

THE
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THE BOOK OF MICAH.

INTRODUCTION.

§ I. SUBJECT OF THE BOOK.

THE Book of Micah, in our present Hebrew copies and in the Latin Vulgate, stands sixth among the minor prophets; in the Septuagint it is placed third. Collected apparently into one volume in the last year of the prophet's life, it contains a number of prophecies uttered, perhaps, at different times, but yet connected together by logical sequence, and displaying a certain symmetrical arrangement. Caspari suggests that he thus gathered the notes of his various discourses, and read them in the ears of the people, in order to assist Hezekiah's great reformation. Threatening and promise alternate in these addresses, upbraiding and pleading, judgment and mercy. There is very much that is common with Isaiah, and the actual words in both are often identical. Being contemporaries, and confronted with the same circumstances, the two prophets naturally use corresponding expressions in dealing with similar subjects. In his account of the moral corruption that prevails, Micah agrees thoroughly with Isaiah, though he differs from him in not touching on politics, and in taking a more hopeless view of the reformation of Israel; in his Messianic anticipations he is as clear and precise as the evangelical prophet himself. Both he and Isaiah look to the great world-empire as fatal to Israel, though Micah calls it in one place (ch. v. 5, etc.) by the current name of Assyria, and in other passages, Babylon.

The state of Judah before Hezekiah's reformation was most unsatisfactory. Apart from the idolatry which was at the bottom of all the evil that prevailed, we gather from the prophet's denunciations that the chiefs of the nation were proud, luxurious, unscrupulous, and cruel; the peasants were ground down by exactions and deprived of their legal rights. And the improvement in religion which Hezekiah effected had not extended very deep, nor produced that real impression which we are wont to assume. "High places" still remained; practical unbelief widely existed; coincident with the worship of Jehovah a virtual idolatry was practised. Looking

sadly on all this evil, Micah knew to what result it tended, and his warnings were embittered by the consciousness that the punishment which he foretold was righteously deserved, and would not now be averted by timely repentance.

The book is arranged, for rhetorical purposes, into three prophetic addresses, consisting of words uttered originally at various times, as the Spirit within moved the prophet to speak. The three portions have a generally distinctive character and a certain inward connection. The first is chiefly of a threatening nature; in the second, Messianic hopes predominate; the third is hortatory, urging to repentance under God's chastening hand, in remembrance of past mercies and promised salvation.

Micah begins with a grand description of the coming of the Lord to judge Israel and Judah for their sins and idolatry, when Samaria, as first in wickedness, shall be first to fall before the avenging enemy; and then a similar fate shall happen to Jerusalem and Judah (whose towns are not mentioned in strictly geographical order), with the deportation of their inhabitants. The sins of the grandees have brought this judgment upon them. There are found in them oppression, injustice, and violence. The false prophets only pander to their evil lusts, and lull them into false security; and the penalty of all this guilt shall be removal from their present home. But God will not cast them off altogether; for they shall yet one day be restored in triumph (ch. i., ii.).

In the second part the prophet, showing the necessity of the judgment, more particularly rebukes the cruelty and rapacity of the great men; denounces woe on the false prophets who led the people astray; on the priests who taught for hire; on the judges who sold their sentences, and the diviners who practised their cheating art for lucre. In requital for these enormities, Zion the royal seat, Jerusalem the holy city, and the temple the house of God, should be brought to desolation. Then a contrast is introduced. This triple overthrow shall be compensated by a triple restoration. The people shall return from captivity, and the Lord's house shall be raised on high, and the nations shall flock unto it to learn piety and true religion; Jerusalem shall be inhabited again, increased and beautified; the royal power shall again be seated in Zion; Jehovah himself shall reign there in the midst of universal peace, having overthrown all the peoples who once rejoiced in Judah's calamity. The Redeemer shall be born in Bethlehem; his kingdom shall extend to the ends of the earth; but all idolatry, all trust in the arm of flesh, must be removed before the great consummation shall occur (ch. iii.—v.).

In the last part, which differs from the preceding portions in being of a more subjective character, Jehovah is represented as holding a controversy or lawsuit with his people, justifying his conduct, and listening to their rejoinder, which is so far from being satisfactory that judgment is pronounced upon them. Then, in touching words, Micah, identifying himself with the people, acknowledges the justice of the sentence, while he bewails

its infliction; he repents of the sins which have occasioned this punishment, looks patiently to God, and puts his sole trust in him, and, in answer to his prayers, is rewarded by the promise of deliverance. The book concludes with a triumphal song, celebrating the victory which God will achieve, and praising the mercy and faithfulness which he always has shown to his people (ch. vi., vii.).

Such is a general sketch of the contents of this book. We may note, besides, that in it are contained many special predictions; viz. the destruction of Samaria by Shalmaneser and his successor Sargon (ch. i. 6, 7); the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib (ch. i. 9—16); the overthrow of Jerusalem and the temple (ch. iii. 12; vii. 13); the deportation to Babylon (ch. iv. 10); the return from exile; the peace and happiness under a theocratic government, and the spiritual supremacy of Israel (ch. iv. 1—8, 13; vii. 11, 14—17); the Ruler born at Bethlehem, of the family of David (ch. iv. 8; v. 2); and, as it seems, the destruction of Nineveh and Babylon (ch. v. 5, 6; vii. 8, 10). To Isaiah and Micah belong the two clearest and most unmistakable prophecies of the Messiah. Isaiah describes his birth of the Virgin; Micah pointed out the place of his birth so plainly that when the Wise Men came inquiring where the King of the Jews was born, the answer was given to Herod without hesitation, "In Bethlehem of Judæa; for thus it is written by the prophet" (Matt. ii. 5). Further, Micah declares that the time of Messiah shall be one of profound peace (ch. iv. 1—7), using the same words as Isaiah (ii. 2, etc.). He intimates that the glory of Messiah shall be won by suffering (ch. iv. 8—13); he speaks of his work and his power (ch. v. 1—3); and he depicts the kingdom of Messiah in its exterior and interior organization (ch. v. 4, 8, etc.).

§ II. AUTHOR.

The name *Micah* (Μιχαῖας: Μαχαιας, Sin.; *Michaeas* or *Micha*, Vulgate), a shortened form of *Michaia* (Jer. xxvi. 18), and in its original shape *Michajahu*, is not uncommon in the Old Testament (Judg. xvii. 1; 2 Chron. xiii. 2; xvii. 7; Jer. xxxvi. 11, etc.); but none of the other persons so called are of much note in the sacred story save Micaiah the son of Imlah, who prophesied so boldly in the days of Ahab (1 Kings xxii.). It is probably to distinguish him from this last-named personage that the minor prophet is termed "Micah the Morasthite," i.e. a native of Moresheth-Gath. The LXX., indeed, in ch. i. 1, treat the appellation as a patronymic, τὸν τοῦ Μωρασθεῖ (Μωραθεί, Alex.); but in Jer. xxxiii. 18 (xxvi. 18, Hebrew) they give Μιχαῖας ὁ Μωραθίτης: and there is no doubt that the latter rendering is correct. Moresheth, elsewhere (Josh. xv. 44; 2 Chron. xi. 8), as some say, called Mareshah, was noticed by St. Jerome as a small village near Eleutheropolis. It is now known as *Mer'ash*, a village on a tel about a mile south-east of *Beit-Jibrin*, which Dr. Thomson ('Land and the Book,' pp. 210, 214, etc.), after Robinson, identifies with Eleutheropolis, and considers

with great plausibility, to be the site of the more ancient Gath. "Micah refers to Moresheth as though it was a suburb of Gath (ch. i. 10, 14). By coupling the two names together, he wrote Moresheth-Gath, probably in order to fix the place of the less-known suburb by the name of the main city."

The name *Micah* signifies, "Who is like Jehovah?" We are reminded by it of the challenge in Moses' song (Exod. xv. 11), "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee?" and it is doubtless with reference to his own name that the prophet introduces the announcement of God's great mercy with the words, "Who is a God like unto thee?" (ch. vii. 18). The name of Micah's father is not given, so that he was probably of mean origin, most likely a peasant, as Amos; and no events of his life are recorded. Whatever can be known about him must be gathered from his own writings; and this is very little. He was a Judean, and prophesied at Jerusalem. This latter fact we infer not only from the mention of the kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, under whom he is said to have exercised his ministry, but from the circumstance that he condemns chiefly the corruptions of the city, and makes Zion the central point of his prophecies, as it was the main seat of the evils against which he contended. He suffered great opposition at the hands of the false prophets (ch. ii. 6), who were now beginning to exert that disastrous influence which culminated in the time of Jeremiah. Disobedience to God's enactments had always been common, but organized hostility to God's prophets had not hitherto been the normal state of things. Micah was destined to exercise his powers under obloquy and contradiction. He seems, however, to have gone to the grave in peace, before the fall of Samaria, in the early part of Hezekiah's reign. His birthplace was, according to Jerome (Ep. 86, 'Ad Eustoch.'), also the place of his burial, on the site of which, in Christian times, a church was built. Sozomen ('Hist. Eccles.,' vii. 28) relates that his remains and those of Habakkuk were discovered, in the reign of Theodosius, at a place called Berathsatia (probably the same as Morasthi), ten stadia from Cila, his tomb being called by the ignorant natives, in their own dialect, *Nephameemana*, which is interpreted *μνῆμα πιστόν*, "monumentum fidele."

§ III. DATE.

The superscription of our book states that Micah prophesied "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." Modern critics see reason to doubt whether this title, as well as the similar ones in Hosea and Isaiah (which, however, contain the name of Uzziah), are genuine. They deem them to be later additions introduced by an unknown editor. In the present case the superscription is confirmed by the contents of the book, Jotham came to the throne in B.C. 757; Hezekiah died in 697; and thus the greatest limit attributed to his ministry would be sixty years; while the interval from the last year of Jotham to the first of Hezekiah, B.C. 742—726, allows a period of sixteen years as the minimum duration of his prophetic

activity. In either case he is contemporary with Isaiah, and with the latter portion of the ministry of Amos and Hosea. We have a testimony concerning his date in Jer. xxvi. 18, where certain elders of the land appeal to the case of Micah as one who asserted unpopular truths in the time of Hezekiah, without incurring the charge of blasphemy. "Micah the Morasthite," said they, "prophesied in the days of Hezekiah King of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Zion shall be ploughed like a field," etc., quoting ch. iii. 12. But this assertion need not be taken as necessarily restricting all his utterances to Hezekiah's reign. The elders had a traditional report that his prophecies originated in that period; "He was habitually prophesying," is their expression; but that no part of the collection was published before that time cannot be proved by this particular reference. It seems probable that the various prophecies, orally delivered on different occasions, were committed to writing and gathered into one volume in the earlier years of King Hezekiah. There really is no sufficient reason for doubting the accuracy of the superscription. The contents of the book are quite consistent with what we know of the condition of the Jewish people in the reigns enumerated. The mention of "the high places" still existing, and the corruption and demoralization of the people (ch. i. 5; ii.), points to the reigns of Jotham and Ahaz as the period when the first section of the book was originally delivered (see 2 Kings xv. 35; xvi. 4; 2 Chron. xxviii. 4, 25). The prophecy of the destruction of Samaria (ch. i. 6) must have been delivered before the final capture of that city by the Assyrians, B.C. 722, in the fourth or sixth year of Hezekiah. Other allusions serve to supply an approximation to the date of different portions of the prophecy. We have seen that ch. iii. was uttered in Hezekiah's day. In ch. v. 10 Micah declaims against the chariots and horses of Judah, which were doubtless accumulated during the prosperous reign of Uzziah, and on which his successor Jotham prided himself (2 Chron. xxvi. 11—15; xxvii. 4—6; Isa. ii. 7). When he bitterly complains of "the statutes of Omri," and "the works of the house of Ahab" (ch. vi. 16), he is denouncing the king who is expressly stated to have "walked in the ways of the kings of Israel" (2 Kings xvi. 3). It is more likely to have been in Ahaz's time than in Jotham's that idolatrous rites were practised in Jerusalem itself; for the latter is commended because he walked in the steps of his father Uzziah, and "ordered his ways before the Lord his God" (2 Kings xv. 34; 2 Chron. xxvii. 2, 6); and the allusion to human sacrifice (ch. vi. 7) befits the time of Ahaz, who sacrificed his own sons to Moloch (2 Kings xvi. 3; 2 Chron. xxviii. 3), and whose example was probably followed by others. That half-service, too, of which Micah complains (ch. iii. 11; vi. 6), when the people, in the midst of their idolatry and wickedness, yet in some sort "leaned upon the Lord," exactly suits the character of Ahaz, who, though he copied heathen altars, resorted to the brazen altar to inquire of the Lord (2 Kings xvi. 15), and offered thereon the lawful sacrifice. The prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, delivered first under Jotham, was repeated

under Hezekiah, and it is to its impressive effect at that time that the elders in Jeremiah allude. Doubtless, too, in those early years of Hezekiah his ministry came to an end. The denunciations of idolatry would not have been uttered after the great, though partial, reformation of religion, which, indeed, could not have been fully carried out till Samaria was destroyed; for otherwise Hezekiah's messengers would not have been able unhindered to invite all Israel to join in the celebration of the Passover (Pusey). Of the parallel passages, ch. iv. 1—5 and Isa. ii. 2—5, it has been much debated which is the original and which the copy; but there seems to be no valid reason for supposing that Micah received the words from Isaiah; and as the passage in the former book occurs in close connection and contrast with what immediately precedes, while in Isaiah the connection is not obvious, most critics believe that the words were originally delivered by Micah; or it may be, as Ewald and others suggest, that both prophets adapted to their own purposes an older prophecy current in their days. That there is a close connection between Isaiah and Micah is obvious. It may be that the two prophets addressed different classes of the populace—Isaiah delivering his messages to the higher, Micah to the lower, with which by descent his sympathies were closely connected; but they worked harmoniously together, strengthening the hands of Hezekiah, and confirming the faithful in their difficult course of obedience and trust.

Some critics have attributed ch. vi. and vii. to another hand and a later date. Certainly they do not suit the time of Hezekiah; but they may have been composed earlier, under other circumstances, and placed where they are now found, not as fitting their present position chronologically, but as aiding the rhetorical arrangement of the book, enforcing the previous monaces and confirming the promised triumph. Other passages, the genuineness of which is disputed, will be noticed in the Exposition.

§ IV. GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE WORK.

The style of the Book of Micah is remarkable. It is rough, as befitting its peasant author, but it is certainly not uncultivated; rugged, perhaps, but pure, clear, and intelligible. It abounds in tropes, figures, paronomasias. It contains sudden transitions of subjects, persons, numbers, genders, which denote in the writer a quick temper and an excitable mind, carried away by inward impulse, and restrained by no formal rules of composition. Micah is at times bold, severe, stern, uncompromising; at times tender, sorrowful, loving, sympathetic. In him mercy rejoices against judgment. Brief and concise in his description of misery, he dilates with exuberance on the blessings that are to follow the day of darkness. He delights in comparing God's tenderness and regard for his people with a shepherd's care for his flock. Those who should head the resistance to the great world-power are "seven shepherds" (ch. v. 5). His last prayer to God is, "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage" (ch. vii. 14). He does not so much preach repentance as set forth God's dealings to

persons who knew that he pardons as well as punishes. It is this strong conviction of the intimate connection between sin and punishment, repentance and forgiveness, which occasions those startling transitions that meet us, as we have said, so continually; where, with the simple conjunction "and," and with no further logical dependence, the prophet contrasts wickedness with its results, punishment with blessing, mercy with comfort. There is wonderful energy in the various forms of his addresses. The last two chapters "take the form of a magnificent colloquy, and are indeed the first prophetic piece of a purely dramatic plan and execution" (Farrar). Elsewhere at one time he commands, at another he entreats; now he uses dialogue, now denunciation; he addresses the whole people under a female designation, then he expostulates with individuals; here he speaks concerning a place, there directly to it; one while he speaks in his own person, and again in that of his nation; he describes a calamity as past in one passage, as future in another. As regards his language, it is measured and rhythmical, the cadences are varied, the grouping is harmonious. A remarkable analysis of these divisions and cadences, both in Micah and other prophets, may be seen in Dr. Pusey's 'Commentary,' pp. 273, 293. The verbal plays and allusions in the description of the calamities that are to overtake Judah (ch. i.) are unequalled in vigour and abundance, and must have fallen with peculiar force upon hearers familiar with the places mentioned, and comprehending with awed intelligence the meaning of the denunciation.

One obvious fact characterizing the book (which it is well to mention in view of neologian theories) is that it exhibits an accurate acquaintance with the Pentateuch, that the author had those writings before him when he put his prophecy into its present shape. The many allusions to the history, the actual expressions sometimes used, prove this beyond question. The Exposition will show it abundantly. Further, other books of the canon were known to Micah besides those of Moses. He refers to Joshua's division of the promised land (ch. ii. 4; vi. 5), to David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (ch. i. 10), to his predecessor's challenge (ch. i. 2; 1 Kings xxii. 28). He introduces words taken from the Psalms (*e.g.* ch. ii. 1; iii. 2, etc.; vii. 2, 7, etc.) and the Proverbs (*e.g.* ch. vi. 9, 11). He adopts images and language from Amos (ch. ii. 3, 6, 11; iii. 6). It must be added that the text of Micah is in an unsatisfactory state, having suffered much from corruptions. Many attempts have been made to improve it by reference to the ancient versions; but little success has attended these efforts, as the versions themselves seem to have been founded upon imperfect copies, and the conjectures of critics have not afforded much material help.

§ V. LITERATURE.

Of the earlier commentators on Micah it is sufficient to mention Ephraem Syrus and Theophylact. Later commentators are these: Bibliander, 'Comm. in Micham' (1534); Luther; Gilby, 'Comm. upon Micha' (1551); Chytræus, 'Explicatio Michæ'

(1565); Brentius, 'Comm. in Michæam' (1580); Pocock, 'Works,' vol. i. (1740); Justi, 'Micha neu übersetzt' (1799, 1820); Hartmann, 'Micha neu übers.'; Caspari, 'Über Micha den Morasth.' (1852); Thomas, Genève (1853); Dr. Cheyne, in 'Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges' (1885); T. Sharpe, 'Micah, a New Translation' (1876); Kleinert, translated in Lange's 'Commentary on Old Testament'; Orelli, in 'Kurzegef. Komm.' (1888); Rygsel, 'Untersuchungen,' etc. (1887); J. Taylor, 'The Massoretic Text,' etc. (1890).

§ VI. ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOK IN SECTIONS.

Part I. (Ch. i., ii.) Threatenings and judgments on Israel and Judah, with prediction of eventual deliverance.

- § 1. (Ch. i. 2—4.) Introduction to the prophet's address. The nations are bidden to attend.
- § 2. (Ch. i. 5—7.) Judgment denounced on Israel for its sins.
- § 3. (Ch. i. 8, 9.) Micah mourns because the punishment reaches to Judah.
- § 4. (Ch. i. 10—15.) That kingdom's fate exemplified by the fate of certain of her cities.
- § 5. (Ch. i. 16.) Zion is called to mourn for her captivity.
- § 6. (Ch. ii. 1—5.) Threat justified by the sins of oppression of which the princes were guilty.
- § 7. (Ch. ii. 6—11.) Threat further vindicated, with a glance at the false prophets who taught the people to love lies.
- § 8. (Ch. ii. 12, 13.) Promise of deliverance and restoration.

Part II. (Ch. iii.—v.) Denunciation of the crimes of the grandees, followed by a promise of the glorification of Zion, the birth of Messiah, and the highest exaltation of the people.

- § 1. (Ch. iii. 1—4.) Sins of the rulers, and their punishment.
- § 2. (Ch. iii. 5—8.) Sins of the false prophets.
- § 3. (Ch. iii. 9—12.) Recapitulation of the sins of the three classes—grandees, priests, and prophets; consequent destruction of Zion and the temple.
- § 4. (Ch. iv. 1—5.) The glory of the temple-mountain, and realization of happiness.
- § 5. (Ch. iv. 6, 7.) All Israel included in this restoration.
- § 6. (Ch. iv. 8—10.) Revival of the kingdom of David, after calamity and captivity.
- § 7. (Ch. iv. 11—13.) Zion overcomes all enemies in God's strength.
- § 8. (Ch. v. 1—4.) After Zion's degradation, Messiah shall be born and bring the world into subjection.
- § 9. (Ch. v. 5, 6.) Under his rule shall be peace.
- § 10. (Ch. v. 7—9.) He shall give his people as conquerors and saviours to the nations.
- § 11. (Ch. v. 10—15.) He shall destroy the instruments of war, and put down idolatry everywhere.

Part III. (Ch. vi., vii.) Punishment is the consequence of sin; repentance is the only ground of hope of participating in the covenant mercies.

- § 1. (Ch. vi. 1—5.) God's controversy with his people for their ingratitude.
- § 2. (Ch. vi. 6—8.) The people ask how to please God, and are referred to the moral requirements of the Law.
- § 3. (Ch. vi. 9—12.) God sternly rebukes prevailing sins.
- § 4. (Ch. vi. 13—16.) He threatens punishment.
- § 5. (Ch. vii. 1—6.) Israel's penitential acknowledgment of the general corruption.
- § 6. (Ch. vii. 7—13.) Confession of faith in God; assurance of the fulfilment of the promised restoration.
- § 7. (Ch. vii. 14—17.) The people pray for this restoration, and the Lord assures them that his mercies shall not fail, and hostile nations shall be humbled.
- § 8. (Ch. vii. 18—20.) Praise of God's mercy and faithfulness.

THE BOOK OF MICAH.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1.—ch. ii. 13.—Part I. THREATENINGS AND JUDGMENTS ON ISRAEL AND JUDAH, WITH PREDICTION OF EVENTUAL DELIVERANCE.

Ver. 1.—The *inscription*, or heading of the book, conveying the prophet's authority. The word of the Lord. The expression applies to the whole contents of the book, as in Hos. i. 1 and Zeph. i. 1. It is often used for some particular message to a prophet, as Jer. i. 4, 11; ii. 1; Ezek. iii. 16. *Micah* the Morasthite; *i.e.* Micah of Moresheth-Gath (ver. 14), a village in the lowland of Judæa, near Eleutheropolis, some twenty miles south-west of Jerusalem (see Introduction, § II.). In the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Thus Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, though his ministry did not begin as soon or last as long as that prophet's (see Isa. i. 1); he was a little later than Hosea and Amos, who prophesied under Uzziah, the father of Jotham. Kings of Judah are mentioned because the prophet's mission was to Judah, as the line of election; but, like Amos, he prophesied against Samaria also. However divided, the two nations are regarded as one people. Which he saw. What he saw in vision or by inward illumination he here relates in words. Thus the prophecies of Isaiah, Obadiah, Nahum, etc., are called "visions." Concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Samaria comes first, as being ripe for punishment, and the first to feel the avenger. The capitals of the two kingdoms Israel and Judah stand for the people themselves.

Vers. 2–4.—§ 1. *Introduction to the prophet's address. The nations and earth itself are summoned to attend the solemn announcement.*

Ver. 2.—Hear, all ye people; rather, *all* MICAH.

ye peoples; Septuagint, *λαοί*. All nations are summoned to come and witness the judgment, and to profit by the warning. So Micaiah, son of Imlah, the bold denouncer of false prophets in the age of Ahab, had cried, "Hear, ye peoples, all of you" (1 Kings xxii. 28). So Moses, in his song (Deut. xxxii. 1), calls on heaven and earth to listen to his words (comp. Isa. i. 2). These expressions are not mere rhetorical figures; they have a special application. Whatever happens to Israel has a bearing on the development of the kingdom of God; the judgments on the chosen people are not only a warning to the heathen, but bring on the great consummation. All that therein is; literally, *the fulness thereof*; Vulgate, *plentudo ejus*; Septuagint, *πάντες οἱ ἐν αὐτῇ*, "all ye that are therein" (Ps. xxiv. 1). Let the Lord God (*the Lord Jehovah*) be witness against you. Let God by his judgments against you, viz. Israel and Judah, confirm my denunciation (comp. Deut. xxix. 24). From his holy temple; *i.e.* from heaven, as ver. 3 shows (1 Kings viii. 30; Ps. xi. 4; Hab. ii. 20).

Ver. 3.—Here follows a grand description, in figurative language, of the course of Divine judgment, and of God's awful majesty and resistless power. Out of his place. It is as though the sins of Israel had roused him to action. God is hidden except when he displays his power in judgment and mercy (see note on Zech. xiv. 3). Will come down. An anthropomorphic expression, as Gen. xviii. 21. The high places. As though descending from heaven, God first came upon the tops of the mountains (see note on Amos iv. 13; comp. Deut. xxxii. 18). The phrase would imply God's absolute sovereignty over the universe.

Ver. 4.—The description of God's advent to judgment is founded on the idea of a terrible storm and earthquake, perhaps accompanied with volcanic eruption, though

evidence of such eruptions in the historical period is not forthcoming. The description recalls the awful revelation at Sinai (Exod. xix.). **Shall be molten**; either by the lightning or the showers of rain that descend from heaven. The mountains, the type of stability and strength, fall away at the presence of the Judge. Septuagint, *σαλευθήσεται*, "shall be shaken;" Vulgate, *consumuntur* (Judg. v. 4, 5; Ps. xviii. 7, etc.; lxviii. 8; xcvi. 4, 5; Amos ix. 5). **Be cleft**; Septuagint, *ταχίσονται*, "shall melt." The valleys shall be hollowed out into channels by the force of the water, which falls in torrents. **As wax** (Ps. lxviii. 2; xcvi. 5). This belongs to the first clause, "the mountains," etc. **As waters**. This belongs to the second clause. The cloven plains shall melt away as waters disappear down a precipice. The idea that underlies this description is that the inanimate creation shares in the effects of the judgment on man, and is used as an instrument in his punishment.

Vers. 5—7.—§ 2. *Judgment is denounced on Israel for its sin.*

Ver. 5.—The prophet shows the cause of this punishment. **Transgression**; better, *apostasy*, which the people's transgression really was. **Jacob**. Here the ten tribes and Judah—the whole of the covenant people. In the latter part of the verse the term includes only the ten tribes, called often Israel or Ephraim. **All this**. The manifestation of God's power and wrath described in vers. 3 and 4. **The house of Israel**. The ten tribes. **Is it not Samaria?** She is naught but sin. He names the capitals of the two kingdoms as the source and centre of the idolatry and wickedness which pervaded the whole country. Samaria was built by Omri, a king who "wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him;" and in it his son Ahab erected a temple to Baal (1 Kings xvi. 32), and it became the chief seat of idolatry in the land. **What are the high places?** The prophet seems to say that Jerusalem is no longer the Lord's sanctuary, but a collection of unauthorized or idolatrous shrines. These were buildings or altars erected in conspicuous spots, contrary to the enactments of the Mosaic Law (Deut. xii. 11—14), and used more or less for idolatrous worship. With a strange perversity, the Jews mixed the pure service of Jehovah with the rites of heathen deities. Even the best kings of Judah were unable wholly to suppress these local sanctuaries (see 2 Kings xii. 3; xiv. 4, etc.). They were found even in Jerusalem itself (Jer. xxxii. 35), especially in the time of Ahaz (2 Kings xvi. 4). The parallelism of this clause with the preceding being thought defective ("high places"

being not parallel with "apostasy"), the Septuagint reads, *ἡ ἀμαρτία*, "the sin," followed by the Syriac and the Targum. One Hebrew manuscript confirms the reading; but it is probably unauthorized, and has been ignorantly introduced. The prophet defines the sins of Samaria and Jerusalem. The sin of the former is apostasy; that of the latter, unauthorized worship. Instead of "what" in both places the Hebrew gives "who," implying that there is a personal cause, the two capitals being personified. Hezekiah's partial reformation had not taken place when this was uttered.

Ver. 6.—**I will make**. This prophecy, therefore, was delivered before the destruction of Samaria in the fourth year of Hezekiah. **As an heap of the field**; or, *into a heap of the field*, like a heap of stones gathered off a cultivated field (comp. Isa. v. 2). Septuagint, *εἰς ὄπωροφυλάκιον ἀγροῦ*, "the hut of a fruit-watcher." **As plantings of a vineyard**; *into the plantings*, etc.; i.e. into mere terraces for vines. Such shall be the utter ruin of the city, that on its site vines shall be planted. The prophet here uses a description of complete destruction which is a regular formula in Assyrian inscriptions, where we read of cities being made into "a rubbish-heap and a field." The expression occurs, e.g., in a monument of Tiglath-Pileser (see Schrader, 'Keilinschr.', p. 449). **I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley**. Samaria stood on a hilly platform (1 Kings xvi. 24), with a sheer descent on every side, and when it was overthrown its stones were hurled into the valley surrounding it, as may be seen to this day. "When we looked down," says Tristram ('Land of Israel,' p. 136), "at the gaunt columns rising out of the little terraced fields, and the vines clambering up the sides of the hill once covered by the palaces of proud Samaria, who could help recalling the prophecy of Micah? Not more literally have the denunciations on Tyre or on Babylon been accomplished. What though Sebaste rose, under Herod, to a pitch of greater splendour than even old Samaria, the effort was in vain, and the curse has been fully accomplished. In the whole range of prophetic history, I know of no fulfilment more startling to the eye-witness in its accuracy than this." **Will discover**; *will lay bare* (Ps. cxxxvii. 7; Ezek. xiii. 14).

Ver. 7.—**Graven images**. The stone idols (Isa. x. 10). Septuagint, *τὰ γλυπτά*. The *hires* thereof. The word properly means, "the wages of prostitution." Idolatry is viewed as spiritual fornication, and the offerings made to the idol-temples are reckoned to be harlot-gifts. Hosea speaks in the same way (ii. 5, 8, 12; ix. 1; comp. Isa.

xxiii. 17; Ezek. xvi. 81). There may be allusion to the shameful practices consecrated with the name of religion, the proceeds of which went to the support of idolatry (see Baruch vi. 43; Horod., i. 199; Strabo, xvi. 1). Idols; more costly *images*, made probably of or plated with precious metals. For she gathered it; rather, *them*, the images and idols, from the offerings made by idolaters, spiritual fornicators, hence called the hire of an harlot. They shall return to the hire of an harlot. The treasures obtained by idolatry shall go to another idolatrous people, viz. the Assyrians; the dedicated offerings in the temples at Samaria shall be carried off to Nineveh to adorn the temples there (comp. Dan. i. 2; v. 3; Ezra i. 7). The sentence seems to be a kind of proverbial saying, like the Latin, *Male parata, male dilabuntur*. Schegg compares the German, *Wie gewonnen, so zerronnen*, and *Unrecht Gut that sein Gut*. The judgment on Samaria was executed by the Assyrians. Three times in his short reign of less than six years did Shalmaneser IV. invade Israel. Shortly after his accession, having reason to suspect the fidelity of Hoshea, he "came up against him" (2 Kings xvii. 3), and so overawed him by the exhibition of his superior power that the King of Israel submitted without a struggle; "became his servant, and gave him presents," or rendered him tribute. But Hoshea's allegiance was not yet secured. Encouraged by the enterprise and success of the Ethiopian monarch So, or Shebek, who had defeated and slain the Egyptian king, and established himself firmly on the throne of Upper Egypt, Hoshea, in reliance on Egyptian aid, again threw off the yoke of Assyria, and refused the customary tribute. His punishment was speedy and sharp. Shalmaneser had no difficulty in making himself master of his person, "shut him up and bound him in prison." On a fresh act of rebellion, of what nature we are not informed, Shalmaneser made his third attack. This time he was everywhere resisted, and ended by laying siege to Samaria itself. Before this city his forces were detained for more than two years; nor was it till b.c. 722, when apparently his own reign had come to an end, that Samaria was taken, his successor Sargon claiming the conquest as appertaining to his first year (Rawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' ii. ch. ix.).

Vers. 8, 9.—§ 3. *Micah mourns because the punishment extends to Judah also.*

Vcr. 8. — I will wail. The prophet marks the destruction of Samaria with these outward signs of mourning, in order that he might affect the minds of his own countrymen, and show how he grieved over

their sins which should bring like punishment. The word rendered "wail" means "to beat" the breast. Septuagint, *κόβεται*: Vulgate, *plangam*. Stripped and naked. The former epithet the LXX. translate *ἀνυπόδητος*, as if it meant "barefoot;" and they refer the verse to Samaria, not to Micah. The two epithets contain one notion; the prophet assumes the character, not merely of a mourner, who put off his usual garments, but that of a captive who was stripped to the skin and carried away naked and despoiled (comp. Isa. xx. 2—4; xlvii. 2, 3). Dragons; Septuagint, *δρακόντων*: Hebrew, *tannin*, "jackals" (Job xxx. 29; Mal. i. 3), whose mournful howling is well known to all travellers in the East. Owls; Septuagint, *θυγατέρας αεθίων*, "daughters of sirens;" Vulgate, *struthionum*. The bird is called in Hebrew *bath yaanah*, which some explain "daughter of the desert," or else refer to roots meaning either "to cry out" or "to be freed." Doubtless the ostrich is meant. Concerning the fearful screech of this bird, Pusey quotes Shaw, 'Travels,' ii. 349, "During the lonesome part of the night they often make a doleful and piteous noise. I have often heard them groan as if they were in the greatest agonies."

Ver. 9.—*Her wound; her stripes*, the punishment inflicted on Samaria. *Incurable* (comp. Jer. xv. 18). The day of grace is past, and Israel has not repented. *It is come*. The stripe, the punishment, reaches Judah. To the prophetic eye the Assyrians' invasion of Judah seems close at hand, and even the final attack of the Chaldeans comes within his view. The same sins in the northern and southern capitals lead to the same fate. *He is come*. He, the enemy, the agent of the "stripe." *The gate of my people*. The gate, the place of meeting, the well-guarded post, is put for the city itself (comp. Gen. xxii. 17; Deut. xxviii. 52; Obad. 11). Pusey thinks that Micah refers to something short of total excision, and therefore that the invasion of Sennacherib alone is meant (2 Kings xviii. 13). But the fore-shortened view of the prophet may well include the final ruin.

Vers. 10—15.—§ 4. *The judgment on Judah is exemplified by the fate of certain of its cities, whose names the prophet connects with their punishment in a series of paronomasias.*

Ver. 10.—*Declare ye it not at Gath*. This phrase from David's elegy over Saul (2 Sam. i. 20) had become a proverbial saying, deprecating the malicious joy of their hostile neighbours over the misfortunes that befell them. Gath is mentioned as the seat of the Philistines, the constant and powerful enemy

of Judah. (For its situation, see note on Amos vi. 2.) The paronomasias in this passage, which seem to modern ears artificial and puerile, are paralleled in many writings both Hebrew and classic, and were natural to a people who looked for mystical meaning in words and names. Thus Gath is taken to signify "Tell-town," and the clause is, "In Tell-town tell it not." Weep ye not at all; Vulgate, *lacrymis ne ploretis*; i.e. "weep in silence," or "hide your tears," that the enemy may not know your grief. As in each of the other clauses a town is mentioned, some editors would here read, "In Acco ('Weep-town') weep not"—Acco being the later Ptolemais, the modern St. Jean d'Acre, and taken here to represent another foreign city which would rejoice at Judah's misfortunes (see Judg. i. 31). The Septuagint alone of all the versions seems to countenance this reading, by translating, *Οἱ Ἐνακίμ μὴ ἀνοικοδομήτε*, "Ye Enakim, do not rebuild," which has been resolved into *οἱ ἐν Ἀκείμ*, supposed to be an error for *οἱ ἐν Ἀκλ*. The objections against this reading may be seen in Keil and Pusey. There is a play on the words in both these clauses (as in the following five verses), which is not seen in the English Version, *begath al taggidu*, and *balko al tibeku*. Knabenbauer imitates the paronomasia in Latin, "Cannis ne canite; Anconæ ne angamini;" Ewald and Schegg in German, "In Mölln meldet nicht; in Weinsberg, weinet nicht;" Reuss in French, "N'allez pas le dire à Dijon! N'allez pas pleurer à Plœrmel!" In these puns, as we should call them, the prophet is far, indeed, from jesting. "He sees," says Dr. Cheyne, "like Isaiah, in Isa. x. 30, a preordained correspondence between names and fortunes;" and he wishes to impress this on his countrymen, that the judgment may not come upon them unwarned. In the house of Aphrah; better, at *Beth-le-Aphrah*, i.e. "House of dust;" Vulgate, *in domo pulveris*. The site of Aphrah is unknown. Some identify it with Ophrah in Benjamin (Josh. xviii. 23), four miles north-east of Bethel; others, with Ophrah in Philistia (1 Chron. iv. 14). Most of the towns named below lie in the Shephelah. Keil notes that the word is pointed with *pathach* here for the sake of the paronomasia. Roll thyself in the dust; *sprinkle dust upon thyself*. This was a common sign of mourning (comp. 2 Sam. xiii. 19; Jer. vi. 26). The Hebrew text (in contradistinction to the margin, Keri) gives, "I roll myself," or "I have besprinkled myself," the prophet identifying himself with the people. But as in all the subsequent passages, not what the prophet does, but what the inhabitants do, is the point impressed, the reading of the Keri is here to be preferred. Vulgate,

pulvere vos conspergite. The Septuagint has an inexplicable rendering, *κατὰ γέλωτα γῆν καταδάσασθε*, "against laughter sprinkle earth," which Brenton translates, "sprinkle dust in the place of your laughter." With this section (vers. 10—15) should be compared Isa. x. 28—32, which describes the alarm occasioned by Sennacherib's invasion of Judah from the north-east, as Mioah represents his progress to the south-west.

Ver. 11.—*Pass ye away*. Leave your house. Thou inhabitant of Saphir. The Hebrew is "inhabitrass," the population being personified as a virgin (comp. 2 Kings xix. 21; Isa. xlvii. 1). "Saphir" means "Fair city." It is placed by Eusebius ('Onomast.') between Ascalon and Eleutheropolis; it is now identified with some ruins named *Snāfir*, five miles south-east of Ashdod. Having thy shame naked; "in nakedness and shame" (Pusey); Vulgate, *confusa ignominia*. The prophet contrasts the shame of their treatment with the meaning of their city's name, "Go, Fair-town, into foul dishonour." Septuagint, *κατοικοῦσα καλῶς τὰς πόλεις αὐτῆς*, "fairly inhabiting her cities." St. Jerome, in despair of explaining these Greek renderings, says here, "Multum Hebraicum a LXX. interpretatione discordat, et tantis tam mea quam illorum translatio difficultatibus involuta est, ut si quando indignimus Spiritus Dei (semper autem in exponendis Scripturis sanctis illius indigemus adventu), nunc vel maxime eum adesse cupiamus." Zaanan is supposed to be the same as Zenan, mentioned in Josh. xv. 37. The meaning of the name is doubtful. It is taken to signify "abounding in flocks" or "going out." Came not forth; or, *is not come forth*. The paronomasia seems to lie rather in sound than sense, and is variously explained, "The inhabitants of Flock-town went not forth with their flocks." "The dwellers of Forthcoming came not forth," i.e. to flee, or to fight, or to aid their brethren; or did not escape destruction. Vulgate, *Non est egressa quæ habitat in exitu*; Septuagint, *οὐκ ἐξῆλθε κατοικοῦσα Σενναάρ*, "She who dwelt at Sennaar came not forth." In the mourning, etc. These words are best joined with the following clause, thus: *The mourning of Beth-ezel taketh from you its standing*; i.e. refuge or shelter. Beth-ezel is explained, "House at one's side." "Neighbour-town;" so the prophet would say, "Neighbour-town is no neighbour to you," affords you no help. But various other explanations are given, e.g. "Lamentation makes its sure abode at Beth-ezel from your calamity." This may, perhaps, be supported by the rendering of the LXX., *Λήψεται ἐξ ὑμῶν πληγὴν δδύνης*, "She shall receive of you the stroke of anguish." Dr. Cheyne connects the whole

verse with one idea, "Zaanen would willingly take to flight, but the sound of the mourning at Beth-ezel (which might mean, 'the house, or place, at one's side') fills them with despair." Taking Beth-ezel to mean "House of root," others would interpret, on account of the public sorrow, "The 'house of root' affords no firm home for you." Others, again, "The lamentation of 'The near House' will not stop near it, but pass on to other places." Beth-ezel is probably the *Azal* of Zech. xiv. 5, the *beth* being dropped, as is often the case. It was in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem (see note on Zechariah, l.c.).

Ver. 12.—*Maroth; bitterness.* Its site is unknown; but it was in the immediate neighbourhood of Jerusalem. Ewald suggests that it is the same as *Maarath* (Josh. vi. 59), *hod. Beit Ummar*, six miles north of Hebron. Waited carefully for good; waited, expecting succour. But the better translation is, *writhed in anguish on account of good*, which they have lost, whether property or liberty. But evil came; for (or, because) evil is come. Unto the gate of Jerusalem (comp. ver. 9). The prophet refers to the invasion of the Assyrian kings, Sargon or Sennacherib, also mentioned by Isaiah (xxii. 7), and the haughty message (Isa. xxxvi. 2).

Ver. 13.—*Laishish.* A very strong and important city of the Canaanites, *hod. Um Lâkis*, about fourteen miles north-east of Gaza, which was captured by Sennacherib after a long siege (2 Kings xviii. 14; Isa. xxxvi. 2; xxxvii. 8). In the British Museum there is a bas-relief, brought from Assyria, representing Sennacherib seated on his throne while the spoil of the city of Lachish passed before him (Sayce, 'Fresh Light from the Monuments,' pp. 123, 125). Bind the chariot to the swift beast. Harness your horses to your chariots, that ye may flee and escape destruction. The phrase is like the Latin, *currum jungere equis*. The paronomasia here lies in the sound, "Inhabitant of Lachish, harness your *rekesh*" ("runner" "courser"). "Inhabitant of Horse-town, harness your horses." Septuagint, *ψόφος ἁμάρτων καὶ ἰπνεύοντων*, "a sound of chariots and horsemen;" Vulgate, *tumultus quadrigæ stuporis* — renderings which the present Hebrew text does not support. She was the beginning, etc. How Lachish came to adopt the idolatry of Israel, and how she infected Judah, we know not. A connection between Jerusalem and Laishish is found in the case of Amaziah (2 Kings xiv. 19), but nothing bearing on religion is mentioned. The whole clause is translated by Calmet, Keil, etc., thus: "It was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion that the iniquities of Israel were found in thee" (comp. ch. vi. 16; Amos viii. 14). The particular transgressions meant may be

the idolatry of Jehoram (2 Chron. xxi. 6) and Ahaziah (2 Chron. xxii. 3, 4).

Ver. 14.—*Therefore.* Because Judah has adopted the evil practices of Israel. The prophet here addresses Judah, and continues to do so to the end of the chapter. Shalt thou give presents to Moresheth-Gath. The "presents" intended are parting gifts, farewell presents. The word is used (1 Kings ix. 16) for the dowry given to a daughter when she is married. The meaning, therefore, is that Judah must relinquish all claim to Moresheth. The paronomasia is explained in two ways. As *Moresheth* may mean "possession," the prophet may be understood to say, "Thou shalt give up possession of Gath's possession." Or the play of words may depend upon the similarity of sound between *Moresheth* and *Meorasah*, "Betrothed" (Deut. xxii. 23), "Thou shalt give dismissal (bill of divorce) to the city once betrothed to thee." Moresheth-Gath, Micah's birthplace, is placed just south of Beit Jibrin, or Eleutheropolis, about twenty-five miles from Gaza (see Introduction, § II.). The addition of Gath to the name of the town is meant to mark its situation as in the immediate neighbourhood of that well-known city. So we have Bethlehem-Judah (Judg. xvii. 7), Abel-Maim or Maachah (1 Kings xv. 20; 2 Chron. xvi. 4). Septuagint, *δώσει ἑξαποστέλλομένους εἰς κληρονομίαν Γέθ*, "He shall cause men to be sent forth even to the inheritance of Geth;" Vulgate, *Dabit emissarios super hereditatem Geth*. To give *shilluchim* the sense of "messengers" seems to be unprecedented. The houses of Achzib shall be a lie (*achzab*), a lying, deceiving brook, which disappoints the hope of the wayfarer, like "fundus mendax" (Horat., 'Carm.' iii. 1. 30). Septuagint, *οἴκους μάταιους*, "vain houses;" Vulgate, *domus mendacis*. The city shall be yielded to the enemy and lost to the Judeans. Achzib (Josh. xv. 44), *hod. Ain Kezbeh*, eight miles north of Adullam, is probably the same as Chezib (Gen. xxxviii. 5), where Shelah, Judah's son by Tamar, was born. The kings of Israel. "Israel" is here equivalent to Judah, having, according to the prediction of vers. 6, 7, lost its political existence (comp. 2 Chron. xxviii. 19, where Ahaz is called King of Israel).

Ver. 15.—Yet will I bring an heir unto thee, O inhabitant of Mareshah. "Mareshah" sounds like *Morashah*, the Hebrew word for "inheritance;" so the play is, "I will bring an inheritor who shall claim your Heritage-town." The "heir" is the Assyrian king, Sargon, into whose possession the city shall pass. Mareshah (Josh. xv. 44; 2 Chron. xiv. 9) was near Achzib, one mile south-east of Beit Jibrin, and is now

called *Mer'ash*. He shall come, etc.; better, *the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam*; i.e. the nobility (comp. Isa. v. 13) of Israel shall fly for refuge to such places as the cave of Adullam, David's asylum (1 Sam. xxii. 1, 2). So the Vulgate. The LXX. has, *Κληρονομία τῆς Ὀδύλλας ἧξει ἡ δόξα τῆς θυγατρὸς Ἰσραὴλ*, "The inheritance shall come to Odullam, even the glory of the daughter of Israel." But Rosenmüller, Henderson, Pusey, and others take the sentence as in the Authorized Version, making "the glory of Israel" in apposition with "Adullam," and understanding by "he" the heir or enemy. One knows no reason why Adullam should be honoured with the above-named title; so the rendering given above is preferable. There is probably a paronomasia intended, "The glory of the Lord shall set (*ad olam*) for ever." The city of Adullam, *hodie Aid-el-Mah*, lay in the valley of Elah, ten miles north-west of Hebron, half-way between Socchoh and Keilah. It was of great antiquity, being mentioned as the birthplace of Hirah, the friend of Judah (Gen. xxxviii. 12), and one of the cities fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 7). In its neighbourhood is the celebrated cave, Mughâ et Khureitun, which is pointed out as the traditional hold of David, and which has been carefully explored by Mr. Tyrwhitt Drake, of the Palestine Exploration Fund (see Thomson, 'Land and the Book,' pp. 332, etc.).

Ver. 16.—§ 5. *The prophet calls upon Zion to mourn for her captivity. Make thee bald. The Hebrew word implies "to make the back of the head bald."* Micah addresses Zion as the mother of the children who are to be led into captivity. Shaving the head in sign of mourning seems to have been retained as a traditional custom in spite of the prohibition of the Law against certain forms which the practice assumed (see Lev. xix. 27; Deut. xiv. 1; and for the actual custom, comp. Isa. iii. 24; Jer. vii. 29; and the note on Amos viii. 10). *Poll thee. Cut off thy hair, nearly synonymous with the word in the former clause. Thy delicate children; literally, the children of thy delights; i.e. the children who are a joy and comfort to thee, the citizens of thy kingdom (comp. ch. ii. 9). As the eagle (nesher).* The vulture is meant, either *Vultur percnopterus*, common in Egypt and Palestine, which is bald on the front of the head and neck, or more probably *Vultur fulvus*, the griffon vulture, whose whole head and neck are destitute of true feathers (see 'Bible Educator,' ii. 247). *Into captivity.* This cannot refer exclusively to the Assyrian invasion, wherein very few captives were taken, but must look forward to the Babylonian deportation in ch. iv. 10. The latter calamity alone is parallel to the destruction of Samaria announced in vers. 6, 7 of this chapter.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*True spiritual teachers.* A preface is often regarded as of comparative unimportance, and many readers ignore it and pass on to the perusal of the work itself. Let not this preface to the Book of Micah be thus summarily dismissed. Every word of God is "profitable." This introductory verse is very suggestive of teachings bearing upon holy service in the cause of God in our own age. The Hebrew prophets were not merely foretellers; they were also the religious educators of the people amongst whom they laboured. We are reminded here that—

1. TRUE SPIRITUAL TEACHERS ARE ENTRUSTED WITH A REVELATION FROM GOD. Note: 1. *This revelation is given in the form of words.* "The word of the Lord that came to Micah." Thoughts may be communicated by utterance, actions, and in writing. In the olden time God communicated his thoughts to Moses on the mount and to the Israelites by the living voice, and to the seers by dreams and visions. In all times he has unfolded his thoughts in actions (Ps. xix. 1, 2). To us he reveals his thoughts in the *written Word*. And it is just in proportion as, taught by the Divine Spirit, we enter into the meaning of the Word of God, and recognize in its teachings a message committed unto us to deliver, that we are qualified to be teachers of spiritual truth (2 Cor. v. 18, 19). 2. *This revelation comes to us stamped with Divine authority.* "The word of the Lord." There was no tone of uncertainty about the utterances of the Hebrew seers; nothing that was speculative, theoretical, problematical, in what they said; nothing that could be described as the creation of their own fancy and imagination. Whilst each prophet retained his own individual peculiarities and natural gifts, so that a pleasing variety meets us in their writings, each announcement was accompanied by "Thus saith the Lord." In our own day all the resources of sanctified genius and endowment should be laid upon the altar of service to God; but let all uncertainty be dismissed. The messenger must not betray a

hesitating tone, as though doubtful whether he has any message to deliver. He has glorious certainties to announce, an authoritative message to declare; and, with confident and unwavering trust, should go forth and publish the bright realities of our faith. 3. *This revelation is made very real to the inner consciousness of the teacher.* "The word of the Lord that came to Micah," "which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem." It was an inward experience with the prophet, a deep inwrought conviction. The word of the Lord took possession of his very soul, and became part and parcel of his very being, touching, quickening, inspiring his whole nature. The circumstances of his nation, too, were vividly presented to him, and the events to be fulfilled were as real as though they had already taken place or were transpiring before his eyes. "Which he saw." The same expression is used with reference to Amos (i. 1) and Habakkuk (i. 1). So still: "That which we have heard," etc. (John i. 1—3). A deeper experimental acquaintance with the truth to be proclaimed would impart to the heralds of it a holier earnestness, and would clothe them with mighty energy and irresistible power. "Let your heart take in by its secret veins that which comes pure from Heaven in showers of blessing: so shall its issues, so far as your influence extends, contribute to fertilize the wilderness" (Arnot). And the heart must be in sympathy with those to whom the truth is to be communicated. The circumstances of his nation pressed upon the heart of Micah. So Ezekiel (iii. 15) and Paul (Rom. x. 1). George Fox said, "I prayed to God that he would baptize my heart into the sense of *all conditions*, so that I might be able to enter into the needs and sorrows of *all*."

II. TRUE SPIRITUAL TEACHERS HAVE OFTEN BEEN RAISED UP AND PREPARED FOR THEIR WORK IN RETIRED AND OBSCURE PLACES. "The word of the Lord that came to Micah the *Morasthite*." Many of the Hebrew prophets sprang from humble and retired localities. Elkosh, Gath-hepher, Tishbe, Abel-Meholah, Anathoth, Moresheth-Gath,—how comparatively insignificant and unknown these places appear! and yet out of them respectively came Nahum, Jonah, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, and Micah. Country life has its special advantages by way of preparing the mind and heart for holy service. It affords a better opportunity for getting the spirit affected with the power and goodness of God as expressed in his works; for scenes of natural beauty are continually unfolded to the view, and of which the citizen is deprived. "God made the country, man the town." Quiet retirement, too, is more available, securing thus facilities for meditation, reflection, and heart-communion. There is so much less to distract and divert the attention than is presented amidst life in the great centres. Yet he who lives in retirement, if designed for prominent service, will not fail, even in his remoteness from the activities of city life, to inform himself concerning the character of the age in which he lives, and to keep himself abreast with it, but will be observant of "the signs of the times," and will familiarize himself with these, even as Micah, away in Moresheth-Gath, was familiar with the moral and spiritual condition of his people, and with the doings of kings and nobles, prophets and priests. It is often a source of discouragement to some engaged in service to God that they are called upon to work in very *retired* spheres, and they ardently long for more scope and wider influence. It should be no slight consolation to such that their spheres, though retired, may nevertheless afford them far-reaching power for good. Perchance under their care may be those whom God has designed for very influential service, and that through their ministry these are being prepared for their life-work; and that in due course, leaving the village and going forth to their mission in city or town, at home or it may be in some far-off land, they will carry with them holy influences which have been exerted upon them by one who may never be known to fame, but whose "witness shall be in heaven, and whose record shall be on high."

III. TRUE SPIRITUAL TEACHERS WILL ADAPT THEMSELVES TO THE AGE THEY ARE TO SEEK TO INFLUENCE. "The word . . . in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." An examination of the period indicates that it was an age: 1. *Thoroughly corrupt.* Nobles, priests, prophets, had alike corrupted their way. Micah denounced with holy boldness the sins of the times (ch. ii. 1, 2, 7—11; iii. 1—4, 5, 7). 2. *Manifestly formal.* In sublime diction Micah enforced the spirituality of genuine worship and the practical character of sincere piety (ch. vi. 6—8). 3. *Utterly unpatriotic.* With loyal spirit he recalled the past of their national history, which

should have stirred their hearts anew (ch. ii. 12; vi. 4, 5; vii. 14, 15, 20). 4. *Setting in darkness.* The cup of iniquity was fast filling. The fate of Samaria was sealed. Jerusalem also was reserved for desolation. But whilst declaring the coming judgments, Micah also declared the Divine mercy to the penitent (ch. vii. 18), and, whilst announcing the approaching ruin, he looked beyond the gathering darkness and the falling shadows, and saw by faith "the mighty Child" appearing in the obscure village of Bethlehem in an age to come, and who should prove himself "a Shepherd more royal even than David," and who should usher in "a peace even more universal than that of Solomon" (ch. v. 2). And so did this distinguished seer adapt himself to the age he was commissioned to serve. And in like manner, he who would work successfully in the present day must fully consider the nature of the times, and the special needs of men. Failure does not always arise from want of ability, but often from lack of adaptation. The thing done is good enough *in itself*, but is not suited to the occasion. There is a Hindu proverb, "The chariot is weak at sea, and the ship on land." In no respect did the Divine Master, the great Prophet of the Church, more thoroughly excel all other instructors than in the marvellous suitability of all his methods and utterances to the deepest needs of those amongst whom he laboured.

Learn: 1. To depend upon God for the teaching of his Spirit, and to receive the truth from him. 2. To gather up strength in retirement for future service. 3. To seek to be inspired with holy courage, so as to declare all the counsel of God. 4. To strengthen your hearts amidst present difficulties and darkness by the prospect of that full and complete salvation which shall be accomplished by Christ.

Vers. 2—7.—*The Divine judgments against Israel.* Micah was a prophet of Judah, and had special reference in his prophecy to that kingdom. Still, he referred also to the kingdom of Israel. In these verses he directed attention to the tribulations speedily to come upon the kingdom of Israel; and, whilst his words have reference to "the dead past," they suggest lessons for all times. Consider—

I. THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS AGAINST THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL AS HERE PREDICTED.

Note: 1. *Their occasion.* (Ver. 5.) The secular historian has his account of the causes of the calamities which overtook the Jewish people. He traces these to lust of power and dominion on the part of the ancient monarchies, Assyrian, Chaldean, Babylonian, by which they were attacked and conquered. But the true spiritual teacher probes deeper, and seeks to get at the root of it all, and finds this to be *sin*—national transgression (ver. 5). There were three stages in the downward progress of the nation. (1) *Degeneration in worship.* Jeroboam, influenced by mere political considerations and worldly policy, set up, at Dan and Bethel, new seats of national worship, and represented the Divinity under the outward figure of the sacred calf. Thus did he "sin and make Israel to sin." (2) *Degeneration in the form of worldliness.* The reign of Omri was marked by the nation's growth in pride and self-sufficiency, in the arts and luxuries of life. He founded Samaria, and made it the capital of the country. "The town sloped down from the summit of the hill. A broad wall with a terraced top ran round it. It stood amidst a circle of hills commanding a view of its streets and slopes, itself the crown and glory of the whole scene. Its soft, rounded, oblong platform was, as it were, a vast luxurious couch, in which its nobles rested, securely propped and cushioned up on both sides, as in the cherished corner of a rich divan" (Stanley's 'Jewish Church,' ii. 239, 240). (3) *Degeneration resulting from foreign alliances,* and specially the union of Ahab to Jezebel, and the consequent establishment in the land of the Phœnician worship, the heathen temples rising, and worship to Ashtaroth and Baal being presented side by side with the degenerate worship offered to the God of heaven. These evils wrought their natural effects in the moral degradation of the land, calling for those Divine judgments which the prophet here declared to be impending. Drunkenness and revellings prevailed (Hos. iv. 11; vii. 5); immorality reigned (Hos. iv. 13; vii. 4; Amos ii. 7); oppression, swearing, lying, theft, murder, were crimes of constant occurrence (Hos. iv. 1, 2). 2. *Their necessity.* (Ver. 3.) "For, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place"—a striking sentence employed to express the necessity that existed for retribution to be exercised. "God's place" is his mercy. He is love. He is good and gracious. It is his nature to show compassion. Let all prominence be given to this characteristic of our God. We cannot dwell too much

upon it, and can never exhaust the rich theme. "God is love," and mercy is "his place." But there are times when there is a stern necessity for him to "come forth out of his place." He is not only loving, he is also righteous, and he is righteous because he is loving. True love excludes partiality, and true justice requires that men be dealt with according to their actions; so that, if God would be true to his character as a God of love, both the recompense of the good and the punishment of the evil is demanded. We are to warn men of the terrible and far-reaching consequences of sin, and whilst joyfully proclaiming "the acceptable year of the Lord," we are also to declare with true solemnity the fact of "the day of vengeance of our God." Whilst delighting to speak of mercy as his dwelling-place, we must also declare that there is the necessity for him "to come forth out of his place" to vindicate the right and to punish the wrong. 3. *Their severity.* (Vers. 3, 4.) This is set forth here in striking metaphor. God is represented as treading upon the high places, the pride of the haughty being as the dust beneath his feet. His judgments are described as fire, under the influence of which the mountains should be molten and the valleys be cleft; whilst as wax melts before the fire, and as the rushing waters, poured over a steep place, no more return, but are scattered in spray and dissipated in vapours, so should the evil-doers at length be brought to nought. Samaria, the centre of the nation, and the source whence proceeded noxious and pestilential influences, should be brought to utter desolation (vers. 6, 7). This stern sentence was literally fulfilled (see Porter's 'Giant Cities of Bashan,' p. 227; Stanley's 'Jewish Church,' ii. 311, 312). 4. *Their equity.* The prophet, like other seers, summons the nations and the earth to bear testimony to the rightness which marks all God's judgments (ver. 2). The acknowledgment of the universe shall be that the Divine judgments are "true and righteous altogether."

II. THE BEARING OF THE STORY OF ISRAEL'S GUILT AND FALL UPON NATIONAL LIFE IN THE PRESENT DAY. 1. It warns us that if we use the pre-eminence God has assigned to us as a nation, simply with a view to our own aggrandizement and the furtherance of our own selfish ends, if, instead of worshipping him, and living with a single eye to his glory, we prostrate ourselves before wealth and luxury, ease and sloth, human reason and human applause, God will be against us, and will come forth "out of his place" to judgment, and national decay and death will assuredly follow. A haughty Frenchman once taunted an English captain, saying, "When will you English fetch Calais again?" The captain replied, "When your sins shall weigh down ours!" 2. It reminds us how essential it is, in order to national prosperity, that the sovereign should be a pattern of every virtue; that rulers should not only be men of wisdom and foresight, but also God-fearing; and that religion, spiritual and practical, should characterize all classes of the community. 3. It indicates to us the forbearance of God in sparing our nation, despite all the defections which have marked us as a people, and should lead us to repentance and a new life. And this must be personal and individual. "He who would reform the world must first improve himself." Then let us each "fear God, and keep his commandments," and so prove good citizens of the land we love. And conscious of our weakness, as Nature in all her helplessness offers herself to the kindly influence of the sun and the refreshing effects of the shower, so let us offer our hearts to the quickening and fertilizing influences of God's Spirit, that as Nature becomes clothed with verdure, so we may abound in all holy graces, and in us the Lord and God of all the nations of the earth be abundantly glorified!

Vers. 5, 9, and 13 (last clauses).—*The contagiousness of sin.* Great prominence should be given in Christian teaching to the sad and solemn fact of sin. Would we lead men to prize the redemption wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ, and to appreciate his unutterable love expressed in his "obedience unto death," we must seek to bring home to them a sense of that sinfulness, from the thraldom and evil consequences of which he came to deliver all who trust in him. The Hebrew prophets present to us in this respect an example well worthy of imitation. We find in their writings bright allusions to the deliverance to be wrought "in the fulness of time" by the Messiah, whose heralds they delighted to be, and whose "day" they "saw afar off;" but accompanying these words of hope were heart-searching utterances, now indignant and scathing, and anon tender, pathetic, wailing, all designed to bring home to the conscience and heart a keen sense of evil-doing, and to lead men to bow themselves low in

penitence for the wrong they had done. We have brought very conspicuously before us in these verses the *contagious influence of sin*. Observe—

I. THE MISCHIEF IS HERE TRACED, IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, TO LACHISH. (Connect vers. 9 and 13.) Lachish was one of the most powerful of the cities of Judah. It was strongly fortified, and formed the cavalry depôt for the nation. Sennacherib spared no effort to reduce it, and, when he had succeeded, he sent from it his boastful and contemptuous message to Hezekiah. The Assyrian monuments represent the taking of this city by the Assyrians, and indicate how that the victors regarded this as a great triumph. Geographically, no city of Judah was more remote from the kingdom of Israel than this; yet it was through this city that the idolatry of Israel found its way into Judah. Lachish was "the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion: for the transgressions of Israel were found in her." How this came to pass we can only conjecture. Rehoboam fortified Lachish. Maachah, his favourite wife, cherished a warm attachment to the worship of foreign divinities, and may, through this channel, have introduced this foreign worship into her country; and in this way probably Lachish became "the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion." And, the gates once opened, the pernicious influence spread, until, despite certain attempts at reformation, the land became thoroughly infected, and the poison so prevailed that we read, "Her wound is incurable," etc. (ver. 9).

II. Another influence that operated in bringing about this morally diseased condition of Judah was THE ALLIANCE FORMED BY JEHOSEPHAT WITH THE HOUSE OF OMRI, AND WHICH RESULTED IN THE MARRIAGE OF JEHOSEPHAT, SON OF JEHOSEPHAT, WITH ATHALIAH, DAUGHTER OF AHAB. Athaliah was a wicked, powerful woman, possessed of fierce determination, cool and calculating, yet of dauntless, resolute spirit. She heard of the overthrow of her father's house, and of the sad end of Jezebel, and the intelligence but strengthened her resolve that the worship of Baal, uprooted in Samaria, should have a home in Jerusalem. And this she secured for it, with all its pernicious influence (Stanley's 'Jewish Church,' ii. 334, 335).

III. THE REMAINING POWERFUL PERNICIOUS INFLUENCE IS TO BE FOUND IN THE ACCESSION OF AHAZ TO THE THRONE. It was during his reign that Micah prophesied; and when we think of the superstitious character of Ahaz, how that he caused new idolatrous sanctuaries to rise on every hand, established the worship of Moloch under the very walls of Jerusalem, and devoted his son to sacrifice, casting him into the fire, need we wonder at the prophet crying with deep distress, "What are the high places of Judah? Are they not Jerusalem?" Beginning at Lachish, in the very extreme border of the land, the contagious influences spread until the whole nation, even to its very centre, had become infected (ver. 9). So is it ever. There is the commencement of the downward course, "the beginning of the sin," leading on to general depravity and defilement.

Learn: 1. To be watchful against "the beginnings" of evil. 2. Christ suffered "without the gate," that he might deliver us from sin and bless us by turning us from our iniquities (Acts iii. 26). 3. Into "the new Jerusalem" there entereth not anything that defileth or worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but there all God's perfected ones, freed from the curse and blight of sin, shall serve him in holiness and love for ever.

Ver. 8.—*The prevalence of sin the source of grief to the good.* I. THE FACT. The good in all ages have mourned over sin and its consequences (Ps. cxix. 136; Jer. ix. 1; Luke xix. 41, 42). In ver. 8 we have pictured to us the distress of one thoroughly noble and good, true and patriotic, occasioned by the prevailing ungodliness and the calamities of which he had to speak. With a vivid sense of the evils of the times and of the coming judgments, this prophet (as others before him) flung aside his mantle and went about beating his breast, and pouring forth wild shrieks and lamentations. By "the dragons" is meant "the jackals," and by "the owls" is intended "the ostriches." Of the former we read, "The jackals make a lamentable howling noise, so that travellers unacquainted with them would think that a company of people, women or children, were howling one to another" (Pococke). And of the latter, another writes, "During the lonesome part of the night they often make a doleful and piteous noise. I have often heard them groan as if they were in the greatest agonies" (Shaw's

'Travels'). So that when the prophet speaks of making "a wailing like the jackals, and mourning like the ostriches," he intimates that he would give way to the intensity of grief and distress, in view of the prevailing iniquity and its prospective punishment.

II. THE CAUSES. This grief arises from : 1. Regard for the honour of that holy and perfect Being against whom all sin is directed. 2. Esteem for his pure and holy Law, of which Law all sin is a violation. 3. Love of righteousness. 4. Deep compassion for those who are thus led captive by evil.

III. THE LIMITATIONS. The manifestation of this grief should be restrained when its expression would furnish occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme (ver. 10). Quoting the expression from David's elegy, "Tell it not in Gath," Micah bids the good, "weeping to weep not," the idea being that prudence should mark them even in their sorrow over sin; that a restraint should be placed by them even upon their mourning over the prevailing evil, rather than by their demonstrations of sorrow they should cause the adversaries of God and of his people to blaspheme and triumph. We should be prepared to endure much, instead of, by giving way, presenting an advantage to the foes of God, and furnishing them with the opportunity of pouring contempt upon his Name.

Vers. 11—16.—*Sorrow following in the train of evil.* I. THIS TRUTH IS SET FORTH IN THESE VERSES IN POETICAL LANGUAGE. The prophet does not mention the land of Judah, but he singles out a number of places in the country, and addresses them by name, employing phraseology calculated to produce a strong impression concerning the grief and sadness that should overspread the nation. We may fittingly compare with this a similar passage in the book of Micah's contemporary, Isaiah (x. 28—32). In both passages these distinguished seers described, in terms of pathetic sadness, the sorrows which should come upon the land in consequence of the nation's guilt. The trials thus predicted did not, however, come in all their intensity so speedily, for the nation, under the influence of Hezekiah, bowed itself low in penitence, and proceeded to reform the prevailing evils. The Assyrian army was, in consequence, divinely checked in its onward march; the destroying angel accomplished his work of terrible destruction in the camp of the Assyrians, and a respite was granted to Judah (Isa. xxxvii. 36).

II. THIS TRUTH, THUS ILLUSTRATED, ADMITS OF THE WIDEST APPLICATION. Sorrow ever follows in the course of evil. A life of obedience to God's revealed will is the only way in which happiness, real and lasting, may be secured. The rabbins say that "when Adam had tasted the forbidden fruit, *his head ached*." The highest authority has declared that "the way of transgressors is hard," and that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" (Gal. vi. 7). An old writer has compared a life of worldliness to one on the stream, and following the river's course. He passes through very lovely scenery. There are the sweet meadows, green woods, the fertile pastures, magnificent buildings, strong forts, famous cities, but at last he comes to *the salt sea*. So the stream of worldliness may yield you many a passing delight, but the end to which it conducts is truly desolate (Thomas Adams). Have we not served sin long enough? All time is too long that is given to that service. It is enough. The time past shall suffice us in which to have wrought the will of the evil one. We cast ourselves at thy feet, O Lord; deliver us from the power and dominion, the shame and sorrow, of sin; and help us to live the manly and godly life!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 2.—*The Lord God a witness against sinners.* God never leaves himself without witness among men. He bears witness perpetually to them—by the gifts of his hand (Acts xiv. 17), by the still small voice within, and by the voice of his messengers. God has borne and still bears witness to us on behalf of Christ. This may be illustrated from John v. 31—39, where our Lord speaks of three ways in which the Father testified on his behalf. 1. By the mission of John the Baptist, representing preachers and teachers. 2. By his works (to us, miracles of grace, converts to Christ). 3. By the written Word. We have to add God's witness : 4. By the resurrection of Christ (Acts

xvii. 31). 5. By the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts v. 32). In all these ways God is bearing witness for us. So even in his chastisements (1 Cor. xi. 32). But if we heed not these testimonies for us, we must be prepared at any time to hear the voice of God's providence calling for judgments (vers. 3, 4), and thus witnessing against us. When such judgments fall, God will be able to testify: (1) That we have had abundant privileges. Illustrate from 1 Sam. xii. 6—15. (2) That we have had fair warning and have neglected it, as did Samaria (2 Kings xvii.), and Judah (2 Chron. xxxvi. 11—21), and the later Jews (Acts xiii. 46). (3) That his judgments are so righteous that God can summon all people to observe and justify them (cf. Deut. xxix. 24—28). "It is a bitter case when our provoked Lord is provoked to go out of doors to the streets with his beloved's faults." They proceed from the very temple of his holiness (cf. Rev. xv. 3—6, where the songs of vindication and the angels of vengeance are coupled together). God never hesitates to give reasons for his judgments (Prov. i. 24—27; Jer. xxix. 23; Mal. ii. 14; iii. 5). Such judgments as fall now are but predictions and earnest of the great judgment awaiting the ungodly. God, who will then be a witness against us, warns us now of some of the ways in which he will then testify. He will bring as witnesses: (1) The Law (John v. 45). (2) The gospel (John xii. 47). (3) Our outward privileges. Illustrate from Josh. xxiv. 26, 27. So there may be cited against us—the pulpit from which we heard the Word, and the preacher who in it "testified repentance towards God," etc. (Acts xx. 21). (4) The less privileged of our brethren (cf. Luke xi. 31, 32). (5) Our misused talents (Jas. v. 1—4). (6) Our words (Matt. xii. 37). (7) Our consciences (John viii. 9; Rom. ii. 15). If true now, how much more then! Lest God should be a witness against us then, we must, by repentance, faith, and obedience, secure his testimony now, like Enoch (Heb. xi. 5; cf. Ps. cxlvii. 11). Then we shall have the testimony of our brethren (Rom. xvi. 6—13; 3 John 3—6) and of our own consciences (2 Cor. i. 12), and shall be able to anticipate without fear the final verdict of God (Rom. viii. 33, 34).—E. S. P.

Ver. 5.—*Sins in the metropolis.* God's interposition by judgment is threatened on account of the nation's sins. The greatness of their privileges involved special responsibilities and chastisements (Amos iii. 2). These sins are traced to their sources in the capitals of the two kingdoms. A metropolis is a centre of influence for good or for evil. This may be illustrated by the histories of both the Hebrew kingdoms. The northern kingdom had in succession three capitals: (1) Shechem, where the apostasy of Israel began (1 Kings xii. 25—33). (2) Tirzah, the home of Jeroboam (1 Kings xiv. 17), the scene of civil strife (1 Kings xvi. 9, 17, 18), and of the court of Omri of sinister memory (ch. vi. 16), for half his reign. (3) Samaria, the seat of monarchy for two hundred years. Among the sins specially charged by the prophets against Samaria we find pride (Isa. ix. 9), luxury and licentiousness (Isa. xxviii. 1—4; Amos vi. 1—6), incorrigible treachery (Hos. vii. 1), contemptuous disregard of God and his worship (Hos. viii. 5; Amos viii. 14), oppression of the poor (ch. iii.; Amos iv. 1). In Judah the high places were an offence to God, which even good kings did not entirely suppress, so that Jerusalem may be said to have been responsible for them, and did not escape the infection (2 Chron. xxviii. 1—4, 23—25) nor the denunciations of the prophets (Isa. i., v.; xxviii. 14—19). We are thus reminded of—

I. THE RESPONSIBILITIES ATTACHING TO A METROPOLIS. It is: 1. The seat of government, where kings and rulers live and exert great personal influence, and where laws are passed which, if bad, may corrupt the national conscience and deprave social life. 2. One chief centre of public opinion, where the most educated and cultivated congregate. 3. The fountain of fashion. 4. The gathering-place of the rural population, where the opinions and practices of the citizens may be speedily imbibed. Illustrate from the influence of Paris during the second empire, culminating in the craze for war, which brought ruin on the country in 1870; or from the influence of Constantinople and its pachas on the present condition of the Turkish empire. Such capitals are centres of corruption, like diseased lungs where the blood is deteriorated rather than purified.

II. LESSONS ARE SUGGESTED FOR ALL CLASSES OF RESIDENTS IN A METROPOLIS. 1. For the court, lest they be like Jeroboam, "who made Israel to sin." 2. For legislators. Illustrate from the demoralizing effects of many of our past licensing acts.

3. For editors of newspapers and other leaders of public opinion. It was these who were, to a large extent, responsible for the Crimean War. 4. For the leaders of fashion, who may foster habits of extravagance, of peril to health, or even of cruelty in matters of dress. 5. For men of business; the exchanges of the metropolis giving a tone to the commercial customs of the country. 6. For artisans, whose trades unions may help or injure their fellow-workmen scattered in the provinces. 7. For preachers, whom many gather from all parts to hear, and who may give a tone to the preaching of the country. 8. For Church members. Heresy or worldliness in metropolitan Churches may soon spread among rural Churches maintaining a simpler faith and practice (cf. Matt. v. 14, 16; Rom. i. 8).—E. S. P.

Vers. 1, 2.—Divine revelation. "The word of the Lord that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth," etc. Micah calls himself a Morasthite because he was a native of Moresheth-Gath, a small town of Judæa. He prophesied in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and his prophetic mission commenced soon after that of Isaiah. He was contemporary with him, as well as with Hosea and Amos. His prophecies were directed to Samaria, the capital city of Israel, and also to Jerusalem. Hence we find denunciations against Samaria mingled with prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem. One of his predictions, it seems, saved the life of Jeremiah, who would have been put to death for foretelling the destruction of the temple, had not Micah foretold the same thing a hundred years before. The book is commonly divided into three sections—ch. i. and ii.; ch. iii. to v.; ch. vi. and vii. Each of these opens with a summons to hear God's message, and then proceeds with expostulations and threatenings, which are followed by glorious promises. His style is bold, fiery, and abrupt, and has not a little of the poetic grandeur of Isaiah. His sudden transitions from one subject to another often make his writings difficult to explain. "It is not," says Delitzsch, "a little remarkable that Micah should adopt as the first sentence of his prophecy that with which his namesake concluded his denouncement against Ahab" (1 Kings xxii. 28). Hengstenberg is of opinion that "he quoted the words designedly, in order to show that his prophetic agency was to be considered as a confirmation of that of his predecessor, who was so zealous for God, and that he had more in common with him than the bare name." We may take these words as suggesting certain thoughts concerning *Divine revelation*, or the Bible.

I. IT IS THE "WORD OF THE LORD." What is a word? 1. *A mind-manifesting power.* In his word a true man manifests himself, his thought, feeling, character; and his word is important according to the measure of his faculties, experiences, attainments. Divine revelation manifests the mind of God, especially the moral characteristics of that mind—his rectitude, holiness, mercy, etc. 2. *A mind-influencing power.* Man uses his word to influence other minds, to bring other minds into sympathy with his own. Thus God uses his Word. He uses it to correct human errors, dispel human ignorance, remove human perversities, and turn human thought and sympathy into a course harmonious with his own mind.

II. IT IS "THE WORD OF THE LORD" MADE TO INDIVIDUAL MEN. It "came to Micah the Morasthite." It did not come to all men of his age and country in common. It came to him and a few more. Why certain men were chosen as the special recipients of God's word is a problem whose solution must be left for eternity. If it be said—The men to whom God made special communications were men whose mental faculties, moral genius, and habits specially qualified them to become recipients, and if all men had the same qualifications, all would have Divine communications, the difficulty is not removed by this; for it might still be asked—Why have not all men such qualifications? The fact remains that "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

III. IT IS "THE WORD OF THE LORD" MADE TO INDIVIDUAL MEN FOR ALL MANKIND. "Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is!" God did not speak to any individual man specially in order that the communication might be kept to himself, but that he might communicate it to others. He makes one man the special recipient of truth that he may become the organ and promoter of it. God's Word

is for the world, and the man who has it should give it forth. God enlightens, renovates, and saves man by man.—D. T.

Vers. 3—7.—*God's procedure in relation to sin.* "For, behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth," etc. This is a highly figurative and sublime representation of the Almighty in his retributive work, especially in relation to Samaria and Jerusalem. He is represented as leaving his holy temple, coming out of his place, and marching with overwhelming grandeur over the high places of the earth, to deal out punishment to the wicked. "Behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him," etc. "The description of this theophany," says Delitzsch, "is founded upon the idea of a terrible storm and earthquake, as in Ps. xviii. 8. The mountains melt (Judg. v. 4; Ps. lxxviii. 8) with the streams of water which discharge themselves from heaven and the valleys split with the deep channels cut out by the torrents of water. The similes 'like wax,' etc. (as in Ps. lxxviii. 2), and 'like water' are intended to express the complete dissolution of mountains and valleys. The actual facts answering to this description are the destructive influences exerted upon nature by great national judgments." The reference may be to the destruction of the King of Israel by Shalmaneser, and the invasion of Judah by the armies of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, by the latter of whom the Jews were carried away captive. The passage is an inexpressibly grand representation of God's *procedure in relation to sin*. Let us look at this procedure in two aspects.

I. AS IT APPEARS TO THE EYE OF MAN. The Bible is eminently anthropomorphic: it presents God to man in human attributes and modes of operation. Two thoughts are suggested: 1. God, in dealing out retribution, appears to man in an *extraordinary position*. "He cometh forth out of his place." What is his place? To all intelligent beings the settled place of the Almighty is the temple of love, the pavilion of goodness, the mercy-seat. The general beauty, order, and happiness of the universe give all intelligent creatures this impression of him. But when confusion and misery fall on the sinner, the Almighty seems to man to come out of his "place"—to step aside from his ordinary procedure. Not that he does so; but in man's view he seems to do so. The Immutible One does not change his purpose. His purpose is benevolent, though in carrying it forward it necessarily brings misery to those who oppose it. Judgment is God's strange work (Isa. xxviii. 21). He comes out of his place to execute it. 2. God, in dealing out retribution, appears to man in a *terrific aspect*. He does not appear as in the silent march of the stars or the serenity of the sun; but as in thunder-storms and volcanic eruptions. "The mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire." Though the Almighty is as benign and serene when bringing deserved suffering upon the sinner as he is when filling heaven with gladness, yet to the suffering sinner he always seems terrific. He seems to be rending the heavens, cleaving the mountains, and tearing the earth to pieces. God is evermore presented to an intelligent creature according to the moral state of his soul.

II. AS IT AFFECTS A SINFUL PEOPLE. In God's procedure in relation to sin, what disastrous effects were brought upon Samaria and Jerusalem! 1. God, in his procedure in relation to sin, brings *material ruin* upon people. "Therefore I will make Samaria as a heap of the field, and as plantings of a vineyard: and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof." It means utter ruin. Sin brings material destruction upon a people, brings on commercial decay, political ruin, destroys the health of the body, and brings it ultimately to the dust. Sin brings material ruin. 2. God, in his procedure in relation to sin, brings *mental anguish* upon a people. "And all the graven images thereof shall be beaten to pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burned with the fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate." A disruption between the soul and the objects of its supreme affections involves the greatest anguish. The gods of a people, whatever they may be, are these objects, and these are to be destroyed. "The graven images thereof shall be beaten to pieces." The divinities, the lares, the priests—all shattered. Such is the ruin which sin brings on a people.

CONCLUSION. Mark well that God has a course of conduct in relation to sin; or

rather, that God, in his beneficent march, must ever appear terrible to the sinner and bring ruin on his head. It is the wisdom as well as the duty of all intelligent creatures to move in thought, sympathy, and purpose as God moves—move with him, not against him. To move with him is to see him in all the attraction of Fatherhood; to move against him is to see him in all the horrors of an infuriated Judge.—D. T.

Vers. 8, 9.—*Moral incurableness.* “Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls. For her wound is incurable; for it is come unto Judah; he is come unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem.” These verses have been thus translated: “Therefore will I lament and howl; I will go spoiled and naked; I will keep lamentation like the jackals, and mourning like the ostriches. For her stripes are malignant; for it comes to Judah, reaches to the gate of my people, to Jerusalem.” Micah’s intention is not only to exhibit publicly his mourning for the approaching calamity of Judah, but also to set forth in a symbolical form the fate that awaits the Judæans. And he can only do this by including himself in the nation, and exhibiting the fate of the nation in his own person. “Wailing like jackals and ostriches is a loud, strong, mournful cry, those animals being distinguished by a mournful wail.” We shall take these words as suggesting the subject of *moral incurableness*. Samaria and Jerusalem were, in a material and political sense, in a desperate and hopeless condition. Our subject is *moral incurableness*, and we make two remarks concerning it.

I. IT IS A CONDITION INTO WHICH MEN MAY FALL. 1. *Mental philosophy shows this.* Such is the constitution of the human mind, that the repetition of an act can generate an uncontrollable tendency to repeat it; and the repetition of a sin deadens altogether that moral sensibility which constitutionally recoils from the wrong. The mind often makes habit, not only second nature, but the sovereign of nature. 2. *Observation shows this.* That man’s circle of acquaintance must be exceedingly limited who does not know men who become morally incurable. There are incurable liars, incurable misers, incurable sensualists, and incurable drunkards. No moral logician, however great his dialectic skill, can forge an argument strong enough to move them from their old ways, even when urged by the seraphic fervour of the highest rhetoric. 3. *The Bible shows this.* What did Solomon mean when he said, “Speak not in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words” (Prov. xxiii. 9)? What did Christ mean when he said, “Give not that which is holy to the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine”? And again, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes”? We often speak of retribution as if it always lay beyond the grave, and the day of grace as extending through the whole life of man; but such is not the fact. Retribution begins with many men here; the day of grace terminates with many before the day of death. There are those who reach an unconvertible state; their characters are stereotyped and fixed as eternity.

II. IT IS A CONDITION FOR THE PROFOUNDTEST LAMENTATION. At the desperate condition of his country the prophet is brought into the most poignant distress. “Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls.” Christ wept when he considered the moral incurableness of the men of Jerusalem. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!” etc. There is no sight more distressing than the sight of a morally incurable soul. There is no building that I pass that strikes me with greater sadness than the Hospital for “Incurables;” but what are incurable bodies compared to *morally incurable* souls? There are anodynes that may deaden their bodily pains, and death will relieve them of their torture; but a morally incurable soul is destined to pass into anguish, intense and more intense as existence runs on, and peradventure without end. The incurable body may not necessarily be an injury to others; but a morally incurable soul must be a curse as long as it lives. Were we truly alive to the moral state of wicked men around us, we should be ready to break out in the words of the prophet, “Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked,” etc.—D. T.

Ver. 13.—*Be quick.* “Bind the chariot to the swift beast.” These words are addressed to the inhabitants of Lachish. “This place appears to have formed the link

of idolatry between Israel and Judah. Lying in the Shephelah, a fortified place of great importance, she was the first city in Judah that was led away by the sin of Jeroboam; and from her the infection spread till at length it reached Jerusalem itself. In the prospect of a sudden attack, it behoved the inhabitants to use all despatch in removing their families and what property they could take with them to a distance. Lachish was besieged by Sennacherib before making the threatened attack on Jerusalem" (2 Kings xviii. 14). Our subject is *promptitude in action*. "Bind the chariot to the swift beast."

I. BE QUICK IN YOUR MATERIAL ENGAGEMENTS. Man has material duties; these are as sacred and as binding as spiritual ones. Indeed, the distinction between the secular and the spiritual is not real, but fictitious. A man should be quick in all his legitimate temporal engagements, whatever they may be. Whatever is to be done must be done at once. "Be diligent in business." By quickness I do not mean the hurry of confusion, but adroit expertness, skilful promptitude. As Shakespeare says, "What the wise do quickly is not done rashly." 1. *The quicker you are, the more you will accomplish.* An expert man will accomplish more in an hour than a slow man in a day. 2. *The quicker you are, the better for your faculties.* The quick movement of the limb is healthier than the slow; the quick action of the mental faculties is more invigorating than the slow. As a rule, the quick man is in every way healthier and happier than the slow. 3. *The quicker you are, the more valuable you are in the market of the world.* The skilful man who cultivates the habit of quickness and despatch increases his commercial value every day. Those trades unions that enact that all of a craft should be paid alike, however they work, enact an absurdity and an injustice. One quick and skilful man may accomplish as much in one day as six slow men, though equally clever. Be quick, then, in business. "Bind the chariot to the swift beast."

II. BE QUICK IN YOUR INTELLECTUAL PURSUITS. You have an enormous amount of mental work to do, if you act up to your duty and discharge your mission in life. You have manifold faculties to discipline, numerous errors to correct, vast and varied knowledge to attain. "The soul without knowledge is not good" (Prov. xix. 2). No, not good either to itself or others. Be quick. 1. *The quicker you are, the more you will attain.* The more fields of truth you will traverse, the more fruits you will gather from the tree of knowledge. Some men in their studies move like elephants, and only traverse a small space. Others, like eagles, sweep continents in a day. The quick eye will see what escapes the dull eye; the quick ear will catch voices unheard by the slow of hearing. 2. *The quicker you are, the better for your faculties.* It is the brisk walker that best strengthens his limbs, the brisk fighter that wins the greatest victories. It is by quick action that the steel is polished and that weapons are sharpened. Intellectual quickness whets the faculties, makes them keen, agile, and apt. "Bind the chariot to the swift beast."

III. BE QUICK IN YOUR SPIRITUAL AFFAIRS. 1. *Morally you have a work to do for your own soul.* It is in a ruined state, it is like the "field of the slothful" and the "vineyard of the man void of understanding" of which Solomon speaks; it needs cultivation. The work is great and urgent. 2. *Morally you have a work to do for others.* There are souls around you demanding your most earnest efforts, etc. (1) Be quick; the work must be done during your life here, if ever done. (2) Be quick; your life here is very short and uncertain. (3) Be quick; the longer you delay, the more difficult it is to do. Be quick: "Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might; for there is no knowledge nor device in the grave whither we are all hastening." "Bind the chariot to the swift beast."

"Oh, let all the soul within you
For the truth's sake go abroad;
Strike! let every nerve and sinew
Tell on ages—tell for God."

(A. C. Coxe.)

D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1—5.—§ 6. *The prophet justifies his threat by recounting the sins of which the grandees are guilty.*

Ver. 1.—The prophet, himself one of the people, first inveighs against the sins of injustice and oppression of the poor. Devise . . . work . . . practise. A gradation. They are not led into these sins by others; they themselves conceive the evil purpose in their own heart; then they prepare and mature their scheme by reflection; then they proceed to execute it. Work evil; i.e. prepare the means for carrying out their conception (comp. Isa. xli. 4). Upon their beds. At night, the natural time for reflection (comp. Job iv. 13; Ps. iv. 4; xxxvi. 4). Is light. Far from shrinking from the light of day in putting into effect their evil projects, they set about their accomplishment as soon as ever the morning allows them. Because it is in the power of their hand. Their might makes their right. (For the phrase, comp. Gen. xxxi. 29; Prov. iii. 27.) As the word *el* may be taken to mean "God" as well as "power," some render here, "For their hand is their god," comparing the boast of Mezentius in Virgil, 'Æneid,' x. 773—

"Dextra mihi Deus et telum quod missile libro."

The Vulgate has, *Quoniam contra Deum est manus eorum*; LXX., *Διότι οὐκ ἔσαν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν χεῖρας αὐτῶν*, "Because they lifted not up their hands unto God." So the Syriac, with the omission of the negative.

Ver. 2.—They carry out by open violence the fraud which they have devised and planned (comp. Isa. v. 8; Amos iv. 1). Covet fields. Compare the case of Ahab and Naboth (1 Kings xxi.). The commandment against coveting (Exod. xx. 17) taught the Jews that God regarded sins of thought as well as of action. The Law forbade the alienation of landed property and the transfer of estates from tribe to tribe (Lev. xxv. 23—28; Numb. xxxvi. 7). A rich man might buy a poor man's estate subject to the law of jubilee; but these grandees seem to have forced the sale of property, or else seized it by force or fraud. Oppress; Vulgate, *calumniabantur*. The Hebrew word involves the idea of violence.

Ver. 3.—The sin shall be followed by its appropriate punishment. As they devised evil, God will devise a penalty. This family. The whole people (Amos iii. 1). An evil. A chastisement, a judgment (Amos iii. 6). Ye.

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The prophet suddenly addresses them, the "family." Your necks. He speaks of the calamity as a heavy, galling yoke, from which they should be unable to free themselves (comp. Hos. x. 11). This yoke is their conquest and exile at the hands of foreigners (comp. Jer. xxvii. 12). Haughtily. With head erect. Septuagint, *ὄρθοι*. Their pride shall be brought low. This time is evil; full of calamity, which is announced in the following verses. The words occur in Amos v. 13, but the evil there spoken of is moral (comp. Eph. v. 16).

Ver. 4.—In that day. The evil time mentioned in ver. 3. A parable (*maschal*); probably here "a taunting song." The enemy shall use the words in which Israel laments her calamity as a taunt against her (Hab. ii. 6). And lament with a doleful lamentation. The Hebrew gives a remarkable alliteration, *Nahah nehi niheyah*; Septuagint, *Θρηνηθήσεται θρήνος ἐν μέλει*, "Lament a lamentation with melody;" Vulgate, *Cantabitur canticum cum suavitate*; "Wail a wail of woe" (Pusey). The Syriac coincides with the LXX. By taking the three words as cognates, we get a very forcible sentence; but most modern commentators consider *niheyah* not a feminine formation, but niph. of the substantive verb *hayah*; hence the words would mean, "Lament with the lamentation;" "It is done," they shall say; "we are utterly spoiled." Thus Cheyne. The lamentation begins with "It is done," and continues to the end of the verse. The verbs are used impersonally—"one shall take up," "one shall lament," "one shall say;" but it is plain that the last two refer to the Jews who shall utter the given dirge, which in turn shall be repeated as a taunt by the enemy. We are utterly spoiled. According to the second of the explanations of the preceding clause, these words expand and define the despairing cry, "It is done!" In the other case, they are the commencement of the lamentation. Septuagint, *Ταλαιπωρία ἐταλαιπωρήσαμεν*, "We are miserably miserable." The complaint is twofold. First, the once flourishing condition of Israel is changed to ruin and desolation. Secondly, He hath changed (*changeth*) the portion of my people. This is the second calamity: he, Jehovah, passes our inheritance over to the hands of others; the land of Canaan, pledged to us, is transferred to our enemies. Septuagint, *κατεμετρήθη ἐν σχοινίῳ*, "hath been measured with a line." How hath he removed it [the portion] from me! This is better than the alternative rendering, "How doth he depart from me?" Turning away he hath divided our fields;

rather, to an apostate he divideth our fields. The apostate is the King of Assyria or Chaldea; and he is so named as being a rebel against Jehovah, whom he might have known by the light of natural religion (comp. ch. v. 15; Rom. i. 20). This was fulfilled later by the colonization of Samaria by a mixed population.

Ver. 5.—Therefore thou. Because thou, the tyrannical, oppressive grandee (vers. 1, 2), hast dealt with thy neighbour's land unjustly, therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast a cord (*the line*) by lot (*for a lot*): i.e. thou shalt have no more inheritance in Israel. The "line" is the measuring-line used in dividing land, as Amos vii. 17. The reference is to the original distribution of the land by lot in Joshua's time (see Josh. xiv. 2, etc.). In the congregation of the Lord. The Lord's own people, whose polity was now about to be dissolved. Hitzig, Reuss, and Orelli suppose that this verse contains a threat against Micah himself on the part of the ungodly Jews, intimating that they will punish him for presuming to prophesy against them, and that he shall die without leaving children. But this seems far-fetched and inadmissible.

Vers. 6-11.—§ 7. *The threat announced in ver. 3 is further vindicated and applied to individual sinners, with a glance at the false prophets who taught the people to love lies.*

Ver. 6.—Prophecy ye not; literally, drop ye not, as Amos vii. 16 (where see note). The speakers are generally supposed to be the false prophets who wish to stop the mouths of Micah and those who are like-minded with him. This is probably correct; but these are not the only speakers; the people themselves, the oppressing grandees, who side with the popularity-hunting seers, are also included (see note on ver. 12). Say they to them that prophesy; rather, thus they prophesy (*drop*). Micah uses their own word sarcastically, "Do not be always rebuking;" "Thus they rebuke." The rest of the verse belongs to the same speakers, and should be rendered, "They shall not prophesy of these things; reproaches never cease." The great men and the false prophets complain of the true prophets that they are always proclaiming misfortune and rebuking the people, and they bid them leave such denunciations alone for the future. The passage is very difficult, and its interpretation has greatly exercised commentators; the above is virtually the explanation of Ewald, Hitzig, Caspari, and Cheyne. Orelli makes the two last clauses Micah's answer to the interdict of the adversaries, "Should one not prophesy of these things?

Should reproaches (against the true prophets) never cease?" We prefer the interpretations given above, and consider the prophet's reply to be given in the next verse.

Ver. 7.—The prophet answers the interdict of the speakers in the preceding verse by showing that God's attributes are unchanged, but that the sins of the people constrain him to punish. O thou that art named the house of Jacob. Other renderings of these words are given, viz. "Ah! what a saying!" or, "Is this a thing to be said, O house of Jacob?" The versions of the LXX., 'O λέγων ὁikos 'Ιακώβ, κ.τ.λ., and of the Vulgate, *Dicit domus Jacob*, do not suit the Hebrew. If we adopt the rendering of the Authorized Version, we must consider that Micah addresses those who gloried in their privilege as the family of Jacob, though they had ceased to be what he was, believing and obedient. "O ye who are only in name and title the chosen nation" (comp. Isa. xlviii. 1; John viii. 33, 39). Professor Driver (*Expositor*, April, 1887) obtains the very suitable meaning, *Num dicendum*, "Shall it be said, O house of Jacob, Is the ear of the Lord shortened?" etc., by the change of a vowel-point. Somewhat similarly Orelli, "Is this the speech of the house of Jacob?" viz. —Should Jehovah be impatient (as these threats declare him to be)? or were these his doings? The following clause is Jehovah's answer to the objection. Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? or, shortened. Is he less long-suffering than Jehovah of heretofore? Will you accuse Jehovah of impatience? "Shortness" of spirit is opposed to longanimity (see Prov. xiv. 29). Are these his doings? Are these judgments and chastisements his usual doings—that which he delights in? Is the cause of them in him? Is it not in you (Lam. iii. 33; Ezek. xxxiii. 11; ch. vii. 18)? Do not my words do good, etc.? This may be Jehovah's answer to the previous questions, or Micah's refutation of the complaint. The Lord's word is good, his action is a blessing, but only to him who does his commandments (Ps. xlvii. 25, 26; xxv. 10; ciii. 17, etc.; Luke i. 50).

Ver. 8.—Even of late; but of late; literally, yesterday, implying an action recent and repeated. Septuagint, *ἐμπροσθεν*, "before;" Vulgate, *e contrario*. The prophet exemplifies the iniquity which has led God to punish. They are not old offences which the Lord is visiting, but sins of recent and daily occurrence. My people is risen up as an enemy. A reading, varying by a letter or two, is rendered, "But against my people one setteth himself." But there is no valid reason for altering the received text; especially as, according to Ewald, the present reading may be taken in a causative sense.

"They set up my people as an enemy," *i.e.* the grandees treat the Lord's people as enemies, robbing and plundering them. This translation obviates the difficulty of referring the words, "my people," in this verse to the oppressor, and in ver. 7 to the oppressed. According to the usual view, and retaining the authorized rendering, the meaning is that the princes exhibit themselves as enemies of the Lord by their acts of violence and oppression, which the prophet proceeds to particularize. Septuagint, Ὁ Κας μου εἰς ἐχθραν ἀντίστη, "My people withstood as an enemy." Ye pull off the robe with the garment; ye violently strip off the robe away from the garment. The "robe" (*eder*) is the wide cloak, the mantle sufficient to wrap the whole person, and which was often of very costly material. The "garment" (*salmah*) is the principal inner garment, or tunic. There may be an allusion to the enactment which forbade a creditor retaining the pledged garment during the night (Exod. xxii. 26, etc.). Septuagint, Κατέναντι τῆς εἰρήνης αὐτοῦ τὴν δорὰν αὐτοῦ ἐξείρασαν, "Against his peace they stripped off his skin." From them that pass by securely as men averse from war. This is probably the correct translation. The grandees rob those who are peaceably disposed, perhaps strip their debtors of their cloaks as they pass quietly along the road. The versions vary considerably from the received Hebrew text. The LXX. (with which the Syriac partially agrees) has, Τοῦ ἀφελεῖσθαι ἐλπίδας συντριμμὸν πολέμου, "To remove hope in the destruction of war." Vulgate, *Eos qui transibant simpliciter convertistis in bellum*. From this rendering Trochon derives the paraphrase—Ye treat them as if they were prisoners of war. Hitzig considers that the reference is to fugitives from the northern kingdom who passed through Judæa in their endeavour to escape the evils of the war, leaving wives and children in the hands of the Judæans. But these treated the refugees harshly.

Ver. 9.—The women of my people. The prophet refers to the widows, who ought to have been protected and cared for (comp. Isa. x. 2). The LXX., with which the Arabic agrees, renders, ἡγοῦμενοι λαοῦ μου, "the leaders of my people." Have ye cast out. The word expresses a violent expulsion, as Gen. iii. 24. Their pleasant houses; literally, the house of their delights (ch. i. 16). The house which was very dear to them, the scene of all their joys. My glory. All the privileges which they enjoyed as God's people and his peculiar care are called "the ornament" of the Lord (comp. Ezek. xvi. 14). The "glory" is by some commentators, but not so oppositely, referred to vesture exclusively. These fatherless children had been

ruthlessly stripped of their blessings, either by being forced to grow up in want and ignorance, or by being sold into slavery and carried away from their old religious associations. For ever. The oppressors never repented or tried to make restitution; and so they incurred the special woe of those who injure the poor, the fatherless, and the widow (Pusey). The Septuagint has no connection with the present Hebrew text of this verse, reading, Ἐγγίσατε ὄρεσιν αἰώνιαις, "Draw ye near to the everlasting hills," and previously introducing a gloss, διὰ τὰ πονηρὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα αὐτῶν ἐξώσθησαν, "They were rejected because of their evil practices." Jerome explains the Greek mystically, despairing of the literal interpretation in its present connection.

Ver. 10.—Arise ye, and depart. The prophet pronounces the oppressors' punishment—they shall be banished from their land, even as they have torn others from their home. This is not your rest. Canaan had been given as a resting-place to Israel (Deut. xii. 9, 10; Josh. i. 13; Ps. xcv. 11), but it should be so no longer. Because it is polluted. The land is regarded as polluted by the sins of its inhabitants. The idea is often found; *e.g.* Lev. xviii. 25, 28; Numb. xxxv. 33; Jer. ii. 7. It shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction. The land is said to destroy when it ejects its inhabitants, as though the inanimate creation rose in judgment against the sinners. The Revised Version, with Keil and others, translates, *Because of uncleanness that destroyeth, even with a grievous destruction*; Septuagint, Διεφθάρητε φθορᾷ, "Ye were utterly destroyed;" Vulgate, *Propter immunditiam ejus corrumpetur putredine pessima*. The Authorized Version is correct.

Ver. 11.—Such prophets as speak unwelcome truths are not popular with the grandees; they like only those who pander to their vices and prophesy lies. This was their crowning sin. If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie. "The spirit and falsehood" may be a hendiadys for "a spirit of falsehood," or "a lying spirit," as 1 Kings xxii. 22 (comp. Ezek. xiii. 2, 3, 17). But it is better to render, *If a man walking after (conversant with) the wind and falsehood do lie*. Wind is symbolical of all that is vain and worthless, as Isa. xxvi. 18; xli. 29. The Septuagint introduces a gloss from Lev. xxvi. 17, Κατεδιώχθητε οὐδενὸς διώκοντος, "Ye fled, no one pursuing you," and translates the above clause, πνεῦμα ἐστῆσε ψεύδος: "spiritus statuit mendacium, *i.e.* finem posuit mendacii" (St. Jerome); Vulgate, *Ultimam non essem vir habens spiritum, et mendacium potius loquerer*. I will prophesy unto thee, etc. These are the words of a false prophet. "Prophecy,"

"drop," as ver. 6. Of wine and of strong drink. Concerning temporal blessings, dwelling on God's promises of material prosperity (Lev. xxvi. 4, etc.; Deut. xxviii. 4, 11) in order to encourage the grantees in self-indulgence. He shall even be the prophet of this people. Such a one is the only prophet to whom the great men, the representatives of "this people," will listen.

Vers. 12, 13.—§ 8. Promise of restoration and deliverance.

Ver. 12.—The prophet, without any preface, introduces abruptly a promise of restoration after exile, a type of the triumph of Messiah. Some commentators, indeed, regard this and the following verse as the language of the false prophets; others, as a denunciation of punishment, not a promise of deliverance; others, as a late interpolation. But the style is entirely Micah's (comp. ch. iv. 6, 7), the promise is a true one, and such-like sudden transitions are common in the prophetic books (comp. e.g. Isa. iv. 2—6; Hos. i. 10; xi. 9; Amos ix. 11); so that we need not resort to the hypothesis that some connecting link has dropped out of the text, or that the clause is misplaced; and we are fully justified in considering the paragraph as inserted here in its right position, and as predictive of the restoration of the Jews after captivity. Micah would seem to imply—I am not, indeed, as one of the false prophets who promise you earthly good without regard to your moral fitness for receiving God's bounty; neither am I one who has no message but of woe and calamity; I, too, predict salvation and happiness for a remnant of you after you have been tried by defeat and exile. I will surely assemble. This presupposes dispersion among the heathen, such as is foretold in ch. i. 8, etc.; ii. 4, etc. O Jacob, all of thee. The promise extends to the whole nation, whether called Jacob or Israel, as ch. i. 5; but still only a remnant, i.e. that portion of the nation which should make a good use of adversity, and turn to the Lord with sincere repentance (comp. Isa. x. 20, etc.; Jer. xxxi. 8; Ezek. xxxiv. 11, etc.; Zeph. iii. 12, etc.). Some see in the term "remnant" an allusion to the people that were left in the northern kingdom after the fall of Samaria. As the sheep of Bozrah. There were two or more towns so named—one in Sidon, for which see note on Amos i. 12; and another, *lud. Buzrah*, on the south border of the Hauran. This is mentioned in Jer. xlviii. 24, as one of the cities of Moab, a district celebrated for its flocks (2 Kings iii. 4); hence "sheep of Bozrah" may have become a proverbial saying. Many commentators

take *Bozrah* as an appellative, meaning "fold," in agreement with the Vulgate, *quasi gregem in ovili*, and Chaldee, as well as Aquila and Symmachus. The parallelism in the following words seems to favour this view. The LXX. reads differently, rendering, ἐν ἀλψει, "in trouble." Thus, too, the Syriac. As the flock in the midst of their fold; rather, as a flock in the midst of its pasture. They shall make great noise, etc. Like a numerous flock bleating in its fold, so shall the returned Israelites be, prosperous and happy, celebrating their salvation with praise and exultation (comp. Ezek. xxxiv. 31). Septuagint, Ἐξαλοῦνται ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, "They shall leap forth from among men," which St. Jerome explains as meaning that the repentant Israelites shall rise above worldly things and aspire to heaven.

Ver. 13.—The breaker is come (*gone*) up before them. Micah depicts Israel's redemption under the figure of release from captivity. The passage is clearly Messianic, and can neither be considered an interpolation nor tortured into a declaration of the siege and ruin of Samaria or Jerusalem. "One that breaketh" is a liberator, a leader that overcomes all obstacles which oppose Israel's return. There may be an allusion in the first instance to a human leader, such as Zerubbabel, in analogy with Moses and Joshua in old time, but the real conqueror intended is generally regarded as Messiah. The Breaker-up is supposed to be a title of the Messiah well known to the Jews (see Pusey; and Pearson, 'Exposition of the Creed,' art. vii., note y'). This interpretation is rejected by Professor Driver (*Expositor*, April, 1887), who considers the "breaker-up" to be "either a leader or a detachment of men, whose duty it was to break up walls or other obstacles opposing the progress of an army." But is not this to introduce an agency unknown to these times? Was there any special body of men trained and maintained for this particular duty? This "breaker-up," according to Dr. Driver's conception, "advances before them, breaking through the gates of the prison in which the people are confined; they follow, marching forth triumphantly through this open way; their king, with Jehovah at his side (Ps. cx. 5), heads the victorious procession (Exod. xiii. 21; Isa. lii. 12)." They have broken up; broken forth, or through. The captives co-operate with their leader. Have passed through the gate, etc. The prophet speaks of a solemn, regular removal, like the Exodus from Egypt, which no human power can oppose. Their king. The same as Jehovah in the next clause (Isa. xxxiii. 22). He shall lead the host, as he headed the Israelites

when they left the house of bondage (Exod. xiii. 21). The prediction may look forward to the final gathering of Israel, which St. Paul seems to contemplate when he writes, "And so all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. xi. 26).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—11.—*Delineations of deep transgression, righteous retribution, and Divine equity.* We have in these verses three pictures, drawn by a master-hand, and very suggestive of practical teaching.

I. A PICTURE OF DEEP TRANSGRESSION. (Vers. 1, 2, 8, 9.) Observe delineated in it: 1. *The abuse of privilege.* (Ver. 1.) What a boon is night! "The season of repose; the blessed barrier betwixt day and day," when the hum and bustle, the anxiety and fatigue, of business is suspended, when the tired artisan rests from his toil; when the voyager on the wide sea forgets awhile the perils of the main; when the warrior ceases for a time to hear the roar of the cannon and to face the foe; and when all nature is hushed to slumber, save the weary watchers by the bed of suffering, and wakeful, loving mothers tending their dear ones in their quiet nests. We bless God for the day with its early sunrise, its noontide glory, its evening shades; but we bless him also for the night, with her sable mantle, her vague solitude, her quiet rest. And this high privilege was grossly abused. "Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds!" (ver. 1). It was not that evil thoughts unwillingly invaded their minds, but that they deliberately planned evil—they devised it. It is one thing for evil thoughts to enter the mind in its quiet hours unbidden; it is quite another to entertain these; and worst of all is it to "devise" these, and in the very seasons given to man for rest, to be found plotting and contriving harm. So has it ever been with the ungodly, that they have abused God's best gifts (Ps. xxxvi. 4; Prov. iv. 16). 2. *The non-improvement of opportunity.* (Ver. 1.) Each morning comes bearing to us a new gift of time from our God. With our waking hours comes the Divine call to fresh service. Strength has been gathered up, now to be expended in the improvement of the opportunities of holy service which will assuredly arise. Happy they who begin the day with God, and then go forth to hallow every engagement of life, and to use for him every opportunity which may be given—

"True hearts spread and heave
Unto their God, as flowers do the sun:
Give him thy first thoughts, so shalt thou keep
Him company all day."

The grave charge here urged was that with the breaking of the day they went forth to renew their evil deeds; that the fresh strength imparted to them by God became employed by them against him; the evil plotted by them in the night they went forth with the morning's dawn to commit; the energies which ought to have been consecrated to God they devoted to dark and daring deeds of impiety. "When the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand" (ver. 1). 3. *The perversion of power.* (Vers. 2, 8, 9.) Both Micah and Isaiah laid stress upon the prevailing sin of covetousness, leading the mighty and influential to pervert the power and influence they possessed, to the injury of the feeble and obscure, oppressing and tyrannizing over them. Thus they are charged here with (1) unscrupulously depriving them of their inheritance (ver. 2); (2) stripping of their raiment peaceful, unoffending persons (ver. 8); (3) driving widows from their houses, and causing fatherless children to suffer from want and neglect (ver. 9). In this way the sad picture of shameless sin here presented to us is rendered increasingly dark through the prevailing sin of covetousness, leading to harsh oppression and grievous wrong. 4. *The wilful rejection of light and preference of darkness.* (Vers. 6, 11.) To the true prophets of the Lord, who sought to bring home to them a sense of their guilt, and to lead them to return unto the Lord, they said, "Prophecy ye not" (ver. 6), whereas to lying spirits they would readily give heed (John iii. 19, 20).

II. A PICTURE OF MERITED CHASTISEMENT. (Vers. 3, 4, 5, 10.) The main feature in this picture is the illustration it affords of the retributive character of the Divine chastisement for sin. Observe: 1. They had "devised" evil against others; now

God would "devise" evil against them (ver. 3). 2. They had oppressed others; now they should be oppressed (ver. 3), and even their own sad elegies, wrung from them through their sorrow, should be taken up and repeated against them in sheer mockery by their oppressors (vers. 4, 5). 3. They had voluntarily chosen their false prophets and had welcomed their lying words, and they should now get no comfort from the words of hope which, in the dark days, should be spoken by the true prophets, and which should prove consolatory to the remnant of God's people who had remained faithful (ver. 6). 4. They had cast out the widows and the fatherless, and they should be themselves cast out (ver. 10). We look on this picture of coming chastisement, and we learn from it that retribution follows sin; we see in it an Old Testament illustration of the New Testament assurance that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. vi. 7, 8).

III. A PICTURE OF THE DIVINE EQUITY. (Ver. 7.) God, through his prophet, expostulated with the people who had acted so unworthily, who bore the name of Israel, but who so dishonoured their pious ancestry; and declared to them that his ways were not unequal; that rectitude and mercy characterized all his operations; that through all he had been seeking their good; that it was not his will that the threatened woes should befall them; that this was entirely their own act; and that neither their sins nor their sorrows could truthfully be charged upon him. There are many such passages scattered throughout the prophetic writings, in which God deigned to expostulate with the erring—passages which are inexpressibly tender and touching (Jer. ii. 5; Isa. v. 4; xliii. 22, 25). So Christ to the Jews of his day, when they took up stones to stone him, asked, "For which of these works do ye stone me?" (John x. 32). And the same Divine voice expostulates with us in our sinfulness; and our response should be, "Unto thee," etc. (Dan. ix. 6, 7). These Divine expostulations are the arrows of conviction coming from God to the hearts of men, and which, unlike the poisoned arrows of the ancients that carried death in their flight, carry mercy and life into the human soul.

Ver. 7.—*God's ways vindicated.* In this verse three important questions are asked, and in the answers to these lies the clear vindication of God's ways in his dealings with transgressors.

I. "IS THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD STRAITENED?" *i.e.* when his judgments overtake men for their sins, is this to be regarded as a token that God's loving-kindness and long-suffering have failed? No; his compassions never fail. "His mercy endureth for ever." What, then, is the explanation? It is that such Divine judgments are imperatively demanded. They are so: 1. *In vindication of the Divine rectitude.* If sin went unpunished, the Divine righteousness might, indeed, be questioned. It was this consideration, and not a spirit of vindictiveness which called forth "the imprecatory psalms," in which chastisement was invoked upon the workers of iniquity. 2. *In the interest of the wrong-doers themselves.* It is not for the advantage of transgressors themselves that they should be allowed to go on unblushingly in sin. The Divine long-suffering may operate in checking and bringing such to a stand; in chastening them with a view to their reformation. 3. *In order to the promotion of the well-being of society at large.* Jehovah is the sovereign Ruler; the universe is his domain; and it may be essential, in order to the good of the race, that he should at times interpose in judgment. "When his judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants thereof learn righteousness" (Isa. xxvi. 9).

II. "ARE THESE HIS DOINGS?" *i.e.* is God the Author and Cause of the evils men have to experience when they stray from righteousness? No; he cannot be; these are to be traced to the wrong-doers themselves, and are the outcome of their misdeeds. The sinner is his own punisher. The woes which befall him he has worked out for himself. "Judas fell from the ministry and apostleship, that he might go to *his own place.*" "Men meet with all sorts of bitter, painful, and bad things in their life, just because they are bitter, painful, and bad themselves, and do not see that this is the root of their misery" (Bushnell).

III. "DO NOT MY WORDS DO GOOD TO HIM THAT WALKETH UPBRIGHTLY?" Assuredly; and hence, if this good is missed, must it not be because there is a lack of obedience in those who miss it, so that the responsibility is entirely theirs?

Ver. 7.—*The beneficial influence of God's words upon the obedient.* By the "words" of God we understand the utterances of his gracious mind. These were communicated unto the fathers by the prophets; in "the fulness of time" they were made known by his Son; to us they are given in the Scriptures of eternal truth. Their influence upon us depends upon our attitude towards them and upon the spirit we cherish. If our aim is to live a godly life, and to pursue the path of rectitude and obedience, they will prove truly helpful to us.

I. GOD'S "WORDS" "DO GOOD" TO THE UPRIGHT IN HEART, AS IT RESPECTS THEIR PERSONAL AND INDIVIDUAL LIFE. They become thus benefited: 1. *Physically*; being preserved by these teachings from those excesses into which the ungodly often fall (Ps. xci. 16; cxix. 95). 2. *Mentally*; their minds being directed to the sublimest themes, by meditating upon which their intellectual faculties become purified and strengthened. Men possessed of the highest intellectual endowments have acknowledged their deep indebtedness to the holy words of God, and have accepted them with the profoundest reverence and the warmest gratitude. 3. In the darkest seasons of their life "God's words" have cheered and comforted them, and through the sanctifying influence of these they have been rendered in times of severest trial so tranquil, and so calm in death that it may be said—

"The night-dews fall not gentlier on the ground,
Nor weary, worn-out winds expire so soft."

II. GOD'S "WORDS" "DO GOOD" TO THE UPRIGHT IN HEART, AS IT RESPECTS THEIR SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS. 1. Their healthful influence is experienced in the home-life of the obedient. In such homes, selfishness, coldness, jealousy, anger, strife, are avoided; and love, sympathy, union, harmony, are continually cherished. God's words are daily recalled to mind, and the voice of praise and prayer continually ascends to their Author. "Good" is thus experienced. There is written on such abodes, in characters legible and golden, the inscription, "Peace." Day by day the members of such households become united in a firmer bond to each other and to God. Yea, it is theirs to enjoy in the home of earth constant foretastes of the home of heaven. 2. And their healthful influence is experienced in the intercourse of *man with man*. God's words give special enforcement to the principle of mutual regard which should be cherished by the children of men. In proportion as the power of his utterances is realized will the servant be led to promote the best interests of the employer, and the employer to act generously towards even the humblest in his service. The holy teachings of our God impel those who truly accept them to minister to the necessities of the distressed, and to endeavour to alleviate human suffering and woe. Love is indeed the essence of all that he has spoken. And abounding in loving teachings for the guidance of its recipients in their social and everyday life, God's "words" promote the good even of those who unconsciously come within the range of their influence.

III. GOD'S "WORDS" "DO GOOD" TO THE UPRIGHT IN HEART, AS IT RESPECTS THEIR POLITICAL INFLUENCE. The men who are under the sway of these pure words which God hath spoken are the true promoters of the national weal. Nations, in order to their real prosperity, need to hear and heed the voice of God speaking to them as to Israel of old, and saying, "And now what doth the Lord require of thee but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways . . . for thy good?" (Deut. x. 12, 13).

Vers. 12, 13.—"*Glorious things*" spoken of the true Israel. No member of "the goodly fellowship of the prophets" had a more vivid sense of the ultimate enfranchisement from all evil, awaiting the race, to be effected by the Messiah in due course, than was possessed by "Micah the Morasthite." Even as in the opening portion of his prophecy, he lingered, in thought and expression, upon the prevailing ungodliness, marking on every hand confusion and strife and wrong, he could yet see coming "the age of gold," when peace and harmony, purity and righteousness should secure the victory; and of that glorious age, lo! he here sings. Just what the oasis is to the surrounding desert, or the silver lining to the dark cloud, or the momentary pause in the storm, when for an instant the noise of the waves is stilled, telling of the coming calm, that these two verses seem to be to the first three chapters of this book of Scripture, and by their bright and hopeful tone the hearts of "the remnant" who

deplored the abounding iniquity of the times became, we doubt not, lifted up with devout thankfulness and inspired with renewed strength. Are we to understand these bright passages scattered throughout this prophecy, and alluding to a glory to be realized in the future, as referring simply to happier days to be experienced by the Jewish nation, or are they to be regarded as having a more comprehensive range? Whilst believing firmly that a glorious destiny is before the Hebrew nation, and that the working out of that destiny shall be not only for its own spiritual good, but also for the enrichment of the world (Rom. xi. 12), yet we should lose much of the force of the prophetic Scriptures in their allusions to "the latter-day glory," by limiting their utterances thus. We should not half realize the depth of meaning underlying these verses by simply regarding the passage as setting forth that the Jews, after a period of captivity in Babylon, should return again to their own land. Prophecy was designed to prepare the way of the Lord Christ. And, thus viewed, it was marked by progressive stages. The work began in the revelation made through Moses of the will and Law of God. Then, after a time, followed the era of Samuel, who, with his contemporaries and successors, laboured to maintain true religion in Israel, chosen of God as the nation through whom his purposes of mercy were to be unfolded. And following these, we come to the age of written prophecy, in which the holy seers, whilst not neglecting the claims of their own nation, took a wider range of vision and looked forward to a new covenant affecting all nations, and to the coming of the Messiah as One who should establish a spiritual kingdom, whose claims were to be urged upon all the world, and unto whom men of every nation and kindred and tribe should turn, thus forming the spiritual Israel over whom the Messiah should reign in righteousness (see Dr. Payne Smith's 'Prophecy a Preparation for Christ'). Micah notably belonged to this more advanced period of the prophetic development, and hence his bright anticipations of the glorious future are to be understood as having this wider scope. He was contemporary with Isaiah, who constantly represented the Lord as reigning over the whole earth, and even the far-distant lands as bringing unto him their tribute. We are led to ask—How did they gain these broad and far-reaching conceptions of all the nations as gathering together, and becoming loyal to the God of the Hebrews, and becoming one as being alike citizens of the heavenly King? It was not natural for them to cherish such a notion as this. It involved their breaking away from their national traditions, and it did violence to all their prejudices as Jews. The Hebrews regarded themselves as the elect of God, chosen by him out of every nation to the highest dignity and honour. How, then, did this conviction, of the world-embracing character of the blessings of the Messiah's reign become developed in the minds, and expressed in the burning words of enthusiasm, by the tongues of men who shared in the national bias? There is no explanation of this remarkable phenomenon save one, even that they had it wrought in them, and were led to embrace it and proclaim it by the inspiration of God's own Spirit (Gal. i. 12). "Glorious things" are here spoken of the true Israel, the spiritual kingdom of the Redeemer, the Church of the living God. Observe—

I. ENLARGEMENT. (Ver. 12.) The good in the land were but few. The vast multitudes of the people, of all sorts and conditions, had corrupted their way. They had turned aside to the practice of iniquity in all its forms. It seemed as though true piety would soon be extinguished in the land. The hearts of the few who amidst the prevailing faithlessness were found faithful were naturally despondent and depressed. And the words of hope here spoken by the prophet were specially designed for the comfort and help of such. God, by the mouth of his holy prophet, reminded such that as there would be, in consequence of the nation's guilt, the scattering and the dispersing, so there should come a time of revival and regathering. The true Israel should not perish. As the shepherd gathers together the scattered members of his flock, so "the remnant according to the election of grace," now to be dispersed through sins not their own, should be watched over in their exile, and eventually be gathered as forming part of the Messiah's flock. Nor they alone; but as in the early days of their national history, the more they were persecuted the more they multiplied and grew, so, as the result of the sorrows now in store, there should be secured a great spiritual increase. Yea, further, whilst "all Israel should be saved," "the fulness of the Gentiles" should also come in. And hence the obedient should be so multiplied

in number that they should be as "the sheep of Bozrah," the wealth of which consisted in the abundance of its flocks and herds; indeed, so numerous should they be, that they should make "great noise by reason of the multitude of men" (ver. 12). There are times when we get depressed and sad at heart in holy service, and specially when we mark the vast portions of the human race as yet untouched by the sacred and saving influences of God's truth. We cry, "How long, O Lord, how long? Why is his chariot so long in coming?" But, courage! it will not be ever thus. The Divine purpose is to flood the world with the light of truth, and to gather a multitude out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. There shall be enlargement. The Messiah "shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied." "Of the increase of his kingdom there shall be no end." This is sure; it is certain; it cannot fail. "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

II. SECURITY. "As the flock in the midst of their fold" (ver. 12). One of the most impressive and encouraging of the figures of speech employed in Scripture to reveal to us the Divine character is that in which the Lord is referred to as the Shepherd folding the flock in his care. True, the figure is suggestive of much that is calculated to humble us; for if he is our "Shepherd," then are we "the sheep of his pasture," and as such are very helpless ourselves, in the midst of the dangers by which we are surrounded, and very prone by reason of our weakness to wander from the fold; but then the beautiful simile encourages us, assuring us that the Lord will be our Strength in weakness, that he will defend us amidst every peril, and that in all our straysings he will follow us with a view to restoring us by his power and grace. Since he is "the Shepherd of Israel," his people are secure "as sheep in the midst of their fold." And this protection will be afforded to "his own," even amidst the gloomiest experiences of their life. There are times when even the best of men are called upon "to walk in darkness," having "no light." And what is needed in such seasons is the spirit of holy trust, a trust which will repose unswervingly in the good Shepherd's faithfulness and love, and which will take comfort in his rod and staff, in the tokens of his presence, the conviction of his sovereign sway, and the assurances of his Word. So Micah would have the tired, yet true-hearted, in his day feel; and so should such in all ages realize, that in the care of God they are as secure from harm as "the flock in the midst of their fold," watched over by the faithful shepherd's continual care.

III. DELIVERANCE. (Ver. 13.) The passage indicates that not only shall there be protection afforded in the times of peril, but also deliverance out of danger. It is in this connection that Micah here introduces into the words of hope he was uttering an allusion to the Messiah. He referred to him as "the Breaker," going on before his servants, overcoming and breaking through every hindrance to their advancement; they following him and through him becoming themselves triumphant. "The Breaker is come up before them," etc. (ver. 13).

IV. HONOUR. "And the Lord at the head of them" (ver. 13). Through all it was their privilege and distinction to be associated with the Lord Most High. The true Shechinah-glory was theirs. And when at length the conflict should be past, and the time of "storm and scattering" should have ended, the all-presiding Love would still be at their head, their everlasting Light, their eternal Glory. "His name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev. xxii. 4); "They shall be his people, and he will be their God." They shall dwell with him, and he abide with them; and from the constant experience of his love and favour their blessedness shall perpetually flow, and flow on for evermore. Thus this messenger of the Lord appears to have turned away his thoughts for a moment from the burden of woe he was delivering, and to have fixed his mind upon that brighter era which should at length dawn upon the world sin had darkened and defiled. We do well also to keep that era in view, and in anticipation of it "in patience to possess our souls."

Ver. 13.—*The Breaker*. In these words the prophet represents the Messiah as going before his people, removing every barrier, overcoming every obstruction, preparing the way for them, and bringing them through every difficulty. This representation was frequently made by the Jewish prophets, and the title, "*The Breaker-through*" was familiar to the Jews as one of the titles of the Messiah.

I. THIS TITLE HAS ITS APPLICATION TO THE MESSIAH IN HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE

UNIVERSAL CHURCH. The ultimate victory and glory of the Church of God is assured. Such is God's eternal purpose, and which by his sovereign power he will eventually accomplish. Obstacles to the fulfilment of this purpose are continually arising. Impediments are placed in the way. Active opposition has been offered to the advancement of the kingdom of truth and righteousness. "The kings of the earth set themselves," etc. (Ps. ii. 2). Or when not thus actively engaged against the truth they have often taken such measures in the interests of their own worldly policy as have seriously impeded the progress of truth. Hoary systems of idolatry also have long held sway over millions of the human race, and the glory due unto the Lord has been given to "graven images." Yet "the counsel of the Lord standeth sure," and the purpose he has purposed shall be accomplished. And with respect to its accomplishment the Messiah is "the Breaker-through." He, "the Leader and Commander of his people," shall go before them, casting down the imaginations and frustrating the designs of the evil, "opening the blind eyes, bringing out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house." Every mountain shall become a plain before him. He shall go on conquering and to conquer, until at last there shall rise the cry of victory, "The kingdoms of this world," etc. (Rev. xi. 15).

II. THIS TITLE HAS ITS APPLICATION TO THE MESSIAH ALSO IN THE RELATIONSHIP HE SUSTAINS TO HIS SERVANTS INDIVIDUALLY. It is a title which may be accounted precious, not only to the Church of God as a whole, but also to each servant of the Lord. It is interesting to notice how that Christ, in one of his memorable discourses, associated this thought, of his going before his servants with a view to their being brought through every difficulty, with his references to himself as "the good Shepherd;" so that in the recorded words of Jesus (John x. 3, 4) we find the very same association of figures of speech which were here employed by Micah; for Christ said of himself as the Shepherd, "He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out;" "He goeth before them, and they follow him." And may not the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews have had the words Micah here employed, and the words of Christ alluded to, in mind when he wrote of the Saviour as being "the Forerunner" of his people (Heb. vi. 20)? Christ has gone before his servants, and has gained the victory over their spiritual foes. He has conquered the *evil one*. In his life he conquered, for not once did the adversary gain the ascendancy over him; and in his death he conquered, for then "he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them," etc. (Col. ii. 15). He has conquered the *world*, and could say to his disciples, "I have overcome the world." And he has conquered *death and the grave*, fulfilling the triumphant declaration, "O death! I will be thy plagues! O grave! I will be thy destruction" (Hos. xiii. 14; Isa. xxv. 8). Thus he is, in the interests of each of his servants, "the Breaker." By his victory he has so weakened the strength of our spiritual adversaries as to render the conflict comparatively easy to us. We have to encounter foes already defeated by our Lord. We have to face enemies already dispirited by failure, and who know assuredly that the time of their triumphing is short. Beautiful representation of the Messiah this! "The Breaker," who removes all difficulty out of the way of his servants; who has gone before them to clear the ground, to cast down every obstruction, to make "the crooked things straight, and the rough places plain," that "the glory of the Lord may be revealed." Let us hear his voice saying to us, as he thus leads us on, "Follow me;" and be it ours (1) cheerfully, (2) trustingly, (3) and courageously to obey the great Captain's call, and to enter through him into honour, glory, and immortality!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Deliberate sins bringing predestined punishments.* We see here—

I. THE GENESIS OF CRIME. Three stages are described. 1. *Sinful desires are cherished in the heart.* These sinners "devise iniquity," think over it (Ps. vii. 14), imagine it (the same word as in 1 Sam. xviii. 25, referring to Saul's thought and plan to secure David's death), dwell on it; for wickedness is "sweet in their mouth" (Job xx. 10—12). Illustrate from the licentious thoughts of David (2 Sam. xi. 2, 3) or Amnon (2 Sam. xiii. 1, 2), the covetous thoughts of Ahab (1 Kings xxi.), or the

envious and revengeful thoughts of Haman (Esth. iii. 5, 6; see Jas. i. 14, 15). Here sin is not traced during its growth. From its birth St. James passes on to its maturity: "The sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death." But Micah points out stages in its growth. 2. *Plans of wickedness are deliberately contrived.* They "work," prepare or fabricate, "evil upon their beds." In their hours of rest they "cannot cease from sin." On their beds, where they might enjoy the sleep of God's beloved, where in wakeful hours they might commune with God and their own hearts (Ps. iv. 4; xvi. 7; lxiii. 6; civ. 34), they plot their crimes (Ps. xxxvi. 4; Prov. iv. 16). If they want allies they hesitate not to secure the aid of the false witness, the procuress, the dishonest lawyer, the bribed judge. Illust.: Jezebel; the priests (Matt. xxviii. 11-14); the assassins (Acts xxiii. 12-15). 3. *The plot is executed in a crime.* They act promptly, early, showing no signs of repentance or reflection (Jer. viii. 6); in the daylight, without shame (Esth. vi. 4; Matt. xxvii. 1, 2)—"swift to shed blood," or defraud, or debauch. Might constitutes their right; "impiously mighty and mighty in impiety," "because it is in the power of their hands." "Dextra mihi Deus" (Virgil). They are reckless of the ruin caused to an innocent man or a whole family robbed of their heritage (Neh. v. 1-5), or of their head (1 Kings xxi. 13), or of the flower of the flock, some beloved child more precious than any heritage (2 Sam. xii. 1-9).

II. ITS INEVITABLE CONNECTION WITH RETRIBUTION. While sinners are coveting, plotting, plundering, God is watching, devising, and framing punishment. This is: 1. *Predestined*; on the ground of deliberate sin. God's "therefores" have all the force of demonstrative reasoning (Prov. i. 31; Isa. lxv. 12, etc.). 2. *Hard to be borne.* Compared to a yoke. Contrast the yoke of the Father's discipline (Lam. iii. 27), and of the Redeemer's service (Matt. xi. 29, 30). If these yokes are contemptuously cast away, the evil yoke of punishment, a "yoke of iron," is prepared (Deut. xxviii. 48; Jer. xxviii. 14). 3. *Inevitable.* See the striking figures in Amos ix. 1-4 and Zech. xiv. 16-18 (God's manifold instruments of punishment); cf. 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. 4. *Humiliating.* "Neither shall ye go haughtily." How often the retribution on the proud or the extortioner is strikingly appropriate to their sin! Man's skill in successful sinning is outmatched by God's wisdom in punishing (Job ix. 4). When God's wisdom and power are both arrayed against us, it is an evil time indeed. 5. *Utterly disastrous.* A revolution in their entire circumstances (ver. 4). Thus the consequences of sin may be irreparable in this world; but the gospel of the grace of God tells of a forgiveness whereby sin may be righteously forgiven, and the eternal consequences may be cut off (Isa. xliii. 25; John v. 24).—E. S. P.

Ver. 6.—*An impious veto; a fatal withdrawal.* We adopt as our rendering of this difficult verse, "Prophecy not; they shall indeed prophecy; they shall not prophecy to these; shame shall not depart." We see here—

I. AN IMPIOUS VETO. Men may seek to put their veto on a faithful messenger in various ways. 1. *By seeking to persuade him to utter smooth words.* Thus Micah's integrity was first assailed (1 Kings xxii. 13). So, too, in the later days of Amos (ii. 12, where the corruption of prophets as well as of Nazarites is suggested) and of Isaiah (xxx. 9-11). 2. *By direct veto, supported by threats,* uttered or implied, as in the case of Amos (vii. 10-13). 3. *By direct persecution.* Micah was imprisoned; Jezebel "cut off the prophets of the Lord," and sought to slay Elijah. Conspiracies were formed against the liberty and the life of Jeremiah (xx. 1, 2; xxvi. 8, 9). God's faithful witnesses are always odious to "the beast" and those who bear his mark (Rev. xi. 7-10). Successive steps in this impious veto are seen in the experience of Christ's apostles (Acts iv. 1-3, 18-21; v. 17, 18, 26-40). 4. *By stubborn neglect or haughty contempt.* These are virtually a veto on faithful preachers (cf. Isa. xxviii. 9-12; liii. 1). It is as though their hearers said, "Spare your breath," etc., or in still ruder phrase, "Shut up!" For they actually prefer such teachers as those alluded to in ver. 11, who encourage them in sin and delusion (Deut. xxix. 19, 20). The contempt with which preachers and their messages are often regarded are a temptation to abandon the work. They say, "Drop not" (Hebrew), which seems almost equivalent to "Drivel not." We hear of "the decay of preaching," and know by how many it is neglected. To say, "We do not care to hear your message," is much the same as to say, "Prophecy not." And the neglect of God's truth by courteous and even complimentary hearers is

a sore temptation to an earnest preacher who watches for souls not for smiles (Ezek. xxxiii. 30—32). To this impious veto a reply comes in the form of—

II. A FATAL WITHDRAWAL. We hear three sharp, decisive messages. 1. "*They shall prophesy.*" God's servants shall continue to do so under the constraint of both a Divine command and an irresistible impulse. Both these are illustrated in the history of Jeremiah, who shrank from his mission (i. 5—19; xv. 10; xx. 7, 8), yet undertook it (ii. 1), and returned to it again and again (xv. 16, 16; xx. 9). St. Paul is another example (Acts xxvi. 16—20; Gal. i. 15, 16; see too Acts xx. 24; 1 Cor. ix. 16). Men's impiety shall not frustrate God's purposes. 2. "*They shall not prophesy to these.*" The ministry shall be withdrawn (Ps. lxxiv. 9; Amos viii. 11—13; and see 1 Macc. iv. 46; ix. 27; xiv. 41); or, if continued, it will be of no avail because of the hardness of heart of the hearers (Ezek. iii. 24—27). Both these threats are illustrated by the treatment of the gospel by the Jews, and of the Jews by the apostles (Acts xiii. 46, 47; xxviii. 23—28). Many now are subject to a similar sentence. They nominally attend some pastor's ministry, but practically are without it, because deaf to the message it brings to them. Then the threat against God's ancient vineyard is fulfilled, "I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it" (Isa. v. 6). Showers of blessing are dropping on others, but their hearts are dry, like Gideon's fleece when the floor around was soaked with dew. 3. "*Shame shall not depart.*" By silencing God's messengers they hoped to silence the reproaches of conscience and the shame they felt at the prophet's rebukes. But in vain. The fact of the withdrawal of the messengers was itself a shame to the people; like the withdrawal of an ambassador because he had been shamefully treated (illust.: 2 Sam. x. 1—4; Roman ambassador insulted at Tarentum; and cf. Luke x. 16). This shame was the fruit of their own doings, and was thus bound up with their future history. It became more and more aggravated, owing to the degrading influence of sin. The wrath of God abode on them, whereas, by repentance and faith, it might have been removed (cf. John iii. 36 with ix. 41). The final issue of shameful sin must be a resurrection "to shame" and "condemnation" (Dan. xii. 2; John v. 29).—E. S. P.

Ver. 7.—*Judgment, God's strange work; mercy, his delight.* Adopting as our translation, "O thou, called the house of Jacob, is the patience of Jehovah short? Are these his doings? Do not his words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" we learn two truths respecting God.

I. JUDGMENT IS GOD'S "STRANGE WORK." 1. *The people are reminded of this by their very name.* It is a great honour but a grave responsibility to have a good name and ancestry (John viii. 39; Acts iii. 25). What sacred associations clustered around the name, "house of Jacob"! The personal history of their ancestor Jacob gave great significance to the name, "God of Jacob" (Ps. xli. 11). The history of Jacob shows that he had to do with a God who is forbearing to sinners; who enters into covenant with men, and renews that covenant even with the unworthy children of godly parents; who is the Hearer of prayer, and condescends to represent himself as being overcome by it; who bestows eternal life on those who die in faith (Exod. iii. 6; Matt. xxii. 31, 32). Similar lessons might be learned from God's treatment of "the house of Jacob" which name they gloried in. They could look back to a long catalogue of mercies (Ps. lxxviii., cv., cvi.). Yet the very fact that they bore this name made more glaring the contrast between it and their real character (vers. 5, 6; Hos. xii. 2—7; John viii. 33—40; Rom. ii. 17—29). Apply to the name we English bear as a Christian nation. 2. *An appeal is made to their judgments as to the character of God.* "Is the patience of Jehovah short?" Let God testify to them (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7), and Moses respond (Numb. xiv. 17—20), and David take up the strain (Ps. ciii. 8—10), and the long lives of the ungodly, and late repentances confirm the Divine words, and their own consciences confess that Jehovah is a long-suffering God. 3. *They are reminded that God is not responsible for sin, and has no pleasure in punishment.* "Are these his doings?" We take it as a moral axiom that God is not responsible for sin, unless the sun can be held responsible for the shadows caused by opaque objects (Jas. i. 13; 1 John i. 5). At the best, sin is the corruption of what God made good; e.g. selfishness is depraved self-love; envy is fallen emulation; and so with other sins. In regard to punishment we know that "he doth not afflict

willingly." He presides over his own laws and executes his threats; but it is sin, not God, who is the great destroyer. "*Evil shall slay the wicked*" (Ps. xxxiv. 21).

II. **MERCY IS GOD'S DELIGHT.** "Do not my words do good," etc.? The special reference seems to be to God's words through his prophets, so that it was a glaring sin as well as folly to try to silence God's prophets (ver. 6), whose words were so wholesome (Jer. xv. 16), because they revealed God's Name, and therefore the path of peace and safety (Ps. ix. 10). The prophets would have grievously misrepresented God's Name if they had spoken comfort to the wicked in their wickedness (Isa. iii. 10, 11). Contrast Zedekiah with Micaiah and Elijah in their conduct towards Ahab; and cf. Ezek. xiii. with Ps. xviii. 25, 26; xxxiv. 15, 16. To us God's words do good still more abundantly. The psalmist's words, "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy Name," are true of the revelation of God in "the word of the truth of the gospel." Yet even the gospel, though offering mercy to the vilest, can do good only to those who deal truly with it and thus walk uprightly. The perversion of the greatest blessing may be the most fatal curse. The word of life will be the word of judgment (John xii. 48); ministers may become a "savour of death," and Christ a stone that shall grind to powder. "When the gospel becomes deadly to a man, it is a terrible thing; to die of a gospel plague is a terrible way of dying" (John Howe). The revelation of God's delight in mercy by Christ's sacrifice for sinners makes it possible for the vilest to walk uprightly. But salvation is from sin itself. Character is essential to heaven, or even God could not make it heaven to us.—E. S. P.

Ver. 10.—*Sin, the great disturber.* It has been so from the beginning; it will be so to the very end.

I. **SIN WAS THE DISTURBER OF THE EARLIEST EARTHLY PARADISE.** It was not the serpent or the temptation, but Adam's sin, that destroyed our first parents' rest. They might have known of the presence of the tempter, have seen his trail, heard his hiss, and been conscious of his solicitations, and yet have continued in the rest of unbroken confidence in God. But when sin entered their hearts, rest fled, and guilt, shame, and fear took its place. If allowed to remain in the garden, it would no longer have been an Eden, a Paradise to them. The groans of creation begin to mingle with the reproaches of their own hearts. But the voice is heard, "Arise, and depart," etc. (Gen. iii. 22—24).

II. **SIN EJECTED THE FIRST INHABITANTS OF CANAAN.** Even then it was "the glory of all lands," a splendid inheritance (Gen. xiii. 10; Numb. xiv. 7, 8; Deut. viii. 7—9). But sin of the foulest kind was there. Vice and crime rendered real rest impossible. The land is represented as stained, saturated with sin, no longer able to tolerate any further iniquity (cf. Gen. xv. 16); but ready to "spue out" its inhabitants (Lev. xviii. 24—28; xx. 22, 23). The summons went forth—Arise, and depart, yet not to exile, but to utter destruction.

III. **SIN CHANGED THE REST OF CANAAN INTO A LAND OF UNREST TO THE CHOSEN NATION.** Canaan was promised as one of God's rests—not the highest, but none the less real (Deut. xii. 9; Ps. xcv. 11). What a rest it might have been, enriched with its natural resources, blessed with peace and brotherhood among the tribes, and crowned with the assurance of Divine protection (Exod. xxxiv. 24; Deut. xii. 10). A dim vision of the fulness of rest they might have enjoyed was seen in the reign of Solomon the peaceful (1 Kings iv. 25). But throughout their whole history they allowed sin to mar their inheritance and break in upon their rest. There were periods of special demoralization, as in the days of the judges and of the later kings. They cast out the fatherless and the widow (ver. 9), they plundered the peaceable (ver. 8), they indulged in some of the abominations of the old Canaanites (1 Kings xxii. 46; 2 Kings xxiii. 7). They could therefore have no rest themselves, but were doomed to exile (Rev. xiii. 10). The land is represented as once more taking sides with God and turning against those who abused his goodness. The false report of the spies (Numb. xiii. 32) received a fulfilment, as Moses foretold (Lev. xxvi. 18—35) and Ezekiel described (xxxvi. 13—19), as though an earthquake or a flood drove the sinners far away (Amos viii. 8). Illustr.: Pompeii. So has it been in the history of nations ever since (wars, slavery, despotism, revolutions, etc.). Illustrate from the Indian chief with his tribe fleeing from his foes, till, on the banks of a splendid river, he

stuck his spear into the ground, exclaiming, "Alabama!" "Here we rest!" But in vain.

IV. SIN BREAKS THE REST OF THE HAPPIEST HOME. A young bride and bridegroom may think they have reached the goal of earthly happiness. But unless Christ occupies in their hearts the place which he claims, and which he alone can fill, they may soon learn that sin is a great disturber, even in a domestic Eden. Augustine's words are found to be true, "O God, thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart is restless till it rests in thee." Sickness, suffering, death, and other fruits of sin stir up their nest (Deut. xxxii. 11), and remind them that their rest is polluted and therefore insecure.

V. SIN INVADES AND DISTURBS EVEN THE ADOPTED FAMILY OF GOD. For "death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," so that "ourselves also which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves" (Rom. v. 12; viii. 23). We rejoice to know that "here we have no continuing city," because it is polluted. But already we know of a rest *in* Christ (Matt. xi. 28, 29; Heb. iv. 3), which will be perfected into a rest *with* Christ (Heb. iv. 9), when we shall have completely "escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust," and be made fully "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. i. 4). To us the summons, "Arise, and depart," will be the signal of emancipation; the curse will be changed into a blessing, for we shall "depart to be with Christ, which is far better."—E. S. P.

Ver. 13.—*God the great Bond-breaker.* There is a marked contrast between the tone of vers. 10, 11 and that of vers. 12, 13. God delights in such contrasts. He loves to turn from threats to promises. Judgment is his strange work; mercy is his delight. The dispersion of his people is a painful necessity, their restoration is a joy to him. Hence the jubilant tone of the concluding verses of this chapter. The great Bond-breaker is God himself. Apply—

I. TO THE BREAKING OF THE BABYLONISH BONDAGE. Cyrus was a bond-breaker. In a certain sense the words are applicable to him (Ezra i. 2—4, etc.). But above him was the greater Deliverer, whom Cyrus himself recognized, who had long before predicted deliverance (Isa. xlv. 1—6), and who now puts it into the heart of the Persian monarch to act as his servant. Before God interposed, the captives were but as a flock of sheep (ver. 12) whom a fold, not to say a fortress, could restrain. Till the seventy years of destined captivity were fulfilled no breaker could release that flock; but then "the man that executeth my counsel from a far country" appeared (Isa. xlii. 9—11). When God broke through, it was an easy thing, even for those timid sheep, to pass through or to break through any gate (like Peter passing the iron gate of his prison). As they streamed forth from Babylon, Zerubbabel, "the Prince of Judah" (Ezek. i. 8), led them. But there was another invisible Leader, of a nobler royalty than Zerubbabel—"their King," who went before them (Isa. xlix. 8—10; liii. 12). See Exod. xiii. 21: there the symbol was visible; now the invisible King was seen by the eye of prophetic faith. Learn to recognize the Divine hand in all national deliverances; as did David (2 Sam. v. 20), and Queen Elizabeth at the destruction of the Armada (medal and its inscription, "Afflavit Deus, et dissipantur"), and godly monarchs in later days.

II. TO DELIVERANCE FROM THE BONDAGE OF SIN. "The Word" was the Divine Deliverer of Israel from Babylon (Isa. lxi. 9), and is so of us. The Jews recognized "the Breaker" as a title of Messiah their Prince. In this work of spiritual deliverance he was foretold, and now is revealed as: 1. *A Bond-breaker.* (Isa. xlii. 7; xlix. 8, 9, 24, 25.) 2. *A Leader and Commander.* (Isa. lv. 4.) 3. *A Redeemer at the cost of conflict.* (Isa. lxi. 1—6.) 4. *A Shepherd-King* (Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24); who gains supremacy by dying for the flock he seeks to deliver (John x. 11, 27—30; Heb. ii. 9—15). 5. *A Saviour from foes within as well as oppressors without.* (Matt. i. 21; Titus ii. 14.) 6. *Who shall save all Israel at last.* (Isa. lxi. 20, 21; Rom. xi. 26.) In both these deliverances the redeemed have their appointed work. Israel was bidden to humble themselves in repentance (Lev. xxvi. 40—42), to pray in faith (Jer. xxix. 12, 13), and to accept the Lord as their Redeemer and Leader (Hos. i. 11). And we, too, are commanded to repent, to "believe in the Name of his Son Jesus Christ" (Acts xvii. 30; 1 John iii. 23), and thus to work "the work of God" (John vi. 29). Then Christ our Bond-breaker will, for us, break through the power of evil habit, of this present evil world, and of the infernal oppressor of our souls.

“The world, with sin and Satan,
In vain our march opposes;
By faith we shall break through them all,
And sing the song of Moses.”

E. S. P.

Vers. 1—4.—Avarice. “Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand,” etc. The prophet, in the preceding chapter, foretold the judgment that would befall both kingdoms on account of their apostasy from the living God. He begins this chapter by denouncing the rapacious avarice of their leading men. Oppression is one of the greatest social crimes; alas! one that has been prevalent in every age and land; a crime this, too, which the Bible denounces with great frequency and with terrific force. Avarice, or greed, is the spring and spirit of all oppression. In the text we have this rapacious avarice presented to us in three aspects.

I. SCHEMING IN THE NIGHT. The avaricious men “devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds.” When avarice takes possession of a man, it works the brain by night as well as by day. It keeps the intellectual faculties busy in the stillness of nocturnal hours. What schemes to swindle, defraud, and plunder men are fabricated in this London of ours every night upon the pillow! Perhaps there is no passion that takes a stronger hold upon man than this, and that moves his intellect with such concentration and constancy. It has been called “the great sepulchre of all other passions.”

II. WORKING IN THE DAY “When the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand.” Delitzsch renders this, “In the light of the morning they carry it out, for their hand is their god.” The idea is, perhaps, that which they esteem most is the worldly gain of their avaricious labour. So it ever is; gain is the god of the greedy man. He sacrifices all his time and labour on its altar. Before it he prostrates his soul. Your avaricious man in the day trots about the streets, the shops, the markets, like a hungry hound in search of food. Shakespeare compares such a man to a whale, which plays and tumbles, driving the poor fry before him, and at last devours them all at a mouthful. Such whales have I heard of on the land, who never leave gaping till they’ve swallowed the whole parish—church, steeple, bells, and all.

III. SUFFERING IN THE JUDGMENT. “Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks,” etc. Judgment comes at last; and in the judgment, as these words give us to understand, the punishment will correspond with the sin. “Because they reflect upon evil,” says Delitzsch, “to deprive their fellow-men of their possessions, Jehovah will bring evil upon this generation, lay a heavy yoke upon their necks, under which they will not be able to walk loftily or with extended neck.” Ay, the time will come when the avaricious millionaire will exclaim, “We be utterly spoiled.” “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you,” etc. (Jas. v. 1).—D. T.

Ver. 7.—God’s truth. “O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?” “Thou called house of Jacob, is the patience of Jehovah short then? or is this his doing? Are not my words good to him that walketh uprightly?” Such is a modern translation. We prefer the translation of Henderson, as follows: “What language, O house of Jacob! Is the Spirit of Jehovah shortened? Are these his operations? Do not my words benefit him that walketh uprightly?” These words seem to be a reply to an objection raised against the prophets in the preceding verse. The objector did not approve of predictions so terribly severe. “It is not strange,” says Matthew Henry, “if people that are vicious and debauched covet to have ministers that are altogether such as themselves, for they are willing to believe that God is so too.” There are people in all congregations who revolt at the proclamation of any doctrines from the pulpit that chime not in with their love of ease and their cherished notions, and especially so if such doctrines are unfamiliar to their ears. They desire the old things to be iterated without end, and with as little change of form and note as possible. The text may be taken as a reproof to such. It says two things to them.

I. THAT THE SPIRIT OF DIVINE TRUTH CANNOT BE RESTRAINED. "Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?" There is no limit to truth; it is an ocean that has no shore, a field whose ever-springing seeds are innumerable. Men's theological systems, even the largest of them, have narrow limits. They are, as compared to Divine truth, only as a barren rood to a fertile continent; a little sand-pool to the mighty Atlantic. It is not "straitened." It has no limit. To every true minister this Spirit has something fresh to suggest, and which he is bound to propound and enforce. "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from his Word."

II. THAT THE PRACTICE OF DIVINE TRUTH CANNOT BUT DO GOOD. "Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" Though you have never heard the particular truth before, though it may be too severe to please you, though it may clash with all your prejudices and wishes, if you practise it, it will do you good. 1. *It is to be practised.* It is not fitted merely for speculation, systematizing, controversy, and debate; it is for inspiring the activities and ruling the life. It is a code rather than a creed; it is not something to play about the brain, the imagination, or the emotions, but to possess, permeate, and transform the whole life. It must be incarnated, made flesh, and dwell in the land. 2. *When practised it is a blessing.* "Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" Yes, they do good—when they are translated, not into languages and creeds, but into living deeds. A man gets good only as he builds up a noble character. But what is a good character? It is made up of good habits, and good habits are made up of good acts, and good acts are but the forms and expressions of God's words and ideas.—D. T.

Vers. 8, 9.—*Sin an antagonist.* "Even of late my people is risen up as an enemy: ye pull off the robe with the garment from them that pass by securely as men averse from war. The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children have ye taken away my glory for ever." This chapter refers to the character and doings of Israel during the last nine years of Ahaz. A very dark period in Israelitish history was this. "We are told in 2 Chron. xxviii. 24, 25 that Ahaz shut up the doors of the temple, and erected altars in every corner of Jerusalem. We may safely conclude, from the language of Micah (ii.) and Isaiah (xi.), that when he did so, abominations of every kind overran the land. A prophet like Micah was no longer permitted to speak. The testimony of Isaiah (vii., viii.) had borne no fruit; the fruitlessness of invoking the aid of Assyria had taught him no better. Ahaz did not repent, like Manasseh, but persisted in his evil ways. What a melancholy course of conduct! Like Uzziah, Ahaz was denied honourable burial (2 Chron. xxviii. 27). The prophet here, in denouncing the sins which were then most prevalent in Judah and Ephraim, alludes expressly to the acts of oppression and violence then common, and tells them that for these they would be driven out of the land." The verses lead us to look at sin in the aspect of an *antagonist*, and suggest—

I. THAT IT IS AN ANTAGONIST TO THE DIVINE. "Even of late [margin, 'yesterday'] my people has risen up as an enemy." "It is not stated," says Delitzsch, "against whom the people rise up as an enemy; but, according to the context, it can only be against Jehovah." Sin is an antagonist to God; it lifts up the soul in hostility against its Maker. We are told that the carnal mind is at enmity with God; it is not only alienated from him, but in deadly opposition to him. Unregenerated men say that they are not conscious of any enmity in their hearts towards their Maker; on the contrary, sometimes they feel a passing glow of gratitude and adoration for him. But it is the conduct of a man that proves the settled state of his heart. What though a man may say that he has no unkind feeling towards me, on the contrary, that he has some amount of respect; if he pursues a course of conduct that he knows is in direct opposition to my wishes, interests, and reputation, can I believe him? I judge his state of heart towards me, not by his words, but by his habitual conduct. Thus men prove their enmity to God; they pursue a course of life which they know is repugnant to his nature, hostile to his government, and injurious to the order and happiness of his universe. 1. *This enmity is most unjustifiable.* Enmity sometimes admits of justification, but never in this case. "They hated me without a cause." There is nothing in his character or procedure to justify one spark of animosity in any intelligent creature in the universe towards him. 2. *This enmity is most wicked.* It is against

reason and justice. The character and relations of God are such as to demand the supreme love of all his intelligent creatures. 3. *This enmity is most miserable.* Enmity to God is the fountain of all the misery in the universe; it is the root of all the cursed passions of the soul. The soul's salvation is in love, its damnation is in enmity.

II. THAT IT IS AN ANTAGONIST TO THE HUMAN. "Ye pull off the robe with the garment [margin, 'over against the garment'] from them that pass by securely as men averse from war." Not content with the outer garment, ye greedily rob passers-by of the ornamental robe fitting the body closely and flowing down to the feet; and this you do, not to enemies, but to friends, to those who are "averse from war." More, "The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses." The widows of the men slain by you in battle you have deprived of their homes. They "devoured widows' houses." This was not all. "From their children have ye taken away my glory for ever." The orphan children you have despoiled. In all this there is the manifestation of sin, as an antagonist to human rights and human happiness. Sin puts man against his brother; hence the slanders, quarrels, litigations, wars, that are rife in every human society. John says, "If a man love God, he will love his brother." The converse of this is true too. If a man hate God, he will hate his brother.

CONCLUSION. Look at sin as an antagonist to God and man, shun it with horror, and battle against it with all the force of your being. This is the great battle of life.—D. T.

Ver. 10.—*The soul's exodus.* "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction." "The prophet, having overthrown, in vers. 7-9, the objection to his threatening prophecies by pointing to the sins of the people, now repeats the announcement of punishment, and that in the form of a summons to go out of the land into captivity, because the land cannot bear the defilement consequent upon such abominations" (Delitzsch). This injunction does not mean either of the three following things: 1. It does not mean the termination of our mortal life. Life is a talent which we should guard. Suicide is a crime. 2. It does not mean neglect of material interests and duties. We are commanded to be diligent in business, etc. 3. It does not mean absolute retirement from the world. The life of the hermit is a sin against our social affections, the claims of our species, and the commands of the Bible. What, then, shall we take it to mean? The rising of the soul above the dominant materialism of this life. It is the setting of the "affections upon things above." It is the exodus of the soul from the Egypt of a dominant materialism. There are three reasons suggested here for this moral exodus of the spirit.

I. THERE IS NO REST FOR THE SOUL IN A DOMINANT MATERIALISM. "This is not your rest." There are four forms in which this dominant materialism exists amongst us, and in neither of which can the soul find rest. 1. *There is the gross, sensual form.* The sensualist and the voluptuary live in this; but they have no rest. Ask the epicurean and the debauchee. 2. *There is the thoroughly secular form.* The man who is absorbed in the work of making money lives here; but he finds in it no rest. Ask the man who has become the creature of business, etc. 3. *There is the intellectual form.* The region of mere flesh wisdom, flesh arts, and flesh literature—poetry and novels that appeal to the flesh. There is no rest for the soul here. Ask Byron, Burns, Dryden, Churchill, etc. 4. *There is the religious form.* There is a fleshly religion amongst men—a religion of pictures, music, pompous rites and ceremonies, all appealing to the senses. There is no rest for the soul here. Let it "arise, then, and depart."

II. THERE IS POLLUTION FOR THE SOUL IN IT. To allow the material in any form to rule us is a sin. 1. *Reason shows this.* Mind was made to govern matter; the senses were made to be the servants, not the sovereign, of the soul. 2. *Conscience testifies this.* Conscience is everlastingly protesting against the dominion of the flesh. 3. *The Bible declares this.* The carnal mind is enmity against God (Rom. viii. 7).

III. THERE IS DANGER TO THE SOUL IN MATERIALISM. "It shall destroy you." "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. vi. 7, 8). For to be carnally minded is death. The work of soul-destruction is going on every

moment; the soul decays in this state. Force of intellect, discrimination of judgment, freedom of will, sensibility of conscience, elasticity of soul, are being destroyed.

CONCLUSION. Arise, then! The voice of philosophy, the voice of history, the voice of the Bible, and the voice of departed saints, all combine in the injunction, "Arise, and depart!"—D. T.

Ver. 11.—*Israel's popular preacher*. "If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people." Henderson's translation of this verse is worth quoting: "If any one conservant with mind and falsehood lie, saying, I will prophesy to thee of wine and strong drink, even he shall be the prophet of this people." This is Micah's idea as to the kind of prophet, or, as we should say, pulpit, the men of Israel would willingly and unanimously accept. Now, if we look a little into the sketch here of this *popular* preacher, we shall find that he was marked by two things which always tend to make a preacher generally acceptable to thoughtless men in every age.

I. BY EMPTINESS OF MIND. "If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie," or, as in the margin, "walk with the wind, and lie falsely." He has nothing in his mind but wind, vain conceits, vapid notions; no deep thought, no rich store of information, no well-digested belief or profound conviction. He walks with the wind. His movements are the swellings of wind, his voice the echoes of wind. Now, the kind of preacher that the Israelites desired is the kind of preacher that is in general request almost everywhere. What thoughtful man of any extensive acquaintance with the religious world does not know that, as a rule, the less brain, intelligence, conviction, a preacher has—if he possesses the gift of passion, voice, and utterance—the more attractive he will be to the people in general? He is the man who attracts the crowd. The causes of this are obvious. The more empty a man is, the more *fluent* he is. The pauses in speech necessitated by thoughtfulness are never pleasing to the thoughtless; they like the rattling flow. The empty mind has generally a glib tongue. Again, the more empty a man is, the more *dogmatic*. The thoughtful man can only suggest and hint, and cautiously and reverentially submit his doctrines. For, as a thinker, he has touched difficulties and mysteries at every point; he can only speak with modesty. This, to the people, is more or less distasteful; they want dogmatism, positiveness, assurance, amounting to audacity. This the empty man can give. The more empty a man is, the more *somnific*. The people do not like mental effort in their pews; what they want is gentle titillation and spiritual dreaminess. This the empty man can and does supply.

II. BY MINISTERING TO PLEASE. "I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink." These prophets would accommodate themselves to their hearers' tastes and habits, and sanction their indulgences. They would not disturb their consciences nor strike against their prejudices, but talk to them in such a way as to leave them satisfied with themselves. The preacher who can do this, who can enunciate his discourses in such a way as to avoid interference with the tastes, habits, and pleasures of the people, will always be popular. Oh, it is sad to think of the thousands of sermons that are preached every year by our clergy and our ministers which interfere in no measure with the sinful delights of the people, which leave them in the full indulgence of their wine, strong drink, and other carnal gratifications!

CONCLUSION. Such a preacher as this popular preacher is, for many reasons, the greatest curse to his race. I see but little hope for the progress of Christianity or for the spiritual reformation of mankind, until the pulpits of Christendom are closed for ever against such men. Oh, haste the time when none shall assume the solemn office of preacher but those who, by the manifestation of the truth, "commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. iv. 2)!

"I venerate the man whose heart is true,
Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life,
Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
That he is honest in the sacred cause.
To such I render more than mere respect,
Whose actions say that they respect themselves."

(Cowper.)

D. T.

Vers. 12, 13.—*Gospel work.* “I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold: they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men. The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them.” “I will surely gather thee entirely, O Jacob; I will surely collect the remainder of Israel; I will put them together like the sheep of Bozrah, like a flock in the midst of their pasture: they shall be in commotion, because of the multitude of men. The Breaker is gone up before them, they break through and pass to the gate, they go out at it; the king passeth on before them, even Jehovah at their head” (Henderson). The prophet here passes from threats to promises, from a dark present to a bright future. The future was to embrace two things. 1. *A grand gathering.* Jacob and the remnant of Israel were to be “gathered” as a mighty flock in the fruitful and lovely region of Bozrah. The scene of the gathering would be like the rich pastures of Bozrah, and the numbers of the gathered would be enormous. “They shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men.” 2. *A triumphant deliverance.* “The breaker is come up before them.” Who is the breaker? If reference is here made to Jewish bonds, it was to Moses; if to Babylonish captivity, it was to Cyrus; if to the bondage of the devil, it was to Christ. We shall apply the words to illustrate the grand work of the gospel. “The fulfilment of this prophecy,” says Delitzsch, “commenced with the gathering together of Israel to its God and King by the preaching of the gospel, and will be completed at some future time, when the Lord will redeem Israel, which is now pining in dispersion, out of the fetters of its unbelief and life of sin. We must not exclude all allusion to the deliverance of the Jewish nation out of the earthly Babylon by Cyrus; at the same time, it is only in its typical significance that this comes into consideration at all, viz. as a preliminary stage and pledge of the redemption to be effected by Christ out of the spiritual Babylon of this world.” Taking the words, then, as an illustration of gospel work, two thoughts are suggested.

I. UNIFICATION. “I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah.” Men are morally divided; there is a schism in the great body of humanity. Men have not only lost interest in their fellows, but an antipathy prevails amongst them. They are scattered abroad in different countries, under different governments, and in connection with different religions and interests. The great work of the gospel is to bring men together, to gather them together in some moral Bozrah, to unite them in the fold of Christ. How is this to be done? Not by any political compact, or ecclesiastical concordat, or social organization. These things can never unite souls together; they have been tried a thousand times, but failed. There is only one way, and that is the presentation of an object of *supreme moral attraction to all men*. That object the gospel presents; it is Christ. It was predicted that unto him should the gathering of the people be, and that he should gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad. And he himself said, “I, if I be lifted up . . . will draw all men unto me.” There is in him what is not found anywhere else—that which can attract with equal power all souls, and centralize in him the strongest sympathies of all hearts. Men can only become socially united to each other in brotherly love by first becoming united to Christ. The true union of souls is like the union of planets having one centre of light, life, and rule. As a matter of philosophy, I proclaim that there is nothing but the gospel that *can* hush the discords, heal the divisions, and terminate all wars and strifes amongst men; and historically I declare nothing else *has* ever done anything *successfully* towards it.

II. EMANCIPATION. “The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate.” Men everywhere are in moral bondage. They are the slaves of sin and the devil. “Carnal, sold under sin.” Moral bondage is the worst of all bondage; it is a bondage (1) connected with self-compunction; it is a bondage (2) of the soul, the self; it is a bondage (3) that death cannot terminate. Who shall free man from this bondage? Who is the Moses that will take us out of this Egypt, the Cyrus that will free us from this Babylon? There is One, and but One—Christ. He is the “Breaker.” He snaps the chains, breaks open the prison gates, and lets the soul into the true light and liberty of life. He came to preach liberty to the captive, and to open the prison doors of them that are bound.

CONCLUSION. Blessed gospel, speed thy work! Bring all the scattered sections of the world together, and unite them together by uniting them to one common centre—Christ. Break the moral chains that bind the faculties, sympathies, and souls of men to sin and the devil. Bring on the moral jubilee of the race, and let the clarion-blast of liberty be heard through all the land.—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1.—ch. v. 15.—Part II. DENUNCIATION OF THE CRIMES OF THE GRANDERS, FOLLOWED BY A PROMISE OF THE GLORIFICATION OF ZION, THE BIRTH OF MESSIAH, AND THE HIGHEST EXALTATION OF THE PEOPLE.

Vers. 1—4.—§ 1. *Sins of the rulers, and their punishment.*

Ver. 1.—The prophet denounces the sins of the rulers, false prophets, and priests; and begins with the injustice and oppression practised by the great men. And I said. The new address is thus introduced as being analogous to the denunciations in the preceding chapter, which were interrupted by the promise of deliverance, to which there is no reference here. *O heads of Jacob*; synonymous with *princes of the house of Israel* (comp. ver. 8; ch. i. 5). Micah addresses the heads of families and the officials to whom the administration of justice appertained. These magistrates and judges seem to have been chiefly members of the royal family, at any rate in Judah; see Jer. xxi. 11, 12 (Cheyne). Septuagint, *οἱ κατὰ τοὺς οἴκους Ἰσραὴλ*, "ye remnant of the house of Israel." Is it not for you to know judgment? Ye, of all men, ought to know what is just and fair, and to practise it (compare the opening of the Book of Wisdom).

Ver. 2.—The good . . . the evil; i.e. goodness and wickedness. Septuagint, *τὰ καλὰ, τὰ πονηρὰ* (Amos v. 14, etc.; John iii. 20; Rom. i. 32). Who pluck off their skin from off them. They are not shepherds, but butchers. We have the same figurative expression for merciless extortion and pillage. Ezekiel makes a similar complaint (xxxiv. 2—4). Cheyne sees in this and the following verse a possible allusion to cannibalism as at least known to the Israelites by hearsay or tradition. There is a passage in Wisdom (xii. 5) which somewhat countenances the idea that the Canaanites were guilty of this enormity, but it is probably only a rhetorical exaggeration of the writer. In the present passage the terms seem to be simply metaphors taken from the preparation of meat for human

food. Such an allusion is natural in the mouth of one who had just been speaking of Israel as a flock (ch. ii. 12).

Ver. 3.—The idea of the last verse is repeated here with more emphasis. The people are treated by their rulers as cattle made to be eaten, flayed, broken up, chopped into pieces, boiled in the pot (comp. Ps. xiv. 4). (For an analogous figure, see Ezek. xxxiv. 3—5.)

Ver. 4.—The merciless shall not obtain mercy. Then, when the day of chastisement has come, "the day of the Lord," of which, perhaps, the prophet spoke more fully when he originally delivered this address. He will not hear them. A just retribution on those who refused to hearken to the cry of the poor and needy (comp. Ps. xviii. 41; Prov. i. 28; Jer. xi. 11; Jas. ii. 13). *As they have behaved themselves ill in their doings; according as they have made their actions evil, or because they have, etc.*; *ὡς ἔβη* (Septuagint).

Vers. 5—8.—§ 2. *Sins of the false prophets who led the people astray.*

Ver. 5.—Concerning the prophets (ch. ii. 11). These are the lying prophets of whom Jeremiah complains (Lam. ii. 14). *That bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace.* Very many commentators take the phrase, "bite with the teeth," to mean "eat," so that the clause signifies that the prophets when bribed with food predict peace and happiness to people. The antithesis of the following clause seems to require this explanation, which is further supported by the Chaldee. But it is quite unprecedented to find the word translated "bite" (*nashakh*) in the sense of "eat," or as it is taken here, "to have something to eat;" wherever it occurs it means "to bite like a serpent," to wound (see Gen. xlix. 17; Numb. xxi. 8, 9; Amos v. 19; ix. 3). The parallelism of the succeeding member does not compel us to put a forced interpretation upon the word. These venal seers do vital harm, inflict gravest injury, when they proclaim peace where there is no peace; by such false comfort they are really infusing poison and death. *He that putteth not into their mouths. If any one does not bribe them, and so stop their evil mouths. They even prepare war against him.* The Hebrew expression is, "they consecrate" or

"sanctify war." There may be allusion to the religious rites accompanying a declaration of war (Jer. vi. 4; Joel iii. 9); but Micah seems to mean that, if the customary bribes are withheld, these prophets announce war and calamity as inevitable; they proclaim them in God's name, as speaking with his sanction and under his inspiration (comp. Jer. xxiii. 16, etc.; Ezek. xiii. 19; see note on Zeph. i. 7).

Ver. 6.—Night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision. The Hebrew is, "from," or "without a vision." Septuagint, *ἐξ ὁράσεως*, "out of vision;" Vulgate, *pro visione*. Hence some interpret this as spoken to the false prophets, who, to punish their lying prophecies and pretended revelations, shall be overwhelmed with calamity. But it is best taken as still addressed to the rulers, and Micah tells how that in the time of their distress there shall be no prophecy to direct them (comp. 1 Sam. xxviii. 6; Prov. i. 28; Lam. ii. 9). "Night shall be unto them without a vision." "Night" and "darkness" are metaphors for calamity, as in all languages. That ye shall not divine; *without divination*. Septuagint, *ἐκ μαντείας*, "out of prophecy." Parallel and identical in meaning with the preceding clause. The sun shall go down over the prophets; i.e. over the false prophets. The sun of their prosperity shall set. Micah seems to derive his imagery from the phenomena of an eclipse (comp. Jer. xv. 9; Amos viii. 9). The day. The time of their punishment (oh. ii. 4; Amos v. 18).

Ver. 7.—Shall the seers be ashamed. The false prophets shall be ashamed because their oracles are proved to be delusive. They shall all cover their lips; *the upper lip*; i.e. the face up to the nose, in sign of mourning and shame (see Lev. xiii. 45; Ezek. xxiv. 17, 22). It is equivalent to covering the head for the same reason, as Esth. vi. 12; Jer. xiv. 4. Septuagint, *καταλαλήσουσι καὶ αὐτῶν πάντες αἱ τοὶ*, taking the verb to mean "shall open" (not "cover") their lips against them. For there is no answer of God. There was no revelation (Ps. lxxiv. 9; Ezek. vii. 26). Septuagint, *Διότι οὐκ ἔσται δ' ἐπακούων αὐτῶν*, "Because there shall be none that hearkeneth unto them."

Ver. 8.—Micah contrasts his own powers and acts with those of the false prophets. I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord. Micah asserts that he speaks and acts by the direct inspiration of God; he claims three gifts bestowed upon him by the Holy Spirit to enable him to effect his purpose. The first of these is "power"—such might imparted to him that his words fall with force and proclaim their Divine origin (comp. Luke i. 17; Acts i. 8). The second gift is judgment—the righteous judgment of God;

this fills his mind and comprises all his message. The third gift is might, i.e. a holy courage that enables him to face any danger in delivering his testimony (comp. 2 Tim. i. 7). In these points he is in strong contrast to the false prophets, who were not inspired by the Spirit of God, spake not with power, called good evil, and evil good, were timid and time-serving. Jacob . . . Israel. The two are identical as in ver. 1, and the clauses in which they occur contain the same thought repeated for emphasis' sake.

Vers. 9—12.—§ 3. Recapitulation of the sins of the three classes—rulers, priests, and prophets, with an announcement of the destruction of Zion and the temple.

Ver. 9.—The prophet exemplifies his courage by delivering in full the denunciation with which he commenced (ver. 1; see note there). Hear this. What follows. Pervert all equity. Ye, who by your position ought to be models and guardians of justice and equity, violate all laws, human and Divine, make the straight crooked, distort every notion of right (comp. Isa. lix. 8).

Ver. 10.—They build up Zion with blood. Blood is, as it were, the cement that binds the building together. They raise palaces with money gained by extortion, rapine, and judicial murders like that of Naboth (1 Kings xxi.; comp. Jer. xxii. 13, etc.; Ezek. xxii. 27; Hab. ii. 12). Cheyne thinks this to be a too dark view of the state of public morals, and would therefore consider "blood" to be used for violent conduct leading to ruin of others, comparing Isa. i. 15; lix. 3; Prov. i. 11. In these passages, however, actual bloodshed may be meant; and we know too little of the moral condition of Judæa at this time to be able to decide against the darker view.

Ver. 11.—Judge for reward. The very judges take bribes (Isa. i. 23; Ezek. xxii. 12), which the Law so stringently forbade (see Exod. xxiii. 8; Deut. xvi. 19, etc.). The priests thereof teach for hire. The priests were bound to teach and explain the Law, and decide questions of religion and ritual (Lev. x. 11; Deut. xvii. 11; xxxiii. 10; comp. Hag. ii. 11, etc.). This they ought to have done gratuitously, but they corruptly made it a source of gain. Divine for money. The accusation in ver. 5 is repeated. These false prophets sold their oracles, pretending to have a suitable revelation when paid for it (Ezek. xxii. 28; Zeph. iii. 3, 4). Yet will they lean upon the Lord. These priests and prophets were worshippers of Jehovah and trusted in him, as though he could not forsake his people. They had faith without love, divorced religion from

morality, made a certain outward conformity serve for righteousness and truth. Is not the Lord among us? (Exod. xvii. 7). As though the very fact that they had in their midst the temple, wherein Jehovah's presence was assured, would protect them from all harm, whatever their conduct might be. Such presumptuous confidence is reproved by Jeremiah (vii. 4, 8, etc.; comp. Amos v. 14, and note there).

Ver. 12.—This is the prophecy quoted by the elders to King Jehoiakim (Jer. xxvi. 17, etc.). It may have been delivered before Hezekiah's time originally, and repeated in his reign, when it was productive of a reformation. The denunciation is a mournful contrast to the announcement in ch. ii. 12; but it was never completely fulfilled, being, like all such judgments, conditioned by circumstances. Therefore . . . for your sake. For the crimes of rulers, priests, and prophets. Shall Zion . . . be ploughed as a field. Three localities are specified which destruction shall overtake—Zion, Jerusalem, and the temple. Zion means that part of the city where stood the royal palace. The prophecy relates primarily to the destruction of the city by the Chaldeans, when, as Jeremiah testifies (Lam. v. 18), Zion was desolate and foxes walked upon it. The expression in the text may be hyperbolic, but we know that the ploughing up of the foundations of captured cities is often alluded to. Thus Horace, 'Carm.,' l. 16, 20—

" . . . imprimeretque muris
Hostile aratrum exercitus insolens."

(Comp. 'Propert.,' iii. 7, 41; and, for the whole passage, Isa. xxxii. 13, 14.) "The general surface of Mount Zion descends steeply eastwards into the Tyropæon and Kidron, and southwards into the Valley of Hinnom. The whole of the hill here is under cultivation, and presents a most literal fulfilment of Micah's prophecy" (Thomson, 'The Land and the Book,' p. 540). "From the spot on which I stood," says Dr. Porter, "I saw the plough at work in the little fields that now cover the site of Zion" ('Illustrations of Bible Prophecy,' p. 17). Jerusalem shall become heaps. The city proper shall become heaps of ruins (Jer. ix. 11; Neh. ii. 17; iv. 2). Septuagint, *ὡς ἀποροφύλακτον ἔσται*, "as a storehouse for fruits," as in Ps. lxxviii. (lxxxix.) 1. The mountain of the house. The mountain on which the temple was built, Mount Moriah, and therefore the temple itself, no longer mentioned as the Lord's dwelling-place. As the high places of the forest; or, as wooded heights, returning, as it were, to the wild condition in which it lay when Abraham offered his sacrifice thereon. In the time of the Maccabees, after its profanation by the heathen, the account speaks of shrubs growing in the courts as in a forest or in one of the mountains (1 Macc. iv. 38). Such was to be the fate of the temple in which they put their trust and made their boast.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—12.—*The abuse of influence.* God has imparted to all men the power of influencing others. We daily exert an influence either for good or for evil. They who know us, and who come into contact with us, are the better or the worse as the result of such knowledge and association. The nature of our influence depends upon our own character. Whether this subtle power we all possess is to result in good or ill depends altogether upon what we are ourselves. Let the life be pure and holy, fed and sustained by those hidden springs which take their rise in the throne of God, and then a healthy and helpful influence will assuredly follow, as effect follows cause. The extent of the range of a man's influence depends very much upon the social position he occupies. The more prominent a man is among his fellows, the wider will be the circle of his influence. In every community there will be, of necessity, positions of special prominence to be occupied. To desire to occupy these for the sake of being prominent, and accounted great, is indeed a very poor ambition; but to desire to reach these in the hope of gaining and using for good the additional influence thus acquired; whilst "rising in the world," to be also ascending the heights of holiness and goodness, and in ascending thus to reach out the hand of help to others and to assist them to climb above the mists of error and sin, is an aspiration that is truly noble; and happy is it for communities when such men rise. When good men are exalted "the city rejoiceth." These verses present to us a painful example of the opposite of all this. Note we have here—

I. GREAT INFLUENCE GROSSLY ABUSED. Three influential classes in the kingdom of Judah are specially referred to. 1. *The princes*; i.e. the ruling class, the judges and magistrates, these functions being exercised by members of the royal family (Jer.

xxi. 11, 12). 2. *The priests*; i.e. members of the Jewish priesthood, taking part in the services of the temple, and also in teaching the people. 3. *The prophets*; i.e. not the men who were specially inspired of God, like Micah, but men who claimed to possess a desire to work for God, who were trained in "the schools of the prophets," and who became a very numerous class in the land, and took an important part in the education of the community. In these three classes we have comprehended the most influential men in the land; men who, by virtue of their position, ought to have exerted the wisest and most salutary influence upon the people. But instead of this the very opposite was actually the case. They who should have been "the salt of the earth" were "as salt which had lost its savour." The princes, instead of righteously administering the Law, sought their own enrichment. They accepted bribes ("The heads thereof judge for reward," ver. 11), and they utterly sacrificed the rights and interests of the people. "They built up Zion with blood" (ver. 10), i.e. they reared their luxurious palaces and increased their own store of wealth by perverting equity, and by unrighteous decisions. Their unjust judgments, their extortions and oppressions, so pressed upon the people that the very life-blood of the nation was drained. Under the expressive figure of cannibalism, the seer describes the effect of their rapacity (vers. 2, 3). The prophets also were utterly mercenary. If the bribe was only given, they prophesied as desired. "They caused the people to err, biting with their teeth [i.e. feeding upon the bribe] and crying, Peace" (ver. 5); but only let the bribe be withheld, and they altered their tone and became the heralds of evil tidings (ver. 5). Nor were the priests behind in cherishing the same spirit. "The priests teach for hire" (ver. 11). The support of the Jewish priesthood was provided for by special Divine arrangement. The tenth in Israel was apportioned to the sons of Levi as their inheritance (Numb. xviii. 20; Deut. xviii. 2). But though thus provided for, such was their greed that, "producing the answer of God upon the receipt of money, they sold the grace of the Lord for a covetous price" (Jerome). And so did these prominent and distinguished classes in the kingdom of Judah abuse the great influence which had been bestowed upon them. History repeats itself; and there have been times in the development of other nations which have presented the counterpart to that which is here recorded respecting the kingdom of Judah (see, for example, the state of Europe during the age preceding "the Reformation," as described by D'Aubigné, 'History of the Reformation,' bk. i. ch. iii.).

II. THE ABUSE OF INFLUENCE RESULTING IN CALAMITY. 1. *To the abusers themselves*. The prophet declared that the day of retribution would duly come, and that in that day of Divine manifestation in judgment (1) the rulers should be required for their evil deeds "measure for measure" (ver. 4), and in the time of trial should find no help in God, for he would hide his face from them (ver. 4); (2) the false priests and prophets should be overtaken by judicial blindness (ver. 6), shame and confusion should be theirs, as the coming events brought to light the falsity of their declarations (ver. 7), and the Divine oracles would be silent in that day (ver. 7). 2. *To the nation*. The land they were seeking to "build up" by unrighteous deeds should be brought to nought, and the responsibility of its overthrow would rest upon them. "Therefore shall Zion for *your sake* be ploughed as a field," etc. (ver. 12).

Learn: 1. The blessing of influence well directed. 2. The boon those who in high places exert such an influence confer upon a community. 3. The need of constant intercession with God on behalf of the leaders of a nation, in order that peace and prosperity may reign. "I exhort," etc. (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2).

Vers. 1—12.—*Avarice*. There is nothing wrong in a man's seeking to acquire riches. Money is good. Its possession is to be desired, since it carries with it the means of surrounding its possessor with the comforts of life, and at the same time gives him the ability to impart good to those who are less favoured and in circumstances of need. The very endeavour also to secure this calls into exercise such qualities as industry and thrift, which are truly commendable. It is rather the love of money, and the inordinate desire for it for its own sake, that merits condemnation. Worldly treasure becomes the greatest possible curse when it is accounted by men the chief good. It will buy up everything else. Time, intellect, justice, truth, conscience, the most sacred rights of humanity, will be bartered for this; and every true well-

wisher of the race will endeavour to stem the ever-swelling torrent, and to present motives to turn the energies and enterprises of the world into another and higher direction. This chapter may be viewed as illustrative of the deplorable evils and the fatal results of this spirit of avarice.

I. THE DEPLORABLE EVILS CONNECTED WITH AVARICE. 1. *It saps the foundations of equity.* (Ver. 1.) These rulers understood the Law, but being so thoroughly possessed by the mercenary spirit, they failed to administer it righteously—were partial in their decisions, favouring those who offered the most tempting bribe, and thus caused the legal administration in the land to become rotten and corrupt. 2. *It leads to oppression and cruelty.* (Vers. 2, 3, 10.) The one concern of the princes was to enrich themselves and to find themselves surrounded with all luxuries and splendours; and hence they cared not to what lengths of extortion and fraud and oppression they went, or what suffering might be involved, if only they could compass this end. 3. *It renders its subject unfaithful in the discharge of the most sacred trusts.* No trust can be more sacred than that committed to the man who is constituted a teacher of spiritual truth, and upon whom it devolves to direct men in the ways of righteousness and God; but here (ver. 5) we have such catching the spirit of covetousness, and, as the result, proving altogether faithless to God and to the consciences of men, prophesying, “peace” to those who bribed them, and “war” to those who withheld the mercenary gift. 4. *It excites the spirit of self-confidence and self-sufficiency.* These leaders of the people, whilst acting thus at variance with the true and the right, yet finding their ill-gotten gains increasing in their hands, boasted that evil could not reach them (ver. 11).

II. THE FATAL RESULTS OF AVARICE. 1. *Loss of the Divine favour.* For “covetousness is idolatry,” and God will not give his glory to another (ver. 4). 2. *Non-apprehension of spiritual realities.* (Ver. 7.) 3. *Complete frustration of their designs.* The palaces they had built up with blood, and the city they had defiled by their iniquity, should come to nought, and in its overthrow all that they had unrighteously sought to secure for themselves should perish (ver. 12). They who boast that they are “full and increased in riches, and have need of nothing,” are in reality the most needy and desolate. Spenser, in ‘The Faëry Queene,’ has described their true condition—

“Most wretched wight whom nothing might suffice,
Whose greedy lust did lack in greatest store,
Whose need had end, but no end covetize,
Whose wealth was want, whose plenty made him poor,
Who had enough, yet wished evermore.”

Ver. 8.—*Worldly and spiritual power: a contrast.* In this verse the prophet seems to place himself in contrast with the false prophets to whom he had referred. They, and the priests and rulers with whom they were in association, may be taken as representing the worldly power of that age, whilst he represented that spiritual power which is inspired in the true servants of God by the working of his own Spirit. It is instructive, in reading this chapter, to contrast these worldly and spiritual forces.

I. THE FORMER IS POWER OFTEN EMPLOYED TO CRUSH; THE LATTER IS POWER EVER EXERTED TO SAVE.

II. THE FORMER IS POWER BRINGING BLIGHT UPON THOSE WHO COME UNDER ITS INFLUENCE; THE LATTER IS POWER THE EXERCISE OF WHICH EVER RESULTS IN BLESSING.

III. THE FORMER IS POWER THE PUTTING FORTH OF WHICH IS PROMPTED BY SELFISHNESS; THE LATTER IS THE OUTCOME OF LOVE.

IV. THE FORMER BRINGS SHAME AND DISHONOUR UPON THOSE WHO EMPLOY IT; THE LATTER YIELDS TO ITS POSSESSORS PRESENT DISTINCTION, AND SHALL SECURE TO THEM IMPERISHABLE RENOWN.

Vers. 8—12.—*Gifts for Divine service.* I. THEIR NATURE. (Ver. 8.) 1. “Power.” (Ver. 8.) Weak as the prophet felt himself to be, he was conscious of a Divine influence resting upon him and inspiring him, clothing him with holy energy and irresistible might. His mind and heart had been brought into an enjoyment of the highest and holiest fellowship with the Invisible and Eternal. His soul was animated by the inward witness of the Father’s love. His whole nature was quickened so that the

spirit, instead of being ruled by the body, had the body as its willing instrument, and all acting in concert with the will of God. God dwelt in him and he in God. His spiritual life was healthy and vigorous. His was the strength of a man who felt that he had been called to engage in a work demanding peculiar gifts and endowments in order to its successful discharge, but that all he thus wanted God would bestow, so as to render him efficient; and hence he was ready for service—full of inward strength, “full of power.” 2. “*Judgment.*” (Ver. 8.) The reference is not to judgment in the sense of being able to discriminate *character* (although *this* is very desirable), but judgment in the sense of enlightenment to understand the message to be delivered. Here was a messenger who knew what to say; who did not go forth with a sense of uncertainty, but as one who had received his message and was prepared without hesitation to deliver it. 3. “*Might.*” The idea is that of *courage*. He not only knew what to say, but was ready to say it *fearlessly*. Humble in origin, born and trained up in obscurity, he cowered not even before princes and nobles, but rather caused *them* to tremble by the holy boldness with which he declared unto them “all the counsel of God.”

II. THEIR SOURCE. (Ver. 8.) “But truly I am full of power by *the Spirit of the Lord.*” These words betray no egotism on the part of the prophet. Had he simply affirmed himself to be a man of power, he had doubtless laid himself open to the charge of manifesting that “self-praise” which is “no recommendation;” but the qualifying sentence entirely frees him from the charge—“by *the Spirit of the Lord.*” He was inwardly strong; he was enlightened to know what he ought to utter in God’s name, and he was prepared to go forth and to say it with unflinching courage, because there rested upon him “an unction from the Holy One,” and he was inspired by God’s own Spirit.

III. THEIR EXERCISE. “He declared unto Jacob his transgression,” etc. (ver. 8). With an inspiring consciousness of the presence with him of the Lord he served; with a clear perception of the character of the age and of the announcements he was to make in God’s name, and with a boldness no adverse force could intimidate, because divinely sustained, he went forth to his appointed service, reprov’d the rulers for their unrighteous judgments and their acceptance of bribes, and their acts of cruelty and oppression (vers. 9, 10), chastised the priests and prophets for degrading, by their mercenary conduct, the high functions they were called upon to discharge (ver. 11), and predicted the coming overthrow of the nation, fastening upon these guilty leaders the responsibility of occasioning the impending doom (ver. 12). The history of the Church of God through all ages tells of men thus inspired by God’s Spirit with “power” and “judgment” and “might;” and hence who nobly fulfilled their commission. Peter on the Day of Pentecost, Paul before kings and governors, Luther before the Diet of Worms, Knox carrying on the work of Reformation in Scotland, Whitefield and the Wesleys in the work of revival—there rested upon the heads of these true servants of the living God the tongues of heavenly fire; their arms were nerved by the might of omnipotence, and there dwelt in them the wondrous spiritual force that shall yet regenerate the world. There are difficulties connected with service to God in the present as in all past times; yet these should not dishearten or daunt us, but in the Divine strength we should courageously meet these and contend against them until they are all overcome. It betrays the possession of a weak faith, and seems to indicate that he does not realize what Divine resources are available to him, if a man in his work for God sits down before the difficulties of his position as a worker, dispirited and fretful. Shall we manifest less courage in reference to spiritual service than men exhibit in the ordinary pursuits of life? Shall we acknowledge ourselves baffled and beaten when the mighty energy of God’s own Spirit is available, and may be ours if we will? There was exhibited on one occasion at the Royal Academy a striking picture of a gallant knight mounted on his charger and approaching a dark cavern. His steed was represented as drawing back through fear, and the dogs following as shrinking through terror; but lo! the knight wears a countenance untouched by alarm. There may be perils ahead, but he recks not, for his hand grasps the cross and his trust is in the living, loving Lord. Let our trust be thus centred, and no difficulty lying before us, or no antagonism against which we may have to contend in holy service, shall be able to daunt us, but we shall say, “Who art thou, O great mountain?”

before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." We should "covet earnestly the best gifts," and above all seek to be "endued with power from on high."

Ver. 10.—*National stability.* I. THE ENDEAVOUR TO SECURE NATIONAL STABILITY IS LAUDABLE AND TO BE COMMENDED. Princes, nobles, leaders of the people of all classes, ought to seek to *build up* Zion and Jerusalem; and earnest, enthusiastic effort directed to this end is honourable and worthy of all praise.

II. THIS RESULT CAN ALONE BE GAINED BY RIGHTEOUS MEANS. National strength and stability has its very foundations in truth, rectitude, justice, and goodness.

III. THE ADOPTION OF ANY OTHER METHODS MUST INEVITABLY RESULT IN DISGRACE AND DECAY. These rulers built up Zion with "blood," i.e. oppression, wrong, cruelty; and Jerusalem with "iniquity," perverting all that was true and right; and hence, despite the semblance of outward prosperity, the process of decay and dissolution was going on, and became at length completed in the ruin of the nation (ver. 12).

IV. THEY ARE THE TRUE PATRIOTS WHO LIFT UP THE VOICE OF WARNING, AND WHO EXPOUND AND ENFORCE THE PRINCIPLES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. To adopt this course specially in a worldly, self-indulgent age is sure (1) to *render the teacher unpopular with many*; (2) hence it requires *holy courage and daring*; (3) which will be possessed in proportion as the man is "*moved by the Holy Ghost*."

Ver. 11.—*The ministry viewed in relation to "hire."* The Jewish priests and prophets were the teachers of the people in matters of religion and morals. They exercised "the teaching faculty;" and this must form a prominent feature in those who devote themselves to the work of the ministry in every age (1 Tim. iii. 2; Col. i. 28; 2 Tim. ii. 15; 2 Cor. iv. 2). The power of the pulpit in these modern times depends very largely upon the maintenance of its teaching efficiency. The men the Church requires as its ministers are such as will come forth week by week not to utter a number of weary platitudes, but to enforce living truths, and to present these in forms fresh and new.

Note—

I. SUCH "LABOURERS" ARE "WORTHY OF THEIR HIRE." The support of the Jewish priesthood was arranged under the Law (Deut. xviii. 2); the prophets also received temporal gifts in recognition of their services (1 Sam. ix. 7, 8). In the New Testament this principle of pecuniary acknowledgment being made for spiritual service is distinctly enunciated (Luke x. 7; 1 Cor. ix. 7, 14).

II. TO RENDER THIS SERVICE FOR THE SAKE OF THE "HIRE" IS SELF-DEGRADING, AND IS AN OFFENCE TO GOD AND THE GOOD. 1. *It leads to mere officialism.* 2. *It results in the perversion of truth,* the character of the message being made to depend upon the nature of the bribe and the desire to gratify those who offer it. 3. *It gives rise to sheer hypocrisy.* "Yet will they" (i.e. hypocritically) "lean upon the Lord and say, Is not the Lord among us?" (ver. 11). 4. *It awakens vain self-confidence.* "None evil can come upon us" (ver. 11). 5. *It incurs fearful responsibility.* "The blood of souls" will be required of such. The ruin of Zion and Jerusalem was here fastened upon such. "Therefore shall Zion for your sake," etc. (ver. 12). How honourable is the work of the faithful minister of truth! How essential it is that they who engage in it should experience the Divine call, and should guard well their hearts so that they may be true to themselves and may render acceptable service to others! Whatever their "hire" here may be, how glorious is the reward awaiting all who are found true in this calling; for "when the chief Shepherd appears they shall receive the crown of life" (1 Pet. v. 4).

Ver. 12.—*The desolating effects of sin.* The Book of Micah may popularly be considered as consisting of three sections—the first setting forth national guilt and corruption (ch. i.—iii.); the second (ch. iv. v.) as presenting glimpses of a brighter and better age; and the third (ch. vi. vii.) as unfolding the nature and importance of sincere and practical religion, and the Divine mercy to all who thus turn to God and serve him with all their hearts. The verse before us closes the first part of the prophecy, and presents to us the culmination of a course of impiety and iniquity. We have described here that "death" which "sin when it is finished" ever "bringeth forth" (Jas. i. 15). Notice—

I. THE HISTORICAL FACT OF THE MATERIAL DESOLATION WHICH WAS TO RESULT FROM THE PREVAILING NATIONAL TRANSGRESSION. (Ver. 12.) Observe: 1. *This prophecy was doubtless oft repeated by the prophet.* That it was uttered by him during the reign of Hezekiah is clear from Jeremiah (xxvi. 17, 19). But it had probably been uttered by him previously, for the words which follow (ch. iv. 1—3), and which are closely connected with them, were quoted by Isaiah from Micah during the earlier reign of Jotham (Isa. ii. 2—4). The prophets enforced their teaching by constant reiteration. "To write the same things," etc. (Phil. iii. 1). 2. *The faithful utterance of this "dark saying" was the means of working a temporary reformation.* (See Jer. xxvi. 17, 19.) It might have exposed the seer to the greatest peril. To declare such evil omens at a time when the prosperity of the land was reviving under the wise rule of Hezekiah might have involved the prophet in suffering, and even death. But, happily, it had its desired effect; it caused the king and the people to bow before God in humiliation, and "judgment" against the evil works which had been wrought "was not executed speedily" (Jer. xxvi. 19). 3. *Though thus delayed, the destruction of the land was ultimately effected.* Dean Stanley observed in reference to this prediction by Micah, "The destruction which was then threatened has never been completely fulfilled. Part of the south-eastern portion of the city has for several centuries been arable land, but the rest has always been within the walls. In the Maccabean wars (1 Macc. iv. 38) the temple courts were overgrown with shrubs, but this has never been the case since" ('Jewish Church,' ii. 464). It is possible to be too literal in our interpretations, and the facts of history are simply sufficient to indicate how entirely that which Micah predicted (ver. 12) has come to pass (see Richardson's 'Travels,' p. 359; Keith on 'Prophecy,' p. 257; Porter's 'Handbook,' p. 92).

II. CONSIDER THIS AS SYMBOLICAL OF THAT SPIRITUAL DESOLATION WHICH IS EVER THE OUTCOME OF EVIL. It is the natural tendency of sin to render the transgressor desolate in heart; indeed, a man cannot indulge in a course of evil without his inner self, his spiritual being, becoming waste. A man yields to the sin of avarice, and perhaps as the result of its indulgence he gains his hundreds and thousands, gets the best of many a bargain, and at length amasses a fortune; but then he loses peace of mind, kindness of heart, the joy resulting from cherishing all generous impulses, and probably also his soul; so that whilst in the worldly sense he has succeeded, he has prospered at a terrible sacrifice, even the withering of his highest and noblest powers; he has "got on," has "risen in the world," but his heart is left void and desolate. So also is it with *unholy ambition*. We think of Sennacherib saying to Hezekiah, "Where are the gods of Hamath?" etc. (Isa. xxxvi. 19, 20), thus proclaiming defiantly his victories; or of Herod sitting upon his throne, arrayed in gorgeous apparel, making his oration to the people, and priding himself in their flattery as he heard their cry, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man" (Acts xii. 21, 22); and whilst on the one hand we see in them representatives of the lovers of power, of outward show, of flattery and applause, we see on the other hand men who, amidst all these outward pretences, were inwardly empty, waste, desolate. And there may be this spiritual desolation amidst much of apparent good. It does not follow that because a man is becoming thus spiritually desolate, his heart is necessarily closed against all that is good, or that because a man is susceptible of some good he is not spiritually becoming waste. There may be love of kindred with all those praiseworthy acts to which this may prompt. There may be large and generous sympathies. Attention, too, may even be paid to religious observances; and yet with all this the heart may be closed to the heavenly influences of the Spirit of God, and may be found at length a moral waste (Prov. iv. 23). Think of the inestimable value of that Sacrifice, the design of which was the putting away of sin and the raising to honour and dignity those whom sin had covered with ignominy and had plunged into ruin. Our very desolation has rendered us the objects of the special concern of the Most High (John iii. 16). Trusting to Christ, we become delivered from sin with all its thralldom and misery. And the happy era shall at length dawn, to which we look forward with longing, expectant hearts, when the entire moral aspect of the universe shall be changed, and "the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 8.—*God's gift of a faithful ministry.* The expression, "But truly (ὅτι)," implies a contrast to what precedes. The false prophets were in alliance with the tyrannical princes, and were destined to humiliation and to the utter loss of whatever power they once possessed. But Micah, conscious of a Divine calling and of fidelity to it, can point to himself as an illustration of God's precious gift of a faithful ministry.

Note—

I. ITS QUALIFICATIONS. The fundamental one is: 1. *The indwelling of the Spirit of God.* The true prophet or minister magnifies his office, but does not exalt himself. He traces all he has to God, as does St. Paul (1 Cor. xv. 10; 1 Tim. i. 12—16). Pretenders to the prophetic or pastoral office were "sensual (ψυχικοί), not having the Spirit," inspired only by the spirit of the world, or of self; but true ministers can use St. Paul's words (1 Cor. ii. 12), for they are relying on their Divine Master's promise of the Holy Spirit. 2. Hence *spiritual power.* It may be special and superhuman, such as prophets and apostles enjoyed. But the more valuable power is that which enables us to witness for Christ (Acts i. 8), to exert a holy influence (2 Cor. iii. 2, 3), and to preach "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Power is a general term; the Divine Spirit manifests his presence by a diversity of gifts appropriate to special necessities. Two of these are mentioned here as needed by the prophet and, in truth, by every faithful minister. 3. *Judgment,* including such thoughts as these—a clear sense of God's equity in his dealings (Ezek. xviii.), an impartial utterance of God's sentences (Jer. i. 16—19), and therefore discrimination in all his messages and in his treatment of his hearers, "doing nothing by partiality," "rightly dividing the Word of truth," "warning every man and teaching every man." Such a ministry will emit light as well as heat, will show discretion as well as zeal. 4. *Moral courage.* "Might," such as the apostles sought and received (Acts iv. 29—31; cf. Eph. vi. 19, 20; Col. iv. 4; 2 Tim. i. 7). All these gifts are needed in a high degree—"full," etc. "However the Lord may bless the meanest gifts of such as be honest, yet neither are ministers to be empty vessels nor swelled with ostentation, but a large measure of real furniture is to be sought after." All these qualifications were more or less fully manifested in the true prophets of God; e.g. Elijah (Ecclus. xlviii. 1), Isaiah (lviii. 1), Jeremiah (vi. 11, 27), Ezekiel (iii. 8—11), and many others.

II. ITS DIFFICULTIES. The main difficulty here suggested arises from its relation to the sins of men. 1. The burden of the Lord laid on ministers requires them to be willing to be used in the disagreeable task of convicting communities and individuals of sin. This may be traced in the long prophetic and apostolical succession of God's true ministers, including such illustrious names as Moses, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Daniel, John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul. We too must be prepared to show to the Church and to individuals their sins in trade, their transgressions of the royal law in their conduct, whether towards servants or masters. Thus we may seem to many "men of strife," or even enemies (Gal. iv. 16). 2. But we do not successfully "show" to men their transgressions unless they are induced to abandon their sin and accept God's method of deliverance. We seek to *take men alive* out of the snare of the devil (see 2 Tim. ii. 24—26, Revised Version). It is a terrible thing to convict a man of sin, and yet fail to save him, thus increasing his condemnation.

III. ITS ENCOURAGEMENTS. 1. *Frequent successes.* We learn from Jer. xxvi. 17—19 that Micah's message on this occasion led to the conversion of Hezekiah, or to the reawakening of his zeal as a reformer. The Christian minister's song of victory is often heard (2 Cor. ii. 14). 2. *Constant Divine approval.* Sometimes a sense of failure causes a feeling of isolation and of heart-sickness, such as Jeremiah often felt. But even then we can fall back on the sense of the abiding presence of God (John xvi. 32), and of his approving smile (Isa. xlix. 4, 5).—E. S. P.

Vers. 9—11.—*Spurious faith.* The prophet at once vindicates the claim he has just made (ver. 8). We have here—

I. AN UNSPARING EXPOSURE OF SINS IN HIGH QUARTERS. All classes are involved, and to each class the most scandalous characteristic offences are imputed. 1. *Civil*

rulers. They are open to bribes, in direct violation of Exod. xxiii. 8, and therefore pervert judgment. These sophists on the judgment-seat make "the worse appear the better reason;" and at length reach such a stage of iniquity that they "abhor judgment," and "call evil good," etc. (Isa. v. 20; cf. 2 Pet. ii. 14). In the striking figure of Isaiah (lix. 14), "truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter." Their crimes are set out in detail in vers. 1—4. Meanwhile they are building fine mansions or laying out estates, but at the price of blood, like Ahab (1 Kings xix.) or Jehoiakim (Jer. xxii. 13—19); or they are wronging the poor, though the consequences may be fatal; as in modern society some of the "heads thereof" connive at social systems in government or in business, by which the poor are defrauded of their claim to a livelihood. "The bread of the needy is their life; he that defraudeth him thereof is a man of blood. He that taketh away his neighbour's living slayeth him: and he that defraudeth the labourer of his hire is a bloodshedder" (Ecclus. xxxv. 21, 22).

2. Ecclesiastical leaders. The priests' duty was to teach the Law (Lev. x. 11; Deut. xvii. 11; xxxiii. 10), but they too needed *douceurs*, or fees or bribes. They probably misinterpreted the Law from the same motive as did Eli's sons (1 Sam. ii. 12—17). "So Arian bishops, themselves hirelings, by false expositions of Scripture countenanced Arian emperors in their persecution of the faithful" (Pusey). So, too, persecuting priests and prelates in more recent days. **3. Prophets.** These religious teachers were raised up to promote a reformation; but they too had been dragged down to the level of other teachers. Divine prophecy had been corrupted into divination, as in the case of Balaam, and covetousness was universal (ver. 5; and cf. Ezek. xiii. 1—6). An instructive parallel may be found in the case of the regular clergy of the mediæval Church, who were gradually degraded to the low moral level of the secular clergy. We are reminded of the odiousness of a mercenary ministry. Thus all classes were combined in a conspiracy of unrighteousness (as in Ezek. xxii. 23—31), and the love of money was the root of all this evil.

II. AN INDIGNANT PROTEST AGAINST UNWARRANTED FAITH IN GOD. They flatter themselves: **1. That they may lean upon the Lord.** Deaf to all past teachings, blind to the danger signals which history has erected, they insult God by leaning upon him, and expecting him to support their vile souls and pampered bodies (cf. Deut. xxix. 19, 20). They further take for granted: **2. That the Lord is among them.** Though invisible to sense, and sending repeated protests, they assume his favourable presence. They trust in lying words, saying, "The temple of the Lord are these," as though the temple of the Lord and the Lord of the temple were identical. In a church at Innsbruck, on the tabernacle containing the consecrated wafer are the words, "Ecce tabernaculum Dei." If this daring perversion of Scripture had proclaimed a truth, what a false confidence for an unworthy communicant; as though "Corpus Christi" and "Christ in you" were the same! "There standeth One among you whom ye know not" may be true, but in a new sense; if not to sanctify, to condemn. **3. That no evil will befall them.** As though God's protests and a guilty conscience were not in themselves evils and the forecast shadows of coming doom. So deceitful and desperately wicked is the heart of man. These truths may be applied to many "*nominal* Christians." (1) Ambitious monarchs or statesmen, "building up" their country by huge standing armies, or navies, or palaces, at the cost of grinding taxation, leading to semi-starvation and loathsome disease as among the Italian peasantry, or of tyrannical extortions from Egyptian felaheen, or of a merciless conscription as in Germany, driving some of her best sons from her shores. (2) Landlords amassing fortunes from rack-renting the fever-slums of London, or confiscating the fruits of the tenants' industry in Ireland. (3) Drink-sellers fattening on the pauperism of their wretched customers, or carrying liquid poisons to tribes just emerging from barbarism. (4) Hireling preachers or priests, prophesying smooth things to unrighteous aristocrats or plutocrats, or lulling guilty consciences by the opiate of the sacrament. Such men of expediency crucified even the Son of God that Zion might be "built up" (John xi. 48; see Jer. v. 30, 31). To that final question an answer is found in ver. 12.—E. S. P.

Vers. 1—6.—**Civil rulers.** "And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment? Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from

off their bones," etc. The punishment threatened in this chapter is against the authorities of Israel, against the princes who turn right into wrong and slay the people, against false prophets who lead the people astray and confirm them in their sin, and against the priests in connection with both princes and prophets. The passage before us is directed to the princes and the rulers. These are represented as radically corrupt, hating good and loving evil, and cruelly oppressive: "Who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones." And more than this, "they eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them." They are represented not only as slaying the people, robbing them of the means of existence, but devouring them, treating them like cattle, which are first killed and then boiled in the pot for food. All this, of course, is strong figure used to make a strong impression. We have two things worthy of notice concerning civil rulers.

I. WHAT CIVIL RULERS OUGHT ALWAYS TO BE. They ought always to "know judgment," that is, always practically to know the right. The ruler who has not a practical knowledge and love of the right is out of his place; he is a usurper. There is such a thing as right in the universe. What is the standard of right? Not public sentiment, not human law, but the Divine will. God's being is the foundation of right; God's will is the standard of right; God's Christ is the completest revelation of that standard. The man who is not Christly in character is more or less despicable everywhere, but nowhere so much as on a throne. Are we not commanded to honour the king? Yes, but the command implies that the king is honourworthy. Reason, conscience, and the Bible call upon us to loathe and despise moral corruption on a throne.

"He, a king,
A true right king, that dare do aught save wrong,
Fears nothing mortal but to be unjust;
Who is not blown up with the flattering puffs
Of spongy sycophants; who stands unmoved
Despite the jostling of opinion."

(Marston.)

II. WHAT CIVIL RULERS OFTEN ARE. What were these rulers? 1. *They were morally corrupt.* These rulers were of those who "hate the good and love the evil." They were in heart radically wrong, corrupt to the very core, hating good. 2. *They were socially cruel.* They treated the people as the butchers and the cooks treat beasts—kill them, boil them for their own use. How often, even in the history of England, have rulers treated the people as mere cattle for food! 3. *They were divinely abandoned.* "Then shall they cry unto the Lord, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time." The Monarch of the universe is no "respector of persons." Princes are no more in his eyes than paupers; and he will treat both according to their character, their responsibility, and their merits. He has often roused nations to send their rulers howling into infamy and ruin. After all, the existence of corrupt kings is to be ascribed to the ignorance, the cowardice, and servility of the people. Let the peoples of the earth advance in intelligence, moral discernment, and independency, and such rulers will disappear. Corrupt rulers are like glowworms, that in the night seem brilliant, but in the day contemptible grubs. Weak, ignorant, and tyrannic kings appear glorious in the night of popular ignorance, but abhorrent as the day of mental intelligence advances.—D. T.

Vers. 5—7.—*False prophets.* "Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him. Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision," etc. The following is the version of Delitzsch: "Thus saith Jehovah concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who bite with their teeth and preach peace. And whoever should put nothing into their mouths, against him they sanctify war. Therefore night to you because of the vision, and darkness to you because of the soothsaying; and the sun will set over the prophets, and the day blacken itself over them. And the seers will be ashamed and the soothsayers blush, and all cover their head, because there is no answer of God."

"Here he attacks the false prophets, as before he had attacked the 'princes.' 'That make my people err'—knowingly mislead my people, by not denouncing their sins as incurring judgments. 'That bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace;' i.e. who, so long as they are supplied with food, promise peace and prosperity in their prophecies. 'And he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him.' Whenever they are not supplied with food, they foretell war and calamity: they sanctify war, i.e. proclaim it as a holy judgment of God, because they are not fed. 'Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark.' Calamities press on you so overwhelmingly as to compel you to cease pretending to divine (Zech. xiii. 4). Darkness is often the image of calamity (Isa. viii. 22; Amos v. 18; viii. 9). 'Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips.' The Orientals prided themselves on the moustacho and beard. To cover the upper lip, therefore, was a token of shame, mourning, and sorrow (Lev. xiii. 45; Ezek. xxiv. 17). 'Cover not thy lips,' i.e. assume not the usual token of one mourning (Ezek. xxiv. 22). They shall be so ashamed of themselves as not to dare to open their mouths, or boast of the name of prophet. 'For there is no answer of God.' 'They shall no more profess to have responses from God, being struck dumb with calamities' (Fausset). False prophets are here brought under our attention again, and three things are suggested concerning them.

I. THEY ARE DECEIVING. God says, they "make my people err." Preachers often make their hearers err. 1. *In theology.* They propound ideas, crude and ill digested, concerning God, Christ, moral conditions and relations, utterly inconsistent with truth. 2. *In worship.* The forms they propose to use in worship, the rules they enjoin for it, are often such as to give the people wrong ideas as to what worship really is. 3. *In morality.* Their standard of duty is often wrong; hence wars are sanctioned, priestly exactions and assumptions encouraged and maintained. Ah me! how the preachers make men err on these great subjects!

II. THEY ARE AVARICIOUS. They "bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace." Greed governs them in all their ministries. They are ever hungering after gain; pelf with them is a passion. Their eyes are ever on pew-rents, offerings, tithes, etc. If their greed is offended, they "prepare war against" the offender; they raise an opposition strong and deadly against him. They are "greedy of filthy lucre."

III. THEY ARE CONFOUNDED. Confounded in darkness. "Night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them." They were blind leaders of the blind, and they themselves fall into the ditch. Confounded in shame. "Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners be confounded." Jehovah ignores them. "There is no answer of God." "Those," says Matthew Henry, "who deceive others are but preparing confusion for their own faces,"—D. T.

Vers. 8—12.—*The true prophet.* "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin. Hear this, I pray you," etc. It is supposed that this chapter belongs to the reign of Hezekiah; if so, the mournful state of matters which it depicts belongs to the time preceding the reformation. These words lead us to consider *the true prophet.*

I. THE WORK OF A TRUE PROPHET. "To declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." It is a characteristic of all true prophets, that they have a keen moral sense to discern wrong, to loathe it, and to burn at it. No man is a true prophet who is not roused to thunder by the wrong. It has been charged against the preachers of England that it is not wrong that rouses them, but little dogmas that agree not with their theology, sects that unite not with their Church, policies that interfere with their income and position. We fear this is too true. The crimes of the people of England are not denounced by the pulpit as they should be—the vice in high places, the injustices perpetrated under the name and sanction of law, the cupidity of traders, the swindlings of joint stock company men, by which they become millionaires and win a seat in the Parliament of the nation. These things are not held up as they should be for public execration, in the broad sunlight of eternal truth.

Where have we men now to “declare unto Jacob his transgression, and unto Israel his sin”? 1. *This is a painful work.* It will incur the disfavour of some, and rouse the antagonism of the delinquents. Still, it must be done—done as John the Baptist did it, who denounced his countrymen as a “generation of vipers;” done as Christ did it, who levelled his terrible “woes” at the heads of the great criminals of his age. 2. *This is an urgent work.* No work is more needed in England to-day. To expose wrong goes a great way towards its extinction. Honeyed words in the pulpit we have enough, tawdry disquisitions, and sensational inauities. God multiply men of the stamp of John the Baptist and of the Apostle Peter, who on the Day of Pentecost charged home the terrible crime of the crucifixion to the men he addressed!

II. *THE POWER OF A TRUE PROPHET.* “Truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might.” There is no egotism in this. A powerful man knows his power, and will ascribe it to the right Source—the “Spirit of the Lord.” Micah’s power was moral; it was the might of conscience, moral conviction, of invincible sympathy with eternal right and truth. This is a very different power to that of mere intellect, imagination, or what is called genius. It is higher, more creditable, more influential, more God-like. What does the man who has it care for the smiles or frowns of his audiences? He sets his face like a flint. The praises of his fellow-men affect him no more than the twitterings of a sparrow would an eagle; their frowns, no more than the yelpings of a cur affect the monarch of the forest.

III. *THE FIDELITY OF A TRUE PROPHET.* This is seen here in three things. 1. *In the class he denounces.* “Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel.” He struck at the higher classes of life. “Heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel.” Ah me! how little we pulpiteering cowards here in England address ourselves to the crimes of the upper classes! The low, the helpless, the destitute, we are always lecturing. Do your ecclesiastical lords lecture royalty, think you? I read their fulsome flatteries often, but their denunciations never. The prophet’s fidelity is seen: 2. *In the charges he makes.* “They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.” (1) He charges them with extortionate cruelty. “The civic rulers only are addressed in ver. 9, viz. those who were charged with the administration of justice and of the affairs of the state, but who did the very opposite—who abhorred justice and made the straight crooked because they passed sentence for bribes. They thereby build Zion with blood, etc., i.e. obtain the means of erecting splendid buildings by cruel extortions, partly also by actual judicial murder, as Ahab, and after him Jehoiakim, had done” (Delitzsch). Building up Jerusalem by blood is something like building up churches by beer. It is not uncommon now for large brewers, from the enormous profits of their pernicious craft, to build up magnificent temples for God. What an outrage on decency! What an insult to omniscient Purity! (2) He charges them with base mercenariness. “The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money.” He saw mercenariness on the bench, inspiring the judge; mercenariness at the altar, inspiring the priests; mercenariness in the pulpit, inspiring the preachers. *Money* was the motive power of all. With all this mercenariness, still they “leaned upon the Lord,” that is, professed to worship the one true and living God, and ignorantly and presumptuously concluded that he would be ever amongst them, and that consequently no great evil would overtake them. The prophet’s faithfulness is seen: 3. *In the doom he proclaims.* “Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.” The prophecy was never literally fulfilled till the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, when the ground on which the city stood was ploughed up, in token of its utter demolition, and no city was to be built there without the emperor’s leave. “It is,” says an old writer, “the wickedness of those who preside in them that brings the ruin. It is for your sake that Zion shall be ploughed as a field; you pretend to build up Zion, but, doing it by blood and iniquity, you pull it down. The sin of priests and princes is often the ruin of states and Churches. *Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi;* the kings act foolishly, and the people suffer by it.”

CONCLUSION. Such is the true prophet.—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Vers. 1-5.—§ 4. *The prophet suddenly announces the future glory of the temple mountain and the ideal happiness of the people.*

Ver. 1.—But. There is no adversative particle here; the verse is merely connected with what precedes without any expressed contrast. What is implied is that it was impossible that the temple, to which God's high promises attached, should lie waste for ever. The passage, vers. 1-3, occurs in Isa. ii. 2-4. The question as to which prophecy is the earlier cannot be settled. Possibly both prophets borrowed the language of some earlier work, as Isaiah is thought to have done on other occasions, e.g. Isa. xv. and xvi., the community of ideas leading them to the same source of testimony. In the last days; literally, *at the end of the days*; Cheyne, "in the days to come." It is the usual phrase to designate the time of Messiah, unto which the prophet's thoughts are directed, and for which all preceding events and periods are a preparation (Jer. xxiii. 20; Hos. iii. 5; comp. 1 Cor. x. 11; 1 Tim. iv. 1). Septuagint, ἐν ἑσχατῶν τῶν ἡμερῶν, "at the last days." The phrase may often suitably be rendered, "in latter days," as spoken not absolutely, but relatively to preceding times. The mountain of the house of the Lord. Mount Moriah, the ruin of which was foretold (ch. iii. 12). But the term here seems to include Jerusalem itself. Shall be established, firmly and permanently (as 1 Kings ii. 45), no longer subject to ruin and devastation. In the top of the mountains; better, *on the head of the mountains*. The idea is that the temple mountain shall be raised above, and stand forth prominently from the lower hills that surround it and form its basis (comp. Ezek. xl. 2; Zech. xiv. 10; Rev. xxi. 10). The prophet speaks as if he contemplated a physical change, expressing thereby with singular force the notion that the worship of the true God (of which the temple was the symbol) shall be promulgated among all nations of the world; that from the old Jewish centre of religion a new order of things shall arise, not transitory, nor local, but extending to all time and pervading the utmost parts of the earth. And people (peoples) shall flow unto it. The prophet beholds the nations of the world coming up in formal procession to join in the service of the temple. Thus is adumbrated the

comprehension of all nations in the Catholic Church. Isaiah says "all nations" in the parallel passage (comp. Zeph. ii. 11 and Zech. viii. 22, and notes there).

Ver. 2.—The prophet further explains his last statement. The new revelation shall be so conspicuous and so attractive that all men shall hear, and desire to become partakers of it. Many nations. In contrast to the one nation from whom the Law emanated. They shall exhort one another to resort to the great religious metropolis, i.e. to the true religion. Of his ways. His plans in the moral government of the world, and the way in which he would have men walk in order to please him. For the law (torah); teaching, direction; not the Mosaic Law, but a rule of life (Prov. vi. 23). This is the reason given by the prophet for the eagerness of the nations to resort to Jerusalem. They would seek instruction at the hand of those authorized to give it (see note on ch. iii. 11). The word of the Lord. The revelation of Jehovah, the gospel. From Jerusalem. It is obvious that in a defined sense the gospel sprang from Jerusalem, the place where Christ exercised his ministry, died, rose, ascended; where the apostles received their commission and the gift of the Holy Ghost (Luke xxiv. 47; Acts i. 8); the gospel being not set up in opposition to the Law, but being its fulfilment and development.

Ver. 3.—The effect of this reception of true religion shall be universal peace. He shall judge among many people; or better, *between many peoples*. The Lord shall be the Arbitrator to whom all disputes shall be referred, as in the next clause. When his reign is acknowledged and his Law obeyed, all war and all causes of war shall cease. The gospel is a gospel of peace and love, and when "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ" (Rev. xi. 15), peace and love shall everywhere abound. (For the phrase in the text, comp. Judg. xi. 27; 1 Sam. xxiv. 12, 15.) Rebuke strong nations afar off. The word rendered "rebuke" means here "decide concerning," "act as umpire for." The arbitration of the sword shall no more be resorted to. The words "afar off" are omitted in the similar passage of Isaiah. Beat their swords into ploughshares; i.e. they shall practise the arts of peace instead of war. Literally, the short broad sword of the Israelites might readily be converted into a share, and the spear forged into a pruning-hook (comp. Hos. ii. 18; Zech. ix. 10). Martial has an epigram entitled, "Falx ex ense" (xiv. 34).—

"Pax me certa ducis placidos curvavit in usus:

Agricolæ nunc sum, militis ante fui."

The reverse process is seen in Joel iii. 10, where ploughshares are beaten into swords. Thus Virgil, 'Georg.,' i. 508—

"Et curvæ rigidum falces conflantur in ensem."

(Comp. Ovid, 'Fast.,' i. 699, etc.)

Ver. 4.—This verse is omitted in Isaiah. They shall sit every man under his vine. This image of plenty and security is derived from the account of the material prosperity of Israel in the days of Solomon (1 Kings iv. 25), in accordance with the Mosaic promise (Lev. xxvi. 4, etc.). It passed into a proverb expressive of peace and happiness (comp. Zech. iii. 10; 1 Mac. xiv. 12). The mouth of the Lord of hosts. The great promise is thus confirmed (Isa. lviii. 14). The LXX. usually renders this expression in Jeremiah and the minor prophets by Κύριος παντοκράτωρ, elsewhere by Κύριος σαβαώθ, and Κύριος δυναμειών. It means, "the Lord of the powers of heaven and earth," the idea being originally that God was the Leader of the armies of Israel.

Ver. 5.—This verse gives the reason why Israel is thus strong and safe. In the parallel passage in Isaiah (ii. 5) it is converted into an injunction to the house of Jacob. All people will walk; rather, all nations walk. Every one in the name of his god. "To walk" is generally used of moral and religious habits (e.g. 2 Chron. xvii. 4; Ps. lxxxix. 31; Ezek. v. 6, etc.); so here the meaning is that all other nations adhere to their false gods, and frame their life and conduct relying on the power and protection of these inanities, and, by implication, shall find their hope deceived. And we will walk in the name of the Lord our God. This is the secret of Israel's strength. The heathen can never prevail against the true believers who put their whole trust in the Lord, and live in union with him. By saying we, the prophet identifies himself with the faithful people. For ever and ever. The Church shall never fail. Heathen powers last for a time; the kingdom of Messiah is everlasting.

Vers. 6, 7.—§ 5. In this promised restoration all Israel is included, if they choose to accept the offer.

Ver. 6.—In that day. The Messianic age of ver. 1. Her that halteth; Septuagint, ἡ συντετριμένη, "her that is bruised;" Vulgate, claudicantem. Under the image of a flock footsore and dispersed, the prophet signifies the depressed condition of the exiled Hebrews (comp. ch. ii. 12; Zeph.

iii. 19). It is the sick and afflicted here who are to be gathered together, the remnant, that is (ver. 7), wherever found, which turns to the Lord in repentance and humility.

Ver. 7.—I will make her that halted a remnant. The "remnant" is "the election," that portion of Israel which accepts the offered redemption (Rom. ix. 27; xi. 5); and God declares that he will treat this section, now miserable and depressed, as sharers in the Messianic promises (see note on Zeph. iii. 19). As commonly, the restoration from captivity and the privileges of Messiah's kingdom are combined in one foreshortened view. But this "remnant" shall be made into a strong nation, which no power shall overthrow (Isa. xi. 14; lx. 22). The Lord shall reign over them. Not through an earthly representative, but by himself (comp. Isa. xxiv. 23; lii. 7; Obad. 21; Zech. xiv. 9). In Mount Zion. This prophecy does not necessarily point to any literal earthly fulfilment, but rather to the establishment of Christ's spiritual kingdom, and the revelation of that new Jerusalem which St. John saw "descending out of heaven from God" (Rev. xxi. 10).

Vers. 8—10.—§ 6. After a certain period of calamity and captivity the kingdom of David shall be revived.

Ver. 8.—And thou, O tower of the flock (migdal-edar). There was a village with a tower so called near Bethlehem (Gen. xxxv. 21), and it is thought that Micah refers to it as the home of David and as destined to be the birthplace of Messiah. But the context compels us to consider the expression as a periphrasis for Jerusalem, which the prophet here addresses, declaring that the royal power shall be restored to her. It is evidently the same place as the strong hold (ophel, "the hill") of the daughter of Zion. The name "Ophel" is affixed to the southern spur of Moriah, opposite to the Mount Zion, from which it was separated by the Tyropœon Valley. It was fortified by Jotham (2 Chron. xxvii. 3) and Manasseh (2 Chron. xxxiii. 14), and on it were the king's house, i.e. the old palace of David, and "the tower that lieth out," or the upper tower (see Neh. iii. 26, 27). This is probably the "flock-tower" mentioned in the text (comp. Isa. xxxii. 14, where Ophel and the watch-tower are named together); and it is so called as having been originally a place of refuge for flocks, or of observation for shepherds. Micah uses the two expressions to represent the power and dominion of Jerusalem. The propriety of the use of the term "flock-tower" is seen when we remember that David was a shepherd before he was king, and that the Israelites are the sheep of the Lord's pasture. The reference to a flock in the preceding

verses may also have influenced the prophet's thought. Owing to a slight variation in the reading, the LXX. renders *Ophel* by αἰχμῶδης, "dark;" so Jerome, "nebulosa;" Aquila, σκοτώδης: Symmachus, ἀπόκρυφος. These translators would refer the term to the ruinous condition of the tower. The first dominion shall come, i.e. the former, original empire, such as it was in the days of David and Solomon, and which had been lost in later times. The LXX. adds, ἐκ Βαβυλῶνος: and hence the Greek expositors explain the passage as referring to the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. The kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem. The verb "shall come" is better taken with "the first dominion," and this clause in apposition to the former, "the kingdom of" or "the reign over the daughter of Jerusalem." Sovereignty over Jerusalem, or, as others take it, that appertains to Jerusalem, represents rule over the whole country. In Messiah the glory and power are restored to the throne of David (Luke i. 32, 33).

Ver. 9.—Before this glorious revival the prophet foresees calamity and exile in the nearer future; yet he bids the people not to despair. Why dost thou cry out aloud? The prophet hears the cry of Zion, and asks the cause. Septuagint, Ἰνατί ἔγνωσ κακά; "Why knowest thou evils?" from a variation in reading. Is there no king in thee? Hast thou lost thy king? Is this the reason of thy sorrow? The allusion is to the captivity of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah (2 Kings xxiv., xxv.). The loss of the king, the representative of the help and favour of God, was a token of the withdrawal of the Divine protection (comp. Lam. iv. 20; Hos. xiii. 10). Thy counsellor. A synonym for "king." Cheyne notes that the root of *melech* ("king") in Aramaic means "to counsel." In Isa. ix. 6 Messiah is called "Counsellor." The Septuagint, treating the word as a collective, renders, ἡ βουλὴ σου, "thy counsel." Pangs, etc. The comparison of sorrow of heart to the anguish of labour pains is very common (comp. Isa. xiii. 8; Jer. vi. 24; l. 43; Hos. xiii. 13).

Ver. 10.—Be in pain. The anguish is not to be resisted, but shall end, like birth-pains, in deliverance. Septuagint, ὄδω καὶ ἀνδρίῳ καὶ ἔγγυϊ, "Be in pain, and do bravely, and draw near," which is like Æneas's encouragement to his friends (Virgil, *Æneid*, i. 207)—

"Durate, et vosmet rebus servate secunda."

For now shalt thou go forth. The prophet leaves his metaphor, and announces that the people shall "go forth" into captivity. He says "now," as having the scene before his eyes. They must leave their city, live shelterless in the open country, be carried

to a distant land, even to Babylon. Shalt dwell in the field; i.e. while they are making their way to the place of their captivity. Thou shalt go even to Babylon. This is simple prophecy, and could have been known to Micah only by inspiration. In his day Assyria was the enemy whom Israel had to dread (as ch. v. 5, 6), Babylon being at this time in the position of a conquered country, and not becoming again powerful and independent for another century. So Isaiah prophesied of the captivity to Babylon (xxxix. 3-8), if modern critics have not shaken our faith in the genuineness of that chapter. Micah does not define the time of the Captivity, or the agents; he notes merely the place whither the Jews were at last to be deported. Even in this case "Babylon" may have its typical import, and be taken to represent the great world-power arrayed against the chosen race; and the prophecy may look forward to other fulfilments in succeeding ages. Some commentators think that Babylon is here mentioned as the most distant country known, or as a portion of the Assyrian empire. Others suppose that Sargon transported some Israelitish captives to Babylon to replace the rebellious Babylonians whom he exiled to Palestine (Records of the Past, vii. 29; 2 Kings xvii. 24; comp. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11), and that thus Micah was naturally led to represent the Judæans as following their brethren. Whichever explanation we take, there is no reason to consider that the reference to Babylon is the interpolation of a late editor of the prophetic writings. There shalt thou be delivered. In Babylon deliverance shall arise. This prophecy was first literally fulfilled in the return from captivity under Cyrus; it is further fulfilled, under Christ, in the rescue of the true Israelites from the bondage of sin and the world.

Vers. 11-13.—§ 7. Rescued from Babylon, Zion overcomes all enemies in the strength of God.

Ver. 11.—Now also; and now. A new scene is presented in contrast to the view in vers. 1-4. Many nations are gathered against thee. Primarily the Assyrians are meant (Isa. xxxiii. 3), whose armies were composed of various nationalities (Isa. xxii. 6; see below, ch. v. 5). Pusey thinks that the reference is rather to the attacks of petty enemies, e.g. in Maccabean times, and in the Samaritans' opposition to the rebuilding of the temple. Cheyne would place vers. 5-10 in a parenthesis, and connect the present with the ideal description in vers. 1-4. Let her be defiled; i.e. profaned, despoiled of her boasted holiness and inviolability. LXX., ἐπιχαρούμεθα, "we

will rejoice." The Vulgate, *lapidetur*, points to her punishment as an adulteress, which does not suit the context. Let our eye look upon Zion. The heathen anticipate with malicious pleasure the sight of the humiliation of Jerusalem (comp. Obad. 12, 13).

Ver. 12.—But the enemies who came to exult over Zion do not know God's design while blindly working it out. God's people are not to be destroyed, but their adversaries. They know not the thoughts of the Lord. The heathen, who were the instruments of God's wrath against his people, knew nothing of his purpose in thus afflicting them, nor perceived that they themselves were drawn together for punishment. He shall gather (*hath gathered*) them as the sheaves into the floor. Their blindness is proved by their not perceiving till too late that God has brought them together before Jerusalem, as sheaves are brought into the threshing-floor, in order to be broken up and destroyed (comp. Isa. xxi. 10; Jer. li. 23). The metaphor is carried on in the next verse. Various are the explanations of the prophet's reference in this prophecy. Many commentators see in it a reference to the destruction of the army of Sennacherib (2 Kings xix. 35); others discern a defeat of the Scythians after the return from captivity; others, again, place it in the times of the Maccabees; and others interpret it of the defeat of the mystical adversaries of God's Church adumbrated in Ezek. xxxviii.; Zech. xii.; and Rev. xx. But the prophet has not one definite event in view, but looks forward to the general conflict between the powers of the world and the Church, of which the historical events and material enemies were the types. Certain historical

circumstances may exactly suit the prediction, but they do not exhaust it. And indeed we do wrong to seek for minute and definite fulfilment of particular predictions. Such utterances are often conditional and are modified by subsequent circumstances. The prophets are concerned with great moral truths and the righteous government of the world, and are not always to be interpreted with literal exactness.

Ver. 13.—*Arise*. Shake off thy sorrow and fear and despair. And thresh. Tread thine enemies underfoot, now that they are gathered in the floor, as the oxen tread out the corn (Isa. xli. 15, etc.; Jer. li. 33.) Thine horn. The horn is an emblem of power and victory, as appertaining to the wild ox, the most powerful animal in Canaan (Deut. xxxiii. 17; 1 Kings xxii. 11.) The metaphor of threshing is dropped for the moment, but resumed in the next clause. Hoofs. In allusion to the mode of threshing mentioned above (Deut. xxv. 4; 1 Cor. ix. 9.) People; peoples. Israel shall crush all the nations that rise up against her. I (God) will consecrate. So the Masoretic text; but the second person, which the ancient versions give, is preferable. Septuagint, *avathōeis*, "thou shalt dedicate;" Vulgate, *interificies*. Thou, Zion, shalt devote their gain unto the Lord. This consecration, or devotion, to the Lord in the case of living things involved death, the restitution to the Lord of the life which he had given (see Lev. xxvii. 21, 28, 29; Zech. xiv. 21). Thus the spiritual Israel, purified by suffering, and redeemed, shall consecrate to the Lord the power of the world; and all the wealth and might of earth shall be subservient to the glory of the kingdom of God.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The Messiah's spiritual kingdom*. These verses call us away from the contemplation of sin and its effects as set forth in the previous chapters, and bid us turn our thoughts to the golden age that rose before the prophet's vision, and animated and cheered his heart in the dark days in which his lot was cast. We live in happier times. Much that was to him only *distant expectation* has become fully realized by us. "Blessed are our eyes," etc. (Matt. xiii. 16, 17). Still, favoured as we are, the kingdom of Christ has not, even in our own day, attained unto the highest perfection. The noontide splendour of his rule has not yet been reached. The cross has brought the crown, and the Lord Christ now reigneth as King in Zion; but "we see not yet all things put under him." There are still many difficulties and discouragements, and there is much to sicken and sadden the hearts of all to whom his Name is precious, and his truth and kingdom dear. And amidst all this we do well, like this seer, to look on to the ultimate complete triumph which the Christ shall assuredly win, and by this bright vision to gain the renewal of heart and hope. We have indicated here—

I. CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MESSIAH'S KINGDOM. 1. *Its spirituality*. We shall assuredly lose sight of the beauty of these prophetic descriptions if we give to them a literal and material significance. This, indeed, is what the Jews themselves did, and hence the true Messiah was by them "despised and rejected." "As upon the

figure of David the prophetic figure of the Messiah is developed, so upon the figure of Jerusalem is the prophetic figure of the holy community of the future" (Lange). Connecting ver. 1 with the last verse of the previous chapter, we are reminded that whilst the material kingdom was marked to fall, and should, in due course and as the result of national guilt, decay and pass away, yet this mournful apostasy of the chosen race should be rendered in the Divine wisdom "the riches of the world" (Rom. xi. 11, 12). The old economy should eventually disappear, but the new dispensation should follow. The long-promised Messiah should appear and establish a spiritual kingdom, the subjects of which should be renewed and sanctified men; to which kingdom higher privileges and honours should be attached than Judaism had ever presented, and the influence of which should extend to the wide world. 2. *Its pure and righteous principles of government.* "For the Law shall go forth of Zion," etc. (ver. 2). These have been framed with a due regard to the interests of all the subjects; they are not only designed to regulate the outward conduct and actions of men, but they go deeper and affect the heart and the secret springs of action. The great law of the kingdom is love—love to God and to man. "Love is the fulfilling of the Law" (Rom. xiii. 10). 3. *Its comprehensiveness.* "Peoples shall flow unto it" (ver. 1); "And many nations shall come" (ver. 2). Judaism was marked by its exclusiveness. Its privileges were confined to a particular nationality. But lo! it is here declared that the kingdom of the Messiah should be world-embracing. It shall become indeed "a great nation," for "unto it" all peoples and tribes "shall flow." The King whom Jehovah has "set upon his holy hill of Zion," and who shall "reign in righteousness," shall sway his sceptre at length over a ransomed, regenerated, happy world. 4. *Its perpetuity.* "It shall be abidingly established" (ver. 1). "The Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever" (ver. 7). The kingdoms of this world are unending. "They all shall perish." They rise, progress, attain unto their zenith, and then decline and pass away. Egypt and Tyre, Assyria and Babylon, Greece and Rome, powers that once dominated the world, their glory is laid in the dust, their pomp has passed away like a dream, their works survive only in chambers of antiquity, and their deeds have only a record in historical lore. So perishes the glory of this world! But this spiritual kingdom of the Lord Christ lives and shall never fail. Its throne shall never be shaken, its riches shall never be impoverished, its glory shall never be dimmed. "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom," etc. (Ps. cxlv. 13). 5. And hence, *its pre-eminence.* "It shall be exalted above the hills" (ver. 1). It shall attain unto heights such as no worldly power has ever reached, and its King shall enjoy distinction and honour such as earthly monarchs have never known. "He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high" (Isa. lii. 13); "And he shall bear the glory" (Zech. vi. 13).

II. THE INFLUENCE OF THE MESSIAH'S RULE. It is here predicted that this should be of the most healthy and beneficent nature. Under his sway: 1. *Enthusiasm should be enkindled.* "Come, and let us go up," etc. (ver. 2). Men drawn to him in the spirit of whole-souled devotion should seek to lead others to participate with them in the enjoyment of the blessings he imparts. "The love of Christ" has "constrained" men to the consecration of all their energies to his service. So Paul (Acts xx. 23, 24). Xavier said, "You say they will kill me by poison. It is an honour unto which such a poor sinner as I dare not aspire; but I am ready to die ten thousand deaths for the salvation of a single soul." In our own day we have seen men thus impelled to go forth to distant and uncivilized tribes; and when they have been stricken down by fever ending in death, lo! others have been found ready to be "baptized for the dead." 2. *Knowledge should be diffused.* "And he will teach us," etc. (ver. 2). The true Messiah is also "the true Light," "the Light of men," "the Light of the world." He came to rule, but his rule should be an enlightened one. Where his influence touches there is light. He dissipates the darkness of error, superstition, idolatry; and his enlightening power shall extend until "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth" (Isa. xi. 9). 3. *Obedience should be rendered.* "And we will walk in his paths" (ver. 2). The connection between this and the preceding sentence is very intimate. All true knowledge is designed to affect the conduct and life. Knowing and doing are closely related (John xiii. 17). How purifying and elevating Christ's moral influence upon the world has proved! Wherever the influence of his truth is felt, there, as sure as

day succeeds night, a higher morality becomes developed. 4. *Peace should be established.* (Ver. 3.) The Messiah is "the Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 6). "Glory to God in the highest," etc. (Luke ii. 14), was the song of angels as they welcomed his advent. Strange, then, that men should ascribe to his religion the prevalence in the world of war and conflict. His religion has often been made the pretext for entering into deadly strife; but underlying this there has been some ambitious design which has been the real though concealed cause. The growing disposition amongst the nations to seek peaceful solutions of existing difficulties, and not to draw the sword until these have been exhausted, is an effect of the influence of the principles of Christ upon society at large. The universal dissemination of his truth shall be followed by the complete fulfilment of this glowing prediction (ver. 3). 5. *Security should be realized.* (Ver. 4.) In the Assyrian monuments representations are given of men in a reclining posture, with the vines in rich profusion over their heads, suggestive of quiet and rest and freedom from everything calculated to disturb and alarm. And this is the idea expressed here. Fear had taken possession of the hearts of those whom the prophet was addressing. They thought with sadness and dismay of the awaiting judgments to follow national sin. The enemy had come well-nigh to the gates; but lo! the seer cheers them by the prospect of happier days which should at length dawn upon them. As it had been with the nation in the peaceful days of Solomon, so he declared it should be in a spiritual sense under the rule of the Messiah. "Such is that most quiet fearlessness which the law of Christ bringeth as being the law of charity, peace, and concord." 6. *Restoration should be effected.* (Vers. 6, 7.) Into the enjoyment of these high blessings even they should be brought who had erred from God's ways, who had "halted" in his service, and had divided their allegiance between him and Baal. They must, in consequence of their sin, be "driven out" and "afflicted" and "cast off;" yet in their exile he would watch over them, seeking them in his deep compassion, "devising means that his banished be not expelled from him" (2 Sam. xiv. 14), and in his own time and way these should be brought in with "the fulness of the Gentiles," to form "a strong nation" over whom he would reign for ever and ever (vers. 6, 7).

III. THE CERTAINTY OF THE REALIZATION OF ALL THUS EXPRESSED. The seer throughout uses the language of holy confidence. And he was warranted in this; for: 1. *Such is the Divine purpose.* The issue is divinely guaranteed. God has promised the kingdom to his Son. 2. *This Divine purpose has been repeatedly expressed.* "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (ver. 4). 3. *That which God has purposed and declared,* his power can and will fulfil. Despite the humble circumstances and conditions through which the chosen of Heaven would have to pass, "the kingdom should come to the daughter of Jerusalem"—"the first or former dominion;" i.e. the rich spiritual honour which had been promised to David's line should be bestowed (ver. 8), for such was the Divine will and which the Divine power would assuredly accomplish. Our hope for a bright future rests upon the same foundation. And as God requires us to put him in remembrance of his Word, we will say, "For Zion's sake," etc. (Isa. lxii. 1); and will cry in the words of our own Milton, "Come forth out of thy royal chamber, O Prince of all the kings of the earth! Put on the visible robes of thy imperial majesty; take up that unlimited sceptre which thy Almighty Father hath bequeathed thee; for now the voice of thy bride calls thee, and all creatures sigh to be renewed."

Ver. 2.—*Enthusiasm in religion.* I. THE SPIRIT OF ENTHUSIASM IN RELATION TO RELIGION IS EMINENTLY DESIRABLE. It is so: 1. *As indicating the possession of loving devotion to God.* 2. *As prompting to endeavour with a view to the spiritual well-being of others.* (Ver. 2, "Come, and let us go up," etc.; John i. 41, 42, 45, 46; iv. 28, 29.) 3. *As being contagious.* For, all aglow themselves, they will be the means of inspiring others with the same fervour.

II. THIS SPIRIT, UNLESS UNDER WISE CONTROL, MAY PROVE INJURIOUS. It may seem a very simple matter to invite others to God, to say to them, "Come, let us go up," etc.; but it is possible, by undue familiarity of approach, or by extravagance of language, to alienate those it is desired to win.

III. THIS SPIRIT IS IN SAFE KEEPING IF ITS POSSESSOR CULTIVATES THE DISPOSI-

TIONS HERE EXPRESSED (ver. 2), viz.: 1. *Of seeking to understand God's truth more clearly.* "And he will teach us of his ways." The consciousness of his imperfect attainments will keep him humble, and preserve him from mere dogmatism and self-conceit. 2. *Of endeavouring to be obedient in heart and life to God's will.* "And we will walk in his paths." His realization of the importance of ethical practical life will preserve him from either thinking or advocating the false notion that piety consists in profuse verbal declarations and mere outward professions.

Ver. 2.—*Higher spiritual life.* "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord." We are too prone to be content with living at a very low level of spiritual attainment. We need to hear and heed the voice of God's own Spirit addressing us through our own consciences, and through all the holy influences encompassing us, and bidding us leave the ordinary plain on which we have been content to dwell, and to ascend the mount of the Lord, and thus to rise to the nobler heights of spiritual privilege and goodness. "Let us go up," etc.

I. WHAT IS THIS HIGHER SPIRITUAL LIFE? It is a life of obedience to God and of faith in him. It is a life of holy and hallowed fellowship with the invisible. It is a life sustained and strengthened by hidden Divine springs. It is not perfect life, but life characterized by constant *endeavour after* the perfect. It is a life characterized by the patient endurance of trial, the successful resistance of temptation, and the cheerful performance of duty. It is a life animated by hopes entering "within the veil," and in which is increasingly realized union with the spiritual world.

II. HOW MAY IT BE REACHED? 1. *The ministration of the truth is designed to this end.* The advancement of the good in Divine knowledge and in the varied graces of the Christian character is one aim of the Christian ministry (Eph. v. 11-13). 2. *The commonest duties of our daily life* may be so discharged as to be made to contribute to our spiritual elevation. The aim should be to make every duty subservient to the great end of our spiritual advancement. 3. *The sorrowful experiences of our life* are all designed to secure to us "more life and fuller." These constitute the threshings of the spiritual man by means of which God would separate his servants from evil, and enable them to enter into the higher joys of his kingdom. 4. And this soul-elevation is to be secured not only by receiving, but also by imparting, *holy influences.* We rise ourselves as we invite others to rise; as we speak to them the encouraging word, and hold out to them the helping hand. Ruskin reminds us that the name which of all others is most expressive of the being of God is that of "the Helpful One," or, in our softer Saxon, "the Holy One." And we may each know what one has beautifully called *the holiness of helpfulness* (Dr. Robert Collyer's 'The Life that now is,' pp. 63, 64).

III. WHAT ADVANTAGES WILL ACCRUE FROM ITS ATTAINMENT? 1. *There will be greater enjoyment in connection with religious privileges than can otherwise be experienced.* 2. *Tranquillity will possess the heart amidst the disappointments, changes, and bereavements of life.* 3. *A clearer apprehension of the truth of God will be gained.* (Ver. 2.) 4. *More effective service to God in the world will be rendered.* Certain saints of God belonging to the past are sometimes set forth as having been specially eminent, and as though the same altitude could not be reached nowadays; whereas we are to be "followers" of such (Heb. vi. 12), and the "helps" they used are as available to us. Use them, and say—

"Go up, go up, my heart!
Be not a trifier here;
Ascend above these clouds,
Dwell in a higher sphere.
Let not thy love go out
To things so soiled and dim:
Go up to heaven, and God
Take up thy love to him."

Ver. 2.—*God our Teacher.* "And he will teach us of his ways." How?

I. BY WORKING IN OUR HEARTS THE SPIRIT OF TRUE HUMILITY. There must be humility in order that we may apprehend spiritual things. We must become "as

little children" would we enter the kingdom of truth. And this disposition is fitting; for what, after all, are we but children in relation to such knowledge? "Embryos we are all." Too many, forgetting this, and cherishing the opposite spirit, misapprehend or pervert the meaning of God's truth. Pride of intellect is cherished, and, strong and dogmatic in their adherence to false intellectual conceptions, they miss the highest truth. "The meek will be guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way." "As low trees and shrubs are free from many violent gusts and blasts of wind which shake and rend the taller trees, so humble souls are free from those gusts and blasts of error that rend and tear proud lofty souls." "The high tide quickly ebbs." "The valleys laugh with fatness when the hills are bare." "I thank thee, O Father," etc. (Matt. xi. 25, 26).

II. BY CONSTRAINING US TO CHERISH THE SPIRIT OF HEARTY OBEDIENCE. By the gentle constraints of Divine love the will is brought into harmony with the higher and perfect will of God; and to the man thus obedient there is unfolded the glorious treasures of Divine wisdom and knowledge. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant" (Ps. xxv. 14); "Then shall we know, if we follow on," etc. (Hos. vi. 3).

III. BY IMPARTING UNTO US SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT. The heart being rendered humble and obedient, light springs up within; a spiritual insight is imparted; the unction of the Holy One rests upon the man; higher perceptions are his; he apprehends and understands truths which formerly were unperceived or distorted by him. "Pure in heart," he "sees God;" spiritually minded, he discovers spiritual things. God's ways stand revealed to him, and God's Word is no longer a dead letter, but is instinct with life and power to his soul. Then, with an earnest desire to enter into the full significance of spiritual realities, and with a deep consciousness of our own weakness and need of guidance, we do well to cry, "Lead us in thy truth and teach us;" and to rejoice in the encouraging assurance, "And he will teach us of his ways."

Ver. 2.—*Obedience to the Divine will.* "And we will walk in his paths." The idea is—living obediently to the will of God. Observe—

I. GOD HAS REVEALED HIS WILL UNTO MAN. "The Law has gone forth," etc. (ver. 3). The revelation of what God requires of his creatures has been given (1) in the commandments unfolded to Moses on Sinai; (2) in the full and perfect exposition of those commandments given in the teaching of Christ; (3) in the complete transcript of them presented in the Divine Teacher's spotless character and life.

II. TO OBEY THAT WILL INDICATES THE POSSESSION OF TRUE PIETY. Sincere piety does not consist in outward observances, although these have so high a value that we are not to "forsake the assembling of ourselves together" for Christian fellowship and teaching; nor does it consist in Church association, although there are many advantages resulting from Christians banding themselves together that thus they may be helpful to each other in the spiritual life, and by combined action the more effectually do God's work; nor does it consist in the repetition of a Creed, however admirably conceived and expressed, and however desirable it may be for us to be well grounded in the foundation-doctrines of our holy religion; but it consists in obedience to the will of God, and in seeking, like the great Exemplar, to act in harmony with God's holy Law.

"Nor name, nor form, nor ritual,
But simply following thee."

III. IN THIS OBEDIENCE LIES THE TRUEST WELL-BEING BOTH OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND OF THE RACE. Walking in these paths, it is found that they are "right paths," that they yield "peace" and "pleasantness;" "mercy and truth" also abound to the obedient, whilst the wide adoption of this course by the children of men is pointed to as the token of the coming of "the latter-day glory." "A world-wide Christ-likeness is the great necessity. If, in imitation of him, there were truth on every tongue and kindness in every heart, gentleness in every spirit and obedience to God in every will, purity in every life and blamelessness in every character, the bloom and blessedness of Eden would be seen to-morrow." Too many, alas! still resolve that "they will walk every one in the name of his god," (ver. 5); but our hope for humanity lies in the

growing number whose feet are being turned into "the ways of righteousness," and who are impelled to say, "And we will walk in his paths." "We will walk in the Name of the Lord our God for ever and ever" (ver. 5).

Vers. 9—13; ch. v. 1.—*Through trial to triumph.* There is a very natural connection between these and the previous verses. The seer has presented a glowing picture of the ultimate triumphs of the Messiah's kingdom. In choicest language he has unfolded the nature of the Messiah's rule, and the beneficent effects to be secured thereby. And now he reminds us that this victory should be won by suffering—that God's order is *through trial to triumph.* Notice—

I. THE EXPERIENCE OF SORROW AS PREPARATORY TO JOY; OF CONFLICT AS PREPARATORY TO VICTORY. (Vers. 9—13; ch. v. 1.) Whatever view may be taken as to the true application of these verses, it is very clear that they refer to deep sorrow, through which the nation must pass before the manifestation of the true spiritual King whose coming is so clearly indicated in the chapter following. Captivity must be experienced; conflict must be engaged in with "many nations;" loss of rulers and leaders must be sustained; war and siege must be felt. Yet all these should prove but preparatory to the experience of joy and victory; they should be but as the pangs preceding birth; out of and following these throes there should come the establishment of a kingdom which should never be moved, and which their *material* kingdom, now being so shaken, even in its most prosperous and peaceful days only faintly symbolized. And this is ever the Divine order of procedure. It is the all-wise appointment of God that his servants should pass through trial and be made perfect through suffering. He takes the seed and plants it in rough soil, and as the result he causes to arise beauteous flowers. The tear often precedes the smile. The thick cloud gathers over our heads, and lo! afterwards the triumphant arch spans the sky, telling of the Divine faithfulness and love. We must suffer would we ultimately reign; we must bear the cross would we wear the crown. God's servants are *soldiers*, and the soldier must "endure hardness" (2 Tim. ii. 3), and engage in sharp conflict ere he reaps the warrior's reward. His followers are *trees of righteousness*, and God prunes his trees that "they may bring forth much fruit" (John xv. 2).

II. STIMULATING THOUGHTS AMIDST THESE DARKER EXPERIENCES OF LIFE. Several such thoughts are suggested here. 1. *There's "a needs be" for these sorrows.* (Ver. 10.) It is here declared that there was a necessity for the sorrows here predicted. The trials are referred to as experiences that *must be*, and that could not be *avoided*. The travail must be endured, the captivity must be experienced, the discipline must be passed through. The nation had woefully transgressed, and only thus could it be purged and purified. As the crushing of the seed results in a more abundant increase, so the oppression of God's servants should result in the upspringing of "the peaceable fruits of righteousness." "Of sorrow, sanctity is born." Here is one solution of "the mystery of suffering." It is designed to work purification; it is a healthful discipline. It is not that our Father-God is wanting in sympathy that we have to pass through adverse scenes, but because his sympathy is so large and so perfect that it extends to the whole of our being. When he says, "Be in pain," etc. (ver. 10), it is not that he does not feel with us, but rather because his sympathy is so large that he deigns to lift us up to a higher level, and to lead us to attain unto a purer and more perfect character and life; and hence, whilst "he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax," he will also "send forth judgment unto victory" (Isa. xlii. 2, 3). 2. *There is an overruling Providence.* (Vers. 11, 12.) In these verses the heathen nations are represented as encouraging each other to make a decisive onslaught upon the favoured people, and as speaking as though their plans could very easily be executed, the overthrow of Judah be effected, and they gaze with satisfaction upon the downfall and desolation (ver. 11). But there was a higher than any mere human power swaying the destinies of the peoples of the earth. The Lord God omnipotent was reigning. He had his purposes and plans of which the nations took no account, but which nevertheless were to be developed. And in the unfolding of these all the dark designs of the evil would be overruled, and whilst the nation of his choice should thus be tried as by fire, and so have its dross consumed, they who, prompted by their own mercenary and ambitious ends, assaulted it, should be brought to utter confusion

and shame (ver. 13). The world still abounds in evil-doers who are pursuing their own ends, and that they may gain these are ever planning and contriving harm; but it may well comfort and strengthen our hearts, amidst the anxiety and distress such occasion, that there is still an overruling Providence guiding human affairs, and that under God's all-wise and loving direction good only shall eventually come to the good, whilst the counsel of the wicked shall perish, and the arm of their power be broken.

3. *There is the Divine abiding presence.* This is implied in ver. 9. The prophet, abounding in deepest sympathy with his people in their calamities, would, nevertheless, have them feel that they were not left utterly destitute; that, though earthly rulers had failed them, there was One who ever abides, and who, if they but trusted him, would bear them safely through all. He who had been the King and Guide of their nation before earthly monarch had ever been appointed over it (1 Sam. xii. 12) would not forsake them now that human supports had given way, but would make their present sorrows to end in higher joy than they had formerly experienced (Hos. xiii. 9, 14). Nor need we fear in the time of trouble, so long as it remaineth that "the Lord of hosts is with us," etc. (Ps. xli. 7).

4. *There is ultimate deliverance.* (Ver. 10.) The Lord would assuredly "turn again the captivity of Zion" (Ps. cxxvi. 1—6). Through fire and through water they should be brought out into a wealthy place (Ps. cxvi. 12). Weeping might endure for a night, but joy should come in the morning (Ps. xxx. 5). And so with his servants in every age. The way he would have us take, despite all its difficulties and discouragements, shall bring us at length to the palace and to our crown.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*A new Mount Zion.* The threat of ch. iii. 12 has been fulfilled. Mount Zion, the glory of the nation on account of its situation, its buildings, its history, and its religious associations (Ps. xlviii.; cxxii., etc.), has become as a forest, or as desolate heaps of ruins. But while the prophet gazes through the tears which patriotism and piety bring to his eyes, as in some dissolving view a new vision unfolds itself before him. Instead of a ploughed field and a ruinous mound, he sees an exceeding high mountain, a glorious city, and countless multitudes flocking towards it. It is the new Mount Zion.

I. *ITS ELEVATION.* There were other hills or mountains that already were or soon would be of note among men, such as the "high places" of a corrupt worship in Judaea and Samaria, the huge artificial hill of Babylon sacred to Belus, the acropolis of Athens, the seven hills of Rome. But this Mount Zion was founded on the summits of the world's loftiest heights, and towered above them all. Thus the mountain is seen to be spiritual and the elevation figurative. It is a vision of "the latter days," of the days of the Messiah, when the new kingdom of God is set up. Because it is "the mountain of the house of the Lord," it is thus exalted. Illustrate from Ezekiel's vision of the "very high mountain" (xl. 2), and the sublime conclusion of it, "Jehovah-Shammah" (xlviii. 35; and cf. 1 Tim. iii. 15). "This mountain of the Church of Christ transcends all laws, schools, doctrines, religions, synagogues, and philosophies, which seemed to rise among men like mountain-tops" (Corn. à Lapide, in Fusey). It is "a city set on a hill."

II. *ITS CONGREGATION.* The prophet sees a stream of worshippers ascending that hill; not an unfamiliar sight in the old days of the literal Zion. But much earnestness is needed to scale this lofty mountain. And it is a miracle of grace that not only the chosen people of God, but "the peoples" of the world lying in wickedness, should be attracted by a Church so lofty and so pure. For, as the prophet watches, he sees strange companies gathering, of varied colours, costumes, and languages—negroes from Ethiopia, Chinese from the land of Sinim, and pale-faced strangers from the western isles of Europe. Contrast the mountain-like tower of Babel, man's scheme of unity, issuing in dispersion, and this Mount Zion, God's way of union, attracting a congregation from all kindreds and peoples and tongues (Isa. lv. 8, 9). The prophet hears their language as they encourage one another, "Come ye," etc. They thus confess: 1. *Their ignorance.* "He shall teach us of his ways"—a comprehensive term (Ps. xxv. 4, 8, 9). 2. *Their dissatisfaction.* Their old paths had been "broad;" "destruction and misery"

had been in them. Henceforth they desire to walk in other "paths," in God's way of holiness. 3. *Their confidence*; that the God of Jacob alone was both able and willing to supply their need. The prophet foresaw what Christ still more clearly predicted (Matt. viii. 11, 12), and what we are seeing in these days of missionary enterprise.

III. ITS EMANATIONS. As light and heat stream from the sun, and fragrance from the flowers, so from this new Mount Zion, this city of God, there stream forth the very blessings which the nations need—truth, light, life. It is a Divine power that first draws this congregation towards the Church of Christ (John vi. 44, 45). And the blessings they need and receive are summed up in two terms. 1. "*The Law*." They receive it as a rule of life, as an ideal of daily conduct. It goes forth as a stream of blessing which can turn the wastes of heathen life into a paradise. But more than law is needed: 2. "*The Word of the Lord*." This is a more comprehensive term. It includes the revelation of his will, his mercy and grace, "the word of the truth of the gospel." This goes forth with all the attractiveness of a message of mercy (Luke xxiv. 47, etc.), but also with all the authority of a law (Acts xvii. 30; 1 John iii. 23). The preaching of the cross proves itself the power of God. This word of the Lord has free course and is glorified. No wonder that such blessings follow as are described in the following verses.—E. S. P.

Vers. 3, 4.—"*The peaceable fruit of righteousness*." The wonders of Micah's vision (vers. 1 and 2) are not yet at an end. He sees a succession of the most improbable and incredible events, as the nations return from their pilgrimage to the new Mount Zion to their distant capitals and homesteads. With those distant and "strong" heathen nations there are associations of horror and dread in the minds of the Hebrews, especially of the godly among them. Illustrate this from what we know through Hebrew prophets and historians of the Gentile nations near and afar off; e.g. border wars and frequent invasions of the Philistines (2 Chron. xxi. 16, 17), Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, and others (Ps. lxxxiii.; and cf. the impressive messages of judgment in Amos i. and ii.). Egypt, at one time their oppressor or invader (2 Chron. xii.), later on their untrustworthy ally, always the home of degrading idolatries (Isa. xix.; xxx. 1—7). Assyria, the seat of a relentless despotism, the captors of their northern brethren, casting its war-cloud over Hezekiah's kingdom (Nah. iii.). Beyond these were the mountaineers of Media, the barbarous tribes of the far north, "Meshech and Tubal," and the sons of Greece in the distant west. The gloomy vision of Ezekiel (xxxii.) graphically describes how the sword and bloodshed are bound up with the histories of these and other nations. All these are seen welcoming a new King, who "shall reign in righteousness," new legislation and new customs. The strangest of all these new customs is that "the peoples that delight in war" are seen changing their weapons into instruments of peace, and enjoying a tranquillity equal to that of the palmy days of Solomon. The mystery is explained by the fact that the word of the Lord had gone forth from Jerusalem. We learn—

I. THE GOSPEL OF GOD PREPARES FOR THE REIGN OF GOD. 1. *It reveals God's love*. It thus comes as a revelation, startling, almost incredible to heathens, in whose minds lust not love, hatred not mercy, are bound up with their thoughts of God. That central verse of the New Testament (John iii. 16), a "miniature Bible," as Martin Luther called it, applied by the Spirit of God, has broken many a rocky heathen heart, and opened the way for the blessings that God's love has prepared for sinful souls (1 John iv. 19). 2. *It inspires men's hope*. Those who were once living "having no hope, and without God in the world," find that all things are become new. All the most bright and buoyant emotions, love, hope, joy, are called forth by the gospel of God. The brightest visions of a golden age in the future which heathen poets have sung about are seen to be possible under the reign of a righteous and merciful God. They are "saved by hope." 3. *It awakens men's consciences*. An educational process ensues. The dormant conscience is awakened; the blind conscience sees the light of truth; the blunt conscience is made sensitive and tender. Thus gradually things which were tolerated in the individual or the community are branded as unchristian, or even infamous. Illustrate from 1 Cor. v. and vi. In those whose spiritual education is most advanced, every thought is brought "into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Thus gradually the average standard of morality is raised first in the Church and then

in the nation, and the gospel of God is seen to have prepared the way for the reign of God.

II. THE REIGN OF GOD WILL BE A REIGN OF PEACE. War is a terrible defiance of God and of his authority, and yet it is one of the most popular forms of wickedness. The press, the clubs, "the forces," often make it hard even for a government calling itself Christian to resist the gusts of popular passion which sweep nations into war. Even as late as 1882 we were told that on board the ironclads off Alexandria the countenances of the officers fell as the sight of a flag of truce made it possible that after all their new guns might not be tested by a bombardment. Yet even this unclean spirit will be exorcised by the power of the gospel of Christ, which has already been at work in many ways; e.g. "the truce of God" in the Middle Ages, providing for the suspension of hostilities during Advent, Lent, and other seasons; the sparing of the lives of prisoners; the care and kindness shown towards the wounded; the power of the public opinion, even of a minority, to restrain governments from hastily rushing into war; the introduction of arbitration, in which the British Government set so honourable an example at Geneva in 1872. In such cases it may be said that God, through the judgments of upright men, is called to "judge between many peoples," and "reprove" even strong nations when they wronged their neighbours. Thus gradually war will be banished, even as duelling and other abominations have been. "Fraternity" will be one of the watchwords of the future, and war will be regarded as fratricide. Lucian says of Christians, "Their first Lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brethren." Christianity is working towards the restoration of that ideal. Then Solomon's days shall be reproduced in more than their ancient glory. New princes of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts at the court of the Prince of Peace, whose subjects shall "dwell safely, and be quiet from fear of evil." The glorious visions of Ps. lxxii.; Isa. lx., etc., shall be fulfilled, "for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it."

Learn: 1. That the only hope of true national righteousness is in the reign of Christ. 2. That the Christian who witnesses for unpopular truths is the noblest among patriots. 3. That the sanctification of individual souls through the power of the gospel is the surest method of securing the ultimate and universal reign of Christ on earth.—E. S. P.

Vers. 6, 7.—*The restoration of Israel.* It is the Gentile nations for whom the blessings of "the last days" have just been predicted (vers. 2—4). The new Mount Zion of the Messiah's days will have a magnetic power on "the East and the West" (Matt. viii. 11; John xii. 32). But Israel, through whom these blessings reach the nations, shall not be excluded from a share in them. Yet the form of the prediction reminds us of the abject condition of God's ancient people and of the gradual extension of the glories of Messiah's reign over them.

I. THEIR ABJECT CONDITION. They are described as: 1. *Halting.* This was the result of internal infirmity or of injury from without, or of both. The Jewish people at the advent were suffering both from ecclesiastical and moral corruptions, which made them figuratively like the folk at Bethesda, "halt, withered, impotent." 2. *"Driven out."* Multitudes had been driven out of their heritage in Palestine by the decrees of conquerors or the oppressions of foreign tyrants. Centuries before, Jeremiah had declared, "Israel is a scattered sheep; the lions have driven him away: first the King of Assyria hath devoured him; and last this Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon hath broken his bones" (l. 17). In subsequent centuries similar captivities or oppressions were endured at the hands of the Ptolemies, the Seleucidæ, the Idumeans, and the Romans. Those who remained were as strangers in their own fatherland. And soon a far more fearful catastrophe scattered them from one end of the heavens to the other, after the destruction of their city by the Romans.

"But we must wander witheringly

In other lands to die;

And where our fathers' ashes be

Our own must never lie:

Our temple hath not left a stone,

And Mockery sits on Salem's throne."

(Byron.)

3. "*Stricken of God, and afflicted.*" Unfaithful "shepherds" among their own rulers (Ezek. xxxiv. 1—6) or heathen conquerors were the scourges; but "shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Devout men recognized this, and uttered such penitential wails as we find in Ps. xlv., lxxiv.; Lam. i., ii., etc.

II. **THEIR RESTORATION.** The establishment of the new kingdom of God—Christ's kingdom—on Mount Zion was itself a pledge of the restoration of the Jews and of their participation in its blessings. For it could not be that Christ should reign over the Gentile nations and leave "his own people" (John i. 11) to perish finally in unbelief. This would be opposed both to the ancient promises of God (Isa. xiv. 17; lix. 20, 21, etc.) as well as to the predictions and the heart of Christ (Matt. xxiii. 37—39). Yet there are stages in this process of restoration. 1. *The halting ones are restored, but they are only a remnant.* (Cf. ch. v. 3, 7, 8.) The immediate effect of the establishment of Christ's kingdom was seen in a great religious revival among the Jews from Pentecost onwards. But all the converts were but a remnant of the nation which, because of its unbelief, was "broken off" (Rom. xi. 1—5, 17—20). Yet in the fact of the salvation of the few the Apostle Paul sees the pledge of the final salvation of the many. 2. *The banished ones shall be made a strong nation.* Trace St. Paul's inspired argument in Rom. xi. till he arrives at the sublime conclusion in vers. 32—36. The nation's restoration to God will be accompanied by a restoration to their own land (Zech. xii. 10—14; xiv. 8—11, etc.). 3. *"The Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion."* We look for the restoration of Israel to their Saviour and to their land as one of the marvellous evidences of the truth of the prophetic word which God is reserving for the scepticism of these latter days. We need not anticipate a literal and local throne of Christ at Jerusalem. But the Lord Christ, being enthroned in the hearts of his long faithless yet much beloved people, will as truly "reign over them in Mount Zion" as though they had his glorified humanity always manifested in their midst. And then his reign shall be "from henceforth, even for ever." "I the Lord will hasten it in his time."

"O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, rejoice: Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!"

E. S. P.

Vers. 9, 10.—Discipline and deliverance. A glorious future has been held up to the view of the Jewish nation (vers. 6—8). It is like the ideals of peace and blessedness presented to all in the Word of God; like the visions of the heavenly glory set before even the most ungodly. Such promises are attractive; even the godless Jews in Micah's time would exult in the thought of "the former dominion," the days of David and Solomon returning to Zion. But the vision again changes. Cries of pain and distress are heard. There passes before the prophet's mind a view of the discipline and chastisement which must fall on the disobedient nation before the promised blessings can be enjoyed.

I. **THE SALUTARY DISCIPLINE.** In brief, vivid words a succession of calamities is sketched. 1. *Their monarchy is overthrown.* "Is there no king in thee?" Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah in succession were dethroned by foreign conquerors, and carried into exile. Many national promises and blessings were bound up with the name and family of David (2 Sam. vii.), so that the loss of their king was no ordinary loss. He was their chief stay and "counsellor" (cf. Isa. ix. 6), "the breath of their nostrils" (Lam. iv. 20). No wonder their consternation and distress: "pangs," etc. (cf. Ps. lxxxix. 38—51). Thus one step in Divine discipline then and now may be the striking down to the ground of the chief objects of our confidence, the earthly props which we seek to substitute for God. 2. *They are humiliated before their foes.* They "go forth out of the city;" some in a vain attempt to escape, like Zedekiah and his troops (2 Kings xxv. 4—6); others as prisoners of war from a city which has capitulated and is being sacked by its conquerors. Illustrate from Lam. v. 1—16. They are driven forth into "the field;" without shelter even from the elements unless

in tents (contrast their former "ease in Zion," Amos vi. 1—7, etc.); without the protection of the old towers and bulwarks in which they had prided themselves (Ps. xlviii. 12, 13); without weapons or leaders, and thus exposed to any indignities that these conquerors choose to inflict upon them. Thus may it be with those whose way God "turneth upside down," stripping them of all their old sources of security—money, position, friends; turning them out of the "nest" in which they expected peacefully to spend the remainder of their days. Illustrate from contrasts in Job xxix. and xxx. 3. *They are carried captive "even to Babylon."* Babel in early days had been a symbol of a godless world-power. It does not rise again on the Hebrew horizon till the days of Isaiah and Micah. Making friendly overtures to Hezekiah, it is presented to his view, by his faithful seer, as a distant, mysterious, but formidable foe of the future—*ignotum pro mirifico* (Isa. xxxix.). As the ten tribes had been carried captive to Halah and Habor and adjacent districts, so should Judah be taken "*even to Babylon.*" Thus is it in God's discipline with his prodigals now. They may find themselves in "a far country," brought down to the lowest depth of humiliation, shut out from all earthly help, shut up to God. And even now, in the midst of the pleasures of sin, prophetic voices within may warn them: "Thou shalt go forth . . . thou shalt go even to —." The dreadful possibilities of judgment, whether in this world or another, may at times mar their peace. For, unlike the servants of God, they dare not say, "Things to come . . . are ours." 4. *In the house of bondage pangs of sorrow must be borne. "Seventy years!"*—a long lifetime of captivity. "Tribulation ten days!" a time of discipline indefinite to us, though fixed by the counsel of God. Those pangs will be "resistless, remediless, doubling the whole frame, redoubled till the end for which God sends them is accomplished, and then ceasing in joy" (Pusey). For the very term "daughter of Zion" suggests hope. It is a term of friendliness, like "Father of spirits" (Heb. xii. 9), which reminds us of the essential relations between us and our God, and gives us a pledge that in wrath he will remember mercy (cf. Isa. lvii. 16).

II. "THE END OF THE LORD." Then and there the end for which the trials are sent will be reached, and deliverance will come. As with their king Manasseh, so shall it be with the nation. In their affliction they will seek the Lord (Jer. xxix. 10—13). 1. *They shall be delivered.* Set free from the burden of their sins, a burden too grievous to be borne; purged from idolatry; blessed with a revival of religion, as shown by a renewed regard to God's Law through the gracious work of his own "free Spirit" (Ezek. xxxvi. 16—27). 2. *They shall be redeemed from the hand of their enemies.* God will visit them as their *Goel*, their Kinsman-Redeemer, who has not forgotten or forsaken them (Jer. xxx. 8—11). By the manifestation of his righteous grace and irresistible power they shall be "redeemed without money" (Isa. lli. 3), restored to their land and to the enjoyment of ancient privileges. Such is "the end of the Lord" in the discipline of life. The revelation of the Fatherhood of God in the Person of Christ and in his sacrificial death for the redemption of sinners assures us that he chastens "for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness." But it is only by sitting at his feet and learning of him, and thus being "exercised" by our trials, that we can hope to win from them "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. xii. 9—11).—E. S. P.

Vers. 1—4.—*The gospel age.* "But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains," etc. "The last days" is an expression frequently used in the Old Testament. It points to the future, beginning with the Christian dispensation and running on to its close. It means the times of the Messiah. The patriarchal times had passed away, the Mosaic epoch was on the wane, and would soon vanish. The times of the Messiah, or "the last days," would succeed, and run on to the end of time. This prophecy, with scarcely any variation, is found in Isa. ii. Whether Isaiah borrowed it from Micah, or Micah from Isaiah, or both from some older prophecy, does not appear. One thing seems certain, that the prophecy has never yet been fulfilled in the history of the world, and that its accomplishment must be in some distant period—"the last days." It enables us to make certain remarks concerning the true religion of the gospel age.

I. THE TRUE RELIGION OF THE GOSPEL AGE WILL BECOME A GREAT POWER. "The mountain of the house of the Lord." Referring particularly to the temple that was

built on Mount Moriah, and called the mountain of the Lord's house. The temple was the greatest thing in the religion of the Jews; it was the "mountain" in their scenery. The true religion is to become a mountain. The little stone will become a mountain, and fill the whole earth. In truth, the true religion, where it exists, is the biggest thing. In the individual soul it is the largest thing. It is the dominant power, it is the mountain in the scenery of a good man's experience. Let all men possess it, and then it will be to the whole world what it is to the individual. In sooth, true religion is either everything or nothing; supremacy is its essence—the supreme thought, the supreme love, the supreme aim. Two things are here stated about this mountain. 1. *It is to become established.* How is it to be established? By civil authority, legislative enactments? Our foolish forefathers have thought so, and many of the dolts of this generation think so too. But this to the last point is unphilosophic and absurd. The weakness of religion in Christendom to-day may be ascribed to the futile attempts of unwise and ambitious men to establish it by law. You may as well endeavour to govern the planetary universe by the ten commandments as to establish religion by civil laws. 2. *It is to become conspicuous.* "In the top of the mountains." It will be seen from afar—the most elevated power of the world. It will be the chief thing in the markets, professions, and governments of the world, high up on the top of all.

II. THE TRUE RELIGION OF THE GOSPEL AGE WILL BECOME UNIVERSALLY ATTRACTIVE. "And people shall flow unto it." "This is a figurative expression, denoting that they shall be converted to the true religion. It indicates that they shall come in multitudes, like the flowing of a mighty river. The idea of the flowing of the nation is of the movement of many people towards an object like a broad stream on the tides of the ocean, and is one that is very grand and sublime" (Barnes). In this period the social element will be brought into full play in connection with true religion. Men will stimulate each other to inquire after truth. "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord." 1. *They will study its laws in order to obey them.* "He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." In those good times that are coming, men will study God's ways, and not man's theories, and study these ways, not as a matter of intellectual speculation, but in order to obey them, to walk in his ways. Religion in those days will be practical; it will be the law of every one's life, the great regulative force of society. 2. *They will study its laws at the fountain-head.* "For the Law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Jerusalem was the fountain-head of Christianity. Christ commanded his disciples to tarry at Jerusalem until they should be endued with power from on high. There also he commanded that the first sermon should be preached, a sermon concerning repentance and remission of sins; and there Peter opened his commission in his wonderful Pentecostal discourse. In those days men will go for religious instruction, not to *patristic, puritanic, Anglican*, or any other theological school, but to the fountain-head, to Jerusalem, where it is fresh and pure, most potent in spiritual stimulation and suggestion. Men in these days have gone far away from the theology of Jerusalem. In that theology there are none of those miserable dogmas that are now preached, but facts concerning a Person, and that Person none other than the *Son of man and the Son of God*.

III. THE TRUE RELIGION OF THE GOSPEL AGE WILL BECOME POWERFUL TO TERMINATE ALL WARS. 1. *Here is the destruction of war.* "Beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks." The arts of war destroyed, in their stead will flourish the arts of peace. The sword and spear, what ills of immeasurable enormity they have inflicted upon the race! Implements of hell, instruments by which all the infernal passions of the human heart have been excited and gratified. War is anti-christ. 2. *Here is the establishment of peace.* "Shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree." The words, "sit under his vine," are taken from 1 Kings iv. 25, etc. Most incredible must this prediction have been to the men of Micah's time; but it will be accomplished, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it. If he has spoken it and it does not come to pass, it must be for one of three reasons: (1) Insincerity; which cannot be entertained. (2) Change of purpose; which is equally inadmissible. (3) Unexpected difficulties; which is an absurdity when applied to Omniscience.—D. T.

Ver. 5.—*Man's religious nature.* "For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the Name of the Lord our God for ever and ever." It is trite to say, what has been said a thousand times, that man has a religious nature. Albeit the practical recognition of the fact is of immense importance; without it, more than half the history of the world would be inexplicable, all methods for its true improvement would be futile, and man would pass through this world to another without a God or any hope for a future. This verse suggests the wrong and the right development of this nature.

I. THE WRONG DEVELOPMENT. What is that? Idolatry. "All people will walk every one in the name of his god." Polytheism proper is, and generally has been, the most popular religion in the world. Men have gods which they have made, palpable objects which they fashioned after an ideal, and the ideal not unfrequently of the most base and loathsome kind. And they walk after these gods. The mariners in Jonah's vessel, when the storm came on, cried every man unto his god. Whence the cause of polytheism? The one great cause, which comprehends all others, is depravity. Depravity: 1. *Involves moral corruption.* What are heathen gods, as a rule, but the deification of the lower passions and vices of mankind? 2. *Involves carnality.* Depraved men are so carnal that they have no idea of real things which have not size and form and tangible properties. Hence they want a god they can see and handle and touch. 3. *Involves thoughtlessness.* Polytheism cannot stand reasoning. It is supported by the thoughtless millions through the craft and sophistry of the priests, Every true thought will shatter a heathen deity.

II. THE RIGHT DEVELOPMENT. What is that? Practical monotheism. "We will walk in the Name of the Lord our God for ever and ever." 1. *This is rational.* The one God is the sum total of all moral properties, the Proprietor of all resources, and the Bestower of all the existences and all the blessings therewith. What can be more rational than to walk in his way? In truth, it is the only true rational way in life. 2. *This is obligatory.* No man is bound to walk in the name of an idol; nay, he is commanded not to do so. But every man is bound to walk in the Name of the Lord—bound on the ground of his supreme excellence, his relations to man, and the obligation springing therefrom. 3. *This is blessed.* To walk in his Name is to walk through sunny fields abounding with all beauty and fruitfulness.—D. T.

Vers. 6—8.—*The moral monarchy of Christ in the world.* "In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; and I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever. And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem." Whether the subject of these verses is the restoration of the Jews after the Babylonish captivity or the gathering of men by Christ into a grand spiritual community, is a question on which there has been considerable discussion among biblical scholars, and therefore should preclude anything like dogmatism on either side. I am disposed, however, to entertain the latter idea, because it seems most in accordance with the previous verses, in which there is an undoubted reference to the gospel age, and because it gives the passage a wide practical application. Delitzsch says, "In that day" points back to the end of the days. At the time when many nations shall go on pilgrimage to the highly exalted mountain of the Lord, and therefore Zion-Jerusalem will not only be restored but greatly glorified, the Lord will assemble that which limps and is scattered abroad." We shall take the words, then, as illustrating certain facts connected with the *moral monarchy of Christ in the world.*

I. IT EMBRACES AMONGST ITS SUBJECTS THE MOST WRETCHED AND SCATTERED OF MEN. "In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble [gather] her that halteth [that which limpeth], and I will gather her that is driven out [that which was thrust out], and her that [which] I have afflicted; and I will make her that [that which] halted [limps] a remnant, and her that [that which] was cast far off a strong nation: and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever." Christ was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. x. 6), and his invitation was

to all that are "weary" and "heavy laden." The Church of Christ from the beginning has comprised those who were the most afflicted, the most scattered, and the most distressed of mankind. It has been and is the grand asylum for the tried and the sorrowful and those who are counted "the offscouring of all things" (1 Cor. iv. 13). 1. *Christ's moral monarchy knows nothing of favouritism.* It does not treat men according to their physical condition, social status, or temporal circumstances. It has respect to souls. It is as much interested in the soul of the pauper as in that of the prince, the soul of the slave as in that of the sovereign. Human monarchies have ever been taken up with man in his material relations. The more wealthy and influential a man is, the more favours will worldly kings bestow; the indigent and the homeless are only regarded as beasts of burden. Not so with Christ as the Monarch. Every soul to him is a matter of profound practical interest. 2. *Christ's moral monarchy is remedial in its design.* It brings all the miserable together in order to rid them of their sorrows. By working into human souls right principles of action and expelling wrong ones, it indirectly, though most efficiently, heals all the temporary woes of mankind. "Seek first the things from above, and all others shall be added unto you." "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, as well as of that which is to come."

II. IT ESTABLISHES ITSELF AS THE GUARDIAN OF MEN FOR EVER. "And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion," etc. The address to the "tower of the flock" shows that, as the most wretched and scattered of men will be brought into a great community, so shall the reign of the daughter of Zion be restored, i.e. the Jews be converted and brought in with the Gentiles. The watch-tower spoken of by Isaiah (xxxii. 14) is most likely the tower here referred to by Micah. "Flock-tower" is a good expression, inasmuch as it indicates the watchfulness of Christ as a moral Shepherd, the great Shepherd of souls. It is said here that "the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem." It did so come; it began with the Jews. "He came to his own, and his own received him not." Although on his last visit to Jerusalem the common people did receive him as their King: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" What a Guardian, what a "Bishop of souls," is Christ! 1. *He knows all his sheep.* Each of the millions is known to him—his idiosyncrasies, imperfections, necessities, etc. 2. *He has ample provision for all his sheep.* His provisions are adapted to all, and are inexhaustible. 3. *He has power to protect all his sheep.*

CONCLUSION. Thank God this moral monarchy of Christ is established on our earth! The kingdom of God is come unto us. Thousands of all grades and classes have entered into it, and they have found it to be "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Would that it were universal! It will be so one day. It is not so yet, because, being moral, men have the power of resisting it.—D. T.

Vers. 9—13.—*The moral regeneration of the world.* "Now why dost thou cry out aloud? is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished? for pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail. Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion," etc. The prophet here, without doubt, refers to the carrying away of the Jews to Babylon. He refers to the consternation in which the Jews would be placed on the approach of the Chaldean army. The questions relative to a "king" and a "counsellor" (ver. 9) are, it is thought, put forth in bitter irony, in order to provoke an answer. "Is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished?" The answer, perhaps, would be, "Yes, we have a king, and we have counsellors, but they are utterly worthless; they have power neither to protect us from the terrible calamities nor to invent means for our escape." The metaphor of the parturient woman seems intended to shadow forth the agony of their consternation at the idea of going forth from the city of Jerusalem, being located in the open country, and afterwards conveyed to Babylon. After this comes the promise of emancipation. "There the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies." Their restoration is metaphorically represented by a travelling woman. Whilst it is unfair to attach to Scripture a wrong interpretation, it is perfectly fair to use its passages as symbols of truths applicable to man in all ages and all lands. These words may serve to illustrate, therefore, some points in relation to the *moral regeneration of the world.*

I. THE STATE OF MANKIND REQUIRES IT. "Is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor

perished?" It was more serious for the Jewish people to be deprived of a king than for any other people, for their king was theocratic; he was supposed to be the voice and vicegerent of God. The prophet means to say that when the Chaldeans would come and carry them away, they would have no king and no counsellors. Now, men in an unregenerate state: 1. *Have no king.* A political ruler is to man, as a spiritual energy, only a king in name. He does not command the moral affections, rule the conscience, or legislate for the inner and primal springs of all activity. Such a king is the deep want of man; he wants some one to be enthroned on his heart, to whom his conscience can render homage. No man in an unregenerate state has such a king; he has gods many and lords many, of a sort, but none to rule him, and to bring all the powers of his soul into one harmonious channel of obedience. 2. *Have no counsellor.* Society abounds with counsellors who proffer their advice; but some of them are wicked, most of them worthless, few, if any, satisfactory, that is, to conscience. What the soul wants is not the mere book counsellor—though it be the Bible itself—but the *spirit* of that book, the spirit of reverence, love, Christ-like trust. Such a spirit, when it comes to us, will guide us into all truth; it is the "unction from the Holy One." 3. *Have no ease.* "Pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail." The unregenerate soul is always liable to consternation, remorse; it often writhes in agony. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Now, moral regeneration brings the man a true King, a true Counsellor, a true Peace—a peace "that passeth all understanding."

II. IT IS OPPOSED BY FORMIDABLE ANTAGONISTS. "Many nations are gathered against thee." The nations here referred to are those that composed the army of Nebuchadnezzar, or those that joined it in the attack against the Jews. What formidable opponents there are to the conversion of man! 1. *The depraved elements of the soul.* Unbelief, selfishness, carnality, etc. These are Canaanites that battle mightily against the moral Joshua. 2. *The corrupt influence of society.* How much, in this country and this age especially, is there struggling against man's regeneration—custom, fashion, amusements, pleasures! And then, too, acting through all these forces within and without, there are the principalities and powers of darkness; so that it comes to pass that it is no very easy thing to effect the regeneration of men; there are nations of moral forces battling against it.

III. IT IS GUARANTEED BY THE WORD OF ALMIGHTY GOD. "They know not the thoughts of the Lord," etc. The enemies of the Jews were utterly ignorant of God's purpose to deliver his people from Babylonish captivity. "They had not the most distant idea that the object of Jehovah, in permitting his people to be so treated, was to recover them from idolatry, and thus prepare them for a triumphant restoration. The metaphor taken from the process of threshing out grain is frequently used by the prophets to denote the complete destruction of a people." 1. *Man in ignorance fights against God's purpose.* The Chaldeans and all the enemies of the Jews did so now. Men are always doing this. "Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." 2. *Man, in fighting against God's purpose, brings ruin on himself.* It is here predicted that the enemies of the Jews should be as "sheaves," and that the Jews themselves should be strengthened. "I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass." "When God," says an old writer, "has conquering work for his people to do, he will furnish them with strength and ability for it—will make the horn iron and the hoofs brass; and when he does so, they must exert the power he gives them, and execute the commission: even the daughter of Zion may arise and thresh." The nations thought to ruin Christianity in its infancy, but it was victorious over them. Those who persisted in their enmity were broken to pieces (Matt. xxi. 44), particularly the Jewish nation; but multitudes by Divine grace were joined to the Church, and they and their substance were consecrated to the Lord Jesus, the Lord of the whole earth.—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

VER. 1—4.—§ 8. *After Zion's degradation Messiah shall be born, and shall bring the world into subjection.*

Ver. 1.—This verse is joined to the preceding chapter in the Hebrew. Jerusalem is addressed, as in ch. iv. 9, 11, not the invading army. The prophet returns to the view of the misery and humiliation expressed in that passage. *Gather thyself in troops; or, thou shalt gather thyself, etc.* Jerusalem must collect its armies to defend itself from the enemy. O daughter of troops. Jerusalem is thus named from the number of soldiers collected within her walls, from whence marauding expeditions were wont to set forth. Pusey considers that she is so called from the acts of violence, robbery, and bloodshed which are done within her (ch. ii. 8; iii. 2, etc.; Jer. vii. 11). Keil thinks the prophet represents the people crowding together in fear. It is more natural to refer the expression to the abnormal assemblage of soldiers and fugitives within the walls of a besieged city. Septuagint, Ἐμφραχθήσεται θυγάτηρ ἐμφραγμῆς, "The daughter shall be wholly hemmed in;" Vulgate, *Vastaberis, filia latronis*. He hath laid siege. The enemy is spoken of by an abrupt change of person (comp. Isa. i. 29). *Against us*. The prophet identifies himself with the besieged people. *They shall smite the judge of Israel, etc.* "The judge" represents the supreme authority, whether king or other governor (Amos ii. 3); but he is called here "judge," that the sacred name of king may not be spoken of as dishonoured. To smite upon the cheek is the grossest insult (comp. 1 Kings xxii. 24; Job xvi. 10; Luke xxii. 64). When Zion is thus besieged, and its rulers suffer the utmost contumely, its condition must look hopeless. Such a state of things was realized in the treatment of Zedekiah (2 Kings xxv.), and in many subsequent sieges of Jerusalem. But the underlying idea is that Israel shall suffer dire distress at the hands of her enemies until Messiah comes, and she herself turns to the Lord. The LXX. translates *shophet*, "judge," by φῶλας, "tribes," but the other Greek translators give κριτήν.

Ver. 2.—At the time of Zion's deepest distress, and when her earthly king is suffering the grossest degradation, reduced as it were to the shepherd-house at Bethlehem, a Deliverer shall arise thence who shall do wonderful things. This passage was quoted by the Sanhedrin to answer

Herod's question where the Christ was to be born (Matt. ii. 5, 6; comp. John vii. 42). But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah. Ephrathah (Ephrathah, or Ephrath), "fruitfulness," is another name for Bethlehem, "House of bread" (Gen. xxxv. 19; 1 Sam. xvii. 12; Ruth i. 2); from its position it is also called Bethlehem Judah (Judg. xvii. 7), being situated in the tribal lot of Judah, about five miles south of Jerusalem, and thus distinguished from a town of the same name in Zebulun (Josh. xix. 15). Septuagint, Καὶ σὺ, Βηθλεὲμ, οἶκος Ἐφραθᾶ [τοῦ Ἐφραθᾶ, Alex.], "And thou, Bethlehem, house of Ephrathah." The rest of the clause is best translated, *too little to be among the thousands of Judah*. Each tribe was divided into "thousands," which would be equivalent to clans, with its own head. Probably the reckoning was made of fighting men (see note on Zech. ix. 7; and comp. Numb. i. 16; x. 4; Josh. xxii. 21, 30; 1 Sam. x. 19). Bethlehem, called in the text Bethlehem Ephrathah for solemnity's sake, was a small place (κῶμη, John vii. 42), of such slight importance as not to be named among the possessions of Judah in Josh. xv., or in the catalogue of Neh. xi. 25, etc. Yet out of thee shall he (one) come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel. In spite of its insignificance, this birthplace of David shall be the birthplace of Messiah. "Shall come forth" is spoken sometimes of birth and descent, as in Gen. xvii. 6 and xxxv. 11; at other times it contains merely the notion of proceeding from, as in Jer. xxx. 21. In the present case both ideas are suitable. *Unto me* (Jehovah is speaking). To my praise and glory, to do my will. Micah by these words would recall the announcement concerning David made to Samuel, "I have provided me a king" (1 Sam. xvi. 1), and thus show the typical relation of David to the Messiah (Keil). Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. The meaning of the word rendered "goings forth" (*motsooth*) is somewhat doubtful. Septuagint, ἐξοδοί: Vulgate, *egressus*. The Fathers see in it a declaration of the eternal generation of the Son: he who was born in time at Bethlehem hath an eternal existence. In this case the plural form of the word is a plural of majesty, or an abstract expression (comp. Ps. cxiv. 2, "dominions;" Isa. liv. 2, "habitations"). To Christians, who believe in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the plural would express the continual generation of the Son from the Father from everlasting and to everlasting, never beginning and never ending; as the Council of Lateran says, "Without beginning, ever and

without end, the Father begetting, the Son being born (*nascens*), and the Holy Ghost proceeding." Many commentators take the "goings forth" to be the ancient promises, the revelations of the Angel of the covenant to the patriarchs, the various preparations made in type and history for the appearance of the great Son of David in due time; but this is a forced interpretation of the word. Granted that Micah's contemporaries understood the prophecy to state merely that a Saviour should arise from the lineage of David who traced his descent from hoar antiquity, and might be said to have lived in the days of old, this fact (if it be a fact) does not preclude us, with our more perfect knowledge, from seeing a deeper meaning in the inspired utterance, an adumbration of the nature of that Prince whom Isaiah calls "Everlasting" (ch. ix. 6), the Word who "was in the beginning with God" (John i. 1, 2). We may note certain contrasts in these two first verses. Zion, "the daughter of troops," is contrasted with the mean and insignificant Bethlehem; yet the former shall be shamefully handled, the latter highly honoured; that one's king shall be dethroned and disgraced, this one's Ruler is from everlasting and to everlasting.

Ver. 3.—Therefore; i.e. because God hath designed to punish before delivering, and this deliverance is to arise from the little Bethlehem, not from Jerusalem. This presupposes that the house of David will have lost the throne and have been reduced to a low condition. Will he give them up. Jehovah will give up the people to its enemies; this is the way in which the house of David shall come to low estate. She which travaileth hath brought forth. Many commentators have taken the travelling woman to be the afflicted community of Israel, or Zion; but we may not altogether reject the old interpretation which regards this as a prophecy of the birth of Christ from the Virgin, in accordance with the received Messianic exposition of Isaiah's great prediction, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive" (Isa. vii. 14). Such an announcement comes in naturally after the announcement of the Ruler coming forth from Bethlehem. Israel shall be oppressed until the time ordained when "she who is to bear" shall bring forth. Then (rather, and, i.e. until) the remnant of his brethren shall return unto (with) the children of Israel. The remnant of his brethren are the rescued of the Judeans, who are the brethren of Messiah according to the flesh; these in a literal sense shall return from exile together with the others, and in a spiritual sense shall be converted and be joined with the true Israelites, the true seed of Abraham.

Ver. 4.—He shall stand. The Ruler,

Messiah, shall stand as a good shepherd, guiding and ordering his flock, watchful and ready to aid and defend (comp. Ezek. xxxiv. 23; John x. 11). Septuagint, *στήσεται καὶ ὄψεται*, "shall stand and see." Feed; i.e. his flock. Septuagint, *ποιμανεῖ τὸ πᾶν τὸ αὐτοῦ*. In the strength of the Lord, with which he is invested and which he displays in the care of his people. In the majesty of the Name of the Lord his God. Messiah shall rule in all the power and glory with which God hath revealed himself on earth (comp. Isa. i. 6; Matt. xxviii. 18; John i. 14). They shall abide; Septuagint, *ἐπαύξουσιν*, "they shall be." The children of Israel shall sit, dwell, in rest and peace in their own land (ch. iv. 4; Lev. xxvi. 5, 6; Joel iii. 2; Amos ix. 14, 15). The Vulgate, from a different pointing of the Hebrew, renders, *convertentur*. With this the Chaldee and Syriac agree. But this idea is already expressed in ver. 3. Now shall he be great. When the prophecy is fulfilled and Messiah is feeding his flock, his dominion shall extend unto the ends of the earth (comp. Mal. i. 11, 14; Ps. ii. 8; lxxii. 8; Luke i. 32).

Vers. 5, 6.—§ 9. Under Messiah's rule shall be peace. Cheyne considers these verses to have been inserted by an afterthought, either to explain the "many nations" and "many peoples" of ch. iv. 11, 13, or to rectify the omission of the period of foreign rule. This may be reasonably allowed; but it is not necessary to the explanation of the paragraph, which is merely a further description of Messiah's kingdom.

Ver. 5.—And this Man shall be the Peace; and he shall be Peace; Vulgate, *et erit iste Pax*. This same Ruler will not only bring peace, and be the Author of peace, but be himself Peace; as Isaiah (ix. 5) calls him "Prince of Peace," and St. Paul (Eph. ii. 14) "our Peace." Peace personified (comp. Zech. ix. 9). It is best to put a full stop here, and remove the colon at "land" in the next clause. There may be an allusion to Solomon, the peaceful king, who erected the temple and whose reign exhibited the ideal of happy times. Septuagint, *καὶ ἔσται αὐτῇ εἰρήνη*, "and to her shall be peace." When the Assyrian shall come. The prophet, in this and the following verses, shows what is that peace which Messiah shall bring. Aashur is named as the type of Israel's deadliest foe, and as that which even then was threatening the kingdom: witness Sennacherib's invasion in Hezekiah's time, when the angel of the Lord smote the alien army with sudden destruction (2 Kings xix.). The prophecy looks forward to a far-distant future, when

the world-power is arrayed against God's people; the details (as often in such prophecies) do not exactly suit the actual facts in contemporary history. Then shall we raise against him seven shepherds. We, the Israel of God, shall be enabled to repel the enemy. "Shepherds," i.e. princes, and those in abundance. "Seven" is the perfect number, representing completeness and rest. And eight principal men; or, *princes among men*, appointed by the Ruler as his subordinates and representatives. These are said to be "eight," to imply their great number: there should be a superabundance of able leaders. (On a similar use of numbers, see note on Amos i. 3.) The LXX. renders, *ὀκτώ δῆματα ἀνθρώπων*, "eight attacks of men," reading differently.

Ver. 6.—They shall waste. The word rendered "waste" (*raah*) is capable of two interpretations according as it is derived. It may mean "to break" or "to feed;" and in the latter sense may signify either "to eat up" or "to be shepherd over," as the Septuagint, *ποιμανοῦσι*. The addition, with the sword, however, limits the explanation, whichever verb we refer it to. These leaders shall not only defend their own land against the enemy, but shall carry the war into the hostile territory, conquer it, and rule with rigour (for the phrase, comp. Ps. ii. 9; Rev. ii. 27; xii. 5). True religion has always a war to wage with error and worldliness, but shall conquer in the power of Christ. The land of Nimrod. This is taken by some commentators to mean Babylon, the other great enemy of the Church of God. But Babylon is nowhere in Scripture called "the land of Nimrod," though Nimrod is connected with Babel in Gen. x. 10; and the term is better explained here as a synonym of Assyria, used to recall the "rebel" (so *Nimrod* is interpreted) who founded the first empire (Gen. x. 8—12), and gives the character to the kingdom of this world. In the entrances thereof; literally, *in the gates thereof*; i.e. in the cities and fortresses, corresponding to the "palaces" of ver. 5 (comp. Isa. iii. 26; xiii. 2; Nah. iii. 13). Septuagint, *ἐν τῇ τάφῳ αὐτοῦ*, "with her trench." Vulgate, *in lanceis ejus*, which, if the Hebrew be taken as Jerome reads it, will be in close parallelism with the words in the preceding clause, "with the sword." Thus (*and*) he shall deliver us. Israel has to undergo much tribulation and many struggles, but Messiah shall save her.

Vers. 7—9.—§ 10. The people under Messiah's rule have a mission to execute; they are to be not only conquerors, but saviours also.

Ver. 7.—First, Israel in God's hands shall be an instrument of life and health to the

nations. The remnant of Jacob. The faithful, Messianic Israel, as ch. iv. 7; Isa. x. 21. Many people; rather, *many peoples* (ch. iv. 11, 13); so in ver. 8. The LXX. inserts, *ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν*, "among the nations," as in ver. 8. As a dew from the Lord. Converted Israel shall act as Messiah himself in refreshing and stimulating the nations. Receiving grace from him, she shall diffuse it to others. (For the metaphor of dew thus used, comp. Deut. xxxii. 2; Hos. xiv. 6.) It is especially appropriate in a country where from May to October the life of herbage depends chiefly on the copious dews (comp. Gen. xxvii. 28; Deut. xxxiii. 13, 28; Hag. i. 10). As the showers upon the grass. The dew is called "showers" as appearing to descend in a multitude of drops. That tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. This refers to the dew, which is wholly the gift of God, and is not artificially supplied by man's labour, as Egypt is "watered by the foot" (Deut. xi. 10). So grace is God's free, unmerited gift, and will come upon the nations in his good time and way. The LXX. has here a curious rendering, *καὶ ὡς ἔρως ἐπὶ ἔρωςτιν, ὅπως μὴ συναχθῇ μηδὲς, μηδὲ ὑποστῇ ἐν υἱοῖς ἀνθρώπων*, which Jerome explains of the obdurate Gentiles who continue in unbelief, "as lambs upon the grass, that none may assemble nor withstand among the sons of men."

Ver. 8.—Secondly, Israel shall be a terrible power among the nations, and invincible in strength. "Nova theocratica agit suavior et fortiter" (Knabenbauer). As a lion. The Lamb of God is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. v. 5; Numb. xxiii. 24), and he "is set for the fall and rising again of many" (Luke ii. 34). In his irresistible strength Israel shall overcome all enemies. So Judas Maccabæus is compared to a lion (1 Macc. iii. 4).

Ver. 9.—The prophet's exulting prayer for the success of his people. Thine hand shall be, etc.; rather, *let thine hand be lifted up*; and so in the next clause, "let thine enemies be cut off." The phrase, "high be thy hand upon, or over," recalls the expression in Exod. xiv. 8, "The children of Israel went out with an high hand" (comp. Numb. xxxiii. 3; Isa. xxvi. 11; and our idiom, "to get the upper hand"). (For the promise contained in the prayer, see Isa. lx. 12.)

Vers. 10—15.—§ 11. Messiah shall destroy all the instruments of war, and put down all idolatry, having taught his people to rely upon him alone.

Ver. 10.—In that day. When Messiah's kingdom is established. Micah depicts the interior perfection of the Church, as he had before explained its relation to external

nations. **Horses . . . chariots.** The things most used in attack and defence, and forbidden by God as betraying distrust in his providence (comp. Deut. xvii. 16; Isa. ii. 7; Zech. ix. 10). In the reign of the Prince of Peace all war shall cease (Isa. ix. 4—6).

Ver. 11.—**Cities.** Abodes of luxury and pride. From Messiah's kingdom all pomp and vain-glory shall be shut out. **Strong holds.** Such defences shall not be needed nor allowed (comp. Isa. ii. 15; Zech. ii. 4, 5).

Ver. 12.—**Witchcrafts.** Magic and sorcery, which were much practised in Syria and Palestine, as in Chaldea, the literature of which country consists in great part of spells and charms. It is to the belief in the efficacy of such incantations that we owe the episode of Balak and Balaam (Numb. xxi. —xxiv.), and the enactments in the Law; e.g. Deut. xviii. 10, etc. (comp. Isa. ii. 6; xlvii. 12). Septuagint, *τὰ φάρμακ σου*, "thy poisons;" Vulgate, *maleficia*. **Soothsayers;** properly, *cloud-diviners*, or *storm-makers*; either persons who professed to divine by means of the shape and colour of clouds, or, as the old Scandinavian witches, charlatans who assumed the power of causing and directing storms. Chayne compares the common name of sorcerers among savages, "rain-makers."

Ver. 13.—**Graven images**, of stone or metal (Lev. xxvi. 1). **Standing images;** Septuagint, *τὰς στήλας σου*, "thy columns;" Vulgate, *statuas tuas*. These are stone images or pillars dedicated to false gods

(1 Kings xiv. 23). A pillar to mark a place consecrated to the worship of the Lord was allowed (see Gen. xxviii. 18; xxxi. 13, 45; Isa. xix. 17). It was when this custom degenerated into idolatry that it was sternly denounced (Deut. xvi. 22; xxvii. 15, etc.).

Ver. 14.—**Thy groves (*Asherim*);** Exod. xxxiv. 13; Deut. vii. 5, etc. **Asherah** was a Canaanitish goddess, whose worship was celebrated with licentious rites. She corresponds to the Ashtoreth of the Phœnicians and Ishtar of the Assyrians, and seems to have been adored as the goddess of the productive power of nature. Her symbol was a tree or a wooden post. So (*and*) will I destroy thy cities; i.e. those cities which have been the centres of idolatry, or are especially connected with such worship (comp. Amos v. 5). The word rendered "cities" has by some been translated, and by others has been so altered as to be translated, "adversaries;" but there is no variety in the reading, or in the rendering of the ancient versions (except the Targum); and, explained as above, it is no mere repetition of the thought in ver. 11.

Ver. 15.—The time of Messiah is the era when judgment shall fall on the obdurate heathen. Such as they have not heard; rather, *which have not hearkened*, which are disobedient. Septuagint, "Because they hearkened not" (comp. Isa. lxi. 15—18; Joel iii. 9, etc.; Zeph. iii. 8; Hag. ii. 22; 2 Thess. i. 7—10). It is implied that some of the heathen will hearken to the revelation of Jehovah by the Messiah.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*Bethlehem Ephratah.* I. THE NAME OF THE PLACE IS VERY SUGGESTIVE. Bethlehem; i.e. "House of bread." Ephratah; i.e. "Fruitfulness." Both thus signified plenty, abundance, fertility. They were most appropriate as designating the spot, for fertility has been and is still characteristic of that locality. "It is now a large village, beautifully situated on the brow of a high hill, which commands an extensive view of the surrounding mountainous country, and rises in *parterres* of vineyards, almond groves, and fig plantations, watered by gentle rivulets that murmur through the terraces; and is diversified by towers and wine-presses" (Kitto's 'Cyclopædia,' art. "Bethlehem," vol. i. p. 326; see also Porter's 'Handbook,' p. 206). The place in its rich fruitfulness was symbolical of that spiritual abundance which should be secured to the world by him who is "the Bread of life" (John vi. 33—35), and the seed-corn to fall into the ground and die, and thus to bring forth much fruit (John xii. 24).

II. THE LOWLINESS OF THE PLACE IS ALSO SUGGESTIVE. From Numb. i. 5—16 and x. 4 we learn that each of the tribes of Israel had its thousands of fighting men, each thousand having its appointed leader; whilst from the Book of Joshua we gather that this appointment was continued after the settlement of Canaan (xxii. 21, 30). So insignificant, however, was Bethlehem that it could make but a small contribution towards this arrangement, and hence was "least among the thousands of Judah." Yet upon this lowly place honour was to be conferred in the birth there of the world's Redeemer. The small was to become great, and the mean exalted. Around its plains the glory of the Lord should shine, and the songs of angels should resound,

chanting the natal-song, "Glory to God in the highest," etc. (Luke ii. 14). And if a humble *village* through its connection with the Christ of God became thus exalted, much more surely shall human hearts and lives. Associated with him, they who, judged by the world's standards, are accounted mean and despicable, secure to themselves present dignity and eternal honour.

III. THIS PROPHECY RESPECTING THE MESSIAH'S LOWLY BIRTHPLACE LIVED IN THE MEMORIES AND HEARTS OF GOD'S ANCIENT PEOPLE. Two striking confirmations of this are given in the Gospels. 1. In connection with the visit of the Magians to Jerusalem. Herod in his alarm gathered the Jewish Sanhedrin together, and imperiously demanded information from the priests and scribes as to where, in accordance with Jewish traditions, the Messiah was to be born. And their reply (Matt. ii. 5, 6) indicates that they had in their memory this prophecy by Micah; whilst the readiness with which they replied to the inquiry of Herod manifests how clearly this prophecy had become impressed upon the Jewish mind. 2. In connection with Christ's appearance in Jerusalem at "the Feast of Tabernacles." His hearers, moved by his marvellous teaching, began to acknowledge him as the Messiah, when lo! the Pharisees cried, "Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of Bethlehem, where David was?" (John vii. 42). It is evident that these Pharisees knew all about this ancient prediction, and that they expected the Messiah, in accordance with it, to appear in Bethlehem.

Note—

IV. THE REMARKABLE FULFILMENT, IN THE ORDER OF PROVIDENCE, OF THIS NATIONAL EXPECTATION. The decree went forth from Cæsar Augustus that all the Roman world should be enrolled (Luke ii. 1). The emperor, in issuing the decree, thought only of his imperial authority and the glory of the empire; but God was working through all, and making the earthly kingdom to serve the heavenly, and bringing about the fulfilment of the prophecy that in Bethlehem the Christ should appear. So, earthly princes and potentates, statesmen and diplomatists, are ever at work, thinking only of the interests of their own nations; but above all is the God of nations, the supreme Ruler, sitting on the throne of his majesty in perfect repose, and overruling all to the accomplishment of his purposes of love and mercy towards the whole race (Prov. xxi. 1; xvi. 33).

Ver. 2.—*The nature of the Messiah's rule.* "That is to be Ruler in Israel." In the first verse Micah had spoken of the failure of earthly rulers. "The judge of Israel should be smitten with a rod upon the cheek." The rulers who had so lamentably failed in their administration should come to nought, but there should rise up in the time appointed "a King to reign in righteousness," and who should establish a kingdom which should never be "moved." Unfortunately, however, in the Jewish mind, the nature of this kingdom took a visible shape; and they anticipated that the Messiah should establish a kingdom which should be marked by regal splendour and worldly power. Hence, when he appeared, the appeal was made to him to free them from paying tribute to Cæsar (Matt. xxii. 17—22); to sit in judgment, and to settle disputes (Luke xii. 13; John viii. 2—11); and they sought to take him by force, and to compel him to set up his throne (John vi. 15). And it is easy to understand how that, cherishing these mistaken notions, the Christ of God became an enigma to them; and that, disappointed in the course he pursued, they turned aside from him, cherished hostility towards him, and even cried, "Away with him! crucify him!" But, for all this, in the spiritual sense predicted by Micah and others, he was the true King of Israel, and his claim can be fully vindicated. He was "Ruler in Israel" in a far higher and nobler sense than David and his successors had ever been the sovereigns of the people. The functions which Jesus declined to fulfil were, after all, the lesser and inferior functions of the King of Israel. The higher functions were those which the Lord God himself had fulfilled in relation to the Jewish nation, and before that nation in the pride of its heart had demanded an earthly ruler. God had been their King. David and his successors were but Jehovah's deputies, and were appointed by him to discharge the lesser and secondary functions; but there were higher functions, which Jehovah alone had fulfilled. It was he who by his appointment and power had separated that people from among the nations, and it was he who of his infinite

wisdom framed those Divine laws by which the people thus separated were to be governed, and in obedience to which they were to find happiness and security. And Christ Jesus became in the highest sense "the Ruler in Israel," in that he came to gather a people to his praise out of the wreck and ruin sin had wrought among the nations, and to give them that Christian law of rectitude and righteousness, of mercy and love, the embodiment and perfecting of all previous revelations, and in following which there should be experienced the truest peace and the most abiding joy. He came to set up on earth "the kingdom of heaven," and to establish amongst men a Divine and heavenly rule. His is not a kingdom of the senses, but of the spirit; it consists not in "meat and drink," but in "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17). He is "the Ruler," and the principles of his rule are such as, finding a lodgment in the heart and drawing the soul to him in loving loyalty and devotion, renders it true and good, holy and happy. And all that is needed in order to render the world sin has blighted bright and blessed, is that his rulership be universally acknowledged and his reign be established in every human soul.

"Hark the glad sound, the Saviour comes,
The Saviour promised long;
Let every heart prepare a throne,
And every voice a song."

Ver. 2 (last clause).—*The eternal "goings forth" of the Christ of God.* "When he says his beginnings are from the beginning, from the days of antiquity, he shows his pre-existent nature, as when he says he will go forth as Ruler to feed his people Israel he shows his temporal birth" (Chrysostom). "Going forth is here opposed to going forth—a going forth out of Bethlehem to a going forth from eternity; a going forth which then was still to come, to a going forth which had been long ago, from the days of eternity. The word expresses pre-existence, an eternal existence backwards as well as forwards, the incommunicable attribute of God" (Pusey, *in loc.*). The expression here naturally leads us to think of the words with which St. John commences his Gospel (i. 1). We can offer no explanation as to how this could be. We fully acknowledge the difficulty, and which lies within the Divine nature itself. We bow before the mystery. "God is great, and we know him not." Reason is baffled when it inquires concerning the Divine Personality; but where reason cannot penetrate, *faith* can reverentially and tranquilly rest. And certainly the Prophet Micah here, and the Evangelist John in the prologue to his Gospel, claimed no more for the Messiah than the Christ claimed for himself (comp. John vi. 62; viii. 58; xvii. 5, 24; Rev. i. 8). This eternal Son of God is presented to us here in his Divine manifestations; for the *seer speaks of "his goings forth."*

I. TRACE THESE "GOINGS FORTH." We may do so: 1. *In creation.* In view of his oneness with God, *this* is declared to have been his work (John i. 3; Col. i. 16, 17). 2. *In providence.* In reading the Old Testament in its allusions to the Divine care exercised over eminent saints of God, we find a Divine exalted Personage occasionally referred to as manifesting himself to such—to Abraham (Gen. xviii.); to Jacob (Gen. xxxii. 24, 30) to the Israelites through Moses (Exod. xxiii. 20, 21); to Joshua (Josh. v. 13—15). There are insuperable difficulties if we simply regard these as angelic ministries expressive of the Divine care over the good as the God of providence. It would not have been said in reference to any angel, "Provoke him not, for he will not pardon your transgressions;" nor would any mere angelic intelligence have accepted the adoration of Joshua, but would have said, "See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow-servant," etc. (Rev. xxii. 9). The most reasonable conclusion is that these were the "goings forth" in providence of the pre-existent Son of God. 3. *In grace.* (1) In the counsels of the Godhead. Man by transgression mournfully departed from his God. He lost the Divine favour and the light of the Divine countenance. And when his condition became helpless and hopeless, lo! Divine interpositions with a view to his salvation. And it was in the depths of the compassion of the eternal Son of God that the stream of Divine mercy took its rise, and which shall flow on to bless the whole world; and from him, "the Sun of Righteousness," has emanated the cheering ray of hope to ruined man. Nor, in speaking thus of the love of the eternal Son, do we slight the love of the eternal Father. Observe, in this verse God, speaking of his Son, says,

"He shall come forth *unto me*," meaning surely that Christ, in his incarnation, with all that was thus involved of mercy and grace, would, in rescuing and restoring man, fulfil the Divine purpose and accomplish the Divine will. The Divine Father is no wrathful Being, needing to be appeased by the sacrifice of his Son. The Father "so loved the world, that he *gave*," etc. (John iii. 16). The eternal Spirit, too, strives and pleads with men. There never has been schism in the eternal counsels. The mercy that saves us had its origin in the free and unbought love of the Godhead. (2) In the life and work of the incarnate Christ. The life of Jesus is the most wonderful ever lived in the flesh. The lives of patriarchs, prophets, and righteous men through all ages pale in the presence of this life. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." "His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting;" but none of his manifestations has ever equalled that which took place when he clothed himself in the veil of our mortal flesh, and enabled man, through his perfect character and self-sacrificing work, to behold expressed in their very midst the glory of the Lord.

II. CONNECT THESE "GOINGS FORTH" WITH WHAT WAS PREDICTED HERE RESPECTING THE ADVENT OF CHRIST. As we behold him in his eternal existence and glory, Creator of all things, the Giver of life, the Imparter of light, manifesting himself in all the departments of the Divine operation; and then think of him as condescending to the limitations and conditions of our humanity, humbling himself to "the poor manger" at Bethlehem, and "the bitter cross" at Calvary, we are filled with wonder; yet love also inflames and inspires our souls. With profoundest gratitude and holiest joy we raise our carols. As we think of him as "the Ancient of days" and also the Babe of Bethlehem, our hearts are drawn to him, and we are impelled to adopt as our own the strain of Micah's great contemporary Isaiah, and to sing exultantly, "For unto us a Child is born," etc. (Isa. ix. 6).

Ver. 3.—*Success; but in God's own time.* There is a certain degree of ambiguity about these words, yet amidst this we find certain practical teachings very clearly enunciated.

I. WE ARE REMINDED OF DELAYS IN THE DIVINE WORKING. Seven hundred years must elapse ere the predictions respecting the advent of the Redeemer should be fulfilled and "the time" come. God's purposes in grace, as well as in nature and providence, are developed gradually. He makes demands upon human patience, bidding us wait. He often, by slow processes, brings to pass that which he has planned. "Rest in the Lord," etc. (Ps. xxxvii. 7).

II. WE ARE REMINDED OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF PRIVILEGE. "Therefore will he give them up until," etc. The favoured people had slighted the privileges which God had so richly bestowed upon them. He had not dealt so graciously with any other nation, but the blessings granted they had failed to improve, and hence these were now to be withdrawn. God had delivered them from their foes, but now they were to go into the land of captivity. The precious symbols of his near presence with them were no longer to be seen. The voice of prophecy, too, should soon become silent. Through sad and solemn losses they were to be led to look with ardent hope to the coming of "the Consolation of Israel."

III. WE ARE REMINDED HERE OF ULTIMATE GLORIOUS INCREASE. "Then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel." Some limit these words to the *conversion of the Jews*, and understand by "the children of Israel" the true spiritual Israelites like Simeon and Anna, who waited for the advent of a spiritual Redeemer, and regard the words as intimating that to these in Messianic times there should be gathered "the remnant of Christ's brethren," i.e. the more spiritually minded amongst *his own nation* who should be constrained to welcome him to their hearts, and to consecrate themselves to his service. According to this interpretation the prophecy received its partial fulfilment in the conversion of the Jews in apostolic times, and shall yet be more completely fulfilled when the Jewish nation shall be brought in, and when "all Israel shall be saved." Others, however, give the words a yet wider meaning, and understand by "brethren" all who "hear the Word of God and keep it," and who are obedient to the will of Christ's Father and theirs, whether they be Jews or Gentiles; and see in these words a pre-intimation in prophetic times of the coming of that happy era when "the Ruler in Israel" shall sway his sceptre

over a ransomed and redeemed world. And to that bright day of God we look on with longing hearts. Dawn upon our darkened world it surely will. God has not totally "given up" and abandoned our sin-stricken and sin-stained world. Even his withdrawals are with a view to the spiritual good of his children, and are followed, when the discipline is accomplished, by brighter and more glorious manifestations of his love and grace. "At the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess him Lord." His kingdom shall come, and his "will be done on earth, even as it is done in heaven."

Ver. 4.—*The ministering Christ.* The whole of this chapter is more or less occupied with graphic descriptions of the Christ of God drawn ages before he appeared, and setting forth his nature, his work, and his influence upon the world and the race. A little child has been called "an unsolved problem." We dare not be so bold as to attempt to forecast the future of any child. This, however, is done here respecting the "Babe of Bethlehem." Distinct Divine pre-intimations were given concerning the destiny of this mighty Child, and to which he has proved himself gloriously true. Here he is presented to us as *the ministering Christ*. We have predicted here—

I. THE HOLY MINISTERING LIFE OF THE CHRIST OF GOD. "And he shall stand and feed," etc. (ver. 4). It was thus declared that the very coming of Christ would be a descent with a view to helpfulness. In his advent the lofty would descend to the low, the strong to the feeble, for the express purpose of ministering unto them in order that he might lift up the fallen and restore the erring, and strengthen the weak by his own great might and love. This ministering character of the life of the Christ who was to appear was set forth by this and other Hebrew seers under the figure of a shepherd tending his flock. This was natural in view of the national history. The Jewish people gloried in David as one raised from the sheepfold to the throne, and rejoiced in him as their shepherd-king. Hence with appropriateness the prophets referred to "great David's greater Son" under this simple yet beautiful emblem. The allusions, too, were in harmony with the destined birthplace of the Messiah—a locality so thoroughly pastoral in its character, and upon the plains of which district the Eastern shepherds kept constant watch. The emblem is admirably suggestive of the character and work of the Messiah, setting forth: 1. His *gentleness*; the weak, the tired, the tempted, the erring, being tended by him with patient love (Isa. xl. 11). 2. His *watchfulness*. "He shall stand," etc. (ver. 4); the posture indicating alertness, readiness to protect and defend. 3. His *succours*. He should "feed" the flock, supplying abundantly the spiritual wants of his people, and fully satisfying the longings and aspirations of their hearts. The records of the evangelists indicate how truly "ministering" in character the life of Christ was, and how that the most trusty shepherd watching over the flock committed to his charge but faintly images his wondrous care (Matt. xx. 28). His followers are to emulate his example, and to live ministering lives (Matt. xx. 26, 27). He, as "the Man Christ Jesus," pursued his course of holy service "in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the Name of the Lord his God." And this Divine influence is available to all his servants.

II. THE PROSPERITY OF ALL WHO AVAIL THEMSELVES OF HIS MINISTERINGS AND WHO COMMIT THEMSELVES UNTO HIS CARE. "And they shall abide." 1. The thought of *rest* is suggested. "And they shall abide;" literally, "sit." The idea is the same as in Ps. xxiii. 2, "He maketh me to lie down," etc. Delightful repose—rest for the weary. The pastures of sin are dry and parched, and its waters are troubled, and man seeks in vain therein freedom from unrest; but when the heart reposes in Christ, then it knows what it is to lie down on the pastures of tender grass, and by the waters of quietness. 2. The thought of *security* is also suggested. They shall sit without fear of harm overtaking them, because he "stands," their Guardian against all intrusion and invasion, ready as their champion to defend them from all peril, and to maintain their cause. So shall they dwell at rest and in security, and true prosperity be theirs perpetually. "And they shall abide."

III. THE HONOUR WITH WHICH THE MINISTERING CHRIST, BY REASON OF HIS CONDESCENDING AND GRACIOUS SERVICE, SHALL BE CROWNED. "For now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth." "For now." The far-distant future was present to the prophet's gaze as he uttered these words, and he referred to it as though it had

already come. His faith had peered beyond the centuries intervening before the advent of the Messiah, and had rendered that event very real to him; and now he took by faith a yet wider range of vision, and looked on to the ages following the advent, and saw the ever-growing, ever-widening influence and honour the Christ should enjoy, and even beheld this as extending to earth's remotest bounds. Long and weary ages had passed since the prophet of God uttered this prediction; and we to-day, in the partial fulfilment of his words, have every ground of encouragement to look on to their complete accomplishment. What name is so powerful to inspire within men the holiest emotions, and to move them to devoted consecration, as that of Jesus Christ? He is indeed "great" in the marvellous influence he exerts upon human hearts and lives; and despite all the discouragements which meet us in Christian service, we find this influence widening, and behold cheering signs of the coming of that bright day in which all the ends of the earth shall see his salvation, and the assurance of the angel Gabriel to Mary be fully realized (Luke i. 32, 33). Let us make room for One who comes with such eager gladness to bind up the world's wounds, and to pour into them the balm of his healing love. Let us yield to his holy and heavenly ministrings, and cast ourselves upon his loving, gentle care. True happiness and peace shall then be ours. The path of usefulness shall open out before us here, and in the day of his complete triumph we shall be sharers with him in his victory, and when his glory shall be revealed we also shall be glad with exceeding joy (1 Pet. iv. 13).

Vers. 5, 6.—*"The Prince of Peace."* Solomon as well as David was a type of Christ; and just as Micah, when he said (ver. 4), "He shall stand and feed," etc., probably thought of the shepherd-youth, raised to the throne of Israel, as typical of Israel's spiritual King, who would eventually appear and bring heavenly strength and succour to a needy world, so when he added respecting the Messiah, "*And this Man shall be the Peace,*" he thought of the peaceful rule of Solomon, and saw in this a symbol of that spiritual tranquillity which the Christ, the greater than Solomon, should, through his appearing, bring to human hearts, and ultimately to the world at large. And the same characteristic of the Messiah was present to the mind of Isaiah, and found expression in one of the titles employed by him in that remarkable cluster of designations (see Isa. ix. 6), so rich in spiritual significance—*"The Prince of Peace."* The text applies to—

I. THE DISTRACTIONS WHICH ARISE TO US IN OUR PERSONAL LIFE. 1. In our *sinfulness* we find peace in Christ. Sin is attended by distraction. It separates from God, the true Source of rest. It creates inward disquiet; for whilst when we do right conscience approves, "in whisper gentle and secret, like the murmur of a brook beneath the foliage," yet when we do wrong its accusations prey upon the spirit as with a fever's strength. And there is no deliverance from all this disquietude but in Christ (Matt. xi. 28; Rom. v. 1). 2. In our *sorrowfulness* we find peace in Christ. He traverses the stormy seas of sorrow, and these adverse waves obey his voice. Amidst all the strifes and struggles of our life occasioned by our darker experiences he can give our spirits rest. Though in the world we must have tribulation, yet in him we have peace. 3. In our *intellectual questionings and doubtings* we find peace in Christ. The spirit of inquiry is rife in this age. Increased light is being shed upon various questions, and may necessitate the laying aside of opinions and forms of thought long cherished. But, amidst this shaking and uprooting, the historical Christ remains, and his words, so charmingly simple and clear, so confident and reassuring, abide for ever. And reposing with childlike trust in him and in his utterances, in which he has revealed to us the true way of life here, and has assured us of a blessed immortality with him hereafter, all mental unrest ceases, and our minds stayed thus shall ever be kept at perfect rest. "*And this Man shall be the Peace.*"

II. THE DIFFERENCES WHICH PREVAIL BETWEEN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES. 1. *From within.* There will be such differences. Truth is many-sided, and our mental constitution varies. But amidst these diversities there is a centre of unity—*Christ himself.* Sharing his spirit, and being under the inspiration of his love, men become united in heart, and, despite their differences, are made one through the possession of a common life and love. This is the true unity, the being one in life, and therefore in spirit, aim,

endeavour, and in sympathy with our Father who is in heaven, and with his Christ, who came to save his people from all selfishness and sin, and to establish a universal brotherhood amongst men. It was for this that the great Intercessor prayed in his memorable high-priestly prayer (John xvii. 21). 2. *From without.* Vers. 5 and 6 clearly refer to assaults from without. Whether we take the reference to Assyria metaphorically or literally, the allusion must be to external attacks. And God in Christ is the Refuge and Strength of his Church, and amidst these will keep her in perfect peace whilst she rests in him (Ps. xlii.).

III. THE CONFLICTS BETWEEN NATIONS. It is mournful to reflect upon the method adopted, even by civilized and enlightened nations, in order to settle the disputes which arise between them. The appeal is made to the arbitrament of the sword. The heart sickens at the very thought of the battle-field, with all the suffering and desolation connected with it, and yearns with ardent desire for the coming of that bright day of God in which such strife shall cease. And our assurance of its coming rests upon Christ. Peace is a distinguishing characteristic of his holy gospel, which shall at length universally be accepted (Jas. iii. 17; Gal. v. 22), and the acceptance of which shall be followed by peoples dwelling in amity and concord (Isa. xi. 6—9; ch. iv. 3). Christ's disciples should be eminently distinguished by this spirit of peace. No contentious jarring spirit, out of tune, and hence marring the harmony of the concert, should be found amongst them, but all their voices should be in agreement, thus producing the sweetest music (Ps. cxxxiii.).

Vers. 7—15.—*The spiritual influence of good men symbolized.* By "the remnant of Jacob" is intended the good who were to be found in the land of Judah; for in the most corrupt times God has ever had a people to show forth his praise. The expression may be taken as descriptive of good, holy, spiritual men; and it is here declared that these shall exert among the nations a gracious influence. Notice—

I. THE SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE OF GOOD MEN IS HERE SET FORTH BY MEANS OF SYMBOLS. 1. This is likened to the influence of *the dew and the rain* (ver. 7). The symbol is suggestive of the preservative influence of the good. We know what a wasteful, scorching drought means to the natural world. Hills and dales, fields and downs, are arrayed in robes of sorrow. Branches that were covered with leaves have become "withered sprays." Meadows that were clothed with grass have become converted into "short, unmowed hay." Flocks once skipping about are pining through hunger and thirst. Earth's fruits are become "abortive," and her clods "stark and dry." Clouds of dust sweep over her plains, and from her banks the river seems to shrink. And thus desolate spiritually had the world been but for the influence of good men. Between the time of "the early and latter rains" vegetable life in Palestine was entirely dependent upon the dew. It was this which kept vegetation from becoming dry and withered, and preserved the land from drought and desolation. And even so the influence of good men in the world is preservative. Bad as the world is to-day morally and spiritually, it is not so bad as it would have been save for the influence exerted by those who are under the motive force of pure and holy principles. This preservative influence of the good is silent, quiet, noiseless in its operation. How gentle is the dew, and how copious when all is calm and tranquil! And how gently the rain falls from heaven in the refreshing shower, penetrating deeply into the thirsty land! There is suggested quiet power, yet very effectual withal. So is it with the influence of the good. In the olden time here referred to, when princes and nobles, priests and prophets, had corrupted their way, a remnant was to be found among the people, unknown ones for the most part, but who nevertheless by their holy virtues and heavenly graces kept piety alive, and whose influence upon society was as that of the dew upon the parched, needy ground. So shall it ever be that our God shall not be left without faithful witnesses to honour and glorify his great Name. 2. The other symbol employed here is that of the *lion* (vers. 8, 9). This suggests the thought of courage, boldness, fearlessness, together with destructive strength and might. "The remnant of Jacob" are ever such as dare to do right, who resolutely follow their convictions, who possess a strong sense of justice and rectitude, and who act upon this at all risks and costs. They "trust in God and do the right." They are unyielding where true principle is at stake. "The wicked fleeth," etc. (Prov. xxviii. 1). And

ultimately the victory is with such. The unprincipled shall be subdued and go down before them, as surely as sheep yield before the beasts of the forest.

II. THIS MORAL AND SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE OF GOOD MEN THUS SET FORTH IS DIVINELY DERIVED. It cometh "*from the Lord*" (ver. 7). He alone can impart to us the quiet, refreshing, reinvigorating power typified by the dew and the showers; and he alone can make us valiant in the maintenance and defence of truth and righteousness. We need hence to be found constantly looking unto him, that, divinely strengthened and sustained, it may be manifest that we belong to "the remnant" through whom it is his purpose to fertilize and bless the world.

III. IN ORDER TO THIS BENEFICENT INFLUENCE BEING EXERTED THERE MUST BE PURITY OF HEART AND SEPARATION FROM EVIL. (Vers. 10—14.) God's ancient people were placed in the most favourable circumstances for being the medium of good to other nations and tribes; but, forgetful of their "high calling," they yielded to the contaminating influences of the world around, and even exceeded the heathen nations in the practice of sin, and hence their honour was laid in the dust, and they were threatened with national decay. And for the comfort of "the remnant" the assurance was given that there should be brought about the purification of the Church (vers. 10—14). True spiritual influence is ever the outcome of true spiritual excellence. Would we be influential for good, we must "follow after holiness." We must be watchful over our lips that we offend not with our tongues. All self-seeking, strifes, jealousies, must be put away from us. "Let every one that nameth," etc. (2 Tim. ii. 19). Then "God will bless us," and through us others (Ps. lxxv.).

IV. THIS SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE SHALL ULTIMATELY PREVAIL. (Ver. 15.) Whilst evil sometimes appears victorious, the cause of truth and righteousness shall finally triumph. This chapter, which begins with declaring the coming of "the Babe of Bethlehem," ends with a solemn declaration of the final discomfiture of all who oppose the sway of this "Ruler in Israel" (ver. 15). Array not yourselves "against the Lord and his Anointed." His foes shall become his footstool. "Kiss the Son" (Ps. ii. 12).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 2.—*A new David: the lowliness and majesty of the Messiah.* Thoughts respecting the lowliness of the Messiah cluster around the reference to his birthplace. Bethlehem was so small and unimportant that it was "little to be among the thousands of Israel." It was like one of our *hamlets*, not even attaining to the dignity of a *parish*. From this village there went forth a youth unknown to fame, and almost unnoticed among his own kindred (1 Sam. xvi. 11; Ps. lxxviii. 70, 71). Even after the establishment of David on the throne, his birthplace was allowed to remain in its former insignificance; or, if honoured for a time, sank into obscurity again (as Micah testifies), just as the royal family of David itself sank into such a low estate that it could be compared to the stump of a tree cut down and giving little promise of a renewed vigorous vitality (Isa. xi. 1). This lowly condition of both the home and the house of David corresponds to the debased condition of the Jewish Church at the time of the advent. It was "despised," "hated," "afflicted" (Isa. lx. 14, 15). In that hamlet Jesus, the Christ, was born. Now note the contrasts that have followed. 1. Bethlehem has become one of the most notable places in the world—a theme for poets, a subject for artists, a goal for pilgrims. Its names have received a new and higher significance. Bethlehem has become a "house of bread" for a dying world; Ephratah has been "fruitful" in the richest blessings for the human race. 2. The family of David is now, through Jesus Christ, the most exalted family of the earth. Contrast the Ptolemies, Cæsars, and other royal names. 3. The Jewish Church sprang to a new life. It has taken a place of supreme influence among the nations, not simply through Christ himself, but through the works and writings of his apostles and evangelists. Great as these blessings are already, we shall see greater things than these. "The kingdom" shall be restored, "yea, the former dominion shall come" (ch. iv. 8). For ages there had been "no king" (ch. iv. 9), at the best only a temporary "judge" (ver. 1). Israel still held as its ideal king *David the great*. Its ideal should be more than realized. A new David shall come forth "unto me," and in

God's Name and strength shall rule (ver. 4). Victory is promised under figures suggested by existing foes (vers. 5—9). In those spiritual triumphs of Jesus Christ we shall see the fulfilment of the predictions of his everlasting dominion. And in these victories of grace his nation will take a share, and will be still further glorious in the eyes of God and man (Isa. lx., lxvi., etc.). The prediction of a Ruler so mighty, yet of such lowly origin, prepares for the description of a still greater glory. And the fact of the power and influence in the world of the Babe of Bethlehem prepares us to receive, nay, more, requires us to believe in, *his Divine dignity*. The "coming forth" from Bethlehem can only be explained by previous "goings forth." These words declare: (1) The pre-existence of the Messiah (John viii. 58). (2) His previous manifestations and operations—in creation (John i. 3), providence (Col. i. 17; Heb. i. 3), and as the Divine Angel of Jehovah (Gen. xviii., etc.). (3) Eternal existence. Because thou art "from everlasting," therefore "thou art God" (Ps. xc. 2; John i. 1). Nothing but the truth of the Deity of Christ can explain the predictions of him or unlock the mysteries of his character and his life. The more lowly his origin and all the facts of his earthly life, the more inexplicable his present majesty, unless we acknowledge him as personally Divine.—E. S. P.

Vers. 7—9.—*The gentleness and terribleness of the people of God.* "The remnant of Jacob" is the faithful few who remain loyal to God's truth and the duty of the day, whether in the times of Elijah (1 Kings xix. 18), Uzziah (Isa. i. 9), or Christ (Rom. xi. 5). The people of God, the Church of Christ dispersed among the "peoples" of the earth, have a twofold aspect—*gentleness and terribleness*. This twofold aspect is seen in God (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7; Ps. xviii. 25, 26; Isa. viii. 13, 14), in Christ (Isa. xxviii. 16; Matt. xxi. 42—44; Luke ii. 34), who is both a "Lamb" and a "Lion;" and therefore in his people who are called into fellowship with himself. They are—

I. GENTLE TO BLESS. Notice the figures. 1. "*A dew from the Lord.*" The dew is of heavenly origin, and comes fresh from the hand of God (Job xxxviii. 28; cf. John i. 13; iii. 3, "from above"), reflecting God's light, transparent and glistening (cf. Matt. v. 16; 2 Cor. i. 12; Phil. ii. 15, 16), evanescent and apparently one of the frailest of nature's forces, yet powerful to quicken and sustain life that would otherwise perish (cf. 1 Cor. i. 26—28; iv. 15; 2 Cor. iv. 12; Jas. v. 19, 20). Such spiritual qualifications in individuals made the Church of Christ a life-giving power. Issuing from Judæa, Christ's disciples were as dew to the parched and perishing Roman world, both by their teaching (Deut. xxxii. 2) and still more by the testimony of the wondrous beauty of their lives (Ps. cxxiii. 3). Therefore they were scattered abroad—John to Asia, Thomas to India, Paul to Rome, etc.—that the life-giving dew might be conveyed to the distant "peoples" of the earth. 2. "*The showers upon the grass.*" Christ "shall come down like rain," etc. (Ps. lxxii. 6), not only by his individual blessings, but through his people. Like the rain, they "tarried not for man." Once the vision was seen and the appeal heard before the mission was commenced (Acts xvi. 9); yet even then, as elsewhere, the prophecy was fulfilled in the disciples as well as the Master, "I am found of them that sought me not" (Isa. lxxv. 1). Nor did they depend upon or "wait for the sons of men" (1 Cor. iii. 5—7). By both proclaiming and living God's Word they became identified with the promise, and sharers in the blessing of the old Messianic predictions (Gen. xxii. 18; Isa. lv. 10, 11).

II. TERRIBLE TO VANQUISH OR DESTROY. Courage and fearlessness are implied, such as were promised (Luke xxi. 15) and enjoyed (Acts iv. 13—21; v. 29—42, etc.). But the lion is not always on the defensive. The Church of Christ, with its new doctrines, maxims, morals, and threats of a wrath to come, was terrible to the pagan world of the first century, with its foul gods, its godless creeds, its nameless immoralities, its revolting cruelties and crimes. The contrast of the "dew" and the "lion" may be marked even in the apostles' teaching both to heathen and to professing Christians (Acts xvii. 24—31; xxiv. 24, 25; 2 Cor. v. 11, 20; xiii. 1—11; 2 Thess. i. 6—10). Its one object was to vanquish souls by destroying sin and bringing them into captivity to Christ. It trod down its foes and "went forth conquering and to conquer" (cf. Acts xxi. 20; Rom. xv. 19; 2 Cor. ii. 14), till, less than two hundred years later, Tertullian could speak of the Christians thus: "We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-

places, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum; we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods" ('Apology,' c. 38). In a similar way the Church of the Reformation was terrible to the corruptions of the papacy, which it sought to "tear in pieces" with weapons not carnal, but spiritual. And to-day the true Church of Christ, with its lofty standards and ideals, is hateful to the world with its maxims of expediency and fraud, its sins and shams; and to many also who would claim the sacred name of Christian. Such foes of Christ and his people must submit (Isa. lx. 14) or perish (Isa. lx. 12). The Church of God will at last be terrible in the day of the destruction of those who love darkness rather than light, and who will be driven away in their wickedness. "The saints shall judge the world" (1 Cor. vi. 3; Jude 14, 15; Rev. xix. 11—15); "Let thine hand be lifted up," etc. (ver. 9).—E. S. P.

Ver. 2.—*The promise of Messiah.* "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." This is one of the most definite of the Messianic prophecies. In the previous verse Micah foretells a period of deep degradation. The people of God would troop together before the invader, as sheep huddle together before a snowstorm. All resistance would prove vain. The judge would be smitten on the cheek, *i.e.* righteous rule and self-rule would perish. But when things were at their worst a new Ruler would arise. He would come, not from the city of Jerusalem, but from the village of Bethlehem, so small a place that it was never reckoned amongst "the thousands" (the chief divisions of the tribe) of Judah. Yet he who came from that obscure birth-place would be "he whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." This prophecy was universally regarded as applicable to the Messiah. It was quoted by the scribes in their reply to Herod (Matt. ii. 6); and at a later period, when it was popularly supposed that Jesus was of Nazareth, it was used as an argument against those who believed him to be the Christ (John vii. 42, etc.).

I. WHENOE CAME THE PROMISED KING? 1. *In his origin he is Divine.* "His goings forth," etc. The prophet and the New Testament concur in asserting the pre-existence and Divinity of our Lord. Jehovah, speaking through the prophet, says, "he shall come forth unto me," *i.e.* as a son is born to his father; and the disciples heard a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son," etc. Micah says, "His goings forth have been from of old;" and in harmony with this John declares, "In the beginning was the Word," etc. Divinity was a necessity to the Redeemer-King. He could not save humanity if he was simply part of it. He could not suffer as the spotless Lamb of God if it was true of him as of us, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity," etc. In order to assume a true humanity he was "born of a woman;" but the active cause of his earthly being was not in man, but in God. Hence Gabriel said, "That holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of the Highest." "The Word was made flesh," etc. Signs of his Divine origin may be seen in the accompaniments of his birth—the angels' song; the effect of the emperor's edict in bringing Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem; the star seen in the east; the Scripture evidence (Matt. ii. 6) unwittingly adduced by the scribes; the general expectation which presaged the advent, as the fragrance of the spice islands foretells to the sailor that they are near. The Babe of Bethlehem was the Son of God. 2. *In his birth he was human.* In spite of its association with David and with Ruth, Bethlehem never became great. From the first God chose "things despised." To a people like the Jews, to whom names were never without significance, these in the text would be suggestive. *Bethlehem*, the "House of bread," was the birthplace of him who spoke of himself as "the Bread of life" (John vi.). *Ephratah*, the old and still the poetic name of the village, signifying "the Fruit-field," was connected with him who was the Seed-corn of the world's life (John xii. 24). Had he been born in Jerusalem, an earthly policy might have sought to use him; but being born in Bethlehem, only loyal hearts welcomed him; so that the cradle, like the cross, tested men. Further, had Jerusalem been his birthplace, it might have been considered the world-centre of his kingdom, which we know is "not of this world."

II. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF HIS RULE? 1. *He reigns by lawful right.* If he is "from everlasting," we should approach him with reverence. Insistence on Christ's

humanity has been of advantage in making him less a theological abstraction, and more manifestly our Brother; but there is some danger of our forgetting his royal dignity. The familiar expressions, "dear Jesus," "my Jesus," etc., are too lightly used of our Lord. Nor are we justified in speaking of him as one superior to other teachers merely in his moral excellence and mental power. Ours should be the reverence of Thomas, who exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" 2. *He reigns by the power of love.* Because he will only rule thus he lost, and is losing, an earthly kingdom. If he appeared in the glory of his power, defiance would break down, hesitation would cease. Yet he is satisfied that instead of this men should be stirred by an exhortation the effect of which may soon pass. Why? Because he only cares for willing service; he would not weaken moral responsibility, and would only have that sway which is deepest and widest, because truest. His is not the power of a tyrant who is repressing by force the aspirations of his people, but the influence of a father who bids his child do something which he is free to leave undone, though he is confident the child, for love's sake, will do more than he says. 3. *He reigns for the welfare of his people.* Note the association of "feed" and "rule" in Scripture. David had training for the exercise of royal power, and at the same time saw a type of it, in his care for the sheep at Bethlehem. Show how Christ used the figure of the shepherd to denote his work and sacrifice. Contrast his reign and its issues with that of many an earthly monarch.

III. WHO ARE THE SUBJECTS OF HIS SWAY? Not always those whom we should expect. Not the scribes, with their knowledge and preparation and responsibility as religious leaders. Not the Jewish people, who did not find their expectations fulfilled in the Babe of Bethlehem, the Lad of Nazareth, the Prophet of Galilee. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Who are the "Israel" now—heirs of the promises? The men who have come from a far country like the Magians, because they seek holiness and truth; the women like Mary, whose hearts are big with hope of "sweeter manners, purer laws;" the children who pray with all their hearts, "Thy kingdom come;" the busy men like Joseph, who are struggling with temptation, and wanting help and hope outside themselves; the sinful and outcasts, who find rest at Jesus' feet, etc. These are the heirs of Jacob, who at Bethel gained his name "Israel;" for they see in Christ the ladder that reaches heaven, though its foot rests on earth; they pledge themselves to serve him, and in agonizing prayer say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

CONCLUSION. May we have given to us of God some thought which shall be to us what the star in the East was to the Wise Men, that we may say, "Where is he who is born to be King? for we have seen his star . . . and have come to worship him!"—A. R.

Ver. 1.—*The Church of God.* "Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek." The prophet, as if fearful that his previous promises would be somewhat too reassuring, so that the people would lose the due impression of the perils to which they would be exposed, here reminds them of the calamities which would befall them before the promised prosperity would be realized. "O daughter of troops!" Jerusalem was so called on account of the numerous troops that it possessed. "He hath laid siege against us." That is, the enemy hath—the invading army. "He shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek." Zedekiah, the judge or king of Israel (Amos ii. 3), was so insulted by the Chaldeans as if he had been smitten on the cheeks. To smite on the cheek was esteemed by the Orientals the greatest affront. This insult, we know, was offered by the nation to him who is the "Prince of the kings of the earth." "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheek to them that plucked out the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Isa. l. 6). It is perfectly legitimate to take these words as a symbolical portrait of the Church of God. Look at it—

I. AS MILITANT IN ITS CHARACTER. Jerusalem is addressed as "daughter of troops." As Jerusalem was a military city, containing a great body of soldiers within her walls, so is the Church on earth; it is military. The life of all true men here is a battle; all are soldiers, bound to be valiant for the truth. They are commanded to fight the good fight, to war the good warfare. They are to "wrestle not against

flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places." The warfare is *spiritual, righteous, indispensable, personal*. No one can fight the battle by proxy.

II. AS PERILOUS IN ITS POSITION. "He hath laid siege against us." The dangerous condition of Jerusalem, when the Chaldean army surrounded its walls in order to force an entrance, is only a faint shadow of the perilous position of the Church of God. It is besieged by mighty hosts of errors and evil passions, and mighty lusts that "war against the soul." Hosts of enemies are encamped round every human soul. The siege is planned with strategic skill and with malignant determination. How it becomes every spirit to be on its watch-tower, fully armed for the fight of defence! "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God," etc. (Eph. vi. 13).

III. AS INSULTED BY ITS ENEMIES. "They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek." Were the enemies of Christianity ever more insolent than in this age? And their insolence, we regret to state, has been encouraged by the brainless utterances and doings of religious fanatics. The argumentative opponents of conventional evangelicism seem to me more insulting in their spirit and behaviour than ever.

IV. AS SUMMONED TO ACTION. "Now gather thyself in troops." The men of Jerusalem are here commanded by Heaven to marshal their troops and to prepare for battle, since the enemies are outside their walls. Far more urgent is the duty of the Church to collect, arrange, and concentrate all its forces against the mighty hosts that encompass it. "Let us not sleep as do others;" "let us quit ourselves like men," etc. "Gather thyself in troops."

"Sounds the trumpet from afar!
Soldiers of the holy war,
Rise! for you your Captain waits;
Rise! the foe is at the gates.

"Arm! the conflict has begun;
Fight! the battle must be won;
Lift the banner to the sky,
Wave its blazing folds on high."

D. T.

Ver. 2.—*Christ*. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." For the sake of continuity we here transfer thoughts on this passage which have appeared before. Our subject is Christ, and the text leads us to consider—

I. HIS BIRTH AS THE SON OF MAN. Two remarks are suggested here. 1. *He was born in obscurity*. "But thou, Bethlehem," etc. Bethlehem Ephratah, where Jacob says, "Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come into Ephrath: . . . the same is Bethlehem" (Gen. xlviii. 7), or Bethlehem-Judah, so called to distinguish it from Bethlehem in Zebulun. It is a few miles south-west of Jerusalem. Bethlehem means "the House of bread;" Ephrath means "Fruitful;" both names referring to the fertility of the region. "Though thou be little among"—though thou be scarcely large enough to be reckoned among, etc. It was insignificant in size and population, so that in Josh. xv. 21 it is not enumerated among the cities of Judah; nor in the list in Neh. xi. 25. Under Rehoboam it became a city (2 Chron. xi. 6). "He built even Bethlehem." The scribes' quotation of Micah, in answer to Herod's inquiry prompted by the Wise Men of the East, who asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" (Matt. ii. 6), seems to contradict Micah, "thou art not the least," but the contradiction is only seeming. What is meant in Matthew is that though "thou art least in worldly importance, thou art morally greatest, inasmuch as thou art the birthplace of the Messiah." Why was this Illustrious One thus born in such obscurity? He had what no other man ever had—the power of selecting his own parentage and birthplace. He might have been born of royalty and nursed in a palace. No doubt there was the highest reason for this. It was a protest to the ages against the popular and influential opinion that human dignity consists in birth and ancestral distinctions. 2. *He was born according to Divine plan*.

"Out of thee shall he come forth unto me." Unto whom? Jehovah. The *fact* of his birth, the *scene* of his birth, the *object* of his birth, were all according to a Divine plan. "He shall be called Great, and . . . the Son of the Highest." "Behold my Servant, whom I uphold, mine Elect, in whom my soul delighteth." "He shall come forth unto me" (1) according to my will; (2) to do my will. 3. *He was born to an empire.* "To be Ruler in Israel." He is the Prince of Peace, on whose shoulder the government is laid. He is a Ruler. Not a *temporal* ruler; temporal rule is but a shadow. He is to rule thought, intelligence, soul. He is the greatest king who governs mind; and no one has obtained such a government over mind as he who, eighteen centuries ago, "came forth out of Bethlehem Ephratah." His kingdom is increasing every day. "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty," etc. Speed the time when the "kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ," etc.

II. HIS HISTORY AS THE SON OF GOD. "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," or, as Delitzsch says, "whose goings forth are from olden time, from the days of eternity." Micah does not announce here the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, or of the Logos from God, the *generatio Filii eterna*, as the earlier orthodox commentators suppose. Eternal generation, humanly speaking, is a theological fiction, a philosophical absurdity. He who was before all time. "I was set up from everlasting;" "In the beginning was the Word;" "He was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last times;" "Glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee;" "Whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting." "Goings forth!" What for? To furnish immensity with innumerable worlds, and to people them with sentient and intelligent beings, to participate in the infinite bountihood of God. As the Son of God, he never has had a beginning and has always been active. "The Father worketh hitherto, and I work." His activity explains the origin and phenomena of the universe. "By him were all things created."

"Oh, who can strive
To comprehend the vast, the awful truth
Of the eternity that hath gone by,
And not recoil from the dismaying sense
Of human impotence? The life of man
Is summed in birthdays and in sepulchres;
But the eternal God hath no beginning;
He hath no end. Time had been with him
For everlasting, ere the Dædal world
Rose from the gulf in loveliness. Like him
It knew no source; like him 'twas uncreate.
What is it, then? The past eternity!"

D. T.

Vers. 8, 4.—Christ as the great Shepherd of mankind. "Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the Name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth." "Therefore will he give them up, until the time when a travailing woman hath brought forth: and the remnant of his brethren will return, together with the sons of Israel. And he will stand and feed in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the Name of Jehovah his God; and they will dwell: for now will he be great to the ends of the earth" (Delitzsch). The following quotation from Delitzsch on this passage we think the best commentary: "Therefore (*lâkhen*), i.e. because the great Divine Ruler of Israel, from whom alone its redemption can proceed, will spring from the little Bethlehem, and therefore from the degraded family of David (Caspari). This is the correct explanation; for the reason why Israel is to be given up to the power of the nations of the world, and not to be rescued earlier, does not lie in the appearance of the Messiah as such, but in his springing from little Bethlehem. The birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem, and not in Jerusalem, the city of David, presupposes that the family of David, out of which it is to spring, will have lost the throne and have fallen into poverty.

This could only arise from the giving up of Israel into the power of its enemies. Micah had already stated clearly enough, in what precedes, that this fate would fall upon the nation and the royal house of David, on account of its apostasy from the Lord; so that he could overlook this here, and give prominence to the other side alone, viz. to the fact that according to the counsel of God the future Deliverer and Ruler of Israel would also resemble his royal ancestor David in the fact that he was not to spring from Zion, the royal city built on high, but from the insignificant country town of Bethlehem, and that for this very reason Israel was to remain so long under the power of the nations of the world." These words may be regarded as presenting to us *Christ as the great Shepherd of mankind*; and looking at them in this light the following points come up to notice.

I. HIS INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD AS A SHEPHERD. "Therefore will he give them up [that is, leave them to suffer their calamities], until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth." Christ came into the world through sufferings that may be fairly represented as parturient. The whole Jewish nation groaned and travailed together until he came; and although the throes of his mother are perhaps specially referred to here, the Hebrew people through all preceding times had struggled in agony in order to give birth to the Messiah. Herein is a mystery—the world's Deliverer came into the world through suffering. And does not all the good we have come out of anguish? Every true enjoyment, like every birth, implies previous pain. "Through much tribulation" we enter into kingdoms. "Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment," etc.

II. HIS QUALIFICATION FOR HIS WORK AS A SHEPHERD. "He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the Name of the Lord his God." Observe: 1. *His attitude*. "He shall stand." The word "stand" here may mean one of two things—either a commanding position, by which he can observe and direct all, or *stability*, indicating his endurance and unswerving perseverance. He is settled and fixed in his work as a Shepherd. Both these ideas are true. It is true that Christ, as a Shepherd, has a commanding view of all, and a controlling power over all; and it is also true that he stands immovable as a Shepherd. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, until he hath set judgment in the earth" (Isa. xlii. 4). 2. *His Divinity*. "In the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the Name of the Lord his God." He is endowed with the strength of Omnipotence, he is invested with the majesty of God himself. He is "Almighty to save," he is the "Image of the invisible God." Here is a competent Shepherd!

III. HIS BENEFICENCE IN HIS WORK AS A SHEPHERD. He "shall feed in the strength of the Lord." The word "feed" means both "feed" and "rule"; indeed, feed implies rule, for human souls can scarcely be nourished without a wise and merciful control. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isa. xl. 11); "They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat or the sun smite them; for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them" (Isa. xlix. 10).

IV. THE EXTENSION OF HIS FAME ON THE EARTH AS A SHEPHERD. "For now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth." His authority on the earth as a spiritual Shepherd is limited to-day, but is wider than it has been; and it will widen and widen until it fills the earth. His Name will one day be above every name on the earth. All other names will be esteemed as mean and contemptible unless they reflect his.

CONCLUSION. "All we like sheep have gone astray," etc. But a Shepherd from heaven has come to seek and restore us. Would that all heard and responded to his voice! "Come unto me, all that are weary and heavy laden."

"Good Shepherd, hasten thou that glorious day,
When we shall all in the one fold abide with thee for aye!"

D. T.

Vers. 5, 6.—*An invasion*. "And this Man shall be the Peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men. And they shall waste the land

of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof: thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders." "And this same shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall invade our land, and tread our palaces, we will raise against him seven shepherds, and eight anointed men. And they shall afflict the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at the entrances thereof; and there shall be deliverance from the Assyrian, when he shall invade our land, and when he shall tread our borders" (Henderson). Assyria is here made the representative of all the foes of Israel in all ages, who shall see the destruction of all its enemies at the Messiah's appearance. "*Seven shepherds and eight principal men.*" Seven expresses perfection; seven and eight are an idiom for a full and sufficient number. "And they" (that is, these seven and eight shepherds) "shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof." The land of Nimrod means Babylon, including Assyria, to which it extended its borders. "Thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land." As the Assyrians invade our borders, so shall their own borders and entrances be invaded. "*He.*" Who? The Messiah, mentioned in the fifth verse, "This Man shall be the Peace." We have here two things.

I. A TERRIBLE INVASION. The Assyrian, which, as we have said, may be regarded as the representative of all the enemies of Israel, enters the Holy Land, takes Jerusalem, and treads in the "palaces" of the chosen people. A faint picture is the Assyrian of the hellish invader of human souls. He breaks his way through all bulwarks, enters the sacred territory, and treads even in the palaces of the intellect and heart. Satan is a strong man armed, that enters the human soul and "keepeth his palace." Moral invasion is the worst of all invasions.

II. A TRIUMPHANT DEFENDER. There are "seven shepherds, and eight principal men" who now hurled back the Assyrian invader, entered his own territory, and carried war into the midst. Who is the Deliverer? "This Man shall be the Peace." The Man mentioned in the preceding verses, "whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting." He did it. 1. *He did it successfully.* "Thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian." "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." Christ will one day ruin this moral Assyrian; as "lightning falleth from heaven he shall fall." He will hurl him from the habitation of men. 2. *Christ, in doing this, uses human instrumentality.* "Seven shepherds, and eight principal men." Christ destroys the works of the devil by the instrumentality of men. (1) The instrumentality that he employs may seem to us very feeble. "Seven shepherds, and eight principal men," against unnumbered hosts of the enemies. "He chooseth the foolish things of the world to confound the wise," etc. (1 Cor. i. 27). (2) Though the instrumentality may seem feeble, it was sufficient. The work was done. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord" (Zech. iv. 6).—D. T.

Vers. 7—9.—*God's people, their tender and terrible aspect in the world.* "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." Two things are here predicted concerning the Jews after their restoration from Babylon. 1. Their influence upon the nations would be as *refreshing dew*. "Their signal victories against such formidable armies, attracting attention to him whom they worshipped, and to whom they ascribed their success. During the existence of the new Jewish state, the members of the theocracy had much intercourse with foreigners, multitudes of whom became proselytes to the faith of Jehovah, and were thus prepared to receive the gospel when preached by the apostles" (Henderson). 2. Their power on the nations would be as *terrible as the lion's on the herds of the flock*. It will not, I think, be unfair to use the passage to illustrate the twofold aspect of the people of God in this world—the tender and terrible, the restorative and the destructive. Like Israel of old, godly men in every age have only been a remnant, a very small minority of the generation in which they lived. It will not always be so. Speed the day when they shall become, not merely the majority, but the whole. Notice—

I. THE TENDER ASPECT OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE WORLD. They are spoken of here

as "dew." *Silent* in its fall, *beautiful* in its appearance, *refreshing* in its influence. Three things are suggested concerning this "dew." 1. *It is Divine.* It is "from the Lord." All that is quickening and refreshing in the thoughts, spirits, character of good men on this earth descends from heaven. "Every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights," etc. (Jas. i. 17). 2. *It is copious.* "As the showers upon the grass." There have been seasons when those spiritual influences have descended on men with plenitude and power, such as on the Day of Pentecost. Would it were so now! The moral heavens seem, alas! closed, and only a few drops fall here and there. 3. *It is undeserved of men.* "That tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." Man has something to do in bringing down those moral showers. Though he is powerless to unseat the natural clouds and bring down the rain, these moral showers do not descend altogether independent of his efforts. Good men in this world are to their generation what the gentle dew and the fertilizing shower are to the thirsty earth. Their speech distils as dew and their influence descends on the souls of men like rain upon the new-mown grass.

II. THE TERRIBLE ASPECT OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE WORLD. The same men as are represented under the metaphor of dew are here spoken of as a "lion." Bold, terrible, and destructive. Elijah was a lion in his age, so was John the Baptist, so was Luther, so was Latimer, etc. Indeed, every good man has these two aspects, the tender and the terrible—gentle, sympathetic, succouring towards the weak in goodness, but strong in indignation towards wrong wherever found. Christ, the great Model, who did not "cause his voice to be heard in the street," hurled his fulminations on the ears of hypocrites. In truth, love—which is the essence of all goodness—is constantly taking these two forms. The same love which whispers in the softest tones of pity, often comes out in the fiercest thunder and lightning: no wrath is so terrible as the wrath of love. Every good man is like the pillar that guided the children of Israel through the wilderness; it gleamed a guiding light to the Hebrews through the sea, but threw a shadow of confounding darkness to the Egyptians who assayed to follow.

CONCLUSION. This subject suggests: 1. *A picture of the unregenerate world.* There are some germs of goodness in its soil that require the fertilizing influence of Heaven to quicken and develop; and there are some things in it so pernicious and baneful that it requires all the courage, force, and passion of moral lions to destroy. 2. *A picture of the completeness of moral character.* A complete character is not all "dew" or all "lion," but both combined.—D. T.

Vers. 10—15.—*God's depriving dispensation towards men.* "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots: and I will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strong holds." "The prophet now returns to times near his own, and predicts the beneficial moral changes that were to be effected in the condition of his countrymen by the Babylonish conquest and captivity. They had, contrary to the express command of the Lord (Deut. xvii. 16), kept up a formidable body of cavalry and war-chariots, trusted in their fortified cities, encouraged sorcery, and indulged in abominable idolatry. These were all to be removed when the Jewish state was broken up; and after God had employed the heathen in punishing his apostate people, they in their turn should be punished for their obstinate adherence to idol-worship, notwithstanding the testimony borne against their conduct by the Jews who lived among them." The grand subject of these words is *God's depriving dispensation towards men.* Here the Almighty is represented as taking away from Israel many things they greatly valued—"horses, chariots, cities, soothsayers, witchcrafts, graven images, groves," etc. God's providence deprives as well as bestows. "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away." He is constantly taking away from men. In relation to his depriving dispensations I offer two remarks.

I. THEY ARE VERY PAINFUL. The things here referred to were the dearest things to the hearts of Israel. They loved them, they trusted in them, and they would feel life to be perilous, if not intolerable, without them; yet they were to be taken away. The things he takes away are of two classes. 1. *The temporally valuable.* Here chariots and horses and cities are taken away. These are valuable. Whatever is dearest to the heart—property, friends, health, fame—is the most painful to lose. And

is not the Almighty constantly, in his providence, taking these things from men? He takes from the rich man his property, the strong man his health, the ambitious man his power, the social man his dearest friends. And such deprivations are the constant sources of human sorrow and anguish. All temporal good must go—chariots, horses, cities, etc. The other class of things he takes away are: 2. The *morally vile*. Here are “witchcrafts, soothsayers, graven images,” etc. Whatever man indulges in that is wrong—false worship, all the sorceries of intellectual or physical pleasure—must go, the sooner the better. It is well when all that is morally wrong is taken from us in this world.

II. THEY ARE VERY USEFUL. It is often well to be stripped of temporary good; it is always necessary to be stripped of the morally wrong. All is done in mercy for the soul. God takes away temporal property from a man in order that he may get spiritual wealth; and often does a man's secular fall lead to his spiritual life. He takes away physical health from a man in order that he may get spiritual; and often do the diseases of the body lead to the cure of the soul. Did we understand things thoroughly, see them as we shall when we have done with this mundane system, we should often acknowledge more mercy in God's depriving than in his bestowing providences. Ever should we remember that the great end of all his dealings with us is our spiritual advancement in intelligence, holiness, power, and blessedness. “Lo, all these things worketh God with man, that he may bring him back from the pit in order to enlighten him with the light of the living” (Job xxxiii. 30).

CONCLUSION. Though I know not the future—and no one does—I know that severe depriving providences are ahead, but that mercy underlies the whole.

“And so beside the silent sea
I wait the muffled oar;
No harm from him can come to me
On ocean or on shore.

“I know not where his islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond his love and care.

“And thou, O Lord, by whom are seen
Thy creatures as they be,
Forgive me if too close I lean
My human heart on thee.”

(J. G. Whittier.)

D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—ch. vii. 20.—Part III. In this address, which is later than the preceding parts, the prophet sets forth the way of salvation: PUNISHMENT IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF SIN; REPENTANCE IS THE ONLY GROUND FOR HOPE OF PARTICIPATING IN THE COVENANT MERCIES.

VERB. 1—5.—§ 1. *God's controversy with his people for their ingratitude.*

Ver. 1.—**Hear ye now.** The whole nation is addressed and bidden to give heed to God's pleading. **Arise, contend thou.** These are God's words to Micah, bidding him put himself in his people's place, and plead as

advocate before the great inanimate tribunal. **Before the mountains;** i.e. in the presence of the everlasting hills, which have as it were witnessed God's gracious dealings with his people from old time and Israel's long ingratitude (comp. ch. i. 2).

Ver. 2.—**Hear ye, O mountains.** Insensate nature is called upon as a witness. (For similar appeals, comp. Deut. iv. 26; xxxii. 1; Isa. i. 2; Jer. xxii. 29.) **The Lord's controversy.** So God calls his pleading with his people to show them their sin and thankless unbelief; as he says in Isa. i. 18, “Come, and let us reason together” (comp. Hos. iv. 1; xii. 2). **Ye strong (enduring) foundations of the earth.** The mountains are called everlasting (Gen. xlix. 26; Deut. xxxiii. 15), as being firm, unchangeable, and as compared with man's life and doings,

which are but transitory. The LXX. offers an interpretation as well as a translation, *Ἀφάργες θημέλια τῆς γῆς*, "Ye valleys, the foundations of the earth." With his people. It is because Israel is God's people that her sin is so heinous, and that God condescends to plead with her. He would thus touch her conscience by recalling his benefits. So in the following verses.

Ver. 3.—O my people. The controversy takes the form of a loving expostulation; and thus in his wonderful condescension Jehovah opens the suit. What have I done unto thee? What has occasioned thy fall from me? Hast thou aught to accuse me of, that thou art wearied of me? Have my requirements been too hard, or have I not kept my promises to thee (comp. Isa. xliii. 23, etc.; Jer. ii. 5)? Testify. A judicial term; make a formal defence or reply to judicial interrogatories; depose (Numb. xxxv. 30) (Pusey).

Ver. 4.—God answers his own question by recounting some of his chief mercies to Israel. He has not burdened the people, but loaded them with benefits. I brought thee up, etc. The Exodus was the most wonderful instance of God's intervention; and to it the prophets often refer (comp. Isa. lxi. 11, etc.; Jer. ii. 6; Amos ii. 10). Out of the house of servants; of bondage, quoting the language of the Pentateuch, to show the greatness of the benefit (Exod. xiii. 3, 14; Deut. viii. 14, etc.). I sent before thee. As leaders of the Lord's flock (Ps. lxxvii. 20). Moses, the inspired leader, teacher, and law-giver. Aaron, the priest, the director of Divine worship. Miriam, the prophetess, who led the praises of the people at their great deliverance (Exod. xv. 20), and who probably was charged with some special mission to the women of Israel (see Numb. xii. 1, 2).

Ver. 5.—The Lord reminds the people of another great benefit subsequent to the Exodus, viz. the defeat of the designs of Balak, and the sorceries of Balaam. Consulted. United with the elders of Midian in a plot against thee (see Numb. xxii. etc.). Answered him. There ought to be a stop here. The answer of Balaam was the blessing which he was constrained to give, instead of the curse which he was hired to pronounce (comp. Josh. xxiv. 10). From Shittim unto Gilgal. This is a fresh consideration, referring to mercies under Joshua, and may be made plainer by inserting "remember" (which has, perhaps, dropped out of the text), as in the Revised Version. Shittim was the Israelites' last station before crossing the Jordan, and Gilgal the first in the land of Canaan; and so God bids them remember all that happened to them between those places—their sin in Shittim and the mercy then shown them (Numb. xxv.),

the miraculous passage of the Jordan, the renewal of the covenant at Gilgal (Josh. v. 9). *Shittim*; the acacia meadow (*Abel-Shittim*), *hosh. Ghor-es-Seisaban*, was at the south-eastern corner of the *Ciccar*, or Plain of Jordan, some seven miles from the Dead Sea. *Gilgal* (see note on Amos iv. 4). That ye may know the righteousness (*righteous acts*) of the Lord. All these instances of God's interposition prove how faithful he is to his promises, how he cares for his elect, what are his gracious counsels towards them (see the same expression, Judg. v. 11; 1 Sam. xii. 7).

Ver. 6.—§ 2. The people, awakened to its ingratitude and need of atonement, asks how to please God, and is referred for answer to the moral requirements of the Law.

Ver. 6.—It is greatly doubted who is the speaker here. Bishop Butler, in his sermon "Upon the Character of Balaam," adopts the view that Balak is the speaker of vers. 6 and 7, and Balaam answers in ver. 8. Knabenbauer considers Micah himself as the interlocutor, speaking in the character of the people; which makes the apparent change of persons in ver. 8 very awkward. Most commentators, ancient and modern, take the questions in vers. 6 and 7 to be asked by the people personified, though they are not agreed as to the spirit from which they proceed, some thinking that they are uttered in self-righteousness, as if the speakers had done all that and more than could be required of them; others regarding the inquiries as representing a certain acknowledgment of sin and a desire for means of propitiation, though there is exhibited a want of appreciation of the nature of God and of the service which alone is acceptable to him. The latter view is most reasonable, and in accordance with Micah's manner. Wherewith; i.e. with what offering? The prophet represents the congregation as asking him to tell them how to propitiate the offended Lord, and obtain his favour. Come before; go to meet, appear in the presence of the Lord. Septuagint, *καταλάβω*, "attain to." Bow myself before the high God; literally, *God of the height*, who has his throne on high (Isa. xxxiii. 5; lvii. 15); Vulgate, *curvabo genu Deo excelso*; Septuagint, *ἀνταφύσμαι Θεοῦ μου ὑψίστου*, "shall I lay hold of my God most high." Calves of a year old. Such were deemed the choicest victims (comp. Exod. xii. 5; Lev. ix. 2, 3).

Ver. 7.—Thousands of rams, as though the quantity enhanced the value, and tended to dispose the Lord to regard the offerer's thousandfold sinfulness with greater favour. Ten thousands of rivers (*torrents*, as in Job xx. 17) of oil. Oil was used in the daily meal offering, and in that which accom-

panied every burnt offering (see Exod. xxix. 40; Lev. vii. 10-12; Numb. xv. 4, etc.). The Vulgate has a different reading, *In multis millibus hircorum pinguium*; so the Septuagint, ἐν μυριάδι χιμάρων [ἀρνῶν, Alex.] ὀρίων, "with ten thousands of fat goats;" so also the Syriac. The alteration has been introduced probably with some idea of making the parallelism more exact. Shall I give my firstborn? Micah exactly represents the people's feeling; they would do anything but what God required; they would make the costliest sacrifice, even, in their exaggerated devotion, holding themselves ready to make a forbidden offering; but they would not attend to the moral requirements of the Law. It is probably by a mere hyperbole that the question in the text is asked. The practice of human sacrifice was founded on the notion that man ought to offer to God his dearest and costliest, and that the acceptability of an offering was proportioned to its preciousness. The Hebrews had learned the custom from their neighbours, e.g. the Phœnicians and Moabites (comp. 2 Kings iii. 27), and had for centuries offered their children to Moloch, in defiance of the stern prohibitions of Moses and their prophets (Lev. xviii. 21; 2 Kings xvi. 3; Isa. lvii. 5). They might have learned, from many facts and inferences, that man's self-surrender was not to be realized by this ritual; the sanctity of human life (Gen. ix. 6), the substitution of the ram for Isaac (Gen. xxii. 13), the redemption of the first-born (Exod. xiii. 13), all made for this truth. But the heathen idea retained its hold among them, so that the inquiry above is in strict keeping with the circumstances. The fruit of my body; i.e. the rest of my children (Deut. xxviii. 4).

Ver. 8.—The prophet answers in his own person the questions in vers. 6 and 7, by showing the worthlessness of outward observances when the moral precepts are not observed. He hath showed thee; literally, one has told thee, or, it has been told thee, i.e. by Moses and in the Law (Deut. x. 12, etc.). Septuagint, Εἰ ἀπηγγέλη σοι; "Hath it not been told thee?" What doth the Lord require of thee? The prophets often enforce the truth that the principles of righteous conduct are required from men, and not mere formal worship. This might well be a comfort to the Israelites when they heard that they were doomed to be cast out of their country, and that the temple was to be destroyed, and that the ritual on which they laid such stress would for a time become impracticable. So the inculcation of moral virtues is often connected with the prediction of woe or captivity. (For the prophetic view of the paramount importance of righteousness, see

1 Sam. xv. 22; Ps. xl. 6, etc.; i. 8, etc.; Isa. i. 11-17; Jer. vi. 20; Hos. vi. 6, etc.; see on Zech. vii. 7.) To do justly. To act equitably, to hurt nobody by word or deed, which was the exact contrary of the conduct previously mentioned (oh. ii. 1, 2, 8; iii. 2, etc.). To love mercy. To be guided in conduct to others by loving-kindness. These two rules contain the whole duty to the neighbour. Compare Christ's description of genuine religion (Matt. xxiii. 23). To walk humbly with thy God. This precept comprises man's duty to God, humility and obedience. "To walk" is an expression implying "to live and act," as the patriarchs are said to have "walked with God," denoting that they lived as consciously under his eye and referred all their actions to him. Humility is greatly enforced in the Scriptures (see e.g. Isa. ii. 11, etc.). Septuagint, ἑτοιμαὶ εἶναι τοῦ πορεύεσθαι μετὰ Κυρίου, "to be ready to walk with the Lord;" Vulgate, *Sollicitum ambulare cum Deo*; Syriac, "Be prepared to follow thy God." But our version is doubtless correct.

Vers. 9-12.—§ 3. *Because Israel was very far from acting in this spirit, God sternly rebukes her for prevailing sins.*

Ver. 9.—The Lord's voice (Isa. xxx. 31; Joel ii. 11; Amos i. 2). These are no longer the words of the prophet, but those of God himself, and not spoken in secret, but unto the city, that all may hear the sentence who dwell in Jerusalem. The man of wisdom shall see thy Name; i.e. he who is wise regards thy Name and obeys thee, does not simply hear, but profits by what he hears. The reading is uncertain. Others render, "Blessed is he who sees thy Name;" but the construction is against this. Others, "Thy Name looketh to wisdom" (or prosperity), has the true wisdom of life in sight. The versions read "fear" for "see." Thus the LXX, φόβου μένους τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, "Shall save those that fear his Name;" Vulgate, *Salvus erit timentibus Nomen tuum*; Syriac, "He imparts instruction to those that fear his Name;" Chaldee, "The teachers fear his Name." This reading depends upon a change of vowel-pointing. Orelli renders, "Happy is he who fears thy Name." The Authorized translation, which seems on the whole to be well established, takes the abstract noun "wisdom" as equivalent to "the wise," or "the man of wisdom." For similar expressions, Henderson refers to Ps. cix. 4; Prov. xiii. 6; xix. 15. The prophet parenthetically announces that, however the bulk of the people might receive the message, the truly wise would listen and profit by it. Hear ye the rod.

Observe the rod of God's anger, the threatened judgments (so Isa. ix. 4 [3, Hebrew]; x. 5, 24). The power of Assyria is meant, The LXX. renders differently, Ἀκούε φυλή, "Hear, O tribe;" so the Vulgate, *Audite, tribus*. And who hath appointed it. Mark who it is who hath ordained this chastisement. It is from the Lord's hand. Septuagint, Τίς κοσμήσει πόλιν; "Who will adorn the city?" with some reference, perhaps, to Jer. xxxi. 4, "Again shalt thou be adorned with thy tabrets;" Vulgate, *Et quis approbabit illud?* This implies that few indeed will profit by the warning.

Ver. 10.—The reproof is given in the form of questions, in order to rouse the sleeping conscience of the people. Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked? Do the wicked still continue to bring into their houses treasures obtained by wrong? The old versions compare this ill-gotten wealth to a fire which shall consume the homes of its possessors. Septuagint, Μὴ πῦρ καὶ οἶκος ἀνδρῶν θησαυρίζων θησαυροὺς ἀνδρῶν; "Is there fire and the house of the wicked treasuring up wicked treasures?" Vulgate, *Adhuc ignis in domo impii thesauri iniquitatis?* So the Syriac; the Chaldee keeps to the Masoretic reading. The scant measure; literally, the ephah of leanness. The ephah was about three pecks. According to Josephus ('Ant.', xv. 9. 2), it contained one Attio medimnus, which would be nearly a bushel and a half. Fraudulent weights and measures are often denounced (Lev. xix. 35, etc.; Deut. xxv. 14, etc.; Prov. xx. 10, 23; Amos vii. 5). Vulgate, *Mensura minor iræ plena*, where the Hebrew has, that is abominable. Such frauds are hateful to God, and are marked with his wrath.

Ver. 11.—Shall I count them pure? literally, *Shall I be pure?* The clause is obscure. The Authorized Version regards the speaker as the same as in ver. 10, and translates with some violence to the text. It may be that the prophet speaks as the representative of the awakened transgressor, "Can I be guiltless with such deceit about me?" But the sudden change of personification and of state of feeling is very harsh. Hence some follow Jerome in regarding God as the speaker, and rendering, "Shall I justify the wicked balance?" others, the Septuagint, Syriac, and Chaldee, Εἰ δίκαιωθήσεται ἐν ζυγῷ ἄνομος; "Shall the wicked be justified by the balance?" Chayne is inclined to read the verb in the second person, "Canst thou (O Jerusalem) be pure?" since in the next verse the prophet proceeds, "the rich men thereof" (i.e. of Jerusalem). If we retain the present reading, "Can I be innocent?" we must consider the question as put, for effect's

sake, in the mouth of one of the rich oppressors. Jerome's translation is contrary to the use of the verb, which is always intransitive in kal.

Ver. 12.—The rich men thereof; i.e. of the city mentioned in ver. 9. They have just been charged with injustice and fraud, now they are denounced for practising every kind of violence. And not only the rich, but all the inhabitants fall under censure for lying and deceit. Their tongue is deceitful; literally, *deceit*; they cannot open their mouth without speaking dangerous and destructive lies.

Ver. 13-16.—§ 4. For all this God threatens punishment.

Ver. 13.—Will I make thee sick in smiting thee; literally, *have made the smiting thee sick*; i.e. incurable, as Nah. iii. 19, or, "have made the blows mortal that are given thee." The perfect is used to express the certainty of the future. The Septuagint and Vulgate read, "I have begun [or, will begin] to smite thee."

Ver. 14.—Thou shalt eat, etc. The punishment answers to the sin (which proves that it comes from God), and recalls the threats of the Law (Lev. xxvi. 25, etc.; Deut. xxviii. 29, etc.; comp. Hos. iv. 10; Hag. i. 6). Thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee; i.e. thy humiliation, thy decay and downfall, shall occur in the very centre of thy wealth and strength, where thou hast laid up thy treasure and practised thy wickedness. But the meaning of the Hebrew is very uncertain, and the text may be corrupt. The LXX. had a different reading, σκοτάσει ἐν σοι, "darkness shall be in thee." The Syriac and Chaldee interpret the word rendered "casting down" (רָץ, which is found nowhere else) of some disease like dysentery. It is most suitable to understand this clause as connected with the preceding threat of hunger, and to take the unusual word in the sense of "emptiness." Thus, "Thy emptiness (of stomach) shall remain in thee." Jeremiah (lii. 6) speaks of the famine in the city at the time of its siege. Thou shalt take hold; rather, *thou shalt remove (thy goods)*. This is the second chastisement. They should try to take their goods and families out of the reach of the enemy, but should not be able to save them. The LXX. interprets the verb of escaping by flight. That which thou deliverest. If by chance anything is carried away, it shall fall into the hands of the enemy (comp. 2 Kings xxv. 4, 5; Jer. lii. 7, 8).

Ver. 15.—Here is another judgment in accordance with the threatenings of the Law (Deut. xxviii. 33, 38, etc.; comp. Amos v. 11; Zeph. i. 13; Hag. i. 6). Shalt not reap.

The effect may be owing to the judicial sterility of the soil, but more likely to the incursions of the enemy. Trochon quotes Virgil, 'Ecl.,' i. 70—

"Impius hæc tam culta novalia miles habebit?

Barbarus has segetes? en, quo discordia cives

Produxit miseros! his nos consevimus agros!"

Tread the olives. Olives were usually pressed or crushed in a mill, in order to extract the oil; the process of treading was probably adopted by the poor. Gethsemane took its name from the oil-presses there. The oil was applied to the person for comfort, luxury, and ceremony, and was almost indispensable in a hot country. *Sweet wine.* Thou shalt tread the new wine of the vintage, but shalt have to leave it for the enemy (comp. Amos v. 11). The Septuagint has here an interpolation, *Kal ἀφανισθήσεται νόμιμα λαοῦ μου*, "And the ordinances of my people shall vanish away," which has arisen partly from a confusion between Omri, the proper name in the next verse, and *ammi*, "my people."

Ver. 16.—The threatening is closed by repeating its cause; the punishment is the just reward of ungodly conduct. The first part of the verse corresponds to vers. 10—12, the second part to vers. 13—15. **The statutes of Omri.** The statutes are the rules of worship prescribed by him of whom it is said (1 Kings xvi. 25) that he "wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him." No special "statutes" of his are anywhere mentioned;

but he is named here as the founder of that evil dynasty which gave Ahab to Israel, and the murderer Athaliah (who is called in 2 Kings viii. 26, "the daughter of Omri") to Judah. The people keep his statutes instead of the Lord's (Lev. xx. 22). **The works of the house of Ahab** are their crimes and sins, especially the idolatrous practices observed by that family, such as the worship of Baal, which became the national religion (1 Kings xvi. 31, etc.). Such apostasy had a disastrous effect upon the neighbouring kingdom of Judah (2 Kings viii. 18). Walk in their counsels. Take your tone and policy from them. That I should make thee. "The punishment was as certainly connected with the sin, in the purpose of God, as if its infliction had been the end at which they aimed" (Henderson). The prophet here threatens a threefold penalty, as he had mentioned a threefold guiltiness. *A desolation;* ἀφανισμόν (Septuagint); *perditionem* (Vulgate). According to Keil, "an object of horror," as Deut. xxviii. 37; Jer. xxv. 9. Micah addresses Jerusalem itself in the first clause, its inhabitants in the second, and the whole nation in the last. *An hissing;* i.e. an object of derision, as Jer. xix. 8; xxv. 18, etc. Therefore (and) ye shall bear the reproach of my people. Ye shall have to hear yourselves reproached at the mouth of the heathen, in that, though ye were the Lord's peculiar people, ye were cast out and given into the hands of your enemies. The Septuagint, from a different reading, renders, *Kal ὀνειδῆ λαὸν λήψετε*, "Ye shall receive the reproaches of nations," which is like Ezek. xxxiv. 29; xxxvi. 6, 15.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The memories of the way.* Truly affecting are those portions of Scripture in which God is represented as expostulating and pleading with erring men (Hos. vi. 4; xi. 8; Isa. i. 16—20; Jer. ii. 1—14). The opening verses of this chapter are of the same character. God testifies, and in so doing calls upon the mountains and hills and strong foundations of the earth which have stood from age to age to bear him witness and confirm his testimony (ver. 2). "O my people," he cries, "what have I done unto thee," etc.? What sadness, what piercing grief, what ineffable sorrow, is implied in these words! Truly God grieves over sinning men. He is not impassive, but is infinitely sensible to the sins and sorrows of men, and every transgression strikes a pang into the heart of the Divine Father. Surely this sorrow of Divine love over the evils inflicted by man upon himself through sin should lead us back to God in humility, in penitence, and in submission to his authority and will. How remarkable is the faculty of memory, strengthening the affections, aiding progress, increasing enjoyment, and alleviating sorrow! Well may the poet sing of "the morning star of memory." The prophet desired his people to review the past of their national history, that by these "memories of the way" they might be impelled to "return unto the Lord." Concerning these memories, note—

I. THEIR REMARKABLE VARIETY. There were memories of: 1. *Wondrous deliverances.* From Egyptian bondage (ver. 3); from the curse pronounced by Balaam (ver.

4). 2. *Heavenly guidance*. "I sent before thee Moses" (ver. 4)—the distinguished leader and lawgiver. 3. *Sacred fellowship*. "Aaron" (ver. 4)—their high priest and intercessor, who led them in thought into "the holiest of all." 4. *Grateful adoration*. "Miriam" (ver. 4), with timbrel and dance inspiring them to celebrate in rapturous praise God's redeeming mercy. 5. *Continuous interposition*. "From Shittim unto Gilgal" (ver. 5), *i.e.* from the desert unto the promised land; by miracle, type, prophecy, and promise, they were continually experiencing Divine help and encouragement. So with us; mercies temporal and spiritual have been bestowed upon us in infinite variety; whilst in number they have been more than could be counted.

II. *THEIR INTENDED INFLUENCE*. These remembrances and memories of God's great goodness are designed to lead men to "*know the righteousness of the Lord*" (ver. 5), and to give him the unswerving confidence of their hearts. Through all his dealings with the children of men he has been calling them to repentance, faith, newness of life, the putting away of cherished sin, the detaching themselves from ungodly associations, the breaking away from habits of evil, the experience of the most satisfying good, and to the purest and noblest service.

III. *THEIR EMPHATIC TESTIMONY*. The Most High, in deigning to expostulate with erring men, makes his appeal to these (ver. 3). He asks, "O my people, what have I done unto thee?" And must not this be our answer, "Nothing but good; good, only good"? "Wherein have I wearied thee?" he asks. And must we not reply, "Thy commandments are not grievous; yet surely we have wearied thee by the way in which we have slighted and neglected them, and have failed to yield to them the true obedience of our hearts and lives?" "Testify against me," says God. "Nay, we can only testify against ourselves. 'To thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy, but unto us shame and confusion of face'" (Dan. ix. 7). "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God," etc. (Rom. xii. 1). Then all must be well with us here, and at last we shall enter the land of light and rest and fulness of joy, where, with memory never failing, and with gratitude rising ever higher, we shall reflect upon the entire course along which we have been guided and upheld by him whose mercy and love endure for evermore.

Vers. 6—8.—*Man's spiritual need, and its supply*. These verses form one of the most striking passages in the Old Testament Scriptures. Let any one inquire as to the nature of true religion; and he may find the exposition of it expressed here with marvellous vigour and terseness of speech, and with a completeness leaving nothing to be supplied. The false conception respecting true religion as consisting in that which is external is swept clean away as with a besom, and the loftiest view concerning it is set before us in diction so simple that it cannot be misunderstood and in tone so earnest that it cannot fail to come home to the conscience and the heart.

I. *THERE UNDERLIES THESE WORDS THE THOUGHT OF MAN'S DEEP NEED OF GOD*. To "come before the Lord" and to "bow before the most high God" is a necessity of humanity. Uncentred from God, the children of men are ever craving after some unattained good, and which alone consists in the Divine favour and blessing. They turn to objects that are unworthy and that can never meet the wants of their higher nature. They seek satisfaction in that which is material, in cherishing attachment to the outward, the fleeting, the unreal; even as these people of Judah turned to luxury, ease, and self-indulgence; and the result is and ever must be miserable disappointment. Or they turn to objects such as are really worthy—wealth, scholarship, oratory, political and civic honours; but anticipating getting more out of these than they had any right to expect, there is failure and consequent disquietude. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." God has declared that true heart-rest can alone be found in himself. "Thou hast formed us for thyself, and our heart is disquieted till it resteth in thee" (Augustine). Consider—

II. *THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF FINDING THE SATISFACTION OF THIS DEEP NEED OF THE SOUL IN A MERELY FORMAL AND EXTERNAL SERVICE*. It is a great thing when a true reformer succeeds in making an impression. When evils have become deep-rooted, when men have become accustomed to perverted ways, there is an indifference and callousness about them which it is difficult indeed to overcome. And the distinction of this Hebrew seer is seen in the success he achieved where so many have signally failed. By the force of his own personal character, combined with the simplicity and vividness,

the mingled severity, tenderness, and the intense earnestness of his language, he succeeded in rousing many to a sense of their sinfulness, and in awakening within them desires and aspirations after a truer life, and impelling them to cry, "Wherewith shall I come," etc.? (ver. 6). But mark what followed. Micah prophesied in the reign of Hezekiah, and the history shows that the people rested in outward reformation and external forms. They cried, "Shall I come before him with burnt offerings . . . rivers of oil?" (vers. 6, 7); i.e. shall I bring the costliest and choicest sacrifices, and cause the oil which accompanies the offerings to flow plentifully? "Shall I" (following the practice of the heathen) "give my firstborn," etc.? (ver. 7). And they acted in the spirit of these inquiries. The interest in the temple and its services became revived, the Law was read, the sacrifices renewed, the fasts and feasts once more observed, and the threatened judgments were delayed. But all this was only temporary, there was outward reformation, but unaccompanied by inward renewal; the observance of external forms and the resting in these instead of in God; so that the spiritual unrest continued, and the process of national decay went on, whilst the voice of God was heard uttering the strongest denunciations, saying, "To what purpose," etc.? (Isa. i. 11—15). Beware of cherishing a merely formal piety, of honouring God with your lips whilst your hearts are far from him, of resting in outward reformation and external worship (Ps. li. 16, 17; John iv. 23, 24).

III. THIS NEED OF THE HEART IS MET IN THE POSSESSION OF SINCERE AND GENUINE PIETY. Such piety is described (ver. 8) as consisting in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. It is spiritual in its nature, and has its seat in the heart. Possessing a heart renewed, trustful, and obedient to the Divine will, God will dwell with us, will be our chief joy, and in all places and at all seasons will manifest himself to us. So shall we at all times and under all circumstances find tranquillity and peace. So shall we sing—

"Without thee life and time are sadness,
No fragrance breathes around;
But with thee even grief is gladness,
The heart its home hath found."

Ver. 8.—*The Divine response to the cry of humanity.* "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." "Who will show us any good?" (Ps. iv. 6) is the cry of humanity, and has been its reiterated inquiry all through the ages of the world's history. And not only has man ceaselessly raised the question, but he has sought its solution, and has thus fallen into errors, which are corrected by the response God has given to this aspiration of the human spirit. We turn, in our darkness, to his unerring Word, and we find light shed upon this otherwise dark problem.

I. IT CORRECTS THE NOTION THAT "GOOD" IS TO BE SOUGHT AND FOUND IN MATERIAL THINGS BY SHOWING THAT IT IS TO BE OBTAINED ALONE BY THE SPIRIT RESTING IN GOD.

II. IT CORRECTS THE NOTION THAT "GOOD" MAY BE OBTAINED BY EXTERNAL OBSERVANCES AND SACRIFICES, BY SHOWING THAT IT DEPENDS UPON THE STATE OF THE HEART, AND LIES IN OBEDIENCE AND SELF-SURRENDER TO THE DIVINE WILL.

III. IT CORRECTS THE NOTION THAT "GOOD" IS THE MONOPOLY OF ANY CLASS OR NATION, BY APPEALING TO MAN AS MAN. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good."

Ver. 8.—*True piety: its clear delineation.* "And what doth the Lord require of thee," etc.?

I. TO "DO JUSTLY." He requires that rectitude and uprightness should characterize us in all our relationships. We are not to oppress or defraud. We are not to seek to damage the reputation of another, or by word or deed to endeavour to lessen the good opinion which has been formed respecting him. The golden rule is to be acted upon, and we "do unto others as we would that they should do unto us."

II. TO "LOVE MERCY." There are two ideas here—that of forgiveness, and that of compassion. Mercy is forgiveness towards the erring and benevolence towards the tried; over both the sinful and the suffering she spreads her wing. This quality is truly royal in its character. "Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge." It is indeed

God-like and Divine, and cannot be exercised without securing to us real happiness. "It is twice blessed," etc. It is well for men to be upright towards their fellow-men, to "do justly;" but let this be joined to "loving mercy," we seeking thus to smooth each other's path through life. We respect the man whose conduct is regulated in accordance with strict justice; but we can love the man who rises higher than this, and who, whilst doing that which is just, is also large-hearted and generous.

III. TO "WALK HUMBLY WITH THY GOD." To walk with God is to make it our fixed purpose and determination to live to him; to devote ourselves to his service. To walk with God is to acknowledge him as our Sovereign and our Father; to set him over before us; to live a life of hallowed communion with him; to make his glory the great object and end of life; to seek to do only those things which are well-pleasing in his sight. To walk with God is to have our mind and will brought into subjection to his; to strive to do all he would have us do and to be all he would have us be; to endeavour more and more to resemble him, and to have taken from us whatever in us is contrary unto him. To walk with God is to love him; to rejoice in his presence; to feel ourselves attracted towards him; to value nothing more than his favour; to deprecate nothing more than his displeasure. To walk with God is to have him dwelling continually in our hearts; ever to seek his approval; ever to make it the great business of life to glorify and to honour him. And in all this true humility is to mark us as we think of his greatness and our own littleness and unworthiness. True piety thus covers the whole range of human duty; it embraces our duty towards God and towards our fellow-men. The fulfilment of this is "required" of us, and in such obedience lies the evidence that we are the possessors of sincere and vital godliness.

Ver. 8.—*True piety: its exalted character.* "And what doth the Lord require of thee," etc.? The standard God has set up for human conduct is very high. His law covers the whole range of man's relationships, and demands lofty attainments. Note—

I. PIETY AS DEFINED IN THE TEXT IS VERY EXALTED IN ITS NATURE. See this: 1. *In its eminently practical character.* It is to enter into all the concerns of our daily life. It does not ignore the emotional in man, but it insists upon holy feeling being transmuted into holy service to God and to man. 2. *In its being synonymous with morality.* The distinction often drawn between "a religious man" and "a moral man" has no recognition here. God's Law has two tables—the one having reference to our obligations to God, and the other to our duties to man; and, correctly speaking, the term "morality" can only be applied to those who are endeavouring to heed both these requirements, and he has no claim to it who regards only one of these tables, and that the lesser, and who virtually excludes God from his own Law. And the converse is also true. As there can be no true morality apart from piety, so also there can be no true piety apart from morality; in other words, that these cannot practically be separated. Profession and life must go together, and be in harmony; it is the union of religion and morality that constitutes the life of true and vital godliness.

II. THE CONTEMPLATION OF THIS EXALTED NATURE OF TRUE PIETY IS CALCULATED TO EXERT A DEPRESSING INFLUENCE UPON OUR HEARTS. When we reflect upon the Divine requirement in the light of our own actions and conduct, we feel how infinitely and painfully short we have fallen below what we ought to have been. The standard set up is so lofty that we fear we shall never reach it. "It is high, we cannot attain unto it," we cry, and almost feel despairing and hopeless.

III. BUT WITHAL THERE ARE GLORIOUS ENCOURAGEMENTS. 1. *The Divine purpose.* What encouragement lies in the thought that he who has revealed this perfect Law for human conduct, and who has the hearts of all men at his own disposal, will not rest until by the power of his grace and Spirit he has so touched and elevated the life of man as that the ideal shall become actual, and the race be delivered, fully and for ever, from guilt and sin. 2. *The obedience of Christ.* In accordance with this Divine purpose, God gave his own Son, and the Christ appeared amongst men. Think of the life he lived, and how complete a transcript of the Divine Law it was! And whilst he exemplified that Law in his life, in his voluntary surrender to the stroke of death as a sacrifice for human guilt he put lasting honour upon it. By that memorable death he declared silently the purity of the Divine Law, and attested the righteousness of the penalty attached to its violation. It has been truly said that

"man convinced of sin is ready to sacrifice what is dearest to him rather than give up his own will and give himself to God" (W. Robertson Smith). It is easier to offer "to come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old," than to lay our proud wills at his feet and to yield to him our hearts. But as we contemplate the obedience of Christ and his yielding himself up for us, and see in him expressed the great Father's love, that which was difficult becomes light—we own ourselves subdued, we view sin now in the light of the cross, and see its loathsomeness, and desire to be more entirely delivered from its practice, whilst as we contemplate God's Law, under the influence of the feelings and emotions thus excited within us, we are impelled to cry in all the fulness of a consecrated heart, "I delight in the Law of God after the inward man!" (Rom. vii. 22); "O how I love thy Law!" (Ps. cxix. 97).

Vers. 9, 13—15.—*Divine chastisement.* I. A SOLEMN DECLARATION OF COMING CHASTISEMENT. (Vers. 13—15.) The form this chastisement would assume is suggestive of the thought of *utter disappointment*. Their gain should be turned into loss; their expectations should be completely frustrated; all that they hoped to realize as the result of their deceptions and extortions should fail them, even as the brook fails the parched traveller when coming to it to slake his burning thirst, lo! he finds it dried up. They should be made desolate because of their sins (ver. 13). Surrounded for a time, and through their ill-gotten gains, with all material comforts, they should no more be satisfied by these than he can be upon whom disease has fastened its deadly grasp (ver. 13). Nor should these material comforts abide. Internal conflicts and foreign invasion should result in their impoverishment. The toil of the sowing had been theirs, but they should not experience "the joy of harvest;" they had trodden the olives and had pressed the grapes, but they should not rejoice in the oil that makes the face to shine, or the wine that makes glad the heart of man (vers. 14, 15). They had broken God's Law, and the judgment threatened in that Law they must now inevitably experience (Lev. xxvi. 16; Deut. xxviii. 30, 38).

II. THIS CHASTISEMENT APPOINTED BY GOD. (Ver. 9.) "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city," bidding men hear him who had "appointed" the judgment (ver. 9). "I will make thee sick," etc. (ver. 13). Their sin was allowed to work out its evil consequences upon them, that they might be led to see how evil a thing it was. God turns events into teachers, and sorrows into discipline. He allows the reeds upon which men were leaning to break, and the earthly pleasures upon which their hearts were set to yield only the bitterness of gall and wormwood, that thus they may be led to look to him, the unfailling Spring. It is not by chance that trials meet the children of men in the pathway of life. It is the Divine arrangement that men should be thus met, if perchance they may be impelled to turn away from an unsatisfying world, and be led to seek in him their chief good. Sometimes we are so wayward that we will not pause in our wandering until God reveals the peril that is in our path. The prodigal had to feel shame and hunger before "he came to himself." So we need at times to be startled and chastened into obedience. Even God's chastisements are love. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," etc. (Heb. xii. 6—8); "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. iii. 19).

III. THE WISDOM OF RECOGNIZING GOD IN THESE ADVERSE EXPERIENCES OF LIFE. "And the men of wisdom," etc. (ver. 9). We show the possession by us of this wisdom when we (1) accept our life-sorrows as coming to us with this wise and loving intent; (2) when we calmly and trustingly bow to the Divine will in the seasons of grief; (3) When we cherish solicitude that the gracious ends designed may be fulfilled in us; and (4) when, our bonds "loosed," and the sorrow overpast, the grateful acknowledgment, springing from our inmost souls, breaks forth from our lips, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Ps. cxix. 71); "Before I was afflicted I went astray," etc. (Ps. cxix. 67).

Vers. 10—12.—"*Weighed in the balances, and found wanting.*" Having expounded the nature of true piety, the prophet proceeds in these verses to apply the principles thus enunciated to the case of his people, endeavouring by means of searching inquiries to bring home to their hearts a sense of their guilt and depravity.

I. WE HAVE HERE AN ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE OF HUMAN CONDUCT WHEN TESTED BY

THE DIVINE REQUIREMENTS BEING FOUND WANTING. Notice in this case: 1. *Dishonesty in trade as opposed to "doing justly."* Rectitude in all the transactions of life was repeatedly insisted upon in the Law of God as given by Moses (Lev. xix. 35, 36; Deut. xxv. 14, 15). Disregard of this requirement was an indictment constantly brought against the Jewish people by their faithful seers (Amos viii. 4—6; Ezek. xlv. 9, 10; Hos. xii. 7, 8). To be engaged in trade has been regarded by some as a badge of social inferiority. No right-minded man could speak or even think thus. All honest trades are honourable. None need be ashamed of their callings because these belong to the shop and the mart. The dishonour lies in fraud, trickery, deceit, and sharp practice; but let all these be eschewed, and the principles of uprightness and honour prevail, and the humblest trade, conducted on these lines, is thereby ennobled. "Royalty in her robes of state is not so majestic as Commerce clothed in spotless integrity and commanding unlimited confidence. Victory, raising her trophies from the spoils of a conquered army, is not so glorious as Commerce, patiently and perseveringly, slowly but surely, gaining its end by scorning and disdaining the arts which promise a speedy but treacherous elevation" (Dr. Robert Halley). 2. *Oppression and violence as opposed to "loving mercy"* (ver. 12). Men, making haste to be rich, fall into many hurtful snares (1 Tim. vi. 9), and one of these is that of oppressing those less favoured than themselves. They become hard, and are led to take undue advantage of those who are needy and who can in any way be made tributary to their interests. Provision against this was made in the Law of Moses (Deut. xxiv. 10—22). This provision of that Divine law, which so marvellously met every circumstance and condition of life, the prophet charged his people with disregarding. "The rich men thereof are full of violence" (ver. 12; Isa. i. 23; v. 7; Amos v. 11; Mal. iii. 5). The love of mercy was sacrificed to the love of gain. Man, consumed by lust of wealth, used his fellow-men as mere stepping-stones, trampling them beneath his feet. 3. *Degeneration in speech as altogether incompatible with "walking humbly with God."* (Ver. 12.) Very glorious is the power of utterance, the ability to give audible expression, with clearness and perspicuity, to the thoughts which may be filling our minds and stirring our very souls.

"And when she spake
Sweet words, like dropping honey, she did shed:
And 'twixt the pearls and rubies softly brake
A silver sound that heavenly music seemed to make."
(Spenser's 'Faëry Queene.')

Speech is a very sure index to character. "Out of thine *own mouth* will I judge thee" (Luke xix. 22). "A bell may have a crack, and you may not see it, but take the clapper and strike it, and you'll soon perceive that it is flawed." Degradation is stamped, not only upon the physical form of savage tribes, but also upon the very language they employ. When, as the result of a long course of transgression or of prolonged banishment from civilization, noble thoughts and high spiritual conceptions have dropped away from them, there has attended this the loss even of the very words by which these thoughts and conceptions are expressed, so that the language of such people has become woefully impoverished. Clearly, then, would we have our speech right, we must get our hearts right. "The weights and wheels are in the heart, and the clock strikes according to their motion. Truth in the inward parts is the certain cure for all evil in the tongue." The prevailing degeneracy over which this seer so deeply mourned is indicated in his words, "The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth" (ver. 12). And, this being the case, they were utterly unfitted for complying with the requirement that they should walk humbly "with their God;" for only "the pure in heart" can have fellowship with him. "Weighed" thus "in the balances" of the requirements of God's pure Law, they were "found wanting."

II. ALTHOUGH DIFFERING IN DEGREE, YET IT IS TRUE UNIVERSALLY THAT HUMAN CONDUCT, PROVED THUS, WILL NOT STAND THE TEST. God's Law is "holy, just, and true," and man is by nature and practice so sinful that, judged by that high standard, "every mouth must be stopped, and the whole world appear guilty before God" (Rom. iii. 19).

III. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THIS SHOULD LEAD US TO WELCOME THE CHRIST OF GOD,

WHOSE ADVENT THIS PROPHET PREDICTED, AND TO REJOICE IN HIS WORK ON OUR BEHALF. We cannot meet God on the ground of obedience to his pure Law. If we take that stand, then he righteously and imperatively requires that the whole Law be kept; and this is impossible to us, since even if we were capable of perfect obedience in the future, this would not atone for the failures of the past. The true meeting-place is not Sinai, but Calvary (2 Tim. i. 9; Rom. iii. 20—26).

Ver. 16.—*The influence of evil men.* These are the last recorded words of Micah declarative of coming judgment; and they are deeply impressive as setting forth the influence exerted by evil men.

I. ITS PERPETUITY. "For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels" (ver. 16). God had separated this people from among the nations, and had specially favoured them with a revelation of his will. He had given unto them his pure Law. Their fathers had gathered in the olden time at Sinai, that

"Separate from the world, their breast
Might duly take and strongly keep
The print of heaven to be exult
Ere long on Zion's steep."

(Kemble.)

God had conferred signal honour upon them in constituting them the depositaries of his truth, and his witnesses unto the ends of the earth. They were bound by the most sacred obligations, the most solemn vows repeatedly renewed, and by pains and penalties too, "to keep his statutes" and "to obey his commandments." But they lamentably failed to fulfil their high mission, and the failure is in no small degree traced in these records to the influence of their kings. Jeroboam, Omri, and Ahab stand out conspicuously in the history of the kingdom of Israel as having sinned and caused Israel to sin, and the evil influence thus exerted spread to the kingdom of Judah, and descended from generation to generation. One hundred and seventy years had passed since the death of Ahab, nearly two hundred since the death of Omri, and about two hundred and thirty since the death of Jeroboam; yet their pernicious influence was still felt, and the people were keeping their statutes instead of God's, and walking in their ways instead of in "the way of holiness." It is clear, then, that, whilst we may by a true life be helpers, even to those who come after us, in all that is good, we may also, by the perversion of this power, prove hinderers to them, and keep them back from the highest bliss. Evil deeds as well as good actions have the stamp of permanence upon them. "Being dead," men "yet speak" for ill as for good. You cannot limit the influence of wrong-doing to the men who commit it. Generations yet unborn will experience the dire effects of the sins men are committing now. "For the statutes of Omri" (ver. 16).

II. ITS PERNICIOUSNESS. "That I should make thee," etc. (ver. 16). The injurious effects thus wrought in a nation are here specially set forth. 1. It leads on to national decay. "That I should make thee a desolation" (ver. 16). 2. It excites the contempt of the adversaries. "And the inhabitants thereof an hissing" (ver. 16). 3. It lays spiritual honour in the very dust, and causes the foes of God and of his truth to blaspheme. "Therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people" (ver. 16; Ezek. xxxvi. 20; Ps. lxxxix. 4; xlv. 13—16).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*A protest and a retrospect.* The serious state of the case between Jehovah and his people is shown by this appeal to the hills and mountains. As though among all the nations none could be found impartial enough to be umpires, or even witnesses, inanimate nature must supply its testimony. (Illustrate from Job xii. 7, 8; Isa. i. 2, 3; Luke xix. 40; 2 Pet. ii. 16.) The mountains have stability; not so the favoured nation. They have survived many generations of God's ungrateful beneficiaries, and have been witnesses of the blessings those thankless ones have

received. The cliffs of Horeb have echoed back the precepts and promises of Jehovah, and the gentler tones of his "still small voice," but his people have remained deaf to his appeals. Hence—

I. A PROTEST. Before Jehovah passes judgment he permits himself to be regarded as the defendant if his people can venture to bring any charge against him. He knows that nothing but unrighteous treatment on his part could justify them in departing from him. Hence the appeal in Jer. ii. 5, and the similar remonstrances of Christ in John viii. 46 and x. 32. Nothing but intolerable grievances can justify a national revolt or a desertion of the paternal home. Had God "wearied" Israel by unreasonable treatment? The whole history of the nation refutes the suggested libel. Or can we make any such charges against God? What can they be? 1. *Undue severity?* Can "*my people*" (what a sermon in that mere term!) say so (Job xi. 6; Ps. ciii. 10; Dan. ix. 7)? 2. *A harsh and trying temper?* The very opposite is the spirit of "the Father of mercies" (Ps. cxlv. 8, 9). 3. *Unreasonable exactions of service?* No; he can make the appeal, "I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense" (Isa. xliii. 23). His "yoke is easy;" "His commandments are not grievous." 4. *Negligence in his training of us?* Far from it; he can declare, "What could have been done more?" etc. (Isa. v. 1-4). Forbearance, loving-kindness, and thoughtful consideration have marked God's conduct throughout. The case against God utterly breaks down. Instead of desiring to remonstrate, or even "reason with God," as at one time Job did, every reasonable soul, hearing God's words and catching some vision of his glory, must acknowledge, as that patriarch did, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (cf. Job xiii. 3; xlii. 5, 6). The way is cleared. O God, thou art justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou art judged. And now God's messenger may take up his parable, like Samuel (1 Sam. xii. 7), and God himself may make the appeal in vers. 4, 5.

II. A RETROSPECT. Jehovah selects specimens of his gracious dealings with them from their early history. He reminds them of: 1. *A grand redemption.* (Ver. 4.) We, too, as a nation can speak of great deliverances from political and ecclesiastical bondage. See T. H. Gill's hymn—

"Lift thy song among the nations,
England of the Lord beloved," etc.

And for each of us has been provided a redemption from a worse than Egyptian bondage, through "Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us." 2. *Illustrious leaders.* Moses, their inspired lawgiver and the friend of God (Numb. xii. 8); Aaron, their high priest and intercessor; Miriam, a singer, poet, prophetess. What memories of "the loving-kindnesses of the Lord" these names would recall—the Paschal night, the morning of final deliverance and song of triumph by the Red Sea, the manna, the plague stayed, etc.! We, too, can look back on our illustrious leaders in English history. And in common with the whole of Christendom, "all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas"—the apostles, the martyrs, the preachers, the poets of the past—"all are yours" by right, if not by actual enjoyment. 3. *Foes frustrated.* (Ver. 5.) "Remember now"—a word of tender appeal, as though God would say, "Oh, do remember." Balak was a representative foe, striving against Israel, first by policy (Numb. xxii.), then by villainy (Numb. xxv.), and finally by violence (Numb. xxxi.). Again the parallel may be traced in national and individual history. 4. *Curses turned into blessings.* (Deut. xxiii. 5.) So has it been with many of the trials of the past. "Remember from Shittim unto Gilgal" (cf. Numb. xxv. 1 and Josh. iv. 19). What a contrast! Sins forgiven; reproach "rolled away" (Josh. v. 9); chastisements blessed; the long-looked-for land of promise entered. All these blessings show us "the righteous acts of the Lord." They remind us of the successive acts of God's righteous grace. They make sin against him shamefully ungrateful as well as grossly unjust. Oh, that the goodness of God may lead to repentance! that he may overcome our evil by his good! that "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" may constrain us to live henceforth, not to ourselves, but to him!—E. S. P.

Vers. 6-8.—*The essentials of godliness.* If the questions of vers. 6 and 7 are those of Balak and the answers are Balaam's, they remind us of how a man may know and

explain clearly the path of righteousness and peace, and yet neglect it. Balaam may prophesy; Demas may preach; Judas may cast out devils; but "I never knew you; depart from me ye that work iniquity!" Or if we regard the questions as proposed, either by the nation convicted of sin (vers. 1—5), or by any one sin-stricken soul, we learn the same truths. It is the old controversy, older than Balak, between God and man, as to the grounds of man's acceptance with God and the essential requirements from man by God. We see—

I. ANXIOUS QUESTIONS. (Vers. 6, 7.) These questions remind us of: 1. *Man's sense of distance from God.* He is not consciously walking "with God," like Enoch; "before God," like Abraham. 2. *His conviction that he cannot come to God by any right or merit of his own.* "Wherewith?" He cannot come just as he is, empty-handed. He has no right of entry to the court of the Divine King. 3. *And that if he comes at all he must "bow," as an inferior, conscious of absolute dependence.* This "consciousness of absolute dependence" (Schleiermacher's definition of religion), which is shared by all intelligent creatures, is intensified by the consciousness of sin. Sin has as its shadow *guilt*, and the brighter the light the clearer and darker the shadow. That shadow projects itself into the mysterious future. A sense of desert of punishment and "a certain fearful looking for of judgment" are the attendants of sin, though there may be no meltings of godly sorrow from a sense of its base ingratitude. Thus sin is the great separator; man feels it; God declares it (Isa. lix. 1, 2). Hence there follow suggestive inquiries as to the means by which acceptance with God may be obtained. Shall they be "burnt offerings"? There was a germ of truth in this thought (cf. 2 Sam. xxiv. 24). Burnt offerings were entirely devoted to God. They might be precious in quality, like "calves of a year old," or multiplied in quantity ("thousands of rams," etc.). These burnt offerings were designed to denote God's right to our entire surrender, but could be no substitute for that surrender. They might be signs of eager desire for acceptance, though at a high price. But in themselves they could bring no sense of access to God and of peace with him. Then comes the suggestion of a sacrifice infinitely more costly ("my firstborn," etc.). To a parent a child's life is more precious than his own. If the sinner can be forgiven and accepted only at such a price, shall it be paid? Terror-stricken, deluded consciences have answered, "Yes;" but the peace has not come. While some of these proposals are detestable to God, all of them are worthless. Unless the man himself is right with God, no sacrifice can avail. Yet many would rather sacrifice health, life, wife, child, than give up sin which is the great separator. Sinful man can ask such anxious questions as these, but he cannot answer them. His suggestions land him in deeper guilt, or at the best leave him in blank despair.

II. REASSURING ANSWERS. (Ver. 8.) These come from God himself. Every fragment of *gospel*—news of good, is news from God. It was given not now for the first time. God had spoken at sundry times and in divers manners by Moses and the earlier prophets. All previous revelations of Law and grace were means of showing men "what is good." In regard to man himself, God from the beginning has testified that his only real "good" is real godliness. This was the sum of his requirements (see Deut. x. 12, 13, etc.). He did not seek for something from themselves, but for themselves and for the fruit of his Spirit within them. There were *false methods* by which "that which is good" was sought, such as heathen sacrifices and austerities. There were *inadequate methods*, such as God's own appointed system of sacrifices and services, when emptied of the spirit of self-surrender they were designed to foster and of the teaching they contained of the need of "better sacrifices" (Heb. ix. 23). These symbolical educational sacrifices were but part of a process which was to issue in man's acceptance by God, that thus man might render to God what he required, and might know and "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (cf. Heb. x. 1—10, 19—25). Looking closely at ver. 8, we see a summing up of both Law and gospel. 1. "*To do justly.*" Elementary morality is here linked with all that is Divine. To do *justly* is not only to do what is just, but because it is just, and with an earnest desire to be right with God. The "righteousness" which "the righteous Lord loveth" (Ps. xi. 7) is more than the outward act. And yet these most elementary acts of righteousness were neglected by many then (vers. 10—12 and ch. vii. 3) as well as now, who proposed anxious questions about their acceptance with God or even professed to

have found satisfactory answers to them. 2. "*To love mercy.*" Mercy is more than justice, just as "a good man" is more than a merely "righteous" one (Rom. v. 7). The lack of it may arise from hardness of character, or from never having passed through the temptations by which some have fallen. To cultivate the love of mercy will bring us nearer to God, and will make it easy for us to scatter blessings around our path, even to the unthankful and the evil (Prov. xxi. 21; Matt. v. 7; Luke vi. 32—36). Such a disposition is incompatible with spiritual pride. But lest a just and benevolent man should be tempted to pride himself and to rely on his outward conduct, we are reminded of God's last requirement. 3. "*To walk humbly with thy God.*" Here the first table of the Decalogue and the law of the gospel are combined. "Walk with God." How can the sinner, except he be reconciled (Amos iii. 3)? Hence the need of peace in God's appointed way. This way to us is not the way of self-righteousness or the way of ceremonies and sacraments, but it is the way of faith in God's own appointed and accepted atonement (Rom. iv. 4, 5; 1 John iii. 23). To "submit" to this righteousness of God requires a humbling of many a proud heart. And if we have welcomed reconciliation as God's free gift through Christ, we shall ever after walk humbly with our God as his grateful, happy children. Such a humble walk will make justice and mercy easier to us. When Luther was asked what was the first step in religion, he replied "Humility;" and when asked what was the second and the third, answered in the same way. Therefore walk humbly, as a learner; as a pensioner; as a pardoned and joyous child, "looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Titus ii. 11—14).—E. S. P.

Ver. 9.—*The voice of the rod.* God's voice has often called to Jerusalem in mercy and in warning; now it cries in judgment—it is *the voice of the rod*. Notice—

I. **THE SINS THAT CALL FOR IT.** In the context many of the chief national sins are once more enumerated, such as ill-gotten gains (ver. 10), false weights and measures (vers. 10, 11), oppression of the poor by the petty magnates of the city (ver. 12), habitual fraud and falsehood (ver. 12). Apply these illustrations to some of England's national sins. But as though these were not enough, there were added thereto the sins of the darkest period of the northern kingdom, viz. from Omri to Jehu (see ver. 16 margin, "He doth much keep," i.e. does diligently keep such statutes as these rather than the statutes of Jehovah, which his people are exhorted diligently to keep, Exod. xv. 26, etc.). These sins included the establishment of idolatry and all the immoralities associated with Baal-worship, the persecution of God's faithful servants (1 Kings xviii. 13; xix. 10; xxii. 27), and oppression even by the highest (e.g. Naboth). In the days of Ahaz the kingdom of Judah sank to such a level as this. All these evils were concentrated at Jerusalem, so that it is to this city the rod appeals.

II. **THE MESSAGES IT BRINGS.** Some elements of distinct retributive justice are discernible. 1. Uneasiness, from consciousness of guilt, while pursuing and seeking to enjoy their nefarious courses (ver. 11 margin, "Shall I be pure," etc.?). Conscience may be like an Elijah confronting Ahab in Naboth's vineyard. Illust.: Shakespeare's Richard III. 2. As they defrauded the poor, so should they be bitterly disappointed when seeking the fruit of their own labour (ver. 14; Eccles. vi. 1, 2). 3. Their labour would be for the benefit of others, and all their efforts to secure it for themselves would be as much frustrated as were the toilsome labours of those whom they had defrauded (vers. 14, 15). For they can save nothing from the hand of God. 4. Thus their wounds would be incurable (ver. 13), and their ill-gotten gain a treasure of wrath (Jas. v. 1—4). 5. These luxurious and delicate ones should become a scandal and a reproach to all around them (ver. 16).

III. **THE SPIRIT THAT WILL SILENCE IT.** 1. *Recognizing God's hand as holding it.* He "hath appointed it." (Illustrate from Isa. x. 5; Jer. xlvii. 6, 7; so now Amos iii. 6.) 2. *Listening to God's voice speaking through it.* Their great sin in the past has been the disregard of God's voice (Isa. xlviii. 18; Jer. xiii. 15—17). The voices of entreaty and warning were not heard, so now the voice of chastisement speaks. Yet even in the time of such chastisement there might be hope (Prov. i. 24—27, 33; and see Lev. xxvi. 40—45). 3. *Honouring God's Name.* "The man of wisdom shall see thy Name." God's Name declares his character, and it is his character as a holy God

that requires the punishment of the unrighteous (Exod. xxxiv. 7). So long as men persist in sin, they must remain under the wrath of God. Sinning and punishment are inseparable. Till sinners "see God's Name" by recognizing its meaning and learning that they can honour it by nothing but a renunciation of sin, the voice of the rod must be heard even through the ages of eternity.—E. S. P.

Vers. 6—8.—*Man's yearning for his Maker.* The prophet supposes that his earnest appeals have had some effect—that the people are stirred from their senselessness, and are beginning to feel after God. Overwhelmed with a consciousness of sin, they dare not approach him as they are. Their hesitation and their self-communing are like those of the prodigal in the far country when he came to himself. The sense of distance between the finite and the infinite, between the sin-stained and the holy, is oppressive and painful, and it finds expression in the words of our text.

I. *THE ANXIOUS INQUIRY.* "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" Whether men wish to do so or not, they are bound by the inexorable laws of God to appear before him. They *may* come as sinners, casting themselves upon his mercy, as David and the publican came; but they *must* come, on the last great day, as responsible creatures, to give an account of the deeds done in the body, whether they are good or bad. It is not as a race, or even as families, that judgment will be received by men, but by each in his individual capacity. Hence the wise man asks himself, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" 1. *This implies belief in a personal God.* There is no conception here or elsewhere in Scripture of the world being ruled by an impersonal Power, by a tendency which makes for righteousness. Such theories are in the long run destructive of the sense of personal accountability, and therefore fatal to the basis on which moral law rests. 2. *This implies conviction of sin.* Else why this nameless dread, and this notion of sin offering? It matters not how it is aroused, whether by tender touches of Divine love or by fervid appeals by inspired messengers; nor is it of consequence whether the sins were those of omission or of commission; but in some form, and by some means, a sense of sin is aroused in most men by the power of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to "convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of a judgment to come." 3. *This implies willingness to make some sacrifice.* Even the heathen have had the innate consciousness that without the shedding of blood there is no remission. The Jews had a divinely ordained and most elaborate system of sacrifice, which kept this idea before their minds, in all the changeful conditions of life. But they were taught that it was not these outward and visible offerings which atoned for sin. "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it," etc. "Lebanon is not sufficient to burn," etc. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

II. *THE SATISFACTORY ANSWER.* With ever-increasing fulness it came, until at last the voice of the Lord Jesus was heard saying, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." 1. *Christ Jesus has offered an atonement for us.* "Once, in the end of the world, he hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." He has not repealed the moral law; he has not abolished the necessity for means of moral culture; he has not quenched the Divine wrath; but he has revealed (not created) the Divine purpose, and has commended (not purchased) the Divine love. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." 2. *Christ Jesus has brought God near to us.* In him God is manifest in the flesh. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (1) By seeing him we can understand what God is. The unseen power which pulsates through this boundless universe is too vast for our appreciation; but revealed in the Lord Jesus, we know him to be a Person, speaking to us in wisdom and love. (2) Through Jesus we know that God is love. He inspires hope and trust in those who are alienated and afraid. A display of Divine glory would terrify us; but we are encouraged to draw near by One who appeared as the Babe of Bethlehem, as the patient Teacher of the disciples, as the gracious Friend of the sinful and distressed. 3. *Christ Jesus attracts us to God.* Arousing gratitude and confidence, he is the great magnet of human hearts. "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."

III. *THE DIVINE REQUIREMENT.* "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and

to walk humbly with thy God." This is not required as a means of our justification, but as an evidence of it. It does not exclude the work of Christ, but presupposes it. But, on the other hand, it effectually refutes the notion that the elect can live as they list. They are only "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." 1. "*To do justly*" involves the discharge of fairly demanded duties both towards God and towards man. We are unjust in our dealings with God when we withhold time and wealth and influence which we are able to devote to him. We are unjust as servants when we render mere eye-service; unjust as employers when we look only "on our own things." Buyers and sellers, statesmen and diplomatists, need all hearken to this law. 2. "*To love mercy*" is to go beyond the strict rights which others may claim of us in the exercise of generosity and pity. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor," etc.; "If thine enemy hunger, feed him." 3. "*To walk humbly with God*" implies fellowship, constant and real. Reverence and seriousness in the treatment of the Divine revelation; consciousness of the infinitude of truth, and our incapacity to grasp it; lowly submission to our Father's will, when it is contrary to our own wishes; and steadfast progress in the Christian life, as we walk hand-in-hand with him, are all involved in walking humbly with our God.

"Walking in reverence
Humbly with thee,
Yet from all abject fear
Lovingly free;
E'en as a friend with friend,
Cheered to the journey's end,
Walking with thee."

A. B.

Vers. 1—5.—*Man in the moral court of history.* "Hear ye now what the Lord saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel," etc. There are three things here very striking and deserving our solemn attention.

I. HERE IS A CALL ON MAN TO GIVE AUDIENCE TO ALMIGHTY GOD. "Hear ye now what the Lord saith." These are the words of the prophet who speaks in the name of Jehovah, and on his behalf. Such an audience as this is: 1. *Natural*. What is more natural than for the child to hang on the lips and attend to the words of his parent? How much more natural for the finite intelligence to open its ears to the words of the Infinite! It is more natural for the human soul to look up, listening, to the great Father-Spirit, and to receive communication from him, than for the earth to thirst for the sunbeam and the shower. The human soul is made for it. 2. *Binding*. Of all duties it is the most primary and imperative. The great command of God to all is, "Hearken diligently to me; hear, and your soul shall live" (Isa. lv. 2, 3). The conscience of every man tells him that his great duty is to hear God in all the operations of nature, in all the events of life, in all the teachings of the Bible, in all the monitions of the soul. God is always speaking to man. Would that the human ear was ever open to his voice! 3. *Indispensable*. It is only as men hear, interpret, digest, appropriate, and incarnate God's Word that they can rise to a true, a noble, and a happy life. "Hear ye now," then, "what the Lord saith." "*Now*." In the scenes of retribution whither you are hastening, you will be bound to hear his voice, whether you wish or not.

II. HERE IS A SUMMONS TO INANIMATE NATURE TO HEAR THE CONTROVERSY BETWEEN GOD AND MAN. "Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel." "It is not unusual," says an eminent biblical scholar, "with the prophets to make appeals respecting the enormity of human guilt to the inanimate part of creation, as if it were impossible for it not to inspire them with life, and call them forth as intelligent witnesses of what had taken place in their presence (see Deut. xxxii. 1; Isa. i. 2; Jor. ii. 12, 13). By a similar personification, the mountains and durable foundations of the earth are here summoned to appear in the court of heaven. Jehovah,

however, instead of bringing forward the charge, abdicates, as it were, his right, and leaves it to the guilty party to state the case. In the appeal to lofty and ever-during mountains, in which the puny affairs of man could excite no prejudice, and which might therefore be regarded as quite impartial judges, there is something inexpressibly sublime." The appeal to inanimate nature: 1. *Indicates the earnestness of the prophet.* He would seem to speak with such vehement earnestness as if he would wake the dead mountains and hills to hear his voice, and shake the very "foundations of the earth" with his thunders. He would cry aloud and spare not. Every minister should be earnest. "Passion is reason" here. 2. *Suggests the stupidity of the people.* Perhaps the prophet meant to compare them to the dead hills and mountains. As firmly settled in sin were they as the mountains, as hard in heart as the rocks. 3. *Hints the universality of his theme.* His mission had no limitation; his doctrine was no secret, it was as open and free as nature.

III. HERE IS A CHALLENGE TO MAN TO FIND FAULT WITH DIVINE DEALINGS. "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me." His challenge: 1. Implies that they could bring nothing against him. "What have I done unto thee?" which means, "I have done nothing. I have not treated you with injustice, I have laid on you no intolerable burdens, I dare you to charge me with any act unrighteous or unkind." What fault has the sinner to find with God? 2. Declares that he had done everything for them. He here reminds them of: (1) His delivering them from Egyptian bondage. "I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants." (2) What he did for them on the way to Canaan. "I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam," Moses the lawgiver, Aaron the priest, and Miriam the prophetess. (3) What he did for them in Canaan. "O my people, remember now what Balak King of Moab consulted," etc. He not only furnished them with inspired teachers, but counteracted the designs of false ones, as in the case of Balaam, who was engaged by Balak to curse them, but was inspired by Heaven to bless them. If the Israelites could find no fault with God, and if he did so much for them, how stand we here in this country and in this age under the full light of the gospel dispensation? What more could he have done for us than he has? etc.

CONCLUSION. Sinner, you are in the great moral court of the universe, you are arraigned before your Judge, you are commanded to listen to his voice. Inanimate nature around is a witness against you in this court; the very timbers of the wall will cry out against you. You are commanded to give a full explanation of your conduct. If you have any fault to find with the Almighty, bring it forth. If you have not, ponder until your heart breaks into penitence and gratitude at the memory of his wonderful mercies to you.—D. T.

Vers. 6—8.—*Fellowship with God.* "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" etc. We raise from these words three general observations—

I. THAT A LOVING FELLOWSHIP WITH THE GREAT GOD IS THE ONE URGENT NEED OF HUMANITY. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" The language is that of a soul convinced of its sin, and roused to a sense of the importance of friendship with the Almighty. "Wherewith shall I come?" *Come I must; I feel that distance from him is my great sin and misery.* 1. *Loving fellowship with the great God is essential to the happiness of moral intelligences.* Reason suggests this. All souls are the offspring of God; and where can children find happiness but in the friendship, the intercourse, and the presence of their loving Father? *Conscience* indicates this. Deep in the moral souls of all men is the yearning for intercourse with the Infinite. The hearts of all "cry out for the living God." The *Bible* teaches this. What mean such utterances as these: "Come now, and let us reason together;" "Return to the Lord;" "Come unto me," etc.? Not more impossible is it for a planet to shine when cut off from the sun, a river to flow when cut off from the fountain, a branch to grow when severed from the root, than for a soul to be happy apart from God. "In thy presence is fulness of joy." 2. *Man, in his unregenerate state, is estranged and far away from God.* He is represented as a lost sheep wandering in the wilderness away from the fold, as the

prodigal son remote from his father's house and in a far country. How far is the human soul, in its unregenerate state, from God? How far is selfishness from benevolence, error from truth, pollution from holiness, wrong from right? The moral space or gulf that lies between is immeasurable.

II. THAT SACRIFICES THE MOST COSTLY ARE UTTERLY INSUFFICIENT TO SECURE THIS FELLOWSHIP. "Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?" Such offerings were presented under the Law (Lev. i., etc.). "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" This also was enjoined in Leviticus. Oil was to be poured on the meat offering. "Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" The Jews offered many human sacrifices in the valley of Hinnom. They caused their children to pass through the fire in honour of Moloch. The idea is—Are there any sacrifices I can make, however costly and however painful, in order to commend me to the favour and friendship of Almighty God? The interrogatory implies a negative—No. Offer the cattle upon a thousand hills: can they be a satisfaction for sin? Can they commend you to Infinite Love? All are his. How men came at first to suppose that human sacrifices could be acceptable to God is one of the greatest enigmas in history. "Though a man give his body to be burned, without charity he is nothing." Two things are here presented. 1. *The great cry of a sin-convicted soul is for God.* No sooner is conviction of sin struck into the human soul, than it turns itself away at once from the world to God: "I want God; I have lost him; God I must have; oh that I knew where I might find him!" 2. *Worldly possessions, in the estimation of a sin-convicted soul, are comparatively worthless.* He is prepared to make any sacrifices. Holocausts, thousands of rams, ten thousands of rivers of oil; what are they? Nothing in comparison with the interests of the soul. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world," etc.? It feels this when convicted of sin.

III. THAT MORAL EXCELLENCE IS THE ONE METHOD BY WHICH THIS FELLOWSHIP CAN BE OBTAINED. "He hath showed thee, O man [Hebrew, 'Adam,' the whole race, Jew and Gentile alike], what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" This moral excellence consists of two parts, social and religious. 1. *That which refers to man.* (1) "Do justly;" "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." "Render to all men their due." (2) "Love mercy." Mere justice is not enough, there must be tender commiseration for the suffering; the poor and the distressed must be remembered. Mercy must not only be shown, but loved. To help the needy must be delight. 2. *That which refers to God.* "Walk humbly with thy God." Walking with God implies consciousness of the Divine presence, harmony with the Divine will, progress in Divine excellence. This is moral excellence—the moral excellence that God has revealed to all men, Jew and Gentile, the entire race, and which he requires from all; and this is the condition of fellowship with him. How is this moral excellence to be attained? it may be asked. Philosophically, I know but of one way—faith in him who is the Revelation, the Incarnation, the Example of all moral excellence—Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION. Learn from this what religion is—how transcendent! It is the soul going away from sin and the world to God. Not merely to temples, theologies, ceremonies, but to God; and to him, not through intellectual systems or ceremonial observances, but through a true life, both in relation to man and God.—D. T.

Ver. 9.—*God's voice to cities.* "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy Name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." We raise three remarks from this verse.

I. THAT GOD HAS A "VOICE" TO CITIES. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city." The city meant here is Jerusalem. He speaks to a city: 1. Through its *commerce*. The failures that follow fraud, indolence, chicanery. 2. Through its *mortality*. The funeral processions that darken the streets, the cemeteries that lie within and around. 3. Through its *churches*. The sermons that are preached, the agents that are employed to enlighten the ignorant, to comfort the distressed, reclaim the lost. Heavenly Wisdom "standeth at the corner of the streets; she crieth aloud," etc.

II. THE WISE IN CITIES RECOGNIZE THE VOICE. "The man of wisdom shall see thy

Name." "And wisdom has thy Name in its eye" (Dolitzsch). "And he who is wise will regard thy Name" (Henderson). The idea seems to be this—that the wise man will recognize God's voice. Job says, "God speaks once, yea twice, and they perceive it not." The crowds that populate cities are deaf to the Divine "voice." The din of passion, the hum of commerce, the chimes of animal pleasures, drown the voice of God. But the wise man has his soul ever in a listening attitude. Like young Samuel, he says, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." Abraham heard the voice of God concerning Sodom, Daniel concerning Babylon, Jonah concerning Nineveh, Jeremiah concerning Jerusalem. "I will hear what the Lord God will say,"—this is the language of wise men.

III. THE JUDGMENT OF CITIES IS IN THAT VOICE. "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." The rod is the symbol of judgment. "O Assyrian, the rod of my anger, the staff in their hand is my indignation" (Isa. x. 5). 1. *God warns cities.* (1) He warns them of ultimate temporal ruin. All cities must go—go with Nineveh, Greece, Babylon, Rome, Jerusalem. London, Paris, Petersburg, New York, etc., all must go as these have gone. It is only a question of time. (2) He warns them of spiritual danger. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This is his voice to every citizen. Here is the "rod"—the warning—over all cities. 2. *His warning should be attended to.* "Hear ye the rod." The only way to escape is attention. Hear it, and flee for refuge; hear it, and thunder it abroad to alarm the careless; hear it before it is too late. "If thou hadst known the things that belong to thy peace in this day! but now are they hid from thine eyes" (Luke xix. 42).

"Heaven gives the needful, but neglected, call.
What day, what hour, but knocks at human hearts,
To wake the soul to sense of future scenes?
Deaths stand, like Mercuries, in every way,
And kindly point us to our journey's end."

(Young.)

D. T.

Vers. 10-15.—*Civic sins.* "Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For the rich men thereof are full of violence," etc. In these verses we have specified a sample of the crimes which abounded in the city, and which would bring on the threatened judgment. The passage leads us to make two remarks concerning *civic sins*, or the sins of a city.

I. *THEIR VARIETY.* 1. *Here is fraud.* "Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable?" "Are there still in the house of the wicked treasures of wickedness and the scanty ephah?" (Henderson). This sin is described in Amos viii. 5, "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?" Fraud is one of the most prevalent crimes in all cities. Perhaps in no city was it ever more prevalent than it is in London to-day. Our commercial immorality is that at which thoughtful men stand aghast. 2. *Here is violence.* "The rich men thereof are full of violence." Strong in every age has been the tendency of rich men to oppress the lower classes by unrighteous exactions of service, by oppressive enactments. Wealth has a tendency to make men arrogant, haughty, heartless, often inhuman. The tyrant in man, as a rule, grows with the increase of his wealth. 3. *Here is falsehood.* "The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth." Unveracity is a crime, and a crime most prevalent in all cities. There is scarcely a trade or profession carried on without deception. Fortunes are made by lies. Men are everywhere deceiving each other. Such are samples of the crimes prevalent in Jerusalem.

II. *THEIR RETRIBUTION.* All these crimes are offensive to the Ruler of the universe, and by the law of retribution bring dire results upon the population. God says, "Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances?" It is said in Ps. xviii. 26 that with the "pure God will show himself pure; but with the froward he will show himself froward." And what are the results? Several are here specified. 1. *Disease.*

"Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee." Crime is inimical to physical health and strength. The diseases that prevail in cities are, in most cases, traceable to their crimes. In every sin there is a germ of physical disease, a something which tends to disturb the nerves, taint the blood, and sap the constitution. 2. *Desolation*. "In making thee desolate because of thy sins." What is desolation? It is not the mere loss of property, friends, or the external means of physical enjoyment. A man may have all these and yet be desolate. It is the awful sense of lonesomeness, desertion. A desolate man is one who neither loves nor is loved; and sin produces this state. Few states of mind are more awful or more crushing than the sense of aloneness. 3. *Dissatisfaction*. "Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied." Of whatever a sinful man partakes, however delicious the viands, however choice and costly the provisions, he has no satisfaction of soul. He has in connection with, and in spite of, all a hunger deep, gnawing, unappeasable. Sin and satisfaction can never coexist. 4. *Disappointment*. "Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine." A sinful soul can never get out of its labour that which it expects. He toils hard for enjoyment, but all the toils are fruitless; enjoyment is not won. The autumn comes, and the fruits are gathered in—the wheat, the olives, the sweet wine; but they do not bring him what he has struggled for—true enjoyment. He has laboured for that which satisfieth not. 5. *Destruction*. "Thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword." Henderson's translation of this seems to me good: "Thou shalt be inwardly depressed; thou mayest remove, but thou shalt not rescue, or what thou rescuest I will give to the sword."

CONCLUSION. Mark the law of retribution. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" "Be sure your sin will find you out." Not more certain is it that the rivers flow to the ocean, the planets follow the sun, than that suffering follows sin. Sins brings with it disease, desolation, dissatisfaction, disappointment, destruction.—D. T.

Ver. 16.—*Omri and Ahab: lessons worth study*. "For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people." On the long dark roll of human infamy there are few darker names than those of Omri and Ahab. The former, who at first was an officer in the army of Israel (1 Kings xvi. 30), through blood and slaughter took possession of the throne of Israel, which he held polluted and disgraced for twelve long years. He built Samaria and made it the capital of the ten tribes. Ahab was his son and his successor, and rivalled even his father in immorality and impiety. He established the worship of Baal as the national religion. I draw three lessons from this passage.

I. THAT THE RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT IN MAN IS OFTEN TERRIBLY PERVERTED. Omri and Ahab were not only idolaters themselves, but established idolatry in their country. They worshipped Baal, the god that was worshipped by the Carthaginians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, and others—the god, it is supposed, who is sometimes called Moloch, to whom the Ammonites made their cruel and bloody sacrifices. For the service of this god Ahab established a numerous hierarchy of priests. The religious sentiment in man is perhaps the fundamental element of his nature. Man is made to worship, and to worship the one true and living God only. But so blinded is his intellect, so debased his nature, so utterly corrupt, that, instead of worshipping the infinitely Great, he falls down before the infinitely contemptible. The perversity of the religious sentiment: 1. *Explains the errors, crimes, and miseries of the world*. Man's strongest love is the spring of all his activities, the fountal source of all his influence. When this is directed to an idol, the whole of his life is corrupted. 2. *Reveals man's absolute need of the gospel*. There is nothing but the gospel of Christ that can give this sentiment a right direction.

II. THAT OBEDIENCE TO HUMAN SOVEREIGNS IS SOMETIMES A GREAT CRIME. The worship of Baal was enacted by the "statutes" of Omri and enforced by the practice of Ahab. If the establishment of a religion by law can make it right, it was right that

the people should worship Baal. But it was not right; it was wrong. A human law, enacted by the greatest sovereign in the world with the sanction of the most illustrious statesmen, if it is not in accord with the eternal principles of justice and truth, as revealed in God's Word, should be repudiated, renounced, and transgressed. "Whether it is right to obey God rather than man, judge ye."

III. THAT THE CRIMES OF EVEN TWO MEN MAY EXERT A CORRUPTING INFLUENCE UPON MILLIONS IN FUTURE GENERATIONS. The reigns of Omri and Ahab were ages before the time when Micah lived. Notwithstanding, their enactments were still obeyed, their examples were still followed, and their practices were still pursued. The wickedness of these two men was now, ages after, perpetrated by a whole nation. How great the influence of man for good or evil! Verily one sinner destroyeth much good. From one corrupt source may flow a stream of polluting influence that shall roll down all future times, widen and deepen in its course, and bear thousands on its bosom to crime and ruin.

"Our many deeds, the thoughts that we have thought,
They go out from us thronging every home;
And in them all is folded up a power
That on the earth doth move them to and fro;
And mighty are the marvels they have wrought
In hearts we know not and may never know."

(F. W. Faber.)

D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VII.

Vers. 1—6.—§ 5. *Israel's penitential acknowledgment of the general corruption.*

Ver. 1.—*Woe is me!* (Job x. 15). Micah threatens no more; he represents repentant Israel confessing its corruption and lamenting the necessity of punishment. I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits; literally, *I am as the gatherings of the fruit-harvest*. The point of comparison is only to be inferred from the context. At the fruit-harvest no early figs are to be found, and (in the next clause) after the vintage no more grapes; so in Israel there is none righteous left. The Septuagint gives a plainer exposition, *Ἐγενήθην ὡς συνάγων καρπὸν ἐν ἀμπύῳ*, "I became as one that gathereth straw in harvest;" so the Vulgate, *Factus sum sicut qui collegit in autumnno racemos vindimie*, joining the two clauses together. *My soul desired the first-ripe fruit; better, nor early fig which my soul desired*. The holiness and grace of more primitive times are wholly absent from this later period (see Hos. ix. 10, where a similar figure is used; compare also Christ's dealing with the barren fig tree, Matt. xxi. 18, etc.). The first-ripe figs were proverbially sweet and good (see Isa. xxviii. 4; Jer. xxiv. 2; and Hosea, loc. cit.).

Ver. 2.—This verse explains the preceding comparison; the grape and the early fig represent the righteous man. The good man; LXX., *εὐσεβής*, the godly, pious man.

The Hebrew word (*khasidh*) implies one who exercises love to others, who is merciful, loving, and righteous. Is perished out of the earth; has disappeared from the world (comp. Ps. xiv. 2, 3; and especially Isa. lvii. 1). They all lie in wait for blood. They all practise violence and rapine, and meditate how they may pursue their evil designs, even to the shedding of blood. LXX., *πάντες εἰς αἵματα διδύονται*, which narrows the charge to one special kind of iniquity, viz. committing judicial murders. They hunt every man his brother with a net. They ought to love their brethren, their fellow-countrymen, partakers of the same hope and privileges (Lev. xix. 18). Instead of this, they pursue them as the fowler traps birds, or the hunter beasts. The word rendered "net" (*cherem*) is in most versions translated "destruction." Thus, Septuagint, *ἐκθλιβουσιν ἐκθλιβή*; Vulgate, *ad mortem venatur*; so the Syriac and Chaldee. In the present connection it is best taken as "net" (Hab. i. 15).

Ver. 3.—That they may do evil, etc.; rather, *both hands are upon* (equivalent to "busy with") *evil to do it thoroughly*. This clause and the rest of the verse are very obscure. Cheyno supposes the text to be corrupt. Henderson renders, "For evil their hands are well prepared;" so virtually, Hitzig, Pusey, and the Septuagint. Caspari agrees rather with the Vulgate (*Malum manuum suarum dicunt bonum*), "Hands are (busy) upon evil to make (it seem) good," which looks to that extremity of iniquity

when men "call evil good, and good evil" (Isa. v. 20). The general meaning is that they are ready enough to do evil, and, as the next clause says, can be bribed to do anything. The prince asketh; makes some nefarious demand of the judge, some perversion of justice at his hands, as in the case of Naboth (1 Kings xxi.). The judge asketh (*is ready*) for a reward. The judge is willing to do what the prince wishes, if he is bribed for it. LXX., 'Ο κριτῆς εἰρηνικοῦς λόγους ἐλάλησε, "The judge speaks words of peace" (comp. ch. iii. 11; Isa. i. 23; Zeph. iii. 3). He uttereth his mischievous desire; or, *the mischief of his soul*. The rich man speaks out unblushingly the evil that he has conceived in his heart, the wicked design which he meditates. So they wrap it up; better, *and they weave it together*. The prince, the judge, and the rich man weave their evil plan together, to make it strong and right in others' eyes. The passage is altered in meaning by a different grouping of the Hebrew letters, thus: "The prince demandeth (a reward) to do good; and the judge, for the recompense of a great man, uttereth what he himself desireth. And they entangle the good more than briars, and the righteous more than a thorn-hedge." The LXX. carries on the sense to the next verse, Καὶ ἐξελοῦμαι τὰ ἀγαθὰ αὐτῶν ὡς σῆς ἐκτρώγων, "And I will destroy their goods as a consuming moth."

Ver. 4.—The best of them is as a brier; hard and piercing, catching and holding all that passes by. The plant intended by the word *chedek* is a thorny one used for hedges (Prov. xv. 19). Under another aspect thorns are a symbol of what is noxious and worthless (2 Sam. xxiii. 6), or of *sin* and *temptation*. The most upright is sharper (*worse*) than a thorn-hedge. Those who seem comparatively upright are more injurious, tangled, and inaccessible than a hedge of thorns. In punishment of all this corruption, the prophet points to the day of judgment. The day of thy watchmen. The day of retribution foretold by the prophets (Isa. xxi. 6; Jer. vi. 17; Ezek. iii. 17). And (*even*) thy visitation; in apposition with the day, the time, and explanatory of punishment. Cometh; *is come*—the perfect tense denoting the certainty of the future event. Septuagint, Οὐαί, αἱ ἐκδικήσεις σου ἡ κασι, "Woe! thy vengeance is come." Now shall be their perplexity. When this day of the Lord comes, there shall be confusion (Isa. xxii. 5); it shall bring chastisement before deliverance. The prophet here, as elsewhere, changes from the second to the third person, speaking of the people generally. Septuagint, Νῦν ἔσονται κλαυθμοὶ αὐτῶν, "Now shall be their weeping;" so the Syriac Pusey notes the paronomasia

here. They were as bad as a thorn-hedge (*merucuh*); they shall fall into perplexity (*mebucuh*).

Ver. 5.—Such is the moral corruption that the nearest relations cannot be trusted: selfishness reigns everywhere. The prophet emphasizes this universal evil by warning the better portion of the people. Friend . . . guide. There is a gradation here, beginning with "neighbour," or "common acquaintance," and ending with "wife." The word rendered "guide" means "closest, most familiar friend," as in Ps. lv. 13 (14, Hebrew). Our version is sanctioned by the Septuagint, ἡγουμένους, "leaders;" and the Vulgate, *duces*; but the context confirms the other translation (comp. Prov. xvi. 28; xvii. 9). Our Lord has used some of the expressions in the next verse in describing the miseries of the latter day (Matt. x. 21, 35, 36; xxiv. 12; comp. Luke xii. 53; xxi. 16; 2 Tim. iii. 2). *Keep the doors of thy mouth*. Guard thy secrets. (For the phrase, comp. Ps. cxli. 3.) *Her that lieth in thy bosom*. Thy wife (Deut. xiii. 6; xxviii. 54).

Ver. 6.—For the son dishonoureth; Septuagint, ἀτιμάζει; Vulgate, *contumeliam facit*; literally, *treats as a fool, despises* (Deut. xxxii. 6, 15). (For the rest of the verse, see Matt. x. 21, 35, etc.) *Men of his own house*. His domestic servants (Gen. xvii. 27). Henderson, referring to this dissolution of every natural tie, compares Ovid, 'Metamorph.' i. 144, etc.—

"Vivitur ex raptō; non hospes ab hospite tutus,

Non socera genero; fratrum quoque gratia rara est;

Imminet exitio vir conjugis, illa mariti;
Lurida terribiles miscent aconita novercæ;
Filius ante diem patrios inquit in annos;
Victa jacet pietas."

Vers. 7—13.—§ 6. *Israel expresses her faith in God, though she suffers grievous tribulation, and is confident in the fulfilment of the promised restoration.*

Ver. 7.—Therefore I; rather, *but as for me, I, etc.* The prophet speaks in the name of the ideal Israel. Though love and confidence have disappeared, and the day of visitation has come, and human help fails, yet Israel loses not her trust in the Lord. Will look; gaze intently, as if posted on a watch-tower to look out for help. Will wait with longing trust, unbroken by delay. The God of my salvation. The God from whom my salvation comes (Ps. xviii. 46; xxv. 5; xxvii. 9; Hab. iii. 18). My God will hear me. My prayer is sure to be answered (Isa. xxx. 19).

Ver. 8.—Israel in her sorrow and captivity asserts her undiminished confidence in the

Lord. O mine enemy. The oppressor of the Church, the worldly power, is represented at one time by Asshur, at another by Babylon. God uses these heathen kingdoms as agents of his vengeance. **When I fall; have I fallen; if I have fallen;** i.e. suppose I have suffered calamity and loss (Amos v. 2). **Sit in darkness.** Darkness is another metaphor for distress (Ps. xlii. 4; Isa. ix. 2; Lam. iii. 6; Amos v. 18). **The Lord shall be a light unto me,** giving me gladness and true discernment (comp. Ps. xxvii. 1; xcvi. 11). The distinction between darkness and the full light of day is more marked in Eastern countries than in our Northern climes.

Ver. 9.—I will bear the indignation of the Lord. However long may be the delay before relief comes, Israel will patiently bear the chastisements inflicted upon her, because she knows that they are deserved. This is the language of the penitent people, owning the justice of the sentence, yet trusting to the covenant God, who in wrath remembers mercy. **Until he plead my cause.** Until God considers that the punishment has done its work, and takes my cause in hand, and judges between me and the instruments of his vengeance. **Execute judgment for me.** Secure my rights, violated by the heathen, who misuse the power given them by God. **The light** (see note on ver. 8). **His righteousness** (ch. vi. 5); his faithfulness to his promises exhibited in the destruction of the enemies and the restoration of his people. For this conception of the Divine righteousness, Cheyne compares 1 John i. 9, "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins."

Ver. 10.—She that is mine enemy. The worldly power is here personified, as so often "the daughter of Jerusalem." Shall see it. She shall see that Israel was not conquered because God was powerless to save. **Where is the Lord thy God?** The Assyrians always attributed their success in arms to the assistance of their gods and the superiority of their deities to those of the conquered nations (comp. Isa. x. 9—11; xxxvii. 10—13). Thus the inscription of the palace of Khorsabad begins, "The gods Assur, Nebo, and Merodach have conferred on me the royalty of the nations. . . . By the grace and power of the great gods, my masters, I have flung my arms, by my force I have defeated my enemies" ('Records of the Past,' vol. ix.). (For taunts like that in the text, see Ps. xlii. 3; lxxix. 10; cxv. 2; Joel ii. 17.) **Mine eyes shall behold her.** Israel shall behold the destruction of the enemy. **As the mire of the streets** (Isa. x. 6; Zech. x. 5).

Ver. 11.—The prophet here addresses Zion, and announces her restoration. In

the day that thy walls are to be built; rather, a day for building thy walls (gader) cometh. Zion is represented as a vineyard whose fence has been destroyed (Isa. v. 5, 7). The announcement is given abruptly and concisely in three short sentences. **In that day shall the decree be far removed.** The decree (Zeph. ii. 2) is explained by Hengstenberg and many commentators, ancient and modern, to be that of the enemy by which they held Israel captive. Keil and others suppose the law to be meant which separated Israel from all other nations, the ancient ordinance which confined God's people and the blessings of the theocracy to narrow limits. This is now to be set aside (comp. Eph. ii. 11—16), when heathen nations flock to the city of God. Caspari, [Hitzig, Cheyne, and others translate, "shall the bound be afar off," i.e. the boundaries of the land of Israel shall be widely extended (comp. Isa. xxxiii. 17, which Cheyne explains, "Thine eyes shall behold a widely extended territory"). Wordsworth obtains much the same meaning by taking the verb in the sense of "promulgated," and referring the "decree," as in Ps. ii. 7, 8, to God's purpose of giving to Messiah the utmost parts of the earth for a possession. The building of the walls does not indicate the narrowing of the limits of the theocratic kingdom. Whether *chok* be taken to signify "decree" (*lex*, Vulgate) or "boundary," the effect of its removal afar is seen by the next verse to be the entrance of foreign nations into the kingdom of God. The LXX. favours the first interpretation, Ἀποφθερεῖς [ἀπόθερα, Alex.] νόμῳ σου [σὺν ομίτ, Alex.] ἢ ἡμέρα ἐκείνη, "That day shall utterly abolish thy ordinances."

Ver. 12.—He shall come; they shall come. Men shall flock to Zion as the metropolis of the new kingdom (ch. iv. 2). The countries named are those in which the Jews were dispersed (see Isa. xi. 11). Micah embraces in one view the restoration of Israel and the conversion of the heathen (comp. Isa. xix. 24; xxvii. 12, 13). **Assyria.** The type of the greatest enemy of God. **The fortified cities;** rather, *the cities of Mazon*, the strong land, i.e. Egypt. The usual term for Egypt is Mizraim; but Mazon is found in 2 Kings xix. 24; Isa. xix. 6; xxxvii. 25. Cheyne compares the Assyrian name for this country, *Muṣar*. **From the fortress; from Mazon;** Septuagint, ἀπὸ Τύρου, "from Tyre" or Taor. **Even to the river.** From Egypt to the Euphrates, which was the river *par excellence* (Gen. xv. 18). **From sea to sea.** Not necessarily from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea or to the Persian Gulf (as Joel ii. 20), but generally, from one sea to another, from the earth as bounded by the seas; so,

from mountain to mountain; *i.e.* not from Lebanon to Sinai, or from Hor (Numb. xx. 22) to Hor (Numb. xxxiv. 7), which is too limited, but from all lands situated between mountain-barriers, which are the bounds of the world (comp. Isa. lx. 3, etc.).

Ver. 13.—*Notwithstanding the land shall be desolate.* Very many commentators consider the land of Canaan to be here intended, the prophet recurring to threatenings of judgment before the great restoration comes to pass; but it is best to regard the clause as referring to all the world, exclusive of Canaan. While the Messianic kingdom is set up, judgment shall fall upon the sinful world. "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted" (Isa. lx. 12; comp. Rev. xii. 12). And the material world shall suffer with its inhabitants (Gen. iii. 15, 18; vi. 13; xix. 25; Isa. xxxiv. 4, etc.). Their doings. Their evil deeds, especially the rejection of Messiah.

Vers. 14-17.—§ 7. *The prophet in the name of the people prays for this promised salvation, and the Lord assures him that his mercies shall not fail, and that the hostile nations shall be humbled.*

Ver. 14.—*Feed thy people with thy rod.* The prophet prays to the Shepherd of Israel (Gen. xlix. 24; Ps. lxxx. 1), beseeching him to rule and lead his people, and to find them pasture. The "rod" is the shepherd's staff (Lev. xxvii. 32; Ps. xxiii. 4). The flock of thine heritage. So Israel is called (Ps. xxviii. 9; xcv. 7; comp. Zeph. iii. 13). Which dwell solitarily; or, so that they dwell; separate from all other nations, religiously and physically, by institution and geographical position. Compare Balaam's words (Numb. xxiii. 9; also Deut. xxxiii. 28). It was Israel's special characteristic to be holy, *i.e.* set apart, and it was only when she observed her duty in this respect that she prospered (see Exod. xxxiii. 16). In the wood (forest) in the midst of Carmel. The forest would isolate the flock, and secure it from interference. The chief pasture-lands west and east of Jordan are named, and the whole country is included in the description. (For Carmel, see note on Amos i. 2.) Bashan and Gilead were also celebrated for their rich pasture. "Bulls of Bashan" were a proverb for well-fed animals, and a metaphor for bloated, proud aristocrats (Deut. xxxii. 14; Ps. xxii. 12; Ezek. xxxix. 18; Amos iv. 1). Gilead was so excellently adapted for cattle that Reuben and Gad were irresistibly drawn to settle there (Numb. xxxii. 1, 5; 1 Chron. v. 9; see the parallel to this passage in Isa. lxxv. 9, 10, and Ezek. xxxiv. 13, 14). As in the days of

old; usually taken to refer to the time of Moses and Joshua, but also and more probably, to that of David and Solomon, which realized the ideal of peace and prosperity. (comp. ch. iv. 4).

Ver. 15.—*According to (as in) the days.* The Lord answers the prophet's prayer, taking up his last word, and promising even more than he asks, engaging to equal the wonders which marked the exodus from Egypt. That great deliverance was a type and foreshadowing of Messianic salvation (comp. Isa. xliii. 15, etc.; il. 16; 1 Cor. x. 1, etc.). Unto him; unto the people of Israel (ver. 14). Marvellous things; Septuagint, *ὀφθαλμοειδῆ θαύματα*, "Ye shall see marvellous things." Supernatural occurrences are meant, as Exod. iii. 20; xv. 11; Ps. lxxvii. 14. We do not read of any special miracles at the return from captivity, so the people were led to look onward to the advent of Messiah for these wonders.

Ver. 16.—*Shall see.* The heathen shall see these marvellous things. Be confounded at (ashamed of) all their might. Hostile nations shall be ashamed when they find the impotence of their boasted power. Compare the effect of the Exodus on contiguous nations (Exod. xv. 14, etc.; Josh. ii. 9, 10). They shall lay their hand upon their mouth. They shall be silent from awe and astonishment (Judg. xviii. 19; Job xxi. 5; Isa. lii. 15). Their ears shall be deaf. Their senses shall be stupefied by the wonders which they see—that which Job (xxvi. 14) calls "the thunder of his mighty deeds." There may also be an allusion to their wilful obstinacy, and unbelief.

Ver. 17.—*They shall lick the dust like a serpent* (Gen. iii. 14; Isa. lxxv. 25). The enemies of God's people "shall lick the dust" (Ps. lxxii. 9), shall be reduced to the utmost degradation (Isa. xlix. 23). They shall move out of their holes, etc.; rather, *they come trembling out of their close places* (or, fastnesses, Ps. xviii. 46), *like crawling things of the earth.* They who prided themselves on their security shall come forth from their strongholds in utter fear, driven out like snakes from their lairs (comp. Ps. ii. 11; Hos. xi. 10, etc.). They shall be afraid of (*whine with fear unto*) the Lord our God. They shall be driven by terror to acknowledge the God of Israel. The expression is ambiguous, and may mean servile fear, which makes a man shrink from God, or that fear which is one step towards repentance; the latter seems intended here, as in Hos. iii. 5, where, as Pusey says, the words, "and his goodness," determine the character of the fear. Because of (or, before) thee. It is the heathen who are still the subject, not the Israelites (Jer. x. 7).

The sudden change of persons is quite in the prophet's style.

Vers. 18—20.—§ 8. *The book ends with a lyric ode in praise of God's mercy and faithfulness.*

Ver. 18.—In view of the many provocations and backslidings of the people, Micah is filled with wonder at the goodness and long-suffering of God. **Who is a God like unto thee?** The question seems to recall the prophet's own name, which means, "Who is like Jehovah?" and the clause in Moses' song (Exod. xv. 11), "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?" Such comparisons are made from the standpoint of the nations who believe in the real existence of their false gods. **That pardoneth iniquity** (comp. Exod. xxxiv. 7; Numb. xiv. 18). **Passeth by the transgression;** Septuagint, *ὑπερβαίνων ἀσθεβείας*, "passing over iniquities;" Vulgate, *transis peccatum*. To pass by, or pass over, is to forgive, as Amos vii. 8. There is probably an allusion, as Jerome says, to the night of the Exodus. As the destroying angel passed over the Israelites and destroyed them not, so God spares his people, imputing not their iniquities unto them. **The remnant** (ch. ii. 12; iv. 6, 7). The true Israel, which is only a remnant (Isa. x. 21; Rom. ix. 27). **He retaineth not his anger for ever** (Ps. ciii. 9). The word rendered "for ever" is translated by Jerome *ultra*, and by the Septuagint *eis μακρόν*, i.e. to testify the justice of his punishment. **He delighteth in mercy.** As the Collect says, "O God, whose nature and property is always to have mercy and to forgive" (comp. Wisd. xi. 24).

Ver. 19.—**He will turn again, and have**

compassion upon us. The verb "turn again," joined with another verb, often denotes the repetition of an action, as in Job vii. 7; Hos. xiv. 8, etc.; so here we may translate simply, "He will again have compassion." **He will subdue;** literally, *tread underfoot*. Sin is regarded as a personal enemy, which by God's sovereign grace will be entirely subdued. So, according to one interpretation, sin is personified (Gen. iv. 7; comp. Ps. lxxv. 3). **Cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.** Thou wilt blot out and bury completely and for ever, as once thou didst overwhelm the Egyptians in the Red Sea (Exod. xv. 1, 4, 10, 21). The miraculous deliverance of the Israelites at the Exodus is a type of the greater deliverance of the true Israelites in Christ (Ps. ciii. 12; 1 John i. 7; comp. Isa. xliii. 25).

Ver. 20.—**Thou wilt perform** (literally, *give*) **the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham.** Jacob and Abraham are mentioned as the chiefs and representatives of the chosen family; and "the truth" (i.e. God's faithfulness to his promises) and "mercy" are equally given to both, separately assigned only for the sake of the parallelism. Knabenbauer compares such passages as Ps. cxiv. 1, "When Israel went forth out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language" (Ps. cv. 6; Isa. xli. 8; lxiii. 16, etc.). The general meaning, therefore, is that God will perform the promises made to the forefathers, as Luke i. 72, etc. **Hast sworn,** as in Gen. xxii. 16, etc.; xxviii. 13, etc.; Deut. vii. 12. With the close of the ode Hengstenberg compares Rom. xi. 33—36. Thus the checkered prophecy ends with the glow of faith and happy hope.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—13.—*The good in degenerate times.* We are not to understand these verses as referring specially to the prophet himself. In ch. i. 8, 9 we have his own lamentation in view of the prevailing ungodliness; here "the speaker is not the prophet, but the true Israel, i.e. Israel within Israel, personified" (Cheyne). God has never left himself without witnesses. Even in the most corrupt and degenerate times he has had a people to show forth his praise. It was so in the age to which this book of Scripture refers. Widespread though the depravity was, "a remnant" continued faithful, true, loyal to God and obedient to his will; and Micah here speaks simply as the mouth-piece of these, setting forth their sadness in view of the abounding wickedness, yet withal their unshaken confidence in the triumph of truth and righteousness; whilst then, as the prophet of the Lord, he declared that this confidence should not be disappointed, but the victory anticipated be most surely won. Notice here, concerning the Church of God—

I. **HER BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.** (Vers. 1—6.) 1. *The desire for spiritual excellence was ardently cherished.* This aspiration of the good is here expressed figuratively. "My soul desired the first-ripe figs" (ver. 1). These were accounted the choicest and sweetest, and were very refreshing and very welcome to the weary traveller, and hence were chosen as the symbol of spiritual excellence. So elsewhere

in the prophetic writings (Hos. ix. 10; Jer. xxiv.). The meaning, then, is that the good longed for the prevalence of piety in the nation, and to see the people bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. This is the aspiration of the good in every age. As the sculptor ardently desires to see the rough block transformed into the perfect statue, or the artist to see the bare canvas before him covered with the creations of his genius, or the horticulturist to see the waste field transformed into a garden of delight, and bearing, in infinite variety, the flowers and fruits; so all good men yearn to see the spiritual transformation of the world. "My soul desired the first-ripe figs" (ver. 1). 2. *This ardently cherished desire was unrealized.* (Ver. 1.) The verse brings vividly before us the sense of disappointment arising from the spiritual barrenness and unproductiveness that prevailed in the land. The scene presented was not that of an abundant harvest, but of a land bare and barren, whose best days were of yore, in which so little good remained as to be but like gleanings when the vintage is over, not even a cluster remaining. "I am as when they have gathered," etc. (ver. 1). And as further illustrating this disappointment, a graphic description is given of the prevailing spiritual desolation. (1) Mortality and martyrdom had impoverished the land in the removal from it of the tender, the trusty, the true (ver. 2; Isa. lvii. 1). (2) Anarchy reigned, with its accompanying violence, treachery, and injustice (vers. 2, 3). (3) The administration of justice had become a burlesque, its administrators working together, "wrapping it up," weaving it together so as to keep up the form, and to appear just, whilst really seeking their own selfish ends (ver. 3), and even "the best" amongst them being "hard and piercing," even as a briar, and "the most upright" being as "a thorn-hedge which, set for protection, inflicts injury" (ver. 4). (4) Friendship, "sweet'ner of life and solder of society," had become insincere and unreal; yea, even the most sacred relationships of life had become perverted, and natural affection sacrificed and changed to hate (vers. 5, 6). 3. *This non-realization occasioned bitter disappointment.* "Woe is me!" (ver. 1). A life of piety is marked by the experience of true joy (Ps. i. 1—3; Prov. iii. 17). Yet it is not always sunshine even with the good. "If we listen to David's harp, we shall hear as many hearse-like harmonies as carols" (Bacon). And a very large ingredient in the cup of sorrow to the good is occasioned by the contemplation of the blighting effects of sin. As looking around them, and despite their endeavours to disseminate truth and righteousness, they see multitudes walking according to the world's maxims, cherishing its spirit and reaping its sad harvest, sorrow fills their hearts, and they become desponding and sad. And hence the lament of the Church in view of her small numbers and the general corruption, as here expressed, "Woe is me!" etc. (ver. 1).

II. *HER UNSWERVING CONFIDENCE.* (Vers. 7—10.) 1. *This confidence rested in God.* "Therefore I will look unto the Lord" (ver. 7). In times of seeming non-success in holy service we should cherish unswerving trust in the God of truth, and having faithfully discharged our duty, should commit the rest unto him. 2. *This confidence was expressed in patient waiting for God.* He had "spoken good concerning Israel," and had declared "glorious things" respecting Zion, the city of God. And in the dark days his servants were prepared patiently to wait for the fulfilment of these, even as the mariner waits for fair winds and favourable tide, or as the watchman waits through the long night for the coming of the day. "I will wait for the God of my salvation" (ver. 7). 3. *This confidence was sustained by inspiring hope.* "My God will hear me." So did hope cast her bow of promise across the stormy cloud and kindle the bright star in the dark sky. 4. *This confidence triumphed even in the midst of adversity.* The world was very evil, and the good in the land were few. Iniquity appeared to be victorious, and might to triumph over right. The hearts of the pious, full of patriotism and of the love of God, were sad; yet their reliance was unshaken and unswerving. Dark days were before them, severe chastisement must be experienced, and they would soon feel the rod of the oppressor and be exposed to the taunts of the heathen, who would mockingly ask, "Where is the Lord thy God?" But they could rest in the assurance that the Lord would be their Light in darkness; that he would interpose on their behalf, bringing them forth out of the gloom into the light, covering their foes with shame, and vindicating his own righteousness. "Rejoice not against me," etc. (vers. 8—10).

III. *HER ASSURED VICTORY.* (Vers. 11—13.) In these verses, speaking, not as the

mouthpiece of the good but prophetically as the seer, Micah delivers the assurance he was inspired by God to utter, and bearing upon the time to come. His words, as rendered in the Authorized Version, are somewhat obscure, but we gather from them that a brighter future should dawn upon the world sin had darkened and defiled, and of that glorious era he here speaks. And as his people, in the days when they "sat by the rivers of Babylon, and wept as they remembered Zion," and thought of the desolation sin had wrought, turned to these and similar assurances of the golden age yet to come, who can tell to what an extent they became nerved afresh and inspired with renewed courage and hope! Even so let those to-day who grieve, with the good through all ages, over the blighting effects of sin, rejoice in the prospect of the ultimate victory. "Lift up your heads . . . redemption draweth nigh." Now death reigns and sin triumphs; but ere long grace shall reign through righteousness unto eternal life. Every throe of sorrow is bringing us nearer to the time of the world's full deliverance from the power of evil. The triumph is sure. "The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." This suggestive paragraph closes with a note of warning. "Notwithstanding," etc. (ver. 13). There is a glorious future awaiting the Church of God, but meanwhile the work of judgment must be perfected. Notwithstanding the bright prospect here unfolded, sin will assuredly work its dire effects. The triumph of righteousness carries with it the defeat of unrighteousness. One of the poets sings of a bell suspended on the Inchcape rock, that the sound might warn the sailors of their nearness to danger; and tells how pirates cut the bell so as to silence the sound; and how that subsequently these same pirates struck upon the very rock which they had deprived of its means of warning them. Let us not thus treat this note of warning, but be constrained to "break off sin by righteousness," as it reminds us that "God is not mocked," and that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Ver. 7.—*Waiting for God.* "I will wait for the God of my salvation." The good, personified, are here represented as declaring that they would place themselves in harmony with the wise and holy will of God; that they would trustingly acquiesce and quietly endure, drawing from intimate personal relationship to God that holy inspiration which would enable them in the dark days now before them, with true heroism to encounter every difficulty, and with calm resignation to bear every sorrow, and to find in so doing tranquillity and peace. "I will wait," etc. (ver. 7).

I. OUR CIRCUMSTANCES IN LIFE OFTEN CALL FOR THE EXERCISE OF THIS SPIRIT OF PATIENT WAITING FOR GOD. It is the method of our God by slow processes to bring to pass all that he has designed, whether in nature, in providence, or in grace. His purposes are gradually evolved. His delays are for wise and gracious reasons. Hence, instead of fretting and repining and growing impatient under adversity, as though some strange thing were happening to us, it behoves us to "rest in the Lord," and so be cheerful even in the night and under the shadow of the cloud, assured that to those rightly exercised by sorrow "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope" (Rom. v. 3, 4).

II. THE CHERISHING OF THIS SPIRIT ENNOBLES HUMAN CHARACTER. 1. *You see in such a case a man who is continually gaining triumphs where multitudes are worsted and defeated.* There are many who can do, but who cannot bear. They can actively serve God and strive to promote the interests of men, but they cannot passively yield themselves up to the will of God, and, without resentment, bear the reproaches of those who seek their hurt. And certainly the man who is able to do this is the more royal. Who can doubt the wisdom of Solomon when he said, "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city" (Prov. xvi. 32)? 2. *You see in such a case a man who is clearly under the influence of high Christian motives.* The influences which impel a man calmly and trustingly to submit to God's all-wise but often inscrutable appointments, are not human, but Divine. There is nothing in mere earthly considerations that is at all calculated to inspire this patience. It is only as we bring the realities of eternity to bear upon our present experiences that we become lifted up to a higher realm, and are enabled patiently to endure.

III. BY THIS PATIENT WAITING GOD IS GLORIFIED AND SERVED. The thought of service to God is too often restricted to *active endeavour*. It is overlooked that he may be served by us passively as well as actively; by quiet resignation to his will as

well as by open and earnest toil in seeking the good of others. "They also serve who only stand and wait." Great was the service rendered by the Man Christ Jesus as he traversed the cities and villages of Palestine, going about doing good, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God; but yet higher service was rendered by him as with holy resignation he acquiesced in the great Father's will and "endured the cross, despising the shame."

IV. THIS WAITING FOR THE LORD SHALL IN NO WISE LOSE ITS REWARD. There shall be ultimate deliverance; salvation shall come, and the thankful acknowledgment shall be, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he hath saved us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will evermore be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isa. xxv. 9).

Vers. 8, 9.—*From darkness into light.* "When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a Light unto me. . . . He will bring me forth to the light." The Bible is "the heart-book of the world." In order to the unravelment of its deep spiritual teaching, we must study it in the light of our own soul-experiences—of our joys and sorrows and needs. It is one thing to be able to understand the volume in the meaning of its words and the construction of its phrases and forms of expression; but it is quite another thing to feel that it is ours to enter into the inward experiences of God's saints of old, through whom he speaks to us in these wondrous pages—experiences by which he has fitted them to be his messengers of help and hope to the world; and to enter into these we must bring our hearts as well as our intellects to the study of the book, and endeavour to trace the application of its teachings to the wants and aspirations of the human spirit. Notice in the human experience here described—

I. DARKNESS. The adverse influences of life are thus symbolized. We are constantly attended by these. It must be so. Human life is a pilgrimage, and no traveller can expect to reach the end of his journey without feeling weary and worn. It is a voyage, and hence we must encounter storms. The world is a stage, and we are the players, and although to outward appearances it may seem that we are acting our respective parts with ease, who can tell what anxiety is encountered *behind the scenes*? These adverse influences meet us in life's daily duties. They are often occasioned by differences in temper and disposition, giving rise to misunderstanding; or by the temporal circumstances being straitened; or by prolonged and tedious suspense in reference to the success or failure of certain projects; or by baffled hopes and expectations. They come to us in the form of the sorrows of life. There is failure of health, with the anxious days and weary nights it brings to the household. There is bereavement, with its attendant grief and gloom. There are also cruel misrepresentations, malicious censures, unjust reproaches (ver. 10). And these adverse influences follow in quick succession.

"When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions."

They fill the heart with sadness, and there settles down upon the troubled spirit the darkness of night. "I sit in darkness."

II. LIGHT IN DARKNESS. Light is revealing, restoring, gladdening, in its effects. Under its influence that which was before concealed becomes manifest to us; new life is put into us, and joy and gladness become inspired within. So shall it be with the good in a spiritual sense. In their gloomiest seasons these gracious influences shall be experienced by them by reason of the presence with them of the Lord their God. It is not so much that the Lord will cause light to break in upon them (although that is gloriously true), as that he himself will be with them as their Light. "When I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a Light unto me;" "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation" (Ps. xxvii. 1); "In his favour is life" (Ps. xxx. 5). Light in darkness, springing from the conscious presence of the Lord, is the thought here expressed. And in the next verse is the additional, yet closely related thought of—

III. PASSING OUT OF DARKNESS INTO THE LIGHT. "He will bring me forth to the light" (ver. 9). So has it been in the past in the experience of the good. Jacob (comp. Gen. xlii. 36 with xlv. 26—28); Elijah (comp. 1 Kings xix. 4 with vers. 5—8, 18); the Shunammite (comp. 2 Kings iv. 20 with ver. 37); the Captivity (comp.

Ps. cxxiii. with Ps. cxxvi.). So still to all trusting hearts; and so hereafter, "The Lord shall be thine everlasting Light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (Isa. lx. 20).

Vers. 14—17.—*Prayer and its response.* How mysteriously great is the privilege of prayer! How wonderful that finite creatures may thus draw near to the Infinite, carrying their needs into the Divine presence, breathing their desires into the ear of God, and obtaining from him all required mercy and grace! We think of the patriarch who, weary and worn with his wanderings, slept, with a stone for his pillow, and we speak of the ladder he beheld connecting the spot where he lay with the very throne of God, as his *vision*; but the thought of *prayer* changes this into a blessed *reality*, for communication between earth and heaven has been established, and thus human spirits rise to God, and enrichments descend from him to satisfy men's deepest needs! Prayer, in the highest conception of it, is a thoughtful communion with God. It is intercourse with God. It is sympathetic contact with him. It is an exercise in which we engage that we may have fellowship with the Invisible, and may thus understand the Divine will, and become increasingly disposed to become obedient thereunto. Helpful, indeed, is the influence we derive from communion with the pure and holy amongst men; then say how elevating must be contact with him who is perfect in purity, the Eternal Spirit! But prayer is also supplication. We have wants. God has constituted us dependent beings. Needs, both temporal and spiritual, press upon us at times with a heavy weight. And prayer is the soul, deeply conscious of these necessities, coming to God with intense desire seeking their supply. Our supplications, however, should rise beyond our own individual wants. Prayer should be presented by us on behalf of others. In this holy exercise we should seize upon interests broader than those pertaining to our own personal life, and, with a true concern, should bear these up before the throne of God. As the great Intercessor pleads for us before his Father's throne, so we also in our measure are to be intercessors for men. The Prophet Micah comes before us in these verses as exercising this intercessory function. Note here—

I. THE DEVOTED SEER PLEADING WITH GOD ON BEHALF OF HIS PEOPLE. (Ver. 14.) Observe: 1. He makes mention of their peculiar relationship to the Most High: (1) As being his chosen servants. "Thy people;" "the flock of thine inheritance." (2) As separated from the nations to his praise: "which dwell solitarily." 2. He recalls the former manifestations to them of the Divine goodness in the bestowment of rich blessings. "The days of old." 3. He supplicates the Divine Shepherd to be with them in the dark days now before them, sustaining them and enriching them with plenty (ver. 14).

II. THE DIVINE RESPONSE TO THE EARNEST SUPPLICATION OF THE PROPHET. 1. The prophet was assured that there should be deliverance wrought for his people by Divine interposition (ver. 15). 2. It was declared to him that the foes who would triumph over them should ultimately be covered with confusion and shame (vers. 16, 17). Intercessory prayer is still an essential part of the ministry of the Church; it is mighty and prevailing; it commands and wields the forces of heaven. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. v. 16).

Vers. 18, 19.—*The forgiving God.* No words could possibly have been more appropriate than these by way of bringing this brief book of prophecy to a close. When we think of the degenerate character of the age in which this prophet lived, and when we remember that he had constantly to deal with human guilt and depravity, to declare the Divine judgments, and to endeavour by warnings and threatenings to bring home to men a sense of their sinfulness,—what could be more fitting than that, in closing his contribution to the Divine oracles, he should expatiate, as he does here so impressively, upon Jehovah as being *the forgiving God*. His design in these verses clearly was to extol the grace and mercy of the Lord his God. As he thought of the Divine forgiving love, he felt that with the Most High none can compare. With warmest admiration, combined with the profoundest adoration, he asks, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" (ver. 18). And instead of attempting to answer his own inquiry, he indicates what his answer would be by enlarging yet further upon God's

pardoning grace: "He retaineth not," etc. (vers. 18, 19). Let us reflect upon the incomparableness of the Lord our God, viewed as the Divine Forgiver. Consider—

I. WHAT THIS DIVINE FORGIVENESS IMPLIES. 1. *The great fact of sin.* There are those who have endeavoured to explain away this solemn fact of sin; who contend that there is not to be found in man any intentional preference of wrong to right; that what we call sin is something predicable of society rather than of the individual; that man himself is right enough, but lacks the science required to organize society rightly; and that what we call sin is after all only the development of these discordant causes in society. See Bushnell's reply to this, setting forth on this theory our inconsistency in blaming the persons by whom sinful acts have been wrought, and in censuring ourselves when we have done unworthy acts, etc. ('Nature and the Supernatural,' ch. v.). There is no escape from admitting the great fact of sin. The Word is unerring as it declares that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 23); that "there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. iii. 12); and that "every mouth must be stopped, and the whole world stand guilty before God" (Rom. iii. 19). 2. *The Divine interposition with a view to the deliverance of the race from this terrible blight.* We can form no true conception of the Divine forgiveness unless these facts of personal guilt and transgression, and of the Divine interposition in order to our deliverance, are kept prominently before us. And even at this stage our admiration is called into exercise, and we cry, "Who is a God like unto thee?" This is intensified as we consider—

II. WHAT THIS DIVINE FORGIVENESS INCLUDES. It includes deliverance from the sad consequences of sin. Note what these are. 1. *Mark the consequences of sin to the individual.* (1) There is *loss of power.* Every spiritual defeat is attended by the weakening of moral strength. (2) There is *disquietude of conscience.* (3) *Separation from God.* There can be no communion where there is contrariety of nature. "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" (4) *Suffering and death.* The connection between the spirit and the body is so intimate that the body necessarily suffers through the disorganization sin has wrought in the soul. 2. *Consequences resulting to society.* These also are sad and distressing. "The bad inheritance passes, and fears, frauds, crimes against property, character, and life, abuses of power, oppressions of the weak, persecutions of the good, piracies, wars of revolt, wars of conquest, are the staple of the world's bitter history. It is a pitiless and dreadful power, as fallen society must necessarily be" (Bushnell, 'Nature and the Supernatural,' p. 123). The Divine forgiveness means deliverance from all these sad consequences of evil. It is not a bare pardon merely, but it carries with it enfranchisement from the blighting effects of evil. There is the impartation to the forgiven of a Divine power, an inward spiritual force to enable them to resist the evil and downward tendencies; the lost power is restored, and which is mighty in "subduing our iniquities" (ver. 19). There is the impartation to the forgiven of peace of conscience; the discordant and disturbing elements are hushed; the harmonies are restored. There is the experience of renewed communion with the Eternal. The soul, accepted and renewed, would ever abide at the feet of the Lord. There is oneness and agreement now, and hence fellowship is possible and practicable, yea, is felt to be desirable and essential. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." And whilst suffering and death remain, yet by a Divine alchemy the character of these life-sorrows becomes entirely changed, and they cease to be viewed as harsh inflictions, but are accepted as the loving discipline by which the Divine Father renders the character perfect and entire, whilst "the sting of death" having been taken away, the terror also is gone. And as men become thus brought into this holy experience will the regeneration of the world and its complete deliverance from evil be brought to pass. What a fulness of meaning, then, there is when God is spoken of as "pardoning iniquity"! And as we think how that this forgiveness carries with it all the privileges, honours, and enjoyments here and hereafter of the spiritual life, our admiration of him who has made all this possible to the individual and the race rises higher still, and we cry with wondering and adoring love, "Who is a God like unto thee?"

III. WHAT THIS DIVINE FORGIVENESS INVOLVES. 1. It has involved on the part of God all that is comprehended in the gift and work of his Son Jesus Christ; for it is through Christ alone that this forgiveness of sin is secured. "In him have we

redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins" (Col. i. 14). It involved the heavenly Shepherd's coming forth to seek his lost and fallen world. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke xix. 10). Lo! the Christ of God, the Gift of the Father's love, clothed himself in our humanity, obeyed the Law we had broken, atoned for sin in the death of the cross, that we might not perish, that we might exchange the wilderness for the fold, be lifted out of the lost condition into hope, dignity, and character here, and be raised hereafter to immortal purity, peace, and joy. The power of human language is too weak adequately to describe the love of God as expressed even in the minutest of his doings; but in reference to this seeking the erring, with a view to their restoration, it signally fails, and we can only adoringly cry, "Who is a God like unto thee?" 2. On the part of *man* this Divine forgiveness involves *penitence and faith*. "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark i. 16). On conditions thus simple the vilest transgressor may find mercy of the Lord. And if there is another thought which leads us to feel this pardoning love of God to be the more wonderful, it is the remembrance that he has not only provided the pardon, but even condescends to plead with men, that they may be led to fulfil the righteous conditions and to receive the boon (Isa. i. 18; Rev. iii. 20). Let us not repel him who has come to bless us by turning us away from our iniquities, but rather give him a hearty greeting. Then, with this ancient seer and with the forgiven through all ages, we shall cry, with hearts overflowing with love and praise, "Who is a God like unto thee?" (vers. 18, 19).

Ver. 20.—*The Divine promises and their fulfilment.* These words bear upon them the impress of deep human experience. They form the crowning testimony of a man who had long proved the reality of that which they affirm. In closing his book of prophecy he would, with all his heart and soul, affix his seal to the bright declaration that God is ever faithful and true. Jehovah was to him a living reality, the centre of his affections and the strength of his heart. "He endured as seeing him who is invisible." And Divine, indeed, is that trust in the eternal Lord which fires the soul and nerves it for entering into "the holy war;" which stands the warrior in good stead, and proves invulnerable whilst he engages in the strife; and which also, when the good soldier, having fought well and grown grey in the service, begins to lay aside his armour and quietly to await the summons to the presence and joy of the Lord he has served, proves his consolation and support. Micah doubtless had in mind the rich promises given by God, first to Abraham, and then reiterated to Jacob, that they should be blessed and multiplied, and that through their line lasting blessings should flow to all the families of the earth (Gen. xxii. 16—18; xxviii. 13, 14). Notice—

I. HE REPRESENTS THE DIVINE PROMISES AS CHARACTERIZED BY "MERCY" AND "TRUTH." "The truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham" (ver. 20). The expression is, at first sight, rather peculiar; yet it may easily be explained. By "mercy" we understand favour shown to the undeserving. Grand hero as Abraham was, there was nothing in him to merit such distinguishing honour as was conferred upon him. The choice was altogether traceable to the abounding mercy and grace of God. So also with Jacob, who, at the outset of his career, was about as unlovely as man could well be. Then why, it may be asked, the change in the form of expression? Why not "the mercy to Abraham" and "the truth to Jacob"? Why "the mercy to Abraham" and "the truth to Jacob"? Simply to introduce the additional thought of "truth." "Truth" here means the bringing into clearer light that which had been partially hinted at. "What was free mercy to Abraham became, when God had once promised it, his truth" (Pusey). And his revelation of truth became clearer and brighter, until at length he appeared in whom both "grace and truth" came in their unveiled clearness and their unrestricted fulness.

II. HE TRACES THESE DIVINE PROMISES AS HAVING THEIR SOURCE AND SPRING IN THE ETERNAL LOVE OF GOD. "From the days of old," i.e. from eternity, God has cherished the loving purpose of enriching us thus. It is not "a modern project, but an ancient charter."

III. HE REJOICES IN THE ASSURANCE THAT THESE DIVINE PROMISES SHALL BE UNDOUBTEDLY FULFILLED. "Thou wilt perform," etc. This assurance rested on the *Divine pledge* ("which thou hast sworn unto our fathers"), and which the faithful Promiser is both able and willing to redeem. "He cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. iii.

13). In building the temple of Solomon two pillars were set up in the porch of the edifice—the left one being called Boaz, *i.e.* “In God is strength;” and the other on the right being named Jachin, *i.e.* “He will establish”—thus beautifully associating together the thoughts of God’s ability and his willing resolve to bless. Let these thoughts dwell in our minds respecting him, for on these pillars our faith and hope may ever securely rest.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*A moral dearth in the land.* The prophet, speaking in the name of the godly remnant of the land, laments their terrible isolation. We are thus reminded of the sad condition of a land in which there is a dearth of good men. For: 1. *They are the choice fruit of the land*—wholesome, fragrant, delicious. The ideal Israel is compared to “grapes” and “the first ripe in the fig tree” (Hos. ix. 10). The Lord “taketh pleasure” in such; they satisfy the hunger of the Divine heart for godliness in the creature (Ps. cxlvii. 11; cxlix. 4; Prov. xi. 20). So far as they share the spirit of Christ, they are, like him, “beloved of God,” and should be attractive to men. 2. *They are the salt of the earth*—the one element that preserves from universal corruption. The picture presented to us is the gradual dying out of the godly; they “cease” (Ps. xii. 1), they “perish” (Isa. lvii. 1). Some few remain, “two or three in the top of the uttermost bough,” which were not touched, or those unripe which were but imperfect and poor, or those which had fallen, “and thus were fouled and stained, and yet were not utterly carried away.” The promise, “Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children” (Ps. xlv. 16), is no longer fulfilled. The sons and daughters of the godly do not rise up to fill their places in the Church. The few godly survivors are heard lamenting and longing for the pious companions of former days; “my soul desireth the first-ripe fig” (*desiderio tam cari capitis*). The fewer the good that remain, the more difficult it is for them to retain the fervour of their piety. Embers dispersed soon die out. It is hard to keep up a June temperature under December skies. From this dearth of the godly many evils follow. There is a loss of confidence, first in spiritual fellowship, and then in social relations (ver. 5). There is a loosening of the most sacred family bonds. Depravity and degradation become deeper and darker (vers. 3, 4). The little remnant of God’s servants are increasingly depressed and discouraged: “Woe is me!” (cf. Ps. cxx. 5; Isa. vi. 5). This results from constant contact with sin and from the heart-sickness which it causes; “great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart” (Rom. ix. 2). Thus we learn: 1. The greatest calamity to a nation is not war, pestilence, or famine, but the withholding of the Spirit of grace to convert the hearts of men, and consequently the dying out of the righteous. The famine of bread is bad; the famine “of hearing the words of the Lord” is worse. But worst of all is the dearth of living witnesses for God in the land. 2. The winning of souls to God is the greatest wisdom and the most enlightened patriotism. 3. The welfare of a nation is bound up with the living God, the true Church, and believing prayer.—E. S. P.

Ver. 3.—*Earnest sinners.* A contrast is suggested between various grades of evil-doing. Some are not so much active as passive in sin. They drift; they are led; when sinners entice them they “consent,” perhaps reluctantly at first. For want of resisting power they are found walking “in the counsel of the ungodly.” Ere long they bestir themselves to gratify some sinful desire. At first they are half-hearted in the service of sin, for memory and conscience still restrain them. “Their heart is divided,” and it is only one hand they stretch out to grasp the forbidden fruit. Their other hand has still hold on the book of the Law of their God which they learned at their mother’s knee. They soon find that they cannot serve two masters. The book of God is dropped; the hand that held it, released from the mysterious magnetic power which the Bible exerts on those that study it, is stretched out to co-operate with its fellow in deeds of sin. Practice makes perfect; the appetite grows by what it feeds upon; and soon the transgressor, who not so long ago blushed even at the enticements to sin that were addressed to him, now is foremost among those who “do evil with both hands earnestly.” In these earnest sinners we note the following points. 1. *Unity*

of purpose. They are men of one idea—how to please themselves. As they have abandoned all thought of seeking their pleasure in doing the will of God, and doing “good unto all men,” they concentrate their energies, “both hands,” on gratifying every desire whatever the cost may be. 2. *Perversion of conscience.* We are reminded of this by Jerome’s rendering, “They call the evil of their hands good.” They speak of the evil done as “well done.” They could hardly be so earnest in sin unless they had in some way perverted conscience. Some of the forms of iniquity disclosed in vers. 3—6 imply this. And certainly this is one of the most fatal results of sinning. Acts of sin form habits of sinning which react on the judgment and pervert it till the doom is incurred, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil!” etc. (Isa. v. 20). 3. *A conspiracy of men of influence.* We expect a certain amount of crime and moral obliquity in what has been called the *residuum* of society; but profligacy in high places is a scandal and “a reproach to any people.” See Jeremiah’s experience (v. 1—5). Wherever the infection began, it has spread now to the court and the judgment-hall: “Death is entered into our palaces.” There is such a dearth of good men (vers. 1, 2) that the restraint of their protests, or even of the silent testimony of their presence, is wanting. The princes expect bribes, or “black mail.” The judges judge for reward. The testimony of contemporaneous and later prophets on this point is very strong (Isa. i. 23; Ezek. xxii. 27; Hos. iv. 18; Amos v. 12). And they veil these crimes under milder names. The prince *demand*s, but calls it “asking.” The judge’s *bribe* is called a reward for service rendered. The great man hesitates not to “utter his mischievous desire” in the presence of meaner men, who, he knows, will be ready enough to carry it out, if they can thus curry favour with him or earn money, though it be the price of blood; “thus they weave it together” (Revised Version). Illustrate by the conspiracy of Ahab, Jezebel, and the elders and nobles in the robbery and murder of Naboth. 4. *We see this infection extending to the most sacred scenes of family life.* What a terrible picture is suggested by vers. 5, 6! The great men who have conspired in crime carry the contagion home with them. They cannot leave their sin on the threshold, like an infected garment. Their children catch the plague. Even a wife is not above suspicion. Thus curses come home to roost. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. Families are demoralized. “The end of those things is death.” Learn: 1. *Earnestness is not in itself an excellent thing.* The devil is terribly in earnest, “going about as a roaring lion,” etc. (1 Pet. v. 8). False teachers are sometimes more earnest than the true. “They zealously seek you in no good way” (Gal. iv. 17). Earnestness may be as glowing as a fire, and as destructive. 2. *Earnest sinners should be a motive and stimulus to the servants of Christ.* If they are so eager in the work of destruction, what manner of persons ought we to be in the work of salvation? Yet some move neither hand, but stand all the day idle. Others are half-hearted, and therefore ply their work with but one hand, not devoting all their faculties to him whom they own as both Redeemer and Lord. Illustrate from King Joash’s interview with Elisha (2 Kings xiii. 14—19). Loyalty to our Saviour-King demands concentration of energy and enthusiasm of devotion, that we may do good “with both hands earnestly.”—E. S. P.

Ver. 7.—*A soul shut up to God.* The word “therefore,” or the term in the Revised Version, “but as for me,” marks the transition from a terrible necessity to a priceless privilege. It was a time when it was needful to be suspicious of those who ought to have been worthy of unlimited confidence. Neither a companion nor a familiar friend, nor even a child or a wife, could be trusted (vers. 5, 6). Such had been the experience of many in the past. Samson had been betrayed by his tribesmen, his friend, his father-in-law (Judg. xiv. 20), and her that “lay in his bosom.” David had found his confidence betrayed by the men of Judah (1 Sam. xxiii. 12, 19), by Joab (2 Sam. iii. 22—39), by Ahithophel, and by Absalom. As it was in the days of Micah, so would it be in the days of Jesus Christ, when many of his disciples would go back and walk no more with him, and when an apostle would betray him. No wonder that some of his servants are called to a similar experience (Matt. x. 24, 34—36). The prospect *manward* is thus dark and depressing in the extreme. Note what a disintegrating and destructive force *sin* is. It not only separates between man and God (Isa. lix. 2), but has a tendency to alienate friends, to break up families, to destroy human confidences, and gender a pessimism which finds expression in the passionate, though not deliberate, verdict of

the psalmist, "All men are liars." If we cannot repose confidence in others, can we trust in ourselves? Our consciousness of sin and utter failure forbids this (vers. 8, 9; Jer. xvii. 9). Thus we are utterly shut up to God. A military man, suffering from some obscure disease of the mind, was in the habit of promenading in a certain track on the ramparts, after sunset. When he walked eastward, and had nothing but the dark sky to look on, extreme dejection oppressed his clouded mind. But no sooner did he turn towards the west, where his eyes caught the brightness left by the sun that had set, than hope and peace revived in his heart. There are times when, if we look anywhere but towards God, our Sun, we may feel ready to despond or despair. Then we know what it is to be shut up to God. "But as for me, I will look unto the Lord." That look implies hope: "I will wait;" and faith: "My God will hear me." When we thus look, wait, trust, our thoughts may express themselves in the following thoughts about God, and our "meditation of him shall be sweet."

I. HOW MUCH WE HAVE IN GOD. 1. *His name, Jehovah, describes his nature.* He is the eternal, unchangeable, faithful, covenant-keeping God. He revealed himself by that new name when he came as the Redeemer of his distressed people. And this Jehovah is "my God." Martin Luther remarks, "There is a great deal of divinity in the pronouns." The theology taught in the term "my God" is worth more than all the lectures ever given on "the attributes." 2. *The figures employed for God remind us of the treasure we have in him.* Look, for example, at a single group of figures in the sixty-second psalm. There God is described as "my Rock," on which I can safely rest and securely build; as "my high Tower" (Revised Version); "my strong Habitation, whereunto I may continually resort" (Ps. lxxi. 3); and therefore as "my Refuge," where I may be safe from the sword of the avenger of blood, or from any other foe. The city of Metz prided itself in the name "La Pucelle," the virgin-fortress; but in October, 1870, its fair fame was tarnished by its fall, and its inhabitants were at the mercy of their foes. But no such disaster can ever overtake those who can say of the Lord, "He is my Refuge and my Fortress, my God; in him will I trust."

II. HOW MUCH WE MAY EXPECT FROM GOD. "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him." Among the blessings we may expect are the two crowning mercies which the prophet claims by faith. 1. *Answers to prayer*; which will be definite, appropriate, decisive ("My God will hear me"), such as God's servants of old received; e.g. Jacob (Gen. xxxii.), Moses (Numb. xiv. 13—20), Asa (2 Chron. xiv. 11, 12), Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xx.). These prayers will bring: 2. *Deliverance*; for "my God" is "the God of my salvation." Thus in the midst of dangers from without or from within we can say, with the psalmist, "I shall not be greatly moved" (Ps. lxii. 2). Like the rocking-stones on the Cornish coast, we may at times be slightly shaken but not "greatly moved;" *moved*, but not *removed*. Like the magnet, we may oscillate for a time, and be slightly affected by changing conditions, but never greatly moved from our purpose of witnessing faithfully for God and his truth. Yet our confidence in regard to our stability is not in ourselves, but in our God, in "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

III. HOW WORTHY HE IS OF UNLIMITED CONFIDENCE. "I will look;" "I will wait;" "My soul, wait thou only upon God;" "Trust in him at all times." "It is comparatively easy," says Dr. Edward Payson, "to wait upon God, but to wait upon him only—to feel, so far as our strength, happiness, and usefulness are concerned, as if all creatures and second causes were annihilated, and we were alone in the universe with God, is, I suspect, a difficult and rare attainment." This is the unlimited confidence to which we aspire. Then we may not only wait *upon* God, but wait *for* God, leaving the time and method of our deliverance to him (Ps. xxxvii. 7—9; cxxx. 5, 6). Then we shall not only be shut up to God, but shut in with God (Ps. xci. 1). With God on our side we are in the majority. "How many do you count me for?" asked an ancient commander of an officer who was alarmed at the disparity of the forces they could array against the foe. "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

"Be thou my God, and the whole world is mine;
Whilst thou art Sovereign, I'm secure;
I shall be rich till thou art poor;
For all I fear and all I wish, heaven,
Earth, and hell are thine."

Vers. 8, 9.—*God the Vindicator of the penitent.* The truths here taught might be applied to the people of Israel, with whom the prophet identifies himself, when humbled before exulting foes like the Edomites (Obad. 8-15) or their Chaldean conquerors. Light came to them in Babylon, through the witness borne by Daniel and his friends, the ministry of Ezekiel, the favour of Cyrus, and above all by their deliverance from the curse of idolatry before their restoration to their land. They may be applied also to a Church in a depressed or fallen state. A godly remnant could yet look forward to deliverance and revival. *E.g.* Sardis (Rev. iii. 1-5). We may also use the words as describing the experience of a sinner humbled before God and man. Notice—

I. HIS PRESENT STATE. 1. *He has fallen.* Then he had stood before. He has been no hypocrite, but a pilgrim on the highway from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Like Christian in Bunyan's immortal allegory, he has been confronted by Apollyon. In the struggle he has been wounded in the head, the hand, and the foot. "Then Apollyon, espying his opportunity, began to gather up close to Christian, and, wrestling with him, gave him a dreadful fall; and with that Christian's sword flew out of his hand." Prostrate and powerless, he seems "drawn unto death and ready to be slain." 2. *He sits in darkness.* A hardened sinner in such a crisis may have a light, such as it is ("Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled," Isa. l. 11). But the fallen Christian is heard bemoaning himself (Job xxix. 2, 3). The sun, the light of God's countenance, is gone. It is a night of mist. Not even a star of promise can be seen except when the mist is for a moment or two dispersed before a rising breath of the Divine Comforter, who, though grieved, will not depart. 3. *He is exposed to the indignation of the Lord.* He cannot attribute his darkness to sickness or nervous depression. In the gloom caused by conscience he sees the shadow caused by the righteous anger of God (Isa. lix. 1, 2). "Therefore we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness." "For our transgressions are multiplied," etc. (vers. 9, 12). 4. *He has to bear the scorn of men.* His enemies rejoice. This makes the cup of bitterness overflow. The self-righteous formalist thanks God he is not as other men, or even as this Christian. The profligate man finds one more excuse for asserting that there is no such thing as real religion (cf. Ps. xxxv. 15, 16, 21, 25). We can imagine the morbid curiosity in the streets of Jerusalem, when it began to be whispered that a dark deed had been committed in the palace of King David, and that Uriah's death had been procured by foul means. Would not the men of Belial mock at the royal psalmist—seducer—murderer (2 Sam. xii. 14)? How the soldiers and the servants round the fire within the judgment-hall must have chuckled while Peter was weeping without! The world may hold its most riotous carnival, not when martyrs are burning at the stake, or their dead bodies are lying in the street of Sodom, but when the Saviour is wounded in the house of his friends, and the Church is mourning over the lost reputations of its fallen members (Luke xvii. 1).

II. THE GROUNDS OF HIS CONFIDENCE FOR THE FUTURE. The fallen Christian looks forward to rising again. He anticipates a new day when the Sun of Righteousness shall again rise on him. He speaks boldly (ver. 8). This is either the grossest presumption or the noblest faith. It is like Samson's boast, "I will go out as at other times;" or like David's trustful anticipation, "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways," etc. That these words are no vain vaunting we learn from the grounds of his confidence. 1. *He resolves quietly to endure God's chastening strokes.* Such submission is one sign of genuine repentance. Illust.: The Jews in captivity (Lev. xxvi. 40-42, "and they then accept the punishment of their iniquity; then will I remember my covenant," etc.); Eli (1 Sam. iii. 18); David, all through his long chastisement (see *e.g.* 2 Sam. xii. 20; xv. 25, 26; xvi. 11; cf. Job xxxiv. 31; Lam. iii. 39; Heb. xii. 5-7). 2. *He puts his trust entirely in God.* He has just before (ver. 7) spoken of himself as shut up to God. Again he returns to him and repeatedly expresses his faith, "The Lord shall be a Light unto me: he shall plead my cause: he will bring me forth to the light." His godly sorrow and cheerful submission are signs that there is a mystic film, a spiritual cord that binds him, even in his fallen state, to his Father-God. And he has promises to plead (Ps. xxxvii. 24; Prov. xxiv. 16). Illust.: Jonah (ii. 3, 4), St. Paul (Rom. vii. 24, 25). Grievous as are the sins of God's adopted children,

they are provided for: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin"—if any one of you little children sin, grievous and aggravated as *your* sin may be—"we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the Propitiation for our sins" (1 John ii. 1, 2). God vindicates such a penitent. He restores his soul. He renews his peace. He re-establishes his tarnished reputation. He puts a new song in his mouth (Ps. xl. 1—3; Isa. xii. 1, 2; lvii. 18, 19).—E. S. P.

Ver. 13.—"*The fruit of their doings.*" This expression is a most suggestive one. It occurs three times in the Prophet Jeremiah. In Jer. xvii. 10 God declares, as one of the signs of his omniscient, heart-searching power, that he can not only recompense each individual according to his *ways*, but "according to the *fruit of his doings.*" In Jer. xxi. 14 a similar declaration is addressed to the royal house of David: "I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings." And in Jer. xxxii. 17—19 the prophet expresses his admiration at the discriminating omnipotence of God—"great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon the ways of the sons of men: to give unto every one according to his *ways*, and according to the *fruit of his doings.*" Our text calls for *exposition* and admits of *illustration*.

I. EXPOSITION. An act is one thing; the fruit of that act is another thing. By fruit we understand that which is the natural result of the acts we perform. Those natural results under the reign of moral law we might foresee. Acts, like trees, bring forth fruit "after their kind." For such fruit we are held responsible. Responsibility varies according to knowledge acquired or attainable. A child's falsehood, though fraught with lifelong disasters, is less criminal than the less injurious lie of an adult. But we cannot disconnect our acts and their fruit. We cannot kill them in the seed, or nip them in the bud, or blight them in the flower; they will bear fruit of some kind. We are not held responsible for what we may call the accidental issues of our acts. Our good may be evil spoken of. The most unjustifiable inferences may be drawn from our words or deeds. Our Lord's teaching has been the occasion of discord in families and strife in states (Matt. x. 34—36). St. Paul's doctrine was perverted (Rom. iii. 8). A clear judgment is needed to discern what will be the natural effect of our conduct. We may not, dare not, leave our influence on others out of the account. We must use the enlightening Word, and pray for the aid of the illuminating Spirit, that we may acquire an enlightened conscience. And then we must seek so to live that the fruit of our doings will bring honour to God and be for our own "praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

II. ILLUSTRATION. Our first class of illustrations will be those in which the fruit of our doings, like the fruit of the tree in the garden, is "good" and "pleasant to the eyes," and "to be desired" as food for the soul through all eternity. 1. *The life and work of Jesus Christ.* The "good Master" "went about doing good." He did the will of him that sent him, and in doing it "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." What is the fruit of these doings? Eternity alone can reveal. His reward will be according to it—according to the glory brought to God and the blessedness to men (Isa. liii. 11, 12). 2. *The characters and labours of devoted servants of Christ.* The life and work of Christ is a pattern and an encouragement to all his followers (Luke vi. 40). Sow now the seed of Christian living and doing. It may seem to be lost, like the seed cast on the surface of flooded lands, but you shall find it after many days. You may die without seeing the fruitage in this life; you may rest from your labours, but your works will follow you (Gal. vi. 7—9). Incidents confirming this frequently come to light. At a Unitarian anniversary in New England a few years ago, one of the ministers, speaking of the small results of his work, added, "It must be remembered where my field is. The Connecticut valley is the home of Jonathan Edwards, and though he has been dead a century, he is a great name and a power for orthodoxy through all that country to-day." A devoted pastor, Rev. Thomas Hall, laboured for twenty-seven years at Heckmondwike, Yorkshire, amid great discouragement because he saw so little fruit from his labours. His successor could report that for a long time after his death most of those who were added to the fellowship of the Church acknowledged their indebtedness to their deceased pastor for their first religious impressions or some other special spiritual help. Take courage, fellow-

labourers. If you seem to have laboured in vain, you can add, "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God" (Isa. xlix. 4). He will recompense you according to the natural results of your life's work, "the fruit of your doings" (Isa. iii. 10). Yet this fruit must vary with the quality of our work (see this lesson taught in 1 Cor. iii. 8—15). But the truth of our text has its shady as well as its sunny side. 3. *A nation will be recompensed according to its national sins and the fruit of them.* Illust.: Great Britain and the opium traffic. Even national repentance and reformation may not avert some of the disastrous consequences of past transgressions. Colonial slavery has left some of its foul stains on the present generation. 4. *Sinners must await "the harvest" which is "the end of the world" before they can receive the just recompense of their deeds.* William Cowper, in a letter to John Newton, alluding to the translation of Homer on which he was engaged, says very truly, "An author had need narrowly to watch his pen, lest a line should escape it which by possibility may do mischief when he has been long dead and buried. What we have done when we have written a book will never be known till the day of judgment; then the account will be liquidated, and all the good that it has occasioned will witness either for or against us." Homer himself supplies an illustration of this. We are told it was the 'Iliad' that did much to mould the character of Alexander of Macedon. The life of Alexander was the inspiration of two other notorious warriors—Julius Cæsar and Charles XII. of Sweden. In contrast to the posthumous influence of Jonathan Edwards, there stands on record the baneful effect on a village in Berkshire of the infidel, wit, and libertine, Lord Bolingbroke. He died in 1751; but he had so poisoned the minds of the poor villagers against religion, that three quarters of a century afterwards "the fruit of his doings" was most distinctly to be traced. Nor need our acts be flagrantly evil to bring forth bitter fruit. The neglect of duty tends to make others neglect it, and thus to leave that duty altogether undone. The neglect of "assembling ourselves together" in public worship tends to the dissolution of such assemblies and the abandonment of such worship. The fruit of secret discipleship would be the dying out of Christian Churches. What can be the fruit of sin but sorrow, suffering, loss? "The harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow" (Isa. xvii. 11). Even though sin be forgiven through repentance and faith, the consequences of misused or wasted years will remain. And as those consequences, ever widening, cannot be summed up till the great day of God, "we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive *the things done in the body*, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Let us therefore "make it our aim . . . to be well-pleasing unto him" (2 Cor. v. 9, 10).—E. S. P.

Vers. 18, 19.—*Matchless mercy.* "The Lord thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the Lord thy God loved thee." These words of Moses receive a striking illustration in the fact that every one of the "minor" prophets who threatens judgments against Israel ends by promises of deliverance which anticipate the days of the Messiah. In none is this more strikingly seen than in Micah. In this chapter the prophet, who has been lamenting the universal corruption of the people (vers. 1—6), finds comfort in God alone, to whom he looks with submission and hope, and obtains an assurance of renewed Divine favour when the chastisement is past (vers. 7—13). This encourages him to pray (ver. 14). His prayer is answered by a promise of deliverance such as God accomplished for his people in Egypt (vers. 15—17). Upon this he breaks forth in adoration of God's *matchless mercy*, and anticipates the fulfilment of promises which would only be realized by the coming of the long looked-for Deliverer (vers. 18—20; and cf. Luke i. 70—75). This matchless mercy is shown both in God's essential character and in his treatment of sinners. Each clause suggests some fresh thought on this attractive subject.

I. "WHO IS A GOD LIKE UNTO THEE?" The reference to the Exodus (ver. 15) reminds us of Moses' words (Exod. xv. 11). If there is none like God, "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders," what wonder can be so great as deliverance from sin? If even ungodly men are charmed into adoration for a brief period at some deliverance from danger, how profoundly and unceasingly should we adore and glorify God for salvation from sin, which is a more dreadful evil than cholera, lunacy, or death! Notice how a question like this is often asked or answered; e.g. in regard to God's

power (Deut. xxxiii. 26), his faithfulness (1 Kings viii. 23), his deliverance of the oppressed (Ps. xxxv. 10), his condescension to the lowly (Ps. cxlii. 5, 6). In a word, in his character and in all his dealings he stands alone (Ps. lxxxix. 6—8).

II. "THAT PARDONETH INIQUITY." This is as essential a part of God's character as is maternal love in a mother's heart. When Moses said to God, "I beseech thee, show me thy *glory*," the answer was, "I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee, and I will proclaim the Name of the Lord before thee" (Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19). And when the sublime proclamation was made, one of the essential elements of Jehovah's character, as revealed in his Name, was "forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exod. xxxiv. 5—7). God loves to be reminded of his Name, and to see that it is that on which our hopes of pardon rest; e.g. Numb. xiv. 17—20; Ps. xxv. 11; lxxxvi. 5, 15; cxxx. 4; Dan. ix. 9.

III. "AND PASSETH BY THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE REMNANT OF HIS HERITAGE." This denotes a continual action on the part of God. Isolated acts of pardon would not meet the case. He comes with his eyes as a flame of fire, and yet he does not "mark iniquities" (Ps. cxxx. 3; and cf. Numb. xxiii. 21). What he commends he practises (Prov. xix. 11). Yet not because of any laxity in his relations to sin, but because of his righteous grace. Such declarations of Divine mercy as the Old Testament is full of can only be perfectly understood when read in the light of the New Testament, and of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, "for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant;" "Whom God set forth to be a Propitiation, through faith, by his blood, to show his righteousness, because of the *passing over* of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God" (Rom. iii. 25; Heb. ix. 15).

IV. "HE RETAINETH NOT HIS ANGER FOR EVER, BECAUSE HE DELIGHTETH IN MERCY." In the midst of words of grace we have a distinct recognition of anger as one of God's perfections. So in Exod. xxxiv. 7, "that will by no means clear the guilty." If he were not angry with sinners he would be less perfect. This truth needs to be emphasized in the present days of superficial views of sin. But if he were to retain his anger for ever, it would be fatal (Isa. lvii. 16). So "he will not always chide," etc.; he "will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies" (Ps. ciii. 9; Lam. iii. 31, 32). And this "because he delighteth in mercy." In its literal sense "he is bent on mercy." Proofa of this crowd on us from every side. We see it in the history of Israel (Neh. ix. 16—19, 26—31; Ps. lxxviii.), in the cross of Christ (1 John iv. 10), in the long lives of many of the most impenitent (Rom. ii. 4), and in the experience of those who are now rejoicing in salvation (Eph. ii. 4—7; Titus iii. 4—7). It is therefore a joy to God to forgive and save. The parables of Luke xv. 1—10 remind us of this. The pearl of parables that follows might be called, not "The prodigal son," but "The long-suffering and rejoicing father."

V. "HE WILL TURN AGAIN, HE WILL HAVE COMPASSION UPON US." In our idiom "He will again have compassion on us." When God sent Jesus Christ "preaching peace" to Israel, it was no new thing. It was the latest and sublimest illustration of a Divine habit (Heb. i. 1). In the wilderness-days, "he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath" (Ps. lxxviii. 38). Thus God treated them all through their history. See the summary of the later history of Judah in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14—16, ". . . till there was no remedy," etc. But he again had compassion; he turned again their captivity, according to his promises by Moses (Deut. xxx. 1—6). And though they crucified the Christ, and were "broken off," they are still "beloved for the fathers' sake." God will again have compassion on them (Zech. xii. 10—14; xiii. 1). "And so all Israel shall be saved." These repeated acts of the mercy in which God delights may encourage the vilest to appeal for forgiveness, "according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies" (Ps. li. 1).

VI. "HE WILL SUBDUCE OUR INIQUITIES." He will tread them down, trample them underfoot. One of the marked peculiarities of the Divine forgiveness is the result on the sinner himself. No one pardons with such a good effect on the sinner pardoned. Some are disappointed in those they forgive. Not so God. Whenever he remits sin he reforms the sinner. His salvation being from the love and the power as well as the punishment of sin, a sinner cannot grasp the pardon and neglect the purity. Nor does

he desire to. The most sacred motives forbid. The promise of pardon is accompanied with the assurance of the purifying Spirit (Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27; Rom. viii. 1, 2; 1 Cor. vi. 11). Sin is a serpent to be crushed under the heel (Rom. xvi. 20). It is a foe to be conquered, and who shall be conquered because we are "not under the Law, but under grace" (Rom. vi. 14). The victory is God's, though the blessedness of it is ours (Ps. xcvi. 1), "*He will subdue our iniquities.*"

VII. "*THOU WILT CAST ALL THEIR SINS INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA.*" This indicates the completeness of the Divine salvation. Elsewhere we have the promise (Ps. ciii. 12). Hezekiah says, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind my back," so that the accuser cannot get them without going behind the very throne of God; and God himself will never turn to see them. Here the figure is still more striking; sins cast, not in the shallows, subject to the tidal waves which might throw them up into sight again, but into the depths of the sea (cf. Jer. l. 20). Other figures are used to teach the same truth—the cloud blotted out, never to be seen again (Isa. xlii. 22); sin forgotten, even by God himself (Isa. xlii. 25). Such is God's matchless mercy in pardoning sin. And when our sins are finally subdued as well as pardoned, cast into the depths of the sea, while we are standing on the eternal shore, justified, sanctified, glorified, then we shall sing the final song, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." And because we are already being saved by a God of such matchless mercy, in whom we have placed our trust, we have no fear as to the issue (Rom. viii. 38, 39).

"We lift our hands exulting
In thine Almighty favour,
The love Divine, which made us thine,
Shall keep us thine for ever."

E. S. P.

Vers. 18, 19.—"*A pardoning God.*" In the days of Micah the social and religious condition of Jerusalem was deplorable. All through the country evils prevailed, but they were worst at its centre. Instinctively the vicious make their way to a crowded city. If vice is condemned in the nation, its disgracefulness is less conspicuous in a crowd; and if vice is not condemned, the city affords the best opportunities for the gratification of unholy desire. It still needs courage and wisdom to recognize and combat evils prevailing in great cities, and God still requires knights of the cross who will fight, not as of old for the grave of Christ, but for his Church. Micah was one of these. The prevalent sins of the prophet's days were threatening the existence of society, loosening the ties which gave unity to the nation, and dividing into factions members of the same family. The wealthy were sucking the very life-blood of the poor, and the judges openly asked for bribes, without the smallest sense of shame; so that the prophets were not only the teachers of truth, but also the tribunes of the people. Unbelief in God lay at the root of such wrong-doing, for unless rulers recognize responsibility to him, one of the greatest safeguards against their abuse of authority is destroyed. Persuading themselves that God was such a one as themselves, idolatry prevailed, and although the temple still stood and its worship was as gorgeous as ever, unreality and hypocrisy rendered such religion worse than useless. A few voices were lifted up boldly against this condition of things. Isaiah and Micah stood side by side in their protests, and did much to stem the tide of iniquity. With all their vigorous denunciation of sin, however, hope was constantly held out to the sinner, and never was the mercy of God more clearly set forth than in the words of our text. Seven hundred years after this prophet's death, Wise Men from the East came to Jerusalem inquiring for him who was born to be the King of the Jews and the Light of the world. They were answered in the words of Micah, and it was through following his directions that they saw and worshipped the infant Jesus. Even in our day we may say, "He being dead yet speaketh." While the splendid orations of Cicero and Demosthenes have no influence over modern society, and the speeches recorded by Tacitus and Thucydides have only their marvellous literary value, the words of this ancient prophet meet our necessities, give us guidance and comfort, emboldening us to trust in the mercy of a pardoning God. The subject of *Divine pardon* suggested here will now have our consideration.

I. THE PREROGATIVE OF PARDON IS CLAIMED BY GOD FOR HIMSELF. He knew the needs of his children, and therefore proclaimed his pardoning love from the first. Even amid the terrors of Sinai he revealed himself as a God "pardoning iniquity." David was emboldened to come into his presence, after the commission of most grievous sins, praying, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, according to thy loving-kindness," etc. He pardons of his own free-will, because, as Micah says, "he delighteth in mercy," and with a perfect knowledge of what is worst in us, he declares his willingness to forgive all who are penitent. This power he has delegated to no man. If Jesus had simply been human, the Pharisees would have been justified in saying, "This man blasphemeth," when he forgave the sins of the paralytic. Nor did our Lord's declaration to his apostles, "Whose sins soever ye remit, they are remitted unto them," endue them with a supernatural or exclusive privilege. Their right was only ministerial and declarative, and is shared by all those who, by Divine grace, have been made "kings and priests unto God."

II. DIVINE PARDON SEEMS THE MORE WONDERFUL WHEN COMPARED WITH MAN'S FORGIVENESS. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways," etc. Suppose the case of an *employé*, who, having robbed his master, is detected, but on evidence of sincere contrition is reinstated in his position. His restitution is accompanied by hard terms, he is watched suspiciously, and his employer considers that he has been exceptionally generous to restore him at all. Contrast this with what our Lord tells of God's pardoning love in his parable of the prodigal son. Instead of being refused, his father sees him "when a great way off;" instead of angry reproaches, he has "compassion upon him;" instead of cold reserve, he falls on his neck, and kisses him; instead of suspicion, there is gladness, and all the house is filled with music and dancing. Or take, as another contrast, the reception given at home to a girl who has gone wrong, with the touching story of our Lord's love to the woman who was a sinner. And Jesus says, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?"

III. DIVINE PARDON IS PROFFERED FOR ALL KINDS OF SIN. Different words are used here and elsewhere in order to show that no sort of wrong-doing is exempt from pardon; so that the moral and the vicious, those who have sinned inwardly or outwardly, may alike be encouraged to return to the Lord. "*Transgression*" is an act of evil committed against a Law acknowledged to be holy. It signifies stepping across a line which is drawn and visible. "*Iniquity*" is the inward tendency which responds to suggestions of evil; which we cannot root out, and which makes self-reformation hopeless. "*Sins*" are acts done from wrong motives. All these it is promised shall be done away with on our repentance.

IV. DIVINE PARDON IS COMPLETE AND THOROUGH. 1. "*Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*" If we drop a knife into a tidal pool, we can see it and regain it; but if we sail out of sight of land, and drop it overboard in the "depths of the sea," it is gone for ever. So completely gone are our forgiven sins. 2. "*He will subdue our iniquities.*" If our nature is not sanctified, we shall only do again our evil deeds. All our affections and thoughts must be subjected to the Divine will, and this can only be the result of God's own work.

CONCLUSION. *How can God be just, and yet our Justifier?* This mystery, which lies at the root of his moral government, finds its only answer in the cross of Christ. God's laws are eternal and inexorable. He cannot swerve from absolute righteousness. Sin must bring shame, misery, and death, here and hereafter. If, therefore, God had said all shall be overlooked, the penalty shall be removed, the Law repealed, it would appear to myriads of intelligent beings (compared with whose multitude the human race is as nothing) that the Law was either unjust in its enunciation or unjust in its repeal. Yet a sense of the perfect integrity of God is the foundation of his creature's bliss. But the Son of God became the Son of man. He gathered up into himself all the sympathies, powers, and sufferings of our race. He stood forth as our Representative, vindicating the Law by his obedience, and dying on the cross for transgressors. This would evoke grander reverence for Law than if the race had been punished; and such a display of love wins all hearts from disobedience.

"My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin."

A. R.

Vers. 1—6.—*The wail of a true patriot on the moral corruptions of his country.* "Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat: my soul desired the first-ripe fruit," etc. In these verses the prophet bewails the moral condition of his country. The picture he draws of its wickedness is a very hideous one. It answers not only to the character of the people in the reign of Ahaz, but to their character under the reign of other kings and in other times. Take the words as presenting the wail of a true patriot over the moral corruptions of his country. "Woe is me!" etc. He means to say, "It is with me as one seeking fruit after the harvest, grapes after the vintage; there is not one cluster." There are several things that he bemoans.

I. THE DEPARTURE OF EXCELLENCE FROM HIS COUNTRY. "The good man is perished out of the earth." Who are the good men referred to here is not known. The statement is put in general terms, and may imply merely that there are no good men to be found in the country. Or do the words, as some think, point especially to Hezekiah, Josiah, or to good men unknown to fame? They had, however, departed. Whether they had emigrated to distant lands or gone into the great eternity, is not said. The latter is the more probable idea. In any case, the departure of such men is a great loss—a loss which true patriots may well bemoan. Good men are the "lights of the world." They are the "salt of the earth." Their influence penetrates the mass, counteracts its tendency to corruption, removes its moral insipidity, gives it a new spirit—a spirit pungent and savoury. They are the conservators of the good and the peaceful reformers of the bad. "Perished out of the earth." It does not say, "perished out of being." They had left the land, but not the universe. They were thinking, feeling, active still. There is a sense, indeed, in which they could not perish out of the land. Good men leave behind them principles, ideas, a character, which will live and spread and work to the end of time.

II. THE RAMPANCY OF AVARICE IN HIS COUNTRY. The workings of avarice are indicated in the latter end of the second and two following verses. 1. *Here we have its working amongst the general community.* "They all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net." To get wealth for themselves was with them such a furious passion, that the rights and lives of others were disregarded. Their avarice was as ravenous as the passion of a wild beast. Nay, they looked upon men only as victims for their prey. Does not this avarice work thus in English society? Man has come to value man just in proportion as he can render him service, enrich his exchequer, and advance his aggrandizement. What nets are spread out in every street, in every mart and office, in every journal, in order to catch men! "They hunt every man." 2. *Here we have its working amongst the higher classes.* "That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up." The idea seems to be this—that the "great man," the "prince," for some corrupt motive, seeks the condemnation of some innocent person; and the "judge," for a bribe, gratifies his wish. A judge from avarice will pronounce an innocent man guilty. All this is done very industriously "with two hands." The business must be despatched as soon as possible, lest some event should start up to thwart them; and when it is done "they wrap it up." "So they wrap it up." Avarice, like all sinful passions, seeks to wrap up its crimes. But the Authorized Version is probably wrong, and the rendering should be "they weave it together," i.e. join in plotting (see Exposition).

III. THE MISCHIEVOUSNESS OF THE BEST IN HIS COUNTRY. "The best of them is as a briar: the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge." There is a gradation of wickedness of the men in the country, but the best of them is like a prickly thorn and worse than a thorn-hedge. The prophet is so struck with this that the thought of retribution takes hold of him, and he says, "The day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh; now shall be their perplexity."

IV. THE LACK OF TRUTHFULNESS IN THE COUNTRY. "Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide," etc. "Place no faith in a companion; trust not a familiar friend; from her that lieth in thy bosom guard the doors of thy mouth. For the son despiseth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the members of his own family"

(Henderson). All social faith was gone; a man had lost all confidence in his brother. Social scepticism and suspicion prevailed in all circles. No faith was to be put in a friend. The very lips were to be sealed. No confidence in the wife, no longer was she to be treated as an object of trust. No confidence in the son, the daughter, or the mother. The nearest relations were counted as enemies. "A man's enemies are the men of his own house."

CONCLUSION. Such were the evils over which this patriotic prophet pours forth his lamentations. What right-hearted man would not bewail such a moral corruption in his country? Jeremiah said, "Oh that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night!" etc. Paul said, "Would that I were accursed!" etc. Christ said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" etc. It is the characteristic of a true patriot that he feels a deeper concern for the moral state of his country than for its educational or commercial condition.—D. T.

Vers. 7—9.—*The possibilities of godly men falling into great trouble.* "Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me," etc. The prophet, having reverted in the preceding verses of this chapter to the wickedness of his people, which he had before depicted in most dark and dreadful colours, here proceeds to represent them in their state of captivity, reduced to repentance, and yearning for that Divine interposition which would involve the complete destruction of their enemies. I take the words as exhibiting the *possibilities of godly men*.

I. THE POSSIBILITY OF GODLY MEN FALLING INTO GREAT TROUBLE. "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise." Who is the enemy here referred to scarcely matters, whether Babylon, Edom, or some other persons or peoples. All godly men have ever had their enemies. All who have ever endeavoured to lead a godly life have suffered persecution in some mode and measure. Two things are referred to here concerning the trouble. 1. *It was a "fall."* Godly men are liable to many falls—falls from health to sickness, from wealth to poverty, from social friendship to desolation; but the greatest fall is *moral*—the fall of character. To this the best of men are liable, e.g. Moses, David, Peter. 2. *The trouble was a "darkness."* "When I sit in darkness." Light and darkness are frequently used for prosperity and adversity. There are many things that darken the soul. Disappointment is a cloud, remorse is a cloud, despair is a cloud. Some of these clouds often mantle the mental heaven in sackcloth. Godly men are often permitted to walk in darkness and to have no light.

II. THE POSSIBILITY OF GODLY MEN BEING GLORIOUSLY SUSTAINED IN TROUBLE. "Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation," etc. The godly man has a power within him, with the Divine help, of lifting his soul above the *crushing* cares, sufferings, and sorrows of life. "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me;" How does he do it? 1. *By looking at God.* "Therefore I will look unto the Lord." The man who fastens his eyes on the sun becomes unconscious of the small things around him. The soul which feels God to be the grand object in its horizon can scarcely fail to be buoyant and courageous. 2. *By waiting upon God.* "I will wait for the God of my salvation." He is sure to come to my deliverance; it is only a question of time, and I will wait. As the farmer in the snows and storms of winter waits for the vernal season, certain that it will come, so the godly man, in trial, waits for God's approach. 3. *By trusting in God.* "My God will hear me." He has promised to do so; he has done so before; he is a prayer-hearing God. He has said, "Unto that man will I look," etc. 4. *By submitting to God.* "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." I will not repine nor rebel under my suffering; I will bow to his will, for I deserve punishment, as I have sinned against him. The sufferings I endure are insignificant compared to the sins I have committed. 5. *By hoping for God.* "He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh with the morning." Thus it is possible for godly men to rise in courage and even triumph in the greatest calamities. Sunk in the deepest affliction, they may look their enemies in the face

and say, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise." Though I am now down, I shall rise again. Blessed hope!

"It whispers o'er the cradled child
Fast locked in peaceful sleep,
Ere its pure soul is sin-beguiled,
Ere sorrow bids it weep.

"It soothes the mother's ear with hope,
Like sweet bells' silver chime,
And bodies forth the unknown scope
Of dark, mysterious Time!

"Tis heard in manhood's risen day,
And nerves the soul to might,
When life shines forth with fullest ray,
Forewarning least of night.

"It speaks of noble ends to gain,
A world to mend by love
That tempers strength of hand and brain
With softness of the dove.

"It falls upon the aged ear
Though deaf to human voice,
And when man's evening closes drear,
It bids him still rejoice.

"It tells of bliss beyond the grave,
The parted souls to thrill—
The guerdon of the truly brave
Who fought the powers of ill."

(Household Words.)

D. T.

Ver. 10.—*Religious persecutors.* "Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets." "And may mine enemy see it, and shame cover her who hath said to me, Where is Jehovah thy God? Mine eyes will see it; now will she be for a treading down like mire in the streets" (Delitzsch). "Although, for example, God had given up his nation to the power of its enemies, the nations of the world, on account of its sins, so that they accomplished the will of God by destroying the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and carrying away the people into exile; yet they grew proud of their own might in so doing, and did not recognize themselves as instruments of punishment in the hand of the Lord, but attributed their victories to the power of their own arm, and even aimed at the destruction of Israel with scornful defiance of the living God. Thus they violated the rights of Israel, so that the Lord was obliged to conduct the contest of his people with the heathen, and secure the rights of Israel by the overthrow of the heathen power of the world" (ibid.). The words present to us a few thoughts concerning *religious persecutors*.

I. *THEIR HUMILIATING VISION.* "Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her." "See" what? The deliverance, the exaltation which God wrought for the victims. Few things are more painful to a malign nature than to witness the prosperity and happiness of the object of its intense aversion. Every beam of delight in the hated one falls as fire on the soul-nerves of the hater. Witness Haman and Mordecai. It is destined that every ungodly persecutor shall witness one day the happiness of the godly whom he has tormented. The songs of the martyr shall fall on the ears of the human demons that forged his chains, kindled his fires, and tortured him when living. "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." Another thing in the passage presented to us concerning religious persecutors is—

II. *THEIR TAUNTING SPIRIT.* "Where is the Lord thy God?" Scorn is one of the

leading elements in the soul of the persecutor. "My tears," said David, "have been my food day and night, while mine enemies continually say, Where is now thy God?" Again, "Mine enemies reproach, saying daily unto me, Where is thy God?" Again, "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?" How this taunting spirit was shown in those who persecuted and put to death the Son of God! "They that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matt. xxvii. 40). The taunting spirit is generally *malific*. It is fiendish, has in it the venom of hell. The taunting spirit is generally *haughty*. "Proud and haughty scorner is his name" (Prov. xxi. 24). The taunting spirit is generally *ignorant*. He who deals in ridicule generally lacks the power of information and argument.

III. THEIR UTTER RUIN. "Now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets." There is a God that judges on the earth, and his retributive forces are ever on the heels of crime. The blood of martyrs cries to heaven, and stirs these forces to action. "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. vi. 10).

"Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Ev'n them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyr'd blood and ashes sow
O'er all th' Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who, having learned thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe."

(Milton.)

· D. T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*The good time coming*. "In the day that thy walls are to be built, in that day shall the decree be far removed. In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain." The prophet here speaks in the name of Israel, and seems to exult in the expectation of the full restoration of Jerusalem. Her walls would be rebuilt, and her scattered citizens would be gathered unto her from Assyria to Egypt, from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain. "The most natural construction," says Henderson, "is that the decree of God respecting the political changes that were to take place was not to be confined to Babylon, but was to be extended to all the countries round about Judæa, in consequence of which great numbers would become proselytes to the Jewish faith." The words may be used to illustrate two things concerning the *good time coming*.

I. IT WILL BE A TIME FOR REBUILDING THE RUINED. "In the day that thy walls are to be built." The walls of Jerusalem are referred to—the walls of fortification, protection; these are to be rebuilt. Daniel said that they were to be rebuilt in troublesome times (Dan. ix. 25). There is, however, a more important rebuilding than this—a rebuilding that is going on, and will go on, until the great moral city shall be complete. 1. *The human soul is a building*. It is a temple, a "spiritual house" reared as a residence for the Eternal, a home for the Holy Ghost to dwell in. It is "a city whose Builder and Maker is God." 2. *The human soul is a building in ruins*. The walls are broken down; its columns, arches, roof, rooms, all in ruins. 3. *The human soul is a building to be rebuilt*. Christ is to be the Foundation-stone, etc. "Ye are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 22). This rebuilding is going on according to a plan of the great moral Architect; is being worked out by agents that know nothing of the plan. It will be completed one day; the top-stone will be brought forth one day, with shouts of "Grace, grace!" (Zech. iv. 7). This new

Jerusalem established on earth, what a magnificent city it will be! The words may be used to illustrate another thing concerning the good time coming.

II. IT WILL BE A TIME FOR REGATHERING THE SCATTERED. "In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortresses even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain." "All," says an old writer, "that belong to the land of Israel, whithersoever dispersed and however distressed, far and wide over the face of the whole earth, shall come flocking to it again. He shall come even to thee, having liberty to return and a heart to return from Assyria, whither the ten tribes were carried away, though it lay remote from the fortified cities and from the fortress—those strongholds in which they thought they had them fast; for when God's time comes, though Pharaoh will not let the people go, God will fetch them out with a high hand. They shall come from all the remote parts, from sea to sea, and mountain to mountain, not turning back for fear of your discouragements, but they shall go from strength to strength, till they come to Zion." The human family, which Heaven intended to live as one grand brotherhood, has been riven into moral sections, antagonistic to each other, and scattered all over the world. The time will come when they shall be gathered together, not, of course, in a local sense, but in a spiritual—in unity of sentiment, sympathy, aim, soul. All shall be one in Christ. They will be gathered in spirit together from the four winds of heaven.

CONCLUSION. Haste this good time! May the chariot-wheels of Providence revolve with greater speed!

"One song employs all nations; and all cry,
'Worthy the Lamb, for he was slain for us!'
The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks
Shout to each other, and the mountain-tops
From distant mountains catch the flying joy;
Till, nation after nation taught the strain,
Earth rolls the rapturous Hosanna round."

(Cowper.)

D. T.

Ver. 13.—*Man's ruin the fruit of his own conduct.* "Notwithstanding the land shall be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings." Here is a prediction of what would take place before the advent of those glorious events pointed out in the preceding verses. There will be a dark night before the morning, a great storm before the calm. The subject here is—*Man's ruin the fruit of his own conduct.* The reason why the land should be "desolate" before the coming of the glorious times is here stated—"for the fruit of their doings." That man's ruin springs from his conduct is demonstrated by universal experience as well as by the Word of God. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself . . . O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity" (Hos. xiii. 9; xiv. 1). It is the man who heareth the sayings of Christ and doeth them not that will be ruined at last. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Assuming it to be a fact that man's ruin is evermore the fruit of his own conduct, four things follow.

I. THAT HIS MISERY WILL BE IDENTIFIED WITH REMORSE. Morally it is impossible for a man to ascribe his ruin to his organization, to circumstances, or to any force over which he has no control. He must feel that he has brought it on himself; and this feeling it is that makes his miserable condition a very hell. The suffering of remorse is the soul of suffering. "A wounded spirit who can bear?"

II. THAT IN HIS SUFFERINGS HE MUST VINDICATE THE DIVINE CHARACTER. Forced to see and feel that all his sin and miseries spring from his own conduct, he will be compelled to say, "Just and right art thou," etc. (Rev. xv. 3). Into the deepest heart of such God speaks the words, "They hated knowledge, they despised all my reproof; therefore shall they eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices" (Prov. i. 29). All their misery is but the eating of the fruit of their own doings; they reap that which they have sown. As fruit answers to seed, as echoes to sound, their calamities answer to their conduct.

III. THAT HIS SALVATION FROM RUIN REQUIRES A CHANGE OF LIFE. Men's

conduct is fashioned and ruled by their likings and dislikings, their sympathies and antipathies; in other words, if their conduct is bad, it can only be made good by a change of heart. "Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again."

IV. THAT CHRISTIANITY IS THE ONLY SYSTEM THAT CAN MEET HIS CASE. The mission of Christianity is to change the heart, to renew the life, and effect a spiritual reformation. This it is *designed* to do, this it is *fitted* to do, this it has done, this it is doing; and no other system on earth is capable of accomplishing this work.—D. T.

Ver. 14.—*A 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." Here is a prayer addressed by the prophet to Almighty God. It is brief, but beautiful, beautiful in spirit and style. It has a prophetic aspect. This prayer recognizes three things.

I. AN INTERESTING RELATION BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE, FLOCK AND SHEPHERD. The Jews, here as elsewhere, are metaphorically referred to as a flock, and Jehovah as their Shepherd (Ps. lxxx. 1; xcv. 7, etc.). "The Lord is my Shepherd;" "I am the good Shepherd." What a Shepherd is he! 1. He is the *absolute Owner* of the flock. "My sheep are mine, and I know them." "All souls are mine." How incalculably valuable is one soul!—a free, ever active, influential, undying spirit! How rich is this Shepherd, to own untold millions of such! 2. *He has a perfect knowledge of the flock.* He knows what they are, what they have been, what they will be through all the future. "I know my sheep," etc. (John x.). 3. *He has an infinite love for the flock.* The good Shepherd hath laid down his life for them. 4. *He has abundant supplies for the flock.* Though their wants are varied, numerous, urgent, ever-recurring, he is able to meet them all. "I give unto my sheep eternal life, neither shall any pluck them out of my hands;" "He is able to do exceeding abundantly more than we can ask or think" (Eph. iii. 20); "Feed thy people with thy rod," or staff. It recognizes—

II. THE TRYING CONDITION IN WHICH GOD'S PEOPLE ARE SOMETIMES FOUND. "Which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel." The primary reference is to their captivity in Babylon. (For another view, see Exposition.) They were as sheep in the forest or wood; in danger of being lost in the thickets or being devoured by beasts of prey. Human souls in this world are in a moral wilderness; beset with perils on every hand. "They are scattered on the mountains as sheep having no shepherd." Two facts render this condition peculiarly distressing. 1. *It is caused by self.* Souls have not been driven away into moral captivity. "All we like sheep have gone astray." 2. *It is undeliverable by self.* No soul ever found its way back to God by its own unaided efforts; hence Christ came to "seek and to save the lost."

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF RESTORATION TO FORMER ENJOYMENTS. "Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old." The regions of Bashan and Gilead, on the east of the Jordan, were celebrated for their rich pasturage, and on this account were chosen by the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh (Numb. xii.; Deut. iii. 17). Morally, the great need of man is the restoration of normal rights, normal virtues, normal enjoyments.

"Good Shepherd, hasten thou that glorious day,
When we shall all
In the one fold abide with thee for aye!"

D. T.

Vers. 15—17.—*The ultimate deliverance of man from sin.* "According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things. The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee." In this passage there is an answer to the prophet's prayer. It contains a Divine assurance that wonders analogous to those displayed in the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt would be vouchsafed in their deliverance from Babylonish captivity; and that the display of those wonders would lead to the utter confusion and ruin of the "nations" who were their enemies. They would feel that all their strength was contemptible impotence in the presence of

God's great power. This deliverance, thus described, resembles the ultimate deliverance of man from sin and ruin in two respects.

I. IT INVOLVES THE EXHIBITION OF THE MARVELLOUS. There were "marvellous things" shown when the Hebrews were delivered from Egypt; marvellous things when they were brought out of Babylonian captivity; but these marvellous things are but mere shadows of the marvels displayed in the moral redemption of mankind. The *incarnation of Christ*; the wonders that his mighty hand performed; the extraordinary phenomena connected with his death, his resurrection, and ascension to heaven; the revolutions in the moral character and institutions of mankind;—all these are, in truth the wonders of the wonderful, the marvels of the marvellous.

II. IT INVOLVES THE CONFUSION OF ENEMIES. "The nations shall be confounded at their might, they shall lay their hand upon their mouth," etc. As Egypt and Babylon were confounded, humbled, and terrified at God's marvels in their deliverance, so will all the spiritual foes of Christ be ultimately overwhelmed at the wonders displayed at the redemption of the world. Matthew Henry's remarks on this passage are worth quoting. "1. Those that had exulted over the people of God in their distress, and gloried that when they had them down they would keep them down, shall be confounded when they see them thus surprisingly rising up; they shall be confounded at all the might with which the captives shall now exert themselves, whom they thought for ever disabled. They shall now lay their hands upon their mouths as being ashamed of what they have said, and not be able to say any more by way of triumph over Israel. Nay, their ears shall be deaf too, so much so that they shall be ashamed at the wonderful deliverance; they shall stop their ears as being not willing to hear any more of God's wonders wrought for that people whom they had so despised and exulted over. 2. Those that had impudently confronted God himself shall now be struck with a fear of him, and thereby brought, in profession at least, to submit to him. They shall lick the dust like a serpent; they shall be so mortified as if they were to be sentenced to the same curse the serpent was laid under (Gen. iii. 14). They shall be brought to the lowest abasements imaginable, and shall be so dispirited that they shall tamely submit to them. They shall lick the dust of the Church's feet (Isa. xlix. 23). Proud oppressors shall be made sensible how mean and little they are before the great God; and they shall with trembling and the lowest submission move out of the holes into which they had crept, like worms of the earth as they are, being ashamed and afraid to show their heads; so low shall they be brought and such abjects shall they be when they are abased. When God did wonders for his Church, many of the people of the land became Jews because the fear of the Jews and of their God fell on them (Esth. viii. 17). So it is promised here that they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee, O Israel! Forced submissions are often feigned submissions; yet they redound to the glory of God and the Church, though not to the benefit of the dissemblers themselves."—D. T.

Ver. 18.—*The incomparableness of God illustrated in his forgiveness of sin: 1. The nature of his forgiveness.* "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" The prophet here—anticipating the full deliverance, not only of the Jews from Babylonian captivity, but probably of humanity itself from the curse of sin through Jesus Christ—breaks forth in a sublime strain of praise and admiration in relation to the *incomparable* character of God. "Who is a God like unto thee?" The subject of the two verses (18, 19) is *Divine forgiveness*, its *nature*, its *source*, and its *completeness*. We shall confine ourselves now to the *nature* of Divine forgiveness. God's forgiveness here is represented in the words, he "passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage." This does not mean that God is unobservant of sin, for all things are naked and open unto him; nor that it is not an offence to him, for it is "an abomination in his sight," but that he regards it in no fault-finding spirit, but with a noble generosity. As loving parents are disposed to overlook much in their children of which they cannot approve, the great Father is disposed to overlook much. "He is not strict to mark iniquity." He passes it by, pursues his benevolent march as if it did not exist. Theology, which has thrown a haze over many of the bright things of revelation, has clouded this, one of its most glorious orbs. Forgetting that the Bible is a popular book, using language in accom-

modation to our habits of thought and expression, it has constructed its theories upon the etymology of words. The truth and pertinence of this remark will be seen if, at the outset, we consider the very diversified forms in which the Bible represents to us the doctrine of Divine forgiveness. Generally, indeed, I find it set forth under figures corresponding to the aspects in which sin stands before the mind of the writer at the time. For example—

I. WHEN SIN APPEARS AS A DEBT, AN UNFULFILLED OBLIGATION, THEN PARDON IS SPOKEN OF AS A CANCELLING. Thus in the forty-third chapter of Isaiah Jehovah is represented as saying, "I, even I, am he who blotteth out thy transgressions;" and Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, exhorts his vast auditory to "repent, that their sins may be blotted out." When a man has paid his debts, or when some one else has discharged them, the creditor takes his pen in hand and strikes from the ledger both the name of the debtor and the amount. But sin is a debt in a very figurative sense, and therefore such representations of pardon must not be taken in a literal meaning.

II. WHEN SIN APPEARS AS AN ESTRANGEMENT FROM GOD, THEN FORGIVENESS IS REPRESENTED AS RECONCILIATION. But as the estrangement is not mutual, it being exclusively on man's part; in the reconciliation there is no mutual change of mind. God *cannot* change, and *need* not change, to be reconciled to the sinner.

III. WHEN SIN APPEARS AS AN INDICTMENT, FORGIVENESS IS SPOKEN OF AS A JUSTIFICATION. But justification can in the nature of the case have but a very remote resemblance to the forensic term as used by men. In civil justification, for instance, the charge has been found false, the accused demands justification as a *right*, and retires from the court with a high sense of insulted innocence.

IV. WHEN SIN APPEARS AS A POLLUTION, FORGIVENESS IS REPRESENTED AS A CLEANSING. Hence we read of Christ's blood cleansing from all sin. But it is only in a very figurative sense that you can employ the word "washing" to the mind, which is an invisible and impalpable power.

V. WHEN SIN APPEARS AS A DISEASE, FORGIVENESS IS REPRESENTED AS A HEALING. "I will heal your backsliding;" "I am come to bind up the broken-hearted."

VI. WHEN SIN APPEARS AS AN OBSTRUCTION BETWEEN THE SOUL AND GOD, FORGIVENESS IS REPRESENTED AS A CLEARING. The mountains are levelled, the clouds are dispersed, the foes are crushed and are buried as Pharaoh and his host were buried in the depths of the sea. There are three points of contrast between Divine forgiveness and human. 1. *In human governments forgiveness is exercised with most cautious limitations.* Human sovereigns, however generous their natures, can only bestow pardon on a few out of numerous criminals. Were forgiveness to become general, the power of the government to maintain order would be weakened. There is no such limitation to the exercise of this prerogative in God. He offers pardon to *all*. 2. *In human forgiveness there is no guarantee against future criminality.* The prisoner pardoned by a human sovereign may be inspired by gratitude and prompted perhaps to resolve upon a life of future obedience, and yet his heart remain unchanged. The principles that led to his crime may still be in him, and, being there, they may break forth again. But in Divine forgiveness it is not so. The pardoned man is a changed man: he has a new heart put within him—a heart inspired with such love to the Sovereign as will secure a joyous and constant obedience. 3. *Human forgiveness can never put the criminal in such a good position as he had before his transgression.* He has his freedom as before, but he has not his self-respect, he has not the same standing in society; his contemporaries will never look upon him in the same light again. Some will shun him, others will suspect him, and few will venture to give him their confidence and their love. But in Divine forgiveness the criminal is raised to a higher status even than that of innocence. I know not whether the angels would have been his servants had he never fallen; but after his forgiveness they become so. They rejoice with him on his conversion, they cheer him on his pilgrimage, they bear him on their pinions to their heavenly scenes. He is brought into an "innumerable company of angels." We see partially from his state in Eden what relations man would have entered into with his Maker had he never sinned; but I believe that he never would have had what the pardoned sinner has—the honour of seeing his Maker, in the Person of Jesus, on the throne of the universe, gazed on by every eye and worshipped by every heart.—D. T.

Ver. 18.—*The incomparableness of God illustrated in his forgiveness of sin: 2. The source of his forgiveness.* "He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." Anger in God is not passion, but principle; not antagonism to existence, but to the evils that curse existence. His anger is but love excited against everything that tends to disturb the harmony, cloud the brightness, and injure the happiness of his creation. "Fury is not in me," etc. (Isa. xxvii. 4). Here is the source of forgiveness: "He delighteth in mercy."

I. **FORGIVENESS IS A MERCIFUL ACT.** It is not an act of equity, but of compassion; not of justice, but of love. It is the prerogative of mercy. "The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Again, "The Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression." It is mercy that cancels the debt, blots out the cloud, effects the reconciliation, cleanses the stain, and heals the disease. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done," etc. All the redeemed in heaven acknowledge this: "Unto him that loved us, and washed [loosed] us from our sins in his own blood," etc. (Rev. i. 5).

II. **THIS ACT OF MERCY IS THE DELIGHT OF GOD.** "He delighteth in mercy." Mercy is a modification of benevolence. It always implies misery, for if there were no misery there would be no mercy. Whilst God does not delight in misery, he delights in removing it. What greater delight has a loving parent than in restoring to health and vigour a diseased and suffering child? To a true soul the delight of moral restoration is even greater than this. A noble father has perhaps more delight in the virtues and fellowship of the son whom he has been the means of raising from moral depravity to spiritual purity and power, than in those of the one who has always pursued the virtuous way. It is thus with him from whom all human love proceeds, he delights in mercy. Will not the song of the redeemed have more music in his ear than the lofty strains of those who have never fallen? He delights to welcome to his bosom and his home his returning prodigals. 1. *If he delights in mercy, then hush for ever the pulpits that blasphemously represent him as malign.* The God that you have in the Calvinian theology is not the God of the Bible, but the God of ill-natured, morose, and vindictive souls. Hence the masses of England turn away in horror from some modern pulpits. "He delighteth in mercy." Let us declare this! "Let the wicked forsake his way," etc.; "Come, let us reason together," etc.; "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden," etc. 2. *If he delights in mercy, then let no sinner despair on account of the enormity of his sins.* Let all the sins of the world be embodied in one man's life; let that one man return to God, and he will "abundantly pardon" him. He will do it, not reluctantly, not half-heartedly, but with aboundings of joy. He will rejoice over you. "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth," etc. 3. *If he delights in mercy, may we not hope that one day there will come an end to all the misery of the moral universe?* "He retaineth not his anger for ever." Who shall say but in some distant future, by some way not revealed, every discord in the moral universe shall be hushed, every prison opened, all sufferers delivered, and all hells quenched? What generous heart would not a thousand times rather believe in this, if they could, than in eternal torment or utter extinction?—D. T.

Ver. 19.—*The incomparableness of God illustrated in his forgiveness of sin: 3. The completeness of his forgiveness.* "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." The reference is here, perhaps, to the destruction of Pharaoh and his host. "He will destroy their sins as he destroyed them, and buried them in the depths of the sea" (Exod. xv. 4, 10).

I. **THE ENTIRE SUBJUGATION OF ALL SINS.** "Sin," says Henderson, "must ever be regarded as hostile to man. It is not only contrary to his interests, but it powerfully opposes and combats the moral principles of his nature and the higher principles implanted by grace; and, but for the counteracting energy of Divine influence, must prove victorious. Without the subjugation of evil propensities, pardon would not be a blessing. If the idolatrous and rebellious disposition of the Jews had not been subdued during their stay in Babylon, they would not have been restored." Sin is the

enemy of all enemies. If it is in us, it sets the holy, happy heavens against us. Take it from us, and hell becomes our minister for good. This God subdues. In truth, Divine forgiveness is the destruction of sin in us, nothing else. It is not something outside; it is all within.

II. THE ENTIRE SUBMERSION OF ALL SIN. "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Forgiveness is deliverance from sin. How strong is the imagery employed in the Bible to represent the completeness of this deliverance! It is as the "blotting out of a thick cloud." See that dark mass of cloud up yonder; how it hides the sun and chills the air! A breeze has sprung up, and it is gone—the sky is azure, the scene is bright, and the flowing air warm with life. That cloud can never come again; no more may thy sins. It is as the throwing of them behind God. "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." Who knows where the back of God is? I see his face in nature. His smiles are the beauty of the world. I see his face in Jesus, "the Brightness of his glory." But where is his back? It is the fathomless abyss of nothingness. It is a separation as far as the east is from the west. Tell me the distance from the east to the west, and I will tell you the distance which the pardoned sinner is from sin. It is a casting them into the "depths of the sea." Not on the shore, to be washed back by the incoming waves, but into the "depths." Into the abysses of some mighty Atlantic, where no storms shall stir them up, no trump shall wake them from their graves. "In those days, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and shall not be found." But where are they buried? In the forgetfulness of infinite love. "I will remember their sin no more." Can Infinite Intelligence forget? Yes, and his forgetfulness is one of the radiant attributes of his character. Does not all true forgiveness involve forgetfulness? Those who say they forgive and cannot forget, lack the faculty of forgiveness; as yet, Heaven has not endowed them with the power of granting absolution. It is of the very nature of love to hide injuries. Charity covereth sins. God has the power of forgetting injuries, because he is *Love*. I see the power of love in hiding injuries working everywhere in nature. The sea hastes to cover up the wounds which ruthless ships have ploughed into its noble bosom. The tree, bleeding with the sores which the woodman has inflicted, loses no time in its efforts to conceal the marks of violence it has received. Day by day goes on, until the year comes round, when, amidst its luxurious foliage you look in vain for the old scars. And thus, as the waves of the sea and the flowing sap, love ever works. It hastes to cover up from the eye of memory the injuries it has received. How soon the love of a wife buries in forgetfulness any injuries she has received from the man she loves too well! The countless pains which the thoughtlessness and waywardness of children in their early days inflict upon the parental heart are soon buried in the sea of parental love. Love digs in the heart of parents a grave for the wrongs, and builds a museum for the virtues of their children. All this is of God, God-like. Infinite love "passeth by the transgression." He leaves it behind him as he proceeds, in the majesty of his goodness, to diffuse wider and wider for ever the blessedness of his own being.—D. T.

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