

THE
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE
VERY REV. H. D. M. SPENCE, D.D.,

DEAN OF GLOUCESTER;

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

WITH
INTRODUCTIONS

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A M O S.

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Homiletics
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Homilies by Various Authors.
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THE BOOK OF AMOS.

INTRODUCTION.

§ I. SUBJECT OF THE BOOK.

At the time when Amos prophesied both Israel and Judah stood high in prosperity and wealth. The warlike Jeroboam II. had overcome the Syrians, and recovered the original territory of his kingdom from Hamath in the extreme north to the Dead Sea (2 Kings xiv. 25, 28). Uzziah King of Judah had subdued the restless Edomites and Philistines, reduced the Ammonites to subjection; and, while largely encouraging agriculture and the arts of peace, he raised a powerful army, and strongly fortified Jerusalem (2 Chron. xxvi.). Israel, secure from outward enemies and strong in inward resources, was very far from expecting ruin and destruction. Prosperity in both kingdoms had produced its too common fruits—pride, luxury, selfishness, oppression. In Zion and Samaria alike such sins were rife; but in the northern kingdom they were accentuated and increased by the calf-worship which was still practised there. To Bethel, the central seat of this idolatry, Amos was sent from Jerusalem. His mission was to rebuke this iniquity, and to announce to these careless sinners the approach of Divine judgment. It was probable that, in a kingdom where impostors abounded, a seer, coming from a foreign district and claiming to be commissioned by the Lord, might command respect; though the issue proved very different. Never since the man of God came out of Judah by the word of the Lord in the days of the first Jeroboam (1 Kings xiii.) had any southern prophet gone on such an errand. Now a second message was sent; and in this book the utterances of the prophet on this great occasion are gathered together and arranged in due order. Though his special mission was directed to Israel, Amos does not confine himself altogether to denunciations of this kingdom. His cry extended to Judah and to the hostile nations which surrounded the covenant people.

The book naturally divides itself into four parts—an introduction; addresses; visions; and Messianic prophecy.

The introduction (ch. i., ii.) consists of denunciations of the heathen kingdoms bordering on Israel, foretelling the destruction that shall befall them, viz. Damascus, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, Edom, Ammon, Moab. Judah, too, is placed in the same category, because it also was alienated from God. The judgment on Israel is proclaimed here in general terms; the remainder of the book particularizes the denounced sins and confirms the awful sentence.

The second part (ch. iii.—vi.) contains three prophetic addresses, divided by the recurrence of the solemn refrain, "Hear ye." The first address convicts Israel of ingratitude for God's past mercies; shows that the Lord must needs punish the nation, and that he has commissioned the prophet to announce the judgment. Israel has sinned by injustice and violence; its palaces and holy places shall be destroyed, and its people carried into captivity. The second address depicts the sins of oppression and idolatry; tells how God had visited the people with various chastisements, but they were still incorrigible; therefore he will inflict further punishment, to see if perchance they will repent. In his third address Amos laments the fate of Israel, exhorts earnestly to amendment, and then, with a double "Woe!" he shows how hopeless is their trust in their covenant relation to Jehovah, and how baseless their fancied security from danger; for ere long their land should be invaded, their cities should be destroyed, and they themselves should be carried into captivity. This last "woe" is to affect Judah also, even "them that are at ease in Zion" (ch. vi. 1).

The visions (ch. vii.—ix. 10) are closely connected with the preceding addresses, and carry on the warnings there enunciated, giving, as it were, the stages or gradations of punishment. The first two visions, of locusts and fire, correspond to the visitations mentioned in ch. iv. 6—11. These chastisements stop short of utter destruction, being alleviated at the intercession of the prophet. The third and fourth visions confirm the irrevocable character of the judgments threatened in the previous addresses. The plumb-line intimates that forgiveness is now not to be expected. Here Amos introduces an historical episode, detailing Amaziah's opposition to his prophecy and God's sentence upon him. He then proceeds to the fourth vision, which, under the figure of a basket of summer fruit, exhibits Israel as ripe for judgment; and he enforces this lesson by foretelling that their feasts should be turned to mourning, and that those who now despise the Word of God shall some day suffer a famine of the Word. The last vision displays the Lord destroying the temple and its worshippers, yea, the whole sinful nation. Yet it should not be utterly annihilated. "Sifted" shall the people be among the nations, yet shall not one good grain perish.

The prophecy ends with one promise—the only one in the book—that the fallen kingdom should be raised again, should be extended by the incoming of the heathen, should be glorified and enriched with Divine graces, and that its duration should be eternal—a promise which has its fulfilment, not in any temporary restoration of Israel to its own land, but

in the foundation of the Christian Church and its final conquest of the world (see the reference to this prophecy by St. James in Acts xv. 16). Amos nowhere mentions the person of the Messiah, but his reference to the house of David includes and leads up to Christ.

§ II. AUTHOR.

Amos is the third of the minor prophets. His name is usually taken to signify "Carrier," but is better interpreted "Heavy" or "Burden," in allusion to the grievous message which he had to deliver. Jewish commentators suggest that he was so called because he stammered or was slow of speech, as St. Paul says of himself that his speech was considered contemptible. In old time he was by some confounded with Amoz, the father of Isaiah; but the final letter of the two names is different, being *samec* in the case of the prophet, and *tzadi* in that of the other. The name does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament; but in St. Luke's genealogy of our Lord (iii. 25), we meet with an Amos, son of Naum and father of Mattathias. Amos was, as he himself tells, a native of Tekoah, a small town of Judah, situate on a hill about five miles south of Bethlehem, lying in a pastoral district. "A road," says Dr. Thomson, "leads from Hebron, through a rough and mostly deserted region, to Tekua, the ancient Tekoah. . . . The ruins of that city are some three miles south of the Pools of Solomon, and cover a broad swell of the mountain, which runs up to a great height towards the south-west" ('The Land and the Book,' pp. 304, 330). "Tekoa," says Mr. Porter, "is now, and has been for ages, an uninhabited waste. So complete has been the overthrow that I could not find even a fragment of a wall sufficient to shade me from the scorching sun. The ruins are scattered over the broad summit of one of the highest hills in the Judæan range. The view is magnificent and full of interest. On the west is seen the sweep of the range from Mizpah to Hebron; on the east, 'the wilderness of Judah' sinks down, white, rugged, bare, to the Dead Sea. In that wilderness David kept his sheep, and afterwards wandered a refugee from the court of Saul. On the north, a few miles off, I saw Bethlehem. To the right, in the bottom of a wild ravine, is the cave of Adullam. Further down, on the shores of the Dead Sea, are 'the cliffs of the wild goats,' from whose side springs the fountain of Engedi. And beyond the sea is the wall-like ridge of Moab, and to the south the ruddy-tinted mountains of Edom. A mournful and solitary silence broods over that wonderful panorama. In the touching words of the old Hebrew prophet, 'the earth mourneth and languisheth'" ('Travels in Palestine,' p. 20). From Tekoah came the wise woman who, suborned by Joab, made use of a parable to incline David's heart to his banished son Absalom (2 Sam. xiv.). It was also one of the places fortified by Rehoboam as a defence against invasion from the south (2 Chron. xi. 6). Thither Jonathan and Simon, the Maccabeans, fled to escape the attack of Bacchides (see 1 Macc. ix. 33, etc.). At this place Amos was born. At first a herdsman and a poor

cultivator of sycamore trees (ch. vii. 14), he received the Divine call, and, untrained in the schools, no prophet nor prophet's son, was sent to prophesy against Israel. So, like an apostle, leaving all at his Master's word, travelling from Judah he came to Bethel, the temple and summer palace of the king, in order to raise his voice against the worship of the calf which prevailed there in profane union with the service of Jehovah. Here he was opposed by Amaziah, the idolatrous high priest, who complained of him to the king as a dangerous conspirator. He was accordingly banished from the northern kingdom, and compelled to return to Judah, where probably he composed the book in the form in which it has reached our hands. But he seems to have found opportunity to deliver his stern message in Samaria (ch. iii. 9; iv. 1) before his final expulsion at Bethel; for Amaziah complains that he had "conspired in the midst of the house of Israel," and that "the land was not able to bear his words" (ch. vii. 10).

Though of such humble extraction, Amos had an eye to the geographical peculiarities of his native land, so as to use with effect his knowledge of various localities; nor was he unacquainted with the history of his own and other countries. Tradition (sp. Pseudo-Epiph., c. xii., 'De Vit. Proph.') asserts that he was cruelly maltreated at Bethel, and returned to Tekoah only to die. His tomb there was still shown in St. Jerome's time.

§ III. DATE.

Amos is said (ch. i. 1) to have prophesied "in the days of Uzziah King of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash King of Israel." Uzziah's reign (according to data corrected by Assyrian monuments) lasted from B.C. 792 to 740, and Jeroboam's from B.C. 790 to 749. The time specified above probably refers to the period during which the two monarchs were contemporaneous, viz. from B.C. 790 to 749, a period of forty-one years. Another computation assigns Jeroboam's reign to B.C. 816—775; but there is still some uncertainty about the exact date. Hence we cannot determine the time of our prophecy with perfect satisfaction. It could not have been the commencement of Jeroboam's reign, as Amos intimates that this king had already overcome his enemies and regained his lost territory (ch. vi. 2, 13, compared with 2 Kings xiv. 25); nor could it have been the end, because he makes no mention of the Assyrians who about that time were beginning to threaten Palestine. The further specification in the text, "two years before the earthquake," is not determinate, as that event is not mentioned in the historical books. One that happened in Uzziah's day, as Jewish tradition said, in consequence of or coincident with his usurpation of the priest's office (Josephus, 'Ant.,' ix. 10), was well remembered some centuries afterwards (Zech. xiv. 5), and is perhaps alluded to elsewhere (e.g. Joel iii. 16; Isa. ii. 19); but we are unable to fix the date of the occurrence. Every detail in the prophecy confirms the authenticity of the statement in the introduction. Jeroboam is mentioned (ch. vii. 10), and the circumstances of his time, as we noted

above, are accurately alluded to. The taking of Gath by Uzziah is inferred (ch. vi. 2 compared with 2 Chron. xxvi. 6).

The prophet uttered his warnings, not at intervals during all the period named, but at some definite time therein, and probably during a very short space. He must have been contemporaneous with, if not a little earlier than Hosea, and later than Joel, as he takes up this prophet's words in the commencement of his own prediction (comp. ch. i. 2 with Joel iii. 16), and quotes him in ch. ix. 13 (see Introduction to Joel).

§ IV. GENERAL CHARACTER.

Critics since Jerome have called Amos *imperitus sermone*, reasoning from his occasional use of homely images drawn from flock and herd and pastoral life, the matters with which his occupation was concerned (ch. ii. 13; iii. 4, 5, 8, 12; iv. 6—9; v. 11, 17; vi. 12; viii. 8; ix. 5). And certainly his style is not sublime or pitched in the highest strain of poetry, but it is notable for clearness and energy, and shows considerable literary skill both in the arrangement of rhythm and in the grouping of parallelisms. The imagery based on scenes amongst which he dwelt, far from being a defect in the work, adds a special charm; and one would be very loath to miss the vividness and naturalness which are thereby imparted to it. The changes in nature (ch. iv. 13), the dangers from wild beasts, the starry sky (ch. v. 8), flood, tempest, lightning, were observed by him in his watchings and wanderings, and left their reminiscence in his language. If at times, as some critics suppose, he uses the dialect of the people instead of the more refined terms of court and school, this would be in entire keeping with his simple life and character. We are not to suppose that inspiration overrides a man's habitual mode of expression, or compels an untrained peasant to adopt the language of a learned scribe. The book, at any rate, shows that we have received it such as its author wrote it, without adventitious ornamentation or amendment. If he speaks mostly in prose, surely visions such as he narrates, denunciations such as he utters, are thus more effectively presented. The very simplicity of his language makes it impressive. We see in him a confirmation of the theory with which Wordsworth has made us familiar, that the diction of uneducated people has in itself a certain poetic power which raises it to an equality with that of higher social station. Without anything of poetry in the words, what force is there in that sudden and unexpected summons, "Because I will do *this* [what?] unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (ch. iv. 12)! There is true pathos when, having shown how the luxurious spared nothing in ministering to their own selfishness, Amos ends with the accusing cry, "But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." The strophic arrangement of some of the periods is very remarkable. The oft-recurring formula, "for three transgressions, and for four" (ch. i., ii.), the sorrowful burden, "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (ch. iv.), are patent instances of this.

This uneducated prophet's accurate acquaintance with the Law of Moses denotes much more than a familiarity with the national traditions. His knowledge of the Pentateuch appears not only in general allusions to history, ritual, ceremony, but in the actual use of verbal forms and expressions which belong to the Mosaic writings. "Blasting and mildew" are the punishment of disobedience (ch. iv. 9 compared with Deut. xxviii. 22); "gall and wormwood" are the bitter fruits into which the sinners turned righteousness and judgment (ch. vi. 12 with Deut. xxix. 18); the sad refrain mentioned above (ch. iv. 6, 8, 9, 10, 11) is founded on Deut. iv. 29, 30. The oppressors "lie down on clothes laid to pledge" (ch. ii. 8 with Exod. xxii. 26), "turn aside the way of the meek, and turn aside the poor in the gate" (ch. ii. 7; ver. 12 with Exod. xxiii. 6; Deut. xvi. 19, etc.). Unnatural immorality "profanes God's holy Name" (ch. ii. 7 with Lev. xviii. 21; xx. 3). One hardly need multiply quotations to prove the prophet's knowledge of the history and ritual of the Mosaic books. He alludes to the Exodus, the overthrow of Sodom, the gigantic stature of the Amorites, the sacrifices of the Law, the Nazarite vow. His threats and promises are often couched in Mosaic language (comp. ch. iv. 6, 7 with Deut. xxviii. 23, 48, 57 and Lev. xxvi. 19, 20; ch. iv. 11 with Deut. xxix. 23; ch. v. 11 with Deut. xxviii. 30).

Thus Amos presupposes that his hearers were well acquainted with the Pentateuch, and had a firm belief in its history; otherwise much of the prophecy would have lost its force or have been unintelligible. Hosea and Jeremiah seem to have borrowed from or to have been acquainted with our prophet. Compare, for instance, ch. ii. 5 with Hos. viii. 14; ch. vii. 17 with Hos. ix. 3; ch. i. 4 with Jer. xlix. 27; ch. i. 15 with Jer. xlix. 3. Further parallelisms will be found noted in the Exposition.

We may conclude that in simple, unadorned eloquence, in structural regularity, in natural vigour, and in loftiness of thought, Amos reaches a well-grounded eminence; and, as Lowth decides ('De Poes. Hebr. Præl.', xx. 1), the author of such writings was in no wise behind the very chiefest of the prophets.

§ V. LITERATURE.

We need not enumerate the commentators who have written upon the whole of the minor prophets, patristic, mediæval, and modern, as the chief of them have already been mentioned in the Introduction to Hosea. Two recent Roman Catholic commentaries, however, may be specially noted, one by L'Abbé Trochon (Paris, 1883), containing the Latin Vulgate with a French translation, and a commentary considerably indebted to Keil; and the other by J. Knabenbauer (Paris, 1886), forming a part of the 'Cursus Scripturæ Sacræ,' edited by Jesuit Fathers. It consists of a commentary written in Latin, and containing useful answers to the rationalistic theories of the present day. Here, too, may be mentioned Archdeacon Farrar's 'The Minor Prophets,' in the 'Men of the Bible' series (1891). Among monographs on this prophet may be mentioned the following: Luther, 'Enarratio in Prophetam Amos'; Gerhard, 'Annotationes' (Jena, 1676); Harenberg, 'Amos Expositus' (Leyden, 1763); Dahl, 'Amos, neu übers. und erläutert.' (Göttingen, 1795); Bishop Horsley, 'Critical Notes'; Baur, 'Der P. Amos erklärt' (1847); Bishop Ryan, 'Lectures' (1850); and works by Uhland,

Justi, Vater, Benefield, and Laurent. Of the above, the commentary of Baur, with a valuable introduction, is most generally useful. Articles by Wellhausen, in the 'Brit. Encyclop.,' xiii., and by Nöldeke, in Schenkel's 'Bibel-Lexicon,' will repay examination.

§ VI. ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOK IN SECTIONS.

The book is best arranged in four parts.

Part I. (Ch. i., ii.) Approaching judgment : a prelude.

§ 1. (Ch. i.—ii. 3.) Summons of the nations bordering on the Holy Land.

§ 2. (Ch. ii. 4, 5.) Summons of Judah.

§ 3. (Ch. ii. 6—16.) Summons and general denunciation of Israel.

Part II. (Ch. iii.—vi.) Three addresses particularizing the sins of Israel and announcing imminent punishment.

§ 1. (Ch. iii.) First address.

§ 2. (Ch. iv.) Second address.

§ 3. (Ch. v., vi.) Third address.

Part III. (Ch. vii.—ix. 10.) Five visions, with explanations.

§ 1. (Ch. vii. 1—3.) First vision : locusts.

§ 2. (Ch. vii. 4—6.) Second vision : fire.

§ 3. (Ch. vii. 7—9.) Third vision : plumb-line.

§ 4. (Ch. vii. 10—17.) Historical parenthesis.

§ 5. (Ch. viii. 1—14.) Fourth vision : basket of fruits.

§ 6. (Ch. ix. 1—10.) Fifth vision : the Lord at the altar.

Part IV. (Ch. ix. 11—15.) Epilogue : establishment of the new kingdom.

THE BOOK OF AMOS.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1.—ch. ii. 16.—Part I. APPROACHING JUDGMENT.

Ver. 1.—ch. ii. 3.—§ 1. *The nations bordering on the Holy Land are solemnly summoned to judgment.*

Vers. 1, 2.—Heading of the book, with short summary of its contents.

Ver. 1.—Heading. The words. So Jeremiah begins his prophecy (Jer. i. 1), and the writer of Ecclesiastes (i. 1). That the words are not those of Amos, but of Jehovah, is shown by the succeeding clause, "which he saw." **Herdmen.** The Hebrew word *noked* used here is found in 2 Kings iii. 4, applied to Mesha King of Moab, a great "sheepmaster;" hence some have considered that Amos was not a mere mercenary, but a rich possessor of flocks. His own words, however (ch. vii. 14, 15), decide his position as that of a poor labouring man. **Tekoah.** A small town of Judah (see above in the account of the author, Introduction, § II.). He saw, with inward intuition. Hence his "words" were inspired (comp. Isa. ii. 1; Hab. i. 1). Concerning Israel chiefly, mention of Judah being introduced only incidentally and as connected with the destinies of Israel. The Septuagint reads, by some mistake, "concerning Jerusalem." In the days. (For the date of the prophecy, see above, Introduction, § III.) Earthquake. No mention is made of this event in the historical books. It was remembered in after-years (see Zech. xiv. 5), and Amos alludes to it as a token of the judgment which he foretold, such catastrophes being regarded as signs of the majesty of God and his vengeance on sinners (comp. Exod. xix. 18; Ps. lxxviii. 8; Micah i. 4; Hab. iii. 6, 10). Josephus ('Ant.,' ix. 10. 4) attributes this earthquake to God's displeasure at

Uzziah's usurpation of the priest's office (2 Chron. xxvi. 16).

Ver. 2.—And he said. This is the commencement of "the words" of Amos (ver. 1); and herein the prophet gives a short summary of the judgment which he has to pronounce. The following clause is a repetition of Joel iii. 16; and Amos thus connects his prophecy with that of his predecessor, to show the unity of prophetic mission, and to warn the Jews that God's punishments are not directed exclusively on heathen nations. To the nations denounced by Joel, Amos adds others of Israel's enemies, viz. Syria, Ammon, and Moab. **Roar . . . voice.** The thunder is the voice of God, announcing his coming to judge. **From Zion.** Not from Dan and Bethel, the seats of idolatrous worship, but from Jerusalem, the abode of his presence. **The habitations; better, the pastures.** It is only natural that Amos, the shepherd, should use such terms to express the idea that the whole land, from Jerusalem on the south to Carmel on the north, should feel the vengeance of the Lord. **Shall mourn; explained by the following term, shall wither; i.e. shall lose their verdure** (comp. Jer. xii. 11; Hos. iv. 3). **The top of Carmel.** This is the Mount Carmel, which stretches boldly into the sea on the south of the Bay of Acre, and is remarkable for its extreme fertility, its rich pastures, its vines, olives, fruits, and flowers. Thomson, 'The Land and the Book,' writes thus about it: "The celebrated ridge, called in the Bible Mount Carmel, and by the Arabs Jebel Kurmul, or Mâr Elyâs, in honour of Elijah, is an extension of the hills of Samaria, in a north-westerly direction, for a distance of about eighteen miles, terminating in the bold promontory of Carmel, which descends almost literally into the sea. It is steep and lofty where it overhangs the Mediterranean above Haifa,

and on that face which overlooks the Plain of Acre on the north, and that of Esdraelon towards the south-east. There is no special excellency in Carmel at the present day, whatever may be said of Sharon. Its name, Karmul, or Kerm-el, signifies 'the vineyard of God'; but its vineyards have all disappeared. It was a glorious mountain, however, and a prominent landmark; according to Jeremiah (xli. 18), Carmel was a resort of herdsmen. Amos says, 'The habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither,' in the time of the threatened judgment, and this implies that its pastures were not ordinarily liable to wither. This may, in part, have been occasioned by the heavy dews which its lofty elevation, so near the sea, causes to distil nightly upon its thirsty head. I found it quite green and flowery in midsummer. It was a noble pasture-field, and, in reference to that characteristic, Micah utters his sweet prayer, 'Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.'

Vers. 3—5.—Before announcing the judgment on Israel, Amos proclaims the punishment on neighbouring heathen nations for their injurious treatment of the chosen people, thus showing God's care for his elect, and leading them to fear vengeance for their own greater sins towards him. The order observed in denouncing these nations is not geographical, but is regulated by the nature of each people's relation to Israel, and the degree in which they have sinned against her. The denunciation begins with Syria, her hitherto most oppressive enemy, and the least akin.

Ver. 3.—For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four. This form of expression is repeated in each of the following strophes, and some critics have taken the terms literally, and have tried to identify that particular number of transgressions in each case; but this is trifling. The phrase and others similar to it are not uncommon, and are used to signify a great number, the last-mentioned being supposed to fill up the measure and make it overflow. Thus Job v. 19, "He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee" (comp. Job xxxiii. 29; Prov. xxx. 15, 18, 21; Eccles. xi. 2). So Hom., 'Od.,' v. 306, *Τριπράκτες Δαυαὸν καὶ τετραπλῆς*; and Virg., 'Æn.,' i. 94, "O terque quaterque beati"; comp. Hor., 'Carm.,' i. 31. 13. Damascus had been an active enemy of Israel since the time that Rezon

threw off his allegiance (1 Kings xi. 28, etc.), and seized Damascus, which had been tributary to David (2 Sam. viii. 5). The history of the wars carried on by Syria against the Jews may be read in the sacred books (see 1 Kings xv. 19, etc.; 2 Chron. xvi. 2, etc.; 1 Kings xx.; xxii.; 2 Kings vii.; ix. 14, etc.; x. 32, etc.; xii. 18; xiii. 5, 25; 2 Chron. xxiv. 23, etc.; 2 Kings xiv. 23). I will not turn away the punishment thereof. So in the following strophes. Literally, *I will not reverse it*. Amos does not expressly say *what*; but he means the sentence or judgment (comp. Numb. xxiii. 20, "I cannot reverse it," where the same word is used). The Latin Vulgate gives, *Non convertam eum*, i.e. *Damascus*, which Knabenbauer explains, "I will not avert its destruction, will not turn it aside from its downward course." The LXX. renders, *Ὀὐκ ἀποστραφήσομαι αὐτόν*, "I will not turn away from it," i.e., as explained by Theodoret, "I will no longer disregard its sins." Because they have threshed Gilead. This is the culminating offence of the Syrians. The word rendered "threshing-instrument" (*charute*) signifies a kind of corn-drag made of heavy planks fastened together and armed beneath with sharp stones or iron points. This machine, weighted with the driver who sat or stood upon it, was drawn by oxen over the corn (comp. Isa. xxviii. 27; xli. 15). A representation of it is given by Smith, 'Dict. of Bible,' i. 31, and Kitto, 'Cyclop.,' i. 86. Such an instrument, set with sharp flints in rows, was to be seen in the Indian and Colonial Exhibition of the year 1886, in the Cyprus department. Another kind of instrument (*moreg*) is thus described by Jerome: "Est autem genus plaustrum, quod rotis subter ferreis atque dentatis volvitur, ut excussis frumentis stipulam in areis conerat, et in cibis jumentorum propter fœni sterilitatem paleas comminuat." Such an implement was used in the infliction of capital punishment by David (2 Sam. xii. 31; comp. Prov. xx. 26). Gilead is here put for all the country east of Jordan (Josh. xxii. 9). The cruel treatment referred to in the text occurred in the time of Hazael during the reign of Jehu (2 Kings x. 32, etc.; comp. xiii. 7). The Septuagint has, "Because with iron saws they sawed asunder women with child." This is doubtless a reminiscence of Elisha's words to Hazael (2 Kings viii. 12).

Ver. 4.—Fire. Material fire, though elsewhere the term is used metaphorically for war and its evils (comp. Numb. xxi. 28; Ps. lxxviii. 63; Jer. xlviii. 45). This passage of Amos, combined with ver. 14, is quoted by Jeremiah (xli. 27), where he is pronouncing the doom of Damascus. House of Hazael . . . palaces of Benhadad. The

two expressions are parallel, or they may signify the family of Hazael, and Damascus itself with its magnificent royal palaces. There were three kings of Syria named Benhadad. The first of the name made alliance with Asa, and fought successfully against Baasha (1 Kings xv. 20); Benhadad II. was the contemporary of Ahab, and carried on war for many years with the northern kingdom (1 Kings xx.). He was murdered either by Hazael or his servants (2 Kings viii. 15). Benhadad III., the son of Hazael, was a monarch of small ability, and Syria under his sway sank into insignificance (2 Kings xiii. 4, etc.; xiv. 27; xv. 17). All this happened before the time of Amos, who probably refers to all the kings of that name, Benhadad, "Son of the Sun," being the title of the dynasty.

Ver. 5.—The bar which secured the gate of the city (1 Kings iv. 13; Jer. li. 30; Nah. iii. 13). Breaking the bar is equivalent to laying the place open to the enemy. From the plain of Aven; Vulgate, *de campo idoli*; Hebrew, *bikath-Aven*; Septuagint, *ἐκ πεδίου Ἀν*; better, *from the valley of Aven*, or *vanity*, perhaps so called analogously with Hosen's naming *Bethel*, *Bethaven*, "House of God" and "House of vanity" (Hos. v. 8). Robinson ('Bibl. Res.' 677) and Pusey refer the name to a valley between Lebanon and Antilibanus, a continuation of the Arabah, still called *Bukaa*, in the middle of which stood Baalbec, "the Temple of the sun of the valley," called Heliopolis by Greek and Roman writers (see 'Classical Museum,' iii. 136). The LXX. renders "On" in Gen. xli. 45 by "Heliopolis;" and On and Baal being both titles of the sun, and indeed synonymous, the introduction of "On" into this passage may be accounted for. Him that holdeth the sceptre. The king and princes, as ver. 8. From the house of Eden; Hebrew, *Beth-Eden*, "House of delight;" Vulgate, *de domo voluptatis*; Septuagint, *ἐξ ἀνδρῶν Χαβδν*, "out of the men of Charran." This last rendering arises from considering that the reference was to the Eden of Gen. ii., which the translators placed in the region of Haran. The place in the text Keil supposes to be the Paradisus of the Greeks, which Ptolemy (v. 15. 20) locates south-east of Laodicea. Schrader suggests a place on the banks of the middle Euphrates between Bālis and Biredschich called *Bit-Adini* in inscriptions of Asurnasirhabal and Salmanassur II. But this seems to be a wrong locality (see 'Die Keilinschriften,' p. 327). The passage means that all the inhabitants of valley and city, king and peasant, shall be cut off. Shall go into captivity. The word implies that the land shall be "stripped" or "bared" of its inhabitants. Wholesale deportation had not

hitherto been common in these regions. Xir has been identified with the country on the banks of the river Kar, which flows into the Araxes on the south-west of the Caspian Sea. It forms part of the territory known as Transcaucasia. From this region the Syrians originally emigrated (ch. ix. 7), and back to this land a large body were carried when Tiglath-Pileser, some fifty years later, killed Rezin and sacked Damascus, as related in 2 Kings xvi. 9. Saith the Lord. This is the solemn confirmation of the prophet's announcement, and recurs in vers. 8, 15 and ch. ii. 3.

Ver. 6.—The judgment on Philistia.

Ver. 6.—Gaza is here used as the representative of the five cities of the Philistines. Three others are mentioned in ver. 8, Gath being omitted as having long lost its importance, if not already destroyed (comp. 2 Chron. xxvi. 6; Jer. xxv. 20; Zeph. ii. 4, where see note; Zech. ix. 5, 6). Gaza, modern *Guzzeh*, was the most southern city of Philistia in the immediate neighbourhood of the desert. (For a description of the Plain of Philistia, see Sir C. Warren, 'Survey Memoirs,' volume on Jerusalem, p. 436.) The whole captivity; Hebrew, "an entire captivity," the whole people, so that neither age nor sex was spared. A similar complaint is made in Joel iii. 4, 6. What the LXX. mean by their rendering here and ver. 9, ἀρχαλοῦσαν τοῦ Σαλωμών, it is very hard to say. Probably they punctuated the word translated "perfect" (*shelemah*) *shelemoh*, making "Solomon" stand for his people Israel. Cyril supposes that the reference is to cities which Solomon established among neighbouring nations; these had now been destroyed or seized. The event referred to may be the invasion of Judah by Philistines and Arabians in the time of Joram, mentioned in 2 Chron. xxi. 16, etc., and in which it is possible that a compact was made that the captive Judæans should be delivered to their bitterest enemies, the Edomites. One would rather have expected a reference to some evil inflicted on Israel (as in ver. 3) instead of an injury done to Judah.

Ver. 7.—A fire. Each guilty city is to have its own special punishment, though probably the calamity of each is common to all. Gaza was conquered by Sennacherib when he invaded Judæa in the time of Hezekiah, by Pharaoh-Necho (Jer. xlvii. 1), and by Alexander the Great, who spent more than two months in its siege (Josephus, 'Ant.' xi. 8. 4; Arrian, ii. 27; see note on Zeph. ii. 4).

Ver. 8.—*Ashdod*, "the Waster," *hōd*. *Esud*, or *Shdood* (called Azotus in Acts viii. 40), and still a large village, lay about thirty-five miles north of Gaza, three miles

from the sea. Ashkelon was situate between the two. "Askelon differs from the other celebrated cities of the Philistines, being seated on the sea, while Ekron, Gath, Jamnia, Ashdod, and Gaza are in the interior. It never could have had a harbour of any considerable size, however. . . . The topography of the place is peculiar. An abrupt ridge begins near the shore, runs up eastward, bends round to the south, then to the west, and finally north-west to the sea again, forming an irregular amphitheatre. On the top of this ridge ran the wall, which was defended at its salient angles by strong towers. The specimens which still exist show that it was very high and thick, built, however, of small stones, and bound together by broken columns of granite and marble. This clearly proves that it is patchwork, and not Askelon's original rampart. . . . The position is one of the fairest along this part of the Mediterranean coast; and when the interior of the amphitheatre was adorned with splendid temples and palaces, ascending, rank above rank, from the shore to the summit, the appearance from the sea must have been very imposing. Now the whole area is planted over with orchards of the various kinds of fruit which flourish in this region" (Thomson, 'The Land and the Book,' *Southern Palestine*, p. 171). In spite of its bad harbour, it carried on a lucrative foreign commerce, which was the chief cause of its power and importance (Ewald, 'Hist. of Israel,' i. 247, Eng. transl.). It was about fifty Roman miles from Jerusalem. In mediæval times there were two cities of the name, one on the coast (Jer. xlvii. 7), the same as Herod's Ascalon, and one inland. In its palmiest days the former could never have had a real harbour ('Survey Memoirs,' iii. pp. 245, 246). Ekron, *hod. Akir*, was twelve miles north-east of Ashdod, and some nine from the coast. Ashdod was taken by Uzziiah (2 Chron. xxvi. 6), by the tartan, or commander-in-chief, of Sargon (Isa. xx. 1), and by Psammetichus King of Egypt (B.C. 635), when it sustained a siege of twenty-nine years (Herod., ii. 157). Senacherib, in a cuneiform inscription, records how he treated the two other cities: "Zedekiah King of Ashkelon," he says, "who had not submitted himself to my yoke, himself, the gods of the house of his fathers, his wife, his sons, his daughters, and his brothers, the seed of the house of his fathers, I removed, and I sent him to Assyria. I set over the men of Ashkelon, Sarludari, the son of Rukipti, their former king, and I imposed upon him the payment of tribute, and the homage due to my majesty, and he became a vassal. . . . I marched against the city of Ekron, and put to death the priests and the chief men who

had committed the sin (of rebellion), and I hung up their bodies on stakes all round the city. The citizens who had done wrong and wickedness I counted as a spoil" (Professor Sayce, 'Fresh Light from the Monuments,' pp. 120, 121). *I will turn mine hand; literally, will bring back my hand; visit again with punishment, or repeat the blow* (Isa. i. 25; Jer. vi. 9; see note on Zeoh. xiii. 7). *The remnant.* All the Philistines who had as yet escaped destruction (comp. ch. ix. 12; Jer. vi. 9).

Vers. 9, 10.—The judgment on Tyre.

Ver. 9.—They delivered up the whole captivity (see note on ver. 6). The sin of Tyre, the great Phœnician merchant city, was committed in concert with the Philistines (comp. Ps. lxxxiii. 7), and was of the same character, except that she is not accused of carrying away the captives, but only of handing them over to the Edomites. It is probable that the Phœnicians had gotten into their hands, by purchase or some other means, Israelitish prisoners, whom they delivered over to the Edomites, forgetting the brotherly covenant made by their forefathers with David and Solomon (2 Sam. v. 11; 1 Kings v. 1, 7—11; ix. 11—14; 2 Chron. ii. 11). The cruel conduct of Tyre was quite unprovoked, as no Jewish king had made war against Phœnicia or its capital.

Ver. 10.—A fire, as ver. 7; see Ezekiel's prophecy against Tyre (xxvi.). She had long been tributary to Assyria, but, revolting, was punished by Sargon, and later was attacked by Nebuchadnezzar, who besieged it for thirteen years, with what success is not known. The Assyrian monuments afford no account of its capture by this monarch (comp. Isa. xxiii.; Jer. xlvii. 4; Arrian., ii. 16—24). (For its capture and destruction by Alexander the Great, see notes on Zeoh. ix. 2, 4.)

Vers. 11, 12.—The judgment on Edom.

Ver. 11.—His brother. The prophet proceeds to denounce the three nations cognate to Israel, of which the Edomites were the nearest and the most inimical. From the time of Esau until now they had been consistent in enmity, and it is this unbrotherly conduct rather than any specific outrages which Amos here condemns. Edom is accused of relentless persecution, inhumanity, savage fury, and persistent anger. (For the brotherhood of Edom, see Numb. xx. 14; Deut. ii. 4, 5, 8; xxiii. 7, etc. For his hostility to Israel, see Numb. xx. 18; 1 Kings xi. 14; 2 Kings viii. 20; 2 Chron. xx. 10; xxv. 11, 12; xxviii. 17.) The prophecy of Obadiah is directed against Edom (comp. also Ezek. xxv. 12; xxxv. 5, 15; Joel iii. 19). *Did cast off all pity; literally,*

corrupted his compassions; i.e. did violence to his natural feelings. So Ezek. xxviii. 17, "Thou hast corrupted thy wisdom," perverted it from its proper end. The LXX. gives, *ἐλυμῆναι μητέρα* (*μήτραν*, Alex.) *ἐπὶ γῆς*, "did violence to the mother that bare them." On this Jerome remarks, "Pro misericordia Septuaginta vulvam transtulerunt, ducti ambiguitate verborum, quia *rethem* et vulvam et misericordiam significat." Did tear, as a wild beast tears his prey. So in Job xvi. 9, where the same word is used, "He hath torn me in his wrath" (comp. Hos. vi. 1). And he kept his wrath for ever; more literally, and *its fury it* (Edom) keeps for ever. The quarrels of relations are proverbially bitter. Arist., 'Polit.,' vii. 7, "Ὅθεν εἰρηται, χαλεποὶ γὰρ πόλεμοι ἀδελφῶν, καὶ οἱ τοὶ πέρα στέρξαντες, οἱ δὲ καὶ πέρα μισοῦσιν" (p. 193, Bekk.).

Vers. 12.—Teman is the region of Idumæa, of which Bozrah is the capital. Both Jerome and Eusebius ('Onomast.') speak of a city so called not far from Petra; but in the Old Testament the name is applied to a district; and as the word in Hebrew means "south," it is probably the southern portion of the land of Edom. Bozrah (*hōd. Busaireh*) was the old capital of Edom, situated on a hill south of the Dead Sea (see Gen. xxxvi. 33; Isa. xxiv. 6). Jeremiah (xlix. 17) predicts the punishment of Edom, and Ezekiel (xxv. 12—14) does likewise. The monologue of Obadiah has been already referred to. The instrument of vengeance in the present case was Nebuchadnezzar, though it suffered much at the hands of other enemies, as the Nabathæans and Maccabees.

Vers. 13—15.—The judgment on Ammon.

Vers. 13.—Ammon was connected with Israel as being sprung from Lot, and together with Moab, which had the same origin, retained the stamp of its incestuous birth in habits, character, and worship (Gen. xix. 30, etc.). The Ammonites seem to have been a predatory and roving nation, though the abundance of ruins in the district shows that they possessed fixed abodes; but Rabbah was the only city of importance in their territory (2 Sam. xi. 1). Their hostility to Israel was first shown in their participation with Moab in the affair of Balaam (Dent. xxiii. 4). Other instances are seen in their treatment of Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam. xi. 1—3) and of David's messengers, and in hiring the Syrians to make war on David (2 Sam. x. 1—6). We have no historical account of the atrocious outrage on the Gileadites mentioned in the text, but it is quite in character with the ferocity of their disposition, and was doubtless intended to depopulate the territory which they wished to acquire. This barbarity is spoken of in

connection with Hazael (2 Kings viii. 12), in concert with whom probably the Ammonites acted (comp. 2 Kings xv. 16; Hos. xiii. 16). Another rendering would refer the clause to the removing of landmarks, and yet a third to the storming of lofty fortresses. But the Authorized Version is undoubtedly correct. That they might enlarge their border. The Ammonites laid claim to the territory which the Israelites had wrested from Sihon, lying between the Arnon and Jabbok, and made an attempt upon it in the time of Jephthah (Judg. xi.), and in later years seized on the possessions of Gad—a proceeding which brought upon them the denunciation of Jeremiah (xlix. 2—6).

Vers. 14.—Rabbah, "the Great," or Rabbath-Ammon, the capital of Ammon, was situated on the southern arm of the Jabbok, and was a place of remarkable strength (see Deut. iii. 11; 2 Sam. xi. 1; xii. 26, etc.; 1 Chron. xx. 1—3). "For picturesqueness of situation, I know of no ruins to compare with Ammon. The most striking feature is the citadel, which formerly contained not merely the garrison, but an upper town, and covered an extensive area. The lofty plateau on which it was situated is triangular in shape; two sides are formed by the valleys which diverge from the apex, where they are divided by a low neck, and thence separating, fall into the valley of the Jabbok, which forms the base of the triangle, and contained the lower town. Climbing up the citadel, we can trace the remains of the moat, and, crossing it, find ourselves in a maze of ruins. The massive walls—the lower parts of which still remain, and which, rising from the precipitous sides of the cliff, rendered any attempt at scaling impossible—were evidently Ammonite. As I leant over them and looked sheer down about three hundred feet into one wady, and four hundred feet into the other, I did not wonder at its having occurred to King David that the leader of a forlorn hope against these ramparts would meet with certain death, and consequently assigning the position to Uriah. . . . Joab afterwards took the lower city, which he called 'the city of waters,' indicating very probably that the Jabbok was dammed into a lake near the lower city, to which the conformation of the valley would lend itself" (Oliphant, 'Land of Gilead,' p. 259, etc.). There is a sketch of the citadel-hill in the 'Dictionary of the Bible,' ii. 985. The city was taken by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. xxvii. 3, 6; xlix. 2, 3), either at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, or in the course of his Egyptian campaign (Josephus, 'Ant.,' x. 9. 7). The expression, I will kindle a fire (not "send," as elsewhere), possibly implies, as Pusey suggests, a conflagration from within. The shouting

is the battle-ory of the opposing host, which adds to the horror of the scene (Job xxxix. 25). With a tempest. The idea is that the walls should fall before the invaders, as if they were tents swept away in a whirl-wind.

Ver. 15.—*Their king*; Septuagint, *ο βασιλεὺς αὐτῶν*. So Keil, Trochon, and others consider that the King of the Ammonites is meant. The Vulgate, with Aquila, Symmachus, the Syriac, and Jerome, retains the word Melchous, or Melcham, which is the same as Molech, their god. This interpretation is favoured by passages in Jeremiah, of which one is evidently quoted from Amos,

"For Malcam shall go into captivity, his priests and his princes together" (Jer. xlix. 3); and the other (xlviii. 7) is similar, with the substitution of "Chemosh," the god of Moab, for "Malcam." That the localized deity should share the fortunes of his worshippers is quite in accordance with the ideas of the time (comp. Isa. xli. 1, 2). Probably Amos meant to include both notions—their "Malcam," whether king or god, should be carried into captivity, accompanied by the princes, all the chiefs, military and sacerdotal, so that no one should be left to head a future revolt.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*A voice from the sheepcotes*. The Jewish nation is almost seven centuries old. A wayward nonage had passed into a maturity incorrigibly perverse. Alarmed by prophetic thunders, and riven by the lightning-bolts of judgment (ch. iv. 6—11), Israel clung to its iniquities in spite of all (ch. ii. 4; v. 11; Isa. i. 5). Yet God had not cast off his people whom he foreknew. There were other arrows in his quiver still, and he would shoot them against national obduracy with a stronger bow. Amos shall take up his controversy against Israel where Moses, and Samuel, and Elijah, and Elisha had laid it down. Famine and the sword and captivity shall maintain and strengthen his expostulation (ch. ii. 14—16). The argument shall at length prevail, and, the irreconcilables destroyed, a remnant shall enjoy his grace and choose his way (ch. ix. 11—15). In this prefatory word consider—

I. *THE SHEEP*. An idol-priest supplies the title (ch. vii. 12), but it is suitable and endures. A prophet sees, where other men are blind, the meaning of what is and the nature of what shall be. 1. *His name*. Amos signifies "Bearer," or "Burden," or "Heavy." And it was prophetically significant of the owner's work. His words were weighty (ch. vii. 10), the burden of them was weightier still (ch. vi. 1), and weightiest of all was the Divine authority with which they came (ver. 3). 2. *His extraction*. "From among the shepherds." These were probably small sheep-owners, who tended their own flocks (Keil, Lange, etc.). They were in the lower ranks of life, the rank from which God has called, and calls the majority of his servants (1 Cor. i. 27, 28). The poor man depends for all his well-being on spiritual good (Luke vi. 24). He therefore chooses it more readily (Mark xii. 37), advances in it more easily (Matt. xiii. 22), rejoices in it more entirely (Isa. xxix. 19), and is chosen to it rather than the rich (Jas. ii. 5). "Poverty is the sister of a sound mind," was a heathen maxim embodying a kindred truth. 3. *His calling*. "A herdsman and gatherer of sycamores." This occupation would be no mean preparation for his prophetic office. A true prophet must be tender of human life, even when he denounces death; and if from the love of man we may rise to the love of God (1 John iv. 20), why not from the love of plant and animal to the love of man?

"He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us
Hath made and loveth all."

4. *His home*. Tekoah, a city south of Bethlehem, in the land of Judah. Thence he went to Bethel, in the land of Israel, to prophesy. That he may not be "without honour," and corresponding influence, he goes from his own to a neighbouring country (Matt. xiii. 57). Then, like Elijah and John the Baptist, he goes to the pampered and dissolute town-dwellers, that with the healthy tastes and simple habits and strong pure life of a dweller in the fields, he might put their laxity and luxury to shame (ch. vi. 1—6).

II. *THE VISION*. The term does not occur in Amos, but the equivalent of it does,

and it is common elsewhere in Scripture (Isa. i. 1; Hab. ii. 2). 1. *It was what "he saw."* Of the way in which God revealed truth to inspired men we know nothing. It is above reason and outside revelation. It was not with the bodily eye, nor in the natural sense, that the vision was seen; but the revelation was adequate, and the result was knowledge (Acts iv. 20). Their cognizance of matters was at once sure and clear (1 John i. 1), and comparable in both respects to that of Christ himself (John iii. 11). 2. *It was "words."* A word is the body of a thought. A thought is the spirit of a word. It is only by words, or something answering to words, that thoughts can be conveyed from man to man. Analogy would suggest that the same method is employed by God. If, as some hold, we think in words, the hypothesis would be greatly strengthened. In any case, what Amos got was not simply thoughts, but words, and the words of Scripture are, in some real and important sense, "words which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (1 Cor. ii. 13; 2 Sam. xxiii. 2).

III. THE SPEAKING OF THE VISION. Coming from his simple shepherd-life into a luxurious city, and with the burden of his heavy tidings on his heart, the prophet's speech is: 1. *Deeply serious.* A grave character and a grave message make a prophetic utterance a solemn thing. Amos had to tell of a cup of iniquity full, of a Divine patience exhausted, of a dispensation of forbearance expired, and of a national ruin ready to fall; and he tells it as one weighted down with the piteous tidings, which yet he cannot choose but speak (ch. iii. 1; iv. 1; v. 1; vi. 1). 2. *Blunt.* Amos is outspoken and honest, names the condemned, and unequivocally denounces their impending doom. He may not mince his tidings who is the messenger of death (Matt. iii. 10; Luke xiii. 3; Rom. i. 18). Suppression would be murder, and even euphemy would be cruel. Life and death hang on his lips, and all sentiment apart he must speak out.

"The power to bind and loose to truth is given;
The mouth that speaks it is the mouth of Heaven."

3. *Characteristic.* His style is bold and clear and tender, like his own nature (ch. iv. 4, 12, 13; ix. 5, 6; vi. 9, 10); and his imagery is racy of the mountains and fields in which his character was formed (ver. 2; ch. ii. 9, 13; iii. 4, 5; v. 19). The word of God in one sense, it is in another, and no less really, the word of Amos. The Divine Spirit supplies the breath and the fingering, and determines and directs the time, but the human instrument gives forth its own characteristic sound.

IV. THE WRITING OF THE VISION. Scripture contains matters that were written at the Divine dictation, and first promulgated in their written form. But it also contains much that was spoken first and written afterwards, for preservation. Such is the Book of Amos. The writing of it was: 1. *Some years after the speaking.* He spoke years before an earthquake, after which he wrote his book. This earthquake he had foretold in his oral prophecy (ch. viii. 8; ix. 5), and he thus puts on record the fulfilment of his own prediction. "After fulfilling his mission, he probably returned to Judah, his native land, where his prophecies were most likely first committed to writing" (Keil). 2. *In a different form from the speaking.* Amaziah (ch. vii. 10, 11) refers to, and gives a summary of "words" that are not recorded. The book is a *résumé* of the essential contents of the oral prophecies (Keil, Lange). Accordingly, it does not contain them in the very form, nor necessarily in the exact order, in which they were spoken. 3. *With a widened purpose.* The oral prophecies were for those whom they directly concerned. The written prophecies were for the sages and the ages that were to follow. They were the flower of the prophecies that went before (Joel iii. 16, 18), and the bud of those that came after (Hos. viii. 14; ix. 3; Jer. xlix. 3, 13—27; xlv. 6; xxv. 30; see Lange). They also contain truths essentially important and requisite for the perfecting of the man of God in all ages (ch. iii. 3, 6, 7; v. 4—6, 14, 15; vii. 2, 3). 4. *Under the same Divine guidance.* The contents of the book lie between the expressions, "thus saith the Lord" (ch. i. 3), and "saith the Lord thy God" (ch. ix. 15). These formulæ cover both the oral and the written prophecy, each being the subject of a distinct inspiration for its own special purpose. So Paul takes an inspired utterance of David, and, under inspiration, charges it with a new lesson (comp. Ps. xl. 6 with Heb. x. 5; also Isa. lx. 1 with Eph. v. 14).

V. THE SUBJECT OF THE VISION. It is brief, but it covers much ground. 1. *The Jews.* Judah and Israel are mentioned separately, having been distinct kingdoms for

above a century (ch. ii. 4, 6). The entire Hebrew people are also grouped together as forming the family of Israel which God redeemed from Egypt (ch. iii. 1). It is as earthly kingdoms that destruction is denounced on both (ch. ii. 4, 6), but it is as one covenant people that they survive in a remnant, and are restored (ch. ix. 11—15). 2. *Their oppressors.* God had made the neighbouring nations "the rod of his anger" (ch. iii. 11; v. 27; Isa. x. 4) to smite Israel. They accomplished his purpose unconsciously, and impelled by evil motives of their own (vers. 3, 6, 9, 13; Isa. x. 7). Accordingly, their wars and oppressions, inflicted on Israel, were essentially wicked, and deserving punishment in turn. It is thus that the wrath of man, which he punishes at last, God makes meanwhile to praise him by the unwitting execution of his will. 3. *Those who resemble either.* God acts on the same principles in all ages. He afflicts the Church for the sins of its members. To the insincere his judgments mean punishment only (Rom. i. 18). To the sincere but faulty they mean discipline also (2 Cor. iv. 17). To the Church as a whole they mean separation between tares and wheat (Matt. xiii. 29, 30). To the outside wicked, through whom they often come, they mean more sin now, and a heavier punishment at last (Luke xviii. 7).

VI. THE TIME OF THE VISION. On this point we have information the most explicit. 1. *Generally it was in the days of Uzziah and Jeroboam.* During those reigns Judah and Israel were in the zenith of their career. It was, therefore, a vision of adversity when prosperity was at its height, of disastrous war when peace by conquest had been obtained with neighbouring powers, of both these as punishment when idolatry and corruption were at their worst. This proves its *genuineness*, as it could not have been suggested by the observed shadows of coming events. At the same time, it accounts for its comparative failure as a warning, the future predicted being so utterly unlike the present. 2. *Specially it was "before the earthquake."* "The presumption is natural that these words indicate not only the period but the motive of the composition" (Lange). The approach of the earthquake was the occasion of the oral prophecy, and the occurrence of it the occasion of the written one. That the latter should contain a record of the fulfilment of the former (ch. viii. 8; ix. 5) is proof that in addition to being *genuine* the vision is *authentic*.

Ver. 2.—*The thunder that both frights and smites.* These words are an echo of Joel iii. 16. We hence infer the continuity of the two prophetic messages. The one strikes the key-note, and the other takes up and continues the strain.

I. DIVINE INTERVENTION. This is to end a period of quiescence. It is: 1. *Intervention.* "Utters his voice." The silence of God is often treated as equivalent to inaction (Ps. xxviii. 1; 1. 21). So his speech would mean his becoming active, whether for good or for evil. Here the breaking silence is for evil. God bears long with his open enemies, and longer still with his seeming friends. But inactivity does not show indifference nor inattention. It is simply forbearance, that will not strike till it must. Action delayed is no less certain, and will be no less vigorous for the delay. 2. *Angry intervention.* Shall "roar," like a lion ready to devour. Not till his anger burneth sore does God break the silence. But when he breaks it he does so emphatically. He thunders with his voice. His roar expresses wrath, and preludes a stroke; and is thus power and light in one (Job xxxvii. 5; xl. 9). 3. *Forcible intervention.* God's speech is followed by action. It is more; it is accompanied by action. It is more still; it is itself action. Creative power, preserving power, redeeming power, each goes forth in a word (Ps. xxxiii. 6, 9; Matt. ix. 2). Christ says, "Be clean," "Come forth;" and the sick are whole, and the dead live at his word. In speaking, God acts. The thunder of his voice is loaded with the electricity of his power. The vehicle of the Divine active energy is, in fact, a word.

II. GOD'S BASIS OF OPERATIONS. God intervenes in character, and along established lines. He operates: 1. *From Jerusalem.* This is God's own city, the metropolis of his earthly kingdom. Nothing could be more appropriate. Going forth to war, the king marches from his capital. There he has his magazine, his arsenal, and his headquarters. From thence he can bear down resistlessly on foes from whatever side, with all the resources of his kingdom. 2. *From Zion.* God's seat and citadel within his city. The place he loves and chooses and honours above all others (Ps. lxxxvii. 2; cxxxii. 13; xlviii. 12, 13). Here he has made his dwelling-place (Ps. lxxviii. 16; cxxxii.

14). The place out of which go forth salvation and destruction. The place out of which the things that come are perfect after their kind. If they be blessings, there are no others so sweet; if curses, no others so stern. Zion is the beating heart of the spiritual world, which sends forth pure or poisoned blood to each greatest and least extremity. 3. *From the temple.* This is not mentioned, but it is necessarily implied. The glory of Jerusalem was Zion, and the glory of Zion (using the word in its broad sense) was God's house. This was his sanctuary. There he dwelt in symbolic presence. There he revealed himself in symbolic portraiture. There he operated in unparalleled energy. Thence accordingly we might expect his activity to issue (Ps. xx. 2). There, too, was his mercy-seat, from which judgment never came till every merciful expedient had been tried, but would come then with the fury of outraged goodness. Now, Jerusalem and Zion and God's house are each a type, and their common anti-type is the Church of Christ. And this is God's base of spiritual operations through all time (Isa. ii. 3; Luke xxiv. 47). He dwells in it (Acts vii. 38; Eph. i. 23), speaks by it (Eph. iii. 10), operates through it (Dan. ii. 44), and conquers in it (Dan. vii. 18, 22).

III. AFTER THE CAMPAIGN. God makes no fruitless expedition. The armies of his judgments leave desolation in their track. 1. *The pastures wither.* God's voice, as a figure for meteorological phenomena, is often spoken of as changing the surface of the earth (Ps. xxix. 3—9). Here it stands for many agencies, including these, and especially drought. Nature is one, and if any part suffers the other parts suffer with it (Jer. xxv. 36). Amos, as a herdsman, thinks naturally first of the calamity as it would affect the pastures by which he made his living. God's judgments strike each man in his special interest. It is as menacing this interest chiefly that they are feared. 2. *The head of Carmel is dried up.* Carmel was in the north, and the pastures in the prophet's mind were in the south. The enumeration, therefore, points to the withering as prevailing over the entire land. Carmel was one of the richest and best-watered spots in Palestine. When it was withered, all other places must have been scorched. God's judgments come seldom, and with tardy foot; but they are thorough, and make an end of their work (1 Sam. iii. 12; Isa. lx. 12). Nor was this a passing visitation. It remains in its leading characteristics till the present day. Carmel, as its name implies, was rich in vineyards. Now there is only scrub, and the *débris* of ruined walls. The "head" is dried up, that might once have been said to "drop down new wine."

Ver. 3—ch. ii. 3.—*A hexade of woes. The heathen in judgment: general features.* In these verses is denounced a series of six woes, on six of the oppressing nations, round about the land of Israel. Each woe has characteristics peculiar to itself, but there are points common to them all to which it will be well to make preliminary reference.

I. IN EVERY CASE JUDGMENT IS THE ACT OF GOD. "I will send;" "I will kindle" (vers. 4, 7, 10, 12). It is not fate, whose "winged shaft" is but a phantasy. It is not chance, which is but another name for inscrutable direction. It is not idols, the guess-work likenesses of imaginary things. It is not natural laws, which are simply forces put into things by their Maker. It is God—God in intelligence of device and energy of execution, who "creates evil" (Isa. xlv. 7)—the evil of calamitous events.

II. IN EVERY CASE GOD'S JUDGMENT IS THE COMPLEMENT OF MAN'S SIN. "Because they have threshed;" "Because they carried away." The connection between human sin and human suffering is original, constant, and necessary. They came together, dwell together, and will die together. And just as our common suffering is the abiding result of our common sinfulness, so special suffering connects itself somewhere with special sin. Its relation to the sin, whether as a punishment, a deterrent, or a chastisement, is often obscure. The particular sin, or even the particular sinner, can seldom be pointed to with certainty. There is a warning against judging harshly of the specially afflicted (Luke xiii. 4, 5). Yet the plain teaching of Scripture and experience and reason is that sin has "brought death into the world, and all our woe" (Rom. v. 12; Job iv. 7, 8).

III. IN EVERY CASE THE SIN SELECTED FOR PUNISHMENT IS THAT COMMITTED AGAINST GOD'S PEOPLE. In five cases out of the six the sin was committed directly against Israel, and in the sixth case it was committed against their ally. God loves the world as a whole, but he loves his people best (John iii. 16; xiv. 23). He gives to the wicked

"life and breath and all things," but he gives to his saints the wicked, and all they have (1 Cor. iii. 21, 22; Eph. i. 22). He avenges the ill done even to the sinner, but he avenges more sternly, because he personally feels, the ill done to his people (Zech. ii. 8, 9). Their persons are more sacred than those of others (Matt. x. 30), and their lives more precious in his sight (Ps. lxxii. 14; cxvi. 15). Accordingly, the worst form of murder is martyrdom (Luke xviii. 7, 8), and the worst form of theft is sacrilege (Mal. iii. 8).

IV. JUDGMENT IS PRECIPITATED BY PERSEVERANCE IN SIN. "For three transgressions and for four" is the invariable formula. The expression (see Prov. xxx. 15, 18, 21; Job v. 19; Eccles. xi. 2) means for many transgressions, culminating in a final one. Persistent sin means cumulative guilt. Drop is added to drop till at last the cup is full. The tendency toward sin God warns; the first sin he rebukes; the second he threatens; the third he menaces with uplifted hand; the fourth he smites. God bears long with the wicked, but they may sin once too often. Your past offences have escaped, your next one may endanger the Divine forbearance. "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

V. IN EVERY CASE THE EXTREME OF GUILT INVOLVES THE EXTREME OF PUNISHMENT OR ENTIRE DESTRUCTION. This is inflicted by fire, the most destructive element in each case. God employed fire in many of his most startling miracles (Gen. xix. 24; Exod. ix. 23; Numb. xi. 1; xvi. 35; Lev. x. 2; 2 Kings i. 10, 12). In the language of figure it is the ideal destructive agent (Isa. iv. 4; ix. 5). In prophecy, too, fire is or symbolizes the agent that destroys the beast, the false prophet, and all the wicked (Dan. vii. 11; Rev. xix. 20; xx. 15). To the impenitent, fire will be a destroying, not a cleansing power. It points onward to the vengeance of eternal fire, which will be the fitting retribution of sin at last.

Vers. 3—5.—*The woe against Damascus.* The kingdom of Syria is here named from its capital. The crime charged against it had been foretold by Elisha to Hazael, and by him indignantly repudiated (2 Kings viii. 12, 13). But a man in one set of circumstances little knows what he would do under an entirely different set; especially a man beginning a sinful life, the magnitude of the crimes of which he may yet be capable. Accordingly, Hazael fulfilled one prophecy, and supplied the materials of another, by smiting Israel as the man of God had said (2 Kings x. 32, 33).

I. THE CRIMINAL. Damascus stands by metonymy for Syria, judging of whom by her representative we see that: 1. *Riches do not prevent rapacity.* Damascus was noted for wealth, the fertile neighbourhood being irrigated by numerous canals, and the city itself lying in the highway of commerce. Yet greed instigated the barbarous treatment described. The wars waged against Israel were wars of rapine and annexation. "The eye that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver." Rather does the lust of gain grow by what it feeds on. Whether it be culture, or power, or pleasure, or wealth, men tend to make a god of the thing they abound in. It was when Israel was richest that her oppression of the poor was most extreme. It was by her richest neighbours that she herself was most rapaciously despoiled. It is thus that the conditions leading men to sin are the guarantee of its punishment in kind. 2. *Beautiful surroundings do not humanize.* Writers speak in glowing terms of the unrivalled beauty of this ancient city. "Its white buildings, embedded in the deep green of its engirdling orchards, were like diamonds encircled by emeralds" (Pusey). Yet here, in scenes of ideal beauty, grew up the monsters of barbarity who took the women and children of Gilead, and, "casting them as into a sort of threshing-floor, savagely threshed them out like ears of corn with saw-armed wheels" (see 2 Kings xiii. 7). Physical scenery and moral character have no necessary connection. The fairest lands have often produced the coarsest and most cruel men. The determining element is the presence or absence of the gospel of Christ. It is not æsthetics, but Christianity, we must look to for the moral elevation of men. 3. *The possession of strength is a temptation to violence.* The beauty of Damascus was also its strength. The miles on miles of walled orchards in which it was set formed an admirable defence against an advancing enemy (see Pusey), and, thus entrenched, the legions of Syria were strong beyond their seeming. Now, just as the subtle choose diplomacy and the rich subsidy in the settlement of disputed matters, so do the strong choose force. It is the readiest and most effective weapon within their

reach. How many wars, how much bloodshed and desolation and misery, are directly traceable to "the strong man glorying in his strength"!

II. **THE CRIME.** Gilead, meaning the whole land given to the two tribes and a half, is here put by metonymy for the inhabitants. The horrible and atrocious outrages on the people described by Amos suggest that: 1. *The obverse of ungodliness is inhumanity.* The relation to God is the fundamental one. If it be wrong, all others are awry. Morality has its basis in religion. There is no duty to men apart from a God and a revelation of his will. There is no good will toward men apart from his gracious influence (Titus iii. 3). The mere animal nature is selfish, and regardless of all life but its own. It will kill for the most trifling advantage, and sometimes in the lust of blood for no advantage at all. Heathen hearts are "hateful and hating one another," and a heathen home is "a habitation of cruelty." 2. *Bloodthirsty men make war even with the implements of peace.* There is a time coming when warlike weapons will be converted into farming implements (Isa. ii. 4; Micah iv. 3). This will be when the gospel shall universally prevail. Meanwhile a reader ear is leant to Joel (iii. 10) than to Micah, and the converse process goes on instead. The threshing-instrument was not made, but only pressed into service, for the occasion. Fallen man is at heart a savage, and, under excitation, his inner nature will break out through the artificial habits of peace. So little is there between work and war, between lawful industry and lawless murder, in the godless life. 3. *Ideal cruelty is utterly indiscriminate.* Elisha's prophecy to Hazael (2 Kings viii. 12), of which this horrid butchery was the fulfilment, mentions women and children as the chief victims of the outrage. There is a bloodhound instinct in wicked men which is aroused to fury by the taste of blood. The horrors of the French Revolution and of the Spanish Inquisition reveal it in the infidel and the fanatic respectively. It knows no distinction of age, or condition, or sex. It simply wants to "slay, and slay, and slay." It is a humiliating thought about our species, but it is a fact that must be faced by all who would humanize the race. The tie of blood is perhaps a natural one, and respected more or less by even heathen peoples, as it is by the very beasts that perish. But even this scarcely operates beyond the filial relation and the period of childhood. And then, as for friendship and philanthropy, they have no place in the sphere of mere nature. The question, "Is man utterly selfish?" is rather a nice one than practical. He has shown himself sufficiently selfish to make unsafe the life of any human being whom he could gain by killing.

III. **THE SENTENCE.** This is severe, detailed, and striking. 1. *It falls on the things in which the nation was pre-eminent.* "I will break also the bar of Damascus." The bar or bolt which secured the gate was an essential part of the city defence. To break it would be to throw open the city to the enemy. By this figure is meant the breaking of the national strength and means of resistance, and leaving the nation helpless before its enemies. Thus God declares himself omnipotent. Those who glory in their strength are broken, and those who trust in their riches are impoverished (Isa. ii. 11; xiii. 11; Ps. lii. 7). Punishment adjusted so is more effectual for its purpose, whether of mercy or of judgment, for it brings the criminal to his knees at once. The niceness of the adjustment is, moreover, a revelation of the Divine directing hand in the whole event, and so a lesson in itself. 2. *It strikes at the national sin.* The "vale of Aven," whose inhabitant was to be cut off, was remarkable as containing Banbec, or Heliopolis, the seat and centre of the Syrian sun-worship. There were observed idolatrous orgies, in which men and women abandoned themselves to shameless profligacy; and there, where their "offence smells rank to Heaven," the hottest bolts of Heaven's vengeance fall. Others would be carried into captivity, but the inhabitants of Aven would be utterly cut off. The flies of God's judgment alight upon the sores of our idol sins. He strikes the covetous in his pocket, and the self-indulgent in his power of enjoyment. And so in every other case. The practice that provokes his judgment is the one on which its first and heaviest effects fall. 3. *It includes the royal house.* The king is in a sense the figure-head of the nation. His policy embodies the national sentiment, if it does not inspire it. Accordingly, national guilt culminates in him. It would be an anomaly if the people were to perish and he escape. Then the destruction that includes king and people is utter and irretrievable. There could be no restoration, no resurrection. When only ashes remain, the rekindling of the fire of national existence has become impossible. 4. *It denounces on all poetic justice.* "Shall go into captivity to Kir." "From Kir the

forefathers of the Syrians had, of their own will, been brought by the good all-disposing providence of God. Now, softened as they were by luxury, they were to be transported back to the austere though healthy climate whence they had come" (Pusey). The family of Ne'er-do-well fall into the mud out of which they were raised at first, and find it has got deeper in the interval. The last state of the misuser of good, in the nature of the case, is worse than the first.

IV. THE EXECUTION. The woe fell half a century later, in the time of Tiglath-Pileser, who slew Rezin the king, and carried the Syrians away captive. *Thus the event was fifty years after the prediction.* Prophecy by the Spirit of God is as easy to the prophet a millennium before the event as an hour. But if it has not been forgotten in the mean time, it is the more impressive and striking, the longer the interval between the utterance and the fulfilment. *Then the evil prophesied was one previously unheard of, and antecedently most unlikely.* "The transportation of whole populations was not, so far as we know, any part of Eastern policy at the time of the prophet" (Pusey). There are unfulfilled predictions, loaded with the world's weal or ill, whose fulfilment is even more distant and more unlikely. But the "sure Word of prophecy" overrides both time and chance, and lifts remotest events above the horizon, and into the light of decisive certitude. For all we fear and hope this is the guarantee, "Hath he said it, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

Vers. 6—8.—*The woe against Philistia.* Gaza was one of the capitals of Philistia, and is put for the country as a whole. Its wealth and strength and special activity against Israel fitted it to be the representative of all the other capitals which are afterwards (ver. 8) enumerated as sharing its punishment. The outrage charged against Gaza is probably that recorded in 2 Chron. xxi. 16 and Joel iii. 6, and which occurred in the time of Jehoram. The crime denounced was—

I. THE CROWNING ACT OF A LONG SERIES. Israel and Philistia were hereditary foes. In the history of their feud were many bloody acts, which culminated in this wholesale deportation. In the judgment provoked by it, however, these acts would all be punished. So the murders of the prophets, throughout a series of ages, remained unavenged till they culminated in the death of Christ, and then it and they were all avenged together (Luke xi. 49—51). Thus vicarious is much of human suffering. God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children generally (Exod. xx. 5), and specially on those like-minded with the fathers (Matt. xxiii. 34—36). The sufferings of each age are largely an inheritance from the ages before.

II. AN ACT OF WHOLESALE DESTRUCTION. "Because they carried away captives in full number." This cruelty was gratuitous, as many captives could have given their captors no offence; and it was senseless as well, for many would be utterly worthless as slaves. It indicated deep and indiscriminating hate of the entire people, and a fixed purpose to root out and utterly exterminate them. Such hatred, directed doubtless against Israel in their character as the people of God, is specially criminal, and calls for special punishment (see Matt. x. 40, 41).

III. AN ACT OF AGGRAVATED CRUELTY. Not satisfied with the suffering they could inflict themselves, they called in the help of Israel's bitterest foe. They sold the people to the Edomites, and so became responsible for the intolerable cruelties to which they were handed over. We are in God's sight as guilty of the crime we procure as of the crime we commit. The Church's mediæval device of condemning heretics, and handing them over to the civil power to be executed, was as vain as the washing of Pilate's hands. The blood shed at our instigation, and with our connivance or through our indifference, is blood that will be required of us in the great day (Ezek. iii. 18—20).

IV. A PUNISHMENT IN WHICH THE CAPITAL CITIES ARE SPECIALLY PROMINENT. Of the five capitals of Philistia, four are mentioned by name, and the fifth is included under the word "remnant." Capitals are centres of opinion, and are largely responsible for the moulding of the national sentiment. They are centres of power, and take the lead in determining the national policy. They were in this case centres of commerce, and so took a prominent part in the work of bartering Israel to the Edomites. Moreover Gaza, the one singled out and emphasized, was through its character and position the chief sinner in this business, and so is the chief sufferer. They were also the seats of as many different idols—Ashdod of Dagon, Ashkelon of Derceto, Ekron of Baalzebub, and Gaza

of Marua—and therefore centres of national sin (see Pusey). Add to this that they were the national depôts and strongholds, and therefore the places which it would most weaken the nation to destroy.

V. A PUNISHMENT TO BE FRAMED AFTER THE FASHION OF THE CRIME. "The remnant of the Philistines shall perish." As they had spared none, so none of them would be spared. This is God's way often. That it may be adequate, and all may be able to recognize it, punishment often comes in the likeness of the crime. The rule, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed," embodies the principle that like will be the punishment of like. It reappears in the gospel dictum, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Not only will sin be punished, it will all be punished, and punished fully. When God's last word has been spoken, the criminal shall be even as his victim, and be God's enemy besides.

Vers. 9, 10.—*The woe against Tyre.* Tyre stands for Phœnicia, of which it was the capital. It was a renowned and very ancient city. Greatest, richest, proudest, and most luxurious, perhaps, of all the cities of its time, it passed through vicissitudes which were equally beyond the common lot. As with most ancient capitals, there were points at which its path and that of Israel crossed, involving that there should be corresponding points where they would recross, and on these the prophet has intently fixed his eye. Of the denunciation against it observe—

I. IT SINNED IN CHARACTER. The Phœnicians were a commercial people, and theirs was a commercial sin. "They delivered up the whole captivity to Edom." They did not make war, nor take prisoners, but they traded in them as slaves—bought them probably from the Syrians and sold them to the Ionians ("Grecians," Joel iii. 6). For this their woe is denounced; and thus early was branded with condemnation "the wild and guilty phantasy that man can hold a property in man." The image of God is not a thing to be trafficked in. "The law" is against men-stealers (1 Tim. i. 10) among other criminals. A man's liberty is precious to him next to life itself. Slavery is the intolerable theft of his manhood and moral agency, and is contrary to the entire spirit of the Bible.

II. IT SINNED AGAINST A COVENANT. This was no doubt the covenant between Hiram and Solomon (1 Kings v. 12). It was a covenant of peace, of which the trading in Hebrew captives was a flagrant violation. This circumstance made the detestable traffic doubly guilty. It was two sins in one—perjury added on to oppression. And all Christian sin is in this respect its counterpart. The believer is in covenant with God. He has said, "This God is my God for ever and ever," etc. Any after-sin is, therefore, a breach both of God's Law and his own vow. The believing sinner has broken through more restraints and violated more laws than the unbelieving, and so is double-dyed in guilt. The difficulty of bringing such to repentance again (Heb. vi. 4—6) is no doubt closely connected with this fact.

III. THE FORGOTTEN COVENANT WAS A BROTHERLY COVENANT. This circumstance aggravated the guilt of the violation. Ties are strong in proportion as they are amicable. The electric core of friendship in the cable of a mutual tie gives it a character all its own. The breaking of it means to both parties more of change and loss in proportion as this core is relatively large. The Phœnicio-Israelitish covenant was brotherly: 1. *In its origin.* It was the outcome of brotherly feeling and affection previously existing. "Hiram," we read, "was ever a lover of David" (1 Kings v. 1), and in token of it he had voluntarily sent materials and workmen, and had built him a house (2 Sam. v. 11). And the feeling was evidently transferred to Solomon. Hiram and he were on such cordial terms that he asked for, and Hiram readily sent him, skilful Sidonian woodmen to hew trees, and an accomplished Tyrian graver to act as foreman over his own workmen in carving, engraving, embroidery, and doing other cunning work for the temple (2 Chron. ii. 3—16). Solomon in turn gave Hiram wheat and oil in liberal measure for provisioning his house, and the outcome of these cordial relations was that "they two made a league together" (1 Kings v. 11, 12), the brotherly covenant referred to. The covenant was brotherly also: 2. *In its working.* It was renewed from time to time with various additions, and was long kept by both parties. Israel never made war against Tyre, nor broke the letter or spirit of their fraternal league. The heartless sin of Tyre was, therefore, not only a violation of the covenant provisions, but of the

intimate and cordial relations which it both expressed and fostered. It was a sin against both vows and close relations, and put on thus an aspect of double criminality. 3. *The covenant had even a religious aspect.* Hiram grounds the good will and help, extended to Solomon, on the facts that the people he ruled and the house he was going to build were God's, as well as on the fact that he had a special gift of wisdom from above (2 Chron. ii. 11, 12). His covenant was thus made with Israel as God's people, and in testimony of his belief in Jehovah as the true God, and his desire to advance his glory. This fact adds much to the significance and solemnity of the covenant, and so of the breach of it. What is done in God's name and as an act of homage to him is done under the highest sanctions possible. The commonest act is glorified, the smallest act becomes great in the greatness of its underlying principle. And as is the doing so is the undoing. The higher the promiser has risen, the lower has the violator fallen. Tyre's sin implied and sealed a large amount of previous deterioration, and so the more emphatically sealed her doom.

Vers. 11, 12.—*The woe against Edom.* We have here an inspired description of an ideal hate. It is loaded with every quality, and emphasized by every circumstance, and stained by every act, which could conspire to establish for it an "unbeaten record" in the emulation of evil passions.

I. IT RESTS ON A BROTHER. Over and above the brotherhood arising out of their common humanity (Acts xvii. 26; Gen. ix. 5), Israel and Edom were bound by the nearer tie of descent from the twin sons of their common ancestor Isaac. And on the basis of this relation they are spoken of as brothers in a special sense (Deut. xxiii. 7). To the relation of brotherhood belongs the duty of love (1 John ii. 10), which must be distinctive in proportion as the relation is close (1 Pet. ii. 17). And the breach of this law of love is great in proportion to its normal strength. It is bad to hate an enemy, but it is worse to hate a friend, and worse still to hate a brother. It is against nature, for "no man hateth his own flesh" (Eph. v. 29). It is against our innate tendency to love them that love us. And it is against the popular sentiment which expects us to "love as brethren." Hatred of a brother is the grossest hate there is.

II. IT IS AGGRESSIVE. "He pursues his brother with the sword." It is hard for hatred to be still. It is a restless devil in the heart. It wants to inflict injury. It actually inflicts it the first opportunity. If opportunity does not come, it seeks it and makes it. In the presence of the hated one it can no more be quiescent than fire in contact with fuel. Edom's hatred of Israel did not fail thus to express its intensity. On every opportunity it broke out into offensive and cruel action (2 Chron. xxviii. 17; Ps. cxxxvii. 7; Ezek. xxv. 12). Rapine, outrage, and murder, and the incitement of others to these, are fitting credentials to an ideal hate.

III. IT IS MURDEROUS. "Tears in pieces." It inflicts not injury only, but deadly injury. It must have blood. And it not only kills, but murders. Unable to fight Israel in battle, Edom always played the part of "wrecker," and spoiled the dead, and murdered the wounded, after some stronger enemy had defeated them (Ps. cxxxvii. 7). Then it murdered with an excess of truculence and savage cruelty that were natural to weakness rather than to strength. Hatred is a passion "blood alone can quell." "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer;" a murderer in fact if opportunity offers, in any case a murderer in heart. Let hatred enter your heart, and from the moment it settles you wear the brand of Cain.

IV. IT IS PITILESS. "Did cast off all pity." No special occasion or act is mentioned, because the thing was habitual. A traditional and inordinate hate of Israel was fostered till it became a first principle of the Edomite's creed, and was gratified till it ate all his humanity out. Too weak to be a soldier, he became a murderous looter, and when the Assyrian or Philistine had vanquished Israel in battle, the Edomite came vulture-like on the scene to butcher the living, and pillage and mangle the dead (Obad. 10—14). There is a pity proper to the human heart on the platform of mere nature. Of the "flowers of Eden we still inherit" is a ruth that shrinks from murder in cold blood. Where the crime is committed, this feeling has previously been choked out. The power to do this, to harden and deaden his own nature, is one of man's most fatal gifts. He disregards the voice of pity till it becomes dumb. He fights against the movings of passion till at last they are felt no more.

V. IT IS INSATIABLE. "His anger endures for ever." The persistence of Edom's hate was matter of contemporary notoriety (Ezek. xxxv. 5), and it was precisely what one might expect. There is an infinity that belongs to the human soul, and which imparts itself to all its affections. Love is not exhausted by indulgence, but strengthened. It goes on and grows for ever, and so with hate. One who knew well has said—

"Now hatred is by far the longest pleasure;
Men love in haste, but they detest at leisure."

(Byron.)

Hate is fed by indulgence as a fire is fed by fuel. Do not think your hatred will be appeased when you have got what you consider a just revenge. It will only then begin to burn with normal fierceness. Such feelings grow by what they feed on. The only way to banish them is to cut off the supplies. Starve a hungry hate, by giving it neither outlet nor audience, and it will soon atrophy and die.

VI. IT IS ALL ON ONE SIDE. Israel's relation to Edom as friendly, considerate, and disinterested, was laid down in explicit terms (Deut. xxiii. 7; ii. 4, 5), whilst the brotherhood of the two nations was emphasized (Numb. xx. 14; Deut. ii. 8). Cruel things were done in spite of this (1 Sam. xiv. 47; 2 Sam. viii. 14; 1 Kings xi. 15, 16), but they were done in defensive wars, and after Edom's enmity had proved itself incurable. It is a robust and thoroughly malignant hate that beats down and burns in spite of others' friendly attitude and feeling. Such hate belongs to a nature utterly inverted, and no longer human but devilish. And in proportion as it is such it becomes impossible of cure. The fire that burns without fuel, and in spite of water, has the elements of perpetuity in it. It is the beginning of the fire that shall never be quenched.

Vers. 13—15.—*The woe against Ammon: brutality in its element.* There is a climax in these woes as we advance. Each seems to outdo in horror the one before. This one in which Ammon figures has circumstances of wanton atrocity and senseless savagery in it unparalleled in any other.

I. UNNATURAL CONNECTIONS MAY BE EXPECTED TO BREED UNNATURAL MONSTERS. Ammon and Moab were the children of unnatural and shameful lust (Gen. xix. 30—38). Begotten in drunkenness, and conceived in a paroxysm of lewdness, their chance of inheriting a healthy physical, mental, or moral organization was very small. The almost inevitable moral twist with which they entered the world, their education by dissolute mothers would only strengthen and confirm. And the passionate and sensual nature he inherited, Ammon transmitted to the nation of which he became the father. An illustration of this inherited coarse corruption in the Ammonites was their gross and indecent treatment of David's servants, sent on a friendly errand (2 Sam. x. 4, 5). The other occasion, recorded in our text, is an example of savage and senseless atrocity unparalleled in the annals of human violence. As to the women, it was from their number that Solomon's harem was largely recruited (1 Kings xi. 1, 7), and they took to harlotry as easily as their ancestress herself (Numb. xxv. 1; xxxi. 16). Our besetting sins are likely to be those of our forefathers, and therefore against these we should be specially on our guard. They are likely also to beset our children after us, and should be all the more vigorously rooted out, lest we transmit to posterity the heritage of our sin and shame. That the thing can be done, let the virtuous simplicity of Ruth the Moabitess prove. Trained and moulded in a godly Hebrew family, she responds to religious influence, and exhibits a character that has been the admiration of all the ages.

II. OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL, THAT IS THE GREATEST SIN FOR WHICH THERE IS THE LEAST OCCASION. "He who has committed injustice for a less advantage has done it under the impulse of a less temptation. . . . The more paltry it is in respect of profit, the more profane it may be in respect of principle" (Chalmers). In the case of Ammon there was the extreme of disproportion between the crime and the incentive to it. The object was to enlarge their border, an object (1) unnecessary, (2) under the circumstances unjust, (3) in itself supplying no occasion for the horrid outrage, and (4) to the attainment of which the atrocity was in no wise essential. The act was simply

one of stolid barbarism, unsoftened by any extenuating circumstance, and unaccounted for by any consideration of need or fitness.

III. **MURDER AS AN ACT OF REPRISAL IS STILL MURDER.** David had put the inhabitants of Rabbah of the sons of Ammon to a death as dreadful as that inflicted on the women in Gilead (2 Sam. xii. 31). The present act of Ammon might look like a just retaliation. But, whatever may be thought of David's conduct, it is clear that sin does not justify more sin. Then David's siege and destruction of Rabbah was a natural and suitable act of defensive warfare against persistent attacks by Ammon in league with Syria. The aggressor in such a case is responsible for the bloodshed on both sides. Man has a natural right to kill in self-defence, and he whose action necessitates such bloodshed is the party on whose head the guilt of it must lie.

IV. **GOD'S JUDGMENTS STRIKE THE DEVISERS OF WICKEDNESS AS WELL AS THE DOERS OF IT.** "The king and his princes." These ancient kings were absolute monarchs. Every national act was an expression of their will. With them, therefore, the responsibility for it ultimately rested. It was done by their direction and under their superintendence, done often in part by their own hand, and so was in every case their own act. And the princes, as the king's advisers, were parties to it. Therefore kings and princes alike must suffer. To strike them was to strike the criminal on the head. Thus far and wide do the consequences of sin reach, devouring from every side. The committer of sin, the suggester of sin, the deviser of sin, the tempter to sin, the procurer of sin, the knowing occasion of sin, the person privy to sin, all are sinners, and as such are written down for the sword. Some are nearer the centre than others, but all are in the vortex, and all must be swallowed up together.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Amos the herdsman.* There must be some special reason why this prophet puts upon record the employments in which he spent his earlier years, and from which he was called to assume the office of the Lord's messenger to Israel. On the barren hills to the south of Bethlehem, where there is no tillage, and where the population must always have been scanty, Amos tended flocks of sheep or of goats, and at certain seasons of the year gathered the fruit from the wild sycamore trees.

I. **RURAL AND MENTAL OCCUPATIONS WERE NO BARRIER TO THE ENJOYMENT OF DIVINE FAVOUR OR TO ELECTION TO SPECIAL AND HONOURABLE SERVICE.** This lesson, taught by the career of Amos, was taught again by the election of the apostles of the Lord Christ. The great of this world are often apt to regard men of lowly station with disdain, but God takes no heed of social and artificial distinctions.

II. **THE SECLUSION OF A PASTORAL LIFE WAS A SUITABLE TRAINING FOR THE PROPHETIC VOCATION.** As David, when guarding the sheepfolds and leading the flocks to water, enjoyed many opportunities for solitary meditation and for devout communion with God, so Amos in the lonely pastures of Tekoah must have listened to the voice that speaks especially to the quiet and the contemplative, the voice of inspiration and of grace.

III. **THE RURAL SUBROUNDINGS OF THE PROPHET AFFORDED HIM MUCH APPROPRIATE AND STRIKING IMAGERY.** The rain and the harvest, the sheep and the lion, the bird and the snare, the fish and the hook, the cart and the sheaf, the earthquake, the fire, and the flood, etc., are all pressed into the service of this poetic prophecy. God taught his servant lessons which stood him in good stead in after-years.

IV. **BY RAISING AMOS FROM THE HERDSMAN'S TO THE PROPHET'S LIFE GOD MAGNIFIED HIS OWN GRACE.** The cultivated and the polished are liable to take credit to themselves for the efficiency of their ministry. But when the comparatively untaught and those who have enjoyed but few advantages are raised to a position in which they do a great work for God, "the excellency of the power is seen to be of God himself."—T.

Ver. 2.—*The voice of terror.* This imagery is evidently derived from the prophet's own experience. In the south-east of Palestine the lion was a frequent and formidable visitor, which every herdsman had reason to dread. The majestic roar of the king of

beasts is here employed to denote the judgments of the Lord upon the disobedient and rebellious, especially of Israel.

I. OBSERVE WHENCE THE VOICE OF THREATENING PROCEEDS. 1. It is the voice of the Lord—that voice which assumes now the accents of compassion and mercy, and again the tones of wrath, but which is always authoritative. 2. It proceeds from the sacred city, which was the favoured abode of Jehovah.

II. AND WHITHER THE VOICE OF THREATENING PENETRATES. From the habitations of the shepherds in the south, to the flowery Carmel in the north, this roar makes itself heard. That is to say, it fills the land. Judah and Israel alike have by disobedience and rebellion incurred Divine displeasure, and against both alike the denunciations of the prophet go forth.

III. CONSIDER THE EFFECT WHICH THE VOICE OF THREATENING SHOULD PRODUCE. 1. Reverent attention. 2. Deep humiliation and contrition. 3. Repentance and prayer. 4. Such reformation as the heavenly summons imperatively demands.—T.

Vers. 3—5.—*The judgment on Damascus.* The beauty of Damascus has been the admiration of travellers and the praise of poets. It is a mournful reflection that a city so magnificently situated, and with associations so romantic, should so often have been the scene of human injustice, cruelty, and bloodshed. The “pearl girdled with emeralds”—as Damascus was gracefully designated—is beautiful without, but, as the text reminds us, has often contained a lawless and godless population.

I. THE OFFENCE OF DAMASCUS. 1. In itself this consisted of atrocious cruelty. The records inform us that war frequently prevailed between Syria and Israel. By Gilead in this passage we understand the land possessed by the Israelites on the east side of Jordan. The inhabitants of this pastoral territory were treated by the Syrians in a way fitted to awaken the indignation even of those who lived in times when savage cruelty was but the too common accompaniment of war. The unfortunate Israelites who were conquered in war seem to have been literally torn to pieces and mangled by the threshing-implements fitted with wheels and armed with teeth of iron. Thus was God's image defaced and God's Law defied. 2. The offence was aggravated by repetition. Thrice, nay, four times, had the Damascenes offended the Divine Ruler of men by their violence and inhumanity. The sin was thus shown to be no mere outbreak of passion, but a habit, evincing a corrupt and degraded nature.

II. THE PUNISHMENT OF DAMASCUS. 1. Observe upon whom it came. (1) Upon the king, the rulers and princes of the land. These were the leaders in the nefarious practices here censured. Their ambition and unfeeling selfishness accounted for the sin; and upon them came down the righteous penalty. The annals of many a nation may prove to the reflective student of history that a righteous retribution visits those royal houses which have been infamous for selfish ambition, for perfidy, for tyranny, for self-indulgence. The King of kings asserts his authority, and brings down the lofty from the throne. (2) The people of Syria shared in the disaster, which thus became national. They may have been misled by their rulers, but it seems rather to have been the case that there was sympathy between kings and subjects, and that the soldiers in the Syrian army delighted in the opportunity of venting their evil passions upon their prostrate foes. 2. Observe in what the punishment consisted. (1) Destruction (“a fire”) came upon the royal house. (2) The splendid and powerful city was laid open to the incursion of the enemy. The brazen “bar” which secured the city gate was broken. (3) The people were carried into captivity, the worst misfortune which could humiliate and distress a nation.—T.

Vers. 6—8.—*The judgment on Philistia.* The great religious truth which is conveyed in this prophetic warning addressed to Philistia is this—national retribution is inevitable.

I. NATIONAL RETRIBUTION IS NOT AVERTED BY WEALTH AND PROSPERITY. Philistia was a fertile plain, abounding in all material riches. The people not only possessed the produce of a fruitful soil; they were versed in the arts of life, being famous as artificers and craftsmen; and they enjoyed the fruits of commerce both by sea and land. There is danger lest a prosperous nation should trust in its riches. Yet history tells us that the wealthiest communities have been overtaken by the righteous judgments of God.

II. NATIONAL RETRIBUTION IS NOT AVERTED BY UNION AND CONFEDERACY. The five cities of the Philistines were leagued together; each supported the other, and every one furnished a contingent to the national armies. Union is strength. But the united strength of the Philistines could not avail them in the day of the Lord. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished."

III. NATIONAL RETRIBUTION IS NOT AVERTED BY POWERFUL ALLIANCES. The Philistines on the west of Judah leagued with the Edomites on the east. And when the Philistines gained an advantage over the Jews, they delivered their foes into the hands of their allies of Mount Seir. But Edom was not able to deliver her confederate in the time of trial and of retribution.

IV. NATIONAL RETRIBUTION IS NOT AVERTED BY CRUELTY TO A FOE. Human policy sometimes urges that the complete destruction of an enemy by the sword or by captivity is the surest protection against revenge. But Divine government dominates human policy. The crafty and the cruel must submit to the decrees of the Judge of the whole earth.—T.

Vers. 9, 10.—*The violation of a brotherly covenant.* The reproach addressed to Tyre, on account of Tyre's league with Edom against the Israelites, is peculiarly severe. This is to be explained by the previous history of the two nations. Hiram, King of Tyre, had been a warm friend both of David and of Solomon. A close and intimate connection had thus been formed. And when Tyre made war upon the Jews and, like Philistia, gave Israel into the hands of Edom, the grievance was felt to be peculiarly distressing. In fact, it was recognized as such by the inspired prophet of Jehovah.

I. THE DEEPEST FOUNDATION FOR NATIONAL FRIENDSHIPS IS THEIR COMMON BROTHERHOOD IN THE FAMILY OF GOD. The Creator has made them of one blood, has appointed the bounds of their habitation, has given to each nation its own advantages, its own opportunities, its own responsibilities. Each has thus a service to render to the Lord and Father of all; and consequently each has a claim to the respect and good will of neighbouring nations.

II. NATIONAL FRIENDSHIP IS RECOMMENDED AND PROMOTED BY MUTUAL INTEREST. The exchange of commodities which had taken place between Tyre and Jerusalem may be regarded as an example of the use which one country may be to another,—a use in some way or other always to be reciprocated. In peace every nation may supply the lack of others; whilst in war both nations so engaged inflict loss and injury. No doubt, when excited by passion, nations lose sight of their welfare; yet it is well to cultivate in men's minds the conviction that unity and concord are of the highest material as well as moral advantage.

III. NATIONAL FRIENDSHIP MAY BE CEMENTED BY SOLEMN COVENANTS AND ALLIANCES. Human nature is such that it is contributive to many desirable ends that men should enter into solemn compact and should ratify covenants with one another. When nations enter into friendly alliance, it is always regarded as peculiarly base when one nation, without overpowering reason for doing so, turns against the other, and betrays or attacks it. Such seems to have been the action of Tyre.

IV. BROTHERLY COVENANTS BETWEEN NATIONS CANNOT BE VIOLATED WITH IMPUNITY. Tyre was one of the great cities of antiquity, especially famous for maritime and commercial prosperity. Proud and confident in its greatness, Tyre little anticipated the fate which Providence had in reserve for it. Yet the inspired prophet foresaw the ruin of Tyre, and connected that ruin with the perfidy for which the city was in this passage so justly blamed. The Lord who rules in the whole earth is a Judge righteous and supreme, whose sentences will surely be executed.—T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*A brother's faithlessness and injustice.* If Tyre was doubly blamable because, being an ally, she turned against Israel, much more deserving of censure was Edom, inasmuch as Edom was near akin to Israel, and yet was guilty of the conduct described in this passage.

I. KINDRED INVOLVES SACRED OBLIGATIONS TO MUTUAL REGARD AND SUCCOUR. Moses had addressed Edom as a brother, and Israel had forbore to attack Edom, even when tempted to do so by most unneighbourly, unbrotherly conduct. The proper response to such conduct would have been something very different from what is here

recorded. Amongst all nations, and in every stage of society, common descent from one ancestor is accepted as a bond of brotherhood and a pledge of friendliness.

II. THERE ARE INSTANCES IN WHICH THESE OBLIGATIONS ARE UTTERLY DISREGARDED. Such was the case with the Edomites. We trace in their conduct towards their kinsmen of Israel several stages of iniquity. 1. Aggression. Edom "pursued his brother with the sword." 2. Pitiless anger. Edom "corrupted his compassions." 3. Implacability. Edom "kept his wrath for ever." Such treatment would have been unjustifiable from any nation towards another; but the relation and circumstances made it flagrantly and atrociously wicked in the instance under consideration.

III. VIOLATION OF OBLIGATIONS SO SACRED INCURS DIVINE DISPLEASURE AND MERITED PUNISHMENT. A nation sins and a nation suffers. Doubtless innocent persons endure in many cases the sufferings which the guilty deserve. This is a mystery of Divine providence. Yet it is evident that cities, tribes, nations, may be, and often have been, chastised, as a proof of the Divine rule, as a correction for human disobedience, and as an inducement to repentance.—T.

Vers. 13—15.—*Greed of territory.* The history of the Ammonites is full of indications of their natural qualities and of their conduct towards Israel. They were an unprincipled and cruel people, and were continually at war with their neighbours. Their settlement on the east of the Jordan brought them into constant conflict with the Jews, and from the Book of Deuteronomy down to that of Nehemiah references to Ammon occur from which we gather that they were an idolatrous, restless, pitiless, lustful, and treacherous tribe. The incident upon which Amos founds this prediction was an incursion which the Ammonites made into Gilead during the reign of King Uzziah.

I. GREED OF TERRITORY IS A NATIONAL SIN. How many a nation has been possessed with a selfish desire to "enlarge its border"! When population increases, emigration and colonization may become necessary, and may be for good. What is blamed is the desire for a neighbour's land, the extirpation or subjugation of friendly neighbours, in order to obtain room for expansion or increase of luxury or of power.

II. GREED OF TERRITORY LEADS TO NEFARIOUS CRUELTY. The instance here mentioned is no doubt an extreme one; it shows convincingly that Ammon had no sense of humanity, compassion, or decency. Alas! the annals of our race afford too many an instance of the cruelty to which ambition leads. The history of the Spaniards in America is a sufficient proof of the awful lengths to which conquerors will go when urged by greed of power or of gold. And settlers even from our own land have not seldom been guilty of most indefensible cruelty and oppression towards the natives of the territories they have acquired. For the protection of *aborigines* it has been necessary to awaken public opinion, to institute special laws. Men plead necessity or expediency in defence or in extenuation of conduct which is a reproach to any people.

III. GREED OF TERRITORY AND ITS FRUITS ARE NOT UNNOTICED BY HIM WHO RULES OVER ALL. "The earth is the Lord's." He has "given it to the children of men." But when he beholds sordid greed animate men to robbery, and not to robbery only but to inhumanity and vile cruelty, his indignation is aroused. Amos makes use of the fire, the tempest, the whirlwind, to set forth the retribution which must overtake the capital of Ammon, its king and princes. But the Lord reigneth over all lands. The violent shall not always prosper. The day shall come when their schemes shall be defeated, and they themselves be laid low in the dust.—T.

Ver. 1.—*The true teacher.* "The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa." In the little village of Tekoa, six miles south of Bethlehem, the young peasant Amos lived. He was a lad of humble birth and lowly occupation. Sometimes he trimmed the sycamore trees, and sometimes drove the cattle to and from their pasture. But he heard the voice of God everywhere, and saw his works in all the scenes around him; for he was devout, and feared the Lord exceedingly. Although he lived in Judah, his heart was stirred with the thought of the sins committed in the neighbouring kingdom of Israel, and of the judgments which would ultimately ensue. It was a time when Israel had every sign of prosperity. The warlike Jeroboam II. was on the throne, and his frequent victories gave his kingdom power, wealth, and security

greater than it had before, or would ever have again. Amos, however, as a true "seer," saw under the surface of society. He was not to be diverted from sins and woes at home by dashing enterprises abroad. He knew that the poor were oppressed, that other classes were sinking into luxurious effeminacy, that the worship of Jehovah was ignored; and these and other evils he rightly traced to the idolatry which had its seat in Bethel. Inspired by God to denounce these sins, he visited the towns and villages of Israel, everywhere delivering his message, until he came to Bethel itself, and boldly denounced idolatry in its chosen seat. He was expelled the kingdom by force, in obedience to the order of Jeroboam, who was instigated by Amaziah the high priest. But (as Church history has often shown) the attempt to silence a voice from God made its echoes reverberate through all the ages. Secluded in his little native village, Amos recorded the words which God had given him as a message to his contemporaries, and hence they have come down to us for our instruction. The history of the man and the style of his teaching in themselves teach us important lessons. We are reminded first—

I. THAT GOD OFTEN CHOOSES HIS SERVANTS FROM AMONGST MEN OF LOW ESTATE. We often quote the words (1 Cor. i. 27, 28), "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen." But we glide over the surface of that assurance without noting, as we should do, its deep significance and profound truth. As a matter of history, however, it is true that the world is most indebted, not to its kings, but to its shepherds, fishermen, and tentmakers. In the stress of poverty and toil, not in the indulgences of luxury, the noblest characters have been formed. It is what a man *is*, and not what a man *has*, that fits him for the service of God. The Church has lost much moral power by ignoring that. No one can visit our places of worship without noticing that members of the artisan class are conspicuous by their absence. Their energy and activity are too often antagonistic to religion. And since they form the basis of society, and it is ultimately their work which makes our wealth, the outlook is sufficiently serious. Doubtless they are to blame, but the Church is to blame also. Abstinence from places of worship is often due, in its initial stage, to absence of welcome; to the unexpressed desire, on the part of Christians, to treat certain of their fellow-men as a separate class, which is "to be done good to" with effusive benevolence. Once more let it be true that "the rich and the poor meet together, and the Lord is the Maker of them all," that "the poor have the gospel preached to them," and we shall see a marvellous change. Those who now, when intelligent, are too often cynically sceptical, or, when degraded, are too often sunk low in drunkenness, will become as of yore—amongst the noblest upholders of love, righteousness, and truth.

II. THAT GOD DESIRES HIS SERVANTS TO DO THEIR WORK NATURALLY. Amos drew almost all his illustrations from the natural objects and scenes with which he was familiar in his calling among the herdmen. Perfect naturalness is a source of moral power to any teacher, especially to a teacher of religious truth. Nothing is more offensive in him than pretence, unreality, and affectation. To ape the style of another man, to speak confidently on subjects which have not been personally studied, etc., brings nothing but contempt. Be real and genuine, and thoroughly yourself, wherever you are, but most of all in speaking for God. Amos the herdman would not put on the style of Solomon the king. He was as wise as David was when he put off the armour of Saul because it was untried and therefore unsuitable. The shepherd lad was mightiest with the shepherd's sling and stone.

III. THAT GOD MAKES HIS WORLD TO BE VOCAL WITH TEACHING. The prophecy of Amos is crowded with scenes which the herdman had witnessed. It is worthy of study, if only as a bold picture of the incidents of village life in the East in olden days. Let us trust ourselves to his guidance in imagination. We see the gin set for the bird, and the snare spread for the game. We hear the roar of the lion in the thicket when he has caught his prey, and stand by the fisherman with his hooks, as with skill and patience he plies his craft. We watch the man fleeing from the lion only to meet the bear, and the fugitive bandit hoping for refuge in the caverns of Mount Carmel. We follow Amos to the field. Here the ploughman and vinedresser are busy at work; and there the gardens, cursed with mildew and blasting, bear no fruit. Now we hear

the chirp of the grasshopper in the meadow, and now the patter of the rain as it falls after the king's mowings. In harvest-time, as we walk with Amos, we see the laden cart pressed down with the weight of the sheaves, and hear the thud of the flail as it falls on the threshing-floor, and watch the corn beaten out flung into the sieve, and note that while the chaff is scattered "not the least grain falls upon the earth." Then in the evening, when the land is quiet, and the heavens are glorious with stars, we hear Amos speak of him who "made the Pleiades and Orion," who makes the day dark with night, and then, in all the splendour of the Oriental dawn, turns the shadow of death into morning. What an example is he to us! Let us re-echo the prayer of Keble—

"Thou, who hast given me eyes to see
And love this sight so fair,
Give me a heart to find out thee,
And see thee everywhere."

IV. THAT GOD WOULD HAVE HOLY THOUGHTS ASSOCIATED WITH ORDINARY THINGS. We all know the power of association. Sometimes we hear a riddle or a joke which presents a text or hymn in a ludicrous aspect. We never hear the text or the hymn afterwards without being reminded of the grotesque thought. Hence such "jesting which is not convenient," and which is unhappily a staple ingredient of American humour, should be repressed by thoughtful men. Our endeavour should be in the opposite direction. Instead of making sacred things profane, let us rather make profane things sacred, so that the prophecy of Zechariah shall be fulfilled, "In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar." All things belong to God. He is present in the fields as well as in his house. He is near us in our homes as well as in our temples; and the life we live as Christian men has sanctity, whether it be spent in the engagements of business or in the services of the sanctuary. Let us seek grace to follow in the footsteps of Amos, or rather in the footsteps of One infinitely greater than he; and then when we see the sower in the field, or the merchant in his business, when we gaze on the lilies in the garden, or on the tares amid the corn, we shall have sweet thoughts of those higher truths which our Lord has associated with them. The voice from heaven still says, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."—A. R.

Vers. 3, 6, 9, 11, 13; ch. ii. 1, 4, 6.—*Great sufferings following great sins.* "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment," etc. Amos, we are informed, was a native of Tekoah, a small region in the tribe of Judah, about twelve miles south-east of Jerusalem. Nothing is known of his parents. He evidently belonged to the humbler class of life, and pursued the occupation of the humble shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees. From his flock he was divinely called to the high office of prophet; and though himself of the tribe of Judah, his mission was to Israel. He was sent to Bethel, into the kingdom of the ten tribes. He commenced his ministry in the reign of Uzziah, between B.C. 772 and 746, and therefore laboured about the same time as Hosea. In his time idolatry, with its concomitant evils and immoralities of every description, reigned with uncontrolled sway amongst the Israelites, and against these evils he hurls his denunciations. The book has been divided into three or four parts: First, sentences pronounced against the Syrians, the Philistines, the Phœnicians, the Edomites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Jews, and the Israelites (ch. i. and ii.). Second, special discourses delivered against Israel (ch. iii. to vi.). Third, visions, partly of a consolatory and partly of a comminatory nature, in which reference is had both to the times that were to pass over the ten tribes previous to the coming of the Messiah, and finally to what was to take place under his reign (ch. vii. to ix.). His style is marked by perspicuity, elegance, energy, and fulness. His images are mostly original, and taken from the natural scenery with which he was familiar. We may say that the whole passage, extending from ch. i. 13 to ch. ii. 8, illustrates the three following great truths: 1. The sins of all the people on the earth, whatever the peculiarities of their character or conduct, are under the cognizance of God. 2. That of all the sins of the people, that of persecution is peculiarly

abhorrent to the Divine nature. 3. That these sins expose to suffering not only the actual offenders, but others also. The first and second of these truths we will not here notice; but to the third we must now give a moment's attention. In all the passages to which we have referred at the head of this sketch punishment is the subject. We offer two remarks on this subject.

I. GREAT SINS ENTAIL GREAT SUFFERINGS. The calamities threatened to these different tribes of different lands are of the most terrible description. But they are all such as to match their crimes. 1. The connection between great sins and great sufferings is *inevitable*. The moral Governor of the world has so arranged matters that every sin brings with it its own punishment, and it is only when the sin is destroyed the suffering ceases. Thank God, this sin can be destroyed through faith in the mediation of him who came to put away sin by faith in the sacrifice of himself. 2. The connection between great sins and great sufferings is *universal*. All these sinful peoples had to realize it from their own bitter experience. It does not matter where, when, or how a man lives, his sins will find him out.

II. GREAT SINS OFTEN ENTAIL GREAT SUFFERINGS UPON PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT THE ACTUAL OFFENDERS. "The fire," which is here the instrument of God's retribution to us sinners, would not only scathe the persons and consume the property of the *actual* offenders, but others. The fact is patent in all history and in all experience, that men here suffer for the sins of others. We are so rooted together in the great field of life, that if the tares are pulled up the wheat will be injured if not destroyed. The cry of men in all ages has been, "Our fathers have sinned, and we have borne their iniquities." Two facts may reconcile our consciences to this. 1. *That few, if any, suffer more than their consciences tell them they deserve.* 2. *That there is to come a period when the whole will appear to be in accord with the justice and goodness of God.*—D. T.

Vers. 3, 6, 9, 11, 13; ch. ii. 1, 4, 6.—*The enormity of the sin of persecution.* "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four," etc. "They are all charged in general," says an old expositor, "with three transgressions, yea, with four; that is, with many transgressions, as by 'one or two' we mean many; as, in Latin, a man that is very happy is said to be *terque quaterque beatus*—'three and four times happy;' or, 'with three and four,' that is, with seven transgressions—a number of perfection, intimating that they have *filled up the measure of their iniquities*, and are ripe for ruin; or, 'with three' (that is, a variety of sins), and with a *fourth* especially, which is specified concerning each of them, though the other three are not, as Prov. xxx. 15, 18, 21, 29. Where we read of 'three things, yea, four,' generally one seems to be more especially intended" (Henry). Now, the sin especially referred to here as the "fourth" is taken to be that of *persecution*, that is, the sin of inflicting suffering upon others because of their peculiar religious convictions and doings. Other sins innumerable, varied and heinous, they had committed, but this fourth seems to be the crowning of their evil. Persecution has been called the measure-filling sin of any people, the sin that will be taken into account on the last great day. "I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat," etc.

I. PERSECUTION IS A MOST ARROGANT CRIME. The religious persecutor acts upon the assumption that his ideas of religion are absolutely true, that his theological knowledge is the test by which all other opinions are to be tried. Such a man is represented by the apostle as one that "sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. ii. 4). Presumptuous mortal! The proud tyrant who has won his way through seas of blood to the throne, and claims authority over men's bodily movements, shows an arrogance before which servile spirits bow, but from which all thoughtful and noble men recoil with disgust and indignation. But his arrogance is shadowy and harmless compared with the arrogance of him who enters the temple of human conscience, and claims dominion over the moral workings of the soul. Yes, such arrogant men abound in all ages, and are by no means rare even in this age and land of what is called civil and religious liberty. The most arrogant title that mortal man can wear is "Vicar of Christ."

II. PERSECUTION IS A MOST ABSURD CRIME. Far wiser is the fool who would legislate for the winds or the waves, and, like Canute, give commands to the billows,

than he who attempts to legislate for human thoughts and moral convictions. Still more foolish to attempt to crush men's religious beliefs by inflicting civil disabilities or corporeal suffering. In sooth, the way to give life, power, and influence to religious errors is to persecute. And truth never seems to rise in greater power and majesty than under the bloody hand of cruel persecution. It has been well said that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

"A blameless faith was all the crime the Christian martyr knew;
And where the crimson current flowed upon that barren sand,
Up sprang a tree, whose vigorous boughs soon overspread the land;
O'er distant isles its shadow fell, nor knew its roots decay,
E'en when the Roman Cæsar's throne and empire passed away."

III. PERSECUTION IS A MOST CRUEL CRIME. What ruthless inhumanities are in these verses charged against the various peoples mentioned—those of Damascus, Gaza, Tyrus, etc.! It has often been observed that no anger is so savage as the anger which springs up between relations of blood. A brotherly hate is the chief of hates; and it may be truly said that there is no animosity that burns with a more hellish heat than that connected with religion. Gibbon, referring to the cruelties inflicted upon the early Christians, says, "They died in torments, and their torments were embittered by insult and derision. Some were nailed on crosses, others sewn up in the skins of wild beasts and exposed to the fury of dogs; others, again, smeared over with combustible material, were used as torches to illuminate the darkness of the night. The gardens of Nero were destined for the melancholy spectacle, which was accompanied by a horserace and honoured with the presence of the emperor, who mingled with the populace in the dress and attitude of a charioteer."—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1—3.—Judgment on Moab.

Ver. 1.—**Moab.** The prophet now denounces the other nation connected by ties of blood with Israel (see on ch. i. 13). Moab's hostility had been shown in the hiring of Balaam to curse the Israelites, and in seducing them to idolatry (Numb. xxii.—xxv. 3). He was their oppressor in the time of the Judges (Judg. iii. 12); and David had to take most stringent measures against him (2 Sam. viii. 2). The Moabites joined in a league against Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xx. 22), and later against Jehoiakim (2 Kings xxiv. 2), and, as we see by the inscription on the Moabite Stone, were always ready to profit by the disasters or weakness of the chosen people. "I erected this stone," says Mesha, "to Chemosh at Kirkha, a stone of salvation, for he saved me from all despoilers, and made me see my desire upon all mine enemies, even upon Omri, King of Israel." And then he goes on to recount his victories. He burned the bones of the King of Edom into lime. This profanation of the corpse of the King of Edom (see 2 Kings xxiii. 16; Jer. viii. 1, 2) is not mentioned in the historical books. Some of the older commentators, as Tirinus and Corn. à Lapidé, think that the prophet wishes to show that the sympathy of God extends beyond the covenant people, and

that he punishes wrongs inflicted even on heathen nations. But as in the case of the other nations, Amos reproves only crimes committed against Israel or Judah, so the present outrage must have the same connection. The reference to the King of Moab's sacrifice of "his eldest son," even if we suppose (which is improbable) the son of the King of Edom to be meant, is plainly inapplicable (2 Kings iii. 27), as the offence regarded the king himself, and not his son, and the expression, "burned into lime," can hardly be thought to refer to a human sacrifice. The act mentioned probably occurred during the time that the Edomites joined Jehoram and Jehoshaphat in the league against Mesha, the King of Moab (2 Kings iii. 7, 9), the author of the inscription on the celebrated stone erected by him at Dibon. Unfortunately, the last lines of that inscription, describing the war against the Edomites, are lost. The paragraph that remains is this: "And Chemosh said to me, Go down, make war against Horonaim [*i.e.* the men of Edom], and take . . . Chemosh . . . in my days. Wherefore I made . . . year . . . and I . . ." The Jewish tradition, quoted by Jerome, tells that after this war the Moabites, in revenge for the assistance which the King of Edom had given to the Israelites, dug up and dishonoured his bones. Edom was then in vassalage to Israel, but regained its independence some ten years

later (2 Kings viii. 20). The sacrilegious act was meant to redound to the disgrace of Israel.

Ver. 2.—**Kiriath**; *cities*, and so taken as an appellative by the Septuagint translators, τῶν πόλεων αὐτῆς: but it is doubtless a proper name of one of the chief Moabite towns (Jer. xlviii. 24, 41). Keil, after Burckhardt, identifies it with the decayed town of *Kereyat*, or *Korriat*; others, with *Ar*, or *Kir*, the old capital (Isa. xv. 1). The plural termination of the word, like *Athena*, *Theba*, etc., may denote a double city—upper and lower, or old and new. **Moab shall die**. The nation is personified. **With tumult**; caused by war (comp. Jer. xlviii. 45, and the prophecy of Balaam, Numb. xxiv. 17). Septuagint, ἐν ἀσυνῳ, “in weakness.” **With shouting**. Omitted by the Vulgate (see on ch. i. 14). **Trumpet** (ch. iii. 6; Jer. iv. 19). Trochon cites Virgil, ‘Æneid,’ ii. 313, “Exoritur clamorque virum clangorque tubarum.” “Rises the shout of men and trumpets’ blare.”

Ver. 3.—**The judge**; *shophet*, probably here a synonym for “king” (comp. Micah v. 1). It implies the chief magistrate, like the Carthaginian *sufes*, which is the same word. There is no ground for deducing, as Hitzig and Ewald do, from the use of this form that Moab had no king at this time. The country was conquered by the Chaldeans, and thenceforward sank into insignificance (Jer. xlviii.; Ezek. xxv. 8—11).

Vers. 4, 5.—§ 2. *Judah is summoned to judgment, the prophet thus passing from alien nations, through the most favoured people, to Israel, the subject of his prophecy.*

Ver. 4.—**They have despised the Law of the Lord**. The other nations are denounced for their offences against God’s people; Judah is sentenced for her offences against God himself. The former likewise had offended against the law of conscience, natural religion; the latter against the written Law, revealed religion. By thus denouncing Judah, Amos shows his perfect impartiality. The Law, *Torah*, is the general name for the whole body of precepts and commandments, *chuggim*, moral and ceremonial. **Their lies**; Vulgate, *idola sua*, which is the sense, though not the translation, of the word. Idols are so called as being nonentities in themselves, and deceiving those who trust in them. “We know,” says St. Paul (1 Cor. viii. 4), “that an idol is nothing in the world.” The Septuagint gives, τὰ μάταια αὐτῶν ἡ ἐκλογαί, “their vain things which they made.” **Their fathers have walked**. This is the usual expression for attachment to idolatrous prac-

tices. From this error the Israelites were never weaned till their return from the penal Captivity.

Ver. 5.—The destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans is here briefly foretold (Jer. xvii. 27; Hos. viii. 14; 2 Kings xxv. 9, 10).

Vers. 6—16.—§ 3. *Summons and general denunciation of Israel for injustice, cruelty, incest, luxury, and idolatry.*

Ver. 6.—**They sold the righteous for silver**. The first charge against Israel is perversion of justice. The judges took bribes and condemned the righteous, i.e. the man whose cause was good. Pusey thinks that the literal selling of debtors by creditors, contrary to the Law (Exod. xxi. 7; Lev. xxv. 39; Neh. v. 5), is meant (comp. ch. viii. 6 and Matt. xviii. 25). **The needy for a pair of shoes**. For the very smallest bribe they betray the cause of the poor (comp. Ezek. xiii. 19); though, as sandals were sometimes of very costly materials (Cant. vii. 1; Ezek. xvi. 10; Judith xvi. 9), the expression might mean that they sold justice to obtain an article of luxury. But the form of expression is opposed to this interpretation.

Ver. 7.—**That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor**. This is the second charge—oppression of the poor. The obscure expression in the text is capable of two explanations. Hitzig, Pusey, Trochon, assume that its meaning is that in their avarice and cupidity the usurers or tyrannous rich men grudge even the dust which the poor man strews upon his head in token of his sorrow at being brought to so low a state. But this seems unnatural and far-fetched, and scarcely in harmony with the simple style of Amos. The other explanation, supported by Kimchi, Schegg, Keil, and Knabenbauer, is preferable. These oppressors desire eagerly to see the poor crushed to the earth, or so miserable as to scatter dust on their heads (comp. 1 Sam. iv. 12; 2 Sam. i. 2; Job ii. 12). **The poor** (*dal*, not the same word as in ver. 6); *depressed*, as brought low in condition. The Septuagint joins this with the previous clause, “And the poor for sandals, the things that tread on the dust of the earth, and smote on the heads of the needy.” The Vulgate gives, *Qui conterunt super pulverem terræ capita pauperum*, “Who bruise the heads of the poor on the dust of the earth.” **Turn aside the way of the meek**. They thwart and hinder their path of life, and force them into crooked and evil ways. Or *way*, according to Kimchi, may mean “judicial process,” as Prov. xvii. 23. This gives to the clause much the same meaning as ver. 6. **The meek** are those who are lowly and unassuming (see note on Zeph. ii. 3). **And a man**

and his father will go in unto the same maid; LXX., *Εισεπορευοντο προς την αβρην παιδικην*. The Vulgate, which omits "the same," is closer to the Hebrew, *Et filius ac pater ejus ierunt ad puellam*, though the Greek doubtless gives the intended meaning. This sin, which was tantamount to incest, was virtually forbidden (Lev. xviii. 8, 15; xx. 11). Some (as Ewald, Maurer, Gandell) see here an allusion to the organized prostitution in idol-temples (Hos. iv. 14), but this seems unnecessary. To profane my holy Name (Lev. xxii. 32). Such crimes dishonoured the God who called them his people, so that to them could be applied what St. Paul says (Rom. ii. 24), "The Name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you" (comp. Lev. xx. 3; Ezek. xxxvi. 20, 23). The word *lemaan*, "in order that," implies that they committed these sins, not through ignorance, but intentionally, to bring discredit upon the true faith and worship.

Ver. 8.—The prophet condemns the cruel luxury which, contrary to the Law, made the poor debtor's necessities minister to the rich man's pleasures. They lay themselves down upon; Vulgate, *accubuerunt*. Ewald translates, "they cast lots upon;" but the Authorized Version is supported by the highest authorities, and gives the most appropriate meaning. The Septuagint, with which the Syriac partly agrees, refers the clause to the immoralities practised in heathen worship, which the perpetrators desired to screen from observation, *τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν δεσμεύοντες σχοινίους παραπετάσματα ἐποιοῦν ἐχόμενα τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου*, "Binding their clothes with cords, they made them curtains near the altar." This is far from the intention of the prophet's words. Upon clothes laid to pledge; or, taken in pledge. The "clothes" (*begadim*) are the large outer garments which formed poor men's dress by day and cover by night, and which, if pledged, were ordered to be returned by nightfall (Exod. xxii. 26, etc.; Deut. xxiv. 12, etc.). These the hard-hearted usurers kept as their own, and reclined luxuriously upon them at their feasts and carousals in their temples. By every altar. At the sacrificial feasts in the temples at Dan and Bethel. They drink the wine of the condemned; Septuagint, *οἶνον ἐκ συκοφαντιῶν*. Wine obtained by fines extorted from the oppressed. So it is better to translate, "of such as have been fined." In the house of their god. The true God, whom they worshipped there under the symbol of the calf.

Ver. 9.—God complains of Israel's ingratitude for the favour which he had shown them. And yet I. The personal pro-

noun has a prominent position, and is continually repeated, to contrast God's faithfulness and the people's unthankfulness. The Amorite (Josh. xxiv. 8, 18). The representative of the seven nations of Canaan who were dispossessed by the Israelites (Gen. xv. 16; Exod. xxiii. 27; xxxiv. 11). The hyperbolic description of this people is taken from Numb. xiii. 32, etc.; Deut. i. 28. Thus is shown Israel's inability to cope with such an enemy, and their entire dependence on the help of the Lord. Fruit . . . roots. Keil explains that the posterity of a nation is regarded as its fruit, and the kernel of the nation out of which it springs as the root, comparing Job xviii. 16; Ezek. xvii. 9; Hos. ix. 16. The expression is equivalent to our "root and branch" (Mal. iv. 1).

Ver. 10.—The deliverance from Egypt and the guidance through the desert, though chronologically first, are mentioned last, as the great and culminating example of the favour and protection of God. First God prepared the land for Israel, and then trained them for possessing it. From the many allusions in this section, we see how familiar Amos and his hearers were with the history and law of the Pentateuch. Led you forty years (Deut. ii. 7; vii. 2-4).

Ver. 11.—Having mentioned two temporal benefits conferred on Israel, the prophet now names two spiritual favours—the presence of holy speakers and holy doers. I raised up. The prophet and the Nazarite were alike miracles of grace. The former gave heavenly teaching, the latter exhibited holiness of life. It was the Lord who gave the prophet power and authority to proclaim his will; it was the Lord who inspired the vow of the Nazarite and enabled him to carry it out in practice. Prophets. To Israel belonged Samuel (1 Sam. i. 1), Ahijah of Shiloh (1 Kings xiv. 2, 4), Jehu, son of Hanani (1 Kings xvi. 7), Elijah and Elisha, Hosea and Jonah. Young men. In the height of their passions, lusty and strong. Nazarites. The law concerning the Nazarites is given in Numb. vi. The special restrictions by which they bound themselves (viz. abstention from strong drink, from the use of the razor, and from all ritual defilement) were the outward signs of inward purity and devotion to God. Their very name implied separation from the world and devotion to God. They were, in fact, the religious of the old Law, analogous to the monks of Christian times. The vow was either temporary or lifelong. Of perpetual Nazarites we have as instances Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. Is it not even thus? Is not the existence of prophets and Nazarites among you a proof that you are

signally favoured by God, separate from other nations, and bound to be a holy people? Taking the general import of the passage and the signification of the word "Nazarite," the LXX. renders, *eis ἀγιασμόν*, "I took. . . and of your young men for consecration."

Ver. 12.—Ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink. Far from profiting by their example, or acknowledging the grace of God displayed in their holy lives, ye tried to get rid of their testimony by seducing or forcing them to break their vow. Prophecy not. Israel was impatient of the continued efforts of the prophets to warn and to win; and, unmindful of the fact that the man of God had a message which he was bound to deliver (comp. Jer. xx. 9; 1 Cor. ix. 16), this ungrateful nation systematically tried to silence the voices which were a standing rebuke to them. Thus Amos himself was treated (ch. vii. 10, etc.). (For proof of this opposition, see 1 Kings xiii. 4; xviii. 10, etc.; xix. 2; xxii. 26, 27; 2 Kings vi. 31; 2 Chron. xxv. 15, 16; and comp. Isa. xxx. 10, etc.; Micah ii. 6; Matt. xxiii. 37.

Vers. 13—16 threaten severe punishment for the sins mentioned above.

Ver. 13.—Behold, I am pressed under you; Septuagint, *κυλῖω ὑποκάτω ὑμῶν*, "I roll under you;" Vulgate, *stridebo subter vos*; Syriac, as Anglican; Hitzig, "I make it totter beneath you, as a cart tottereth;" Ewald, Keil, "I will press you down, as the cart presseth;" Baur, Pusey, "I straiten myself under you, as a cart is straitened;" Revised Version, "I will press you in your place, as a cart presseth." The translation of Keil, which is that of Gesenius, is most suitable,

meaning, "I will press you with the full force of war, as a loaded wain presses the earth over which it passes." The sense of the English Version is that God is burdened and wearied with their sins, as Isa. xliii. 24; Mal. ii. 17. The verb, being hiphil, is an objection to this explanation. The comparison of the wain is very natural in the mouth of the shepherd Amos.

Ver. 14.—In this and the two following verses Amos individualizes the "pressure" that awaits them, when every means of resistance and escape shall fail. The flight shall perish from the swift. The swift of foot shall have no time or way to flee (Jer. xxv. 35; xli. 6). Ewald, Pusey, Gandell, for "flight" render "place of flight, refuge," as Job xi. 20; Ps. cxlii. 5; Septuagint, *φυγή*: Vulgate, *fuga*. Shall not strengthen his force. The strong man shall not be able to collect or put forth his strength to any good purpose (comp. Prov. xxiv. 5; Nah. ii. 1). Neither shall . . . himself. Some of the Greek manuscripts omit this clause. Deliver himself occurs three times—a kind of solemn refrain.

Ver. 15.—Stand (Jer. xli. 21; Nah. ii. 8). The skilled archer shall not stand firm. That handleth the bow (Jer. xli. 9).

Ver. 16.—He that is courageous among the mighty; literally, *the strong in his heart*; i.e. the bravest hero. The LXX. takes the words differently, *Ὁ κραταῖος οὐ μὴ εὐρήσει τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ ἐν δυσαστελείαις*, "The strong shall not find his heart (confidence) in powers." Naked. Casting away heavy garments and weapons and whatever might hinder flight (comp. Mark xiv. 52; John xxi. 7). Virgil, 'Georg.' i. 299, "Nudus ara, sere nudus."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The woe against Moab.* Much that has been said of Ammon applies equally to Moab. The two nations had close relations and affinities, and in Scripture are generally mentioned together. Both were mildly treated by Israel (Deut. ii. 9, 19) as long as such treatment was possible. Yet were they at one in an implacable hatred of her, and a national policy of outrage towards her. A spring raid into Hebrew territory seems to have been an established Moabitish institution (2 Kings xiii. 20, literally, "were wont to come"). Again, Moab adopted the novel and unlikely expedient of employing a prophet of God to curse his own people (Numb. xxiii. 7). Of the comprehensive and thorough character of the national hatred, which these doings reveal, we have evidence in the passage before us.

I. THE NATIONAL HATES OF MOAB WERE DETERMINED BY ITS HATE OF ISRAEL. "It has burned the bones of the King of Edom." The particular occasion referred to here is not known. But the events that led up to it are briefly recorded. Moab was for some time tributary to Israel, and rebelled against it in the reign of Jehoram (2 Kings iii. 1, 4, 5). In the repressive war that followed, Jehoram was joined by the King of Judah and the King of Edom, then probably a tributary of Judah (2 Kings viii. 20). This war, the only one in which Edom and Moab came into conflict, exasperated Moab against it even more fiercely than against Israel itself (2 Kings iii. 26, 27). The

horrible sacrifice of the King of Edom's son by the King of Moab, and the subsequent burning of the King of Edom's bones by the Moabites, were both expressions of this wild and savage resentment. Moab's hatred of Edom was hatred of her as Israel's ally, and therefore at bottom was hatred of Israel itself. So the ungodly hate things from the standpoint of their connection with religion. They hate believers for Christ's sake (Matt. x. 22), and the friends of believers for believers' sakes. The compensation for this is that for Christ's sake also Christians love each other and the ungodly as well, and God for his own sake loves them all.

II. MOAB'S WAS A HATE THAT EVEN DEATH COULD NOT APPEASE. This fact illustrates its insatiability. "The soul being after death beyond man's reach, the hatred vented upon his remains is a sort of impotent grasping at eternal vengeance. It wreaks on what it knows to be insensible the hatred with which it would pursue, if it could, the living being who is beyond it" (Pusey). The employment of the burnt bones as lime is a circumstance which, like the ripping of pregnant women by Ammon, reveals the savage debasement of the people, and that contemptuous disregard of the human body which is generated by a career of blood and lust. There is a sacredness about death. It introduces an unseen factor, marks off a territory into which we may not intrude. There is a sacredness, too, about the human body. It is for a temple of the Holy Ghost, and to be treated as holy (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). Its members are to be members of Christ, and to be treated as consecrated things (1 Cor. vi. 15—18). The best guarantee against intemperance, uncleanness, violence, and every abuse of the body is respect for it as the home and instrument of God.

III. THE CIRCUMSTANCE THAT MAKES MOAB THE ENEMY OF EDMOM MAKES GOD HER FRIEND. Edom's alliance with Israel had results in two directions. It embroiled her with Israel's enemies, and commended her to Israel's friends. And primarily it commended her to Israel's God. His favour to his people includes, to certain intents, their friends. Members of the families of Noah and Lot were spared for their fathers' sake. A mixed multitude of foreigners were fed miraculously in the desert, because they were servants to the Israelites. Even the Egyptians were favoured because they for a time had given Israel a home (Deut. xxiii. 7). So with Edom. He was a brother by blood (Deut. xxiii. 7), and had been an ally against Moab, and so his cause is championed by God in this exactly as the cause of Israel is in the other woes. So with more spiritual relations. The virgin-companions of the bride, the Church, are brought, as her companions, to the King (Ps. xlv. 14). The final judgment apart, service rendered to God's people will not go unrewarded (Matt. x. 40—42). No investment brings in surer return than help and kindness shown to the saints of God.

IV. MOAB'S DOOM WAS ONE THAT MATCHED ITS LIFE. "Shall die with tumult." The Moabites were "sons of tumult" (Numb. xxiv. 17; Jer. xlviii. 45), and as in tumult they lived, so in tumult they should die (see Pusey). This is providential, the punishment being made appropriate to the crime. It is also natural, violence provoking violence, and so fixing the character of its own punishment. Moab had probably lost its kings before the prophecy was fulfilled, but the judges and princes who had headed the nation in its violence fitly head it in its destruction also.

Vers. 4, 5.—*The woe against Judah.* In the form of this woe, as compared with those before, is nothing to indicate the difference of underlying principles which it involves. A woe on a Hebrew and a heathen have little in common but the inevitable connection between punishment and sin.

I. THE SINS FOR WHICH GOD VISITS RESPECTIVELY THOSE WHO KNOW HIM AND THOSE WHO KNOW HIM NOT ARE VERY DIFFERENT. The six woes against the heathen are fathered exclusively on their sins against Israel or its friends. This woe against Judah is denounced with exclusive reference to sins against God himself. This is exactly what we might expect. Each is judged out of his own law (Rom. ii. 12). The revelation of God and duty to him was the first great commandment of the Law given to the Jews (Matt. xxii. 37, 38), and for this God reckons with them—first, because it was at once the guiltiest sin, and the sin of which they were oftenest guilty. The law revealed to the heathen made known the existence and many perfections of God (Ps. xix. 1; Rom. i. 20), and threw a side-light on the way to worship him (Acts xvii. 29). But this was not their clearest revelation, and so their sin against it is not

the sin that is emphasized. The law written on their heart (Rom. ii. 14, 15)—i.e. speaking in reason, conscience, and human feeling—was specially the law of duty to their fellow-creatures; and it is for their sin in this matter specially that God brings them into judgment. It is its blindness, and not its darkness, that is the condemnation of the world (John iii. 19). Where the white ray of revelation focusses, there the red ray of judgment shall fall and burn.

II. CONTEMPT OF LAW AND THE VIOLATION OF LAW INVOLVE EACH OTHER. "Despised the Law of Jehovah, and kept not his commandments." The Law is the abstract thing—God's revealed will as a whole. The commandments are the "particular precepts" (Keil) into which it is broken up. The first, being general, is fitly described as being "despised;" i.e. its drift disliked and its authority spurned. The second, being precepts enjoining particular duties, is said with propriety to be disobeyed. The order of enumeration is also the logical and natural order. Action is ever the outcome of sentiment, and its expression. What a man outwardly disobeys he has begun by inwardly despising. And so what he begins by despising he naturally goes on to disobey. It is in the heart that the eggs are hatched which, in a later stage, are the birds of evil-doing. It is, therefore, at the door of his heart that the wise man will mount guard (Prov. iv. 23).

III. ALL TRANSGRESSION IS THE OUTCOME OF IDOLATRY. Their lies led them astray. "By 'lies' here we are to understand idols. And the figure is most appropriate. Amos calls the idols 'lies,' not only as *res quæ fallunt*, but as fabrications and nonentities" (Keil; see 1 Cor. viii. 4). It is this lying character that makes them inevitably the occasion of sin. The first sin was brought about by a lie, in which the truth of God's threat was denied, and so its practical power destroyed. And every idol is just such a lie in embodied form. It is an abrogation of God's authority, a denying of his very existence; and it is a substitution for these of a god and a code congenial to our fallen nature. Under such circumstances violation of God's Law is a foregone conclusion.

IV. THE IDOLS OF THE CHILDREN ARE THE IDOLS OF THE FATHERS. Imitation is easier than invention. Hence Israel, when they first wanted an idol, adopted the calf of Egypt (Exod. xxxii. 4); and Jeroboam, also just left Egypt, set up calf-worship in Dan and Bethel (1 Kings xii. 28). Then, other things being equal, the persons men are most likely to imitate are their fathers, who are their teachers and guides and natural examples. Add to this that national tastes and habits and characters, formed in connection with a particular idol-worship, would be in special harmony with it, and would be transmitted with it from sire to son.

V. SIN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE SPIRITUAL CIRCLE IS DEALT WITH ON THE SAME PRINCIPLES. *The manner of the sin was the same* with Judah and the heathen. It was a transgression, or act of disobedience to a known law, as distinguished from a sinful disposition. It was a series of these acts, culminating in a final one of special enormity. "For three transgressions, and for four." *The manner of treatment was the same.* God threatened to strike. Then he lifted his hand for the stroke. Then he withheld it for a time. Then he declared the limit of forbearance was past, and nothing could now prevent the falling of the blow. *The mode of punishment was to be the same.* The agent would be devouring fire. This would fall on the capital. Sin in a visible spiritual relation, and however mixed up with acts of worship, is no whit less guilty. There is only one hell, and all sin alike deserves it, and, unrepented of, must bring to it.

Ver. 4.—*Heredity and the idol-taint.* "And their lies led them astray, after which their fathers walked." Idolatry was Israel's besetting sin. Within two months of their leaving Egypt they fell into it, and, in spite of Divine deterrent measures, they returned to it persistently for nine hundred years. They took to idol-worship, in fact, as "to the manner born." And that the sin was constitutional, and in the grain, is evident from the fact that there was no corresponding secession from idol-worship to the service of the true God (Jer. ii. 11). It was, moreover, the germinal sin. Deranging the primary relation to God, it led to the derangement of all other relations subordinate to this. From it, as a fruitful seed, sprang up in a luxuriant crop the hateful national vices, in which the heathen around were not merely imitated but

outdone. And then, as was natural, all the national troubles, including the crowning one of captivity in Babylon, were brought on them by this and its resultant sins, and were designed to be at once its punishment and cure. How near the practice lay to the sources of national corruption and calamity this passage shows. We have here—

I. AN IDOL A LIE. This is a strong figure, and very apt (Jer. xvi. 19, 20; Rom. i. 25). 1. *It is a figment of the imagination.* "An idol is nothing in the world" (1 Cor. viii. 4). It is simply, as the very name implies, the creation of an errant fancy. If we think that to be something which is nothing, we deceive ourselves; and the idol which is the occasion of the deception is an illusion and a lie. There are idols in every human heart. Such are all its passions and lusts (Col. iii. 5; 1 John v. 21). And they are lies. They are conversant with unrealities only. They deceive by false shows and promises. They promise joys that are purely visionary. They afford joys that turn out greatly poorer than they seemed. They refuse to believe in evil consequences that are manifold and inevitable. Every man who has given them entertainment has deceived himself (Rom. vi. 21). 2. *It is the devil's figure-head.* This is Paul's reading of the natural history of an idol (1 Cor. x. 19, 20), and it was that of Moses (Lev. xvii. 7; Deut. xxxii. 17) and Ezra (2 Chron. xi. 15) and David (Ps. cvi. 37) before him. Thus the imaginary god is, after all, a real devil, and therefore doubly a lie; for he "is a liar, and the father of it." He suggests it, and designs it, and works through it, and embodies himself in it, and then crowns all by concealing the fact. The "kingdom of the beast" in prophecy is probably the great idolatrous confederation or false Church in which idolatry is wedded to empire (Dr. Wylie, 'Great Exodus'). So with the spiritual idols of our hearts. They are of the devil (1 John iii. 8), produced by his working (Acts v. 3) and charged with his evil nature (John viii. 44). To serve the flesh in the lusts of it is, in a very literal sense, to serve the devil. 3. *It disappoints all expectations from it.* "Ye are of nothing," says Isaiah, addressing idols, "and your work of nought" (Isa. xli. 24). So we say, "Out of nothing nothing comes." Idol impotence, declared in Scripture (Jer. xiv. 22), and proved by experiment (1 Kings xviii. 24, 29), is a corollary from the very nature of things. So with spiritual idols. Nothing comes out of them to the purpose. Covetousness and concupiscence and frivolity promise happiness, and it never comes, but is wasted by them beyond recovery. And then, instead of happiness, there comes a ruined estate, and shattered health, and blasted hopes, and an accusing conscience, and the first tooth of the worm that never dies.

II. AN IDOL A CORRUPTING LIE. "Caused them to err," or "led them astray." There is a whole philosophy of morals in this statement. 1. *Wrong belief leads to wrong action.* The modern byword that "religion is not a creed, but a life," is cant generally, and a blunder always. Religion is neither a creed nor a life; it is both. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." You cannot do them otherwise; and in that case, to know them is useless. It is impossible to steer right with a wrong theory of navigation or with no theory. So a right life is impossible where there is a wrong creed or no creed. A creed is but a formula, of which the intelligent life is the filling up. Belief in idols, or in any ordinance of their worship, is a mistake, and acted on must lead astray. So, too, with the idols of sinful appetites. We expect happiness from serving them, and serve them with that view. What is this but committing sin on principle—wrong practice the inevitable outcome of wrong theory? 2. *Idolatry casts off God, and so all restraints on ill-doing.* Morality has its basis in religion. The standard of it is God's character. The ground of it is God's command. If there is no God there is no duty, as theists understand duty, and men may live as they list. This was what Israel did as soon as they became idolatrous (ver. 7). Idolatry was equivalent with them to a deed of idemnity for sinning. So with the worshippers of idol lusts. The idolatry that makes a god of ourselves makes us also a law to ourselves. 3. *An idol is evil even as a conception, and the worship of it makes the idolater like it.* "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" The idol invented by corrupt man is a corrupt creation. The gods of Greece and Rome were many of them simply the embodiments of human vices; and as they were models for men to study and imitate, the worship of them made the people like them. We are naturally assimilated to the likeness of the thing we serve, if we serve it truly. Let this warn us to take service only with a pure master.

III. AN IDOL AN HEREDITARY LIE. "After which their fathers walked." Reason suggests and history shows that the idols of the fathers are the idols of the children. 1. *All practices tend to become hereditary.* Children are imitative. They do what they see done. An act repeated becomes a habit, and the habit leading to persistence in the act, presses it on others' attention, and leads to its being imitated. It is thus that the social and religious customs of a community assume an aspect of heredity, and propagate themselves down the generations. 2. *Evil practices do so especially.* (Prov. xxii. 15.) Evil is congenial to human nature, and men will do the thing that is pleasant. Hence evil never dies, whilst good is dying out continually; and evil propagates itself, whilst good can be propagated only by a perpetual exercise of Divine influence. 3. *Family sins are the most surely hereditary of all.* Dispositions run in the blood. The drunkard, the thief, the libertine, each transmits his evil appetite or tendency to his children, and so practically ensures their falling into his sin. There is no reason to except a taste for idol-worship from the operation of this law. In the literal sense it is an appetency easily transmissible. In the spiritual sense it is more easily propagable still. If "the fathers have eaten the sour grapes" of idol-service in any form, "the children's teeth" are more than likely to be "set on edge." 4. *Idol-worship is self-worship in an insidious form, and therefore specially congenial to human nature.* Self is the idol easiest to enthroned. The injunction to love ourselves is not given in Scripture. It is safely and properly assumed, and made the model and measure of our love to others (Matt. xix. 19). Self-love is an affection native to the heart, and that in ideal strength. Now, an idol represented the maker's ideal of himself. It was, therefore, agreeable to his nature, and its service congenial, and so of easy transmission from generation to generation. All sin is really at bottom self-worship. We prefer ourselves to God; our will, our pleasure, our way, to his. We push him off the throne, and ourselves on it, and then do as we list. It is only grace that says, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Vers. 6-8.—*The woe against Israel.* This is the last woe and the greatest. "The thunder-cloud of God's judgments having passed over all the nations round about, and even discharged the fire from heaven on Judah and Jerusalem, settles at last on Israel" (Pusey). Just as God's honour suffered specially by their sin, so does his heart suffer specially in their punishment. And so, whilst compendious justice may be meted out to heathen nations, the destruction of the chosen people cannot be denounced without regretful enlargement on the circumstances of the case.

I. COVETOUSNESS PUTS A CONTEMPTUOUS ESTIMATE ON HUMAN LIFE. "They sell the righteous for money, and the poor for a pair of shoes." This may be either a commercial or a judicial transaction, but in either case the principle involved is the same. An undue estimate of wrong involves an inadequate estimate of all else. Wealth becomes the one good, and gain the one pursuit. Human life is as nothing in comparison with personal aggrandizement to the extent of even a paltry sum. Officialism, to which the death of a human being is mainly a question of a burial or registration fee, is not an altogether unheard-of thing. This principle has a bearing, not only on murder and the perversion of justice, but on slavery, oppression, the opium and liquor traffics, and every method of making money at the expense of human life or health or well-being. The extent to which such things prevail, and the tens of thousands of human lives annually sacrificed for gain, is a startling commentary on the maxim that "the love of money is a root of all evil."

II. THE DOMINATING VICE OF A COMMUNITY MAKES ALL THE OTHER VICES ITS TRIBUTARIES. Israel's besetting sin as against their fellow-men was covetousness. 1. *This was inhuman.* It bore hardest on the poor. These, being helpless, were its easiest victims. Humanity was put out of the question, and the unspeakably greater suffering involved in making the same gain off the poor, as compared with the rich, was no deterrent whatever. Gain, though it be the very heart's blood of miserable fellow-creatures, was all they had an eye for or a heart to consider. 2. *It was ungodly.* It made special victims of the righteous. This course was partly utilitarian, no doubt. The righteous might be expected to submit to the maximum of wrong with the minimum of retaliation. But it was profane as well. The wicked hate good, and all in whom it is found. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in

him." It was natural, therefore, that a worldly act should assume an ungodly character where opportunity arose. 3. *It was devilish.* "Who pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor." It rejoiced in all the incidental evils which oppression of the poor involved. When those it impoverished were levelled in the dust of misery and degradation, this was the sort of thing it panted after. One side of a man's moral nature cannot become vitiated without affecting the other sides. The vices have an affinity for one another, and tend to come together in groups. If evil gets in the little finger of one vice, the intrusion of the whole body is only a question of time.

III. WHEN MEN GET SATIATED WITH SIMPLE SINS, THEY RECOURSE TO COMPOUND SINS FOR A NEW SENSATION. Sin does not satisfy any time, and the longer it is followed up it satisfies the less. In the commission of it appetite increases, and relish diminishes *pari passu*, and so the candle of actual enjoyment is being shortened at both ends. One device in mitigation of this is to increase the dose, and another to multiply the ingredients. Reduced to the latter expedient, Israel mixed: 1. *Carousal with uncleanness.* The two things often go together. They are the two chief indulgences craved for by carnal appetite. The one, moreover, helps to produce the other. A Falstaff who combines the drunkard with the libertine is the typical debauchee. 3. *Uncleanness with incest.* "A man and his father go to the same girl." This act was equivalent to incest, which was a capital crime according to the Mosaic code (Lev. xviii. 7, 15; xx. 11). It outdid the heathen themselves, among whom this crime was not so much as named (1 Cor. v. 1). An apostate is always the vilest sinner (2 Pet. ii. 21, 22). 3. *Robbery with all three.* "Stretch themselves upon pawned clothes." This was robbery in two forms. They retained pawned clothes overnight, contrary to the Law of Moses (Exod. xxii. 26, 27), and in further violation of it used them to sleep on (Deut. xxiv. 12, 13). "And drink the wine of the amerced." Again a double injustice. The fine was unjustly inflicted, and then dishonestly appropriated. 4. *Profanity with the entire troupe.* "In order to profane my holy Name." Incest was the guiltiest, but as a carnal indulgence it had no advantage over any other form of uncleanness. It must, therefore, have been sought out because of its very horrors, and with a view to the profanation of God's holy Name, making the "members the members of an harlot." "Before every altar," i.e. at Beersheba and Dan, where Jehovah was worshipped after a fashion (see Keil), and therefore in determinate contempt of God. "In the house of their God," not the idol-god probably, but the God of Israel. "In the time of Jeroboam II. there was no heathenish idolatry in the kingdom of the ten tribes, or at any rate it was not publicly maintained" (Keil). But the sin, though less complicated, was scarcely less heinous than if idolatry had been a part of it. It was done of set purpose to dishonour him, and in order to this the place selected for the commission of it was his house, and the occasion the celebration of his worship. What a horrible exhibition of extreme and multiplex depravity! "They condensed sin. By a sort of economy in the toil of sinning they blended many sins in one . . . and in all the express breach of God's commandments" (Pusey).

Vers. 9—11.—*The manifold mercies of the covenant people.* In striking contrast to Israel's treatment of God stands out his treatment of them. Mercy rises above mercy, tier on tier, in a mighty pyramid of blessing. Of these there was—

I. NATIONAL ADOPTION. This is not mentioned, but it is implied, as underlying all the other favours. God's first step was to make them his people. He loved and chose them (Deut. x. 15; vii. 7, 8). He separated them from the peoples, and took them into covenant with himself (Exod. xxxiii. 16; Gen. xvii. 7, 19). That covenant he sealed (Gen. xvii. 13), and all who observed the seal he styled his own people (Isa. xliii. 1), lavishing on them in addition many a title of affection. This national adoption is the fact that subtends the whole line of Israel's national favours.

II. NATIONAL DELIVERANCE. "Brought you up," etc. (ver. 10). This was a stupendous providence; stupendous in its measures and stupendous in its results, and therefore of immense moral significance and weight. The mighty forces of nature are utilized. A haughty heathen nation is brought to its bended knees before the God of the down-trodden Israel. A rabble becomes an army. Crouching slaves become the fearless free. And, out of the chaos of despair and death emerges the young world of a fresh national life. This astounding work was Jehovah's rod to conjure with in the

after-centuries. He makes it the fulcrum on which to rest the lever of resistless motive. His Law, in its moral (Exod. xx. 2), judicial (Deut. xxiv. 18—22; xv. 16), and ceremonial aspects (Deut. xvi. 12), is bespoken a ready and glad obedience in the word, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt," etc.

III. NATIONAL PRESERVATION. "And led you forty years." The sustained but quiet miracles of the desert-pilgrimage were a worthy sequence to the prodigies of the Exodus. Divine energies were not exhausted in the thunder-bursts under which Egypt was made to reel. They were but the stormy prelude to the sunshine and soft showers and gentle wooing winds of a long spiritual husbandry. In the manna falling silently, and the mystic guiding pillar, and the Shechinah-glory lighting up the most holy place, Jehovah by a perpetual miracle kept himself before the nation's eye in all providential and saving relations. The resistless Deliverer was the jealous Protector, the bounteous Provider, and the solicitous and tender Friend.

IV. NATIONAL TRIUMPH. "I destroyed the Amorite," etc. The Hebrews had fierce and powerful enemies in all the neighbouring nations. These were generally their superiors in physical strength and courage and the warlike arts. Apart from miraculous help, it is doubtful whether Israel would not have been overmatched by almost any one of them (Exod. xvii. 11; 1 Sam. xvii. 42). Yet the giant races were subdued before them and wasted off the earth. When the grasshopper (Numb. xiii. 33) seizes on the lion's domain there are forces at work that invert the natural order of things. To make the minnows of unwarlike, timid, plodding Israel victorious over the tritons of Anak, the colossal warriors of Hebron (Josh. xi. 21), was a moral miracle, sufficient in itself to carry a nation's faith and a nation's gratitude till the end of time.

V. NATIONAL ENFEOWMENT. "To possess the land of the Amorite." An earthly inheritance was included in the earliest promise to Israel (Gen. xvii. 8). The tradition of this ideal provided home was never lost. In the stubble-fields and by the brick-kilns, where, "like dumb, driven cattle," they toiled throughout the years of their Egyptian bondage, the vision of it came as a ray of comfort lighting the darkest hours. When they marched from Egypt they consciously went to possess their own land, and the long detention in the desert was taken as a tedious but appropriate schooling to prepare them for the coming of age. Palestine, when at last they settled in it, was the very garden of the world, and a home so perfect of its kind as to be made an emblem of the eternal home above. God's standing monument, written over with the story of his goodness, was to every Israelite the teeming, smiling land in which he lived.

VI. NATIONAL EVANGELIZATION. "And I raised up of your sons," etc. The prophet was a characteristic national institution among the Jews. He was a man to whom God made revelations of his will (Numb. xii. 6), and through whom he communicated that will to the people (Heb. i. 1). Of this communication more or less was generally, although not invariably, committed to writing, and embodied in the Scriptures. The prophet did not regularly instruct the people; that was rather the business of the priest. But he did so often, and was besides God's mouthpiece for the communication of new truth, speaking it always according to the analogy of faith (Deut. xiii. 1—5). The permanent establishment thus of a Divine oracle in their midst, giving constant access to the fountain-head of truth, was a notable privilege to Israel. The institution of Nazarites was little less so in another direction. They were consecrated ones, separated from common men and common uses, and devoted in a special manner to God (Numb. vi. 1—21). Such consecration was the ideal human life (John xvii. 19). Therefore what the prophet did for truth in the abstract the Nazarite did for it in the concrete. The one revealed God's will, the other embodied it, or at least its great central principle. Their respective functions were complementary of each other, and between the two the Israelitish nation was "thoroughly furnished unto good works."

Ver. 12.—"*Children that are corrupters.*" "But ye made the dedicated drink wine; and ye commanded the prophets, saying, Ye shall not prophesy." Action and reaction have a natural connection and a normal relation to each other. In all departments of being they meet and answer, as face answers to face in a glass. The rebound is as the blow, the conviction as the argument, the response as the appeal. The mention of what God had done for Israel brings up the question—How had Israel been affected by

it all? Had things occurred in the normal way? Had gratitude waited on blessing in due proportion, and improvement followed privilege? This verse is the disappointing answer. Israel's response to God's appeal, as contained in his gracious dealings, was not the gratitude and fealty due, but unaccountable and aggravated sin. God delivered them from bondage, and they oppressed each other; he defended them against unjust violence, and they wrought injustice. He guided them in their journeys, and they led one another astray. He plied them with evangelizing agencies, and they responded by committing sacrilege and procuring blasphemy. The last is the sin charged against them here.

I. THIS WAS PRIMARILY A SIN AGAINST GOD. The Nazarite and the prophet were both Divine institutions. The vow of the one and the message of the other were alike prescribed by God (Numb. vi. 1; xii. 6). It was his will that they should perform their characteristic acts. In doing so they were but his instruments, accomplishing his purpose toward the nation. Accordingly, Israel's action against them was really against him, against his servants, against his ordinance, against his authority. So with all action against God's people as such. As we deal by them will he regard us as dealing by himself. They are all God's prophets, understanding the mysteries of his kingdom, and "holding forth the Word of life." They are all his dedicated ones, separate from the world, and living, "not to themselves, but to him who died and rose again for them." And whether as the one thing or the other, they are his accredited representatives on earth (Matt. x. 40). Our treatment of them is virtually our treatment of him that sent them (Matt. xxv. 40). A kiss to them reaches the Master's lips; a blow to them touches the apple of his eye.

II. PROXIMATELY THIS WAS A SIN AGAINST MAN. It consisted in compelling the prophet and the Nazarite to disobey God. Now, disobedience is sin, even when committed under pressure. "We ought to obey God rather than men." Men have faced death rather than the guilt of disobedience to known law. And so long as there is any alternative, even death itself, there is no place for disobedience. Israel's was the sin of compelling others to sin. This was soul-murder, and therefore guilt of the darkest dye. Early persecutors sometimes compelled Christians to swallow poison, an infernal device to make them suicides as well as martyrs, and so destroy them soul and body both. So diabolically ingenious was the young persecutor, Saul of Tarsus, that he compelled believers to blaspheme (Acts xxvi. 11); and when recalling the sin of his unconverted life he makes that fact the bitterest count in his self-accusation. Kindred to this was Israel's sin. It was an attempt to compass not men's death alone, but their damnation—a crime to which killing the body is as nothing. And it is not so uncommon in Christian lands and Christian Churches. How many among us are tempters to drunkenness, tempters to uncleanness, tempters to falsehood, tempters to profanity! Well, every tempter is a murderer—a murderer not merely in the ordinary sense, but in the Satanic sense of destroying or trying to destroy an immortal soul.

III. ULTIMATELY IT WAS A SIN AGAINST THE SINNER'S OWN INTERESTS. All sin is unprofitable, but this was doubly so. The prophet brought God's message, not for their destruction, but for their salvation. When they shut his mouth they cut themselves off from their only chance of being saved. "Where no vision is the people perish;" and in deliberately cutting it off, Israel sealed its own destruction. Then the Nazarite was an embodied revelation, a typical representation of a consecrated life. A heedful eye might have read a spiritual lesson out of his separation. "The life of the Nazarites was a continual protest against the self-indulgence and worldliness of the people. . . . It was a life above nature and thought. . . . They were an evidence what all might do and be if they used the grace of God" (Pusey). But, in the compulsory violation of his vow, the rich page was blotted and its lesson blotted out. It presents the piteous sight of a people stopping the fount of life in order that they may die of thirst. Israel would neither listen to the Divine voice nor look at the Divine life. And the sight is not confined to Israel (2 Tim. iv. 3). There are Churches that will not tolerate faithful preaching. There is a preaching that minces the gospel testimony against sin. It is the case of Israel over again. The people sinfully silence the preacher, and the preacher sinfully submits to be silenced. A Church asleep, and the minister rocking the cradle, is a poor interpretation of the pastoral relation.

IV. ALTOGETHER IT WAS A SIN AGGRAVATED BY THE ENJOYMENT OF SPECIAL
AMOS. D

MERCIES. All that God had done was a motive to obedience and an argument against sin. But all the arrows of influence fell pointless and broken from their hearts of stone. The more Divine mercies multiplied, the more did abominable wickedness increase. Sin, under such unlikely circumstances, argues special inveteracy, and involves corresponding aggravation of guilt (Rom. ii. 4). With every want supplied and every better feeling appealed to, it was sin not only without temptation, but in spite of strong deterrents, and was therefore hopeless as it was guilty. The love and goodness of God are the most potent persuasives to his service. Where these fail the case is desperate. What mercy cannot bend judgment will only break. If you sin against mercy you can sin eternally. There is no spiritual argument that can make you yield (2 Pet. iii. 15; Rom. ii. 4).

Vers. 13—16.—*The wrath of outraged goodness.* “A wounded spirit who can bear?” Even God will not bear it for evermore. A “base contempt of covenant mercies,” exemplified here, may go too far. The limit of intelligent forbearance will be passed, and the pent-up vials of wrath restrained will be poured forth.

I. THE CRUSHER. “Behold, I will press you down as the cart presses that is filled with sheaves” (Keil). This is a strong figure. God, in his retributive action, is compared not only to a cart, but to a heavily loaded one, which crushes all it passes over. His stroke, when it falls, will be heavy in proportion as, in mercy, it has been long suspended. His love had long been spurned, and now at last it is turned into righteous hatred. Unspeakable goodness disregarded persistently will now give place to thick disasters. His power had been insanely dared, and Israel would now discover whether they had an arm like his. “On whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder.” How indignant love can be that has suffered persistent outrage! How stern goodness becomes when it finds itself thrown away on inappreciation and contempt! How overwhelming Omnipotence is, which nevertheless endures defiance from worms of the dust so long! How terrible God will be as a Foe where he will not be accepted as a Friend (Ps. xviii. 26; Prov. i. 24—28)!

II. THE CRUSHED. These are not the nation in general, but each class in particular—the strong, the courageous, the swift, the fighter, the runner, and the rider alike. None shall escape. God’s wrath, like his love, is distinctive—rests not on masses, but on individuals. And, answering to this, the judgments which execute his wrath are elaborated in detail. They are no more necessary than reluctant, no more reluctant than sure, no more sure than thorough.

“The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small.”

It is noticeable, too, that of those who fall in the sweep of God’s sword, it is the best protected who are emphasized. Nothing is said of the weak and timid and slow. Their destruction might be taken for granted. But, lest any should cherish a hope of escape under any circumstances, the persons to whom such hope would be most natural are doomed by name. An occasion of remaining in sin is, with many wicked, the stealthy hope that somehow or other they will escape at last (Isa. xxviii. 15). Perhaps they have no definite expectation, no theory even, on the subject. They know the Word of God to be decisive, and feel the chances are against them. But they cajole the judgment into negligently making the wish the father to the thought, and go down to death the half-conscious victims of a make-believe. The gospel to such wants heralding with a Saviour’s warning cry, “How can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

III. THE CRUSHING. A variety of figures combine to illustrate this. 1. *It cannot be resisted.* “The strong one will not fortify his strength,” etc. There are no arms we can use against God. They are suited to a material, not a spiritual, foe. There is no strength to be put in competition with his. The bare thought of a struggle is the climax of all absurdity. “Let the potsherders strive with the potsherd of the earth.” 2. *It cannot be faced.* “The courageous one among the heroes will flee away.” Man has strength, and confidence in it, for a struggle with fellow-man. But his strength leaves him in God’s presence (John vii. 44). He cannot even attempt resistance. “He falls at his feet like one dead.” 3. *It cannot be escaped.* “The flight will be lost to the swift.” To fly from Omnipresence is as inconceivable as to fight against Omni-

potence. Darkness cannot hide, nor distance separate, from God. We live in his presence. We sin in his presence. We die in his presence. Even the destruction *from* his presence as gracious (2 Thess. i. 9) is destruction *in* his presence as filling heaven and earth. (1) *Judgment is the obverse of grace.* There are only the two ways of it. There is no compromise between obedience and disobedience (Matt. xii. 30). So there is no *via media* between salvation and destruction. The coin of Scripture truth comes to us with a *nimbus* on the one side and a death's head on the other. We may choose between the two, but one or other we must take (Mark xvi. 16). God will save if he may, but he will destroy if he must. (2) *Grace is the converse of judgment.* Judgment empties the strong of strength. Grace makes the weak to be strong in God. You may have either; and you must have one. Which shall it be?

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Moab's brutality avenged.* It is natural for the mind to lay hold upon and to retain in memory some one out of many characteristics of a nation, some one out of many incidents of a war. The one thing that is remembered is representative of many things that are forgotten. So is it with Amos's treatment of the sins of the surrounding nations. Several of these are characterized by some special quality. In the case before us in this passage an incident of malignant brutality is mentioned, not as standing alone, but evidently as a sample of the conduct of which the children of Lot had been guilty, and which was about to bring down upon them the wrath of Heaven.

I. IRREVERENCE AND INSULT OFFERED TO THE DEAD INDICATE A BASE AND ABANDONED DISPOSITION. We know nothing of the circumstance here referred to. The Moabites had made war upon the Edomites; had conquered them, had captured their king, and had slain him, and then consumed his bones with fire. This last action must be judged by the standard of the habits and feelings of the time. In some nations and at some periods cremation has been regarded as an honourable mode of disposing of dead bodies. In the time of the prophet, and among the Hebrews and their neighbours, it was held in detestation. No greater insult, no more horrible evidence of brutality, was possible. The dead are always considered, by civilized and religious communities, as entitled to tender and reverential treatment. Especially those who believe in a future life are bound to support their creed by treating a dead body as something better than a carcase. The instance of irreverence here recorded was aggravated by the fact that it was a king whose body was thus treated. War is in itself bad enough; but savage brutality renders war still worse.

II. DIVINE PROVIDENCE VISITS BRUTALITY WITH APPROPRIATE RETRIBUTION. 1. War, with all its accompanying horrors, is the doom of the savage slaughterers. They that take the sword perish by the sword. The measure they mete is measured to them again. 2. In this retribution the great suffer equally with the multitude. They who insult their neighbours' kings may suffer in the person of their own mighty ones. Fire devours the palaces as well as the cottages, and the judges and princes are cut off and slain along with the meanest of the subjects. The Lord is King and Judge, and he will not allow those nations always to prosper which violate his Law and defy his authority.—T.

Ver. 4.—*The privileged but faithless.* The preceding denunciations refer to the idolatrous nations by whom the chosen people were surrounded. But the impartiality of the prophet is apparent from his condemnation of his own kindred. Amos came from Tekoah, a city of Judah, and, instructed by the righteous Ruler of all, he did not spare his own tribe.

I. THE TRANSGRESSION OF JUDAH WAS AGGRAVATED BY THEIR POSSESSION AND THEIR NEGLECT OF THE DIVINE LAW. From the days of the desert wanderings the Jewish people had enjoyed the unspeakable privilege of possessing the laws of Moses, which were the laws of Jehovah. A treasure of incomparable value should have been highly esteemed and diligently used. That there were those to whom the Law was as "fine gold," as "honey and the honeycomb," cannot be questioned. But the people as

a whole were insensible of their privileges, and neglected and abused them; indeed, they are charged with having despised them. The surrounding and heathen nations were not guilty of this heinous offence. Great is the sin of those who have the Word of God, but who treat it with neglect and disdain.

II. THE TRANSGRESSION OF JUDAH WAS AGGRAVATED BY THEIR FAILURE TO PROFIT BY THE LESSON OF WARNING OFFERED IN THE HISTORY OF THEIR FOREFATHERS. The chosen people were taught not only by words, but by facts; not only by the books of Moses, but by the history of their ancestors. How often had the Hebrew people forsaken their God! How grievously had they sinned! And how terribly had they been scourged for their folly! Yet the lesson, emphatic and impressive though it was, was overlooked and unlearned.

III. THE TRANSGRESSION OF JUDAH WAS AGGRAVATED BY THEIR LAPSE INTO IDOLATRY. The "lies" spoken of by the prophet refer to the deceptive and hideous rites and practices of the heathen. Jehovah was the true God; the "gods of the nations" were but idols, the professions of whose worshippers and priests were delusive and vain. That those who had been trained to idolatry should persevere in it was intelligible; but that Judah should forsake the righteous, pure, and gracious God for the capricious and obscene and ridiculous divinities of the surrounding nations, was monstrous, and only to be accounted for by an awful abandonment to self and sin. The greater the height from which one falls, the deeper is his descent.

IV. THE AGGRAVATED TRANSGRESSION OF JUDAH MET WITH A SEVERE RETRIBUTION. Nebuzaradan and the army of the Chaldees fulfilled this prediction to the letter.—T.

Vers. 6—8.—*A nation's crimes.* The ministry of Amos was mainly to the northern kingdom. With this passage commences the long impeachment and warning which the prophet was inspired to address to Israel. The previous denunciations are pungent, but brief; now Amos puts forth all his strength of invective, reproach, and expostulation.

I. UNGODLINESS IS AT THE ROOT OF A NATION'S MORAL DEBASEMENT. Israel did not, indeed, abjure religion; but Israel abjured God. "The house of *their* god," says the prophet with a quiet irony, referring to the idol-temples which the people had taken to frequenting. The reverence of the supreme Lord of righteousness is the very root of national morality. Let a people worship such deities as were worshipped by Israel's neighbours, the Philistines, the Amorites, the Syrians, and it is well known to what fatal results such worship will surely lead. And let a nation abandon all worship, and live a life of sense, and it is certainly upon the high-road to moral ruin.

II. GREED AND OPPRESSION ARE AMONG THE FRUITS OF NATIONAL UNGODLINESS. In the state of society with which Amos was conversant, these immoral habits displayed themselves in the enslavement of the poor or in their deprivation of the ordinary comforts of life. There was no human law to prevent some of the base transactions mentioned, and all belief in a Divine Law was abandoned. History gives us many proofs of the pernicious effect of secularism and superstition upon human relations. Not only are all restraints, save those of civil law and physical force, spurned and ridiculed; there is no impulse and no motive to a higher than the selfish and animal life.

III. FLAGRANT LICENTIOUSNESS IS ANOTHER FRUIT OF A NATION'S IRRELIGION. The passions which lead to such atrocities as those here mentioned are, no doubt, deep seated in human nature. But religion assists men, not in repressing them wholly, but in controlling and guiding them. It is believed by many that Amos refers to some of the practices which were encouraged by the idolatries to which the Israelites were conforming. Certain it is that infidelity is often associated with the vilest principles of an immoral life, and tends to the letting loose of that wild beast—sensual appetite—which works dire devastation in society.

APPLICATION. These considerations should induce those who prize true religion for themselves to seek its maintenance at home against the assaults of infidelity, and to seek its propagation in lands where its absence is so morally deleterious.—T.

Vers. 9—11.—*A nation's privileges.* The transgressions of Israel were all the more reprehensible because of the peculiar favour which had been shown to the people who

were descendants of the father of the faithful and the friend of God. Upon these special privileges the prophet here dwells and expatiates, with a view to bring home to the offenders the magnitude of their sin.

I. A NATION SHOULD TRACE THE HAND OF GOD IN THE DELIVERANCES WROUGHT ON ITS BEHALF. Israel was established in the land of the Canaanites, of whom the Amorites are in this passage taken as the representatives. These foes of the chosen nation are pictured majestic as the cedar and mighty as the oak. Yet Jehovah had smitten them in the lofty branches, and had extirpated them from the roots, and had planted in their stead the vine brought out of Egypt. It was not by Israel's sword or bow, but by the right hand of the Lord, that the Amorites had been vanquished. A devout mind will trace the presence and the action of Divine Providence in a nation's history. In great crises England has been succoured by the interposition of Omnipotence from the assaults of powerful and un pitying foes. The "good hand of our God" has been upon us to protect and to deliver.

II. A NATION SHOULD REMARK THE GUIDANCE OF THE ALL-WISE GOD APPARENT IN THE EVENTS OF ITS POLITICAL LIFE. "I led you:" such is the language in which Jehovah reminded the forgetful and unfaithful Hebrews of his treatment of his chosen. The epoch of wilderness-wandering was the critical epoch of Israel's life; it was then that the nation was consolidated and disciplined. A marvellous story it remains to this day, the story of the forty years in the Peninsula of Sinai. Fraught, too, with encouragement for all who trust God. What Christian nation has not reason to give thanks to "him who led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever"? The eye must be dull which cannot see, the heart must be cold which does not confess, the directing hand of the Eternal in the career of such a nation as our own.

III. A NATION SHOULD GRATEFULLY HONOUR GOD FOR RAISING UP WISE AND HOLY MEN AS NATIONAL TEACHERS AND EXAMPLES. The prophets and Nazarites of the Jews may represent men of sanctified genius and insight, and mental and moral force, whom Providence appoints to be the inspiration of the community towards all that is beautiful and good. A people's greatest strength and most valuable possession must be sought in its finest, purest, ablest *men*. God did much for Israel in the way of outward guidance and interposition; but all his mercies were transcended by the gift of heroes and saints, judges and seers, valiant, true-hearted kings, fearless prophets, faithful priests. Rich as our own country is in many other respects, its true wealth must be sought in its noblest, most unselfish sons. God give us grace to appreciate and to profit by his goodness in this respect!—T.

Ver. 13.—*Men's sins a Divine burden.* The figure of the text is one taken by Amos from his own experience as a husbandman. In the harvest-field the cart is piled high with sheaves to be taken to the garner or the threshing-floor. The wain groans—as poets put it—beneath the load. Even so, it is represented that the sins of Israel oppress Jehovah; he is distressed by their magnitude and their aggravations.

I. LIGHT IS CAST BY THIS LANGUAGE UPON THE CHARACTER OF GOD. 1. His *repugnance* to sin is here brought before us. The deities of the heathen do not seem to have been represented as hating sin, though they were pictured as resenting the neglect of their worshippers. It was otherwise with Jehovah, for he was not an invention of human ignorance and frailty. The Old Testament writers, with one consent, represent the Eternal as holy, and as hating sin as sin. 2. His *distress* at sin is conveyed in this declaration. This is no imperfection. Mere disapproval would have been an imperfection. But it is an encouraging view which we are justified in taking of the Divine character, as we read that God is pained by human iniquity. What an appeal to sinful man is this, "I am pressed under you"!

II. LIGHT IS CAST BY THIS LANGUAGE UPON THE NATURE OF HUMAN SIN. Men's transgressions are not unheeded by God, neither are they a matter of indifference to him. The Supreme Being is not oppressed by the vast care of the material universe. But *sin* is so heinous and awful that it affects his feelings—if we may use language so human. Shall man be careless with regard to that which is so felt by the infinite heart? Of all ills there can be none like this.

III. LIGHT IS CAST BY THIS LANGUAGE UPON THE PROSPECT OF REDEMPTION. This light may be dim, but it is an advance upon darkness. If man's sin is so distressing

to God, there is reason to hope that Divine wisdom and grace will concur to provide means for its forgiveness and its cancelling. The feeling which is uttered in the figurative language of the text found full expression in the cross of Christ, in the gospel of salvation.—T.

Vers. 14—16.—Judgment inevitable. In the preceding verses there is observable an accumulation of human transgression and iniquity. And in these closing verses of the chapter the reader is equally struck with the rhetorical accumulation of figures intended to convey a deep impression of the inevitableness of retribution.

I. A PICTURE OF HUMAN GREATNESS. Man has his own standard of greatness. The prophet piles up epithets to represent man's power. In vivid colours and in rapid succession there rise before the imagination the figures of the "swift" runner who is wont to overtake his foe, the "strong" hero whose blow cleaves the helmet in twain, the "mighty" whose praise is upon all lips, the "bowman" whose arrow pierces the fugitive in the battle-field, the "swift on foot" who trusts for safety to his speed, the "horseman" whose charge has often broken the doughty ranks of the enemy, the "courageous," "the strong of his heart," whom no danger daunts.

II. A VISION OF INEVITABLE RETRIBUTION AND OF THE DISCOMFITURE OF THE ENEMIES OF GOD. Even such as those who have been described shall be powerless in the day of the Lord. Exemption from the operation of righteous law is not to be obtained by any human craft or might. The swift shall be overtaken, and the arm of the warrior shall fall powerless by his side. Justice must be vindicated; the Lord of right will never abandon his sovereign throne.—T.

Vers. 9—13.—God and nations. "Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath," etc. These verses suggest a few remarks in relation to God and nations.

I. He reminds nations of the GREATNESS OF HIS KINDNESS TOWARDS THEM. In these verses he reminds Israel of two great merciful interpositions of his on their behalf. (1) The destruction of the Amorite—the original inhabitant of Canaan. Amorite here stands for all the old Canaanites. He drove out the Canaanites that Israel might possess and enjoy the goodly land in which they then lived (Exod. xxiii. 27). (2) Their emancipation from Egypt and their guidance into the Holy Land. "Also I brought you up from Egypt, and led you into the promised land." These two great acts of kindness are mentioned only as specimens of millions of others. The language in which these acts are represented suggest three great truths in relation to God's conduct toward the world. 1. *He often sacrifices one people in order to advance the interests of another.* The old Canaanites he sacrificed for the good of Israel. In the history of the world this is often done; one country ruined for the advantage of another. This is marvellous; it clashes with our primitive ideas of justice and Divine goodness. But we cease to murmur when we remember that there is a great explaining day, and that the peoples that have been ruined for the interests of others have never suffered more from the hands of God than they have justly deserved. 2. *That the mightiest human powers cannot obstruct him in his procedure.* The Amorites, the original inhabitants of Canaan, were a great people. It is said their "height was like the height of cedars," and they were "strong as oaks." They were in the great field of mankind not like the tender sapling or the stunted shrub; they were tall as the cedars and mighty as the oak (Numb. xiii. 32, 33). Then Egypt, too, from which he delivered them, was a mighty power. Pharaoh was the greatest despot of the old world. But what was all this human power before the march of Omnipotence? The mighty Canaanite and the powerful Egyptian were as mere stubble under his feet. God will not be hindered. 3. *That he fulfils his great purposes with nations by the agency of men.* He crushed the Canaanites and he crushed the Egyptians, not by hurling directly from his hand the thunderbolts. No; but by the agency of Joshua and Moses. God works with men by men. By men he blesses and by men he punishes. He allows man to be the devil of man, and he makes man the saviour of man.

II. He reminds nations of THE ABUSE OF THE MERCIES HE HAD CONFERRED ON THEM.

He specifies here two special mercies which he had bestowed upon Israel. 1. *A spiritual ministry.* "And I raised up of your sons for prophets." He gave them men whom he duly qualified to indoctrinate and inspire them with the highest truths of duty and of destiny. The greatest blessing which God bestows upon a people is a *true ministry*. 2. *Virtuous young men.* "Your young men for Nazarites." "These were young men who," to use the language of another, "bound themselves by a vow to God and his service, and, in pursuance of that, denied themselves many of the lawful delights of sense, as drinking wine and eating grapes. There were some of their young men that were in their prime for the enjoyment of the pleasures of this life, and yet voluntarily abridged themselves of them; these God raised up by the power of his grace to be *monuments of his grace*, to his glory, and to be his witnesses against the impieties of that degenerate age." Virtuous and high-minded young men are amongst the chief ornaments and brightest hopes of a people. But how did Israel treat these Divine mercies? "They commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not." They did not wish to hear their voices; they closed their ears to their ministry. To a great extent this is the case with our own country now. The great bulk of our people say to the pulpits of England, by their conduct, "Prophecy not;" we do not want your ministry. Sad state this—a state of sin and the precursor of ruin. How did Israel treat these virtuous young men? "They gave the Nazarites wine to drink." They caused them to break their vow. This they did, it may be, by seductive promises, or frightening threats, or abashing ridicule and reproach. A greater crime than the crime of a people endeavouring to make young men drunkards can scarcely be imagined, and this crime England is on all hands earnestly promoting. The multiplication in our midst of beer-houses and gin-palaces, all under the sanction of law, is an insult to Heaven, an outrage on decency, a curse to the country. It behoves every philanthropist to take his stand against this abomination, and to sweep from the earth such huge establishments of the devil as the Burton breweries and the infernal spirit-distilleries, whence streams of poison flow through every grade of social life. "Every inordinate cup is unblest'd, and the ingredient is a devil;" "O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil!" (Shakespeare).—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—ch. vi. 14.—Part II. THREE ADDRESSES PARTICULARIZING THE SINS OF ISRAEL AND ANNOUNCING IMMINENT JUDGMENT.

Vers. 1—15.—§ 1. *First address: the prophet begins by showing Israel's ingratitude for past mercies* (vers. 1, 2), and *his own commission to announce the coming judgment* (vers. 3—8). *They have drawn this upon themselves by iniquities which astonish even heathen nations; and they shall be punished by the overthrow of the kingdom and the destruction of their city* (vers. 9—15).

Ver. 1.—The peculiar favour which God has shown the Israelites enhances the guilt of their ingratitude and increases their punishment. *Hear this word.* Each address (ch. iv. 1; v. 1) begins with this solemn call. *O children of Israel.* The summons is addressed to the twelve tribes, as the following words prove; but the succeeding denunciation is confined to Israel,

Judah being only indirectly warned that she may expect a similar fate unless she turns in time. *I brought up from the land of Egypt.* This is mentioned as the crowning act of God's favour (ch. ii. 10).

Ver. 2.—*Have I known;* i.e. loved, acknowledged, chosen. So in Hos. xiii. 5 God says, "I knew thee in the wilderness;" and St. Paul (2 Tim. ii. 19), "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (comp. Nah. i. 7). The peculiar relation in which God allowed Israel to stand to him is much dwelt upon (see Deut. iv. 8, 20; xiv. 2; 2 Sam. vii. 23; 1 Chron. xvii. 21). Therefore *I will punish you; literally, visit upon you.* They must not presume upon their privileges; the retention of God's favour depended upon obedience to his Word (Exod. xix. 5); the nearer they were brought to God, the greater their guilt if they fell from him. Unlike the nations denounced in the former chapters, Israel had sinned against light and knowledge and love, therefore the sentence on her must be heavier (comp. Ezek. ix. 6; Luke xii. 47; 1 Pet. iv. 17).

Vers. 3—8.—Before announcing more par-

ticularly the coming judgment, Amos, by a series of little parables or comparisons, establishes his right to prophesy, and intimates the necessity laid upon him to deliver his message. He illustrates the truths that all effects have causes, and that from the cause you can infer the effect.

Ver. 3.—Can two walk together except they be agreed? or, *except they have agreed?* The “two” are God’s judgment and the prophet’s word. These do not coincide by mere chance, no more than two persons pursue in company the same end without previous agreement. The prophet announces God’s judgment because God has commissioned him; the prophet is of one mind with God, therefore the Lord is with him, and confirms his words. The application of the parables is seen in vers. 7, 8. The Septuagint, reading differently, has, “except they know one another.”

Ver. 4.—Will a lion roar, etc.? The lion roars when he has his prey in sight, and is about to spring upon it. So God makes the prophet utter his voice because he is ready to execute vengeance. The second clause expresses the same fact in different terms. The young lion (*kephir*) is not a whelp, but one able to provide for itself. He growls over the prey which he has in his lair. So Israel lies helpless as the words of God’s threatenings strike upon him.

Ver. 5.—The thought here is that the punishment is deserved as well as certain. A bird is not caught unless a trap is set for it. The trap which the sinner sets for himself is sin. Can a bird fall in a snare (*pach*) upon the earth, where no gin (*moqesh*) is for him? i.e. is set for him? The “gin” is a net with a stick for a spring, which flew up when touched, carrying part of the net with it, and thus the bird was enclosed and caught (see Kitto, ‘Cyclop.’ s.v. “Fowling,” ii. 36). The LXX. probably read *yoqesh*, as they translate, *ἐπεὶ ἰκέρου*, “without a fowler.” So the Vulgate, *absque aucupe*. The second clause should be, *Shall a snare (pach) spring up from the ground without taking anything?* The snare, or trap-stick, would not rise if it had not caught something. The sin is there, and the sinners shall surely not escape. When God appoints retributive punishments for the guilty, and announces the same by his prophets, they may be expected with absolute certainty.

Ver. 6.—The prophet must needs speak: shall not his denunciation arouse alarm among the people, as the trumpet suddenly heard in a city excites the terror of the inhabitants (comp. Ezek. xxxiii. 2-5)? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? The “evil” is affliction,

calamity, *malum pars*. As states have no future, all temporal calamities in their case may rightly be regarded as the punishment of sin. Thus the ruin impending on Israel was sent by the Lord, whose agent was the enemy now approaching. All phenomena are ascribed in the Bible to Divine operation, no second causes being allowed to interfere with this appropriation (see Job i.; 1 Sam. xviii. 10; 1 Kings xxii. 19, etc.; Isa. xlv. 7). The verb “do” is often used absolutely, the context defining the result (see note on Hag. ii. 4).

Ver. 7.—This and the following verse apply the foregoing parables. All the evils announced come from the Lord; but he brings none of them on the people without first warning by his prophets (comp. John xiii. 19; xiv. 29). His secret (*sed*); unrevealed till then. Septuagint, *ταῖς ἐκείνων*, “instruction;” so the Arabic.

Ver. 8.—As the lion’s roar forces every one to fear, so the Divine call of the prophet forces him to speak (Jer. xx. 9; Ezek. ii. 8; 1 Cor. ix. 16, etc.). St. Gregory, moralizing, takes the lion in a spiritual sense: “After the power of his Creator has been made known to him, the strength of his adversary ought not to be concealed from him, in order that he might submit himself the more humbly to his defender, the more accurately he had learned the wickedness of his enemy, and might more ardently seek his Creator, the more terrible he found the enemy to be whom he had to avoid. For it is certain that he who less understands the danger he has escaped, loves his deliverer less; and that he who considers the strength of his adversary to be feeble, regards the solace of his defender as worthless” (‘Moral,’ xxxii. 14). Of course, this exposition does not regard the context.

Vers. 9-15.—Having vindicated his own commission, Amos proclaims what God purposes to do unto Israel. He is bidden to summon the heathen Ashdod and Egypt to bear witness to the iniquities of Samaria, which should bring about the overthrow of the kingdom, the destruction of the city with its altars and palaces, and the exile of the people.

Ver. 9.—Ashdod (ch. i. 8). God bids the prophets (*publish ye*) summon the inhabitants of the palaces of Philistia (of which Ashdod is the representative) and Egypt, because they had been the chief enemies of his people, and in their sight had mighty works been wrought for Israel; thus they could appreciate her iniquity and ingratitude. Some, translating *al* “upon,” say that the prophets are bidden publish their

message upon the flat roofs of the palaces, that it may be heard far and near (comp. 2 Sam. xvi. 22; Matt. x. 27). Keil thinks that not all the inhabitants of the town are summoned, but only those who live in the palaces, who alone "could pronounce a correct sentence as to the mode of life commonly adopted in the palaces of Samaria." But this seems an unnecessary refinement. The Septuagint reads, *Ἀναγγεῖλατε χάρις ἐν Ἀσσυρίοις*, "Proclaim ye to the regions among the Assyrians," doubtless by some mistake of copyists. **Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria.** The city of Samaria was built on a hill which stands alone in the valley or basin, but it is surrounded by higher mountains, from whence, though at some distance, spectators could look down into its streets, and, as from the seats in an amphitheatre, behold the iniquities transacted there. Their implacable enemies, the Philistines, and those they were then courting, the Egyptians (Hos. vii. 11; xii. 1), are alike called to witness this spectacle. Tumult; the disorder, where might makes right. LXX., *θαυμαστά πολλά*, "many marvels," as if the sight were a surprise even to the heathen. The oppressed (*ashugim*); better, the oppressions, i.e. of the weak at the hands of the powerful (comp. ch. ii. 6; iv. 1). It was to the eternal disgrace of Israel that there were doings in her cities which the very heathen would condemn.

Ver. 10.—**They know not how to do right.** The Samaritans have lost all sense of justice, the foundation of social life (Jer. iv. 22). LXX., *Οὐκ ἔγνω ἡ ἔσται ἐναντίον αὐτῆς*, "She knew not what things shall be before her." Store up violence; i.e. the fruits of violence and robbery (*ταλαιπωρίαν*, "misery," Septuagint), what they had wrung from the poor by oppression and rapine.

Ver. 11.—**An adversary.** The Hebrew is forcible, the Lord speaking as though he saw the foe present: "an enemy and around the land." Ewald and Hitzig take *tsar* as an abstract noun, "distress;" the LXX. and Aquila, pointing it differently, read, *τύπος*, but the continuation of the sentence is scarcely to be deemed a translation, *κυκλόθεν ἡ γῆ σου ἐρημωθήσεται*, "Thy land shall be made desolate round about thee." The adversary meant is Shalmaneser, who attacked Israel more than once and besieged Samaria; or his successor, Sargon, who claims to have reduced the city and removed the inhabitants (2 Kings xvii. and xviii. 9, etc.; see Introduction to Micah). Thy strength. All wherein thou trustedst shall be brought down to the ground (Obad. 3). Palaces, in which were stored the fruits of injustice and rapine (ver. 10).

Ver. 12.—**The prophet shows that the**

chastisement is inevitable, and that only the smallest remnant, the most worthless among the inhabitants, and they with much difficulty, can escape. The illustration from a common incident in a shepherd's life is very natural in Amos. Taketh; better, *rescued*. So below, shall be taken out; shall be rescued. The usual explanation is that a shepherd attacks the lion which has seized one of his sheep (comp. 1 Sam. xvii. 34, etc.), and rescues from it the most worthless parts—"a couple of shank-bones or a bit, or tip, of an ear." But as an attack on a lion would be an abnormal act of courage on the part of a shepherd, and the comparison is with things likely and usual, it is probable that the meaning is that the shepherd finds only these poor remnants after the lion has left his prey. So such a poor remnant shall be rescued from the ten tribes of Israel. **That dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed; that sit at ease, lounging in the cosiest corner of the divan, an image of indolent ease and careless security in the face of impending judgment.** And in Damascus in a couch; LXX., *καὶ ἐν Δαμασκῷ*: Vulgate, *et in Damasci grabato*. The Syriac and Jewish Versions agree in considering the word "Damascus" to be a proper name. The other modern rendering takes it to mean the material which we call "damask" or something similar. Hence our Revised Version gives, "on the silken cushions of a bed;" and others, "on the damask of a couch." Dr. Pusey retains the old rendering, on the grounds that there is no evidence to prove that the manufactures for which Damascus was celebrated in after-time existed at this period, its exports being then wine and white wool (Ezek. xxvii. 18), and that the Arabic word *dimakso* (which critics have cited as connected with the term "damask") has nothing to do with Damascus, and meant "raw," not manufactured, "silk." He translates, "in Damascus, a couch," and explains this to mean that Damascus, which Jeroboam II. had won for Israel (2 Kings xiv. 28), "was a canopied couch to them, in which they stayed themselves." This agrees with the ancient Jewish interpretation, which explains the clause to mean that the Israelites would some day depend for help on the Syrians represented by Damascus. A third exposition, favoured by the Latin Vulgate, makes the words to mean, "on a couch of Damascus;" i.e. a Syrian couch of a costly and luxurious nature. This comes to the same as the modern rendering given, above and seems to be the easiest explanation of the expression. The difficulty depends chiefly on the punctuation of the word דמשק; or there may be some corruption in the text. What the LXX. meant by their rendering is prob-

matical, *κατέναντι τῆς φυλῆς καὶ ἐν Δαμασκῷ*, "The children of Israel who dwell in Samaria in the presence of the tribe and in Damascus."

Ver. 13.—*Hear ye*; Septuagint, *ἰερεῖς ἀκούσατε*, "Hear, O ye priests." The address is to the heathen, already summoned (ver. 9) to witness the sins of Israel, and now called to witness her punishment. In the house; better, *against the house of Jacob*, the tribes of Israel (ver. 1). God of hosts. God of the powers of heaven and earth, and therefore able to execute his threats. Septuagint, *ὁ Παντοκράτωρ*, "the Almighty."

Ver. 14.—*That in the day*, etc. This verse is rightly joined to the preceding, as it particularizes the threats which the heathen are summoned to testify. Visit upon; equivalent to "punish" (Zeph. i. 8). Altars of Bethel. We read of one altar being set up by Jeroboam I. (1 Kings xii. 29, 33), but doubtless others had been added in the course of time. The denunciation of 1 Kings xiii. 2, 3 is here repeated. The horns of the altar. These were certain projections at the four angles of the altar, perhaps in the form of an ox's horn, on which the blood of the sin offering was smeared, and which therefore were con-

sidered the holiest part of the altar (see Exod. xxvii. 2; xxix. 12; Lev. xvi. 18). The instruments of idolatry or impure worship should share the destruction of the idolaters.

Ver. 15.—*The winter house*. The luxurious habits of kings and princes had led them to have different houses for the various seasons of the year, facing north or south as the case might be (comp. Judg. iii. 20; Jer. xxxvi. 22). Septuagint, *τὸν οἶκον τὸν περικτερον*, "the turreted house," which Jerome explains, *Domum pinnatam, eo quod ostiola habeat per fenestras, et quasi pinnas, ad magnitudinem frigoris depellendam*. Houses of ivory; panelled or inlaid with ivory, such as Ahab had (1 Kings xxi. 39). Solomon's throne was thus decorated (1 Kings x. 18; comp. Ps. xlv. 8). (For the Assyrian practice of veneering in ivory, see Rawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' i. 463; comp. also Homer, 'Od.' iv. 73; Virgil, 'Æneid,' vi. 895.) The great houses; better, *many houses*; Septuagint, *ἔτεροι οἶκοι πολλοί*, "many other houses." Not only palaces, but many private houses, shall be destroyed (comp. Isa. v. 9, where the same words are used).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The judgment of apostates a foregone conclusion*. This chapter, like ch. v. and vi., opens with a call to attention. God is going to speak, and his voice is worth listening to. He is going to speak a word, moreover, the issues of which are capital. To attend to his communication is as vitally important as dutiful.

I. GOD, WHO HAD ONLY SPOKEN ABOUT THE HEATHEN, SPEAKS TO ISRAEL. Syria and Edom and Tyre may never have heard of the doom to which they were going down. Their first intimation of the tempest of Divine wrath was likely the falling of the first drops. Their chance of repentance and escape was in this way minimized. Left in ignorance of the danger of advance, there was little likelihood of their turning back of their own accord. But Israel hears from inspired lips that never lied the guilt of her sin, and its inevitable end. This putting of "prophecy between his secret and its execution" is a special favour on God's side, and a corresponding advantage on her side, whilst, like all advantage, it involves a proportionate responsibility.

II. GOD'S SPECIAL REGARD FOR ISRAEL HAD EXPRESSED ITSELF IN PECULIAR FAVOURS.

1. *He had constituted them a family by themselves*. Other nations in their rise had been left to circumstances and the play of natural affinities. Israel had been called out of the peoples, constituted a nation by itself, furnished with a national organization and policy, and set consciously to work out an exalted destiny. This was fitted to awake a lofty national aspiration, and give direction and dignity to the national life. The choosing of God's people out of the world is the beginning of his favours.
2. *He had brought them out of Egypt*. This was an act of Divine power, an instance of Divine championship, an expression of Divine distinguishing favour, and a beginning of Divine help, which contained in it the promise of more to come. Conversion, following on election (Acts xiii. 48), is another privilege of God's people, and another spur to grateful service.
3. *He had taken them into intimate personal relations*. "Known," etc. This is "practically equivalent to electing, including both the motive and result of election" (Keil). God took special notice of them, set them in a gracious relation to himself, acknowledged them to be his people, and brought to bear on them the influences that are ever coming forth on those in covenant with him.

III. JUDGMENT IS INEVITABLE WHERE MERCY HAS BEEN RECEIVED IN VAIN. "Therefore will I visit," etc. (ver. 2). Mercy extended is made here the ground of judgment denounced. Each gift bestowed in the past is a count in the present indictment. 1. *It is inevitable as punishment.* Sin by God's professing people is specially heinous. It involves ingratitude to a special Benefactor, insensibility to his love, contempt of his gifts, and disregard of special claims on their allegiance. The guilt is in every aspect extreme, and so the punishment is sure. 2. *It is inevitable as testimony.* God's honour is closely identified with his people's conduct, which must therefore be closely looked after. Any sin in it must be rigidly punished if God would vindicate his purity and impartiality, bating sin as such, and wherever it appears. "It is necessary that God should vindicate his own honour by making it appear that he hates sin, and hates it most in those that are nearest him" (M. Henry). 3. *It is inevitable as discipline.* Judgments are corrective as well as punitive. In this aspect they are sure, and will be severe in proportion to the love and mercy despised. Whom God leaves without correction he bastardizes (Heb. xii. 8), but he expresses fatherly interest in the application of the rod. Judgment with Israel was just a change of corrective treatment. Mercy had failed, and now love would try another way, that nothing might be left undone to separate Israel from sin. This is why judgment begins at the house of God.

Vers. 3—8.—*No smoke without fire.* God cannot utter empty threats. His every declaration is *bona fides*. When he roars he is about to rend. Let, then, the doomed sinner tremble. For all his insensibility he is no better than a dead man.

I. SIN INVOLVES DISCONNECTION FROM A HOLY GOD. "Can two walk together," etc.? This deep principle involves that: 1. *Israel, quarrelling with God, cannot reckon on his company.* For so far God had associated with them. In Egypt, in the wilderness, in Canaan, he had vouchsafed them close companionship. But their rebellious attitude against him, approaching as it was a climax of irreconcilableness, must make a continuance of intimate relations impossible. 2. *The prophet, walking as he did with God, must be regarded as in agreement with him, and so expressing his will.* Amos spoke as God's servant and mouthpiece. He looked at Israel's sin from God's standpoint. In reference to it he was as emphatically associated with God as he was dissociated from them. Underlying this formal association it must be believed there was real agreement. "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God."

II. WHEN THE THUNDER OF GOD'S THREATENINGS IS HEARD, THE LIGHTNING OF HIS JUDGMENTS IS IMMINENT. That peril is sure and near is taught in a series of similes of a graphic kind. 1. *When God utters his war-cry it is evident that he is just about to strike his enemy.* (Ver. 4.) The lion roars when he has marked his prey, and is about to spring. God sees the sinful nation ripe for judgment. He sees that the time for sending it has come. His roar out of Zion (ch. i. 2) is, therefore, the prelude to striking his prey forthwith. "The threatenings of the Word and providence of God are not bugbears to frighten children and fools, but are certain inferences from the sin of man and certain presages of the judgments of God" (M. Henry). 2. *When God reaches forth his hand there is something to take, and within his reach.* (Ver. 5.) It is the lighting of the bird on the trap that snaps it. If there were no trap laid no bird would be caught. If there were no bird in the trap it would not rise from the ground. Israel is the bird, and God is the Fowler, and his judgment is the snare, and the lesson of all is that she is already in God's destroying grasp. 3. *When some are already alarmed it shows that danger to all is real and close.* (Ver. 6, "Is a trumpet blown," etc.?) The prophet, who knew what was coming, was alarmed, and those like-minded with him. The note of alarm was already ringing over the land. Signs of evil will not show themselves until the evil is comparatively at hand. So surely as the smoke rises the fire is kindling. 4. *When misfortune falls it is a proof that God has been at work.* "Does misfortune happen in the city," etc.? (ver. 6). "All things are of God," is an axiom that in one sense or other covers all events, whether good or bad. The qualification of it is that the sin of any of them is exclusively of man. God "creates evil" (Isa. xlv. 7)—the evil of suffering—whilst the evil of sin he allows us to create, that he may bring out of it greater good.

III. GOD WARNS HIS PROPHETS OF EVIL BEFORE IT COMES. (Ver. 7.) The prophet is a negotiator, hearing the truth from God, and handing it on to men. God does not

destroy men unwarned, nor warn them but through his accredited messengers. The history of his judgments illustrates this. Through Noah he revealed the coming deluge, through Lot the destruction of Sodom, through Joseph the famine in Egypt, through Moses the Egyptian plagues, through Jonah the sentence on Nineveh, and through Christ and his apostles the destruction of Jerusalem. "Thus God has ever warned the world of coming judgments in order that it may not incur them" (Lange). "He foretelleth the evil to come that he may not be compelled to inflict it" (Pusey).

IV. GOD'S TRUE PROPHETS CANNOT BUT SPEAK HIS MESSAGE. (Ver. 8.) It is his will that they should prophesy. He tells them his purposes mainly with a view to this. To prophesy is their function and duty, and is made their business. They are moved at the sight of coming evil. They are in sympathy with the Divine compassion, giving a last chance to the doomed; and so, like the apostles, they "cannot but speak the things they have seen and heard" (1 Cor. ix. 16, 17; Acts iv. 19, 20). "Moses was not excused though slow of speech, nor Isaiah though of polluted lips, nor Jeremiah because he was a child. Ezekiel was bidden 'be not rebellious like that rebellious house;' and when Jeremiah would keep silence he saith, 'His Word was in mine heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay'" (Pusey). Taken in connection, vers. 7 and 8 reveal a perfect arrangement for making known God's purpose in reference to sin. God anticipates action by a communication to his prophets, and the prophets execute orders, and hand the communication on.

Ver. 2.—*The inevitable punishment of Christian sin.* "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." These words are at once an accusation, a condemnation, and a sentence. What God had done for Israel in vain was a ground and the measure of what he now must do against them. Blessing abused is but the faggot feeding the fire of merited curse. They had given themselves up to wickedness, and the fire-tongue of a lofty privilege sits above every sin, revealing its demon-face.

I. THERE IS A GRACIOUS SENSE IN WHICH GOD KNOWS MEN. "I know my sheep;" "I never knew you." These sentences mean salvation and condemnation respectively. For God to know men is with them a question of life and death. This knowledge may be: 1. *National.* It was so with Israel. "You only have I known." This meant that God loved them (Deut. x. 15), chose them (Deut. vii. 6), formally acknowledged them as his people (Deut. xiv. 2), and gave them privileges—not necessarily saving in every case—of light (Ps. cxlvii. 19; Rom. iii. 2), and help (Ps. cxxxvi. 10—24), and fellowship (Exod. xx. 24; Numb. xiv. 14; Deut. iv. 7), and promise (Rom. ix. 4, 5), answering to this visible relation. This knowledge may also be: 2. *Personal.* Then it means, in addition to what has been mentioned, the forth-putting of Divine energy in them, making them new creatures in Christ, and so "partakers of the Divine nature" (Gal. vi. 15; 2 Pet. i. 4). God brings them into his family (Gal. iii. 26) by this spiritual birth (John i. 13), calls them sons (1 John iii. 1), makes them co-heirs with Christ (Rom. viii. 17), and gives them all family privileges and graces, chiefest of these the spirit of adoption, by which we cry, "Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6). Man, in fact, is by nature an alien and a stranger, and for God to know him is to substitute a gracious for his natural relation.

II. THIS KNOWLEDGE IS A SPECIAL, NOT A GENERAL, AFFECTION. "You only." There are gifts of God that are indiscriminate (Job xxv. 3; Matt. v. 45). Man gets them as man, and irrespective of personal character. But spiritual gifts are necessarily confined to the spiritual circle. It is evident as regards God's gracious knowledge of men. 1. *That it rests on a minority of the race.* Israel at best was little among the nations of the earth. In comparison with the Chaldean, Medo-Persian, Greek, or Roman empires, it was scarcely worthy of being named; and a dozen peoples bordered Palestine from time to time, any one of which, in the natural course, would have wiped it off the earth. Yet, passing by the many and the mighty, God says to single, feeble Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Deut. iv. 32—38). And this action is of a piece with other Divine action for similar purposes. The saints are now, and have always been, a "little flock." It is the few who go in at the "strait gate" of the kingdom. Even the nominally Christian peoples are less than

a third of the population of the earth. If out of the number of these were taken the actual Christians, the true believers in Christ, the saintly company would assume smaller dimensions still. This state of matters will no doubt be reversed before the dispensation ends. Christ "in all things shall have the pre-eminence," and the minority which his followers compose will, during the millennial era, be converted into a vast majority (Isa. xi. 9). Meantime God looks on a small circle of transfigured souls, and says, "You only have I known." 2. *It does not follow human probabilities.* If any single nation was to be made the repository of revealed truth, and the teacher of the other nations, we should have expected one or other of the four universal empires to be chosen for the purpose, rather than a second or third rate power, located in a circumscribed and excentric spot. Then the typical Jew was, like his ancestor Jacob, a sordid fellow, deficient in the more heroic qualities, and, from the standpoint of the natural, decidedly inferior to his brother the Edomite, or almost any neighbour you would select. The greater readiness with which the Gentiles received the gospel, when it came to them, would seem, moreover, to indicate that they would have responded more worthily to the Divine Old Testament culture than Israel did, if it had pleased God to bring it to bear. It is the same with individuals. Not only does God pass by the rich and great for the humble poor (Jas. ii. 5; 1 Cor. i. 26—28), but he passes by the wise and prudent, and gives the light of his salvation to babes (Matt. xi. 25). It is not the great geniuses of society, but the commonplace average men, who form the circle of the saints. The reasons for this are adequate, but God keeps them to himself. Obvious to reason in many cases, they are not revealed, because in many others they would be above it, and God acts without reasons given, that "no flesh may glory in his presence."

III. *IT DOES NOT INEVITABLY PREVENT SIN IN THE OBJECT OF IT.* The life of the Hebrews was as a whole above the moral level of the heathen life around them. But still it was far from pure. If we subtracted from Jewish history all that arises out of sin, and the punishment of it, comparatively little would remain. So little congenial to human nature is God's service, and so congenial the service of sin, that Israel was perpetually turning aside after the idols of the heathen, whilst in no instance did the heathen ever turn from their idols to God (Jer. ii. 11). And not only does outward religious privilege fail to put an end to the sinful life, it is to some extent the same with inward religious principle. The saint remains a sinner all his days. Grace, like the house of David, is getting stronger with him, and corruption, like the house of Saul, is getting weaker through life. But it is still with him as with the apostle, striving after perfection, yet burdened with a feeling of the surviving power of sin (Phil. iii. 12; Rom. vii. 24).

IV. *IT DOES MAKE THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN ON EARTH CERTAIN.* "Therefore will I punish you." Sin inside the kingdom necessitates punishment, and will be visited with it promptly. 1. *Because it is guiltiest as against God.* More has been done to prevent it than in other cases. It is sin against light (Jas. iv. 17; Luke xii. 47, 48), against love (2 Cor. v. 14), against favours (Ps. ciii. 2), against restraining grace (1 John iii. 9). In proportion to the strength and number of deterrent influences against which sin is committed must be the strength of our sinful bent, and so the guilt of our wrong-doing. 2. *Because it is most hurtful as against his cause.* The sin of the wicked is natural. It is to be expected from one who consults lust, and serves the devil. It is done, moreover, from the standpoint of opposition to God, and responsibility for it is thus kept outside the spiritual circle. God and his cause are not dishonoured in the eyes of men by what is formally done against them. It is sin by the professedly righteous that brings righteousness into disrepute. Religion is charged with all the evil that is done in its name. The more closely identified wrong-doing is with the Christian name, the more hurtful is it to the Christian cause. Therefore Christian sin, in addition to the general reasons, involves punishment for reasons peculiar to itself. If God would have his Church a tree for the healing of the nations, he must lop off every unsound and rotten branch. 3. *Because it is most incompatible with the destiny of the person sinning.* The sin of the wicked need not necessarily be punished here. It will be amply visited on him throughout eternity. It is quite in the line of the man's life-course that he should suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. But the sin of the righteous presents a different aspect. Its commission is the contradiction of

his gracious nature, and its future punishment would be the contradiction of his exalted destiny. It is vital to his well-being that the judgment, inevitable somewhere, should fall here (Ps. lxxxix. 30—33). Only thus can his happy immortality be safeguarded. The present destruction of his flesh conditions the saving of his spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. v. 6).

Ver. 3.—*Communion and concord inseparable.* “Do two walk together unless they have agreed?” The special reference of this general question is not apparent. But the scope of the context suggests two points on either or both of which it would throw light. The one is the prophet’s claim to be speaking the truth, the other is the people’s claim to be doing the right. Between his words and their works there was utter incompatibility. Those must be wrong if these were right, and *vice versa*. And the axiom quoted supplies a decisive test. Amos walked with God—there could be no denying that; took his side and sought his glory amidst prevailing defection and disobedience. Must it not be argued from this that he was at one with God, and so in all his utterances spoke agreeably to his will? Israel, on the other hand, had clearly not agreed with God, for they were red-handed in rebellion against him. Was not the inference from this resistless that they could not walk with him, here by faith or hereafter by sight? Consider here—

I. THE WALKING WITH GOD THAT IS THE IDEAL OF HUMAN LIFE. “Enoch walked with God.” That is a short biography. But there is more in it, more important in its character and more adequately expressed than in many an octavo volume. “They shall walk with me in white” is a summary of the joy and glory of redeemed spirits on high. And life below is ideal in proportion as it approximates the life above. To walk with God implies: 1. *That we walk with the same purpose as God.* The *raison d’être* of things is God’s glory first (Rom. xi. 36; Col. i. 16), the good of his people next (2 Cor. iv. 15; Rom. viii. 28), then the happiness of the race (1 Tim. iv. 10; Gal. vi. 10), and ultimately the well-being of the planet as a whole (Ps. xxxvi. 6; Rom. viii. 20, 21). The attainment of these objects in this order is God’s purpose as revealed in Scripture. With this purpose it is the design and nature of religion to make man at one. By creating him in God’s image he is endowed with a spiritual nature which exalts God (1 Cor. x. 31), loves the brethren (1 John iii. 4), consults the interests of others (Phil. ii. 4), and regards the life even of the beasts (Prov. ii. 10). In proportion as the godly endorse and homologate the Divine purpose thus are they in the image of Christ (John xii. 28; xiii. 1, etc.) and do they walk with God. 2. *That we walk like God.* “The Christian,” says Joseph Cook, “is a man who has changed eyes with God.” Subtle affinities have arisen involving a marvellous unity of thought and aim. The end of our walking is God’s end, and naturally his way becomes our way. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.” In Christ, “the Image of the invisible God,” it became an open secret to all who believe. He has left “us an example,” and there are no relations in life to which it does not apply. We “follow his steps,” and by consequence walk like God, being “imitators of him as dear children.” 3. *That we walk in company with God.* The ungodly are far from God, and of set purpose keep their distance. But faith brings near and keeps near his side. The humble, contrite heart, which is the home of faith, is also the temple of God (Isa. lvii. 15). The love by which faith works is his welcome and feast (Rev. iii. 20). The believer lives in God’s presence. He walks by faith, holding on as it were by the Divine hand. It is the promise and the thought of God’s presence with him that makes the journey light (Isa. xliii. 2), whilst the reality of it is the guarantee of safety and ease. God with us, we have unfailing provision, unerring guidance, and an invincible escort. No marvel if they who thus travel “go from strength to strength.”

II. THE AGREEMENT WITH GOD THAT IS THE CONDITION OF WALKING WITH HIM. Walking with God is not an occasional act, but a habit of life, and must arise out of an established relation. 1. *The parties must both be willing.* Men are naturally at enmity with God, and so averse to his company. They know not and desire not to know his ways, and the expression of this feeling is the “Depart from us!” in which they decline the establishment of spiritual relations (Job xxi. 14). The operation of grace, however, is one “to will and to do of God’s good pleasure,” and the result of it is “a willing people in the day of God’s power.” They choose God (Josh. xxiv. 15),

desire his fellowship, and adopt the course that will best consist with its enjoyment. 2. *They must have arranged it.* "Unless they have agreed." Spiritual relations are not accidental relations, nor such as men may drift into unconsciously. There are understood objects to be intelligently adopted. There are explicit terms (Matt. xvi. 24) to be deliberately accepted. There is a distinct transaction in which God and his way are adopted, and made our life-King and life-programme respectively (Hos. xiv. 2). If it be a question of faith, we say, "Lord, I believe." If it be a question of penitence, we say, "I abhor myself, and repent." If it be a question of allegiance, we declare, "I will be for the Lord." If it be a question of fellowship, we vow, "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living." Our walking with God is not only with consent, but by arrangement, duly and solemnly subscribed. 3. *They must be congenial spirits.* Like draws to like. Companionship with God bases itself in conformity to him. If there be no affinity there will be no association. If this fails, association will be broken off. Duty must be our choice, or it will never be begun; and our joy, or it will never be continued. Walking with God implies a previous coming to him, and both are conditioned by a spiritual change creating us in the Divine image. Hearts have begun to beat in unison when hands are clasped for life.

III. THE BEARING OF THIS MAXIM ON THE CASE IN HAND. The two whose walking together is in question are Jehovah and the prophet, according to some; Jehovah and the nation, according to others. But as it is a general maxim, it may be legitimately applied to both, and every other case on which it can throw light. 1. *The words of a teacher who walks with God will be on the whole agreeable to his will.* The authenticity of Amos's message was called in question by many. But he was on God's side in this controversy with Israel. He spoke as it were out of the arms of the Divine fellowship. The truth of his deliverance was therefore a foregone conclusion. With every religious teacher the same principle holds. Communion with God gives insight into truth attainable in no other way. It conditions that "unction from the Holy One" by which "we know all things." The best guarantee of orthodoxy is to be spiritually minded. "The anointing" by Christ in the work of grace, among other benefits, "teacheth of all things, and is truth" (1 John ii. 27). Let a man read the Bible, so to speak, over God's shoulder, and the thing he will read out of it will be truth. 2. *A life of rebellion cannot possibly be a walk with God.* The prophet foretold to Israel a final rupture of visible covenant relations. And the prophecy was along the lines of natural fitness. The parties were already alienated in heart and sympathy, and in the nature of things formal separation must follow. To walk with God whilst fighting with him was an unworkable arrangement. The men who try it are men whose religious life is failure. When hearts go apart their owners go after them; and the soul, loveless to-day, will be godless to-morrow. Sinful man will have it so, and a holy God can have it no otherwise. Alienation leads to apostasy, and the apostate is *ipso facto* an outlaw. Are our affections given to Christ in self-surrender and love and happy trust? It is the one condition of walking with him to any purpose of spiritual effect. Is the dedication made maintained in unswerving true allegiance? See to that, for the beginning of estrangement is as the letting out of water, and what is deflection now will be defection in the next stage.

Ver. 6.—*Calamity one of the works of God.* It is not sin, but suffering, that is here meant. We are to regard temporal calamities as the warning voice of God, a manifestation of his character, and a corrective expression of his displeasure. God maintains his controversy with Israel. The verses before contain language of unimpeachable equity, ill-requited kindness, and injured honour. On every ground the threatened punishment was merited, and only in mercy had it been suspended so long. There is a natural atheism in the human heart, a constantly prevailing tendency to forget God. This tendency is most powerful in prosperity, and must often be counterworked by a dispensation of adversity. Not that Divine judgments, acting on human corruption, necessarily lead to repentance. But in God's hand they have often been overruled to this effect, and it is in this reclaiming and reforming capacity that they are alluded to in this text.

I. WE DISTINGUISH THE AGENCY OF JEHOVAH FROM CHANCE. "Chance" is a word much used, and little understood. When we say that an event has happened by

chance, we mean either that it had no cause, which is atheism, or that we do not know the cause, which is an abuse of language. Chance, in fact, is nothing but a term of human ignorance. Yet the use of the word implies either atheism, denying the Divine existence, or naturalism, denying his superintending agency; the two coming to the same thing, for we might as well have no God as no providence. The sentiment of our text is the refutation of both, and as such is but the echo of all Scripture. "All things are of God." Not creation only, but providence, which is as wonderful as a continuous creation. Not great events only, but the very least, without any one of which the whole machinery would be incapable of a single revolution. How beautifully yet powerfully is this brought out by Christ in his illustration from the sparrows (Matt. x. 29—31)! If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without our Father, much less can a whole city. When evil is in a city, it is not a visitation of chance, but of the hand of God, under which it has come.

II. THE DIVINE AGENCY IS HERE DISTINGUISHED FROM THAT OF IDOLS. Something to worship is a necessity of human nature. Hence men, when they forsake the true God, set up a false one in his place. The existence and power of this idol they believe without proof, and even against presumption. Unconquerable incredulity in reference to the true God becomes irrational credulity in reference to the false ones. Thus atheism is more a question of the heart than of the head. Men do not like to retain God in their knowledge (Rom. i. 23, 28), and so discard him for gods of their own devising. This fact shows polytheism a form of atheism. And it was demonstrably so with the Jews. The obverse of apostasy with them was always idolatry; and this text affirms that Jehovah, whom they had forsaken, not any senseless idol which they had chosen, dominated history and sent good and evil to men (see Isa. xli. 21—24; Jer. x. 3—16). We think we are in no danger of making their mistake. But the world, in its ambition, avarice, or pleasure, may take away our hearts from God, and become their idol, climbing to his throne. And we give it credit often for what God does and alone can do, and to that extent misread the providential events in which God is dealing with us.

III. DIVINE AGENCY IS TO BE DISTINGUISHED FROM THE AGENCY OF SECOND CAUSES. The deification of nature is a common practice. Conventionally, nature is a kind of mystical personification of some unknown existence, and to which the omnipotence denied to God is freely attributed. If "nature" does a thing, it is assumed that God has no hand in it, and that it wants no explanation further. "Nature is that created realm of being or substance which has an acting, a going on or process from within itself, under and by its own laws" (Bushnell). But these laws are just "the actuating power of God." They are not powers in themselves, but only the rules according to which his power operates. We have various kinds of seasons which we trace to various causes in nature. But these are second causes, and under the sovereign control of the First Cause. "Can the heavens give showers? art not thou he, O Lord our God?... for thou hast made all these things" (Jer. xiv. 22). Air, earth, and sea, and all that they contain, are subject to him (Ps. civ. 4; cxlviii. 8). From the natural cause of this or that we must rise to him who makes it what and puts it where it is, and gives it a commission to work. "All things are of God."

"This truth philosophy, though eagle-eyed
In nature's tendencies, oft o'erlooks;
And having found his instrument, forgets
Or disregards, or, more presumptuous still,
Denies the Power that wields it."

The same principle rules events in which men are agents. "Men are in God's hand" as well as matter. The King of Assyria was simply the rod with which God struck Israel (Isa. x. 5—16). *In attributing temporal evils to God's sovereign control of things, distinguish between sovereignty and caprice.* What God does he could assign the best of reasons for. He exercises his sovereignty in declining to do so. But he tells us that the great general cause of suffering is sin. Evil does not come on us as creatures, but as sinners. The infliction of it has not to do with sovereignty, but with equity. All good is from God, all evil from the sinner. All good is gratuitous, all evil is deserved. All evil is righteous retribution, all good is free and sovereign love. Nor

is suffering destitute of a large benevolent element. On the contrary, it often serves a merciful purpose, and would always do so were it properly received. When the sun of prosperity fails to soften, God casts men into the furnace of trial, if perchance the stronger method may prevail. If there be evil in your city, then consider who sends it, on what account, and for what purpose; so, it may be, you will "turn to him that smiteth you," as he means you should. (From a sermon by Ralph Wardlaw, D.D., supplemented and condensed.)

Ver. 7.—*The hounds that bay before they bite.* The prophet speaks here as if he were announcing axiomatic truth. And it is nothing less. It might be argued from reason; it is historic fact; and it is a prominent Scripture doctrine.

I. JUDGMENT NEVER COMES WITHOUT WARNING. The Deluge, the destruction of Sodom, the plagues of Egypt, and the fall of Jerusalem, are cases in point. Sometimes judgment has taken people unawares (Matt. xxiv. 39), but this is because the warning has been disregarded (Gen. xix. 14; vi. 3). When there has been no warning the judgment has been provoked, not by a course of wickedness, but by a single flagrant transgression in connection with which warning was out of the question (Exod. xxxii. 27, 28; Numb. xxvi. 10; Acts xii. 23). The warning of coming judgment is: 1. *A disclosure of sin.* To allow men to sin unheeded, and to find it satisfactory, would be to amnesty evil-doing and practically to encourage it. To erect the gallows of impending judgment, on the other hand, brings into sight the fact of sin, and emphasizes its demerit. Next to execution, the sentence of death is a revelation to the criminal of the enormity of his crime. It is a mental association of guilt with penalty, and so a measuring of its moral proportions. It is also: 2. *A deterrent from sin.* Judgment executed without warning loses half its value. The fear of the rod is a wholesome restraint on the folly of the child; greater often than the actual blow, because it operates through a longer period. God's moral government in its relation to sin aims at cure rather than mere punishment, at prevention rather than either. His blows fall only after his threats have failed to move (Prov. i. 24, etc.; Jer. vi. 10, 11). Accordingly: 3. *To denounce judgment sometimes makes it unnecessary to inflict it.* A notable instance was that of Nineveh. If her repentance were more common, her escape would be more common also (Matt. xii. 41). God frights with the thunder of his threats, that he may not be compelled to smite with the lightning of his judgments. He makes a display of his resistless forces that the rebels may yield without going into action. "Turn ye, turn ye: why will ye die?" that is the message of his open preparations to destroy.

II. THIS WARNING REACHES MEN THROUGH THE PROPHETS. On his way to the establishment of personal relations, God always treats with men through mediators. Covenants are made with representatives, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Christ. Justifying righteousness is negotiated typically through a priesthood, and antitypically through Jesus Christ. So saving knowledge is negotiated through the Holy Ghost, and by the instrumentality of inspired men. 1. *This was the only feasible way.* Not every man is fit to receive a revelation direct from God. To do so implies mental and moral conditions that are realized in but a small percentage of men. His revelation must reach many through a third party in any case. If the worse qualified must be spoken to through the better qualified, it is only carrying out the principle to speak to both through the best qualified of all, *i.e.* the prophet selected by God himself. The Scripture is God's revelation, and adequate to man's need (2 Tim. iii. 15—17). The attempt to substitute for it an "inner light," or any other device, is to substitute our own nonentity for God's reality. 2. *It tends to call faith into action.* God wants his Word believed. And he wants it believed in a certain way and on certain grounds. To believe what we see is not the faith he wants (John xx. 29), nor properly faith at all. "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." Only such believing is intelligent or voluntary, and therefore possessed of moral qualities. If God revealed his will directly to each individual, bearing it in resistlessly on his consciousness, the moral discipline involved in faith would be lost to men. 3. *It secures a record of God's message for universal use.* A revelation given to men individually would be only for the individual, and for the time then being. It would neither be common property nor permanent property. And it is worth being made both. God's way is one

in all ages. He is in the same mind about sin, and deals with it on the same principles always. The record of what he has done is the prophecy of what in similar circumstances he will do. The prophet wrote so much of his message as had permanent interest, and the aggregate of such inspired deliverances is the Scripture, which is "a light in a dark place until the day dawn." It is not a revelation for an individual merely. Having served its turn with one, it is no less available for others in endless succession.

III. GOD'S PROPHETS ARE FIRST OF ALL HIS SERVANTS. "His servants the prophets." The explanatory words, "his servants," widen greatly the sentiment of the clause. 1. *To prophesy under Divine direction is itself an act of service.* There is a wide sense in which all are God's servants who carry out any of his purposes. Thus Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar (Isa. xlv. 1; Jer. xxv. 9) are styled respectively the "anointed" and the "servant" of God, because they were designated to and did a work for him. This was a purely external relation, but it was real. All the prophets, even the wicked Balaam, were God's servants in this sense. They represented his interest. They went his errand. They carried his message. They laboured to accomplish his purpose. Their exercise of the prophetic office was service. 2. *Official relations have their basis in personal relations.* Shepherds and sheep alike come into the fold by the Door, Jesus Christ (John x. 1—14). All come in to the effect of their own salvation first, and being in fall into rank as gatherers-in of others. First faith, and then works, is thus the spiritual order; faith establishing personal relations with Christ, and work, among other things, trying to get others to do likewise. Hence Church officers are to be chosen out of the number of Church members. The conditions of spiritual work are spiritual gifts, and the condition of spiritual gifts is to be in the spiritual connection (John xiv. 6; Eph. ii. 18).

Vers. 9—12.—*The prophet gets his heavy commission.* It is Jehovah that speaks. He addresses the prophets (Keil), or the heathen (Lange), or the heathen through the prophets. The passage is a summons to the nations to appear as witnesses of Israel's flagrant sin, and her dreadful punishment. There are many articles in her predicted woe. Not least of these is condemnation by the heathen, who for less heinous sins were to be themselves destroyed. When a professed follower of God apostatizes in such a fashion that even God's enemies cry shame, and endures a corresponding punishment in their sight, the cup of his iniquity and of his retribution are both full.

I. THE CRIME CHARGED. There are many counts in this grave indictment. 1. *The confusion of sordid money-seeking.* "See the great confusions in the midst thereof." The restlessness of greed, the fever of speculation, the wrangling of barter, and the tumult of audacious extortion are all included here. The mingling of excitement, disorder, and noise in a struggle for money, suggest a scene in which little is left to fancy with one who has been "on 'Change." 2. *The oppression of power without principle.* "And the oppressed in the heart thereof." From fraud to oppression is but a single step, and a short one. It is simply a question of power. The swindler would steal if he could. The thief would rob with violence if he dare. When dishonesty, moreover, prevails in private life, a system of public plunder is only a question of opportunity. 3. *Wrong-doing till the way to do right had been forgotten.* "They know not to do right." "In the nature of things every sin against light draws blood on the spiritual retina" (Joseph Cook). Men are both hardened and blinded by a course of sin. Evil actions repeated become habits, and evil habits indulged in work themselves into the very texture of the soul. The wrong of ill-doing soon ceases to be felt, which naturally leads to its ceasing to be seen (Jer. iv. 22; cf. Rom. xvi. 19). When we can sin without conscience, we are very near to sinning without consciousness. The way to preserve a good conscience, a conscience that knows evil and condemns it, is to respect its least dictate. "Sow an act, and you reap a habit; sow a habit, and you reap a character; sow a character, and you reap a destiny." 4. *Putting by plunder in store.* "Who store up violence and devastation in their palaces." Plunder has not even the poor excuse of need. It is practised gratuitously, as without limit. The poor were fleeced and impoverished, that the sordid rich might heap up enormous and superfluous stores. And by the terms there was stored up not only the spoil of violence, but violence itself. *Pari passu*, with the accumulation of ill-gotten gain was

the heaping up of the sin of their unrighteous getting, whilst in heaping up sin they were necessarily treasuring up wrath (Rom. ii. 5).

II. THE WITNESSES SUMMONED. "Assemble upon the mountains," etc. A reference to the topography of Samaria brings out the graphic fitness of the language here. The city was built on a hill, surrounded and overlooked by mountains higher than itself, and from the tops of which the nations could look down into the very streets, and observe the daily doings of the inhabitants. As regards these we notice: 1. *Abandonment in sin is a sight for a man's worst enemy to see.* The certainty, severity, and nearness of avenging judgment makes sin, from even the low utilitarian standpoint, the greatest possible evil. The enemy, who rejoices in our ill, can find no such occasion of malignant joy as our giving ourselves up to sin. After the fact that it offends God, the strongest argument against sin is the fact, the obverse of the other, that it pleases the devil and wicked men. 2. *When men lose the sense of sin, God appeals to their sense of shame.* It is strange that the sense of shame should survive the sense of sin, but so it is. We fear men more than God. We are not ashamed to do what we would be very much ashamed to acknowledge. The poet's sarcasm is just, that in the matter of sin our care is "not to leave undone, but keep unknown." The bitterness of punishment is greatly aggravated by its being inflicted in the presence of an exulting enemy. Philistia and Egypt were, moreover, the enemies whose cognizance of their way and end Israel would most feel and fear (2 Sam. i. 20). To this last shred of feeling on which a motive could lay hold Jehovah here appeals. They would be a gazing-stock to their bitterest enemies. "Like the woman set in the midst amid one encircling sea of accusing, insulting faces, with none to pity, none to intercede, none to show mercy to them who had showed no mercy. Faint image of the shame of that day when not men's deeds only, but the secrets of all hearts, shall be revealed, and they shall begin 'to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us'" (Pusey). 3. *The pupil in the art of ill-doing often outdoes the master.* It is assumed that even Egypt and Philistia would be shocked at the sight of the wrong-doing of apostate Israel, and so become witnesses against them. Yet Egypt had taught them "oppression," and Philistia had given them many a lesson in "violence and devastation." The art of wrong-doing advances with rapid strides as it is handed on. The son of the "smart" trader is a swindler, the son of the swindler is the burglar, the son of the burglar is the robber-assassin. The pupil of the religious liberal is the rationalist, and the pupil of the rationalist is the atheist. Begin by imitating wicked men, and you will end by outstripping them in sin.

III. THE SENTENCE PRONOUNCED. This is at once heavy in its nature and explicit in its details. We see here that: 1. *When God's judgments come against a man they surround him.* (Ver. 11, "An enemy, and that round about the land.") The impossibility of escaping when God attacks is axiomatic. Punishment is in such a way interwoven with sin that they cannot be dissociated. When we sin against God we sin against the nature of things. Physical, mental, and social law jump each with moral law, are broken in the breach of it, and so are each of them a channel to guide to us the full flood of retribution. "Though hand join in hand, yet shall not the wicked go unpunished." 2. *When God strikes a sinner he strikes him on the seat of his sin.* "And he shall bring down," etc. (ver. 11); "That dwell in Samaria," etc. (ver. 12). The strong had oppressed and pillaged the weak, and God's hand would fall on their strength. In the palaces the spoil of violence had been heaped up, and the palaces should be the special prey of the plunderer. The beds and couches which had ministered to their sinful indulgence would be carried away to the last stick. It is so always. The punishment of drunkenness, uncleanness, pride, lying, comes in many ways, but in every case pre-eminently through the lust or appetite involved. This is according to natural laws, but is none the less the arrangement of God. He has put latent in every power a mystic spark, which, if the power be abused, becomes a retributive fire to burn the breaker of his Law. 3. *When sin is adequately punished the sinner's well-being is practically destroyed.* "Delivers out of the mouth of the lion two shin-bones and an ear-lappet," etc. (ver. 12). These are paltry leftovers, not worth the rescue. And such, and so insignificant, would be the surviving good of Israel, when God's controversy was settled. Where the scythe of God's judgment has passed there is little left for the gleaner. The detected thief, the broken-down

sensualist, the besotted drunkard, what is each but a human wreck? The kernel of life is wasted, and only a husk remains. No wallflower of good can ever grow to cover these wrecks of time.

Vers. 13—15.—*The residue of Israel's woe.* Those who had been called to witness the sin of Israel are now summoned to hear and report her sentence. In connection with this we see that—

I. **EVEN HEATHENS CAN TESTIFY AGAINST APOSTATE ISRAEL IN THE JUDGMENT.** To testify is not merely to convey intelligence; it contains in it the idea of protest, *i.e.* testifying against. 1. *The heathen had a natural sense of right and wrong.* Paul says they "show the work of the law written in their hearts," and "are a law unto themselves." A rule of duty is included in the constitution of their nature. They know right from wrong, and are governed by a sense of obligation. They could, therefore, judge the conduct of Israel. They could see and testify that it did not come up to even their own imperfect standard of right. 2. *They had been truer to their standard of right than Israel had.* Paul tells us that the heathen had not been true to their light (Rom. i. 21—28), and that the punishment of that was diminished light. But they had been truer, on the whole, than Israel had been to hers. Their morality was not so far below Israel's as their inferior light would lead us to expect. Hence the assumption that they would be shocked at Israel's manifold corruptions. Moral deterioration is measured, not so much by the absolute amount and kind of wrong-doing as by the extent to which it falls below the known standard of right. Other things being equal, he is relatively the best man who most closely follows his light (John iii. 19; Rom. ii. 14). 2. *They would learn something for themselves from this witness-bearing.* Discrimination would see that Israel's sin was not a result, but the contradiction, of the national religion; that it was an evil result of heathen influence, and involving the heathen more or less in its guilt; that Israel's God was a God that judgeth righteously, and taketh vengeance on evil-doers; and that judgment, beginning at God's chosen people, would not miss his open enemies. The very act of testifying against Israel, moreover, would involve such an exercise of the moral sense, in reference to their sin, as could not fail to be beneficial.

II. **SIN IS PUNISHED BY BEING RETURNED ON THE SINNER'S HEAD.** "When I visit Israel's transgression upon him." The sin not only leads to the punishment, but as it were re-embodies itself in it. 1. *The memory of it haunts him.* When sin is done it is not done with. Like the dead bird around the Ancient Mariner's neck, an avenging Providence ties the memory of it to our soul. Like the crime of Eugene Aram, it becomes an evil-haunting memory, to dog our steps for ever.

* And still no peace for the restless clay
Will wave or mould allow;
The horrid thing pursues my soul—
It stands before me now."

(Hood.)

2. *The permanent evil consequences of it keep it before the memory.* The sins of youth are the sowing of which the sufferings of manhood and age are the harvest—a harvest too constantly and painfully reaped to allow the harvester to forget. The sins of one man are the fruitful source of the sins and sorrows of many, and find in each of these a mentor who makes it impossible to forget. In addition to the sinner and the sinned against, wrong-doing injures those whose well-being depends on either. It is thus a poison-tree that forks and branches in the bearing of its deadly fruit. While the evil consequences of his wrong-doing are around him, and propagating themselves in ever-widening circles, the sinner apart from conscience cannot get his iniquities out of sight. 3. *Not seldom the punishment is a resurrection of the sin itself.* Laban's trick on Jacob was a repetition of Jacob's trick on Isaac (Gen. xxix. 23; xxvii. 15—27). The deaths of Haman and Jezebel were similarly adjusted punishments. So with the cutting off the thumbs and great toes of the arch-mutilator Adoni-bezek (Judg. i. 8, 7). In such cases the sin is palpably returned in retribution on the sinner's head.

III. **IDOL-WORSHIP IS A SIMULATION OF THE WORSHIP OF GOD.** "The altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar." Both in the use of an altar and in the form of the altar

used the idol-worship set up by Jeroboam was a plagiarism from the worship of Jehovah. 1. *Man cannot create in religion, but he can adapt.* He can form no idea of spiritual things apart from Divine revelation (1 Cor. ii. 9). At the same time, God's revelation of spiritual things is too pure for his taste. The result is that he compromises the matter by adopting ready-made ordinances, and loading them with his own corrupt spirit and meaning. 2. *Idolatrous worship seems less of an apostasy in proportion as it retains the forms of true worship.* The devil lets man down into idolatry as into other sin by easy stages. First he parts with the spirit of true worship, whilst retaining the form. Then he parts with the object of it, corrupting the form. Then he adopts a new object, and adapts to its worship the already corrupted form. And so with all sin, which is spiritual idolatry. Man does not first abandon the forms of godliness, and then the practice of it. He gives up the substance of it as a matter of taste, and tries to save his conscience for this by adhering to its forms (2 Tim. iii. 5). 3. *This also makes it more plausible and insidious.* The worship set up in Dan and Bethel by Jeroboam was not idol-worship pure and simple. It was the worship of God by means of idols, and in forms which mimicked the worship at Jerusalem. Heresy at the outset always masquerades in the guise of truth. By adopting the sheep's clothing the wolf gets easy access to the fold. It is only after he has entered, and the danger of eviction is over, that his true character is assumed.

IV. ONE IDOL BREEDS MANY. "The altars of Bethel." There was but one sacrificial altar in connection with the worship of Jehovah, but when many gods were invented, many altars were provided to correspond to them. This multiplication of idols is accounted for by the fact that: 1. *Evil naturally spreads.* One sin leads to more. Covetousness leads to theft, drunkenness to uncleanness, all three often to murder, and almost every sin to deceit and lying. No man can set up one sinful idol and say he will have no more. It will bring others with it whether he will or no. It is the first swallow of the summer of evil-doing, and heralds a coming flock. 2. *Idolatry must become polytheism in the attempt to meet the spiritual wants of men.* God is an infinite Being, and so can meet our human necessity all round. But an idol is the creation of a finite mind, and so a finite thing. It is to meet one need of our nature, the need that was uppermost in the consciousness of the inventor. But a different need will be uppermost in another worshipper, and a different idol will be wanted to meet his case. Accordingly, in the mythology were many gods, who distributed among them the various functions necessary to complete the circle of human good. It was, in fact, an attempt, by multiplying deities indefinitely, to provide a substitute for the infinite God of revelation. 3. *A worship that is all error is more logical than one that is half truth.* Everything has its own proper form. You do not find an eagle in the form of a dove, nor an apple in the form of a plum, nor an evil principle in the form of a good one. If such a form is artificially put round it, the result is a palpable misfit. Polytheism is the nearest approach to logical idolatry, and in proportion as it is self-consistent is dangerous, and wins its way.

V. THE FIRST THING JUDGMENT DOES AGAINST THE IDOLATER IS TO DEPRIVE HIM OF HIS GODS. "The horns of the altar shall be cut off," etc. This would put an effectual stop to the idol-worship. We thus see that: 1. *God wants his judgments to be recognized.* He never punishes men *incognito*. When he puts forth his power he wants men to see that it is his (Exod. vii. 5; 1 Kings xx. 28; Ezek. vi. 7), and striking the very seat of sin inflicts a stroke at once significant and effectual, a revelation at once of the Divine hand and power. 2. *He wants them to be effective.* The moral effect of a judgment depends very much on our knowing whence it comes. If we recognize it as sent by God, it is tenfold more impressive. Now, to exercise the maximum of beneficial influence with the minimum of afflictive visitation is ever God's way (Lam. iii. 32, 33). He does not strike an aimless or a needless blow. Each stroke is meant to tell, and the medicine of affliction is stopped the moment the patient is cured. 3. *Idolatry is at the root of all other sin.* It is the complement of atheism, which is radically the heart departing from God. It is a sublimated self-worship, making an idol of our own mental creation. A god dethroned, and a self enthroned, is a state of things which "contains the promise and potency" of all evil. To strike at Israel's idolatry was to lay the axe to the root of the national evil. The idols abolished, and God restored to the national heart, its life would be again a consecrated one.

VI. MAN'S SELF-INDULGENCE, THE DEAREST IDOL HE HAS, WILL BE TAKEN FROM HIM ALONG WITH THE REST. (Ver. 16, "And I will smite," etc.) Luxuries long enjoyed become necessities of life, and no judgment would be thorough that left them untouched. Self-indulgence, if it were left, would soon invent a new idolatry for its own accommodation. It is only by making a clean sweep of the idols already in possession that God can get his place in the sinner's heart.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Sin against light and love.* This language of reproach and threatening was addressed to Israel and Judah. Yet all who occupy a parallel position of privilege, and who are guilty of similar insensibility, ingratitude, and apostasy, are subject to the condemnation and the penalty pronounced upon the favoured but sinful descendants of Israel.

I. UNPARALLELED FAVOURS ARE RECOUNTED. As a matter of history, Israel had been treated in a singular manner, with unique favour. However we may explain the fact, a fact it is which is here recalled to the memory of the too oblivious Hebrews. 1. Israel had been treated as the family of God. The heavenly Father had cared for, provided for, and protected his peculiar family, the children whom he had adopted. 2. Israel had been brought up from the land of Egypt. To the marvellous deliverance and interposition recorded by Moses, to the equally marvellous guidance and guardianship experienced in the wilderness of wandering, the sacred writers frequently refer. This is not surprising; for never was a more signal instance of Divine compassion than that afforded in the earlier passages of the national life of the chosen people. 3. Israel had been the object of the Divine knowledge. By this we understand (for the language is accommodated to our human weakness) that God had regarded and selected Israel in his inscrutable wisdom for a certain purpose, viz. in order by Israel to make himself known to mankind at large. A peculiar honour was conferred upon the Hebrew nation, not, however, for any excellence or worthiness in them, but for reasons larger and higher than any which were generally apprehended.

II. UNPARALLELED INIQUITIES ARE IMPUTED. Idolatry was charged upon those who had been distinguished as the recipients of the revelation of the Divine unity. Immorality of various kinds was rife amongst those who enjoyed the advantage of the purest moral code known amongst the nations of mankind. The just principle was applied, "To whom much is given of him will be much required." And the application of this principle made manifest the peculiar guilt of Israel. The Word of the Lord by his prophet was therefore righteously severe; other nations were guilty of equal enormities, but the privileges of Israel rendered their iniquities more reprehensible.

III. UNPARALLELED CHASTISEMENT IS THREATENED. *All* the iniquities of Israel were to be visited by Divine correction. In the remainder of his prophecies Amos enlarges upon this theme. Whether we consider the captivities and humiliations undergone by the favoured nation in the period immediately succeeding, or the history of subsequent centuries, we see the truth of this prediction. Much more apparent is it when we look at the national life of Israel as a whole; and, connecting the earlier apostasies with the rejection of the Messiah, recognize in the present dispersion of the tribes the fulfilment of a Divine purpose and the inculcation of a Divine lesson.—T.

Ver. 3.—*Harmonious fellowship.* These words have passed into a proverb, which fact is in itself a proof that they accord with human experience.

I. HARMONY OF SENTIMENT AND PURPOSE ALONE CAN ENSURE AGREEMENT IN LIFE. The spiritual is a key to the outward life. And this holds not only with regard to the individual, but with regard to society. Because people live together in a house, they are not necessarily a true family; because they meet together in an ecclesiastical building, they are not therefore a true congregation; because they occupy the same territory, they are not therefore a true nation. There must be inner accord in order that fellowship may be real.

II. WANT OF HARMONY OF HEART WILL SUBELY MANIFEST ITSELF IN LIFE. This is the other side of the same law. The strifes of society are an indication of conflicting

principles. Even Christ came to send, not peace, but a sword. Where there is no agreement, one will walk in this road and another in that. External uniformity is of little value. In fact, manifest discord may be of service in revealing the want of spiritual unity, and so leading to repentance.

III. IN THE RELATION BETWEEN GOD AND MAN AGREEMENT IS ONLY TO BE ATTAINED BY THE CONFORMITY OF MAN'S MIND AND WILL TO God's. It is not to be expected, it is not to be desired, that God's purpose should bend to man's. The human ignorance must accept the Divine wisdom, and the human error and sin must embrace the Divine grace and holiness. Such is the teaching of revelation, of the Law, and of the gospel.

IV. WHERE THERE IS WANT OF HARMONY BETWEEN GOD AND MAN, IT IS FOR MAN TO SEEK THE RECONCILIATION AND UNITY WHICH ALONE CAN BRING ABOUT MAN'S WELFARE. If these blessings were not offered, there would be room to doubt their accessibility. But the revelation of God's counsels in Scripture assures us that our heavenly Father desires that his children should be at one with him.—T.

Ver. 6.—*Warning notes.* There is something in this interrogatory style that arrests the attention and excites inquiry. Combined as it is with bold figures of speech, it gives both vivacity and impressiveness to the prophecies of the herdsman of Tekoah.

I. THE PRESENCE OF CALAMITY. The phrase, "evil in a city," is certainly vague, but how much it may imply! How many forms of misery may be suggested by the expression!—e.g. famine, pestilence, war, riot, and faction, all are evils, and evils which do not always come singly to a community.

II. THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CALAMITY. The suggestion of the prophet is that "the Lord hath done it." We are not warranted in applying the test of our opinions to events permitted by Divine providence. It is foolish to profess ourselves able to interpret all the events, and especially all the calamities, that occur; to see God's "judgments" in all human distresses. Yet no devout mind can question that there is a very important sense in which, when evil happens to a city or a country, the Lord hath done it. The world is governed by moral laws; but the Governor is the supreme Creator of all things, the supreme Disposer of all events. Disobedience to his authority and ordinances entails suffering, privation, disaster. Men reap as they sow.

III. THE PROPHETIC WARNING OF COMING CALAMITY. The prophet was a watchman, as Ezekiel so vigorously shows us, whose office it is to recognize the approach of ill, and to give the people timely and faithful warning. The same office is still fulfilled by those who being dead yet speak, whose declarations concerning Divine government remain for the instruction of all generations. The Bible abounds with admonitions to which cities and nations will do well to give heed. And all ministers of religion are bound to explain to the people the principles of moral rule and law, of moral retribution, of repentance and reformation.

IV. THE PROPER EFFECT OF CALAMITY. The immediate result is that described in the text—fear, trembling, alarm. But the remote result, that chiefly to be desired, is the turning of men's hearts unto the Lord, and their consequent acceptance and forgiveness.—T.

Ver. 7.—*The revelation of secrets.* That there must be assumed to be some limitation to this broad statement is manifest. It is not intended to declare that God made his prophets acquainted with *all* his counsels and intentions, but rather that revelation and inspiration are realities, and that prophecy is a Divine ordinance.

I. THE ACTIONS OF GOD ARE THE RESULT OF DELIBERATE COUNSEL AND PURPOSE. This way of representing the conduct of Divine affairs is out of harmony with much current teaching of our time. We are often told that it is childish to conceive of God as personal, as thinking, feeling, and acting. But so far from such representations being derogatory to the Divine dignity, they do, in fact, enhance our conceptions of him. Reason and will are the lofty attributes of mind; and whilst the Eternal is not bound by the limitations which circumscribe our faculties, these faculties are the finite reflection of what is infinite in him. It is the glory of our Scriptures that they reveal to us a God who commands, not a blind awe, but an intelligent veneration, and elicits an appreciative and grateful love.

II. THE COUNSELS AND PURPOSES OF GOD ARE REVEALED TO THE SYMPATHETIC

MINDS OF HIS SERVANTS THE PROPHETS. The mode of this communication is concealed from us; it may have been but partially understood even by the prophets themselves. There is nothing unreasonable in the fellowship of mind between the Creator and created spirits. The human consciousness is above all vehicles surely the fittest medium for the intercourse between the Divine and the finite. God has his own servants employed in his household, his husbandry; and he chooses his own agents for the several works he has for them to do. Among his servants are the prophets—men selected and qualified to speak forth his mind and will to their fellow-men. Perhaps we are too restricted in the view we commonly take of the prophetic office. We know that there were schools of prophets among the Hebrews, and that there was an order of prophets in the primitive Church. There were cases in which by the agency of prophets new truth was revealed, but there were also cases in which prophets were inspired to apprehend and republish truth already familiar. Prophets in this second sense there certainly are among us to this day.

III. THE COUNSELS AND PURPOSES OF GOD COMMUNICATED BY THE PROPHETS DEMAND OUR REVERENTIAL ATTENTION AND CHEERFUL OBEDIENCE. When the Omniscent declares his mind, when the Omnipotent unfolds his purpose, by the agency he has chosen, the revelation is first made by the Spirit to the human minister, and then by the human minister to his fellow-men. The holiness of the Divine character and the righteousness of the Divine government are thus brought effectively before the minds of the intelligent and responsible sons of men. The secret is revealed, not simply to excite wonder, but to guide conduct. The appropriate attitude of those privileged with a revelation so precious is that expressed in the resolution, "All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do."—T.

Ver. 10.—The corruption of conscience. The conception of Amos is remarkable for grandeur. He sees in prophetic vision the approaching siege of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, and poetically summons the Egyptians and Philistines to gather themselves together upon the surrounding hills, and to witness the tumults within the city, the assaults from without, and the impending ruin. But the moral significance of history, in the prophet's mind, transcends the pictorial interest; and in this verse he gives utterance to a profound and awful truth with regard to human nature. Wrong-doing corrupts the conscience and interferes with a correct perception of right and goodness.

I. IT IS A LAW OF HUMAN NATURE THAT CONDUCT REAOTS UPON CHARACTER. No doubt actions are the expression of the moral nature, the moral habits, of men. But, on the other hand, those who persevere in a certain course of conduct are by that very fact moulded and fashioned and even transformed. Thus it is that those who submit to circumstances and who yield to influences are affected even in their inmost moral nature by the experience they pass through.

II. PASSION AND INTEREST WARP THE MORAL JUDGMENT. Nations which, like Israel, are guilty of luxury and of idolatry, which pillage their neighbours' goods, and wage unlawful war, involving widespread calamity, thereby blunt their sensibilities to right and wrong. They habituate themselves to regard all questions in the light of their own ambition, or their own aggrandizement and enrichment. As a consequence they are tempted to call evil good, and good evil. Especially are they liable to form a false judgment upon their own conduct.

III. THUS WRONG-DOING HAS A TENDENCY TO PERPETUATE ITSELF. They who by reason of abandoning themselves to evil courses have silenced the voice of conscience, lose the moral power to do better. Because they "know not to do right," they continue to do wrong. They reap as they have sown. They advance upon the road of sin by the momentum derived from past iniquity.—T.

Vers. 13—15.—Retribution upon the altar and the palace. The language of the prophet in this passage is severe in its import and graphic in its style. He foresees the approach of the invaders, the powerlessness of Israel to resist their attack, the completeness with which their work is destined to be done. In two directions especially the blow of vengeance is seen to fall.

I. IDOLATRY IS PUNISHED BY THE DESTRUCTION OF IDOL TEMPLES AND ALTARS.

Departure from Jehovah was the radical offence of Israel. Beside the great altar set up at Bethel by Jeroboam, where the golden calves were worshipped, there seem to have been other sacred places, which were polluted by idol-service and idol-sacrifice. Heathenism was seen to encroach upon the territory consecrated to Jehovah. Altars were reared to deities, imaginary indeed, but endowed by popular superstition with characters altogether opposed to the pure and perfect character of the Eternal who had revealed himself to the ancestors of the Hebrew nation. It was most appropriate that retribution should fall upon the centres and the symbols of a worship so debasing as that which had been substituted for the service of Jehovah. The powerlessness of the so-called "gods" to protect their sanctuaries and their altars was made manifest; the defeat of Baal was the triumph of Jehovah.

II. **PRIDE AND LUXURY ARE PUNISHED BY THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MANSIONS AND PALACES OF THE GREAT.** Whether we regard these "summer houses" as simply the upper apartments, or as country villas erected in rural retreats, the prophetic lesson is the same. Their destruction, and the destruction of the sumptuous residences decorated with ornaments of ivory, was a retribution upon those who esteemed the splendour and luxuriousness of their abodes more dear than the practice of virtue, of benevolence, of piety. No lesson is more frequently repeated in Scripture than the lesson that the Judge of all the earth delights to abase the proud, whilst he exalts the lowly. When the princes of Israel beheld their sumptuous dwellings razed to the ground, and when they themselves passed into exile, how could they fail to recognize the hand of a righteous and indignant God?—T.

Vers. 2, 3.—*A specially blest people.* "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" "You only have I known," says God, "of all the families of the earth." What does this mean? It does not mean that he was ignorant of all other people. God knows everything connected with each individual of all generations. Nor does it mean that he had not been kind to other people. "His tender mercies are over all the works of his hands." But by the expression, "I have known," he means, "I have bestowed on you privileges which I have bestowed on no other people" (see Rom. ix. 4, 5). Now, it is a fact that some men are far more highly favoured by Heaven than others. Some have more health, some more riches, some more intellect, some more friendships, some more means of spiritual improvement. We offer three remarks about specially favoured people.

I. **THEY ARE OFTEN TIMES THE GREATEST SINNERS.** Who of all the people on the face of the earth were greater sinners than the Israelites? Yet they were specially favoured of Heaven. There was not a crime they did not commit; and they filled up the measure of their iniquity by crucifying the Son of God. England is a *specially favoured land*, but where is there more moral corruption? The fountain of moral iniquity is as deep, as full, as noxious, as active, here as in the darkest and most corrupt parts of the earth. It is true that civilization has so decorated it that its loathsomeness is to some extent concealed; but here it is. The corpse is painted, but it is still a putrid mass.

II. **THEY ARE EXPOSED TO SPECIAL PUNISHMENT.** "Therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities." Men are not to be envied simply because they are endowed with special favours. Those very endowments, unless they are faithfully used, only augment responsibility, deepen guilt, and ensure a more terrible retribution. Where much has been given, much will be required. "It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment," etc. "Therefore will I punish you." I who know all your sins, I who abhor all your sins, I who have power to punish you, will execute vengeance.

III. **THEY SHOULD, LIKE ALL PEOPLE, PLACE THEMSELVES IN HARMONY WITH GOD.** "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" 1. *Agreement with God is essential to the well-being of all intelligent existences.* No spirit in the universe can be happy without thorough harmony with the will and mind of God. Heaven is happy because of this harmony; hell is miserable because of antagonism to the Divine mind. 2. *The condition of all sinners is that of hostility to the will of God.* Indeed, enmity to God is the essence of sin. What, then, is the conclusion? *Reconciliation.* "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled unto God" (2 Cor. v. 20).—D. T.

Vers. 4—6.—*Retribution.* “Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey?” etc. These verses suggest certain remarks on retribution.

I. RETRIBUTION SPRINGS OUT OF THE NATURE OF THINGS. The lion roars in the forest for prey; the young lion cries in his den from an instinct of nature. They are hungry, and they roar; they crave for food, and they cry; this is natural. The lion is quiet till he sees his prey, but roars at the sight of it, and thereby inspires it with such terror that it is deprived of the power of escape. In like manner the young lion which has been weaned and is just beginning to hunt for prey, will lie silent in the den till it is brought near, when the smell of it will rouse him from his quiet. Poiset, in his travels, states that the lion has two different modes of hunting his prey. When not very hungry, he contents himself with watching behind a bush for the animal which is the object of his attack, till it approaches; when by a sudden leap he springs at it, and seldom misses his aim. But if he is famished he does not proceed so quietly; but, impatient and full of rage, he leaves his den and fills with his terrific roar the echoing forest. His voice inspires all beings with terror; no creature deems itself safe in its retreat; all flee they know not whither, and by this means some fall into his fangs. The naturalness of punishment, perhaps, is the point at which the prophet aims in the similitude. It is so with moral retribution. It arises from the constitution of things. Punishment grows out of vice. Misery follows iniquity. Every sin carries with it its own penalty. It does not require the Almighty to inflict any positive suffering on the sinner. He has only to leave him alone, and his sins will find him out.

II. RETRIBUTION IS NOT ACCIDENTAL, BUT ARRANGED. “Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all?” The bird is not taken in a snare by chance. The fowler has been there and made preparation for its entanglement and death. Every sinner is a bird that must be caught; the snare is laid in the constitution of things. Instruments were prepared by the providence of God for the capture of the Israelites, which would certainly do their work.

III. RETRIBUTION ALWAYS SOUNDS A TIMELY ALARM. “Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid?” Heaven does not punish without warnings. Nature warns, providence warns, conscience warns; there is no sinful soul in which the trumpet of alarm does not sound.

IV. RETRIBUTION, HOWEVER IT COMES, IS ALWAYS DIVINE. “Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?” God is in all. He has established the connection between sin and suffering. He has planned and laid the snare. The everlasting destruction with which the sinner is punished comes from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power.—D. T.

Vers. 7, 8.—*The irrepressibility of moral truth.* “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets,” etc. These words mean that although punishment for the guilty Israelites was natural, arranged, and withal Divine, yet it would come according to a warning made to them through the prophets, and which these would feel compelled to deliver. The words suggest two remarks.

I. GOD HAS MADE A SPECIAL REVELATION TO HIS SERVANTS. “He revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.” In all ages God has selected men to whom he has made communications of himself. In times past he spake unto the fathers by the prophets. In truth, he makes *special* revelations of himself to all true men. “Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?” “The secrets of the Lord are with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.” God has given to all men a general revelation. In nature without and within, in the material domain, and in the spiritual. But he makes a special revelation to some. The Bible is indeed a special revelation. 1. Special in its *occasion*. It is made on account of the abnormal moral condition into which man has fallen—made in consequence of human sin and its dire consequences. Had there been no sin, in all probability we should have had no written revelation. The great book of nature would have sufficed. 2. Special in its *doctrines*. The grand characteristic truth is this—that God so loved men as sinners that he gave his only begotten Son for their redemption. This is the epitome of the gospel.

II. THAT THE RIGHT RECEPTION OF THIS SPECIAL REVELATION NECESSITATES PREACHING. "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" The idea is that the men who have rightly taken the truth into them can no more conceal it than men can avoid terror at the roar of the lion. There are some truths which men may receive and feel no disposition to communicate, such as the truths of abstract science, which have no relation to the social heart. But gospel truths have such a relation to the tenderest and profoundest affections of the spirit, that their genuine recipients find them to be irrepressible. They feel like Jeremiah, that they have fire shut up in their bones; like the apostles before the Sanhedrin, "We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard;" like Paul, "Necessity is laid upon me to preach the gospel." "Who can but prophesy?" None but those who have not received the truth.—D. T.

Vers. 10, 11.—*Rectitude*. "For they know not to do right, saith the Lord, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces," etc. We derive from this passage three general remarks.

I. THAT THERE IS AN ETERNAL LAW OF "RIGHT" THAT SHOULD GOVERN MAN IN ALL HIS RELATIONS. Right, as a sentiment, is one of the deepest, most ineradicable, and operative *sentiments* in humanity. All men feel that there is such a thing as right. What the right is, is a subject on which there has been and is a variety of opinion. Right implies a standard, and men differ about the standard. Some say the law of your country is the standard; some say public sentiment is the standard; some say temporal expediency is the standard. All these are fearfully mistaken. Philosophy and the Bible teach that there is but one standard—that is the *will* of the Creator. That will he reveals in many ways—in nature, in history, in conscience, in Christ. Conformity to that will is *right*. 1. The law of right should govern man in his relations with *God*. That law says—Thank the kindest Being most, love the best Being most, reverence the greatest Being most. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," etc. 2. The law of right should govern man in his relation to *his fellow-men*. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." This law of right is *immutable*. It admits of no modification. It is *universal*. It is binding alike on all moral beings in the universe. It is *benevolent*. It seeks the happiness of all. Earth will be Paradise again when the will of God is done here "as it is in heaven."

II. THAT A PRACTICAL DISREGARD OF THIS LAW LEADS TO FRAUD AND VIOLENCE. "For they know not to do right, saith the Lord, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces." The magnates of Samaria had no respect for the practice of right, hence they "stored up violence and robbery in their palaces." Fraud and violence are the *two great primary crimes in all social life*. By the former men are deceived, befooled, rifled of their rights, and disappointed of their hopes and expectations. Never was fraud stronger in England than to-day—fraud in literature, commerce, religion, legislation. By the latter, men are disabled, wounded, crushed, murdered. Can the history of the world furnish more terrible manifestations of violence than we have had in the wars of Christendom in this age? Why this fraud and violence? Why are these devils let loose to fill the world with lamentation and woe? The answer is in the text, "Men knew not to do right." That is, they do not practise the right.

III. THAT FRAUD AND VIOLENCE MUST ULTIMATELY MEET WITH CONDIGN PUNISHMENT. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God; An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled." How was this realized? "Against him came up Shalmaneser King of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents. . . . In the ninth year of Hoshea the King of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes" (2 Kings xvii. 3—6; xviii. 9—11). The cheats and murderers of mankind will, as sure as there is justice in the world, meet with a terrible doom. "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud,

crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you" (Jas. v. 1—6). "Punishment is the recoil of crime; and the strength of the back-stroke is in proportion to the original blow."—D. T.

Vers. 13—15.—*National judgments.* "Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob, saith the Lord God, the God of hosts," etc. The same persons are here addressed who in the ninth verse were summoned from Philistia and Egypt. They were now to testify to the facts of the case, that it might be seen that the punishment inflicted upon the inhabitants was richly deserved. The subject of the words is *national judgment*, which we are here led to regard in three aspects.

I. IN RELATION TO THE TRUE PROPHETS. "Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob." We may perhaps regard the words also as spoken to the prophets. Hear, ye prophets. 1. The prophets were to *make themselves acquainted with the coming judgments*. They were to be watchmen who were to descry afar the coming danger. All true ministers of religion should by earnest study acquaint themselves with the terrible punishment that awaits the guilty world. 2. The prophets were to *announce the coming judgment*. "Hear ye, and testify." Their work is to sound the alarm, to blow the trumpet. "So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me" (Ezek. xxxiii. 7). One of the chief duties of a true minister is to "warn every man" (Col. i. 28).

II. IN RELATION TO ITS MORAL CAUSE. What was the cause of these threatened judgments? Here it is. "I shall visit the transgressions of Israel." Judgments do not come on men as a matter of necessity; they do not roll on man like the billows of ocean on the shore, by blind force; nor do they come because the Governor of the universe is malevolent, and has pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. No; he is love. He "desireth not the death of a sinner." They come because of *sin*. The sins of a nation draw judgment after them as the moon draws after it the billows that beat upon the shore. Let no nation hope to escape judgments until it gets rid of sin. Judgments are but sins ripened into a harvest, subterranean fires breaking into volcanoes. Eternal love requires for the order and happiness of the universe that sins and sorrows, transgressions and troubles, should be inseparably linked together.

III. IN RELATION TO ITS TERRIBLE ISSUES. 1. There is the deprivation of *religious institutions*. "I will also visit the altars of Bethel: and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground." "Signal vengeance was to be taken on the place whence all the evils which spread through the ten tribes originated. The 'horns' were four projecting points, in the shape of horns, at the corners of ancient altars. They may be seen in the representations of those dug up by Belzoni in Egypt. As they were ornamental, the action here described was designed to express the contempt in which the altar would be held by the Assyrians." Corrupt punishment for a nation's transgressions would involve the ruin of religious institutions. 2. There is a deprivation of all their *conveniences and luxuries*. "And I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord." Eastern monarchs and princes, we are told, have summer as well as winter houses. The "ivory houses" do not mean houses composed of that material, but richly ornamented dwellings. These were to be destroyed. "The pomp or pleasantness of men's houses," says Matthew Henry, "will be so far from fortifying them against God's judgments, that it will make them the more grievous and vexatious, as their extravagance about them will be put to the score of their sins and follies."—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Vers. 1—13.—§ 2. *Second address. The prophet reproves the voluptuous women of*

Samaria, and foretells their captivity (vers. 1—3); with bitter irony he describes the people's devotion to idolatry (vers. 4, 5); he shows how incorrigible they have proved them-

selves under God's chastisements (vers. 6-11); therefore they must expect further punishment, if so be that they will learn to fear the Lord (vers. 12, 13).

Ver. 1.—The very women are leaders in dissoluteness and oppression. Ye kine of Bashan. Fat and well-liking, such as the rich pastures of Bashan produce. Some have supposed that by this term are meant the luxurious nobles of Samaria, who are called "cows" as being effeminate and licentious. This is possible; but such grandees would be called rather "bulls of Bashan," and the "masters" mentioned just below signify more naturally these women's husbands than the kings. Pusey notes that the genders in the sentence are interchanged. "Hear ye," "your Lord," "upon you," "they shall take you," being masculine; "that oppress," "that crush," "that say," "your posterity," "ye shall go out," "each before her," "ye shall cast," feminine. Evidently the prophet addresses his reproaches to the luxurious of both sexes, though he begins with the women. The land of Bashan extended from Hermon to the Jabbok, including Gaulonitis, Aulonitis, Batanea, and Trachonitis. It was always famous for its pasturage, cattle, and oaks. The Vulgate takes the term as metaphorical, and has, *vaccæ pingues*. So Symmachus, *βόες εὐτροφοί*, which translation Jerome adopts. Mountain of Samaria. The hill of Shomer, on which Samaria was built (see note on ch. iii. 9). Oppress the poor. This they did in ministering, or getting their husbands to minister, to their luxury and debauchery. Apparently they urged their husbands to violence and fraud in order to obtain means to satisfy their extravagance. A bad woman is thoroughly unscrupulous (see the case of Ahab and Naboth, 1 Kings xxi. 7, etc.). Their masters; their lords; i.e. husbands (comp. Gen. xviii. 12; 1 Pet. iii. 6). Bring, and let us drink. They invite their husbands to supply the means of debauchery and to join in their revels.

Ver. 2.—By his holiness. God swears by his holiness, which cannot tolerate iniquity, and which they had profaned (ch. ii. 7; comp. ch. vi. 8). That he will take you away. "That one, or they, shall take you away;" the enemy, the instrument of God's vengeance, is meant. With hooks; *tsinnoth*; Septuagint, *ἐν ὄπλοις*; Vulgate, *in contis*. The translation, "with hooks," is correct, the idea being that the people shall be utterly helpless and taken for destruction, like fish caught with hooks (Jer. xvi. 16; Hab. i. 15). Your posterity; *acharith* (ch. ix. 1); better, your residue, those who have not been destroyed previously. The Septuagint and the Vulgate give quite a different notion to

the passage. The former (according to the Vatican manuscript) has, *Kal τοὺς μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰς λέβητας ὑποκαίοντους ἐμβαλοῦσιν ἔμπυροι λοίμοι*, "And fiery destroyers shall cast those with you into boiling caldrons;" the latter, *Et levabunt vos in contis, et reliquias vestras in ollis ferventibus*. (For the explanation of these versions, which arise from mistakes in the meanings of ambiguous words, see Schegg and Knabenbauer.)

Ver. 3.—At the breaches made in the city walls, as cattle hurry through gaps in a fence. Thus they should go forth when Samaria was taken. Every cow at that which is before her; better, each straight before her, just where the opening offered itself (comp. Josh. vi. 5, 20). The LXX. inserts *γυμναί*, "naked." And ye shall cast them into the palace; Septuagint, *Kal ἀποβιβήσεσθε εἰς τὸ ὄρος τὸ Ῥομμάν* (*Ῥεμμάν*, Alex.), "And ye shall be cast forth into the mountain Romman;" Vulgate, *et proiciemini in Armon*. The Syriac and Arabic Versions, and Aquila, render, "unto Mount Armon;" the Chaldee paraphrast, "far beyond the mountains of Armenia." The Hebrew expression *haharmonah* occurs nowhere else. Our version takes it in the sense of *armon*, "a palace," intending probably a palace or citadel of the enemy, which certainly ought to have been expressed. Kimchi renders, "Ye shall cast yourselves into the palace of the king." The passage is probably corrupt. If the verb is taken as passive, the unusual word must be considered to denote the place of banishment. Thus, "Ye shall be cast forth into Harmon." Whether Harmon means Armenia, as many ancient commentators thought, or not, cannot be determined. Various opinions may be seen in Keil, Schegg, Trochon, and others; but the simplest explanation is that of Oralli and Ewald, viz. that each fugitive shall fling away her idol Rimmona (the wife of the god Rimmon, 2 Kings v. 18), in order to be more free for flight (comp. Isa. ii. 20).

Ver. 4.—The prophet now turns to Israel, and ironically bids them exhibit their zeal for idolatry, and thus increase their guilt. Bethel; as the chief seat of idol-worship (ch. iii. 14). At Gilgal; rather, to Gilgal, "come ye" being repeated in thought. Gilgal was a strong position in the plain of Jordan, three miles east of Jericho, taking its name probably from the stone circles erected for purposes of worship in very early times. Joshua (v. 9) gave a new meaning to the old name. There is a large pool of water in this neighbourhood called Jil-julieh, about four miles from the Jordan, which is doubtless a corruption of the ancient name Gilgal. It seems to have been regarded as a holy place in Samuel's days or even before (see Judg. iii. 19; 1 Sam. vii. 16;

x. 8; xi. 14. etc.; xiii. 8, etc.); and later was appropriated to false worship, though we have no information as to the date of this declension. Gilgal and Bethel are associated together in idolatrous worship (ch. v. 5 and in Hos. iv. 15; ix. 15; xii. 11). **Bring your sacrifices every morning.** They were careful to maintain the outward semblance of the regular Levitical worship, even beyond the letter of the Law in some respects, though their service was all the time idolatry. As this and the following clause are still ironical, Amos is speaking, not of the daily prescribed sacrifice (*olah*, Numb. xxviii. 3), but of the offerings (*zebach*) of individual Israelites which were not required to be presented every day. **Your tithes after three years;** literally, *on the three of days*; *lishlosheth yamim*; Vulgate, *tribus diebus*; Septuagint, *eis τὴν τριημέριαν*, "every third day." Revised Version, "every three days." So Gesenius, Ewald, Keil, Schegg, Hitzig, Baur. The prophet bids them bring their tithes, not as the Law ordered, every year (Lev. xxvii. 30), or, as in the case of the second tithe, every three years (Deut. xiv. 28; xvi. 12), but, by an ironical exaggeration, "every three days." Dr. Pusey defends the English Version on the ground of the idiomatic use of "days" for one circle of days, i.e. a year (Lev. xxv. 29; Judg. xvii. 10; 1 Sam. xxvii. 7). But this loses the irony which is so marked in the whole passage. Keil, "If ye would offer slain sacrifices every morning, and tithe every three days, ye would only thereby increase your apostasy from the living God."

Ver. 5.—Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven; more definitely, *offer by burning a thank offering of that which is leavened*. This is an alteration of the prescribed ritual in two particulars. The Law forbade leaven in any meat offering consumed by fire (Lev. ii. 11; vii. 12); and if it allowed cakes of leavened bread to be offered on one occasion, these were not to be placed on the altar and burned, but one was to be assigned to the officiating priest, and the rest eaten at the sacrificial meal (Lev. vii. 13, 14). The ironical charge to the Israelites is that in their unlicensed zeal they should not only burn on the altar that which was leavened, but, with the idea of being more bountiful, they should also offer by fire that which was to be set apart for other uses. The Septuagint Version can only be explained by considering the translators to have had a different reading, *καὶ ἀνέγνωσαν ἐξω νόμον*, "and they read the Law without." **Proclaim . . . publish.** Make public proclamation that free-will offerings are to be made, or else, like the Pharisees (Matt. vi. 2), announce with ostentation that you are about to offer. The essence of such

offerings was that they should be voluntary, not of command or compulsion (Lev. xxii. 18, etc.; Deut. xii. 6). Septuagint, *καὶ ἐπεκαλίσσαντο ὁμολογίας*, "and called for public professions" (as Deut. xii. 6, 17, 18). **This liketh you; this ye love;** Septuagint, "Proclaim ye that the children of Israel loved these things." Their whole heart was set on this will-worship.

Ver. 6.—In this and the five following verses God sets forth instances of the judgments which he had sent at various times to correct Israel; viz. famine, drought, blight, pestilence, earthquake; but all had been in vain. Five times recurs the sad refrain, "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." God's unwearied love had not conquered their rebellion. **Cleanness of teeth;** Septuagint, *γομφασμὸν ἰδόντων*, "dulness of teeth;" Vulgate, *stuporem dentium*. It is not "toothache" that is meant, but famine, as is seen by the parallel term, want of bread; as Corn. à Lapide says, "Cum enim in fame et penuria dentes non habent quod mordeant et mandant, innocentes sunt et mundi." This is the first chastisement mentioned. It was threatened in the Law as a consequence of backsliding (see Lev. xxvi.; Deut. xxviii. 48, 57). The famines to which Amos alludes are not recorded. Plainly they were not fortuitous, but were providential inflictions, in accordance with previous warnings. **Yet have ye not returned unto me.** Pusey notes that the words imply, not that they returned not at all, but that they did after a fashion return, but not so as to reach God, their repentance being a half-repentance and their worship a half-worship, and therefore unacceptable.

Ver. 7.—The second punishment is drought, as predicted (Lev. xxvi. 19, etc.; Deut. xxviii. 23). **When there were yet three months to the harvest,** and when rain was most necessary to swell the grain. The season meant is in February and March, when what was called "the latter rain" fell. In the south of Palestine the harvest commenced at the end of April, but in the northern parts it was some weeks later, so that it might be said in round numbers that it took place three months after the latter rain. **I caused it to rain upon one city.** That they might not attribute this drought to the blind laws of nature, God caused it to be of a partial character, giving rain to one city while he withheld it from another. **One piece.** The portion of ground belonging to an individual is so called (Deut. xxxiii. 21; Ruth ii. 3; iv. 3).

Ver. 8.—This want of rain produced great dearth of water to drink, and persons had to go long distances to procure supplies. **Wandered;** literally trembled, staggered, as spent and exhausted by thirst. The word

is used in Ps. lix. 15; cix. 10. The supply thus used was soon exhausted, and brought no permanent relief.

Ver. 9.—The third chastisement is occasioned by blight (Deut. xxviii. 22) and palmerworm (Deut. xxviii. 39, 42). **Blasting**; the scorching east wind spoken of by Isaiah (xxvii. 8) and Ezekiel (xvii. 10). Vulgate, *in vento urente*; Septuagint, *ἐν πυρώσει*, "with parching;" Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, *ἀνεμοσφορία*. **Mildew**; a blight, under the influence of which the ears of corn turned yellow and became unfruitful. "Blasting and mildew" are mentioned together in Moses' curse (Deut. xxviii. 22) and in Solomon's dedication prayer (1 Kings viii. 37; comp. Hag. ii. 17). The LXX. has, *ἐν ἰκτέρι*, "with jaundice." When your gardens . . . increased. It is better to take this sentence as the English margin, "The multitude of your gardens . . . hath the palmerworm devoured." So the Vulgate, *Multitudinem hortorum tuorum . . . comedit eruca*. Gardens included orchards, herbaries, and pleasure-grounds. The palmerworm; *gazam*; Septuagint, *κέρμη*; Vulgate, *eruca*. The word occurs in Joel i. 4; ii. 25, and is taken by many commentators to mean some kind of locust; but it is more probable that the Greek and Latin translators are right in regarding it as "a caterpillar" (see Smith, 'Dict. of the Bible,' ii. 696, etc.; 'Bible Educator,' iv. 293). Amos seems to be referring to the visitation in Joel's time, if we take *gazam* ("biter") to be a kind of locust.

Ver. 10.—The fourth visitation is pestilence and the sword (Lev. xxvi. 25; Deut. xxviii. 60). After the manner of Egypt. In the manner in which Egypt is stricken (comp. Isa. x. 24, 26; Ezek. xx. 30). There is here no reference to the plague of Exod. ix. 3, etc., or xii. 29. The allusion is to the plague which was reckoned to be epidemic in Egypt, and to other loathsome diseases for which that country was notorious (see Deut. vii. 15; xxviii. 27, 60). Sir G. Wilkinson notes that the plague used to occur about every ten years ('Handbook,' p. 7). Your young men have I slain with the sword. Pestilence and war are allied scourges in Lev. xxvi. 25. A reference may here be made to the wars with the Syrians, wherein the Israelites suffered heavy losses (2 Kings vi. 25; viii. 12; xiii. 3, 7, 22). And have taken away your horses; rather, *together with your captive horses*, still under the regimen of "I have slain." The destruction of men and horses is mentioned in 2 Kings xiii. 7. The stink of your camps. These unburied carcases caused pestilence in the district. Septuagint, *καὶ ἀντήγαγον ἐν πυρὶ τὰς παρεμβολὰς ἐν τῇ ὁργῇ ὑμῶν*, or, according to the Alexandrian manuscript, *παρεμβολὰς*

ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ ὁργῇ μου, "In my wrath against you I set fire to your camps."

Ver. 11.—The fifth visitation is the earthquake (Deut. xxix. 23). I have overthrown. This is the word used to describe the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. xix. 25; Jer. xx. 16), and it seems better to refer the occurrence mentioned to some such convulsions of nature which caused widespread destruction, than, as Keil and others, "to the utter confusion of the state by which Israel was brought to the verge of ruin." We do not know anything about the particular earthquake to which the prophet alludes. (For an exhaustive catalogue of the earthquakes in this country, see Pusey's notes on this verse.) As God overthrew. The substitution of the name of God for the personal pronoun, when the Lord himself is speaking, is not uncommon in Hebrew. Here it rather takes the form of a quotation from Genesis. Ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning (Zech. iii. 2, where see note)—a phrase which implies, not only a narrow escape, but an escape accompanied with loss. The "brand" not wholly consumed is yet blackened and diminished by the burning (comp. 2 Kings xiii. 5).

Ver. 12.—Therefore. Because all previous judgments have been in vain, therefore will I send upon them something more terrible still. Thus. God says not how; he leaves the nature of the coming chastisement in mysterious uncertainty, that the very suspense may work fear and repentance. Because I will do this (pointing back to the mysterious "thus" above) unto thee; because I am ready to bring on thee still heavier punishment. Prepare to meet thy God; Septuagint, *Ἐτοιμάσου τοῦ ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸν Θεόν σου*, "Prepare to call upon thy God." Make ready to meet thy God in judgment, turning to him with changed heart, if perchance he may forgive thee and withdraw his heavy hand. Another explanation, derived from Symmachus and adopted by à Lapide, Schegg, and others, "Præparare ut adverseris Deo tuo"—an ironical encouragement to them to withstand God—deprives the following verse of its suitability to the context. For the prophet would hardly invite them to this contest by expatiating upon God's almightiness.

Ver. 13.—The prophet enforces his threats by declaring God's power and omniscience. He that formeth the mountains; *ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ στερεῶν βροντὴν*, "I am he that strengtheneth thunder" (Septuagint, reading differently). The mountains are mentioned as the most solid and everlasting of his works; the wind, as the subtlest and most immaterial of created things. Declareth unto man what is his thought; i.e. man's thought; reveals

man to himself, shows that he knows man's thought before man puts it into words. This he does sometimes by the stings of conscience, sometimes by inspiring his prophets to declare men's secret motives and the real state of their heart (see Jer. xvii. 9, 10; and comp. 1 John iii. 20). Vulgate, *Annuntians homini eloquium suum*, where *eloquium* is equivalent to *cogitatio*. The LXX., with some change of letters, has, *ἀπαγγέλλων εἰς ἀνθρώπους τὸν Χριστὸν αὐτοῦ*, "proclaiming unto men his Christ"—a reading which supports the misinterpretation of "his thought" as meaning God's thought, Christ being regarded as the *Λόγος* of God. Many of the Fathers have seen here a prophecy of the Messiah. See Tirinus and Corn. à Lapide on this verse. That maketh the morning darkness. Keil, after Calvin, takes these words as asyndeton for "the morning dawn and darkness." So the Septuagint, *πρωὴν ὄρθρον καὶ δούλην*,

"making morning and gloom." This would be simply a further instance of God's creative power. The Vulgate gives, *faciens matutinam nebulam*; and it seems probable (comp. ch. v. 8; viii. 9) that the clause means that the Lord turns the dawn into darkness. This may refer to the action of clouds or an eclipse; or it may be said metaphorically of prosperity and adversity. Treadeth upon the high places of the earth. An anthropomorphic representation of the might and majesty of God, who governs all things, and has the loftiest in perfect subjection (comp. Deut. xxxii. 13; xxxiii. 29; Job ix. 8; Micah i. 3). The Lord, Jehovah, the eternal, self-existent, covenant God, is he who in these things manifests himself, and therefore his threats are not to be despised (ch. v. 8). In the prophet's view the laws and powers of nature have their scope in executing God's commands.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The woes of the women at ease.* By a contemptuous and striking figure, the women of Samaria are styled the "kine of Bashan." They were as kine, unmindful of the past, unheeding of the future, their attention limited to the present, and living in it only the life of sense. They were as Bashan's kine, wandering in richest pastures, overfed, indulged, and pampered, and therefore waxed voluptuous and wanton. In explanation of the special reference to them, observe—

I. THAT THE WOMEN OF A NATION ARE ALWAYS MORE OR LESS RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS SINS. This appears from the fact that: 1. *They reflect the national character.* Soft, and easily receptive of influence, whether good or bad, the female character is, to a greater extent than the male, a compound tincture of the prevailing qualities of the land and time. It is natural that, as reflecting the national sin, the women will be obnoxious to national punishment. 2. *They form the national character.* They have earliest, most constant, and most affectionate access to the young. They influence character at its softest and most pliant stage, and they approach it, moreover, on its softest side. Reflecting national character so truly, and impressing this so inevitably on the rising generation, it is through them chiefly that good or evil becomes hereditary in society.

"O woman, nature made thee
To temper man."

The "tempering" is oftener for good than ill, converting into porcelain the common clay, purifying and ennobling all she comes near.

"Woman's empire, holier, more refined,
Moulds, moves, and sways the fallen yet God-breathed mind."

But if she reigns as the devil's viceroy, if the influences that go forth from her tend to the enthronement of corruption and wrong, she must be deposed as a matter of policy, and punished as a matter of justice (Isa. iii. 16—24; xxxii. 9—13).

II. A COURSE THAT INVOLVES EVIL IS AS GUILTY BEFORE GOD AS A COURSE THAT INFLECTS IT. The evil a woman does outside her family circle is largely indirect. Of the women of Israel it appears that: 1. *They were self-indulgent at the necessary expense of the poor.* "Which oppress the humble, which crush the needy." This would sometimes be done directly, but generally through the agency of the men. A luxurious mistress often makes a hard and oppressive master. Her extravagant demands must be met by an increased income, and that is only too likely to be sought in exactions

from the dependent poor. Let it be in overcharged dues or in underpaid work, in every case the luxury that forces on the demand is responsible for the evils of the enforced supply. "Those at ease often know not that their luxuries are continually watered by the tears of the poor . . . but God counts wilful ignorance no excuse" (Pusey). Hood's stanza, addressed to men, is doubly pertinent to women.

"O men with sisters dear!
O men with mothers and wives!
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures' lives."

The self-indulgence of the women of Israel meant really the grinding of the poor, out of whose poverty "their lords" were driven to wring the means of carrying on their shameful excesses. 2. *They encouraged their husbands in self-indulgence.* "Bring, and let us drink." This was a doubling of the evil. They not only did wrong, but tempted others to do it. They wasted much, and procured the wasting of more. They were at pains to increase the number of harpies who would gorge themselves on the hard earnings of the poor. 3. *This was not an isolated act, but a habit.* "Oppress" is equivalent to "are continually oppressing." Luxury had settled into a chronic social evil. The demand for fuel to feed the fire of indulgence was constant. It was a cancer eating out the well-being of society continually, and devouring, generation after generation, the inheritance of the poor. The evil of it smelled rank to Heaven, and the guilt of it clamoured for punishment.

III. GOD'S OUTRAGED PERFECTIONS ARE THE GUARANTEE OF THE SINNER'S PUNISHMENT. "The Lord Jehovah hath sworn by his holiness." The occasions of God's action are often supplied by men, but the grounds of it are in himself—in the perfections of his character and the purposes of his will. 1. *Holiness is God's characteristic quality.* There is a universal ascription of it to him in Scripture (Exod. xv. 11; Isa. vi. 1—3; lvii. 15; Hab. i. 13). Absolutely his "name is holy;" relatively he is the "Holy One of Israel." This holiness is an infinite contrariety to all that is morally impure. It characterizes all his other perfections, and is, in this aspect, not so much a distinct attribute as the blending together of them all. Administratively, he swears by his holiness, and sits upon the throne of his holiness (Ps. lxxxix. 35; xlvi. 8); believers are the people of his holiness, and heaven the habitation of his holiness (Isa. lxiii. 18, 16); whilst a synonym for the consecrated life is "holiness to the Lord." 2. *God's holiness was the quality specially profaned.* (Ch. ii. 7.) It was to profane his holy Name that they had sinned. The perfection specially sinned against is naturally the one to be vindicated. "He pledges his own holiness that he will avenge their unholiness" (Pusey). Jealous of all his perfections, the one our conduct tends to obscure or hurt is the one God will most emphatically illustrate and glorify. 3. *Holiness is the quality that makes punishment of sin inevitable.* It is the recoil of God's infinitely pure nature from moral evil. It is the expression and sum of an essential and external antagonism to it. It is incompatible with impurity as light is with darkness, and its necessary and natural action toward it is destructive. Fundamentally it is because God is holy that he punishes, and must punish, sin.

IV. THE SINNER'S PUNISHMENT WHEN IT COMES WILL MATCH AND SQUARE WITH HIS SIN. (Vers. 2, 3.) Here the dovetailing of retribution with crime is very complete. There would be: 1. *Deportation from luxurious scenes.* "I will take you away." The indulgences become habitual would be violently interrupted. The luxurious and vicious tastes, developed into tremendous strength by long-continued sensuality, would be deprived of their gratification. Instead of the high living, become by long enjoyment a thing of course, and a necessity of their life, they would have the coarse and scanty fare of slaves. To visit with want and bondage, when habits of rule and luxury have become a second nature, is a judgment bitterly felt. 2. *This in a violent and painful manner.* "With hooks." The figure is drawn from fishing. The drawing out of the fish by means of a hook is always painful, and is rendered doubly so by its resistance. So with the soft and delicately nurtured women of Samaria in the hands of a rough and brutal soldiery. They would suffer as a fish transfixed by a barbed hook, and their former luxury would be in a sense its own avenger. 3. *This to the last one.* "And your last one with fish-hooks." Not one should escape. God's judgments are

particular. He does not visit people in the mass, but individuals. Not a cow but would feel the cut of the drover's whip, and experience the famine-pangs of the scanty pasture. 4. *This in connection with their own lusts as auxiliaries.* The hook that draws out the fish has been baited for it, and voluntarily swallowed, though under a wrong impression. In heathen luxury and dissolution the Hebrew women found a bait which they swallowed greedily. Now they should find that, with the bait, they had swallowed also a cruel hook, which would draw them away to suffer evils worse than they had themselves inflicted. "And be cast away to Harman" (Authorized Version, "into the palace"), i.e. probably Armenia (see Pusey). Here, being used to minister to heathenish luxury and lust, they would be victims in the matter in which they had been so long the victimizers of others. There is a nameless cruelty in debauchery, which only the victims of it know. This, with the added burden of heathen horrors, the delicate and pampered Israelitish women would now suffer. Their punishment would rise upon them in familiar shape, the resurrection of their own sin. 5. *The bovine solidity of their prosperous days would make them helpless as driven cattle in the day of calamity.* "In the wall ye shall go out every one before her," i.e. "as a herd of cows go one after another through a gap in the fence" (Pusey). The level of intelligence goes down with the level of morality. The penalty of living the brutes' life of sense is a weakening of the heavenly gift of reason, by which we are distinguished from them.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Corruption and religiosity in unholy alliance.* Here the prophet turns from the women of Israel, and addresses the people at large. His language is that of strong irony. What he bids the people do is the thing he knows they have been doing and will go on doing, notwithstanding the imminence of the punishment he predicts. He means, by a sarcastic co-ordination of their acts of hollow worship with those of their sin-stained lives, to bring them to see themselves as God and others saw them.

I. MORAL CORRUPTION AND A ZEAL FOR RELIGIOUS FORMS MAY EXIST TOGETHER. (Ver. 4.) Here it would seem as if the multiplication of transgressions and of observances went *pari passu* together. 1. *The observance of religious forms involves nothing in the way of spirituality.* Taste is wanted, and feeling and judgment, but that is all. Enjoyment in the formal acts of worship may be an æstheticism which is altogether apart from spirituality. The sensuous delight in music, oratory, attitudinizing, millinery, upholstery, and other ecclesiastical impedimenta is just as abundant and as much at home in the theatre as in the church, and is the same non-spiritual thing wherever found. 2. *Worship may even be made so sensuous as to become the minister of luxury.* Other things being equal, the largest congregations gather where the adjuncts of worship are most elaborate and most gorgeous. Many confessedly attend the house of God exclusively for the music and singing, never waiting to hear the gospel preached, or consenting to do so only for appearance' sake. And the thing is perfectly intelligible. A musical and ornate service is decenter than a music-hall, and pleasanter than their own room, and makes an agreeable break in their idle Sunday afternoon. So far from such an observance involving or tending to produce spirituality of feeling, it leaves this out in the cold, and makes its appeal entirely to sense. It has no more bearing on the religious life than theatre-going, or club-going, or race-going, or any other mode of raising the sensational wind. 3. *External religious observance quiets the conscience, and so smooths the path of the self-indulgent.* Even after the sinful life has far advanced, his conscience gives the sinner trouble. Failing to prevent the sin, it suggests the performance of some compensatory work. To sin, and then do penance, is easier than to crucify the flesh and be separate from sin. And one of the commonest selves for an accusing conscience is diligence in the externals of religious observance. It looks and feels like worship, and it makes no demands on the religious faculty. Rather, by substituting an emotional exercise for one of the conscience and heart, it deadens the moral sense, and lulls the transgressor into a dangerous complacency.

II. MEN WHO REST IN FORMS ARE PRONE TO MULTIPLY THEM. This is a logical necessity. If the form be everything, then the more of it the better. Besides, the sensation produced by observing it gets stale after a time, and, in order to keep it at its first strength and freshness, there must be a continual increase of the dose. Israel illustrated this principle in two degrees. 1. *They were particular about ceremonial observances.* They offered the slain sacrifices, the praise offerings, the free offerings,

and the tithes at their appointed times. In addition to the annual tithe they also gave a second tithe every three years (Deut. xiv. 28; xxvi. 12). This was keeping up to the very letter of the Law. A Pharisee in later times could not have given more circumstantial obedience to it than they did. When the *opus operatum* is made the whole of a religious ordinance, it is sure to be circumstantially observed; and the rule is that the more completely the spirit is lost sight of, the more elaborately is the letter observed. To the exhaustive observance of ordinances by Israel, according to our text, there was one significant exception. This was the omission of the sin offering and the trespass offering. They had no consciousness of sin. They deported themselves as men who had praise to offer and gifts to bestow, but no sin to be atoned or to confess. To the formalist an adequate idea of sin is impossible, and in his worship the question is not raised. 2. *They went beyond the letter of Divine requirement.* In addition to the morning sacrifice required by the Law, they offered *slain sacrifices* (so the Hebrew) every day. Then, not content with burning unleavened cakes on the altar as a praise offering, they burned also the leavened cakes which were to be eaten at the sacrificial meal (see Keil, *in loc.*). As to the free offerings, they carried the provision for having them made beyond the command by having them cried. Thus, so far as forms went, the idol-loving, corrupt, rebellious people were almost exemplary worshippers—went further, indeed, than true worshippers had always felt called upon to go. “It is a characteristic of idolatry and schism to profess extraordinary zeal for God’s worship, and go beyond the letter and spirit of his Law by arbitrary will-worship and self-idolizing fanaticism” (Lange). To compensate for the utter absence of the spirit, the letter is made to do double and vicarious duty.

III. TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO THE EXTERNAL FORM OF AN ORDINANCE TENDS TO THE VIOLATION OF THE SPIRIT OF IT. On the one hand, the spirit gets lost sight of through inattention, and on the other hand, the inventive faculty introduces practices inconsistent with it. 1. *In their anxiety to offer more than was required Israel offered a thing that was forbidden.* To “kindle praise offerings of that which is leavened” was contrary to Levitical law. The leavened bread of the praise offering, which they burned along with the unleavened cakes and oil, was not to be burned, but eaten (Lev. ii. 11; vii. 12—14). The human mind cannot add to a Divine ordinance anything in character. The addendum will either obscure or traverse the religious rite to which it is attached. God’s ordinances, like his oracles, can only be added to under a heavy penalty—the penalty of mistaken action arising out of erroneous thought. 2. *They destroyed the essentially spontaneous character of the free-will offerings by endeavouring to make them practically compulsory.* These offerings must be made of the offerer’s free will (Lev. xxii. 19). Made under compulsion, moral or otherwise, they lost their spontaneous character, and might as well not have been made at all. And what but compulsion was it to “proclaim and publish,” or literally to “call out” for them? God’s ordinance can be safely and rightly observed only in God’s way. In such a matter human invention, if it interferes, is sure to err. Hence the so emphatic and frequent warnings in Scripture against “the commandments and ordinances of men.” 3. *This amateur tinkering of Divine institutions is very agreeable to human nature.* “For so ye love it.” Unspiritual men love the forms of religion if they serve as a means of escape from its realities. They love them more still if, by observing them, they can seem to accomplish a salvation by works. They love them most of all when they are partially of their own invention. Almost all human ordinances in religion are the expression of man’s love of his own intellectual progeny.

IV. THE MULTIPLICATION OF ACTS OF WILL-WORSHIP IS ONLY THE MULTIPLICATION OF SIN. The close association of the words “transgression” and “sacrifice” would indicate that the sacrifice itself was sinful. 1. *It was not meant to please God, being an act of pure self-will.* That which will please God must be meant to please him. A formal religious act, if done for our own pleasure, and not as an act of service to God, is valueless (Col. ii. 20—23). Will-worship is self-worship. It is only an insidious way of “satisfying the flesh.” It is a thing by which God is not honoured, but dethroned, and by which man is prejudiced with God and not commended (Isa. ii. 11). 2. *It was not fitted to please him, being observed in a manner contrary to his will.* God’s ordinances had been altered. The alteration of form in every case had been a violation of the spirit. The ordinances were no longer God’s, but something different from and

Inconsistent with the thing he had appointed. The observance of them was not service, but disobedience and rebellion. For the Nadabs and Abihus who offer strange fire before the Lord there is reserved the fire of his wrath and not the light of his favour. 3. *It was reeking with the wickedness with which it was deliberately mixed up.* "Multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices." The "obedience" to himself which "is better than sacrifice" was entirely wanting. The "mercy" to men which he will have "and not sacrifice" had been desiderated in vain. With one hand they piled high the offering, and with the other piled higher still the trespass. And in so doing they piled the mountain of a moral impossibility between them and acceptance. The form of worship, in combination with the reality of sin, is a spiritual monstrosity which, as an offering to God, may not be so much as named. God will take no gift from a sin-stained hand (Isa. i. 15). "If we regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear us" (Ps. lxi. 18). If we lift up unclean hands in worship, he will not accept (1 Tim. ii. 8). Let us "wash our hands in innocence" when we go to the "holy altar." With clouds of sin hovering over our sanctuary service no dew of Divine favour can ever fall.

Vers. 6—13.—*Judgment the Divine retort to human sin.* This is the sad history of God's vain contentings with an incorrigible nation. In ch. iii. is an account of the mercies by which he at first had tried to draw them. All that had failed utterly. They met privilege with inappreciation, friendship with rebuff, and favour with incredible disregard. Then he had changed his tactics. They would not be drawn, perhaps they might be driven. The experiment was worth the making, and the record of it is in these verses.

I. THE VARIED VISITATIONS OF JEHOVAH. "So then God had but one gift which he could bestow, one only out of the rich storehouse of his mercies, since all besides were abused—chastisement" (Pusey). This he sent: 1. *In diverse forms.* He reduced them by famine, which often acts as a moral depletive, by cutting off its supply from lust. He plagued them with pestilence—a visitation that strikes terror into the boldest hearts. He slew them with the sword of their enemies—a fate which has terrors peculiarly its own. He swallowed them up in earthquakes—the most portentous and awful of earthly phenomena. 2. *In increasing severity.* Famine is direful, but it is directed primarily against the means of life. Pestilence is ghastlier, for it is directed against the life itself. The sword is more terrible than either, for it takes the life with circumstances of cruelty, which are an added horror. The earthquake is the most terror-moving of all, for it summons the overwhelming forces of nature to our destruction. 3. *With differentiating circumstances in different cases.* There was nothing humdrum in the visitations, no pitching them on the dead level of hackneyism or prescription. (1) *The drought came three months before harvest.* This was a most unseasonable and fatal time. It was in February, just when the latter rain was due. The seed would be braided, or just in the stage in which rain was the one thing absolutely essential to life and growth. Drought at this season "is utterly ruinous to the hopes of the farmer. A little earlier or a little later would not be so fatal, but drought three months before harvest is entirely destructive" ('The Land and the Book'). (2) *It came on one place and not on another.* Ordinarily the showers fall impartially. They water the fields of the just and the unjust alike (Matt. v. 45). They refresh the wilderness where no man is, as abundantly as the cultivated land, with its teeming population (Job xxxviii. 26). When they become eclectic, falling on one city or field and not on another, the feature reveals miraculous intervention. When, as probably in this case (see Prov. iii. 33), the watered fields or cities are those of the righteous, the adjustment is eloquent of the moral government of a God who hates sin (Isa. lxv. 13). On the artificially irrigated gardens, where drought would not readily tell, he sent blasting, mildew, and worms (ver. 9). In the repertory of nature he found an instrument of destruction suited to every possible case, and in the allocation of these was revealed his omnipotent and resourceful hand. The overthrow of "some" when others escaped (ver. 11) was a providence burdened with the same lesson. (3) *The cause and its effect are set close together for identification.* "The piece whereupon it rained not withered," etc. The nearer results are to their causes the easier it is to see the connection between them. God, both in the visitation and the record of it, pointedly

associates the drought with the sin, and the withering with the drought, and thus puts his signature and endorsement on his disciplinary work. 4. *In minute correspondence to prophetic warnings.* They were plagued with pestilence "after the manner of Egypt" (ver. 10). This Moses had circumstantially announced would be the result of disobeying the Law revealed on Sinai (Deut. xxviii. 27, 60), whilst immunity from it was promised in connection with fealty and obedience (Deut. vii. 15). Then, with blood-curdling explicitness (vers. 6, 7, 10), famine, pestilence, the sword, and desolation (Lev. xxvi. 23—33), blasting, mildew, drought, and locusts (ver. 9; Deut. xxviii. 21—26, 38, 42), and, to crown all, destruction and ruin, as of Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. xxix. 22—28), are piled (ver. 11), Ossa on Pelion, in prophetic intimation to Israel to be "upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever" (Deut. xxviii. 46). In all this the work of identifying national judgments, as from a pledge-keeping and sin-avenging Jehovah, is made easy to all but the wilfully blind.

II. **THEIR MEAGRE RESULTS.** Judgments fell thick and wide in five varieties of terror-moving severity and appositeness, and five times the prophet, gleaning vainly after the scythes of God for a grain of good result, can but repeat the sadly reproachful refrain, "Yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord." 1. *The sinner refuses to believe that his affliction is punishment.* He attributes it to accident, or bad management, or natural causes, or the malice of others, as the case may be. While unconscious of his sin, he is necessarily blind to the significance of his suffering, and until he sees this he cannot profit by it. If men would "hear the rod and who hath appointed it" they would have realized a primary condition of improvement under it. 2. *Suffering is not in itself purifying.* A bad man it often makes worse. He wants to "curse God and die." Even if the hardening stops short of this, he is frequently soured and embittered. Suffering, to be beneficial, must not go alone. It prepares for other measures. It makes men more amenable to moral influence, but if no such influence be brought to bear in connection with it, it is no more fitted of itself to purify the character than ploughing is to fertilize the desert sand. "Bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him." 3. *The love of sin is stronger than the fear of suffering.* Courses, which all observation and experience declare to be ruinous to health and happiness, are entered on deliberately by millions. Even the physical evil consequences of the early steps in sinful indulgence, which are soon felt, do not arrest the evil-doer in his way. By the confirmed sinner hell itself is practically, if not consciously, preferred to reformation. Only what weakens the love of sin secures the successful application of suffering for its removal. The operation of one or other of these principles, or the concurrence of them all, no doubt accounted for Israel's persistent sinning even in the fire.

III. **THE LAST RESORT TO WHICH GOD WILL NOW BETAKE HIMSELF.** "Therefore thus will I do unto thee." The terror of these words is in nothing lessened by their vagueness. It is evident rather: 1. *That the thing menaced would in point of severity be an advance upon all that had yet been done.* Only thus would there be any use in adopting it. After expostulation the rod, and after the rod a sword—that is the logical order of corrective measures. "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee," was a foreshadowing of God's consistent policy. 2. *It would involve being brought face to face with God.* "Because I will . . . prepare" (ver. 12). The kind or occasion of the meeting with God is not explained. It is, therefore, to be taken to include all modes and occasions, whether in life, at death, or at the final judgment. And the thought of it is one of terror to the ungodly, under whatever circumstances. They can face his judgments; God is not in them, unless in figurative sense. They can face his prophets; God is not in them, unless in a spiritual sense. But to face God literally was, even to a pious Jew, like facing death (Exod. xxxiii. 20; Judg. xiii. 22); whilst to the impious it must have been the embodiment of all terror. It is from the "presence of the Lord" that the wicked in the judgment call upon the hills to hide them. That, of all things in the universe, is an ordeal they cannot face. 3. *It is left undefined that it may seem the more terrible.* We have here the eloquence of silence. The terror of the threat is enhanced by its vagueness. Familiarity breeds contempt. If a thing, however bad, is exactly defined, we can familiarize ourselves with the thought of it in time, and brace our courage up to meet it. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," but our idea of it, meantime, has an element of enlargement in its very indefiniteness. God

says vaguely "Thus," and stops short, that imagination may fill up the blank. His silence is charged with deeper meaning than any words could carry.

IV. ONE FINAL APPEAL BEFORE THE STROKE FALLS. "Prepare," etc. 1. *Look for a meeting with God.* It is inevitable. It is at hand. The fact must be faced. No good, but harm, can come out of the attempt to escape or blink it (2 Cor. v. 10; Ps. cxxxix. 7—12). 2. *Prepare for it.* This is a word of hope. Meeting with God is inevitable; but it need not necessarily be injurious. Preparation for it is possible, being enjoined, and would avail something if it were made. "God never in this life bids people or individuals prepare to meet him without a purpose of good to those who do prepare" (Pusey). 3. *Do this because of impending judgments.* "Because I will do this unto thee." We might suppose that if God was going to destroy, the preparation to meet him would be too late. But that does not follow. When Nineveh was wicked God expressed his purpose to destroy it, but when it became penitent he spared it. Hezekiah, prayerless in the particular matter, was bidden prepare to die; but Hezekiah, praying for more life, was spared fifteen years (Isa. xxxviii. 1, 5). What God will do to us, so far as it comes within our cognizance, is conditioned by what we will do to him. Until the judgment has actually fallen, the threat of it is a message of mercy. A sentence of destruction itself is a call to repentance, and so has woven into it a thread of hope. "Because I will do this unto thee, prepare."

Ver. 11.—*Burning, yet not turning.* From Moses to Amos was about seven hundred years. It is a long time with men and the works of men. But it is little in the two eternities through which the purposes of God extend. There were prophecies which it had taken all this period to mature; courses of treatment for the cure of sin pursued through all the interval, and whose last measure had not yet been taken. One of these finds record here. A new event looks out at us in the guise of an ancient prophecy (Deut. xix. 22—24). What seven centuries before had been conceived in the womb of time is here "delivered upon the mellowing of occasion."

I. GOD'S JUDGMENTS A FIRE. "Plucked out of the burning." A commentary on this figure is the association by Isaiah of "the spirit of judgment" and "the spirit of burning" (Isa. iv. 4). Like a fire: 1. *Judgments are painful.* The sensation of burning is about the most painful we know. Too severe for capital punishment, too cruel even for prisoners of war, death by burning has been generally reserved for the martyred saints. This intensest form of physical pain is a fitting symbol of the effects of God's inflictions. What he sends is the greatest of its kind. If it be pleasure it is ideal—a pleasure at his right hand for evermore. If it be pain it is phenomenal—a torment whose smoke ascendeth up for ever and ever. 2. *They are consuming.* What fire feeds on it destroys. Where the flames have passed no organic matter remains. So with God's judgments. They are the mills of God which "grind exceeding small." That on which they must fall "they destroy and consume unto the end." They are nothing if not adequate to their purpose. 3. *They are purifying.* By burning out what is inflammable they leave what is incombustible behind, unmixt and pure. This idea of refining is often associated with the fires of judgment (Zech. xiii. 9; Mal. iii. 2, 3). They seize on the dross of evil, and burn it out of the mass. When their work is done there is only the fine gold of a pure nature in the crucible. 4. *They are irresistible.* Fuel, in contact with fire, can do nothing but burn. If the flame is to be quenched it must be done by some extra agency. To be as "tow" or "stubble" in the flames (Isa. i. 31; Neh. i. 10) is the strongest possible figure for helplessness under the avenging stroke of God. Men cannot prevent it, cannot avoid it, cannot arrest it, cannot in any degree reduce its force. When he works "who shall let it"? When his day burns as an oven, who shall withstand the fire (Isa. xliii. 13; Mal. iv. 1)?

II. SINNERS ARE THE BRANDS ON WHICH IT FEEDS. "Ye were as a firebrand." There are certain steps which lead up to burning, whether literal or figurative. The brand was: 1. *Withered.* It is not on the sappy growing branch that the fire seizes. Before, in the natural course, it reaches the flames, a preliminary process has been finished. Its leaf yellows and falls, its bark shrivels, its sap dries up. Then it is mere tinder, and fit for nothing but the fire. So sin withers and kills the branches of the tree of human character. It dries up the sap of spiritual life, and so turns sere the leaf

of profession, and destroys the fruit of well-doing. In a little no function of life is possible, and all its uses are lost. To cut it down is all the husbandman can do, and to burn it follows in the natural course. 2. *Brought to the flames.* There are no prairie fires in God's domain. What is burned is first prepared, and then bound in bundles (Matt. xiii. 30) and then set fire to. There is no accident anywhere. The man by his ill-doing makes himself tinder, and God in his providence uses him for the only purpose he suits. 3. *Combustible.* Fire seeks out and feeds on what is most inflammable. There is an affinity between the two things that does not fail to bring them together. So with God's avenging fires and the fuel they consume. The vultures of his judgments spy out, and alight upon the carrion of the sinner's lusts. Every transgression of the written Law is a transgression also of the unwritten law of the nature of things, and brings punishment on and through the instrument of the sin.

III. THE BURNING THAT SCATHES WITHOUT CONSUMING. "Plucked out of the burning." This language implies: 1. *A narrow escape.* The brand had been in the fire, and actually alight. A little while and it would have been inextinguishable. The fires of judgment had been around Israel, and around her close and long. If she had been in them but a little longer she could not have come out alive. The narrowness of her escape was a fact charged with the double influence of fear as to what might have been, and gratitude for what actually was. 2. *An escape with a certain amount of injury.* The brand that has been alight has suffered. Its fair surface has been scathed and charred. It can never be its original self again. Such a thing was Israel. "Once it had been green, fresh, fragrant, with leaf or flower; now scorched, charred, blackened, all but consumed. In itself it was fit for nothing but to be cast back into the fire whence it had been rescued. Man would so deal with it, a re-creation alone could restore it. Slight emblem of a soul whose freshness sin hath withered, then God's severe judgment had half consumed; in itself meet only for the everlasting fire, from which yet God withdraws it" (Pusey). 3. *An escape managed for an important purpose.* God tries all means before going to extremities. He threatens, menaces, sets fire to, and scorches, yet after all delays to consume. (1) *This gives the sinner a final opportunity of reconsidering his relation to sin.* It is possible that a last chance of reformation may be embraced for the very reason that it is the last one. The prospect of death is a new factor in the problem of a man's relation to the Prince of life, and is likely to modify the solution. (2) *It gives him a chance of viewing sin in the light of its effects.* The charred brand knows the taste of the fire. The ultimate like the immediate punishment of sin is burning (Mark ix. 43, 44). The plagued sinner has tasted the firstfruits of his terrible retribution. He can argue from it what the harvest will be. This is all in favour of his profiting under the dispensation.

IV. THE NATURE THAT WILL CONSUME BEFORE IT WILL MELT. Israel had not repented, and was not going to repent. Rescued from the flame in unspeakable mercy for a season, the brand would have to be thrust in again and burned. This unconquerable hardness was that: 1. *Of a nature that had strayed.* The hardest sinner is the apostate. He sins against light, against favours received, against experience enjoyed, against gracious influences felt. To have beaten down, and sinned in spite of all these deterrents, argues a hardness and determination that the stranger to gracious influences has not had an opportunity of acquiring. Paul tells us that those who have so sinned cannot be "renewed to repentance" (Heb. vi. 4—6). 2. *Of a nature that had been hardened by punishment.* There is a degree of induration in the back that has experienced the lash. The brand put into the fire and taken out again is hardened by the process. The criminal often leaves the prison more callous than he entered it. So with the subjects of Divine judgment. If they are not melted by it they are indurated. Hatred to God and love to the sin are intensified, rebelliousness is stirred up, self-will is put on its mettle, and so moral insensibility is increased by the process of resistance. 3. *Of a nature in which sin is supreme.* In most natures there is a struggle between good and evil. It is largely a question of circumstances, which will preponderate at any given time. Temptation is resisted sometimes, and sometimes yielded to, according to our mood and the manner in which it is brought to bear. This indicates a state of war between the law in the members and the law in the mind, victory inclining to Israel or to Amalek as the hands of conscience are upheld. But

when a man sins invariably, under whatever pressure of temptation, and when there is no temptation at all—sins in spite of all conceivable deterrent circumstances—the case is different. He says to evil, "Be thou my good." His moral nature is inverted. He will not mould into a vessel of mercy now. He is "a vessel of wrath and fitted for destruction."

Ver. 12.—*The great preparation.* "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel." etc. Here an important duty fathers itself on a stupendous fact. An omnipotent God is in judgment with sinful Israel. His wrath has expressed itself in bolt after bolt of judgment already hurled. But these measures are far from embodying all his punitive resources. In the failure of these to bring repentance there are woes unnamed, because unutterable, still in store. If Israel, then, would have the heaviest artillery of retribution kept out of action, they had need bestir themselves in the matter of a duty the further neglect of which must precipitate disaster.

I. GOD AND MEN LIVING APART. The enjoyment of God's presence was paradise (Gen. iii. 8), and will be heaven (1 Thess. iv. 17); that privilege lost is death (Gen. iii. 24), and will be hell (Luke xvi. 26). 1. *The wicked neither have God's presence nor desire it.* "God drove out the man," when he became a sinner; and all men, as sinners, are "afar off." Purity and impurity are incompatible, and there can be no fellowship between them. Righteousness and unrighteousness are antagonistic, and cannot come together without coming into collision. Man's instinctive consciousness of this led him to anticipate expulsion from God's presence by trying to run away (Gen. iii. 8). The separation between God and the sinner is thus by consent, and in the nature of the case, and so inevitable during the *status quo*. 2. *The righteous enjoy it in the imperfect measure in which they desire it.* The need of Divine fellowship, universal with men, becomes conscious when they become spiritual (Ps. xlii. 2). As supply everywhere meets demand (Phil. iv. 19), and measures it, the drawing near of God is synchronous with the springing of desire for it (Matt. v. 6), as well as proportioned to its strength (Rev. xxi. 3). To each of us God comes when we desire him, and as we desire him. If the presence be intermittent or incognizable, it is because appreciation is inadequate, and the longing for it irregular or weak (Isa. lvii. 15; xliii. 22). 3. *To desire it perfectly and possess it fully is heaven.* "Heaven is endless longing accompanied with an endless fruition" (Maclaren). In it there is perfection of the faculties which commune with God. There is perfection of opportunity for their exercise. Accordingly, there is perfect attainment of the normal result. We are "with Christ," and "know even as also we are known."

II. CERTAIN OCCASIONS ON WHICH THEY NEVERTHELESS MEET. The wicked fear God (Rom. viii. 15) and hate him (Rom. viii. 7), would be miserable in his presence (Rev. vi. 16), and so do all they can to keep away from it (Job xxii. 17; xxi. 14). But: 1. *They meet him in the dispensations of providence.* He is their King. He rules their life. All the events in it are of his disposing. He is where he operates, and so in each operation of which they are the subjects they meet him. Especially does he come to them in his judgments, which they are provoking every day. Misfortune, sickness, death,—these in their order, for a widening circle, and at ever closer quarters, are occasions of meeting God which none would choose, yet none can shun. 2. *They meet him in the influences of his grace.* "No one's salvation is so desperate, no one is so stained with every kind of sin, but that God cometh to him by holy inspirations to bring back the wanderer to himself" (Jerome, in Pusey). The strivings of the Spirit are unnoticed often, and resisted often (Luke xix. 44; Acts vii. 51), and so are in the end withdrawn (Gen. vi. 3); but, so far as we know, they are universal. As truly as he met the Prophet Balaam in the way does God meet men in the exercise of constraining or restraining grace. 3. *They shall meet him in the judgment-day.* "Before him shall be gathered all nations." This meeting is sure, and will be unutterably momentous. All other meetings are preliminary and preparatory to it. It will gather up and declare and finally administer their cumulative results. The wicked shall be finally banished from God's presence, and the righteous be finally admitted to it; and so for each it shall be the great meeting and the last meeting.

III. THE PREPARATION NEEDED FOR SUCH ENCOUNTERS. Israel was evidently deficient in this; not expecting the meeting and not furnished for it. In making it

we must: 1. *Prepare a character.* To meet God satisfactorily men must be like him. To see him on the one hand, or relish him on the other, or be capable in any sense of holding communion with him, a man must be pure (Matt. v. 8; 2 Cor. vi. 14). He must bring to the meeting a character in sympathy with God's, if he would bring a blessing away. 2. *Prepare a case.* Man before God is a criminal, guilty, condemned, and sentenced. He wants all this reversed, and he must be able to show reason before it can be done. And what are the elements essential to his case? Clearly the penalty he was under must have been exhaustively endured (1 Pet. ii. 24); the Law he is under must have been perfectly obeyed (Isa. xlii. 21); both these things must have been done with the approval and by the appointment of God (Heb. v. 4, 5); and the man must be intelligently resting his case on these facts. In other words, there must be Divine vicarious obedience and death, divinely recognized, and rested in by faith. Any appearance before God apart from these must end in confusion. 3. *Prepare an advocate.* Man cannot plead his own case. He has no *locus standi*. He can approach God only through a mediator (1 John ii. 1). This mediator, to be admissible, must have Divine recognition (Isa. xlii. 1; Heb. v. 4, 5); to be efficient, must have Divine power (Ps. lxxxix. 19; Matt. xxviii. 18); and to be available, must have Divine sovereign love for men (Eph. v. 2). These conditions meet, and meet only, and always met, in Jesus Christ. He is the one Advocate of every dispensation. Access into the antitypical holiest of all has been one thing and by one way always (Heb. ix. 8; x. 19—22). It is and was and shall be only spiritual and through the Son of God. 4. *Prepare at once.* To Israel a meeting in judgment had been long foreshadowed, and was now overdue. It might be any time, and must be soon. A surprise—and in like circumstances it is the same with all—was probable, and would be disastrous (Rev. iii. 3). To prepare immediately was, therefore, a duty as urgent as it was clear (Matt. xxiv. 44). It is ill beginning to dig a well when the house of life is already on fire.

IV. THE CONSIDERATIONS THAT MOVE US TO PREPARE. In the context these are written large. There is: 1. *An implied promise.* "It has hope in it to be bidden to prepare" (Pusey). The person so enjoined is not yet given up. The menaced doom is not yet inevitable. The way in which God shall be met, and so the result of the meeting, is still capable of being modified. Every call to action is an implicit promise of the result to which it naturally leads. There is also: 2. *An explicit threat.* "Thus will I do unto thee." There is a vagueness here that is far more terrible than the most explicit denunciation. A series of woes already sent has just been named. But there is a woe that is unutterable in reserve, and already on its way. This, because words are too weak to express it, is left to the imagination to picture. "Thus will I do unto thee," he says, and attempts to particularize no further, where the sentiment is too terrible for words. And so it is with the woe in store for all the impenitent wicked. It cannot be literally defined, and so is suggested by figures such as "the blackness of darkness" (Jude 13), "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched" (Mark ix. 48). But, however figuratively represented, the woe is real, is prepared, is being kept in store, is incomparably great, and shall fall as God is true. 3. *Whether we are prepared or not, the meeting with God must come.* "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." There is a needs be in the case. The purpose of God must be fully carried out in issuing all the matters that go down unsettled to the grave. The righteousness of God must conclusively be vindicated in meting out to all rewards according to their works. The truth of the Divine Word, pledged in promise and in threat, must be established for ever in the answering of event to explicit prediction. The meeting may be a joy to us or a shame, as we choose to have it; but it must be a fact. 4. *A feeling of unreadiness is a necessary step to preparation.* The measure of a sinner's fancied readiness to face his Maker is the measure of his ignorance as to what real fitness implies. The man who has been brought to say, "I dare not face God," has made one step in advance. He is disillusionized. His eyes are open and his conscience awake. Self-deception and false security are at an end (Rev. iii. 17, 18). The first step toward grappling with the facts has been taken when once we have fairly faced them. Realize that you are sinners, and the grace of God that bringeth salvation will find appreciation and an open door.

Ver. 13.—*The God with whom we have to do.* God always acts in character. From the thing he is may be inferred the quality of the thing he will do. We see him here—

I. AS REVEALED BY HIS NAMES. Each Divine name and title is a Divine revelation; sets forth some one of God's incomparable perfections. 1. *Jehovah*, "The Being;" "the Living One." In contradistinction to idols, having real existence. In contradistinction to created things, having eternal existence. In contradistinction to all outside himself, having necessary existence. Jehovah is the true God and alone claiming faith, the self-existent God and alone giving life, the eternal God and alone conferring immortality. 2. *God*, "The Adorable One." The Sum of all excellence. The Object of all worship. The Inspirer of all veneration. The Being who at once deserves and commands the heart's whole allegiance and devotion. 3. *Of hosts*, "God of the armies." The hosts are the heavenly bodies (Gen. ii. 1; Deut. iv. 19), the angels (Josh. v. 14, 15; 1 Kings xxii. 19; Ps. ciii. 21; cxlviii. 2), and men (Exod. xii. 41). "All these he made, owns, keeps, controls, and uses. He is the universal Sovereign, and "doeth according to his will" everywhere, always, and without appeal. Such a Being it is no light thing to meet. Just as it is done will utter ruin or absolute safety result.

II. AS REVEALED BY HIS WORKS. The worker puts something of himself into his work—the author into his book, the painter into his picture, the mechanic into his machine. And so with God (Ps. xix. 1). 1. *He produces physical phenomena*. Three kinds are enumerated: (1) solid matter, "the mountains;" (2) gaseous matter, "the wind;" (3) ethereal matter, "dawn, darkness." Matter in all forms is the creature of God. Its mutations are the doing of his power. Its elements are the instruments of his hand. He does to it and by it what his own moral excellence prompts. And thus it reveals him. We

"View great Nature's open eye,
And see within it trembling lie
The portrait of the Deity."

2. *He reveals mental phenomena*. "Maketh known to man what is his [man's] thought." The power of introspection is peculiar to man of earthly creatures. He takes cognizance of what passes in his own mind; reads his thoughts, and analyzes the process of thinking. This is among the highest exercises of reason. It is a revelation of its marvellous powers, and so of the wisdom and power of him by whom the faculty was bestowed. If a man's thoughts are open to himself, much more are they to God. The mind can do all this; what cannot the Maker of it do (Jer. xvii. 9, 10)? 3. *He rules moral phenomena*. "Goeth over the high places of the earth." The "high places" are the exalted people. All these he rules. The highest do his bidding. From prince to peasant all are but clay in the Potter's hands. Who, then, shall strive with him? What can avail against his transcendent might? All natural forces, all creaturely existences, are but tools in his hand, and ministers that do his will. This is the God we must meet, and to meet whom we may well prepare.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Hypocrisy*. The rhetorical fervour of the prophet leads him in this passage to address himself to the guilty nobles of Israel in terms of bitter irony. That descendants of Abraham should have forsaken Jehovah, should have set up altars to a golden calf, or to deities of their heathen neighbours,—this cuts the prophet to the heart. But that, even whilst acting thus, they should retain some of their ancient observances, should profess any reverence for the precepts of the Law of God,—this is the most cruel wound. Hence this language of irony, the severity of which is apparent to every reader.

I. IT IS HYPOCRISY OUTWARDLY TO REVERENCE THE ORDINANCES OF GOD WHILST REALLY SERVING GOD'S ENEMIES. Sacrifices, tithes, leaven, offerings—all of which are mentioned in this passage—were prescribed in the Mosaic Law. The sin of the Israelites lay here. All the time that they were attending to these observances, they were worshipping idols, and breaking the first and second commandments of the ten. Virtually, all men who profess Christianity, and yet love the sinful practices and

pleasures of the world, are guilty of this sin. It is hypocrisy, which is worse than an open defiance of the Divine authority.

II. **HYPOCRISY SEEMS TO MEET A NEED OF DEPRAVED AND SINFUL NATURES.** "This liketh you;" "So ye love to have it;"—such is the reflection of Amos upon this evil conduct. Men do not "like" to break off the associations of the past; they do not "like" to turn their back upon the principles they have formerly professed; they do not "like" to forfeit the apparent advantages of conformity to the requirements of religion. Yet, at the same time, they are not willing to forsake the pleasures of sin, to deny self, to take up the cross.

III. **HYPOCRISY MAY DECEIVE SOCIETY, AND MAY EVEN DECEIVE THE HYPOCRITE, BUT IT CANNOT DECEIVE GOD.** The conscious aim of the hypocritical is often to impress their companions with the belief of their goodness. But in many cases men actually persuade themselves of their own piety, whilst their life is in flagrant contradiction to the assumption. Let it never be forgotten that God "searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins of the children of men;" that his scrutinizing gaze cannot be averted, nor his righteous judgment avoided. Those who multiply insincere observances really "multiply transgression." And multiplied transgressions surely involve multiplied penalties.

APPLICATION. Bethel and Gilgal are not the only spots on earth where hypocrisy has been practised. The question of all importance for every professed worshipper to put to himself is this—Is there harmony between the language which I use in devotion and the thoughts and desires of my heart, the actions and habits of my life?—1'.

Vers. 6—11.—*National calamities are Divine chastisements.* Graphic and morally impressive is the catalogue of Divine judgments which the inspired prophet here draws up and puts upon record for the admonition of future ages.

I. **OF WHAT THESE CALAMITIES CONSIST.** They are thus enumerated in the several verses. 1. Famine. 2. Drought. 3. Blight. 4. Pestilence. 5. War. 6. Destruction. Alas! from the beginnings of human history such have been the sad and weary experiences of the nations. Some of these ills appear to be beyond human control; others of them are more or less attributable to human ignorance, to human neglect, to unbridled lust and passion. The peculiarity of their treatment in the books of Scripture is not in their description, but in the connection shown to exist between them and the moral life and probation of man, and the righteous government of God.

II. **FOR WHAT INTENT THESE CALAMITIES WERE INFLICTED.** They are not here regarded simply as events; even the philosophical historian does not regard them thus. 1. They convince the observant and pious mind of the concern of God in human affairs, and of God's indignation with human sin. Certain philosophers imagined the great rulers of the universe to be indifferent to all the affairs of men. The Scriptures teach us that nothing escapes Divine observation, that nothing eludes Divine justice, God's censure, or approval. 2. They induce, in the case of the right-minded, repentance and reformation. When God's judgments are abroad, the inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness. If events teach men that "the way of transgressors is hard," they may also teach them that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every child whom he receiveth." "Before I was afflicted," said the psalmist, "I went astray; but now have I kept thy Word."

III. **IN WHAT SPIRIT THESE CALAMITIES ARE RECEIVED.** 1. There can be no question that, in many instances, they are the occasion of hardening of the heart. As in the case of Pharaoh King of Egypt, afflictions may increase insensibility and rebelliousness. 2. There are cases in which chastisements of the kind here described produce national humiliation and repentance. Such was the case with Nineveh, even when Jonah preached and foretold the city's doom; the people repented even before the calamity came, and so averted it. And there were instances in the history of stiff-necked Israel where chastisement led to general abasement and repentance. 3. There are cases in which calamity fails to produce a general reformation, but is nevertheless the means of effecting in individuals a genuine repentance and a sincere conversion unto God.—T.

Ver. 6.—*Obduracy reproached.* There is a mingling of severity and pathos in this

language of Jehovah addressed to Israel. The repetition of the reproach adds to its effectiveness and solemnity. As one calamity after another is described, and as all are represented as chastisements inflicted by Divine righteousness, the touching words are added, "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord."

I. THE WANDERINGS IMPLIED. In order that there may be a return to God, there must first have been a departure from God. Such had certainly been the case with Israel. The people and their rulers had alike done wickedly in departing from their covenant God. They had mingled with the worship of Jehovah practices superstitious and idolatrous. They had broken the Divine laws of morality, and that in a flagrant and shameful manner.

II. THE SUMMONS AND INVITATION TO RETURN WHICH HAD BEEN ADDRESSED BY GOD TO ISRAEL. Dealing with sinful men, a benevolent God has not been content simply to reveal truth and to inculcate holiness. He has ever addressed the children of men as those who have disregarded the truth and disobeyed the Law. Revelation is full of declarations of Divine mercy and promises of Divine forgiveness.

III. THE CHASTISEMENTS WHICH WERE INTENDED TO PRODUCE REPENTANCE AND REFORMATION. Words proving insufficient, they were followed by acts. It is dangerous for us confidently to interpret the plans of Divine providence. Yet God most high is the supreme Ruler of the nations, and in his own Word his "dealings" with the nations are interpreted with unerring justice and truth. The several disasters recounted in this passage as having befallen Israel are declared to have been of the nature of chastisements designed to awaken reflection and to call to penitence and to newness of life. "The voice of the rod" is a voice sometimes effectual, and always morally authoritative.

IV. THE INATTENTION OF ISRAEL TO THE SUMMONS AND TO THE CHASTISEMENTS. It is amazing to learn that not only the messages of prophets and authorized heralds, but even the "judgments" of the righteous Ruler, failed to produce the intended effect. Yet so it was, and those who had been often reproved hardened their neck. In this Israel was an example of that obduracy which may be discovered in all ages and in all communities. The power of man to resist the appeals and the entreaties, the commands and the chastisements, of a righteous God, is one of the most surprising and awful facts of the moral universe.

V. THE PATHETIC REPROACH. He whose power could smite and destroy the rebellious speaks as if himself wounded and distressed by the perseverance in rebellion of those he governs. It seems as if Omniscience were astonished and appalled at human obstinacy and obduracy. Hence the expostulation, the reproach addressed to the impenitent and rebellious, "Yet have ye not returned unto me."—T.

Ver. 11.—*The brand snatched from the burning.* Amongst the methods employed by the Divine Ruler to bring Israel to repentance was some calamity, some "judgment," which overtook certain of the cities of the land. It may be doubtful whether we are to understand that those cities were, like Sodom, struck by lightning and partially consumed by fire from heaven; or were attacked and given to the flames by an invading, hostile force; or were overtaken by some disaster figuratively described in this pictorial language. In any case, the circumstances are naturally suggestive of reflections upon the methods and purposes of God's treatment of sinful men.

I. A STRIKING PICTURE OF PUNISHMENT FOR SIN. Like a city given to the flames, like a brand flung upon the blazing fire, is the man, the community, that, on account of disobedience and rebelliousness, is abandoned for a time and for a purpose to the ravages of affliction and calamity. How often has a sinful, proud, luxurious, oppressive nation been consigned to this baptism of fire! How often has the wilful and obdurate nature been made to endure the keen and purifying flames! The connection between sin and suffering does indeed abound in mysteries; yet it is a reality not to be denied.

II. A STRIKING PICTURE OF THE DANGER OF DESTRUCTION TO WHICH THE IMPENITENT AND SINFUL ARE EXPOSED. Fire may purify the gold from dross, but it may consume and utterly destroy the chaff. Some nations exposed to the flames of war and calamity have perished and disappeared. Some individual lives seem, at all events, to have vanished in the flames of Divine judgment. The peril is imminent and undeniable.

III. A STRIKING PICTURE OF DIVINE DELIVERANCE. As the brand is plucked, snatched from the burning, so that, although bearing the traces of fire upon it, it is not consumed, even so did it happen to Israel that Divine mercy saved, if not the community, yet many individuals, from destruction. Where, indeed, is the soul, saved from spiritual death, of which it may not be said, "Here is a brand plucked from the burning"? And there are instances of salvation in which the similitude is peculiarly appropriate. There are those whose sins have, by reason of enormity and repetition, deserved and received no ordinary punishment in this life. And amongst such there are not a few whom the pity, the wisdom, and the power of our Saviour-God have preserved from destruction, and who abide living witnesses to his delivering might and grace.

APPLICATION. Here is encouragement for those who labour for the conversion and salvation of the degraded and debased. Even such, though nigh unto burning, may be plucked by Divine mercy from the flames of judgment.—T.

Ver. 12.—"Prepare to meet thy God." Forbearance has its limits, and probation is not for ever. Discipline itself is temporary, and, when the purposes of God concerning men are fulfilled, will come to an end. There is a time for preparation, and then after that comes the time for reckoning and for recompense.

I. THE PERSONS DIRECTED TO PREPARE FOR THIS MEETING. 1. Especially the disobedient, the threatened, the chastened. The previous verses make it evident that it was to these that the admonition was particularly addressed. The people of Israel, as a whole, had departed from God, and had been censured and chastened by God. It seems to have been in consequence of their impotence and obduracy that they were addressed in the solemn language of the text. 2. Yet the appeal has surely reference to such as were learning the lessons so powerfully though so painfully inculcated by Divine providence. There were individuals disposed to profit by the awful dispensations that were befalling the nation, and by the faithful admonitions addressed by inspired prophets.

II. THE EVENT DESCRIBED AS A MEETING WITH GOD. 1. It is not to be supposed that there is ever a time when God is not in immediate contact with his creatures. We meet him at every turn, we meet him at every moment. His eye is ever upon us, his hand is ever over us. "Whither shall we flee from his presence?" To the pious soul this thought is grateful, congenial, welcome. To the irreligious soul this thought should be productive of sincere humiliation and penitence. 2. There are, however, occasions appointed by the providence of God upon which the sons of men are constrained, manifestly and unmistakably, to meet their God. Nations meet God in national crises, in solemn conjunctures of incident, of probation, of destiny. Individuals meet God in critical events in human life, in remarkable experiences of the inevitable incidence of the moral law of God. 3. All Scripture declares that there is a future judgment, when all the intelligent and accountable shall be summoned into the Divine presence and before the Divine tribunal. "After death the judgment;" "Then shall every man give account of himself to God." We are directed to keep this day of account before our view, and to live in prospect of it.

III. THE PREPARATION HERE ENJOINED. 1. In character it must be thorough and sincere. Nothing hypocritical or superficial can suffice. For the meeting anticipated is with him who is the Searcher of all hearts. 2. In nature it must consist of true repentance and true faith. A turning of the heart from evil, and a turning unto God,—these are essential. Unfeigned repentance and cordial faith are indispensable. 3. In manifestation it must be in conformity with Divine requirements. If thou wouldst meet God with holy confidence, then must thou "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God."—T.

Ver. 13.—The majesty of God. This and several other passages in this book of prophecy prove to us that Amos was a man who lived much in communion with nature and nature's God. A herdsman and a gatherer of figs, he passed his earlier years, not in towns, in palaces, in libraries, in schools, in the temple, but beneath the open sky, and in the presence of the solemnity, the grandeur, the sublimity, of the works of the Eternal. He had climbed the mountains of Judæa, had gazed upon

the rugged ranges that closed in the Dead Sea, had scanned the desert of the south, and had delighted himself in the blue waters of the Mediterranean. He had outwatched the stars and greeted the glorious dawn; he had bowed his head before the tempest, and heard the voice of the Almighty in the thunder's crash. He had read the scroll which unfolds itself to every observant eye; he had listened to the language best heard in solitude and seclusion. His meditations concerning God as known, not by the book of the law, but by the book of nature, relate to—

I. GOD'S CREATIVE POWER. This he doubtless recognized wherever he turned, by day and by night, in the peaceful plain and upon the awful hills. He here refers to two instances of the Maker's might, two proofs of his incomparable majesty. "He formeth the *mountains*." The stability and the immensity of the mountains have ever possessed a charm and an inspiration for the sensitive and thoughtful student of nature. Little as Amos could have known of those processes by which the enduring hills have been fashioned, he was capable of appreciating their testimony to the Creator, and probably of recognizing their symbolism of Divine attributes. The *wind* is a phenomenon which has always impressed the observer of God's works. Its immense power and its inscrutable mystery, its tenderness as it breathes through the forests at eventide, its awfulness when it roars upon the mountains, when it lashes into fury the mighty waves of the sea, are suggestive of the manifold operations of the all-comprehending Deity. And our Lord himself has reminded us of its symbolical significance as setting forth the wonderful, varied, and inexplicable manifestations of the presence and the working of the Divine Spirit.

II. GOD'S SPIRITUAL INSIGHT. When the prophet describes God as "declaring unto man what is his thought," the language has sometimes been taken to refer to the Divine thought revealed to man; but it probably is to be interpreted of that omniscient energy by virtue of which the Eternal penetrates the spiritual nature of men and reads their thoughts afar off. That the creating Spirit is thus in perpetual and intimate contact with those created spirits into which he has breathed the breath of life, and which he has fashioned in his own likeness: this is reasonable enough. Yet the enunciation of this unquestionable truth should have two effects upon us. It should enhance our conception of God's majesty, and so call forth our adoration and our praise; and it should make us concerned as to the moral quality of the thoughts of our minds, which the omniscient and holy God must surely estimate with justice, and by a standard infinitely lofty and pure.

III. GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL RULE. If we take literally the language, "That maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth," then these clauses are additional acknowledgments of the Creator's power and wisdom as displayed in nature. But coming after the preceding clause, which refers to men's thoughts, they seem to invite another interpretation. God's presence is to be recognized in the order of the world, in the tokens of moral government, in the workings of retributive law—in a word, in the facts which are justly deemed providential.

IV. GOD'S GLORIOUS NAME. To the Hebrew mind there was a very close connection between the nature and attributes and the Name of the Divine Ruler and Lord. He was Jehovah, *i.e.* the Self-existing and Eternal, whose Being accounts for all being beside. He was the Lord of hosts, *i.e.* supreme over all powers, possessed of all might, ordering all natures and all processes according to his own wisdom. The angelic hosts of unseen ministers and warriors, the armies of Israel and of the nations, the innumerable forces that obey the Divine behests and bring to pass the Divine purposes,—all these are beneath the cognizance and the sway of the Eternal, all these are ever executing his authoritative commandments and establishing his universal and everlasting kingdom. In the presence of a Being so glorious, so mighty, so holy, what power attaches to the mention of Scripture, "Stand in awe, and sin not"!—T.

Ver. 12.—"*Prepare to meet thy God.*" The threats which precede this summons are very indefinite. Designedly so; for the prophet wished to arouse a *general* foreboding of retribution amongst the careless people, which would have its fulfilment in national disasters, but its final consummation in another world. Such indefiniteness also makes it possible to apply his words to men of every age and country. All responsible beings must at last meet their God, and may wisely be urged to "prepare."

From the time of man's fall the all-merciful Father has been calling men to return from their evil ways. Adam was encouraged to hope in his mercy. The antediluvians were faithfully warned through Noah, the preacher of righteousness. Israel was constantly being exhorted by the inspired prophets. John the Baptist had as the burden of his preaching this same word "prepare;" and it has come ringing down the centuries to make itself heard among us also.

I. **THE JUDGMENT FORETOLD.** It is clear that the reference is to a summons to the tribunal of God, the Judge of quick and dead. There is a sense in which we may meet God in the study of his wonderful works in nature; in the strange and sometimes startling events of his providence; in the pages of his Word; in earnest supplication at his footstool. But another special and more solemn occasion is alluded to in our text—even that day when the great white throne will be set, and every man will have to give an account of all the deeds done in the body, whether good or bad. 1. *That judgment is certain to come.* Even nature seems to point onward to some crisis in the future of our race. Conscience warns us that sin cannot always go unpunished, for the world is governed by a God of righteousness. Scripture constantly affirms that he has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world by that Man whom he has ordained. 2. *It is quite uncertain when it will come.* "Of that day and of that hour knoweth no man." It will come suddenly and unexpectedly, as a thief in the night. Death will end our time of probation, and no one knows where and when it may meet him. Therefore "prepare to meet thy God." 3. *When it comes the trial will be thorough and final.* All actions, together with their motives, are under the Divine cognizance. None will escape his notice. No false excuses will avail; and, on the other hand, no mere errors will be condemned as if they were wilful sins. The good will be severed from the evil, as our Lord teaches us in the parables of the drag-net and the tares of the field.

II. **THE PREPARATION NEEDED.** We should not be urged to "prepare" unless by nature we were unprepared. It is merciful of our Judge to give us warning, counsel, and opportunity. He willeth not the death of a sinner, but would rather that he should repent and live. Had it not been possible for us to make ready, had he wished us only to hurry onward to a certain doom, we should not have heard this exhortation. But he gives us forewarning in many ways, and at certain seasons with peculiar force; e.g. when death enters our family, or some accident befalls ourselves. 1. *We need self-examination.* "Know thyself" was the advice of a heathen philosopher; but it is worth heeding by us all. We want the illumination of God's Spirit and the instruction of God's Word to aid us. "The candle of the Lord" must throw its rays into the recesses of our hearts. 2. *We need confession and repentance.* "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 3. *We need faith in the atonement of Jesus.* It is said of all sinners who safely pass the great tribunal and enter into the heavenly world, "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

III. **THE REASONS URGED.** These appear in the next verse. 1. *God is omnipotent.* "He formeth the mountains." The mightiest cannot resist him; the most subtle will not escape him. 2. *God is omniscient.* "He declareth unto man what is his thought." He is the Searcher of hearts (Ps. cxxxix. 2; Jer. xvii. 10). Nothing eludes his notice. There is warning in this thought for the wicked; and there is comfort for the righteous, because these may reflect that their unspoken prayers, and their secret self-denials, and their unfulfilled purposes, are all recognized by him. They are represented by our Lord (Matt. xxv. 37—40) as being surprised at reward coming for acts which they thought little of or had quite forgotten. "God is not unfaithful to forget your work of faith and labour of love."

Apply the words of the exhortation to the careless.—A. R.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Worship abounding with abounding sin.* "Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning," etc. The language of these verses," says Henderson, "is that of the keenest irony. The Israelites were addicted to the worship of the golden calf, and to that of idols, whereby they contracted guilt before Jehovah, and exposed themselves to his judgments; at the same time, they hypocritically professed to keep up the observance of certain feasts

which had been appointed by Moses." The subject that the text teaches is—*abounding worship with abounding sin*. The sins of Israel, the frauds, violences, and nameless iniquities, are referred to in the preceding chapters. Crimes ran riot amongst them at this period; and yet how religious they seemed to be! "Amos has described how zealously the people of Israel went on pilgrimage to Bethel and Gilgal and Beersheba, those places of sacred associations; with what superabundant diligence they offered sacrifice and paid tithes; how they would rather do too much than too little, so that they even burnt upon the altar a portion of the leavened loaves of the praise offering, which were only intended for the sacrificial meals, although none but unleavened bread was allowed to be offered; and, lastly, how in their pure zeal for multiplying the works of piety, they so completely mistook their nature as to summon by a public proclamation to the presentation of free-will offerings, the very peculiarity of which consisted in the fact that they had no other prompting than the will of the offerer" (Delitzsch). We offer two remarks on this subject.

I. *Abounding worship often IMPLIES ABOUNDING SIN*. This is the case when the worship is: 1. *Selfish*. More than half the worship of England is purely selfish. Men crowd churches, attend to religious ceremonies, and contribute to religious institutions purely with the idea of avoiding hell and getting to a happier world than this. They do not serve God for naught. Selfishness, which is bad everywhere, is never worse than when engaged in religion. 2. *Formal*. When religion is attended to as a matter of form, when sentiments are expressed without conviction, services rendered without self-sacrifice, the insincerity is an insult to Omniscience. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Abounding worship is no proof of abounding virtue and abounding godliness. Often, alas! the more worship in a community, the more corruption.

II. *Abounding worship often SPRINGS FROM ABOUNDING SIN*. It may spring from: 1. A desire to *conceal sin*. Sin is an ugly thing; it is hideous to the eye of conscience. Hence efforts on all hands to conceal. Nations endeavour to conceal the terrible abominations of infernal wars by employing the ministers of religion in connection with their fiendish work. The greatest villains have often sought to conceal their villainies by worship. 2. A desire to *compensate for evils*. Great brewers build churches and endow religious institutions in order to compensate in some measure for the enormous evil connected with their damning trade. 3. A desire to *appear good*. The more corrupt a man is, the stronger his desire to appear otherwise; the more devil in a man, the more anxious he is to look like an angel.

CONCLUSION. Do not judge the character of a nation by the number of its churches, the multitude of its worshippers, or the amount of its contributions, or efforts to proselytize men to its faith.—D. T.

Vers. 6—11.—*God's government of the world a chastising government*. "And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places," etc. In these verses the Almighty describes the various corrective measures which he had employed for effecting a moral reformation in the character of the Israelites. At the end of each chastising measure which he describes, he marks their obstinate impenitence with the expression, "Yet have ye not returned unto me." As if he had said, "The grand end of all my dealings is to bring you in sympathy, heart, and life back to me." The subject of the verses is this—God's government of the world is a *chastising government*; and three remarks are here suggested.

I. The chastisements employed are often *OVERWHELMINGLY TERRIFIC*. 1. He sometimes employs *blind nature*. Here is *famine*. "I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places." The transgressors under the Law God had threatened with famine (Deut. xxviii. 48). The Divine government has often employed famine as a ruthless and resistless messenger to chasten mankind. In the days of Elisha the demon wielded his black sceptre for seven long years (2 Kings viii. 1). The second is *drought*. "I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied." Rain—indispensable to

the life of the world—comes not by accident or blind necessity, but by the Divine will. "He watereth the hills from his chambers." To show that the rain is entirely at the disposal of the Almighty, it came upon one field and one city, and not upon another. Hence the inhabitants of the places where it rained not had to go great distances for water, and yet "were not satisfied." This is a terrible chastisement. The third is *blight*. "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens, and your vineyards, and your fig trees, and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them." A malignant atmosphere combined with devouring reptiles to destroy the produce of the land. The fourth is *pestilence and the sword*. "I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils." The allusion, perhaps, is to the pestilence with which God visited Egypt (Exod. ix.). The pestilence is God's destroying angel. Thus by blind nature God has often chastised mankind. He makes the stars in their courses fight against Sisera. Nature is a rod in his chastening hand; and what a rod it is! At his pleasure, by a touch, he can wake tempests that shall shake the globe, earthquakes that shall engulf cities, etc. Yes, whatever materialistic scientists may say, nature is nothing more than a rod in the hand of its Maker. The fifth is *fire*. "I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning." 2. He sometimes employs *human wickedness*. The sword is mentioned here. "Your young men have I slain with the sword." War, unlike famine, drought, pestilence, and fire, is human, devilish. It is the work of free agents, under the influence of infernal evil. But God employs it; he does not originate it, he does not sanction it, he does not inspire it; but he permits it and controls it for purposes of chastisement. Thus all things are at the use of his chastising government—matter and mind, angels and fiends, heaven and hell.

II. The chastisements employed are ever **DESIGNED FOR MORAL RESTORATION**. After each judgment described we have the words, "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." This is the burden and design of the whole. Note: 1. Men are alienated from the Lord. They are estranged in thought, sympathy, and purpose. Like the prodigal, they are in a far country, away from their Father. 2. Their alienation is the cause of all their misery. Estrangement from God means distance, not only from virtue, but from freedom, light, progress, dignity, blessedness. Hence the benevolence of all these chastisements. They are to restore souls. "Lo! all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring him back from the pit, that he may be enlightened with the light of the living" (Job. xxxiii. 29, 30). To every unconverted man God can say, "I have chastised you in this way and in that way, on this occasion and on that, but 'yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.'"

III. The chastisements employed often **FAIL IN THEIR GRAND DESIGN**. "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." This shows (1) the force of human depravity, and (2) the force of human freedom. Almighty goodness does not force us into goodness. Almighty love does not dragoon us into goodness. He treats us as free agents and responsible beings.—D. T.

Vers. 12, 13.—*Preparation for meeting God*. "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel," etc. "All the means that had been employed to reform the Israelites having proved ineffectual, they are here summoned to prepare for the final judgment, which was to put an end to their national existence. To this judgment reference is emphatically made in the terms כָּךְ, 'thus;' and כֵּן, 'this.' There is a brief resumption of the sentence delivered in vers. 2 and 3." We raise three observations from these words.

I. **MAN MUST HAVE A CONSCIOUS MEETING WITH GOD**. "Prepare to meet thy God." "I shall see God," says Job: "whom I shall see for myself, and not another." Yes, we shall all see God. All men ought ever and everywhere to see him, for he is the great Object in the horizon, nearer to them infinitely than aught besides. But they do not. Their spiritual eye is so closed that they see him not; they are utterly unconscious of his presence. But see him they *must* one day. All must be brought into conscious contact with him, and in his presence they will feel the greatest things

in the universe melt into nothing. The atheist who denies his existence shall see God; the worldling who ignores his existence shall see God; the theologian who misrepresents his existence shall see God. We must all see God.

II. THIS CONSCIOUS MEETING WITH GOD REQUIRES ON OUR PART PREPARATION. 1. To meet him, *reconciliation* is needed. Practically we are at enmity with him. How shall an enemy stand in his presence? Who does not feel uneasy and even distressed when he confronts a man he hates, although the man may have no disposition and no power whatever to injure him? How will the soul with enmity in its heart then confront him? "I beseech you then in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2. To meet him, *moral purity* is necessary. How will a consciously corrupt soul feel in the presence of absolute holiness? How are the flames of hell kindled? By the rays of Divine holiness falling on corrupt spirits.

"Eternal Light, eternal Light,
How pure the soul must be,
When, placed within thy searching sight,
It shrinks not, but with calm delight
Can live and look on thee!"

III. THE PROCEDURE OF GOD IS AN ARGUMENT FOR THIS PREPARATION. 1. His procedure is *terribly judicial*. "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." He was approaching the sinner in judgment, moving towards him judicially. He was coming towards the Israelites as an Avenger. And so he is ever coming towards wicked men. Prepare, therefore, to meet him. He is coming as a Judge—slowly it may be, but surely and terribly. 2. His procedure is *overwhelmingly grand*. "Lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The Lord, The God of hosts, is his Name." This magnificent description of Jehovah is given in order to urge the call to preparation.

CONCLUSION. The one mighty, loud, unceasing voice of God to man through all nature, history, and special revelation is, "Prepare to meet thy God."—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1—ch. vi. 14.—§ 3. *Third address: the prophet utters a lamentation over the fall of Israel.* (Vers. 1—3.) He calls her to repentance, while he shows wherein she has declined from the right way. To make this plain, he contrasts God's power and majesty with the people's iniquity, instances of which he gives (vers. 4—12). The only condition of safety is amendment (vers. 13—15); and as they refuse to reform, they shall have cause to lament (vers. 16, 17). This threat is enforced by the two emphatic "woes" that follow, the first of which demonstrates the baselessness of their trust in their covenant relation to God (vers. 18—27); the second denounces the careless lives of the chiefs, who, revelling in luxury, believed not in the coming judgment (ch. vi. 1—6). Therefore they shall go into captivity, and the kingdom shall be utterly overthrown (vers. 7—11), because they act iniquitously and are self-confident (vers. 12—14).

Ver. 1.—*Hear ye this word.* To show the certainty of the judgment and his own feeling about it, the prophet utters his prophecy in the form of a dirge (*kinah*, 2 Sam. i. 17; 2 Chron. xxxv. 25). Which I take up against you; or, *which I raise over you*, as if the end had come. O house of Israel; in the vocative. The Vulgate has, *Domus Israel cecidit*; so the LXX. But the present Hebrew text is most suitable, making the dirge begin at ver. 2. The ten tribes are addressed as in ver. 6.

Ver. 2.—*The virgin of Israel*; i.e. the virgin Israel; so called, not as having been pure and faithful to God, but as tenderly treated and guarded from enemies (comp. Isa. xxiii. 12; xlvii. 1; Jer. xiv. 17). *Is fallen* (comp. 2 Sam. i. 19); *she shall no more rise*. This is apparently a contradiction to the promise of restoration elsewhere expressed, but is to be explained either as referring exclusively to the ten tribes, very few of whom returned from exile, and to the kingdom of Israel, which was never re-established; or, as Pseudo-Rufinus says, "Ita debemus accipere, quod lugentis affectu cumulatus aestimavit illata discrimina, siquo funditus appellasse deletos, quos ex

maiores videret parte contritos." Forsaken upon her land; better, *she shall be dashed upon her own land*; her own soil shall witness her ruin—that soil which was "virgin," unconquered, and her own possession.

Ver. 3.—The vindication of the prophet's lament. The city that went out by a thousand. Septuagint and Vulgate, "from which went forth thousands," or, "a thousand;" i.e. which could send out a thousand warriors to the fight. In such a city only a tenth of the inhabitants shall remain; and this shall happen to small cities as well as great.

Ver. 4.—The more formal proof that Israel has merited her punishment here begins. In calling her to repentance the prophet contrasts God's requirements with her actual conduct. *Seek ye me, and ye shall live.* Two imperatives: "Seek me, and (so) live;" duty and its reward. "Seek me in the appointed way, and ye shall be saved from destruction" (comp. Gen. xlii. 18).

Ver. 5.—Bethel . . . Gilgal. The scenes of idolatrous worship, where was no true seeking of God (see note on ch. iv. 4). Beersheba. A spot about fifty miles south-west of Jerusalem, the site of which has never been lost, and is marked to this day by seven much-frequented wells. As being one of the holy places celebrated in the history of the patriarchs (Gen. xxi. 31, 33; xxvi. 23, etc.; xlii. 1), it had become a shrine of idolatrous worship, to which the Israelites resorted, though it lay far out of their territory (comp. ch. viii. 14). Gilgal shall surely go into captivity. There is in the Hebrew a play on the words here and in the following clause (*Hag-gilgal galoh yigleh*), which commentators have paralleled with such expressions as, *Capua capietur, Cremona cremabitur, Paris perira*, "London is undone." Or, taking Joshua's explanation of the name, we may say, "Roll-town shall be rolled away." Bethel shall come to nought. As Bethel, "House of God," had become Bethaven, "House of vanity" (see Hos. iv. 15), as being the temple of an idol (comp. 1 Cor. viii. 4), so the prophet, with allusion to this, says that "Bethel shall become *aven*"—vanity, nothingness, itself. No mention is made of the fate of Beersheba, because Amos has in view only the ten tribes, and the destiny of places beyond their territory is not here the object of his prediction; and indeed, when Israel was ruined, Beersheba escaped unharmed.

Ver. 6.—Break out like fire. God is called "a consuming fire" (Deut. iv. 24; Heb. xii. 29; comp. Jer. iv. 4). And devour it; Septuagint, *Ὅπως μὴ ἀναδύμῃ ὡς πῦρ ὁ οἶκος Ἰωσήφ, καὶ καταφάγῃ αὐτόν*, "Lest the house of Joseph blaze as fire, and he devour him;" Vulgate, *Ne forte comburatur ut ignis domus Joseph, et devorabit.* But it

is best to take the last member of the sentence thus: "and it (the fire) devour." The house of Joseph. Ephraim, i.e. the kingdom of Israel, of which Ephraim was the distinguishing tribe. In Bethel; or, *for Bethel*. The LXX., paraphrasing, has, *οἶκος Ἰσραὴλ*, "for the house of Israel."

Ver. 7.—The prophet brings out the contrast between Israel's moral corruption and God's omnipotence. *Ye who turn judgment to wormwood.* As Jerome puts it, "Converserunt dulcedinem iudicii in absinthii amaritudinem," "They turned the sweetness of judgment into the bitterness of absinth" (comp. ch. vi. 12). Who make judgment the occasion of the bitterest injustice. There is no syntactical connection between this verse and the last, but virtually we may append it to "seek the Lord." It would sound in people's ears as a reminiscence of Deut. xxix. 18, 20. The LXX. reads, *ὁ ποιῶν εἰς ὕψος κρίμα*, "that executeth judgment in the height," referring the sentence to the Lord, or else taking *laanah*, "wormwood," in a metaphorical sense, as elsewhere they translate it by *ἀνδύκη, πικρία, δόρυ* (Deut. xxix. 18; Prov. v. 4; Jer. ix. 15; xxiii. 15). The name "wormwood" is applied to all the plants of the genus that grew in Palestine the taste of which was proverbially bitter. And leave off righteousness in the earth; rather, *cast down righteousness to the earth* (as Isa. xxviii. 2), despise it and trample it underfoot (comp. Dan. viii. 12). This is Israel's practice; and yet God, as the next verse shows, is almighty, and has power to punish. *Righteousness* includes all transactions between man and man. The LXX. (still referring the subject to the Lord), *καὶ δικαιοσύνην εἰς γῆν ἐθήκεν*, "and he established righteousness on earth."

Ver. 8.—Striking instances are given of God's creative power and omnipotence. Seek him that maketh the seven stars. "Seek him" is not in the Hebrew. "He that maketh" etc., is in direct antithesis to "ye who turn," etc. (ver. 7). *The seven stars*; Hebrew, *kimah*, "the heap," the constellation of the Pleiades (Job ix. 9; xxxviii. 31). The Septuagint here has, *ὁ ποιῶν πλάττει*, but in Job has *πλάττει*. The Vulgate gives, *facientem Arcetorum*. Symmachus and Theodotion give *πλάττει* in the present passage. The identification of this term is discussed in the "Dictionary of the Bible," i. 891. The observation of this most remarkable cluster among the heavenly bodies would be natural to the pastoral life of Amos. And Orion; Hebrew, *kesil*, "foolish," a rebel, the name being applied to Nimrod, whose representation was found by the Easterns in this constellation. Some render *kesil*, "gate;" others connect it with the Arabic

schail, equivalent to Sirius, or Canopus. The Septuagint here has *καὶ μετασκευάζων*, "and changing," which looks as if the translator was not familiar with the Hebrew word, and substituted something in its place. It reads *ἡσπῆρος* in Job xxxviii. 31. Turneth the shadow of death into the morning. "The shadow of death," the depth of darkness. This and the following clause do not simply state that the regular interchange of day and night is in God's hands, but rather notify that God is a moral Governor of the world. He saves men from the utmost dangers, from the darkness of sin and from the night of ignorance; and, on the other hand, he sends calamity on those that offend his Law (comp. ch. iv. 13). **Maketh the day dark with night**; literally, as the Septuagint, *ἡμέραν εἰς νύκτα συσκοτάων*, "darkeneth day into night." That calleth for the waters of the sea, etc. As judgments are the prophet's theme, this expression cannot be an intimation of the working of the natural law by which the moisture taken up from the sea as cloud returns upon the earth as rain (comp. ch. ix. 6). Rather it is an allusion to the Flood and similar catastrophes, which are proofs of God's judicial government of the universe, when "he maketh the creature his weapon for the revenge of his enemies" (Wisd. v. 17). The Lord is his Name. Jehovah, the self-existent God, doeth all these marvellous things, and men presume to scout his Law and think to be unpunished (ch. iv. 13).

Ver. 9.—**That strengtheneth, etc.** Translate, *That causeth destruction to flash forth upon the strong, so that destruction cometh upon the fortress.* The idea is that God, as with a lightning-flash, smites the strongest man, and no fortress is a refuge from him. Septuagint, *ὁ διαίρων συντριμμὸν ἐπὶ ἰσχύι*, "Who divideth destruction unto strength." The Vulgate, taking the Hebrew verb *balag* in the sense of lighting up the countenance, renders, *Qui subridet vastitatem super robustum*, which means that the Lord smiles while he brings desolation on the mighty—a figurative expression denoting his anger at man's pride, and the ease with which he punishes. We may add that Rosenmüller agrees with the Authorized Version in the first clause: "Who strengtheneth the weak against the strong, and giveth the plunderers power over the fortresses of the strong."

Vers. 10—12.—The prophet gives further instances of the people's corruption.

Ver. 10.—**Him that rebuketh in the gate** (Isa. xxix. 21). The gate of Eastern cities was the place of public resort (Prov. i. 21), either for business (Deut. xxv. 7), or the ad-

ministration of justice (2 Sam. xv. 2), or for gossip. So "he that rebuketh in the gate" may be a judge, or a chief, or a prophet (Jer. xvii. 19; xix. 2). It seems better to take the words thus than to join "in the gate" to "they hate," with the meaning that those who resort to the gate—kings, chiefs, judges—hate the prophet's reproof, for the following verses show that Amos is referring chiefly to judicial proceedings, and not to his own mission. **Uprightly; literally, perfectly; Vulgate, perfects;** i.e. without reserve, keeping nothing back.

Ver. 11.—**Therefore.** Because ye refuse reproof, and oppress the poor. **Your treading is upon the poor; ye trample upon.** The Hebrew word *boshes* is found nowhere else, and is variously explained. Septuagint, *κατεκορδύλιζον*, "smote with the fists;" so the Syriac; Vulgate, *diripiebatis*, with which the Chaldee agrees. Keil, Schegg, and most modern commentators explain the word, by a slight dialectical variation, as equivalent to *conculcare*. **Burdens of wheat; rather, tribute, exactions of wheat, or presents like enforced "benevolences."** They exacted such gifts before they would do justice to the poor. Or it may refer to interest for money or victuals lent, which took the form of presents in order to evade the Law (Exod. xxii. 25; Lev. xxv. 37; Deut. xxiii. 19). Septuagint, *δῶρα ἐκλεκτά*; Vulgate, *prædam electam*, the Hebrew word *bar* meaning either "wheat" or "elect." **Hewn stone.** Houses thus built were a mark of luxury and wealth, sundried brick being the usual material employed (comp. Isa. ix. 10; Ezek. xii. 5, 7). **Ye shall not dwell in them.** This is the punishment of their evil doings, according to the threat in Deut. xviii. 30, 39. The people shall be banished and the land desolated (Micah vi. 15; Zeph. i. 13).

Ver. 12.—Your punishment is richly deserved, for "I know how many are your transgressions and how mighty are your sins," especially, as it follows, your sins of oppression and injustice. They afflict the just. The construction is continuous: "afflictors of the just." *Hostes justis* (Vulgate); *καταπατοῦντες δικαίον*, "trampling down the just" (Septuagint); comp. Wisd. ii. 12—15. **They take a bribe.** The translation of *kopher* as "bribe" is justified, perhaps, by 1 Sam. xii. 3; but the word is elsewhere used for "ransom," redemption-money paid to escape the consequences of crime (Prov. vi. 35), in direct opposition to the Law in Numb. xxxv. 31, which forbade any ransom to be taken for the life of a murderer. The Septuagint has, *λαμβάνοντες ἀλλάγματα*, "taking wares;" the Vulgate (with which the Syriac agrees), *accipientes munus*. **Turn aside the poor in the gate from.**

their right; or, *bow down the needy in the gate*, i.e. in the place of judgment (see note on ver. 10). Vulgate, *pauperes deprimentes in porta*; Septuagint, *πενήτας ἐν πύλαις ἐκκαλύπτει*, "turning aside the poor in the gates." The crime specified is that of wresting judgment in the case of the poor, or not giving the poor man justice unless he could pay for it (comp. Exod. xxiii. 6; Deut. xvi. 19).

Ver. 13.—Even while he speaks, the prophet feels that his reproof is useless (comp. Jer. vii. 27, etc.; Hos. iv. 1, 17). In that time; *at such a time* as this, the man who acts wisely holds his peace, because it is a time of moral corruption and of personal danger. But the prophet cannot restrain his call (comp. Ezek. xxxiii. 3, etc.). In Micah ii. 3 the "evil time" is one of calamity.

Ver. 14.—He repeats his loving summons to repentance, as in vers. 4, 6, showing that their only hope of safety lay in amendment of life (comp. Zeph. ii. 3). Seek good, and not evil. Use that diligence and zeal in pursuing what is good which you have hitherto shown in the pursuit of evil. The Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken; or, *as ye say*. The Israelites fancied that, owing to their covenant relation to God, he would be always with them and ready to help them under any circumstances. Their prosperity under Jeroboam II., as Calmet remarks, seemed an argument in their favour, proving that God blessed them, and that they had no cause for fear (comp. Jer. vii. 4, etc.; Micah iii. 11; Matt. iii. 9; John viii. 39). But really God's help and favour were conditioned by their obedience.

Ver. 15.—Reverse your former conduct, unto what ye have done (ver. 10). This verse emphasizes the preceding; hating and loving are more real and hearty than mere seeking. The LXX. makes this clause to be what the people said, *Ὁν τρόπον εἶπατε, μεμίσσηκαμεν τὰ πονηρὰ, καὶ ἠγαπήσαμεν τὰ καλὰ*, "As ye said, We have hated evil, and loved good." Establish judgment. Maintain justice in your tribunals (in contrast to ver. 7); then it may be that the Lord will have mercy on you or some of you. The remnant of Joseph; implying that only a few of them will be saved after this heavy chastisement, which points to the final ruin of their city and nation. The prophet speaks of the "remnant of Joseph" instead of Ephraim, to remind them of their forefather, who received the patriarchal blessing of Jacob, for whose sake this remnant should be spared (comp. Isa. vi. 13; x. 21, etc.; Joel ii. 32; Rom. xi. 4, etc.).

Vers. 16, 17.—The retribution for their incorrigible iniquity is here announced.

For "they that would not be reformed by that correction, wherein he dallied with them, shall feel a judgment worthy of God" (Wisd. xii. 26).

Ver. 16.—Therefore. The prophet returns to what was said in ver. 13 about the uselessness of reproof; vers. 14 and 15 being a kind of parenthetical exhortation which his love for his nation forced from him. "Jehovah, the God of hosts, the Lord," *Adonai*, saith what follows, these solemn titles being used to add solemnity, certainty, and weight to the announcement. *Wailing*; *miserere*, "the death-wail." *Streets*; *broad places*; *πλατείας* (Septuagint); *plateis* (Vulgate). *Highways*; the narrower *streets*; *δδοὶς* (Septuagint); *in cunctis quæ foris sunt* (Vulgate). Everywhere in town and country shall the wail be heard. *Alas! alas! ho! ho!* This is the death-wail (comp. Jer. xxii. 18), which should sound abroad when Samaria was besieged and taken. They shall call the husbandman to mourning. The husbandman shall be called from his labour in the fields to mourn for a calamity in his house. Pusey thinks the mourning is for his occupation gone, his tillage now only furnishing food for the enemy; but the context involves the notion of death. And such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing; literally, *proclaim wailing to such*, etc. These are the hired mourners, both male and female, who sang mournful songs at deaths (comp. 2 Chron. xxxv. 25; Jer. ix. 17; Matt. ix. 23).

Ver. 17.—Vineyards. The place of mirth and gladness, that, says St. Jerome, "ubi quondam fuit materia lætitiæ, sit origo lacrymarum" (Isa. xvi. 10). I will pass through thee. A terrible echo of the last plague of Egypt (Exod. xii. 12), when God will not "pass over" thee as he did then, but treat thee as Egypt, and "pass through" to smite and punish (Nah. i. 12).

Vers. 18—27.—The prophet enforces the threat by denouncing woe on those that trust to their covenant relation to God, expecting the day when he would punish the heathen for their sakes, and thinking that external, heartless worship was acceptable to him.

Ver. 18.—The day of the Lord. Any crisis in the nation's history is so called, when God interposes to punish and correct. To our minds it looks forward to the final judgment. It is often mentioned by the prophets (e.g. Isa. ii. 12; xiii. 6, 9; Joel ii. 1, 11; iii. 18; Zeph. i. 7, 14) as a time when the heathen should be judged, all the enemies of Israel defeated, and when Israel herself was exalted to the highest pitch of prosperity and dominion. Without any regard

to the moral condition affixed to the realization of these expectations (see Joel ii. 32), the people "desired" the appearance of this day, thus foolishly confirming themselves in their sinful life and false security. Some think scoffers are intended, but the context shows that the persons signified are sincere but mistaken believers in the safety of Israel's covenant position. To what end is it for you! the day of the Lord is darkness; *Why would ye have the day of the Lord? It is darkness.* Why do ye, such as ye are, want this day to come? Ye know not what ye ask. It will be the very contrary to your expectations; it will be darkness, and not light, tribulation and misery, not joy and triumph for you (comp. Micah vii. 8).

Ver. 19.—Amos explains the dangers of this judgment-day by illustrations drawn from pastoral life, equivalent to the rushing from Charybdis into Scylla. Every place is full of danger—the open country, the shelter of the house. Jerome applies the passage to the fate of the kingdom in general: "Fugientibus vobis a facie Nabuchodonosor leonis occurrent Medi, Persæ, demum Antiochus Epiphanes, qui moretur in templo et vos instar colubri mordeat, nequaquam foris in Babylone, sed intra terminos terræ sanctæ."

Ver. 20.—The character of the day of the Lord is enforced with reiterated earnestness (ver. 18) by an appeal to the conscience of the hearers. Do you not feel in your inmost hearts that in the case of such guilt as yours the Lord can visit but to punish?

Ver. 21.—Ontward, formal worship will not avert the threatened danger or secure the favour of God in the day of visitation. *Your feast days (chaggim); your feasts;* your counterfeit worship, the worship of the true God under an idol symbol (compare God's repudiation of merely formal worship in Isa. i. 11—15). *I will not smell;* οὐ μὴ ὁσφρανθῶ θυρίας (Septuagint). No sweet savour ascends to God from such sacrifices; so the phrase is equivalent to "I will not accept," "I will take no delight in" (comp. Gen. viii. 21; Exod. xxix. 18; Lev. xvi. 31). *Solemn assemblies;* πανηγύρεις (Septuagint); *aisaroth*; the convocations for the keeping of the great festivals.

Ver. 22.—They maintained the formal ritual of the Mosaic worship in their idolatry. The various offerings are here enumerated. *Burnt offerings;* δλοκαντώματα (Exod. xxix. 38, 42; Num. xxviii. 9—11). *Meat offerings;* θυσίας (Septuagint); *munera* (Vulgate); Exod. xxix. 40, 41; Lev. ii. 1. *Peace offerings of your fat beasts;* σωτηρίους ἐπιφανείας ὑμῶν, "your grand peace offerings" (Septuagint); *vota pinguium vestrorum* (Vulgate); Lev. iii. 1, etc.

Ver. 23.—The noise of thy songs. Their

psalms and hymns of praise were mere noise in God's ear, and wearied him (Isa. i. 14; xxiv. 8; Ezek. xxvi. 13). *Viola* (ch. vi. 5); ὀργάνον (Septuagint). The *nebel*, usually translated "psaltery," was a kind of harp. Josephus ("Ant.", vii. 12. 3) describes it as having twelve strings, played by the fingers. Music, both instrumental and vocal, was used in the temple-worship (see 1 Chron. xvi. 42; xxiii. 5; and xxv.).

Ver. 24.—But let judgment run down as waters; let judgment roll on; Septuagint, καὶ κολιθήσεται ὡς ὕδωρ κήρυμα, "and judgment shall roll along as water;" *Et revelabitur quasi aqua iudicium* (Vulgate). This verse has been explained in different ways. Hitzig, Keil, with many ancient commentators, find in it a threat of chastisement, "the flooding of the land with judgment and the punitive righteousness of God." Pusey, Professor Gandell, and others consider it to be a call to amendment. "He bids them let judgment, which had hitherto been perverted in its course, roll on like a mighty tide of waters, sweeping before it all hindrances," filling the whole land with righteousness. Schegg makes it to be a promise of the coming of the day of the Lord, that is, the revelation of Messiah. But such a promise in this position is very forced and unnatural. The second interpretation seems most suitable. In the midst of the denunciation of men's formal worship, the prophet announces their duty in the present crisis, attention to which could alone win God's favour. Judgment and righteousness, long neglected and forgotten, should permeate the land like refreshing streams of water—a simile of special significance to an inhabitant of an Eastern country, where the neighbourhood of a perennial stream was as delightful as it was unusual. *Mighty (ethan); ἔβας*, "impassable" (Septuagint); *fortis* (Vulgate). The word may mean "strong," or "perennial." "Whence the seventh month, just before the early rain, was called the month *Ethanim*, i.e. the month of the *perennial streams*, when they alone flowed" (Pusey).

Ver. 25.—Ye have always been idolaters, corrupters of pure worship. Your service in the wilderness, when you were little exposed to external influence, was no more true and faithful than that which you offer now; that was as unacceptable as this. *Have ye offered unto me? Did ye offer unto me?* The answer expected is "No;" i.e. you did not so really, because your worship was mixed with falsehood, and was not offered simply and genuinely to me. It is certain, too, that during the sojourn in the wilderness sacrificial worship fell greatly into desuetude, as we know that the rite of circumcision was suspended (Josh. v. 5—7), the Passover was not duly celebrated, and Joshua urged

the people to put away the strange gods from among them (xxiv. 23). Moses, too, doubtless with a view to existing practices, warneth against worshipping the heavenly bodies (Deut. iv. 19), and offering sacrifice unto devils (*seirim*), "after whom they had gone a-whoring" (Lev. xvii. 7). The prophets, too, allude to the idolatry practised in the desert (see Ezek. xx. 7-26; Hos. ix. 10). But to argue (as some neologians do) from this passage of Amos that the Israelites during those forty years knew nothing of Jehovah, or that Amos himself denies that they offered him any worship, is absurd, seeing that the prophet presupposes the fact, and blames them for corrupting the Divine service and mingling the prescribed and enacted ritual with idolatrous accretions. **Sacrifices; slain, bloody sacrifices. Offerings; bloodless sacrifices, meal offerings.**

Ver. 26.—This verse has occasioned great perplexity to commentators. The connection with the context, the meaning of some of the terms, and whether the reference is to past, present, or future, are questions which have roused much controversy. We need not here recapitulate the various opinions which have been held. It will be sufficient to state what seems to be the simplest and most probable explanation of the passage. But we must not omit to mention first the explanation adopted by Ewald, Schrader, Farrar, König, and others, viz. that this verse refers to the punitive deportation which was to be the people's lot, when they should take their shrines and images with them into captivity. "So shall ye take (into exile) *Sakkuth* your king," etc. But the punishment is foretold in ver. 27; and this verse contrasts their idol-worship with the neglected worship of Jehovah (ver. 25). **But ye have borne; and ye bare; καὶ ἀνέλαβετε** (Septuagint); **et portastis** (Vulgate). Ye offered me no pure worship in the wilderness, seeing that ye took false gods with you, and joined their worship with, or substituted it for, mine. **The tabernacle of your Moloch; τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ Μολόχ** (Septuagint); **tabernaculum Moloch vestro** (Vulgate). The Hebrew word rendered "tabernacle" (*sikkuth*), which is found nowhere else, has been variously explained. Aquila gives *συσκισμοῦς*: Theodotion, "vision," reading the whole sentence thus: Καὶ ἤρατε τὴν ὄρασιν τοῦ βασιλέως ὑμῶν, ἀμαύρωσιν εἰδώλων ὑμῶν, ἔστρον τοῦ Θεοῦ ὑμῶν. Many moderns render, "stake," "column," or "shrine." Others suppose it to be equivalent to *Sakkuth*, an Assyrian name for Moloch (or Adur); but this is very uncertain (see 'Studien und Kritiken,' 1874, p. 387), and the parallelism requires the word to be an appellative and not a proper name. It most probably means "shrine," a portable

shrine, like those spoken of in Acts xix. 24 in connection with the worship of Diana. The Syriac and Arabic versions call it "tent," and thus the reproach stands forth emphatically that, instead of, or in conjunction with, the true tabernacle, they bore aloft, as if proud of their apostasy, the tabernacle of a false god. Such shrines were used by the Egyptians, according to Herodotus (ii. 63, where see Rawlinson's note) and Diod. Sic. (i. 97). Many such may be seen in the Egyptian room of the British Museum. Keil quotes Drumann, 'On the Rosetta Inscription,' p. 211, "These were small chapels, generally gilded and ornamented with flowers and in other ways, intended to hold a small idol when processions were made, and to be carried or driven about with it." Hence we must look to Egypt as the source of this idolatry. Moloch, though sanctioned by the LXX. and St. Stephen (Acts vii. 43), is a mistranslation. De Rossi, indeed, mentions that one Hebrew manuscript gives *Moloch*, but the received reading is *Malkekem*, which is confirmed by Symmachus and Theodotion, who have τοῦ βασιλέως ὑμῶν, and by the Syriac. The translation, therefore, should run, "Ye took up the shrine of your king," i.e. of him whom ye made your king in the place of Jehovah, meaning some stellar divinity. **And thine your images; καὶ τὰ ἔστρον τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῶν Παφῶν,** "and the star of your god Raphan" (Septuagint); **et imaginem idolorum vestrorum;** literally, **the kityyn of your images.** The parallelism again requires us to take this unknown word as an appellative; and according to its probable derivation, its meaning is "pedestal," or "framework," that on which the image stood. The Greek rendering is, as Keil thinks, owing to a false reading of the unpunctuated text, in old Hebrew *kaph* and *resh* being easily confounded, and *vau* and *pe*. Theodotion considered the word a common noun, translating it by ἀμάρωσιν. It is probably a mere coincidence that in some Assyrian inscriptions the name *Kairas* occurs as that of a deity, who is identified with Saturn; that the Egyptians (from whom the Israelites must have derived the notion) ever acknowledged such a deity is quite unproved. St. Stephen merely quotes the *Textus Receptus* of his day, which was close enough to the original for his argument. **The star of your god.** These words are in loose apposition with the preceding, and are equivalent to "your star-god," or the star whom ye worship as god. Whether some particular star is meant, or whether the sun is the deity signified, cannot be determined, although the universal prevalence of the worship of sun-gods in Egypt makes the latter supposition very probable.

St. Stephen puts the sin in a general form: "God gave them up to serve the host of heaven" (Acts vii. 42; comp. Deut. iv. 19; xvii. 3). Which ye made to yourselves. This was the crime, self-will, desertion of the appointed way for devices of their own invention.

Ver. 27.—Therefore. The consequence of their continued alienation from God should be deportation to a foreign land, beyond Damascus, far away from the confines of

the country once their own possession (2 Sam. viii. 6), thus dimly denoting Assyria, at that time not hostile, but known in the time of Tiglath-Pileser I. (see the accomplishment, 2 Kings xv. 29; xvii. 6). St. Stephen says (Acts vii. 43), "beyond Babylon;" "Magis enim," observes Jerome, "intelligentiam quam verbum posuit;" and he is probably blending other prophecies with that of Amos, e.g. Jer. xx. 4.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Israel's elegy.* It is poor work singing the things that might have been. It means sweet dreams dispelled, fair hopes blighted, and human lives in ruins. Yet such is the prophet's task in this passage—writing Israel's elegy among the graves of her dead millions. He had been denouncing nameless woes against the rebellious people. Here he changes his tone to that of a mournful spectator of accomplished ill. In imagination he throws himself forward out of the sinful present into the calamitous future, and in accommodation to the change of scene his denunciation becomes a dirge. It is a natural transition, and at the same time a new form of appeal. When ears become inattentive, the skilled musician will vary his tune. We have here—

I. A BROKEN IDEAL. The things that might have been with Israel were far enough from existing facts. The Israel of God's ideal was: 1. *A holy people.* (Exod. xix. 6; Deut. xxviii. 9.) Theoretically they were, as the word "holy" means (Deut. vii. 6), a people separated from men and sin and set apart to God. But the fair ideal of their national life remained an ideal and nothing more. The reality never reached it, never approached it. They connected themselves freely with heathen men and heathenish sin. They at times outdid the nations (ch. ii. 6—9) in avarice, injustice, spoiling the poor, abominable rites, and every nameless infamy. 2. *An unconquered people.* This is the force of the expression "virgin (of) Israel." God was to champion their cause, and to fight for them as his loyal people (Deut. i. 30, etc.). If, and so long as he did so, they would be invincible. But they never claimed his help on the appointed terms. His promise was doubted (Deut. i. 32) and its conditions disregarded, with the inevitable result that it failed of fulfilment in many a critical time. Israel, theoretically "the unconquered," was practically the often vanquished, the twice carried captive, the soon-to-be-destroyed. God's help comes surely, but comes only where there is attention to the conditions on which it is offered and given. 3. *A prosperous people.* Palestine, their national inheritance, was the very garden of the earth; unique in the combination of the highest agricultural capacities, with the finest commercial situation. The prosperity of an industrious, peaceful nation in it was, so far as favourable circumstances went, a foregone conclusion. But war had devastated, and mildew blighted, and drought laid bare its fertile fields. God saw his gifts abused and made the ministers of sin, and he was driven to destroy these in their hands. When temporal good begins to be made the occasion of moral evil, our tenure of it will soon end. 4. *A happy people.* A people prosperous, strong, and pure, could not but be happy as well (Ps. cxliv. 15). And such was Israel in the Divine ideal (Deut. xxxiii. 29). But the actual misery experienced was as complete as the theoretical happiness revealed. Happiness is nowhere so impossible, misery nowhere so intense, as with a people who have fallen beneath themselves. In proportion as the former might have been, will the latter be.

II. AN ANTICIPATIVE DIRGE. Prescient of coming evil, the prophet's lamentation becomes a funeral song. 1. *A nation made shipwreck is a sight for tears.* It is the destruction of magnificent possibilities of good. It is the falling of a tremendous reality of evil. It is the ruin of most precious interests on a gigantic scale. If one soul lost is the occasion of grief to pure spirits and a travelling Saviour, what must the calamity be when multiplied a millionfold? 2. *When the wicked fall the truest mourners*

are the righteous. Not the heathen who had seduced them, not the remnant of apostate Israel that might escape, but the prophet of God, who had kept himself unspotted in the midst of national corruption, was the tearful mourner by the ruined nation's grave. The wicked are too selfish to care for any sorrows but their own. They are as the wolves, which would make a prey of the dead one's remains, rather than any mourning for his fall. God and the God-like alone truly mourn when the wicked perish. 3. *A prophetic sight of his own epitaph ought to stay the hand of the suicide.* Men supposed to be dead have lived to read their own obituary notice. It has enabled them to see themselves for once as others see them. And it ought to have a practical influence for good. Israel, reading beforehand the inscription on their own tomb, might have been warned away, if anything could have warned them, from the course in which they were rushing on. It showed them what was coming, and how it was being brought on, and how it looked, whether as a morality or a policy, in enlightened eyes. An adequate idea of sin must include its end and issues and place in history, and this it was in Israel's power to learn from Amos's prophetic wail.

III. AN INSPIRED COMMENTARY. An act of God is an expression of his way. The way of God is a revelation of his purpose. All three are along the lines of the just and fitting. Now: 1. *Adequate punishment means practical extermination.* Sin is an infinite crime, merits an infinite punishment, and failing this will receive a punishment exhaustive of the criminal's good. The proverbial question, "Wherefore doth a living man complain?" (Lam. iii. 39), is an understatement of the case. While a field, or a blessing, or a living man remained, Israel had not been punished as it deserved. When body and soul have been both destroyed, there will still be no more than justice done. If our sin have not its punishment in Christ, then that punishment must be utter destruction. 2. *When wrath smiles many, mercy spares a remnant.* Nine-tenths were to be destroyed. The thousand should become a hundred, and the hundred ten. Neither the strength of the great nor the insignificance of the small should avail them for escape. With perfect impartiality, all should be made to suffer proportionally. Yet decimation was to stop short of utter extinction. A tenth part (see Isa. i. 9; vi. 13) should be spared. This less guilty remnant, taught and chastened by the judgments which swept away the bulk of the nation, might form the nucleus of a new and better Israel. When judgment has destroyed the "bread to the eater," mercy often steps in and saves a "seed to the sower." There is seldom a deluge without its ark and its Noah family, the conditions and materials of a fresh start for the reduced. 3. *Israel decimated is Israel still.* The remnant would retain the national name, and with it the covenant relation and privileges to which the name referred (Gen. xxiii. 28). Toward the Gentile Church, for its sin "cast down but not destroyed," the same gracious policy was announced (Isa. liv. 7—10). While a Mephibosheth remains the royal line of God's anointed is not extinct. Chastisement makes a chaos only to bring out of it the young world of a new life and a new hope (Ps. lxxxix. 30—33).

Vers. 4—6.—*The seeking that is life.* This passage contains at once a vindication of the coming destruction on Israel, and a last offer of escape. All past evil had been justly incurred by departure from God. All coming evil might yet be avoided by return to him. "Seek ye me" was the direction on their treatment of which the whole issue turned.

I. EVEN THE FOREDOOMED ARE NOT ABANDONED OF GOD. The antediluvians were preached to for a century after their destruction was denounced. So Jerusalem got a Pentecost, and the ordinances of a Christian Church for forty years after Christ had pronounced her doom (Matt. xxiii. 37—39). 1. *God's threatenings are in a certain sense conditional on men's conduct.* They are addressed to men in their character or circumstances at the time they are uttered. If and when the character or circumstances cease to exist, the threatenings cease to apply. It was so in the case of Hezekiah (Isa. xxxviii. 1, 5), and also of Nineveh (Jonah iii. 4, 10). God in such cases does not change, but the circumstances do, and his modes of treatment change accordingly. 2. *They are designed to turn men, not to plunge them in despair.* All life is disciplinary. Each event and experience is fitted, and meant, to exercise a moral influence. Being, moreover, controlled by a holy God, the moral influence of each must be in the direction of right. It is so with blessings and the promise of them (Rom. ii.

4; Isa. i. 19). It is so also with judgments and the threat of them (Isa. xxvi. 9; Luke xiii. 3, 5). God takes pleasure in the soul's turning (Ezek. xviii. 23, 32), and all his dealings with it aim at and tend to this result. Therefore, until judgment actually falls, the threat of it is kept as a deterrent before the sinner's eyes. 3. *Individuals may turn after national repentance has become hopeless.* Language addressed to a nation is really meant for the individuals composing it; and as individuals they would be influenced by it. No general forsaking of sin was probable in Israel. Still, some might turn, as many did in Jerusalem, and were saved after the destruction of the city as a whole was foretold; and, so long as this was possible, the means fitted to turn would not be withdrawn. God's expostulations will go forth to glean in corners even when the prospects of a harvest are blighted.

II. THERE IS A SEEKING IN CONNECTION WITH WHICH IT IS LIFE TO FIND. To Israel here and to all men everywhere the great object of search is God, not mere good (Ps. xlii. 2); and God for himself, not for his gifts. 1. *This seeking implies previous non-possession.* God is neither the property of the wicked nor his possession. Sin made separation between them, and a severing of all previously existing ties. Man abandoned God, and God drove out man. Now he is "without God," is "enmity against God," bids God depart from him, says in his heart, "No God." It is only by the saint, and after seeking, that it can be said, "I have found him whom my soul loveth." "This God is our God for ever and ever." Grace it is that knits again the ties broken by sin, and restores man and God to a condition of mutual love and possession and indwelling. 2. *It is a quest with the whole heart and strength.* The essence of seeking God is to desire him. And to desire him really is to desire him heartily. Not to desire him with other things. Not to desire him more than other things. Not to desire him weakly. Not even to desire him strongly. But to desire him wholly, supremely, and intensely. Seeking God is heart-seeking, or it is nothing. Heart-seeking is truly such when it is seeking with the whole heart. Therefore only to such seeking is there a promise of finding (Jer. xxix. 13; xxiv. 7). God cannot be had till he is adequately wanted, and to be wanted adequately is to be wanted supremely. 3. *It is synonymous with finding.* In God's world everywhere supply meets and measures demand. Plant, animal, and man, each finds on earth, in climate, habitat, covering, and food, exactly the thing it needs. There is no want for which there is not full and fitting provision. So in the spiritual sphere. "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst," etc. Over against every need of the soul is a Divine supply. That need become conscious, means help waiting; that need expressed, means help already on the way. Spiritual good is obtained on the simple condition of its being truly desired. 4. *To find God is to find all good which inheres in him.* God is himself the greatest Good; he is, moreover, the Sum, and therefore the Source, of all good. There is certain good which he unconditionally bestows on all, even the ungodly. But it is good of the lower kinds, and which ministers to the lower needs. All spiritual good, and all temporal good that has any spiritual aspect, God gives only with and in Jesus Christ (Rom. viii. 32; Matt. vi. 33). The planets attend the sun and follow where he leads. So on Christ, as God's unspeakable Gift, the other lesser gifts wait. We have them when we grasp him. 5. *This good, summed up in one word, is life.* Life is a general term for the highest good (Ps. xxx. 5; cxxxiii. 3). It is physical life, the prevention or withdrawal of destroying judgments. It is judicial life, or the reversal of the death-sentence on the soul, and the privilege for it of living. It is spiritual life, being quickened once for all out of the death in sin, being made alive and kept alive. It is everlasting life, the out-blooming in eternity of the flower of soul-life planted on earth.

III. THIS IS NOT THE SEEKING TO WHICH MEN NATURALLY TURN. It was under pretence of greater convenience that Jeroboam's calves were set up in Dan and Bethel. But Beersheba was fifty miles south of Jerusalem, and Gilgal was on the other side of Jordan, and so most inconvenient of access. That Israel preferred them to Jerusalem was proof that they preferred idolatrous rites to the worship of God (see Pusey). 1. *Idols are man's own invention, and therefore the egoist's choice.* There is self-sufficiency verging on self-worship in all sin. Man puts his own opinion and will and work above God's. An idol is his own creation, and for that reason, if for no other, is preferred to God. It is a subtle form of self-worship, and so inevitably preferred to any other. 2. *They are credited with qualities congenial to his nature.*

A man impresses himself on his work, virtually puts himself into it. It reflects his genius and his moral character. The idol a man makes is thus substantially a repetition of himself, and therefore congenial to him all round. Made by his hand, it is after his heart, which the God of heaven is very far from being. 3. *The fall into idol-worship is broken by the retention in it of a flavouring of the worship of God.* Bethel and Beersheba, its shrines, were spots where the Divine presence had of old been richly manifested. Its rites mimicked, to some extent, the national worship of God. It was added on at first to Divine worship, not substituted for it. Satan lets men down into idolatry by easy stages. It begins in the sanctuary. It appears at first in the likeness of a better thing. Then, when men have become sufficiently familiar with it and degraded by it to bear the sight, it puts on its natural shape, and is idol-worship pure and simple.

IV. IN THE SEEKING OF THE NATURAL HEART SUCCESS MUST MEAN DISASTER. By a play upon words, Gilgal, "the Great Rolling," is to be rolled away; and Bethel, styled elsewhere "Bethaven," shall become "aven," or vanity. 1. *An idol is a figment, and the worship of it can only result in deception and loss.* It is not a thing, but only the image of a thing. It is the image, moreover, not of a real, but of an imaginary thing. It is, therefore, "nothing," and "a thing of nought" (1 Cor. viii. 4), and out of nothing nothing can come. To worship it is delusion, to trust it inevitable disappointment. 2. *God's infinite power and his wrath are against them that forsake him.* The idolater pits idol impotence against Divine omnipotence, with the inevitable result of discomfiture and destruction. There are idols of the heart the service of which is no less ruinous. They group themselves under the heading "world," and the love of them is incompatible with the love of God, and so "Anathema" (1 John ii. 15; 1 Cor. xvi. 22).

Vers. 7—13.—*The contrast presaging the conflict.* Judgment is coming. Warning has been given. Duty, and the prevailing derelictions of it, have been pointed out. Here God's perfections and Israel's iniquities are set in juxtaposition, and the collocation is suggestive. Such incompatibility must lead to collision. It is by God's character and ours that our mutual relations and attitudes are shaped. We see here—

I. GOD REVEALING HIMSELF. (Vers. 8, 9.) God's work is an important revelation of himself. He has written all over it the glorious lineaments of his character. Each part of it reflects some feature, and in the whole we see his face. Here he shows himself: 1. *In the sphere of creation.* "He maketh the seven stars and Orion." This is a pregnant thought. Alcione, one of the seven stars, or Pleiades, is the central orb of the heavens, round which the others move. It is as it were the heart of the material universe; and the Creator of it is by implication the Creator of all. In this fact speak the power and wisdom of the Great Uncaused, who is the Cause not only of all effects, but of all causes as well. 2. *In the sphere of providence.* "And turneth the shadow," etc. (vers. 8, 9). We have here three classes of operations. The first was illustrated in the miraculous light that shone around Paul at his conversion, is seen daily in the rise of the morning sun, and appears in the turning of the night of adversity into the day of prosperity. The second was seen in the three hours' miraculous darkness at the Crucifixion, is seen in the gathering shades of every night, and in the darkening down into adverse circumstances of many a life-day. The third was seen in the Deluge, is seen in every shower of rain, and will be seen in future widespread judgments on the wicked. Ver. 9, "Who causeth desolations to flash on the strong," etc. God's judgments are bold, as singling out the strong and the fortress; swift, as coming on them like the lightning's flash; sweeping, as involving them in utter destruction. 3. *In the sphere of redemption.* God scatters spiritual night. He illuminates the darkness of the soul. He makes men light in the Lord. He gives them the inheritance of the saints in light. He also judicially blinds, by leaving impenitent souls to the natural effects of wrongdoing; and he casts into outer darkness at last. In all these things we behold power—power here as goodness, power there as severity; but power everywhere as resistless and Divine.

II. ISRAEL REVEALING HERSELF. (Ver. 12.) This is a sad apocalypse. In many transgressions and great sins Israel's many-sided and deep corruption comes out. Particulars are: 1. *As unjust.* Injustice is a natural form for the sin, which is at

bottom selfishness, to take. It was a specially prevalent form, moreover, among the Hebrew people. From Jacob down the sordid race has cheated the strong and imposed on the weak. Action is in a sense the fruit of character, and answers to the tree. God's grace is to convert the thorn into the fir tree, and the briar into the myrtle tree; but man's sin works the converse process, and changes the sweet "tree of righteousness" into bitter wormwood. Casting "righteousness down to earth" is another aspect of the same charge. Righteousness ought to rule. Its proper place is the throne of human life. But Israel had dethroned and cast it down to the earth, and set injustice, a usurper, in its place. 2. *As oppressive.* (Vers. 11, 12.) The oppression suffered by Israel had done nothing to produce detestation of the thing. What other nations had inflicted on them in this way, they were only too ready to inflict, with interest, on each other as they had opportunity. Humiliation does not always prepare for exaltation, nor poverty for wealth, nor the endurance of injustice for power. The freed slave will often make the very worst master, and the erewhile victim of wrong the most outrageous inflictor of it (Prov. xix. 10; xxx. 22, 23). 3. *As venal.* "Who take a bribe." They did injustice, not only in their private, but in their public, capacity. They not only plundered the public themselves, but made a profit by helping others to do the same. A dishonest man will make a corrupt magistrate. He will use for his own aggrandizement whatever power he gains. 4. *As impious.* (Vers. 10, 12.) As cowardice appeared in oppressing the poor, so did impiety in oppressing the righteous. Much of what the righteous suffer is due to the hatred of righteousness by the wicked. They hate the thing itself, they hate it as a standing rebuke to their own ways, and their antipathy invariably exhibits itself as it has occasion.

III. THEIR FUTURE RELATIONS CLEAR IN THE LIGHT OF BOTH. Given what God is and what Israel is, and the Divine course of treatment may easily be anticipated. 1. *God will disappoint their schemes of self-aggrandizement.* (Ver. 11.) Their labour and pains and sin would prove in the end to have been thrown away. Their ill-gotten gains would never be enjoyed. The vineyards and houses, in which they had invested them, would, after having been acquired at great pains, be lost again before they had even begun to be used. Gain gotten by injustice is seldom abiding, and never remunerative. The one condition of getting satisfaction out of earthly good is to acquire it according to the will of God. 2. *He will leave them unrebuked.* (Ver. 13.) The prophets and the wise would both be silent. This would be a great calamity. It would be followed by an increase of sin, involving in turn an aggravation of punishment. It would mean abandonment to fate; for when God ceases to strive, a man's doom is sealed. It is the Physician discontinuing his treatment because the hand of death is on the patient. The sinner sins conviction away, and then congratulates himself on the discovery of peace. But it is only God saying, "Ephraim is joined to his idols: let him alone." It is the one spiritual case that is utterly desperate.

Ver. 13.—"*A time to be silent.*" "Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time." These words describe an evil time, and specify one of its most evil features. It is a time of culminating wickedness, of imminent destruction, and, as related to both, of Divine non-intervention. "There is a time to keep silence" (Eccles. iii. 7) as well as "a time to speak." And that time, as pointed out by characteristic features, was at hand in this case. Israel, which in vain had been pled with and plagued, would then be severely left alone. Her victims would suffer in silence. Her prophets would cease to expostulate. God, in judgment, would cease to strive for her restraint or turning. In an awful and unnatural calm she would pass the moments before there broke on her the storm of doom. And the dawning of this "dies iræ" was almost come. As to the particular characteristic of this day, note that God's servants are silent—

I. WHEN THERE IS NOTHING THAT CAN BE SAID TO THE PURPOSE. This will often happen. Seasonable speech is a valuable thing. But men are not infallible, and occasions are often puzzling, and the right thing to say is hard to find. 1. *Silence is sometimes the resource of feeling too deep for words.* There are unspeakable things. "Speech is but broken light on the depth of the unspoken." The finest thoughts, the deepest feelings, are unuttered often because they cannot be expressed in words. As a noted Shakespearian character says—

"Silence is the perfectest herald of joy:
I were but little happy if I could say how much."

And the sentiment is not uncommon. "Does the wind write what it sings in those sounding leaves above our heads? Does the sea write the moaning of its surge? Nothing is fine that is written; the divinest in man's heart never issues forth. The instrument is flesh, the note is fire. What would you have? Between what one feels and what one expresses, there is the same space as between the soul and the twenty-four letters of the alphabet; that is to say, the Infinite. Can you on a rosewood flute give forth the harmony of the spheres?" (Raffaële). 2. *Silence is often more impressive than any speech.*

"The silence of pure innocence
Persuades, when speaking fails."

So also do the silence of deep feeling and of strong passion, uttering "speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture." Christ but looked on the recreant Peter after his miserable desertion and denial. Yet that silent look, as the denied One passed him in the hall, was eloquent of wounded love, and cut the denier more keenly than any words. No word was uttered on the cross where the dying thief was brought to faith. The God-like fortitude, the ineffable meekness of the Saviour, suffering silently the devilish malice of sin,—it was that broke his heart and won his free allegiance. In this dumbness was speech to the power of which articulate speech admits of no comparison. The gift of being "eloquently silent" is one that is not unworthy of more general cultivation. To Israel the sudden silence of the prophets, after centuries of expostulation, would tell its own startling tale. It would indicate discouragement and disgust, and duplicate to their minds the "let him alone" (Hos. iv. 17) of Divine desertion at a similar crisis. And this unequivocal proof that they are given up might bring the tardy repentance which all else had failed to stir. When communications are broken off, the dream of a lasting peace is over. The patient will believe that death is at hand when the physician turns away and refuses to prescribe. 3. *Silence is always better than haphazard speech.* When a man knows not what to say he should guard against saying he knows not what. "Silence, when nothing need be said, is the eloquence of discretion." Peter would have escaped some blunders and rebukes if he had followed this rule. But it was when "he wist not what to say" (Mark ix. 6) that he was given to saying most. Such speech is more likely to be inappropriate than silence, and being inappropriate there are many more ways in which it can work evil. Hence the numerous Scripture references to the tongue, the power of it, the difficulty of governing it, and the danger of it if unruly. Indeed, so liable are men to err and so specially liable to err in speech as compared with overt act, that the proper government of the tongue is made the highest religious act (Jas. iii. 2).

II. WHEN IT IS EVIDENT THAT SPEECH MUST BE UNAVAILING. There are many such cases. 1. *Sometimes men will refuse to listen.* The Jews did in the beginning of the gospel. Faithfully and firmly Stephen pressed the truth home; but they "stopped their ears, and ran upon him" (Acts vii. 57). Here was a case for silence. Speech, had it been possible, would have been unheeded. Those men, with murder in their hearts, and their fingers in their ears, would listen to no words. With Israel now things had come to a like pass. Their ears were stopped, and their hearts within them were set to do iniquity. For such a state of matters the appropriate measure is the silence which the prophet predicts. And all God's servants, in the exercise of their enlightened judgment, will do likewise in a like case. When men will not hear, they will refuse to waste on them unregarded speech. Bawling into an ear that is deaf or stopped is effort thrown away, and unworthy of common sense (Matt. x. 14; Mark vi. 11). 2. *Sometimes evil has gone so far that words can be of no avail.* God's Spirit will not always strive. With the antediluvians by Noah's preaching he strove above a century, but when iniquity reached a certain stage he ceased, and his *ultima ratio* was the Deluge. He strove with Saul for years, but when insensibility and hardness became confirmed, communications were broken off; and whether by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets, God spoke no more (1 Sam. xxviii. 6). He strove with Israel during the ministry of our Lord, but they would not listen to his word, and at last he was silent, and the doomed people were left to die (Luke xix. 42). God ceases to speak when

he is ready to strike. Expostulation would be an anachronism when execution is imminent. The point at which he will give up the persistent wrong-doer and withdraw all deterrent measures none can fix. But there is such a point, and, to each of the ungodly, the danger of passing it (Prov. i. 26). Every hour we continue in rebellion is cutting down our chance of being longer striven with. Those who speak for God to men are sometimes conscious that the time to be silent has come. The sinner seems to have reached a final fixity. In the nature of things he cannot be expected now to change. Paul at a certain stage concluded the Jew to be incorrigible, and turned deliberately to the Gentile (Acts xiii. 46). And like Paul, when it becomes clear that further dealing with men must be barren of result, the servant of Christ will transfer his strength from the hopeless to some hopeful form of effort.

III. WHEN IT IS JUST AS LIKELY TO DO HARM AS GOOD. This is no remote contingency. Such times are cropping up continually. Under certain circumstances speech : 1. *May do harm to men.* The truth of God and the sinful heart are uncongenial. Men love the darkness and hate the light. The truth forbidding all lust is actually through the corruption of our nature the occasion of stirring it up (Rom. vii. 7—9). This, of course, is no reason for withholding it or suppressing our testimony to it. But there are circumstances and moods in which this tendency attains its maximum of strength, and it will then be prudent to keep silence "even from good." It is as "fishers of men" that we speak the truth, and we must justify our claim to the title by presenting the truth in the time and way in which it is most likely to tell. If we "testify" at random, and uniformly, in all companies and on all occasions, we shall oftener harm than help the people whom we wish to serve. 2. *It may do harm to the truth.* There is such a thing as "casting pearls before swine" (Matt. vii. 6) to no better purpose than the prostitution of sacred things. The difference between truth profaned and necessarily inoperative, and the same truth listened to and the power of God, is often the difference between the untimely presentation of it and the timely. To force it on men when they are out of humour and will not give it a fair hearing is only to bring it into contempt—to lessen its dignity in the eyes of others, and diminish its chance of winning their acceptance. The truth is meant to sanctify and save, and we must be careful to do nothing that would place it at a disadvantage in the work. 3. *It may do harm to ourselves without any compensating advantage.* "He that reproveth a scorner getteth himself shame"—the shame of aggravating the case and bringing needless evil on himself. No Scottish Covenanter was called on to enter the camp and preach the gospel of good will and peace to the bloodthirsty troopers of Claverhouse or Dalziel. The thing would have been good in itself, and was deeply needed, but to attempt it meant not merely failure, but death. If there was no one else to do it, this work must be left undone. There is room for judgment and discretion in timing and planning the work of winning souls. The most acceptable service and the most useful we can give to God is our "reasonable service." We are not to "count our lives dear to us" in comparison with his work; but it must appear that the work demands the sacrifice, and will benefit by it, before we are at liberty to give up the life which we hold in trust for God. Pearls are to be withheld from swine for this among other reasons, "lest they turn again and rend you." The characters of the "time to keep silence" deserve attention no less than those of the "time to speak," and he has mastered both who rightly divides the Word of life.

1. *Silence is sometimes a Divine form of appeal.* 2. *In that case it is probably the last appeal.* 3. *Disregarded, it is the lull before the storm.*

Vers. 14, 15.—*The nation with which God will dwell.* The opening words of this passage imply a history. Israel "not only did evil, but they sought it out and the occasions of it" (Pusey). They gave evil their special attention, never failing to do it when they had opportunity, and seeking opportunities when none presented themselves. In fact, they did it with an amount of method and pains which they are now called upon to direct into a new channel, and apply to the doing of good.

I. THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITH MEN IS THE CHIEFEST EXPRESSION OF HIS FAVOUR. It was the original, and remains the normal condition of human life. 1. *It is the restoration of acceptance.* Separation from God is penal. God "drove out the man," and we remain "afar off" because of sin committed. He will dwell with us again

only when our sin is put away. The king will not consort with rebels as such. He will meet them only as subjects and friends. The condition of access to his presence is the equitable recovery of his forfeited favour. In the promise to dwell with Israel was the implied promise to restore them to his favour. 2. *It is the restoration of God-likeness.* "What communion hath light with darkness?" None. The two things are essentially antagonistic, and fellowship between them is impossible. Accordingly, Adam left God's presence and hid even before he was driven out of the garden. In losing the Divine likeness he had lost all relish or fitness for the Divine presence. The one could be recovered only with the other. Born from above, and made partakers of the Divine nature, we are in affinity with God, and come with relish to his presence. 3. *It is the restoration of happiness.* "In thy presence is fulness of joy." Sin means loss on the one side and infliction on the other. Its guilt separates from God, with the result that our being is incomplete. Its corruption introduces disorder among our own powers, and disease in each, and so unrest and misery become inevitable (Isa. xlviii. 22; lvii. 20). In reunion with God these two occasions of unhappiness are removed. By regeneration the old nature is crucified, and the new one is set by faith in union with God, where it has spiritual completeness, and so its ideal of a happy state. Hence the Christian's aspiration is summed up in one idea—to "be with Christ, which is far better."

II. ISRAEL HAD A THEORETICAL DIVINE PRESENCE WITH THEM WHICH WAS NOT NOW IN FACT ENJOYED. (Exod. xxix. 45, 46.) It is implied in God's offer to be with them under certain circumstances, that he was not with them then. 1. *He was not with them in worship.* God's presence at the Jewish national worship was pledged (Exod. xx. 24). But the worship must be his worship, conducted according to his appointment. This it now was not. Where not positively idolatrous or profane, the worship of Israel was utterly formal and hollow. In such worship the Divine presence is not desired and is not enjoyed (Isa. i. 13—15). The worship must be real, the heart contrite, in which God promises to be present. Israel failed of God's promised presence by failing to claim it on the appointed terms. 2. *He was not with them in war.* For centuries he had been (Judg. vi. 16), and victory attended their arms (Josh. xxiv. 12, 18; 1 Chron. xvii. 21). Nothing could withstand them. The nations of Canaan, in whose sight they had felt as grasshoppers, were subdued before them. And God had explicitly connected their victories with his presence and help (Exod. xvii. 11, 14; Ps. xlv. 1—3). But there came a time of which the psalmist had to say, "Thou hast cast off and put us to shame, and goest not forth with our armies" (Ps. xlv. 9). The conditions on which the Divine promise of help in the field was suspended were violated or ignored, and God left them to fight with the arm they preferred to his. 3. *He was not with them in their daily walk.* They did not seek him nor want him, nor were they fit to be near him. The graces to which his presence is congruous, the means by which his presence is secured, were all absent, and so they were a nation given up of God and forsaken (Isa. ii. 6; Jer. vii. 29). He no longer dwelt with them, nor met them, nor directed them, nor spoke to them. He became, as he does to all under like conditions, "a God afar off, and not a God near at hand;" and the journey of their national existence, begun in such goodly company, was left to be finished alone.

III. TO MAKE THE THEORY OF GOD'S PRESENCE FACT, THE THEORY OF ISRAEL'S SEPARATION MUST ALSO BE FACT. God's withdrawal was the natural reply to Israel's forsaking. His resumption of relations would synchronize with their return to righteousness. 1. *Evil must be rejected.* This duty is laid down in three degrees. It is not to be sought, nor done, nor loved. It had been all three. It could cease to be the one only by ceasing to be the others also. The seeking implies that the love and the doing have gone before. The love guarantees that the doing and seeking shall follow in due course. The way to break off from evil is to be utterly separate. The least link of connection will develop into a mighty chain. 2. *Good must be chosen.* This is dutiful. Duty has a positive side still more important than its negative one. Mere avoidance of what is wrong would be a colourless thing. God's Law is not merely a system of restrictions, but a system of commands. There must be actual doing of what is right, with a knowledge that it is right, and because it is right. And this is no more dutiful than natural. The qualities that turn away from evil turn instinc-

tively to good. Indeed, the two things are so antagonistic that the love of the one and the hatred of the other are only different aspects of the same feeling. And in this choosing of God, again, there are three phases or degrees answering to those in the avoidance of sin. It is to be *loved*, as the fairest and most amiable thing on earth. It is to be done, as the only thing that is fitting and right. It is to be sought, as a thing important and desirable in the highest possible degree. 3. *Justice must be done.* "Established in the gate." Unjust judgment was a prevalent and crying evil. The Jewish character was prone to it, and the experience of it at the hands of strangers only strengthened the tendency. Perversion of justice is one of the most constant elements in natural corruption everywhere. A corrupt man makes a dishonest trader, an unjust judge, and an oppressive master. Fair and upright dealing between man and man has no natural basis, unless in the fear of God. The fear of God, on the other hand, will naturally co-ordinate itself with regard for man. The man who "does justly and loves mercy" is one who "walks humbly with God."

IV. WHAT GOD DOES FOR ISRAEL HE DOES FOR THEM AS BEING "THE REMNANT OF JOSEPH." This form of expression is significant. 1. *The remnant.* This implies weeding out by previous judgment. Israel had sinned long, and in punishment had been almost decimated. This was necessary as a matter of justice. Until it had been done they could not be saved. Sinners, individually and collectively, must receive for the wrong they have done. God's original promises were made to Israel as a nation, and not to individuals, and the nation in his eye was the remnant left after his judgments had run their course. To this remnant hope of deliverance is here held out as a brand plucked from the fire; a thing on which, justice having been vindicated, mercy may now, and not till now, be shown. 2. *The remnant of Joseph.* This means Israel as the covenant people. Joseph was Israel's favourite, "the man that was separate from his brethren," and the recipient of the promise (Gen. xlviii. 4) given to Abraham (Gen. xvii. 8) and repeated to Isaac and Jacob. Accordingly, the "remnant of Joseph" is equivalent to the "remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. xi. 5). God never forgets his covenant, never fails to give its promised blessings, never gives them to the covenant people, but as covenanted mercies. On the broad ground of creaturehood his general mercies are distributed, but special mercies are on the narrower basis of a spiritual relation. All wherein we are made to differ from others is the gift of a God in covenant, and the story of providence is at bottom the story of grace (Rom. viii. 32, 28).

Vers. 16, 17.—*The track of the destroyer.* Each name of God is a guarantor of his action. It expresses a character, or relation, or operation, in which he thereby reveals himself. The multiplication of his names and titles here is a cumulative argument for the sureness of the matter revealed. He who is God of hosts or the Omnipotent One, Lord or the Absolute One, and Jehovah or the Self-existent One, is the Being with whom to decide is to act, and to will is to accomplish. Of the deliverance so emphasized observe—

1. *THE MORAL CERTAINTY THAT THE WARNING TO AN APOSTATE WILL BE VAIN.* The possibility of a happy end, by the grace of God, to Israel's sin and troubles is held out in the previous verse. Yet here the falling of the judgments denounced is assumed to be inevitable. Paul declares that it is impossible to restore to repentance those who might fall away from a high degree of spiritual attainment. The apostate is a hopeless case: 1. *Because he loves sin more than other men.* They love it knowing nothing better, but he does so with experimental knowledge of the way of peace. He loves it under a less impulse than they, and in the face of stronger deterrents than they, and must therefore love it more than they. The fuel that kindles with the least fire, and burns in spite of most water, is clearly the most inflammable. 2. *Because he is harder than other men.* The strain is proportioned to the wrench. All sin hardens, and hardens in proportion as we are active and resolute in it. Sinning against more light, and more deterrent influence than others, the apostate's sin involves a more decided act of will, and so a more violently hardening effect. The more firmly the branding-iron is applied, the more deeply it scars. The more violently the moral sense is sinned against, the more the organ is indurated and injured. 3. *Because his day of grace will be shorter than that of other men.* The only chance of men's turning at all is God's

striving with them. This he does with all men during a longer or shorter period. In the case of the antediluvians the striving was for a hundred and twenty years (Gen. vi. 3). In the case of Jerusalem it was three years (Matt. xxiii. 39). In the case of Saul, King of Israel, it was till within about seven years of his death (1 Sam. xviii. 12). In the case of many it is during the entire life (Matt. xx. 6—9). Thus each man has his day of grace, during which God strives with him to bring him to repentance. In the nature of the case the day of grace for the apostate must be far advanced. He has been more and longer striven with than other men, and so is presumably nearer the limit beyond which the process does not go.

II. A THREAT THE REVERSE OF A CONDITIONAL PROMISE. "For I will pass through the midst of thee;" *i.e.* as elsewhere (Exod. xii. 12) in judgment. The language is a threat. God, so far from dwelling with them, as under other circumstances he was ready to do (ver. 14), would pass through them in wrath and destroying power. Underlying the announcement of this alternative is the fact: 1. *That compromise is impossible with God.* He will save or he will destroy. There is no half-way house between the good of his promise and the evil of his threat. He can yield nothing and abate nothing of either. He will come as a Friend to abide and bless unspeakably, or he will pass through as an invading Foe, making desolation in his track. 2. *That the incentive to repentance must be double-edged.* There are people who must be led, and others who must be driven. "The mercies of God" are the strongest motive power with some minds, whilst "the terrors of the Lord" are most potent with others. The Divine machinery of impulsion, to be perfect in itself and for its purpose, must include both. Hence men are plied with each in turn and often with both together (John iii. 36) in connection with the salvation which they ultimately embrace. Israel's case would not be abandoned as hopeless until both menace and promise had made their contribution to the work of its persuasion.

III. CREATION LANGUISHING WHEN THE CREATOR FROWNS. The connection between man and the creation is very close. The judgment on Israel would mean evil: 1. *In the fields.* They would not be fertile as heretofore. Their crops would fail to grow, or be blighted before they could be gathered (ch. iv. 7). Enemies would devastate the country and destroy the fruit of the ground. Rapacious officials would confiscate the earnings of honest industry. In each calamity, much more in all together, was enough to quench the joy of harvest, and cause the husbandman to mourn. 2. *In the vineyards.* The whole food of the people, the corn, the wine together, would be swept away. The grape-gathering was a proverbial occasion of joy (Isa. xvi. 10). But with no vintage to gather, or no chance to gather it for the lawful owner, the "vintage shouting" would cease, and for the usual singing in the vineyards would be substituted a universal wail. 3. *In the streets.* "God made the country, and man made the town." And the human depends on the Divine. Trade and commerce draw from agriculture their chief materials, and so when it fails they fail with it. When the husbandman has cause to weep there can be no dry eye in the community. The wail that begins in the fields, and spreads through the vineyards, will rise to a mighty roar when it reaches the streets, where the sufferers herd and lament together.

IV. THE LAMENTATION SYMPTOMATIC OF A GREAT DISASTER. 1. *This is universal.* In all "streets and vineyards," etc. The judgment affecting all classes in the community, all should mourn. 2. *It is in concert.* Men would call their fellows to lamentation. Not as individuals merely, but as a community, they sinned and suffer, and so as a community they should wail. 3. *It is worked up.* "And lamentation to those skilled in lamenting." The mourning would not be left to take any form that happened. It would be appointed and organized, and then observed according to programme. All this implies an intelligent and vivid idea of the significance of the occasion. God's judgments, however long despised, will make themselves to be understood and respected at last. In hell there is no misappreciation of the nature and strength of Divine retribution; and on earth appreciation comes infallibly with experience.

Vers. 18—20.—*The day of the Lord the night of the impenitent.* Divine judgments will be as sharp as they are sure. Sent in wrath, proportioned to guilt, falling on the vulnerable points, they are the least desirable of all imaginable things. The very

thought of them should be sobering, and the sure prospect of them overwhelming. Now, the scoffer is the worst type of sinner, and will, in the nature of the case, be the greatest sufferer when judgment comes. He is at the same time the most utterly blinded character, and therefore likely to be taken most violently by surprise. How he shall be so, and to what extent, is made in these verses to appear.

I. "THE DAY OF THE LORD." This is a common expression in the prophets, and its meaning is well defined. It is applied: 1. *To the day of active Divine intervention on earth.* (Job i. 15; ii. 1; Isa. ii. 12; Jer. xlii. 10; Obad. 15.) There are periods which God signalizes by special doings. Long quiescent, he becomes conspicuously active. He intervenes in human affairs with unusual emphasis. Judgments often menaced are sent. Sinners long borne with are punished. The godly, for a time imposed on, are delivered. Abuses, the growth of centuries, are dealt with on their merits, and swept away. Such a period is called "the day of the Lord" because it is the time of obvious and special Divine activity. God not only strikes, but shows his hand. 2. *To the day of final judgment.* All others foreshadow, lead up to, culminate and lose themselves in this. "The day of the Lord had already become the name for every day of judgment, leading on to the last day" (Pusey). This is the day of the Lord in a unique sense. It is unique as regards universality. It will see dealt with, not individuals merely, or nations even, but the entire race (Matt. xxv. 31). It is unique in the matter of thoroughness. There will be inquisition as to each person, and as to every act of each (2 Cor. v. 10). It is unique also in the matter of finality. Questions already dealt with by temporal judgments will be reopened to be settled once for all. Its sentence will be final, and its adjudication of rewards and punishments for all eternity (Matt. xxv. 46).

II. ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO THE WICKED. This is explicitly and minutely defined as: 1. *Evil.* "Darkness, and not light." It could not be otherwise. Sin means wrath, and wrath means infliction. Between a righteous God and all unrighteousness there must exist an infinite antagonism. Between his Law and such there is an essential incompatibility. Therefore his action towards them must be adverse, his judgment on them that of condemnation. It is a result of God's purity, of the majesty of law, of the needs of moral government, that "with the froward he shall show himself froward." 2. *Only evil.* "And no brightness in it." The dispensation of forbearance, the time for any measure or kind of good, is over. While any hope of reformation remained, judgment was mingled with mercy. But when this is hopeless, and the question is only one of punishing the reprobate, the exercise of goodness would be an anachronism, and only severity can be meted out. 3. *Evil playing into the hands of evil.* "As if a man fleeth before the lion, and the bear meets him." Divine punitive measures are various and complete. They surround us. They hem us in on every side. They form as it were a circle of fire round us. They are not to be evaded or escaped (Jer. xi. 11; Rom. ii. 3; Heb. ii. 3). In running away from one, we only run into the jaws of another. If it is not the lion's tooth, then in any case it will be the bear's claws. If health escape, property will suffer. If both escape, the good name will be tarnished. If all three escape, conscience will be wounded and happiness destroyed. If earthly evil consequences do not reach us, there are eternal fires kindled against which there will be no appeal. 4. *Evil in the arms of good.* "And rests his hand upon the wall, and the snake bite him." The wall, a ready support for the feeble or weary to lean on, may furnish in its chinks a hiding-place for the venomous snake. So with all human refuges in God's day of visitation. They will fail us. Their help will not be available, or it will not be sufficient, or it will involve some other evil as great as the one it will relieve. "The staff of bruised reed" (Isa. xxxvi. 6) is the fitting emblem of all fancied helps in the day of God's wrath. Even the likeliest will be found wanting in the very matter in which it promises most.

III. THEIR FOOLISH DESIRE FOR IT. "Woe to those who desire the day of Jehovah!" The sinner's desiring the day of vengeance on his sins may mean: 1. *Misapprehension.* Israel did not realize the enormity of their sin. They did not see that the threatened judgments were for themselves and on account of it. They trusted to their position as "Israel after the flesh" to secure them the immunity that only belonged to Israel after the Spirit. And so their idea of the day of God was a time when their enemies would be destroyed, and they themselves delivered and exalted. With all the wicked,

the eye for the sins of others is so much keener than the eye for their own, that coming good is unconsciously allocated to themselves and coming evil to others, and so Divine judgments desired which can only destroy them when they come. 2. *Bravado*. The prophets who foretold the coming of God's day rebuked the people's sin on account of which it was to come. Put on their mettle by the rebuke, many would affect to ridicule the prophecy. Like others (Jer. xvii. 15; 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4), they would say, with an affectation of unbelief, "You are trying to frighten us with a bugbear. Let your talked-of judgment fall, and then we will believe it." The delay of God's judgment, which means that when it comes it shall be the more terrible, is often taken as meaning that it is not coming at all (Ezek. xii. 22, 27). 3. *Vindictiveness*. Some would deem themselves less criminal than others—their enemies, it may be, and oppressors. On these they would expect the heaviest strokes to fall, and to bring this about they would suffer more or less themselves. There are Samsons among sinners who would run the risk of perishing themselves in order to secure the destruction of others. To all three classes "the day of the Lord is darkness, and no brightness in it." Evil will come none the less surely because it is good that is expected, and it will come all the more sharply on those who to their other sin have added malice against men and mockery of God.

Vers. 21—23.—*The autograph of the unreal*. Wicked Israel, strange to say, was worshipping Israel still. Theirs was sanctimonious sinning. It was done more or less in a religious connection. It was accompanied, and attempted to be covered, by an unstinted dressing of pietistic cant. But it only smelled the more rank to Heaven. Unreal worship is no mitigation, but only an aggravation, of the guilt of unholy living.

I. INSINCERITY IS OFTEN SCRUPULOUS ABOUT ALL THE CIRCUMSTANTIALS OF WORSHIP. This is natural. It builds on the form as a substitute for the spirit, and on the observance of the ordinance thus as a substitute for a godly life. Going through religious forms costs nothing in the way of crucifying the flesh. Accordingly, the scrupulosity of Israel seemed to be great in proportion to their hypocrisy. 1. *They kept the feasts*. "Feasts" (ver. 21) means the annual feasts. There is no hint that these, or any of them, were neglected or overlooked. The routine of celebration went mechanically on. They were observed without purpose and without heart, but they were observed. 2. *They performed the acts of worship*. "The assemblies" (ver. 21) were probably the meetings for worship (Lev. xxiii. 36) appointed to be held at the feasts. These as a class, no exception to which is indicated, are spoken of as having been held. "Then 'songs,' no doubt of Zion, and inspired by God, were duly sung, and the accompaniment played on harps—instruments almost exclusively consecrated to the service of God" (Pusey). 3. *They offered the usual gifts*. The "burnt offering," the "meat offering," and the "peace offering," which are all voluntary offerings, were regularly made, so far as appears. They were made, moreover, with fatlings—beasts the best of their kind, and such as the Law prescribed. So far, therefore, as form went, their worship was scrupulously correct. And the same is generally true of hollow and unspiritual worship. Being purely formal, it will seem excellent in proportion as it is elaborate. The absence of the spirit is attempted to be compensated for by the exaltation of the letter. Worship can no more be appraised by its fulness, and fairness of outward form, than the dietary value of a fruit by its size and colour.

II. INSINCERITY IS CHARACTERISTIC NO LESS IN WHAT IT OMITTS THAN IN WHAT IT OBSERVES. No mention is made of the "sin offering" or the "trespass offering." Yet these were both compulsory, whereas the three observed were optional. Hence it appears that: 1. *To the formalist that is least acceptable which is most Divine*. He has no true respect for God's authority. He is a self-pleaser first of all and most of all, and will find the ordinance most acceptable into the observance of which there enters most of his own will and least of God's. On this principle the *optional* in worship will be preferred to the *prescribed* (Isa. i. 12), and the *unauthorized* to either (Mark vii. 9). The illustration of this in the countless vagaries of the Romanist and Ritualist is easy to trace. Practical attention to the various details of worship by the unspiritual almost seems to be inversely as their Divine authority. 2. *To the formalist that is most distasteful which most closely connects him with his sin*. The sin offering was an acknowledgment, and involved a remembrance, of guilt. This is distasteful to the

natural heart. Give a sinful man his way, and the last matter he will face will be his own sinfulness. Allow a formalist discretion in worship, and the ordinance that most articulately speaks of sin will be the one least observed. Singing will be preferred to praying, a form of prayer will be preferred to the directness of spontaneous utterance, and preaching, which most distinctly brings face to face with personal responsibility and duty, will be almost crowded out. Worship, in fact, in proportion as it becomes formal, becomes impersonal and indirect.

III. SUCH HOLLOW WORSHIP IS UTTERLY OFFENSIVE TO GOD. The degrees of Divine disapprobation run up a graduated scale. "I will not accept;" "I will not take pleasure in;" "I will not regard;" "I hate;" "I despise." In all such worship the moral element, the first element of acceptability, is altogether wanting. The thing is not meant for worship, and cannot be treated as such. It is not observed according to God's will, nor as God's appointment at all, but as our own invention or choice. It is not aimed at the God-glorifying, soul-saving objects prescribed in Scripture. Gone through without interest or heart, done for fashion, or freak, or gain, it honours neither God nor his command, whilst it calls into play no grace of the religious life whatever. It is a mere performance, not only destitute of moral value, but distasteful to God, and in gratuitous violation of his Law. Hence the vocabulary of condemnation is exhausted on it (Isa. i. 11—15) as the meanest and most hateful thing in the whole spiritual connection.

Ver. 24.—*Real calamity waiting upon unreal service.* "The meaning of this verse is not, 'Let justice and righteousness take the place of your sacrifices.' . . . The verse threatens the flooding of the land with judgment and the punitive righteousness of God" (Keil). Adopting this interpretation, we observe—

I. THAT WHICH IS REJECTED "IS NIGH UNTO CURSING." Hollow service has been sitting for its portrait, and the picture is striking. Now we have the Divine appraisal revealed in the action to be taken forthwith. Instead of approval there is condemnation. Instead of reward there is punishment. Instead of profit resulting there is loss on every issue. 1. *It deserves this.* Want of conformity to law is a sufficient ground of condemnation. Positive transgression of law is ground more decided still. Wilful mockery of the Lawgiver is most deeply criminal of all. All these elements pertained to Israel's sham observances, and, together, they constitute an indictment on which the criminal's conviction is inevitable. 2. *It requires it.* God's moral government must show itself strong and just, and in order to this, sin, and all sin, must be visited with his avenging stroke. Especially must this be done in the sphere of "things whereby God maketh himself known." The thing whose function it is to make him known must do so in the glorious character he bears.

II. THE JUDGMENTS THAT ENGULF ARE RIGHTEOUSNESS. This could be argued, and is here affirmed. 1. *They express righteousness.* They are deserved. They are all deserved. They are deserved in the proportions in which they come. If they did not come, the moral balance of things would be disturbed. If they came in less decided form, this balance would be only half adjusted. They are "righteous judgments" in the fullest and highest sense. 2. *They accomplish righteousness.* They are sent in the interests of it. They fall on the unrighteous. They are designed and fitted to lead to their reformation (Isa. xxvi. 9). Sometimes the righteous suffer from them also. In that case their tendency is on the one hand to promote the righteousness of the sufferer, and on the other to emphasize the evil of unrighteousness in any section of a community, and so prevent it. As a matter of fact, Divine judgments have often wrought righteousness both in individuals (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—16) and communities (Isa. xliii. 21). Even in eternity they bulk largely, in the thought of the redeemed, among the helpful experiences of earth (Rev. vii. 14).

III. WHEN JUDGMENT IN RIGHTEOUSNESS COMES, IT COMES LIKE A FLOOD. There are two ideas here. The first is: 1. *Let judgment roll on like water.* In this: (1) It will be deep (Ps. xxxvi. 6), swallowing up all its victims. (2) It will be sudden, taking the evil-doers by surprise (Luke xvii. 20—31). (3) It will be irresistible, sweeping before it every opposing object (Ps. xc. 5). (4) It will be destroying, leaving no living thing in its track. (5) It will be ultimately fertilizing, leaving behind it the rich ooze of an abiding lesson. 2. *And righteousness like an inexhaustible stream.* Judgment

is the act of which righteousness is the principle. God's righteousness, whether in himself or in his judgments, is like an inexhaustible stream. (1) *It is perennial.* The righteousness of God's judgments is a constant quantity. It never intermits. Each is righteous and all are righteousness. (3) *It is pure.* Righteousness in God is necessarily so. There is no foreign ingredient, no cloud of mixture in it whatever. It is righteous through and through. "There is," there can be, "no unrighteousness in him." (3) *It is cleansing.* It purifies all it touches; the person it is lavied on, the city it passes through. (4) *It is irrigating.* It waters the fields of human life. It makes the grass, like the grass, to grow in the desert, and withering things revive. The righteousness of God, like water-streams, is rich in every element of blessing for time, and is a benefactor for eternity as well.

Vers. 25—27.—*Trusting in idols that cannot save.* In these words, God's case against Israel just announced is strengthened. Their services now were hollow and insincere; their sacrifices formal acts in which the heart had no part. This, in itself, was ground of punishment even to destruction. But it is only a portion of the iniquity chargeable against them. In the wilderness the course had been already entered on. Appointed ordinances had been neglected. Idolatrous ordinances had been introduced. As now they were going on, so they had long ago begun. There was a diuturnity in their wrong-doing which made the fall of destroying judgments a foregone conclusion. We see here—

I. ISRAEL'S PRESENT JUDGED IN THE LIGHT OF ITS PAST. What Israel in Amos's time was and should receive was affected by what Israel had been and done in the desert of sin. This is according to principles universally received. 1. *Every nation is held responsible for its own entire past.* The England of to-day not only owns responsibility for, but is striving nobly to make compensation for, errors of the England of three hundred years ago. The prophet-killing Israel of our Lord's time are declared responsible for all the martyr-blood shed from that of Abel down (Matt. xxiii. 35). The logic of this is unassailable. The national identity remains unbroken. The national policy remains unchanged. The national life maintains its continuity. And so among its heirlooms is the inherited responsibility for the sins of other days. 2. *A nation is further responsible for its past, in that the present takes its tone from it.* A certain proportion of almost every evil is hereditary. From the past generations we inherit evil qualities and learn evil ways. The father's vices reappear in the child. The present is the child of the past, begotten in its likeness, and liable as such for the evil it has taken up and perpetuates. 3. *The life of a nation, like that of an individual, can be judged of only as a whole.* If a nation from its birth to its death be one thing, so is a nation's life. Now, the glory of God's dealing is its perfect equity, arising out of its exhaustive induction of facts. He leaves nothing out of account, no smallest word, no slightest desire, no most trifling act. His verdict in each case is based on the entire life of the party in court. The method is fair. No other method would be fair. Each part is modified by its relation to all the others, and cannot be fairly judged unless in connection with them.

II. THAT PAST PERSISTENTLY UNFAITHFUL. The interrogative form of ver. 25 is equivalent to a strong negation. 1. *They had neglected sacrifice in the wilderness.* "Have ye offered me sacrifices and gifts in the desert forty years?" Typifying the atonement of Christ, through which men draw near to God, sacrifice was the fundamental exercise of Old Testament worship. This was not abandoned by the priests (Numb. xvi. 46), but it was, like circumcision (Josh. v. 5), neglected by the people, and superseded by sacrifices to idols (Deut. xxxii. 17; Ezek. xx. 16). In this neglect or perversion were included the voluntary gifts (offerings) as well as the prescribed sacrifices. Thus early adopted, and long persisted in, was Israel's rebellious way. Emphasizing the pronoun, God says in effect of the whole run of Jewish national history, "Ye either offered no sacrifice at all, or none to me." 2. *They were at pains to make, and carry, idolatrous appliances with them.* "But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch." Divinely appointed sacrifice they found too burdensome to be followed. Of Divine worship in each of its ordinances they said, "What a weariness is it!" But they thought it no trouble to make and carry about portable shrines and pedestals for use in the worship of heathen idols. A man will do for his idol what he

will not do for God. Be it idol lust, or habit, or opinion, he loves it more, and is more like it, and so finds its service more congenial. The God of the legalist is not the God of Scripture, but a God of his own devising, and so he serves him laboriously in works of self-righteousness, whilst stubbornly declining the far easier call of the true God to simple faith in Jesus Christ. It was in following his affinities thus that Israel was ever found joined to his idols, and alien to the God of heaven. 3. *This idolatry they had derived from Egypt.* "It was no doubt to these Egyptian sun-gods that the star-god which the Israelites carried about with them belonged" (Keil). They were not seduced into idolatry merely by the nations among whom they passed. They did not wait for that. They tired of Jehovah's service, and sought out false gods for themselves. They were bent on having idols, come whence they would. Failing others, they adopted, in their blind and besotted perverseness, those of Egypt itself. Their return to Jehovah for deliverance was desertion, and the lesson learned under idolatrous Egypt's savage oppression was to adopt the idol-worship that produced it. This is eloquent of the godlessness of the corrupt heart. Nothing can disgust it with idols, nothing can attach it to God. It hates him always, and embraces, or seeks, or makes occasions of abandoning his worship. 4. *Israel's worship of idols involved the serving of them.* "The booth of your king." Every man's god is his king. Worship is the highest act of service. When it is rendered, the other and lower acts necessarily follow; when it is abandoned, they logically and actually cease. A new idol in the heart means a new sovereign over the life.

III. THE DIVINE PUNISHMENT TO BE ADJUSTED TO THE SIN. This it always is, but in the present case the correspondence is specially obvious. 1. *They should go into captivity.* God often punishes sins against himself by human instrumentality, generally that of the wicked (2 Sam. xxiv. 13; Ps. cix. 6). The severity of such punishment is guaranteed by the native cruelty of the human heart. As the conqueror and owner of the vanquished and enslaved, the wicked puts on his worst character, and his treatment becomes punishment corresponding to the worst sin of idolatry. 2. *Their captivity should be among idolaters.* The rod of God's anger in this case was to be the Assyrian (Isa. x. 5). In captivity with him, Israel would find out what kind of masters idolatry makes of its votaries. This would disenchant them, if anything could. The test of the god we worship is the practical one of the character of his service. When our idol lusts become our masters, we know them as they really are. The drunkard has attained to a knowledge of the drink-appetite that would be a wholesome revelation to those who are just beginning to indulge. 3. *They should die as slaves in the land out of which their progenitor had at first been called.* "I will carry you beyond Damascus," Stephen (Acts vii. 42, 43) quotes this "beyond Babylon." In either case the neighbourhood of Ur of the Chaldees would be referred to. This, which had been the cradle of the nation, would be its grave. There, where their godly ancestor had been a prince, the idolatrous nation would be slaves (Josh. xxiv. 14, 3); his faith, and the promises to it, having been lost together.

IV. GOD'S THREATS EMPHASIZED BY HIS NAME. This says what he is, and so indicates how he will act. 1. *He is Jehovah, the Self-existent One.* "He cannot but be, and he is, the Source of all being; the unchangeable, infinite, eternal Essence." As Jehovah, he originates all things (ver. 8; ch. ix. 6; Jer. xxxiii. 2), controls all things (Ps. x. 16; xcix. 1), fills and possesses all things, and "nothing is too hard for him" (Jer. xxxii. 27). 2. *He is Lord of hosts.* "The Lord of the heavenly hosts, for whose worship they forsook God; the Lord of the hosts on earth, whose ministry he employs to punish those who rebel against him. All creatures in heaven and earth are, as he says of the holy angels, 'ministers of his that do his pleasure'" (Pusey). "Jehovah," the great First Cause, "God of hosts," the Controller of all second causes whatever, there is that in the Name of God which guarantees the execution, literal and exhaustive, of all his threats.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 4.—"*Seek the Lord.*" Man is by nature a seeker. He desires good, of one kind or another, and what he desires he makes the object of his quest, more or less

diligent and persevering. Hence the restlessness, the energy, the effort, so distinctive of human life. Religion does not destroy or repress natural characteristics; it hallows and dignifies them. Religion gives to human search a just direction and noble aim.

I. THE REASONS IN MAN'S NATURE AND CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH SHOULD LEAD HIM TO SEEK THE LORD. 1. Man is so constituted that he cannot find a full satisfaction in any earthly and created good. He returns from every such endeavour with the complaint, "All is vanity." "Our heart," said St. Augustine—"our heart is restless till it rests in thee." 2. Especially do all human religions prove their insufficiency. Israel was learning this by bitter experience. "Seek not Bethel," etc., was the admonition of the prophet to those who had been in the habit of resorting to idol-shrines. The gods of the heathen were known to the Jews as "vanities."

II. THE REASONS TO BE FOUND IN GOD WHY HE SHOULD ENGAGE THE SEEKING POWERS OF MAN. 1. His own proper excellence is such that the soul that gains even a glimpse of it may well devote to the pursuit of Divine knowledge and favour all powers and all opportunities. 2. God alone is able to succour and to save those who set their affection and desire upon him. 3. God condescends to invite the children of men to seek him. By the mouth of the prophet he gives an express command and invitation. We may be assured that this language is sincere and trustworthy. 4. There is an express promise of incomparable preciousness addressed to such as are ready to respond to the heavenly call. "Ye shall live," is the authoritative assurance. By this we may understand that seekers after God shall be delivered from destruction, that they shall be made partakers of the Divine life, in all its spiritual energy and happiness.

III. THE METHODS IN WHICH GOD MAY BE SOUGHT AND FOUND. 1. Observe *where* he is to be found: *i.e.* in his holy Word; in his blessed Son, by whom in this Christian dispensation he has revealed himself unto us, and who has said, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." 2. Consider *how* he is to be found: *i.e.* by penitence, in humility, through faith, with prayer; in a word, by the exercises special to the spiritual nature. 3. Notice *when* he is to be found: *i.e.* now. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."—T.

Vers. 7—9.—*The Lord of the universe.* The herdsman of Tekoah was a true poet. His eyes were open to the beauty and to the splendour of nature; and his heart felt the presence of the Unseen and Eternal in all the works of his hands, in all his providential arrangements. More than this, the moral character and rule of the Omnipotent were very present and very real to him; he felt the force of the appeal made to the spiritual nature of man, and calling for a life of religious faith, of practical obedience. There is nothing strained or unnatural in the striking conjunction in this passage of poetic sensibility with ethical and religious exhortation.

I. A REPRESENTATION OF DIVINE GREATNESS AND GLORY. 1. Seen in the creation of the starry host. The Pleiades and Orion are mentioned as two of the most noticeable and most splendid of the constellations of the midnight sky. 2. In the alternations of day and night, in sunrise and sunset, in storm and in eclipse. 3. In the grandeur of the sea, in the torrents of rain, in the floods which pour their waters over the earth; in a word, in all the processes of nature. 4. In the providential interpositions and the righteous rule of the Most High, who does according to his will among the inhabitants of the earth.

II. AN INFERENCE AS TO HUMAN CONDUCT. The poet-prophet is more than a mirror to reflect the visible splendour, the awful forces of the universe. To him nature has a voice of authority, appealing to the understanding and to the conscience of the sons of men. There is a summons to the unrighteous and the irreligious to forsake their ways and to choose a better path. This summons will take a different form according to the character, the moral development, of those addressed. 1. There is what may be called the *lower* view—a God so great will not suffer iniquity to triumph, or injustice and disobedience to go unpunished. All are in the hands of the Almighty; and he whose power is so evidently revealed in the heavens above and on the earth beneath will not fail to assert his authority over all the creatures of his power. Although wickedness may prosper for a season, the law of righteousness shall be maintained and vindicated. 2. There is a *higher* view—not inconsistent with the other, but presenting

itself to natures more morally cultivated and advanced. Great as God appears in nature, our conceptions of his excellence are enhanced when we reflect upon his glorious attributes and his righteous reign. The eternal law of righteousness administered by Omnipotence demands our lowly reverence, deserves our grateful obedience.—T.

Vers. 14, 15.—*The great alternative.* The coincidence between religion and morality is brought very strikingly before us in such passages as these. How different are such appeals as these, made by the prophet in the name of the Lord, from the requirements of merely formal religion! The highest conception of good is revealed, the noblest standard of right is exhibited; and all the sanctions furnished by the authority and the loving-kindness of the Eternal are brought to bear upon human nature to induce to consecration and obedience.

I. MAN'S NATURE AND POSITION RENDER NECESSARY A MORAL CHOICE. 1. Man's emotional nature impels him to adopt an object of supreme love. Human affection may be diffused or it may be concentrated, it may be languid or it may be intense. But in any case it exists and acts as a principle of the moral life. 2. Man's voluntary and practical nature requires an object of supreme quest and endeavour. We seek what we love, we avoid what we hate.

II. THE GREAT ALTERNATIVE WHICH PRESENTS ITSELF TO MAN IS THE CHOICE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL. This is a real and not a fictitious or conventional distinction. It would be as reasonable to deny the distinction between straight and crooked, between light and darkness, as that between moral good and moral evil. The distinction is vital and eternal, connected with the "nature of things," with the attributes and character of God, with the constitution of man. The choice between pleasure and pain, between worldly prosperity and adversity, is as nothing compared with this choice. The appeals of revelation, from the beginning to the end of the Bible, urge men to choose the good in preference to the evil. There are doubtless inducements to another choice; but this remains the choice enforced by reason, by conscience, by God.

III. HOWEVER IT MAY BE REPRESENTED OTHERWISE, THE FACT IS THAT THE PRACTICAL PREFERENCE OF GOOD CONDUCTS TO MAN'S WELFARE. The inducements offered to adopt a life of selfishness and of pleasure are many and powerful; there are "pleasures of sin for a season." The way of virtue and religion is a steep and rugged path. Yet it yields a deep and pure satisfaction not to be found in the ways, the broad and primrose paths, of sin. We are not called upon to balance pleasures. The voice of right, of God, is authoritative, and demands obedience without hesitation or calculation. Yet God promises such as listen to and obey his voice that he will "be with" them, that he will be "gracious unto" them, and that they shall "live."—T.

Vers. 21—23.—*Ceremonialism disdained.* Although the Jewish religion prescribed, as is evident especially from the Book of Leviticus, innumerable observances, elaborate ritual, frequent and costly sacrifices, still nowhere are there to be found more disclaimers, more denunciations, of a merely ritual and ceremonial piety than in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. This is but one of many declarations that the true and living God will not accept any tribute of the hands which may be offered in lieu of the homage of the heart.

I. THE OUTWARD MANIFESTATIONS OF RELIGION WHICH GOD REJECTS. 1. Sacred assemblies are displeasing to him. He does, indeed, love the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob; yet the prophet is inspired to declare that God hates and despises the gatherings of his own people. 2. Solemn festivals are equally distasteful. These, indeed, have been prescribed in the Law; they are commemorative of great mercies, great deliverances; their neglect or omission is viewed with displeasure. Yet here God is indignant that these feasts should be celebrated. 3. The same detestation is extended to the burnt offerings, meat offerings, and peace offerings, which the Hebrews were instructed on proper occasions to present to their Divine King. 4. More remarkable still, sacred songs and strains of music are as discord in the ear of God. The very psalms in which the Divine attributes are celebrated and the Divine gifts acknowledged are no longer acceptable to him who inhabiteth the praises of Israel.

II. THE GROUNDS UPON WHICH GOD REJECTS THE OUTWARD MANIFESTATIONS OF

RELIGION. 1. Not because they are themselves an inappropriate tribute of religious emotion and religious consecration. 2. But because they are not expressive of sincere worship, gratitude, confidence, and love. "This people," saith the Searcher of hearts, "draweth nigh unto me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." And our Lord Christ has taught us that "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." 3. And because ceremonial observances may be, and in the cases in question are, consistent with an idolatrous and wicked life. The very men who were punctilious in these ceremonies and sacrifices were tampering with the idolatry of surrounding peoples, and were acting with injustice and selfishness in the ordinary relationships of life. 4. Because, further, these manifestations are as a matter of fact substituted for those feelings and purposes which they are intended to promote. In fact, seeming religiousness hides the absence of real religion, so that this absence is sometimes unnoticed by the apparent but heartless and formal worshipper.—T.

Ver. 24.—*The river of righteousness.* Whilst the holy King and Judge rejects the mere service of the lip and of the hand, when unaccompanied by genuine piety, he desires above all things the prevalence of those practical principles of rectitude which are the secret, hidden power of an upright and acceptable life. In a very bold and beautiful metaphor the Divine wish and pleasure are declared. Let the hypocritical festivals, the unmeaning sacrifices, the hollow songs, be swept away, and let the river of righteousness roll through the land, and God shall be pleased, and his people shall be blessed.

I. ITS DIVINE SOURCE. The fountain of rectitude is not to be found in the arrangements of human society, in the laws of human device, in the expediency which aims at human pleasures. We are to look up to the hills, to the heavens, for its source. It wells from the eternal constitution of the moral universe, from the very nature, from the glorious government, of the Eternal.

II. ITS VAST VOLUME. There is no community of men, there is no social relationship, in which righteousness may not be exemplified. Even the heathen philosophers could say great things of justice.

"Nor morning star, nor evening star, so fair!"

Ardent religionists sometimes lose sight of this principle and its necessity, thinking justice too sublunary and commonplace to be deserving of their attention. Such a practice is not sanctioned by Scripture, which from beginning to end lays stress upon the faithful and honourable discharge of human duty, as between man and man, in all the varied relationships of life.

III. ITS MIGHTY CURRENT. There is a power in righteousness which only the morally blind can overlook, which commands the homage of the observant and the thoughtful. For whilst it is not the kind of power that the worldly cannot but see, and the vulgar cannot but admire, it is nevertheless power—enduring, effective, undoubted power. The state is strong in which justice is administered, in which a high standard of uprightness is maintained in social and public life; whilst injustice, insincerity, oppression, corruption, and deceit are detrimental to the true interests of any community.

IV. ITS PERENNIAL FLOW. A river differs from a cistern, a reservoir, in this—that it does not run dry, that it is not exhausted, that it flows on from age to age. And the righteousness that the eternal King desires to see prevail in human society is an ever-flowing stream. Not like the mountain-torrent, which is dried up in summer heat; but like the vast river, which is fed from the everlasting hills, and is replenished by many a tributary stream, is the course of Divine righteousness upon earth. Not in one nation, in one age, in one dispensation only, but in every time and place does this river of righteousness flow for the welfare of mankind.

V. ITS BENEFICENT RESULTS. From insincere religious observances no good can come; but from justice, from a proper discharge of duty, from right principles, we may look for every good. God is pleased that his attribute becomes his creature's law. And righteousness exalts nations and establishes thrones.—T.

Vers. 25, 26.—*A divided homage rejected.* The continuity of Israel's national life is

here assumed. Amos addressed the same people that was brought by Moses out of Egypt, that was led by Joshua into Canaan. The same temptations were followed by the same falls; in fact, until after the Captivity, the chosen nation was ever liable to relapse into partial and temporary idolatry. This was especially the case with the northern kingdom, which had not the benefit of the temple services, sacrifices, and priesthood. The peculiarity of the case was the attempt to combine two systems of religion so inconsistent as the worship of Jehovah and the worship of the false deities of the neighbouring nations. Yet this attempt is substantially one which is renewed by some in every generation, even under this spiritual and Christian dispensation. Displeasing as was the conduct of Israel in the view of a holy and "jealous" God, equally offensive is every endeavour to serve two masters, to divide the allegiance and devotion of the heart.

I. THE FACT THAT MEN DO ATTEMPT TO DIVIDE THEIR HOMAGE AND WORSHIP. This is no doubt an evidence of human inconsistency and instability; but it is not to be denied that our nature frequently exhibits these qualities. On the one hand, education, the voice of conscience, the aspirations of better moments, the influence of pious friends, tend to retain the heart beneath the sway of true religion. On the other hand, the example of the pleasure-seeking and the worldly, the baser impulses of our nature, the suggestions of our spiritual adversary, all draw our hearts towards an inferior good, towards an ignoble choice. Hence many are found neither renouncing God nor rejecting the allurements of a sinful world.

II. THE GROUNDS UPON WHICH THE SUPREME REJECTS THE DIVIDED HOMAGE AND WORSHIP WHICH ARE SOMETIMES OFFERED. 1. God's just claim is to the whole nature and the whole life of his intelligent creatures. The Father of the spirits of all flesh cannot consent to share his rightful possession with any rival, any pretender, be he who he may. 2. The nature of man is such that he can only give religious reverence and service that shall be worthy of the name to one Lord. Christ has emphatically pronounced upon the case in his words, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." 3. The moral degradation and disaster involved in the endeavour are palpable. There is inconsistency, nay, there is opposition, between the two services. A riven heart is a wretched heart. Hypocrisy is a sandy foundation upon which to build the character and life; upon this no secure and stable edifice can possibly be reared.

III. THE URGENCY OF THE ALTERNATIVE CONSEQUENTLY PRESENTED TO EVERY MORAL NATURE. It is the alternative which Joshua urged upon the Israelites: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." It is the alternative which Elijah urged upon a later generation: "How long halt ye between two opinions [between the two sides]? If Jehovah be God, serve him; but if Baal, then serve him."—T.

Ver. 4.—*Seeking the Lord.* "For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live." It is impossible to read this chapter without noticing the tenderness of the prophet, his compassion and pitifulness, his yearning wish to help and save. This feeling is the more remarkable because Amos belonged to the tribe of Judah, and felt thus towards the neighbouring and hostile kingdom of Israel. Such pity is ever a sign of Divine inspiration. Thus Isaiah (xxii. 4) says, "Look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people," etc. Samuel, too, after Saul the king had proved himself so headstrong and wilful that nothing could save him, although he went down to his own house and, in accordance with Divine command, saw him no more, nevertheless mourned for Saul to the day of his death. And, loftiest of all, Christ Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives, and as he beheld the city which had rejected him, he wept over it, saying, "O Jerusalem," etc. It was in this spirit that Amos wrote the passage before us, and thrice repeated the message in our text. Meditation on this subject gives us some thoughts: 1. *On the loss of God.* 2. *On the search for God* 3. *On life in God.*

I. THE LOSS OF GOD. The exhortation to "seek" him implies that he has been lost sight of by his creatures. This is brought about by various influences. 1. *By intellectual temptations.* These vary in different ages. In the time of Amos the study of God's works led to superstition, while in these days it leads many to scepticism. Then the stars were believed to affect human destiny (ver. 8); each season had its

own deity; every element obeyed some unseen being. The polytheist would have joined heartily with the Jew in saying, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." In our day, on the contrary, folly is supposed to lie in the other direction, namely, in the heart of him who believes in that which is beyond sensuous perception and purely intellectual research. Science, which has driven fairies from the woods, elves from the mountains, and nymphs from the sea, is now supposed to be almost prepared to drive God from his universe. Articles in our magazines, addresses in our halls, speak with such ill-disguised contempt of religious men that their language is, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is a God." But the world never wanted God more. Men are not satisfied with knowing, and some who see no evidence for a future heaven are bitterly asking—Is life worth living? Amidst the miseries of civilized society, and the wrangling of sects, many a one secretly says, "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God!" In an age when men believed in gods who had no personal love or righteousness, they wanted to know the heavenly Father; and in this age, when scepticism has swept the world bare of some of its old creeds, we do well to hearken to the message of God, "Seek ye me, and ye shall live." 2. *By prevailing idolatries.* Show how places of sacred memory had become sources of idolatry and pollution (ver. 5). *Bethel*, where Jacob saw the heavenly ladder, and vowed that he and his would be the Lord's; *Gilgal*, where the people reconsecrated themselves on entering Canaan; *Beersheba*, where Abraham called on the Lord, and Isaac built his altar, and Israel offered sacrifice when going with his sons into Egypt;—were all transformed into idolatrous resorts. From this, point out how easily creeds, forms of worship, holy places and relics, nominal profession of Christianity, etc., may hide God, instead of bearing witness to him. Suggest also certain modern idolatries. 3. *By practical unrighteousness.* Amos addressed his hearers as "Ye who turn judgment to wormwood [that is, who, instead of rendering justice, commit bitter wrong], and leave off righteousness in the earth [or, rather, 'dethrone it from rule']. Trace these sins in some trades and professions, and in some social customs and ecclesiastical movements, of our own day. Yet, in spite of such sins, which will incur the penalties here foretold, the message comes to every sinner from him who is not willing that any should perish, "Seek ye me, and ye shall live."

II. THE SEARCH FOR GOD. Let us rightly estimate the privilege offered to us. God is great beyond our conceptions. "He maketh the seven stars and Orion," etc., yet says, "To that man will I look . . . who is of a humble and contrite heart." 1. *There is necessity for seeking him.* He will not force himself on our notice, nor blazen his name in the sky. Any man, if he chooses, is free to live as if God were not. It is "he who seeketh findeth." 2. *There are advantages in seeking him.* These are additional to the advantages of *finding* him. The most precious things (jewels, corn, knowledge, etc.) are not the most easily obtained. The self-discipline, the steadfast effort, the trials of faith and hope, etc., cultivate character. So, in seeking God, we find that the pains and difficulties resulting from doubts, indolence, sins, etc., are part of our Heaven-appointed discipline. If God were visible as the sun is visible, there would be no moral advantage in "seeking" him; but as he is visible only through faith and prayer, we rise heavenward in our very seeking after him. 3. *There is a right way of seeking him.* Hence ver. 5, "Seek not Bethel," etc. Some hoped to get help in other directions rather than in the path of penitential prayer. Multitudes now, instead of turning to him who is the Light of the world, pursue false lights, which, like the will-o'-the-wisp, will lead to destruction. Hear the words of Jesus Christ: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father;" "I and the Father are one."

III. THE LIFE IN GOD. "And ye shall live." This does not allude to national life. That was irrevocably doomed. But in the doomed nation any sinner turning to God would live. Nor is the allusion to natural life, but to that spiritual life which is referred to in the verse, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee," etc. This life in its nature and source is more fully revealed to us than to Amos himself. 1. *The source of this life* is found in God, revealed to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. No man can create life where it is not, nor restore it where it once was. Christ, by the raising of the dead, showed in a visible sphere what he alone can do in the invisible. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ

our Lord." 2. *The nature of this life.* It is Divine, and constitutes us "partakers of the Divine nature." Its germ is faith, its inspiration is love, its breath is prayer, its manifestation the likeness of Christ. 3. *The vigour of this life.* It will live amid the influences of an evil atmosphere, as a hale man walks unhurt through a tainted hospital. It will assert itself in streams of benediction to the world around, and it will finally prove itself victorious over death; for the Lord has said, "He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die;" text.—A. R.

Ver. 8.—*The message of the stars.* "Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The Lord is his Name." This recognition of God amidst the phenomena of nature is characteristic of Amos. He looked on the Pleiades and Orion, as they shone radiantly in the heavens, changeless in their relations, calm amidst human vicissitudes, and constant in diffusing their light upon a troubled world, and bade men seek him who created them. He speaks of night, that "shadow of death," and reminds his hearers that, though it be long and fearsome, the light of dawn comes at last, and God turns it into morning; and again, after the work of the day is done, and tired men want rest, God draws the curtains, and "makes the day dark with night." The last clause is more obscure. Sometimes the waters have been "poured out upon the earth" in destructive deluge, and this has occurred at the command of God; but we prefer the application of the prophet's words to that familiar and constant display of the Divine power by means of which the waters are secretly gathered up into the sky, that they may be poured out in showers of blessing upon the earth. Our text is true of nature; but it is also true of that of which nature is the symbol and shadow, as we shall endeavour to show. It reminds us—

I. THAT GOD OVERRULES THE OUTWARD CONDITIONS OF HUMAN LIFE. "Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion." The words are literally true. Philosophy teaches us to find an adequate cause for all effects, and science acknowledges that the First Cause eludes its search, and is beyond its sphere. Revelation declares, "God made the sun to rule by day, and the moon to rule by night: he made the stars also." More than this primal fact is, however, asserted here. Amos was speaking to those who saw in the stars more than material lights. His hearers believed in astrology, which has been prevalent in all ages, from the very dawn of history. This superstition, which has left its mark on the earliest records of our race, in the literature of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Hindus, and Chinese, was not without effect on the people of Israel, as many passages in Scripture show. Indeed, it only received its deathblow when the Copernican system was finally established; for even Kepler would not deny that there was a connection between the movements of the stars and the fortunes of men. Now, two constellations so peculiar and brilliant as Pleiades and Orion naturally had special powers ascribed to them. Thus Rabbi Isaac Israel, in his remarks on Job xxxviii. 31, says, "Some of the stars have operations in the ripening of fruits, and such is the opening of the Pleiades; and some of the stars retard and delay the fruits from ripening, and this is the opening of Orion." In other words, the Pleiades were associated with the spring, when Nature was bursting into new life, when she was emitting the sweetest influences from every blade and flower, when ships which had been shut up through stress of weather could put out once more to sea. Hence the question, "Canst thou bind the sweet influence of Pleiades?"—Canst thou prevent the outpouring of vernal life? Whether you will or not, the change comes; for it is of God. Similarly, Orion was associated with autumn, when the earth was throwing off her beauty, and the voyages of the ancient times came to an end, and frost bound the streams as in fetters of iron. "Canst thou loose the bands of Orion?"—Canst thou check the storms, and break up the reign of frost? Now, says Amos, look beyond these constellations to him who made them; and when you rejoice in the spring, or dread the approaching winter, when you are glad over the pleasantness of life, or faint under its adversity;—think of him who is above and beyond all material forces and all visible influences. There is a spring and autumn known in human experience which have their sources beyond ourselves and beyond all visible agency; and our hearts find rest in the assurance of this. Compare the lot of two children in dissimilar cir-

cumstances—the one with every comfort and care, as if “born under a lucky star,” and sharing “the sweet influences of Pleiades;” the other in the drunken home, with curses temporal and moral on every side. These children do not choose their lot, they do not appear to deserve treatment so different; yet their circumstances are not the result of chance nor the decree of blind fate, but are to be ascribed to him “who made the seven stars and Orion,” and, as the Judge of all the earth, he will do right. (Suggest other examples of seeming unfairness in men’s circumstances.) This Divine revelation in Scripture affirms of God that he appoints the lot of each, and this with a view to the training of character, which far outweighs the pleasantness or the painfulness found in mere circumstances. Adversity will by-and-by appear to be but a small thing to him who amidst it proved himself faithful, and prosperity will seem in the retrospect of little worth to him who, through his thanklessness and prayerlessness, has failed to “lay hold on eternal life.” Whatever influences surround us, we are, for our own sakes, called on to recognize God as overruling them. If we are prosperous, it is “the Lord who gives power to get wealth;” if we are in adversity, we are not to blame our luck or our friends, but to seek the comfort and help of him “who maketh the seven stars and Orion.”

II. THAT GOD OVERRULES THE INWARD EXPERIENCE OF MEN. “He turneth the shadow of death into the morning,” etc. The Hebrew word translated “shadow of death” almost always means more than natural night, however black that may be (see references in Job and Psalms). Admitting this figurative use of the word here, the reference of the prophet would seem to be to the changes from sorrowfulness to joyfulness, and from joyfulness to sorrowfulness, which we frequently experience. These are not dependent on circumstances. The wealthiest men have often said of their surroundings, “I have no pleasure in them;” while the poor and persecuted have sometimes made their miserable abodes resound with praise. We may illustrate this from the life of our Lord. At one time “he rejoiced in spirit,” at another time he was “exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;” yet the Father’s hand was recognized in both experiences. God inspires the children’s songs, and he gives the cup of agony. What abundant reason we have to praise God for certain inward changes—the carelessness turned into serious and sad penitence, and this again into the joyfulness of pardon! To many a weeping penitent, sitting in darkness, he has come and “turned the shadow of death into morning.” Others have been in the darkness of doubt. They have cried, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” They have felt around them for some hand to help in their dire extremity. At last the sense of Christ’s love has come home to them, and though their questions are not all answered, they believe in him, and enter into rest, and soon they find that “he that believeth does not walk in darkness, but has the light of life.” God turns for them the shadow of death into morning. Soon “the shadow feared of man” will come. Yet even the darkness of death shall be transformed into the brightness of heaven; and in the place where “there is no need of the sun or moon to shine,” because God himself is the Light thereof, we shall see how God has for evermore turned the shadow of death into morning.

III. THAT GOD TRANSFORMS CURSES INTO BLESSINGS. God “calls for the waters of the sea.” They secretly ascend to heaven, and then descend in refreshing showers. The transformation effected in that phenomenon is noteworthy. If we pour sea water on flowers, they will die; but when it is called up into the heavens the pernicious salt is left behind, the water is purged from its destructiveness, and the curse is made a blessing. A transforming influence passes over all that comes to us, if it is caught up to heaven. Suppose prosperity comes to you. It may enervate and destroy your spiritual life, but if praise to God is associated with it, and habitual prayer that you may use this for God, you may become by your very prosperity a more generous, tender-hearted, and Christ-like man. If adversity is yours, and you take all your troubles before the Lord, they will be transfigured before you in the light of God’s love and Christ’s sufferings, and through your valley of Achor you will enter into deeper rest and nobler hope. If doubts or temptations try you, they will not curse, but bless you, if they arouse the earnest prayer, “Lord, help me!” Christ was never more precious to Thomas than when, after his doubts, he exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” But his doubts would have ruined him had they kept him from the presence of the Lord. Let all your troubles and joys be wafted, by prayer and praise, into the

heaven of God's presence, and they shall be poured down upon you in showers of spiritual blessings.

CONCLUSION. If you would know the comfort of the text, you will only find it in obedience to its first clause, "Seek him!" "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found," etc.; "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." Then, under the quiet light of the stars, or in the splendours of sunset and dawn, or watching the fall of the heaven-sent showers, you will have thoughts of him who rules over all, as of one who through Jesus Christ is your Father and your Friend.—A. R.

Vers. 8, 9.—*The glory of religion.* "Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning," etc. The word reveals two things.

I. THE CONNECTION WHICH GOD HAS WITH HIS UNIVERSE. His connection is that: 1. Of a *Creator*. "He maketh the seven stars and Orion." These constellations are only given as specimens of all the things he has created in different parts of the universe. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." 2. Of a *Governor*. "He turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth." The truth taught is this—that he presides over the revolution of day and night, and the changes of the seasons, and the fortunes of men. All nature is under his control. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." 3. Of a *Redeemer*. "That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress." The reference is here undoubtedly to his redemptive work in human history.

II. THE CONNECTION WHICH MAN SHOULD HAVE WITH GOD. "Seek him." A phrase of frequent use in the Bible, denoting the duty of man to attain to the knowledge, the friendship, and the fellowship of the Eternal. And in this all true religion consists. The pursuit implies: 1. Faith in God's personal existence. A belief that he is. 2. A consciousness of moral distance from God. We do not seek what we possess. 3. A felt necessity of friendly connection with God. 4. An assurance that such a connection can be obtained.

CONCLUSION. What a grand thing is religion! It is not a thing of mere doctrine, or ritual, or sect, or party. It is a moral pursuit of "him that maketh the seven stars and Orion," etc.—D. T.

Ver. 14.—*Religion.* "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken." From these words two things may be inferred concerning religion.

I. IT IMPLIES A SPECIFIC PURSUIT. "Seek good, and not evil." Good and evil are both in the world; they work in all human souls; they explain all history. 1. *They imply a standard of right.* By what do we determine the good and evil in human life? The revealed will of God. What accords with that will is good, what disagrees with it is evil. 2. *Their object is a human pursuit.* There are those who pursue evil; they follow it for worldly wealth, animal pleasure, secular aggrandizement. There are those who pursue good; and their grand question is, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" 3. *The pursuit of good is the specific effort of religion.* Good in thought, spirit, aim, habit, as embodied in the life of Christ. To get good requires strenuous, persistent, devout, prayerful effort.

II. IT INVOLVES THE HIGHEST BENEDICTION. 1. The enjoyment of *true life*. "That ye may live." Without goodness you cannot really live: goodness is life. Everlasting goodness is everlasting life. "This is life eternal, to know thee," etc. (John xvii. 3). 2. The enjoyment of the *Divine friendship*. "So the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you." What a benediction is this! "The Lord God of hosts," the Almighty Creator, Proprietor, and Governor of the universe to be with us, to guide, guard, beautify existence! "I will walk among you," says he; "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people."—D. T.

Ver. 19.—*Selfishness in terror.* "As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him."

The Israelites rested their hope of deliverance from every kind of foreign danger upon their outward connection with the covenant made with their forefathers; hence many put their trust in the days spoken of in the context, when Jehovah would judge all the heathen, expecting that he would then in all probability raise Israel to might and dominion. All this was simple delusion, the delusion of selfishness; for when Jehovah would appear to punish the nations, Amos says they would be so panic-struck as to be confounded in their efforts to escape. Running from the lion, they would fall into the jaws of the bear; or fleeing into a house, they would be met by a serpent that would bite them. The passage illustrates *selfishness in terror*. Its characteristic is that in seeking protection from one danger it rushes into another. This is often seen—

I. IN COMMERCIAL LIFE. A selfish man in trade often finds himself running down the hill of insolvency, and ruthless bankruptcy appears before him as a lion ready to destroy him. What does he do? Where does he seek protection? Perhaps in abscension. But he is apprehended, and he finds he has fled from "a lion" to "a bear," enters the house where the "serpent" of enraged justice fastens on him. Or perhaps he resorts to forgery. Here he is detected, and the same result is experienced. He has fled from the lion only to rush into the jaws of the bear.

II. IN SOCIAL LIFE. In few social circles are men not to be found who in some way or other commit a wrong against their members. Indeed, in family life it is so. Children do some injury to their parents, and parents to their children, husbands to their wives, and wives to their husbands. After the commission of the deed, selfish terror is awakened, and they fabricate falsehoods in order to escape the danger. The falsehood is detected, and then it is felt that the man has only fled from the lion to the bear. He has run for protection where he has found the "serpent."

III. IN RELIGIOUS LIFE. Men get convinced of sin, their consciences are roused, and hell appears before them as a ravenous lion, which they endeavour to escape; and they fly for protection to what? To selfish prayers, selfish sacrifices, selfish performances; but to attempt to escape from hell by selfish efforts is only running from the lion to the bear. "He that seeketh his life shall lose it."

CONCLUSION. This subject is capable of endless illustrations. It is an eternal truth that he who seeks protection from selfish fear only rushes from one danger into another. There is no protection for a soul but in self-renunciation, in the entire consecration of self to the worship and service of the great God.—D. T.

Vers. 21—24.—*The divinely abhorrent and the divinely demanded.* "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies," etc. Notice—

I. THE DIVINELY ABHORRENT. What is that? Mere ceremonial religion; empty ritual. "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies," etc. "The same aversion from the ceremonial observances of the insincere and rebellious Israelites which Jehovah here expresses he afterwards employed Isaiah to declare to the Jews (Isa. i. 10, etc.). The two passages are strikingly parallel, only the latter prophet amplifies what is set forth in a more condensed form by Amos. It is also to be observed that where Amos introduces the musical accompaniments of the sacrifices, Isaiah substitutes the prayers; both concluding with the Divine words, 'I will not hear.' 'Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.' The singing of their psalms was nothing more to God than a wearisome round which was to be brought to an end. Singing and playing on harps was a part of the worship of the temple (1 Chron. xvi. 41; xxiii. 5; xxv.). Nothing seems more abhorrent to the holy eye and heart of Omniscience than empty ceremony in religion. No sacrifices are acceptable to him, however costly, unless the offerer has presented himself. No psalmody is acceptable to his ear but the psalmody of self-oblivious devotion." "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

II. THE DIVINELY DEMANDED. "Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." While no direction is given respecting the regulation of the sacrifices in order that they may be rendered acceptable, here is a special demand for morality in life, moral rectitude in conduct. Thus God once more expresses the idea that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." The way to worship God acceptably is not by ceremonial observances, not by religious

contributions, not in singing psalms, but in doing the right and loving thing towards our fellow-men. The true practical expression of our love to God is that of a virtuous and generous conduct towards mankind. Stud your country with fine churches if you like, fill them with æsthetic worshippers and enthusiastic devotees. But all that is abhorrent to God unless you feel and act rightly towards your fellow-men in your daily life. We had rather see justice rolling on like mighty waters, and righteousness as a swelling and ever-flowing stream, than crowded churches. "Show me your faith . . . by your works." Show me your worship by your morality; show me your love to God by your devotion to your fellow-men. "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us." "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for if he loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VI.

Vers. 1.—6.—With a second woe the prophet denounces the chiefs of the whole nation, who were quite satisfied with the present state of things, and revelling in luxury, feared no coming judgment.

Ver. 1.—**Them that are at ease in Zion**; living in fancied security and self-pleasing (Isa. xxxii. 9, 11; Zeph. i. 12). Judah is included in the denunciation, because she is equally guilty; the whole covenant nation is sunk in the same dangerous apathy. Septuagint, τοῖς ἐφουθενούσι Σιών, "them that set at naught Zion." The same rendering is found in the Syriac, and can be supported by a small change in the Hebrew. It may have been intended thus to confine the announcement to Israel alone, in conformity with the prophet's chief scope. But he has introduced mention of Judah elsewhere, as ch. ii. 4; vi. 5; ix. 11, and his sense of his own people's careless ease may well lead him to include them in his warning. **Trust in the mountain of Samaria.** The city was deemed impregnable, and it kept the Assyrians at bay for three years before it was finally taken (2 Kings xviii. 9, etc.; see notes on ch. iii. 9 and iv. 1). Another rendering, not so suitable, is, *the careless ones upon the mountain of Samaria*. The point, however, is the supposed impregnability of the city which occasioned a feeling of perfect security. Which are **named chief of the nations**; rather, *to the notable men of the chief of nations*; i.e. the principal men of Israel, which had the proud title of the chief of the nations because it was beloved and elected of God, and was designed to keep alive true religion, and to set an example to the rest of the world (Exod. xix. 5; Numb. i. 17; Deut. iv. 20; 2 Sam. vii. 23). Septuagint, ἀπερύγησαν ἄρχας ἐθνῶν, "they plucked the chiefs of the nations," where the verb is a mistaken rendering. **To whom the house of Israel came**; or, *come*. Resort for counsel and

judgment (2 Sam. xv. 4), and who ought therefore to be patterns of righteousness and equity. The rendering of the Vulgate, *ingredientes pompaticè domum Israel*, "entering with pomp into the house of Israel" (which does not agree with the present Hebrew text), implies that these chieftains carried themselves haughtily in the congregation of Israel.

Ver. 2.—**Pass ye.** Go and compare your condition with that of other countries, from the furthest east to the north, to your own neighbours—has not God done more for you than for them? Nothing is said about the destruction of the three capitals, nor is Samaria threatened with similar ruin. Rather the cities are contemplated as still flourishing and prosperous (though by this time they had suffered at their enemies' hands), and Israel is bidden to remember that she is more favoured than they. Calneh, one of the five great Babylonian cities, is probably the *Kul-unu* of the inscriptions, a town in Southern Babylonia, whose site is unknown. In Gen. x. 10 and Isa. x. 9 the LXX. call it *Chalanné* or *Chalane*; in the present passage they mistake the Hebrew, and render, διδόντε πάντες, "pass ye all by" (see Schrader, 'Die Keilinschriften,' p. 442). St. Jerome identifies it with Ctesiphon, on the east bank of the Tigris. Others (see Rawlinson, 'Herodotus,' i. p. 490, 2nd edit.) find in it Nopher or Nipur, the modern *Niffer*, some sixty miles south-east of Babylon. As one of the oldest cities in the world, ranking with Babel, Erech, and Accad, it was well known to the Israelites. Hamath the great; Septuagint, Ἐλαρπαββδ. This was the principal city of Upper Syria, and a place of great importance. In after-years it was called Epiphania, after Antiochus Epiphanes (Gen. x. 18; Numb. xxxiv. 8; Isa. x. 9). It fell in Sargon's reign, B.C. 720; afterwards it lost its independence, and was incorporated in the Assyrian empire. Gath of the Philistines. One of their five chief cities, and at one time the principal (1 Chron. xviii.

1). The site is placed by Porter at *Tell es-Sâfi*, an isolated hill, standing above the broad valley of Elah, and "presenting on the north and west a white precipice of many hundred feet." Dr. Thomson ('The Land and the Book,' p. 215, etc.) considers Gath to be the same city as Betogabra, Eleutheropolis, and the modern *Beit Jibrin*, which is some few miles south of *Tell Sâfi*. He thinks the site of Tell Sâfi is not adapted for the seat of a large city, and he saw few indications of ancient ruins there; whereas Beit Jibrin has in and around it the most wonderful remains of antiquity to be found in all Philistia. It had probably declined in importance at this time (see note on ch. i. 6), but its old reputation was still remembered. It was taken by Uzziah, but seems not to have remained long in his possession (2 Chron. xxvi. 6). In the year B.C. 711 Sargon reduced Ashdod and Gath, which he calls Gintu Asdudim, i.e. Gath of the Ashdodites. Be they better! Have they received more earthly prosperity at God's hands than you? Is their territory greater than yours? No. How ungrateful, then, are you for all my favours (comp. Jer. ii. 5-11)! Schrader and Biokell regard the verse as an interpolation, grammatically, metrically, and chronologically inadmissible; but their arguments are not strong, and Amos makes no mention of the fate of these cities.

Ver. 3.—Ye that put far away the evil day. They assigned a distant date to the time of punishment and calamity; they would not look it in the face or contemplate it as approaching and ready to come upon them. Septuagint, *Οἱ ἐρχόμενοι εἰς ἡμέραν κἀκην*, "Ye who are coming unto the evil day." The Alexandrian manuscript has *οἱ εὐχόμενοι*, "ye who pray for" (ch. v. 18), with which the Syriac seems to agree. The Vulgate (as Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion), taking the verb passively, renders, *qui separati estis in diem malum*. But it is best to translate it as above, in the sense of "repelling," "putting away with aversion," as in Isa. lxvi. 5. And cause the seat of violence to come near. They erected the throne (*shebheeth*, "the sitting," or "enthroning") of violence in their midst, made themselves the subjects and slaves of wickedness and oppression. The LXX., mistaking *shebheeth* for *shabbath*, translates, *Οἱ ἐγγιζόμενοι καὶ ἐπαγγόμενοι σαββάτων ψευδῶν*, "Ye who are drawing near and clinging to false sabbaths."

Ver. 4.—That lie upon beds of ivory; couches inlaid with ivory (see note on ch. iii. 15) at meals. The prophet substantiates his denunciation by describing their selfish luxury and debauchery. Stretch themselves; literally, *are poured out*; Septuagint, *κατα-*

σπαταλῶντες, "wantoning." Out of the midst of the stall. Calves put up to be fattened. They do this presumably not on festivals, when it would have been proper and excusable, but every day.

Ver. 5.—That chant. The word *parat* (*παρὰ λεγόμενον*) means rather "to prattle," "to sing idle songs," as the Revised Version translates it. The reading of the Septuagint varies between *ἐπικρατοῦντες*, "excelling," and *ἐπικροτοῦντες*, the latter of which words might mean "applauding." Viol (see note on ch. v. 23). Invent to themselves instruments of music, like David. As David devised stringed instruments and modes of singing to do honour to God and for the service of his sanctuary (see 1 Chron. xv. 16, etc.; xxiii. 5; 2 Chron. xxix. 26, 27; and the supernumerary psalm at the end of the Psalter in the Septuagint), so these debauchees invented new singing and playing to grace their luxurious feasts. The Septuagint rendering, which Jerome calls "sensus pulcherrimus," is not to be explained by the present Hebrew text, however true to fact it may be considered, *ὡς ἐστηκότα ἐλογίζαντο, καὶ οὐχ ὡς φεύγοντα*, "Regarded them as abiding and not as fleeing things."

Ver. 6.—Wine in bowls (*mizraqim*); sacrificial bowls; used in libations of wine and in the sprinkling of blood (comp. Exod. xxxviii. 3; Numb. vii. 13, etc.; 1 Chron. xxviii. 17; 2 Chron. iv. 8, 22; Zech. ix. 15; xiv. 20). These vessels the luxurious and sacrilegious princes employed in their feasts, proving thus their impiety and their excess (comp. Dan. v. 2). Septuagint, *οἱ πίνοντες τὸν διυλισμένον οἶνον*, "who drink strained wine." The chief ointments. Such as were used in Divine service (Exod. xxx. 23, etc.), and nowhere else. If they had felt as they ought to feel in this time of rebuke and sorrow, they would, like mourners, have refrained from anointing themselves (Ruth iii. 3; 2 Sam. xiv. 2); but, on the contrary, they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. The coming ruin of the ten tribes affects them not; in their selfish voluptuousness they have no sympathy with calamity and suffering, and shut their eyes to coming evil. "The affliction of Joseph" is probably a proverbial expression derived from the narratives in Gen. xxxvii. 25, etc., and xl. 14, 23 (comp. Gen. xlii. 21).

Ver. 7-11.—Here follows the announcement of punishment for the crimes mentioned above: the people shall go into captivity; they shall be rejected of God, and given over to utter ruin.

Ver. 7.—With the first. They shall have a pre-eminence indeed, being the first to go

into captivity. St. Jerome, "Vos qui primi estis divitiis, primi captivitatis sustinebitis jugum, secundum illud quod in Ezechiele scriptum est: 'a sanctuario meo incipite'" (Ezek. ix. 6). *With the first*; literally, *at the head*, with reference doubtless to ver. 1. *The banquet* (*mirzakh*); *the screech of revellers*. The word is used of the scream of mourners in Jer. xvi. 5; here of the cries and shouts of feasters at a banquet. *Them that stretched themselves on couches*, as ver. 4. The Septuagint, reading differently, has, "They shall depart into captivity from the dominion of princes, and the neighing of horses shall be taken away from Ephraim." From this passage of Amos St. Augustine takes occasion to show that the most untrained of the prophets possessed eloquence and literary skill ('De Doctr. Christ.,' iv. 7).

Ver. 8.—*Hath sworn by himself* (*nepheesh*); *in anima sua* (Vulgate), "by his soul;" a concession to human language (comp. ch. iv. 2; Jer. li. 14; Heb. vi. 13, 17, 18). God thus shows that the threat proceeds from him, and is immutable. The excellency; *the pride* (*ὑψηλόν*, Septuagint; *superbiam*, Vulgate); that of which Jacob is proud (Hos. v. 5), as, for instance, his palaces, built by exaction, maintained in voluptuous luxury. Will deliver up to the enemy for destruction (Deut. xxxii. 30; Obad. 14).

Ver. 9.—*If there remain ten men in one house*. If these escape death in war, they shall die of famine and pestilence in the three years' siege of Samaria (2 Kings xvii. 5). If the prophet is still referring to the rich chieftains, ten would be only a poor remnant of the inhabitants of their palaces. The LXX. adds, very unnecessarily, *καὶ ὑπολειφθήσονται οἱ κατάλοιποι*, "And those remaining shall be left behind."

Ver. 10.—The prophet gives an instance of the terror and misery in that common calamity. He depicts a scene where the nearest surviving kinsman comes into the house to perform the funeral rites for a dead man. *And a man's uncle*; better, *and when a man's kinsman*; the apodosis being at the end of the verse, "Then shall he say." *Dad* is sometimes rendered "beloved," but usually "father's brother," but it may mean any near relation upon whom, in default of father and brethren, would devolve the duty of burying the corpse. Septuagint, *οἱ ἀκείνοι αὐτῶν*; *propinquus suus* (Vulgate). *And he that burneth him*; literally, *and his burner*. This is the same person as the kinsman, the burier; but for some reason, either from the number of deaths, or from the pestilence, or from the distance of the burying-place, which would be out of the city and inaccessible in the blockade, he cannot lay the body in the grave, and is forced to take

and burn it. Though the Jews generally buried dead bodies, cremation was sometimes used, both in honour or emergency (1 Sam. xxxi. 12) and in punishment (Lev. xx. 14; xxi. 9). *The bones*; i.e. the corpse, as in Exod. xiii. 19; Josh. xxiv. 32; and 2 Kings xiii. 21; Keil. The kinsman takes it up to bring it out of the house to burn it. *Him that is by the sides of the house*; *him that is in the innermost parts of the house*; *qui in penetralibus domus est* (Vulgate). This is the last living person, who had hidden himself in the most remote chambers; or it may be a messenger whom the kinsman had sent to search the house. *He asks him—Is there yet any with thee? Is there any one left alive to succour, or dead to bury? And he shall say, No*; Vulgate, *et respondebit, Finis est*. Then he (the kinsman) shall say, *Hold thy tongue* (*Has!*); *Hush!* He stays the man in the inner chamber from speaking; and why? For we may not make mention of the name of the Lord; Vulgate, *et non recorderis nominis Domini*. Some, as Pusey, Schegg, and Gandell, see here the voice of despair. It is too late to call upon God now; it is the time of vengeance. We rejected him in life; we may not cry to him in death. St. Jerome refers the prohibition to the hardness of heart and unbelief of the people, who even in all this misery will not confess the name of the Lord. Keil says, "It indicates a fear lest, by the invocation of the name of God, his eye should be drawn towards this last remaining one, and he also should fall a victim to the judgment of death." Others again think that the notion in the mind of the impious speaker is that Jehovah is the Author of all their calamities, and that he is impatient at the very mention of his name. The simplest explanation is the first, or a modification of it. The person addressed is about to pray or to call on God in his distress. "Be silent," says the speaker; "we can no longer appeal to Jehovah as the covenant God; by naming him we call to his remembrance how we have broken the covenant, violated our relation to him; therefore provoke him not further by making mention of his name."

Ver. 11.—The prophet confirms the judgment denounced in ver. 8. The Lord commandeth, and he will smite. The expression, thus taken, implies that God executes his commands through the ministers of his judgment; but it may well be rendered, "and men shall smite" (comp. ch. ix. 9). *Breaches . . . clefts*. The great palace requires a breach to bring it to the ground; the little hut is ruined by a small rent or cleft. All houses, great and small, shall be smitten. Possibly Israel and Judah are signified respectively by "the great house" and "the little house" (comp. ch. ix. 11);

and their treatment by the Assyrians may be thus symbolized.

Vers. 12—14.—The prophet shows the folly of these evil-doers who think in their own strength to defy judgment and to resist the enemy whom God is sending against them.

Ver. 12.—*Shall horses run upon the rock? Can horses gallop safely over places covered with rocks and stones? Will one plough there with oxen? Do men plough the rock with their oxen?* The answer, of course, is "No." Yet your conduct is equally foolish, your labour is equally lost. Some, dividing the words differently, translate, "Does one plough the sea with oxen?" which reminds one of the Latin proverb, "*Litus arare bubus.*" Thus Ovid, '*Ep. Heroid.*' v. 115—

"*Quid facis Ceneone? Quid arenæ semina mandas?*"

Non profecturis litora bubus aras."

For ye have turned; or, that ye have turned. Judgment into gall (see note on ch. v. 7). *Hemlock.* Some plant with an acrid juice. *Ye turn the administration of justice, which is "the fruit of righteousness," into the bitterest injustice and wrong. It were "more easy," says Pusey, "to change the*

course of nature or the use of things of nature, than the course of God's providence or the laws of his just retribution."

Ver. 13.—*In a thing of nought; a nothing*—a thing which does not really exist, viz. your prosperity and power. *Horns;* symbols of strength (Deut. xxxiii. 17; 1 Kings xxii. 11); the idea being derived from the wild bull, the strongest animal of their fauna. Their boast was a consequence of the successful wars with the Syrians (2 Kings xiv. 25—28). The prophet proceeds to demolish their proud vaunt.

Ver. 14.—*I will raise up* (comp. 1 Kings xi. 14, 23; Hab. i. 6, where see note). *A nation. The Assyrians. From the entering in of Hamath.* A district in the upper part of Coele-Syria, *hodie, El-Bukaa*, the northern boundary of the kingdom of Israel (Numb. xxxiv. 8; see on ver. 2). *The river of the wilderness; rather, the torrent of the Arabah,* which is the curious depression in which the Jordan flows, and which continues, though now on a higher level, south of the Dead Sea, towards the Gulf of Akaba. The torrent is probably the *Wady es Safieh*, just south of the Dead Sea. The limits named define the territory which Jeroboam recovered (2 Kings xiv. 25). The LXX. gives, τοῦ χειμαρρῶτος τῶν θυμῶν, "the torrent of the west."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Wantonness the way to woe.* God's thoughts are not as ours. He sees things all round; we see but one side of them. He sees the inner reality of things; we see but their outward semblance. He sees the tendency and ultimate result of things; we but guess their probable tendency, knowing nothing of distant results whatever. Hence, in their estimates of life and of good, "the wisdom of men is foolishness with God." The passage before us is an illustration of this. The conditions of being desecrated by carnal wisdom are here declared utterly baneful, its calculations fallacious, and its canons of judgment false. We see here—

I. THE GREATNESS OF THE WICKED. This is no uncommon sight (Ps. xxxvii. 35), nor one whose lesson is hard to read (Ps. xcii. 7). 1. *Israel was first of the nations.* (Ver. 1.) In its palmy days, and even now, it would have compared favourably with the neighbouring heathen states (ver. 2). It had the power of unique knowledge. It had the greatness of a unique culture. It had the glory of a unique Divine connection (Exod. xix. 5; 2 Sam. vii. 23). With an equal numerical, financial, and territorial strength, it held, in virtue of these advantages, a pre-eminence above any other people. Its wealth and magnificence were the admiration of even Oriental sovereigns (1 Kings x.); its armies, under normal circumstances, could hold their own with any of the time (1 Sam. xv. 1—8); and the white wings of its commerce gleamed on every sea. In spite of national unfaithfulness and rebellion and wickedness, God's promise to Abraham to make of him "a great nation" had been, in the fullest sense, accomplished. 2. *These were the chiefs of Israel.* (Ver. 1.) They were magistrates, rulers, and judges of the people. They occupied the position of princes, and the house of Israel came to them for the regulation of its affairs. "They were the descendants of those tribe-princes who had once been honoured to conduct the affairs of the chosen family along with Moses and Aaron, and whose light shone forth from that better age as brilliant examples of what a truly theocratical character was" (Hengstenberg). "This was a proud position, and it had brought the usual amount of arrogance with it."

II. **THE SECURITY OF THE GREAT.** "Woe to the secure!" Conscious strength makes men and nations feel secure. As to Israel: 1. *They were secure in religious privilege.* "In Zion." They presumed on their covenant relation. They ignored its sanctions, disregarded its responsibilities, and took it as a guarantee of immunity, even in sin. Religion is only good as a whole. To have its privileges without its spiritual character leads through carnal security to carnal indulgence, and so to a condition worse than to be destitute of both. 2. *They were secure in strategic strength.* "And to the careless upon the mountain of Samaria." Samaria was a strong place, a mountain-fortress, situated in a rich valley. It held out against Benhadad, King of Syria, defying assault, and escaping reduction even by famine (2 Kings vii.). To Shalmaneser, long afterwards, it only yielded after a three years' siege (2 Kings xvii. 5, 6). Man naturally looks for victory to "the big battalion." This is reasonable in the case of a human enemy, but mere fatuity if the enemy be God. 3. *They were secure in self-deception.* "Put far away the evil day." Security, beaten out of one retreat, betakes itself to another. Trust in our earthly resources will ultimately fail. Security in external religious advantages will some day be broken also by a rude awaking. But the Fabian policy still prevails, and proves an almost impregnable last resort. "It cannot be for a long while yet" is an argumentative device that seldom fails to reassure.

III. **THE WANTONNESS OF THE SECURE.** The idea of immunity is an encouragement to sin. Among Israel's sins were: 1. *Indolence.* "Stretch themselves upon their couches." This is the first temptation of wealth. Work has ceased to be necessary, and the easily acquired habit of idleness very soon develops indolence of disposition. Having nothing to do leads to doing nothing, and when a man does nothing for a while he wants to go on with it. 2. *Luxury.* "Lie upon beds of ivory;" "Eat lambs," etc. Luxury is a direct result of indolence. Having nothing else to occupy their attention, men concentrate it on themselves. They make it the business of their life to coddle themselves, with the inevitable result of becoming harder to please. As the appetite is pampered it becomes more dainty, and must be tempted with luxury after luxury, if any measure of relish would be retained. 3. *Effeminacy.* "Who trill to the sound of the harp" (ver. 5). The tendency of luxury is to unman. On the discontinuance of manly exercises follows closely the loss of manly qualities. Pampering the body weakens body and mind both, and prepares the way for occupations that will be in character. Effeminacy grows fastest when nursed in the lap of luxury. The Israel that was too fastidious to lie on anything but an ivory couch, or too dainty to touch coarser fare than "the fatted calf," was too enervated in a little while for any manlier pastime than trilling to a harp. 4. *Profanity.* "Drink wine out of sacrificial bowls." "The pleasures of sin" are only "for a season." They quickly wear out. Zest and relish fail, and satiety and disgust follow. Hence the tendency of indulgence to become more and more extravagant and eccentric. It is an attempt to stimulate failing powers of enjoyment by presenting new sensations. Then the natural heart is essential enmity against God. Accordingly, in the case of a thoroughly perverted nature, when a sinful indulgence has ceased to give pleasure as indulgence, it will continue to do so as sin. Israel had now fallen so low as this. Sensual indulgence began to pall, and it took a fresh lease of enjoyableness by becoming sacrilegious. 5. *Heartless egotism.* "And do not grieve for the hurt of Joseph." Sin is essentially selfish, and the sin of self-indulgence supremely so. The happiness, and even the lives, of others are as nothing in the balance against lust. Let who may suffer, let what may happen, the sensualist will indulge. To such a person philanthropy and patriotism are alike impossible. He will "not grieve for the hurt of Joseph" even when he is himself responsible for it. He could play comfortably "while Rome burns." 6. *Increasing violence.* "And bring near the seat of violence." As destruction becomes more imminent, the violence that provokes it becomes more extreme. This is sometimes due to the blindness that will not see; sometimes to the recklessness that does not care; sometimes to the malignity that, forecasting overthrow, would do all the evil possible before it comes. In any case it is aggravated and judgment-hastening sin.

IV. **THE DOOM OF THE WANTON.** Here, as elsewhere, punishment answers to crime, both as to degree and kind. 1. *Cherished indulgence should be interrupted.* "The

shouting of the revellers will depart" (ver. 7). This is about the first step in retributive punishment. The criminal's enjoyment comes to be centred in his sin, and to interrupt it is a sharp blow. The retributive measure to which lust is most of all amenable is to put a stop to indulgence. Deprive the oppressor of his power, the extortioner of his opportunity, the drunkard of his drink, and already the work of taking vengeance on him is well begun. 2. *Apposite hardship should be inflicted.* "Shall go captive." As captives they should endure oppression, not inflict it. For indulgence would be substituted privation in every form. They would make juster acquaintance with luxury by having the means of it wrung out of their own helplessness and misery. It is no doubt along these lines that eternal reward and punishment are arranged. Heaven will be the perfect exercise and enjoyment of all that is pure and spiritual in desire and taste. Hell, among other things, will be the cutting off for ever of sinful sources of enjoyment, for which the wicked had learned to live. 3. *Those who had been first among the nations should be first among the captives.* This is only fitting. The guilt of any evil movement culminates in its ringleaders, and "first in transgression, first in punishment," is a maxim of natural justice. Those who organize and officer a wicked movement are those on whom justice will lay the earliest and the heaviest hand.

Ver. 1.—*Sorrow dogging the secure.* Human life is proverbially uncertain. "We know not what shall be on the morrow," whether we ourselves shall be. "The unexpected" is always happening; and the lesson of this is—take nothing for granted that is still future. In the religious sphere the application of this principle would put an end to carnal security, and at this object our text aims. As to the security denounced here, notice—

I. THE SPHERE OF IT. "In Zion." This is often in Scripture a name for the Church on earth (Rom. ix. 33; see on ch. i. 2). The membership of this is mixed (Matt. xiii. 30, 41). There are cold and hot and lukewarm among them. Some love God, some hate him; some are *in equilibrio*, having neither declared for him nor against him. Of the last two classes many are at ease. The ideal of spiritual life is watchfulness, activity, and self-suspicion; but these qualities need not be looked for in unspiritual men. Their fitness is not seen, nor the motives to them felt. Though in the Church, they are not of it; and the characters of their life are not those proper to the sincere believer.

II. THE MEANING OF IT. There are principles at hand on which to account for it without difficulty. 1. *Preoccupation.* Spiritual things ought to get our first and best and continuous attention (Matt. vi. 33; xxvi. 41; Luke xiii. 24). But they do not. The careless "eat, and drink, and marry, and are given in marriage" (Luke xvii. 27), and so events come on them unawares. The householder relaxes his vigilance, and as a result his house is broken into (Matt. xxiv. 43). The wise virgins as well as the foolish sleep (Matt. xxv. 5), and the bridegroom comes on them unawares. The security is foolish in proportion to the interests involved, and criminal in proportion to the number and plainness of arousing circumstances. 2. *Blindness.* The natural man is blind in spiritual things (1 Cor. ii. 14). He does not see the beauty of spiritual qualities (Isa. liii. 2), nor the self-evidentness of spiritual principles, nor the inviolability of spiritual deliverances, nor the grounds of spiritual assurance, nor the evidences of approaching Divine action. He sees neither what has been, nor what is, nor what is coming. Accordingly, he is secure and at ease in the very teeth of danger. 3. *Presumption.* Men do not adequately realize sin as to either its guilt or danger. They live in it equally and calmly, as if it were the normal thing. They anticipate no evil and no disturbance. They reckon on being spiritual fixtures, and on the perpetual maintenance of the *status quo*. They do not mean to turn, nor take account of being disturbed; but assume that there will be "no changes" for evermore. Character is become stereotyped, conscience is silent, and the quiet of strong delusion is within them and around.

III. THE VARIETIES OF IT. The secure in Zion are not all secure in the same degree or sense. 1. *Some are secure in sin.* They expect to sin on and suffer no evil. Either they do not recognize the inseparable connection between the two, or they trust to the chapter of accidents for something to intervene and stay proceedings before

evil actually falls (Isa. xxviii. 15). 2. *Some are secure in morality.* They trust in the arm of flesh. They persuade themselves that they are but little to blame. They view the coming judgments as provoked by, and meant for, others. They see nothing in their own life to provoke them; and they build on this as a ground of immunity from evil when the day of it shall come. And so they are secure; less guiltily, it may be, but no more reasonably than the secure in sin (Jer. xvii. 5; Rom. iii. 20). 3. *Some are secure in ordinances.* They locate spiritual power in Church forms. The sacraments, they say, contain and convey the grace they signify. Regeneration with them means a sprinkled face, and justification an elevated host, and sanctification an exhaustive observance of ordinances. Many are secure in the persuasion of these things. They put a hollow form of godliness for its spirit and power, and lull their souls to rest in its deep recesses.

IV. THE OCCASIONS OF IT. There is an incongruity about it that seems to call for explanation. In the case of Israel, and others like it, one cause was: 1. *Unvarying prosperity.* "Because they have no changes they forget God." People calculate on uniformity. As life has been, so they easily assume it will be. A smiling world is a dangerous tranquilizer. Even the godly experience this (Ps. cxix. 67), and the direct tendency of adversity is to prevent it (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18). An unbroken run of prosperity is most unfavourable to spiritual life and liveliness. 2. *Luxurious living.* (Ver. 4.) The course of religion in the soul is just the progress of a warfare between flesh and spirit (Rom. vii. 23). To this warfare there is one uniform issue—the triumph of the spiritual principle. But victory is not won without a struggle. The spiritual principle waxes strong only under culture. The flesh gets weak only by being crucified. If it be let alone it will grow strong, much more if it is indulged and fed. Hence "fulness of bread and abundance of idleness" (Ezek. xvi. 19) are a revealed occasion of spiritual declension; and God was lightly esteemed and forsaken when Jeshurun "waxed fat, and grew thick" (Deut. xxxii. 15). Luxury is leaving its mark on all the Churches in indolence and self-indulgence and a lowered spiritual tone. 3. *Companionship of the ungodly.* "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise," etc. Character propagates itself—begets character in its own likeness. Familiarity with sin breeds tolerance of it. A sinful example is a temptation to sin. So long as men not impeccable instinctively imitate each other, association with the wicked must, to a certain extent, corrupt. The corrupter any society is, the lower will be the spiritual tone of the Church in it. All Israel were not alike guilty, nor alike secure. Many were innocent, no doubt, of the special national sins; and there is no reason to suppose that they all were recklessly at ease in Zion. But it is certain that the security of many was due to the hardening influence of the sins become familiar to his mind. 4. *Sin.* This is not an occasion merely, but a cause, and the most fruitful cause of all. Sin both blinds and hardens. The more sin we commit the less do we see of its consequences, the less do we fear what we can see, and the further are we from an appreciative knowledge of God in those characters which lead inevitably to the punishment of it. The climax of security is more than likely to correspond to the extreme of wickedness. It was so with Israel. Never was she more corrupt, yet never was she more recklessly at ease, than when these words were spoken.

V. THE EVIL OF IT. "Woe to them," etc.! Wherever the security is the woe is denounced. 1. *With the godly it comes before a fall.* They stand by faith. That faith is not an act merely; it is a habit of soul. It is not maintained at normal strength without an effort. And the frame most favourable to its maintenance at par is evident from the injunction, "Be not high-minded, but fear" (Rom. xi. 20). In the perfect realization of our dependence on God is the condition of abiding faith, and in the maintenance of such faith is the condition of escaping a fall. From the moment Peter soared in his own imagination, his fall was a foregone conclusion (Matt. xxvi. 33, 34). 2. *With the ungodly it comes before destruction.* Carnal security is in proportion to blindness, and blindness is in proportion to corruption. When a sinner is most secure he most of all deserves his doom, and is least of all on his guard against it. Hence, as the height of imagined safety is the depth of real danger (1 Thess. v. 3). No surer sign of destruction near than the cry, "Peace, peace!"

Ver. 3.—*The procrastinator family.* The fear of suffering is universal and instinc-

tive. All the lower animals exhibit it. So do men in different ways. It is not joyous, but grievous. Human life and happiness are shaped largely by this feeling. Men make their relations to it a chief concern. If it be past, they seek compensations for it. If it be present, they seek relief. If it be coming, they try to prevent it; or, failing that, to postpone it; or, failing both, to mitigate it. And as a certain proportion of the pain is altogether mental, and due to our thoughts about it, one of the commonest palliatives for it is the endeavour to ignore it altogether. Among her other follies and sins, the attempt to do so on the part of Israel is here announced.

I. THE EVIL DAY WHICH MEN WOULD PUT OFF. This will be: 1. *The day of actual evil.* To the wicked there are many such days, with almost as many individual characteristics. Such a day pre-eminently is: (1) *The day of death.* This is the king of terrors. To the wicked it means the end of all the good they know of, and the beginning of sufferings of every possible kind and a magnitude inconceivable. It is, therefore, the day of evil in a sense peculiar to itself. (2) *The day of visitation for sin.* Such days are sure and frequent. Israel had experienced many of them, and the reminiscence was not agreeable. They had brought, and might again bring, every calamity for body, mind, and estate short of utter destruction. They were evil days in a very emphatic sense, and as such were specially feared. 2. *The day of imagined evil.* Such days would be: (1) The day of submission to God, which is an evil day in the estimation of pride. (2) The day of forsaking sin, which is disagreeable to lust. (3) The day of coming into relation to spiritual things, against all which the carnal mind is enmity. For such things the "more convenient season" is convenient in proportion as it is or can be regarded as distant.

II. THE FOOLISH DEVICES BY WHICH MEN TRY TO ACCOMPLISH THE IMPOSSIBLE. A foolish thing is never attempted for a wise reason or in a wise way. As to the evil day: 1. *Some do not practically believe that it is coming at all.* They minimize their own guilt, which is the provoking cause. They magnify the considerations which bear in the direction of postponement. They ignore the sure Word of God, which denounces inevitable suffering on sin. The result is an amount of ignorance or scepticism about the matter sufficient to prevent its exercising any practical effect. It is believed in a vague and heedless way, but not so as to lead to appropriate, nor in fact to any, action. 2. *Some trust to the chapter of accidents.* They know the evil day is denounced. They know it is coming. They know that, if it comes, it will involve them in its calamities. But they hope events will take some happy turn, and something indefinite, but highly convenient, will occur, which will change the issue, and prevent the crisis from touching them (Isa. xxviii. 15). All sinners persist in the life of sin, yet hope, somehow or other, to escape hell. 3. *Some endeavour not to think about it at all.* They, of set purpose, divert their attention from the subject. They refuse to "consider their latter end." They busy themselves about other things. They insanely act as if the danger would be annihilated by being ignored. Into this snare of the devil many fall. They cannot see the nearness of the evil day who refuse to look at the matter. Blinder and more stupid than the ox or the ass is the people that will not consider (Isa. i. 3).

III. THE LAST STATE OF THE PROCRASTINATOR, WHICH IS WORSE THAN THE FIRST. What he gains is a heritage of woe (ver. 1). As to the coming of this, it is evident: 1. *He cannot prevent it.* God makes his own arrangements and keeps to them. We cannot resist his power. We cannot change his purpose. His word on any matter is the last word, and fixes it once for all. What he has spoken, and as he has spoken, must come to pass. 2. *He cannot postpone it.* The justice, goodness, and wisdom that combine in fixing an event enter also into the timing of it. All possible considerations are taken into account, and infinite power no more surely does the thing it means than at the time it means. It would be as wise to attempt and as easy to accomplish the defeat of God's purposes as their postponement. Our mental and active attitude are alike inoperative as to both. 3. *He disqualifies himself for facing it.* "Be ye also ready" is the Divine prescription in reference to the unrevealed date of the day of God. To be unready is to face it at tremendous disadvantage. To be inexpectant besides is to aggravate the disadvantage to the very utmost. Prepare and watch are equally essential conditions of meeting the day of God in safety. Wilful delusion about the event means woeful injury by it. Men ought to be prepared for

what is sure to come, and when it comes be in expectation of it. "Be ye also ready;" "Watch therefore." By the confluence of these streams of action is made the river of a life "thoroughly furnished."

Ver. 6.—*The dry eye of the destroyer.* "But they are not grieved for the hurt of Joseph." Of the many aspects of Israel's sin, this is among the most repulsive. It is bad enough to sin against our brother, and by our wrong-doing to blight his life; but it makes the crime hideous to look, uncaring and callous, on the desolation we ourselves have wrought.

I. ONE MAN'S SUFFERING IS A FIT OCCASION OF ANOTHER MAN'S SORROW. Men are brothers (Acts xvii. 26), and owe a mutual regard for each other's concerns (Phil. ii. 4). Suffering is evil, and the proper relation toward those enduring it is sympathy (1 John iii. 17). God pities the afflicted, and compassion in him is the reason and measure of its dutifulness in us (Matt. ix. 36; Luke x. 33—37). We cannot disregard the sufferings of men without sinning against God and against our own humanity.

II. THE GREAT OBSTACLE TO SYMPATHY IS THE SELFISHNESS OF SIN. This leads to atheism on the one hand, and misanthropy on the other. The first man showed this tendency, the second that. Adam failed in regard for God, Cain in regard for his brother. But both transgressions arose out of the one sinful character of selfishness. Adam violated God's command because he preferred his own way; Cain destroyed Abel's life because he thought less of it than of his own wounded self-love. And all men, in proportion as they are sinful, are selfish, inconsiderate, and misanthropic. Love is of God, and rules where God dwells. Where God dwells not we have men "hateful and hating one another." Selfishness and disregard of others' happiness is the very mark and token of a corrupt nature.

III. SELFISHNESS IS WORST IN KIND WHEN MANIFESTED TOWARD OUR OWN KINDRED. In addition to the philanthropy which has its basis in the brotherhood of the race, is the stronger affection which arises out of nearer ties. "Our neighbour," "our own," "those of our own household," are, in an ascending scale, the prescribed and natural objects of our love and care (Matt. xix. 19; 1 Tim. v. 8). In proportion to the closeness of our relation to an individual is the normal strength of the tie between us, and so the guilt of disregarding it. The disregard of Israel for Israelites was selfishness of a peculiarly heartless kind. It was the sin of brother against brethren, and involved the violation of blood ties sacred by every law.

IV. THE GREATEST DEGREE OF SELFISHNESS IS THAT IN REGARD TO THE SUFFERINGS OF OTHERS, INFLICTED OR BROUGHT ABOUT BY OURSELVES. In Israel, the men who disregarded the judgments decimating the nation were the men whose wickedness had brought them on. They were indifferent, in fact, about sufferings of which they were themselves the authors. And they have their counterparts in the world still. The drunkard who ruins his own family, the libertine who ruins the family of his neighbour, are the only men in the community who "care for none of these things." The explanation is that special sin produces special hardness of heart, and the man whose wickedness involves society in misery is the man who, by the very fact, is constituted most incapable of feeling it.

Vers. 8—11.—*Wrath revealing itself in judgment.* The squaring of a sinner's account with God is of necessity a bitter experience. It is the last fact in a wide induction, and completes our knowledge of what sin really is. The best and only adequate view of this is reached when a man reads it in the light of its punishment. We are enabled to perform this office for Israel's crying and incredible wickedness here.

I. THE WORD THAT CANNOT BE BROKEN. Accommodating himself to our mode of conceiving things, God condescends to give assurance of his faithfulness in three degrees of assertion. The word that cannot be broken is: 1. *What God says.* "Thy Word is truth." God can neither err nor lie. He does when he promises (Numb. xxiii. 19). He does as much as he promises. He does exactly the thing he promises. The fact of his truth lies at the foundation of all religion and all knowledge. Because he is true, we not only believe his testimony absolutely, but we believe absolutely the testimony of our own consciousness as being his gift. 2. *What God swears.* In itself his word is as good as his oath. But to our apprehension there may be a difference.

For God to swear is an act of special condescension. It is making a great concession to our unbelief, and the limitation of our faculties, that God conforms to our human modes of making solemn affirmation, in order if possible to win our implicit credence for his words (Heb. vi. 17). His oath, added to his word in any matter, is for fulness of confirmation and assurance, and is a specially gracious act. 3. *What he swears by himself.* In default of a greater, God swears by himself (Heb. vi. 13). He is "the true God," and a "God of truth." An oath in his name has the highest sanction possible, and assumes its most solemn form. God's oath in his own name is as sure as his own existence—is, in fact, a putting of his existence in pledge for the word of his mouth.

II. THE ESSENTIAL ANTAGONISM BETWEEN DIVINE HOLINESS AND HUMAN SIN. This is extreme, utter, and necessary. 1. *God does not hate men, but their sin.* He is not said to do so here. The statements elsewhere, that he hates the wicked (Ps. v. 5; Rom. ix. 13), must be taken in connection with the clearly revealed fact that he also loves them (John iii. 16), and loved his people while they were of them. It cannot be that he loves the wicked and hates them in the same sense. His love has reference to their humanity, his hatred to their sinfulness (Rom. i. 18). He hates them as sinners, yet loves them as men; forgives them often, yet takes vengeance on their inventions (Ps. xcix. 8). 2. *God's hatred of sin extends to the occasions of it.* "I abhor the pride of Jacob." God's abhorrence of sin extends to everything that tends to produce it. Pride or loftiness, being in itself sinful, and a fruitful occasion of sin, he must hate. Excellence or greatness, whether imaginary or real, is, in so far as it leads to pride, included in the reach of the Divine abhorrence. Sin, like a cesspool, fouls all approaches to it. It is spiritual treason, and attains its nearest of kin. 3. *It includes even the scenes of it.* "And I hate his palaces." The palaces were closely connected with the sin. They were built with the wages of unrighteousness, for luxurious gratification, and as a means to further exaction. Accordingly, as at once an expression of sin and an accessory of it, they were hateful in God's sight. God's attitude in the matter is the model for ours. If we are baptized into his Spirit we shall "hate even the garments spotted by the flesh." Not only is sin hateful, but all that leads to it, all that borders on it, all that has any connection with it. Even the remotest contact with it will be hateful to the spiritually minded.

III. THE SWEEPING JUDGMENTS THAT EXPRESS A HOLY WRATH. These are set forth in various forms and degrees of severity. 1. *The capital would be delivered up.* "And give up the city and the fulness thereof." Samaria, the capital, was the strength and pride of Israel. It was the impregnable metropolis, the great storehouse of national wealth, the seat of government, the home of luxury, the social, political, economical, and military centre of the kingdom. To destroy it was like taking the heart out of their kingdom at one fell stroke. Notwithstanding this, or rather perhaps because of this, it would be captured and pillaged. In sin it had set the example, and taken the lead, and in punishment its leading position would be retained. 2. *Not even one out of ten should escape.* (Ver. 9.) Such sweeping destruction as this was almost unheard of. Even Sodom and Gomorrah were not more utterly destroyed. This was due ultimately to the almost universal impenitence, and proximately to the length and stubbornness of the fighting. God would not allow the persistently impenitent to escape, and the Assyrian armies, his instruments, would not spare the obstinate defenders of Samaria, who had kept them three years at bay. 3. *The straggling survivors should be in abject fear of the almost universal fate.* (Ver. 10.) The solitary survivor is no nearer faith in God than those who have been destroyed. He does not cast himself on his mercy. He does not even in that dreadful hour seek his face. His stupid but thoroughly characteristic impulse is to hide away from his presence. Apart from Divine grace, sin committed drives away from God (Gen. iii. 8), and punishment approaching drives further still (Rev. vi. 16). In prosperity the wicked will not even fear God; in adversity, if they fear, they still refuse to trust him. 4. *The work of destruction would be carried out systematically and in detail.* (Ver. 11.) Neither palace nor cabin should escape. The great house would be broken into great pieces, and the small house into small pieces. God's judgments are nothing if not effective. The greatest cannot defy, nor can the smallest elude them. The destruction of each shall be elaborately and circumstantially complete.

IV. GOD THE AUTHOR OF THE PUNISHMENT HE PROCURES. "The Lord commandeth," etc. 1. *The sin of man is often a factor in the accomplishment of God's purpose.* It was so with the transportation of Joseph (Gen. xlv. 5, 8; i. 20), with the death of Christ (Acts ii. 23; iv. 28), and with the affliction of Israel by Assyria (Isa. x. 5—7). The actors are in each case impelled by their own evil motives, aim at their own evil ends, use their own evil means, and act altogether of their own free will; and yet, when they succeed, the result is found to serve some important collateral interest they think nothing of, and so to be part of the infinitely good purpose of God. It is thus that God accomplishes his will by the instrumentality of men, without infringing on their perfect freedom, or being implicated in the sin which, in unconscious furtherance of it, they commit. The Assyrian destroying Israel in an unjustifiable war was at once carrying out God's purpose and sinning against him. 2. *God destroys the chosen people, not as "Israel," but as "Jacob."* "Israel," the covenant name, is given them in connection with promises of covenant treatment. God blesses them as "Israel," and afflicts them as "Israel," and even decimates them as "Israel," all these being elements of a gracious discipline. But destruction is not so. It is the penalty of a covenant already broken, and God marks them out for this by the uncovenanted name of "Jacob."

Vers. 12—14.—*The doomed people who will not turn.* Sin brings often present gain, but it never pays in the end. When the balance is struck, the wrong-doer always finds it on the wrong side of the book. A sinner is one who sets himself against God, and in the nature of things ignorance cannot overreach knowledge, nor weakness overcome omnipotence. Israel had long been under instruction in this matter, and they would see it one day when the knowledge would be too late. Many Scripture maxims are illustrated here.

I. "BEHOLD, YE ARE OF NOTHING, AND YOUR WORK OF NOUGHT." (Ver. 13.) "In a thing of nought;" literally, a "non-thing," a phantasm, what has an appearance of being, and yet is not. 1. *Human strength is nothing.* It is nothing in comparison with God's. It is nothing apart from God's. Being derived wholly from God, it has no existence independent of him. It is, therefore, virtually and practically "a thing of nought;" incapable of being used for any purpose either against him or irrespective of him. 2. *Out of nothing nothing comes.* Human power being a nonentity, belief in it is delusion, trust in it is baseless, and expectation from it must be disappointed. Doubly, therefore, and trebly "cursed is he that maketh flesh his arm." 3. *Yet it is in this nonentity that men rejoice.* Sin is at bottom a deification of self. We believe in ourselves—in our own power and knowledge and excellence. We are satisfied with ourselves, expect great things from ourselves, and rejoice in ourselves (Ps. x. 6; lii. 7). Only by a work of grace are we disabused of our carnal confidence and won to a higher trust. It is as complementary of our "trusting in the Lord" that we "lean not to our own understanding."

II. "WHO CAN BRING A CLEAN THING OUT OF AN UNCLEAN? NOT ONE." (Ver. 12.) Israel joined oppression to unrighteousness, and out of this endeavoured to bring themselves lasting gain. This is likened to an attempt by the husbandman to cultivate the rock. It implies: 1. *Utter futility.* The husbandman does not attempt impracticable things. He knows there is no fertility in a bare rock—no soil for crop, no bed for seed, no furrow for plough; and so he cultivates the good soil, and leaves the rock alone. And no more than till the rock for a harvest need men seek safety by wrongdoing. They cannot find it so. It is not where they seek it. Good cannot come out of evil by natural generation, for it is not in it. 2. *Loss instead of gain.* An attempt to plough the rock, like every other offence against the nature of things, must be worse than futile. It means lost time, lost labour, and broken implements. So with the perversion of justice, and the corruption of the fruit of righteousness. It is evil, and can only lead to evil. It increases the sum total of the wickedness that provokes Divine wrath, and itself creates a new source of danger.

III. "THEREFORE LET NO MAN GLORY IN MEN." (Ver. 13.) It is the very essence of unreason. 1. *It is a crime.* It involves departure from God. The soul is capable of sustaining but one great attachment at a time. We cannot love both the Father and the world, or "serve God and mammon," or "make flesh our arm," without our

heart departing from the Lord. And it is not only that the two trusts are one too many; they are incompatible and mutually destructive. To defy self, and defy Jehovah, are acts of the same moral quality. The blindness, and only the blindness, that is capable of the one is capable of the other. 2. *It is a blunder.* It is putting faith in the faithless. It is attributing power to the impotent. It is pitting the creature against the Creator, the vessel against the potter, the thing formed against him that formed it. Only disappointment can come out of this. A pierced hand is the natural and inevitable penalty of leaning on a broken reed. "Hast thou an arm like God," etc.?

IV. "O ASSYRIAN, THE ROD OF MINE ANGER." Israel's overthrow was decided on, and the instrument of it prepared. 1. *War the minister of God.* He does not command, nor authorize, nor sanction it. He forbids the lusts of ambition and greed and revenge that lead to it. He inculcates a love of others which, carried out, would make it impossible. The progress of his religion leads to the diminution of war, and its final establishment will co-ordinate itself with the turning of war into peace to the ends of the earth. Yet, as with other evil things, he permits it to happen, controls its operation, utilizes its results, and makes it a means of good, and the minister of his holy will. War has always been a prominent agency in the judgments that fall on nations. And a terrible agency it is, more ruthlessly destructive than any other. It expresses all the evil qualities of corrupt humanity, deserving the poet's scathing words—

"O war, thou son of hell,
Whom angry Heavens do make their minister."

And war, apart from its severity as a scourge, is well calculated to be disciplinary. As a revelation of human wickedness, it indirectly lays bare to us the plagues of our own heart. Linked hand in hand as it is, moreover, with deceit and treachery, it exhibits carnal human nature as "a thing of nought," and so is an effective antidote to confidence in the flesh. 2. *The heathen the rod in his hand.* God is not fastidious in the matter of instruments. He uses every man, however vile, for some purpose or other. Israel, moreover, was so enamoured of the heathen—of their gods and worship and ways—that to know them in the character of enemies and conquerors and masters would be a great advantage. It would be in these capacities that the worst effects of idolatry on the human character would show themselves, and closer acquaintance with them might help to disenchant the idol-loving Israel. 3. *Victory always on God's side.* God, for the time being, would be on the Assyrian's side. Without reference to the intrinsic merits of the struggle, as between parties almost equally wicked, he would help the heathen to overcome the apostates. Israel's victories over the nations were due, not to their own valour or strength, but to God's assisting arm (Ps. xlv. 2, 3). Left to themselves, they would be utterly beaten now. The difference between defeat and victory is the difference between the God-forsaken and the God-defended. 4. *God-sent affliction covers all the ground covered by the provoking sin.* "And it shall oppress you from the entrance Hamath"—the extreme northern boundary (Numb. xxxiv. 8)—"to the brook of the desert," the southern boundary, whether "the brook of the willows," Isa. xv. 7 (Pusey), or the present "El Ahsy" (Keil). This territory they had recovered under Jeroboam II., and lost soon to Tiglath-Pileser, defeat and loss retracing to the last inch the steps of conquest. Not only was "the whole scene of their triumphs one scene of affliction and woe" (Pusey), but the very thing, and the whole thing, which they had made an occasion of pride and carnal confidence, vainly deeming that they had conquered it in their own strength, is made an occasion of humiliation and distress. The only way to put us out of conceit with our idol is to destroy it all, and destroy it utterly.

Ver. 13.—*Joy in the unreal always precarious.* It is quite unaccountable. It is almost incredible. But it is unquestionably true. Men reject the staff, and lean upon the broken reed. Whatever is worthy of trust they doubt, whatever is utterly unreliable they confide in. This was the way of Israel, and it is the way of humanity. They do not see the reality of things. They attribute to them qualities they do not possess, qualities sometimes the very opposite of the actual ones. Then they

act on their theory of things, and rejoice in a figment, the creation of their own fancy, whilst repudiating or disregarding real and reliable objects of trust.

I. THE THINGS THAT ARE "THINGS OF NOUGHT." The arm of flesh, or human help, as against God's strength, is the "non-thing" or nonentity referred to primarily. But the expression is capable of wider application. Among the nonentities are: 1. *All things sinful*. This is an extreme case. Sin is an ephemera, offering only what fleets away. It is a negation, the privation of all good. It is a phantasm, having an appearance of good with no reality below it. It is a deception, having a lie at the bottom of it. It is a non-thing in a unique sense. 2. *All things material*. The positivist only believes in material phenomena, as those of which alone he has positive knowledge. But these are really the most uncertain phenomena there are. The bodily sense that notes them is more certain, and the thinking mind that has cognizance of the bodily sense is more certain than either, and the ultimate test of the existence of both. What we know most surely and directly is spirit. Observation may be incorrect, and lead us astray, but consciousness speaks only truth. If there are things which "are not as they seem," they are physical, as distinguished from psychical things. 3. *All things temporal*. These are evanescent in their nature. "The world passeth away." They are still more evanescent in their form: "The fashion of this world passeth away." They are doubly evanescent in their character as a means of happiness; for not alone the world, but the "lust thereof," passeth away. This evanescence means unreality. The thing that perishes in the using is conspicuously a thing of nought. Such a thing is human nature, and each of its temporal blessings and relations—in other words, human life. It is a vapour on the hill, a bubble on the stream, a ripple on the wave, a meteor in the sky, an unsubstantial thing that passes and leaves no trace. 4. *All things created*. God, the "I Am," is essential Existence. He alone hath immortality, exists of himself and from himself. The existence of creatures is derived, an existence from God and in him. It is not, therefore, real as God's is. We are phantoms, he is reality. We are shadows, he is substance. Creation as contrasted with the Creator is a "non-thing," a thing of nought.

II. THE CHARACTER THAT FINDS ITS JOY IN UNREALITY. This character is one with a wide geographical range. It might almost be said to belong to sinful man as such. As to its qualities, it is: 1. *Blind*. Such a man "cannot see afar off." He does not see things through and through. He does not see things as they are. He sees things through coloured glasses. He dwells in the superficialities of things. He is deceived by appearances. He confounds the qualities of things. He cannot, in fact, be said to "know anything as he ought." The blindness of our heart is a universal infirmity. Sin blinds, and prejudice blinds, and infirmity blinds us all; and the most convincing proof of the fact is that we choose the worst and poorest in the universe, and often and long reject the true riches. 2. *Prejudiced*. The blindness that permits us to rejoice in the flesh must have prejudice behind it. It involves a wrong condition of heart. "The carnal mind is enmity against God" is a maxim which explains the rejection of him by the sinner. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh" is one which explains his choice of sin. In the spiritual, as in other departments, things follow their affinities. 3. *Proud*. Well says the poet—

"What the weak head with strangest bias rules
Is pride, the never-failing vice of fools."

It misreads altogether the proportions of things. It has an overweening estimate of self. "Thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think," and "thinking God to be altogether such a one as ourselves," the transfer of trust from heaven to earth, is not alone natural, but inevitable.

III. THE JOY THAT FLAMES WITHOUT FUEL. That there should be such joy at all is an abnormal thing. *A priori* it is not what we should expect. And we are prepared to find something anomalous about a joy that could exist in such circumstances. This we do. 1. *It is a passing joy*. It cannot last. The meteor irradiating the sky, the thorns crackling under the pot, both blaze and both burn quickly out. The fire has too little to feed on. It is only a puff, and done with. So with joy in the earthly. It has an unsubstantial and unenduring basis. The thing it rests on perishes, and it cannot itself endure. 2. *It is an unreal joy*. It is not alone that it has reference to an

ephemeral thing, but to an unsubstantial thing. It is a mere figment of the mind; an appearance rather than an existence; not a fire in the proper sense, but a phosphorescence. 3. *Its unreality is the parent of real woe.* To rejoice in a nonentity is a course on which disappointment clearly waits. It also involves distrust, and so incurs the wrath of God. No man can deceive himself with impunity. The line of action into which his false notion will lead him must end in calamity. Mistaken opinion associates itself with unfitting action, and this in turn with undesired results. He who follows the fen fire lands in the fen. 4. *Of all who rejoice in a thing of nought the most hopelessly deceived are the self-righteous.* With others the trust is something apart from religion, and adopted in preference to it. But with the self-righteous it masquerades in the name of religion itself. There is an idea, either that nothing is wrong, or that the man can help himself. In either case Divine help is despised. God's right is spurned. The one only way is refused. And on the moral impossibility of escaping if they neglect so great salvation, the self-deluded soul makes shipwreck. "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire," etc.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Religious indifference and false security.* Amos was a native of the southern kingdom, but his ministry was mainly to Israel. His impartiality appears in the censures and reproaches which he addresses, as in this passage, to both Judah and Samaria. But the description applies to professing Christians to-day as accurately as if it had just then been written, and had been explicitly applied to such. How many who are called to devotion and diligence are "at ease," are "confident," or "secure"!

I. THE DISPOSITION AND HABIT HERE CONDEMNED. The following elements are to be recognized. 1. Self-satisfaction. 2. Self-indulgence. 3. Indifference. 4. Carelessness. 5. Negligence.

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH AGGRAVATE THE SIN OF INDIFFERENCE AND SECURITY. In the case of those here addressed we observe: 1. That they resided in places which were themselves a reminder of the character of Jehovah and of his past "dealings" with the chosen people. 2. That they occupied positions fitted to inspire them with a sense of personal responsibility. They were the distinguished chiefs of the nations—the men to whom the people looked as their leaders, and in whom they might reasonably expect to find an example of piety, unselfishness, and zeal. 3. That they lived in times when the judgments of God were abroad, and when insensibility to duty and religion were all the more inexcusably culpable.

III. THE EVIL FOLLOWING UPON THE DISPOSITION AND HABIT HERE CONDEMNED. 1. Divine displeasure is prophetically declared against those who are at ease when they should be at work, against those who are secure and confident when they should be examining and judging themselves, and beginning a new and better life. 2. Moral deterioration cannot but follow upon such a state of mind as is here depicted. The slothful are the first to feel the ill effects of their sloth; the habit grows, and a religious, not to say an heroic, life becomes an impossibility. 3. National disaster and punishment are entailed by the indifference and unfaithfulness of those who are called to be a nation's guides and rulers.—T.

Ver. 3.—*Putting away the evil day.* By the "evil day" must be meant the day of account and reckoning which comes to all men and to all communities. As surely as there is a moral government and a moral Governor in the universe, so surely must all reasonable and intelligent natures be held responsible for their conduct and for their influence. Yet it is no unusual thing for men to follow the example of those who are censured in this verse.

I. THE THOUGHT OF A DAY OF ACCOUNT IS UNWELCOME TO THE UNFAITHFUL AND THE IRRELIGIOUS. Such persons need not be disbelievers in judgment, in accountability; they may accept the assurance of their own reason and conscience that an account must be rendered to the Judge of all. Yet, as the thought of a reckoning is one altogether repugnant to them, they persuade themselves that it may be indefinitely deferred. It must come, but it may not come yet; it may not come for a very long

time; indeed, may be so remote that it need not be taken into consideration in arranging the plans of life. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

II. THE DEFERRING OF THE THOUGHT OF THE DAY OF ACCOUNT WILL NOT DEFER THE DAY ITSELF. Moral law is never inoperative, is never suspended. Judgment lingereth not. The history alike of nations and of individuals proves that there is a Ruler on high, who is not remiss in carrying out his purposes. There is a reckoning in time; there will be a reckoning in eternity.

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience he stands waiting, he exactly judgeth all."

It is irrational and futile to imagine that by forgetting responsibility men can efface it. Such a supposition reminds of the action of the foolish ostrich who thrusts his head into a bush, and, because he loses sight of his pursuers, supposes that he has eluded them. There is no discharge in this war.

III. NEGLIGENCE CONCERNING RESPONSIBILITY MAY EVEN HASTEN THE APPROACH OF THE INEVITABLE DAY OF ACCOUNT. They who forget their accountability to God for their unfaithfulness are likely to be confirmed in their sinful courses; and, as iniquity abounds, judgment approaches. Thus the dreaded retribution is hastened rather than postponed; and the evil day which men would fain put far from them is brought near, and the tempest, which they dread and would avoid and escape, breaks upon them in all its force and fury.—T.

Vers. 4—7.—*The sin of dissolute life.* A herdsman and gatherer of wild figs like Amos, brought into contact with the nobility and the courtiers of a wealthy and luxurious city like Samaria, was likely enough to be shocked and scandalized. The judgments he formed were naturally severe, but they were not unjust or passionate. His language remains a merited and everlasting rebuke to those in high station who live for their own gratification and indulgence.

I. A LUXURIOUS AND DISSOLUTE LIFE IS A SHAMEFUL MISUSE OF PRECIOUS OPPORTUNITIES. It is sometimes judged that those who are "born in the purple," those who inherit great estates, great wealth, are to be excused if they form in youth, and retain in manhood, habits of expensive self-indulgence. But as all men are, above all, the children of God, endowed with a spiritual nature and entrusted with sacred opportunities, it is not to be for a moment admitted that the advantages of high station absolve them from the obligations involved in human nature and human life. A man has no right to pamper the body and exalt it to a lordship over the spirit; he has no right to gratify his tastes as though self-gratification were the great end of existence.

II. A LUXURIOUS AND DISSOLUTE LIFE IS MORALLY DEBASING AND DEGRADING. No one can live below the appointed level of humanity without paying the inevitable penalty, without incurring the inevitable deterioration. The light burns dim; the fine gold turns to clay. The couch of indolence, the feast of gluttony, the voluptuous music, the brimming bowls of wine, the costly unguents,—these are dangerous indulgences. Men may give them fine names, and call them the bounties of Divine providence. And it is quite true that the evil is not in the instruments of self-indulgence, but in the bad uses to which they are put. But none can live merely for bodily, for æsthetic, for social, enjoyment, without injuring his own character, without losing self-respect and the esteem of those whose esteem is worth having.

III. A LUXURIOUS AND DISSOLUTE LIFE ON THE PART OF THE GREAT IS A BAD EXAMPLE TO THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE. Bad habits penetrate from the so-called upper to the so-called lower class. When the nobility and gentry are self-indulgent, the tradespeople who grow wealthy are likely to follow their example, and the poor are likely enough to grow envious and discontented. The Samaritan chiefs were reproached for misleading the people, and justly. The ignorant and the thoughtless are naturally influenced by an example of selfishness, and none can altogether escape receiving some measure of harm.

IV. A LUXURIOUS AND DISSOLUTE LIFE RENDERS THE GREAT INSENSIBLE TO THE AFFLICTIONS OF THE POOR AND OPPRESSED. The language of the prophet is very touching: the self-indulgent "are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." Wrapped up in

their own enjoyments, comforts, and luxuries, the great fail to sympathize with those whom we call "the masses." A self-denying and benevolent and public-spirited course of conduct would have precisely an opposite effect. There is no reason in the nature of things why nobles should not feel with and for the poor and unfortunate; as a matter of fact, they often do so. But those whose absorbing thought is of self have neither heart nor time to give to their less-favoured neighbours.

V. A LUXURIOUS AND DISSOLUTE LIFE OFTEN INVOLVES A SPEEDY AND FEARFUL RETRIBUTION. The table of the epicure is overthrown. The sybarite is dragged from his palace, and sent away into exile. Those who have been worthless members of their own state become banished mourners in a strange land. And the song of pleasure is exchanged for the wail of woe.—T.

Ver. 11.—"*The Lord commandeth.*" It was the office and function of a prophet to lose himself in becoming the vehicle of Divine communications, the organ of Divine decisions. His prefatory words were these: "Thus saith the Lord." He saw and felt the Lord's presence, not only in his own ministry, but in all the events that occurred in the range of his observation, whether affecting individuals or nations.

I. THERE IS AN ELEMENT OF AUTHORITY IN EVERY WORD OF THE LORD. Whether God addresses to men language of rebuke or reproach, of entreaty or of threatening, he speaks with authority. His invitation is that of a King; it is a command. When our Lord Christ spoke in the course of his ministry, he spoke with authority. The Divine judgment is always correct, the Divine will is always obligatory.

II. ALL AGENCIES AND INSTRUMENTALITIES ARE OBEDIENT TO THE LORD'S BEHESTS. It is so with the forces of nature. "The stormy wind fulfilte his word;" "His ministers are a flaming fire." It is so with the institutions of human society, with the purposes and the activities of men. The hand which is visible in a work may be that of a creature; the power that directs that hand may, nevertheless, be creative wisdom and creative might. God gives the word; it is executed by ten thousand ministers of his holy will. He maketh even the wrath of man to praise him.

III. THE POWER OF THE GREATEST AMONG MEN IS INCAPABLE OF RESISTING THE DIVINE COMMANDS. The "great house" and the "little house" alike are smitten when the Lord makes bare his arm. Israel and Judah, the prince and the husbandman, may know that nothing can protect them from the might of the Eternal when his decree of judgment has gone out against them. Well may the people that rebel against God tremble and fear, and remember that they are but men.—T.

Ver. 12.—*The vanity of the sinner's principles and hopes.* The perfect naturalness and genuineness of Amos must be apparent to every reader. The sources from which he drew his graphic imagery were his own life and experiences. As a husbandman employed upon the land, he was brought into contact both with the phenomena of nature and with the processes of agriculture; and from these sources his mind was supplied with the bold similitudes which occur in his prophecies. Wishing to depict the irrational and absurd suppositions and expectations of the sinful and rebellious, he compared them to husbandmen who should attempt to drive horses up a steep cliff, or to plough the hard, barren rock by oxen.

I. JUSTICE IS THE ETERNAL LAW OF THE MORAL UNIVERSE. Here is the true and Divine bond of human society; here is the principle which should govern earthly rulers, judges, and princes. The higher men's station, the greater men's power, the more important is it that justice should guide and inspire their conduct.

II. IN A CORRUPT STATE OF SOCIETY OPPRESSION AND VIOLENCE ARE SUBSTITUTED FOR JUSTICE. Amos complained that the kings and nobles of Israel were guilty of the basest and most degrading conduct; they exchanged the sweet and wholesome fruit of righteousness for the bitterness of gall and wormwood and the poison of hemlock, i.e. for bribery, for violence, for oppressiveness. History is full of such instances. The noble institutions of society are perverted into instruments of personal ambition, aggrandizement, and wrong. Cruel kings, luxurious nobles, corrupt judges, are morally disastrous to the state; their example spreads through all classes, and faith, honour, and purity decay and perish.

III. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE THAT TRUE PROSPERITY SHOULD PREVAIL WHERE THE FOUNTAIN

OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS POISONED. The great men of Israel had come to confide in their own strength, in their military power, and, like so many in high estate, thought that physical force was sufficient to secure a nation's greatness. The prophet justly characterizes such a doctrine as "a thing of nought," a nonentity, an absurdity! As well may horses climb the scaur, as well may oxen plough the bare, hard rock, as a nation prosper which has renounced the Law of God, and is attempting to base its success upon physical force, military prestige, ostentatious luxury, judicial corruption. We in our own days need not look far for an exemplification of the folly of such confidence. "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth."—T.

Ver. 14.—*The hand of God seen in national retribution.* Coming when it did, this prophecy was an unmistakable proof of Divine foresight. Samaria was rejoicing and boasting because of a temporary victory obtained by her arms. The kingdom of Israel had taken horns, and by its own strength had pushed back the foe from the borders. This was the moment appointed for Amos to utter the faithful warning contained in this verse. Subsequent events proved the predictive authority from which this language proceeded. The advance of Assyria soon reminded the unbelieving and impenitent of the warning to which they had been indifferent. But we are chiefly concerned to trace the truths and to draw the lessons regarding Divine government upon earth, which this prediction so strikingly unfolds.

I. THE FACT THAT A NATION IS CHOSEN BY GOD FOR A SPECIAL PURPOSE DOES NOT EXEMPT THAT NATION FROM THE OPERATION OF THE LAWS OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT. It is sometimes represented that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were treated by the Ruler of all with an especial favouritism. But such a view cannot be justified from the sacred records. Undoubtedly, this nation was selected for high purposes, and appointed to occupy a position of enlightenment and eminence; but this was in order that the Jews might fulfil the purposes of God's wisdom, might in the fulness of the time produce the Messiah, and might become a blessing to all the nations of the earth. But never was a nation subjected to more stringent discipline than the Hebrew theocracy endured. No transgression was unnoticed or unchastised. Such afflictions have indeed seldom been endured as Israel has known, both in ancient and in modern times.

II. GOD, WHO IS NOT CONFINED TO ANY SPECIAL AGENCIES, HAS OFTEN EMPLOYED ONE NATION AS THE SCOURGE BY WHICH ANOTHER NATION HAS BEEN CHASTISED. It may be asked why Assyria, an idolatrous nation, should be employed to punish the transgressions of Israel. To such a question we can give no answer; but we may point out that the moral qualities of the chastising instrument have no bearing upon the purposes of punishment. God raiseth up one and setteth down another. History is full of examples of this principle. Amidst very much that is mysterious, there is not a little that is plain. Only in the most general way is it permitted us to interpret the methods of the Divine government. But the authoritative language of this and other passages of Scripture assure us that he who doeth according to his will among the inhabitants of the earth is impressing his own great lessons and fulfilling his own great designs by the changes which occur among the nations. Even wars, conquests, and captivities are the means by which God's Law is vindicated and God's kingdom is advanced.

III. NATIONAL TRIBULATION MAY BE THE MEANS OF NATIONAL PURIFICATION AND PROGRESS. Punishment is not an end in itself; however deserved and just, it is inflicted with a view to the good of the community or individual punished, or the good of human society at large. We can to some extent trace, in the subsequent history of the Hebrew people, the beneficial results of the conquest and captivity here foretold. Idolatry, at all events, came to an end; more spiritual views of religion became general; the nation, or that portion of it which returned to the land of promise, was prepared for giving birth to the Messiah, and for furnishing the elements which were to constitute the primitive Church. Thus God brought the light of morning out of the darkness, and a spiritual spring from the long winter of affliction.—T.

Vers. 1—6.—*Woeful ease.* "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!" etc. "This chapter embraces the character and punishment of the whole

Hebrew nation. The inhabitants of the two capitals are directly addressed in the language of denunciation, and charged to take warning from the fate of other nations (vers. 1, 2). Their carnal security, injustice, self-indulgence, sensuality, and total disregard of the Divine threatenings are next described (vers. 3—6). After which the prophet announces the Captivity and the calamitous circumstances connected with the siege of Samaria, by which it was to be preceded (vers. 7—11). He then exposes the absurdity of their conduct, and threatens them with the irruption of an enemy that should pervade the whole country (vers. 12—14)" (Henderson). The words of our text (ver. 1) denounce a state of mind which most men desiderate—"ease." Amidst the harassing cares, turmoils, and agitating events of life, men on all hands are crying out for ease. Like mariners that have long battled with tempests, they long for a calm sea in which to drop anchor and be at rest. But here there is a fearful "woe" denounced against ease. What is this ease?

I. IT IS THE EASE OF PRIDE. These great nations, Judah and Israel, the one having its seat in Zion and the other in Samaria, because of their imaginary superiority as the chief of the nations, settled down in carnal security. Those that dwelt in Zion, or Jerusalem, felt themselves safe because of its historic grandeur, its temple, the dwelling-place of the Almighty, and its mountain fortifications. Those that dwelt in Samaria—the ten tribes—had the same false confidence in their safety. The mountains of Samaria, the seat both of the religion and government of a strong people, they relied upon, free from all apprehension of dangers. It was the ease of pride and overrated power.

II. IT IS THE EASE OF RUIN. "Pass ye unto Calneh [this was an ancient city built by Nimrod] and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great [one of the chief cities of Syria]: then go down to Gath of the Philistines [the great city in Philistia]." Remember these cities, "Be they better than these kingdoms?" Are you who live at Zion and Samaria greater people than they were, more strong and invincible? Yet they are gone. Calneh gone, Hamath gone, Gath gone. All are in ruins, long, long ago. Why, then, should you feel yourselves safe and be at ease in Zion and Samaria? Their example condemns your false security and predicts your ruin. The ease here denounced is like the ease of stolid indifference or the ease of a torpid conscience, terribly general, fearfully criminal, and awfully dangerous. It must sooner or later be broken. The hurricanes of retribution must sooner or later lash the sleeping ocean into foaming fury. Souls are everywhere sleeping on the bosom of volcanoes. Oh for some voice from the heavens above or the earth beneath, to startle the men of this generation!

CONCLUSION. Learn from this subject: 1. *That the mere feeling of security is no infallible proof of safety.* Men are prone to deceive themselves. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Some men, like the drunkard whose vessel is going down, feel themselves safe because they are unconscious of the danger. Some men feel themselves safe because of the confidence they have in objects that are utterly unable to sustain them. The only feeling of security that warrants safety is that which springs from a conscious trust in God. Such as have this can say, "God is our Refuge and Strength," etc. 2. *That great advantages may prove great curses.* It was a great advantage for Judah to have Zion, and Israel to have Samaria—great in many respects, national and religious. But these advantages, because they were overrated, trusted in, put in the place of God himself, proved to them most disastrous. So it ever is. Our civilization, our literature, our Churches, our Bibles, have proved curses to millions, and will perhaps to millions more. The Pharisee in the temple is an illustration of this. 3. *That retributions which have overtaken others should be a warning to us.* The prophet calls upon these men of Judah and Israel to remember Calneh, Hamath, Gath. "All these things," says Paul, "happened unto them for ensamples." Learn to read our fate in history. Ungodly nations, where are Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome? Ungodly Churches, where are the Churches of Asia Minor?—D. T.

Ver. 3.—*Man's evil day.* "Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near." This is another denunciation addressed to the great men in Zion and Samaria. They are said "to keep the day of calamity afar off, and bring the seat of violence near" (Delitzsch). Three remarks are suggested by these words.

I. ALL MEN HAVE AN "EVIL DAY" IN THEIR FUTURE. Even the holiest men, men

whose path through life has been most calm and prosperous, have to expect certain calamities that befall all. There are trials common to all men, whatever their condition or character—afflictions, bereavements, infirmities; these await most men. There is one evil day, however, for us all. Death is in many respects an "evil day." What mysterious sufferings it generally involves! What privileges and pleasures it terminates! What disruptions it produces! Sinner, thy death will be an evil day; and it is before thee, and it is nearer now than ever.

II. SOME MEN ADJOURN IN THOUGHT THIS "EVIL DAY." They "put far away the evil day." Ungodly men put this evil day so far on in the course of time that they seldom discern it and never realize it. It is a mere speck, seldom visible on the horizon of many years of unclouded sunshine. Why do men adjourn in thought this evil day? 1. Not because they *have any doubt as to its advent*. No day is more certain. Sooner shall all the wheels of nature be stopped than the sun of this day fail to break on every eye. "It is appointed to men once to die." 2. Not because they *lack reminders of its approach*. Every physical pain, every tolling knell, every funeral procession, every graveyard—all remind us almost every moment that our evil day is coming. Why, then, adjourn the thought? The reason is found: 1. In the *strength of our material attachments*. 2. In our *dread of the mysterious*. 3. In our *lack of interest in the spiritual and material*. 4. In our *conscious want of preparation for the scenes of retribution*.

III. NONE WHO ADJOURN THIS "EVIL DAY" IN THOUGHT CAN DELAY IT IN FACT. "And cause the seat of violence to come near." Perhaps what is meant here is that these men so ignored their coming calamities that by their conduct they hastened them on. Ignoring the evil day, they pursued such a course of injustice, falsehood, dishonesty, sinful indulgence, and impiety as served to bring it nearer. Thus the more they put it off in thought the nearer it drew, because they became more self-destructive in their conduct. A general truth is suggested here, viz. *that a man who adjourns all thought of his end will pursue such a course of conduct as will hasten its approach*. Some men imagine that by thinking upon death they will hasten its advent; hence their dread of making wills. But such is not the fact. He who keeps the evil day in view, rightly regards it, prepares for it, will render such a practical obedience to the laws of health as to delay rather than hasten it. "Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."—D. T.

Vers. 4—7.—*Carnal indulgence*. "That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall," etc. Here is a sketch of the way in which these leading men of the chief nations luxuriated in carnal pleasures and sensual indulgences. Observe two things.

I. THE MORAL TORPOR OF CARNAL INDULGENCE. Observe two things. 1. These people wrought *entirely for the senses*. See how they *slept*! They provided themselves with "beds of ivory." They did not require rest for their weary limbs, otherwise beds of straw would have done. They wanted to be grand, they loved glitter, hence "beds of ivory." Here is the lust of the eye. See how they *ate*! "And stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall." They abounded in superfluities; they partook of the choicest dainties of nature, and that in a recumbent position. Here is the lust of the palate. See how they *sang*! "That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David." Musical sounds gratified their auricular sensibilities, and they chanted to the "viol." Here is the lust of the ear. See how they *drank*! They "drink wine in bowls." Small vessels would not do; they must take long, deep draughts of the pleasing beverage. Here again is the lust of the palate. See how they *anointed themselves*! "With the chief ointments." They regaled their olfactory nerves with the choicest perfumes of nature. Here is the lust of the smell. See how *indifferent* they were to the suffering of the true Church of God! "They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." What a description this of a people that lived and wrought entirely for the senses! They were practical materialists. They had no spiritual vision, sensibilities, or experience. Their imperishable souls were submerged in the deep flowing sea of mere animal pleasures. Are there no such men now? For

what do our prosperous tradesmen and the upper ten thousand live? For the most part, we fear, for the senses. Grand furniture—"beds of ivory;" choicest viands—"lambs out of the flock, and calves out of the midst of the stall;" ravishing music—"chants to the sound of the viol;" delectable beverages—the choicest wines in "bowls;" the most delicious aromas—"the chief ointments." Has carnal indulgence been more rife in any land or age than this? Matter everywhere governs spirit; the body everywhere is the despot, men are "carnal, sold under sin." 2. These people wrought *without conscience*. In all this there is no effort of conscience recorded, no word uttered. There is, indeed, a reference to intellectual effort, for it is said "they invented to themselves instruments of music." Carnal indulgence has ever been and is now as much, if not more than ever, the great employer of man's inventive faculties. Luxury in England to-day is the great employer of human ingenuity. But there is no conscience here. When conscience is touched in such a state of things, and startled by the sense of its guilt, it exclaims, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this sin and death?"

II. THE RETRIBUTIVE RESULT OF CARNAL INDULGENCE. The threat in the text is: 1. The loss of *liberty*. "Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive." Those who had taken the lead in revelry and all manner of wickedness were to be the first in the procession of captives. In such a position their disgrace would be more conspicuous. Luxury always leads to slavery: it is the eternal law of justice, that those who live to the flesh shall lose their freedom and be exiled into the region of tyranny. "Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death" (Jas. i. 15). 2. The loss of *provisions*. "And the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed." They shall have scarcity, perhaps starvation, instead of the profusion of dainties with which their tables have been spread. All this carnal indulgence and voluptuousness, this luxury in ease, and diet, and music, and aroma will not go on for ever. They are abnormal conditions of human nature; retribution will one day put an end to them.

"O luxury,
Bane of elated life, of affluent states,
What ruin is not thine? . . . Behind thee gapes
Th' unfathomable gulf where Ashur lies
O'erwhelmed, forgotten; and high boasting Cham;
And Elam's haughty pomp; and beauteous Greece;
And the great queen of earth, imperial Rome."

(Dyer.)

D. T.

Ver. 8.—*National depravity*. "The Lord God hath sworn by himself, saith the Lord the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein." In order to show the voluptuous debauches referred to in the preceding verses the terrible judgments that would overtake them, Jehovah is here represented as making a solemn oath. Whether the city here refers to Samaria or Jerusalem, or both, is of little moment. The subject is national depravity, and we infer from the words—

I. THAT DEPRAVITY MAY EXIST IN A NATION WHERE THERE IS MUCH THAT IS MAGNIFICENT. Here is a reference to the "excellency"—or, as some render it, the splendour—"of Jacob;" and here is a reference to "palaces," the homes of princes. There was much that was magnificent amongst the Jewish people of old in their own land. Great cities and their palaces, and, above all, the temple at Jerusalem, beautiful in architecture and situation, with an organized priesthood and gorgeous ceremonies. Still, its depravity at this time was wide and deep and hideous. A nation may have much that is magnificent, and yet be deeply sunk in moral corruption. Witness ancient Greece and Rome; witness England to-day. The arts, sculpture, painting, architecture, music, have reached their perfection, and abound. On all hands our eyes are attracted by grand churches, splendid mansions, marts, banks, museums, colleges, and galleries of art. Albeit was depravity ever more rife in any age or country than this? Greed, ambition, selfishness, sensuality, fraud, falsehood, and self-indulgence,—these, the elements of depravity and the fountains of crime, abound in all directions.

It is true they do not appear in their naked deformity, as in barbaric lands. Our civilization not only spreads a veil over them, but paints and decorates them, and thus conceals their native hideousness. Still, though the devil robes himself in the garb of an angel, he is yet the devil. Poison is poison, however much you may flavour it.

II. THAT DEPRAVITY UNDER THE MOST MAGNIFICENT FORM IS UTTERLY ABHORRENT TO THE GREAT GOD. "I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces." No veil can cover it from his eye; his glance pierces through all its decorations; to his view its ornamentalities add to its ugliness. The same vices displayed in the hut of a savage chief, are more hideous to him when developed in the gorgeous palaces of Christian sovereigns. "I abhor the excellency [splendour] of Jacob." God has moral sensibility. He has not only a sensibility for the beautiful in form and the perfect in arrangement, but for the moral. He loves the true, the beautiful, and the good; he loathes the false, the selfish, and the corrupt. "Oh, do not this abominable thing, which I hate" (Jer. xlv. 4).

III. THAT DEPRAVITY, WHICH IS EVER ABHORRENT TO GOD, MUST BRING RUIN ON ITS SUBJECTS. "Therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein." Observe: 1. The completeness of the ruin. "All that is therein"—utter destruction. 2. The certainty of the ruin. "The Lord God hath sworn by himself."

CONCLUSION. What an argument does this subject furnish for national seriousness and investigation! The progress of civilization is not the true progress of humanity. A nation may advance in the arts, and go back in morals; may be robed in artistic beauty, and yet be loathsome in moral corruption. Heaven will not smile on a nation because it is externally grand, but only when it is internally good.—D. T.

Ver. 12.—*Trying the impossible.* "Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plough there with oxen?" The folly of expecting real prosperity by committing acts of injustice or pursuing courses of sin is here forcibly represented by comparing it to the absurdity of attempting to run horses upon a rock or to plough the rock with oxen. The strength of the representation is increased by its interrogative form. Our subject is—*Trying the impossible.* Men are constantly doing this. Let us furnish a few examples.

I. WHEN THEY ATTEMPT TO DESTROY AN ENEMY BY PHYSICAL FORCE. An individual has an enemy, a man who hates him with an inveterate antipathy. In order to overcome him, what does he do? He disables or perhaps kills him. Or a nation has an enemy, strong and malignant. How does it seek to overcome it? In the same way, by brute force—swords, cannons, bayonets, these are employed. Now, the attempt to destroy an enemy by brute force is as absurd as to make horses run on the peaks of craggy rocks, or to put oxen to plough them. To destroy the enemy's body is not to destroy either him or his enmity. Philosophy and the Bible teach that the body is not the man; it is his, not himself. All the men that have fallen in duels, campaigns, or private assassinations are living, thinking, acting still, and await their murderers in another state. No bullet or sword can touch the man.

II. WHEN THEY ATTEMPT TO MAKE SOCIETY MORALLY GOOD BY MERE SECULAR INSTRUCTION. There are men who imagine that by teaching children the arts of reading, writing, ciphering, and the rudiments of science they will improve the morality of the nation. When you remember that the moral character grows out of the heart and not out of the brain, out of the likings and dislikings, not out of the ideas or intelligence, all this seems as absurd as the attempt to make horses run on rocks. Secular knowledge cannot change the heart, cannot alter a man's likes or dislikes. It may strengthen them, but not alter them. Dishonesty, uneducated, may commit petty thefts; but educated, it will legally swindle a nation. Knowledge, alas! is all in vain.

III. WHEN THEY ATTEMPT TO GET HAPPINESS FROM WITHOUT. All mankind are in search of happiness. "Who will show us any good?"—this is the universal cry. The great bulk seek happiness from without, from what they can see, and taste, and hear, and handle. They look for happiness in the titillation of the nerves and the gratification of the senses. Now, were man nothing but body, this would do. This does for the brute and the bird. But man is spirit; and matter in no form or combination can satisfy spirit. A man's life, or happiness, consisteth not in the abundance of material

things. True happiness springs from within, not from without; arises from holy loves, hopes, aspirations, and aims. In one word, love is the well of water that springs up unto everlasting life.

IV. WHEN THEY ATTEMPT TO SAVE SOULS BY MINISTERING TO THEIR SELFISHNESS. There are men in all Churches who give themselves to saving souls, as they say. Salvation is the burden of all their thought and talk. But how do they endeavour to accomplish their object? By everlasting appeals to the selfish fears and hopes of men. Tragic descriptions are given of hell in order to frighten men, and sensuous descriptions of heaven in order to attract them. But can this save the soul? Impossible. It will only aggravate its damnation. Salvation consists in the extinction of all that is selfish in human nature, and in the generating, fostering, and perfecting disinterested, self-oblivious love. "He that seeketh his life shall lose it: he that loseth his life shall find it." A preacher may increase his congregation by appealing to the selfishness of his hearers, but he does not add one to the family of the good. The man who tries to save souls by constant appeals to the selfishness of human nature acts more absurdly than he who attempts to gallop horses upon the sharp peaks of rugged rocks.

V. WHEN THEY ATTEMPT TO CONVERT HEATHENS ABROAD BEFORE CONVERTING THE HEATHENS AT HOME. London abounds with heathens. All the heathens of the heathen world have their representatives in London; besides, the great bulk of the resident population are heathens; they are without God and without hope in the world. The influence of London upon the most distant parts of the world is a thousand times as great as that of all the missionaries from England and America. Under such circumstances, to send a few lonely men to distant peoples, who are ignorant of our language, modes of thought, and habits, with the idea of converting the world, is more absurd than to put horses to run on the rock, and oxen to plough thereon. Are we not bound to go into all the world to spread the gospel? Yes, but is there a greater world than London? and should not our sailors, our merchants, our travellers, and emigrants be the missionaries to foreign lands? Whilst your missionaries carry teaspoonfuls of the gospel here and there, your London pours out floods of depravity on every zone.

CONCLUSION. Alas! how much human effort and sacrifice are lost for the want of practical wisdom and common sense! "Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plough there with oxen?" Yes, more successfully than we poor fools can accomplish some things that we labour to attain.—D. T.

Ver. 12.—*Man's perverting power.* "For ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock." The meaning of this is that they had turned the best things into bad use. Judgment and righteousness, the laws of right, they had made as nauseous and noxious as "gall" and "hemlock." Our subject is *man's perverting power*. Our blessed Maker in our constitution has endowed us with a force which no other creature under heaven seems to have, of turning things to wrong uses, and making those things which he intended to bless us the means of misery and ruin. You can see man exercising this power in many departments of action.

I. IN PHYSICAL OPERATIONS. What does he do with the iron which he discovers in the depths of the earth? Forges it into implements of human destruction. What does he do with the vineyards and the corn-fields? He turns them into inebriating liquids, and rolls them like rivers of poison through every district of society. What does he do with his own physical appetites? Instead of attending to them as means of relief, he makes their gratification the chief sources of his pleasure, and thus degrades his mental and moral nature. Everywhere you see man perverting nature—perverting the metals, the rivers, the fruits, and the chemical elements of the world.

II. IN CIVIC LIFE. The principle of human government is a Divine ordinance, intended to secure equal justice and protection. But how has man perverted it! He has turned it into an instrument to benefit the few at the expense of the many, an instrument of tyranny and oppression. The principle of *judicature*, intended to secure for all a just administration of law, man notoriously perverts. Men are appointed to occupy the throne of judgment who are not always, or generally, known as incorruptibly just and morally pure. Hence often in the name of justice iniquities are enacted. Man's perversion of the law is proverbial as a hideous enormity. The principle of *merchandise*, intended to band man together by the exchange of com-

modities in mutual obligation and fellowship, man has awfully perverted. He has made it the instrument of cupidity, monopoly, and nameless frauds. Thus, in every part of social life you see this perverting power in action—man turning “judgment into gall, and the fruits of righteousness into hemlock.”

III. IN THE RELIGIOUS SPHERE. In spiritual matters and in scenes that should be the most sacred, its action is perhaps more flagrant and formidable than anywhere else. Without going into the great world of heathenism, or even to remote parts of Christendom, look into our own religious England, and what do you see? You see the gospel ministry, which is essentially self-denying, humble, devout, turned into an arrogant and plethoric priesthood. You see gospel ceremonies, intended to adumbrate spiritual truths, employed as mystic channels of saving grace. You see a system of universal philanthropy made an instrument of miserable sectarianism and intolerable bigotry.

CONCLUSION. Do not let man say he has no power. His moral power is something stupendous. He has power to turn the things of God to the use of Satan, heavenly blessings into hellish curses. This he is doing everywhere. “Ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock.”—D. T.

Ver. 13.—*Human joy in the unsubstantial.* “Ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?” “Horns” are signs and symbols of power; here they stand for the military resources with which they fancied that they could conquer every foe. “These delusions of God-forgetting pride the prophet casts down, by saying that Jehovah, the God of hosts, will raise up a nation against them, which will crush them down in the whole length and breadth of the kingdom. This nation was Assyria” (Delitzsch). What these ancient Hebrews did is an evil prevalent in all times and lands—rejoicing in the things of nought, taking pleasure in the unreal, the empty, and the fleeting.

I. TO REJOICE IN WORLDLY WEALTH is to “rejoice in a thing of nought.” Rich men everywhere are always disposed to rejoice in their wealth. Houses, lands, and funded treasures, of these worldly men are ever boasting, in these they proudly exult. But what is earthly wealth? It is, in truth, so far as the possessor is concerned, “a thing of nought.” It was not his a few years ago, and may not be his to-morrow. “Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle towards heaven” (Prov. xxiii. 5). Wealth, at best, is a most unsubstantial thing; it is a mere air-bubble rising on the stream of life, glittering for a moment, and then departing for ever. Great fortunes are but bubbles; they vanish before a ripple on the stream or a gust in the atmosphere. “Wealth,” says old Adams, “is like a bird; it hops all day from man to man as the bird from tree to tree, and none can say where it will roost or rest at night.”

“Go, enter the mart where the merchantmen meet,
Get rich, and retire to some rural retreat:
Ere happiness comes, comes the season to die;
Quickly then will thy riches all vanish and fly.
Go, sit with the mighty in purple and gold;
Thy mansions be stately, thy treasures untold;
But soon shalt thou dwell in the damp house of clay,
While thy riches make wings to themselves and away.”

II. TO REJOICE IN PERSONAL BEAUTY is to “rejoice in a thing of nought.” Nature has endowed some with personal charms which it has denied to others—finely chiselled features, a radiant countenance, commanding brow, symmetrical form, majestic presence. He who is thus blest has many advantages; he commands admiration and exerts an influence upon human hearts. But is this beauty a thing to rejoice in? Those who possess it do rejoice in it; many pride themselves on their good looks and fine figures. But what is beauty? It is “a thing of nought.” Why rejoice in that for which we can take no credit? Does the moss-rose deserve praise for unfolding more beauty and emitting more fragrance than the nettle? Who can make one hair white or black, or add one cubit to his stature? Why rejoice, too, in that which is so evanescent? Socrates called beauty “a short-lived tyranny;” and Theophrastus, “a silent cheat.” One old divine says it is like an almanac—it “lasts for one year, as it were.” Men

are like the productions of the fields and the meadows. In the summer the variety is striking, some herbs and flowers appear in more stately form and attractive hues than others; but when old winter comes round, who sees the distinctions? Where are the plants of beauty? They are faded and gone. "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof as the flower of the field."

"Beauty is but a vain and doubtful good,
A shining gloss, that fadeth suddenly;
A flower that dies, when first it 'gins to bud;
A brittle glass, that's broken presently:
A doubtful good, a gloss, a glass, a flower,
Lost, faded, broken, dead within an hour.

"And as good lost is seldom or never found,
As fading gloss no rubbing will refresh,
As flowers dead lie withered on the ground,
As broken glass no cement can redress,
So beauty, blemished once, for ever's lost,
In spite of physic, painting, pain, and cost."

(Shakespeare.)

III. To REJOICE IN ANCESTRAL DISTINCTION is to "rejoice in a thing of nought." There are those who are constantly exulting in their pedigree. Some who in this country can go back to the days of William the Conqueror, how delighted they are! But who were the men that William brought over with him, and between whom he divided this England of ours? Cobblers, tailors, smiths, plunderers, men of rapine and blood, most of them destitute alike of intellectual culture and morality. But even had we come from the loins of the intellectual and moral peers of the race, what cause in this is there for rejoicing? It is truly "a thing of nought." Our ancestry is independent of us; we are not responsible for it. It is not a matter either of blame or praise. Each man is complete in himself—an accountable unity, a moral cause. A prime minister has a number of earnest servile lackeys—they are printers, jewellers, clothmakers, tailors, and such-like; in the zenith of his power he rewards them by causing them to be titled "sir," "lord," "baron," etc. In this their children rejoice. But is it not "a thing of nought"? What is there in it? Nothing.

"Knighthoods and honours borne
Without desert, are titles but of scorn."

(Shakespeare.)

IV. To REJOICE IN MORAL MERITORIOUSNESS is to "rejoice in a thing of nought." There are many who rejoice in their morality. Like the Pharisee in the temple, they thank God they are not as "other men." They consider they are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," whereas they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Moral merit in a sinner is a baseless vision, a phantom of a proud heart. The man exulting in his own self-righteousness acts as foolishly as the man who endeavours to secure himself from the scorching rays of the sun under his own shadow. He seeks to bring his shadow between him and the sun, but cannot. If he runs, the shadow is before or behind him; if he falls down, the shadow falls with him, and leaves him in contact with the burning beam. No; our righteousness is "a thing of nought;" it is "filthy rags."

"Beware of too sublime a sense
Of your own worth and consequence.
The man who deems himself so great,
And his importance of such weight,
That all around, in all that's done,
Must move and act for him alone,
Will learn in school of tribulation
The folly of his expectation."

(Cowper.)

CONCLUSION. Ah me! how many on all hands are rejoicing in "a thing of nought"! Wealth, beauty, ancestry, self-righteousness,—what are these? Fleeting shadows,

dying echoes. They are clouds without water; to the eye they may for a minute or two appear in gorgeous forms, but before a breeze they melt into thin air and are lost. Rejoice in the *real*, the spiritual, the eternal, the Divine.—D. T.

Ver. 14.—*God chastising nations by nations.* “But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the Lord the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of the wilderness.” What “nation” is here referred to as about to be raised up by God against Israel? Undoubtedly, Assyria. This Assyrian nation is here represented as overspreading the country “from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of the wilderness.” Hamath was a point of entrance for an invading army into Israel from the north, which had just been subjugated by Jeroboam II. The boundaries are virtually the same as those mentioned (2 Kings xiv. 25) as restored to Israel by Jeroboam II., “from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain,” i.e. the Dead Sea, into which the river of the wilderness here mentioned flows: Do not glory in your recently acquired city, for it shall be the starting-point for the foe to afflict you. How sad the contrast to the feast of Solomon, attended by a congregation from the same Hamath, the most northern boundary of Israel, to the Nile, the river of Egypt, the most southern boundary! “Unto the river of the wilderness,” i.e. to Kedron, or that part of it which empties itself into the northern bay of the Dead Sea below Jericho (2 Chron. xxviii. 15), which city was at the southern boundary of the ten tribes (Maurer). To the river Nile, which skirts the Arabian wilderness and separates Egypt from Canaan (Grotius). If this verse includes Judah as well as Israel, Grotius’s view is correct, and it agrees with 1 Kings viii. 65, “Solomon held a feast, and all Israel . . . from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt” (Fausset). The subject suggested by the words is this—*God chastising nations by nations.* He now threatens to chastise the kingdoms of Judah and Israel by the Assyrian people. This is how the Almighty has acted from the beginning. He has chastised nations by nations. The history of the world is little else than a history of civil wars. Let us for a moment notice the how and the why of this.

I. *THE HOW.* How does the Almighty bring about wars? 1. Not by his *inspiration*. The God of peace does not breathe into any people greed, ambition, revenge. These principles, from which all war emanates, are repugnant to his nature. He denounces them. His grand aim in the world is to annihilate them, and in their place propagate disinterestedness, humility, and magnanimous love. 2. Not by his *authority*. All war is directly against his command; whilst everywhere he prohibits covetousness, pride, and revenge, he inculcates, in almost every page of inspiration and every form of utterance, love to our neighbours. The God of peace works everywhere in the world through peace, works by the peaceful influences of nature and the love of the gospel to produce “peace on earth, and good will towards men.” How, then, can he be said to raise a nation to war? Simply by *permission*. He allows human nature freedom to work out the evil principles that are operating in it. The power of free action with which he endowed men at first he does not crush, he does not restrict; he treats it with respect, and leaves men free to do evil as well as good. He who permits the river at times to overflow its boundaries, and the subterranean fires to break forth, permits the passions of men to issue in war and bloodshed. Permission is not authorship.

II. *THE WHY.* Why does the Almighty chastise nations by nations? Why not employ the elements of nature or angelic intelligences? or why not do it by his own direct volition, without any instrumentality whatever? He may, for aught we know, chastise men in all these ways; but we can see reasons for his employing nations to chastise nations by wars. In acting thus: 1. Man has revealed to him in the most impressive way the *wickedness of the human heart*. It has been well said that war is the effect, the embodiment, and manifestation of every conceivable sin. In every war hell is revealed; its fires flash, its thunders roll, its fiends revel and shriek. For man to get rid of sin, he must be impressed with its enormity; and does not war make that impression? Does not every crimson chapter in its history reveal to the human heart the stupendous enormity of sin? 2. Man has revealed to him the *utter folly of putting confidence in his fellow-man*. War reveals falsehood, treachery, cunning, fraud, cruelty;

and who can trust these? Does not war say to every man, "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm"? To-day a man may fondle you as a friend, to-morrow foam at you as a fiend. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no hope." 3. Man has revealed to him the *supreme importance of cultivating the true friendship of his fellow-men*. What thoughtful men have not groaned and wept over the utter failure of all means to produce the results for which they were ostensibly commenced—to vindicate national honour, to establish peace? Such ends are never realized. What, then, is the lesson? Cultivate friendship with your fellow-men, the friendship of man with man, family with family, tribe with tribe, nation with nation. Wars are God's moral lessons to man in tragedy.—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1—ch. ix. 10.—Part III. FIVE VISIONS, WITH EXPLANATIONS, CONTINUING AND CONFIRMING THE PREVIOUS PROPHECY. The afflictions are climactic, increasing in intensity. The first two symbolize judgments which have been averted by the prophet's intercession; the third and fourth adumbrate judgments which are to fall inevitably; and the fifth proclaims the overthrow of the temple and the old theocracy.

Vers. 1—3.—§ 1. *The first vision, of locusts, represents Israel as a field eaten down to the ground, but shooting up afresh, and its utter destruction postponed at the prophet's prayer.*

Ver. 1.—Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me. By an inward illumination (comp. vers. 4, 7; and ch. viii. 1; Jer. xxiv. 1—3). He formed grasshoppers; rather, *locusts* (Nah. iii. 17). This points to the moral government of God, who uses nature to work his purposes, "wind and storm fulfilling his word." In the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; when the aftermath was beginning to grow under the influence of the latter rains. If the herbage was destroyed then, there would be no hope of recovery in the rest of the year. After the king's mowings. It is deduced from this expression that the first crop on certain grounds was taken for the king's use—a kind of royal perquisite, though there is no trace of such a custom found in Scripture, the passage in 1 Kings xviii. 5, where Ahab sends Obadiah to search for pasture, having plainly nothing to do with it; and in this case, as Keil remarks, the plague would seem to fall upon the people only, and the guilty king would have escaped. But to interpret the expression entirely in a spiritual sense, with no substantial basis, as "Jehovah's judgments," destroys the harmony of the vision, ignoring

its material aspect altogether. It is quite possible that the custom above mentioned did exist, though it was probably limited to certain lands, and did not apply to the whole pasturage of the country. It is here mentioned to define the time of the plague of locusts—the time, in fact, when its ravages would be most irremediable. The LXX., by a little change of letters, render, *ἰδοὺ βροῦχος ἐπὶ τῶν δ βασιλείς*, by which they imply that the locusts would be as innumerable as the army of Gog. The whole version is, "Behold, a swarm of locusts coming from the East; and behold, one caterpillar, King Gog." The vision is thought to refer to the first invasion by the Assyrians, when Pul was bribed by Menahem to withdraw.

Ver. 2.—The grass of the land. The term includes vegetables of all sorts, the food of man and beast (Gen. i. 11; see note on Zech. x. 1). O Lord, . . . forgive. The prophet is not concerned to obtain the fulfilment of his prophecy; his heartfelt sympathy for his people yearns for their pardon, as he knows that punishment and restoration depend upon moral conditions. By whom shall Jacob arise? better, *How shall Jacob stand?* literally, *as who?* If he is thus weakened, as the vision portends, how shall he endure the stroke? Small; weakened by internal commotions and foreign attack (2 Kings xv. 10—16, 19).

Ver. 3.—Repented for this; or, *concerning this destruction*. The punishment was conditioned by man's behaviour or other considerations. Here the prophet's intercession abates the full infliction of the penalty (compare analogous expressions, Deut. xxxii. 36; 1 Sam. xv. 11; 2 Sam. xxiv. 16; Jer. xviii. 8; xlii. 10; Jonah iii. 10, where see note). Amos may have had in memory the passage in Joel ii. 13. The LXX. here and in ver. 6 has, *Μετανόησον, Κύριε, ἐν τούτῳ καὶ τούτῳ οὐκ ἔσται, λέγει Κύριος*, "Repent, O Lord, for this; and this shall not be, saith the Lord." Hence some early commentators gathered that the prophet's

intercession was rejected; but the words do not necessarily bear that sense (see St. Cyril Alex. and Theodoret, *in loc.*). It shall not be. This respice refers to the retreat of the Assyrians under Pul, the usurping monarch who assumed the name of Tiglath-Pileser II. (2 Kings xv. 17, etc.). Some commentators consider the judgment to be literally a plague of locusts; but this is not probable.

Vers. 4—6.—§ 2. *The second vision, devouring fire, represents a more severe judgment than the preceding one, involving greater consequences, but still one which was again modified by the prayers of the righteous prophet.*

Ver. 4.—Called to contend by fire; Septuagint, ἐκάλεσε τὴν δίκην ἐν πυρὶ, "called for judgment by fire;" Vulgate, *vocabat iudicium ad ignem*. God called the people to try their cause with him by sending fire as a punishment among them (comp. Isa. lxvi. 16; Ezek. xxxviii. 22); and in the vision the fire is represented as so vehement that it devoured the great deep, drank up the very ocean itself (Gen. vii. 11; Isa. li. 10); or the subterranean fountains and springs, as Gen. xlix. 25. And did eat up a part; τὴν μερίδα κυρίου (Septuagint). This version takes *eth-hacheleq* as the "inheritance" or "portion" of the Lord, i.e. the land of Israel (Jer. xii. 10); but Canaan is nowhere called absolutely "the portion;" nor were the ten tribes specially so designated. Rather, the *portion* (not a *part*) is that part of the land and people which was marked out for judgment. The particular calamity alluded to is the second invasion of Tiglath-Pileser II., when he conquered Gilead and the northern part of the kingdom, and carried some of the people captive to Assyria (2 Kings xv. 29).

Vers. 5, 6.—The intercession is the same as in ver. 2, except that the prophet says *cease* instead of "forgive;" and in effect the tide of war was rolled back from Israel, and Samaria itself was spared for the time.

Vers. 7—9.—§ 3. *The third vision, the plumb-line, represents the Lord himself as coming to examine the conduct of Israel, and finally deciding on its entire ruin.*

Ver. 7.—Upon (rather, over) a wall made by a plumb-line. The word translated "plumb-line" (*anakh*) occurs only here. Septuagint, ἀδάμας: so the Syriac; Vulgate, *trulla cementarii*; Aquila, γάλακτις, "brightening," "splendour;" Theodotion, τηρόμενον. As the word in other dialects means tin or lead, it is usually taken here to mean the plumb-line which builders use to ascertain that their work is even and per-

pendicular (see a very different explanation in Knabenbauer, p. 314, etc.). The "wall" is the kingdom of Israel, once carefully built up, solidly constructed, accurately arranged. God had made it upright; how was it now?

Ver. 8.—Amos, what seest thou? A question asked to give occasion for the explanation of the symbol, as in Jer. i. 11, 13; xxiv. 3. I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel. As it was built by rule and measure, so it should be destroyed. The line was used not only for building, but also for pulling down (see 2 Kings xxi. 13; Isa. xxxiv. 11; Lam. ii. 8). And this should be done "in the midst" of the people, that all might be tried individually, and that all might acknowledge the justice of the sentence, which now denounced complete ruin. Pass by; so as to spare, or forgive (ch. viii. 2; Prov. xix. 11; Micah vii. 18). The judgment is irremediable, and the prophet intercedes no more. The final conquest by Shalmaneser is here typified.

Ver. 9.—The high places of Isaac. The shrines of idolatry all over the land. The *bamoth* are the altars erected on high places and now dedicated to idols (1 Kings iii. 2; 2 Kings xxiii. 8; Isa. xvi. 12; Hos. x. 8). Isaac here and in ver. 16 is used as a synonym for Israel, perhaps with some idea of contrasting the deeds of the people with the blameless life of the patriarch and his gentle piety (Pusey). Septuagint, βασιλ τοῦ Ἰσαακ, with reference to the meaning of the name Isaac, "altars of derision," whence Jerome's version, *excelsae idioli*. The sanctuaries of Israel. The idol-temples at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings xii. 29), at Gilgal (ch. iv. 4), and perhaps in other places, which had been sanctified by ancient patriarchal worship. Septuagint, αἱ τελεταὶ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, "the rites of Israel;" Vulgate, *sanctificationes Israel*. With the sword. God is represented as standing like an armed warrior taking vengeance on the guilty family. Jeroboam II. had saved Israel from Syria, and was popular owing to his success in war (2 Kings xiv. 25—28); but his dynasty was overthrown, and this overthrow was the destruction of the Israelitish monarchy. The murder of his son Zachariah by Shallum (2 Kings xv. 10) led to those disastrous commotions which culminated in the conquest of Samaria by the Assyrians and the deportation of the people.

Vers. 10—17.—§ 4. *This bold prophecy, no longer conceived in general terms or referring to distant times, but distinct and personal, arouses the animosity of the priestly authorities at Bethel, who accuse Amos before the*

king, and warn him to leave the country without more words, or to fear the worst.

Ver. 10.—**Amaziah the priest of Bethel.** Amaziah ("the Lord is strong"), the chief of the idol-priests at Bethel, a crafty and determined man, hearing this prophecy against the royal house, takes it up as a political matter, and makes a formal accusation against Amos with the view of silencing him. **Hath conspired against thee.** Probably some of the Israelites had been convinced by the prophet's words, and had joined themselves to him; hence Amaziah speaks of "a conspiracy" (1 Sam. xxii. 8, 13; 1 Kings xv. 27) against the king. Or very possibly the story was fabricated in order to accentuate the charge against Amos. **In the midst of the house of Israel.** In the very centre of the kingdom, where his treasonable speeches would have the greatest effect. **The land, personified, cannot endure such language, which is calculated to disturb its peace, and is quite contrary to its ideas and hopes.**

Ver. 11.—This is a partly correct account of what the prophet had said, but it differed in some important particulars. Amaziah carefully omits the fact that Amos had merely been the mouthpiece of God in all his announcements; he says falsely that a violent death had been predicted for Jeroboam himself; and, in stating that Amos had foretold the captivity of Israel, he says nothing of the sins which led to this doom, or of the hope held out to repentance, or of the prophet's intercession.

Ver. 12.—**Also Amaziah said.** Jeroboam appears to have taken no steps in consequence of this accusation, either deeming that the words of a visionary were unworthy of serious consideration, or, like Herod (Matt. xiv. 5), fearing the people, who had been impressed by the prophet's words and bold bearing. Therefore Amaziah endeavours by his own authority to make Amos leave the country, or else does not wait for the command of the king, who was probably at Samaria. **O thou seer!** Amaziah calls Amos *chozeh*, δ ὀρῶν (1 Chron. xxi. 9; xxv. 5), either with reference to the visions just given, or in derision of his claims—as we might say, "visionary." **Flee thee away; fly for thine own good to escape punishment, patronizing and counselling him. Go to the land of Judah; where doubtless your announcement of the ruin of the rival kingdom will be acceptable. Eat bread.** Amaziah speaks as if Amos was paid for his prophecies, made a gain of godliness. **Prophecy there.** "Vaticinare in terra Juda, ubi libenter audiuntur insani" (St. Jerome). The idolatrous priest has no conception of the in-

spiration under which the prophet speaks. He judges others by himself, attributing to Amos the sordid motives by which he himself was influenced.

Ver. 13.—**The king's chapel; i.e. "a sanctuary"** (Exod. xxv. 8; Lev. xix. 30) founded by the king (1 Kings xii. 28), not by God. So in truth it had only an earthly sanction, and the prophet of the Lord was out of place there. **The king's court; literally, house of the kingdom.** "National temple" (Kuenen); "a royal temple, the state church" (Pusey). Not the political, but the religious, capital, the chief seat of the religion appertaining to the nation. Amaziah speaks as a thorough Erastian; as if the human authority were everything, and the Lord, of himself, had no claims on the land.

Ver. 14.—The prophet, undaunted by Amaziah's threats, in simple language declares that he does not practise prophesying as a profession or to gain a livelihood, but in obedience to the voice of God. The exercise of the prophetic office was restricted neither to sex nor rank. There were many prophetesses in Israel, e.g. Deborah (Judg. iv.), Huldah (2 Kings xxii. 14), Noadiah (Neh. vi. 14); and besides a large number of nameless prophets there are twenty-three whose names are preserved in Holy Writ, omitting those whose writings have come down to us (Ladd, 'Doctrine of Scripture,' i. 117, etc.). **A prophet's son; i.e. brought up in the schools of the prophets, the pupils of which were called "sons of the prophets"** (see 1 Kings xx. 35; 2 Kings ii. 5). Amos was neither self-commissioned nor trained in any human institution. **A herdman (voger); usually "a cow-herd;" here "a shepherd;" αἰπόλος (Septuagint).** **A gatherer of sycamore fruit.** The phrase, *boles shiqmim*, may mean either one who plucks mulberry-figs for his own sustenance, or one who cultivates them for others. The latter is probably the meaning of the term here. The Septuagint rendering, *κνίζων σικιμύα*, "pricking sycamore fruit," and that of the Vulgate, *vellicans sycamoros*, indicate the artificial means for ripening the fruit, which was done by scraping, scratching, or puncturing it, as is sometimes done to the figs of commerce. As the tree bore many crops of fruit in the year, it would afford constant employment to the dresser (see 'Dict. of the Bible,' iii. p. 1394; 'Bible Educator,' iv. p. 343).

Ver. 15.—**As I followed; literally, from after, from behind,** as in the call of David (2 Sam. vii. 8; Ps. lxxviii. 70). The Divine call came to him suddenly and imperatively, and he must needs obey it. He, therefore, could not follow Amaziah's counsel.

Ver. 16.—*Hear thou the word of the Lord.* The punishment of him who tried to impede God's message. *Drop not thy word.* Be not continually pouring forth prophecy. The word is used similarly in Micah ii. 6, 11 and Ezek. xxi. 2. The idea, though not the term, is taken from Deut. xxxii. 2. Septuagint, *μη ἀχλαγωγῆσθης*, "raise no tumult," which rather expresses Amaziah's fear of the effect of the utterance than translates the word. St. Jerome's explanation is somewhat too subtle, "*Stillare prophetas idioma Scripturarum est, quod non totam Dei simul inferant iram, sed parvas stillas comminatione denuntient.*"

Ver. 17.—With this denunciation compare that of Jeremiah (xx. 3, etc.) against Pashur. As husband, as father, as citizen, Amaziah shall suffer grievously. *Shall be an harlot in the city.* Not play the harlot willingly, but suffer open violence when

the city is taken (comp. Isa. xlii. 16; Lam. v. 11). *And thy daughters.* This would be abnormal cruelty, as the Assyrians usually spared the women of conquered towns. *Shall be divided by line.* Amaziah's own land was to be portioned out to strangers by the measuring-line (Zech. ii. 2). *A polluted land; an unclean land;* i.e. a Gentile country. Amaziah himself was to share his countrymen's captivity. The sins and idolatry of the people are often said to defile the land; e.g. Lev. xviii. 25; Numb. xxxv. 33; Jer. ii. 7. *Shall surely go into captivity; or, be led away captive.* Amos repeats the very words which formed part of his accusation (ver. 11), in order to show that God's purpose is unchanged, and that he, the prophet, must utter the same denunciation (see the accomplishment, 2 Kings xvii. 6).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The vision of devouring locusts.* The prophet is appropriately called a seer. He sees clear and he sees far. Not only has Amos foresight of what is coming; he has insight into what, in certain circumstances, would have come. He is taken as it were behind the scenes, and made a witness of the forging of Heaven's thunderbolts, to be laid up for use as occasion may require. In this case he is cognizant by spiritual intuition of the preparation of judicial measures which, as circumstances turn out, are never executed.

I. ALL HIS CREATURES ARE MINISTERS OF GOD TO DO HIS WILL. The angels are his "hosts"—ministers of his that do his pleasure. The Assyrian was the rod of his anger. He says, "I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them." He maketh the winds his messengers, the flaming fire his minister (Ps. civ. 4). All created things, in fact, are but different elements in a vast ministry, by which he executes his purpose. 1. *Judgments are generally brought about by second causes.* To this rule there is scarcely an exception. Sometimes it is famine, brought about by drought, or mildew, or locusts. Sometimes it is desolating war, brought about by jealousy, love of power, and greed. Sometimes it is pestilence, the result of causes all within the natural sphere. We know nothing of afflictive judgments coming apart from the interposition of the causes out of which they would naturally arise. 2. *Second causes are all in the hands of the First Cause.* They do not operate at random. Theirs is action "co-operant to an end." They are adjusted and controlled. They are combined in schemes of order and proportion, nicely fitted to the achievement of their ultimate results. The eye is of the blindest that cannot see how—

"Behind the dim unknown
Standeth God, within the shadow, keeping watch above his own."

(Lowell.)

3. *Natural causes are prepared and used for a moral end.* Manasseh's captivity leads to his conversion (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—13). Israel's desert discipline cultivates a robustness of national character which was wanting at the Exodus (Isa. xliii. 21). So a long captivity in heathen Babylon puts an end to the ever-recurring national idolatry. When all God's measures were executed, he could look on the Hebrews and say, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." And that is God's method in all cases. Scripture declares, and experience and observation argue—

"All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good."

(Pope.)

II. GOD'S AGENTS STRIKE IN THE NICK OF TIME. "He formed locusts in the beginning of the springing up of the second crop." In consequence of the timing of this judgment, it is: 1. *More thorough-going*. If the locusts had been sent earlier, there might have been time after they had gone for the second crop to grow. If they had come later, it might have been already saved. God will not beat the air. He will strike how and when and where the culprit shall feel his blow. 2. *It is more striking*. The element of time is the chief index to the miraculous character of many events. They follow immediately on the Divine word or act, and so reveal themselves to be Divine works. The catching of a netful of fishes, or the sudden calming of a storm, or the recovery of a woman from fever, were none of them necessarily miraculous events. It was their occurrence at the Saviour's word that revealed the Divine agency in them. The coming of the locusts at the prophet's word, and at the critical time, revealed God's hand in the event. 3. *It is more effectual*. A judgment is likely to serve its disciplinary purpose in proportion as it is real, appropriate, and manifestly of God. The difference between a timely judgment and an untimely one would be the difference between one blessed to its proper effect and one utterly futile.

III. THEY MAKE AN END OF THE WORK THEY TAKE IN HAND. In all that God does we should expect thoroughness. 1. *There is the power*. All forces and agents are under his control. He can bring them to bear in any quantity and on any point. For him "nothing is too hard," and "all things are possible." When God lifts his hand he can "smite through." 2. *There is the need*. Divine judgments never come unneeded, nor till it is evident that nothing else will do. Each is wanted, and the whole of each. If anything less, or anything else, were sent it would be inadequate. The last atom of imagined strength must be destroyed. The last remnant of fancied resource must be swept away. Only when every conceivable prop has been knocked away will men be brought to their knees in absolute submission.

IV. THE HAND OF JUDGMENT MAY BE ARRESTED BY THE TOUCH OF PRAYER. "Jehovah repented of this: It shall not take place, saith Jehovah." The pictured events never transpired. The adoption and abandonment of them as retributive measures occurred only in vision. Still, a parallel for this "plastic vision" may be found in God's actual doings, as in the case of the antediluvians, of Saul, of Hezekiah, of Jerusalem, and of Nineveh (Gen. vi. 6; 1 Sam. xv. 11; Isa. xxxviii. 1—5; 2 Sam. xxiv. 16; Jonah iii. 10). As to this: 1. *God does not change his mind, but his method*. His immutability arising out of his infinity is clearly revealed (Numb. xxiii. 19; 1 Sam. xv. 29; Ezek. xxiv. 14; Mal. iii. 6). As self-existent and independent he is above the causes of change, whilst as an absolute Being he is above the possibility of it. And the immutability of his Being is true of his purpose. His ends are unchallengeably right and his means resistlessly powerful. He may change his method, and often does. Up to a certain point is mercy. Then it is exaltation, denunciation, and judgment in quick succession. When one method fails to bring about desired results, another and another are resorted to by a God who will not fail. The variation of method is really the expression of an unalterable plan. 2. *This change of method is correlative to a change of circumstances*. It is the varying of the one that leads to the varying of the other. New circumstances justify and even call for a new line of action. Yet these circumstances are themselves part of his wider purpose, which therefore remains unchanged and unchangeable. 3. *Such a change of circumstances is often the introduction of the element of prayer*. This is a new factor in the problem, and puts another complexion on the case. Nineveh, sinning with a high hand, God said he would destroy. But Nineveh, praying in dust and ashes, was a different thing. God does not destroy penitent people. This, and not the sparing of them, would imply a change of purpose, and even of nature itself. Intercessory prayer, as here, modifies the circumstances in a different way; but the modification is real, and will be co-ordinated with a corresponding modification in God's way. 4. *The necessity of a case is a legitimate plea with God*. "How can Jacob stand? for it is small." So David prays, "Pity me, for I am weak." God's blessings are not only gifts, but mercies. He bestows them freely, and in pity for our need. The extremity of this need is, therefore, its strength as an appeal for God's help. "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Ver. 2.—*The problem of stability.* The prayer of faith is free. The believing soul has the privilege of reasoning with God, and embraces it. It asks what it wills, and as it wills, and for whom it wills. There is room for originality in it, and scope for inventive resource; yet little risk of impropriety. The Spirit safeguards that in an effective "unction." Then grace is one thing ever, and there is a ground-plan of supplication which is practically the same with all the faithful. It has centrifugal energy, flowing from the individual outwards. Its rivers wind and wander and discharge themselves ultimately on the desolate places of ungodly lives; but they run first by the homes of the household of faith. And then it has a spiritual stream. It blesses temporal interests too, but leaves its fertilizing ooze most richly on the things of the religious life. Of the prophet's prayer here all this is characteristic. It reveals to us—

I. JACOB'S ACTUALITY. "Small." There is a natural Israel and a spiritual Israel also, the one at once the type and the germ of the other. The Christian Church is not distinct from, but a continuation and expansion of, the Jewish; and both together are the one visible Church of God. To this, an already existing community, many were added at Pentecost (Acts ii. 47). In the congregation of Israel to which the sweet psalmist sang (Ps. xxii. 22) Paul sees the one Church of God (Heb. ii. 12); and with Stephen (Acts vii. 38) the wandering host of the tribes (Exod. xvi. 2) was nothing else than the "Church in the wilderness." This Church, continuous from the beginning, and one in all ages, is the "good olive tree" (Rom. xi. 17—24), whose Jewish "branches" excised, and again to be "grafted in," are meantime displaced by the ingrafted Gentile shoots, which partake "of the root and fatness of the olive tree." In Amos's time it was a little flock, whose preservation was matter to him of anxiety and prayer. 1. *He is small in comparison with Esau.* The heathen around outnumbered Israel overwhelmingly. Left to itself in the struggle among them for existence, it would inevitably have been swallowed up. So with the spiritual Israel. Satan has had in his kingdom a majority of the race for so far. Faith-gate is a strait one, Purity-way is a narrow one (Matt. vii. 13, 14), and the saints who enter the one and follow the other are a little flock (Luke xii. 32). And no wonder. Unbelief is natural, living after the flesh is congenial (Exod. xxiii. 2), and an overwhelming preference for both is a foregone conclusion. Hence, not only has the Church been smaller than the world, but within the Church itself the wheat has apparently been less than the tares. Relatively to Esau, Jacob is, and has been, small indeed. 2. *He is small in comparison with what he might have been.* Smallness is sometimes a misfortune, but it was Israel's fault. It was a result of persistent national sin, drawing down the destroying judgments of Heaven. Their ranks had been thinned by war, or pestilence, or famine in just and necessary retribution for their incorrigible unfaithfulness. So the small number of the saints is the sin of all concerned. It means opportunities neglected, ordinances abused, and a Holy Spirit resisted. None of the agencies of a heavenly culture have been withheld (Isa. v. 1—4). Every unbeliever is such in despite of influences that ought to have brought him to faith (Acts vii. 51). Every spiritual weakling is one who has debilitated himself (Heb. v. 12; 1 Cor. iii. 1—3). Moreover, as workers for God the saints are not guiltless, for which of them has exercised his full influence for good? The difference between what the Church is and what she might have been is the measure of her delinquency before God. When the sun shines and the showers fall, something subjective is wrong with the crop that stunts. 3. *He is small in comparison with what he will yet be.* Israel is not yet full grown. The Gentiles are Abraham's seed (Gal. iii. 7), and their in-bringing is the increase of spiritual Israel. That increase is to attain world-wide proportions yet. The Church's limits shall be the ends of the earth (Ps. lxxii. 8), and its constituents the heathen nations (Ps. ii. 8; lxxii. 11). It shall be a centre to which all the peoples shall gravitate (Isa. ii. 2). It shall be a light illuminating and incorporating in its own radiance the entire globe (Hab. ii. 14). It is only a stone as yet, but it will be a mountain one day, and fill the whole earth (Dan. ii. 35, 44). In the faith of such a destiny the Church may well find strength to avail her, even in the day of small things.

II. JACOB'S IDEAL. "Stand." It is assumed here that he ought to stand; that standing is his appropriate and normal position. And so it is. In the ideal and

purpose and promise, and as the handiwork of God, he is not to fall. He is: 1. *To stand against destruction.* Israel was not to perish. Low she might fall, small she might become, contemptible she might long remain; but in all, and through all, and after all, she was to live. 'The spiritual Israel has a perpetuity of existence also. The individual Christian "shall never perish" (John x. 28). The grace that is in him is a Divine thing, and indestructible (Gal. ii. 20). His life is a living Christ within, and he is immortal while Christ lives. This involves that the Church—God's kingdom—is an everlasting kingdom. If even a member cannot perish, much less the whole body. Redeemed by his Son, and dowered in permanence with his Spirit, the Church stands, let what may fall (Dan. ii. 44). A structure of God's building, on a foundation of God's laying, according to a plan of God's devising, it stands impregnable on its rock (Matt. xvi. 18), and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Its immovable stability is a question of Divine will and resource. There is the unchangeable purpose, the unconquerable power, the inviolable promise. The house is impregnable over which these three mount triple guard (John x. 28). In the soil of God's plan, in the rock-cleft of his might, in the showers and sunshine of his pledge, the fair Church-flower can neither fall nor fade, but must bloom while the ages run. 2. *To stand against temptation.* Israel was separate and to be pure. The Divine ideal was set before her not to mingle with the nations, nor serve their gods, nor learn their ways (Numb. xxiii. 9; Deut. vi. 14; xviii. 9). So with the Church as a whole, and individual members in particular. Temptation in some degree is inevitable. While within is the iron of a corrupt nature, and outside the loadstone of a corrupt surrounding, there will be the drawing toward sin. But while God is stronger than the devil, and his grace stronger than sin, there shall not be a lapsing into wickedness. The word of acceptance is peace-bringing. The change by regeneration is radical. The measure of grace conferred is sufficient (2 Cor. xii. 9). Therefore Israel, harnessed in armour of proof, shall defy the devil's darts, and stand in the evil day (Eph. vi. 13). The bride of Christ will abide in loyal love, and be to eye and heart at last his "undefiled," with no spot in her (Cant. vi. 9; iv. 7). She may grow languid almost to slothfulness, but even in her sleep her "heart waketh" (Cant. v. 2—6). Her love may at times burn low (Matt. xxiv. 12), but the fire remains alight, and glows at the slightest breath from heaven. In the end she is presented to Christ a glorious Church, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing (Eph. v. 27). 3. *To stand against misfortune.* From this there is no earthly immunity (Job v. 7). God's Israel will get a share, and a large share, of the shocks of calamity. There will even be special evils to which their character will expose them alone of men. But over against this stand the Divine helps which also are theirs alone. God is for them. They are the objects of a special providence. The Divine favour—their shield and buckler—is armour of proof. The darts of evil are turned aside, and fall pointless and broken to the ground. Nay, the evil, having been endured and survived, may be utilized. God constitutes it the appropriate and effective means of a heavenly culture (Heb. xii. 11; 2 Cor. iv. 17). It destroys nothing, not even a hair of their head; and it prunes the tree into richer and choicer fruit-bearing. It even increases future glory, adding the piquancy of contrast to its otherwise perfect bliss.

III. JACOB'S ATTAINMENT OF HIS IDEAL A CARE OF GOD. God concerns himself about all that concerns his people. The prophet assumes that one way or other Jacob is bound to be upheld, and that God in the last appeal will see it done. As to this ideal: 1. *God loves it.* It is set up by his own hand, and characterized by his own excellences, and it must be a thing after his own heart. All the graces that are acceptable with God shine in the saints, and the interests dear to his heart are those with which they are inseparably identified. Righteous himself, he loveth righteousness; unchangeable, he loveth steadfastness; and the things his heart loves his hand will guard. 2. *God appoints it.* Salvation from first to last is of his devising. He decides that salvation shall be, and what, and how. It is the purpose of his adorable grace, and therefore something along the lines of which he may be expected to work. He has predestinated the individual "to be conformed to the image of his Son," and the Church to "come to a perfect man." And we may safely reckon that his measures will work in these directions; helping the individual, that he is "changed into the same image from glory to glory;" and blessing the Church, that she gathers up and

exemplifies in her many-sidedness the graces of Christ's faultless character. The Divine forceful action propels things in the direction of the Divine gracious appointment. 3. *God has already committed himself to it.* To Israel his word of promise was pledged, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." To us it is pledged with greater emphasis still, "They shall never perish;" "Whom he justified, them he also glorified," etc. None shall pluck the Christian out of Christ's hand, nor shall the gates of hell prevail against his Church. The circle of the promises towers a wall of fire around the saints. The result is pledged to them; so are the means. The inheritance is reserved for them, and they for the inheritance (1 Pet. i. 4, 5). Their faith will keep them, and God will keep their faith (1 Pet. i. 5). *Then God had already begun to help.* Israel had been upheld in many an evil. And there is continuity in the operations of God. He does not abandon a work once begun, nor allow after-disaster to neutralize accomplished good. He had done something for Israel; he has done something for us. Then he will do more, and he will do all. Having bestowed his grace, he swears by the gift that the circle of our good will be made complete. A part already of the work of God, invulnerable in his armour, and immortal in his life, they have "a strong consolation," surely, "who have fled for refuge," etc.

IV. **THE WHOLE MATTER A FITTING SUBJECT OF PRAYER.** The prophet comes between God and Israel as an intercessor. In his act we see that: 1. *Prayer is a universal means of grace.* "Men ought always to pray;" "In everything by prayer and supplication," etc. There is no blessing, temporal or spiritual, that is not the gift of God. There is no way of securing the least of these but by seeking it in prayer. The heart must throb continuously if the blood would be driven through the body; the breath must be regularly drawn if this blood would be purified and oxidized. So prayer, the throb of the new heart, the breath of the new creature, must go on if the new life is to be maintained. The interruption of it means the suspension of the most essential vital function. There is nothing we can count on getting without it (Ezek. xxxvi. 37; Jas. iv. 2). There is nothing legitimate we may despair of getting by it (John xiv. 13). In prayer the soul puts forth its tentacles round about, and lays hold of good on every side. 2. *Prayer is a universal instinct of grace.* All vital functions go on without an act of the will or the exercise of attention. And so with prayer in the new-created soul. It does not require a specific injunction. It does not wait on an effort of the will. It goes up as naturally as the hunger-cry of the young raven. The new man breathes, the new heart pulsates, the opened lips speak, and the action in each case is prayer. "Behold, he prayeth," is an infallible token of a converted man. 3. *Prayer is expansive like grace.* Sin is selfish. Seeking salvation, the sinner prays for himself only. He is conscious of need, but as yet knows nothing of supply. Only when he gets spiritual blessing himself does he know how valuable it would be to others, and begin to desire it for them. Selfishness gives way with sin. Philanthropy grows with the love of God. And prayer answers to and expresses the change. The prayer-circle widens as personal religion deepens. Its instinct is catholic. It goes out to the Church of the Firstborn. It seeks the coming of the kingdom. We pray for Israel when we are Israelites indeed. Request for the household of faith is God's will, the Church's weal, and the spontaneous offering of the gracious soul.

Vers. 4—6.—*The vision of consuming fire.* The prophet's vision goes on, and the situation in it becomes more critical. One woe is averted only for a worse to take its place. The Divine avenging hosts remain in battle-line. They return to the attack with renewed vigour. For the fusillade is substituted the booming of the great guns. Escaping as by the skin of their teeth from the wasting locust, incorrigible Israel are met in the prophet's eye by the devouring fire. In connection with this second scene in the panoramic vision notice—

I. **GOD CONTENDING BY FIRE.** Again and again is it so in Scripture. 1. *It is the most destructive element in nature.* It destroys all comfort, inflicting intense pain. It destroys all life, no animal or vegetable organism being capable of enduring it. It destroys the very form of organic matter, reducing it to its original elements. It destroys with unparalleled rapidity and thoroughness almost anything it attacks.

2. *It is the element used and to be used by God in bringing about the greatest catastrophes.* It was in the fire-shower from heaven that Sodom was overwhelmed (Gen. xix. 24). Fire "very grievous" was mingled with the plague of hail which smote the land of Egypt (Exod. ix. 24). It was the fire of the Lord that burnt up complaining Israel at Taberah, and also Korah and his company in their gainsaying (Numb. xi. 1; xxvi. 10). By fire from heaven were Ahaziah's two captains and their fifties consumed before Elijah (2 Kings i. 10—12). It was by bringing down fire that James and John proposed to destroy the inhospitable Samaritans (Luke ix. 54). And it is in a lake burning with fire that the beast, the false prophet, and all the finally impenitent shall be overwhelmed at last. 3. *It is in Scripture a frequent emblem of active power.* God the Father in wrath (Deut. iv. 24; ix. 3), God the Son in judgment (2 Thess. i. 8), God the Holy Ghost in grace, are each so figured (Luke iii. 16). Indwelling sin is fire (1 Cor. vii. 9; 2 Cor. xi. 29); the busy mischief-making tongue is fire (Jas. iii. 6); God's Word is a fire (Jer. xxiii. 29); his ministers are "burning ones" (seraphim); spiritual life is fire (Luke xii. 49); affliction is fire (1 Cor. iii. 13; 1 Pet. i. 12); and the misery of the finally lost is fire (Mark ix. 44). A God contending by fire is a God putting forth the extreme of destructive energy.

II. JUDGMENT DRINKING UP THE GREAT DEEP. As the fire is figurative, so probably is the "deep." It is the heathen world. God's judgment which includes this is: 1. *Discriminating.* "The deep." The sweltering, restless sea is a fit symbol of the wicked in their unrest of heart and rebellion against God (Isa. lvii. 20; Ps. xlvii. 3). These are the natural prey of the eagles of judgment. They deserve it, provoke it, and are its characteristic objects. The righteous may suffer sometimes with the wicked, but the ungodly cannot escape. 2. *Extensive.* "The great deep." Not merely "wells," which are individuals (2 Pet. ii. 7), nor "rivers," which are nations (Isa. viii. 7; Jer. xlvii. 7, 8), nor "seas," which are races (Ps. lxxv. 7; Isa. xvii. 12), but "the great deep," or rebellious humanity in its entire extent, shall be contended with and destroyed. When the last word has been spoken God's argument against sin will be overwhelming; and all the ground covered by sin will have been covered also by judgment.

III. JUDGMENT EATING UP "THE PORTION" DOOMED. "Probably the definite portion foreappointed by God to captivity and desolation" (Pusey). 1. *God's acts are coextensive with his decrees.* His plan has reference to all events, and these in turn exactly embody his plan. He had devoted beforehand a definite number to judgment; and all these, and these only, would it eat up in the day of its falling. No tares escape, nor is any wheat burned. "The Lord knoweth them that are his." 2. *To be nominally God's people establishes no special relation to him.* Outward relations, if they have not inward relations to which they correspond, are nothing. Mere names and semblances leave unchanged the underlying realities which God regards, and to which his dealings are adjusted. A hollow profession is simply unbelief plus hypocrisy. 3. *God's judgments on his professing people are not for annihilation, but for weeding out.* The "portion" was not all Israel (Isa. x. 20—22; xxxvii. 31, 32). After it had been devoured, a remnant would remain. Judgments are the gardener's knife; they prune out the worthless branches, but leave the tree. Exposure to the wind is not for destruction of the wheat, but for the scattering of the chaff. In the track of the fire is to be found all that is fire-proof.

IV. THE LEGITIMATE MEASURE OF ASKING IN PRAYER. (Ver. 5.) It seems a forlorn hope to offer such prayer. Yet here it is done by a man under the guidance of God's Spirit. In imitation of him: 1. *We may ask anything that is innocent.* It may not be promised. No one else may have received it. It may be a thing utterly unlikely to be done. It may be what God is threatening not to do. Yet it is legitimate matter of prayer, and we need not despair of it. God cannot do less than he promises, but he may do more; and, as a matter of fact, he does much for which no explicit promise is to be found. 2. *We may ask any amount that can be enjoyed.* God's is no niggard heart or hand. He has exhaustless store. He loves to see us filled and thoroughly furnished. Hence he giveth liberally, satisfies with his mercy, gives all we can receive, and more than we can ask or think. Economy in asking where there is infinity to draw on is modesty run mad. 3. *We may ask it up till the last moment.* While, in the nature of things, answer is possible, request may be made. Who knows whether

evil may not be averted until it has actually fallen? Besieged cities have been saved even after the garrison had thrown open the gates, and battles won after the ranks of the victors had begun to break. With God all things are possible, and by prayer he is always moved. Till the moment of death we may pray for life, for salvation till the moment of destruction. 4. *Having received, we may ask again and again.* "Men ought always to pray." Prayer has reference to returning wants, and is normally a habit of soul. As often as we hunger we eat, and, on the same principle, as often as we need we pray. Continued prayer is matter of necessity, a command of God, and an instinct of the soul. "In everything by prayer and supplication," etc. Half a century later the mercy of God's dealings appeared. After ravaging the greater portion of the land, the Assyrians unaccountably withdrew, and left the capital untouched. The connection between Amos's prayer and the unwonted slackness of Tiglath-Pileser belongs to that region into which sense cannot penetrate, but which is all patent to the eye of faith.

V. THE MERCIFUL ASPECT OF GOD'S THREATS. (Ver. 6.) The perseverance of the prophet's prayer is justified by the event. God's threat is not executed. Judgment is arrested on the way. Does God, then, change? No; but circumstances do, and with them his adjusted mode of action. The unexecuted threat is not unmeaning nor unnecessary. 1. *It forewarns of the coming evil.* When the black clouds rise we know the storm is brewing. So when God speaks we know he is going to act and how. A threat is a conditional prophecy. It tells us exactly what, in given circumstances, we may expect. Knowledge of the evil coming is a prerequisite to any measure of precaution. 2. *It thereby often turns from the path in which the evil lies.* All actions have their proper issues, and whatever changes the one changes the other. God's judgments are directed against us as transgressors in a certain way. If we cease so to transgress the reason for them is gone, and they will not be sent. The knowledge of these two facts operates as a powerful incentive to reformation, and so a means to the arrest of impending judgment. We face a different way when we adequately realize that we thereby face a different end. 3. *It displays God's character in a most attractive aspect.* He warns before he strikes. He warns that he may not need to strike at all. His threats are the merciful heralds of his judgments, offering terms of peace before the stern hour of intervention arrives. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." A threat like that is only a promise in disguise. It speaks of a gracious heart which "wills not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Vers. 7—9.—*Righteousness to the plumb-line.* There has been reprieve after reprieve. The enemy of God's wrath has been met in the breach by intercessory prayer, and, for the time, turned back. Once and again the hounds of vengeance have been cried off. But respite is not escape. There is a certain limit beyond which the system of Divine reprieves cannot go. And that limit has now been reached. The locust has been disappointed of his meal. The fire has been beaten back from the tinder. But the criminal is obdurate, and now the plumb-line is applied to the bowing wall, and the word goes forth to overturn and destroy utterly. In this graphic delineation we notice—

I. THE WALL. This figure for Israel (ver. 8) suggests: 1. *Something built.* Other nations grow up as it may happen, shaped by the circumstances in which they arise. The nation of Israel was not a natural growth, but a Divine creation. "This people have I formed for myself." So with the Church. It is not a voluntary association. It is not a human institution. It is a vineyard of God's husbandry, a house of God's building (Matt. xvi. 18). Every stone in it is quarried and chiselled and laid by the Divine hand. 2. *Something strong.* A wall has substance, stability, resisting power, and is in Scripture emblematic of these things (Ezek. iv. 3; Isa. xxv. 4; Zech. ii. 5). In regard to these qualities Israel is a wall. God is "known within her palaces for a Refuge." Salvation is to her for walls and bulwarks. In these things is her strength; and fortified thus, she "shall not be moved" (Ps. xli. 5). 3. *Something upright.* "Made by a plumb-line." God "made man upright." And he made Israel upright. Whatever comes out of his hands comes out of them free of any moral twist. It is made according to righteousness. Formed into a nation by God, Israel had a constitution, laws, and administration theoretically faultless. The uprightness of this God-built

wall was a main condition of its strength. In the perfection of the one was the perfection of the other. The loss of one would be the loss of both. The wall that leans is about to fall.

II. THE PLUMB-LINE. This is the regulating appliance, and the testing instrument with which the building must tally. 1. *It is righteousness.* Righteousness in the moral world answers to straightness in the world of matter. It is the moral rectilinear, or line of "oughtness"—the line along which moral beings ought to move. This is manifestly the plumb-line by which to adjust the wall Israel to the perpendicular. Exemplified in the character, this righteousness is uprightness. Exemplified in the conduct, it is justice. In either case it is the ideal of rightness. 2. *It is righteousness as it exists in God.* God is universal Perfection—"Light," "Love," "Truth," "the Holy One," "the righteous God," and all in ideal form. He is, in fact, the typical moral Being. Each grace exists in him in its highest form. His righteousness is unspotted righteousness, and the realized ideal of all that righteousness ought to be. 3. *It is this righteousness as it is revealed in Scripture.* Scripture is the rule of man, just as being the revelation of God. What he is is our Model. What he does is our Exemplar. What he is and does and requires is the burden of Scripture—a formulation of his whole will. "To the Law and to the testimony," etc. By the Law must Israel be tried, its true character revealed, and its fitting destiny settled. "Those that have sinned in the Law shall be judged by the Law." The Law is the unerring plumb-line, exposing every deviation from the moral perpendicular.

III. THE TESTING. "Behold, I will set," etc. (ver. 8). This is to apply the plumb-line to the wall, so as to reveal irregularity if it exists. 1. *This is no longer to be put off.* "I shall pass by it no more." The limit of Divine forbearance was now reached. No more passing by, no longer indulgence, no further forgiveness, no more postponement of the vengeance vowed. There is a last word of God to every man, and after it nothing can come but the blow. 2. *The wall is to be tried by the rule it was built by.* (Ver. 7.) "He destroys it by that same rule of right wherewith he had built it. By that law, that right, those providential leadings, that grace which we have received, by the same we are judged" (Pusey). God has only one standard, and he uses it always. Things ought to be as he made them, and he tries them to discover if they are so. The measure of divergence from original righteousness, whether in men or Churches, is the measure of guilt in the diverging party. Comparison with its own pure ideal would bring out Israel's corruption in the strongest light. 3. *The testing is to be one of the entire nation.* "The wall is not the emblem of Samaria, or of any one city. It is the strength and defence of the whole people" (Pusey). There was general defection, and to discover this there will be a general plumbing. All the wall must be tested before it can be all destroyed.

IV. THE DEMOLITION. The wall is found to have bowed, and the word is given to pull it down. In this destruction would be involved: 1. *The idolatrous places.* "The sacrificial heights of Isaac," all the high places at Dan, Bethel, and Gilgal, where idol-worship was carried on. In the wasting of these would appear, on the one hand, the vanity of idol-worship, and, on the other, God's special wrath against it—matters which it was necessary to emphasize in the mind of idol-loving Israel. 2. *Idolatrous objects.* "The holy things of Israel" (ver. 9) are the objects and adjuncts of their idolatrous worship. Dan and Bethel, as rivals of Jerusalem, having been desolated, Baal, Ashteroth, etc., as rivals of Jehovah, would be destroyed. Broken idols and levelled shrines would alone remain, a commentary on the impotence of the "lying vanities" to which blinded Israel persistently turned. 3. *The Hebrew monarchy.* "The house of Jeroboam" was the reigning family. It was the last dynasty of the Israelitish monarchy. In it and with it was to perish (Hos. i. 4), and did perish, "the kingdom of the house of Israel." The royal house was so identified with the national idol-worship as of necessity to be involved in whatever destruction this provoked. It was specially fitting, moreover, that the family of the arch-idolater should be the one to sink in the burning grave of the idolatry he set up.

Vers. 10—17.—*Machination foiled by fearless candour.* Amos had deserved well of Israel. He took a more practical interest in their welfare than any other man from the king down. He saw their sin, and lamented it; their impending ruin, and would

have averted it; their one way of escape, and pressed its adoption strenuously. Had they not been as blind as besotted, they would have revered him as a national benefactor. But the reformation he preached meant the abandonment of rooted habits and the harassing of vested interests in sin, neither of which would be so much as named. Accordingly, Amos anticipated the experience of all reformers since, in being assailed by a policy of falsehood, backed by force. We have here—

I. A MEDDLING PRIEST. "The priest of Bethel" was the chief idol-priest at the sanctuary of the golden calf there. His position and functions were in profane mimicry of those of the high priest at Jerusalem. In making this charge: 1. *He appeals to force.* The tyrant Jeroboam was the embodiment of irresponsible power in Israel. Idolatry is the religion of brute force. Its appeal to the strong arm as the only argument worth using is characteristic. Error eschews argument. The kingdom of darkness instinctively fears the light. What is an outrage on reason takes its shelter fitly behind a sword. "My kingdom is not of this world;" "The weapons of your warfare are not carnal." The true religion makes its appeal to truth. The religion that appeals to the sword is *primâ facie* false. 2. *He is prompted by jealousy.* He had a vested interest in the national idolatry. To abolish it would be to take the bread out of his mouth. Like the chief priests and scribes with Christ, and the Ephesian silversmiths with Paul, Amaziah was striking for his livelihood. "He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." Conflicting self-interest, actual or supposed, is a constant and effective obstacle in the way of the religious life. It is the preliminary necessity of leaving all in act or spirit that makes the followers of the Lord so few. 3. *He makes a lying accusation.* (Ver. 11.) Amos had not really made either statement. That applied to Jeroboam had been made about Jeroboam's house. That about Israel had been accompanied by a call to repentance, and a conditional promise of escape, which modified its character altogether. The charge, therefore, consists of a lie and a half-truth, and is an attempt to work on the king's personal fears, by construing into a conspiracy against his kingdom and life what Amos did to save both. For this now stale device persecutors in all ages have shown a characteristic predilection. Christ was calumniously accused of speaking against Cæsar (Luke xxiii. 2; John xix. 12; Matt. xxii. 21). Paul was falsely charged with "doing contrary to the decrees of Cæsar," and "stirring up sedition among the Jews" (Acts xvii. 7; xxiv. 5). And often since has the assertion of liberty of conscience been construed into rebellion against the civil power. Falsehood and violence are the traditional propaganda of the kingdom of darkness. 4. *He judges the prophet's morals by the standard of his own.* (Ver. 12.) His relation to his own office was utterly sordid. He held the office of priest for the "bit of bread" it secured him. And he assumes that Amos is like himself. It is thus that the saint "judges the world, yet himself is judged of no man." Forming an estimate of the righteous, the wicked leave conscience out of the computation, and so vitiate the finding. 5. *He condemns idolatry by the argument he uses in its defence.* (Ver. 13.) "The king's sanctuary," set up and consecrated by the king, maintained by his authority, and subordinated to his purposes. The national idolatry was a creature of the king. Its claim to be a religion was no stronger than his claim to be a god. For religious ordinances state authority is so inadequate as only to expose them to suspicion—the suspicion of adjustment to a state policy rather than to the Word and glory of God.

II. A FAITHFUL PROPHET. Like every true man, Amos was: 1. *Humble.* (Ver. 14.) He remembers and confesses his lowly origin. He asks no respect but such as might be due to his native condition. He treats the prophetic office as an entirely unmerited dignity. His exercise of it was disinterested. He was neither a professional prophet nor the son of one. His prophesying was an incident, and the trust of Divine grace. The man whom office spoils was unfit for it. The religion that is puffed up by employment in God's work was never intelligent, or of a high order. 2. *Loyal to his Divine commission.* (Ver. 15.) In a believing life God is all. His will is the supreme interest and exclusive rule. God has chosen the man, and that means unconditional consecration. God has commissioned him, and he makes the fact the basis of his whole life-programme. "I must work the works of him that sent me." That is a comprehensive life-maxim. In the spiritual circle nothing is held supremely important but that God's work be done. 3. *Zealous.* Amos made the salvation of Israel a personal

concern and his life-effort. He could think, speak, be active about nothing else. "The land could not bear his words," so vehement were they and so persistent. The advocacy that will take no refusal, that must be either yielded to or silenced, is that which alone becometh the stupendous importance of the cause of God. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." If this is not an all-absorbing passion, it is not after the one Example. 4. *Bold.* (Vers. 16, 17.) Prohibition is treated as a challenge. It only leads him to repeat and emphasize. There is no bravado in this, but only a supreme regard for the principle, "We ought to obey God rather than men." The King's messenger, on the King's business, must brook obstruction from none. The best soldier is the boldest. Perfect devotion to and faith in his Captain speaks in absolute fearlessness in his service. 5. *Explicit.* (Ver. 17.) The heathen oracles always "paltered in a double sense." After the event their deliverances could be reconciled with whatever happened. But the prophet, delivering God's message, is sure of his ground. He specifies details with confidence, for no jot or tittle of the Divine Word can fail. As in other cases, the fulfilment of this particular detail of the prophecy is not recorded (Isa. xxii. 17, 18; Jer. xxix. 22), nor could it be expected to be in the condensed account of the Scripture narrative. "Scripture hath no leisure to relate all which befalls those of the viler sort." Yet the broad fact of the Captivity and exile, accompanied by all the horrors of Oriental warfare, forms a constructive record of the events.

III. A HARROWING PICTURE. (Ver. 17.) These are the horrors born of idolatry. When Amaziah came to suffer them in his family he would know practically what his chosen idolatry was, and made of men. 1. *Family dishonour.* "Wife dishonoured," etc. A common atrocity (Isa. xiii. 16; Zech. xiv. 2), and to all concerned the most diabolically cruel conceivable. Between this crime and idolatry there are analogies, and probably affinities, in virtue of which the one is figuratively called by the name of the other (Jer. iii. 9; Ezek. xxiii. 37). The patron of the one is fitly punished by being made the victim of the other. The conduct of Turkish troops in recent wars, in respect to this matter, is a commentary on the assertion that Mohammedanism is a valuable protest against idolatry. 2. *Family impoverishment.* A Hebrew's property is inalienable. If he lost it by mismanagement, it reverted to his family at the jubilee. But the Assyrian would know nothing of jubilees. The chance of disorgement was small when he had eaten up the inheritance. 3. *Family extermination.* We all like to perpetuate our name and family. The Hebrew had this feeling in almost unparalleled strength. To die childless was with him the sum of all disaster. What more appropriate than that it should wait on idolatry, "the sum of all sin"? 4. *Dishonoured death.* Dying in a strange country, both Jacob and Joseph made provision for being buried in their own land (Gen. xlvii. 30; 1. 25; Heb. xi. 22). No Jew could die happy expecting burial in a heathen country. Exposure to such a fate would cap the climax of Amaziah's wretchedness. 5. *Exile for all Israel.* They had polluted their land, and were unworthy longer to remain in it. They had become assimilated to the heathen in their character and ways, and would be associated with them yet on closer terms. It was a holiday heathenism they were in love with, and they would be cured of their *penchant* by a sight of it in its working dress.

IV. A CLENCHING ARGUMENT. "The word of Jehovah." It was Amos who spoke it; but the word was God's. And it cannot be broken. The Divine truth is pledged to it. The Divine energy is lodged in it. The Divine purpose is couched in it. The thing it affirms is potentially a fact.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 2.—*Intercessory prayer.* In the language which the prophet employed in his appeal to God, he copied that of the great leader and lawgiver of his nation; and he was probably encouraged by remembering that Moses had not pleaded for Israel in vain.

I. THE PROMPTING TO INTERCESSORY PRAYER. Why should one man plead with God on another's behalf? It is evident that there is in human nature not only a principle of self-love, but also a principle of sympathy and benevolence. Amos interceded for the nation from which he sprang, in which he was interested, and which was endeared to him by sacred associations. He was well aware of his countrymen's offences, and of

God's just displeasure with them. He knew and had foretold that retribution should befall them. Yet he entreated mercy—a withholding of judgment, a little respite at the least. He identified himself with the sinful, and sought forbearance.

II. THE GROUND OF CONFIDENCE IN INTERCESSORY PRAYER. Amos could not ask for the withholding of punishment on the ground that punishment was undeserved; for he confessed that the people's sin had merited chastening. His reliance was not upon justice, but upon mercy. It was forgiveness he besought; and forgiveness presumes disobedience on the part of the subject and offence taken on the part of the ruler. In pleading for our fellow-men, as in pleading for ourselves, we have to rely upon the pity and loving-kindness of our God.

III. THE PLEA BY WHICH INTERCESSORY PRAYER IS URGED. "Who is Jacob?" is the language of the prophet. "Who is Jacob, that he should stand, that he should endure, if such a visitation befall him? He is feeble and impoverished." Thus, whilst the main reliance of him who intercedes must ever be upon the character and promises of the Eternal, he will naturally bring before God—as well known to the Omniscient—the weakness and helplessness of those whose interest he would promote. God is not as man. Men sometimes are found willing to favour the great, though they are indifferent to the woes of the obscure; whilst with God need, poverty, and helplessness are a commendation to compassion and assistance.

IV. THE SUCCESSFUL ISSUE OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER. The entreaty of the prophet was not in vain. The calamity—whether we understand it literally, as a plague of locusts, or figuratively, as the invasion by Pul—was averted and withdrawn. This is but one of many instances in Old and New Testament Scripture in which God represents himself as willing to listen to the pleading of the pious on behalf of their sinful fellow-men. It is one office of the Church of Christ to plead perpetually for mankind, uttering the plaintive and effectual intercession, "Spare them, good Lord!"—T.

Ver. 3.—*The repentance of Jehovah.* Whatever it was of which the Lord is here said to have repented, the meaning, the lesson, is the same. The plague of locusts, the incursion of the foe, was stayed, and it was stayed in consequence of the prophet's intercession, and because of the pity and loving-kindness of Jehovah.

I. NO CHANGE IS ASSERTED IN THE CHARACTER, THE GOVERNMENT, THE WILL, OF THE ETERNAL. In this sense the Lord is not a man that he should repent. Whilst all men are subject not only to vicissitudes of circumstances, but to variations in disposition, and even in principles of action, God is a stranger to all such mutability. "I," says he, "am the Lord that changeth not." Well for us is it that this is so; that we have not to do with a mutable, a capricious deity. Because he is the Lord that changeth not, therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed.

II. BUT ALL THE THREATS OF THE DIVINE JUDGE ARE CONDITIONAL UPON HUMAN CONDUCT. The whole of revelation bears out this statement. What God commands he enforces with the promise of reward and with the threat of punishment. This is in accordance with his character and position as the Moral Governor of his universe. He does not, as an earthly tyrant might do, take pleasure in inflicting punishment upon any of his dependent creatures. On the contrary, he desireth not the death of a sinner. If the threatened respond to the appeal of Heaven, if they turn from their wickedness, they shall surely live, and not die. He repenteth him of the evil, and is favourable and forgiving towards the penitent.

III. THE DIVINE REPENTANCE DEMANDS THE ADORATION AND THE PRAISE OF THOSE WHO OWE TO IT THEIR SALVATION. There is not one child of Adam who is not indebted to the repentance of Jehovah for the sparing of life, for long-suffering, for the aversion of judgment. In fact, but for this, the original sentence against the sinner must have been fulfilled, and the race of mankind must have perished. Every successive interposition of Divine mercy has been the evidence of that relenting which exclaims, "How shall I give thee up?" And the advent and sacrifice of Immanuel, the mediatorial scheme, the redemption of mankind, the recovery of the lost, are all to be attributed to this same cause. The fountain of salvation must be discovered in the repentance of the Unchanging. It is a paradox; but it is a paradox honouring to God and life-giving to man.—T.

Vers. 7—9.—*The plumb-line of judgment.* The pictorial style of Amos here sets before us in an impressive and memorable way a great truth. Whether in a dream or in a prophetic ecstasy, the prophet beheld one with a plumb-line standing by a wall. He recognized in the wall the palaces, the temples, the city ramparts of Samaria; in the figure, a representation of the eternal Ruler of the nations; in the plumb-line, the emblem of just and orderly procedure. And a voice explained the vision as predictive of the destruction and ruin of the capital of Israel, in execution of the decree of Divine justice against the unfaithful, sinful, rebellious, and impenitent people.

I. THE SIN OF MAN MAY EXHAUST THE PATIENCE OF GOD. It must not, indeed, be supposed that the Divine nature is susceptible of capricious changes, such as men are liable to experience. But we have to consider God as the moral Governor of the nations of mankind. And we are taught that he is, as we say, in earnest in the laws which he promulgates, and in the promises and threats by which he accompanies them. He will not continue to threaten, and then falsify his own words, by withholding punishment from those who withhold repentance. With no weariness, with no irritability, but with a righteous judgment and a compassionate heart, he will execute his threats.

II. THE JUST RETRIBUTION OF GOD IS ACCORDING TO UNCHANGING AND INFLEXIBLE RULES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. In human punishment there is often an element of caprice and an element of vindictiveness. From the Divine mind both are for ever absent. No sinner can complain, or ever will be able to complain, that he has been punished beyond his deserts. On the contrary, he will ever recognize that wisdom and righteousness have characterized all the appointments of the eternal King. The plumb-line is employed not only in construction but in destruction. And God who has made men's moral nature, and who rules over it and in it, will not violate his principles of righteousness in the administration of his government or in the execution of his sentences.

III. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS A POWERFUL ENCOURAGEMENT TO REPENTANCE AND OBEDIENCE. It is a dissuasive from sin and impenitence, inasmuch as it is a guarantee that rebellion shall not go unpunished. It is an inducement to repentance, for it is part of God's unchanging purpose that the penitent and submissive shall receive pardon and acceptance. And it is not to be forgotten that God's purposes of mercy are as much distinguished by law as are his purposes of punishment. Mercy is in accordance with the "plumb-line" of Divine righteousness, and in his gospel God appears, as he is, just and "the Justifier of him who believeth in Jesus."—T.

Vers. 14, 15.—*The herdsman becomes a prophet.* The simple dignity of Amos's reply to Amaziah must strike every reader with admiration. The priest of Bethel treated him as a professional prophet, who had a calling which he was constrained to fulfil in some place or other. But Amos did not prophesy because he had been trained to the prophetic vocation; he prophesied because the Lord constrained him to do so. The Lord had made him very sensitive to the prevailing sins of his countrymen, had sent him with a message of warning to the court of Samaria, and had imparted to him supernatural qualifications for the fulfilment of this sacred ministry.

I. GOD IS NOT DEPENDENT UPON EDUCATION OR LEARNING FOR THE QUALIFICATION OF THE AGENTS HE SELECTS. Amos was not the first or the last unlettered, intellectually uncultivated man employed by Infinite Wisdom upon a high and sacred ministry of usefulness. There were in Palestine "schools of the prophets," but in these Amos was not trained. The spiritual power, which is the true "note" of a prophetic calling, is not confined to those who are reared in seats of learning, who have acquired the scholarship which is imparted by the intellectual discipline of school and university.

II. GOD CAN, HOWEVER, GIVE AN EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF HIS OWN, EFFECTIVE FOR THE PURPOSES OF A SPIRITUAL MINISTRY. It is a common mistake to suppose that those who have not been educated in the way which is familiar to us have not been educated at all. The Lord taught Amos in the solitude of the fields, the valleys, the hills of Judæa, as he tended the cattle, as he gathered the fruit of the sycamore. His education was, in a sense, very thorough. It gave him insight into the mighty works of the Creator, into his wonderful ways in dealing with the children of men, into the secrets of the human heart. His writings are a sufficient proof of his familiarity with

the works and ways of God. His sublime descriptions of natural scenery, of the heavens and the earth, his minute acquaintance with the processes of growth and of husbandry, his knowledge of the human heart and all its conflicts,—these are evidences that his mind was not uninformed or untrained.

III. AN UNLETTERED BUT DIVINELY TAUGHT NATURE MAY BE A BLESSING TO MEN, AND MAY BRING GLORY TO GOD. The service which Amos rendered to Israel, to Judah, to the Church of God in subsequent ages, is a proof that God can use instruments, which seem to man's wisdom unsuitable, in order to effect his own purposes. The power of this prophet's ministry is unquestionable. To some extent his message was heeded; and that it was not more effective was not owing to any fault in him, but rather to the hardness of heart which distinguished those to whom he was sent. At the same time, there was so manifest an evidence of Divine power in the life and work of Amos as must have impressed all who knew him with the conviction that the power of God was upon him. A Divine election, Divine qualifications, may be as really present in the case of a minister of religion who has enjoyed every social and educational advantage, as in the case of him who is called from the plough to prophesy in the name of the Lord. But the impression upon the popular mind is in the former case far more deep, and naturally so. Thus God is honoured, whilst witness is borne to him before men, and the cause of righteousness is maintained and advanced.—T.

Ver. 15.—*Prophecy.* Amos was one of the "goodly fellowship of the prophets," who once witnessed for God on earth, and who now praise God in heaven. There was a long succession of prophets in Hebrew history, and especially during one epoch of that history. The Christian dispensation has also enjoyed the benefit of prophetic gifts and prophetic ministrations.

I. THE AUTHOR AND THE AUTHORITY OF PROPHECY. No true prophet ever spake the counsels of his own wisdom merely. The preface to a prophetic utterance is this: "Thus saith the Lord." "The Lord took me," says Amos, in his simple, graphic style, "as I was following the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy." 1. The prophet was called and appointed by the Lord of all truth and power. 2. The prophet was entrusted by the Lord with a special message. It was these facts that aggravated the guilt of those who were inattentive to the Divine message, who rejected and persecuted the Divine messengers.

II. THE MATTER AND SUBSTANCE OF PROPHECY. The function of the prophet was to utter forth the mind and will of the Eternal. Sometimes it is supposed that it was his special duty to declare things to come, to foretell. Doubtless the prophet was often directed to warn of evils about to descend upon the guilty and impenitent. But to foretell was not so much his distinctive office as to tell forth the commands and the counsels of the Lord.

III. THE PROPHET AS THE VEHICLE OF PROPHECY. Personality, loving intelligence and will, a truly human nature,—such was the condition to be fulfilled by the chosen vehicle of the Divine purposes. Men of temperaments as different as Elijah and Jeremiah were selected by him who can make use of every instrument for the fulfilment of his own purposes. One thing was necessary, that the prophet's whole nature should be penetrated by the Spirit of God, that he should give himself up entirely to become the minister and the messenger of Eternal Wisdom.

IV. THE METHODS OF PROPHECY. *Speech* was no doubt the chief means by which the prophet conveyed his message to his fellow-men; speech of every kind, bold and gentle, figurative and plain, commanding and persuasive. *Life* was no inconsiderable part of prophecy. There were cases in which the very actions and habits of the prophet were a testimony to men. *Symbols* were not infrequently employed in order to impart lessons which could be better taught thus than by the logical forms of speech. God made use of every method which human nature allowed and the conditions of the prophetic ministry suggested.

V. THE PURPOSE OF PROPHECY. An agency so special and so highly qualified must have aimed at an end proportionably important and valuable. It may be noted that: 1. Prophecy was largely intended to lead sinful people to repentance and reformation. 2. To encourage the obedient and spiritual amidst difficulties and persecutions. 3. To introduce higher views of religion than those current at the time, and thus to

prepare the way for the dispensation of the Messiah, for the religion of the Spirit, for the universal kingdom of truth and righteousness.—T.

Ver. 17.—A polluted land. If in Amos we have an example of a faithful prophet, in Amaziah we have an example of an unfaithful priest. One servant of the Lord seems in this narrative to be set against another; but, in fact, the priest was a nominal servant, whilst the prophet was sincere and devoted. The fate predicted for Amaziah was indeed terrible; but we discern in its appointment, not the malice of a human foe, but the justice of a Divine Ruler. Among the circumstances which enhanced the horror of this fate is mentioned the pollution of the heathen land in which the wicked priest should close his life.

I. A LAND MAY BE POLLUTED NOTWITHSTANDING ITS WEALTH, LUXURIOSNESS, AND POLITICAL EMINENCE AND POWER. Some of the ancient monarchies of the world were no less remarkable for moral corruption than for grandeur, prosperity, and military strength. Such was the case with Assyria. And it is well to be upon our guard against the deceptiveness of external appearances. The semblance of national greatness may mislead us in our judgment. The surface may deceive; there may be much to outward view fascinating and commanding. Yet beneath the surface there may be injustice, oppression, selfishness, wretchedness, and disunion; the land may be polluted by vice and, if not by idolatry, yet by practical atheism.

II. A LAND MAY BE POLLUTED ALTHOUGH IT BE CHOSEN AS THE SCENE OF THE EXECUTION OF PURPOSES OF DIVINE JUDGMENT. It must not be supposed that, because certain nations were appointed by Divine providence to be the ministers of retribution upon Israel, those nations must have been morally admirable or even superior to that upon which their power was exercised for purposes of chastisement. The records of the Old Testament Scriptures are decisive upon this point. Idolatrous people were permitted to scourge Israel for idolatry. A polluted land was to be the means of cleansing those defiled by sin.

III. TO CLEANSE A LAND FROM POLLUTION IS THE HIGHEST END WHICH THE PATRIOTIC AND RELIGIOUS CAN SET BEFORE THEM. Splendour, opulence, military power, are in the view of the enlightened as nothing compared with the righteousness which exalteth a nation.—T.

Vers. 1—6.—Revelation and prayer. "Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me," etc. This portion of the Book of Amos (ch. vii. and viii.) contains four symbolical visions respecting successive judgments that were to be inflicted on the kingdom of Israel. They were delivered at Bethel, and in all probability at the commencement of the prophet's ministry. Each of them, as it follows in the series, is more severe than the preceding. The first presented to the mental eye of the prophet a swarm of young locusts, which threatened to cut off all hope of the harvest (vers. 1—3); the second, a fire which effected a universal conflagration (vers. 4—6); the third, a plumb-line ready to be applied to mark out the edifices that were to be destroyed (vers. 7—9); and the fourth, a basket of ripe fruit, denoting the near and certain destruction of the kingdom (ch. viii. 1—3). The intervening eight verses which conclude the seventh chapter (vers. 10—17) contain an account of the interruption of Amos by Amaziah the priest of Bethel, whose punishment is specially predicted. In point of style, this portion differs from that of the rest of the book, being almost exclusively historical and dialogistic (Henderson). In the words we have two subjects of thought—*A Divine revelation leading to human prayer, and human prayer leading to a Divine revelation.*

I. A DIVINE REVELATION LEADING TO HUMAN PRAYER. 1. Here is a *Divine revelation*. What is the revelation? It is a vision of judgments made to the mind of the prophet. Both judgments are symbolically represented. (1) Destruction by grasshoppers at the beginning, or the "shooting up of the latter growth after the king's mowings."¹ The prophet saw the devouring grasshoppers eating up the grass of the

¹ As we write, glancing at the *Times*, we are struck with the following statements referring to such judgments: "Australian papers state that in the Riverina district the grasshoppers, or locusts, have been very troublesome recently, not only destroying crops, but filling up wells and water-holes, and even consuming textile fabrics, such as blinds and window-curtains, in the houses."

land. No agents are too insignificant for the employment of Jehovah. He can inflict terrible judgments by insects. Here was a prospect of famine set before the prophet. (2) Destruction by fire. "Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me: and, behold, the Lord God called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part." Perhaps this represents a great drought, the sun's fire burning up all vegetation. It is said this fire "devoured the great deep." It drank up the pools, the lakes, the rivers. Thus in two symbolical forms is a Divine revelation made to the mind of Amos. Most terrible and alarming is the prospect of his country, thus divinely spread out before him. God makes revelations of his mind to his people. "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?" 2. Here is a *human prayer*. What is the prayer? Here it is: "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small." And again, in ver. 5, "O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small." "Forgive." This calamity is brought on by the sin of the nation. Forgive the sin; remove the moral cause of the judgment. "By whom shall Jacob arise?" Or, better, "How can Jacob stand? for he is small." Jacob's—the nation's—weakness is the plea of the prayer for forgiveness. The Israelites had been greatly reduced by internal commotions and hostile invasions, and were now on the point of being attacked by the Assyrians, but purchased their retreat by a payment of a thousand talents of silver (2 Kings xv. 19, 20). The nation was now so weakened that it was unable to stand before another invader. How can Jacob stand? The time has come when men may well ask this question in relation to the Church. How can it stand? The numbers are decreasing, viewed in relation to the growth of the population. By whom shall it arise? Not by statesmen, scientists, ritualists, priests. A new order of men is required to enable the Church to stand. Heaven raise them up!

II. HUMAN PRAYER LEADING TO A DIVINE REVELATION. The prophet prays, and the great God makes a new revelation—a revelation of mercy. "The Lord repented for this: It shall not be, saith the Lord." "The Lord repented for this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord God." "Repented," which means merely that he appeared to Amos as if he repented. The Immutable One changeth not. Though we are far enough from holding the absurdity that human prayer effects any alteration in the ordinances of nature or the purposes of the Almighty, we nevertheless hold with a tenacious faith the doctrine that a *man gets from God by prayer that which he would not get without it*. Indeed, in every department of life man gets from the Almighty, by a certain kind of activity, that which he would never obtain without the effort. A man has a field which he has never tilled, and on which Providence has bestowed no crop for many a long year. He tills it this year, and in autumn God crowns it with his goodness. Another man has no health; for many years he has neglected the conditions of physical vigour, and he is infirm and afflicted. This year he attends rigorously to the laws of his physical well-being. He takes the proper exercise, the right food, the pure air, and he feels his infirmities and his pains decrease, and new vigour pulsating through his veins. Another man has never enjoyed the light of Divine knowledge; his soul has been living in the region of indolence; he has neglected all the means of intelligence. He alters his course and sets to work; he reads and thinks, studies God's holy book, and prays; he feels his nature gradually brightening under the genial rays of truth. Thus everywhere God reveals to man his goodness in connection with his activity, which never comes without human effort. It is so in prayer. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." It puts the soul in that angle on which the Divine light falls, in that soil in which its intellectual and moral powers will grow. "Ask, and ye shall receive."

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friends?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

(Tennyson.)

D. T.

Vers. 7—9.—*Man's moral character.* "Thus he showed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand," etc. "Behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb-line," viz. perpendicular. "Amos." "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. ii. 19), as he saith to Moses, "I know thee by name" (Exod. xxxiii. 12, 17). "He calleth his own sheep by name" (John x. 3). "Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel." No longer are the symbols, as in the former two, stated generally; this one is expressly applied to Israel. God's long-suffering is worn out by Israel's perversity; so Amos ceases to intercede, as Abraham did in the case of Sodom. The plummet-line was used, not only in building, but in destroying houses (2 Kings xxi. 13; Isa. xxviii. 17; xxxiv. 11; Lam. ii. 8). It denotes that God's judgments are measured out by the exactest rules of justice. Here it is placed in the midst of Israel; i.e. the judgment is not to be confined to an outer part of Israel, as by Tiglath-Pileser—it is to reach the very centre. This was fulfilled when Shalmaneser, after a three years' siege of Samaria, took it, in the ninth year of Hoshea the King of Israel, and carried away Israel captive finally to Assyria (2 Kings xvii. 3, 5, 6, 23). "I will not again pass by them any more." I will not forgive them any more (ch. viii. 2; Prov. xix. 11; Micah vii. 18). "And the high places," dedicated to idols, "of Isaac." They boasted of following the example of their forefather Isaac, in erecting high places at Beersheba (ch. v. 5); but he and Abraham erected them before the temple was appointed at Jerusalem. But these Israelites did so after the temple had been fixed as the only place for sacrifices and worship. The mention of Isaac and Israel is in all probability intended simply to express the names which their posterity boasted in, as if they would ensure their safety; but these shall not save them. Homiletically, we may use these words as suggesting certain things concerning man's moral character.

I. THERE IS A KIND OF MASONRY IN THE FORMATION OF MAN'S CHARACTER. "Thus he showed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb-line." A plumb-line is an architectural instrument; and the wall on which the Lord stood was being measured by a plumb-line. Moral masonry is suggested. Man's character may be compared to masonry in several respects. 1. It has *one foundation*. Walls are built, not upon two, but upon one foundation. So is every man's character. There is some one principle on which it is organized, some one fount to which you can trace all the streams of human activity. The principle is the paramount affection of the man. Whatever he loves most, governs him. If he loves pleasure most, his character is sensual; if he loves money most, his character is worldly; if he loves wisdom most, his character is philosophic; if he loves God most, his character is Divine, etc. 2. It has a *variety of materials*. In a building there are earth, lime, stones, bricks, wood, iron, etc. These are brought together into a whole. Character is not formed of one set of actions, thoughts, impulses, volitions. All kinds of acts enter into it, mental, moral, muscular, personal, political, religious—all are materials in the building. 3. It is a *gradual advancement*. You cannot build a house in a day; stone by stone it must advance: so the formation of character is a slow work. Men cannot become either devils or saints at once, cannot spring into these characters by a bound. It takes time to build up a Satan, and a longer time still to build up a seraph within us. Acts make habits; habits make character.

II. THERE IS A DIVINE STANDARD BY WHICH TO TEST MAN'S CHARACTER. Here is the great God standing on the wall with a "plumb-line" in his hand, with which to test his people Israel. What is the Divine "plumb-line" by which to test character? Here it is: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." Or, perhaps more intelligibly, the moral character of Christ: "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." That spirit is love for God and men. Without love we are "nothing." Here is a plumb-line. Are you *Christly*? If not, your moral masonry is not architecturally sound or symmetric. He who now stood before Amos on the wall, with a "plumb-line in his hand," stands to-day amongst men with this moral test of character.

III. THERE IS A TERRIBLE RUIN FOR THOSE WHOSE CHARACTERS WILL NOT BEAR THE TEST OF THIS PLUMB-LINE. "Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more: and the high places of Isaac shall be

desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." See this test applied on the day of judgment, as represented in Matt. xxv. 31—46, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory," etc.—D. T.

Vers. 10—17.—*The conventional and the genuine priests of a people.* "Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam King of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words," etc. In these words we have types of two classes of priests who are ever found amongst the people.

I. THE CONVENTIONAL PRIEST OF A PEOPLE. Amaziah was the recognized, authorized, conventional priest of Bethel—the chief priest of the royal sanctuary of the calves at Bethel. He was the recognized religious teacher—a kind of archbishop. We find this man doing three things which such conventional priests have done in all ages, and are doing now. 1. He was *in close intimacy with the king*. He "sent to Jeroboam King of Israel." Conventional priests have always an eye upward, always towards kings and those in authority; they have generally proved ready to obey their behests, study their caprices, and wink at their abominations. In their prayers they will often insult the Omniscent by describing their royal masters, whatever their immoralities, as "our most religious," "our most gracious sovereign." As a rule, they are the mere creatures of kings. 2. He seeks to *expel an independent teacher from the dominion of the king*. He seeks to do this in two ways. (1) By appealing to the king. He does this in a spirit that has ever characterized his class—by bringing against Amos the groundless charge of treason. "Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words." By a base slander he endeavours to influence the king against the true teacher. He does this: (2) By alarming the prophet. "Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." It does not appear that the king took any notice of the message which this authorized religious teacher had sent him concerning Amos; hence, in order to carry out his malignant purpose, he addresses the prophet and says, "O thou seer, go, flee thee away." Not imagining that Amos could be actuated by any higher principle than that of selfishness, which reigned in his own heart, the priest advised him to consult his safety by fleeing across the frontier into the kingdom of Judah, where he might obtain his livelihood by the unrestrained exercise of his prophetic gifts. Here, then, we have, in this Amaziah, a type of many so-called authorized religious teachers of a country. Two feelings inspire them—a miserable *servility* towards their rulers, and a cruel *envy* towards their religious rivals. They want to sweep the land of all schismatics. Thank God, the days of the Amaziahs, through the advancement of popular intelligence, are drawing to a close!

II. HERE WE HAVE THE GENUINE PRIEST OF A PEOPLE. Amos seems to have been a prophet not nationally recognized as such. He was no professional prophet. Observe three things concerning the prophet. 1. He is *not ashamed of his humble origin*. "I was no prophet"—that is, "I am not a prophet by profession,"—"neither was I a prophet's son." By the son of a prophet he means a disciple or pupil. He had not studied in any prophetic college. On the contrary, "I am nothing but a poor labouring man"—"an herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit." No true prophet is ever ashamed of his origin, however humble. As a rule, the greatest teachers of the world have struggled up from the regions of poverty and obscurity. From the lower grades of social life the Almighty generally selects his most eminent servants; "not many mighty does he call." 2. He is *conscious of the Divinity of his mission*. "The Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." Amos seems to have had no doubt at all as to the fact that the Lord called him. How he was called does not appear. When God calls a man to work, the man knows it. No argument will convince him to the contrary. The conventional teacher may say, "You are unauthorized, unrecognized, unordained; you have intruded yourself into the holy calling." But the true teacher knows when he is divinely called, and under this impression he carries on his work. "The Lord took me as I followed the flock." 3. In the name of Heaven he *denounces the conventional priest*. In return for this

rebellion against Jehovah, Amos foretells for the priest the punishment which will fall upon him when the judgment shall come upon Israel, meeting his words, "Thou sayest, Thou shalt not prophesy," with the keen retort, "Thus saith Jehovah." The punishment is thus described in ver. 17, "Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city," i.e. at the taking of the city she will become a harlot through violation. His children also would be slain by the foe, and his landed possessions assigned to others, viz. to the fresh settlers in the land. He himself, viz. the priest, would die in an unclean land, that is to say, in the land of the Gentiles; in other words, would be carried away captive, and that with the whole nation, the carrying away of which is repeated by Amos in the words which the priest had reported to the king (ver. 11) as a sign that what he has prophesied will assuredly stand (Delitzsch).

CONCLUSION. To which class of teachers dost thou belong, my brother? That represented by Amaziah, who, though recognized by his king and country as the true teacher, was nevertheless destitute of loyalty to the one true God and the spirit of true philanthropy and honest manhood; or that represented by Amos, who although a poor labourer, unrecognized by his country as a true teacher, yet was called of God and manfully fulfilled his Divine mission? Heaven multiply in this country and throughout the world religious teachers of this Amos type!—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VIII.

Vers. 1—14.—§ 5. *In the fourth vision, the basket of summer fruit, the Lord shows that the people is ripe for judgment.* Explaining this revelation, Amos denounces the oppression and greed of the chieftains (vers. 4—10), and warns them that those who despise the Word of God shall some day suffer from a famine of the Word (vers. 11—14).

Ver. 1.—A basket of summer fruit; Septuagint, *ἄγρος ἱετροῦ*, "a fowler's vessel;" Vulgate, *unicuius pomorum*, which Jerome explains, "Sicut unicuique rami arborum detrahuntur ad poma carpenda, ita ego proximum captivitatis tempus attraxi." The word *chelub* is taken to mean "a basket of wickerwork;" it is used for "a cage" in Jer. v. 27, but is found nowhere else. The gathering of fruit was the last harvest of the year, and thus fitly typified the final punishment of Israel. This is set forth by the play on the word in the next verse.

Ver. 2.—The end (*kets*). This is very like the word for "fruit" (*kaita*). Pass by (see note on ch. vii. 8).

Ver. 3.—The songs of the temple; Septuagint, *τὰ φωνήματα τοῦ ναοῦ*, "the pannels of the temple;" Vulgate, *cardines templi*. These versions point to a different reading. It is better rendered, "the songs of the palace," referring to the songs of the revellers mentioned already (ch. vi. 5). These shall be changed into howlings of lamentation for the dead which lie around (comp. ver. 10). There shall be many dead bodies. The Hebrew is more forcible:

"Many the corpses; in every place he hath cast them forth. Hush!" The Lord is represented as casting dead bodies to the ground, so that death is everywhere; and the interjection "hush!" (comp. ch. vi. 10) is an admonition to bend beneath the hand of an avenging God (comp. Zeph. i. 7). Orelli takes it as an expression of the apathy that accompanies severe and irremediable suffering—suffering too deep for words. The Greek and Latin versions take this onomatopoeic word *has!* "hush!" as a substantive. Thus the Septuagint, *ἐπιβήσω σιωπῇν*, "I will cast upon them silence;" Vulgate, *projicietur silentium*—an expressive rendering, but one not supported by grammatical considerations.

Ver. 4.—The prophet, by admonishing the grandees of their iniquities, which they will not cast away, shows how ripe they are for judgment. That swallow up; better, that pant after (ch. ii. 6, 7), like a beast after its prey, eager to devour. Even to make the poor of the land to fail; and cause the meek of the land to fail. They grasp at the property of the unresisting poor, adding field to field, and impoverishing them in various ways, to root them out of the land.

Ver. 5.—When? expresses impatience and desire, as in the hymn—

"Thy joys when shall I see?"

The new moon. The first day of the month was a holiday, on which all trade was suspended. It is not mentioned in Exodus, Leviticus, or Deuteronomy; but its observance is enjoined in Numb. xxviii. 11, and various notices of this occur in later Scriptures; e.g. 1 Sam. xx. 5; 2 Kings iv. 23; Hos. ii. 11; Col. ii. 16. These greedy

sinner kept the festivals, indeed, but they grudged the time given to them, and considered it as wasted. **The sabbath.** Compare the difficulties with which Nehemiah had to contend in upholding the sanctity of the sabbath (Neh. x. 31; xiii. 15—22). **May set forth**; literally, *open*; so Septuagint, καὶ ἀνοίξομεν θησαυροὺς. The word expresses the opening of the granaries and storehouses. **The ephah**, by which corn was measured (see note on Micah vi. 10). This they made small, and so gave less than was paid for. **The shekel.** The weight by which money was weighed. This they made great, and thus gained too high a price for the quantity of corn. Coined money of determined value seems not to have been used before the return from Captivity, all payments of fixed amount previous to that period being made by weighing (comp. Gen. xxiii. 16; xxxiii. 19; xliii. 21; Exod. xxx. 13; Isa. xlv. 6). **Falsifying the balances by deceit**; better, as in the Revised Version, *dealing falsely with balances of deceit*. To increase their gains they falsified their scales or used fraudulent weights (see Lev. xix. 36). Thus they cheated the poor probably in three ways—by small measure, exorbitant price, and light weight.

Ver. 6.—**Buy the poor for silver** (comp. ch. ii. 6). The probable meaning is that they so reduced the poor man by their exactions and injustice, that he was compelled to pay his debt by selling himself into slavery (Lev. xxv. 39; Deut. xv. 12). **For a pair of shoes.** For the smallest debt they would deal in this harsh manner. **The refuse**; literally, *that which fell through the sieve*; Septuagint, Ἄνδ πάντος γεννήματος ἱμπορευόμεθα, “We will trade in every kind of produce.” Vulgate, *Quisquilias frumenti vendamus*, “Let us sell the refuse of corn.”

Ver. 7.—Such crimes as these, which sap the very foundations of social life, shall meet with vengeance. **The Excellency of Jacob.** This is a title of God himself, as in Hos. v. 5; vii. 10, where it is rendered “pride.” Thus the Lord is said to swear by his holiness (ch. iv. 2), by his soul (ch. vi. 8; comp. 1 Sam. xv. 29). So here he swears by himself, who is the Glory and Pride of Israel; as truly as he is this, he will punish. The Vulgate treats the sentence differently, *Juravit in superbium Jacob*, i.e. “The Lord hath sworn against the pride of Jacob,” against the arrogance with which they treat the poor, and trust in their riches, and deem themselves secure. So the Septuagint, Ὁμνέει Κύριος κατὰ τῆς ὑπερηφανίας Ἰακώβ. I will never forget, so as to leave unpunished. Literally, *if I forget*, equivalent to a most decided denial, as Heb. iv. 3, 5, etc. “Nec mirum est, si Deus jurare dicatur; quum dormientibus

dormiat et vigilantibus vigilet; hisque qui sibi thesaurizaverunt iram in die iræ, dicatur irasci” (St. Jerome).

Ver. 8.—**Shall not the land tremble for this?** “This” is the coming judgment, or the oath with which God announced it in the previous verse; and the prophet asks, “Shall not the land tremble as with an earthquake when the Lord comes to judgment?” The LXX., rendering ἐν τοῖς, takes the reference to be to the “works” or sins of the people (ver. 7); but the thought in these two verses is the punishment of the transgressions, not the transgressors themselves. **And it shall rise up wholly as a flood** (ch. ix. 5). The LXX., pointing differently, renders, καὶ ἀναβήσεται ὡς ποταμὸς συντέλεια, “And destruction shall come up as a river;” the Vulgate, *Et ascendet quasi fluvius universus*; it is best, however, to refer both clauses to the Nile: “Yea, it shall rise up wholly like the river”—the land shall heave and swell like the waters of the Nile at its annual rising. **And it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt**; better, *it shall be tossed up and sink again, like the river of Egypt*—a picturesque comparison, which would allude to a phenomenon well known to the Israelites. It is as though the whole earth were turned into a sea, tossing and labouring under a tempestuous wind (comp. Isa. xxiv. 4).

Ver. 9.—I will cause the sun to go down at noon. This is probably to be taken metaphorically of a sudden calamity occurring in the very height of seeming prosperity, such as the fate of Israel in Pekah’s time, and Pekah’s own murder (2 Kings xv. 29, 30; see also 2 Kings xvii. 1—6). A like metaphor is common enough; e.g. Joel ii. 2; iii. 15; Micah iii. 6; Job v. 14; Isa. xiii. 10; Jer. xv. 9. Hind calculates that there were two solar eclipses visible in Palestine in Amos’s time, viz. June 15, B.C. 763, and February 9, B.C. 784. Some have suggested that the prophet here predicts the latter in the year of Jeroboam’s death; but this, it is discovered, would have been so partial as hardly to be noticeable at Samaria. And it is improbable that such natural phenomena, unconnected with God’s moral government, should be the subject of the prophet’s prediction (Pusey). Doubtless a sudden reverse is signified (comp. Matt. xxiv. 29, etc.), expressed in terms rendered particularly appropriate by some late and well-remembered eclipse. The Fathers note here how the earth was darkened at the Passion of our Lord.

Ver. 10.—I will turn your feasts into mourning, etc. (comp. ver. 8; ch. v. 16, 17; Lam. v. 15; Hos. ii. 11; Tobit ii. 6). **Sackcloth.** A token of mourning (1 Kings xx. 31; Isa. xv. 3; Joel i. 8, 13). **Baldness.**

On shaving the head as a sign of mourning, see note on Micah i. 16; and comp. Job i. 20; Isa. iii. 24; Jer. xvi. 6; xlvii. 5; Ezek. vii. 18). I will make it; *Ponam cam* (Vulgate); *eo. terram*. But it is better to take it to refer to the whole state of things mentioned before. The mourning for an only son was proverbially severe, like that of the widow of Nain (Luke vii. 12, etc.; comp. Jer. vi. 26; Zech. xii. 10). And the end thereof as a bitter day. The calamity should not wear itself out; it should be bitter unto the end. Septuagint, *θήσομαι . . . τοὺς μέτ' αὐτοῦ ὡς ἡμέραν ὀδύνης*, "I will make . . . those with him as a day of anguish."

Ver. 11.—This shall be the bitterness at the end; they had rejected the warnings of the prophets (ch. vii. 12, etc.); now the Word of God and the light of his teaching should fail them. *Famine*. When the light of God's revelation is withdrawn, their longing for the Word, however sore and great, shall remain unsatisfied, like that of Saul (1 Sam. xxviii. 6). They may grieve like the psalmist, "We see not our signs; there is no more any prophet; neither is there among us any that knoweth how long" (Ps. lxxiv. 9); but it will be in vain (see a similar punishment threatened, Lam. ii. 9; Ezek. vii. 26; Micah iii. 7).

Ver. 12.—They shall wander; literally, *they shall reel*. The verse implies the eagerness of their unsatisfied desire, which seeks everywhere for the revelation which for their sin is denied them. From sea to sea. This expression is taken, by Keil and others, to mean here "all the world over," as Ps. lxxii. 8; Micah vii. 12; Zech. ix. 10; but it is probably used by the prophet in a more restricted sense, as it would not be natural for him to refer in the first place to the seeking of the words of God beyond the limits of the Holy Land. Therefore "from sea to sea" means from the Sea of Galilee or the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean; and from the north even to the east—from the north round again to the east, the south not being mentioned, because there alone was the true worship of God to be found, and they refused to seek it there (Pusey). Of course, according to the wide scope taken by prophecy, which is not exhausted

by one fulfilment, we may see here the fate of the Jews to the present time hopelessly seeking Messiah and the Word of God, never finding that which they once recklessly rejected. By some error the LXX. render, *κατευθίσονται ὕδατα ἀπὸ τῆς θαλάσσης, κ.τ.λ.*, unless they mean, "They shall be tossed as waters," etc.

Ver. 13.—This verse is parallel to the preceding. The thirst, spiritual and physical, shall affect the fair virgins and young men—those in all the freshness, beauty, and vigour of youth. Shall faint; literally, *shall be veiled*, covered, expressive of the feeling of faintness, when the sight grows dim and a mantle of darkness drops over one (Jonah iv. 8). If the strongest thus fail, much more will the rest succumb to the threatened calamity.

Ver. 14.—They who trusted in idols shall find no help in them. They who swear by. Those who reverence and worship, as Deut. vi. 13; x. 20. The sin of Samaria. The golden calf at Bethel (comp. Deut. ix. 21; Hos. viii. 5, 6). Septuagint, *κατὰ τοῦ ἱλασμοῦ Σαμαρείας*, "by the propitiation of Samaria." Thy god, O Dan, liveth; i.e. as thy god liveth, by the life of thy god. This was the other calf erected at Dan, near the source of the Jordan, in the extreme north (1 Kings xii. 29). The manner of Beersheba liveth; Septuagint, *Ζῇ ὁ θεὸς σου Βηρσαβέ*, "Thy god, O Beersheba, lives." Some commentators, ancient and modern, think that the actual road which led to Beersheba is here meant, and would translate, "As the way to Beersheba liveth," "By the life of the way to Beersheba," as Mohammedans swear by the pilgrimage to Mecca. But it is best to take the word rendered "manner" in the sense of "way," as *ὁδὸς* is used in Acts (ix. 2; xix. 9, 23) for mode of worship, or form of religion, the ritual, or use of the service there. (For Beersheba, see note on ch. v. 5.) From Dan to Beersheba is just a hundred and forty-four miles. They shall fall, etc. This was partially fulfilled by the destruction of the kingdom of Israel and the deportation of its inhabitants; and its truth to this day is demonstrated by the fate of the Jews who will not receive Jesus as the promised Messiah.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*A nation ripe for ruin*. While immunity lasts iniquity will go on. Men only love it less than they fear suffering. In the actual presence of the penalty the hand of the transgressor is stayed. The murderer will not strike the death-blow under a policeman's eye. The blasphemer will not move a lip when the thunderbolt is crashing through his roof. But by so little does the one feeling master the other that if punishment be not both certain and at hand, the fear of it will fail to deter from

sin. "My lord delayeth his coming." Let escape be out of the question, yet even the chance of respite will turn the scale in favour of doing the forbidden thing. Israel, sentenced and to be destroyed *some time*, sinned with a high hand. Israel, sentenced to be destroyed *soon*, yet sinned still. Perhaps Israel, sentenced to be destroyed at once, may be brought to bay. Here God tries the experiment.

I. THERE IS A TIME WHEN THE VINE OF SODOM RIPENS ITS FRUIT. Sin has its day. It disturbs the harmony of things, and when derangement reaches a climax a catastrophe comes, and arrests the process with a "thus far and no further." Israel's wicked course had reached this critical point. 1. *Idolatry, the archetypal sin against the first table, had practically superseded the worship of God.* It was the religion of the king and court and people. It was established and endowed by the state. Its rites were observed at Bethel and elsewhere, in profane mimicry of the Levitical worship at Jerusalem. The substitution of it for the worship of Jehovah was part of the royal policy. Short of this the national apostasy could go no further. Interference, if it would be in time to save anything, must take place at once. 2. *Oppression, the archetypal sin against the second table, had reduced society to dissolution.* The safeguards of property, liberty, and life were alike removed (ch. iii. 9, 10; v. 7, 12; vi. 3). The order of society had been converted into chaos. Incapable of using liberty without perverting it into licence, it was high time to deprive Israel of the grossly abused trust. As slaves they would be under a *régimé* of the strong arm, which was the only one that suited them in present circumstances. There are chains forging somewhere for the man who can neither consider others nor rule himself.

II. SUCH RIPENING FOREBODES AN EARLY GATHERING. (Ver. 2, "The end is come upon my people of Israel.") The sickle is put in as soon as the harvest is ripe. No practical husbandry could delay the operation longer. 1. *The crop has then reached the limits of its growth.* Like the corn ripe unto harvest, or the grape purple and mellow, the natural life of Israel had fully developed itself. Tastes were matured, habits acquired, and characters settled into crystalline form. Things generally had put on an aspect of finality, and the sickle of judgment that follows the ripening of character need no longer wait. Let the ripe sinner beware the scythe. The fruits of unrighteousness full grown are suggestive of the harvesters on their way. 2. *It is then ready to serve its natural purpose.* Green grapes are useless in the vat, and green faggots would only put out the fire. It is in the harvest, when both are mature, that the wheat and the tares alike are sent to their ultimate destination. One purpose, a high and noble one, Israel had at last proved their unfitness to serve; their exclusive fitness for another purpose had only now by the same events become apparent. Reward and punishment alike take typical form only when they have reference to lives and characters which have assumed an aspect of finality. The hard grain and the dry faggot are waiting respectively for the mill and for the fire. 3. *After this it will be in the way of the next crop.* When the reaper goes the ploughman comes. If the harvesting were neglected the ploughing must be postponed. Israel had failed utterly to accomplish its Divine mission, and, left longer alone, would only prevent its accomplishment by other agency. "Take the talent from him, and give it to him that hath ten talents." The unfruitful become in a little while cumberers of the ground, and a necessary measure of practical husbandry is then to cut them off. 4. *At this stage it will begin naturally to decay.* Overripe fruit will "go bad" at once. If not used or preserved when ripe, it will be lost altogether. National decline waits on the development of national corruption. Israel become utterly dissolute would go to pieces according to a natural law, even if the Assyrian never came. Indeed, it was in the degeneracy already apparent that the invader saw his opportunity and found the occasion of his coming. The disease that stops the career of the sensualist means God's judgment on one side, and the natural break-down of his constitution on the other.

III. THE DUNGHILL IS THE DESTINATION OF ALL TAINTED PRODUCE. (Ver. 3.) The incorrigible wrong-doer is involved at last in overwhelming calamity. God's judgments must fall, his mercy notwithstanding. Indeed, they are an aspect of it. "A God all mercy is a God unjust." He is leaving the lion to prey on the lamb. The most merciful course is that which offers most effective opposition to the wicked doings of wicked men. Israel's manners are past reforming, and past enduring. By their intolerable abuse of freedom they showed their fitness only to be slaves. And accord-

ing to character and capacity they must be treated. What is bad for the table may be good for the dunghill. The life of many had become a curse, and it only remained to stop that, and make their death a warning. That is one crop which even the sluggard's garden cannot refuse to bear (Prov. xxiv. 30—32).

IV. THE OCCASION OF SUCH A HARVEST HOME TOO DEPLORABLE FOR WORDS. (Ver. 3, "Hush!") When judgment is overwhelming, silence is fitting. 1. *As opposed to songs.* These had resounded from the palace. They spoke of mirth and revelry. But they would be turned into yells ere long. In awestruck anticipation of the utterance of pain and horror, the prophet bids the revellers be silent. 2. *As opposed to lamentations.* You cannot always "give sorrow words." There is a grief that "speaks not"—the grief of the overwrought heart. "I was dumb, opening not the mouth, because this stroke was thine." Such grief would besit a time like this. Words, however strong, must be beneath the occasion. Let them then remain unspoken, and let the eloquence of silence meet the overwhelming severity of the visitation. 3. *As opposed to reproaches.* Israel had outlived the period of probation, and therefore of expostulation. Its "great transgression" was committed, its course unchangeably chosen, its doom sealed. The condemned and sentenced murderer is removed to his cell in silence. In sterner measures than abuse of words must his crime be expiated. His very life is to be exacted, and windy denunciation may well be spared. "Let him alone" is of all measures the most sternly significant. It is the preternatural hush of the elemental world, presaging the thunder-crash that shall make the very earth to reel.

Vers. 4—6.—*The covetous man's way.* Punishment, however stern, is proportioned rigidly to sin. They answer to each other as face to face. From the contemplation of Israel's deplorable fate we turn to the horrors of her crime. And they are dark beyond exaggerating. To idolatry, dethroning God and robbing him of his glory, is added covetousness defrauding and destroying men. Indeed, the one is but a department of the other. The worst type of mammon-worshipper, the covetous, is an idolater in a very real sense. And Israel's covetousness, detached as it was from all religious restraints, and operating in a purely heathen connection, was of the most aggravated and repulsive kind. Acting in character, observe that—

I. IT SELECTS AN EASY PREY. (Ver. 4, "the poor;" "the meek.") 1. *The poor cannot defend themselves.* Their poverty makes them helpless, and the weakness which ought to commend them to protection commends them to plunder. Covetousness, the meanest of the vices in any circumstances, goes down to the nadir of paltriness when it wrings its gold "from the hard hands" of the poor. 2. *The meek will not resist.* Their position and disposition are both against it. They would "rather suffer wrong." And they get enough of it to suffer. Weak on one hand, and unresisting on the other, they are a doubly tempting prey to the pitiless vulture's beak.

II. IT HAS MURDER IN ITS HEART. "Gape to destroy," as the beast of prey its victim at hand. There is a covetousness that puts its own paltriest gain above another's life. It will have men's money although their life should pay the forfeit. This is the very spirit of murder. To make money, at the necessary cost of human life, is to break the sixth commandment as well as the eighth.

III. IT HANKERS AFTER SUNDAY TRADING. (Ver. 5, "When is the new moon over," etc.?) These people retained the form of sabbath observance, but the reality had been altogether abandoned. They occupied its sacred hours with wishes that they were over. "Sabbath days and sabbath work are a burden to carnal hearts" (Henry). The hours drag heavily. Time-killing devices are exhausted. "Behold, what a weariness it is!" is the verdict on God's day, given weekly through all their years. "When shall I come and appear before God?" a question that the spiritually minded ask, is one which the carnally minded cannot even understand. They are making markets mentally in the very house of God, and, with the words of worship on their lips, "their heart goes after covetousness." From Sunday devising to Sunday transacting of business the step is but a small one—too small not to be taken when opportunity and temptation meet.

IV. IT PRACTISES UNFAIR DEALING. (Vers. 5, 6.) As they fear not God, neither do they regard man. When religion is abandoned, morality is undermined. Given greed present, and religious restraint absent, and dishonest dealing is inevitable. 1.

One device is the use of a false balance. "Make the ephah small, and the shekel great," i.e. give thirteen pounds to the stone, and charge twenty-one shillings to the pound. They perpetrate thus a double swindle, robbing "with both hands earnestly." Such fraud is too unscientific and direct for any but the coarser cheats. There are more delicate ways of fraudulent dealing, which the more refined rogues affect. Such a method is: 2. *Selling an adulterated or inferior article.* "The refuse of the corn we will sell" (ver. 6). This is probably the commonest form of commercial fraud. There are few who possess the strength of moral fibre to avoid it entirely. We might arrange it on a graduated scale. At one end is the man who bluntly sells one thing under the name of another. At the other end is the man who, in selling, insinuates the impression that the thing is of better quality than it really is. Between these two are dishonest artifices of all varieties and shades. All, however, originate in covetousness, eventuate in injustice, and deserve the generic name of fraud.

V. *IT TRAFFICS IN HUMAN LIFE, AND THAT FOR A CONTEMPTIBLE PRICE.* (Ver. 6.) The law, compelling the poor to sell themselves to their creditors to work for what they owed, was enforced in the case of the paltriest debts, and the needy might be brought into bondage for want of the price of even a pair of shoes. To work such hardship on such trifling occasion argues inhumanity too gross to be long endured. The worker has inverted the natural order, has lost out the sense of reverence, is blind to the dignity of human nature, and has conclusively shown that he is an eyesore, and his life a curse, to the society in which he lives. His selfishness puts the least interest of his own above the most essential interest of others. His greed of gain has so intensified that he is blind at last to all other considerations. He has fallen altogether beneath the human level, and when a man has done this, the chances are that he has lived his day. Well may we pray, "Incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not to covetousness."

Ver. 7.—*Confirming by an oath.* God's judgments sometimes take, and will continue to take, the wicked by surprise (Matt. xxiv. 36—39). But this need not be, and should not be, and can be only where blindness, or heedlessness, or incredulity make warning useless. God always warns before he strikes. Sometimes he warns by divers methods at once. Often he warns again and again. Invariably he warns with a solemnity that makes disbelief a crime and stupid. Here is a case in point.

I. *THE OATH THAT CANNOT BE BROKEN.* "God is not a man, that he should lie." To do so would be a natural impossibility, a contradiction of himself. For the same reason his truthfulness can have no degrees; his slightest word is absolutely inviolable. Yet to human apprehension an oath is peculiarly convincing, and, accommodating himself to men's weakness, God condescends, on peculiarly solemn occasions, not merely to say, but swear. Here he swears: 1. *By himself.* "The Pride of Jacob" is Jehovah himself. Elsewhere explicitly God swears by "himself" (Jer. li. 14), by his "great Name" (Jer. xlv. 26), by his "holiness" (ch. iv. 2), by his "life" (Ezek. xxxiii. 11). This is of necessity. Men "swear by the greater." God, "because he can swear by no greater, swears by himself" (Heb. vi. 17, 18). In this form of oath the greatest Being is invoked, and so the maximum of solemnity is reached, whether it is God who swears or man. 2. *By himself in his ideal relation to Israel.* "By the Pride of Jacob." Israel, alas! did not "glory in the Lord." They gloried in their idols. "These be thy gods, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt," they had said, in their blind fatuity, of the molten calf. God had been forgotten and his wonders ignored before they were many days accomplished, and in this forgetfulness they had persistently gone on. Yet was he none the less their Glory still, the Strength of Israel, their Life and Spring, the Founder, Builder, Sustainer, of their kingdom, the one Source and Spring of all that made them great. This fundamental relation he emphasizes here in vowing vengeance on their sin. By this character, as their Life and Strength and Excellence, he swears he will now degrade and destroy them utterly. The nearer God's tie to the rebels, the grosser outrage is their rebellion, and the more embittered the after-relations. It is on the ruins of violated friendship that the most irreconcilable enmity arises. Not even the heathen is as hateful, or doomed to a fate as direful, as the apostate.

II. *THE RECORD THAT CANNOT BE ERASED.* "I will not forget and for ever." To forget is to forgive, put out of sight, treat as non-existent. "I will remember their iniquities no more." *Sin unatoned for cannot be forgiven.* God must be just in his

justifying, and justice demands satisfaction. From the provided satisfaction the unbelieving sinner has turned away, and so from the grace of his own salvation. *Neither can sin unforaken.* The sinner is in actual conflict with God, and the rebel may not be forgiven with arms in his hands. *Neither can sin unrepented of.* Still loving sin, the impenitent is not in a moral condition to appreciate pardon, and the gift of God is not to be thrown away. By such a threefold cord was Israel bound to inevitable destruction.

III. THE WORKS THAT CANNOT BE FORGOTTEN. There are sins more heinous, and for the authors of which it will be less tolerable in the judgment than for others (Matt. xi. 22). 1. *Such are the sins committed against the poor and needy.* "God hath chosen the poor of this world." Their poverty presents the minimum of resistance to his grace. Their hardships excite his special pity. Their helplessness commends them to his special protection. He gives them the most prominent place in his religion. He champions them against their enemies. He requires his people to do the same. He identifies himself with them in the judgment, and he deals with men then in terms of their relation to the duties they owe the needy (Matt. xxv. 35—45). While God is "the Avenger of all such," oppression of the poor shall not go unpunished. 2. *Such especially are the sins committed against the poor by those who bear his Name.* The element of beneficence bulked large in Judaism. Besides the general injunctions to regard the poor (Deut. xv. 7—11), there were special enactments allocating to them a poor tithe (Deut. xiv. 28, 29), the spontaneous produce of the soil (Lev. xxv. 5), the droppings from the sheaves, and the produce of the corners of the fields (Lev. xix. 9, 10; xxiii. 22), also sheaves accidentally dropped (Deut. xxiv. 19), as much from vineyard or field as the hungry wayfarer required to eat on the spot (Deut. xxiii. 24, 25), and periodical entertainments at the tables of the rich (Deut. xvi. 10, 11). Thus nothing could be more utterly antagonistic to the genius of the Jewish religion than to rob or oppress the poor. The Israelite guilty of it sinned against Scripture, against custom, against education, against every deterrent powerful with men and increasing guilt before God. Christianity, too, is essentially benevolent. To "love one another," and "do good unto all," is the very spirit and essence of the religion of Christ. Injustice or oppression under Christian auspices is sin in its most abominable and heinous form.

Vers. 8—10.—*Carried away as with a flood.* A man in earnest is always graphic. If he be also inspired he can afford to be explicit. In this passage Amos is both. The words were spoken before the convulsions they foretell, and written after some of them had occurred. But the descriptions of events, transpired between the speaking and the writing, have no flavour of an *ex post facto* deliverance. There is a bare record of the original verbal utterance without the attempt to write into any part of it details of what meantime had become history. Such an apologetic device, suicidal in any case, is a thing to which a man who is God's mouthpiece could not and needs not stoop.

I. THE EARTH TREMBLING WHEN GOD SWEARS. "For this" (ver. 8), i.e. the oath of God, and its purport. That oath means a catastrophe on the way in the shock of which the earth would tremble. The very utterance of it was a cause of trembling. "He uttered his voice, the earth melted." His word is a word of power. It operates in the physical forces, and shakes the whole frame of nature. In the poetic language of the psalmist, "the voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars," "shaketh the wilderness," "divideth the flames of fire." In the world of matter, as in the world of spirit, the great ultimate force is the word of God.

II. THE CREATION SUFFERING IN THE SUFFERINGS OF MEN. Man sins, and the earth is smitten. It was so at first with the ground. It was so at the Deluge with the lower animals and plants. It is so here. The universe is one throughout, and all its parts are in closest connection and interdependence. "Not a leaf rotting on the highway but is an indissoluble part of solar and stellar worlds" (Carlyle). Our life, our animal spirits, our reason itself, have fundamental and probably undiscovered relations with the sun and moon and stars. Relations so intimate may be assumed to be mutual, and we need not be surprised if we find casualties meant primarily for either extending to both.

III. GOD'S JUDGMENTS, LONG MENACED, TAKE THE INCREDULOUS BY SURPRISE AT LAST. (Ver. 9.) The antediluvians were no better prepared for the Flood by their

hundred and twenty years' warning. They absorbed themselves in their work and pleasure, and knew not till the Flood came (Matt. xxiv. 38). So with the Sodomites, warned by Lot (Gen. xix. 14); and the inhabitants of Jerusalem at its capture, warned by Christ (Matt. xxiv. 33). Warning is thrown away on unbelief, and its end is always a surprise. In this case the sun would set at noon. The end would come untimely. In the midst of days and prosperity Israel would be cut off. There would be no anticipation, no fear, no suspicion even, of such an event. So with the ungodly at last. The judgment will surprise them and look untimely, but only because their incredulity will be unconquerable.

IV. RETRIBUTION CLOSELY ADJUSTED TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CRIMINAL. (Ver. 10.) *Sinners are smitten in their joys.* The covetous in their possessions, the luxurious in their luxuries, the revellers in their revelries. When sackcloth and ashes are substituted for "ivory couches," and baldness for hair fragrant with the chief ointments, when howls rend the throats till lately melodious in song, the stroke is identified as that of One who never "beats the air." The fly of judgment, selecting infallibly the sore spot of the sufferer, reveals its mission as from God himself. *The joys in which the sinner is smitten are, moreover, those most closely connected with his sins.* God's stroke is as obviously righteous as appropriate. Falling on the sins that provoke them, God's judgments are self-interpreting. Israel's luxurious appliances were simply plunder, the wages of iniquity, sometimes even the price of blood. Hence God singles them out for special attack, and will plague Israel rigorously in every pleasure that has its root in sin.

V. THE FINALITY OF GOD'S RETRIBUTIVE ACT. The rule is that judgment is more severe in proportion as it is long delayed. 1. *It makes an end.* The sun goes down, and ends the day of life. After that nothing can come but night—the night of death. Destruction for sinners of Israel, destruction for all such sinners while the world stands, is the Divine provision. When the last measure of retribution is executed, the last shred of the sinner's good has been torn away. 2. *That end unspeakably bitter.* The wine-cup of God's fury is necessarily a bitter draught. There is wounded dignity in it, and wasted mercy, and outraged love, and all ingredients which are gall and wormwood in the mouth. They are digging for themselves Marah-pools no branch can sweeten, who "heap up wrath against the day of wrath," etc. 3. *That bitterness the bitterness of utter desolation.* "And make it like mourning for an only one." That is bitter mourning indeed. The loss of an only one is total loss, including our all. It is irreparable loss, for the dead cannot come back. It is loss not physical merely, nor sentimental merely, but loss wringing the heart-strings, and leaving us with the very jewel of life torn from its setting. Such is the mourning in which unforgiven sin is expiated at last. It is heart-agony, unrelieved, unmitigated, and never to end. "Son, remember;" "There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth;" "Their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched."

Ver. 9.—*A sunset at noon.* This language is at once prophetic and figurative. It predicts an event in the moral world under the figure of an analogous event in the physical world. The symbolical event is not an eclipse of the sun, which the language does not suit, but his going down at midday; and the event symbolized is clearly death in the midst of young life. Israel was rich and prosperous and young. To all outward seeming she was just in the meridian of her life. But her sun would never reach the west. Her end would be premature, sudden, and tragic. As if the sun dropped in an instant beneath the horizon from mid-sky, and the radiancy of noon gave place in that instant to the darkness of night; so Israel's day would darken suddenly, and the night of death fall in a sky all lit with the golden glow of noon.

I. THERE IS TO MEN A NATURAL TERM OF EXISTENCE, WHICH IS THEIR DAY. There is a natural life-term to all earthly creatures. This varies endlessly for each, between limits so far apart as a millennium and a day. There are chelonæ that lengthen out their slow existence to centuries, and there are insects that sport out their little life in an afternoon. Intermediate between these widely distant limits is man with his three score years and ten (Ps. xc. 10). This period is his day. Beyond it few may hope, and none expect, to live. To reach it even there must be normal conditions of life within and around. This is not a long time at best. Let the utmost diligence be

used, and the work that can be done in it is not much. Take from it the two childhoods, infancy and infirm age, and it becomes greatly shorter still. Not more than fifty active years enter into the longest life. On the most sanguine assumption these are the working hours of our day of life. What we do for God and men is done while they pass. They may not be so many, but they can scarcely be more, and if they are all given us we may thankfully reckon that we have lived our time.

II. THERE ARE EXCEPTIONAL CASES IN WHICH THIS PERIOD IS CUT SHORT. The normal life-term is not the actual one. The overwhelming majority never see it. When the septuagenarian has his birthday feast, the friends of his youth are not one in ten among the guests. From childhood till that hour they have been dropping off, and now nine-tenths and more are gone. 1. *A moiety of the race die in childhood.* Infant mortality is an obscure subject. Whether from the standpoint of equity or economy, there is much in it we cannot explain. Their death before they have transgressed brings up the solemn mystery of original sin, and the suffering of one for the sin of another (Rom. v. 14). Then their death before activity begins or consciousness dawns, and so apparently before they have been used, raises the almost equally perplexing question—Is there, so far as this life goes, a single human being made in vain? 2. *Many more die before or at maturity.* They are healthy till growth is almost complete. The body has acquired the strength and hardness needed for the burden of life's work. The mind has received the training which fits it to solve the problems of existence, and govern and use the body in accomplishing the highest purposes of both. Yet just now, when the tool has been formed and tempered and finished, it is broken before it has once been used at its best in the more serious work of life. Here we are face to face not only with an apparently purposeless creation, but also with what seems an unproductive training. 3. *Many also die with their work to all appearance unfinished, or only well begun.* Their capacity is growing; their field is widening; their influence is increasing. They are in the full swing of activity and usefulness. Yet at the very moment when the richest fruit of their life-work is beginning to form, they are cut down—cut down, too, where their death leaves a permanent blank, and no one is available to take up their work. Their mysterious character and solemn interest prepare a field for faith in the fact that—

III. THESE SUNSETS AT NOON ARE DIVINELY ORDERED. "I will cause," etc. To kill and to make alive are Divine prerogatives. Let the sun set where he will, the event is God's doing. And, in the light of Scripture and observation, a philosophy of such events is not altogether impossible to conceive. 1. *Take noon sunsets in sin.* These are often untimely and far from unaccountable. (1) *Sin is war against God;* and while he is omnipotent and righteous and the Disposer of life, it cannot conduce to length of days. The wickedness of men is a continual provocation of his just judgment, and therefore an inevitable shortener of life. (2) *Sin is also war against the species.* The wicked are hateful and hating one another. The essential selfishness of the corrupt heart is misanthropy in another aspect. Misanthropy, again, is murder in its earlier stage (1 John iii. 15), leading on to the other stages of it (Jas. iv. 1, 2); and a dispensation of universal murder must mean many a life cut short and many a sun untimely set. (3) *Sin does violence to our own nature.* The normal life of the body is a pure one; the direction of appetites only to their legitimate objects, and to these in the strictest moderation. This is obviously the royal road to health and length of days. Perversion of appetite on the one hand, and excessive indulgence of it on the other, do violence to the natural order. If the life is impure, in fact, and as it is impure, it is unnatural, and therefore likely to be short. There is no "fleshly lust" which does not "war against the life" (1 Pet. ii. 11) of soul and body both. Of course, the operation of second causes, such as the laws of reciprocity and health, is not something distinct from the Divine agency, but the instrumentality it employs. The laws of nature are simply God's executive, the hands and fingers which weave the threads of his purpose into the web of his work. 2. *Take noon sunsets in grace.* These also are not unknown. The good die young. Sometimes they die through the sin of others, sometimes in consequence of sin of their own. These, however, are the occasions only of their removal. The reason of it lies deep in the purposes of God. (1) *Some are taken away from the evil to come.* (Isa. lvii. 1.) The young Ahijah, "because in him was found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the

house of Jeroboam," was carried peacefully to his rest before the falling of the provoked disaster (1 Kings xiv. 10-14). The good King Josiah also, because he repudiated and mourned the sin of Judah, "was gathered to his grave in peace, that his eyes did not see all the evil which God brought upon Jerusalem" (2 Kings xxii. 19, 20). In many a family, on whose survivors the shock of a great calamity falls, the previous removal of some gentle spirit from their circle becomes intelligible as a merciful folding of the tender lamb before the crash of the nearing storm. (2) *Some are taken away because their work, although apparently only beginning, is really done.* Not every man's life-work can be identified, during its progress, by either his contemporaries or himself. Sometimes it is incidental, aside from his line of effort, and altogether unconscious. A child lives to awake by its endearing ways a parent's sleeping heart. A youth lives by the tokens of early grace to bring brothers and sisters to look at the unseen, and the life for God. A man lives to carry some movement over its crisis, which, in its after-stages, will require a different hand. If we only knew "the end of the Lord" (Jas. v. 11), we should see that it is always attained before the means are discontinued; that he never breaks a tool till its work is done. (3) *Some can only do their work by dying.* The errand of Bathsheba's first child into the world was by its death to bring David to his knees and a right mind (2 Sam. xii. 13-23). And how many an early death in a careless family has been that family's salvation! Even the minister cut down in his early prime, with a life of usefulness opening out, as it seems, before him, may preach a sermon by his death more potent for good than all he could have said alive. Untimely death may even in certain cases anticipate the loss of influence for good. We know men of influence in the Church who in their erratic age are undoing the good they were honoured to do in their earlier years. Such men have only lived too long. If their sun had set at noon their life-work would have been far greater, humanly speaking, than it will now be. Looking as we do at the surface of things, and blind to their deeper relations and far-reaching issues, we are not in a position to criticize the providential arrangements of God. To believe that there is order in the seeming tangle, and ultimate and wider good behind the present partial evil, is the attitude of that enlightened faith which argues that Infinite Wisdom, omnipotent on the one hand and benevolent on the other, being at the helm of things, will steer in character.

Vers. 11-14.—*The scarcity that swallows the residue of good.* To waste is to want, in things temporal and spiritual alike. Abuse is inevitably followed by deprivation, and the prodigal is one who is purveying for himself a suit of rags. God caps our "will not" with his "shall not," and the rude hand of change soon spills the cup of good we have refused to taste. Under the operation of this law the nation of Israel would now come. They had wasted the Word of God, neglecting it, despising it, and at last forbidding it to be spoken. Now they should "want" it as a penal result. It would be taken from them in anger, and that at a time when even their inappreciation would long for it as for life itself. Observe here—

I. THE WORST OF ALL FAMINES. "Not a hungering for bread, nor a thirst for water, but to hear the words of Jehovah." This is a new form of disaster, and one that is specially severe. This follows from the fact that: 1. *It is in the spiritual sphere.* "Fear not them which kill the body." It is the least part of us. Whether it live or die, enjoy or suffer, is a question involving trivial interests, and these during a limited period. The soul is the man, and its well-being, next to God's glory, the great interest. For its injury there is no compensation, for its loss no parallel. When it suffers, the worst has happened. 2. *It is due to the loss of a necessary of spiritual life.* The deepest need of humanity is a communication from God. "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God," etc. Hence the Word which God speaks is the Word of life. Apart from it spiritual life is impossible. (1) *It is the revelation of spiritual things.* God and his will and way; the soul, its duty and destiny,—are subjects on which it alone throws adequate light. The light of nature makes known the existence of God, and some features of his character. But its twilight, whilst touching here and there a mountain-top, leaves all the valleys in darkness. After trying four thousand years, "the world by wisdom knew not God," and did not because it could not. In all saving relations Christ is the Revelation of the Father (Heb. i. 1; John i. 18), and

Scripture alone reveals Christ (John v. 39), and the way of life through him. (2) *It is the vehicle of spiritual power.* "The power of God unto salvation" is Paul's synonym for the gospel. Spiritual energy, no doubt, inheres in the Holy Spirit, but he operates only through or with the truth. It carries the power by which life is given (1 Pet. i. 23), by which life-functions are discharged (Rom. x. 17), by which the life-principle is sustained (Jer. xv. 16), by which growth is promoted (1 Pet. ii. 2). In fine, the "engrafted Word," received with meekness, "is able to save our souls." The power that begins, that sustains, that develops, that matures religious life is a power linked inseparably to the Word. That any saving grace is attainable in the absence of it is a thing impossible of proof, and which all Scripture testimony bears against. (3) *It is the assurance of spiritual good.* "We are saved by hope," and it is through patience and comfort of the Scriptures that this heavenly candle is lighted in the soul (Rom. viii. 24; xv. 4). The Scriptures reveal the heavenly blessings in store, and thus supply the warp and woof out of which the web of comfort is woven. What we shall have, and that we shall have it, is the burden of the Word of promise, which, making the rich future sure, makes thus the present glad and strong. Poor indeed would man be if there were no such word to twine the heart's-ease when his brow is wrung in anguish and distress. To Israel, sinful but penitent, God elsewhere, allotting the bread of adversity, promises, "Thine eyes shall see thy teachers," etc. (Isa. xxx. 20, 21). This is calamity, but with compensation. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God;" and with God, their Guide and Counsellor, no scarcity of bread could make them altogether wretched. But, *vice versâ*, the proposition will not hold. For the loss of the Word there is no offset possible. The impoverishment is central and radical, and all hedging is out of the question. 3. *This loss at a time when it would be most keenly felt.* "The Word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision." The mere fact of the sudden withdrawal of the Word would create an immediate demand for it. In this case the demand would rest on a practical necessity. "Crushed by oppressors, hearing only of gods more cruel than those who make them, how will they hunger and thirst for any tidings of One who cares for the weary and heavy laden?" (Maurice).

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT PROVOKE IT. The unique rigour of the penalty suggests some special circumstances in the provoking crime. One of these would be: 1. *Extreme heinousness.* "There is a sin unto death." It will never be forsaken. It precludes the idea of penitence. It involves the perversion, or rather inversion, of character, which "calls evil good, and good evil." There is nothing for it but the extreme penalty of being left alone. And even that will be inflicted. Saul had provoked it when "God answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." Israel had provoked it when God said to his servant, "Thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover" (Ezek. iii. 26; vii. 26). When a man sins on principle, he is not far off "a famine of hearing the words of the Lord." 2. *Failure of other judgments to turn.* "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." Other judgments had been for reformation and had failed; this would be for destruction—the only alternative left. When "cure" is out of the question, what else is to be done but "kill"? 3. *Chafing under and rejecting the Word itself.* Israel had heard more of the words of the Lord than they wished. They had made an effort to get rid of them, or some of them, by forbidding his prophets to speak his message. More of the Word to men in that mind would have been thrown away, and God never wastes his gifts. If we shut our eyes, he will take away the light. If we close our ears, "the voice of the charmer" will soon be silent. The men who will not have the words of the Lord shall be treated to a dispensation of silence.

III. THE PERSONS IT ASSAILS. When judgment falls upon a nation, the righteous often suffer with the wicked. Yet here there are persons against whom the shock is specially directed. They are: 1. *Those who put their trust in idols.* The idolater would naturally feel the extreme of dislike to the Word of God, and adopt the strongest measures against his prophets. He was therefore in that moral condition which needed, and that opposing attitude which provoked, the heaviest stroke. God will not give his "praise to graven images," and he will give the man who trusts in them an early opportunity of discovering whether they will suffice for his need. The more unreservedly he has chosen them, the more entirely will he be left to them. 2. *The*

young and buoyant among these. (Ver. 13.) Youth and hope are hardest to overcome. There is a buoyancy in them, and a recuperative energy, that rises above calamity to which the old and broken would succumb. Yet even these would not avail. Physical suffering, breaking down even youth and vigour, mental suffering, overwhelming the most buoyant hopefulness, were among the enginery of the wrath of God.

IV. THE EFFECTS IT PRODUCES. These are distressing as the calamity producing them is stern (ver. 12). 1. *They seek the Word in vain.* It is sought as a last resource. In the extremity of trouble, and the failure of other help, men turn perforce to God. And then the quest is vain. It is made too late, and from a motive to which there is no promise given (Prov. i. 24—28). It is sought in an extremity, as the lesser evil of two; and in abject fear, in which there is no element of loyalty or love; and, thus sought, cannot in the nature of things be found. The time for God to give it has passed, because the time has passed in which men might have received it to any effect of spiritual good. 2. *They faint in the search.* "They shall reel from sea to sea." "The word [reel] is used of the reeling of drunkards, of the swaying to and fro of trees in the wind, of the quivering of the lips of one agitated, and then of the unsteady seeking of persons bewildered, looking for what they know not where to find" (Pusey). It is characteristic that search is made everywhere but in the South, where alone the true worship of God was, and where, if anywhere, his Word might have been found. Wrong seeking is wrong all round, and so is of necessity in vain. It is a loss of effort, which is "a grievous labour won." It wearies itself out in aimless blind exertion, made out of season, and vitiated by the very ills that drive men to make it. 3. *They fall and never rise.* God will "make an end." The time for it had come. Sin had reached a climax. Evil character had reached a final fixity. Calamity had ceased to improve. The tardy anxiety for a Divine communication meant simply that every other resource was exhausted. "Cut it down" is the one process of husbandry for which the tree is fitted. (1) *There is a famine of the Word on Israel still.* "Blindness in part has happened" to them, in that, "when Moses is read, the veil is on their heart." This practically amounts to the removal of the Word. It is a sealed book to them—sealed by their blindness to its spiritual sense. Not heathen ignorance is more effectually cut off from the knowledge of the truth than Jewish prejudice and hate. (2) *It rests on them for the same reason for which it came.* Persistently, blindly, bitterly, they rejected the truth of the gospel. They made it evident that they would not have it (Acts xiii. 46). And so sadly, reluctantly, but sternly, it was taken from them. "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles." When that Word was spoken, Israel was left to the darkness, it loved. In that chosen darkness they still grope, and will till the latter-day glory dawns. (3) *It will give place one day to a period of plenty.* "God hath not cast off his people which he foreknew." There is a remnant to which the promise belongs, and with which it will be kept (Rom. ix. 27; xi. 5). "When it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." The period, extent, and occasion of this turning are not revealed, but it will be the crowning triumph of the "glorious grace" of God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Ripeness in iniquity.* The figure here employed by Amos comes very naturally from him who had been a gatherer of the fruit of the sycamore tree. But at the same time, it is somewhat of a shock to the reader of this prophecy to find such a similitude employed for such a purpose. Our associations with "a basket of summer fruit" are all agreeable; but here the ripeness is in iniquity, and is unto condemnation and destruction.

I. A PAST PROCESS OF MATURITY IN SIN IS IMPLIED. As the fruit has been ripened during months of growth unto maturity, so the nation of Israel has gradually and progressively come to such a condition as that lamented and censured by the prophet of the Lord. 1. Past privileges have been misused. No nation had been so favoured as the descendants of Jacob; the greater the privileges, the greater the guilt of neglect and abuse. 2. Past warnings have been despised. If the people could not, in the exercise of their own faculties, foresee the end of all their misdeeds, they had no

excuse, for prophet after prophet had arisen to rebuke them for unfaithfulness, and to warn them of impending judgment. 3. Past invitations have been unheeded. Often had the messengers of God mingled promises with threats, invitations with censure. But in vain. The voice of the charmer had been disregarded; the tenderness of Divine compassion had been despised. Hence the process of deterioration had gone on. And circumstances which should have ripened the national character into heroic virtue, into saintly piety, had only served to mature irreligiosity and rebellion. Thus the sun and the showers which ripen the corn and the wholesome fruit bring also every poisonous growth to perfection.

II. A SPEEDY PROSPECT OF CONSEQUENT DESTRUCTION IS REVEALED. The ripe fruit speaks not only of the sunshine of the bygone days, but of the consumption which awaits it. In this passage the figurative language of the prophet is to be interpreted as foreboding approaching ruin. "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." 1. Perseverance in irreligiosity issues in deterioration of character. The very years, the very privileges, which make the good man better, make the bad man worse. It was so with Israel as a nation. The operation of the same law may be traced in human society to-day. 2. Perseverance in irreligiosity will, under the Divine government, involve chastisement and punishment. The captivity foretold was to be accompanied by the desolation of the capital and the cessation, or at least the interruption, of national life. "The end is come," saith God, "to my people Israel." The prosperity and superficial peace of the wicked must be brought to a disgraceful close.—T.

Ver. 2.—"*My people*." The occurrence of this expression in such a connection as this is very amazing and very encouraging. Even when, by the mouth of his prophet, the Lord is uttering language of regretful denunciation, the prediction of sore chastisement, he still calls Israel his own! God's ways are indeed higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts.

I. THIS LANGUAGE IS A REMINISCENCE OF PAST ELECTION. God called Israel his people, because he had chosen them from among the nations of the earth, to be the depository of his truth, the recipients of his Law, the instrument of his purposes among men. As early associations are strong amongst men, as we always retain a tender interest in those whom we have watched over, befriended, and benefited from their childhood, so the Lord represents himself as cherishing kindness for the people whom he had called as it were in their childhood, and nursed into maturity. He did not forget the days "when Israel was a child."

II. THIS LANGUAGE IS PROOF OF PRESENT KINDNESS. He does not say, "*Ye were* my people;" for they are his people still.

"Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above;
Deeper than the depths beneath;
Free and faithful, strong as death."

Even in carrying out his threats of punishment, Jehovah does not act in anger and vindictiveness. He is the Father chastening the child whom he loveth. He does not abandon the disobedient; he subjects them to discipline which may restore them to submission and to filial love.

III. THIS LANGUAGE IS PREDICTIVE OF FUTURE RECONCILIATION. As long as God says, "*My people*," there is hope for the future. He has not abandoned; he will not abandon. The city may be razed, but it shall be built again. There shall be captivity; but he deviseth means whereby his banished ones shall return. Wounds shall be healed. The grave shall give up her dead. The wanderer shall return, and shall be clasped to the Father's patient, yearning, rejoicing heart. "*My people*" are mine for ever.

APPLICATION. God in the midst of wrath remembers mercy. When sin is recognized and realized as such, when chastening has answered its purpose, when the disobedient are penitent and the rebellious are submissive, then is there hope. Not in any excellence connected with man's repentance, but in the grace of the Father's heart, in the faithfulness of the Father's promises. Not Israel alone, but mankind at large, are

designated by the Eternal "my people." Therefore he who sent his Son to seek and to save that which is lost is described as "the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe."—T.

Vers. 4-6.—*Covetousness.* It was not for heterodoxy in theology, it was not for remissness in ritual, that Amos chiefly reproached the Israelites. It was for injustice, violence, and robbery; it was for seeking their own wealth and luxury at the expense of the sufferings of the poor. Avarice, or undue love of worldly possessions, is a serious vice; covetousness, or the desiring to enrich self at the cost of neighbours, is something very near a crime, for to crime it too often leads.

I. THE MORAL DISEASE OF COVETOUSNESS. The symptoms may differ in different states of society; and there are details in the text which apply rather to the state of society in Samaria of old than to the England of to-day. But the malady is the same, deep-rooted in the moral constitution of sinful men. This sin is: 1. Injurious to the person who commits it. He who sets his affection upon this world's good, who carries his selfishness so far as to deprive, or even to wish to deprive, his neighbour of what is his—far more he who uses fraud or violence to gratify this desire—is working his own ruin. He is subverting the standard of value, by setting the material above the spiritual. He is dragging his aspirations down from the stars above his head to the dust beneath his feet. 2. Mischievous to society. If all men follow the example of the covetous, and long for the possessions of others, then human society becomes a den of wild beasts bent upon devouring one another, and earth becomes a very hell. Instead of being members one of another, in the case supposed, every man sees an enemy in his neighbour, and seeks his harm. The bonds of society are strained, are even broken. 3. Displeasing to God. In the ten commandments a place was found for the prohibition of this spiritual offence: "Thou shalt not covet." This fact is sufficient to show how hateful is this sin in the eyes of the great Lord and Ruler of all.

II. THE DIVINE REMEDY FOR COVETOUSNESS. 1. The recognition of the benevolence and bounty of God. From him cometh down "every good gift and every perfect boon." He is the Giver of all, who openeth his hands, and supplieth the need of every living thing. He who would share the Divine nature must cherish an ungrudging and liberal spirit. 2. The remembrance of the "unspeakable Gift," and of the incomparable sacrifice of the Redeemer. Our Saviour's whole aim was to impart to men the highest blessings, and in the quest of this aim he gave his life for us. His constraining love alone is able to extirpate that selfishness which in human nature is the very root of covetousness. 3. The adoption of the counsels and the submission to the spirit of Christ. It was his saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."—T.

Ver. 7.—*The memory of God.* This language is actual truth, although it is based upon and accords with the experience of created intelligences. Memory is one of the primitive endowments of intellect, admitted to be such even by philosophers, who are very loth to admit that the mind of man can possess any such endowments. A man who should never forget would indeed be a marvel, a miracle. But it would be inconsistent with our highest conceptions of God to suppose it possible for anything to escape his memory. In his mind there is, of course, neither past nor future, for time is a limitation and condition of finite intelligence. To the Eternal all is present; all events to him are one eternal now.

I. A GENERAL TRUTH CONCERNING THE DIVINE NATURE AND GOVERNMENT. Nothing is unobserved by God, and nothing is forgotten by him. All men's actions as they are performed photograph themselves indelibly upon the very nature of the Omniscient and Eternal. Nothing needs to be revived, for nothing ever becomes dim.

II. A SOLEMN TRUTH CONCERNING THE CONDUCT AND PROSPECTS OF THE SINFUL. Parents forget the wrong-doing of their children, and rulers those of their subjects. Hence many evil deeds escape the recompense which is their due. But Jehovah, who "remembered" (to use the expression necessarily accommodated to our infirmity) all the acts of rebellion of which the chosen people had been guilty, does not lose the record of any of the offences committed by men. On the contrary, they are written "in a book of remembrance"—a book one day to be unrolled before the eyes of the righteous Judge.

III. A PRECIOUS ASSURANCE CONCERNING THE GOOD PURPOSES AND ACTIONS WHICH GOD DISCERNES AND REMARKS IN HIS PEOPLE. Thus we find saintly men of old in their prayers beseeching the Lord to remember them: "Remember me, O Lord, for good;" "Remember me with the favour thou showest unto thy people." He who said, "I know thy works," who said, "I will never forget any of their works," is a Being to whom we may safely commend ourselves and all that is ours which he himself creates and which he approves.

APPLICATION. 1. In our confessions let us be frank and open with God, who searcheth the heart, and who forgetteth nothing. It would be folly to suppose that he forgets our sins; it would be wickedness to strive to forget them ourselves. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive." 2. In our prayers for pardon let us bear in mind that there is a sense in which he will "remember no more" the offences of his penitent and believing people. He will treat us as if he had forgotten all our rebellion, and as if he remembered only our purposes and vows of loyalty.—T.

Ver. 10.—"*A bitter day.*" There is something incongruous in this language. Day is the bright and beauteous gift of God, and its sunlight and all the glory it reveals may justly be taken as the emblem of happiness and prosperity. The light is sweet; the day is joyous. Yet here there is depicted a *bitter day*! The context makes it evident that this is attributable to sin, which makes all sweet things bitter, and all bright things dim.

I. THE BITTER DAY OF ISRAEL CONTRASTS WITH BYGONE DAYS OF SWEETNESS. Festivals and songs are mentioned in the context as distinctive of the religious life of the chosen people. And in times of national plenty and prosperity there had never been wanting abundance and even luxury, mirth and music, festivity and joy. These things have vanished into the past now that the "bitter day" has dawned.

II. THE BITTER DAY OF ISRAEL IS MARKED BY CIRCUMSTANCES OF TERRIBLE DISTRESS. The sun goes down, the land is darkened, mourning and lamentation are heard, sackcloth is worn, the hair is shaved off the heads lately anointed for the banquet and wreathed with flowers; the signs are those of "mourning for an only son." The fallen and wretched condition of the nation could not be depicted more graphically. The prophet-artist is skillful to heighten the dark colours which are expressive of Israel's woe.

III. THE BITTER DAY OF ISRAEL IS THE RESULT OF ISRAEL'S SINS. What is called misfortune and calamity is often really punishment. There was nothing accidental in what befell this nation. On the contrary, Israel brought disaster upon itself by unfaithfulness, disobedience, rebellion. As the people had sown, so they were to reap. Under the government of a just God it cannot be otherwise. The fruit of sin cannot be otherwise than bitter.

IV. THE BITTER DAY OF ISRAEL IS SUGGESTIVE OF LESSONS OF WISDOM TO EVERY NATION. The rule of a righteous God is a fact not to be disputed. The retributive consequences of that rule are not to be evaded. Let not the people imagine a vain thing, or the rulers take counsel together against the Lord.—T.

Ver. 11.—*Famine of the Word of God.* There are many blessings which are not suitably valued until they are withdrawn and missed. It is so with bodily health, with political liberty, with domestic happiness. And the prophet assumes that it will be found the same with the Word of God. When it is possessed—when the Scriptures are read and the Gospel is heard—it is too often the case that the privilege is unappreciated. But what must it be to be shut off from all communication with Heaven! And such, it was foretold, was to be the lot of Israel in the days of retribution and calamity which were about to overtake Israel.

I. THE WORDS OF GOD ARE TO THE SOUL AS BREAD AND WATER TO THE BODY. Man's bodily constitution is such that food and drink are a necessity to health and even to life; to be even partially starved is to be disabled and to be rendered wretched. Even so, the truth, the righteousness, the love of God, are the necessary aliment of the spiritual nature. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Fellowship with God by his Word is indispensably necessary in order that a high, holy, and acceptable service may be rendered.

II. A FAMINE OF THE WORD OF GOD IS TO BE DREADED AS DETRIMENTAL TO SPIRITUAL

LIFE AND WELL-BEING. 1. If the knowledge of God himself be withheld, there is for man no solution of all the mysteries of the universe, the mysteries of his being. 2. If the Law of God be concealed, there is no sufficient guide through human life. 3. If the gospel of Christ be withheld, there is no peace for the conscience, no sufficient inspiration for duty, no assurance of immortality. 4. If revelation be denied, there is no power, no principle sufficient to guide and to govern human society. (*Vide* 'The Eclipse of Faith,' by the late Henry Rogers, where a chapter "The Blank Bible," sets forth the consequences which may be supposed to follow upon the disappearance of the Holy Scriptures.)

III. THOSE WHO POSSESS THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD BY THESE CONSIDERATIONS BE INDUCED TO STUDY IT AND TO USE IT ARIGHT. Neglect of the Divine Word may not in our case entail the actual deprivation foretold in the text. But it certainly will entail an indifference and insensibility to the truth, which will be equally injurious and disastrous. Now the Word is ours; let us listen to it with reverence and faith; let us obey it with alacrity and diligence. "Walk in the light while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you."—T.

Vers. 1—3.—*Ripeness for judgment.* "Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit. And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit," etc. The text suggests three general truths.

I. WICKED NATIONS GROW RIPE FOR JUDGMENT. The "basket of summer fruit," now presented in vision to Amos, was intended to symbolize that his country was ripe for ruin. This symbol suggests: 1. That *Israel's present moral corruption was no hasty production.* The ripe fruit in that basket did not spring forth at once; it took many months to produce. It came about by a slow and gradual process. Men do not become great sinners at once. The character of a people does not reach its last degree of vileness in a few years; it takes time. The first seed of evil is to be quickened, then it grows, ripens, and multiplies until there is a crop ready for the sickle. 2. That *Israel's season for improvement was past and gone.* The ripened fruit in that basket had reached a stage in which improvement was impossible. The bloom was passing away, and rottenness was setting in. Nations become incorrigible. The time comes when it may be said—The harvest is past, all cultivation is impossible. What boots your sowing seed under the burning sun of July or August? The fructifying forces of nature will not co-operate with you. 3. That *Israel's utter ruin was inevitable.* Nothing awaited that "basket of summer fruit" but rottenness. Its decomposition was working, and would soon reduce it to putrescent filth. So it was with Israel.

II. TRUE PROPHETS ARE MADE SENSIBLE OF THIS RIPENESS. God gives Amos a vision for the purpose. "Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit. And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel." God always gives his true ministers a clear vision of the subjects of their discourse. This clearness of vision is in truth their call and qualification for their Divine mission. Men, alas! often assume the work of the ministry whose mental vision is so dim that they are unable to see anything with vivid clearness; hence they always move in a haze, and their language is circumlocutory and ambiguous. Amongst the vulgar, those who should be condemned for their obtuseness get credit for their profundity. To every true teacher God says at the outset, "What seest thou?" Hast thou a clear vision of this basket of summer fruit? Hast thou a clear idea of this subject on which thou art about to discourse? Thus he dealt with Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Paul, John.

III. ALMIGHTY GOD MAKES HIS PROPHETS SENSIBLE OF THE RIPENESS OF A PEOPLE'S CORRUPTION IN ORDER THAT THEY MAY SOUND THE ALARM. Why was Amos thus divinely impressed with the wretched moral condition of the people of Israel? Simply that he might be more earnest and emphatical in sounding the alarm. "The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more. And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence." What was the calamity he was to proclaim? 1. *Universal mourning.* "The songs of the temple shall be howlings." Where the shouts of mirth and the songs of joy had been heard, there should be nothing but the howlings of distress. The inevitable tendency of sin is

to turn songs of gladness into howlings of distress. 2. *Universal death*. "And there shall be many dead bodies in every place; and they shall cast them forth with silence." The reference is to sword, pestilence, and famine multiplying the dead so rapidly as to render impossible the ordinary decencies and ceremonies at funerals. "Cast them forth with silence."

CONCLUSION. How stands our country? Is not its moral depravity ripening in every direction? Is it not filling up its measure of iniquities, treasuring up wrath against the last day? Does it not become all true teachers to sound the alarm? The time seems past for crying, "Peace and safety." Destruction is at hand; the fields are white for harvest.—D. T.

Vers. 4—10.—*Avarice*. "Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail," etc. The prophet here resumes his denunciatory discourse to the avaricious oppressors of the people. The verses may be taken as God's homily to greedy men. "Hear this." Hush! pay attention to what I am going to say. Listen, "ye that swallow up the needy." The words suggest three remarks concerning avarice.

I. IT IS EXEORABLE IN ITS SPIRIT. 1. It is *sacrilegious*. "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?" Bad as Israel was, it still kept up the outward observances of religion, yet these observances they regarded as commercial inconveniences. In their hearts they wished them away, when they seemed to obstruct their greedy plans. With sacrilegious spirit, they treated religious institutions as worthless in comparison with sordid gain. Avarice in heart has no reverence for religion. 2. It is *dishonest*. "Making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit." It is always overreaching, always cheating; it generally victimizes the poor; it makes its fortunes out of the brain and muscles, the sweat and life, of the needy. 3. It is *cruel*. "Ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail. . . . That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes." Avarice deadens all social affections, steels the heart, and makes its subject utterly indifferent to all interests but its own; it will swallow up, or as some render it, gape after, the needy just as the wild beast pants after its prey. "Greedy men are a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw-teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from amongst men" (Prov. xxx. 14).

II. IT IS ABHORRENT TO JEHOVAH. "The Lord hath sworn by the Excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works." Some render the "Excellency of Jacob" the "Pride of Jacob," and suppose the expression to mean that Israel professed to regard him as its Glory; and therefore it is by himself that he swears, for he can swear by no one greater. God observes all the cruelties which avarice inflicts upon the poor. Nothing is more abhorrent to his benevolent nature than covetousness. One of the leading principles in his moral code is, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house," etc. Against no sin did his blessed Son preach more earnestly. "Take heed, beware of covetousness," said he (Luke xii. 15). He closes the gates of heaven against covetousness. "The covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven" (1 Cor. vi. 10). 1. It is *repugnant to his nature*. His love is disinterested, unbounded love, working ever for the good of the universe. Greed is a hideous antagonist to this. 2. It is *hostile to universal happiness*. He created the universe in order to diffuse happiness; but greed is against it. (1) It is against the happiness of its *possessor*. The soul under the influence of covetousness can neither grow in power nor be gratified in desire. Avarice is an element of hell. It is in truth one of the fiery furies of the soul. (2) It is against the happiness of *society*. It prompts men to appropriate more of the common good than belongs to them, and thus to diminish the required supplies of the multitude. It is the creator of monopoly, and monopoly is the devil of social life.

III. IT IS A CURSE TO SOCIETY. See what punishment comes on the land through this! "Shall not the land tremble for this," etc.? Observe: 1. How God makes nature an avenging angel. He makes "the land tremble." He "toucheth the hills, and they smoke;" pours out waters as a flood. He can make the world of waters deluge the earth as the overflowing Nile at times inundates the land of Egypt. He can (to use human language) roll back the sun. "I will cause the sun to go down at

noon." 2. How God makes a multitude to suffer on account of the iniquities of the few. "And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentations; and I will bring up sackcloth," etc.

CONCLUSION. Avoid covetousness. It is the chief of the principalities and powers of darkness. It may be considered the great fountain whence all the streams of crime and misery flow forth. It is eternally opposed to the virtue and happiness of the universe. The fable of Midas in Grecian mythology is strikingly illustrative of this tremendous evil. Bacchus once offered Midas his choice of gifts. He asked that whatever he might touch should be changed into gold. Bacchus consented, though sorry that he had not made a better choice. Midas went his way rejoicing in his newly acquired power which he hastened to put to the test. He could scarcely believe his eyes when he found a twig of an oak, which he had plucked, become gold in his hand. He took up a stone, and it changed to gold. He touched a sod; it did the same. He took an apple from a tree; you would have thought he had robbed the garden of the Hesperides. His joy knew no bounds; and when he got home he ordered the servants to set a splendid repast on the table. Then he found to his dismay that whether he touched bread, it hardened in his hand, or put a morsel to his lips, it defied his teeth. He took a glass of wine, but it flowed down his throat like melted gold. In utter terror, fearing starvation, he held up his arms shining with gold to Bacchus, and besought him to take back his gift. Bacchus said, "Go to the river Pactolus: trace the stream to its fountain-head; there plunge your head and body in, and wash away your fault and its punishment." Hence Midas learned to hate wealth and splendour.—D. T.

Vers. 11—13.—*Soul-famine*. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord," etc. The Israelites now despised the message of the prophets, and by a just retribution, in addition to all their other calamities, they should experience a total withdrawal of all prophetic communications. In whatever direction they might proceed, and whatever efforts they might make to obtain information relative to the issue of their trouble, they should meet with nothing but disappointment. The subject of these words is soul-famine, and they suggest three general remarks.

I. THAT THE PROFOUNDTEST WANT OF HUMAN NATURE IS A COMMUNICATION FROM THE ETHERAL MIND. This is implied in the Divine menace of sending a worse famine than the mere want of bread and water. They were *special* communications from himself, not the ordinary communications of nature, that Jehovah here refers to. And man has no greater necessity than this; it is the one urgent and imperial need. Two great questions are everlastingly rising from the depths of the human soul. 1. *How does the Eternal feel in relation to me as a sinner?* Nature tells me how he feels in relation to me as a creature; but nature was written before I fell. 2. *How am I to get my moral nature restored?* I have a sense of guilt that is sometimes intolerable; the elements of my nature are in eternal conflict; I have sadly terrible forebodings of the future. Now, the special Word of God can alone answer these questions. These are the problems of men the world over. God's Word is to the human soul what food is to the body—that which alone can strengthen, sustain, and satisfy. But as the soul is of infinitely greater importance than the body, the Divine Word is more needed than material food.

II. THAT THE GREATEST DISEASE OF HUMAN NATURE IS A LACK OF APPETITE FOR THIS COMMUNICATION. Which is the greater want of the body—the want of food, or the want of appetite for food? The latter, I trow, for the latter implies disease. It is so with the soul. The vast majority of souls have lost the appetite for the Divine Word. They are perishing, shrivelling up, for the lack of it. The desire is gone. They die, not for the want of the food, but for the want of appetite. As a rule, the starvation of souls is not for the lack of food, but for the lack of appetite. The worst of this disease is (1) men are not conscious of it; (2) it works the worst ruin.

III. THAT THE GREATEST MISERY OF HUMAN NATURE IS A QUICKENED APPETITE AND NO SUPPLIES. "They shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the Word of the Lord, and shall not find it." 1. *The appetite will be quickened sooner or later*. Sometimes—would it were ever so!—it is quickened here, where supplies abound. Hear Job's cry, "Oh that I knew

where I might find him!" And hear Saul's cry at Endor, "Bring me up Samuel." Oh for one word from his lips, one loving sentence from the mouth of the great Father! "Bring me up Samuel." 2. When the appetite is quickened and there is no supply, *it is an inexpressible calamity*. Such a period will come. "The days shall come," says Christ, "when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it" (Luke xvii. 22). And again, "Ye shall seek me, and not find me: for where I am, thither ye cannot come" (John vii. 34). Oh miserable state of immortal souls, to be crying to the heavens, and those heavens to be as hard as brass!—D. T.

Ver. 14.—*Religious sincerity*. "They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth; and, The manner of Beersheba liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again." "The sin of Samaria" means the idolatry of Samaria. In Samaria they worshipped the golden calf as the chief object; but it would seem there were other inferior idols. The god of Dan was the golden calf set up by Jeroboam in Dan (1 Kings xii.). "The fulfilment," says Delitzsch, "of these threats commenced with the destruction of the kingdom of Israel and the carrying away of the ten tribes into exile in Assyria, and continues to this day in the case of that portion of the Israelitish nation which is still looking for the Messiah, the Prophet promised by Moses, and looking in vain because they will not hearken to the preaching of the gospel concerning the Messiah who appeared as Jesus." The words suggest a thought or two in relation to religious sincerity.

I. THAT RELIGIOUS SINCERITY IS NO PROOF OF THE ACCURACY OF RELIGIOUS CREED. These Israelites seem to have been sincere in their worship of the golden calf; "they swore by it." That dumb idol to them was everything. To it they pledged the homage of their being. Yet how blasphemously erroneous, how contrary to the express mandate of Jehovah, "Thou shalt have none other gods but me"! How contrary to the dictates of common sense and all sound reasoning! Idolatry, in every form and everywhere, is a huge falsehood. Hence sincerity is no proof that a man has the truth. There are millions of men in all theologies and religions, who are so sincere in believing lies, that they will fight for their lies, make any sacrifice for their lies, die for their lies. Error, perhaps, can number more martyrs than truth. Saul of Tarsus was sincere when he was persecuting the Church and endeavouring to blot the name of Christ from the memory of his age. "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," etc. (Acts xxvi. 9). Hence sincerity is not necessarily virtuous. A man is sincere when he is faithful to his convictions; but if his convictions are unsound, immoral, ungodly, his sincerity is a crime. The fact that thousands have died for dogmas is no proof of the truth of their dogmas.

II. THAT RELIGIOUS SINCERITY IS NO PROTECTION AGAINST THE PUNISHMENT THAT FOLLOWS ERROR. "They shall fall, and never rise up again." The sincerity of the Israelites in their worship in Bethel and at Dan prevented not their ruin. There are those who hold that man is not responsible for his beliefs—that so long as he is sincere he is a truthful man, and all things will go well with him. In every department of life God holds a man responsible for his beliefs. If a man takes poison into his system, sincerely believing that it is nutriment, will his belief save him? Error leads evermore to disappointment, confusion, and oftentimes to utter destruction. To follow error is to go away from reality; and to leave reality is to leave safety and peace.

CONCLUSION. Whilst there is no true man without sincerity, sincerity of itself does not make a man true. When a man's convictions correspond and square with everlasting realities, then his sincerity is of incomparable worth.—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IX.

Vers. 1-10.—§ 6. *The fifth vision displays the Lord standing by the altar and commanding the destruction of the temple* (ver. 1). No one shall escape this judg-

ment, flee whither he will (vers. 2-4); for God is Almighty (vers. 5, 6). Their election shall not save the guilty Israelites; still they shall not be utterly destroyed (vers. 7-10).

Ver. 1.—I saw the Lord. It is now no longer a mere emblem that the prophet sees, but actual destruction. He beholds the majesty of God, as Isa. vi. 1; Ezek. x. 1. Upon (or, by) the altar; i.e. the altar of burnt offering at Jerusalem, where, it is supposed, the whole nation, Israelites and Judæans, are assembled for worship. It is natural, at first sight, to suppose that the sanctuary of the northern kingdom is the scene of this vision, as the destruction of idolatry is here emblemized; but more probably Bethel is not meant, for there were more altars than one there (ch. iii. 14), and one cannot imagine the Lord standing by the symbol of the calf-worship. *Smita*. The command is mysteriously addressed to the destroying angel (comp. Exod. xii. 13; 2 Sam. xxiv. 15, etc.; 2 Kings xix. 35). The lintel of the door; *τὸ ὑακρίσιον* (Septuagint); *cardinem* (Vulgate); better, *the chapter* (Zeph. ii. 14); i.e. the capital of the columns. The word *kaphor* is used in Exod. xxv. 31, etc., for the knop or ornament on the golden candlesticks; here the idea is that the temple receives a blow on the top of the pillars which support it sufficient to cause its overthrow. The LXX. rendering arises from a confusion of two Hebrew words somewhat similar. The posts; *the thresholds*; i.e. the base. The knop and the threshold imply the total destruction from summit to base. Cut them in the head, all of them; rather, *break them [the capital and the thresholds] to pieces upon the head of all*. Let the falling building cover them with its ruins. The Vulgate renders, *avaritia enim in capite omnium*, confounding two words. Jerome had the same Hebrew reading, as he translates, *questus eorum, avaritia*, as if giving the reason for the punishment. The overthrown temple presents a forcible picture of the destruction of the theocracy. The last of them (ch. iv. 2); *the remnant*; any who escape the fall of the temple. He that fleeth, etc. All hope of escape shall be cut off.

Ver. 2.—The thought of ver. 1 is further expanded, the notion of flight being, as Jerome says, dissected. For dig, the LXX. reads, “be hidden;” but the expression implies a breaking through (Ezek. viii. 8). *Hell* (*Sheol*) is supposed to be in the inmost part of the earth (comp. Ps. cxxxix. 7, 8; Obad. 4). *Take them*. To receive punishment.

Ver. 3.—The top of Carmel. Among the woods and thickets. There are no caves on the summit of Carmel. “Amos tells us that in his day the top of it was a place to hide in; nor has it changed its character in this respect. . . . I would not have been prompted to place ‘the top of Carmel’ third in such a series of hiding-places, yet I can fully appreciate the comparison from my own experi-

ence. Ascending from the south, we followed a wild, narrow wady overhung by trees, bushes, and tangled creepers, through which my guide thought we could get up to the top; but it became absolutely impracticable, and we were obliged to find our way back again. And even after we reached the summit, it was so rough and broken in some places, and the thorn-bushes so thick-set and sharp, that our clothes were torn and our hands and faces severely lacerated; nor could I see my guide at times ten steps ahead of me. From such biblical intimations, we may believe that Carmel was not very thickly inhabited” (Thomson, ‘The Land and the Book,’ Central Palestine, p. 237, etc.). Other writers speak of the occurrence of caves and deep valleys in the Carmel range. In the bottom of the sea. Both this and heaven (ver. 2) are impracticable hiding-places, and are used poetically to show the absolute impossibility of escape. *Serpent* (*nachash*, elsewhere called *leviathan* and *tannin*, Isa. xxvii. 1), some kind of sea-monster supposed to be venomous. Dr. Pusey mentions that certain poisonous hydrophidæ are found in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and may probably infest the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

Ver. 4.—Captivity itself, in which state men generally, at any rate, are secure of their lives, shall not save them from the sword (Lev. xxvi. 33; Deut. xxviii. 65, etc.; comp. Tobit i. 17, 18; ii. 3, where we see that the murder of captives was not unusual). The prophet looks forward to the Assyrian deportation. For evil. The people are indeed subject to God’s special attention, but only in order to punish them (Ps. xxxiv. 15, 16; Jer. xlv. 11).

Ver. 5.—To confirm the threats just uttered, the prophet dwells upon God’s omnipotence, of which he gives instances. He who will do this is the Lord God of hosts. There is no copula in the Hebrew here. (So ch. iv. 13; v. 8.) This title, *Jehovah Elohim Zebaoth*, represents God not only as Ruler of the heavenly bodies, but as the Monarch of a multitude of heavenly spirits who execute his will, worship him in his abiding-place, and are attendants and witnesses of his glory (see note on Hag. i. 2). Shall melt; *σαλεύων* (Septuagint); comp. Ps. xli. 6; xcvi. 5; Micah i. 4; Nah. i. 5. The expression denotes the destructive effects of the judgments of God. Shall mourn. The last clauses of the verse are a repetition of ch. viii. 8, with some slight variation.

Ver. 6.—*Stories*; *ἀράβασιν* (Septuagint); *ascensionem* (Vulgate); *upper chambers*, or the stages by which is the ascent to the highest heavens (comp. Deut. x. 14; 1 Kings viii. 27; Ps. civ. 3). *His troop* (*aguddah*); *vault*. The word is used for “the bonds”

of the yoke in Isa. lviii. 6; for "the bunch" of hyssop in Exod. xii. 22. So the Vulgate here renders *fasciculum suum*, with the notion that the stories or chambers just mentioned are bound together to connect heaven and earth. But the clause means, God hath founded the vault or firmament of heaven upon (not *in*) the earth, where his throne is placed, and whence he sends the rain. The Septuagint renders, *τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν αὐτοῦ*, "his promise." So the Syriac. **The waters of the sea.** The reference is to the Deluge (ch. v. 8; Gen. vii. 4, 11).

Ver. 7.—Israel's election to be God's people should not save them, unless their conduct corresponded with God's choice. If they obeyed not, they were no better in his eyes than the heathen, their delivery from Egypt had no more significance than the migration of pagan nations. Here is a contrast to ch. vi. 1, etc. The children of Israel were now no dearer than the children of the Ethiopians (*Cushites*). The Cushites are introduced as being descendants of the wicked Ham, and black in complexion (as Jer. xiii. 23), the colour of their skin being considered a mark of degradation and of evil character. **The Philistines from Caphtor; from Cappadocia** (LXX. and Vulgate). This rendering is mistaken. The immigration spoken of took place before the Exodus (see Deut. ii. 23; Jer. xlvii. 4); and Caphtor is either Crete (see Dillman on Gen. x. 14) or the coast-land of the Delta, "which was occupied from an early period by Phœnician colonists, and thus came to be known to the Egyptians as *Keft ur*, or 'greater Phœnicia,' Keft being the Egyptian name of Phœnicia" (*Monthly Interpreter*, iii. 136). Mediæval Jewish writers identified it with Damiatta (Conder, 'Handbook to the Bible,' p. 237). **The Syrians (Aram, Hebrew) from Kir; robes** *Σύροις ἐκ Κίρρου*, "the Syrians out of the ditch" (Septuagint); *Syros de Cyrene* (Vulgate); see note on ch. i. 5. "Aram" here probably means the Damascenes, Damascus shortly before the time of Moses having been occupied by a powerful body of immigrants from Armenia (Ewald, 'Hist. of Israel,' i. 286, 311, Eng. transl.).

Ver. 8.—**The sinful kingdom.** The kingdom of all Israel and Judah, the same as the house of Jacob just below, though a different fate awaits *this*, regarded as the covenant nation, whose are the promises. **Destroy it**, etc., as was threatened (Deut. vi. 15). **Saving that.** In spite of the destruction of the wicked people, God's promises hold good, and there is still a remnant who shall be saved (Jer. xxx. 11).

Ver. 9.—**For, lo!** He explains how and why the whole nation is not destroyed. **I will sift.** Israel is to be dispersed among the nations, tried and winnowed among

them by affliction and persecution, that the evil may fall to the ground and perish, and the good be preserved. The word rendered "sift" implies "to shake to and fro;" and this shaking shall show who are the true Israelites and who are the false, who retain their faith and cleave to the Lord under all difficulties, and who lose their hold of true religion and assimilate themselves to the heathen among whom they dwell. These last shall not return from captivity. **The least grain;** Hebrew, *teeror*, "pebble;" so the Vulgate, *lapillus*; Septuagint, *σύντριμμα*, "fragment." It is used in 2 Sam. xvii. 13 of small stones in a building; here as hard grain in distinction from loose chaff (Keil). The solid grain, the good wheat, are the righteous, who, when the chaff and dust are cast away, are stored in the heavenly garner, prove themselves of the election, and inherit the promises (comp. Isa. vi. 13; Ezek. xx. 38; Matt. iii. 12). **Fall upon the earth;** i.e. perish, be lost (1 Sam. xxvi. 20).

Ver. 10.—If any are to be saved, it will not be the sinners; they need not flatter themselves that their wilful blindness shall secure them. **The evil shall not overtake.** They lulled themselves into a false security, and shut their ears against the warnings of the prophets; but that would avail them nothing. **Prevent;** come upon suddenly, surprise.

Vers. 11-15.—**Part IV. EPILOGUE. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEW KINGDOM AND THE REIGN OF MESSIAH. THE KINGDOM SHALL EMBRACE ALL NATIONS** (vers. 11, 12), **SHALL BE ENRICHED WITH SUPERABUNDANT SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS** (vers. 13, 14), **AND SHALL ENDURE FOR EVER** (ver. 15).

Ver. 11.—**In that day.** When the judgment has fallen. The passage is quoted by St. James (Acts xv. 16, 27), mostly from the Greek, in confirmation of the doctrine that the Church of God is open to all, whether Jew or Gentile. **The tabernacle** (*sukkah*); *hut*, or *tent* (as Jonah iv. 5); no palace now, but fallen to low estate, a "little house" (ch. vi. 11). The prophet refers probably to the fall of the kingdom of David in the ruin wrought by the Chaldeans. Interpreted spiritually, the passage shadows forth the universal Church of Christ, raised from that of the Jews. Pusey notes that in the Talmud Christ is called "the Son of the fallen." **The breaches.** The house of David had sustained breaches under the hands of Jeroboam and Joash, and in the severance of the ten tribes at the hands of Assyrians and Chaldees; these should be repaired. Unity should be restored, the captives should return, and another kingdom should be established under another

David, the Messiah. Judah's temporary prosperity under Uzziah and Hezekiah would have been a totally inadequate fulfilment of the prophecy. Prophecies of the temporal and spiritual are, as usual, blended together and run up into each other. **His ruins.** The destroyed places of David. **I will build it;** Hebrew, *her*. The whole Jewish Church (comp. Jer. xxxi. 4; xxxiii. 7). **As in the days of old.** The days of David and Solomon, the most flourishing times of the kingdom (2 Sam. vii. 11, 12, 16). In the expression, "of old," Hebrew, "of eternity," may lurk an idea of the length of time that must elapse before the fulfilment of the promise. Septuagint, *Ἀνοικοδομήσω αὐτὴν καθὼς αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ αἰῶνος*, "I will build it up as are the days of eternity." This seems to signify that the building is to last for ever.

Ver. 12.—**That they** (the true children of Israel) **may possess the remnant of Edom;** i.e. those who were nearest in blood, and yet most hostile of all men. David had subdued the Edomites (2 Sam. viii. 14; 1 Kings xi. 16), and Amaziah had inflicted a great slaughter upon them (2 Kings xiv. 7); but later they recovered their independence (2 Kings xvi. 6, where "Edomites" should be read for "Syrians;" 2 Chron. xxviii. 17), and were actively hostile against the Jews. It was on this account that they were emphatically denounced by Obadiah. "The remnant" is mentioned because, according to the threat in ch. i. 11, 12, they would be punished so that only a few would escape. The Septuagint gives, *Ὅπως ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων [τὸν κύριον, Alexandrian]*, "That the remnant of men may earnestly seek the Lord," regarding Edom as a representative of aliens from God, and altering the text to make the sense more generally intelligible. This version, which reads "Adam," *men*, instead of "Edom," is endorsed by St. James. **Which are called by my Name;** "over whom my Name hath been called" (Septuagint). This is closer to the Hebrew; but the meaning is much the same, viz. all those who are dedicated to God and belong to him being by faith incorporated into the true Israel. (For the phrase, comp. 2 Sam. xii. 28; Isa. iv. 1; and to illustrate the idea, refer to Deut. xxviii. 10; Isa. xlv. 5; Ps. lxxxvii. 5, 6.) The Messianic kingdom shall be established in order that salvation may be extended to all nations who embrace it. **Saith the Lord; is the saying of Jehovah.** This is added to show the immutability of the promise. The covenant-God himself hath predicted it.

Ver. 13.—The prophet expatiates upon

the rich blessings which shall follow the establishment of the kingdom. Under the figure of a supernatural fertility are represented the victories of grace (comp. Isa. xi. 6; Ezek. xxvi. 10, etc.; xxxiv. 25, etc.). The blessing is founded on the Messianic promise (Lev. xxvi. 5). The ploughman shall overtake the reaper. Ploughing and harvest shall be continuous, without sensible interval. The treader of grapes him that soweth seed. The vintage should be so abundant that it should last till sowing-time. **The mountains shall drop sweet wine.** This is from Joel iii. 18. **And all the hills shall melt.** As Joel says, "shall flow with milk," in this promised land "flowing with milk and honey." Septuagint, *πάντες οἱ βουνοὶ σύμφυτοι ἔσονται*, "all the hills shall be planted" with vines and olives. For, as Corn. à Lapidé quotes, "Bacchus amat colles" (Virg., 'Georg.,' ii. 113). The hyperbolic expressions in the text are not to be taken literally; they depict in bright colours the blessings of the kingdom of Messiah. Material and temporal blessings are generally represented as closely connected with spiritual, and as figurative of them. Such predictions, understood literally, are common in the so-called Sibylline Books; see e.g. lib. iii. 743, etc., where, among other prodigies, we have—

Πηγὰς τε ῥέξει γλυκερὰς λευκοῖο γάλακτος.

One is reminded of the golden age depicted by Virgil in his fourth eclogue. Trochon cites Claudian, 'In Rufin,' i. 381, etc.—

" . . . nec vomere sulcus adunco
Findetur; subitis messor gaudebit aristas.
Rorabunt querceta favis; stagnantia passim
Vina fluent, oleique laos."

Ver. 14.—**I will bring again the captivity;** i.e. I will repair the misery which they have suffered. The expression is here metaphorical, and does not necessarily refer to any restoration to an earthly Canaan. **Shall build the waste cities** (Isa. liv. 3). All these promised blessings are in marked contrast to the punishments threatened (Deut. xxviii. 30, 33, 39; compare similar promises in Isa. lxxv. 21, etc.).

Ver. 15.—The blessing shall last for ever. **They shall no more be pulled up.** This was not true of the literal Israel; it must be taken of the spiritual seed, planted in God's land, the Church of Christ, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. "Lo," says Christ, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20)

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1-4.—*A quest which none may elude.* We have here a vivid picture of a dreadful subject. The prophet makes a new departure in his mode of figuration. In other visions we saw the judgments of Heaven painted in terror-moving forms; the mighty forces of nature let loose and working destruction on sinners of men. Here we see, not judgments merely, but the Judge himself, active for destruction, fulminating his thunders, brandishing his two-edged sword, and spreading devastation where his anger rests. It is true all natural forces are his instruments, and their results his work. But they do not so reveal themselves to our sense. It is Scripture that shows us an omnipotent God in the forces of nature, and in every disaster they work a judgment from his hand.

I. THE GOD OF ISRAEL STANDING ON AN IDOL-ALTAR. Not the altar of God at Jerusalem, but the altar for calf-worship at Bethel, is probably here referred to. *God's standing on the idol-altar is not for purposes of fellowship.* That would be a moral impossibility. "What concord hath Christ with Belial? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" Not light and darkness are less compatible, not fire and water more inherently antagonistic, than the great God, who "is all in all," and the idol which is "nothing in the world." *Neither is it in token of tolerance.* Between the two can be no peace, no truce, no parley. "God is a jealous God," and can have no rival. His sovereignty and supreme greatness make him necessarily intolerant here. There can be no Dagon on any terms where the ark rests. *It is for purposes of destruction only.* "There, where, in counterfeit of the sacrifices which God had appointed, they offered would-be-atoning sacrifices and sinned in them, God appeared standing, to behold, to judge, to condemn" (Pusey). When God approaches sin, it is only to destroy it. Sometimes he destroys it in saving the sinner; sometimes the sin and the sinner, hopelessly wedded, are destroyed together.

II. IDOLATERS' JUDGMENT BEGINNING AT THEIR IDOL-SHRINE. "Smite the lintel," etc. This is the natural course. The lightnings of judgment strike the head of the highest sin, and strike it in the provision made for its commission. And there is a fitness in this Divine order. 1. *It stops the worship.* With the appliances destroyed, the observances could not go on. The interruption of sin is an intelligible and appropriate object of Divine judgment. The most effectual punishment of criminal indulgence is a visitation that stops it perforce. If not cured, at least the evil is stayed. 2. *It reveals the Divine hand.* Two plagues had passed on Egypt without any very deep impression having been made. But when Moses smote the dust, and it became lice on man and beast, the magicians said unto Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." The miracle stopped at once the entire ceremonial of their national worship by making all the priests unclean. The idols were confounded, and Jehovah's power revealed. When a man finds his sufferings in the seat of his sins, he has materials for identifying them as the visitation of God.

III. THIS JUDGMENT FOLLOWING THEM INTO ALL THEIR RETREATS. (Vers. 2, 3.) Driven in terror from their idol-shrines, men seek escape in diverse ways, according to their diverse characters and surroundings. But it is a vain quest. The God who is omnipresent to infallible saving effect in the case of his saints (Ps. cxxxix. 8-12) is so also to the inevitable destruction of the ungodly. One climbs the heaven of proud defiance, to be brought ignominiously down (Jer. xlix. 16; Obad. 4). Another "breaks through into the hell" of abject fear and self-abasement, to be dragged forth into the intolerable light. The Carmel of philosophic nescience presents no cave or grove impenetrable by the hounds of righteous judgment. Even the sea of deeper sinful indulgence has a serpent of avenging providence in its depths, from whose bite there is no escape.

IV. THIS JUDGMENT REACHING THEM THROUGH THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF ALL NATURAL CAUSES. The "sword," as representing human agency, and the "serpent," as representing the agency of natural causes, are both set in motion by God's command. The causes of nature are to God as the bodily organs to the brain, viz. servants to do his bidding. He "acts himself into them." Human wills are accessible to the will of the Supreme, and move with it as the tides with the circling moon. The Assyrian

warring against Israel for his own reasons is, nevertheless, the rod of his anger in the hand of Israel's God. This fact gives moral significance to many events that seem purely natural. The drunkard's bloated body, the sensualist's shattered health, the spendthrift's ruined fortunes, are results of natural laws, it is true, but of these directed and combined by supernatural power, and accomplishing Divine moral ends. The evil that comes through nature comes from its God.

Ver. 4.—*The lidless eye.* God is not an absentee. He sits at the helm of things. He administers the affairs of the world which he has made. All creatures he takes cognizance of, determines their destiny, controls their actions. His kingdom ruleth over all. And this rule is moral. Under it condition takes the colour of character. God is pure to the pure, froward to the froward (Ps. xviii. 26). This transgressors know to their bitter cost.

I. GOD'S EYE FOLLOWS THE WICKED. In one sense his "eyes are upon the righteous" (Ps. xxxiv. 15). On the wicked they rest in a very different sense. 1. *In heedfulness.* Divine omniscience is an uncomfortable fact which the wicked try not to realize. "They seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord." Their whole aim is to get away from him; to be able to think thoughts he shall not know, and cherish desires he shall not sift, and do works he shall not observe (John iii. 20; Isa. xl. 27). But the project is futile (Jer. xxiii. 24; Ps. xxxiii. 13; Prov. xv. 3). God is everywhere, sees everything, fills heaven and earth. No dispensation of inadvertency is possible. God will not ignore. He cannot be inattentive. Events of whatever kind, and everywhere, are infallibly submitted to his cognizance as the movements of the clouds above are faithfully mirrored in the glassy lake. He fills all things, and all that happens happens in his presence. 2. *In perfect insight.* "I the Lord do search the heart." Noticing things, God sees them through and through, discerns their character, and appraises their moral value. The mind and heart of man are no mystery to him. No slightest motion of either eludes his perfect knowledge. The purpose before it comes forth in action, the thought before it has matured into a purpose, the fancy before it has taken shape in evil desire,—all these are open to his eye. Even to the heathen he was *totus oculus*, a Being "all eye." He knows all things eternally, immeasurably, immutably, and by a single act; and men and their works and words and wishes are continually in his sight. 3. *In uncompromising displeasure.* God is passible. He can be affected by the actions of his creatures. His possession of genuine character ensures his genuine feeling. The moral perfection of that character ensures his feeling appropriately. "There must be so much or such kind of passibility in him that he will feel toward everything as it is, and will be diversely affected by diverse things according to their quality" (Bushnell). Therefore "he is angry with the wicked every day." Sin is to him as smoke to the eyes and vinegar to the teeth. It pains him inevitably, and leads to that infinitely pure recoil of his nature from evil, and antagonism to it, in which his wrath consists.

II. GOD'S INFLUENCES FOLLOW HIS EYE. "I set mine eye upon them for evil," etc. God's look brings evil consequences where it falls on evil things. 1. *To feel is with God to act.* Much human feeling comes to nothing. No action is taken on it. Its very existence may remain unspoken. Not so with God. It is a result of his perfection that his mental or moral attitude toward any object is his active attitude toward it also. Disposition associates itself inevitably with suitable action. Feeling against sin, he must also act against it. His very feeling is equivalent to action, for his volition is power, and to will a thing is to bring it to pass. 2. *God's action exactly answers to his feeling.* If he regard sin as evil, he will not treat it as good. His attitude towards it must be one all round, and therefore rigorous all round. And so it is. Whatever mystery may be about certain cases, there is no mystery about the connection between all suffering and sin. In sickness, in sorrow, in anxiety, in doubt, in all forms and degrees of pain, God's eye and hand are on sinners for evil. Until sin becomes congenial to his nature, it cannot become satisfactory to the sinner.

III. GOD'S MERCY WARNS THE SINNER OF BOTH. He makes no secret of his attitude and way in reference to sin. Both are made known to those whom they most concern. 1. *This course is merciful.* It gives the sinner an advantage. He sees the moral quality of sin as hateful in God's sight, and its inevitable result as provoking his

hostile action. He can neither sin ignorantly nor incur the penalty unawares. Forewarned, it is his fault if he is not forearmed. 2. *It is moral.* It tends to deter from sin, and so to save from its penal consequences. The thought that it is under God's eye ought to make sin impossible, and does make it more difficult. The knowledge that it ends inevitably in ruin does much to stay the transgressor's hand. 3. *It is judicial.* Sin done consciously under God's eye, and deliberately in defiance of his wrath, is specially guilty. The warning which being heeded might have deterred from sinning will greatly aggravate the guilt of it if disregarded. The truth will be, as we treat it, a buoy lifting us out of the sinful sea, or a millstone sinking us deeper in its devouring waters.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The image of the Deity in "great nature's open eye."* God's wrath "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness." And it is terrible as it is great. Impotent anger is ridiculous, but the wrath of Omnipotence overwhelms. Whatever, therefore, illustrates the power of God adds terror to his threat. And such is the effect of this passage. The stern purport of the previous condemnation is emphasized by the moving picture it presents of the Divine majesty and resistless might. Omnipotent resources will push forward to full accomplishment the purposes of Omniscience against doomed and abandoned Israel. We have here—

I. GOD'S NAME REVEALING HIS CHARACTER. This is the object of a name. It distinguishes the bearer from others, and this by expressing some leading characteristic. 1. *The Lord.* This is the word invariably substituted by the Jews for *Jehovah* in the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is a name of authority, and means "the supreme Lord." The Lord is over all. He is Governor and Judge in one. He does as it pleases him. He disposes of all matters, and settles all interests without appeal. He reckons with none, and none can call him to account. 2. *Jehovah.* This is a verb, third person, signifying "he is," and another form of the name "I am," by which God revealed himself to Moses. Its root-idea is that of "undervived existence;" then, as arising out of this, "independent action;" and then, as the corollary of both, "eternity and unchangeableness" (see Fairbairn). It is thus the proper name of God to man; self-existent himself, the Author of existence to all persons and things, and manifesting his existence to those capable of knowing it. *Jehovah* is the concrete and historical name of God. As revealed by it, he exists by his own energy, and makes to be all things that are. Absolute and undetermined, he determines absolutely all things outside himself. Unseen and invisible, he comes forth—concretes himself, as it were—in the works which his hands have made. 3. *Jehovah of hosts.* This title appears first in 1 Sam. i. 3, and, as has been remarked, "simultaneously with the foundation of the Jewish monarchy." It may mean Lord of (Israel's) armies (Ps. xlv. 9), or of celestial beings (Ps. cxlviii. 2), or of the heavenly bodies (Isa. xl. 26), or, more probably, of all three. In this wide sense we "see in the title a proclamation of the universal sovereignty of *Jehovah*, needed within the nation, lest that invisible sovereignty should be forgotten in the visible majesty of the king; and outside the nation, lest *Jehovah* should be supposed to be merely a national deity" (Kirkpatrick, on 1 Samuel). This is the God whose eye is for evil on Israel—God supreme, God absolute, and God in special relation to the hosts of Israel who had forsaken him, to the heavenly bodies which they worshipped, and to the angel-hosts, the ministers to do his will on those whom he would visit in wrath.

II. GOD'S OPERATIONS REVEALING HIS WAY. What God does is a criterion of what he can do. His all-pervading activity will include in its sweep the accomplishment of the destiny again and again announced. 1. *He occupies the sky.* "Who buildeth his stories," etc. There were, according to a rabbinical theory, seven heavens, the seventh containing the throne of the Eternal, symbolized by Solomon's throne of ivory and gold, the six steps leading up to which symbolized in turn the six celestial regions below the highest heaven (1 Kings x. 18—20). In terms of this mystic theory is the expression, "stories of the heaven." Heaven is conceived of as a giddy height, approached by aerial steps or stages, all of them the handiwork of God. He stands on the "cloud-capped towers." He dwells in the "airy palaces." He walks on the "fleece-like floors." He makes the different levels of the firmament steps between his throne and the earth below. 2. *He metamorphoses the earth.* (Ver. 5.) God's word

brought order out of chaos at first. "He spake, and it was done," etc. By the same word, turning order into chaos again, shall all things be dissolved (2 Pet. iii. 10, 11). It is little for the word that makes and unmakes, that created and will dissolve the frame of nature, to move in earthquake upheaval the solid crust of earth till it mimicks the roll of the sea, or "Nile's proud flood" in its rise and fall. 3. *He distributes the waters of the sea.* The sea is the most stupendous natural object. There is majesty in all its moods, and awe in its very presence. Hence in the mythology a god was allocated to it, brother to Zeus, the god of heaven and earth, and second only to him in power. And God's "way is in the sea." He rules its waves. He regulates its myriad currents and restless tides. Its great throbbing pulse beats but at his will. He holds its waters in the hollow of his hand, and concentrates or disperses them as it pleases him. He is a God, then, "whose wrath is terrible." Every force of nature he not alone controls, but wields an instrument of his will. In ch. v. 8 the same fact is pled as an inducement to seek his favour, which here appears as a reason to dread his wrath. As the same locomotive will drive the train before it or draw it after it at the engineer's will, so the fact of the omnipresent energy of God is fitted alike to alarm and to attract, but in either case to bring the sinner to his feet.

III. PHYSICAL CONVULSIONS THE COUNTERPARTS OF MORAL CONVULSIONS. Events in the two worlds happen according to similar if not identical laws. To a discriminating eye, the one set rises up in the likeness of the other, created so by God. "He daily buildeth his stories in the heavens when he raiseth up his saints from things below to heavenly places, presiding over them, ascending in them" (Pusey). "He toucheth the earth, and it melteth," when he stretches out his hand in wrath on its inhabitants, and men's hearts fail them for fear. "He calleth to the waters of the sea, and poureth them out over the earth," when he makes the wicked the rod of his anger to overrun and vex society (Ps. xciii. 3, 4). Verily the God who makes the heavens his throne, the earth his footstool, the elements his playthings, and men and angels his ministers, is a Being in whose favour is life and whose power is terrible.

Vers. 7—10.—*The exalted brought low.* "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father." And yet the blind and infatuate Israel were always saying it. They said it in view of every imminent catastrophe. They said it in abbreviation of all argument. They said it in lieu of fit and seasonable action. They made it an amulet to hang around their neck when they rushed purblind into rebellious action. They ran into it as into an intellectual joss-house, where any absurdity was raised to the dignity of a god. This last support of their false security the prophet in this passage knocks away. They had acted altogether out of character, and now—

I. APOSTATE ISRAEL CAN ONLY TAKE RANK WITH THE HEATHEN IN GOD'S ESTIMATION. National election was, no doubt, a pledge of national preservation, but only in connection with national faithfulness; for: 1. *A spiritual relation with the unspiritual is impossible.* "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" It is a moral impossibility. They are moral opposites and incompatible in the nature of things. Becoming assimilated to the heathen, Israel contracted themselves out of the covenant, and became "afar off," even as they. 2. *A relation, when it is repudiated on either side, virtually terminates.* Israel had said, "We will not have this Man to rule over us;" and the relation of favour on the one side and fealty on the other could not survive the step. God must cease to be their God when they ceased to be his people. "God chose them that they might choose him. By casting him off as their Lord and God, they cast themselves off and out of his protection. By estranging themselves from God, they became as strangers in his sight" (Pusey). 3. *Acts done because of a spiritual relation existing lose their meaning when it is broken off.* "Have I not brought Israel," etc.? They might think that, after bringing them out of Egypt, God could never disown them, however unfilial and unfaithful. But had not the circumstances of their idolatry and corruption altered the case? Theirs was not the only exodus. He had brought "the Philistines out of Caphtor, and the Syrians out of Kir;" yet these nations were aliens, and to be destroyed (ch. i. 5). If Israel conformed itself to these in character and way, then Israel's exodus would lose its significance, and be no more than events of a like kind in their distant past. What the father did for the son is no binding precedent for the case of the prodigal.

II. ACCORDINGLY, ISRAEL SHALL FARE AS THE HEATHEN DO WHO FORGET GOD. Grouping Israel like to like with heathen, God's attitude must be the same to both. They shall be treated: 1. *As the objects of God's displeasure.* He is angry with the wicked every day. He is angrier with those of them who sin against light and privilege. He is angriest with the spiritual renegades whose disaffection is guilty in proportion to the strength of the ties it sets aside. 2. *As the victims of his destroying judgments.* (Ver. 8.) "And I will destroy it off the face of the earth." Strange words from a God visibly in covenant. But the covenant was broken. The theoretically "holy nation" was actually a "sinful kingdom." Israel's character was not the character to which covenant promises referred. Heathenish in corruption, what but the bolts forged for their pagan kin could fall upon their heads? 3. *This in the character of defiant transgressors.* (Ver. 10.) "Not because they sinned aforetime, but because they persevered in sin until death" (Jerome, in Pusey). Sin may be forgiven, but impotence never. The unpardonable sin is unforsaken sin.

III. THE JUDGMENT THAT SHALL DESTROY THE WICKED MASS SHALL LEAVE A RIGHTEOUS REMNANT. (Ver. 8.) "Except that I shall not utterly destroy the house of Jacob." God ordains no indiscriminate destruction. His bolts strike his enemies. Of his friends: 1. *Not one shall perish.* "Not even a little grain falls to the ground." The Divine nature, of which the righteous are partakers, is indestructible. The life of the saint is a living Christ within him (Gal. ii. 20). Christ "is alive for evermore" (Rev. i. 18), and says to all in whom he is as their life, "Because I live, ye shall live also." In a mixed community the righteous sometimes die for the fault of the wicked; but their death is precious in God's sight (Ps. cxvi. 15), and "not an hair of their head shall perish." 2. *They shall be sifted out of the mass.* (Ver. 9.) In these graphic words the righteous minority are corn, and the corrupt masses the chaff. The nations are the sieve, and the Divine judgments the shaking of it. The result is not destruction of the grain, but separation between it and the chaff. "In every quarter of the world, and in well-nigh every nation in every quarter, Jews have been found. The whole earth is, as it were, one vast sieve in the hands of God, in which Israel is shaken from one end to the other. . . . The chaff and dust would be blown away by the air; . . . but no solid corn, not one grain, should fall to the earth" (Pusey). So in other cases. God's judgments winnow men, discerning clearly between clean and unclean. When the storm is over, the seaworthy vessels are easy of identification, for they alone survive. 3. *Their own sinfulness shall be sifted out of them.* "What is here said of all God doth daily in each of the elect. For they are the wheat of God, which, in order to be laid up in the heavenly garner, must be pure from chaff and dust. To this end he sifts them by afflictions and troubles" (Pusey). Suffering is not purifying *per se*. But the suffering of the righteous is (Heb. xii. 11; 1 Cor. iv. 17). It subdues the flesh, deepens our sense of dependence on God, spiritualizes our thoughts, and tests, and by testing strengthens, faith (1 Pet. i. 7). In the night of suffering come out the stars, guiding, consoling, irradiating the soul.

"Then fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long—
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong."

Vers. 11, 12.—*The rebuilding of the waste places.* "God hath not cast away his people, which he foreknew," as the cumulative series of woes announced might seem to indicate. As a people they conspire, rebel, and cast him off, and as a people they are scattered, decimated, and disowned. In their corporate character they cannot longer survive. But there were individuals among them who had either remained loyal or come back to their allegiance, and these stood in a different position. Not only would they be spared, but made the nucleus of a new people, and their existence the occasion of a new dispensation. Such is the burden of these verses. The sinners are destroyed, and a new prosperity blooms for the faithful remnant that survives. The waifs of the national wreck are drawn in safety from the waves, and the desolated land is renovated for their home.

I. THE RESTORATION OF DAVID'S HOUSE. David's house here is not merely the

dynasty of David, but the kingdom of David, and this as a type of the kingdom of Christ. Its restoration, in the ultimate sense, is accomplished only in the establishment of the Messianic kingdom which it symbolized. "The raising up of the fallen hut of David commenced with the coming of Christ and the founding of the Christian Church by the apostles" (Keil). Interpreting the passage thus, the rabbis adopted "the Son of the fallen" as one of the titles of Christ. 1. *This house has degenerated into a fallen hut before its true dignity is reached.* Judah shrinks into a petty province, the royal line is represented by a carpenter's wife, and the Jewish Church is a little flock with many a black sheep, ere the set time to favour Zion comes. "Strange comment on human greatness, that the royal line was not to be employed in the salvation of the world until it was fallen. The royal palace had to become the hut of Nazareth ere the Redeemer of the world could be born, whose glory and kingdom were not of this world" (Pusey). 2. *Its restoration will be to a state of ideal perfection.* The "breaches" would be repaired, and the "ruins" rebuilt, with the effect of making it "as in the days of old;" i.e. restoring it so as to embody the original design. This restoration to an as yet unrealized ideal could be only spiritual, and the Restorer Jesus Christ. The "hut" into which the "palace" had deteriorated (2 Sam. v. 11) was transformed into a far more glorious structure when Christ sat "upon the throne of David to order it," etc. (Isa. ix. 7; Luke i. 32, 33). The ideal of the Davidic kingdom is realized in the Christian Church; there fully, and there only. 3. *This restoration will be a work of Divine power.* "In the days of these kingdoms shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed" (Dan. ii. 44). The Church, composed of Spirit-quickened men, is the creature of God as no political kingdom can be. Redeemed by Jesus Christ, quickened by the Holy Ghost, made one in the white heat of heavenly grace, it is altogether a Divine thing. Every energy it has is God-given; every grace is Spirit-wrought. In this is the special glory of the Jerusalem which is above. And when, among the ruins of a Hebrew monarchy, there rises, radiant in the beauties of holiness, the kingdom of our God, then indeed the bricks are changed to hewn stones, and the sycamores to cedars, and the palace of David is rebuilt as in the days of old.

II. THE WIDE CIRCLE OF INTERESTS TO BE ADVANCED BY THIS RESTORATION. "The restoration was not to be for themselves alone. No gifts of God end in the immediate objects of his bounty and love. They were restored in order that they, the first objects of God's mercies, might win others to God" (Pusey). Those brought in were to be: 1. *Gentiles as well as Jews.* (Ver. 12.) James, in his speech at the council of Jerusalem (Acts xv. 14-17), declares the fulfilment of this prophecy in the calling of the Gentiles. Edom, as the nation most hostile to the Jews and furthest from David's house, is put by a natural figure for the whole Gentile world. The "remnant of Edom," whether mystic or natural, are the few called in each case out of the many (Matt. xx. 16; ch. i. 12). "All the nations," etc., is a fuller and more literal statement of the ingathering of "the fulness of the Gentiles," when God brings his sons from afar, and his daughters from the ends of the earth. The gospel kingdom is to be the universal kingdom, "filling the whole earth," covering it with the knowledge of God, and making it, as the home of righteousness, a transfigured place. 2. *The Gentiles by means of the Jews.* "That they may take possession," etc. It is in Abraham and his seed that the nations are blessed. In our spiritual freedom and fulness of privilege we may not forget that Christ who founded the Church, the apostles who preached the kingdom of God and organized it, and the holy men who wrote the Scriptures as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, were, almost without exception, Jews. It is thus that "out of Zion has gone forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." To those we owe to the Jews there are no earthly obligations parallel, and the time of their grafting in again is one for which by every tie we are bound to pray. 3. *Both these in virtue of a Divine appropriating act.* "And all the nations upon which my Name is called;" i.e. appropriated, or marked as God's own (Gen. xlviii. 16; Deut. xxviii. 9, 10; Jer. xv. 16). Those whom God saves are such as he has graciously chosen to be his own. "Whom he did foreknow them he also called." Salvation is the evolution of an external plan, which in turn is the expression of Divine electing love.

III. GOD'S PURPOSE IN THIS MATTER POTENTIALLY A FACT. "Saith Jehovah who doeth this." 1. *The Divine energy is the efficient cause of events.* Second causes are

not independent of or co-ordinate with the First Cause, but the instruments in its hands. Behind all and in all is the Divine Omnipotent energy, the ultimate cause, direct or indirect, of whatever is. 2. *The Divine word pledges the exercise of this Divine energy.* God's word is absolute truth. It cannot be broken. If it goes before, the corresponding act will follow. As well divorce the lightning from the thunder as the work from the word of God. When he says, and what he says, and as he says, he does infallibly. 3. *The Divine will constitutes the Divine energy.* God wills all things into existence. His choosing that a thing shall be brings it to pass. What a source of unfailing consolation is this fact to the gracious soul! Its rich future is assured. Omnipotent power and unchanging truth have the issue in hand, and miscarriage is not to be named.

Vers. 13—15.—*Out of the shadow into the sun.* Israel's atmosphere has cleared. The thunders are silent. The storms are blown out. The clouds are scattered. The shadow of "the great doom's image" has lifted. And now the sun comes out in the clear shining after rain. We look forth on a new land of promise, a land from which the curse of God and the track of the destroyer have disappeared. The ruins are rebuilt. The waste places bloom. The fields throw teeming crops, beyond the harvester's power to gather. The erewhile sinful and down-trodden people are prosperous and pure and free. It is a scene of idyllic beauty and peace—a happy *finale* to the dark storm-times that have gone before. This time will be—

I. A TIME OF TEEMING PLENTY. Figures of unheard-of fertility and abundance are multiplied. 1. *Seed-time and harvest should overlap.* "The ploughman shall overtake the reaper," etc. With a certain difficulty of defining the exact idea here, the general purport of the language is plain. The teeming crops could scarcely be gathered till another seed-time had come, or else growth would be so quick that the harvest would begin as soon as the seed-time was over. So Shakespeare—

"Spring come to you at the farthest
In the very end of harvest."

This rich promise was not now recorded for the first time. Conditionally on obedience, it had been made by the mouth of Moses seven centuries before (Lev. xxvi. 5). But, absolutely made, it assumes a new value now. And as the events in it are altogether impossible in the natural world, it must obviously be taken in a spiritual sense. The plenty, like the previously threatened famine (ch. viii. 11), was not to be one of bread and water, but "of hearing the words of the Lord." In the spiritual sphere the seed-time and the harvest may come together. The man who goes forth with seed may return with sheaves (Ps. cxxvi. 6). Indeed, the Samaritan fields were "white unto harvest" (John iv. 35), when, as yet, the sowing had only begun. In such a case poetic figure becomes literal truth, and Zion, as soon as she travails, brings forth (Isa. lxvi. 7, 8). 2. *The mountains should drop wine spontaneously.* The vineyards of Israel were on the mountain-slopes. Of the plethora of over-rich grapes with which they would be loaded many would burst, and in the spontaneous discharge of their juice the mountains would literally "drip new wine." This process, in its spiritual analogue, is more wondrous and delightful still. Spiritual plenty has its inevitable and enriching overflow. "Freely have ye received, freely give." Spiritual character is always imparting of itself in spiritual influence. From the gracious lip there drops continually the new wine of "a word in season." And the religious life, "lived not for ourselves," is a tide of helpful action beating perpetually on the shore of others' lives. 3. *The hills should dissolve themselves in the products they yield.* This is the force of the expression, "All the hills shall melt." The rich earth throws its own substance into the teeming crops it bears. The richer it is the larger proportion of its substance is expended in this process. Pure leaf-mould would, in this way, almost totally disappear, transforming itself entirely into grain or fruit. In the spiritual sphere self-surrender for others is a law of life. Christ gave himself, and Christians give themselves, for men. "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you" (2 Cor. xii. 15) is the philosophy, not alone of Paul's, but of all Christian living. The gracious heart expends itself in helpful action. The sum-total of philanthropic effort in the world is just the concentered spiritual energy of the godly company.

II. A TIME OF NATIONAL RESTORATION. (Ver. 14.) Each term here has a spiritual

reference, and the whole has an ultimate spiritual fulfilment. This comes: 1. *Generally, in the breaking of every yoke by Christ.* Sin is bondage—enthrallment by the devil, the world, and the flesh. Ceremonialism was bondage—subjection to “weak and beggarly elements” in symbolic and wearisome observance. From both Christ comes a Liberator. He “makes an end of sin” in every aspect; “destroying the devil,” “delivering from this present evil world” (Gal. i. 4), and fulfilling his righteousness in men “who walk not after the flesh.” He abolishes type, substituting for it the thing typified: for the shadow, the substance; for the Law, “grace and truth.” 2. *For individuals, when the Son makes them free.* Spiritual bondage cannot survive believing union with Christ. His blood dissolves the chains of guilt. His Spirit breaks the bonds of indwelling sin. Acceptance with God is not conditioned on an impossible obedience to the whole Law, “for we are not under the Law, but under grace” (Rom. vii. 6). The life of self-surrender is not made burdensome by a carnal nature, “for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death.” The conditions of the life of joyous fellowship are presented in the inwrought spirit of adoption, and the “Abba, Father” of the free, on Spirit-opened lips (Rom. viii. 15, 21; John iv. 18). They are free indeed, whom, trebly loosing thus, the Son makes free. 3. *For the nation, when brought into the Church during the millennial era.* Their conversion in the latter days is distinctly and repeatedly foretold (Hos. iii. 4, 5; Rom. xii. 12, 15, 23; 2 Cor. iii. 16). National restoration this may not strictly be, but it is more than equivalent to it. When the long-wandering return, when the hearts cold and embittered for ages glow with heavenly love, when the veil drops that hung on mind and sense, when the broken-off branches are set again in the good old olive tree, a spiritual fulfilment will have come of Amos’s words, more glorious than any literal or local one, as the glory of the second temple exceeds the glory of the first.

III. A TIME OF RESETTLEMENT IN THEIR OWN LAND. (Ver. 15.) In three classes of events, come or coming, we have as many steps in the fulfilment of this promise. 1. *The return from the Babylonish exile.* The captivity was God’s final, because effective, disciplinary measure. Israel was thoroughly sickened with heathen gods and heathen ways. Osiris and Isis in Egypt, and Baal and Ashtaroth in Palestine, had won, almost without wooing, an attachment which, in Babylon, Bel and Nebo could not so much as stir. The last and bitterest prescription had succeeded, and soon the patient, cured abroad, was ordered home. Amidst tremendous difficulties, Jerusalem was repaired, the temple rebuilt, and the land in a measure resettled, and so an approximate fulfilment of Amos’s glowing prophecy realized (Ezra vii. 13, etc.). 2. *The calling of the Gentiles.* They are the spiritual Israel, the true children of Abraham (Gal. iii. 7—9). They throw off the yoke of the mystic Babylon; “possess the kingdom for ever” (Dan. vii. 8—22); “inherit the earth,” as their own land; repair the ruins, and restore the spiritual wastes left by sin; and they revel in “the feast of wines on the lees,” etc. “Throughout the world Churches of Christ have arisen which, for the firmness of faith, may be called cities; for the gladness of hope, vineyards; and for the sweetness of charity, gardens” (Pusey). 3. *The future restoration of the Jews to Palestine.* This is foretold (Ezek. xxxviii. 25; xxxvi. 28; xxxvii. 25). God does the work (Ezek. xxxiv. 11—13) through the legal agency (Isa. xlix. 22; lvi. 20). “They are to be nationally restored to the favour of God, and their acceptance publicly sealed by their restoration to their land” (David Brown, D.D.). Converted Israel will be eminent alike in character and influence in the millennial Church (Isa. lix. 21; lvi. 19; Ezek. xxxix. 29; Micah v. 7). Held again by the old people, her cities rebuilt, her grandeur restored, her broad acres reclaimed and fertile, and, above all, Jesus Christ on the throne of the nation’s heart, Palestine will be indeed “the glory of all lands.”

IV. ALL THIS SECURED BY INFALLIBLE GUARANTEE. There is no romancing with inspired men. What they say is coming, as God is true. The pledge of this is: 1. *God’s character.* “Saith Jehovah,” i.e. “the One who is.” He is Reality as against the seeming, Substance as against the typical, Veracity as against the deceiving, Faithfulness as against the changeful. As being Benevolent he is true, human happiness depending on confidence in his character. As Independent he is true, being above all possible temptation to deceive. As Unchangeable he is true, falsehood being essentially a change of character. As Omnipotent he is true, the use of moral agents in free and yet infallible execution of his purposes being possible only as his Word is a

revelation of his thought. 2. *His existing relation.* "Thy God." Not a God unknown. Not a God apart. Not a God untried. In his present attitude, his covenant relation, his past deeds, in all such facts is "confirmation strong." The God they connect themselves with is a God to trust. His perfections are the strands, and his relation their twining together, in the cord of confidence not quickly broken, which binds the soul to his eternal throne.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Inevitable judgment.* The thought of the Divine omniscience is a welcome thought to the friend, the child of God. But to the impenitent transgressor no thought is so distasteful, so distressing. If he cannot persuade himself that there is no God, he at all events hopes that the Divine eye does not rest upon him, that he is overlooked and forgotten. This vain refuge of sinners is discovered and destroyed by the revelation of this prophecy. The idolatrous temple shall be dismantled, the idolatrous altar shall be overthrown, when the Lord enters into controversy with unfaithful Israel. And in that day the sinful and deluded worshippers and priests shall be scattered. Whether slain or carried into captivity, none shall escape the eye or elude the chastening hand of the God who has been defied or forgotten. Every individual shall be dealt with upon the principles of eternal justice.

I. THE FOOLISH AND VAIN ENDEAVOURS OF SINNERS TO AVOID THE RECOMPENSE OF THEIR INIQUITY. The language of the prophet is vigorous and poetical. He pictures the smitten and scattered Israelites as delving into the abyss, as soaring to the heights of heaven, as hiding in the caves of Carmel, as crouching beneath the waters of the ocean; and all in vain. This figurative language represents the sophistry and the self-deception and the useless wiles and artifices by which the discovered sinner seeks to persuade himself that his crimes shall be unpunished.

II. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE. We are reminded of that ancient acknowledgment, "Thou God seest me!" as we read this declaration, "I will set mine eyes upon them." The psalmist, in the hundred and thirty-ninth psalm, has given us the most wonderfully impressive description which is to be found even in sacred literature of the omnipresence and the omniscience of God. Next to that description, for vigour and effectiveness, comes perhaps this passage of the prophecies of Amos. At every point and at every moment the universal and all-comprehending Spirit is in closest contact with every created intelligence; and that presence which may be discerned in operation wherever any work of God in the realm of nature is studied, is equally recognizable in the intellectual, the spiritual kingdom. Every conscience is a witness to the ever-present, all-observing Deity.

III. THE CONSEQUENT CERTAINTY OF THE CARRYING OUT OF ALL THE REGAL AND JUDICIAL DECISIONS OF THE DIVINE RULER. The circumstances of Israel led to the application of this great principle to the case of the sinful and rebellious. It was a painful duty which the prophet had to perform, but as a servant of God he felt that there was no choice left him. It was his office, and it is the office of every preacher of righteousness, to say unto the wicked, "Thou shalt surely die."—T.

Ver. 7.—*National pride and presumption.* It is usual for nations to boast of their history, their position, their great qualities, their good fortune, their invincibility. We know this from our own observation of the nations of modern times. And in this respect all ages seem alike. There were, no doubt, very peculiar grounds for self-confidence and boastfulness on the part of the Jews. Yet such dispositions and habits were again and again censured and condemned by the inspired servants of Jehovah.

I. IT IS A BROAD GENERAL FACT THAT THE MOVEMENTS OF NATIONS ARE UNDER THE GUIDANCE OR SUPERINTENDENCE OF THE ALMIGHTY RULER. Amos is directed to point out that what was true of Israel in this respect was equally true of the Cushites, the Philistines, and the Syrians. In the case of all these nations there had been remarkable migrations and settlements. The hand of God is recognized in one as much as in the other. The Hebrews are sometimes charged with narrowness and vanity in their interpretations of Divine providence. Doubtless many of them may be justly so

charged. But the language of Amos is a proof that the enlightened Jews took a far wider view. There is no contradiction between general and special providence. The nations of men, because they are men, are subject to the control and direction of God. Not one tribe is unworthy of his regard. In what manner, and to what extent, the great Ruler interposes in the political affairs of peoples it is not for our limited wisdom to decide. But the petty notion that one favoured nation enjoys the protection and guidance of Heaven, whilst other nations are neglected and uncared for, is utterly inconsistent with the teaching of the text.

II. THE GUIDANCE AND PROTECTION WHICH NATIONS HAVE ENJOYED IN THE PAST IS NO GROUND OF EXEMPTION FROM THE OPERATION OF THE MORAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD. There were those in Israel who deemed it incredible that a nation so favoured as theirs had been could possibly be called upon to experience defeat, conquest, captivity, disaster. But the fact is that great privileges simply place men upon a higher level of responsibility. To whom much is given, of them will much be required. Unfaithfulness is the one great ground of censure, condemnation, punishment. Israel had sinned in separating from Judah, in setting up rival altars at Dan and Bethel, in introducing an alien religion, idolatrous sacrifices and worship, in giving way in times of prosperity to luxury, pride, covetousness, and ambition. All the mercies accorded to their forefathers could not release the Israelites from the obligation to maintain the pure religion of Jehovah, and to keep his laws and ordinances. Nor could they be a ground for exemption from the action of those laws of Divine government which are universal in their operation, and disciplinary and morally beneficial in their tendency. The Captivity and the dispersion were conclusive proofs that there is no favoritism in the administration of God's rule; that his laws are not to be defied with impunity by the most privileged of nations. Presumption is irrational and foolish, and is the sure, swift road to destruction.—T.

Ver. 9.—*Sifting and salvation.* If any prediction could convince the reader of the Old Testament that the prophets spoke and wrote under a supernatural inspiration, surely this prediction must possess this virtue. The history of Israel, not only in times immediately following upon those of Amos, but throughout the centuries which have since elapsed, is just a fulfilment of this language. How picturesquely and forcibly is the truth presented under this similitude, so natural as employed by one familiar with all the processes connected with husbandry!

I. THE PROVIDENTIAL SIFTING APPOINTED FOR THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL. 1. It has been determined by the Divine Ruler and Lord. "I will command," says Jehovah. Men may trace the history of the Jews with the design of showing that all the events which have occurred to that people are explicable upon ordinary principles, that Israel drops into its place when marshalled by the enlightened philosopher of history. But beneath all such theory there is an explanation which satisfies the intelligence of the thoughtful and devout student of God's Word: the Lord has ordered it. 2. It has taken place in different lands, and throughout lengthened periods. "Among all the nations," was the expression of the inspired prophet. The successive invasions of Palestine, the conquest of Israel and then of Judah, the captivity into the East, the settlements in Assyria and in Persia, the partial restoration to the land of promise, the subjection of Palestine to successive conquerors, and its subjugation by the Romans, the dispersion among the Gentiles, the scattering of the sons of Israel amongst the nations, alike in the East and the West,—these are but some of the more salient points in a history the most remarkable, the most romantic, and yet the most painful, in the annals of mankind. 3. It has been ordained for a purpose of a moral and beneficial character. Sifting is for the purpose of separating the chaff and refuse from the pure grain. A process of sifting, winnowing, tribulation (in the literal meaning of that word), has been going on throughout the ages. Even yet the purposes of God are very partially accomplished, for the process is continued; nor is there any sign of its immediate termination.

II. THE DIVINE PRESERVATION OF THOSE SUBJECTED TO THIS TRIAL. Not a grain shall drop out of sight and perish. It is a wonderful paradox—sifting and salvation, trial and protection, scattering and gathering, alike experienced. Yet the marvellous story of the chosen people supports to the letter this ancient representation. It is the

simple, actual, literal truth. 1. This protection is apparent in the preservation of the Israelites during the Oriental captivity. This was even made to minister to the religious purity and enlightenment of a nation previously inclined to fall into idolatrous worship. 2. We recognize it equally in the preservation and the national or tribal distinctness of the Jews in the ages which have elapsed since the destruction of Jerusalem. The corn has been sifted, but the grain has not been lost. "Whom he scattereth he shall gather." 3. There is a fulfilment of this inspired declaration in the individual conversions to God which have from time to time taken place among those who have been trained among the unbelieving and rebellious. As a nation Israel has never ceased to endure chastening. But members of the community, individual sons and daughters of Jacob, have again and again been seen to turn unto the Lord whom their fathers grieved by their ingratitude and insensibility. Precious grains have thus been preserved and gathered into the garner and saved. 4. Such cases are an earnest of a more complete fulfilment of the prediction. So—such is the assurance of the Christian apostle—"all Israel shall be saved."—T.

Ver. 10.—*The folly of self-confidence.* The conduct of these Israelites, and their fate, may well stand as a beacon of warning to all who have heard the Word of God with indifference and unbelief.

I. THE REASONS WHICH SHOULD PROMPT THE SINNER TO CONCERN. 1. The voice of his own conscience assures him of guilt and ill desert. 2. The warnings of Scripture should not be lost upon him, and revelation abounds with such warnings uttered upon the highest authority. 3. The examples of the impenitent who have been overtaken by judgment and destruction enforce the faithful admonitions of Holy Writ.

II. THE EXPLANATIONS OF THE SINNER'S SELF-CONFIDENCE AND PRESUMPTION. It is unquestionable that there are many who say, "The evil shall not reach nor overtake us." How can this be accounted for? 1. The voice of conscience may be silenced or unheeded. 2. The warnings of Scripture may be utterly disregarded. 3. The sinner may think rather of those instances in which judgment has been delayed than of those in which it has been hastened and fulfilled.

III. THE WISDOM AND DUTY OF IMMEDIATE REPENTANCE. 1. God's Word will certainly be verified. 2. No human power can save the impenitent. 3. The time of probation is short, and may nearly have expired.—T.

Ver. 11.—*The reconstruction of the tabernacle of David.* The reference is probably not to that tabernacle which was replaced and superseded by the temple of Solomon, but to the house of David. The booth or hut may well serve as an emblem of the depressed state of the Jewish monarchy and people, not simply as they were in the time of Amos, but as the prophet foretold that they should be in days about to come. The language is very expressive, and depicts a restoration very complete. Breaches shall be closed, ruins shall be repaired, the structure shall be rebuilt. The fortunes of the people of David must indeed be dark for a season, but a brighter day shall surely dawn.

I. THE MOST GLORIOUS FULFILMENT OF THIS PROPHECY WAS IN THE ADVENT OF THE DIVINE SON OF DAVID. Jesus was recognized by the people as the descendant and successor of their national hero. They shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" He himself made the claim, only that he asserted that he was not only David's Son, but also David's Lord. Like David, he was "after God's heart;" like David, he sang praises unto God in the midst of the Church; like David, he overcame the enemies of Jehovah and of his people; like David, he reigned over the nation of Israel. But unlike David, he was Divine in his nature and faultless in his character; unlike David, he was rather a spiritual than a worldly Conqueror; unlike David, he was King, not over one people, but over all mankind. In Christ the true Israel has found more than the Israel "according to the flesh" lost in David's removal.

II. THE MAIN PROOF OF THIS FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY IS TO BE FOUND IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MESSIAH'S SPIRITUAL KINGDOM. Time has given an interpretation to this language which was impossible beforehand. How truly the house of David has been more than rebuilt, the kingdom of David more than re-established, is apparent to every observer of what has occurred in the Christian centuries. The

kingdom of the Redeemer is : 1. Spiritual. In which respect it is more admirable and more glorious than that of David, which was founded upon the sword, and whose sway was over, not the heart, but the outward life. 2. Universal. For whilst David reigned over a strip of Syrian territory, Christ's empire is vast, and is widening year by year. "The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." 3. Everlasting. The few brief glorious years of David's reign were prophetic of that sway which shall endure for ever. Of Christ's kingdom "there shall be no end."—T.

Vers. 13—15.—*The golden age.* Nothing short of inspiration can account for such a close to such a book. Throughout his prophecies Amos has been exposing national sinfulness, threatening Divine chastisement, picturing the degradation, the desolation, the captivity of the kingdoms of Israel and of Judah. How comes it that he is able to transcend this distressing representation? to look beyond these gloomy clouds? to discern, whether far or near, the vision of a smiling earth, a happy people, a splendid prosperity, an eternal joy? It is not the force of human reasoning; it is not the impulse of delusive hope. No; it is the presence of the Divine Spirit that has purged the prophet's spiritual vision, so that he sees the glory yet to be; it is this that touches the prophet's tongue, so that the wail of sorrow and distress is changed into the shout of triumph and the song of joy.

"The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return;
The earth doth, like a snake, renew
Her winter weeds outworn;
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream."

I. THE PICTURE OF PROSPERITY. The inspired poet presses into the service all the resources of nature laid open to him by long years of observation and of fellowship. We notice as depicted : 1. The fruitfulness of the soil. The crops of corn, the summer vintage, follow each other in quick succession. From the laden vineyards and adown the sunny slopes flow rivers of delicious wine. The boughs of the trees are weighed down with fruit. For the tillers of the soil and the dwellers in the cities there is "enough and to spare." 2. The peopling of the towns and villages. The banished ones have returned. The once-silent streets resound with the noise of traffic, with the voices of men, with the songs of the happy. 3. Security and perpetual possession. No longer do the dwellers in the fenced cities arm themselves and man their walls against the foe; no longer do the husbandmen dread the incursions of marauders. Quiet resting-places and a sure habitation are secured by the goodness of Providence. Earth seems transformed into primal Paradise.

II. THE REALITY WHICH THIS PICTURE REPRESENTS. 1. By many interpreters this vision of peace and happiness is deemed predictive of national prosperity still awaiting the scattered children of Israel. The land of promise shall again flow with milk and honey. Jerusalem shall again be the seat of a mighty kingdom. The hills of Judah and the plains of Ephraim shall again be tilled by the children of Jacob. A converted Israel shall—from the Mediterranean to the Jordan, and from the Jordan to the desert, from the heights of Lebanon to the river of Egypt—witness to the faithfulness of the Eternal, to the Messiah long rejected, but now and henceforth to be held in honour and to be served with devotion. Planted, and no more to be plucked up, the chosen people shall flourish like the green bay tree, like the cedar in Lebanon. 2. Other interpreters pass straight from this vision of prosperity and gladness to the spiritual prospect which it opens up to the eyes of the believers in God's Word, of the disciples of Christ. There is peace of which the seat is the conscience, the heart, of man. There is plenty for the satisfaction of man's deepest wants. There is a sure abiding-place for the faithful in the care and love of the Eternal. There is a kingdom which is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." There is a city of which every renewed man becomes a denizen, nay, an immortal citizen. There is prosperity in which the poor, the feeble, the despised may share. And there are songs of gladness and of thanksgiving in which all the redeemed and saved shall join.—T.

Ver. 9.—*The winnowing of God.* "For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." Introduction: The free use made by Amos of all the scenes in nature. We may learn from the text three lessons.

I. THAT AMONG THOSE CALLED BY A RELIGIOUS NAME THERE EXISTS A GREAT DIVERSITY OF CHARACTER. "I will sift . . . as corn is sifted." If corn were gathered as manna was—pure, unmixed with deleterious or useless elements—no sifting would be needed. But it grows with other growth; thistles, poppies, darnel, etc., and it seems impossible to keep the field perfectly clean. In the physical, as in the moral, world the false grows beside the true, and the evil beside the good; and God's own law is, "Let both grow together until the harvest." Indeed, during their growth it is difficult to distinguish these. You may mistake tares for wheat, fool's parsley for the garden herb, poisonous fungi for edible mushrooms, and so forth, and only discover your error by serious or even fatal consequences. The mystery of the coexistence of good and evil, then, runs through nature. It is seen in character. "All are not Israel who are of Israel," or are called by that sacred name. Let us now exemplify this from a comparison of the times of Amos with our own. 1. *Idolaters were among the prophet's hearers.* They had deliberately turned from Jehovah. They held that it was a wise policy on the part of Jeroboam I. to prevent the people going to Jerusalem. They were convinced that the calves at Bethel gave a centre to their national life; and therefore, from motives political and worldly, many of them said, "These be thy gods, O Israel." Knowing as they did the history of their fathers, and the laws and ceremonies of the Mosaic institutes, they sinned against the light. Yet they still called themselves "Israel," and they were not marked out by external sign from the true people of God. No brand was on their foreheads, no curse fell on their homes, no fire of judgment overwhelmed them with destruction; but they were amongst the sleek, successful men of Samaria. In this Christian land, and in our Christian congregations, may still be found those who have forsaken God and made unto themselves other gods. Sometimes, for example, a man deifies wealth. His thoughts are concentrated on it, and his full energies are directed to its attainment. To claims made on his generosity he turns a deaf ear; over scruples about the forsaking of righteousness and mercy he rides roughshod. If at last he succeeds he says, "It is my power, and the might of my hand, that has wrought this." Yet prayerless, godless, as such men are, they still call themselves by the Christian name. 2. *Amos spoke to others who were simply indifferent to religion.* They considered that the questions debated between the true and false prophets were professional questions, with which they had no personal concern. Worshipping neither the calves nor Jehovah, their wish was to glide quietly through life, winning for themselves such enjoyment as was possible. Describe the attitude of many towards religion in our day—occasionally attending worship, knowing nothing of the meaning of it, and taking their chance as to the unseen future. They are known, not to us, but to God. 3. *Some in the days of Amos had the character as well as the name of "Israel."* They dared not, could not, go up to Jerusalem. But their families were instructed in the Scriptures. They thought of the old days when Jehovah was universally acknowledged as the Lord, and, like Jacob, they prayed in an agony of supplication, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." These belonged not only to the "kingdom" but to the "house" of Israel, on which God would have mercy. (See the promise to this effect, distinguishing between the "kingdom" and the "house," in ver. 8.) Such are still to be found. In business, because of their integrity and charity, their name is as ointment poured forth. In the homes, as instructors of their children, they are preparing blessings for the world. In the sanctuary their praises wing their way to heaven, and in prayer they are princes "having power with God." Now, these differing characters were and are mingled, as are the tares and wheat. They are even united, as are the chaff and the corn, and therefore the day of sifting and separation must come. It has not come yet. When corn is ripening and flowers are blossoming it is useless to send in the weeders. When the reapers are busy their scythes must cut down all growths alike. There is no time then for separation, but it comes at last. You see a heap of winnowed corn in the granary; the weeds have been burned, the straw is gone, and all the chaff is scattered. So Israel was to be scattered by persecution, war, and captivity; but not one grain of God's wheat should fall upon the ground. (Text.)

II. THAT THERE ARE TESTING-TIMES IN WHICH SUCH DIVERSITY ASSERTS ITSELF. The earth is here represented as a great sieve, in which Israel should be ceaselessly tossed, that the evil might be lost and the good saved. The process is still carried on. There are testing-times here, and there will be a testing-time hereafter. 1. *Preaching*, for example, sometimes so disturbs conscience, that on self-examination the man sees what is true and false in his character. Many a hearer has thus been led to ask, "Am I as the chaff which the wind driveth away?" 2. *Affliction* is a sieve for testing character. Job was an example of this. His distresses revealed him to himself and to his friends; and not a grain of wheat (of that which was worth preserving) was lost. Show how this is still true of the afflicted. Illness, bereavement, losses, etc., lead to serious thought, and while they sometimes destroy unfounded hopes, they give more confidence in that "hope which is the true anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast." 3. *Temptation* is a revealer of character. Compare the text with our Lord's words, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." What a revelation to Peter of his weakness and presumption was his denial! Illustrate by the story of the two houses, built, the one on the rock, the other on the sand (Matt. vii. 24—27). Thus we may test ourselves. If the opportunity offers itself to gratify some passion secretly, without the least risk of detection, is the reply, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" or is the opportunity gladly seized to enjoy "the pleasures of sin for a season"? 4. *Persecution* tests character. It is easy to deceive ourselves when all our associations are religious. But let these be changed for worldly, sceptical, or immoral surroundings, and the reality of our religious life is proved. Then, either we say, "We must obey God rather than man," and our character is ennobled by the struggle, or the old prayer is omitted, the old Bible neglected, and the old influences blotted out of memory. All such tests as we have mentioned are sent in mercy, to lead to self-examination, and, if need be, to repentance; but Christ draws the veil of the future, and tells us further of a day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and: 5. *When the judgment of God*, according to equity, will be declared. You may escape all other trials, but you will not escape that. Affliction may leave you untouched. Amidst persecution and temptation your reputation may be unscathed. But death will scatter all delusions, and from it, and from that judgment to which it leads, there is no escape (see ver. 3, "And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel," etc.). On that day there shall be "the manifestation of the sons of God;" the secret life will be commended, and the quiet service recompensed. With others the vain show will be over, the veil of outward respectability rent asunder, and the words will be heard, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity!" Then there will come the separation, as between the sheep and the goats, the tares and the wheat, the corn and the chaff. Men may have met in the same church, heard the same gospel, lived in the same home, yet above the portal of heaven is this inexorable law, "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, . . . but they that are written in the Lamb's book of life." Still the words hold good, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not perish, but have everlasting life;" "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" "Among thy saints may I be found," etc.!

III. THAT OVER THE TESTING PROCESS GOD WATCHES AND RULES SO THAT NOTHING TRUE AND NOTHING GOOD MAY BE LOST. "For, lo, I will command . . . yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth" (comp. Mal. iii. 3). Our text is true in a much broader sense than that in which we have attempted to deal with it. 1. *In changes amongst the nations*, where there seems little but confusion and unrest, God rules. He is testing and purifying his own people. Not a grain of his purpose will fall to the earth. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Word shall not pass away." 2. *Movements take place in ecclesiastical life*. One system makes room for another. The Old Testament economy with its ceremonies, the apostolic Church with its simplicity, the mediæval Church with its superstitions, etc., all were changed, yet of all the praises and prayers offered through past ages not a grain fell to the earth. 3. *In dogmatic theology changes are still going on*. Formularies and phrases die out, but the truth in them is not lost. Christ lives and reigns still, and "of his dominion there shall be no end." That which is saved by God is "the grain," that which has life in it; and planted in the earth, it shall be developed in new forms of strength and beauty.

CONCLUSION. Therefore, amidst the wreck and the fall of much that seems precious, let your hearts as Christian men be quiet from fear of evil. Have trust in God, who commands and controls, and believe that amidst all his cares you are not forgotten, amidst all these perils you will be safe. Because good is stronger than evil, and Christ is mightier than our adversary, the words of his promise are true to all believers, "They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."—A. R.

Vers. 1—4.—*Great sins, great calamities, great efforts.* "I saw the Lord standing upon the altar," etc. "This chapter commences with an account of the fifth and last vision of the prophet, in which the final ruin of the kingdom of Israel is represented. This ruin was to be complete and irreparable; and no quarter to which the inhabitants might flee for refuge would afford them any shelter from the wrath of the omnipresent and almighty Jehovah." The prophet in vision sees the Almighty standing upon the altar, and hears him give the command to smite the lintel of the temple door that the posts may shake; in other words, to destroy the temple. The temple here is not, I think (though the allusion is uncertain), the temple at Jerusalem, the temple of true worship, but the temple of idolatrous worship. The passage suggests three remarks.

I. THAT UNDER THE RIGHTEOUS GOVERNMENT OF GOD GREAT SIN EXPOSES TO GREAT CALAMITY. How terrible the calamities here referred to! The Israelites, when threatened by the Assyrians, would flock in crowds to Bethel and implore protection from the golden calf. But the very place where they sought protection would prove their ruin. Jehovah says, "Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword," etc. The sin of these Israelites in their idolatrous worship was great. They were the descendants of Abraham, the friend of God. As a people, they were chosen of God and blessed with a thousand opportunities of knowing what was right and true in doctrine and in practice. Yet they gave themselves up to idolatry. Hence these terrible calamities. The greater the sin, the greater the punishment. "Unto whom much is given of him shall be much required;" "He that knoweth his Lord's will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes;" "It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah," etc.

II. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF APPROACHING CALAMITIES WILL STIMULATE TO GREAT EFFORTS FOR ESCAPE. "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down." There are here supposed attempts at escape. There is the supposed attempt to get into hell—Sheol, the dark realm of shadows, where they could conceal themselves. There is an attempt to climb Mount Carmel, twelve hundred feet in height, there to conceal themselves under the shadows, intricacies, and the crowded forests of oak, pines, laurels, etc., and also in the deep caves running down to the sea. Men in view of great dangers always seek refuge. The sinner here, when he finds death approaching, what strenuous efforts does he employ in order to escape the monster's touch! On the great day of retribution sinners are represented as crying to the rocks and mountains to fall on them.

III. THE GREATEST EFFORTS TO ESCAPE MUST PROVE UTTERLY FUTILE WHEN GOD HAS GIVEN THE SINNER UP. "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them," etc. There are many similar passages to these in the Bible, such as the following: "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there" (Ps. cxxxix. 8); "Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?" (Job xx. 6, 7); "Though Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from me shall spoilers come unto her, saith the Lord" (Jer. li. 53); "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord" (Jer. xlix. 16). Whatever the efforts of the sinner in the prospect of approaching danger, there is no escape for him. God is everywhere, and everywhere all-seeing, all-just, and almighty.

CONCLUSION. The only way to escape utter ruin is to renounce your sin, and commit yourself unto the safe keeping of him who is the Redeemer of mankind.—D. T.

Vers. 5—10.—*God as the Administrator of justice.* "And the Lord God of hosts is he
AMOS. o

that toucheth the land, and it shall melt, and all that dwell therein shall mourn," etc. These words present God to us as the Administrator of justice.

I. HE DOES IT WITH THE GREATEST EASE. The administrators of justice in connection with human government have often to contend with difficulties that baffle and confound them. But the Almighty has no difficulty. "He toucheth the land, and it shall melt." By a mere touch he can punish a whole nation, nay, destroy the world. Whence come earthquakes and volcanoes? Here is their cause: "He toucheth the hills, and they smoke." Never can there be any miscarriage of justice with God. He bears it right home in every case. He has no difficulty about it. He toucheth the clouds, and they drown the world; he kindles the atmosphere and burns cities, etc.

II. HE DOES IT WITH ALL THE POWERS OF NATURE AT HIS COMMAND. "It is he that buildeth his stories in the heaven, and hath founded his troop in the earth." His throne is on high, above all the forms and forces of the universe, and all are at his call. From those heights which he has built, those upper chambers of the universe, he can pour floods to drown a world, or rain fires which will consume the universe. Every force in nature he can make with ease an officer to execute his justice.

III. HE DOES IT DISREGARDFUL OF MERE RELIGIOUS PROFESSION. "Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?" Jehovah here repels the idea which the Israelites were so prone to entertain, that because he had brought them out of Egypt and given them the land of Canaan, they were peculiarly the objects of his concern, and could never be subdued or destroyed. He now regarded and would treat them as the Cushites, or Ethiopians, who had been transplanted from their primal location in Arabia into the midst of the barbarous nations of Africa. The Almighty, in administering justice, is not influenced by the plea of profession. A corrupt Israelite to him was as bad as an Ethiopian, though he calls Abraham his father. "Think not to say . . . that ye have Abraham to your father." Conventional Christians are in the eyes of God as bad as infidels or heathen. He judgeth not as man judgeth, by the outward appearance; he looketh at the heart.

IV. HE DOES IT WITH A THOROUGH DISCRIMINATION OF CHARACTER. "Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saying that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord." There were some good people amongst the Israelites, men of genuine goodness; the great Judge would not destroy them. "I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob. . . . I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve," etc. He would burn up the chaff, but save the wheat. Evermore will the Almighty Judge recognize and tenderly guard the virtuous and the good, however humble their position in life. He will not destroy the righteous.—D. T.

Vers. 11—15.—*The restoration of the true moral theocracy.* "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old," etc. In the previous verses we have had to notice the destruction of the sinful kingdom; in this paragraph we have the establishment of the true kingdom—the true moral theocracy. "In that day," i.e. when the judgment has fallen upon the sinful kingdom, and all the sinners of the people of Israel are destroyed. "The Israelites," says Dr. Henderson, "now disappear from the scene, in order to give place to a brief and prominent exhibition of the restoration of the Jews from their repressed condition during their anticipated captivity in Babylon." The Apostle James, at the first ecclesiastical council at Jerusalem, quotes this prophecy (Acts xv. 16, 17)—not, however, in its identical phraseology, but in its general meaning—and applies it to the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the world by the admission of the Gentiles into it. The old Hebrew world was for ages governed by a theocracy. God was their King. He had under him and by his appointment human rulers and other functionaries; but they were simply his instruments, and he was their King. That form of government has passed away; but it was symbolical: it was the emblem of a higher theocracy that is to be established, not over the Jews merely, but over the Gentiles and over the whole world. It was to stand for ever. We shall use these words as an illustration of this theocratic government. Four thoughts are suggested concerning it.

I. IT ROSE FROM THE HUMBLEST CONDITION. "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen." "The fallen hut of David" (Delitzsch). Not the magnificent palace of David, which the monarch built for himself on Mount Zion (2 Sam. v. 11). "It is striking that Amos, prophesying in Israel, closes with a promise, not to the ten tribes primarily, but to the royal house of David, and to Israel only through its restoration. Strange comment on human greatness, that the royal line was not to be employed in the salvation of the world until it was fallen. The royal palace had to become the hut of Nazareth ere the Redeemer of the world could be born, whose glory and kingdom were not of this world, . . . who came to take from us nothing but our nature that he might sanctify it, our misery that he might bear it for us" (Pusey). Ay, this true moral theocracy had in truth a humble origin! Its Founder, who was he? The Son of a poor Jewish peasant, who commenced his life in a stable. Its first apostles, who were they? They were amongst the poorest of the poor. In its origin, indeed, its symbols are the little stone, the grain of mustard seed, and the few particles of leaven.

II. HEATHENS ARE SUBJECT TO ITS AUTHORITY. "That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my Name, saith the Lord that doeth this." The old theocracy was confined to the Jews; this one, this moral theocracy, is to extend to the heathen. Even Edom—the old and inveterate foe of the theocratic people, who may be regarded as the representative of the whole heathen world—is to be subjected to it. It shall "inherit the Gentiles." It is to have the heathen for its inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for its possession. The Bible assures us, in language most explicit and of frequent occurrence, that the time will come when from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same his Name—that is, the Name of this great moral King, Christ—shall be great among the Gentiles. Or, in the language of Daniel, "When the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Dan. vii. 27).

III. ABUNDANT MATERIAL PROVISIONS WILL ATTEND IT. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt." "The metaphorical language here employed is at once in the highest degree bold and pleasing. The Hebrews were accustomed to construct terraces on the sides of the mountains and other elevations, on which they planted vines. Of this fact the prophet avails himself, and represents the immense abundance of the produce to be such that the eminences themselves would appear to be converted into the juice of the grape." Just as this moral theocracy extends, pauperism will vanish. With the kingdom of God and his righteousness all necessary material good comes. "Godliness is profitable unto all things." Let this theocracy, which means the reign in human hearts of Christliness, extend, and the earth "shall yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us."

IV. LOST PRIVILEGES ARE RESTORED AS IT ADVANCES. "I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them." Three blessings, which man has lost through depravity, are here indicated. 1. *Freedom*. "I will bring again the captivity," or rather, "I will reverse the captivity," give them liberty. Man in a state of depravity is a slave—a slave to lust, worldliness, etc. This moral theocracy ensures freedom to all its subjects. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John viii. 32). 2. *Prosperity*. "Shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof." One of the sad evils connected with man's fallen depravity is that he does not reap the reward of his labours. He builds cities and plants vineyards and makes gardens for others. Through the reign of social injustice he is prevented from enjoying the produce of his honest labours. Under this theocracy it will not be so. What a man produces he will hold and enjoy as his own. 3. *Settledness*. "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God." Unregenerate man has ever been restless, homeless, unsettled. He stands not on a rock, but rather

on planks floating on surging waters ; he is never at rest. All the subjects of the true theocracy are established. "God is their Refuge and Strength."

CONCLUSION. Let us have faith in this predicted future of the world. This faith can alone sustain us in our arduous work ; this faith has ever been the nerve of all the great men who have toiled for the world's good.

"Poet and seer that question caught
Above the din of life's fears and frets ;
It marbled with letters, it toiled with thought,
Through schools and creeds which the earth forgets.
And statesmen trifle and priests deceive,
And traders barter our world away ;
Yet hearts to the golden promise cleave,
And still at times 'Is it come ?' they say.

"The days of the nations bear no trace
Of all the sunshine so far foretold ;
The cannon speaks in the teacher's place,
The age is weary with work and gold ;
And high hopes wither, and memories wane,
On hearths and altars the fires are dead ;
But that brave faith hath not lived in vain,
And this is all that our watcher said."

(Frances Brown.)

D. T.

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