent who had special designs against him? or was he thus only trying to make more forcible the story of his sufferings? However this is to be settled, some of our difficulty is taken away when we find, on coming to ver. 18, this clear reference to Jehovah: "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord." These words we may take to mark about the lowest point in reckless and unadvised speaking. They give a sort of confession as to what a deadly member the tongue may become in hours of suffering. What we *only feel* to be the reality is taken to be the reality, whereas the reality may be immensely better. The prophet came to speak in a worthier way, and lived to admit that, in the very depths, he discovered what God's disposition to him really was. Note how the prophet made a double mistake.

I. HE SAID HIS STRENGTH AND HOPE WERE PERISHED. Yet these things, even when composed of purely natural elements, are not so easily destroyed. Even with all the weakness that belongs to human nature, there is immense strength in it. After a long life men wonder to look back and see what they have actually achieved, and the strain they have undergone. While we may be alarmed in the midst of our troubles and vicissitudes, God looks on very differently, knowing how much strength there is to get over them. The resources of our own natures have to be developed, and the resources of grace connected with them. Then, when the strength is brought out, the hope naturally springs forth at the same time. There is hardly a greater peril in life than to act from the conclusions coming to us in gloomy moods.

II. HE SAID HIS STRENGTH AND HOPE WERE PERISHED FROM GOD. *From God.* How came he to say such a thing, or even to think it for a moment? Probably because he had not sufficiently recollected wherein it is that God's favour really appears. To that God who has all power nothing would have been easier than to have made the prophet's path outwardly pleasant and straightforward. But where would have been the gain in that? The thing really wanted was that, when Jeremiah was left alone, bereft of earthly comfort and stays, he should be led into a state of mind where he could say, "Though I seem alone, and in my solitude weak and hopeless, yet I am not alone; for the God who made me a prophet is with me in ways which cannot be comprehended by my innumerable enemies."—Y.

Ver. 21.—*How hope rises from the depths of despair.* This utterance needs to be contrasted with that in ver. 18. There the prophet says that hope is perished. Here he has hope, grounded on a "therefore" and strengthened by a resolved attitude of mind. Thus we are helped to get an explanation of his past depression, or, as we might even call it, despair. We are helped to distinguish between abiding Divine realities and the way in which they are coloured or concealed by our moods. How is it, then, the prophet is here able to come to such an inspiring resolution? Two things are to be noticed.

I. THIS HOPE COMES BY CONSIDERING THE RIGHT THINGS. The prophet says, "This will I recall to my mind," or "take to heart." *This*, that is to say, such things as he goes on to mention later in the chapter. He said that he had been led into darkness and confinement. That he had been *led* was only his own way of putting the thing; the important point to note is that he got into such confusion of mind, such preoccupation with mighty evils, as to be unable to see life in the whole. Darkness had covered gracious truth, or clouds had risen between it and his spiritual vision. We can easily come to the most melancholy conclusions if only we determine to shut certain considerations from the mind. Let it also be noted that, as satisfying hope comes from considering the right things, so delusive hope comes from letting the mind dwell exclusively on the wrong ones. And what is true of the production of satisfying hope is true of other satisfying states of mind. So men may pass from unbelief to the firmest and most fruitful faith, and from selfishness to love.

II. THIS HOPE COMES FROM CONSIDERING THE RIGHT THINGS IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT.

As the expression may be rendered, there must be "a taking to heart." Loss of hope comes from taking to heart the sad side of human life. The same things are, of course, before us all. There is enough mysterious misery in the world to oppress any human heart that thinks of nothing else, but then along with this we should ever have before us, as things to be searched into with all earnestness, the great facts of the loving revelation of God in Christ Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus, rightly considered, will give a hope rooted deep below the most discomposing powers of this world. It is not enough to place the great facts before us; they must be dealt with as being very dear and necessary to the heart.—Y.

Vers. 22, 23.—*The unfailing compassions of Jehovah.* Here indeed is a full retraction of the reckless falsehood recorded in ver. 18. He who had hinted that God was a Destroyer, that he delighted, as it were, in reducing his children to despair, is now found glorying in the same God as the great Preserver, the one effectual Guardian of man's existence and peace.

I. NOTE THE DESTROYING POWERS THAT BESET HUMAN LIFE. God's mercies are the only guarantee against our being consumed. How great, then, must be the perils of life! Jeremiah had nothing to do but look back on his own experience, and then he would be filled with wonder to think he had got so far. Think of the vivid way in which Paul summed up the perils of his life. It is indeed true that we do well not to think too much of such perils. All the comfort would be taken out of life if we thought of them too much. But there they are, and times do come when it is useful to pass them before the mind. And especially we should note those perils which are perils because they have temptation in them. One of the greatest perils of life is to make an inadequate estimate of perils. The greatest of all perils is to be false to truth and goodness for the sake of life or even of temporal prosperity. Our passions, our fears, and our pride are all ready to league with the great enemy of God and of mankind.

II. NOTE THE ONLY ADEQUATE DEFENCE AGAINST THESE DESTROYING POWERS. 1. *That defence is to be found in Jehovah.* With him alone is the might and the power requisite to make due provision. Man is ignorant and prejudiced, continually going into the way of death, under a firm conviction that it is the way of life. If Jeremiah had been left to himself, to his own prudence and his own notions of safety, the chances are he would have been a dead man in no long time after he had begun prophesying. The true wisdom is to put ourselves into the hands of God. Then the way of duty becomes the way of safety. We are no longer misled by appearances. We suffer from the lesser danger and escape the greater. We discover how true it is that a man may lose his life, and yet in the very losing find it. 2. *The compassion and faithfulness of Jehovah are specially insisted on.* We ask constantly why men do things, and what motives are at the bottom of their doings. And we must ask the same things with respect to God. From the thing done we may rise to understand the heart of the doer. And then, knowing what his character is, we may confidently calculate what sort of things he will do in the future. God's mercies are new every morning—light after darkness, strength after sleep, conscious life with all its large endowments after hours of unconsciousness. And great is his faithfulness. The irregularities and forgettings of human procedure are not to be found in the dealings of God. And this is just the responsibility that comes to us from all the attainments of science, that the deeper we search into the constitution of the universe, the more we should be impressed with the greatness of God's faithfulness.—Y.

Ver. 24.—*Those who have Jehovah for their Portion.* I. EVERY MAN HAS HIS PORTION. That which is his capital, which constitutes his resources, and out of which he has to build up the results of his life. It was only natural that an Israelite should make a great deal of *portions*. Israel had a portion, divinely secured and wonderfully packed with the raw materials of wealth. Each tribe had its portion, given by lot, so that there was no ground of complaint, and so to each household in due time there came a portion. In Israel, as in every other nation, there were the rich and the poor—those with great possessions and those with none at all. Thus there are inequalities, and not the least of them are those which inhere in the constitution of the individual. Our portion depends, not on what we legally possess, but on what we have the energy

and the skill to use. The greatest of a man's natural resources are in himself. Otherwise he may sit among large possessions which are of no more use to him than are his hoards to a miser.

II. EVERY MAN HAS IT IN HIS OWN POWER TO REMOVE THE INEQUALITIES OF HIS PORTION. Jeremiah shows us how. Whatever his natural portion may have been, it had well-nigh vanished through the hatred of his people and even of his own acquaintance. Nor must we forget that he was speaking in the midst of a desolate land. Many portions had gone and left their owners not knowing which way to turn. But now Jeremiah both assures us of his own resources and advises us where to seek ourselves, by saying, "Jehovah is my Portion." Thus he turns away the mind from mere external property. It is the dreadful character of all mere external wealth that there is only so much of it, and therefore, just in proportion as some grow rich, others must become poor. Besides which there is to be considered that moment when riches will take to themselves wings and flee away, and that still more serious moment when flesh and heart will fail. Thus we see that the complaint about the inequalities of life has more plausibility than force. All purely natural portions are reduced to the same vanity at last, and the man who trusts in them has but wasted his time and procured for himself the deepest disappointments. Whatever we may lack, we need not lack that portion which consists in the promises of God made to them who truly trust in him.

III. THE CONSEQUENCE OF HAVING GOD FOR A PORTION. The life is filled with hope. A man can only hope according to his portion. If his portion is in this world, his hope will have a corresponding character; whereas if his portion is really in God, his hope will partake of the necessary elevation and fulness of his portion. God takes care that those who are really his should have a feeling in their hearts which makes them look forward to a future always better than the present. We are saved by hope. The process is yet far from complete, but it is our right to rejoice that we are in the hands of One who will make salvation complete in his own time.—Y.

Vers. 25, 26.—*God's goodness to the hopeful and the patient.* God's goodness is one thing; that it should be made manifest to men so that they may get comfort out of it is quite another. Bad men will never see God to be good. Not being good themselves, not having kindly, generous, and unselfish feelings towards others, they can never come to look upon God from the point of view necessary to get a manifestation of his goodness. Hence we notice—

I. HOW GOD'S GOODNESS APPEARS TO THOSE BEHAVING THEMSELVES IN A RIGHT WAY. About the first thing that is required is to believe that God is good, however much his goodness is concealed, and however trying the experiences of life may be. We must not be contented to say, "Peradventure something good will come somehow." But rather let us say, "The manifestation of the goodness will depend on our making ready for it." We must wait. So to speak, we have to take our turn. When the seed is sown, the harvest must be waited for. God could give us certain good things immediately, but not the best things. The child cannot receive the things of the man. The servant can only get his reward when his service is completed, and that in a worthy manner. Then besides waiting there is seeking. There is no proper attitude towards God without a combination of the passive and the active. God has made excellence in true knowledge the result of strenuous, long-continued effort.

II. THE GREAT ATTAINMENT IN ALL TIME OF TROUBLE IS TO HAVE A DUE MINGLING OF HOPE AND PATIENCE. Jehovah can save, if only we have what may be called spiritual presence of mind. If we say, "I must get rid of my troubles *now*, or I shall straightway give up the struggle," then, indeed, the prospect of salvation retires to an immense distance. What is wanted is that we should put all our highest interests in the hand of God, and then go quietly about our daily opportunities of serving him. When the passenger goes on board ship at the beginning of a long voyage he puts complete confidence in the captain, and thus he hopes and quietly waits for the voyage to come to an end. Through all perils of the sea he can only hope and quietly wait, knowing that the master of the vessel is the only one who can guard against the perils. And so in the voyage of life; we cannot shorten it, we cannot determine what its circumstances will be; but we can put ourselves in the hands of the great Guide. He will look after our safety, if we only take heed to our part in the

doing of his work. Let silent waiting be our rule. We are very likely to say foolish things in our criticism of the Divine ways, and therefore it is well to keep silent. But while we are silent we may think a great deal. That is good advice of the psalmist, "Commune with your own heart . . . and be *still*." It is through inward questionings and discontent with received traditions that we are to get at the comfortable truth at last. But if we go on talking we are very likely to discompose and mislead others. The moods in which we are doubting, fearful, and weary, we should do our very best to keep to ourselves.—Y.

Ver. 27.—*The discipline of youth.* Remember how early Jeremiah was called to prophesy. He says at the beginning, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child" (Jer. i. 6). He had to bear the yoke in his youth, and doubtless this did much to fit him for a useful and well-controlled life afterwards. The comparison, of course, is plain. An ox might be put under the yoke when quite young, and then, though the restraint would be irksome for a while, at last the sense of restraint would pass away, and the yoke become second nature; whereas if an ox had never been tried with the yoke until full-grown, the chances were it would not accept it in a docile and serviceable way. There is this difference between the youthful ox and the youthful human being, that the youthful ox is entirely in the hands of his master, while the youthful human being has his own choice. For we do not take the yoke here to mean chiefly the external circumstances of life. The yoke is that which we take upon ourselves, seeing that it is the right and manly thing to do. Self-denial is a yoke. The effort needful in forming right habits is a yoke. The subordination of the present to the future, the lower to the higher, the human to the Divine, is a yoke. Not that we are to leave external circumstances altogether out of the question. Men who had hard times when young have come to be thankful, in after years, for those very hard times. It is better to be an orphan than to be the child of parents who have both the means and the disposition which make them lavishly indulgent. Only bear in mind that external circumstances have not in themselves any disciplining power. The materials of a yoke might be used to make something else. The decision rests with us. One may make a yoke out of prosperity and favourable circumstances, while another so chafes and sulks under adversity as to become worse every day.—Y.

Vers. 31—33.—*God's good purposes in causing pain.* All this is the language of hope and continues naturally what is said in vers. 21 and 24. The existence of present trouble presses upon the heart, but along with it there is the confident assurance of future deliverance. Observe, then, certain admissions, along with the cheering qualifications which accompany them.

I. THE LORD CASTS OFF. There is a discontinuance of the signs of his presence. Enemies get their own way, and, worst of all, the prophets find no vision from the Lord. He is not towards Israel as he used to be. But then, what a qualification comes in! *Not for ever.* Indeed, the casting off only emphasizes the bringing back. The casting off must not be taken too literally. God does not cast off as men do. They cast off and do not wish to bring back, or, if they so wish, they find they are not able. When God casts off, though there is a feeling of separation, and something is lost that is not to be gained by any effort, still the truth remains that in God even the castaway lives and moves and has his being. God casts men off, as it were, that they may realize their weakness and true state, and then, when they make the full discovery, God's hand is stretched out to restore.

II. THE LORD CAUSES GRIEF. Great grief, pain of body and pain of heart, must have come from the casting off. And it is of no use to make nice distinctions between God causing pain and permitting pain. Really we do not know much about the causes of pain, and it may be that we attribute to God much that we ourselves produce. The one clear thing is that God shows forth a multitude of mercies. To most of us a multitude of mercies came before there were any pains at all, and the mercies remain through the pains, even though at times they be greatly eclipsed. We may be wrong in attributing the infliction of pain to God, hampered as we too often are by the conceptions of earlier ages. But we can never be wrong in glorifying God for the multitude of his mercies. We may spoil and misuse the mercies and thus

make pain, but the mercies we could not get for ourselves. Our very wrong-doing makes fresh mercies to arise in view. They are many, and each one of them is a great deep of love and wisdom.

III. THE LORD AFFLICTS THE CHILDREN OF MEN. This is but saying what is already said. The new thing is the qualification. He does not do it *willingly*. The distinction is plain between injury inflicted with malice and injury inflicted with reluctance. There have been, and, alas! there still are, too many who put all their heart into the hurting of others. Their very end is to cause pain; whereas the end God has in view is to remove the causes of pain. The surgeon does not inflict pain willingly—he inflicts it because he cannot help it; and thus he welcomes and utilizes to the full the agent which brings unconsciousness while he performs his operation.—Y.

Vers. 40—42.—*Approaching God in sincerity.* I. THE ASCERTAINING OF OUR TRUE STATE. Such is the exhortation of ver. 40. The talk of complaining people is generally the hasty outbreak of superficial thought—if, indeed, such loose operations of the mind are worthy to be called thought at all. Searching is above all things needful. Beneath the surface with which we are only too easily contented there are deep possibilities of good and evil. Note the figure here employed. We are in a way—further advanced to-day than we were yesterday. There is no standing still. This way we are urged to search and try—asking whither it goes, who are our predecessors, our leaders, our companions. Then note the result of all our searching and testing. The way is one in which God is not. He walks in quite another way, and therefore we must turn to him. Only one result of a real searching is deemed possible. The man without God who yet concludes that all is right, has in truth left the most important matters unexplored.

II. THE RETURN TO GOD MUST BE A REAL RETURN. There had, perhaps, been abundant lifting up of the hands on the part of many, with no lifting of the heart. But many more had not even lifted up the hands. We must not say that posture and gesture are mere trifles. To God, of course, the mere gesture in itself can matter nothing, but from its associations it may matter a great deal. Prayer to the unseen and spiritual One is such a difficult thing that we may welcome every aid. Still, the great matter is to lift up the heart. Lift it up—filled with gratitude, humility, repentance, submissiveness.

III. A SUGGESTION OF THE GREAT DIFFICULTY YET TO BE OVERCOME. God has not pardoned. On one side there is transgression and rebellion; on the other side, God angry with all this. And what is wanted is that Israel should see transgression as transgression, rebellion as rebellion. Here we are amid the confusion of life, and we do not see that for all the worst way in which that confusion affects us we are ourselves responsible. With a humble and repentant heart, taking continual cognizance of God's righteous will, we could ride as in an ark over that deluge which overwhelms others. But with pride and selfishness in our hearts we are strong against all ameliorating forces. We will not come to God that in him we may have first pardon and then safety, peace, and blessing.—Y.

Ver. 51.—*The eye and the life.* "Mine eye affecteth mine heart." More correctly, "Mine eye paineth my soul, or my life;" that is, what I see, so melancholy is it, that it preys on my mind and undermines my health. Note—

I. THE EFFECT OF THE SENSES ON THE LIFE. The eye is more than an optical instrument. The effect produced by the image on the retina depends upon who it is that sees and what it is that he sees. Age, education, peculiarities of experience, will make all the difference. The very exercising of the senses was evidently intended to give pleasure. There is correspondence between the eye and the beautiful and sublime in nature; between the ear and melodious and harmonious sounds; and yet some peculiar experience may interpose, so that there shall no longer be beauty in the beautiful, melody in the melodious. What we *get* from the exercise of our senses will depend upon what we *bring*. The prophet saw desolation all around him where once there had been crowded and prosperous life. What could he do but feel as if a broken heart would be the end of his thoughts? But the spoilers would look at the scene differently, for to them it was the place of enrichment and triumph.

II. COMPENSATIONS FOR THE LOSS OF SENSE. Loss of vision is a serious matter to one whose intellect is full of life and activity. So Milton seems to have felt, judging from his touching references to his blindness in his poetry. But this makes it all the more needful to recollect the other side. The blind have exemptions from some pains. They do not see the painful sights of the streets: the drunkard, the ragged beggars, the weary faces—wearied with incessant struggling for a position or a livelihood. They can guess much of the trouble of the world, but many of the manifestations of that trouble they only know when they are told. We do well to keep in mind and rightly estimate the compensations for natural losses.

III. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE RIGHT USE OF OUR NATURAL POWERS. The expression of the prophet here indicates that he was in the right way. To have looked on such a scene with indifference or only mild regret would have argued a very wrong state of mind indeed. Surely in the judgment the question to many will be, "What use did you make of your eyesight? Did you gather up impressions which made you feel how deep is the spiritual sickness of the world, how certain it is that only Christ can make the world better? And further, did you lend practical help to bring men within reach of the saving power of Christ?" To this extent it will be better in the day of judgment for many blind than for those who have gone through the smitten world with both eyes open and yet as if they did not see.—Y.

Ver. 55.—*Jeremiah calling out of the dungeon.* This is no mere figure for a great extremity, as we are made to feel when we read ch. xxxviii. of the prophecies. It was not from amid mere restraint that the prophet cried, but from miry depths, most perilous, painful, and disgusting. Note—

I. THE PUTTING INTO THE DUNGEON. God does not stretch forth his hand to prevent his servants from being put into such dreadful circumstances. He looks on while they are haled to prison and even to death. For a lesson has to be taught with regard to the limitations of human power. Jeremiah's enemies might say to him, while down in the miry pit, "Where is now thy God?" but this was because they estimated God's favour to men according to the presence or absence of certain outward things. God's favour is not shown by preserving us in certain external possessions. Even life may have to be yielded for his sake. God does not interfere miraculously, even with the conduct of wicked men, unless there is some very special reason. What he says is, "You shall really be safe whatever men may do." He who allowed his Son to be put to death, did then open wide, so that no man can shut it, the gate that leads to eternal life.

II. THE TAKING OUT OF THE DUNGEON. This was in answer to prayer. And the prayer came from a spirit of trust that no gloom and discomfort of the pit could destroy. If Jeremiah had allowed himself to say that his conjunction with Jehovah had been a mere delusion, then he might have been left in the pit. And even with all his faith he might have been left in the pit. But then there would have been a clear assurance that death was better than life. And, indeed, it is probable that, if God had allowed his servant to go out of the world at the hands of his enemies, he might have been spared a great deal of pain and sorrow. What is to be looked to in these matters is, not the present ease of the individual, but the best way in which his life can be used for the good of men and the glory of God. Prisons are no prisons, pits are no pits, if God chooses to give to his servants liberty and continue to them their natural life. In one way or another he brings his servants out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay.—Y.

Vers. 60—66.—*Jeremiah and his enemies.* I. THE PROCEEDINGS OF THESE ENEMIES. The spirit of vengeance is in their hearts. Jeremiah has spoken steadily against them what Jehovah had laid on him to say. They know the language in which they have been described. It was, of course, just the thing to be expected that bad men should cherish vengeful purposes. And Jeremiah had to bear the consciousness of this—the very painful consciousness that he was the cause, however innocent, of showing up the worst passions in the hearts of others. This spirit of vengeance manifested itself in two ways. 1. *Reproach.* He was called all sorts of names, held up to derision and execration. He indeed had to reproach, but then there was a measure and dignity in

the words he employed. His reproaches were meant to call the reproached ones to repentance. But the reproaches from his enemies meant immediate danger to him—danger from the populace on the one hand, and the authorities on the other. 2. *Plotting.* Society was just in the state when plots could be carried out with success. Jeremiah did not make one enemy or a few enemies, but many. They were wicked men, and doubtless had subordinates ready to hand for any knavery that was going on.

II. JEREMIAH'S BELIEF THAT GOD'S EYE WAS UPON THESE ENEMIES. "Thou hast seen." It is a great matter to feel that God has his eye upon all human wickedness. We may suffer greatly from it, and yet see only a very small part of what he sees. We are for ever running into extremes, exaggerating or palliating, magnifying the reality or else diminishing it. We look at things too much in reference to our individual selves, and as they concern us. But God sees things as they truly are, in all their relations and possibilities. Some things are worse than we think them, others better. And so we are enabled to feel that all wickedness is kept within comparatively innocuous limits. The mischief only reaches the outside of what is attacked, for the same God who watches the wicked watches the good at the same time.

III. THE PRAYER OF JEREMIAH. (Vers. 64—66.) The vehemence, the almost savageness of these words staggers us. But then, we are not to expect the gentleness of a Christian from an old Jewish prophet. We are not required to justify every petition of God's servants. We have to distinguish between the prophet taken out of himself by inspiration and the man of like passions with ourselves, who has to pass through a long discipline before he can pray as he ought to pray. We may feel here that a silent waiting upon God would have been better than any imprecations of vengeance, and yet, at the same time, we must acquit Jeremiah of anything like personal malice. He wished that the wicked might be recompensed *according* to the work of their hands. The wicked wished Jeremiah to be treated according to the ferocity of their own hearts.—Y.

Ver. 63.—*The music of the wicked.* I. THE PLEASURES OF BAD MEN. Musical tastes are, of course, irrespective of moral character. There are certain original qualities both in eye and ear which remain and demand satisfaction, whatever the moral character may become. If a person of musical tastes becomes a Christian, than his Christianity may be the better for his music, or possibly, if he is not careful, it may become worse. On the other hand, if a person of musical tastes becomes an utterly selfish and self-indulgent man, then music will become the instrument of all that is bad. And so we find that great excellence in arts has been found intermingled with the grossest profligacy. Men are not necessarily better because intellect and tastes have been cultivated. The only power which, allowed to work, must make men better is the Holy Spirit of God, and where he is working, such things as music and pictures may be welcomed to give additional beauty.

II. A MALIGNANT TENDENCY IN THE PLEASURES OF BAD MEN. Bad men must ever be hindered and thwarted by the good, and when the bad get any sort of temporary triumph over the good, they will make it a cause of exultation. To some degraded and embittered hearts great is the pleasure of giving pain. This is the peril of satirists. Great intellectual gifts and powers of literary expression are concentrated on a few polished verses, which pain the subject of them all his life. There is no diviner instrument than pain as a means to an end, but surely that heart is set on fire of hell that can make pain an end in itself.—Y.

Ver. 64.—*The principle of retribution.* Whatever the feelings in the prophet's heart may have been, at all events he lays down something like a principle on which he expects God will act in dealing with the wicked. It is not because he hates them, or because they have hurt *him*, that he wants them to suffer, but because they have done wrong. Further, he wants to see them dealt with according to the wrong they have done. Perhaps we ought to look at this question of recompense apart from its being made a matter of prayer. One would not like to think of it as a desirable petition in any prayer, that the wicked might be dealt with according to their wickedness. God's law will secure all that is necessary, and we may trust the working of that law. Men will be recompensed according to the work of their hand, only this expression, "the

work of their hand," must be taken with a very liberal meaning. What the heart of the wicked purposes, his hand generally carries out to some extent, and yet many qualifications must be made. To go literally according to the work of the hand would be to deal too severely in some instances, too leniently in others. We have to infer the heart from the hand, and our calculation of motives is a very rough-and-ready one. Human law, trying to be just and adequate, is not unfrequently unjust and cruel. We are so under the influence of things seen and temporal that a punishment only looks real when we can see it in operation, manifest to all. Our confidence should rather be that God has so made things by their very nature that a wicked heart becomes a miserable one. Whatsoever a man sows, he reaps. But then there is also another thing to be considered, and that is that God makes room for repentance. He who sows repentance will reap forgiveness and renewal of heart. We cannot undo the works of our hands, but God can bring good out of evil.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUFFERINGS OF JERUSALEM; NO CLASS IS EXEMPT. EDMOM'S TRIUMPHING.

Ver. 1.—**How is the gold become dim! . . . the stones of the sanctuary, etc.** "Alas for the sad sights of the capture of Jerusalem! The most fine gold has lost its brilliance now that the fire of Nebuzar-adan (2 Kings xxv. 9) has passed over it, and the precious stones, consecrated to Jehovah, have been cast out into the open street!" Not that the latter part of this description can have corresponded to literal fact. None of the hallowed jewels would have been treated with such indifference. The expression must be as figurative as the parallel one, "to cast pearls before swine," in Matt. vii. 6. The precious stones are the "sons of Zion," who are compared to "fine gold" in ver. 2, precisely as they are in Zech. ix. 16 (comp. ver. 13, "Thy sons, O Zion") to "the stones of a crown." They are called "stones of the sanctuary," in allusion, perhaps, to the precious stones employed in the decoration of the temple according to 1 Chron. xxix. 2 and 2 Chron. iii. 6. But we may also translate *hallowed stones*, which better suits the figurative use of the phrase. Those, however, who adopt the literal interpretation, explain "the stones of the sanctuary" of the hewn stones of the fabric of the temple, which are described as "costly" in 1 Kings v. 17. But how can even a poet have represented the enemy as carrying these stones out and throwing them down in the street? On the other hand, in an earlier lamentation we are expressly told that the young children "fainted for hunger in the top of every street" (ch. ii. 19).

Ver. 2.—**The precious sons of Zion; i.e.** not merely the nobility, but the people of Judah in general. It is needless (as the literal interpreters of ver. 1 are compelled to do) to alter *U'né* (sons) into *bâté* (houses)

or *'abné* (stones). The comparison of men to potters' vessels is familiar to the Hebrew writers (comp. Isa. xxii. 24; xlv. 9).

Ver. 3.—**The sea-monsters; rather, the jackals (*tannin*, the Aramaic form of the plural for *tannim*).** Cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. So in Job (xxxix. 14—16) it is said of the ostrich that she "leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers." The description is literally true, if we add a detail not mentioned by the sacred poet. The eggs destined for hatching are deposited in a nest-hole scratched in the sand, but there are other eggs laid, not in the sand, but near it, to all appearance forsaken. These eggs, however, are not exposed in simple stupidity, though they do often fall victims to violence. "They are intended for the nourishment of the newly hatched young ones, which in barren districts would at first find difficulty in procuring food" (Houghton, 'Natural History of the Ancients,' p. 198).

Ver. 4.—**Breaketh it unto them.** The Jewish bread, consisting of round or oval cakes (comp. 1 Kings xix. 6).

Ver. 5.—**They that did feed delicately, etc.** *i.e.* luxuriously. The rendering has been disputed, but without sufficient ground. "They that did eat at dainties," *i.e.* pick at their dainty food, is forced. The Aramaic mark of the accusative need not surprise us in Lamentations (comp. Jer. xl. 2). **Brought up in scarlet; rather, borne upon scarlet; i.e.** resting upon scarlet-covered couches. The poet speaks of adults, not of children.

Ver. 6.—**The punishment of the iniquity . . . the punishment of the sin.** This is a possible rendering (see Gen. iv. 13; Zech. xiv. 19), but the renderings, "the iniquity," "the sin," are preferable, and yield a finer meaning, viz. that the punishment having been so

severe, the guilt must have been in proportion. And no hands stayed on her. To make the picture of sudden destruction more vivid, the poet alludes to the ordinary circumstances of the capture of a city, the "hands" of a fierce soldiery ever "whirling" a destroying sword. Comp. "the swinging of the hand of Jehovah Sabaoth, which he swingeth against it" (Isa. xix. 16).

Ver. 7.—*Her Nazarites*; rather, *her eminent ones* (just as Joseph is called *n'zir ekháv*, "eminent among his brethren"). The rendering of the Authorized Version is lexically possible, but is intrinsically improbable. The Nazarites constituted too small a portion of the Jewish people to receive so prominent a place in the elegy. Rubies; rather, corals. Their polishing was of sapphire; literally, *their shape was (like) a sapphire*. But the point in which the sapphire is compared to the bodies of the princes is evidently not the outline of its form, but its gleaming brilliant appearance; so that the Authorized Version is substantially correct.

Ver. 8.—*Their visage is blacker than a coal*; rather, *their appearance is darker than blackness*—one of the hyperboles which seem to indicate that the poem was not written at the very moment of the calamity described (comp. Job xxx. 30). Not known in the streets. Another point of contact with the Book of Job (ii. 12). Their skin, etc. Again we must compare the lamentations of Job (xix. 20; xxx. 30). Ps. cii. 5 may also be quoted; for the second half of the verse is too short unless we insert "to my skin" before "to my flesh."

Ver. 9.—The miserable condition just now described maintains a sad pre-eminence even when compared with the fate of the slain in battle. And why? For these pine away (literally, *melt away*), stricken through (with the pangs of hunger). The Authorized Version takes the subject of the second half of the verse to be the famished. But it is, perhaps, more natural to take it to be those wounded in a battle, to whom the expression, "stricken through," is actually applied in ch. xxxvii. 10; li. 4. In this case the line had better be rendered thus: *For those pine away, stricken through, leaving the fruits of the field* (which they no longer need). The word rendered "pine away" would be particularly applicable to those who perished from loss of blood.

Ver. 10.—*The pitiful women*. Strange contrast between the compassionate nature of woman (comp. Isa. xlix. 15) and the dread horrors of this moral as well as physical catastrophe (comp. note on ch. ii. 20).

Ver. 11.—*Hath accomplished* means here, not "hath finished," but "hath poured out in full measure," as in the song of Moses Jehovah declares that he will "spend his

arrows upon them"—the Hebrew verb is the same as here (Deut. xxxii. 23). To show the completeness of Zion's ruin it is compared to a fire which hath devoured the (very) foundations thereof.

Ver. 12.—*The kings of the earth, etc.* And yet Jerusalem had been taken twice before its capture by Nebuchadnezzar (see 1 Kings xiv. 26; 2 Kings xiv. 13). How is the language of the second part to be accounted for? It will help us to an answer if we observe that the later Jews seem to have acquired an exorbitant confidence in their national future ever since the Book of Deuteronomy had become as it were canonical in the reign of Josiah. "The temple of Jehovah" was ever in their mouths (Jer. vii. 9), and the strong outward regard paid to the directions of the Law seemed to them to justify their believing in the fulfilment of its promises. And, in fact, the grand deliverance of Jerusalem in the reign of Hezekiah might, even without this misunderstanding of Deuteronomy, have inspired a firm faith in the security of Jerusalem. A sacred poet had already, on the occasion of that deliverance, declared of the holy city that "God upholdeth the same for ever" (Ps. xlviii. 8), and also (in vers. 4, 5) used the same hyperbole as the author of this lamentation to express the wide-reaching interest felt in the fortunes of Jerusalem.

Ver. 13.—*For the sins of her prophets, etc.* Instead of connecting this verse by a comma with the following, we should rather view it as a unit in itself, and understand at the beginning, "All this hath happened." The sins of the prophets and priests are mentioned together by Jeremiah (vi. 13; xxiii. 11), as well as by Isaiah (xxviii. 7). But we are nowhere else told that the spiritual leaders of the people, in these closing years of the Jewish state, were guilty of shedding innocent blood, unless this is to be inferred from the incident related in Jer. xxvi. 7, etc.

Ver. 14.—*They; i.e. the prophets and priests. Wandered as blind men.* The leaders of the people are blinded by ignorance, for they know not the only true way of averting calamity, and by passion, for they have not that "eye" of the soul (Matt. vi. 22, 23) which alone enables a man to see the good and the right course for himself individually. The "wandering," or, rather, "staggering" (comp. Ps. cvii. 27, Authorized Version), however, may also refer to the panic-stricken condition of those self-deceived deceivers when overtaken by God's punishment; comp. "wine of reeling" (Authorized Version, "astonishment"), l's. lx. 3; also the prophecies in Deut. xxviii. 28, 29; Jer. xxiii. 12. The doubt is whether

"have wandered" refers to some period before the final catastrophe, or to the consternation produced by that awful surprise. The latter view seems the more probable. **They have polluted themselves, etc.** Their acts of violence have been continued to the very end of their term of power. Their garments are still stained with blood when the summons to depart into exile reaches them.

Ver. 15.—They cried unto them, etc. As they leave the city they are pursued by the maledictions of those whom they have oppressed. It is **unclean**. The cry with which the leper was directed to warn off passengers, lest they should become infected (Lev. xiii. 45). There may be an allusion to this, but, though commonly accepted, the view is not certain, as the "leper" in the present case is not the person who raises the cry, but those who meet him. **When they fled away and wandered.** The clause is difficult. If the text is correct, Keil's explanation may perhaps pass, "When they fled away, (there) also they wandered," alluding to the "wandering" ascribed to them with a somewhat different shade of meaning in the preceding verse. In any case there ought to be a fuller stop than a comma after "touch not," which words close the first of the two parallel lines of which the verse consists. But very probably "when" (Hebrew, *ki*) is an intrusion, and we should begin the second line thus: "They fled, they also wandered about." **They said among the heathen, etc.** Even in their place of exile they found no rest (comp. Deut. xxviii. 65). This is better than understanding "the heathen" (literally, *the nations*) to mean "the Chaldean army," and the place of sojourn prohibited to be Jerusalem.

Ver. 16.—Hath divided them; i.e. hath scattered them, like "I will divide them in Jacob" (Gen. xlix. 7).

Ver. 17.—As for us, our eyes, etc. ; rather (correcting the reading of the first word), *Our eyes were still wasting away (as we looked) for our help in vain.* To the very last the Jews leaned on "that broken reed," Egypt (Isa. xxxvi. 6); how vain that hope would be Jeremiah had already told them (Jer. xxxvii. 7, 8). **In our watching; i.e.** earnestly and continually; or, *on our watch-tower.*

Ver. 18.—They hunt our steps, etc. Realistic attempts to explain this line have not been wanting, but seem unsuccessful. The Chaldeans were either within the city or without. If within, they would not need literally to "hunt the steps" of the Jews; if without, they had not war-engines

adequate to shooting the inhabitants at some distance. Probably the expressions are metaphorical; they are similar to those used in ch. iii. 52, immediately after which we meet with such a purely poetical phrase as, "They have cut off my life in the pit [Authorized Version, 'dungeon'], and cast a stone upon me," (see note on ch. iii. 52—56).

Ver. 19.—Swifter than the eagles of the heaven. Jeremiah, or his imitator, repeats the figure which occurs in Jer. iv. 13. There is probably no special reference to the circumstances of the capture of Zedekiah (Jer. xxxix. 4, 5); the escape of many fugitives would be similarly cut off.

Ver. 20.—The breath of our nostrils. The theocratic king was the direct representative of the people with Jehovah, and to him the promises of 2 Sam. vii. were conveyed. He was also, in a sense, the representative of Jehovah with the people. His throne was "the throne of Jehovah" (1 Chron. xxix. 23). A similar conception of the king was generally prevalent in antiquity. Most of all among the Egyptians; but, even in imperial Rome, we find Seneca (*De Clementiâ*, i. 4, quoted by Archbishop Secker, in Blayney) declaring, "Ille (Princeps) est spiritus vitalis, quem hæc tot millia (civium) trahunt." For the Jewish, or Old Testament, conception, see Ps. xxviii. 8, where (as the Septuagint shows) "his people" and "his anointed" are used almost synonymously. **Was taken in their pits.** A figure from hunting (comp. ch. i. 13; Ps. vii. 15). The fate of Zedekiah is referred to. **Among the heathen; better, among the nations.** The rendering of the Authorized Version suggests that the Jews hoped to preserve at least a qualified independence under their own king, even after their captivity.

Ver. 21.—Rejoice and be glad. An ironical address to Edom, who is bidden to enjoy her malicious triumph, but warned that it will be but short-lived. How ungenerously the Edomites behaved at the fall of Jerusalem we are repeatedly told (see on Jer. xlix. 7). **In the land of Uz.** As to the situation of Uz, see on Jer. xxv. 20. **The cup; one of Jeremiah's images** (see Jer. xxv. 15).

Ver. 22.—The punishment of thine iniquity or, thy guilt (see on ver. 6). The prophet speaks with the confidence of faith, and sees the guilt wiped away, and the danger of a future captivity removed by the purification which the Jewish national character has undergone. **He will discover thy sins.** God is said to "cover over" sins when he remits their punishment, and to "discover" them when he punishes them (comp. Job xx. 27, 28).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Fine gold dimmed.* Gold is a precious metal, partly because it is less liable to corrode than other metals. It will not rust like iron nor even tarnish like silver. For fine gold to be dimmed is for it to undergo exceptionally severe treatment. Such was the treatment of the gold of the temple after the Chaldean siege of Jerusalem. Josephus describes how the gold glittered on the temple walls in his day; and doubtless the effect of the earlier temple's splendour must have been similarly dazzling. But when covered with the dust of a ruined city, smoked with its fires, neglected and defiled, this fine gold would lose its brilliancy. In the dimming of the brightness of the temple mourning patriots saw an illustration of the shame that had come over the nation, and especially of the degradation of the noblest of the citizens of Jerusalem. But whenever rich gifts and graces of God are corrupted we may echo the same lament, "How is the gold become dim!"

I. FINE GOLD IS DIMMED WHEN NOBLE GIFTS OF NATURE ARE PUT TO BASE USES. Nature is wealthy with precious things that in themselves and in the eye of God are purely good. The beauty of earth and sea, the wonder of natural forces, the delicate organizations of plant and animal, all things created by the hand of God, are fine and fair and worthy. And these things are given us as our heritage. Science opens to our use many a secret treasure-house. Art and manufactures result from the appropriation of natural resources. But how often are they degraded by being turned to the service of evil, in constructing instruments of war, in ministering to luxurious self-indulgence, in pampering intemperate appetites, etc.!

II. FINE GOLD IS DIMMED WHEN RARE TALENTS ARE WASTED OR ABUSED. Intellectual ability, artistic taste, gifts for music, philosophy or science, stored knowledge, refined culture, natural genius, and educational acquisitions are like fine gold. Yet this gold may be dimmed: 1. *When the gifts and acquirements are idly neglected.* Noble promises disappoint the beholder with a miserable failure. Even so coarse a sin as drunkenness has its victims among the sons of genius. When sensuality, sordid love of money, self-satisfied conventionality, feverish worldly ambition, or any other low pursuit draws the soul away from the high vocation marked out for it by its own peculiar gifts, the fine gold is dimmed. 2. *When the talents are prostituted to low ends.* The gold may be used, but, instead of adorning a temple, it decorates a voluptuary's banquet-hall. The evil use of it degrades the precious metal. Great endowments are too often similarly degraded. They are used for ill. The painter, unlike Fra Angelico, who, working on his knees and for God, made the exercise of his art an act of worship, forsakes his ideal to please the low tastes of his patrons. The writer neglects truth to flatter the popular cries of the day. The philosophic genius absorbs his mental gifts in mercenary calculations. Thus the fine gold is dimmed.

III. FINE GOLD IS DIMMED WHEN YOUTH IS ILL SPENT. For youth is the golden age of life. If not in liberty and ease, for the yoke must then be fitted to the shoulders, still, in freshness, vigour, and opportunity, it is like the morning going forth in its strength, bright as gold. But when the promise of childhood is belied by the performance of manhood, how is the fine gold become dim! Young men who have not yet lost the bloom of first innocence should beware of the fatal temptations which threaten to cast the beauty and purity of their souls into the mire. We all have an opportunity to begin life well. Some fine gold is then bestowed upon every soul. Let us see to it in these early years that the treasure of a good conscience before God and man is not lost.

IV. FINE GOLD IS DIMMED WHEN A CHRISTIAN FALLS INTO SIN. The graces of the spiritual life are as finest gold. God counts his people as his jewels (Mal. iii. 17). Rare, and bright, and beautiful, glorious and golden in the sunlight of God's love, is the character of true saintliness. There is no beauty comparable to the beauty of holiness. But alas! when the saint trails his white robe in the foul ways of sin and casts the pearls that adorn him to the swine, how is all the glory and beauty degraded! Nothing looks more repulsive than a fine garment besmirched with filth; it is far worse than the beggar's rags, to which dirt seems natural. The fallen Christian defiles himself and dims his gold and brings shame on the Name of Christ by his sin.

V. FINE GOLD IS DIMMED WHEN THE CHURCH IS CORRUPTED. Like Jerusalem of old, the bride of the Lamb should be all-glorious with grace and goodness. The golden perfection of humanity should characterize this society and make it a worthy kingdom of heaven upon earth. But how often has the fine gold been dimmed, in pagan additions to primitive Christianity, in superstitions of the dark ages, in cruelties and immoralities of the Middle Ages, in Catholic prejudice and Protestant bitterness, in the arid rationalism of Germany and the worldly conventionalism of England!

Vers. 3, 4.—*The violation of maternal instincts.* I. MATERNAL INSTINCTS ARE AMONG THE MOST WIDESPREAD AND DEEP-SEATED ORDINANCES OF PROVIDENCE. 1. *Widespread.* They are shared by the lower animals as well as by human beings. The fiercest monsters are careful of their cubs. The most stupid know how to tend and rear their offspring. Roaming jackals of the desert have their lairs where they give suck to their little ones. The varied fields of animal life all bear evidence to this wonderful instinct. It is seen among all races of men. Brutal degraded classes, untrained savages, fierce warlike people, all possess it. 2. *Deep-seated.* These instincts are far deeper than any merely social tendency. They are strong and vital as appetites. The mother feels for her child as for part of herself. Many desires and habits will be abandoned before these instincts will fail. They outlive virtue and principle and dwell still in the vicious.

II. THE VIOLATION OF MATERNAL INSTINCTS IS ONE OF THE MOST HORRIBLE EVENTS. 1. In proportion to the profound and almost universal character of these instincts is the *outrage on nature* itself that the violation of them involves. We judge of an influence by the forces it has to overcome. It must be very strong if it can conquer great resistance. To conquer such resistance as that offered by the maternal instincts the evil influence must be powerful indeed. Therefore the violation of these instincts must be a proof of a most exceptionally energetic force of evil. Lady Macbeth must have sold herself to a very demon of ambition before she could unsex herself enough to say—

“I have given suck, and know
How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck’d my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash’d the brains out, had I so sworn, etc.”

2. Moreover, the *fatal effect* of the violation of maternal instincts is another proof of the terrible evils of the corruption that can make it possible. These instincts are essential to the very continuance of life on our globe. Creatures that come into the world with so much feebleness as is the case with human beings would perish were they not protected in infancy by the wonderful passionate care of maternity.

III. THAT MUST BE A FRIGHTFUL CALAMITY WHICH CAN LEAD TO THE VIOLATION OF MATERNAL INSTINCTS. Such was the calamity of the siege of Jerusalem. Then hunger and despair led parents to neglect their children. The worst mad violation of maternal instincts had been anticipated in a siege of Samaria, when a mother devoured her own child (2 Kings vi. 24—29). Such things have been done since. They force us to realize the barbarous cruelty of war which some would hide beneath its foolish pomp and pageantry. They also make us see the evil of extreme misery. There is a point beyond which suffering ceases to be beneficial. It then becomes a positive curse. It tears up the very roots of the most precious growths of nature. It drives to worse moral degradation than luxury tempts to, though in the eyes of a merciful God the guilt cannot be regarded with so much wrath where the misery that urges to it is so pitiable. Therefore it should be the work of the Christian philanthropist to remove physical wretchedness, not only for its own sake, but also as one of the first means for preventing crime and vice.

Ver. 5.—*Reverses of fortune.* I. REVERSES OF FORTUNE ARE NOT UNCOMMON. It is not only in the rare case of a protracted siege, when at last rich and poor both suffer from the severities of famine, that we may see some who once fed delicately wandering desolate in the street. All who have gone down into the haunts of the very poor and have investigated the severest cases of wretchedness know how many of the most abject

paupers have enjoyed wealth and luxury in former years. Even in an orderly society such as our own the number of these violent reverses of fortune is appalling. Let no one boast of his assured comfort.

II. REVERSES OF FORTUNE ARE MOST PAINFUL. We rarely miss what we have never known. There is, therefore, much mitigation to the hardness of the lot of those who are born in the most miserable circumstances, arising from the fact that they have never experienced anything better. But the greatest distress is in coming down from affluence, comfort, and honour to poverty, distress, and shame.

III. REVERSES OF FORTUNE ARE FREQUENTLY MERITED. We must beware of the error of Job's friends. The innocent may and often do suffer from a most grievous succession of calamities. Still, those three men had much to say for their view. Their mistake was in making it universal in its application. It is rarely that the seed of the righteous man has to beg for bread. Good men may have a humble lot and sometimes may have to suffer considerable loss. But usually the greatest degradation and misery follows the folly or sin of the sufferer. Probably the one vice of intemperance is the cause of more than half the cases of the very worst reverses of fortune.

IV. REVERSES OF FORTUNE SHOULD EXCITE PECULIAR COMMISERATION. The happy and prosperous should look out for such cases. The most sad among them are often the hardest to find. They hide in shame and misery. Especially when the degradation is moral it becomes a Christian work to seek to restore the fallen. The Son of man came, not so much to preserve the prosperous nor to raise those who had never known better things, as to seek and to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel, *i.e.* those who had once been privileged and had fallen from their first estate.

V. REVERSES OF FORTUNE DO NOT JUSTIFY LOSS OF FAITH IN GOD. They tempt men that way. "Curse God, and die," a voice whispers into the ear of the despairing man. But it is the voice of folly as well as of sin. For: 1. *We must expect to be governed in many mysteries by the great and all-wise God.* It may be rational to disbelieve in the existence of God; but it cannot be rational to believe that he is, and yet to doubt his wisdom or goodness. 2. *The reverse is often due to the fault of the sufferer.* 3. *It may be overruled for his good.*

VI. REVERSES OF FORTUNE MAY BE REVERSED. So was it in Job's case; the end of the patriarch's life was even brighter than the beginning of it. 1. This may happen *on earth.* In suffering we are too ready to lose heart. We paint the future in dark shades manufactured solely from present experiences. But there are more resources in the world than we dream of. 2. It will surely come *in the next world* to all who trust in God. Then the second reverse will be as joyous as the first was miserable. For the same principle will apply in both cases, and the great change will heighten the sense of the new condition. Happy are they who, in Christ, though suffering and despised, are looking forward to this glorious reverse of their present dark fortunes.

Ver. 12.—*Incredible calamities.* Not only had Jerusalem believed herself invincible, but she had been so long preserved in safety and so signally delivered in extreme danger, as in the Assyrian invasion when Hezekiah was king, that neighbouring nations had come to look upon her as secure from harm, and to regard such calamities as those which came in the wake of the Chaldean invasion as incredible. There are men whose condition in the eyes of the world is as safe as that of Jerusalem was to the kings of the earth, and who nevertheless may fall into a greater ruin than the overthrow of Jerusalem.

I. THE CAUSES OF POPULAR DISBELIEF IN APPROACHING CALAMITIES. 1. *Self-confidence.* Jerusalem believed herself to be safe. Proud in the favour of Heaven, she scorned to fear danger. This attitude of assurance impressed her neighbours. They thought there must be good ground for such loud bravado, or they did not think but simply acquiesced in the opinion of herself which the boastful city published abroad. Thus does the world often take men at their own estimates of themselves, not troubling to test these partial verdicts. 2. *Previous security.* Jerusalem seemed to bear a charmed life. She had braved many a fierce storm. The enemy had swept up to her very gates. But there they had been flung back by mysterious interventions of Providence. So the world believes in the prosperity of the prosperous. She indolently takes for granted that what has been will be.

II. THE FOLLY OF POPULAR DISBELIEF IN APPROACHING CALAMITIES. 1. *Insufficient evidence.* The grounds of this notion are irrational. It is foolish to take people at their self-valuation; but it is more foolish for the people thus accepted to take the popular voice, which is only the echo of their own vanity, as a justification for it. And when the past security engenders confidence, they who do not know what subsequent changes of circumstances have taken place cannot reasonably give security for its continuance. 2. *Ignorance of the real sources of prosperity and danger.* The heathen kings knew not the God of Israel. They knew nothing of the secret of Jerusalem's safety in the days of her prosperity, nor did they see the sure presages of her ruin. Worldly men, who do not understand wherein the safety of a soul consists, are poor judges of that soul's prospects.

III. THE DANGER OF POPULAR DISBELIEF IN APPROACHING CALAMITY. Though it is foolish it is influential, because it is readily accepted as an agreeable solace to fear. Thus Jerusalem was deluded by the flattery of her neighbours. When there is a general opinion that all is well it is hard for individual souls to see and feel their danger. In a condition of worldly ease the prophet of repentance is opposed by the mocking indifference of popular opinion, and souls are lulled to sleep with a hollow security that says, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. The antidote to this dangerous anodyne of conscience must be sought in the Word of God, which speaks of judgment, and warns us to flee from the wrath to come for refuge where only safety can be found, not in the flattery of our neighbours, but at the cross of Christ.

Ver. 14.—*Blindness.* The prophets and priests are so dismayed that they wander through the streets of Jerusalem like blind men. No doubt the confused movement of these men as they run to and fro, not knowing whither to turn, is the chief idea in the mind of the poet. But the image of blindness by which he illustrates it is suggestive of the secret of their confusion. They were, indeed, as blind men because spiritual blindness had seized on them.

I. THE MEN WHO WERE BLINDED. Priests and prophets. 1. Blindness would be *least excusable* in these men. They were not like the illiterate, nor even like the mass of the laity. Priests were trained in traditional lore, and prophets had access to new fountains of truth. 2. Blindness would be *most dangerous* in these men. They assumed the position of "men of light and leading." The world was made to believe that whoever else might be in darkness these teachers were fully illuminated. Their blindness was most fatal because they were "blind leaders of the blind."

II. THE CHARACTER OF THEIR BLINDNESS. It was spiritual. These teachers had all their senses and faculties. They could see the standards and chariots and hosts of the invader. They could measure his forces and calculate his movements. They had intellectual as well as physical eyesight. But they could not see the hand of God in the whole transaction. They failed to discern that moral condition of the nation which had called the judgment of Heaven down upon its head. They were quite at sea as to the future. They did not understand the Divine purpose of the chastisement; and they were helpless when called upon to guide their followers in the great emergency. When the wolf broke into the fold the shepherds were hopelessly confounded. So must it be with all unworthy guides. The moment of need will discover their worthlessness.

III. THE CAUSE OF THIS BLINDNESS. Sin (see ver. 13). Priests and prophets had shed the blood of the just. Gross abuse of power and tyrannous violence were iniquities enough to blunt the spiritual vision of the most gifted. This is one of the most terrible fruits of sin. It always tends to deaden conscience and darken the eye of the soul. We must do right if we would see truth. It is not only sensuality, passion, and gross worldliness that debase the soul beyond the power of perceiving higher things, but more spiritual sins—pride, bigotry, self-will, etc.—also blind it. Purity of heart is essential to clearness of vision.

IV. THE EFFECT OF THIS BLINDNESS. "They wandered as blind men in the streets." Darkness of vision leads to confusion in action. We must see clearly that we may walk straightly. A confused conscience will make an uncertain will. Practical truth is not merely a subject for discussion in the seclusion of the study. It is a necessary chart to guide our course by. When the seeing and teaching of this is at fault all life is thrown into helpless disorder.

V. THE CURE FOR THIS BLINDNESS. This is not suggested here. It is not the function of Lamentations to console and heal. But there is a remedy. For Christ came to "open the blind eyes" (Isa. xlii. 7). He is "the Light of the world," and all who follow him "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John viii. 12).

Ver. 15.—Contamination. So horrible is the condition of Jerusalem after the siege that men regard the holy city as an unclean place, like a haunt of lepers or an abode of the dead. They cry, "Go aside! Unclean! Go aside! Go aside!" as they would to one who incautiously approached too near to one of these banned spots. The dread of contamination is a natural testimony to the instinct for purity; but it is often sadly perverted, for while no feeling should be more related to truth and fact, it happens that no feeling is more subject to artificial, conventional regulations. We need to inquire what are the true causes of contamination and how real contamination may be avoided.

I. WHAT ARE THE TRUE CAUSES OF CONTAMINATION? It is uncleanness that defiles. The primitive notion of uncleanness is connected with material things—the dirt that soils a garment, etc. Then disease which is loathsome and offensive, and death with its attendant corruption, are felt to be defiling. But to the soul true defilement can only come from what is morally impure. As Christ teaches, it is internal not external (Luke xi. 38—40). Jerusalem, when in her prosperity she abandoned herself to idolatry and immorality, was more unclean than when she lay in ashes a charnel-house of slaughtered citizens. Yet no man cried, "Unclean!" in the prosperous times. The degradation was thought to be defiling, while the sin which led to it was connived at. This mistake is common in various forms. The criminal with the brand of punishment upon him is shunned, while the far more vicious man who has contrived to keep himself safe is courted. Parents fear the corruption of manners which their children may contract by mingling with social inferiors, and yet permit them to mix with far more corrupt society if only the rank of it be higher than their own. Many people look with contempt on certain kinds of honest business, who will engage in pursuits of very questionable morality without compunction. Thus some regard trade as degrading and betting as gentlemanly. They would be ashamed to be connected with a shop; they have no shame in their connection with the turf. We want a healthier conscience, that will declare no honest pursuit to be dishonourable and no immoral one to be respectable simply because patronized by rank and fashion.

II. HOW IS REAL CONTAMINATION TO BE AVOIDED? Granted that we know what things are defiling and can distinguish them from the objects of conventional ostracism; how are we to behave ourselves in regard to the unclean things? We are to avoid contact with them. But here a difficult question arises. As Christians we are to be the salt of the earth. It is our mission to purify the impure. But if we shun it, how can we change it? If we neglect politics because we see politicians to be acting dishonourably, and business because we wish to avoid tricks of trade, and society because we must escape the corrupting influences of unwholesome amusements and scandalous conversation, shall we not be handing over politics, business, and society to the unchecked influence of evil? The answer to this question seems to be that the departure must be in spirit and from the spirit of those things that are degrading. We are not to flee bodily. We may do so in vain. For the corruption of the world may pursue the hermit to his cell and torment his mind with evil imaginations in the desert. But if we forsake all sympathy with the unclean our soul cannot be touched by it. Thus Christ ate and drank with publicans and sinners and passed through their foul atmosphere without defilement. Especially if the object is to do good we may be sure that the consciousness of a mission and the cleansing influence of Christian charity will prevent contamination. Thus a pure-minded Christian woman is able to go into the haunts of vice on an errand of mercy and return scatheless as the snowdrop that lifts its head from the impure soil.

Ver. 22.—The end of punishment. Here is a gleam of prophetic hope. From doleful lamentations the poet is able to look forward and see the end of the sad desolation of Jerusalem.

I. PUNISHMENT HAS AN END. Nothing is everlasting but God, and the life which God gives and the goodness of that life. Evil, darkness, pain, and death are temporal

phases of being. This may seem to many an unjustifiably dogmatic statement. Text for text we may find passages of Scripture to support it and to contradict it. It is when we take into account the drift of the whole Word of God, the character of God therein revealed and the purposes of punishment and of all dark facts of providence as far as these purposes are made known to us, that we are led more and more to believe in the victory and duration of the blessed and the overthrow and cessation of the evil phases of experience.

II. THE END OF PUNISHMENT IS DETERMINED BY ITS OBJECT. What is the object of punishment? This may be manifold. 1. *It is not the satisfaction of vengeance in One who is wronged.* For (1) such a satisfaction could only be required by sinful human passion, never by the good will of God; and (2) if such a satisfaction were required, it would not be punishment, which is quite another thing. 2. *It is partly the deterring of possible offenders.* In so far as law must be vindicated for the sake of its future observance the punishment must be severe, but not beyond that point. 3. *It is chiefly for the restoration of the offender.* This was the reason given for the terrible calamities that overwhelmed the guilty city of Jerusalem. Human punishment under criminal laws is so far a failure that the primary end of it is rarely achieved. But with God's all-wise government it is held in view and mainly aimed at. Therefore the punishment is called "chastisement." What is required of chastisement is that it should be sufficient. For it to be endless would be to defeat its object. Moreover, it does not require to be measured by the offence alone. Even if it were so measured it need not be everlasting, since no finite being can commit an infinite sin. But it is measured by the change required to be wrought in the guilty person.

III. THE PROSPECT OF THE END OF PUNISHMENT SHOULD HELP US TO BEAR IT. God sends chastisement on earth. And he does not except any from it—at all events he does not except Christians, for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." If there were no hope to the chastised, and punishment were a sign of being cast off for ever by God, we might well sit down in sullen despair. But there is encouragement in the thought that it is temporary, is working our good, and may be lightened and shortened by prompt repentance and patient submission.

IV. THE GUILTY AGENTS OF PUNISHMENT WILL BE PUNISHED. Edom had triumphed over Jerusalem. Edom was to have her sin discovered and punished when Jerusalem was restored. So Babylon's doom was promised (Isa. xiii.). Satan, the great enemy of souls, may be used as an instrument for our chastisement. But his day of doom is drawing near. Then he can torment us no more.

V. CHRIST PUTS AN END TO PUNISHMENT. It is not necessary that we should endure our punishment to the end. If we had to do so where would the end be? The awful prospect would shut out all view of any end, whatever we might reason about its far-off certainty. But Christ has accomplished for us by his suffering and sacrifice a work of redemption which will save with full, free, and immediate pardon all who repent and trust in him.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The gold dimmed.* Present adversity brings to mind, by force of contrast, the prosperity of bygone days. The Hebrew prophet of sorrow might well recall the golden days of old.

"A poet's cowl of sorrow is remembering happier things."

His touching and poetic language affords—

I. A LESSON OF HUMAN MUTABILITY. The exclamation reminds us of those oft-quoted words, *Ilum fuit!* Troy was, but is no more! The proudest cities have crumbled into ruins, the most splendid palaces have mouldered into dust.

II. A LESSON THAT PRECIOUS THINGS MAY TURN TO VILE. The homes of kings, priests, and prophets, were possessed by the brutal soldiery; the city of David and Solomon resounded with the ferocious cry of the Chaldeans. Sin can bring the brightest and the most glorious of human societies and institutions into decay and contempt.

III. A LESSON THAT SACRED THINGS MAY BE PROFANED. "The stones of the sanctuary" were flung about. The very temple of Jehovah became a ruin, the sacred solemnities came to an end, and the voice of the priests and the Levites ceased in the precincts. Sin can rust even the fine gold.

IV. A LESSON OF THE UNSPARING ENMITY OF MAN. The Chaldeans were not deterred by any consideration from carrying out their wrath to the bitterest extremity. The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. *Væ victis!* is an old cry.

V. A LESSON AS TO THE EXACTING NATURE OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION. The hand was the hand of the Chaldean, but the judgment was the judgment of God. When men rebel against him, no human power or splendour can preserve them from his righteous indignation and just retribution.—T.

Ver. 2.—"*Precious sons . . . fine gold,*" . . . become "*earthen pitchers.*" The prophet's appreciation of the proper dignity and value of his nation was naturally very exalted; in proportion were his sorrows and humiliation when his country rebelled against the Lord, and became, in consequence, a prey to the despised and hated foreigner. The reflections are applicable, not to Judah only, but to all the sinful and rebellious among men; for there is no escape from the action of the moral law, from the chastisement of the righteous Judge.

I. THE TRUE VALUE AND PROPER DIGNITY OF MAN. Comparable to "fine gold" in beauty, preciousness, and use, is our humanity when in the state designed by the Creator, free from the corroding rust of sin, and minted and stamped with the image and superscription of the Most High.

II. SIN INVOLVES CHASTISEMENT, AND CHASTISEMENT BRINGS DISGRACE. The striking contrast between gold, fine and solid, on the one hand, and "earthen pitchers" on the other hand, is a pictorial and effective representation of the change which took place in Judah. A holy nation, a kingdom of priests, the chosen of the Eternal, was reduced to the level of the poorest, meanest tribe vanquished and despoiled by an unsparing enemy. Here, as so often, the chosen nation was an emblem of humanity. For though man be by nature the sublimest of God's creatures, when he is abandoned to sin and all its consequences he sinks below the level of the brutes.

APPLICATION. Only Divine grace and power can restore the beauty and dignity of which sin has robbed humanity. The gospel of Christ transforms the earthen pitcher into the fine gold of the sanctuary.—T.

Vers. 3—5.—*The horrors of famine.* A more graphic, a more terrible picture than this of the misery of a captured, starved, and desolated city, no pencil could paint. If the circumstances of the famine-stricken population of Jerusalem are portrayed with too literal a skill and with too sickening an effect, it must be borne in mind that the description is not that of an artist, but of a prophet, and that the aim is not merely to horrify, but to instruct, and especially to represent the frightful consequences involved in a nation's sin and apostasy.

I. PHYSICAL SUFFERINGS ARE DESCRIBED. If the condition of the wretched citizens be examined, they are seen to be afflicted with all physical evils, *e.g.* with hunger and want, with emaciation and feebleness of body, with homelessness, squalor, and filth, with pestilence and death.

II. MORAL DEGRADATION IS DENOUNCED. A siege, the sack of a city, have sometimes called out exalted self-sacrifice and heroism; but they have sometimes been the occasion of the bursting forth into flame of the vilest passions—of avarice, cruelty, selfishness, and lust. In this passage we observe an atrocious exhibition of selfish indifference to the pains and necessities of others, and especially a display of cruelty towards children which contrasts with the parental instincts and tenderness of the brutes. To so low a level does sin bring human nature.

PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. In plenty and peace let men cherish gratitude. 2. Let those who are prosperous commiserate the famine-stricken and the victims of war. 3. Let generous provision be made for the wants of the destitute.—T.

Ver. 12.—*The impregnable taken.* The natural position of Jerusalem was such as to mark it out for a stronghold, as to invite its possessors to fortify it and to deem them-

selves invincible. When David conquered it by daring and valour, he made it the metropolis of the nation. Succeeding kings strengthened the walls and completed the fortifications, so that Jerusalem became one of the strongest fortresses of the ancient world. And at this time Nebuchadnezzar had only taken the city after a siege extending through a year and a half.

I. THE IMPRESSIVE CONTRAST. 1. One such contrast was upon the surface and obvious to every eye. The mighty and apparently invincible was vanquished and desolated. 2. Another contrast was apparent to the mind of the observing and reflecting: the city favoured by God himself was abandoned, spoiled, and desolated. If Jehovah had not gone out of the gates, the Chaldeans could not have entered in. 3. The contrast was one universally amazing and astounding. "The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed it."

II. THE INSPIRED EXPLANATION OF THIS CONTRAST. It was not chance, it was not "the fortune of war," it was not the consequence of some political machinations, some military strategy, that the proud city of Zion fell into the hands of the foreign conqueror. Unfaithfulness and rebellion against God were the true explanation. The Lord only forsakes those who forsake him. All men, all nations, endure chastisement for sin. Blessed be God! in the midst of wrath he remembers mercy.—T.

Vers. 13, 14.—*The degradation of the prophets and the priests.* There is a somewhat obscure reference in this passage to some incidents which took place during and after the siege of Jerusalem. The book of Jeremiah's prophecies casts some light upon the language of his lamentations. It is evident that the offices of priest and prophet were vilely abused at this period of Judah's degradation, that the prophets prophesied in false and flattering words, that the priests burned incense to idols, that both professions were debased to selfish ends, and that both were accountable to a very large extent for the calamities of the nation. No wonder that prophets and priests became the objects of national detestation, that Jew and alien alike shunned and hated them.

I. THE NOBLEST OFFICES, WHEN MISUSED, BECOME THE GREATEST CURSE. The priests were "holy unto Jehovah;" the prophets were the commissioned ministers of the All-wise, and they spake his words to men. But when they retained their name, but lost the spirit and the moral authority attaching to their position, they misled and oppressed their countrymen. Alas for the nation whose leaders in Church and state are selfish and corrupt! they who should be an honour and a blessing become then a disgrace and a curse. Let the great and the consecrated take warning, and watch and pray.

II. WHEN SPIRITUAL AND INTELLECTUAL LEADERS ARE DEBASED THEIR INFLUENCE UPON A NATION IS MOST DELETERIOUS AND DISASTROUS. "Like priest, like people," says the old proverb. In modern communities it is observable that the journalists and the clergy have amazing power in giving a tone to public life. Where these are corrupt the very springs of a nation's life are poisoned; all classes are affected by the influences which are potent for harm as they had otherwise been for highest good.

III. THE UNFAITHFULNESS OF THE LEADERS BRINGS PENALTIES AND CALAMITIES UPON THE PEOPLE. The constitution of human society is such that one must needs suffer for another. As the sins of the prophets and the iniquities of the priests had no small share in bringing about the ruin of Jerusalem, so a corrupt literature and a selfish clergy will bring any nation, however powerful, into misery and contempt.—T.

Ver. 17.—*Vain help and hope.* When Jerusalem was besieged by the Chaldeans its inhabitants seem to have looked for assistance from their Egyptian neighbours. This was a policy and an expectation displeasing to Jehovah, who ever taught his people to rely, not upon an arm of flesh, but upon the eternal King of righteousness. In verse the prophet pictures the attitude of the Jews as day after day they strained their weary eyes to catch some glimpse of an approaching deliverer. How striking a picture of the folly and vanity of those hopes which man fixes upon his fellow-man!

I. THE DISTRESSED AND HARASSED NATURALLY HAVE RECOURSE TO HUMAN AID. As the Jews looked now to Assyria and again to Egypt for allies and helpers, so the children of men have recourse to human counsellors, philosophers, and saviours to

deliver them from the perplexities and sorrows and fears to which human nature is always subject.

II. IT IS PROVIDENTIALLY APPOINTED THAT EXPERIENCE SHOULD CONVINCE MEN OF THE VANITY OF ALL HUMAN HELP. When application after application fails to bring relief, when hope after hope is disappointed, then, and perhaps not until then, men learn how vain is the help of man, and perceive the wisdom of the advice, "Put not your trust in man, or in the son of man, in whom is no help."

III. GOD INTENDS BY SUCH DISCIPLINARY EXPERIENCE TO DRAW HIS PEOPLE TO HIMSELF. When the eyes are dim and weary with looking earthward for deliverance, then they may be lifted heavenward. And when the help of man is sincerely acknowledged to be vain, then the help of God is at hand.—T.

Ver. 18.—*The end is come!* The progress of the enemy's works, the approach of the enemy's forces, the frequency of the enemy's assaults, all tended to dishearten the citizens of the besieged Jerusalem. The prophet represents the discouraged and dismayed citizens as gazing with terror upon the assailants and their strategy, and exclaiming in despair, "Our end is come!" The dealing and the discipline of God with the souls of the disobedient and rebellious may well awaken the same conviction and elicit the same cry.

I. THE END OF OUR OWN RESOURCES. It is sometimes only when men have tried what is in their power, have done their best to solve their spiritual difficulties and to make their way secure, that, convinced of their own insufficiency, they admit themselves to be altogether in the wrong.

II. THE END OF OUR RESISTANCE TO OUR FOES. Men strive to carry on the conflict in their own strength, and they strive in vain. "Wearied in the greatness of their way," convinced that they are no match for the spiritual enemy, they may confess that, left to themselves, they cannot conquer, they cannot withstand.

III. THE END OF ALL OUR HOPES OF DELIVERANCE. Those hopes may have buoyed up for days and years; but when they have issued only in disappointment how can the discouraged do other than at last for ever abandon them?

IV. THE END OF OUR REBELLION AGAINST GOD. If this be the effect produced by long experience of the wretchedness and the futility of such hostility, there will be reason for gratitude. They who lay down the weapons of rebellion shall receive mercy and experience deliverance.—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Fallen reputation.* I. THE WEIGHT OF THIS REPUTATION. The position of the people was comparable to gold in its glitter and attraction. Gold has its use and iron has its use, and we may be glad we have both; but if one of these two had to be given up, it would certainly be the gold. Iron means immensely more in modern civilization than gold. But if frequency of mention is to count for anything, gold was much more valued among the Israelites than iron, and being so, it had a large place in the symbolism of the tabernacle service and in the splendours of Solomon's temple. Hence any one with a high reputation might very well be compared to gold. People run after such a one even as they do after gold. There is a time when the crowd are not contented to speak well of a man; they must praise him extravagantly, using the language of superlatives, and showing that their standard, if standard it can truly be called, is far from an ideal one.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE REPUTATION. Had Israel ever been worthy of this comparison with fine gold? On what was the comparison based? It is to be feared that it rested very much on mere appearance. Remember the saying, "All that glitters is not gold." Jehovah had made Israel to glitter by taking it out from among the nations and making it the object of great demonstrations of his power. But, so to speak, this was only gilding over the impure and incoherent mass of common humanity with a coating of pure gold for a certain purpose. The men and women who made up Israel were at heart like men and women elsewhere. But by giving them a certain outward splendour God furnished a symbol of that true golden nation which is made up from individual believers in him.

III. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE REPUTATION. The gold becomes dim. The comparison was once to gold out of which vessels for honour are made, beautifully shaped

and decorated. But now the comparison is to the common clay out of which the potter makes his cheap and fragile ware. And yet, after all, if gold be a standard of preciousness, these sons of Zion were indeed comparable to it; only the gold is in the unpurified state, mixed very intimately with baser elements that take away the use and glory of the gold. Man in his *best* natural state may have his reputation lifted too high; in his *worst* natural state that reputation may sink too low; but when God takes the natural man in hand and renews, purifies, and disciplines him, then it will be seen that the most splendid and pleasing of visible objects is only a feeble hint of that glory wherewith God has chosen to glorify his own children.—Y.

Vers. 3, 4.—*Natural affection gone.* I. NOTE AN UNFAVOURABLE CONTRAST WITH THE LOWER CREATION. Everything is to be estimated according to its nature. It matters little what the sea-monster here stands for. It is sufficient to know that some fierce destructive creature is thought of. Truly there is a vast difference between the brutes whose very nature it is to destroy in order that they may live, and man who never looks more worthy of his position in the scale of being than when he is doing his very best to preserve life, risking even his own life for this end. And yet even in the most savage brutes there is natural affection. To stoop to a very common sight, what is more suggestive of some of the deep mysteries of existence than to see a cat one moment patiently suckling its own young, and the next moment stealthily and silently making its way to spring on some defenceless bird? If, then, it is put into the nature of these fierce creatures thus to care for their young, what care is it not right to expect from man, the highest creature whom we know? There is hardly any limit to what he can do for his offspring in the way of guarding its weakness and developing its power; and yet how negligent he can become! The lower creation puts him to shame. Jeremiah here speaks of cruelty, but we do well to remember that there is a thoughtlessness, an indolence, and a selfishness which are productive of as bad effects as any cruelty can produce. More evil, it has been truly said, is wrought from want of thought than from want of heart.

II. WHAT IT IS THAT PRODUCES THIS CONTRADICTION TO NATURE? Generally stated, it is the stress of circumstances that does it. "The daughter of my people" would not have become cruel if her life had gone on in its ordinary way. But all at once the supplies that have been so regular become uncertain, and at last virtually stop. The cruelty, if in such circumstances it may be truly called so, is an involuntary one. And yet it is not involuntary in this sense, that the state of things was altogether unpreventable. The famine came from disobedience to God. We are not left to make a superstitious inference as to this connection. It is stated on authority. It were presuming far too much to trace a connection between particular suffering and particular wrong-doing, but where the connection between particular wrong-doing and particular suffering is made perfectly plain, we shall be very foolish if we do not take heed to it. Whatever wrong thing we do will have some evil consequences, and we know not how soon they may come, how widely they may spread, and how much suffering and difficulty they may bring to the innocent.—Y.

Ver. 5.—*Social revolution.* I. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE INSTABILITY OF HUMAN SOCIETY. We may consider it either as the instability of wealth or the instability of rank. It shows how no class of the community is able to say that, whatever happens in the way of stress or destitution, it will keep right. Men build up societies in which rank comes from the accumulation of wealth or the exercise of power that is in a man by nature. But these human societies thus built up cannot reckon on permanence. Greed is excited on the part of others, and the higher a man has risen the lower he may fall.

II. THE ILLUSTRATION HERE SHOULD MAKE US CONSIDERATE OF THOSE IN HIGH POSITION. The high are of necessity the few. Their position is seen from the outside and from a distance. What we do see is very likely to mislead us, for our eye lights on outward splendour and the appearance of much leisure and the ability to do very much what one likes. But the many journals and memoirs that have been published revealing the inner life of courts and titled circles show that human beings may be none the less miserable because the misery is gilded over. Our pity may be needed at

any moment for the man of rank and privilege. Whatever the outward differences may be, the inward heart is the same, and that must have its sorrows, its disappointments, and its perils.

III. WE ARE TAUGHT THE NEED OF CAUTION IN GLORIFYING HUMAN CIVILIZATION. What many people reckon to be the highest civilization needs material wealth in great profusion to keep it up. There must be classes to paint pictures, carve statuary, and give long periods of time to the elaboration of artistic conceptions, whatever they may be. And what a satire on all this it is to recollect how fragile and fading some of these art treasures have proved! The ignorant and narrow-minded under-value these things, but then it is also possible to over-value them, to get so occupied with them as to forget the deepest things of humanity, the things that endure. The civilized, refined, natural man may be good, but how much better is the spiritual man, even though he be rude in speech and full of error in his tastes! Truly we may say, he that is least among spiritual men is greater than the highest of attainments among natural men.—Y.

Ver. 6.—*The sin of Sodom.* God was doing nothing new or indefensible in allowing Jerusalem thus to be wasted and humiliated. The Israelites had in their possession illustrations more than one of how great sin had been followed by great suffering. Jeremiah quotes Sodom, and he might have said something about Egypt when God visited it with the plagues. We must not, of course, press too literally the statement that the sin of Jerusalem was greater than that of Sodom. The prophet's aim is simply to insist that no sin could have been greater than that of Jerusalem. If it was a right and a necessary thing that Sodom should be so suddenly visited, so completely overwhelmed, then assuredly no complaint could be made against the severe treatment experienced by Jerusalem. Indeed, relatively, Jerusalem might think itself very well off. If the height on which Jerusalem stood had sunk in another Dead Sea, there would have been no ground for complaint. No impartial Israelite, looking at the privileges of Israel, considering how much it had been instructed and warned, and how patiently it had been dealt with, could do anything but confess that on the whole it had been mildly visited. We must, however, be careful here not to attribute anything arbitrary to God. We shall naturally be very much perplexed if we allow ourselves to think that, though Sodom's sin was less than Jerusalem's, yet it received a greater punishment. It is only by a figure that we talk of communities being punished. Punishment is strictly an individual thing. Communities may suffer, and the suffering will be according to the needs of God's government at the time. The cities of the plain were utterly swept away, that the rest of the world might not become as bad as they were. These visitations have to be looked on somewhat in the light of surgical operations. One patient in the hospital needs to have a limb amputated that the whole body may be saved. Another can have his body saved without the loss of a part of it.—Y.

Ver. 9.—*Sword and hunger.* I. WORSE THINGS THAN WAR. Better, says the prophet, to be swiftly slain in battle than have the slow and gnawing death of hunger. None worthy the name of Christian can but appreciate and admire the zeal, devotion, and self-abnegation of those who toil incessantly in the things that make for peace. War is so dreadful an evil that hardly too strong things can be said against it. And one of the strong things said is with respect to the immense suffering produced by war. Yet after all there is a great deal that deceives imagination here. Suffering is crowded into a small space, and puts on a horrible aspect, and thus it looks huger than it is, and so when we are appalled at the continuance in the world of great wars full of carnage, we shall do well to recollect that war is by no means the worst of things so far as power of inflicting suffering is concerned. Evidently the prophet saw starvation as a more horrible thing than war. It may, of course, be said the war was the cause of the famine, and very likely it was, but then, what was the cause of the war? Good men in their enthusiasm come in with all sorts of ready remedies for great evils, not sufficiently considering how one evil is connected with another, and how the stopping up of one channel may only fill other channels all the more. Who can dry up the fountain of all evil?—that is the question.

II. THE DREADFUL ACCOMPANIMENTS OF FAMINE. Is there anything worse than the carnage of a battle-field? Yes; the pangs of a multitude slowly dying of starvation.

There is death from disease, death from decay, death of the strong man in full health from violence; but worse than any surely is this slow torment of hunger. What an instance of the rigid way in which law binds us down, unless there be some Divine reason for interfering with the operations perceptible to us! He who intervened to feed the five thousand and the four thousand could have intervened to keep these wretched women from laying their hands on their own children for food. What necessity was there in the one case which there was not in the other? Some there must have been, though we may fail to grasp it as a whole. Doubtless if we could only see clearly it would then become manifest that there is no lack in the giving of food, but that it is we who lack wisdom in developing and distributing what is given.—Y.

Ver. 12.—*A seeming impossibility achieved.* I. THE VALUE OF A REPUTATION. Jerusalem had a far-spread reputation for security. It was a reputation, too, which prevailed among those with whom it was desirable it should prevail, namely, the kings of the earth. A reputation for security is to a certain extent an element in security, and what we have to do is to let it have its just value. For instance, in a world where solicitations to evil abound it is well if those who have all the inclination to tempt us nevertheless say in their hearts that we are beyond such temptations, and therefore it would be mere waste of time to attack us. Jerusalem had probably escaped many sieges through this far-spread feeling.

II. THE CAUSES OF THIS REPUTATION. Here is the value of history. A tradition springs up that Jerusalem is impregnable. Failures in attacking it are contrasted with successes in attacking other places. It is not that any particular invader fails, but different nations and different commanders. Furthermore, the people of Jerusalem come to accept what seems an unquestionable privilege. If it has come to be a foregone conclusion among their enemies that their city is impregnable, how much more may they themselves rest in such a conclusion! But what had made this conclusion possible? Was it the position of Jerusalem? No doubt this counted for something, for other walled places beside Jerusalem have had the reputation of being able to defy all attack. The great thing, however, was the purpose of God that Jerusalem should stand against its enemies. To him must be laid the origin of this wide and deep feeling. He who had been as a shield to the individual warrior became as a high and fenced wall to the city. Jerusalem is the contrast to Jericho. Well-defended Jericho can be made to fall without any visible force, and Jerusalem can be made to stand against the most furious accumulations of the heathen.

III. THE WORTHLESSNESS OF MERE REPUTATION. Reputation by itself is always to be looked upon with caution. If we would have reputation to be a valuable element in judgment, it must be by asking in whose voice the reputation lies. The voice of the multitude, the voice that takes up a cry and as it were transmits an echo, what is it worth? The people of Jerusalem had come to rest in the comfortable feeling that their city was reckoned impregnable. Do not let our safety rest in what other people think about us. If our safety is not of God, if it does not rest in trusting him and obeying him, then sooner or later that will happen to us in our life which happened to Jerusalem. The walls of our life will be broken down, our most precious treasures taken away, our hearts made desolate.—Y.

Ver. 13.—*Shedding the blood of the just.* Consider—

I. THE THING THAT IS DONE. It is not merely that life is taken away; nor is it even that murder is committed. It would be bad enough if even the most wicked of men were maliciously slain—slain, not because of his wickedness, but because of some evil motive on the part of the slayer. But here those who are slain are just men, and slain because they are just. All they needed in order to live on was to fall in with prevailing and popular iniquities. Instead of this, they set their faces against the multitude that are doing evil. They must, as a matter of necessity to their own consciences, say and do things which are a continual exasperation to the wicked. They do not mean to exasperate, they may be in the spirit of their life most meek, gentle, and unaffected; but all this will avail nothing—the wicked are bound to pick a quarrel with them, even as the wolf in the fable picked a quarrel with the lamb. And let it be observed that shedding the blood of the just is only the climax of the persecuting treatment which the just must be ready to experience.

The wicked are often quite willing to stop short of the climax if they can gain their ends by something less. Not all at once do they proceed to the shedding of blood. It is well for those who, if they be indeed Christians, are assuredly to be reckoned among the just to remember what they have to number among the possibilities of their endeavour to live a truly righteous life. No mere human civilization will ever secure the just man from the risk of having to lose his life for his righteousness.

II. THOSE WHO DO IT. Once again, as so often, the prophet and priest stand forth in a shameful revelation. Their life is so contrary to their office. The prophet whose force should have come from the strong righteousness of his heart within and be directed straight against all evil-doers, is found ranging himself with the wicked and making evil put on the semblance of good. And as for the priest, he does holy things with his hands and offers sacrifices for sin, while those whose lives are a continual protest against sin he hates and strives to slay. Not that we must reduce the prophet and the priest here spoken of to the level of vulgar murderers. Doubtless, in many instances, they persuaded themselves they were right and doing God service. Fanaticism and class feeling, where each one blows the flame of his neighbour's zeal, will urge men on to the greatest atrocities. There may be no danger, most likely there will be no opportunity, that we should go as far as these prophets and priests, but we need to guard against having their narrow spirits in our hearts. We may not shed the blood of the just, but nevertheless we may do much to hinder and trouble them.—Y.

Ver. 20.—*A disappointed confidence and a desecrated sanctity.* There seems to be indicated in these words a great attachment to the kingly office and a great confidence in it. It is the same spirit continuing and probably intensified which caused the people ages before to demand a king. And is it not thus suggested to us what a deep feeling there is in the human heart to have some one individual to look up to as having rule over us? "The right Divine of kings" is a principle which more than once in history has been seen pushing itself to disastrous issues, but that is no reason for asserting that "the right Divine of kings" is an absurdity. It is only an absurdity when a weak fallible mortal holds himself, by virtue of his ancestry and kinship, to have little less than absolute control over multitudes of his fellow-men. The question is not whether kingship is right, but who shall be the king. And especially does this need to be recollected among the changing forms of government so perceptible in modern times. Now that despotisms are tending to limited monarchies, and limited monarchies becoming more limited, and extensions being made of republican territory, it is more than ever important to insist on the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. Not without deep reason does the proper government for man stand before us in the New Testament as a kingdom. The collective wisdom of mankind can only be at best a puzzling mixture of knowledge and ignorance, prudence and rashness. Blessed is he who feels that the real Anointed of the Lord is the proper Being to guide. Under his shadow we can live the true life in that safety of the spirit which is of far more moment than that mere external safety from the Gentiles, which counted for so much in the esteem of the Israelite of old. In no pits has the Lord Jesus Christ ever been taken.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

Vers. 1—18.—**INSULT UPON INSULT HAS BEEN HEAPED UPON JERUSALEM.**

Ver. 2.—**Our inheritance.** The land had been "given" to Abraham (Gen. xiii. 25; xvii. 8), and was consequently inherited by Abraham's posterity. **Our houses.** Not as if the Chaldeans had actually taken up their abode in some of the houses of Jerusalem. The expressions are forcible, but inexact. The land was seized; the houses were destroyed (Jer. lii. 13).

Ver. 3.—**We are orphans and fatherless;** i.e. "We are like the most desolate of beings," as the Targum already explains it. Hence in the next clause the mothers of Israel are likened to widows.

Ver. 4.—**We have drunken our water,** etc. The Jews were not yet carried away to Babylonia when this was written, but had to pay a dear price to the new lords of the soil for the commonest necessities of life.

Ver. 5.—**Our necks are under persecution.** Persecution is here compared to a yoke. But this rendering and explanation hardly

suit the phrase, which rather means, "We are pursued close upon our necks." The harassing conduct of the Babylonian conquerors is compared to the pursuit of a foe fast gaining upon a fugitive.

Ver. 6.—We have given the hand, etc. Starvation awaits the Jews unless they submit to one or the other of their hereditary foes. Some escape to Egypt and "give the hand" (i.e. surrender, Jer. i. 15) to the lords of the fertile Nile valley; others acquiesce in the fate of the majority, and sue for the alms of the Babylonians.

Ver. 7.—We have borne their iniquities. The fathers died before the iniquity was fully ripe for punishment, and their descendants have the feeling that the accumulated sins of the nation are visited upon them. This view of national troubles is very clearly endorsed by one important class of passages (Exod. xx. 5; xxxiv. 7; Numb. xiv. 18; Jer. xxxii. 18). The objection to it is forcibly expressed by Job (xxi. 19), "God [it is said] layeth up his iniquity for his children: [but] let him requite it to himself, that he may feel it!" Hence Jeremiah (xxxi. 30) and Ezekiel (xviii. 1, etc.) insist on the truth that every man is punished for his own sins. Of course the two views of punishment are reconcilable. The Jews were not only punished, according to Jer. xvi. 11, 12, for their fathers' sins, but for their own still more flagrant offences.

Ver. 8.—Servants have ruled; rather, slaves. The Babylonians in general might be called slaves, by comparison with the "kingdom of priests" (Exod. xix. 6), and the "sons" of Jehovah (Isa. xlv. 11; Hos. i. 10). Or the expression may mean that even baseborn hangers-on of the conquering host assumed the right to command the defenceless captives.

Ver. 9.—We gat our bread; rather, we get our bread. The allusion in the following words is perhaps to murderous attacks of Bedawine (as we should call the Ishmaelites) on the Jews who attempted to gather in the scanty harvest.

Ver. 10.—Was black like an oven. The translation is misleading; there is no real parallel to ch. iv. 8. Render, gloweth. It is the feverish glow produced by gnawing hunger which is meant. The terrible famine; rather, the burning heat of hunger. Hariri, the humoristic author of the cycle of stories in rhymed Arabic prose and verse, called 'Makâmât,' puts into the mouth of his ne'er-do-well Abu Seid very similar words to describe a famished man—

"Dess Eingeweide brennend nach Erquickung schrein,
Der nichts gegessen seit zwei Tagen oder drein."

(Bückert's adaptation, third Makâma.)

Ver. 12.—Princes are hanged up by their hand; i.e. by the hand of the enemy. Impalement after death was a common punishment with the Assyrians and Babylonians. Thus Sennacherib says that, after capturing rebellious Ekron, he hung the bodies of the chief men on stakes all round the city ('Records of the Past,' i. 38). Bonomi gives a picture of such an impalement from one of the plates in Botta's great work ('Nineveh and its Palaces,' p. 192).

Ver. 13.—They took the young men to grind; rather, the young men have borne the mill. The lower millstone seems to have been specially hard, and therefore heavy (see Job xli. 24), and to carry it about must have required a more severe exertion even than the constant turning of the mill-handle. Dr. Thomson "cannot recall an instance in which men were grinding at the mill" ('The Land and the Book,' edit. 1881, p. 108), and both Exod. xi. 5 and Matt. xxiv. 41 presuppose that it was women's work. The conquered Jewish youths, however, share the fate of Samson—

"Eyeless, in Gaza, at the mill with slaves."
(*'Samson Agonistes,'* 41.)

"Eyeless," indeed, they may some of them have been, as putting out the eyes was a common Oriental punishment (comp. Jer. xxxix. 7). The children. This is, perhaps, too strong. The Hebrew *na'ar* is applicable, not only to children, but to youths at the age for marriage (Gen. xxiv. 19) or war (1 Kings xx. 15). The wood; not the wooden handle of the mill, but the wood required for fuel.

Ver. 14.—From the gate. The place where the elders, technically so called, assembled for legal proceedings, and where the citizens in general met together for social concourse (comp. Gen. xix. 1; Ruth iv. 11; Ps. lxxix. 12; Amos v. 12, 15; Dan. ii. 49). From their music (comp. Jer. vii. 34; xvi. 9).

Ver. 16.—The crown is fallen, etc.; rather, the crown of our head is fallen. The Jewish people is compared to a rich man at a banquet, crowned with a diadem (comp. Isa. xxviii. 1). Jeremiah has a similar phrase in his prophecies (xiii. 18). It evidently expresses figuratively the prosperity and honour formerly enjoyed by the now vanquished people.

Vers. 17, 18.—These verses form a transition to the final appeal. The thought of the desolation of Zion overwhelms the spirit of the poet. But he will soon be able to lift himself up again when he recalls the sublime truth of the inviolable security of Israel's God. Foxes; rather, jackals.

Vers. 19—22.—FINAL APPEAL TO GOD FOR THE REVERSAL OF THE JUDGMENT.

Ver. 19.—*Remainest; hotter, art enthroned.*

Ver. 20.—*Wherefore dost thou forget us, etc.?* The poet does not say, "Wherefore hast thou forgotten us?" One of the psalmists, indeed, does go so far (Ps. lxxiv. 1); but the poet of this lamentation, with a more tender and trustful reserve, adopts the tense of feeling (the imperfect) in preference to that of fact (the perfect), and asks, "Wherefore dost thou [to my feeling] forget us? Wherefore, if Jehovah's power is still unbroken, does he allow Israel to feel herself forsaken?" The fact is certain, viz. that the land of Israel is desolate, and (the poet seems to imply) desolate for some time already. The interpretation is hypothetical, and, as the last verse will show, the poet cannot bring himself to believe that it can be accurate.

Ver. 21.—*Turn thou us, etc.* Not "bring us back to thee," i.e. to the sacred land (as Thenius), for it is not a speech of the exiles, but of the Jews left behind, at least for the present, in Judæa. "Turn thou us" means "Bring us into a state of reconciliation with thee." The next petition, *Renew our days as of old*, means, "Restore the old happy mode of life, each man with his own vine and his own fig tree, undisturbed by the fear of

invasion, and rejoicing in the sense of the favour of Jehovah." The first petition has the priority because only on repentance and recovered purity of heart and life can Jerusalem rise from her ashes. Isaiah had said this long ago (i. 26, 27), and the elegiac poet repeats it (comp. Jer. xxxi. 18).

Ver. 22.—*But; rather, unless.* The poet wishes to suggest that the idea seems to him inconsistent with the covenant relationship of Jehovah towards Israel. May we not compare a striking passage in Isaiah which should probably be rendered thus: "A wife of one's youth, can she be rejected? saith thy God" (Isa. liv. 6)? Both passages express, in a most delicate way, the incredulity of the writers with regard to the absolute rejection of Israel. And thus this melancholy Book of Lamentations concludes with a hope, "faint, yet pursuing," of the final realization of the promises to Israel. The interpretation adopted admits of no reasonable doubt, in spite of the fact that ancient doctors of the synagogue thought otherwise when they established the custom of repeating ver. 21 after ver. 22 had been read, in order to soften the supposed gloomy impression of ver. 22.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*A prayer of distress.* I. IT IS OFFERED TO GOD. The whole of this last elegy is in the form of a prayer. Other laments are interspersed with cries to Heaven. This poem is one continuous address to God. We see here true wisdom; for mere complaining is useless. To wail to the winds is foolish and vain. To make our troubles known to our fellow-men often avails little, for we may only weary them instead of eliciting their pity, or, if we do succeed in gaining commiseration, that may be of little real use to us. But God is the great Comforter. His ear is ever open to the cry of his distressed children. His heart is always tender to feel compassion for their woes. His hand is strong and willing to work substantial deeds of helpfulness.

II. IT DESCRIBES THE MOURNFUL CONDITION OF THE SUPPLIANT. The poet refers to "what has come upon us" and "our reproach." Subsequent verses describe the miserable condition of the Jews in more detail. It is much that we can unbosom our souls before God. The mere relief of confiding in him is a comfort. Moreover, if we desire his help we must make this confidence. Reserve on our part necessitates apparent indifference on his part. We need not fear of wearying him with our plaints. Indeed, if we were more open-hearted in confiding our troubles to God we should come to have fewer troubles to concern ourselves with.

III. IT ASKS FOR DIVINE NOTICE. 1. "*Remember.*" It seems as though God must have forgotten and deserted his children when he has permitted them to fall into grievous distresses. 2. "*Consider.*" We need God's thought for us. Our case is such that the wisdom of God as well as his grace is necessary for our salvation. The great work of Christ is a proof of Divine thought, study, consideration. 3. "*Behold.*" Here is a nearer attention. God is not only asked to remember and think of our case, but to inspect it himself. And when he looks he heals. When once we are assured that God remembers, considers, and beholds our trouble, we can leave it with him, well knowing that he will not mock our cries by listening without answering.

Ver. 2.—*The lost inheritance.* I. THE EARTHLY INHERITANCE OF ISRAEL WAS TURNED TO STRANGERS. Canaan, the land promised to Abraham and his seed, was always

regarded as more than a mere possession. It was considered to be received from God as an inheritance, and held by a Divine right. Yet even this sacred soil was taken away from the people. Strange races from the East settled down upon it, and the rightful owners were driven into captivity or compelled to pay for water from the wells their fathers had dug, and for fuel from their own woods (ver. 4). A second time the people have been driven from their inheritance, and Turkish mosques now desecrate the city of the Jews.

II. **THE SPIRITUAL INHERITANCE OF ISRAEL WAS TURNED TO STRANGERS.** The Jews were more than possessors of one little favoured land. To them were entrusted the oracles of God. Prophets and priests gave them peculiar privileges in spiritual things. They were a people of God's own possession. The blessings of the Jews were to culminate in the advent of the Messiah. The Messiah came. He came to his own inheritance, and his own people received him not; for Christ first offered himself to Jews, and Christ was first refused by Jews. In rejecting Christ the house of Israel rejected its true inheritance. Gentiles took up the privileges which Jews despised. We and other nations of Gentile Christendom are the strangers to whom their inheritance is turned over.

III. **THE CHRISTIAN INHERITANCE MAY BE TURNED TO STRANGERS.** There have been Christian lands, such as North Africa and Asia Minor, which have lost their Christianity and have passed into the possession of the bitterest foes of the Crucified. Within the pale of Christendom the inheritance may be lost. If we permit unbelief to lay hold of people who once enjoyed full faith in Christ, this result will take place. When men who are unbelievers at heart get possession of Christian pulpits and undermine the very faith they are supposed to be preaching, is not this a terrible instance of the inheritance passing to strangers?

IV. **THE INHERITANCE IS TURNED TO STRANGERS BECAUSE THE CONDITIONS ON WHICH IT IS HELD ARE VIOLATED.** This truth applies to all three cases just described—to Israel's earthly inheritance and her spiritual inheritance and to the Christian inheritance. The land was not given to strangers till after strange gods had been admitted into the land. It was always designed by God that the privileges of the gospel should be given to Gentiles as well as to Jews (e.g. Isa. lx. 3). But it was owing to their refusal of these privileges that the Jews lost their own share in them. The inheritance was to have been widened to admit new citizens; the old citizens cast themselves out of it, and so gave place to the new. In like manner Christ never takes the candlestick from any portion of his Church till his people have faithlessly cast him out of their hearts.

V. **THE LOST INHERITANCE IS TO BE RESTORED.** Whether Israel will return to Palestine is only a question for the curious, and of no great practical interest. For so long as the people are restored to God and truly prosperous it cannot much matter on what spot of the globe they reside. In their palmy days many of them were in the habit of wandering far from their native land. But the true restoration, restoration to the spiritual inheritance in God, is promised to all who will return to him (Isa. lxi. 1—3).

Ver. 3.—*Orphanage and widowhood.* In the desolation of Jerusalem the inhabitants felt like orphans and widows, bereaved of the stay and comfort of life, uncared for and homeless. Many would be literally orphaned and widowed after the great slaughter of the siege. The sad condition of these greatest sufferers brings before our notice the similar trouble of those who are similarly situated in our own day.

I. **ORPHANAGE AND WIDOWHOOD INVOLVE OVERWHELMING SORROW.** The mournful condition of the sufferers is the first thing to strike us. Their sorrow is keen because it concerns a nearest and dearest relative, and it is the more dreadful because it strikes a whole family. Moreover, the trouble is not simply one of affection. The bread-winner is lost. The prop and strength of the household is cut down. The protector of the helpless is removed. The guide and counsellor of the young is no more.

II. **ORPHANAGE AND WIDOWHOOD SHOW US THE BROKEN CHARACTER OF HUMAN LIFE.** There is a oneness in a true family. All the members together constitute a unit. But when death claims the head the family is broken and its completeness destroyed. Then part is on earth and part in the other world. The widow and her children thus

bear testimony to the imperfection of earth, to the transitoriness of what once seemed perfect, and to the need of a future life wherein the severed threads may be reunited and the Divine idea of the family realized.

III. ORPHANAGE AND WIDOWHOOD ARE UNDER THE ESPECIAL CARE OF GOD. He is the "Father of the fatherless and the Judge of the widow" (Ps. lxxviii. 5). If God sends exceptional trouble, he also feels exceptional compassion and gives exceptional aid. Helplessness is the greatest claim on the Divine pity. The heavier the need of any sufferers the more likely is it that God will come to their deliverance. It is true that he may not restore lost comforts. A shadow, long and dark, may long lie across the path of orphans and widows. But unseen hands will be tending them, if not for their wealth and pleasure, yet for their peace and blessedness. God sometimes helps by raising up friends. He may also aid by rousing the faculties of the sufferers. Under the pressure of necessity a widow, left with the care of a family, may develop capacities that slumbered in neglect so long as they were not called for.

IV. ORPHANAGE AND WIDOWHOOD HAVE A FIRST CLAIM ON CHRISTIAN CHARITY. Where God's compassion is strongest ours should be also. If the trouble is great and the sufferers have not brought it upon themselves by their own folly or fault, the sympathy should be particularly large and active. The care of widows and orphans was one of the first characteristics of the Church, distinguishing it from the selfish indifference of paganism. With all our desire for the spiritual welfare of men, and all our zeal in preaching the gospel, this elementary duty of Christianity must have a first place in our energies if we would not be justly accounted hypocrites.

Ver. 7.—*Children suffering for the sins of their parents.* I. IT IS A FACT THAT CHILDREN DO SUFFER FOR THE SINS OF THEIR PARENTS. It was apparent in the times of the Captivity; for owing to Josiah's reformation the moral condition of the nation then was better than it had been a generation or so before; yet the blow, which was caused by the greater guilt of the fathers, fell upon the children. It may often be observed in history that the greatest catastrophes do not fall on the most guilty, but on their successors, who are often better men. Thus James II. was a better man than Charles II., though the Stuart dynasty ended in the younger brother; and Louis XVI. was comparatively innocent, and yet he had to suffer for the vices of Louis XIV. and Louis XV. In private life, poverty, disease, and disgrace are inherited by children from their parents. Now, it is a sign of the robust truthfulness of the Bible that this dark fact is distinctly recognized. There is no attempt to shun it because it is mysterious. We have in the Bible an honest, brave confronting of the evils of life, and not a system which is only beautiful to contemplate in idea and which cannot be squared with facts.

II. THIS FACT IS A WARNING TO PARENTS. The selfishness that incurs disastrous consequences on a man's family is too often ignored if those consequences are not immediately apparent. But it should be exposed and reprobated. Thus the intemperate man is sometimes regarded as a kind and good-natured man because he displays no malice of temper. Surely his cruelty in impoverishing his household and risking the health of his children should be considered a gross sin. If a man will not hold his hand for his own soul's sake, let him consider how he will wreck his family and ruin innocent sons and daughters before he yields to temptation.

III. THIS FACT SHOULD NOT SHAKE OUR FAITH IN GOD. 1. Men in all ages have faced it clearly and yet have retained their trust in Providence, e.g. the writers of the Bible. 2. The very idea of faith implies that we must confide and wait in the darkness where we cannot understand. 3. The necessary greatness of the scheme of the government of a world should lead us to expect mysteries in it.

IV. THIS FACT SHOULD HELP US TO UNDERSTAND PART OF THE DIVINE IDEA OF LIFE. It is a sorrowful sight—innocent little children plunged into poverty and distress through no fault of their own, solely on account of the sins of those who should be their greatest benefactors! But it shows us that God does not treat us as isolated units. He takes notice of families as such. There is a "solidarity" of mankind. Everywhere we see the innocent suffering with the guilty. Social and domestic life are under providential care. And it may be best for the world as a whole that the several societies and collective bodies of which it consists should be governed with blessing and discipline than that each individual should receive only his own private grace and

judgment. Moreover, if this is the case, inasmuch as the individuals profit by the corporate life and prosperity, this treatment by families and cities and nations may turn out in the long run to be the best for the separate persons.

Ver. 19.—*Consolation in the supremacy of God.* The Divine supremacy is often regarded as a topic of dread rather than as one of comfort. The awful throne towers above poor humanity, sublime and majestic, and men turn from it to seek refuge at the humbler footstool of mercy. But the writer of this elegy finds deep satisfaction in contemplating the supreme and eternal government of God.

I. THERE IS CONSOLATION IN THE FACT THAT GOD IS ENTHRONED. Above the tumult, above the darkness, stands the throne of God. God is King over all, not only reigning in majesty, but also ruling in might. 1. *Evil is not supreme.* It rears its head in boasts and threats. It dwells in high places. But it does not reach to the highest. 2. *Evil is under government.* Not only is it not supreme, but in the lower domain where it seems to rove at will it is not really free. It is chained, checked, and overruled. The kingdom of God extends over the rebellious haunts of iniquity. 3. *Justice is above all.* Wrong must give place to righteousness. Law must triumph over disorder. The fair order that is the image of God's equitable and righteous will is ultimately to supersede the hideous confusion of man's lawlessness. Even now God is reigning and working through the chaos to the development of life and beauty. 4. *Goodness controls everything.* He who is enthroned supreme is our Father, the kind and merciful God. His rule must reflect his character. For such a Lord to be supreme is for all the law and government of his kingdom to be inspired with love.

II. THERE IS CONSOLATION IN THE FACT THAT GOD'S THRONE IS ETERNAL. The eternal is always of first moment. Whatever be the force, or size, or character of any temporal thing, its transitoriness makes it as an unsubstantial dream compared with the solid endurance of what is eternal. God's eternal throne renders the petty thrones of evil, so hastily set up and so swiftly cast down, like mere passing shadows. 1. *Nothing can overthrow the throne of God.* We see good causes frustrated, good men crushed and bad powers apparently victorious; but they cannot take the citadel. The throne above looks down upon their petty victories with scorn. 2. *Goodness will outlive evil.* The temporary phase of darkness cannot endure like the everlasting kingdom of light. Generation after generation comes and goes; still the grand old throne stands above all, immovable. In one age, wild dreams of new religions possess the minds of men. In another, lethargy and degeneration of character are prevalent. But all these shadows pass, and the throne still abides. Like the rock about which the surf fumes and frets, the throne of God dwells firm and calm in the midst of all earthly changes. 3. *Evil will be made to work for good.* The everlasting throne will draw all transitory things into subjection to itself. We can endure our passing troubles if we are children of God and citizens of the kingdom of heaven, because these very troubles must do the will of our gracious Lord.

Ver. 20.—*Questioning God.* I. IT IS NATURAL THAT WE SHOULD WISH TO KNOW THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US. There is no subject for inquiry that touches us more nearly or that affects us in such important matters. God's treatment of us concerns our highest welfare for time and eternity. It is in all the experience of life—our many blessings, our varied trials, our greatest prosperity, and our heaviest trouble. Surely it is natural that we should ask whither are all these waves driving us, and why do they sometimes beat so strangely and severely.

II. THERE IS MUCH IN GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US THAT WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND. It seems that he has forgotten us when we are permitted to fall into great and lasting trouble. Short, sharp affliction may be faced. But long-enduring distress wears out hope and faith, and makes it appear more and more as though the lonely sufferer had been deserted by God. The purpose of this is not easy to discover. The whole dispensation is just inexplicable.

III. THE RIGHT WAY TO DISCOVER THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US IS TO ASK HIM. We often discuss vainly when we have no data to start with. But speculation is sure to fail if it goes beyond all evidence and clear reason. Prayer is the one safe resource. It would be well if we had enough faith in God to confide our doubts to

him. For it is too often only unbelief that makes us silence doubt. If we truly trusted God we should more bravely confess to him all that troubled and perplexed our minds. In response to such confidence God may reveal to us a new way of looking at our experience that shall help us to understand something of its object; or he may simply reconcile our minds to the mystery—perhaps an equally beneficial result.

IV. WE MAY REST ASSURED THAT GOD HAS A PURPOSE IN HIS DEALINGS WITH US. It is there, though we cannot see it. We may say, "Wherefore dost thou forget us?" and we may not be able to receive an answer to our question. Yet we should not doubt that there is a "wherefore." God does nothing aimlessly. He certainly cannot be putting his children to pain without an object, nor without one that is adequate to the cost. The knowledge of this fact should quiet fear and restless doubt, even if the object itself remains hidden in mystery.

V. WE MUST BEWARE OF QUESTIONING GOD QUERULOUSLY. We have no right to demand an explanation from God. To couch complaints in the form of inquiries is insulting to God. Let the questioning be humble and submissive, and the answers are sure to come in peace, if not always in light.

Ver. 21.—*Renewal*. When they do not lead to improvement lamentations are profitless, though they may be unavoidable. It is vain to mourn the past if our grief does not help us to make the future better. Sorrow for sin is good only when it leads to an active repentance. It is therefore necessary that a true consideration of the miserable condition into which evil living has brought us should rouse an earnest desire for a new and better life.

I. RENEWAL MUST BE THE WORK OF GOD. The writer does not simply resolve to do better, nor hope that a happier state of affairs will come about of its own accord. He prays. And the object of his prayer is to plead with God to produce the great change which is so much needed. 1. *We cannot accomplish the renewal*. (1) We cannot change our own hearts; they are too corrupt and too hard. (2) We cannot bring back the old days. The past is lost for ever. If it is to be equalled or surpassed by the future, a Divine providence alone can accomplish the great work. 2. *God does bring about renewal*. He renews the face of the earth. He sends spring-time into wintry lives. No soul is so corrupt that God cannot renew it; no life is so desolate that God cannot brighten it. We try vainly to turn ourselves. But God is strong as well as gracious. If only he turn us we shall be surely turned.

II. RENEWAL MUST BE IN OUR EXPERIENCE. The mistake is to suppose that God must change to us. But there is no need for him to turn. He is always good and always willing to be favourable to his children as soon as they submit and obey. Till then nothing can induce him to do so unrighteous an act as to turn from wrath to pleasant treatment. The necessary change lies all on our side. Men used to think that night was the desertion of the earth by the sun, and day the enjoyment of his return. They were wrong. They now know that the sun is not thus fickle. So it is with the soul's night and day. A primitive and narrow theology says that God changes—now going, now returning. Larger knowledge shows that he abides the same, and that as our distress is in turning from him, so our redemption must be in returning to him.

III. RENEWAL MUST BEGIN WITH OUR INNER LIFE. The writer wisely prays to be turned back to God before he prays for the renewal of the old days. It is a common mistake to seek for the external fruits of forgiveness before the internal. The first thing is to bring the soul back to God. Other happy consequences will follow. It is vain to pray for the brightness of noon before our part of the earth has revolved towards the sun. It is to be noted that the great change in the soul is a turning to God. God draws us to himself. Redemption is reconciliation to God. To be near him, to trust and love and obey him, to seek more and more of his light and life,—this is the renewed health and blessedness of the soul that is restored from the wretchedness and ruin of sin.

IV. RENEWAL WILL AFFECT OUR WHOLE EXPERIENCE. After the interior life is renewed the exterior also undergoes a happy transformation. The Jew yearned for the old happy days of peace and prosperity. We inevitably clothe the joyous past with a glamour of affection. Many a lost joy seems inconceivably bright now it

has gone. Yet God may bring it back, if not in the old form, for the exact past is irretrievable, yet in even richer sweetness. The penitent muses sadly over the innocent days of old in the dear home now long since broken up. He would give worlds to bring back that peaceful time before all his sin and shame. It cannot return. But far off, at last, there may be reunions in the better world and rejoicings that will outdo the brightness even of those happy days.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The Lord's remembrance besought.* The inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem had looked, now to Egypt and now to Assyria, for help and deliverance. Events had shown upon how broken a reed they had leaned. Their experience was now leading the best among them to another and a surer, higher, Refuge. As the spokesman of his repeating fellow-countrymen, Jeremiah entreats the remembrance and the regard of Jehovah.

I. ADVERSITY SOMETIMES LEADS MEN TO SEEK THE REGARD AND FAVOUR OF THE GOD WHOM IN PROSPERITY THEY HAVE FORGOTTEN. That trouble may foster self-control and patience is a commonplace of moral teaching. But it only answers its highest end when it leads the afflicted to seek and call upon their God. In the noon-day of happiness, the healthy, busy, and joyous too often forget him to whom they are indebted for all. Providence is forgotten when the sun shines; clouds and darkness seem to have a natural tendency to remind the soul of God.

II. THE LORD'S REMEMBRANCE AND CONSIDERATION ARE AN ASSURANCE OF HELP AND DELIVERANCE. That the Omniscient is not perfectly aware of all that happens to man is not for a moment to be supposed. The language of the prophet is human language, adapted to our ignorance and infirmity. The Lord will be entreated; he summons his children to think of him; and he promises to draw near to those who draw near to him. The sinner may well dread the all-including gaze of the righteous Judge; but the lowly and believing penitent may well take courage when he learns that, the Lord has not forgotten to be gracious.—T.

Ver. 7.—*The moral continuity of nations.* Man is naturally not merely gregarious, but social. The powers that be, an apostle teaches us, are ordained by God—from which we learn that political and social life have a Divine sanction. Accordingly, the Judge of all deals with men, not only as individuals, but as communities. This fact was present to the mind of the prophet when he wrote these words.

I. THE FACT OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE MORAL GOVERNOR. The history of the Jews is the history of a theocracy; but it embodied lessons which are adapted to all mankind. Nations have national privileges, national responsibilities, national probations, national rewards and punishments.

II. NATIONAL RETRIBUTION IS SOMETIMES DEFERRED FOR A SEASON. The prophets appear to have had a clear view of this law. Wrong-doing in one generation was seen to be followed by punishment in a succeeding age. Jeremiah is the author of the well-known proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The seed (to change the figure) is sown by one generation; a following generation reaps the harvest.

III. THE CERTAINTY THAT PENALTIES WILL BE INFLICTED UPON THE IMPENITENT. There is indeed a sense in which even the repenting and reformed suffer for the sins of those who have gone before them. But for the impenitent and unreformed there is no exception, no escape. We, says the prophet, speaking of himself and of his rebellious and ungodly contemporaries—"we have borne the iniquities of our fathers." The apostasy and rebellion of the former generations were visited upon those who endured the horrors of the siege and the degradation of the Captivity. There is mystery in the providential appointment that, not only shall every man bear his own burden, but that some shall bear the burden of those also who have gone before them. But the fact remains, and it gives solemnity to the life of families and of nations.

IV. THE LESSON IS THUS IMPRESSED UPON ALL MEN—HOW SERIOUS AND REAL A THING IS NATIONAL PROBATION! The teaching which was profitable for Israel is equally

adapted to England, and indeed to all the nations of mankind. The Lord is King, and from his government and authority none of the earth's inhabitants is free.—T.

Ver. 8.—*None to deliver.* Bitterness was added to the misery of the Jews when Chaldean slaves—advanced to eminence and power on account of their ability—were placed in authority over them. But there was no choice; resistance was impossible and deliverer there was none. In this respect the condition of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may represent that of sinful, helpless men.

I. A CRUEL BONDAGE. Sinners have yielded themselves up to obey the enemy of their souls, the foe of God. This is (1) *a usurper*, who has no right to rule over men; (2) *a tyrant*, who with unjust and unreasonable exercise of authority oppresses those beneath his power; (3) *a cruel master*, whose service is slavery, whose stripes are many, whose wages are death and destruction.

II. A SEEMINGLY INEVITABLE FATE. The conquered Judæans had looked hither and thither, in the crisis of their fate, for some friend and helper, but they had looked in vain. Similarly the captive of sin can find no earthly deliverer; his fellow-men are his fellow-sinners and fellow-captives; there is no eye to pity and no hand to save.

III. A SOLITARY BUT SUFFICIENT CONSOLATION AND REFUGE. The restless waves answer their purpose when they toss the imperilled mariner towards the haven of refuge. Affliction and adversity, chains and dungeons, oppressors and torturers, may make the one only Deliverer welcome. The Lord God has revealed himself to us as the Saviour of all men. There is no prison from which he cannot set the captive free; there are no gyves and fetters he cannot strike off; there are no foes from whose hands he cannot rescue and deliver.—T.

Ver. 15.—*The cessation of joy.* This fate had been foretold. "Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride: for the land shall be desolate." Well is it for those who take the warning which is given beforehand, and do not wait, as Jerusalem waited, for the stern lessons of a retributive Providence.

I. THERE IS CESSATION OF JOY WHICH IS NOT PUNITIVE. The health, the elasticity of spirits, the pleasures of youth, cannot be protracted to old age. "Earth's joys grow dim, its glories fade away." Days of sickness, of poverty, of bereavement, of sorrow, are appointed by the Lord of the human lot, to follow days of brightness. The wail of sorrow will replace the song of gladness. Yet all this experience may be spiritually disciplinary and helpful; there may be in it nothing of punishment, nothing of Divine displeasure.

II. THERE IS CESSATION OF JOY WHICH IS THE SIGN OF DIVINE ANGER AND THE FULFILMENT OF DIVINE THREATENING. Such was the case with Judah, upon whom the siege and the Captivity came, not without warning, not without space for repentance. In fact, sin puts an end to the joy which it promises to increase and perpetuate, and brings about the mourning and distress against which it pretends to ensure us. The retrospect of those whose joy has ceased becomes in such cases a retrospect of human rebellion and Divine forbearance. Conscience awakes and admits that sorrow is merited.

APPLICATION. Yet there is a way of repentance. God will renew the days of his people as of old. This is the cry and the hope of the penitent: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."—T.

Vers. 16, 17.—*The degradation of sin.* The promise of sin is something very different from this; no flattery is untried, no prospect withheld, which may induce men to rebel against God. But, as with our first parents, as with the dwellers in Jerusalem, so is it in the experience of all men; the promises which sin makes are unfulfilled; the wages of sin are death.

I. THE PICTURE OF DEGRADATION. It is highly figurative language which the prophet here employs; but it is not exaggerated, it is not unjust. 1. The *head* is uncrowned. Judah's independence and freedom was as a crown to the head; but the Chaldeans tore it off and flung it away. They who defy God must lose in so doing all that is most honourable, most sacred, most precious. 2. The *heart* is faint. Judah's joy was turned

into mourning, her hopes were dashed to the ground; how could the heart be other than faint? The ways of sin are ways of disappointment, weariness, and distress. The heart of the transgressor sinks within him when he sees the fruit of his doings. 3. The eyes are dim with watching for deliverance, with tears of woe.

II. THE CAUSE OF DEGRADATION. Judah may have been unwilling to admit the truth, and may have been disposed to attribute calamities to second causes. But the prophet was just, and laid his hand upon the true explanation when he confessed on behalf of his countrymen, "We have sinned!" Trace up human misery and national disaster to the source, and this is to be reached only when we come to defection and departure from the righteous Lord.

III. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF DEGRADATION. "Woe unto us!" is the cry of the prophet. When men sin and suffer but fail to acknowledge their own ill desert, the intentions of Providence are as yet unfulfilled. The sin must be taken home; the punishment must be acknowledged just; the confession must be penitent, sincere, and frank.

IV. THE LESSONS OF DEGRADATION. 1. Let the virtuous and obedient abjure self-confidence and cherish trust in God. 2. Let the tempted beware of the foe, and watch and pray lest they sin and come into this torment. 3. Let the smitten sinner repent and turn unto the Lord and seek pardon and renewal.—T.

Ver. 19.—*The eternal throne.* The believer in God has this great advantage over the atheist and the agnostic—he has a firm conviction that all things are under the control and rule of a wise, righteous, and benevolent King, who reigns both in heaven and on earth. Afflictions, personal and relative, may distress his mind; calamities may overwhelm his imagination and baffle his reason; but he has this consolation—he knows that the Lord remains for ever on his throne.

I. GOD'S ETERNAL THRONE CONTRASTS WITH THE PERISHING THRONES OF EARTH. The King of Judah, defeated and carried captive, was torn by a foreign hand from the throne of his power and glory. All earthly monarchies are transitory and all earthly monarchs are mortal. They perish, but God endureth.

II. THE STABILITY OF GOD'S THRONE RESTS UPON THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF HIS DOMINION. "A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." Injustice and oppression may prevail for a season, but only right is indestructible and immortal. Even in his mercy the Supreme has regard to the claims of justice and to the maintenance of rightful authority.

III. THE DEFEAT OF GOD'S ENEMIES IS ASSURED. They may rage and they may take counsel together, but the Lord has them in derision. All their assaults upon his kingdom must fail, and those who lead those assaults must come to shame and misery. No weapon that is formed against God and his people shall prosper.

IV. THE VICTORY OF GOD'S CAUSE IS CERTAIN. Kingdoms rise and fall, princes are elevated and dethroned; but the King of kings goes conquering and to conquer. All his foes are put beneath his feet, and on his head are many crowns.—T.

Ver. 21.—"*Turn us again!*" The Scriptures are the volume of hope; they lend no countenance to despondency; they rebuke despair. Deep as was the degradation of the Jews, far as they had wandered from God's ways, inexcusably as they had defied his authority, there was for them a place of repentance. And Jeremiah closes this Book of Lamentations with language of confident supplication and well-grounded hope of better times.

I. THE NEED OF TURNING. The whole of the book thus closed witnesses to this necessity. Judah had gone wrong, had wilfully taken the path of rebellion and defiance. In this respect her case represents that of every culpable transgressor. The end of the way of sin is death, is destruction without remedy. It is a stern truth, but it is a truth, and a truth which mercy reveals.

II. TO WHOM THE TURNING MUST BE. "Turn us unto thee!" Away from the sin which has misled, away from the human counsellors and helpers in whom is no wise counsel and no sufficient help, away from self, to God against whom the sinner has transgressed and to whom he needs to be reconciled. The old phrase, "conversion unto God," is one full of truth, meaning, and appropriateness.

III. BY WHOM THE TURNING MUST BE EFFECTED. The prayer is unto the Lord; for he alone can turn the wanderer unto himself. By the authority of his Law, by the winning, melting power of his gospel, by the sweet constraint of his Spirit, he alone can transform the heart, reverse the steps, and renew the olden days of those who have transgressed but have now at length sought his favour and forgiveness.—T.

Ver. 2.—*The fate of inheritance and houses.* The Israelite reckoned a great deal on his inheritance, that which came to him as an Israelite; and in this he did quite right, seeing how he was bound to dwell on the promises made to Abraham. There was the national territory, sanctified and made a peculiarly valuable thing by the manner in which it first came into Israel's hand. Then there were the tribal inheritances and the family inheritances. So that altogether inheritance was continually before the Israelite mind; inheritance became almost a part of self. Doubtless many tracts of land had run down in the same families for generations. And now the foreigner comes in to reap the riches of these lands and dwell in the houses built on them. What the Israelites failed to recollect was that the inheritance they esteemed so much was not the real inheritance in the eyes of God. The visible land, out of which comes the corn, the wine, the oil, is only the type of that deeper, that truly exhaustless spiritual land, where we are to sow plentifully, assured that a harvest cannot fail. There is the inheritance, corruptible, defiled, that doth fade away. There is the house made with hands, temporal, on the earth. And then, all unconscious of the pains we are preparing for ourselves, we let our heart's best affections get round these things. The loss of the inheritance, the loss of the houses, was the way to gain, if only the loser could see it. Doubtless what we may fail to possess of temporal things some one else gets hold of; but his getting is not with a firm, abiding grasp. These lamenting Israelites would reckon that the loss of inheritance and houses, which made them so miserable, would make the new possessors correspondingly happy; and such would be the case for a time, but only so long as the brightness of the first delusion lasted. God does not mean that we should ever say of any really good thing that our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. Of the really good things there is enough and to spare for all. Christ sends out his apostles to urge every one towards the inheritance of the saints in light; and in the house of him who is Father of Jesus and of all that believe in Jesus there are many mansions, many abiding-places, a place for every one wishing to dismiss the restless, craving spirit, and abide in such a place.—Y.

Ver. 7.—*The sin of the fathers and the suffering of the children.* This chapter is the complaint of those who suffer. "We," "us," "our,"—these are the prominent words. The complainers are those who have lost inheritance and houses, become fatherless, and entered into a galling servitude. And now what do they give as the reason of all this terrible experience? This—that "our fathers have sinned."

I. THE MEASURE OF TRUTH IN THIS. The fathers had sinned. That was an historical fact. The utterances of former prophets, recorded, perhaps, in far greater abundance than we have any idea of, attested the iniquities of past generations. No generation of which there was any record had been without its disobedience. And had it not also been said that the sins of the fathers should be visited on the children? Hence there is plain logic in these words, "Our fathers have sinned, . . . and we have borne their iniquities." Great is the suffering in bodily pain, in privation, and in emotion, of every generation; and each generation has a right to say that some, at all events, of this suffering would have been escaped if only preceding generations had lived according to the full law of righteousness. Hence the appeal to us, when self-indulgence presses with all its energies, to consider others. Indulging self, we have to make ready for after-pains; but those pains cannot be kept within the limit of our own lives.

II. True as this statement is, there is A MEASURE OF DEFECT IN IT. Note exactly how the point is put: "Our fathers have sinned, and are not;" that is, "they cannot suffer any more, and now the suffering comes on to us." In such an aspect of the situation there is great pathos, but we need to travel round to the other aspects also. There is a difference between retribution and suffering. Some kinds of pain and injury may be inherited to the third and fourth generation, but a guilty conscience belongs to the individual. The worst pains, the worst consequences, and those on which the Saviour looks

with the most pity, are surely those coming out of our own wrong-doing; and searching into the connection between the sins of past generations and the suffering of the present one will do harm rather than good, if such a searching tends to obscure our own lawlessness, our own want of attention to the requirements of God. There is, indeed, a great difference in kind between the suffering coming on us from the wickedness of others and that which comes from our own.—Y.

Ver. 14.—*The occupation of the elders gone.* I. THE PLACE OF OLD MEN IN A COMMUNITY. As men grow old they may get past certain kinds of work, but they need not cease to be useful, nor need age become, unless from bodily frailty, a burden and a weariness. There is much for an old man to tell from the stores of his experience and observation. He may show what ought to be avoided, even if he cannot always tell what ought to be done. The elders sat in the gate, where the throng passed in and out, and where they could see more people probably than anywhere else. An old man should endeavour to be useful and to mingle with the life of the world as long as he can. It is right that he should be in the way of all the respect and veneration he can receive, not because these things are necessary to his happiness, but because those who give them are the better for their giving. A society without its troops of children at one end, full of life and eagerness, and its sprinkling of hoary heads crowned with glory at the other, would soon feel that very important elements were lacking. Elders sitting in the gate bore testimony to a certain stability and continuity in the social life of Jerusalem.

II. THE PECULIAR ASPECT OF THE CALAMITY FURNISHED BY THE FACT THAT THE OLD MEN HAVE FORSAKEN THE GATE. There is no longer anything to take them to the gate. Where of old they had many pleasures, now they will have nothing but pain. The place of honour would only become a place of insult, and in all likelihood only too many of these elders had been advisers of the wrong sort, men with a serene and firmly rooted confidence in their own opinion. To the warnings of a prophet old men can often reply that such things have been said over and over again without coming true; and then, when all at once the threatening takes effect, what can they do but retire into as much obscurity as possible? These same old men, many of them, must have had much to do with the state of affairs that made all these calamities a Divine necessity.—Y.

Ver. 16.—*Discrowned Jerusalem.* I. THE PAST HONOUR OF JERUSALEM. The crown has fallen from the head; a crown, therefore, has been upon the head. The lament is not over something striven for and not attained, but over something, as it seems, securely possessed and now irretrievably lost. Notice how Ezekiel is instructed to put the matter (xvi. 12). In making Jerusalem to know her abominations there is a contrast with former privileges. Jehovah says, "I put a beautiful crown upon thine head . . . and thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty." Unquestionably Jerusalem and the land of which she was the radiant centre shone forth gloriously among the Gentiles. The great example of this is that queen of the south who came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. God for his own purposes, inscrutable, and yet, as we must believe, beneficent, constituted it so that Jerusalem was like a fair woman crowned with a crown of pure gold. Other cities had their strength, glory, peculiarities, but Jerusalem was uniquely glorious. And so human individuals may have most attractive natural endowments. There may be physical beauty, or genius, or some ineffable charm of character, or great intellectual capacity, something that lifts man or woman above the common crowd, and thus puts upon them a bright and manifest natural crown. The same great secret power that glorified Israel glorifies men still, not for what they do, nor for any claim they have, but that in their glory they may stimulate and inspire others, and multiply the happiness of every life coming within their sway. It was for the sake of the nations that Jehovah glorified Jerusalem and made her beautiful.

II. HER PRESENT HUMILIATION. The crown has fallen from the head, but the mark of past and lost regality remains. It cannot be obliterated. The higher a nation climbs, the further it can fall and the more terrible becomes the spectacle of its fall. It needed all the slow and majestic ascent of Rome to greatness to make Gibbon's great book possible. Thus, looking from such a height, he had pathetic struggles and contrasts to depict, which would else have been impossible. So, also, we contemplate

the aberrations and miseries, the cynicism and misanthropy coming out in the lives of geniuses who have missed their way, men of richest endowments who, from the depths of self-indulgence and debauchery, might well cry, "The crown is fallen from my head." And so we see that the great crown to be desired is, not that which comes through natural differences or differences in social position, but that which comes through the divinely inspired quality of one's living. "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Phil. iv. 1; 2 Tim. iv. 8; Jas. i. 12; 1 Pet. v. 4).—Y.

Ver. 17.—*The faint heart and the dim eyes.* I. THE PENETRATING EFFECT OF THE DIVINE CHASTISEMENTS. Jerusalem had been satisfied with outward things. Wherever it turned, there had been enough to satisfy its pride and its pleasure. And now Jehovah, by efficient agents, had taken these outward things away. The difference that had been made in Jerusalem was perceptible to any eye. But another difference could only be known when it was confessed, namely, the difference made in the hearts of the people when their outward circumstances were so completely changed. Proud, resolute men, full of joy in their selfish purposes, found the interest of life completely gone. It would have availed nothing if all these chastisements had ended in leaving the people real Stoics, able to say that it was all the same whether they kept their temporal possessions or lost them. God did not desolate Jerusalem for any delight that he took in this; it was to find a way to humble hearts that were unsubdued after every prophetic appeal. When men are delightedly occupied with the things of sense, then it is a great end gained if, through losses and changes, their hearts become faint and their eyes dim. For then they may accept the ministry of Christ to put into their hearts an energy which will tend for righteousness and direct their eyes to look on the world in the right way.

II. THE CAUSE HERE SPECIALLY MENTIONED. The hill of Zion has become a desolation; it has become again a mere height in the wilderness, such as doubtless it had been at some time before in the immemorial past. That Zion is here specified seems to point to the sorrow and despair caused by the overthrow of religious ordinances. The very fact that Jehovah had allowed the place devoted to him to become thus desolated made his displeasure with the people to become a much more vivid thing. It seemed as if he needed no more a habitation in their midst.—Y.

Vers. 19—22.—*The only resource acknowledged to be in God.* It will be felt that this prayer is a fitting conclusion to the book. What could be more proper than that these people, having looked all *around* with an ever-deepening sense of loss and humiliation, should now look *above*? Upon earth, in strength or skill of man, there is nothing to be looked for; if anything is to be got, it is by looking to heaven.

I. AMID ALL THESE CHANGES THE CONTINUANCE OF JEHOVAH IS PERCEIVED. Zion has become desolate, but the true throne of God is not there. That God lives, unchangeable, unaffected by our lapses and losses, is the last safeguard of hope, and it is an impregnable one. Much is it to be desired that, amid all the vicissitudes of life, we should have this sense of something unchanging.

II. THE SENSE OF SEPARATION FROM GOD. This was the crown of troubles to some of the people, that God seemed to have forgotten them and forsaken them. But when God remembered them and manifested his presence, all that the people in general did was to take his gifts and think nothing of the Giver's will and purpose. God, of course, had neither forgotten nor forsaken. What the people called forgetting was only a different kind of remembering. What they called forsaking was only a closer presence.

III. THE UNQUENCHABLE HOPE OF THOSE WHO TAKE THE RIGHT VIEW OF GOD. This chapter has had in it the tones of penitence and contrition. It is admitted that the cause of all this desolation is the people's turning away from God. And now there is the petition which results from a full self-discovery. Inward weakness is discovered. The last cry of the book indicates that the turning of men to God is the great thing to be desired. Not a restoration to external possessions and comforts, but a turning to God consequent on his turning to us. The results that come from our being turned to God by his power will one day be seen to justify all the loss and pain needed to bring them about.—Y.

HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.



CHAPTER I.

THEME	PAGE
The Solitary City ...	3
Comfortless ...	4
The Abandoned Feasts ...	5
Her Beauty departed from Zion ...	5
Pleasant Things in the Days of Old ...	6
Sorrow unequalled, yet unheeded ...	7
Fourfold Trouble from God... ..	7
The Righteousness of God confessed... ..	8
The Contrasts of Adversity... ..	9
The Decline of National Religion ...	9
Mournful Memories ...	10
Spoilation and Profanation ...	10
Unparalleled Woe ...	11
"The Lord is Righteous" ...	11
The Cry of the Contrite ...	12
Widowhood . . . the Emblem of Loneli- ness ...	12
Nights of Weeping explained ...	13
Zion forsaken as a Religious Centre ...	14
The Real Need of the Soul made manifest ...	14
The Observation of Suffering ...	15
The Acknowledgment that Suffering is deserved ...	16
A Wicked Gladness ...	16

CHAPTER II.

God not remembering his Footstool ...	19
The Lord as an Enemy ...	20
The Rejected Altar ...	20

THEME	PAGE
"No Vision" ...	21
The Vision of Falsehood and Folly ...	22
The Triumph of the Foe ...	22
Ruin from God ...	23
A Cry to God in the Night Watches... ..	24
The Anger of the Lord ...	25
Retribution in Church and State ...	25
Law and Prophecy suspended ...	26
Commiseration ...	26
The Glory and Shame of Jerusalem ...	27
The Entreaty of Anguish ...	27
Consideration besought ...	27
The Manifestation of Jehovah's Wrath against Israel ...	28
Jehovah reckoned as an Enemy ...	28
The Prophetic Office suspended ...	29
The Silence of the Elders ...	30
The Suffering of the Children ...	30
The Share of the Prophets in ruining Jerusalem ...	31
The Completeness of Jehovah's Visita- tion ...	31

CHAPTER III.

"The Man that has seen Affliction" ...	35
"Dark Places" ...	36
Hedged about ...	37
Strength and Hope perished ...	38
God taking Notice of Man's Affliction	38
The Unceasing Mercies of God ...	39
The Secret of Hope ...	40

THEME	PAGE
Quiet Waiting	41
Youth	41
Chastisement only for a Season ...	42
How Evil and Good both proceed from God	43
Self-Examination	44
God covering himself with a Cloud ...	44
Tears which only God can wipe away	45
"Fear not!"	46
The Great Appeal	46
Afflicted by God	47
The Way of Life hedged and built up	48
Unheard Prayer	48
Prosperity forgotten	48
Remembering Affliction	49
Hope reviving	49
Sparing Compassion	50
"New every Morning"	50
The Portion of the Godly	51
Waiting for Salvation	51
The Yoke in Youth	52
The Cheek to the Smiter	52
Divine Benignity	52
The Source of Evil and of Good ...	53
Why murmur?	53
Repentance	54
"Sursum Corda!"	54
Sympathetic Sorrow	54
The Cry from the Dungeon... ..	55
Prayer heard and answered]	55
The Lord's Knowledge of his People's Sufferings and Wrongs	56
Righteous Recompense	56
The Sum of a Terrible Experience ...	57
How Hope rises from the Depths of Despair	57
The Unfailing Compassions of Jehovah	58
Those who have Jehovah for their Portion	58
God's Goodness to the Hopeful and the Patient	59
The Discipline of Youth	60
God's Good Purposes in causing Pain	60
Approaching God in Sincerity	61
The Eye and the Life	61
Jeremiah calling out of the Dungeon...	62
Jeremiah and his Enemies	62
The Music of the Wicked	63
The Principle of Retribution	63

CHAPTER IV.

THEME	PAGE
Fine Gold dimmed	67, 72
The Violation of Maternal Instincts ...	68
Reverses of Fortune	68
Incredible Calamities	69
Blindness	70
Contamination	71
The End of Punishment	71
"Precious Sons . . . Fine Gold . . . become Earthen Pitchers"	73
The Horrors of Famine	73
The Impregnable taken	73
The Degradation of the Prophets and the Priests	74
Vain Help and Hope	74
The End is come!	75
Fallen Reputation	75
Natural Affection gone	76
Social Revolution	76
The Sin of Sodom... ..	77
Sword and Hunger	77
A Seeming Impossibility achieved ...	78
Shedding the Blood of the Just	78
A Disappointed Confidence and a Deseccrated Sanctity	79

CHAPTER V.

A Prayer of Distress	81
The Lost Inheritance	81
Orphanage and Widowhood	82
Children suffering for the Sins of their Parents	83
Consolation in the Supremacy of God	84
Questioning God	84
Renewal	85
The Lord's Remembrance besought ...	86
The Moral Continuity of Nations	86
None to Deliver	87
The Cessation of Joy	87
The Degradation of Sin	87
The Eternal Throne	88
"Turn us again!"	88
The Fate of Inheritance and Houses...	89
The Sin of the Fathers and the Suffering of the Children	89
The Occupation of the Elders gone ...	90
Discrowned Jerusalem	90
The Faint Heart and the Dim Eyes ...	91
The Only Resource acknowledged to be in God	91